

# UNICEF-WCC Partnership – 2015 - 2021: Examples and Highlights of the Churches' Commitments to Children (CC2C)



**World Council  
of Churches**

unicef  for every child

## Joint efforts for Children

Representing more than 580 million Christians in more than 110 countries, the World Council of Churches is a worldwide fellowship of churches with over 70 years of experience in pursuing justice and peace for all. It does this work together with those of different faiths and secular organizations.

In 2013, the WCC adopted a joint declaration, “Putting Children at the Centre,” and partnered with UNICEF to build the capacity of its member churches and ecumenical partners to (1) protect children and adolescents, and (2) promote children's meaningful participation, and (3) their engagement in climate justice initiatives.

UNICEF entered this partnership to further strengthen their effective engagement with religious actors to improve the well-being of children. Religious actors can reach the most vulnerable children, and often have the trust, moral influence, and capacity to do so. Through this partnership, larger numbers of locally connected, grassroot partners can be reached.

Thus, in 2015, the WCC and UNICEF signed the first of several Letters of Collaboration<sup>1</sup>. Key in this was the development of “[Churches' Commitments to children](#)”.

## The Churches' Commitment to Children

The question was asked among WCC member churches, child rights experts and children “**How can churches best use their influence to improve children's lives?**”



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The commitments of child protection, participation, and inter-generational climate justice were agreed upon.

### *1. Promote child protection through church communities*

- Ensure child-safe church environments
- Contribute to ending violence against children in society at large
- Support child-protection in emergencies
- Advocate for children's and adolescents' rights through birth registration

### *2. Promote meaningful participation by children and adolescents*

- In church activities and worship
- Advocate to recognize children and adolescents as persons with agency in society at large

### *3. Raise church voices for intergenerational climate justice for and with children and adolescents*

- Promote eco-friendly systems and practices within churches and adapt to the impacts of climate change
- Advocate for systems and practices in societies at large that also are eco-friendly and adapt to the impacts of climate change

The high number of responses from churches and partners was unprecedented. Subsequently, the WCC developed an [online platform](#) in collaboration with UNICEF, enabling member churches to implement these commitments and offer ways of supporting others to do so. This

<sup>1</sup> Since that date, the official partnership between UNICEF and WCC has been extended through the signing of two other LoCs, the latest of which in January 2018.

platform includes information about other child-focused organizations around the world that can assist and support member churches.

In 2017, the WCC and UNICEF also published [Collaboration with Children and Adolescents in the Implementation of the Churches' Commitments to Children](#). The WCC webpage on [child rights](#) features numerous resources to support the implementation of the Commitments in local settings.

In 2016, the UN Secretary General launched the “Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children” [GPEVAC](#). This aims, amongst other engagements, to protect children and provide online safety. The WCC also prioritized supporting the GPEVAC. The “[End Violence Solution Summit](#),” in early 2018, set forth an urgent call to action. It brought together the UN, governments, civil society, the private sector, academics, and children to design and share bold solutions for preventing and responding to violence against children. The WCC general secretary emphasized the destructive effects of corporal punishment and bullying, where both changes in attitudes and legislation are necessary, and where churches can make a strong contribution. The partnership continues with support from WCC's General Secretary as a Board member, and collaboration in its Civil Society Forum. The WCC also promotes the partnership's “[Safe to Learn](#)” initiative, which aims to end violence in and through schools, so children are free to learn, thrive and pursue their dreams.

On World Children's Day in 2018 the WCC and UNICEF asked children to share their recent experiences as participants in the many “youth talks” on ending violence in schools. WCC member churches around the world had organized these talks, and responses were delivered to governmental ministries of education.

While serving on UNICEF's Stakeholder Advisory Group, the WCC offered advice and practical recommendations on civil society mobilization and multi-sectoral event planning. The WCC also participated in a 2019 consultation on multi-religious perspectives. Later that year, in observance of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the WCC supported many who are pursuing this at the grassroots level.

### Some examples

Many churches worldwide adopted the action plan and disseminated it to congregations.

The *United Reformed Church* in the United Kingdom adopted the commitments and offered support for its implementation.

In *Canada*, a 2017 theological statement sought to repeal the Canadian criminal code, which provides for the legal defense of using physical punishment by parents (or others) to correct a child's behavior.

In 2018 the *Church of South India (CSI)* held a large consultation on “Churches assuring the Rights of Children” to discuss their action plan.

WCC member churches in *Argentina* agreed to collaborate with UNICEF in the areas of violence against children and juvenile justice. In 2018, an advocacy event featured the participation of churches, civil society organizations and many children and adolescents, to tackle the increasing violence against children in Argentina.



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At the 2018 World [Conference on Mission and Evangelism](#), the UNICEF representative emphasized the importance of the churches' commitment to children, and that the cooperation of UNICEF and the WCC would bring more holistic, behavior change solutions to the crises faced worldwide.

In February 2019, the *South Sudan Council of Churches* signed an agreement to work in partnership with UNICEF and other organizations, toward food security and peacebuilding in South Sudan, for the sake of children and others.

In *Uruguay*, UNICEF produced videos raising awareness of the consequences of psychological and physical violence on children. These were broadly shared by churches to build capacity at grassroots levels.



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Several global and national church organizations supported the Churches' Commitments to Children by developing action plans for their denominational networks, such as the *World Methodist Council* and the *Anglican Communion*. The spiritual leader of 300 million Orthodox Christians proposed close collaboration on the commitments and encouraged the participation by churches, calling for inter-generational justice and support to children on the move. Ecumenial Patriarch Bartholomew urged churches to “undertake initiatives that promote the protection of the environment and subsequently, our children.”

Child-focused partners ranging from NGOs and UN agencies to academia have also offered support and collaborative implementation, such as faculties in Canada, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and have incorporated the Churches' Commitments to Children action plan in their curricula.

### Joint Webinars

The WCC Programme Executive for Child Rights together with UNICEF organized webinars in response to capacity building requests from churches, providing examples of implementation and platforms for discussions. These webinars have focused on:

- Climate justice and environmental initiatives for and with children and youth
- Meaningful participation by children and youth

- Birth registration and statelessness
- Faith communities and children on the move.
- Ending violence against children

### How the WCC is building capacity in churches

The WCC collaborates in the [Faith for Positive Change for Children Initiative](#), a global alliance for social and behavior change launched by UNICEF in 2018. This recognizes the impact of religion on personal and collective values and social norms, and how it can be a powerful catalyst for positive action that improves the lives of women and children. The WCC was also able to reach wider interfaith audiences through this collaboration.

In 2019, the Churches' Commitments to Children programme was awarded the [Keeling Curve Prize, because it supports children and youth](#) to pursue climate justice through church-run schools, Sunday schools, and summer camps. With funding received from this award, the WCC was able to develop a [toolkit](#) for children and youth and a [research paper](#) for decision-makers.

In April of 2020, WCC initiated capacity building workshops for churches, in which practical and spiritual resources were developed for pastors, leaders, and teachers to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse.

The [Out of the Shadows](#) campaign and toolkit provides concrete steps, particularly when confined during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through collaboration with the *Christian Conference of Asia (CCA)* the WCC also supported the development of “Out of the Shadows” campaigns of churches in *India, Indonesia, and the Philippines*.

*Nigeria* was one of the first pilot countries of the UNICEF-WCC partnership. Collaboration was facilitated between the *Christian Conference of Nigeria (CCN)* and the UNICEF country office, to end violence against children.

Since February 2020, the WCC has been working on a plan with *the Church of England* to scale up to an international level their successful initiative in the UK -- [The Clewer Initiative](#) that especially addresses modern child slavery.

A pilot development is led by WCC with the *Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy* in its “Mediterranean Hope Project.”

In December 2020, UNICEF and WCC, together with the “Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Development” and with other partners, co-hosted the online [conference](#) “From Faith to Action: Working with Faith-based and Inter-religious Actors to Protect Children on the Move”.

In April 2021, outcomes of the UNICEF-WCC partnership were shared at the Harvard [Symposium](#) on “Faith and Flourishing: Strategies for Preventing and Healing Child Sexual Abuse”.

In May 2021, joint efforts were undertaken in the response to COVID-19 through the [World Immunization Week](#).

### Conclusion and next steps:

“The Churches' Commitments to Children” shows how the WCC is uniquely able to mobilize its member churches to advance a common goal, in this case, for the justice of peace of all children. For UNICEF, the partnership has strengthened its engagement with religious communities in advancing children's rights and positive outcomes.

The WCC and UNICEF celebrates the partnership's fifth anniversary throughout 2021. The progress of the past several years has shown that the partnership and the Commitments now stand as a template for engaging religious communities in advancing children's rights globally. The scale and impact of this partnership relative to the low levels of financial and other resources the WCC and UNICEF could commit to it demonstrate the viability of this model of partnership engagement with religious communities to advance the Sustainable Development Goals.

WCC and UNICEF encourage all churches and partners to engage in this ongoing process. Further information is available through the following link: <https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/wccs-engagement-for-children#get-involved>



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