

#CHILDRENCOUNT CLOSING THE CHILD DATA GAP

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THE YALE CLUB, 50 VANDERBILT AVE, NEW YORK, NY 10017, USA



Vulnerable children who are not counted are left behind

Children who grow up without the care of a safe and nurturing family are some of the most vulnerable in the world. Separated from their families by poverty, conflict, and discrimination, they live on the streets, in institutions, or are on the move. They are at increased risk of being trafficked, forced into domestic servitude, and prevented from achieving their right to an education and to quality health care. Unfortunately, the methods that governments use to gather national statistics mean that this group of children are often excluded from government statistics, so no one knows exactly how many children live in these situations.

When children are counted, they are more likely to be included in government programs which help to ensure they grow up healthy, safe, and better-prepared to contribute positively to their societies.

The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to leave no one behind, committing states to providing basic health, education, and protection to all children. However, if we are not able to quantify the number of children that need support and identify their needs, it is impossible to ensure that they realize their rights and develop to their full potential. It is vital that accurate data are obtained by government and other agencies so that they can plan according to actual, not estimated or unrecognized need. Unless we have a clear idea of the numbers of children living outside families, these children will be left behind by the very development goals intended to reach them.

Working together to close the child data gap

The issue of uncounted children is not new, and there is a growing recognition among states of the need to start counting children who are left behind due to faults in data collection methodology. At the UN Statistical Commission meeting in March 2017, 45 UN Member States made a public statement expressing their support for "concerted action to [...] capture data on children outside households."¹ Despite this strong statement, no concerted action has yet been taken by governments to change the way children living outside of households are counted. The Children Count summit comes at a pivotal moment to start developing a solution that can be implemented by states.

There are already innovative methodologies and initiatives, in particular by NGOs and intergovernmental organizations, attempting to address the problem. With the aim of learning from this work and building on it, the summit will convene experts and key stakeholders to share experiences and ideas to:

- Co-create a roadmap for collective action to find, map, and measure the development of children outside families.
- Identify ways to ensure that these data are used by governments and donors to materially improve children's lives, within the framework of the SDGs.
- Create connections between sectors, ensuring contributors leave with actionable ways to continue testing, scaling, and collaborating on new approaches.

The purpose of this briefing paper is to provide an overview of the problem, examples of current initiatives tackling it, and ways stakeholders can be involved in the solution. The accompanying resource paper, 'Mapping children outside family care - resources and initiatives. A working paper,' provides more detailed information on initiatives and methods.²

The missing millions...

Millions of vulnerable children are left out of national and global statistics and data collection efforts. If they are not included in the data gathered, they become invisible in development goals and even more marginalized. In order to ensure that programs, support, and services reach the most vulnerable populations, they must be identified, counted, listened to, and monitored.

Children living outside families are among the hardest to reach and most vulnerable populations. These include children living on the streets, unaccompanied and separated children in emergency and migratory situations, those in forced or hazardous domestic labor, and those in institutional care; and it is notoriously difficult to count them. Because these groups are not part of 'households', they are systematically left out of mainstream data collection processes which tend to rely on household-based surveys, where a researcher will go door-to-door to a sample of households to gather information on the composition and needs of residents, such as the Demographic and Health Surveys³ and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys.⁴ The consequence is that over 200 million children are estimated to be missing from these surveys worldwide because they are not included in common data collection processes,⁵ although this number is likely to be an underestimate.

?00 MILLION CHILDREN OUTSIDE OF PARENTAL CARE

CHILD
DOMESTIC
WORKERS



STREET
CHILDREN



TRAFFICKED
CHILDREN



CHILDREN IN
ORPHANAGES
AND OTHER
INSTITUTIONS



CHILDREN ON
THE MOVE



Challenges to inclusive counting

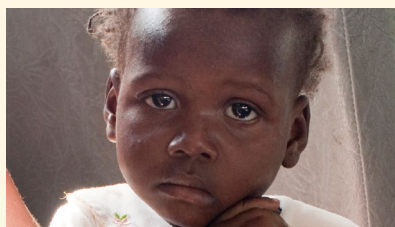
There are numerous obstacles to counting children outside families. For example, children in domestic labor may be living with a 'family unit' but not as part of that unit, which means they are unlikely to be included in surveys identifying who lives in the household. The very nature of trafficking means that children are purposely hidden, and street-connected children and unaccompanied children on the move are, by definition, fluid populations that are difficult to track. Counting children in institutional care is difficult as there is inconsistency in what constitutes an 'institution,' and in many countries, the number of unregistered and unregulated private and faith-based institutions is unknown.

Many governments and National Statistics Offices lack the capacity and resources to include children outside families in data collection.⁶ In many countries, there is either no system in place for collecting this type of data, or such systems are not always comprehensive or robust. Collection of administrative data, such as birth registration or care arrangements, is underdeveloped in many countries; either this data is not collected at all, cannot be disaggregated, or there are significant gaps.

The consequences of excluding vulnerable children

The lack and inaccuracy of official data can lead to significant underestimates of the number of vulnerable children. If governments are unable to quantify the number of children that need support and identify their needs, they will never be able to create the services needed to ensure children develop to their full potential.⁷ There is also a risk that the numbers could be overestimated in order to promote the issue and attract funding, although conversely, some funders could be put off by a seemingly insurmountable problem.⁸

Children outside families are extremely vulnerable and therefore are most in need of the protection and development opportunities offered by the SDGs. If this group are excluded from the data, they are likely to grow up without benefitting from efforts to achieve the goals' intentions of basic health, education, and protection, whilst facing continued exposure to harm and abuse. A central theme to the SDGs is to "leave no-one behind," yet millions of children will be forgotten and marginalized unless a strategy for counting all children, including those living outside family care, is developed and implemented.

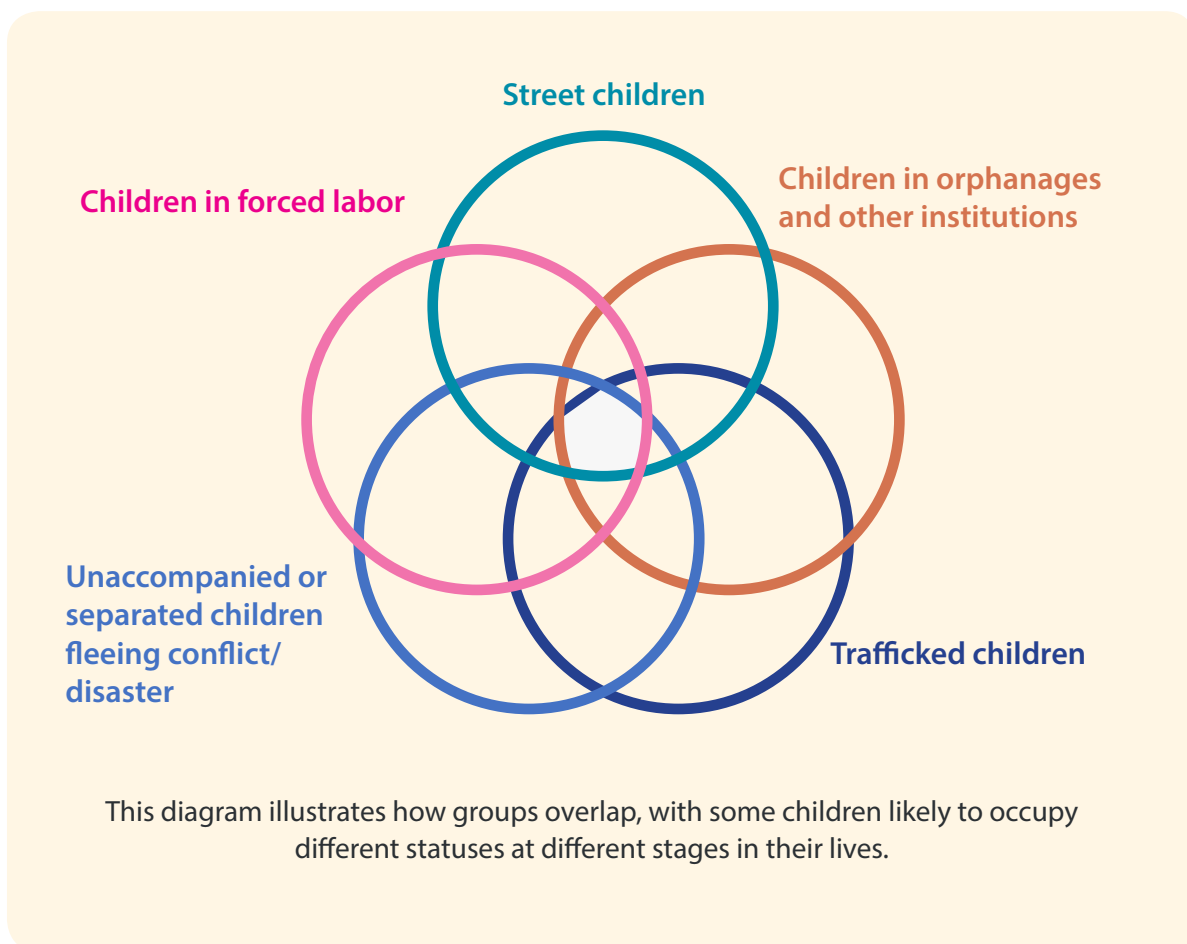


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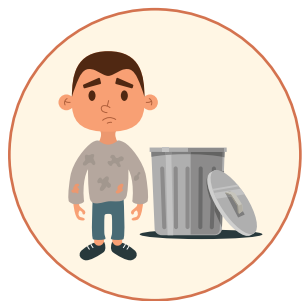
Current initiatives and methods

The international community has long been aware of this critical gap in the data; a few initiatives and methodologies designed to overcome it are described below.⁹ It is essential that we build on and learn from these and share information, data and experience, to ensure the best use of resources and the best solutions for children.

Children outside families live in a variety of different circumstances and have diverse needs. While some of the issues are specific to particular groups, there are also overlaps and common themes. It is also likely that children may occupy different statuses at different stages in their lives – for example, a child might be trafficked into an institution, and end up living on the streets.



Shrinking the data gap is not just about numbers and metrics - it is about children's lives. In addition to collecting quantitative data, governments and researchers must include children's voices, gathering qualitative information on their needs and aspirations, so that they are not just counted, but also included in a meaningful way.



Street children

There are several different definitions of street children used, such as 'street-involved children,' 'children working and/or living on the street,' 'children in street situations,' and 'street-connected children.' The inconsistent use of these terms and who should be included when counting makes accurate estimates and comparisons difficult.¹⁰

Consortium for Street Children has published a briefing paper outlining the strengths and limitations of the main counting methodologies to better understand the challenges of counting street-connected children.¹¹

These methodologies include:

- Capture-recapture (where the number of street children in a particular location are counted and their identities noted to create a list; the count is then repeated at a different time, and based on a comparison of the new count to the original list, the overall number of street children are estimated)
- Respondent-driven sampling (where participants in a study recruit their friends or peers to participate)
- Census (an enumeration of a population combined with surveys or interviews)
- Observational head count (where children are counted in a specific location through observation, with no additional data being collected)

The capture-recapture approach was recently used in Cambodia in specific urban areas to estimate the number of homeless children, in a study led by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), Columbia University and Friends International; with the implementation and data collection carried out through the Cambodia Street Children Network. The study estimated that there are at least 4,086 homeless children in the areas covered. The intention is to repeat this estimation exercise in the same areas in approximately three years, in order to gauge Cambodia's progress towards meeting its stated goal of reducing the total number of homeless children.¹²



Children in orphanages and other institutions

A primary challenge in ensuring that all children in institutions are counted is that there is no universally accepted definition of an 'institution.' In some contexts, 'orphanages,' 'residential care,' and 'institutions' may be used interchangeably. In other cases, a narrow definition of an institution is used, focused for example on size or type of provider. Furthermore, especially in Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs), it is common that the majority of institutions are unregistered or unrecorded. As a result, there are no official records of the number of children resident.

While methodologies for estimating the number of missing children from administrative databases have been tested, there is considerable room for improvement in both the coverage of administrative data and estimation methods used. For example, a comprehensive modelling study carried out in Cambodia by the National Institute of Statistics and Columbia University estimated the national figure of children in residential care based on data collected from institutions at 24 sites across the country. The researchers used statistical analysis to calculate the rate of children in residential care in each location, enabling a national estimate to be made.

They estimated that 48,775 children live in institutions - over 4 times higher than the official government's estimate at the time of 11,453.¹³

In Haiti, an estimated 85% of institutions are unregistered, and there is no system of keeping track of all children entering or leaving care.¹⁴ The Government of Haiti is currently working with Lumos and other stakeholders to carry out a comprehensive assessment of all institutions and record each child living in them.¹⁵



Unaccompanied or separated children fleeing conflict/disaster

Counting children who are fleeing conflict or disaster is inherently difficult due to the transient nature of this group. In addition, unaccompanied children may be unwilling to register with the national authorities,¹⁶ or may declare themselves to be adults so they are not prevented from continuing their journey.¹⁷ As such, accurate data and statistics remain limited.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR's Missing Migrants Project have developed a website providing information and the latest data on the numbers of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean and worldwide.¹⁸ The project uses a number of sources, which vary depending on the region, but broadly include data from national authorities, media reports, NGOs, and interviews with survivors of shipwrecks.

A team of researchers from the Faculty of Public Health and Policy at London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine has explored the potential use of very high resolution satellite imagery to remotely estimate the size of forcibly displaced populations.¹⁹ They found that the method had reasonable accuracy for the purpose of rapid estimation, but with some significant limitations depending on the context, and further development of this approach is needed.



Children in forced labor

Counting children in forced labor can be extremely difficult as this issue usually remains hidden, meaning that regular household-based surveys are largely ineffective at identifying them. Information on the location, characteristics and circumstances of these children is hard to identify and special sampling and counting procedures must be employed.²⁰

One method used for attaining information on this group is a census which asks how many children there are in the household, and how many of those are not identified as sons or daughters, but as 'other'.²¹ There are also school-based surveys, which look at the numbers of children enrolled at and actually attending school. This number is then compared with the total population of children in the area, providing an estimate of the number of children who are not enrolled or not attending school, and hence are potentially at risk of child labor.²²

The International Labour Organisation has noted that no single survey method can capture a complete data set on child labor.²³ Therefore, they are also looking beyond conventional household surveys, and have developed sample methodologies for targeted sectors and activities, such as child street vendors or child domestic workers.²⁴



Trafficked children

The sinister nature of trafficking means children are actively 'hidden' and, as such, traditional surveys are less applicable.

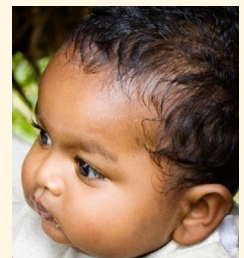
International Justice Mission (IJM) use several methodologies to measure the prevalence of child sex trafficking. These include time-space sampling, which is a method that identifies areas where groups of the target population can be found, and from which a list of randomly selected areas are visited and mapped. IJM has used this method to measure the prevalence of child sex trafficking in Cambodia, the Philippines, and the Dominican Republic.²⁵

Walk Free Foundation also use a range of methods to gain insight into the scale and scope of victims of child trafficking. These include respondent-driven sampling - where data are collected via a peer referral process, and multiple systems estimation - where multiple lists of trafficking victims from governments and NGOs are examined and the overlap between incomplete data lists is used to determine a total.

Ensuring all children are counted

We need to work together to ensure all children count and are counted. For governments, NGOs and others to protect the lives of vulnerable children and meet their human rights obligations, they need to know the scale and the scope of the problem. This is not just about numbers and data, it is about children's lives.

The SDGs present an opportunity to ensure that those historically left out of traditional statistical survey methods – the most vulnerable populations – are included. This is a pivotal time as states begin to implement the goals; it is vital that different actors work together, using a cross-sectoral approach, to ensure that everyone can benefit from these efforts and to hold governments accountable for the commitments they make. Political commitment, expertise, innovation and resources are necessary for creative enumeration and to ensure that programming reaches children outside family care.



Political: How can governments create an enabling environment for counting children outside families?

Governments can play a vital role by developing policies and guidelines for counting children, ensuring that all children are included in future censuses, working in partnership with NGOs, and fully supporting National Statistics Offices (NSOs). NSOs are in charge of collecting population data in most countries and their funding and mandate is usually (at least partly) directed by the government. Government legislation calling for the counting of non-household populations, alongside the designation of sufficient budgetary resources to implement this objective, is critical.

In addition to committing government funding and capacity towards counting children outside families, collaborative advocacy work with the civil society sector is needed to ensure that these hidden children are continually brought to the forefront of the minds of influential policy makers. Civil society can also play a key role in providing third party data to support governments' mapping initiatives, as well as demonstrating best practice in working directly with vulnerable populations and including children's voices.

Expertise and innovation: How can new technologies and innovative methodologies provide greater opportunities to count and measure children outside families in ways that were not possible before?

The tech sector has an important role to play in identifying existing technologies that can support or enable inclusive data collection, and developing new innovative and user-friendly methods that are adaptable for use by NSOs, NGOs, local academia and other stakeholders - for example, social media analytics or satellite imagery.

No single method will capture all children outside families and expertise is needed on both traditional and new methodologies to close the data gap. In addition to the methodologies mentioned above, new ways to collect data should be tested and explored. For example, citizen-led surveys, where volunteers are provided with training to administer a short questionnaire, may provide more accurate data on the most marginalized populations.²⁶ Community-Based Monitoring Systems, where community members and local officials monitor development issues, may be used to track the achievement of the SDGs.²⁷

Resource partners: How can all donors, including private, bilateral and multilateral, take these issues into account when prioritizing their funding?

Investment can play a key role in demonstrating that closing the data gap is possible, particularly in the short-term. Sharing expertise and resources from different sectors can help provide much needed momentum to tackle existing challenges. Support can take many different forms, such as investments, including portions-of-proceeds, challenge funds, and matching donations; or in-kind contributions, for example through supply chains, communications platforms, branding or sharing data.

Conclusion

In describing the problem of missing data and the primary reasons behind it, this paper has demonstrated a strong case for changing the way that data is collected. It has highlighted that there are already efforts underway to rectify this, and some of the roles different actors can play to find a solution. The paper has also emphasized the importance of working together to ensure that efforts to realize the SDGs reach all children, including the most vulnerable.

The benefits of investing in children

Children are the future.

To ensure that children develop and reach their full potential, investments, political will, and innovation are needed now. There are many compelling reasons for investing in children, including a moral imperative to realize their rights, as well as the long-term social and economic value. Investment in children promotes more equitable and inclusive societies and the benefits far outweigh the costs.²⁸ It can reduce the risk of social exclusion and reliance on the state, while increasing wage-earning potential, benefitting society as a whole.²⁹ But to ensure that these investments are effective and efficient, we must first, together, find ways to gather data on the most vulnerable, many of whom are currently uncounted and living outside family care.



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FURTHER READING AND INFORMATION

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Read more about the #ChildrenCount campaign and how you can get involved [here](#).

Lumos has created a supporting working paper of resources to accompany this paper, it is a non-exhaustive list and participants are encouraged to add missing information; it is available on the Lumos website: wearelumos.org/sites/default/files/Research-Children-Count

Hosted by the UAE Permanent Mission to the UN, the #ChildrenCount summit is organised by Lumos, the Global Alliance for Children and Comic Relief Inc. It has been created with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Atlantic Philanthropies.