



Child Protection

IRC Niger



Children after a socio-emotional learning session organized in an IRC SHLS in Chanel/Kablewa site (Mainé-Sorao)

Context

Since the security crisis of February 2015, children living in the Diffa region have been in a particularly vulnerable situation, due to violence, forced displacement and multiple security risks, as well as violations of their rights. Continued displacement has exposed girls and boys in this region to family separation, the worst forms of child labour including sexual exploitation, toxic stress due to insecurity and violence, forced child marriage, and other forms of abuse such as neglect. Due to family separation and declining incomes, many children have been forced to drop out of school to work to contribute to the household income. Children have been exposed to an excessive number of risks to their safety and family life. In some cases, children were enlisted or forced to enlist in armed groups. As a result, IRC teams regularly encounter children who show signs of prolonged distress such as bedwetting, excessive crying, anger, sadness, low self-esteem, anxiety, and difficulty managing their emotions, which can have a lasting negative impact on their cognitive, emotional, and physical development.

Our innovations

Our Safe Healing and Learning Spaces (SHLS) are safe and caring spaces where children in conflict and crisis can heal from trauma, learn and feel safe. Research shows that regular access to predictable and caring learning spaces, combined with a safe and supportive family environment, can have a profound and lasting impact on children's learning and well-being. IRC's SHLS toolkit includes maths and reading classes to develop literacy, social-emotional learning (SEL), parenting skills and individual child protection case management. Integrated services between education and protection services can play a key role in the lives of children in insecure situations.

The IRC SHLS Toolkit contains resources for a child-friendly program over a period of 9 months. The Social Emotional Learning (SEL) sessions aim to strengthen 5 SEL skills - including cognitive development, emotion regulation, positive social skills, conflict resolution and perseverance - for children aged 6 to 11 years. The sessions are delivered in structured two-hour sessions, accompanied by mindfulness sessions.

IRC's intervention in reading and mathematics targets children aged 6-11 years to develop basic literacy and numeracy skills, as well as problem solving, through analysis and reasoning (number sense, operations, measurement, etc.). In Niger, the national curriculum for primary education (CI and CP) has been adapted to the level of these children in coordination with the Government of Niger in order to facilitate access to education for out-of-school children and to allow for a subsequent transition to formal schooling.

IRC's Families Make the Difference parenting sessions are evidence-based and designed to reduce the use of violence in the home, promote healthy child development by increasing caregivers' use of positive behavior management, stress management, and practices that improve the quality of caregiver-child interactions. Caregivers participate in a series of 12 interactive sessions for children ages 0-5, 6-11, and 12-17 on topics such as understanding parental stress, the impact of parental stress on children, understanding child development and emotional needs, understanding child brain development, toxic stress, and techniques to support your child.



Our response

Child protection case management: In Niger, IRC provides individual, family-centred, time- and gender-sensitive child protection case management services to children at risk or exposed to violence, neglect, abuse or exploitation, including family separation, loss of caregivers, psychosocial distress and child survivors of sexual abuse. Children from displaced communities, refugee children, children with disabilities and children with specific vulnerabilities are targeted for outreach services.

CRI social workers work closely with the child and his or her family or support network to create an action plan tailored to the child's needs in order to reduce the risks to which he or she is exposed and to increase his or her access to services that improve his or her quality of life. CPR's social workers aim to empower children to make choices in their lives, identify risks and mitigation measures. Referrals of children at risk are received from community structures (Associations Mères Educatrices - AME, Comités de Gestion Décentralisée des Etablissements Scolaires - CGDES, protection committees, women's groups).

Unaccompanied and Separated Children (ENAS): IRC supports the placement of unaccompanied/separated minors in foster families that are selected by the Regional Directorate for the Promotion of Women and the Protection of Children (DRPF/PE). IRC also works on the process of reuniting children with their biological families in partnership with DRPF/PE, ICRC and UNHCR in Niger, who are responsible for family tracing. In cases where a child in temporary foster care is reunited with his/her family, IRC ensures that the child



and his or her family also receive material support to meet the child's basic needs.

Birth certificates: To ensure that children have access to their inalienable rights and to prevent long-term marginalization and exposure to protection risks, IRC facilitates access to birth registration for unregistered children who face barriers to accessing their certificates. IRC works with Nigeria's Regional Directorate of Civil Status and Refugees as well as local municipal authorities and magistrates to ensure that children have access to birth registration, which facilitates access to a plethora of services, including school, health and other key services. Birth certificates allow children to obtain school certificates after completing certain grades. The lack of birth certificates hinders children's long-term access to education and locks families into cycles of poverty.

Child Protection Awareness: To raise awareness of the causes of child abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation, and ways to prevent and respond to abuse. IRC staff conduct awareness-raising sessions on issues such as child rights, child labour and the right to education in communities, targeting key stakeholders, parents, teachers, community leaders and children. IRC aims to strengthen the protective environment for children by building the knowledge and influencing the behaviour of protection committees, youth peer educators, women's groups and other relevant groups.

Highlights :

- IRC has established 7 active child protection committees in Diffa, Mainé Soro and Nguigmi) that identify and respond to child protection issues,
- More than 840 children (including 540 girls) can participate in weekly activities in 5 functional SHLS (4 in Diffa and 1 in Mainé Soro), where they receive support in social and emotional learning, basic literacy and individual support,
- More than 168 children who have experienced violence received psychosocial and material support from the IRC between September 2020 and September 2021,
- Over 300 parents/families of children at risk of dropping out of school received cash transfers to reduce barriers to accessing school. Caregivers were able to use the cash assistance to cover the costs of keeping their children in school - for some, this included school uniforms, food and transportation costs,
- More than 2,632 birth certificates were issued to displaced and indigenous children in the middle classes through a court decision in the Diffa region,

Next Steps

- IRC will expand its child protection interventions in the Maradi region.

IRC to step up cash distributions to families to support children who are at risk of dropping out of school in order to support school retention.

The IRC will create 11 more spaces for healing to provide access to literacy and numeracy skills.

The project also provides support for basic literacy and numeracy, social, emotional learning, and individual support for children who have been displaced and not in school

IRC will begin providing psychosocial support to adolescents with the IRC SAFE program.

IRC's child protection and education teams will contextualize social-emotional learning