

Policy Brief

Establishing an Office of
Children and Families at the U.S.
Department of State



I. Executive Summary

Instability abroad directly impacts U.S. safety, security, and prosperity. Investing in the well-being of children and families globally is one of the most effective and cost-efficient strategies to advance U.S. interests. This brief recommends establishing a dedicated **Office of Children and Families (OCF)** within the Bureau of Foreign Assistance, Humanitarian Affairs, and Religious Freedom (F) at the U.S. Department of State to ensure coherent leadership and coordination on international child and family well-being.

II. What is the Office of Children and Families (OCF)?

The OCF would oversee U.S. Government mandates and priorities related to children in low- and middle-income countries. Its portfolio would include:

- **International Basic Education** (READ Act)
- **Children in Adversity** (P.L. 109-95)
- **Early Childhood Development** (Global Child Thrive Act)
- Cross-cutting programs such as **PEPFAR's Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC)** initiative

By consolidating these mandates under one office, the OCF will drive a more coherent and strategic U.S. approach to child well-being abroad.

III. Why Place OCF at the State Department?

A. Aligning Child Well-Being with U.S. Foreign Policy Goals

The State Department is uniquely positioned to integrate diplomacy, foreign assistance, and multilateral engagement to advance systemic improvements in child protection, education, and development. As global crises—from armed conflict to pandemics to digital risks—disproportionately affect children, placing OCF at State ensures that child-focused investments are both technically sound and politically strategic.

B. Distinct from Domestic Mandates

Children overseas face vulnerabilities such as armed conflict, displacement, trafficking, digital exploitation, and limited access to health and education. These challenges require foreign policy tools, international partnerships, and diplomatic engagement—functions not suited to domestic agencies like HHS or the Department of Education. OCF ensures that international child policy is treated as a foreign policy imperative, not a domestic extension.



IV. Mandate and Core Responsibilities:

The OCF would:

- **Lead and Manage Smart Investments** in education, safety, health, well-being, and nutrition aligned with U.S. foreign policy.
- **Oversee Mandated U.S. Positions and Strategies**, including:
 - Special Advisor for Children in Adversity (P.L. 109-95)
 - Senior Coordinator of International Basic Education Assistance (READ Act)
 - Early Childhood Development Lead (Global Child Thrive Act)
 - U.S. Strategies on Children in Adversity and International Basic Education
- **Coordinate Within State** (regional bureaus, embassies, TIP Office, Special Envoy for Future Generations, Bureau of Consular Affairs' Office of Children's Issues) to strengthen child- and family-focused diplomacy.
- **Coordinate Across U.S. Agencies** (CDC, DHS, HHS, USDA, Peace Corps, DOL/ILAB, MCC) to align programs and maximize impact.
- **Enhance Accountability and Transparency** through mandated reporting to Congress, including:
 - Annual International Basic Education Report
 - Annual Report on Children in Adversity
 - Youth in Development Policy Report



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V. Advancing America's Strength, Security, and Leadership

Establishing OCF strengthens U.S. interests by:

- **Preventing Crises:** Supporting children and families reduces risks of recruitment into extremist networks and criminal activity.
- **Building Stable Partners:** Healthy, educated children become productive citizens and reliable partners for trade and governance.
- **Saving Costs:** Prevention and early investment reduce future humanitarian, security, and defense expenditures.
- **Projecting American Values:** Leading with compassion and purpose enhances U.S. credibility and moral authority globally.