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OUR GLOBAL REACH
April 1, 2021 – March 31, 2022

- 275 interfaith projects supported, working with 220 GNRC member organizations
- 77,344 children empowered to be change-makers in their communities
- 1,476 people adopted our unique approaches, tools, and resources
- 2.2 million people reached by World Day of Prayer and Action for Children and Together We Can End Child Poverty campaigns
Thank you for taking a moment to review our annual report. I truly appreciate your interest in our work.

Arigatou International is guided by three simple but profound convictions which we inherited from our founder, the late Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto.

The first is that the massive amount of suffering that children experience in our world must not be tolerated for even a single day more. Numbness, passivity, and inaction are simply not acceptable.

The second is that all religious leaders and faith-communities have a moral obligation not only to do their utmost to relieve children’s suffering, but also to cooperate with one another across religious lines, for what should be the greatest common cause of the human family—building a world where every child can grow up safe and sound.

The third is that children and young people themselves can and must be active participants in this effort. Children have precious insights and uniquely creative views on how to address the problems they face, and their voices are essential to building a just and peaceful world.

If I were to add a fourth—where I think we have made a contribution globally in the last 32 years—it would be the power of promoting closer cooperation between religious and civic/secular leaders, organizations, and communities.

Everyone’s participation is needed to make the significant changes required to build a world fit for children to live in, and such cooperation is required more than ever.

All of the efforts that you will read about in this report represent creative ways of applying these core ideas to cope with the unprecedented challenges that children are facing today and build back better for the future.

We strive to be as strategic as we can in selecting both the methods of our intervention and the themes on which we focus. Our four global initiatives, in essence, represent unique methods and models designed either to capture key opportunities for making a difference in children’s lives—such as promoting interfaith cooperation or ethics education—or to target a priority children’s issue, such as violence or poverty. Across them all, we do all we can to invite and empower children and young people to help shape, lead and implement the work.

As you will notice throughout this report, we are deeply grateful to the many valuable partners and collaborators we work with. As we like to say, “All for Children” means cooperation is the key.

Thank you again for your interest in our work. I look forward to traveling with you on our continued journey to a better future for children.
SPECIAL FEATURE: SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHO ARE CHANGING THE WORLD

Children are natural innovators with the capacity to imagine effective solutions for the world’s most pressing problems. They are strong team players who can inspire not only their peers but all of us to take action together for justice and peace. They want to make a difference, and they have much to teach us. Born with a longing to live with meaning, purpose and joy, children have the right to a voice in shaping the world.

At Arigatou International, we have great faith in children. One of our leading priorities is to inspire more and more people to listen to what children have to say and involve them as equal participants in building a better world. This is why we work so hard not only to secure children’s basic rights to safety, healthy development, and connection, but also to foster their capacity to be changemakers and empathetic leaders who drive transformation in their communities.

Arigatou International offers creative opportunities for children to take action for change, as well as to connect with their diverse peers all over the world to build a better future. We reach out across religious, socioeconomic, and ethnic boundaries, inviting every unique voice to be part of the solution to the challenges children face worldwide.
Children's Solutions Lab
Child-led educational solutions to child poverty in local communities

Arigatou International’s Children’s Solutions Lab offers mini-grants and mentorship to groups of children implementing their own child-designed, child-led solutions to child poverty in their communities.

Thirty-seven children’s groups from 21 countries applied, and five groups — from Cuba, India, Kenya, Peru, and Serbia — were awarded micro-grants ranging from US$500 to US$1500. Supported by adults in their local communities, the children then implemented their solutions during the first quarter of 2021.

The Children’s Solutions Lab has encouraged adults to create meaningful participatory spaces and opportunities where children are empowered to lead, develop, and implement relevant actions.

Highlight
A Children’s Solutions Lab Award-Winning Project

In Kenya, children running a project in Garissa County focused their efforts on fighting negative social norms and cultural practices that contribute to child poverty. The project was conducted by 11 children coming from different backgrounds. They organized three theater plays in different communities in Garissa. Their 35-45 minutes of acting carried a powerful message about the need to shun child marriage and provide equal educational opportunities for all children, as a way to break the shackles of poverty. The group organized awareness and community mobilization actions during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence in the autumn of 2021.

Learn more about the 2022 projects in the Children’s Solutions Lab here.

“In the implementation of projects, we had viewed kids as recipients that should not be part of developing and implementing, but this has changed. Having them involved, we have seen the critical role they play.”

— Ms. Benazir Mohamed, adult supporting the children’s group in Kenya
INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUES

To enhance children’s meaningful participation, Arigatou International creates opportunities for intergenerational dialogue among children, young people and adults.

In these spaces for dialogue, children share their own concerns and recommendations on topics of real relevance to their lives. Recently, the focus has been on how to enhance opportunities for their participation particularly through education, given the persisting disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Arigatou International works to help more children contribute to local, regional, and global advocacy efforts, ensuring their views are heard by religious leaders and decision makers at the United Nations and in government.

“A school is a place where children grow and develop together with others, and so it has a very important role in helping children learn about this diversity and appreciate their differences.”

— Sophia, child from Indonesia

“Some teachers blame children if the children are not able to access online classes without problems ... It is going to be harder to go back to school physically because we have been online for almost a year.”

— Raluca, child from Romania

“If we are not efficient during the pandemic, we will not be effective after the pandemic.”

— Aakash, young person from India

The Lab has supported projects addressing multiple issues affecting children, including child marriage, online sexual abuse and exploitation, and the lack of meaningful participation in policy-making processes. In the year under review, GNRC members from Chile, Nepal, Serbia and Tanzania brought together diverse religious communities to increase children’s participation in protection and advocacy efforts against violence.

**SERBIA: Sombor Educational Center**

Sombor Educational Center (SEC) advocates for children’s rights. Their participation in the Lab focused on developing and implementing a model to ensure meaningful participation of children in the drafting of local municipality action plans.

**NEPAL: Peace Service Center/Shanti Sewa Ashram**

The Stop Online Sexual Exploitation and Harassment (SOSEH) project supported by the Lab provided children and teenagers with opportunities to promote peer-to-peer learning about the importance of responsible and ethical use of the internet, to protect them from violence and exploitation.

**GNRC Tanzania**

In Tanzania, the Lab focused on multi-stakeholder mobilization to end sexual violence against children and stop early child marriage. So far, the Lab has been implemented in Dar es Salaam, Shinyanga, and Zanzibar, involving children, faith leaders representing Christian and Muslim communities, educators, parents, caregivers and government officials.
This was our first time carrying out an interfaith advocacy project. The most important thing for us has been to listen to the voices of adolescents. They emphasized the importance of having a space to be heard; their enthusiasm for action; their lack of knowledge of their rights and how important it is to them to participate in decisions that affect them; the value that working from an interreligious perspective has for them and their interest in learning about other religions; and a real passion for advocacy.

— María José Ananias, GNRC Chile
Launched in 2020, the “Faith in Action for Children” virtual exhibition gave children from around the world a space to creatively express their opinions and concerns about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, by hosting guided tours for more children—from 14 different countries so far—the exhibition is supporting their conversations about the pandemic and the support they still need.

For many of the children on the guided tours, this was a first experience interacting with children from different regions, cultures, and religious traditions. Thanks to the facilitation of GNRC members and many others, tour participants hailed from both urban and rural areas in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and at least five different religious traditions. The tours were conducted in English, Spanish and Portuguese.

### What Children Are Saying During the Guided Tours

“Some children are victims of abuse at home, if they cannot go to school they cannot report if they have problems at their homes.”
— Emira, child from Bosnia and Herzegovina

“Things have been harder for girls, as they are doing more work at home than boys. While the boys are sent out to play, the girls are asked to wash the dishes or clean the house.”
— Mwanaid, child from Tanzania

“Adults should play more with the children to cheer them up.”
— Cristel, child from Peru

Learn more about the exhibition and the tours [here.](#)
Since 2019, Arigatou International has supported the GNRC Children’s Committee, seeking out children’s insights and recommendations for our work. This year’s committee included nine children from 15 to 18 years of age from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The program involves mentoring to strengthen members’ understanding of child safeguarding and children’s rights. The members plan for and participate fully in activities at the local, regional and global levels, including this year the Online Global Symposium on Transforming Education and the World Day of Prayer and Action.

The children on the Committee actively involve other members of their communities in their actions. Children in Latin America, for example, brought together peers for a virtual dialogue about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives. In Lebanon, Anthony involved other children from his community to co-create a video sharing their experiences with the pandemic. With the support of his local GNRC group, Anthony also organized virtual discussions about how poverty was affecting children in order to prepare a project application for the Children’s Solutions Lab.

“Children have highly developed minds, and, like all human beings, they must be listened to and taken seriously regarding important decisions that have to do with them.”
– Lucia, Panama

“When children are denied the right to be heard, negative consequences such as violence can result.”
– Sara, Colombia

“Teaching people about different cultures and traditions and organizing meetings with people from around the world is a great way to protect children from discrimination.”
– Anthony, Lebanon

“During this pandemic, it is very important for children to get back to face-to-face classes because we learn much faster and we will have the chance to develop our social skills and feel reconnected.”
– Tudor, Romania

“When adults take children’s ideas into account, they not only give children a sense of satisfaction but also of maturity to deal with a similar problem in the future.”
– Pavithran, India

“We need to look at why discrimination happens, for fear of the unknown and different, stereotypes and prejudices. To solve this, we need to get to know others, their cultures, and customs, and we can only do that through education.”
– Ivana, Bosnia and Herzegovina

“When adults take children’s ideas into account, they not only give children a sense of satisfaction but also of maturity to deal with a similar problem in the future.”
– Pavithran, India

“Before, children had no voice, they were not considered important in the world. Now we are important, we have a voice and that makes us a little less vulnerable in this cruel world.”
– Vanesa, Dom. Republi

“Letting a child express himself and give his point of view will help him to awaken his spirit; it will also give him the ability to think for himself without being afraid.”
– Soudjay, Comoros

“As children, we always see everything, when a situation happens, we can assess it and we can say what we believe is the best for us or for our community.”
– Tamara, Mexico

Meet the GNRC Children’s Committee online
SDGs ACADEMY FOR CHILDREN

Arigatou International launched the SDGs Academy for Children during its 2020 Global Week of Faith in Action for Children. The goal of the Academy is to empower children to make important contributions to the global effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The Academy is designed to provide safe spaces—including in-person and virtual hybrid environments—for children to learn about the SDGs and come up with their own actions to help achieve the goals by 2030. It includes:

• Learning course with 3 modules to help children of different age groups to understand the SDGs and Agenda 2030

• Multimedia storytelling campaign that collects and amplifies SDG-related stories by and for children

• Multi-level game app that teaches children about the SDGs as they play; and

• Joint advocacy actions and intergenerational dialogues.

A model physical space has been set up in Limuru, Kenya, to provide an example of the five hubs—Knowledge, Capacity, Innovations/Solutions, Dialogue and Faith/Fun—for other locations to replicate.

EMPOWERING CHILDREN TO INFLUENCE POLICYMAKERS AND IMPROVE EDUCATION

Arigatou International organized four focus group meetings with children within the framework of the G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) Education Working Group, of which Arigatou International is an active member. The focus groups took place in Brazil, Indonesia and Portugal. In Brazil and Indonesia, the meetings took place online. In Portugal, there were two face-to-face meetings. The focus groups brought together 46 children ages 14 to 18 from the Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities and 12 accompanying adults including teachers, social workers and non-formal educators working with children in faith communities.

The focus groups created safe, caring spaces for children to explore important questions such as: How has their education, learning and life been impacted by COVID-19? What has helped them to stay motivated, safe and connected with others?

What part has education played in helping them, and what support have faith communities provided as children struggle with the difficulties and challenges of the disruptions to education? They also created spaces for children to imagine education post-COVID and think about what they would like education to focus on. What kind of changes would they like to see in their school and in the way education is provided? What support would they like faith communities to provide for their learning and well-being?
PRAYER AND ACTION FOR PEACE IN UKRAINE

The war in Ukraine engulfed the world’s attention beginning in February 2022. The conflict has had an especially devastating impact on the children of Ukraine, with many losing their lives, being forced to flee their homes, or enduring completely inhumane siege conditions. Arigatou International has focused on raising awareness about the needs of children and families affected by the conflict, and deeply appreciates the efforts of GNRC members in Macedonia, Moldova, and Romania, who have taken action locally to support them.

When it comes to the unacceptable harm that violence causes to children, the war in Ukraine is no different than any of the other armed conflicts currently raging around the world. Arigatou International deplores all forms of violent conflict and is joining forces with partners to support children on the move as they seek safety and peace (see pages 30, 48).

Arigatou International issued a statement regarding the war in Ukraine on March 2, 2022 (at right).

Gravely concerned about the 7.5 million children affected by the escalation of violence and armed conflict in Ukraine, we at Arigatou International call for, and pray for, an immediate cessation of all military aggression, and for the quick provision of aid and assistance to all civilians, especially women and children and their families. We support the UN Secretary General’s call for an immediate cessation of hostilities to protect children from violence and the violation of their rights, and a return to bilateral negotiations for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Every religion values life and prohibits the taking of human lives. We therefore ask all people of faith everywhere to join us in solidarity to oppose this war in Ukraine which is causing death, pain and suffering. We pray for all decision-makers to be filled with a spirit of great wisdom and a heartfelt commitment to put an end to this armed conflict and violence.

We call in particular on all political and faith leaders to unite and for the entire human family to come together to protect the children of Ukraine. Children are our present and our future. If we fail them, we fail our world’s prospects for peace. At Arigatou International, we firmly believe that together we can build peace and protect the precious children of this wondrous human village we call home.

Arigatou International
March 2, 2022
INTERFAITH COOPERATION FOR CHILDREN

Faith communities around the world play an integral role in supporting children. Often, it is faith-based organizations that are uniquely effective in reaching the most vulnerable, marginalized children in contexts beset by poverty and violence. Religious leaders also play a critical role by employing their moral influence and working with families to shape environments that are healthy, safe places for children to grow up.

At Arigatou International, we strongly believe that people of faith can make unique contributions to children’s rights and well-being. But we are convinced that these efforts are even more effective and far-reaching when they involve cooperation across diverse religious traditions. Add empowered participation by children and the impact is even more profound.

Our experience since launching the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) in the year 2000 shows this is true. Today, we continue to do everything we can to inspire and equip people from different faith backgrounds to work together to build a better world for children.
1,200 organizations, entities and individuals from 15 faith and spiritual traditions located in 61 countries with active networks in 57 countries.
STRENGTHENING OUR GLOBAL NETWORK OF FAITH ACTORS WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN

Dr. Mustafa Y. Ali
Secretary General, GNRC, and Director, Arigatou International – Nairobi

From April 2020 to October 2021, we conducted a comprehensive assessment of the Global Network of Religions for Children, focusing on three areas: GNRC Network and Connectivity; GNRC Network Health and Capacity; and GNRC Network Results and Significance. The goal of the assessment was to reinvigorate, strengthen, and map out the next steps for the GNRC, while building on the GNRC’s 20 years of extensive interfaith collaboration in shaping and advocating for a better world for children.

The assessment revealed the GNRC Network to be a diverse, multi-religious, multi-cultural platform comprising over 1,200 organizations and individual members spread over 61 countries around the world. The assessment elicited a range of recommendations from members, which the GNRC Secretariat is currently implementing. Six working groups of members have been formed to support this process, focusing on: Shared Purpose; Membership and Member Engagement; Communications; Monitoring and Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL); Resources; and Infrastructure.

In the GNRC’s first 20 years, it has directly and indirectly reached millions of children and adults around the world through its grassroots work. In the last five years alone, the GNRC has directly reached 287,639 adults, including 10,211 faith leaders, and 496,354 children in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa. The Network has indirectly reached over 54,035,000 individuals globally in the last five years.

More information on the GNRC Assessment Report is available here.
INTERFAITH COOPERATION IN ACTION

INDIA: Intergenerational dialogue with boys on ending violence against women and girls in rural areas

In 2018, Shanti Ashram, a GNRC member in India, formed a partnership with the International Centre for Child and Public Health (ICPH) and the Indian Academy of Paediatrics (IAP) to implement a program focused on ending violence against women and girls, which is a growing problem in rural India. The Government of the Netherlands provided the bulk of the funding for 2021. The program employs intergenerational dialogue and equips boys to be active allies in challenging gender-based violence. It uses Arigatou International’s Ethics Education framework, which is designed to nurture a sense of belonging to a common humanity and support adolescents striving to peacefully transform their communities. More than 3,000 children have participated in the program. In the year under review, 657 children and parents engaged directly in 13 sessions involving 10 schools and 31 villages.

“I understood how learning crises and mental crises were impacting children, particularly in this adolescent age group. Dialogue with boys lets these adolescent boys open their minds and understand the challenges faced in the community. During the panel discussions, boys easily shared their thoughts on the kind of violence happening in their community and neighborhood. The boys also gave wonderful child-friendly solutions on how to end violence against children, especially girls.”

— Vijayaragavan Gopal, Head, Youth Leadership Programme, Shanti Ashram

“With the help of this session, I learnt the legal marriage age of men and women, and learned to show respect and empathy to women. If a girl child is harassed or molested, she should inform 1098—the child helpline number—and understand that there should not be any gender-based discrimination.”

— Saran, boy from India
LEBANON: Religion and spirituality for healthy child upbringing

The Annas Linnas Association, a GNRC member in Lebanon, seeks to nurture children’s spirituality with a focus on promoting self-acceptance and self-esteem, fostering personality development, and encouraging connection with the Divine. In the year under review, Annas Linnas held a workshop to help children understand that they are perfect just as they are, and to understand that social media is not a good way to measure self-worth. Children also learned, from faith leaders, the importance of contributing to making the world a better place by ending hate, including “Saying No to Bullying.” The workshop also had a sports component designed to develop empathy, promote healthy behavior, and offer moments of joy and growth to children. Both Lebanese and Palestinian children participated. Several partners support GNRC Lebanon’s work, including Caritas, Provida, Mamre, and the Jezzine and Kfranabrakh and other municipalities.

ROMANIA: Creating a space for learning and sharing

The Community of Practice is a flagship program of GNRC Romania, led by the Education for Change organization. The program has reached 5,500 children, with the involvement of 200 teachers and NGO representatives. The goal of the program is to create safe spaces for learning in schools. In 2021, teachers and students were empowered in conflict management, with a focus on addressing the increased violence in and around schools during the pandemic. The teachers and students trained by the program then offered sessions on the topic of reconciliation in multiple schools around Bucharest.

“While talking about the way children are raised, it is necessary to mention the importance of the way the person who is raising them is raised as well.”

— Sheikh Faisal Al-Mahdi, Imam, Ali Alnahri Mosque, Beqaa, Lebanon

“This Community of Practice is a real resource for me. I’ve met role models who have inspired me a lot in my work.”

— School Director, Magherus School
Interfaith Cooperation for Children

I realized that usually, we don’t really accept other people’s opinions. That’s how I have contributed to many conflicts. In the future, I’m going to listen more to my friends and ask them what their arguments are.

— Student

I realized what I was doing to my fellows was bullying. I understood the grave consequences of bullying and started to change. My fellow students don’t believe me yet, but I understand why, and I’m determined to show them I’m a different person now.

— Student

I realized that I had been passive in my communication with my peers. I never had the courage to show that their behavior hurt me. Now I try every day to become assertive.

— Student

The power of the GNRC Romanian Community of Practice has been evident in the response to the increased number of refugees from Ukraine in February and March 2022. High school students collected support for Ukrainian children fleeing the conflict, contributing to the interfaith efforts by AIDROM to prepare transportation for thousands of refugee mothers and their children arriving at the borders from Ukraine. GNRC youth in Romania were involved in similar initiatives. Other key partners of the Community of Practice include AIDROM (the main funder), EDUHSP Association, Craiova, Leea Hub Association, and several secondary schools and colleges in Romania.

UGANDA: Supporting achievement of the SDGs during the pandemic

Restoring and Empowering Communities (REC) is a community-based initiative and member of GNRC Uganda. REC mobilized communities to reach out to children affected by the pandemic, who were exposed to increased violence and had no access to education. Children and young people were reached via phone and door-to-door visits, offered counsel, and invited to share their experiences. Food was distributed to families from underprivileged communities and other community-based organizations were engaged to sensitize the community about COVID-19. A total of 450 children were supported directly, and ten faith leaders also supported the project.

To improve the post-COVID learning environment, REC is integrating national curriculum resources with tools from Arigatou International’s Learning to Live Together program, COVID-19 Global Campaign, End Child Poverty resources and guide on preventing violent extremism.
HONDURAS, EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA AND MEXICO: 55 faith-based organizations working together to end violence

In February 2022, Arigatou International co-organized the Solutions Summit event on “Harnessing the Unique Role of Faith Actors to Protect Vulnerable Children from Gang Violence and Organized Crime in the Northern Triangle and Mexico.” Part of the Solutions Summit Series organized by the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, the event was co-sponsored by the Global Partnership and the Alliance for the Protection of the Children (APN). APN is a multi-faith, multi-country coalition of over 55 faith-based organizations that Arigatou International and others formed in follow-up to the GNRC Fifth Forum in 2017. It works to protect children from violence in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico.

The online Summit event brought together representatives of the governments of Mexico and the USA, faith groups, private foundations, civil society organizations and academia. Participants shared a multisectoral perspective and discussed multi-stakeholder commitments to address the challenges often faced by children in these four countries, mainly those living in areas controlled by maras and other gangs. These challenges include risk of recruitment by drug traffickers, living in a situation of human mobility, risk of being victimized by organized violence on migration routes including trafficking and smuggling, and the needs of children and adolescents whose parents or guardians are incarcerated.

The discussion highlighted concrete approaches that can be taken by faith actors to help to reduce the number of children who become victims of, or who are recruited by, gangs and organized criminal groups. During the event, Arigatou International presented the Regional Project for the Prevention of Violence against Children and Resilience Building (PREVENIR) on behalf of the APN. Project PREVENIR is being implemented across El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. The project is based on the evidence-based approach to violence prevention outlined in the Guide for the Prevention of Violence against Children and Adolescents (in Spanish), which was co-developed and published by the members of the Alliance.

To learn more about the event, view the video here.

To stay connected with the work of the Alliance for the Protection of the Children (APN) and project PREVENIR please visit the website (in Spanish) here or contact the alliance here.
Voices of GNRC Coordinators

Empowering Children with Disability: GNRC Montenegro
Sabra Decević
GNRC Coordinator – Montenegro

The work of GNRC member “Dječa Crne Gore-Children of Montenegro” focuses on children and youth living with disability. Children attend sessions where they meet with psychologists, speech-therapists, social workers, and personal assistants. We have provided these free of charge since 2016 with support from donors. In some areas where most people speak Albanian, it is a challenge to get experts who can work with children in that language. Aside from the language barrier, large class sizes prevent individualized learning plans for children in public schools, raising the potential for bullying.

Despite challenges posed by COVID-19, we assisted 21 families whose children received daily hour-long individual treatments. We organized ten workshops with families to help them overcome stress and accept their children’s unique situations. The workshops helped them establish self-care so they can be of more support to their children. Parents also learned how to play with their children and stimulate their development. Additionally, we organized trainings for 40 teachers on how to tailor educational plans and on developing transitional plans for those entering secondary school.

Our future plans include building stronger connections with institutions and practitioners to better respond to needs, and engaging more local authorities in this work.

I am most grateful that our efforts are being recognized countrywide, and I feel privileged to have been awarded the Iskra Philanthropy Award, a special recognition for civic contribution to the common good.

Interfaith Cooperation in Europe
Ismeta Begić
President, UŽ “Mozaik,” and GNRC Coordinator – Bosnia and Herzegovina

Religion in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and across Europe, is treated as a private matter, making it difficult to engage in interfaith activities that protect children. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, GNRC’s interfaith engagements began on the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children in 2012, when we mobilized children and religious leaders around advocacy and promotion of children’s rights.

Bringing religious leaders from different faith traditions to a common platform wasn’t easy. To encourage cooperation, we picked a topic they could comfortably speak about publicly. The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP) in 2013 also created a wonderful opportunity for interfaith cooperation. For the first time ever, religious leaders visited and supported vulnerable families. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we organized online activities to promote the role of religious leaders in providing guidance in this critical time. We now have three religious leaders from the Muslim and Christian faiths as members of the GNRC Bosnia and Herzegovina committee.

In my academic studies, I conducted research which clearly showed that learning about others and cooperation are crucial to peacebuilding. We believe there is much to be done for interfaith cooperation to gain full acceptance. What holds us back, however, is the constant uncertainty about how our messages and activities will be received in new situations, and more critically, the limitations in our technical and material capacities. Working for and with children through the GNRC interfaith platform has facilitated and made it easier for us to bring faith leaders from across the religious traditions to speak together, thereby increasing mutual understanding.

With September being Heritage Month in South Africa and September 21 being the UN International Day of Peace, what better way was there to commemorate these occasions, than for GNRC South Africa to launch our Zimbali Zonke Garden4Life Project? We launched the project on September 19, 2020 at a children’s interfaith day camp held in the run-up to the United Nations International Day of Peace, and it has continued to be a platform to share and take action to mitigate climate change.

South Africa is particularly vulnerable to the impacts and effects of climate change. We see this in our weather patterns every day. Temperatures are rising and rainfall is increasing each year, causing serious problems and damage. The Sustainable Development Goals call for action to protect the planet to ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The GNRC’s mission and vision of building a better world for children include caring for our earth. We look at how we can offer balanced education to our children and youth to include care for the environment and understanding how climate change affects us. We, at GNRC South Africa, consider knowledge, understanding and action on climate change as part of our personal commitments to protect the earth.

We commit to learning more about the impacts of climate change and understand how we can support environmental action locally. It is with this in mind that we started a vegetable garden for our children at World Assembly of Muslim Youth premises in 2021. The children come in on weekends to care for the garden, and learn about environment and climate change.

Visit the GNRC website here for more voices like these.
ETHICS EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN

Education is a powerful tool to influence children’s development. The experiences children have in schools—with teachers and their peers—shape the trajectories of their lives.

Education systems traditionally focus primarily on imparting knowledge and developing technical skills needed in the world of work. However, in today’s increasingly multicultural, pluralistic world—sadly so often marked by conflict, injustice, and discrimination—there is a great need to create educational spaces and opportunities that equip children with broader life skills and character assets such as empathy, respect for difference, and ethical decision-making, supporting their physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and also spiritual development.

At Arigatou International, we believe education should prepare children holistically—not only to successfully navigate our rapidly changing world, but also to play an active role in making it a better place. This is why we work hard to advance values-based education for children with a transformative approach to interfaith and intercultural learning, placing children at the heart of all that we do and how we do it.
ETHICS EDUCATION PROGRAM REACH
April 1, 2021 – March 31, 2022

Learning to Live Together
Implementation and Training

5,779 children and youth reached with programs based on Learning to Live Together, implemented by partners in 15 countries

Online course “Ethics Education for Children: A Transformative Pedagogy for Learning to Live Together”

66 participants from various countries

“Prevention of Violence Against Children in the School Environment” workshop during Geneva Peace Week

50 participants from over 20 countries
Over the past year, we have seen increasing concerns about education as well as growing momentum to transform systems of education to positively address the socioeconomic, political and environmental dynamics of our world today. It is undeniable that education is one of the most powerful tools in our hands to help build more inclusive and just societies. However, for education to play a transformative role, it needs to respond with precise relevance to the needs of our societies, particularly those of children and young people. Our ethics education programs offer a very important contribution to the broader effort to transform education today, since they place the focus on the learner, on building not just knowledge and skills but strengthening the values and attitudes children need to learn to live together with others and become agents of change in their communities. Ethics education can contribute to building a new social contract where children’s social, emotional and spiritual needs are met as paramount to their being and becoming.

The Online Global Symposium on Transforming Education that Arigatou International held in November 2021 was a milestone in our work, bringing together religious leaders, government representatives, UN agencies, CSOs and faith-based organizations, as well as children and young people, to reflect on how education needs to be transformed to build more inclusive and peaceful societies. The voices of children were strong and clear: They do not want more speeches, more promises or empty words. They demand action and transformation now. Arigatou International has listened carefully to their upraised voices and has committed to strengthening our actions in the years to come to support formal and non-formal educational institutions by integrating ethics education into their curricula and systems. This year, we launched a collaborative effort with many partners to work on this in Asia and Africa, and we are redoubling our efforts to strengthen our communities of practice. We look forward to collaborating with you in these efforts.
TRANSFORMING EDUCATION—A GLOBAL SYMPOSIUM ON ETHICS EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN

On November 22–23, 2021, Arigatou International together with ten partners held a global symposium to provide a platform for various stakeholders to share their experiences with ethics education programs and policies, as well as their contribution to peacebuilding and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. In a series of panel discussions and interactive workshops, participants learned from the experience, insights, and expertise of diverse partners working at national, regional and global levels.

More than 900 educators, children and young people, policymakers, religious leaders, academic researchers, and representatives of faith-based and civil society organizations, and ministries of education and multilateral agencies took part.
Children and young people have taught us resilience, and they are also asking us to transform education to address the multiple ethical challenges our societies face and to help them prepare to be agents of change in building a better world.

— Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, President, Arigatou International
The discussions and workshops during the symposium examined the importance of recognizing the role of education in building safer, equitable, and inclusive societies. Education needs to support children’s sound and holistic development, not only cognitive and physical but also social, emotional, and spiritual development. By nurturing ethical values in children, such as empathy, respect, and responsibility, as well as life skills such as critical thinking and the ability to solve their differences with others, children can learn to live together with people of different cultures, religions, and beliefs.

The new Learning to Live Together curriculum addresses the need to provide children earlier in life with opportunities to strengthen their sense of self and purpose, to learn to empathize with and respect people from diverse cultures, religions, spiritual traditions and beliefs, and to develop 21st-century skills that empower them to learn to reconcile their differences with others, care for the environment, and transform their communities together.

— Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, President, Arigatou International

One of the main outcomes of the symposium was the launch of the Ethics Education Fellowship Program, created for ministries of education to build a network of formal education institutions and a platform for sharing and building capacity within the ministries.

Find the recordings of the symposium, its report, and the policy brief, here.

Learning to Live Together — Now for Children Ages 6 to 11

Nurturing ethical values and children’s spiritual development early on can make a significant difference in the lives of children, their families, and their communities. In the year under review Arigatou International published Learning to Live Together – An Intercultural and Interfaith Program for Ethics Education for Children 6 to 11 Years Old. The new manual is designed to equip educators in formal and non-formal educational settings to facilitate transformative educational experiences. It provides them with pedagogical guidelines, tools and resources tailored for children in the middle childhood years. The manual was developed in collaboration with UNESCO within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal 4 to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,” and is intended as a contribution to the realization and fulfillment of children’s rights.

This new publication builds on 13 years using the Learning to Live Together program in 50 countries, reaching more than 4,500 educators and 435,230 children.

Download the new manual here.
SUPPORTING MIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN THROUGH EDUCATION

Arigatou International worked in collaboration with Synyparxis, an ecumenical organization from the Church of Greece, and KAICIID’s Network for Dialogue to help educators across Europe ensure the well-being of migrant and refugee children through education.

Educators and faith communities can play a critical role in fostering resilience in children on the move and refugees. By employing transformative educational approaches, they can also help promote inclusion and understanding among migrant, refugee and host communities.

As part of this collaboration, a booklet entitled “Solidarity: Advancing the Role of Education in Fostering Migrant and Refugee Inclusion in Europe,” was published in November 2021 to support educators and policymakers working with migrants and refugees in Europe. The booklet builds on the reflections and recommendations collected during a series of three webinars organized in 2021 for educators working with children across Europe. It invites readers to reflect on the dynamics and main challenges affecting migrant, refugee, and host communities in Europe and seeks to create awareness of the transformative role of education in fostering learning to live together. The booklet also provides examples of good practices and a practical model for ensuring that education fosters inclusion of refugees and migrants in the classroom, is attentive to their needs, and promotes dialogue, collaborative processes, mutual understanding, and respect among refugees, migrants and local community members.

Visit the Solidarity project website here. The booklet is available in English here and Greek here.
EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH EDUCATION TO CREATE A CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER

The collaborative project “Creating a Culture of Encounter—Empowering Youth through Education to Challenge Xenophobia, Discrimination and Exclusion in Europe,” is designed to reach young people and their teachers from Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. The project is a collaboration between Arigatou International, the Aga Khan Foundation, the European Wergeland Centre, the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace Research Institute, and Scholas Occurrentes.

The project creates shared spaces for young people to further develop their knowledge, attitudes and skills and get acquainted with community engagement tools related to democratic citizenship, intercultural and interfaith learning and dialogue, ethics, values and pluralism, project development and storytelling. Participants are encouraged to question and transform the narratives of hate speech and discrimination, thereby helping to build a culture of encounter, mutual understanding, respect, and solidarity in Europe.

“This has been a very beautiful experience, because I have understood to “give value” to the fundamental values in life and I have changed the way I look at people different than me.”
— Young person at Culture of Encounter workshop

“I would like to continue with this project; with these moments of encounter and dialogue where we appreciate diversity and feel a call to embrace diversity reflecting on the rich social identity we can build.”
— Educator
Arigatou International has developed an innovative educational framework for ethics education that can respond to the ethical challenges societies face. This framework has served as the foundation for several interventions to build peace and resilience in contexts of conflict and fragility.

In the year under review, in collaboration with the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (UNESCO-IICBA), we conducted 11 training workshops and webinar sessions under the project “Prevention of violent extremism and its resurgence amid the COVID-19 pandemic through education in Africa” which is aligned with the spirit of the Seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development and the New Approach for Peace and Stability in Africa (NAPSA) supported by the Japanese government.

With the workshops and webinars, we reached 480 higher education teachers, youth leaders, representatives from ministries of education and other stakeholders from 21 countries in Africa. Participants learned to integrate a transformative approach to education into efforts to prevent violent extremism. They reflected on the role of education and teachers in facilitating holistic learning experiences and gained skills and knowledge useful in supporting students to develop to their fullest potential.

Arigatou International has been collaborating with UNESCO-IICBA on similar projects since 2017, providing technical expertise to foster peace-and resilience-building and the prevention of violence using a transformative pedagogy.

TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY FOR BUILDING PEACE AND RESILIENCE IN AFRICA

The aspect of bringing in a transformative pedagogy broadened my perspectives about peace education and peacebuilding. Talking about transformative pedagogy in practice made sure that this training was not only theoretical but implementable.

— Michelle, participant from Zimbabwe

The world belongs to the youth. Today’s education system must emerge building on what has already been achieved to enable young people to live together and meet challenges with resilience and peaceful intentions.

— Yumiko Yokozeki, Director, UNESCO-IICBA
Activities in the Year Under Review

2 Training of Trainers workshops

60 educators from different educational institutions

- To build capacities in transformative pedagogy for peace, resilience, and the prevention of violent extremism

2 Training of Trainers workshops

96 young leaders

- To enhance youth capacities in peacebuilding and prevention of violence through the promotion of dialogue, mutual understanding, and respect in their communities
- Collaboration with UNESCO-IICBA and the African Union’s Youth4Peace program

3 Training of Trainers Workshops on Peace, Resilience and Prevention of Violent Extremism for Higher Education

85 university professors, college educators, and pedagogical inspectors

- To help participants understand conflict, violence, identity, conflict resolution mechanisms and peace consolidation, and learn how to implement ethics education programs to contribute to peacebuilding through a transformative pedagogy

4 Thematic Webinars

240 educators

- To support educators in creating safe learning environments, empowering learners and addressing sensitive issues during conflicts, emergencies and the COVID-19 pandemic
Nothing is more reprehensible than an act of violence committed against a child. Yet, around the world, children continue to suffer the highest level of violence of any other group. This disproportionate violence takes many forms: children are killed or injured in armed conflict, exploited for labor, afflicted by domestic violence, forced to serve as child soldiers, sexually exploited and abused through trafficking or online, and suffer from the especially pernicious violence known as extreme poverty.

Action from every sector of society is required to end this plague of violence against children. At Arigatou International, under the banner of “Prayer and Action for Children,” we focus our efforts on bringing together diverse religious leaders and faith communities to influence and advocate for the policy, social, and behavioral changes needed to end violence against children.

Our flagship effort is the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children, celebrated each year on November 20 around the globe by diverse organizations and individuals who come together for prayer, meditation, and other forms of worship, followed by concrete actions for and with children in the local community.
HONORING INNOVATIVE CHILD-LED EFFORTS TO PROMOTE MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

Rebeca Rios-Kohn
Director, Prayer and Action for Children, and Director, Arigatou International – New York

We were delighted to launch for the first time the Wear My Shoes Award as part of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children 2021. This helped put the spotlight on grassroots efforts and the remarkable actions co-led by children and adults to mitigate the global learning crisis arising from the COVID-19 global pandemic. Children—who are among the most affected by the pandemic—are emerging around the world as key agents of change by taking concerted action to help improve the lives of their peers. Innovative child-led activities are taking place in many countries in response to the unprecedented crisis, with school closures having left millions of children without access to learning.

The five award-winning practices focused on the most vulnerable and marginalized children, who were hit hard when deprived of access to learning. They all addressed children’s mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Increasingly, child-focused organizations working to improve the lives of children are involving them in decisions affecting their lives.

The Wear My Shoes Award ceremony was held during the Week of Tolerance and Inclusivity at EXPO 2020 Dubai to foster greater common understanding and build more tolerant societies, under the theme “Connecting Minds, Creating the Future.”
The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children 2021 was celebrated with an innovative Wear My Shoes Campaign (see page 37), building on the contribution of faith actors to children’s spiritual development and promotion of respect for their dignity and rights. In collaboration with UNICEF and 18 child-focused organizations and networks, Wear My Shoes sought to mobilize adults—including religious leaders, policymakers, parents/caregivers, and educators—to become the support system that children needed to return to school and overcome the impact of school closures.

The campaign advocated for people and organizations from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds to take actions to ensure that schools and educators create learning environments that are sensitive to the social, emotional and spiritual needs and concerns of children and youth.

Joint Statement Calling for Children’s Return to School
Issued by 18 Organizations on World Day 2021 (Excerpt)

We call on all persons and communities of faith to support and advocate for schools and educators to create learning environments that are sensitive to the social, emotional and spiritual needs and concerns of children and youth.

We call upon governments and international organizations to support all possible measures so children return to school and a learning environment that meets their needs.

We ask them to:
• Establish or invest in supportive and inclusive learning environments which address children’s mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being, while supporting their cognitive readiness, as well as supporting them in civic engagement and collaboration in advocating for climate solutions;
• Scale up evidence-based school programmes to provide preventative and responsive mental health services;
• Involve children and young people in decisions affecting their education and to ensure children’s rights and best interests are at the heart of COVID-19 responses;
• Address the disparities in children’s access to learning and provide special support for migrant children’s education;
• Include violence prevention and response measures, and remove violence-related barriers to return to school post COVID-19, in all school reopening plans.

On this World Day of Prayer and Action for Children 2021, we pledge to do our part by inspiring and empowering children, galvanizing religious leaders and faith communities, teachers, parents, civil society organizations, international organizations, technology companies, governments, and many others to take urgent action so that children’s right to education remains at the heart of all COVID-19 response. We commit to strengthening grassroots initiatives to promote all children’s return to school and to take action to prioritize the mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of all children.
WEAR MY SHOES CAMPAIGN

In November 2021, Arigatou International launched the Wear My Shoes Campaign to inspire children and adults—including religious leaders, policymakers, parents/caregivers, and educators—to advocate for children’s return to school and respond to the impact of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic on their social, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Wear My Shoes Awards

At EXPO 2020 Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, five winners were honored for outstanding practices carried out during the global pandemic in 2020-21 at the grassroots level, focusing on the most vulnerable and excluded children. A prize of US$5,000 was awarded to each of the five winners to support their ongoing work. The awards were made possible thanks to a generous donation by the Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities in support of the annual World Day of Prayer and Action for Children and the Wear My Shoes Campaign.

The five winners of the Wear My Shoes Award 2021 joined the celebration of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children 2021 and offered acceptance speeches.

1. Ecuador
   “Listening to the voice of children and adolescents”
   Paz y Esperanza, Misión Alianza (Ecuador) and Movimiento con la Niñez y la Juventud (Latinoamérica)
   The project was implemented from January 4, 2020 to January 31, 2021 in the northeast area of Guayaquil, Ecuador, to lift up the voices of children and adolescents during the pandemic and highlight its effects on their lives.

   “This prize inspires us, makes us enthusiastic as a movement for children and youth to continue onward because it highlights our mission of mobilizing Christian churches and other organizations of faith so that children’s and adolescents’ voices will be heard. In Latin America at this time, the voices of children and adolescents in Ecuador are being heard. Thank you for being our strategic partner in defending and advocating for children’s rights.”

   — Lisbeth Souza (Movimiento con la Niñez y la Juventud)

2. Mexico
   “Knowing and applying our rights”
   RED MILPA
   The project started on August 20, 2020 and ended on June 20, 2022. It reached 40 children each month in the marginalized communities in the cities of Monterrey and León. These communities are characterized by social and economic vulnerability and high levels of violence, with limited access to health and education services.

   “On behalf of the children, girls and boys in vulnerable situations, I’d like to say that we are thankful for generously giving us this support which we know involves solidarity and vision of helping children achieve their rights to education. Well-being for children is a priority for our children, for us as well. May God accompany, may God also strengthen us so that we can continue making an impact with the excellent sensitivity considering empathy and love to the children in communities that we serve who are at risk and may God also help us replicate.”

   — Sandra Cázares

3. Ecuador
   “Listening to the voice of children and adolescents”
   Paz y Esperanza, Misión Alianza (Ecuador) and Movimiento con la Niñez y la Juventud (Latinoamérica)
   The project was implemented from January 4, 2020 to January 31, 2021 in the northeast area of Guayaquil, Ecuador, to lift up the voices of children and adolescents during the pandemic and highlight its effects on their lives.

   “We are very happy to receive this. The honor of this distinction of Wear My Shoes by Arigatou International, we dedicate it to the children and youth of Ecuador in the whole world whose thoughts, feelings and voices must be heard, not only in this context of the pandemic, where the right of education has been undermined, but also at all times. Education has been undermined in our country and all over the world, so therefore we feel that children’s leading role must be promoted by adults in public domain, social domains, educational realm, religious world and in their families.”

   — Jose Vinces (Paz y Esperanza)
1. **Cuba**

**“Children of the Internet”**

Centro Cristiano de Servicio y Capacitación Bartolomé Gregorio Lavastida

The project was implemented in Santiago de Cuba from November 19, 2020 to May 1, 2021. It was carried out by school children who assisted 30 children living in very poor and marginalized communities, with limited or no access to the Internet. The project aimed to address the digital divide affecting these children, which was preventing them from following online classes and completing their homework, while also promoting peer-to-peer support.

“We would first of all like to thank God for this prize because this has enabled us to be with God in the commission of accompanying children, the most vulnerable children affected by the pandemic. We would also like to give special thanks to our children, on our project team who were the protagonists of implementing action and their families and collaborators in the project. The Center la Bastida and I would also like to share our special thanks to Arigatou International for their accompaniment and constant support to grow up. And we would like to ask God to enable us to continue working for happy children and their well-being. Thank you very much for this prize.”

— Maite María Alvarez Roca

2. **Myanmar**

**“Learning at Home Program”**

Saya Foundation

The Learning at Home Program was started in April 2020 to help respond to the need for online education when schools were closed because of the pandemic.

“Thank you all so much for recognizing our effort for children in Myanmar. The Learning at Home Program started with a very simple idea of making education available, bringing learning opportunities to home using Facebook, which is very accessible to children across Myanmar. We believe that no one should be left behind in learning no matter what. Learning must go on, with the work of love and compassion for children, and this is why the Wear My Shoes Award means a lot to us and children in Myanmar. We will keep going to create safe learning opportunities for children. Once again thank you all and let’s keep working for children.”

— Tin Ma Ma Htet

3. **Serbia**

**“School of Good Will – Volunteers in the Service of Children”**

Sombor Educational Center

The program in 2020-2021 is an adapted version of the program School of Good Will that Sombor Education Center has implemented since 2010. The Center cooperates with all primary and secondary schools in Sombor and its surroundings, as well as with interfaith leaders in the local community, and institutions for children.

“I want to say a big thanks to all who recognized our idea and who supported our idea during all those years in which we implemented this program, especially in the time when it was very difficult to provide this kind of help to children from marginalized groups. We try to adapt this and transfer all those activities in the online world so once again, big thanks for recognizing our efforts and also big thanks to all our volunteers and coordinators, teachers and donors who supported our program during all those years. This will motivate us to continue to improve the position of children in our community and to face all problems regarding this situation.”

— Srđjan Vlaskalic
World Day of Prayer and Action for Children 2021

Wear My Shoes Awards

5 award-winning grassroots projects focusing on children’s right to education

World Day of Prayer and Action

Global flagship event held at EXPO 2020 Dubai and live-streamed worldwide

National celebrations: 15 countries

Wear My Shoes Podcasts

Child-led, interfaith, intergenerational

Listen here.

New room added to Arigatou International’s “Faith and Children’s Rights” online exhibition, to feature Wear My Shoes

Wear My Shoes social media campaign

Over 2.2 million people reached, with 1.2 million of them engaging
The Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University’s Institute for Quantitative Social Science invited Arigatou International to co-sponsor and help to coordinate an international, interfaith, interdisciplinary online symposium focusing on the prevention and healing of child sexual abuse. Other co-sponsors included the Vatican, the United Nations, and the World Council of Churches. Arigatou International also provided guidance, technical support, and recommend speakers and panelists.

Held April 8-10, 2021, the event brought together 1,600 child welfare advocates, policymakers, health care and public health professionals, religious and spiritual leaders, and lay leaders of diverse faith traditions to explore best practices for preventing and healing childhood sexual abuse. Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Rev. Dr. Denis Mukwege delivered the keynote address: “We are uniting the health professions and the faith community in the prevention and healing of child sexual abuse.”

The Symposium’s main objective was to increase the capacity of policymakers, public health and health care professionals, and religious and spiritual leaders to implement effective, evidence-based child sexual abuse prevention and healing programs in their local communities.

A video prayer by Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, President, Arigatou International, opened the interfaith service at the Symposium, and he also gave a statement which was viewed by participants around the world.

“We are uniting the health professions and the faith community in the prevention and healing of child sexual abuse.”

— Rev. Dr. Denis Mukwege
ENDING CHILD POVERTY

Poverty cripples children’s development in many devastating ways, depriving them of their basic human rights and severely limiting their access to the opportunities needed to build fulfilling lives. As with other human problems such as violence, injustice, and environmental crises, poverty has an outsized impact on the most vulnerable—the children.

At Arigatou International, we apply our experience and expertise in interfaith cooperation, children’s empowerment, and partnership-building among religious and civic leaders to propose and support creative solutions to the problem of child poverty. We deeply believe that children are not merely passive victims of poverty, but can also be empowered to help solve it in their communities, and we involve children in all of our efforts.
PROGRESS ON CHILD POVERTY IN THE LAST 10 YEARS

Fred Nyabera
Director, Interfaith Initiative to End Child Poverty

Over the years since Arigatou International launched its Interfaith Initiative to End Child Poverty (End Child Poverty) in 2012, there have been significant changes indicating that the world is making positive strides in alleviating child poverty. This is particularly evident if looked at through the lens of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – where, world over, more children now have access to basic nutrition, healthcare and education, and more children live in safer societies where violence against children is increasingly being challenged.

However, prominent challenges remain in ensuring that all children live free of poverty and all children experience their rights. Though education for children has become widespread, huge gaps in quality and universal access (including access to digital learning) remain a present reality. Violent conflicts have led to the greatest number of displaced persons and refugees globally, since World War II. With increased global wealth, there have also been increased inequalities on the socio-economic front. Furthermore, the global COVID-19 pandemic has in the past two years eroded development gains and negatively impacted children. Action to secure the wellbeing of all children and the eradication of child poverty is more urgent now than when we started 10 years ago.
In 2021, the global theme was “Building Forward Together: Ending Persistent Poverty, Respecting all People and our Planet.” The campaign highlighted efforts by communities to build resilience in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, tackling the intergenerational persistence of extreme poverty, and responding to the global challenge of climate change as well as achieving the SDGs. It included grassroots actions, the 5th End Child Poverty Photo Contest, and strategic online communication. This campaign was informed by the work of our SDGs Academy for Children (see page 13).

### Africa—GNRC Tanzania: Teaching children about the SDGs

GNRC Tanzania held SDGs learning outreach in four schools, reaching 250 children with facts about how the SDGs are crucial to their wellbeing. The focus was on climate action, peacebuilding and poverty eradication. Children said that they gained new insights, and they recommended issues for the religious leaders, government officials and prominent persons present to address.

### Asia—Sri Lanka: Quality education for children

The End Child Poverty Knowledge Centre organized three events with over 200 children, parents and teachers. The focus was on raising awareness of the SDGs and promoting access to quality education for vulnerable children. The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement and other GNRC members in Sri Lanka collaborated, and school supplies were donated to more than 110 vulnerable children.

“Arigatou International and Sarvodaya are celebrating IDEP in Sri Lanka, aiming to challenge us all to think and act for a sustainable development and sustainable life patterns to make a better future for our children.”

— Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne, President, Sarvodaya

### Europe—GNRC Bosnia and Herzegovina: Policy dialogue with local leaders

Members of GNRC Bosnia and Herzegovina, led by the organization Mozaik, held policy dialogue roundtables in several towns, including children, GNRC volunteers, religious leaders, and civil society local government representatives. Examples of collaborative work to alleviate child poverty done by diverse faith actors were presented.

### Middle East—Anna Linnas: Child poverty and its impacts on children’s behavior

Annas Linnas, a GNRC member in Lebanon, held an online symposium on how child poverty impacts children’s behavior. It was attended by 79 people from five countries—Egypt, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The symposium highlighted the benefits of supporting children’s spiritual development.
5th End Child Poverty Photo Contest

This year’s global photo contest focused on how communities are respecting the planet and creating environmental sustainability. In promoting the contest, we incorporated the 2021 Climate Change Conference (COP-26) and showed the links between climate change, care for the environment and alleviating child poverty. After online voting, two winners, from the Philippines and Kenya, respectively, were selected as the “Editors’ Choice” and “Peoples’ Choice.”

“Teaching every child the values towards saving the planet and inculcating to them the essence of a sustainable future is the best way to fight against child poverty and build the future generations.”

— Mark Linel Padecio - Philippines
End Child Poverty 2021
Photo Contest Winner

“When children are provided with clean water, they remain healthy and thus escape poverty in terms of diseases. This is especially essential during these times of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

— Godwine Jaika - Kenya
End Child Poverty 2021
Photo Contest Winner
Arigatou International’s approach to the work on child poverty was carefully crafted in consultation with diverse religions leaders and theologians, poverty researchers, and grassroots children’s rights workers. The three pillars of the approach, illustrated below, continue to drive the development of creative programs and projects to end child poverty.

**THE END CHILD POVERTY APPROACH**

**Vision**
A world free of child poverty

**Mission**
Mobilizing faith-inspired resources to end child poverty

**Addressing root causes of poverty in the human heart**
(greed, fear, hatred and ignorance)

**Challenging structural causes of poverty**
unequal distribution of resources, poor governance, corruption, war and violence

**Accompanying or initiating grassroots activities**

**Through theological reflection and action**

**Through interfaith advocacy and lobbying**

**Through replicable flagship projects**

**Strategies Used**
Technical and financial facilitation; capacity enhancement; alliance and partnership building and direct implementation

**PILLAR 1**
**Theological Reflection and Action**
Efforts designed to mitigate the root causes of poverty in the human heart—including greed, hatred, ignorance and fear. Here, we strive to encourage reflection by asking questions such as: “What does your faith community teach about child poverty and overcoming it?” and, “How does your faith community take action to overcome child poverty?”

Among other efforts on this pillar in the year under review, Arigatou International supported the Africa Faith Leaders / Interfaith Initiative on the SDGs (AFLI) in organizing and hosting a two-day forum in Kenya for religious leaders, representatives from faith-inspired institutions and youth leaders. This interfaith, intergenerational dialogue explored development effectiveness principles and actions to “build back better” by promoting decent work and economic growth as envisioned in SDG 8.

**PILLAR 2**
**Interfaith advocacy, lobbying and awareness raising**
Work to mobilize faith communities and their leaders in addressing the structural causes of child poverty. This includes intra-faith, inter-faith, or multi-faith advocacy and lobbying and awareness-raising, and tackling underlying causes of poverty in society such as inequitable resource distribution, corruption, poor governance, violence against children, and violent conflicts. We seek to influence policy and social change through high-level “upstream” and grassroots-level “downstream” actions.

Every year our work on this pillar includes organizing the global Together We Can End Child Poverty Campaign on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP), October 17. (See page 43)

Arigatou International’s End Child Poverty Knowledge Centre in Sri Lanka, a collaboration with the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, contributes to awareness raising. In 2021, the Centre brought together regional and local actors to reflect on “Religious Agency in the Response to COVID-19 in Asia.” The forum created a space for faith actors to discuss and share local experiences, challenges and solutions, and identify gaps and needs.
PILLAR 3
Grassroots initiatives to end child poverty
These projects seek to alleviate child poverty using a rights-based approach. They promote children’s right to adequate nutrition, education, sustainable livelihoods for their caregivers, peace and a life free from violence, as well as overall sustainable development. Examples of just a few of these projects are described below.

The Nutrition+ Project
In four countries in East Africa, this project is a collaborative effort between the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) and Arigatou International to promote adequate nutrition and sustainable farming. The project provides nutrition education, offers farmers training in both theology and sustainable agricultural practices, supports seed banks, and provides support to families with children under five years old to fight malnutrition.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Nutrition+ Project has a presence in five countries: Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Peru, and Uruguay. In 2021, it focused on establishing community/family gardens in Colombia; holding community awareness sessions on prevention of child malnutrition in Peru; and mobilizing a food donation drive to benefit families affected by poverty in Uruguay.

Also during the year under review, a group of 18 indigenous children from the municipality of San Juan Chamula-Chiapas in Mexico started implementing Project T’zun. They set up a biological community garden with the aim of improving the nutrition of indigenous children, by growing organic vegetables and native seeds from the indigenous mayan tradition. The children were supported by the Theological Community of Mexico (a member of the GNRC Committee in Mexico).

GNRC Argentina also supported 457 families with food and hygiene kits, through donations received from the Ministry of Social Development of the Buenos Aires Province. During the month of September, the Committee received and distributed 6 tons of non-perishable food.

Education for Every Child Program
Arigatou International provided co-funding and technical cooperation to ICAN Malaysia and Kids Future Syria for virtual project management training sessions for volunteer teachers from their respective teams. These trainings sought to equip the volunteer teachers for their work providing virtual and in-person lessons to Rohingya children living as refugees in Kuala Lumpur, in Malaysia, and displaced children in the Idlib Refugee Camp, in Syria.
Ending Child Poverty

Right to Livelihoods Program
India Poverty Solutions is a children- and youth-led initiative of Shanti Ashram, a GNRC member in India, which addresses child poverty using local resources. Arigatou International and the GNRC have partnered with Shanti Ashram to establish and grow this initiative across several states in India, reaching more than 150,000 children. India Poverty Solutions includes an income-growing and giving component, where children are encouraged to save money and use the saved funds to cover their own needs, plus donate a portion to help lift other children out of poverty.

Inspired by the work in India, similar programs have been launched in Bhutan and Nepal by the GNRC members Youth Society for Community Service and Shanti Sewa Ashram, respectively.

Although there is no easy solution to poverty, never did I imagine young children from two years old could also a part of the solution. The Nepal Poverty Solution Project is such a simple yet powerful project that needs to be replicated by many schools as possible.

— School principal

Right to Peace Program
Arigatou International works to empower communities to transform violent conflicts and drivers of conflict that cause child poverty. This includes ending violence against children, preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), and advancing Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and social cohesion.

EAST, GREAT LAKES, AND HORN OF AFRICA REGION:
Regional Peace Programme (RPP)
The Regional Peace Programme (RPP) is a peacebuilding initiative instituted by the East African Regional Office of Norwegian Church Aid, together with seven partners, including Arigatou International. It reaches 12 countries. Under the RPP, Arigatou International has established the Youth in Action (YIA) network and the Regional Faith Leaders Forum (RFLF) as platforms to spearhead our peacebuilding and conflict transformation work in the region. In the year under review, we supported country-level actions by the YIA and RFLF, directly reaching 670 people.

SUDAN: Sudan Social Cohesion Initiative (SSCI)
Together with the Sudan Council of Churches, Sudan Interreligious Council and the RPP nested partners, Arigatou International is working to strengthen social cohesion and advance FoRB, through the SSCI. A key highlight of the year under review is the work done to support the establishment of Peace Clubs and build the Children’s Peace Ambassadors Network. In collaboration with SCC and SIRC, we trained 23 teachers in Khartoum, Sudan in June 2021 on how to establish Peace Clubs for children and invited children to provide their own input into the process.
HIGHLIGHT: WORKING FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

Faith-Sensitive Mental Health and Psychosocial Support to Foster Resilience

Arigatou International, the KAICIID International Dialogue Centre, and World Vision International carried out a project in the year under review entitled “Faith Sensitive Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) to Foster Resilience in Children on the Move.”

More than 350 participants attended the online sessions held September – November 2021. Participants shared experiences and best practices for supporting, protecting and nurturing the physical, socio-emotional, and spiritual well-being of children on the move.

Religious leaders and faith actors, experts and academics, civil society practitioners offered and children on the move themselves offered recommendations highlighting the importance of faith-sensitive mental health and psychosocial support. They maintained that these approaches are crucial for fostering the resilience and well-being of children on the move, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also identified the unique role faith communities can play.

This project was carried out in the framework of the Sustaining Peace and Health workstreams of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD).

Download the recommendations booklet here. Learn more about PaRD here.

“...The opportunities and support offered by faith communities in my host countries of India and Pakistan helped me grow and achieve my goals in terms of education and allowed me also to contribute actively to society.

— Hayat, refugee from Afghanistan

“We have to keep in mind that children on the move are first and foremost children and their rights move with them!”

— Dr. Najat Maalla M’jid, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against Children
CHOOSE A TOOL!

Arigatou International works hard to provide creative, useful resources for all those working to build a better world for children. Working closely with partners, doing thorough field-testing, and consulting children themselves, each tool is developed to address a specific need for capacity-building and empowerment. All are shared free of charge. This section introduces a few of the main resources available now.


Download the guide [here](#).

**Learning to Live Together: An Intercultural and Interfaith Program for Ethics Education for Children**

For working with children ages 6 to 11
Download the manual [here](#).

For working with children ages 12 to 18
Download the manual in many languages [here](#).

**Guide for the Prevention of Violence against Children and Adolescents**

Published by the Alliance for the Protection of Children in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico

Download the guide in Spanish [here](#).


Available [here](#) in English, Spanish and an executive summary in French.

**Advocating for Children’s Rights and Well-Being: An Interfaith Approach**

Available [here](#) in English and Spanish.

For more Arigatou International publications, visit us [here](#) online.
Arigatou International’s advocacy efforts are wide-ranging, going far beyond the two major global advocacy campaigns we drive each year: the “Together We Can End Child Poverty” campaign (see page 43) on the International Day to Eradicate Poverty on October 17; and the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children (see page 36) on Universal Children’s Day on November 20. Highlighted here are just a few of the ways we advocated this year for the changes children need to see in the world.

On June 24, 2021, Arigatou International, in collaboration with the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, KAICIID Dialogue Centre, and the Government of Cyprus, organized an online panel of experts with representatives of UNHCR, UNESCO, UNICEF, the governments and Lebanon and Greece, and World Vision International. The panel, held within the framework of the 47th session of the Human Rights Council, reflected on the role of inclusive education in supporting migrants and refugees. More than 130 people from 45 countries attended. The discussion focused on identifying the main challenges and opportunities for implementing educational policies and programs that foster inclusive education as a central response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On March 17, 2022, more than 187 people tuned in for the panel discussion “Investing in Integrated Services to Prevent and Respond to Violence against Children,” held online on the margins of the 49th Human Rights Council. The event was organized by the Office of the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children and the Child Rights Connect Working Group on Children and Violence, which is composed of 17 civil society organizations and co-convened by Arigatou International and World Vision International.

On March 15, 2022, Arigatou International co-signed a joint statement to the 49th session of the Human Rights Council on behalf of the Working Group on Children and Violence of Child Rights Connect. The statement highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic has increased threats to the well-being of children, and pointed out the shortcomings in government laws, policies, programs and budgets for addressing violence against children. The statement was delivered during the Interactive Dialogue with the United Nations Office on Violence against Children.
COLLABORATION—WORKING TOGETHER TO REACH MORE CHILDREN

At Arigatou International, we recognize that collaboration is the key to securing children’s rights and well-being worldwide. Early on in our history, we began participating in and supporting projects launched by UNICEF, UNHCR, and other organizations that share our commitment to children’s survival and protection. Then, our 10th anniversary in the year 2000 saw a major expansion of our collaborative efforts in supporting faith communities, with the inauguration of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), a network of faith organizations working for the well-being of children. In convening the GNRC, it was the deep conviction of our founder, the late Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto, that people of every faith have a special moral obligation to care for the most vulnerable, especially children. He believed that people from every religious tradition could amplify their efforts to make the world fit for children by working together, not just at the global level, but at the grassroots.

Today, Arigatou International is proud to work closely with a very diverse range of partners and collaborators at every level—global, regional, national, and local. We are also a member of a number of important coalitions, consortiums, global partnerships, and alliances. True to our “All for Children” mission, we envision a world where everyone is actively involved in helping children thrive, and we work hard to provide platforms where all sorts of organizations and people can work together to ensure every child can grow up safe and sound and reach for her or his highest potential. Many of these joint efforts are featured in this report.

**Partners**

Here is a list of the organizations with which we have entered into agreements or other formal arrangements.

- Aga Khan Foundation Portugal
- Comunità di Sant’Egidio
- European Wergeland Centre (EWC)
- Fundación Universitaria San Pablo (UNISANPABLO)
- Geneva Peacebuilding Platform – Geneva Peace Week
- Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF)
- Globalalethics.net
- Goldin Institute
- Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace Research Institute (GHFP)
- Inter-American Children’s Institute (IIN-OAS)
- Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities
- International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)
- Japan Committee for UNICEF
- KAICIID
- New Venture Fund
- Norwegian Church Aid
- Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement
- Scholas Occurrentes Pontifical Foundation
- Smart Peace Foundation
- UN ECOSOC (special consultative status)
- UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa
- UNESCO IICBA
- UNESCO’s Multisectoral Regional Office for West Africa (Sahel)
- UNICEF (consultative status)
- United Religions Initiative (URI)
- World Vision International
Collaborators
Here is a partial list of the many other collaborators we work with around the world. Unfortunately, space does not permit every organization and individual to be listed, but we deeply value them all.

- Act Alliance
- Aga Khan Foundation
- Catholic Relief Services
- Child Fund Alliance
- Church World Service (CWS) Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean
- Coalition Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers (NRTP)
- Cordoba Peace Institute
- Early Childhood Peace Consortium
- Focolare Movement
- Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace
- GNRC member organizations in 61 countries around the globe
- Higher Committee on Human Fraternity
- Indonesia National Commission for UNESCO
- Initiatives of Change International – Caux Forum for Human Security
- International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN)
- Islamic Relief Worldwide
- Kenya National Commission for UNESCO
- Office of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against Children
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- Parliament of the World’s Religions
- Pastoral Da Criança Internacional
- Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID)
- Shanti Ashram
- UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
- UNESCO Office for Asia Pacific
- UNESCO New Delhi Cluster Office
- UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- United Nations Multi-faith Council (MFAC)
- University of Montreal
- World Bank Group
- World Council of Churches
- World Health Organization

Membership in coalitions, consortiums, global partnerships, and alliances
Arigatou International plays an active role in the following collaborative platforms.

- African Children and Youth Network for Human Rights
- Africa Interfaith Initiative on the Sustainable Development Goals
- Alliance for the Protection of Children (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico)
- Child Rights Connect
- CSO Forum to End Violence Against Children
- Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies
- Global Coalition to End Child Poverty
- Global Movement for Children in Latin America and the Caribbean (MMI-LAC)
- Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children
- International Consortium on Nurturing Values and Spiritual Development in Early Childhood for the Prevention of Violence (conceived and convened by Arigatou International)
- International Foundation for Interreligious and Intercultural Education (IFIIE)
- International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD)
- Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (JLI)
- KAICIID Network for Dialogue
- Moral Imperative to End Extreme Poverty
- Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers
- Religions for Peace
- The Africa Interfaith Initiative on the SDGs (AFLI)
- WePROTECT Global Alliance
The majority of Arigatou International’s funding comes from donations made by individual donors in Japan who support the organization’s mission. The work of the organization around the world is also supported by many volunteers, by in-kind and financial contributions from project collaborators, as well as by project- or partnership-based grants from foundations or other institutional donors.

Much of Arigatou International’s work involves catalyzing, mobilizing, equipping and inspiring other organizations and individuals. We participate in multi-stakeholder partnerships and apply our resources in a targeted manner that capitalizes on our globally unique core competencies in interfaith cooperation and children’s empowerment and participation. In this way, we seek to strategically expand the direct and indirect impact of every contribution and grant we receive. Arigatou International is profoundly grateful to all who support its efforts to build a better world for children.

**Note:** Original figures in Japanese yen for individual donations in Japan were translated to US dollars at 122.41 yen to 1 dollar.

*Tokyo Headquarters expenses include assistance for children’s participation in educational and other programs, and general administrative expenses.*
GOVERNANCE

Governance and Operating Structure

Arigatou International is a general incorporated foundation registered under Japan’s public interest corporation system. It was established in 1990 as the Arigatou Foundation by the Japanese Buddhist organization, Myochikai, in order to help build a better world for children. In 2012, the name was changed to Arigatou International, accompanying its formal incorporation.

Arigatou International is governed by a Board of Directors and a Board of Councilors, in accordance with Japanese law. The Chairperson of the Board of Directors is Rev. Kenichiro Saito. The organization’s operations are directed by the President of Arigatou International, Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, who also serves as the Chairperson of the Board of Councilors. The organization’s day-to-day functioning is managed by a Secretary-General, who reports to the President. The Board of Directors has 6 members, 5 of which are outside directors. The Board of Councilors has 3 members.

The Board of Directors meets twice annually to deliberate upon and approve budgets and work programs, as well as other matters affecting the organization as a whole. Work plan and budget proposals are prepared and presented to the Board by the Chairperson of the Board of Directors. The fiscal year of the organization is from April 1 to March 31.

Arigatou International is headquartered in Tokyo, Japan, and maintains offices in Geneva, Switzerland; Nairobi, Kenya; and New York, USA. Each office outside Japan is overseen by a director, who is appointed by and reports directly to the President of Arigatou International. Arigatou International operates four global initiatives from these offices outside Japan.

Arigatou International’s work is significantly extended by all the volunteer members and committees of the Global Network of Religions for Children as well as the close cooperation of its partners and collaborators (see page 51). See page 53 for information on Arigatou International’s funding sources.

Members of the Board of Directors

Rev. Kenichiro Saito (Chair)
Chairman of the Board, Myochikai

Mr. Mitsuyoshi Banjyu
Tax Accountant

Dr. Keishin Inaba
Professor, Osaka University

Rev. Mitsuo Miyake
Chief Senior Minister, Konko Church of Izuo

Rev. Kazuhiro Motoyama
Chief Priest, Tamamitsu Shrine

Rev. Hidehito Okouchi
Chief Priest, Jukoin and Kenjuin Temples

Members of the Board of Councilors

Rev. Keishi Miyamoto (Chair)
President, Arigatou International, Leader of Myochikai

Rev. Takashi Suzuki
Board Member, Myochikai

Rev. Yuji Suzuki
Board Member, Myochikai
The Arigatou International Advisory Group provides strategic advice on how Arigatou International can make the most of its unique initiatives to help build a world where every child gets to grow up safe and sound. Arigatou International is very grateful for the significant collaboration and contributions that the Advisory Group members are offering to its work.

Advisory Group

Mr. Kul Gautam
Former Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF, and Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations (Chair of the Advisory Group)

Dr. Kezevino Aram
President, Shanti Ashram (Vice-Chair of the Advisory Group)

Dr. Agnes Abuom
Moderator, World Council of Churches, Central Committee

Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne
President, Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement

Ms. Paloma Escudero
Director, Division of Communication, UNICEF

Dr. Azza Karam
Secretary General, Religions for Peace

Ms. Esther Lehmann-Sow
Global Director, Faith & Development, World Vision International

Sheikh Ibrahim Lethome
Secretary General, Centre for Sustainable Conflict Resolution, and Legal Advisor, Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims

The Most Reverend Felix Anthony Machado
Roman Catholic Archbishop of Vasai

Dr. Katherine Marshall
Senior Fellow, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, and Professor of the Practice of Development, Conflict, and Religion, Georgetown University

The Right Reverend Dr. Barry Morgan
Former Archbishop, Church in Wales

The Most Reverend Julio E. Murray
Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Central America, Bishop of Panama

Prof. Anantanand Rambachan
Professor, Religion Department, Saint Olaf College

Rabbi David Rosen, KSG, CBE
International Director for Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee

Dr. Mohammad Sammak
Secretary General of the Christian-Muslim Committee for Dialogue, Secretary General of the Executive Committee of the Christian-Muslim Arab Group, and Secretary General of the Islamic Spiritual Summit

Ms. Marta Santos Pais
Former UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children