

To ensure transparency and enhanced understanding with those truly concerned with CRS' Catholic identity, CRS is sharing additional details about the allegations raised in the latest circulated report. You will note that most of these critiques have already been addressed as they are recycled from previous years.

Most of the critiques are related to a project called Coordinating Comprehensive Care for Children (4Children), which is an ambitious 5-year project funded by the US Government operating in approximately 17 countries, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa. A consortium of organizations implements the project including Catholic Relief Services (CRS). The focus is to improve the lives of children affected by HIV by strengthening the capacity of key actors within a child's system of care and support. The project seeks to help some of the most vulnerable children in the world reach their God-given potential. Key initiatives are promoting parenting programs for families affected by HIV, training on reduction of violence against children, increasing positive outcomes of early childhood development, and building social welfare systems in high-risk locations to provide case management and social services to vulnerable children.

The project has, so far, had significant success assisting governments in multiple countries establish social welfare systems for vulnerable children. Given the complexity of the program and implementers, CRS took proactive measures to mitigate risks that could emerge related to our Catholic Identity. For example, CRS mandated training for all CRS head of programming staff in the participating countries on risks related to Catholic identity in any HIV programming. Additionally, in countries with heavier HIV and health programming, CRS held additional in-depth training for health and HIV programming staff. CRS also established a thorough review process to ensure all documents and materials produced would be reviewed at the country and regional level with headquarters support as needed. In addition, CRS proactively included clauses in our contracts with other organizations to ensure project branding would not be used without prior approval.

Despite these efforts, there were instances when documents produced by other organizations as part of this consortium did not align with Catholic teaching. For example, in 2018 in the Democratic Republic of Congo documents (a presentation and manual) authored by consortium staff were produced and posted online using standardized branded templates without following the authorized review protocol CRS requires. When CRS learned these materials included unacceptable content, we immediately removed and corrected them. The consortium members were then reminded of our contracts and procedures, and they were provided additional training on our Catholic approach based on our Catholic teaching and identity.

Similarly, materials referenced from Mozambique were developed by consultants under contract to address case management in social work. Without our knowledge, the consulting organization added sections on HIV prevention. The consultancy ended at an unfortunate time when senior CRS staff were transitioning from Mozambique, which contributed to CRS staff outside of Mozambique not realizing the additional content had been added. When the materials were raised to our attention, they were immediately corrected, and the consultant agency was notified that it had acted outside the scope of the contract.

In other documents, the reference to condoms is criticized. Condoms are the *go-to* response for other HIV prevention efforts globally. CRS is one of the only voices in the field today that continues to promote abstinence and fidelity as the means for HIV prevention. CRS recognizes that many people in the communities we are serving have heard far more about condoms than abstinence and fidelity, and we

tackle this head on in our HIV prevention work. Our approach over the last decade has been to provide appropriate and scientifically accurate information on HIV: highlighting abstinence and mutual fidelity and including the failure rate associated with condom use as there is a misconception that they are 100% effective.

The literature review, “HIV and Caregiver Common Mental Disorder: Synergistic Impacts on Child Development and Entry Points for Interventions” was conducted by an academic researcher from a prominent South African university. In the review, the researcher included 339 peer-reviewed articles related to HIV and mental health and how these affect early childhood development. The review was designed to provide recommendations from a meta-analysis about published ways to address early childhood development among mothers with HIV. Although the researcher included articles that had points or findings related to condoms within his/her general findings, the literature review did not promote condoms (the word “condom” is used five times in the 110-page paper).

CRS anticipates future critiques during Lent to continue to focus on the Coordinating Comprehensive Care for Children (4Children) project. The project currently manages a website known as OVCsupport.org (OVC stands for Orphans and Vulnerable Children). This website was created by other organizations many years ago and has been hosted by multiple organizations, ultimately becoming a platform for the storage and sharing of thousands of documents related to OVC. 4Children was asked by the previous host and the US government to host this website. As the host, staff immediately began reviewing all documents that were on the website and they removed those that were not in line with Catholic teaching including materials that mentioned LGBT. Unfortunately, some web caches cannot be cleared completely so some documents may still be “associated” with the site even though they are no longer hosted on the site.

CRS takes all reports of deviations from CRS policy and Catholic teaching very seriously, and, once informed, investigates them immediately and takes appropriate action. It is CRS’ policy to take a proactive and responsive management approach to ensure our Catholic identity is protected and promoted. CRS does not promote or distribute condoms and, against the prevailing culture, builds support where we operate for abstinence and fidelity to prevent HIV transmission.