

Children and Youth Relief Organization (CYRO) is a youth-led nonprofit based in the Somali Region of Ethiopia, dedicated to protecting vulnerable children and empowering young people affected by conflict and marginalization. Founded in 2021, CYRO works across education, child protection, peacebuilding, and advocacy to build resilient, inclusive communities. Through grassroots action and strategic partnerships, CYRO gives voice to those often left behind.

A Voice That Must Be Heard

"We live, but it feels like no one knows we are alive."

— Orphaned child, Somali Region

In a land scarred by conflict and silence, thousands of children are growing up invisible. They are not asking for miracles. They are asking to be seen—to be heard—to be given a chance. Their stories are filled with loss, yet their resilience still flickers with hope. These children are not statistics. They are future doctors, teachers, leaders, and caregivers. But without support, they risk being forgotten entirely.

Now is the time to listen.

Now is the time to act.

Donor Call-to-Action

Be the reason a child finds hope after loss. Partner with CYRO today.

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Department of Foreign Affairs



**CONCILIATION
RESOURCES**
working together for peace



**Forgotten Voices: Orphaned
Children of the Somali Region**
Decades of conflict. A generation left behind.

Introduction Of Research

This research was initiated by the Children and Youth Relief Organization (CYRO) to shed light on the forgotten plight of orphans in the Somali Region of Ethiopia, particularly those affected by decades of violent conflict, political repression, and socioeconomic marginalization.

The Somali Region has experienced prolonged instability spanning over seventy years, including armed clashes between liberation movements and successive governments. These conflicts have not only disrupted development but have also left deep scars on communities, particularly on the lives of children who have lost one or both parents.

The primary objective of this study is to assess the current situation of orphaned children in the region, document their needs, and understand the circumstances surrounding their orphanhood. The research focuses on five zones **Fafan, Doolo, Qoraxey, Shabelle, and Erer**, and captures data on over **1,000** orphaned children.

The study explores multiple dimensions of their lives, including **educational access, health status, living conditions, caregiving arrangements**, and exposure to trauma or abuse. It also investigates the socioeconomic status and health of guardians who care for these orphans. Special attention is given to identifying the root causes of parental death, many of which are linked to conflict and human rights violations.

This research is a call to action for government institutions, humanitarian organizations, and donors. It provides critical data that can guide the development of targeted interventions and long-term support mechanisms for orphans and their caregivers. Above all, it amplifies the voices of children whose suffering has remained invisible and demands a coordinated response to restore their dignity, protection, and opportunities for a better future.

A Generation Growing Up Alone

In the heart of Ethiopia's Somali Region, a silent crisis is unfolding. A generation of children is growing up without the love, care, and protection of their parents many of whom were lost to war, imprisonment, or illness. These orphans, most of them under the age of 15, are not just statistics; they are young lives burdened by trauma, poverty, and abandonment. Raised by overwhelmed mothers, elderly grandmothers, or distant relatives with little to no support, they represent a generation growing up alone forgotten by systems, unseen by institutions, and underserved by humanitarian responses. This research gives voice to their struggle and calls for urgent action to protect, educate, and empower Ethiopia's most vulnerable children before their silent suffering becomes a generational tragedy.

Lives on the Edge

For thousands of orphaned children in Ethiopia's Somali Region, daily life is a constant battle for survival. With no access to education, healthcare, or stable shelter, and with nearly no institutional support, these young lives are lived on the edge—of poverty, of neglect, and of being forgotten entirely. Their caregivers, often uneducated and unemployed women, carry immense burdens with little help. Many of these children lost their parents not to natural causes, but to violence, conflict, and systemic injustice. Their existence is a stark reminder of the human cost of prolonged instability. This report tells their stories and exposes the urgent need for action—because no child should have to live on the edge of hope and despair.

Rooted in Injustice

The suffering of orphaned children in Ethiopia's Somali Region is not accidental—it is rooted in injustice. Decades of violent conflict, mass incarceration, and systemic human rights violations have left behind a generation of children who bear the brunt of decisions they never made. Most lost their parents not to illness or misfortune, but to political violence and abuse by state actors. Their lives are shaped by deep structural neglect, a lack of access to basic services, and the absence of protection or reparative action. This research reveals that nearly half of the orphans' parents died due to conflict or imprisonment, often under government custody. These are not just orphans—they are victims of historical and institutional injustice. Their healing and future cannot begin without truth, recognition, and collective accountability.

What Must Be Done

The findings are clear: this is not just a humanitarian crisis, it is a moral obligation. A generation of children in the Somali Region is growing up abandoned by systems that should have protected them. Their lives marked by grief, poverty, and neglect demand more than sympathy; they demand action.

What must be done is urgent and non-negotiable:

Immediate access to education for all orphaned children, including reintegration into formal schooling.

Targeted healthcare services for children and their guardians living with physical and mental health conditions.

Safe and stable housing, prioritizing families caring for multiple orphans and those without shelter.

Economic support and livelihood programs for women caregivers who bear the brunt of responsibility with no income.

Justice and recognition for those orphaned by conflict and state violence through public acknowledgement, reparation, and trauma healing.

Policy and program frameworks that place orphaned and vulnerable children at the center of development and post-conflict recovery.

CYRO calls on the government, international agencies, and civil society to move from awareness to action. The cost of inaction is a future lost. The time to act is now.