

CHILDREN WITHOUT APPROPRIATE CARE

FACT SHEET

Millions of children are living without the loving, nurturing care that allows them to be safe and grow up enjoying their childhood. Children living in institutional care fall into this category but so do other children who are neglected by, abandoned by or separated from their families as a result of chronic poverty, parental illness, stigma or discrimination, migration, war or displacement. Save the Children is working to strengthen the caring capacity of families and to build family-based alternative care options for children who cannot remain with their families.

The number of children living without appropriate care is staggering.

- This world is home to **18.3** million orphans¹.
- There are more than **15** million children under the age of 18 who have lost one or both parents to AIDS².
- More than **one** million children are trafficked every year³.
- An estimated **eight** million children around the world are living in care institutions, such as orphanages – although no one knows the exact number because many governments have no means of knowing this⁴.
- In the last decade, an estimated **20** million children have been forced to flee their homes⁵.
- More than **one** million have been orphaned or separated from their families by an emergency⁶.

Who are children without appropriate care?

‘Children without appropriate care’ encompasses a broad range of **children who are not receiving suitable, continuous and quality care**, nurture and guidance at a physical, emotional, social and psychological level from either their families or from other primary carers that are meant to replace the family environment and are responsible for their well being and development.



Menaca Calyaneratne

Sinjuba is a 14 year old Sri Lankan girl who was sent to an orphanage because her parents could not afford to feed her and send her to school. Four out of five children living in institutions have one or both parents alive.



George (not his real name) is a 4 year old Romanian boy. He was aggressive and threw tantrums and was difficult for his parents to handle. His parents were tired. They decided to seek help at the parents' counseling centre established by Save the Children in Romania. This is a place parents can come to get support and guidance on how to raise their children, ideas on how to tackle family problems and confidential support when problems arise.

Staff at the centre sat down with the parents to conduct an evaluation of George. During that initial discussion, it became clear that the parents did not consistently use a system of rules, rewards and consequences and that they only resorted to punishment to discipline their child. The staff at the centre taught the parents ways to manage undesirable behavior in George and showed the family ways to promote the child's development as well as create a positive relationship between the parents and the child. Within two months, the parents saw significant improvement. George threw fewer tantrums and his behavior was less aggressive. Most importantly, the parents felt more in control of their parenting.

They include neglected and/or abused children in their families, children living on the street, children in institutions or other forms of poor quality alternative care, and children on the move, including child refugees, child migrants and trafficked children and those who are at risk of requiring alternative care.

Children in, or at risk of requiring, alternative care

Chronic poverty and destitution, illness, stigma or discrimination, HIV and AIDS, and the increasing number of natural disasters, along with ongoing conflict in many countries, mean that more and more children and families need an increasing amount of support to be able to stay together in healthy, happy, and safe environments. Many children remain in families unable to offer them adequate care because they are too poor and lack adequate support. Other children end up in poor quality alternative care or on the street.

In many countries institutional care continues to be a first line response to the situation of orphaned, abandoned and separated children. This is despite the fact that, rather than being orphans, the overwhelming majority of children in residential care (at least four out of five) have one or both parents alive⁷. Furthermore scientific evidence suggests that institutional care can cause significant harm to children's physical, intellectual and emotional development, with children under the age of three being particularly at risk.

Save the Children recognizes that residential care can be appropriate for a small minority of children and should be available as a last resort for those children with no other options. In those contexts, regulated, safe institutions that meet agreed-upon standards can save children's lives and give them opportunities to learn and develop that they would not otherwise have.

In November 2009, the International Guidelines on Alternative Care⁸ were adopted by the UN. This has created a much more supportive international

environment towards family-based care and a clearer consensus about the need to dramatically reduce the use of residential care. The guidelines give priority to the prevention of family separation and abandonment, and to the importance of local family-based care alternatives.

There is also growing international, regional and country level action towards tackling both care and protection issues via strengthening national child protection systems and reforming the care system within that broader framework.

Children on the move

Millions of children are on the move, both within and between countries, with or without their parents. They are part of large-scale population movements currently taking place in many parts of the world.

Children on the move are those children moving for a variety of reasons, voluntary or involuntary within or between countries, with or without their parents or other primary caregivers, and whose movement might place them at risk (or at an increased risk) of inadequate care, economic or sexual exploitation, abuse, neglect or violence.

But movement can also help children and their families improve their living standards and life opportunities. Children do not always benefit from such potentials. The majority of countries still have an almost exclusive focus on child trafficking and migration control. Child protection policies and interventions should refocus to place the protection of the child at the centre as well as the need to support the positive aspects of mobility.

What is Save the Children doing about it?

Save the Children's ultimate goal is to prevent children from being separated from their families in the first place.

Save the Children is helping to deliver two main responses. Firstly, offering support to vulnerable families to care for their children and prevent family



Increasing numbers of children from countries such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland are crossing

over the border to South Africa. According to UNICEF, more than 21,000 children on the move are currently living independently in South Africa. Poverty and the death of a parent persuade many children to cross to South Africa in order to survive while others are enticed by the dream of better opportunities. Many of these children lack essential documentation and cross borders under very trying conditions, increasing their vulnerability in the process.

In response, Save the Children established a transit centre for children on move along the South African/Zimbabwean border in March 2009 where more than 1000 undocumented, unaccompanied children and youth have been assisted with family tracing and reunification or supported to join family or friends in South Africa. In addition, children are being assisted to access temporary South African documentation and immediate shelter, food, clean water, and healthcare.

Determining the best interests of these children has been, at times, extremely challenging due to complicated individual circumstances and the limited experience of practitioners (at times volunteers) working with children on the move without parental or family support. The project developed a rights-based decision-making tool for practitioners working in the transit centre to determine how to help individual children ensuring their best interest is paramount.



Excerpt of recommendations by children at the 3rd Mekong Youth Forum on Anti-Trafficking and Migration – 29 October 2010

- **Government officials and agencies concerned should monitor and follow up the condition of victims (of trafficking and unsafe migration) and their families through consultation with victims.**
- **Governments should build counselling centres, with working hotline numbers, to ensure victims' proper reintegration into their families and communities. To make sure centres have well-trained staff to give counselling services, government should provide continuous capacity building trainings for their staff.**
- **In each country there should be assigned one department to be in charge of protection of migrant children. This department will be in cooperation with other departments to mobilise resources for protecting migrant children.**
- **Government should provide safe reporting channel for people to report wrong doing along the border check point.**

separation and abandonment. Depending on the context this support could include parenting education, counseling, cash transfers, or skills training. The second component of Save the Children's work is to support the development of family-based alternative care options in children's own communities for those children who cannot be with their parents. These options include foster care, kinship care and domestic adoption. At the same time, the organisation supports the transition away from existing institutional care services while ensuring that they reach minimum standards during the remaining time that they provide care for children.

Save the Children also aims to prevent the 'worst forms of movement', increase children's choices and improve their access to services, support and opportunities. This includes working in children's home communities to reduce vulnerability to exploitation, abuse and violence, and ensuring that when children do move, they do so more safely and in an informed way. Children in transit and those who have arrived at their destination are advised and provided practical support and interim care. Decisions about whether they remain in their new community or to return home are made in the best interest of each child and in consultation with them.

Save the Children also works with governments and inter-governmental bodies to ensure child protection monitoring, reporting and response structures are in place and functioning.

"You have to help us... I was placed here for protection because I was living on the streets. But boys like me are mixed with bad boys and we can't even bathe or sleep properly because we're scared of getting stabbed, assaulted or something like that." -12-year-old boy, in institutional care, Fiji

Rio Helmi/Onaisa



Farida hugs her daughter Khariana in the kiosk where she sells cooking oil to support her family in Aceh, Indonesia. Khariana recently returned home from a child care institution.

Indonesia has 8,000 childcare institutions housing about 500,000 children. Nearly all (99%) are privately run by faith-based organisations and are unregulated. Even though a law was passed in 2003 emphasising family care, the child

protection system in Indonesia is almost entirely reliant on residential care. However, a 2007 survey conducted by Save the Children, UNICEF and the government of Indonesia revealed that almost 90% of the children living in institutions had one parent alive, and that 56% had both. Most children had been placed in residential care so that they could get an education, and stayed until that had completed secondary school. This revelation led to a major shift in government thinking.

Save the Children began working closely with the government of Indonesia to come up with some solutions. As a result of advocacy, the Ministry of Social Affairs gave the go-ahead for a regulatory framework for childcare institutions, including National Standards of Care, and the establishment of a regulatory authority and licensing system. The Children's Directorate strategy 2010–14 incorporates the shift to family-based care and services, not only for those without parents, but in all child protection cases. There has been a shift in financial support from institutions to family care, and family care is being introduced as a priority in the Country Strategic Plan. The Ministry of Social Affairs has also set up a national database on children in alternative care and has directed all district level social authorities to monitor their childcare institutions. Fostering and adoption are being promoted. Save the Children is also supporting the National Graduate School of Social Work to set up a pilot centre showing how the prevention of institutionalisation and support to family reintegration can be done, and social work training is being shifted to prioritise family support.

Quick reference guide

Better Care Network: <http://bettercarenetwork.org/bcn/>

International Guidelines on Alternative Care: <http://www.crin.org/docs/Guidelines-English.pdf>

UN Study on Violence against Children: <http://www.unviolencestudy.org/>

End notes:

- 1 UNAIDS, UNICEF & USAID (2004) Children on the Brink, USAID; available at http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/cob_layout6-013.pdf. This figure refers to double orphans, both of whose parents have died.
- 2 UNAIDS (2008), Report on the global AIDS epidemic.
- 3 United Nations (2006) Report of the Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence against Children, A/61/299. P.12
- 4 Save the Children (2009) Keeping Children Out of Harmful Institutions, pp. 3, 5
- 5 UNICEF, UNICEF's role in emergency, http://www.unicef.org/emerg/index_33296.html
- 6 *ibid*
- 7 Save the Children (2009) Keeping Children Out of Harmful Institutions, pp. 3, 5
- 8 These can be found at <http://www.crin.org/docs/Guidelines-English.pdf>

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For more information please check the website: www.savethechildren.net or contact cpi@rb.se