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CARE REFORM IN MALAWI

A VIRTUAL STUDY TOUR

Changing
THE WAY WE
care



HOW TO TAKE PART IN THE VIRTUAL STUDY TOUR

This virtual study tour aims to provide you with an overview of care reform in Malawi from the comfort of your own home. Care reform relates to the care of children. It refers to efforts to improve the legal and policy frameworks, structures, services, supports and resources that determine and deliver alternative care, prevent family separation and support families to care for children well. To take part, you will need to:

1.

Read the snapshot and timeline of care reform below and follow the link provided to watch a short interview on care reform in Malawi.

2.

Look at the promising practice examples, reading the case studies provided. You can explore all the examples or just look at those that interest you the most.

3.

Take part in a live webinar to ask a panel of experts from Malawi any questions you still have. The webinar will be held in November 2021. To register your interest and receive further details, complete this [short form](#). A recording will be made available [here](#) after this event.

4.

Let us know what you think of this virtual study tour by completing this [short form](#).

HOW TO TAKE PART IN THE VIRTUAL STUDY TOUR

Still want to know more?

There is a list of resources at the end of this document.

Confused by all the jargon?

There is a glossary of key terms at the end of the document.

Too much information?

You will see some colour coding in the document to help you quickly find the information of most interest to you.

Bold black	is for information on the systems and mechanisms needed to support care reform, including legislation and policies, coordination mechanisms and workforce strengthening.
Orange	is for information on work with families to improve the care of children, prevent separation or support reintegration.
Purple	is for information on kinship care.
Red	is for information on residential care.
Blue	is for information on foster care.
Green	is for information on adoption.

SNAPSHOT OF CARE IN MALAWI

Population of country

17.6 million¹

Child population

Over half of the population are aged under 18.²

Kinship care

Around a third of households in Malawi include children who are in kinship care.³

In 2017, a survey of 102 children reintegrated from residential care found that 75 per cent were placed with extended family or friends of the family.⁴

Residential care

6,203 children in 126 residential care facilities.⁵

Foster care

No figures are available, but numbers are believed to be small.

In 2017, a survey of 102 children reintegrated from residential care found that only 2.8 per cent were placed in foster care.⁶

Domestic adoption

The government estimates that around 30 children are adopted each year.⁷

In 2017, a survey of 102 children reintegrated from residential care found that only 0.9 per cent were adopted.⁸

A TIMELINE OF CARE REFORM IN MALAWI⁹

The Adoption of Children Act is passed. This remains the primary piece of **legislation** on **adoption** in Malawi. It has been criticised for failing to put the child's best interest at the centre of adoption proceedings and for requiring foreigners who want to adopt a Malawian child to have to been resident in the country for 18 months.

1949

The National **Policy** for Orphans and Vulnerable Children emphasises that children should grow up in a family environment and that institutional care should be used as a last resort only.

2003

Regulations are developed for the establishment and management of **residential care**.

2006

A TIMELINE OF CARE REFORM IN MALAWI

The supreme court overturns a ruling that Madonna cannot **adopt** a child from Malawi on the grounds that she is not resident in the country. As a result of this ruling, foreigners with a strong connection to the country can now adopt children from Malawi providing it is in the child's best interest.

A study was carried out on the situation of children in **residential care** providing details on the numbers of children in care, the proportion of children with living parents, the capacities of caregivers and the registration and management of facilities.

2009

The Malawi Child Care, Protection and Justice Act provides the overarching **policy** framework on the care and protection of children in Malawi. This law promote **family care**, strengthens **adoption**, regulates **foster care**, includes regulations for the establishment and management of **residential care**, and aims to ensure that any child in need of care and protection has access to care.

2010

A TIMELINE OF CARE REFORM IN MALAWI

The Malawi Human Rights Commission publishes a mapping of all **residential care** facilities in the country. This report suggests an increase in the number of children in residential care from 6,040 in 2011 to 10,136 in 2014. 16 per cent of these children have special needs. Over 50 per cent of staff are not qualified to work with children. Many facilities are not registered with government.¹⁰

The Government of Malawi publishes a study on **children's reintegration**. This study identifies food insecurity and lack of access to quality education as primary drivers for entry into **residential care**. It shows that many children in residential care and staff working in these facilities are reticent about reintegration. This is linked to fears around child marriage, child labour and lack of access to schooling in home communities. The study finds that **gatekeeping mechanisms** in Malawi are inadequate and that facilities are not regularly monitored by government. The study provides a five-step framework for reintegration (see below for further details).

2014

A TIMELINE OF CARE REFORM IN MALAWI

Building on the introduction of **case management** in 2012, the government develops a case management framework which provides standardised procedures and guidance on children's protection and care.

Malawi's National Plan of Action for Vulnerable Children (2015–2019) is launched, which supports family and community-based care for children. This builds on a previous National Plan of Action for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (2005–2011).

2015

Government and UNICEF staff take part in a study tour to Rwanda.

2016

A TIMELINE OF CARE REFORM IN MALAWI

Research suggests a fall in the number of children in **residential care** from 10,126 in 2014 to 8,049 in 2017.¹¹ This is linked to a pilot programme on **reintegration** in four districts, and the closure of some residential care facilities due to financial challenges. Problems in residential care such as poorly qualified staff, violence against children, and lack of access to basic services remain.

A learning visit to Ethiopia on children's reintegration takes place involving government and UNICEF staff and academics.

2017

As part of efforts to reduce the numbers of children in residential care, the government works to enhance **foster care** in Malawi. This includes developing a foster care training manual with the support of the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Hope and Homes for Children.

Hope and Homes also build the capacity of government social workers on **reintegration** and government work to improve case management guidance on reintegration.

2018

A TIMELINE OF CARE REFORM IN MALAWI

The government publishes a feasibility study on reintegration. This follows on from the **reintegration** study of 2014 and the subsequent piloting of the reintegration framework. It outlines key lessons learnt from the pilot and provides a reintegration model which updates and expands on the framework.

The National Children's Policy and National Children's Commission Act provide over-arching **legislation** and a **coordination body** on child rights. The policy includes reference to the importance of family-based care. The new Children's Commission offers the opportunity for more inter-sectoral cooperation in care reform.

2019

A TIMELINE OF CARE REFORM IN MALAWI

UNICEF publishes a situation analysis of children with disabilities in Malawi. This shows that 2 per cent of children with disabilities reported ever having stayed in a **residential care** facility.

The COVID-19 pandemic hits Malawi. Monitoring by the Human Rights Commission suggests that funding to **residential care** has fallen leading to worrying signs of a drop in the quality of care. Some facilities also temporarily close or reduce the number of children in their care to enable better social distancing. Children returning to their families are often not supported, placing them at risk of harm. UNICEF reports that many of the drivers of entry into **residential care**, such as poverty and violence in the home, are exacerbated by COVID.

2020

A TIMELINE OF CARE REFORM IN MALAWI

The Human Rights Commission preliminary results indicate 6203 children in 126 CCIs, a decline from 8049 in 2017. It has carried out a mapping and assessment on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children in or **reintegrated** from **residential care**.

2021

AN OVERVIEW OF CARE REFORM IN MALAWI

Watch this [short video](#) of an interview with government and UNICEF officials which describes the care reform process in Malawi and outlines key lessons learnt.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND LESSONS LEARNT

STRENGTHENING THE WORKFORCE TO SUPPORT CARE REFORM

Since 2017, UNICEF has supported social services workforce capacity building, with a specific focus on building the capacity of social workers to support family reintegration (see Example 1).

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND LESSONS LEARNT

EXAMPLE 1

Training social workers to support children's reintegration

In 2017, UNICEF supported the Government of Malawi to recruit 16 social workers to support the reintegration of children from residential care in four districts. Training was then provided for these 16 social workers, alongside other 32 social workers working at the district level, on case management, the reintegration framework (see Example 4) and foster care (see Example 6). UNICEF paid salaries for these additional 16 social workers for the first three years with the hope that they would be absorbed into the civil service at the end of this process.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND LESSONS LEARNT

SUPPORTING POSITIVE PARENTING

Since 2019, UNICEF has supported the government to develop a training package for parents to improve the care of young children. This has included the Super Dads campaign, designed to make fathers and other male caregivers more responsive and positive in their parenting. Although UNICEF's parenting programmes largely focus on enhancing the development of young children, they also have ramifications for the quality of children's care, and could help to prevent family separation.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND LESSONS LEARNT

EXAMPLE 2

Parenting and Super Dads in Malawi

UNICEF's Early Childhood Development programme has developed a comprehensive package designed to improve the parenting of young children. This covers nutrition, care, stimulation and educational supports in the home. The programme involves community members sharing learning between one another. In 2020, UNICEF launched the Super Dads campaign to encourage more involvement of men in children's care. This used high profile role models, such as famous Malawian musicians, highlighting the important role that fathers play in the care of children. For more details see this [article](#).

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND LESSONS LEARNT

LESSONS LEARNT ON FAMILY REINTEGRATION

UNICEF has been working with the government to reintegrate children from residential care since 2012. This work began with research on the causes of entry into residential care, lessons learnt from CSO interventions, and attitudes towards reintegration. The study was used to develop a reintegration framework that provided a five-step reintegration process. The framework was piloted in four districts and used to support the reintegration of 298 children. Lessons learnt fed into a government mandated reintegration model (see examples 3 and 4). Several CSOs in Malawi also support the reintegration of children.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND LESSONS LEARNT

EXAMPLE 3

Lessons learnt about children's reintegration in Malawi ¹²

The following needs to be in place to ensure the successful reintegration of children.

- ➔ **Sensitisation and awareness raising about the importance of reintegration:** This includes work with residential care providers, social workers, children, families and the wider community.
- ➔ **Commitment of children and families:** Both children and their caregivers need to want children to return home for reintegration to be successful. Some children are loved and well cared for in kinship care; others are discriminated against, neglected, and abused.
- ➔ **Preparation and follow-up support:** Successful reintegration is a process not an event; children and families must be well prepared and follow-up monitoring and support offered. All care homes should have a reintegration programme that works to support children and their families through this process. Reintegration planning should start from the day the child enters care.
- ➔ **Adequate resourcing:** The extensive preparation and follow-up involved in reintegration involves human and financial resources, including adequate numbers of social workers to support the process. Parents are often unaware that children can be poorly treated by relatives.

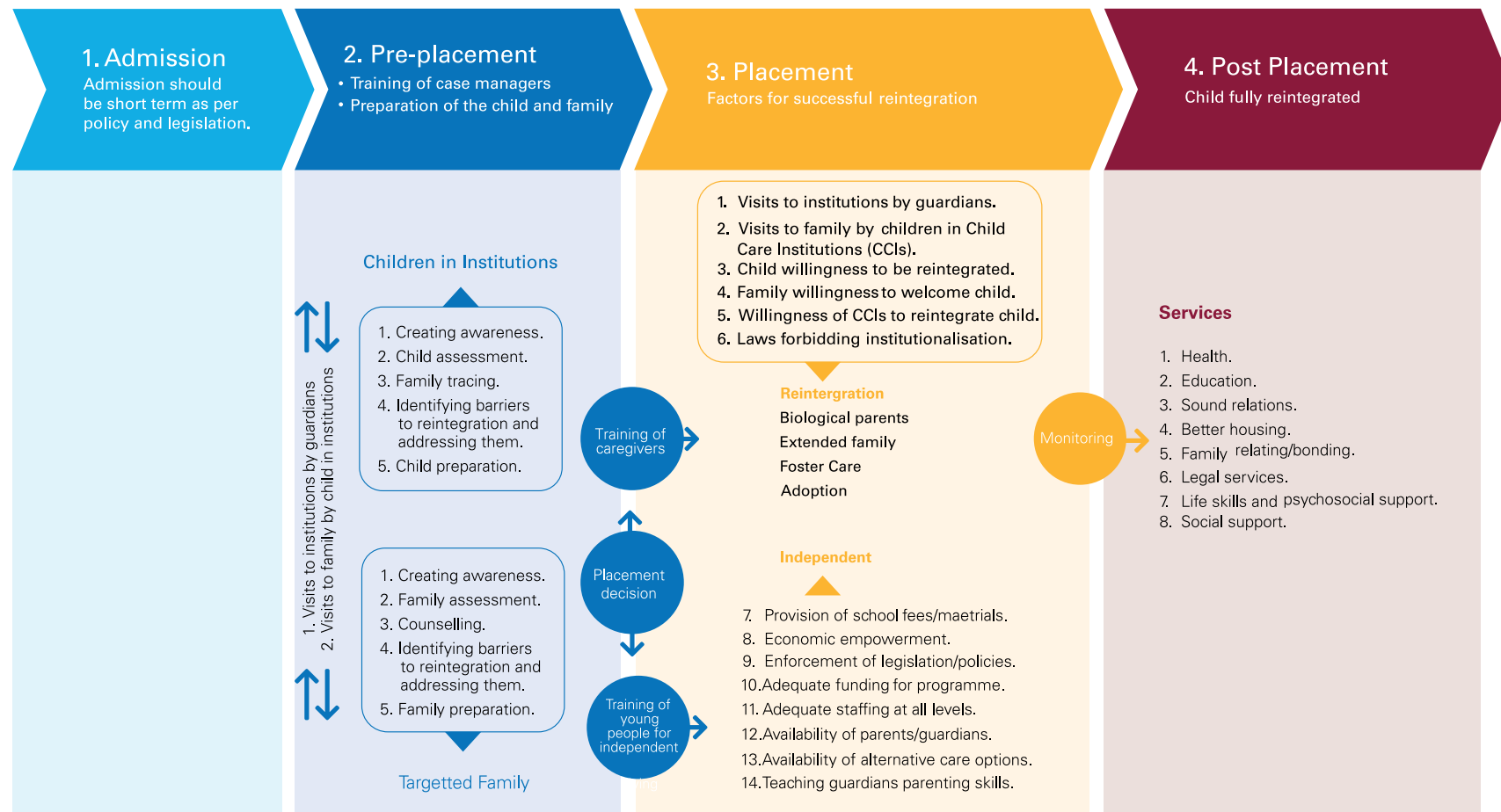
PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND LESSONS LEARNT

➔ **Supports for poor households:** Poverty and lack of access to school are key reasons for separation in Malawi. Families need economic empowerment and help with the cost of schooling if children are to remain at home.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND LESSONS LEARNT

EXAMPLE 4

The Malawi reintegration model



PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND LESSONS LEARNT

WHY SUPPORTING KINSHIP CARE IS SO IMPORTANT

Evidence from research in Malawi on kinship care and reintegration illustrates the importance of supporting kinship care in care reform efforts (see Example 5).

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND LESSONS LEARNT

EXAMPLE 5

Lessons from research on kinship care in Malawi ¹³

- ➔ Most children outside of parental care are cared for by kin. Large families are particularly likely to place children in kinship care if they struggle to cope with the care of children.
- ➔ Poor households can struggle to care for extra children, placing all children in the family at risk of malnutrition or loss of access to education.
- ➔ If ultra-poor households are not supported to care for children in kinship care, it can force them to place children in residential care. Sometimes, allegations of witchcraft are made against children and used by kinship carers as an excuse to reject them from the community and place them into care. This is highly stigmatising for children and can make it very hard for them to reintegrate back to communities.
- ➔ Seventy-five per cent of children being reintegrated from residential care are looked after by kin.¹⁴ Although most children are cared for well some face abuse and exploitation and require child protection supports.
- ➔ Most kinship caregivers are elderly and themselves vulnerable. Many care for children with little or no support. The Child Care, Protection and Justice Act does not include provisions to formalise kinship care and most children in Malawi are cared for informally. Formalising all forms of kinship care may be unnecessary and a drain on resources. However, kinship carers may still require financial or other forms of assistance, and particularly vulnerable children in this care may need case management supports.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND LESSONS LEARNT

PROMOTING FOSTER CARE IN MALAWI

In Malawi, foster care is seen as an important option for children who cannot live with their parents or wider extended family/friends of the family. Research from 2017 suggests that foster care is under-utilised in Malawi, with potential for more children to be placed in foster rather than residential care.¹⁵ The government is concerned not just with expanding foster care, but also with ensuring that foster care is of high quality. The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare has worked with the CSO Hope and Homes for Children to develop a training package for foster carers (Example 6).

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND LESSONS LEARNT

EXAMPLE 6

A training package on foster care

This training has to be completed by all foster carers in order to gain official accreditation. It involves three modules covering 27 sessions and takes at least 20 hours. The training covers child rights and protection, child development and the role and place of foster care in the child protection system.

RESOURCES

Government of Malawi (2019) [Reintegrating children from institutional care. A feasibility study on a model for Malawi](#)

QUESTIONS?

A webinar will be held in October 2021. To register your interest and receive further details, complete this [short form](#). A recording will be made available [here](#) after this event.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Alternative care

The formal and informal care of children outside of parental care. Children outside of parental care are children not in the overnight care of at least one of their parents, as parents are unwilling or unable to care for children.¹⁶The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children outline several different forms of formal and informal alternative care including kinship care, residential care and foster care.¹⁷

Residential care

Care provided in any non-family-based group setting.¹⁸ A distinction is often made between different forms of residential care. For example:

- *Institutional care.* Large-scale facilities where children are cared for in large groups, usually involving shift-systems, a common set of rules, children sleeping in dormitories, and isolation from wider communities.
- *Small group homes.* Children cared for in small groups, usually with one or two carers, in specially designed and designated facilities.¹⁹

Family-based care

Care in a family environment. Family-based care includes kinship and foster care (see below for definitions) and care by the child's biological or adoptive parents.

Kinship care

Family-based care within the child's own extended family or with close friends of the family known to the child.²⁰

Foster care

Foster care is a formal arrangement whereby a competent authority places children in the domestic environment of a family other than the child's own that has been selected, qualified and approved for providing such care.²¹

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Supervised supported/ independent living

Children and young people living alone or in groups in the community but supervised by social workers, caregivers and/or community volunteers.

Gatekeeping

“A recognised and systematic procedure to ensure that alternative care for children is used only when necessary and that the child receives the most suitable support to meet their individual needs.”²²

Case management

Case management is a key means of ensuring that vulnerable children and families get the services they need. Case management uses standardised guidance to support social workers in identifying needs, making referrals to appropriate services, monitoring children and families, and keeping effective records.²³

ENDNOTES

1. National Statistical Office (2019) *2018 Malawi population and housing census: main report*. Zomba, Malawi: National Statistical Office, p.4.
2. National Statistical Office 2019, p.16.
3. National Statistical Office and ICF (2017) *Malawi demographic and health survey 2015–2016*. Zomba, Malawi, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: National Statistical Office and ICF, p.13. This survey shows that 33 per cent of households includes children who are ‘fostered or orphaned.’ As there is very limited formal foster care in Malawi, it is assumed that most of these children are being cared for by relatives or friends of the family.
4. Government of Malawi: Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (2019) *Reintegrating children from institutional care. A feasibility study on a model for Malawi*. Lilongwe, Malawi.
5. Figures provided by the Government of Malawi from September 2021.
6. Government of Malawi: Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare 2019, p.18.
7. From interviews with government.
8. Government of Malawi: Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare 2019 , p.18.
9. Information taken from: Government of Malawi (2015) *National plan of action for vulnerable children in Malawi*. Government of Malawi; Malawi Human Rights Commission (2014) *Report on mapping of child care institutions in Malawi*; UNICEF Malawi (2020) *2019/2020 child protection budget brief*. Lilongwe, Malawi: UNICEF Malawi; Government of Malawi: Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare 2019; Government of Malawi (2014) *Malawi Reintegration Study 2014*. Malawi: Government of Malawi; Government of Malawi: Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare 2019; Government of Malawi: Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (2015) *Child protection case management framework*; Hope and Homes for Children/ Government of Malawi (2018) *Foster care training manual*; Malawi Human Rights Commission (2021) *Concept note to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on rights of children living under institutional care in Malawi*.
10. Malawi Human Rights Commission 2014.
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14. Government of Malawi: Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare 2019
15. Government of Malawi: Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare 2019.
16. United Nations General Assembly (2010) *Guidelines for the alternative care of children*. GA Res 142, UNGAOR, 64th session, supplement number 49, Vol.1 (A/64/49 2010). New York: United Nations.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.

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19. Family for Every Child (2012) *Towards a family for every child. Conceptual Framework*. London: Family for Every Child.

20. United Nations General Assembly 2010.

21. Ibid.

22. Better Care Network (2015) *Making decisions for the better care of children. The role of gatekeeping in strengthening family-based care and reforming alternative care systems*. New York: UNICEF and the Better Care Network.

23. UNICEF and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (2019) *Guidelines to strengthen the social service workforce for child protection*. New York: UNICEF.

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