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Eastern and Southern Africa regional learning platform on care reform

Monthly update - June 2023

Introduction

Welcome to the monthly update from the regional learning platform on care reform in Eastern and Southern Africa. The platform is an opportunity for policy makers and practitioners in Government, UNICEF and NGOs to exchange learning on care. The platform was established by UNICEF and Changing the Way We Care (CTWWC) and is supported by the consultancy firm Child Frontiers. Explore our past webinars, case studies, videos and policy papers

Announcements on the platform

- **Webinar - care leavers 23rd June:** Our next webinar will share findings from UNICEF and government research on care leavers in Kenya, and will explore the peer-to-peer methodology used in this research. Date: 23rd June. Time: 11-12.30 Nairobi time. Zoom [link](#) Meeting ID: 862 3656 9273 Passcode: 952272
- **Webinar recording - the transformation of residential care.** In this webinar we heard about international experiences in the transformation of residential care. Two residential care providers from the region told us why they chose to reintegrate children and develop alternative services for vulnerable children and families. The government of Rwanda explained how transformation can be brought to scale through integration in national care systems. A recording of the webinar can be found [here](#).
- **Opportunity to join a small learning group on the transformation of residential care:** This group will provide an opportunity for residential care providers going through the transformation process and those supporting them to discuss challenges and share lessons learnt. If you are interested in joining this group, please email: Ismael Ddumba-Nyanzi <idnyanzi@childfrontiers.com> Please share this opportunity with partners who you think might be interested.
- **Seeking case management resources related to care.** In response to multiple requests, we will be developing a list of useful case management resources that relate to children's care. If you have any guidance, toolkits or SOPs that on any aspect of children's care, please share with Ismael Ddumba-Nyanzi <idnyanzi@childfrontiers.com>
- **HelpDesk:** Do you have a dilemma about care reform? Would you like to know about how others have succeeded in their care reform efforts? Whether you are just starting out on your care reform journey or a long way down this road, we can help. As part of the learning platform, we offer a HelpDesk for all UNICEF and government staff in Eastern and Southern Africa. Please contact Emily: edelap@childfrontiers.com or Mona: maika@unicef.org



Painting on a wall outside a residential care facility in Mozambique reading: Are you familiar with the law on the promotion and protection of children's rights?

Safeguarding children in alternative care

Children placed in alternative care, particularly residential care, face a significantly increased risk of experiencing violence, exploitation, neglect, and abuse. The risk is even greater for children with disabilities. For instance, children in residential care often suffer from 'structural neglect' and are at a significantly higher risk of physical and sexual abuse compared to those in foster care or the general population.

The increased susceptibility of children in alternative care to violence, exploitation, neglect, and abuse arises from a complex interplay of factors. These include the disruption of their familial connections, instability in placements, history of trauma and pre-existing vulnerabilities, irregular admission into care, inadequate monitoring and oversight, under-resourced care systems, and the absence of accessible child-friendly complaint mechanisms for them to report instances of violence or abuse and seek appropriate redress in a safe and supportive manner. The absence of standardised procedures and thorough screening processes

Exposure to violence, particularly when such exposure is repeated or chronic, can significantly affect a child's brain development and function and cause life-long consequences, including poor mental health, hindered neurological development, slowed physical development, reduced learning, and risky health behaviours.

Unfortunately, incidents of violence often go unreported to the relevant authorities due to fear of reprisals, insufficient understanding of reporting procedures, concerns about potential consequences for the children affected.

Power dynamics and hierarchies in alternative settings create an unsafe environment where victims fear the repercussions of reporting. Children may fear that reporting abuse or violence could result in negative outcomes, such as being labeled as troublemakers, facing retaliation from staff or peers, or being subjected to further harm. Moreover, the lack of trust in the reporting process and the perception that nothing will be done to address the reported incidents also contributes to the underreporting of violence.

This lack of reporting creates significant challenges in effectively monitoring and addressing instances of violence, perpetuating the cycle of harm. Without accurate and timely reporting, it becomes difficult to identify patterns, intervene promptly, and provide necessary support and protection to the children affected.

Protecting children in alternative care necessitates a comprehensive and collaborative approach that places the safety, well-being, and rights of children at the forefront. This involves working closely with various stakeholders, including relevant government ministries, departments, and agencies, child welfare organisations, caregivers, and children themselves, including those with lived experiences of care.

Some of the strategies that can help mitigate the risks and improve the wellbeing of children in care include:

- Establishing and enforcing standardised procedures for assessing, screening, and placing children in alternative care to mitigate the risks associated with irregular admission.
- Setting and enforcing staffing standards in formal care services and facilities to ensure adequate ratios and qualifications.
- Implementing thorough screening processes for all individuals working with children in care, including comprehensive background checks, and reference checks.
- Requiring caregivers and all those who work with children to complete mandatory training and obtain relevant certifications ensures they possess the

- Conducting regular inspections, ongoing monitoring, and supervision of alternative care providers to ensure compliance with standards and identify potential risks or concerns.
- Promoting stable and supportive placements to minimise disruption and provide a nurturing environment for children.
- Ensuring each residential care facility has a safeguarding policy, which includes a code of conduct in place for staff, expectations about reporting violence, and data protection protocols.
- Prohibiting by law, all forms of violence against children in alternative care, and providing guidance and enforced instructions regarding acceptable behaviour management techniques and disciplinary measures,
- Ensuring children are aware of policies regarding disciplinary measures, behaviour management, the use of force and restraints, empowering them to raise concerns and make complaints.
- Providing ongoing training for caregivers to enhance their skills in supporting and nurturing children in their care.
- Ensuring child-friendly reporting mechanisms are readily available, allowing children to safely report incidents and concerns.
- Establishing clear reporting mechanisms and whistleblower protection policies to encourage employees to come forward with any concerns or incidents they witness.

The [Safeguarding Toolbox](#), developed by Changing the Way We Care (CTWWC), provides detailed guidance on developing and implementing effective, relevant safeguarding policies and practices. The materials in this toolbox include the risk assessment tool, job aids and guidance identified as useful for work with and for vulnerable children and adults, particularly those at risk of or living in alternative care. Other resources include:

- [Carefree From Violence for African Children](#)
- [Moving Forward: Implementing the 'Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children'](#)
- [Maltreatment in residential child protection care: A review of the literature](#)
- [Child violence experiences in institutionalised/ orphanage care](#)

Other news and resources

- **Framework on Kafalah in Kenya.** The government of Kenya have just launched [The national framework for the implementation of Kafalah care](#)

Kafalah.

- **Learning series on care reform in Kenya.** Changing the Way We Care have just launched a series of three learning briefs around positive parenting and family strengthening based on their work in Kenya. The learning briefs can be accessed [here](#).
- **Parenting programme for supporting reintegration, and kinship and foster care.** Families Together is a parenting curriculum for use by families who have a child returning home after living elsewhere (such as a Charitable Children's Institution), or are providing kinship or foster care. The programme has been designed and delivered in Kenya by Investing in Children and their Societies (ICS) and can be found [here](#).
- **Resources on scaling care reform.** Changing the Way We Care have published two new resources on scaling care reform. The first is a [learning brief](#) demonstrating that strengthening systems is essential to scaling and doing so, while aligning the vision and interventions across a coalition of actors, will increase impact to more children and families. The second is a [conceptual framework](#) for scaling care reform, which outlines seven steps in the scaling process to be adapted to each context. This document shows how scaling is an iterative process, involving continuously leveraging successes and opportunities as they arise.
- **Webinar and global guidance on kinship care.** Family for Every Child will be holding the latest in their series of webinars on kinship care on the 22nd of June. This will focus on the role of kinship carers in promoting policy reforms and providing mutual support groups, and will feature speakers from Zimbabwe, India and Ireland. Details can be found [here](#). Family for Every Child have also just shared the first draft of global inter-agency guidance on kinship care for comments by the 26th of June. This resource is packed with ideas about how to effectively support kinship care, including numerous examples from across Africa. It can be found [here](#).
- **Request for information relating to care for children with albinism and other vulnerable groups affected by harmful practices.** In several countries in Eastern and Southern Africa persons with albinism are attacked for their body parts to be used in ritual witchcraft practices. Many families therefore resort to the institutionalisation of their children in shelters or boarding schools as a means to 'protect' them. Whilst this

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including their right to a family – and may have a detrimental impact on their longer-term development and life-chances. Martin Punaks is carrying out research on behalf of the UN Expert on Albinism, Muluka-Anne Miti-Drummond, to identify potential family-based solutions for the care and protection of children with albinism. There are many parallels we can learn from in relation to children being protected from violence and other harmful practices in family and community-based settings. If you have any knowledge or experience of these issues, or ideas or suggestions for solutions, possibly based on other areas of child protection and child care, please contact me, I would love to hear from you. The research findings will contribute to the Independent Expert's report to the UN General Assembly in October 2024 and other policy platforms. Thank you. martin@martinpunaks.com.

Want to share resources or advertise a webinar or event on care reform in Eastern and Southern Africa? Please contact Bertha Lutome of Child Frontiers: blutome@childfrontiers.com

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