

# Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child

Submitted by: **Family for Every Child**, a global Alliance of local CSOs



## INTRODUCTION

Family for Every Child is a diverse, global alliance of 40 local civil society organisations in 36 countries. We work with millions of children in extended family care, alternative care, detention, and those on the move or without adequate care in their own families. Our goals are to prevent family separation, strengthen families, ensure high quality alternative care when needed, and protect children outside of any adult care. Our members are deeply-rooted where they work, so their models for change grow directly out of the needs of their unique communities. Together, we achieve collaborative projects that deliver impact and change at a larger scale than our members could do separately. These include global campaigns and advocacy, international research, and programme pilots to achieve change in multiple countries.

In 2019, Family for Every Child contributed to the inter-agency efforts behind the UN General Assembly's resolution on children without parental care (CWPC). As an active member of the UNCRC Committee's CSO Task Force, we welcome the 2021 DGD topic. We believe that this discussion is an opportunity for the global community to question what is required to create an environment that places support to families and child wellbeing at the centre of all government policy to ensure more equitable, non-violent and sustainable societies. Our submission stresses the importance of locally rooted responses, as it explores frequently ignored issues including care for sexually exploited children (particularly boys), the role of kinship care, the needs of and care opportunities for children on the move and in detention, re/integration from alternative care, and the impact of COVID-19.

## KEY ISSUES AND RECOMENDATIONS

### **1- Greater investments in preventing family separation of children by supporting kinship care through locally rooted solutions**

Prevention starts with identification of children at risk. In any given setting, many children who are at risk are unknown to the child protection system and this needs to be tackled. Investment is needed to ensure that the damaging and often traumatic impact of family separation is avoided, that families are kept together and children are kept out of stranger care and the formal child protection system wherever possible. Prevention needs to be the major focus of care reform but requires recognition of the intense and sustained support needed for highly complex families. Family strengthening efforts can be long and complicated and there is no quick fix solution. This means that the child's best interest needs to be considered.

Kinship care is a highly valued and commonly used traditional response in most cultures. It has proven to be the vital mechanism to ensure children are not placed in stranger care but are kept within their extended family with all the attendant benefits of family bonds, relationships and identity.

Many children are pushed into kinship care as a result of poverty, lack of access to services, abuse and neglect. These children are therefore likely to be more vulnerable than the general population, and caregivers need assistance to help them reach their full potential. These risks are not intrinsic to kinship care- most could be addressed through further investments and are not an indication that that kinship care should be used less or with a high degree of caution. Rather, kinship care families should be provided with proper financial, legal, practical and emotional support. Investments **must be made in order to maximise the potential of kinship care** to enhance children's well-being.

In conclusion, rather than top-down universal approaches being applied to various contexts, investment is needed in the existing informal child protection systems, building on the strengths of traditional approaches and practices that are reflective of their local contexts.

## **2- Recognition and attention to family care and protection of children on the move and children in detention**

The scale of the issues related to these groups of children is far greater than often presented or addressed. Preliminary research on children on the move in a number of contexts finds that support by governments and agencies is largely focused on cross-border movement, and on those at the highest risk such as trafficked\*. Attention also needs to be focused on support to children who move within their own countries, which is often neglected. This movement is caused predominantly by rural-urban inequalities, and opportunities and services available in the urban setting. It is often hastened in the more immediate term by family violence, dysfunction and the desire of young people to improve their situation and that of their families.

Sexual violence against unaccompanied boys is more prevalent than is acknowledged and requires specialised prevention and care measures\*\*. Our member Voice of Children (Nepal) reported that many boys who migrate from rural to urban areas find it difficult to obtain gainful employment and out of desperation accept exploitative labour condi-

## **EXAMPLES OF LOCALLY ROOTED SOLUTIONS FROM OUR MEMBERS**

**JUCONI (Mexico)** - works to build safe relationships with and within families with high levels of domestic violence. It uses an educational and therapeutic process to break intergenerational cycles of violence. 80% of the families successfully complete the programme and end violence in their households. This in turn strengthens family unity.

**FSCE (Ethiopia) and Voice of Children (Nepal)** work with street-connected children to determine if reintegration back to families of origin including kinship care is appropriate and if not, use alternative care programmes. Interventions that include supportive caregivers have a much greater chance of long-term success. Families can also be helped to provide longer-term support once external services end.

**FOST (Zimbabwe)** implements the Supporting Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (SOVC) programme in which kinship care is a core component in preventing family separation.



\*Findings from a Family for Every Child literature review on children on the move within and between countries in Africa, 2021 (unpublished)

\*\*[Caring for Boys affected by Sexual Violence](#), Family for Every Child, 2018.

**ACCORDING TO RESEARCH  
CARRIED OUT BY FAMILY  
FOR EVERY CHILD,  
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WHO CANNOT LIVE WITH  
PARENTS, FOR THE  
FOLLOWING REASONS:**

- Children prefer it to other choices such as institutional or foster care, and many children in kinship care are loved and well cared for;
- Kinship care offers continuity and stability for some children, and the opportunity to enhance important social networks for others;
- Kinship care is undoubtedly a better alternative to harmful institutional care;
- Children in kinship care can often maintain relationships with parents;
- Kinship care benefits caregivers, providing companionship, practical support and the satisfaction of helping a much loved child to flourish;
- Kinship care supports household livelihood strategies by enabling migration, and can save the state resources otherwise spent on costly residential or foster care.

tions, where they are at risk of sexual violence. Boys without adequate parental care who experience sexual violence often do not receive the protection, healthcare, education and psychosocial support that they require. Older unaccompanied refugee boys can often be difficult to place in alternative care and are usually placed in shelters with adult men- a situation which poses a risk of sexual violence. Boys without adequate parental care who experience sexual violence often do not receive the protection, healthcare, education and psychosocial support that they require.

Older unaccompanied refugee boys can often be difficult to place in alternative care and are usually placed in shelters with adult men- a situation which poses a risk of sexual violence. Unaccompanied boys need to be identified proactively and offered quality services that they find accessible. These groups of boys should not be accommodated with adult men. Instead, tailored, family placements should be sought or independent living arrangements created and then monitored.

Children on the move who are intercepted often end up in the detention system instead of being immediately re-integrated with family members. This can introduce yet another traumatic experience into the lives of children who have already experienced a significant amount, and the impact of long-term detention can be catastrophic, exacerbating psychological harm and suffering. Government detention of children is a last resort and must be overseen by an independent, child-focused body.

If a parent is in detention, the remaining child will be in need of a supportive temporary living arrangement. Kinship care is often the solution, though still requires specialised support to address any issues that may arise.



### 3. Strengths and needs-based reintegration or integration into a new community

Reintegration is a process in which children should be engaged at every step, and acting in their best interests should be the primary consideration of all involved. It is necessary to **prepare both children and families**, and intensive work is needed where there is a history of violence, abuse and neglect within the family. In some cases it may not be possible or in their best interests for children to be reintegrated back into their families, or such efforts may fail. Several of our members **work closely and over prolonged periods with children** to determine if reintegration back into families of origin-including kinship care placement- is appropriate, and where it is not, alternative care programmes are used.

Reintegration efforts should involve an understanding of the capacity of the family to support the child, as well as ways of assessing the risk of and preventing further abuse or re-separation. **Families may need to be supported to provide the protection children need, with special attention given to addressing** stigma, discrimination and marginalisation.

**Successful reintegration** of children affected by sexual exploitation and abuse **requires a specific and holistic approach to ensure that their needs are met**. The idea of acceptance is a key indicator of success for them and it starts with themselves - accepting that they are not to blame for their exploitation, that they are a 'survivor', as well as the acceptance of family members, particularly parents.

Research led by Family for Every Child looked at the importance of independence for boys and girls affected by sexual exploitation in Nepal, and their integration into an urban community of friends and colleagues. In many cases, both boys and girls had moved away from their family home (in the rural area) and were living in the city independently from their families, often with friends. Many had not reintegrated with their families because they had found employment or education in the city and, particularly for the boys, these opportunities were not available in rural communities. The possibility of supporting formerly rural young people to live with their peers and set up integration programmes in urban communities is worthy of research and support.

Family reintegration for children affected by armed conflict presents particular challenges. In Colombia, many children recruited by armed

## EXAMPLES OF LOCALLY ROOTED SOLUTIONS FROM OUR MEMBERS

**The Detained Immigrant Children's Project** - run by our US member, **Legal Services for Children** - provides a model for attending to the psychosocial needs of children (with support from social workers) as well as providing legal representation to those who have been released and are now beginning the integration process in their new community.

Our Greek member **METAdrasi** developed the **foster care programme** in which refugee and migrant children are placed in foster care with families who wish to take care of unaccompanied children on either a short-term or long-term basis. The aim is to prevent children from being placed in detention centres or camps in which they would be exposed to further trauma.

Interventions should include addressing harmful social norms relating to masculinity and sexual violence, such as Family for Every Child's 'Blue Umbrella Day' awareness campaign. Through this locally embedded campaign our members aim to raise awareness of families and communities to protect their boys, along with girls, from any harm including sexual violence.



## CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES DURING COVID-19 AS SHARED WITH FAMILY FOR EVERY CHILD

These along with their creative expressions will be available through a virtual exhibition from July 2021

*'When I heard about coronavirus, I didn't feel good and I was scared for my family, me and my siblings' Boy, 13, from Syria living in a shelter home for unaccompanied minors in Greece*

*'My parents income diminished and I am afraid for my studies', Boy, 14, Senegal, living with grandparents*

*"During COVID-19 I live as a prisoner in my home' Girl, 13, Senegal, living with parents*

*'The situation was not good at all [...] But everyone learned something good during this time. Firstly, gratitude for having a home, a place of safety, and a family to spend these difficult times with, unlike many other people who didn't have a place to protect themselves, or a family to support them, or a job to earn a living.' Girl, 16, Colombia*

groups have come from violent homes, and after witnessing and being forced to commit violence themselves in **the context of armed conflict, these children need specialised reintegration support.** Taller de Vida uses a psychosocial intervention based on art and music therapies with high levels of success.

METAdrasi's Supported Independent Living prepares young people (16-18) to make a smooth transition to independent living, adulthood, and integration into Greek society. Along with an appropriate level of care and supervision, its model supports the young person's self-reliance, along with their acquisition and development of life skills.

Globally, LGBTQI+ children are particularly likely to face family separation, and are also at a higher risk of being sexually abused and exploited. When given a choice, many of these children opt for independent living and community integration, rather than family reintegration. LGBTI+ children need to be listened to, as this autonomy can be deeply protective and is to be encouraged.

### 4- Covid-19 local issues and responses

COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenges of reintegration. Decision makers are having to choose between leaving children in risky situations or pushing them through rushed, ineffective and uncertain reintegration processes. School closures due to lockdown have impacted not only children's education but also their lack of protection. COVID is also leading to a significant rise in number of children in absolute and relative poverty, and this is leading to increase in child labour, child marriage and child trafficking.

**Coordination and collaboration with community-based actors is essential** where decision-making has moved to virtual processes in many areas. Our member in Guatemala - CONACMI - worked in alliance with government agencies in the face of the overcrowding and closures of institutions, using the inter-agency global Reintegration Guidelines for assessing and effectively reintegrating children back into families.

Processes of integration and reintegration in many countries have stalled due to the closure of services, and border closures have left many children stuck in protracted and precarious states of 'limbo' in asylum and refugee camps. It is essential that **during a period of cri-**



**crisis**, children requiring alternative care receive it in a timely manner whether they are still in care or trying to live back with their family. Unfortunately, the stress associated with the pandemic is leading to more domestic violence and abuse within the home; as explained in Family for Every Child's paper on reintegration and COVID-19, this is directly affecting the reintegration of children. Efforts must be made to assess and attempt to address risk before children return home.

In conclusion, Family for Every Child argues strongly that locally grown solutions should be recognised and invested in to ensure relevant and sustainable solutions are provided to uphold children's rights.

