A) ECONOMIC SECURITY, ENDING POVERTY AND BUILDING SOCIAL PROTECTION

How poverty can drive the institutionalisation of children

2.3 Structural social, economic and environmental forces

a) Economic security, ending poverty and building social protection

How poverty can drive the institutionalisation of children

Across the world, **poverty is the most common underlying risk factor** that leads to children being separated from their families and institutionalised.

Poverty is a **direct driver of institutionalisation, and indirectly exacerbates the impact of all other factors that are associated with institutionalisation**, such as disability, gender, violence, health, education and discrimination, among others.

Poverty can place families in a situation where they are not able to meet the basic needs of their children. This can result in authorities taking children away from their families, or parents feeling that they have no choice but to place their child in an institution.

Without an adequate social protection safety net to support families on the margins of poverty, they are **incredibly vulnerable to changes** in circumstances, such as unemployment, which can very quickly lead to financial difficulties and increase the risk of family separation.

Poverty can be a manifestation of intergenerational poverty[111] or trauma.[112] In certain communities it is **often a consequence of longstanding inequity and exclusion, rooted in forms of discrimination**. This is highlighted by indigenous children, children of particular ethnic backgrounds, children with disabilities and children from poor and vulnerable families being over-represented in institutions.

How institutionalisation can lead to poverty

Children who have been in institutions can suffer multiple disadvantages in adult life[113] which all affect the likelihood of them experiencing poverty. Those who have lived in residential care have less income, and are more likely to be young parents and experience mental health issues. They experience poorer health as adults than those who grow up with parents.[114] They are more likely to be marginalised, isolated and in conflict with the law as well as more vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. For example, evidence from Ukraine shows that of those who survive childhood in an institution, 23% become homeless, 50% are in contact with the law and 90% are not prepared for independent living.[115]

Children of adults who have grown up in institutions are more likely to become institutionalised themselves – reflecting the intergenerational cycle of poverty and institutionalisation.[116] For example, almost 50 per cent of parents in Ukraine who had their babies placed in institutions had grown up in institutions themselves.[117]

111 Intergenerational Transmission Of Poverty: The Role Of Agency In Mitigating The Impact For Child Headed Households - A Case Of Zola, Soweto (South Africa) 2019, https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/198850-Article%20Text-499993-1-10-20200819.pdf

112 Brittany Barker, Kali Sedgemore, and others Intergenerational Trauma: The Relationship Between Residential Schools and the Child Welfare System Among Young People Who Use Drugs in Vancouver, Canada'. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 65(2), pp.248-254 (2019), https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30948272/

113 van IJzendoorn *et al*, 2020 https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(19)30399-2 Berens & Nelson, 2015 https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)61131-4/fulltext. Schoenmaker *et al*., 2014. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-9063-8_179

114 Murray *et al*, 2020 https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckaa113

115 Children's Ombudsman Office of Ukraine, 2021. No link available.

116 Elizabeth Wall-Wieler, Ylva Almquist & others 'Intergenerational transmission of out-of-home care in Sweden: A population-based cohort study.' *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 83,2018. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213418302760X?via%3Dihub

117 Sereda *et al,* 2020. As referenced in Behind the Mask of Care, Hope and Homes for Children, https://www.hopeandhomes.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Behind-the-Mask-of-Care-Hope-and-Homes-for-Children-Ukraine.pdf

The role of poverty reduction in the care reform process

A **systemic approach to poverty reduction must be integrated into the care reform process to prevent unnecessary family separation and the institutionalisation of children**. This can be a catalyst for wider societal change and help promote more equality (in-line with achieving Goal 10 of the SDGs).

Historically, some attempts to end poverty have resulted in **children having to go where resources are, rather than resources going to the child**. This can lead to perverse situations where the only way a child can find a meal is by being placed in an institution. The importance of a stable, nurturing and loving family has played secondary to development responses which have, at times, focused on material needs, to the detriment of strengthening families, communities and, ultimately, societies.

Small investments in the family so they can meet their children's material needs are far more effective, and cost-effective, than placing resources in institutions. An important part of the care reform process is to strengthen services and support for families, **redirecting resources away from institutions towards families and community services to build the capabilities, resilience and support needed**. This can include investment in areas such as poverty reduction programmes, social protection, measures to address discrimination, marginalisation and social exclusion, counselling and financial support services, which tackle both the symptoms of poverty and prevent entry of children into institutions.[118]

> #### Household Economic Strengthening: Uganda
>
> The Accelerating Strategies for Practical Innovation and Research in Economic Strengthening (ASPIRES) project outlines how initiatives such as cash transfers can help to strengthen families and prevent the separation of children and families in Uganda. It includes useful resources and tools related to family preservation and reintegration.[119]

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118 Neil Quinn, Jennifer Davidson and others, 'Moving Forward: Towards a rights-based paradigm for young people transitioning out of care' International Social Work, 60(1) 2012, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872814547439

119 FHI 360, 'Accelerating Strategies for Practical Innovation and Research in Economic Strengthening (ASPIRES) Project' 2019, https://bettercarenetwork.org/library/strengthening-family-care/household-economic-strengthening/accelerating-strategies-for-practical-innovation-and-research-in-economic-strengthening-aspires

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:
ECONOMIC SECURITY, END POVERTY AND BUILD SOCIAL PROTECTION

💛 Recognise the role of poverty reduction – including universal and targeted support – in preventing family separation and institutionalisation. Ensure policies and programmes developed in this area focus on building the capabilities and resilience of families and communities, rather than providing incentives for family separation, such as resources being locked up in institutions.

💛 Ensure that programmes to tackle poverty reach communities that are often the most vulnerable and marginalised. Identify and tackle the role of stigma and discrimination against vulnerable and marginalised communities in order to maximise the potential of poverty reduction programmes.

💛 Increase coverage and quality of poverty reduction measures. Listen and establish accountability mechanisms to families and children and prioritise what social protection measures are most essential.

💛 Ensure that a financial case for care reform is produced, which outlines the short, medium and long-term costs and benefits of the process, with a particular focus on outcomes for children. Ensure cross-ministry/agency involvement and commitment to long-term investment. Mobilise civil society to ensure ongoing commitment remains a priority.

💛 Map international funds going into the care system – formal and informal – and create a plan to engage with donors to influence them to pivot funding away from institutions, to new services needed in the care system. It is essential that donors are part of the process, therefore donor engagement and education must also be a significant part of this process.

💛 Support families of children being reintegrated, and those transitioning out of care, to build their independence and wellbeing, including housing, employment and social protection measures.