

A young boy in a white school uniform is writing on a chalkboard. He is looking intently at the board. In the background, other children are visible, some also writing on the board. The scene is set in a classroom.

## B) ACCESS TO QUALITY, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

How barriers to education can drive  
the institutionalisation of children



## **b) Access to quality, inclusive education**

### **How barriers to education can drive the institutionalisation of children**

Many children are placed in institutions because they **cannot access quality, affordable and inclusive education in their community**. This happens at all ages, from early childhood education and development through to primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Some groups of children – such as children with disabilities, girls, children in rural communities, refugees, minority ethnic or indigenous children, and children living in extreme poverty – face more challenges in accessing quality, inclusive education in their communities. It is likely that this exclusion places them at a **higher risk of institutionalisation**.<sup>120</sup>

The availability of education in institutions should never be seen as an acceptable alternative to providing inclusive education close to home. **Parents should never be asked to choose between raising their child in their family or giving them an education.**

In some countries, institutions are labelled as ‘boarding schools’ – **this can give false legitimacy to the institution in the eyes of parents, donors and the community, and lead to institutions being invisible in alternative care statistics.**



#### **Education driving placement in institutions: Rwanda**

The National Survey of Institutions in Rwanda found that of the 3,323 children living in institutions, records showed that only 0.5% of them were placed in order to access education.<sup>121</sup> However, on closure inspection, interviews with family members found that many had placed their child into an institution expecting better access to education. For example, the reason recorded for a child’s entry to an institution was recorded as ‘family breakdown, poverty or child abandonment’; whereas the parents themselves reported “I am poor and could not afford his education in the future” and another one “I abandoned him because I am sure he will get better education which I can’t afford.”.

### **How institutionalisation can lead to poor education outcomes**

Despite promises made by institutions, education for children in institutions is very rarely of a satisfactory standard, if provided at all – **leading to lower educational attainment and contributing to poorer life chances.**

Evidence highlights that school-age children with a history of early institutionalisation perform worse on measures of both memory and executive functioning compared to their peers without a history of institutionalisation.<sup>122</sup> A meta-analysis of 75 studies covering over 3,800 children in 19 countries found that children who grew up in institutions had, on average, an IQ 20 points lower than their peers in foster care.<sup>123</sup>

120 European Commission Daphne Programme, *Deinstitutionalising and Transforming Children’s Services* (July 2007). Available online: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/5995.pdf>

121 Hope and Homes for Children and MIGEPROF (2012), *National Survey of Institutions for Children in Rwanda*.

<https://bettercarenetwork.org/library/the-continuum-of-care/residential-care/national-survey-of-institutions-for-children-in-rwanda>

122 Karen Bos, Nathan Fox and others, *Effects of Early Psychosocial Deprivation on the Development of Memory and Executive Function*. *Frontiers in Behavioural Neuroscience* 2009 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2741295/>

123 Marinus van IJzendoorn, Maartje Luijk and others, and others ‘IQ of children growing up in children’s homes: A meta-analysis on IQ delays in orphanages’. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 54(3) 2018.

[https://faculty.uml.edu/darcus/47.361/FOSTER%20CARE/vanijzendoorn\\_etal\\_2008\\_IQ.pdf](https://faculty.uml.edu/darcus/47.361/FOSTER%20CARE/vanijzendoorn_etal_2008_IQ.pdf)

Education in institutions often segregates children from local communities, **subjecting and compounding stigma and discrimination** against certain groups of children.

Carers' low expectations of children in their care, unstable or multiple placements, low levels of investment and a pervasive medical model of care, are among the plethora of reasons why children in institutions are often **significantly behind their peers in both academic attainment, and work-life earnings in later life**. Analysis of high-, middle- and low-income countries all report a significant degree of difference between children in institutions and their peers.<sup>124</sup>

Decades of research has shown the detrimental effects of institutionalisation on child development, such as attachment disorders and impaired or delayed brain development, growth and cognitive development. Coupled with poor educational provision, across the world, **children who grow up in institutions have lower educational attainment, lower high school graduation rates and do not progress as far in the education system, compared to their peers**. Care leavers often struggle to access employment or vocational training.



### Impact on educational attainment: Romania

Research with a sample of 800 young care leavers from Romania who left care from 2014 to 2017 highlighted that only 24% had completed 'general education' (8 grades), with 6.1% graduating from higher education.<sup>125</sup>

In some countries, the nature of the education provided in institutional settings may reflect the culture, faith or worldview of the donor and not necessarily that of the local community.<sup>126</sup> This can result in children being unable to speak the local language or unfamiliar with their own cultural customs or heritage.<sup>127</sup> In some cases, institutions have been used with the express purpose of eradicating links to culture or 'assimilating' communities. This has been particularly acute in countries with indigenous populations, with countries such as Canada undergoing inquiries and processes of reflection into historic and more recent examples of institutionalisation of indigenous populations<sup>128</sup> taking place over many decades.

## The role of education in the care reform process

Until children with disabilities have **access to high-quality education** in the community, the pull of institutions will remain and it will be difficult for children to return home from institutions.

**Inclusive education reform and care reform processes are deeply connected.** Access to affordable, quality, inclusive education services – including early childhood education – is essential to any reintegration or care reform programme.

Education provides children with the opportunity to socialise with a diverse range of peers within their communities. This **opportunity for socialisation is greatly diminished when children are**

124 Yasuharu Shimamura The Dynamics of Educational Attainment for Orphaned Children in Sub-Saharan Africa: Evidence from Malawi, 2015, [https://arefiles.ucdavis.edu/uploads/filer\\_public/2015/01/26/orphan\\_education\\_jan2015.pdf](https://arefiles.ucdavis.edu/uploads/filer_public/2015/01/26/orphan_education_jan2015.pdf) and Takashi Yamano. "The Long-Term Impacts of Orphanhood on Education Attainment and Land Inheritance among Adults in Rural Kenya," *Agricultural Economics (Amsterdam, Netherlands)*, 37.2–3: 141–49 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1574-0862.2007.00260.x>

125 Alexandru Toth, Daniela Mita, Research report on the study regarding the situation of youth leaving the care system in Romania 2020, <https://www.sos-satelecopiilor.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Studiu-tineri-iesiti-english-web-1.pdf>

126 [https://www.hopeandhomes.org/blog-article/orphanages-have-no-place-in-an-africa-fit-for-children/?utm\\_source=Social&utm\\_medium=Twitter&utm\\_campaign=Black\\_History\\_Month\\_2021](https://www.hopeandhomes.org/blog-article/orphanages-have-no-place-in-an-africa-fit-for-children/?utm_source=Social&utm_medium=Twitter&utm_campaign=Black_History_Month_2021)

127 Andrew Gray and Wesley Cote, Cultural connectedness protects mental health against the effect of historical trauma among Anishinabe young adults. *Public Health*, 176, 77. *Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts* 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2018.12.003>

128 Amélie Ross, Jacinthe Dion and others, Impact of residential schooling and of child abuse on substance use problem in Indigenous Peoples. *Addictive Behaviors*, 51, 184–192. 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2015.07.014>

**segregated** in institutions. Inclusive education is essential in breaking down stigma and discrimination.

Funding that flows into institutions (including child sponsorship, donations from abroad as well as government or faith-based funding) can be **reallocated to support children's integration and the development of education provision in the community.**

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL



**By building the capabilities and resilience of families and communities, and addressing the root causes of family separation, the care reform process will contribute to the delivery of SDG4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**

*4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes*

*4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education*

*4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship*

*4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations*

*4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy*

*4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all*

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS: ACCESS TO QUALITY, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

- ♥ Recognise that denying access to quality inclusive education plays a key role in driving family separation, and that keeping children in supported families will deliver better education outcomes. All human rights are indivisible and interdependent. The right to education should not supersede the right to respect of family life.
- ♥ Ensure that education sector planning includes a specific focus on the needs of children in the care system and of those at risk of being taken into care.
- ♥ Develop an education system that ensures access to free, safe, inclusive and equitable learning opportunities and environments for children in their own communities. This includes early childhood education, inclusive education for children with disabilities and support services in the community. Special attention should be paid to vulnerable groups, including girls.
- ♥ Identify and reduce barriers to accessing education, such as financial barriers including: uniforms, meals and transportation.
- ♥ Ensure that national registration, reporting and monitoring systems on children outside family care include educational facilities which provide long-term residential care so that they can be included in national efforts to ensure appropriate family-based care for every child.
- ♥ Identify and tackle stigma and discrimination that hinder access to education in societies through policy change and awareness raising initiatives. Schools are also valuable places to influence the attitudes and beliefs of communities – challenging and shaping discriminatory social norms.
- ♥ Enshrine formal coordination between the child protection, education and care sectors so that no child falls through the gaps and is left behind.