

Contribution to the European Commission Recommendation on integrated child protection systems

Hope and Homes for Children, an international NGO with decades of experience protecting and promoting the rights of children without parental care and supporting the reform of child care and protection systems in Europe and globally, welcomes the initiative of the European Commission to propose a Recommendation on integrated child protection systems. This is both timely and necessary. We see this forthcoming Recommendation as an opportunity for the EU to guide its Member States in strengthening child protection systems and tackling a wide range of child protection risks and vulnerabilities, as well as breaches of child rights. While this initiative will mainly cover EU countries, it will set important standards for accession and partner countries alike.

Due to overlapping crises, including ongoing conflicts, natural disasters, the refugee influx, and the economic and energy crises, more and more children are at risk of separation and being placed in institutions. The EU has taken a leading role in recognising the harm of institutionalisation and committing to the transition from institutional to family and community-based care in its most relevant policies and funding regulations (Annex I). Child institutionalisation is a gaping symptom of flawed child care and protection systems. Tackling the root causes of child institutionalisation and implementing the transition from institutional to family and community-based care is essential for child protection systems strengthening.

This contribution, based on decades of experience in supporting the child protection systems globally, including in EU countries such as Bulgaria and Romania, explores the far-reaching implications of institutionalisation on children and delves into the structural factors that lead to child institutionalisation. It also highlights the violation of children's rights associated with domestic violence and the separation of the child from the non-abusive parent. Finally, it provides detailed evidence-based recommendations to EU Governments on how to strengthen the child care and protection systems.

1. Child care reform as a key element of child protection systems strengthening

The primary objectives of a functioning child protection system are promoting children's rights and ensuring that child victims and children at risk are protected from violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Child institutionalisation, directly and indirectly, violates a wide range of children's rights (Annex I) and is incompatible with a functioning and effective child protection system. Children in institutions are deprived of stable, continuous and loving family care and may consequently suffer life-long harm.¹ Analyses of growth data from institutions show that children lose, on average, 1 month's growth for every 3 months spent in an orphanage.² Institutionalisation also harms children's socio-emotional development and mental health, and children's ability to form attachments.³ Children in institutions are often subject to physical, sexual and emotional abuse at the hands of peers, visitors or staff.⁴ The impacts of institutionalisation can continue beyond childhood and lead to multiple disadvantages during adulthood,⁵ and include severe developmental delays, disability, irreversible psychological damage and poor health.⁶

The process of care reform typically starts with understanding the reasons why children are separated, or at risk of separation, from their families. In line with the principle of indivisibility and interdependence of children's rights,⁷ it is crucial that the drivers for child institutionalisation are approached through a holistic perspective. This will prevent the fragmentation of services, ensure that children do not fall into the cracks of the child protection systems, and increase the effectiveness and accountability to the community it serves. An integrated and intersectional approach will address a full range of child protection issues and strengthen the critical roles and assets of the key actors responsible for child protection, which provide formal and informal child protection mechanisms and services.⁸

Another key element of successful care reform is the collaboration of all stakeholders, including those who work in welfare, education, health, security, justice, and migration. Their collaboration is key to avoid fragmentation in the response and re-victimisation, minimise trauma, maximise resources and eliminate duplication. To ensure an integrated approach, all actors should have a general understanding of their respective roles in promoting

children's rights, and thoroughly assess the complete spectrum of issues the child may experience, their underlying causes, and the available remedies at all levels.⁹ A socio-ecological model,¹⁰ recognising that children's rights are influenced by a complex interplay of factors at multiple levels, ranging from the individual child to the larger society and environment in which they live, would orient all actors towards comprehensive and integrated responses.¹¹

This is especially important for child victims. In line with Article 39 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,¹² all actors intervening in cases of children suffering or at risk of suffering serious harm¹³ should collaborate to ensure that the recovery of the child victims takes place in an environment that fosters the child's health, self-respect and dignity. As children need the support and care of trusted adults to help navigate the traumatic experience they are going through, family-based care should be prioritised, supported and facilitated whenever possible.

2. Preventing family separation and child institutionalisation

Strong and mature child protection systems are not merely based on a reactive approach¹⁴ but should promote a wide range of children's rights. A quality child protection system is also defined by its ability to ensure that children are not unnecessarily separated from their families, and by its capacity to provide suitable alternative family-based care for children in line with their needs, circumstances, and their best interests.¹⁵

To deal with the key drivers of institutionalisation of children, it is crucial to recognise its structural determinants, including social, economic, and environmental forces. Some of the common factors that lead to institutionalisation include lack of access and availability of services, lack of alternative care available for children who cannot remain with their birth families, discrimination, unequal distribution of justice, misplaced good intentions, and reluctance to change.¹⁶

If families struggle to provide for their children's basic needs, parents can feel that the only way their children can access the services is by placing them in an institution or, in some circumstances, authorities deciding to take their children away. This is particularly the case for specialised, targeted services, namely for children with disabilities, which in many countries are not always available in the community. Many children may be institutionalised because of poverty or other risk factors that can be prevented through family strengthening and support programmes. As highlighted in Annex II, Member States are obliged under international law to tackle these risk factors and secure quality alternative family-based care for the child who cannot remain with their birth families.¹⁷ The development of a wide range of family and community-based services is crucial in this process.

In addition, certain groups of children are disproportionately represented in institutions. Minority and vulnerable child and youth populations, such as children with disabilities, refugee children, children in street situations and children in poverty, are inherently at risk of being separated from their parents and placed in institutions.¹⁸ The intersection between multiple forms of inequalities and discrimination children face - such as gender, disabilities, ethnicity and migration status - can also create compounding experiences of discrimination. Through an intersectional approach, these inequalities should be identified and addressed simultaneously.

3. Domestic violence and the separation of the child from the non-abusive parent

As recognised by the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls,¹⁹ child victims of domestic violence, including those witnessing violence who are not physically abused,²⁰ are often revictimised by the justice system through detrimental practices.²¹ These include the separation of the child from the non-abusive parent²² and other decisions on contact and visitation rights that are not in the best interests of the child.²³ As a result of the lack of collaboration between the child protection systems and domestic violence services, and between the family and criminal courts, allegations of violence are often ignored in legal proceedings involving divorce, custody and access.²⁴

Litigation over care and contact arrangements are sometimes used to coercively control mothers following separation.²⁵ Many judicial systems²⁶ not only perpetuate patriarchal norms by exhibiting gender bias when handling domestic violence cases – e.g., blaming the victim and underestimating the severity of abuse – but also

fail to safeguard children from harm by misunderstanding and underestimating the impact of domestic violence on them.²⁷ They tend to prioritise and allow fathers to maintain contact, even when they have a history of abuse, thus providing unsupervised access to their children.²⁸ Due to a lack of safeguards and risk assessment, the proceedings themselves can expose both the non-abusive parent and the child to harm.²⁹ Fear of child removal³⁰ also prevents women from reporting domestic violence.^{31 32}

Through a truly intersectional and integrated approach, child protection and domestic violence services actors should collaborate to ensure that victims of domestic violence are protected, and to avoid the isolation and inefficiency that can result from siloed approaches. All decisions should be made in line with the best interests of the child. The relationship between the child and the non-abusive parent is to be prioritised and supported.

4. Ensuring family reunification and support to care experienced people

Efforts should focus on finding solutions to safely reunite children with their families, whenever possible and in the child's best interest, or providing support for young adults to transition towards independent living. Importantly, a significant majority of children in the child care system have a connection with their families, with approximately 90% of them knowing their parents or at least one parent.³³ It is also paramount to provide targeted support to care experienced people who bear the impact of institutionalisation well beyond childhood and often face multiple disadvantages throughout adulthood such as social exclusion and difficulties accessing social and economic rights.³⁴

In Romania, a survey involving young adults who have left the institutional care system revealed that 32.8% of them expressed feeling unprepared or minimally prepared for independent living. This underscores the necessity for comprehensive support and preparation programs to assist these young adults in the process of transitioning out of the care system.³⁵

5. Recommendations

We call on the Commission to include the following points in its Recommendations towards EU Member States:

a. Addressing the drivers for family separation and child institutionalisation

- Ensure that social assistance, social security and social care services focus on building the capabilities and resilience of families and communities and take necessary measures to prevent unnecessary child-family separation.
- Establish dedicated and effective strategies aimed at combating poverty, which is a leading factor for child institutionalisation.
- Promote a social model approach to disability, focused on eliminating the barriers that a child or carer with disabilities faces in accessing services and ensuring that children with disabilities are supported within their families and communities.³⁶
- Ensure access to quality inclusive education, including early childhood education, to all children in order to prevent unnecessary child-family separation and deliver better education outcomes.
- Pre-existing vulnerabilities and patterns of discrimination are exacerbated in emergencies. Establish and implement child-centred emergency preparedness strategies and activities aimed at strengthening the capabilities and resilience of families and at preventing separation.³⁷
- Recognise the role played by the social service workforce and the education system in identifying and supporting children at risk, and collaborate in empowering children, parents, community organisations, and law enforcement to create a holistic approach to violence prevention.³⁸

b. National legislative and regulatory framework, including child protection policies

- Recognise in the legislative framework the right of children not to be unnecessarily separated from their families. Acknowledge and tackle stigma and discrimination within the system, including gender norms and discriminatory social norms towards certain communities.
- Ensure national service standards, strategies, and guidance support the legislative framework and create a system that strives for continuous improvement.
- Adopt a moratorium on the placement of children in institutions, prioritising children under three, and put in place the necessary measures for its implementation.

Bulgaria has adopted a moratorium on the placement of children without disabilities under the age of 3 in institutions. However, concerning practices, such as the placement of children in residential care facilities without fully exploring alternative options, are still observed. Despite strenuous efforts to place children in family-based care, the number of children residing in the last four medical and social care homes remains stable, amounting to around 200 children. One notable challenge is the shortage of specialised foster families capable of providing care for children with disabilities, despite the existence within the country of an adequate number of available foster families who could be trained and licensed to fulfil this role.

c. Governance and coordination structures

- Set up a collaborative platform across community stakeholders, authorities, and other agencies and NGOs responsible for identification, referrals, and decisions about child protection and care at the local and national levels.³⁹
- Ensure that all actors supporting the child, including those in welfare, education, health, security, justice, and migration cooperate to avoid fragmentation in the response, prevent re-victimisation and minimise trauma.⁴⁰
- Integrate child protection systems and social schemes in order to expand the coverage of social protection programmes, enhance socio-economic and well-being outcomes for children and their families, and optimise resources.⁴¹
- In the context of emergencies, ensure the child protection system closely works with other actors to trace children's families and reunite them with their children in line with their best interest.
- Ensure the child protection system and domestic violence services collaborate closely to avoid detrimental decisions and practices, such as the removal of children from the non-abusive parent and other decisions on contact and visitation rights that are not in the best interests of the child. Mandatory institutional cooperation mechanisms should be established between the criminal, child protection and family law systems or the use of integrated court structures.⁴²
- Set mechanisms to be regularly informed by the best practices employed by civil society actors involved in child protection, and actively integrate these practices into specific contexts to ensure the effective implementation of all measures and activities within the child protection system.

d. A continuum of services

- Commit to ensuring access to family and community-based care for children by tackling child institutionalisation and implementing holistic reforms of child care and protection systems, as well as strengthening national social protection systems.
- Ensure availability and integration of scaled-up prevention and response-related child protection services.
- Identify and develop the support and services needed so that families and communities can meet the needs of children, and strengthen gatekeeping mechanisms to ensure that children only enter care when truly necessary. This requires a targeted focus on those most discriminated against and left behind and an understanding of which services are needed to ensure they don't end up in institutions.

- Support safe family reunification and transition towards independent living according to the individual needs and circumstances of the service users. Provide continuous support for families and care-leavers for their full integration into the community, as well as for your people with lived experience of care.
- Through a truly intersectional approach, prioritise and support the relationship between child victims of domestic violence, including those who witnessed violence, and the non-abusive.
- In line with Article 39 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ensure all actors intervening in cases of children suffering or at risk of suffering serious harm collaborate to ensure that the recovery of the child victims takes place in an environment that fosters the child's health, self-respect and dignity. As children need the support and care of trusted adults to help navigate the traumatic experience they are going through, family-based care should be prioritised, supported and facilitated whenever possible.

e. Minimum standards and oversight mechanisms

- Ensure formal alternative care settings, including foster care, meet minimum standards. Measures, indicators and tools, and monitoring and evaluation systems should be in place under the auspices of a national coordinating framework.⁴³
- Assess the availability, accessibility, inclusivity and quality of existing prevention and alternative care services in the community.

f. Human, financial, and infrastructure resources

- Conduct a top-line analysis of the current financing of the care system – including public and private funding sources and ensure that funds are spent towards alternatives to institutions.
- Make full use of the European Child Guarantee framework to ringfence funds to support the reform of child protection and care systems, including the transition from institutional to family and community-based care and tackling the drivers of child institutionalisation.
- Ensure sufficient funding and prioritisation of services to prevent family separation and quality alternative family and community-based care for children in EU and national budgets.
- Ensure professionals, practitioners, and foster families receive adequate training and guidance on children's rights, child protection law and child development to secure the fulfilment of national standards for children in alternative care.
- Ensure mandatory training on domestic violence and child protection for all actors supporting children, including judges, mediators, custody evaluators, teachers and other professionals.
- Invest in strengthening the foster care system. This should include supporting foster care associations and providing support to foster parents.
- Strengthen the social service workforce, including raising awareness about the profession, providing training and adequate incentives to improving the quality of work, ensuring adequate payment, developing and strengthening education programmes and monitoring mechanisms.^{44 45}
- Ensure policies, strategies, and reform processes prioritise reliance on national budgets and resources. This approach is essential to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of these initiatives.
- Enhance child protection programmes led by local authorities, with a particular focus on the training and specialisation of foster families. This will enable more precise planning and a better approach for district-level teams, especially when dealing with foster families caring for children with disabilities.

In various regions across Bulgaria, there are accredited foster families with available capacity that are currently not receiving children. To prioritise efforts towards deinstitutionalisation of children, it is vital to carry out a thorough assessment of all the children still residing in specialised institutions and residential services with a view of placing them in suitable foster families.

g. Mechanisms for child participation

- Ensure meaningful partnerships with children without parental care, people with lived experiences, caregivers, and civil society in the process of strengthening child care and protection systems.
- In line with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ensure that the views of the child are sufficiently and independently represented in family and criminal law procedures and, where possible, children are able to participate in such proceedings, according to their age and maturity.⁴⁶
- Ensure continuous engagement of all children and youth within decision-making processes, fostering their active participation and providing them with a platform where their voices can be heard.

h. Data collection

- Map all children in alternative care and children in institutions, including specialised institutions for children with disabilities and unregistered institutions, to inform individual care plans and the transition towards family and community-based care.
- Assess the capacity and capabilities of the national social workforce, including the workforce in prevention and gatekeeping services, institutions and alternative care services, case management capacity and practices, and all resources currently placed in the system, including human, material, and financial resources.
- Ensure that data and information are disaggregated systematically across all sectors, including with respect to housing, child or parental disability, living arrangements, and social protection schemes, as well as access to family-based alternative care, support and services. The information should allow for regular analyses of how the transition to support services in the community have progressed.
- Ensure that collected data is made accessible to the public in a user-friendly and disaggregated format and aligned with national regulations governing public data access, as well as children's right to privacy.

i. Monitoring mechanisms

- Put in place data collection and monitoring mechanisms to ensure timely follow-up, monitoring of outcomes, and planning, including resource allocation, service development, and consolidation of good practices.
- Ensure that the conditions of all children in alternative care, both in private and public facilities, are subject to independent oversight.
- Continuously assess the availability and accessibility, comprehensiveness, participation, and satisfaction of services for families, children, and care-experienced children and young people.

Annex I

The transition from institutional to family and community-based care in EU policies and funding regulations

The EU committed to care reform in its most important funding regulations:

- Within the EU borders, the **Common Provision Regulation (CPR) 2021-2027**⁴⁷ requires Member States to develop a national strategic framework for poverty reduction and social inclusion, including *"measures for the shift from institutional to community-based care."*
- In the EU external action, the **Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)**⁴⁸ seeks to support, in its geographic and thematic programming, *"the promotion of the transition from institutional to community-based care for children, as well as the promotion of new initiatives to build stronger child protection systems in third countries."*
- The **Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)**,⁴⁹ used by the EU to implement reforms in the EU accession countries, highlights that: *"Interventions in this area shall aim at modernising social*

protection systems to provide effective, efficient and adequate protection throughout all stages of a person's life, promoting the transition from institutional to family and community based care fostering social inclusion, promoting equal opportunities and addressing inequalities and poverty (Annex II).

The EU's commitment to child care reform has also been enshrined in key EU policies.

- In the [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2021-2024](#),⁵⁰ *"the European Commission invites Member States to promote national strategies and programmes to speed up deinstitutionalisation and the transition towards quality, family- and community-based care services including with an adequate focus on preparing children to leave care, including for unaccompanied migrant children."* According to the global dimension of the strategy *"The EU will support actions to address the issue of street children as well as invest in the development of quality alternative care and the transition from institution based to quality family and community based care for children without parental care and children with disabilities."*
- In the [EU Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030](#),⁵¹ *"The Commission calls on Member States to implement good practices of deinstitutionalisation in the area of mental health and in respect of all persons with disabilities, including children to strengthen the transition from institutional care to services providing support in the community."*
- The [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024](#)⁵² includes the commitment of the EU to *"Support the development of quality alternative care and the transition from institution based to quality family and community based care for children without parental care."*

Annex II Global human rights framework

Global human rights frameworks have recognised the harm of institutions and the need to transform care systems to better meet the needs of children and families.

- The [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#)⁵³ sees the family as the *"natural environment for the growth and well-being for all its members and particularly children"* (preamble), and recognises the right of the child not to be separated unless it is necessary for their best interests (Art. 9) and the duty of the state to assist the parents in the performance of their child rearing responsibilities (Art. 18). States have an obligation to provide material support for the family (27), and children with disabilities and those responsible are entitled to special care and obligation (23).

Child institutionalisation represents a threat to many of the rights of the child and directly and indirectly, breaches the following provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- Article 7: The right to a name, nationality and to know and be cared for by parents
 - Article 9: The right not to be separated from parents
 - Article 18: Rights concerning parental responsibilities
 - Article 19: The right to protection from all forms of violence
 - Article 20: Rights concerning children deprived of their family environment
 - Article 25: The right to periodic review of treatment and all other circumstances of placement
 - Article 36: The right to protection against all other forms of exploitation
 - Article 37: Deprivation of liberty, prohibition of torture, degrading and inhuman treatment and of capital punishment and life imprisonment
 - Article 39: The right to physical and psychological recovery of child victims.
- The [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(UNCRPD\)](#)⁵⁴ affirms that the *"family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and the right of persons with disabilities to live in the community (Art. 19). Under art. 23 of the UNCRPD, "States Parties shall ensure that children with disabilities have equal rights with respect to family life" and "In no case shall a child be separated from parents on the basis of a disability of either the child or one or both of the parents". To ensure this,*

States Parties shall ensure that children with disabilities have equal rights with respect to family life. With a view to realizing these rights, and to prevent concealment, abandonment, neglect and segregation of children with disabilities, States Parties shall undertake to provide early and comprehensive information, services and support to children with disabilities and their families".

- In the **2019 UN Resolution on the Rights of the Child**, the United Nations General Assembly⁵⁵ "expresses deep concern on the potential harm of institutionalization and institutional care to children's growth and development" and urges states to "progressively replacing institutionalization with quality alternative care, including, inter alia, family and community-based care and, where relevant, redirecting resources to family and community-based care services, with adequate training and support for caregivers and robust screening and oversight mechanisms."
- The **UNCRC General comment No. 1**, defines institutionalisation as deprivation of liberty.⁵⁶
- According to the **UN (2010) United Nations Guidelines For The Alternative Care Of Children**, "Financial and material poverty, or conditions directly and uniquely imputable to such poverty, should never be the only justification for the removal of a child from parental care, for receiving a child into alternative care, or for preventing his/her reintegration, but should be seen as a signal for the need to provide appropriate support to the family" and "the State is required to put in place many forms of preventive measures, such as parenting courses, the promotion of positive parent-child relationships, and conflict resolution skills."⁵⁷
- The **2019 UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty**⁵⁸ affirms that "institutions, by their very nature, are unable to operate without depriving children of their liberty" and details the human rights violations in institutions for children, including the deprivation of liberty and, in certain cases, torture.
- The **UN Guidelines on deinstitutionalization, including in emergencies**, according to which institutionalisation constitutes detention and deprivation of liberty based on impairment.⁵⁹
- The **2019 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** highlights that "Deprivation of liberty on the basis of impairment is not a "necessary evil" but a consequence of the failure of States to ensure their human rights obligations towards persons with disabilities."⁶⁰

- ¹ [Hope and Homes for Children \(2022\) Families. Not institutions](#)
- ² [Dana E. Johnson, 'Medical and Developmental Sequelae of Early Childhood Institutionalization in Eastern European Adoptees', in The Minnesota Symposia on Child Psychology. Vol 31: The Effects of Early Adversity on Neurobehavioral Development, ed. by Nelson \(Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2001\)](#)
- ³ [van IJzendoorn, M.H., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J. et al \(2020\) Institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation of children 1: a systematic and integrative review of evidence regarding effects on development. The Lancet Psychiatry, 7\(8\)](#)
- ⁴ [Gray, A.P. and Cote, W. \(2019\) Cultural connectedness protects mental health against the effect of historical trauma among Anishinabe young adults. Public Health, 176, pp.77-81.](#)
- ⁵ [van IJzendoorn, M.H., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J. et al \(2020\) Institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation of children 1: a systematic and integrative review of evidence regarding effects on development. The Lancet Psychiatry, 7\(8\)](#)
- ⁶ [G. Mulheir et al \(2012\) 'Deinstitutionalisation – A Human Rights Priority for Children with Disabilities' Equal Rights Trust Review, 9 \(2012\)](#)
- ⁷ [Desai, M. \(2020\) Rights-based integrated child protection service delivery systems. Springer Singapore.](#)
- ⁸ [World Vision International \(2011\) A systems approach to child protection: A world vision discussion paper.](#)
- ⁹ [Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action \(2023\) Guidance Note for Integrated Child Protection and Education Programming](#)
- ¹⁰ [Todres, J., & King, S. M. \(Eds.\). \(2020\). The Oxford handbook of children's rights law. Oxford University Press.](#)
- ¹¹ [Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action \(2023\) Guidance Note for Integrated Child Protection and Education Programming](#)
- ¹² [United Nations \(1989\) Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- ¹³ [UNICEF \(2021\) Child Protection Systems Strengthening](#)
- ¹⁴ [UNICEF \(2021\) Child Protection Systems Strengthening](#)
- ¹⁵ [Hope and Homes for Children \(2022\) Families. Not institutions](#)
- ¹⁶ [Hope and Homes for Children \(2022\) Families. Not institutions](#)
- ¹⁷ [Hope and Homes for Children \(2022\) Families. Not institutions](#)
- ¹⁸ [Vaghri, Z., Zermatten, J., Lansdown, G., & Ruggiero, R. \(2022\). Monitoring State Compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: An Analysis of Attributes Springer Nature.](#)
- ¹⁹ [Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences \(2023\) Custody, violence against women and violence against children: report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences](#)
- ²⁰ [McGee, C. \(2000\). Childhood experiences of domestic violence. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 69-113](#)
- ²¹ [Holt, S., Buckley, H., & Whelan, S. \(2008\). The impact of exposure to domestic violence on children and young people: A review of the literature. Child abuse & neglect, 32\(8\), 797-810.](#)
- ²² [Bow, J. N., & Boxer, P. \(2003\). Assessing allegations of domestic violence in child custody evaluations. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 18\(12\), 1394-1410.](#)
- ²³ [Saunders, D. G., Faller, K. C., & Tolman, R. M. \(2016\). Beliefs and recommendations regarding child custody and visitation in cases involving domestic violence: A comparison of professionals in different roles. Violence against women, 22\(6\), 722-744.](#)
- ²⁴ [Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences \(2023\) Custody, violence against women and violence against children: report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences](#)
- ²⁵ [V. Elizabeth \(2017\) Custody Stalking: A Mechanism of Coercively Controlling Mothers Following Separation ' Feminist Legal Studies, 185-199](#)
- ²⁶ [Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences \(2023\) Custody, violence against women and violence against children: report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences](#)
- ²⁷ [Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences \(2023\) Custody, violence against women and violence against children: report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences](#)
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- ³⁹ [UNICEF \(2021\) Child Protection Systems Strengthening](#)
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- ⁴¹ [International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth, Unicef \(2022\) Integrating social protection and child protection services for better outcomes for children in the Middle East and North Africa](#)
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- ⁴⁴ Baltruks, D.; Hussein, S.; Lara Montero, A. (2017) Investing in the social services workforce. Brighton: European Social Network.
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- ⁵⁴ [United Nations. \(2006\). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Treaty Series, 2515, 3.](#)
- ⁵⁵ [United Nations General Assembly \(2019\) Resolution on the Rights of the Child A/RES/74/133](#)
- ⁵⁶ [UNCRC \(2014\) General comment No. 1 Article 12: Equal recognition before the law, para. 40](#)
- ⁵⁷ [United Nations \(2010\) United Nations Guidelines For The Alternative Care Of Children](#)
- ⁵⁸ [United Nations \(2019\) Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty](#)
- ⁵⁹ [UNCRC \(2022\) Guidelines on deinstitutionalization, including in emergencies, para. 6](#)
- ⁶⁰ [Human Rights Council \(2019\) Rights of Persons with Disabilities Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities](#)