

# Policy Brief 01

## Deinstitutionalisation (DI)



### Summary

South Africa does not have a policy that focuses on the deinstitutionalisation of children who are in the care of the country's formal social protection system. This is the current situation despite the country having various policies and legislation that seek to promote family life and imply that the best setting for nurturing and socialising children is the family. This policy brief recommends that South Africa should have a policy on deinstitutionalisation of children in South Africa, in the context of alternative childcare.

It is further recommended that the guidelines for implementing the deinstitutionalisation of children should mainly be drawn, but not exclusively, from the work that has been undertaken, thus far, by the government and civil society organisations (CSOs) and recommendations included in national policies, such as *inter alia*, the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997), National Child Care and Protection Policy (2019), Revised White Paper on Families in South Africa (2021), and the

### Description of the problem

South African children find themselves growing up in a society that is encumbered by a plethora of societal ills such as high levels of violent crime, child and other forms of abuse, gender-based violence and femicide, varying violent protest actions which invariably result in the loss of life and destruction of property; xenophobic attacks, racism, bullying, drug abuse and gangsterism, and so forth. In the context of child protection, institutional care has historically been the first response, but it is not a panacea for the social ills and challenges a child may face in the absence of parental, and family care. Despite its prevalence, institutional care often fails to address the comprehensive needs of children and should not be relied upon as the primary solution for child well-being.

South Africa's child protection system is mainly predicated on institutional care and actions, and over the years, there have not been concerted efforts made to decongest the system on the one hand and revitalise the roles and responsibilities of families and communities in raising children on the other. Although many South African children face significant challenges, such as abuse, violence, and neglect, that may seem to warrant removal from their families and placement in institutional care, deinstitutionalisation must be a viable option coupled with the necessary psychosocial support. Priority should be given to alternatives such as family reunification, foster care, kinship care, and adoption, which can better support the well-being of South Africa's children. However, deinstitutionalisation cannot be effectively implemented in isolation; it operates within the nexus of

## Draft National Community Development Policy.

This policy brief is informed by evidence emanating from an evaluation study that sought to serve not only as a learning tool to ensure relevance, effectiveness, usefulness, and sustainability of the care reform in six out of the nine provinces of the country (Gauteng Province and five additional provinces), that could create a potential critical mass for system change nationwide but also as a valuable mechanism to assist Hope and Homes for Children South Africa (HHCSA) and the Gauteng Department of Social Development (GDSD) in achieving maximum impact and benefit to target groups. Also, the evaluation's role was to support in responding to relevant forward-looking questions and in developing recommendations for enabling conditions for systemic change in child protection in South Africa.

During the evaluation study, a critical gap was identified by the researchers which pointed to no policy or plan that could guide stakeholders in implementing the deinstitutionalisation of children in South Africa. Indeed, during data collection, some of the respondents were of the view that there was no policy that spoke of deinstitutionalisation. They pointed out that they relied on the Children's Act, which they said did not provide enough guidelines to

family, community, and other social environments that significantly influence children's well-being.

### Overview of research

Data was collected in the Western Cape and Gauteng provinces to measure and evaluate outcomes of the care reform/deinstitutionalisation programme in these two provinces. The evaluation study was predicated on a mixed-method approach. Mixed methods (MM) evaluations seek to integrate social science disciplines with predominantly quantitative (QUANT) and qualitative (QUAL) approaches to theory, data collection, data analysis and interpretation. The purpose is to strengthen the reliability of data, the validity of the findings and recommendations, and to broaden and deepen an understanding of the processes through which programme outcomes and impacts are achieved, and how these are affected by the context within which the programme is implemented.<sup>[i]</sup>

### Current and proposed policies

It can be deduced from key policies and legislation pertaining to families and children that South Africa has been yearning for a dispensation that allows children to grow up in a family environment, whichever form it may be. The main issue here is that there has been a recognition from the government and civil society that children need to be socialised and nurtured by families, for them to grow into independent and productive members of society one day. It is this wish that keeps on being reaffirmed in policies and legislation and which resonates with deinstitutionalisation, even though this has not been explicitly stated in the policy documents and legislation.

For instance, the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) arrived at specific priorities aimed at promoting family life (which should inadvertently prevent the institutionalisation of children).<sup>[ii]</sup> Also, the Revised White Paper on Families (2021) sets out several strategic priorities for promoting the importance of the family as a core unit of society and fostering family well-being.<sup>[iii]</sup> Furthermore, the Children's Act 2000 (No. 38) seeks to give effect to promoting the strengthening

implement the  
deinstitutionalisation process.

of families, the protection of constitutional rights, the well-being of children in terms of international instruments; the promotion of structures for the development of the child, strengthen community structures, protection of the child from abuse, discrimination, provide care and protection and recognition of special needs and care of children with disabilities.<sup>[iv]</sup>

### Policy recommendations

Deinstitutionalisation should be located within the purviews of building the capacities of families and communities as well as fostering active citizenship - as envisaged by the government and organs of civil society - so that the former can raise children in safe and fulfilling environments. Such capacitation should not only be based on psycho-social support but it must be driven by strong economic empowerment programmes, as articulated in some government policies and the National Development Plan (NDP). When such a strong family-community-based agenda is implemented across the country, many of the country's social ills would have been nipped in the bud, as the building of families and communities would also be anchored in a preventative approach, where societal challenges are anticipated and addressed before they blossom.

### References

[i] Bamberger, M. (2019). *Introduction to mixed methods in impact evaluation*. The Rockefeller Foundation.

[ii] Ministry of Welfare & Population Development (1997). *White Paper for Social Welfare*. *Government Gazette*, Vol. 386, No. 18166 (8 August). Government Printer.

[iii] Department of Social Development (DSD) (2021). *White Paper on Families*. DSD.

[iv] Republic of South Africa (RSA) (2005). *Children's Act (No. 33)*. Retrieved from [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/a38-053.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a38-053.pdf)

