

# Schools that care:

A review of linkages between children's education and care



**Family**  
for every child

# Contents

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<b>1</b>	Acknowledgements
<b>2</b>	Summary
<b>4</b>	Introduction
<b>4</b>	Methodology
<b>5</b>	Key findings
<b>5</b>	1. How education impacts on children's care
<b>13</b>	2. How different forms of care impact on children's education
<b>18</b>	Conclusion
<b>20</b>	Glossary of key terms
<b>22</b>	References

# Acknowledgements

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This report was written by Camilla Jones of Family for Every Child, with inputs from David Schley of Challenging Heights, Joanna Rogers of Partnership for Every Child and Chaste Uwihoreye of Uyisenga Ni Imanzi, plus Emily Delap, Amanda Griffith and Hugh Salmon of the secretariat of Family for Every Child.

The research presented in this report was led by a reference group of members of Family for Every Child: Butterflies in India; Challenging Heights in Ghana; ChildLinK in Guyana; Partnership for Every Child in Russia and Uyisenga ni Imanzi in Rwanda.

It draws on the following.

- A literature review conducted in English by Camilla Jones and Payal Saksena, in Spanish by Sandra Contreras Aprile and in French by Susanna Davies.
- Key informant interviews conducted by Camilla Jones.
- Consultations with children, families and teachers conducted by:
  - Butterflies in India: Moushumi Barauh, Rita Paniker, Satyavir Singh and Subair Mohammad Ibrahim
  - ChildLinK in Guyana: Claire Alexander, Kean Chaste and Omattie Madray
  - Partnership for Every Child in Russia: Joanna Rogers, Lyudmila Sorokina and Yulia Andreeva
  - Uyisenga Ni Imanzi in Rwanda: Chaste Uwihoreye, Gatsinzi Turinimana Egide, Nsabimana Youssouf and Paul Hategekimana.

The report was designed by Chasqui Design & Communications and published in 2016.

## Summary

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This report presents the key findings of a scoping study on the links between education and children's care. The study involved a literature review in English, French and Spanish; key informant interviews; and consultations with 170 children, carers, teachers and other stakeholders in Guyana, India, Russia and Rwanda.

The evidence presented in this report suggests that a lack of access to quality education is a key cause of inadequate care. Children who are pressured or forced away from families and into exploitative work, early marriage or life on the streets are a greater risk of dropping out of school. In many countries, children are placed in harmful large-scale institutions in order to access education that is not available locally. Those that remain in local schools often face violence and abuse in unsafe school environments, which can lead to them dropping out of school, increasing the risk of family separation. In order to access schooling, children are often placed with extended families or wider kinship networks. In some cases, this can lead to deterioration in children's care, especially when children live with more distant relatives. Lack of access to school can also hinder the effective reintegration of separated children. Some groups of children are more vulnerable than others to inadequate care caused by a lack of access to education. These groups include children with disabilities, girls, children living in poverty and displaced, refugee, migrant and minority groups.

The report shows that, despite impressive progress in access to universal primary education in recent years, children who live outside of families or who experience abuse and neglect in their homes have commonly missed out on these gains. Children who are trafficked, live alone on the streets or with employers or who marry early are often denied access to education. Children who live apart from parents or who live with more distant or non-relatives are less likely to be able to access school than children living with parents/close relatives. Abuse or neglect in the home negatively impacts on children's learning and development.

Evidence from high income countries shows that children in formal alternative care systems, such as those in foster and residential care, tend to have lower educational outcomes than children in the general population, and this is particularly true for children with disabilities. Stability in care placements and in schooling, and additional support for learning, can help eliminate achievement gaps. Educating children in alternative care alongside children in the general community also supports their social integration. Evidence on educational outcomes for children in alternative care in low and middle income countries is lacking. Many children enter care in order to access education not available in their home communities and in some cases entry into care could lead to an improvement in children's education. However, as separation from families is usually traumatic, and as care is often institutional and of low quality, this should not be seen as a viable solution to the lack of schooling close to children's homes. Parents, carers and children should never have to make the difficult choice between children's education and their care.

Currently, the linkages between children's education and their care are not widely recognised. More effective collaboration between the education, child protection and care sectors is urgently needed and will support the mutually reinforcing goals of children achieving rights to

education and to adequate care and protection. In particular, it is recommended that education and care sector planners work together on the following activities.

1. Assess and monitor the educational needs and performance of children in different care settings, of reintegrating children, and of children leaving care.
2. Jointly work to enable the education system to recognise and address the support needs of children without or at risk of losing effective care, and provide specialised assistance where necessary.
3. Train teachers and other school staff in providing a safe environment for education, in positive, non-violent methods of discipline, and in recognising signs of abuse and neglect and risk of family separation.
4. Use schools to teach children how to protect themselves from abuse, neglect and family separation.
5. Establish mechanisms in schools for the referral of suspected cases of abuse and neglect to child protection authorities.
6. Ensure that social workers and residential and foster carers are able to support separated and vulnerable children to attend and do well in school.
7. Enable children's continued access to schooling during changes in their care arrangements, and ensure integration into new schools as caring arrangements change.
8. Meet the care and protection needs of children while in boarding schools, including enabling regular contact with families.

In addition, education system planners should ensure the following.

1. Provide quality education close to home so that children and families do not have to make difficult choices between children's education and their care. This should include early childhood care and education, and inclusive education for children with disabilities.
2. Ensure schools are accessible, sensitive, flexible and responsive and have a relevant and useful curriculum for children in a range of different living situations. Consult and, where possible, involve vulnerable children and their parents or carers in the governance of schools to help ensure education is relevant and inclusive.
3. Ensure that financial support to education is extended to grandparents and other relatives with low incomes caring for children who are separated from their parents.
4. Ensure that education settings are safe and provide a model for non-violent behaviour and discipline that can be extended to the home.
5. Support catch-up schooling for children who have missed out on a number of years of education owing to a loss of family care.
6. Address cultural barriers to girls' education in areas with a high prevalence of early marriage.
7. Ensure continuing education in emergencies to prevent disruption in education, thereby helping to prevent family separation and supporting children's resilience and recovery.

# Introduction

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Impressive progress has been made towards efforts to provide universal primary education (UNESCO and UNICEF 2015). However, evidence suggests that not all children have benefited from increased access to schooling, with the most disadvantaged children commonly missing out (UNICEF 2015; UNESCO 2015b). This report considers one such group: children without adequate care.

Children without adequate care are girls and boys who do not receive the necessary physical and psychological support from parents or carers in a nurturing family environment. They include children in institutional care, children outside of family care living on the streets or with employers, and those who are abused and neglected within their own families.<sup>1</sup> There is evidence to suggest that the numbers of children without adequate care is increasing and the relationship between inadequate care and education is therefore of major significance (Family for Every Child 2014).

This report argues that children's rights to education and care are inextricably linked, with a loss of adequate care commonly pushing children out of school, and education systems having the potential to help prevent unnecessary family separation, abuse and neglect. It is further argued that education systems need to adapt to better support children in different forms of alternative care. Currently, the linkages between children's education and their care are not widely recognised.

# Methodology

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The research for this report comprised three elements.

1. A literature review of over 100 documents in English, French and Spanish. Documents were found through online libraries such as that of the Better Care Network, key informant interviews and internet searches. Priority was given to global and regional documents. Those from before 2000 were excluded. Academic articles were included if recommended, but the study could not extend to a full academic literature search. Unpublished documents were included if from reputable sources. Overall it was found that there is a lack of research on the links between education and care; particularly in low and middle income contexts.
2. Key informant interviews.
3. Consultations with children, carers and teachers in four countries: Russia, India, Rwanda and Guyana. Eighty-six children aged 8-17 years participated: 42 boys and 44 girls. These children included migrant children, children in residential, kinship and foster care and children with disabilities. Eighty-four adults participated, 16 of whom were teachers and 68 caregivers.

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1. They do not include children whose families are making their best efforts to provide for them with limited resources at their disposal, but still cannot ensure their children's basic needs are always met.

### 1. How education impacts on children's care

#### **Children leave parents and go to live with kin to access education, and in some instances face discrimination, abuse and exploitation.**

In several regions children go to live with relatives or family friends in order to access education. In the vast majority of cases, these children are well cared for, especially when they live with grandparents or other close relatives. Children who live with distant relatives or family friends may be at risk of discrimination and, despite having been sent to live with relatives to access education, are often less likely to enter school than other children in the household (Devers 2012; EveryChild and HelpAge International 2012; Roelen and Karki Chettri 2014). School staff may also discriminate against children in kinship care, which can lead to school dropout (Roby 2011). In extreme cases, children in informal care may be exploited by their caregivers and treated as domestic workers, and may be too busy working to attend or do well in school (Achi et al. 2009; Pilon 2003; RELAF and SOS International 2010; Roby 2011; Roelen and Karki Chettri 2014; Roelen and Shelmerdine. 2014; Rossi 2005; Smucker et al. 2009; UNICEF 2010b; UNICEF 2014a). In some instances parents may be aware that their child will work while in kinship care, but believe that they will also be able to access education or that they can learn more from this work than from the poor quality education available in their home community (Achi et al. 2009). Placement of children with kin to access education often increases during emergencies (UNICEF 2014a).

#### **Children enter residential care to access education.**

In many countries, particularly where education access is limited or education is of poor quality, parents place their children in residential care to be educated (Armstrong 2011; Bhawan 2005 and Terre des Hommes 2008 cited in Delap 2011; Martin and Sudrajat 2007; UNICEF 2010b; UNICEF 2012a). This is a trend that can increase during emergencies (Martin and Sudrajat 2007; Save the Children and UNICEF 2007). Large-scale residential care that is institutional in nature is a serious risk to children's health, development and well-being. All children need a loving relationship with a consistent carer which cannot be provided in such forms of care, where children are cared for collectively by staff working in shift systems. Limited contact with home means that children often have no one to report abuse to outside of the institution (Browne 2009). When the main aim of institutions is to provide education, there is a higher risk that children's care will be neglected (Martin and Sudrajat 2007).

While the care provided in smaller scale residential facilities may be of better quality, long-term placement in such children's homes is still problematic as growing up in a caring family is widely acknowledged to be the most appropriate environment for children, and children usually prefer it (UN GA 2010; Munro 2011). Those running residential care homes may not see any problem with a child leaving family care to access education (Martin and Sudrajat 2007) and parents may present their children as orphans or otherwise without care to give children a chance to be schooled

in residential care. Care homes can be run as a business to attract funding while neglecting or exploiting the children under their care (Doyle 2010).

### **Children placed in boarding schools to access education sometimes face similar challenges to those placed in institutional care.**

In some contexts children in boarding schools have limited contact with home, and few opportunities to visit families (CEPAL 2012, informant 4; RELAF 2013) and boarding schools can effectively take over the children's care from parents. Some children in boarding schools have faced abuse and neglect within their family and are in need of support to enable safe family reintegration, temporary alternative care or permanent alternatives such as adoption. These needs are unlikely to be addressed in facilities with an educational purpose, and children may instead get stuck in the system and face long-term institutionalisation. Describing care institutions as boarding schools can also distort national statistics on institutional care, which can prevent concerted efforts to develop alternatives (UNICEF 2010a). Religious boarding schools may also require attention from those seeking to improve the care of children as they may focus on children's spiritual welfare and education, and neglect their emotional and care needs. (Antonowicz 2010; Boursin 2002 referenced in Pilon 2003; Human Rights Watch 2014c; Martin and Sudrajat 2007).

### **Lack of access to quality education can push children into exploitative work, early marriage or life on the streets, all of which involve separation from families.**

Lack of access to safe, quality education, when combined with other factors such as poverty, is a key driver of trafficking, child labour, and street living (Corcoran and Wakia 2013; Megumi 2009; Ray et al. 2011; Rossi 2005). While out of school as a result of dropout, or even during holidays, children are more vulnerable to exploitation or to running away from home (Corcoran and Wakia 2013). In some contexts, parents and children do not see the relevance of formal education to the work available locally, and adolescents may be expected to leave school to become financially independent (Feneyrol 2011). Children and parents may see greater value in informal education gained through work (Feneyrol 2011) even where this involves family separation through labour migration (IOM, UNICEF and ILO 2013; Van De Glind 2010).

“Some children are stopped from going to school and sent to work to get money in the cities. The dejected life they live makes some of the children start to consume drugs and alcohol and others become prostitutes.”

- Girl, Rwanda consultations

Adolescents who lack access to quality education are at greater risk of family separation than younger children due to their desire for independence (Feneyrol 2011), and the limited availability of secondary education in many contexts (UNESCO 2015a).

Lack of access to education and a lack of value placed on education can lead to early marriage, resulting in a loss of family care (Burde and Linden 2013). Both boys and girls marry early, but boys comprise just one-sixth of the total number of children who are married earlier worldwide (UNICEF 2014c).

“In our neighbourhood I have seen a few girls quit their schooling because they had to get married.”

- Girl, India consultations

Disruption to education can push children into armed forces and groups, especially when there is limited access to basic services, and few other economic opportunities/activities available to them (UNICEF 2009; UNESCO 2010a; Gilchrist and Sheppard 2015; Visman 2005). Children may also be lured into armed forces or groups by promises of the schooling that they could provide (Nicolai and Triplehorn 2003).

### **Unsafe schools can prompt children to drop out, which can be a precursor to unnecessary family separation.**

Schools may be unsafe as a result of bullying, robbery, discrimination, gang association, drug use, sexual violence and exploitation perpetrated by pupils and staff, and physical and humiliating punishment by staff (Antonowicz 2010; UNICEF and Plan International 2011; UNICEF 2014b). This was described by participants in the consultations in Guyana, Rwanda and India as part of this study.

“Some teachers drink too much and beat children with no good reasons.”

- Boy, Rwanda consultations

Anecdotal evidence from key informant interviews in Ghana suggests that the intensity of school violence in some contexts pushes children to leave school, which can be a precursor to family separation.

“Teachers should not beat children – that forces students to drop out from school.”

- Boy living without adult care on the streets in Delhi, India consultations

Causes of unsafe schools include cultural and social norms that tolerate or condone violence, high pupil to teacher ratios, lack of female teachers, poor teacher training, inadequate facilities and resources including lack of separate and secure toilets for boys and girls, non-payment of teachers, poverty among students, impunity from punishment for those who commit violence, and discriminatory curricula (various studies cited in Antonowicz 2010).

In some regions, crime and violence in the family and community, and social norms that perpetuate violence, permeate the school environment (Antonowicz 2010; CIDH 2011). In Ghana research has shown that teachers fear the elimination of physical punishment, believing it will lead to reduced academic standards (Antonowicz 2010). A key informant reported that teachers in Ghana also fear that it will lead to complaints from parents, who routinely bring their children who have misbehaved at home into school to be caned. In such environments children may not report school violence to parents for fear that it would lead to physical abuse at home, as punishment for their behaviour at school. Positive (non-violent) discipline can provide an alternative to some of the violence children experience in school.<sup>2</sup>

2. More information on this established approach in education: <https://www.positivediscipline.com/about-positive-discipline>.

## Life skills and language support through schools can prevent family separation.

Children's decisions to leave home for work, education or other opportunities could be better informed if risks of leaving home early were included in school curricula. Curricula are available on the tactics employed by those wishing to exploit and abuse children (Save the Children 2008) and specific risks associated with trafficking (Save the Children 2012a; UNICEF 2012b), domestic work (Children Unite and Anti-Slavery International undated) and recruitment into armed forces and armed groups (Smith 2007). However, data on the use and impacts of these programmes were not identified through this study. Teachers may need training and support to create a safe learning environment for discussing such topics and to safely refer any children experiencing issues discussed (UNICEF 2012b).

Quality education develops children's intellectual competencies, awareness of right and wrong, confidence, and skills such as problem solving. Such skills can help children to make safe decisions that prevent a loss of care, or enable them to speak out to peers or safe adults about abuse or neglect (UNESCO, 2010a). For refugees, learning the language of the host country enables children to read important information about protection risks and know how to seek help when necessary (Horn et al. 2013; UNESCO 2010b).

## The education sector can play a role in preventing and identifying abuse and neglect in the home.

Education personnel who see children on a daily basis and have contact with parents are in a good position to identify behaviours that are symptomatic of maltreatment (Home Office 2015; Munro 2011). With the right training, education staff can identify abuse, neglect or exploitation in the home by monitoring, noting and exploring signs of change in children's behaviour, such as changes in attendance, participation, attainment, behaviour, mood and relationships (Home Office UK 2015).<sup>3</sup> Children may be more willing to report challenges at home to education staff than to others, particularly where schools are safe, teachers have positive relationships with children and education supports children's confidence and social skills (Horn et al. 2013; Nicolai and Triplehorn 2003).

Teachers can be trained to work with parents from violent families to address the difficulties their child may be having in school and to help reduce violence at home (Safe Families Safe Children Coalition 2011). However, teachers may not always be best placed to provide such specialist services and they may be better provided by other trained personnel such as social workers.

“Parents should love their children more. Sometimes, when you look at the children, it feels as if they are simply not wanted; the parents completely don't care how their child is dressed, if he has eaten or not eaten, is clean or not. The main thing is that parents love and value their children. We teachers try to get this through to them. Of course parents are tired, but many parents simply have not accepted their child. We try to help them with this, our school pedagogues and psychologists work on this problem with them.”

- Teacher of children with special needs, Russia consultations

3. This does not mean that poor performance would be assumed to be necessarily the result of neglect, or that parents who cannot help with children's education at home are assumed to be providing poor care in general, but rather that education staff should be sensitive to and act upon warning signs of inadequate care, which are likely to vary according to context.

In some regions social workers are based within schools to enable easy referral and immediate response to child protection concerns, but social workers should not only be stationed within schools, as this may result in those not accessing education missing out on their support.

Referral mechanisms should be developed and education staff trained to prevent gaps in the referral chain, whereby concerns are not identified, recorded or passed to the right people (Munro 2011). Training can cover how to make safe and effective referrals and the feedback that referral services will provide (Jones 2014). Where no social services exist, community-based child protection mechanisms can support referrals if volunteers are trained and supported (Case Management Task Force 2014).

Some evidence from high income countries suggests that early childhood care and education can play a role in preventing child maltreatment, where they involve well trained staff and heavy parental involvement (Barth 2002). This suggests that certain interventions may be more successful than others in helping to prevent inadequate care and that parental involvement plays a role.

### **Education is essential to the successful reintegration of children.**

Many children who are reintegrating back into families and communities have a strong desire to attend school. As education is a common cause of separation, access to school is often essential for successful reintegration and the prevention of re-separation (BCN et al. 2013; Delap and Wedge 2016). Education can establish important routines, embed children back in the community, and potentially provide children with a supportive environment that improves self-esteem and confidence. Education can be important to build trust with children during preparation for reintegration (Jouget 2011). Many children miss out on school while they are separated and need help to catch up before they can enter schools in their home communities. Parents and education staff may need assistance to be ready to bring children back into schools (BCN et al. 2013; Delap and Wedge 2016).

Specific educational support that may be required as part of reintegration processes includes the following.

- Assessment of the child's education, skill levels and aspirations, and monitoring of their education outcomes (Guyen et al. 2012; Delap and Wedge 2016).
- Support with resuming the habit of learning and addressing gaps in educational capacity and skills (Baños Smith 2014; Guven et al. 2012; Jouget 2011; Mukene 2014; UNESCO 2007b; Wedge 2013).
- Ensuring access to school during preparation for reintegration, including catch-up schooling, and working with families to ensure they can meet the costs of education after reunification (Boursin 2014; Consortium for Street Children 2010; BCN et al. 2013; Delap and Wedge 2016).
- Working with school staff to make them aware of the emotional and educational needs of children who are reintegrating, and of the impact of their experience of separation (which may include certain skills or coping behaviours acquired) and helping them support and monitor the children's progress and wider well-being (Delap and Wedge 2016).
- Understanding and taking steps to mitigate any discrimination the child may face in school, and using schools to address discrimination in the wider community (Banos Smith 2014; Delap and Wedge 2016).

Formal classroom schooling may not always be the best option when the child's immediate psychosocial and other reintegration requirements are more pressing (Güven et al. 2012). Children may require more intensive support than would be possible if they were in formal education for the usual hours. However, attending mainstream schools can be an important part of children's social reintegration and prevent discrimination. Consequently, decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis considering the best interests of the child.

Providing separated children with education in the community as opposed to within residential care can assist with their eventual reintegration, though children, particularly those with disabilities, may face discrimination in local schools (Hart et al. 2015; Human Rights Watch 2014b; RELAF 2013).

"When I went to high school [...] I realised there is so much information that I didn't know. Certain values, certain ways of living, I just didn't know. If we were integrated into the community, the exchange of ideas would be much better."

- Child with disabilities in residential care in Japan, Human Rights Watch 2014b, p.35

### **The impact of lack of access to education on care is likely to be greater for already disadvantaged groups.**

Several groups of children are less likely than those in the general population to access quality education.

- Children living in poverty, due to the costs of schooling and the need for them to work (Save the Children and Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos 2009; UNESCO 2010b; UNESCO 2012)

"We do not have enough income, so we get into debt and to pay back we will need our children also to work."

- Father, India consultations

- Girls – due to concerns about their safety (CIDH 2011) and discrimination (Antonowicz 2010; Croft 2010; Devers 2012; UN Girls' Education Initiative and Global Partnership for Education 2014; UNESCO 2015b).<sup>4</sup>

"There are persons in their neighbourhood who do not value girls' education and therefore spread rumours about girls which creates unnecessary stress. Sometimes parents fall prey to such rumours and prevent their daughters from pursuing schooling."

- Girl, India consultations

"There is a very significant difference between children of different sexes because girls are not sent to school. In my village when there is a family that has girls and a boy; a boy is well cared for and sent to schools while girls are supposed to go looking for the money."

- Girl, Rwanda consultations)

4. However, gender inequity in education is reducing globally, particularly at primary level (UNESCO 2015b) and in some settings girls are more likely to stay in school and reach the upper grades than boys, once enrolled (ibid).

- Displaced, refugee or migrant children and children from minority groups who experience language and cultural barriers and discrimination in education (Association Oum El Banine 2014; Horn et al. 2013; UNESCO 2010b; Save the Children and Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos 2009; Swift 2010).

“At school they take the children to picnic, which we cannot afford to pay for. That makes our children feel bad and they feel discriminated against, [compared to] other children from their class.”

- Mother from a migrant community, India consultations

- Children with disabilities, due to lack of integrated education, discrimination or superstition (CEPAL and UNICEF 2013; Forced Migration Review 2010; Human Rights Watch 2014a, informant 5; Lansdown 2009; Walker 2010; WHO and World Bank 2011).

The relationship between children’s education and their care may be particularly strong for these groups, and lack of schooling close to home is especially likely to push these children away from families and into trafficking, migration for work or institutional care. For example, lack of inclusive education close to home pushes many children with disabilities into institutional care in order to access schooling (Walker 2010; Delap 2011; EveryChild and BCN 2012). This is particularly problematic as children are often placed in large-scale institutions where inconsistent or neglectful care can exacerbate disability (EveryChild and BCN 2012). The emotional, behavioural and academic needs of children with disabilities are often not met by residential care, and lack of attention paid to rehabilitation can make it hard for children to reintegrate back into families or live independently as adults (EveryChild and BCN 2012; Walker 2010).

Inclusive education enables children to be cared for at home and can help parents to provide the specialised care their child needs, especially if schools share information on teaching methods and on the child’s progress with parents, which can help parents understand and support the child’s education (Keshavarzian 2015a; Lansdown 2009; UNICEF 2013).

“After each lesson I communicate with teachers. They help me to understand my child’s strengths and weaknesses in studying. It supports me.”

- Mother of child with special needs, Russia consultations

However, inclusive education requires investment, training and changes in attitudes and practices to implement effectively, and in many settings, schools lack the resources to provide this kind of support (UNICEF 2013). Discriminatory attitudes of teachers and other parents and children also need to be addressed (Croft 2010; UNICEF 2013; WHO and World Bank 2011).

“One of the teachers criticised my child because of his eye; all of the other children heard. How can he permit himself such behaviour?”

- Foster carer, Russia consultations, referring to negative remarks about the disability of a child in her care by his teacher

“After the operation, the attitude of the teachers towards my daughter changed suddenly... they forgot about her... and we had to transfer to home-based education after 3rd grade.”

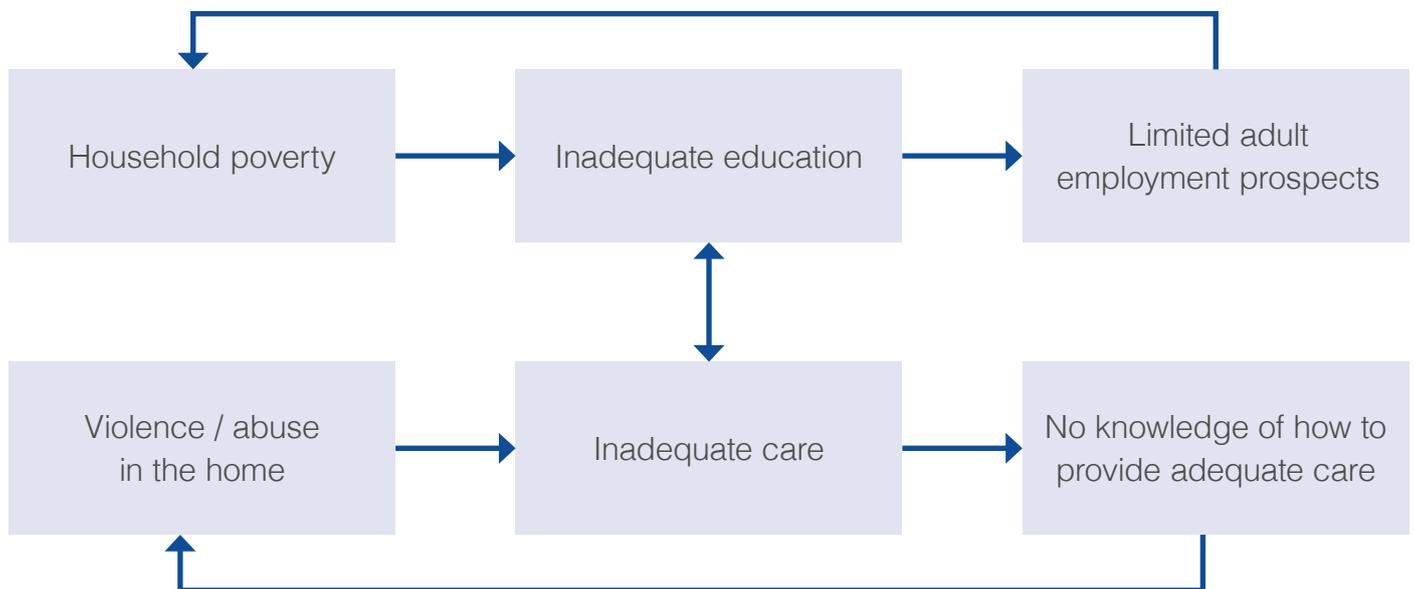
- Mother of child with cerebral palsy, who lost mobility following an operation, Russia consultations

## Education access and quality need to be urgently improved to prevent long-term negative impacts on children's care.

Lack of access to education and its consequent impacts on children's care can create cycles of disadvantage (see figure 1). Poverty impacts on access to education and care, and is a major driver of separation in many contexts (RELAF and SOS International 2010). Children who are unable to go to school owing to poverty are more likely to become separated from families, and this further inhibits their chances of gaining a quality education. This can impact on their employment prospects in later life (UNESCO 2012) and on the care and education of their children (Bouarre 2012; UNESCO 2014). This in turn can impact on social development by diminishing a country's human capital (UNESCO 2014).

Violence in school is deeply related to violence in homes and communities (Antonowicz 2010; CIDH 2011). Violence in homes is often inter-generational (UNICEF 2014b) and it can be hard to break the cycle. However, quality inclusive education can help heal both communities and children (Nicolai and Triplehorn 2003). Thus, when the cycle of inadequate education and care, and resulting violence, is broken, far reaching benefits can be seen for future generations of children (Perezniето et al. 2014).

Figure 1: Cycles of disadvantage in children's education and care



Conversely, access to quality education can trigger a positive cycle, whereby education increases future job prospects. When children are safely in school during the day, parents can work to provide enough income for the family, in turn reducing pressure on their children to drop out of school early to enter exploitative work (UNESCO 2007a).

## 2. How different forms of care impact on children's education

**Abuse, neglect and violence within care settings can impact negatively on children's education, but, conversely, positive school experiences may bolster children's resilience.**

Abuse and neglect in care settings, including institutions and the family, can hinder children's brain development, learning, behaviour, physical and mental health, and their capacity to solve problems and relate to others (Early Childhood Matters and Bernard Van Leer Foundation 2011; UNICEF 2014b). This is caused by chronic activation of the body's stress response systems, which young brains are particularly sensitive to (Early Childhood Matters and Bernard Van Leer Foundation 2011). The area of the brain likely to be most affected by abuse, neglect and violence is the critical area for active learning and regulating thought, emotions, and actions (ibid.). Multiple forms of violence place children at highest risk (UNICEF 2014b). Neglect can impact on children's capacity to learn (ibid.) either as a result of poor nutrition (UNESCO 2007a), or extremely poor care, inadequate stimulation, or not hearing language in early childhood, which can cause developmental deficits that are difficult to redress (ibid.). Poor care of children in institutions has been shown to lead to physical and learning disabilities (Browne 2009).

Emotional abuse can also impact on children's access to and performance in education (Save the Children and Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos 2009). Witnessing violence between parents negatively affects children's ability to learn and achieve (UNICEF 2014b). It can distract from learning and cause stigma, which can lead to dropout (Pells et al. 2015). It can also cause children to develop dysfunctional behaviours in order to cope, which may provoke exclusion from school and other adverse experiences such as drug abuse or gang involvement (Safe Families Safe Children Coalition 2011).

Conversely, research suggests that positive experiences at school, and support gained through children's social networks at school, can bolster resilience to violence at home (Pells et al. 2015).

“When I am at school I enjoy being with my schoolmates and I forget all problems I have at home.”  
- Girl, Rwanda consultations

“There are some children that feel happier at school than at home. When we are with our teacher we forget the miserable life we live in at home and feel happy.”  
- Girl, Rwanda consultations

Prior schooling has also been shown to protect children who live outside of family care on the street, reducing the number of deprivations they experience (Corcoran and Wakia 2013).

Early childhood care and education<sup>5</sup> enhance children's health, cognitive and language skills, social and emotional development and enrolment in primary school (UNESCO 2007a). Programmes that encourage good care in the form of a combination of pre-school education and parenting education, as well as a nutrition intervention, have been shown to improve children's cognitive abilities more than nutrition interventions on their own (Watanabe et al. 2005 referenced in Kaplan and Jones 2013). This highlights the importance of care inputs as part of a holistic, multi-sector approach to early childhood care and education.

5. Early childhood care and education or early childhood development programmes are designed to support the care, education and development of children pre-primary school.

## **The closer a child's blood relationship is to their carer the better their education access and outcomes are likely to be.**

A concept known as Hamilton's rule states that the closer the blood relation between a child and their carer, the greater the investment the carer will make in that child (Case et al. 2004 referenced in Nagaishi and Roby 2014). Demographic and Health Survey data from several African countries supports Hamilton's rule when comparing children cared for by non-relatives and children cared for by relatives or parents (Nagaishi and Roby 2014; Roby et al. 2016; UNICEF 2014d). Hamilton's rule is also supported by research from other contexts (Abadia-Barrero and Castro 2006 and UNICEF 2002 both referenced in Roby 2011; Sinha et al. 2016; UNICEF 2014d). UNICEF research across 11 mainly African countries shows that children living with anyone besides parents experience 30 per cent lower odds of having attended school compared with children living with one or both parents (UNICEF 2014d). Recent research in India shows that children who are not biologically related to their caregivers and involved in some kind of work are less likely to be at target grade in school than children who are biologically related to their caregivers and engaged in some kind of work (Sinha et al. 2016).

Children living apart from parents may in some instances fare better if living with grandparents. This is particularly the case for girls in Africa, owing to the burden of household chores they would otherwise face, which grandmothers instead can take up, enabling the girls in their care to focus on school (Schrijner and Smits 2014). However, older carers may lack up-to-date knowledge of education systems, making it hard for them to support children's schooling (HelpAge International 2004a referenced in Delap 2012) and may struggle to meet the costs of schooling children they are caring for. Fee waivers and pensions can bridge this gap and encourage girls' enrolment in particular, though they are not consistently provided (HelpAge International 2004b; Adato and Bassett 2008; both referenced in Delap 2012). Where children are placed with relatives in their original community it can enable them to attend their usual school with their usual friends, thereby minimising disruption to their education (Oswald 2009).

## **Children in formal care often experience educational challenges.**

Evidence on the education of children in formal care, which includes foster and residential care, is largely limited to high and middle-income contexts. In general, children in formal care in such countries have good access to education, but lower than average levels of educational achievement (Department for Education 2013; Department for Education 2014a; Human Rights Watch 2014b; Anglicare Australia 2003; Roy and Rutter 2006). This can lead to high numbers of care leavers being poorly paid, jobless and even homeless (Human Rights Watch 2014b).

Children in care may experience lower educational outcomes for a range of reasons including earlier life experiences of abuse and neglect, frequent changes of schools due to care placement changes, or discrimination by teachers and peers towards children in alternative care (Department for Education 2014b; Hibbert 2006; HM Inspectorate of Education Scotland 2008; Human Rights Watch 2014b; National Working Group on Foster Care and Education 2014;

National Youth in Care Network 2001; Wilson et al. 2004; Žižak et al. 2012). Lower educational outcomes may be due to challenges that exist prior to entry into alternative care rather than weaknesses in the care system (Berridge and Biehal 2012; Human Rights Watch 2014b; National Working Group on Foster Care and Education 2014). However, it is hard to identify cause and effect and it is clear that formal care systems are failing to meet children's educational needs in some contexts (Department for Education 2014a; Hart et al. 2015; National Working Group on Foster Care and Education 2014).

“Often, teachers at school tell our children off for studying badly even if they have prepared well, for example for assembly or performances. This happens very often, such a negative attitude to the children in our care in general.”

- Caregivers at a children's home, Russia consultations

As noted above, placement in large-scale institutional care often leads to developmental delays. Even in settings where small group homes are used there is some evidence to suggest that children in residential care have worse educational outcomes than those in foster care. However, there is also evidence to suggest that some forms of residential care produce better educational outcomes, depending on the quality of care and how well matched the service is to children's needs (National Youth in Care Network 2001).

Evidence from the US, Latin America and Moldova suggests that children with disabilities in care face particular problems in relation to their education. Children in foster care with special educational needs in the US may be placed in more restrictive educational settings and these children have been shown to have poorer quality education plans than their non-fostered peers in special education (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education 2014). Research shows that children in residential care with disabilities in some countries in Latin America lack access to education and other necessary services (OAS CIDH and UNICEF 2013). Children with disabilities in Moldova study a simplified curriculum that is less challenging than that provided in mainstream education, which prevents them from continuing their education or getting certain jobs (Baños Smith 2014). This is often due to lack of proper assessment of children's special educational needs (ibid).

In many lower-income countries, there is limited comparative data to enable firm conclusions on the educational outcomes for children in formal care. As elsewhere, children in large-scale institutional care are likely to experience developmental delays due to their lack of ability to form strong attachments with a consistent carer. However, children from poorer communities commonly enter residential care in order to access education that is not available in home communities. In some instances therefore entry into residential care may improve educational outcomes. Of course, given the harm caused by separation from families and particularly by large-scale, poor quality residential care, this is not a viable long-term solution to lack of access to schooling, and no child or family should have to choose between quality family care and a good education.

## **Children placed in detention centres and penal institutions often experience disrupted or inadequate education.**

Children deprived of their liberty by being placed in detention centres,<sup>6</sup> either for having committed an offence, or because they are unaccompanied child migrants considered to have entered a country illegally,<sup>7</sup> often experience disrupted or inadequate education. Problems are especially likely to occur when children are detained together with adults, including in adult prisons. Where separate detention facilities are available for children in conflict with the law, education services are usually provided, but a number of barriers often cause this provision to be interrupted, obstructed or poor quality (Robinson and D'Aloisio 2009).

## **Additional support for children aging out of care improves educational outcomes.**

Both children leaving foster care and those leaving residential care in high income countries face problems in the transition to independence, including in educational outcomes (Keshavarzian 2015a). If the transition is abrupt, the educational outcomes are worse than among young adults who remain under the care and supervision of the child welfare system for longer, benefiting from steadily adjusted levels of support to help them prepare for independence. Overall, the evidence from various countries, mainly high or middle income, suggests that better support during transitions out of care tend to contribute to positive educational outcomes and employment for care leavers (Department for Education 2014a; Harvey et al. 2015; Human Rights Watch 2014b; Keshavarzian 2015a; National Working Group on Foster Care and Education 2014; National Youth in Care Network 2001; SOS Children's Villages International 2012). When support for young people leaving care is provided, it often takes the form of one-to-one mentoring or group support, addressing both emotional and social needs, and practical life skills such as finding and maintaining suitable accommodation; finding and staying in education, training and employment; and learning self-care skills such as budgeting, cooking and keeping safe and healthy. As one example of a supported transition, caregivers in the Russia consultations noted that older children can go to live in student accommodation at the colleges in which they enrol after school, while remaining under the legal guardianship of the children's home.

## **There are ways to improve the educational outcomes of children in formal alternative care.**

Evidence from high income countries suggests that both foster and residential carers can support children's education by creating a stable and consistent environment, valuing education and having high expectations of children, helping with homework, monitoring children's progress, responding to problems in school, and discussing the child's education, training and future jobs with them (HM Inspectorate of Education Scotland 2008; London Fostering Achievement 2014; National Working Group on Foster Care and Education 2014; Wilson et al. 2004; Russia consultations).

“Support and approval, [and] help in doing homework in the children's home, helps the child learn better in school.”

- Caregivers in children's home, Russia consultations

6. Including young offenders institutions, penal colonies or institutions in which they are deprived of their liberty.

7. Farmer, A (2013) The impact of immigration detention on children. Forced Migration Review, FMR44. Available at: <http://www.fmreview.org/detention/farmer.html>

Specialist teachers can support children affected by placement moves in order to minimise potential disruption to their education and support reintegration (HM Inspectorate of Education Scotland 2008). Support can include tutoring and improving coordinated support between children, carers and schools (Berridge and Biehal 2012; HM Inspectorate of Education Scotland 2008; London Fostering Achievement 2014; National Working Group on Foster Care and Education 2014; Wilson et al. 2004). Children's educational outcomes can be supported by life skills training alongside more traditional educational support (HM Inspectorate of Education Scotland 2008; National Working Group on Foster Care and Education 2014).

Children who experience severe behavioural problems as a result of inadequate care are sometimes denied access to education, which impacts on their educational outcomes, but specialised early childhood care and education programmes in some high income countries that target young children entering formal foster care have been shown to reduce aggression and negative classroom behaviour (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education 2014). School-based therapeutic programmes can also help to address behavioural problems (Anglicare Australia 2003; National Working Group on Foster Care and Education 2014).

Involving children in educational planning can support their educational outcomes, but requires skilled facilitation (Hibbert 2006; HM Inspectorate of Education Scotland 2008; National Working Group on Foster Care and Education 2014; National Youth in Care Network 2001). Governments can ensure relevant actors work together, make decisions and take action to enable positive education outcomes for every child, including monitoring the progress of all children in formal care and providing additional funds to schools educating high numbers of children in care (Department for Education 2014b).

## Conclusion

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The research presented in this paper suggests that children's education and care are inextricably linked. Many children who are separated from their families, living with more distant or non-relatives, or who face abuse and neglect in the home, are missing out on recent global gains in education. In other cases, families are having to make impossible choices between children's care and their education, with harmful institutional care offering some children, particularly those with disabilities, their only chance of receiving an education. Children who cannot access school close to home are far more likely to have to leave families behind and enter exploitative work, early marriage or a life on the streets. Children returning to families after a period of separation need education to reintegrate effectively.

These findings suggest that education and care sector planners must work closely together to ensure the mutually reinforcing goals of improving the education of vulnerable children and reducing inadequate care. In particular, education and care sector planners must jointly carry out the following activities.

1. Assess and monitor the educational needs and performance of children in different care settings, of reintegrating children, and of children leaving care.
2. Jointly work to enable the education system to recognise and address the support needs of children without or at risk of losing effective care, and provide specialised assistance where necessary.
3. Train teachers and other school staff in providing a safe environment for education, in positive, non-violent methods of discipline, and in recognising signs of abuse and neglect and risk of family separation.
4. Use schools to teach children how to protect themselves from abuse, neglect and family separation.
5. Establish mechanisms in schools for the referral of suspected cases of abuse and neglect to child protection authorities.
6. Ensure that social workers and residential and foster carers are able to support separated and vulnerable children to attend and do well in school.
7. Enable children's continued access to schooling during changes in their care arrangements, and ensure integration into new schools as caring arrangements change.
8. Meet the care and protection needs of children while in boarding schools, including enabling regular contact with families.

In addition, education system planners should ensure the following.

1. Provide quality education close to home so that children and families do not have to make difficult choices between children's education and their care. This should include early childhood care and education, and inclusive education for children with disabilities.

2. Ensure schools are accessible, sensitive, flexible and responsive and have a relevant and useful curriculum for children in a range of different living situations. Consult and, where possible, involve vulnerable children and their parents or carers in the governance of schools to help ensure education is relevant and inclusive.
3. Ensure that financial support to education is extended to grandparents and other relatives with low incomes caring for children who are separated from their parents.
4. Ensure that education settings are safe and provide a model for non-violent behaviour and discipline that can be extended to the home.
5. Support catch-up schooling for children who have missed out on a number of years of education owing to a loss of family care.
6. Address cultural barriers to girls' education in areas with a high prevalence of early marriage.
7. Ensure continuing education in emergencies to prevent disruption in education, thereby helping prevent family separation and supporting children's resilience and recovery.

## Glossary of key terms

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**Child abuse** can be defined as a deliberate act of ill treatment that can cause harm or is likely to cause harm to a child's safety, well-being, dignity and development. Child abuse can include physical, sexual or psychological ill treatment (Save the Children Resource Centre).

**Children without adequate care** are girls and boys who do not receive the necessary physical and psychological support from parents or carers in a nurturing family environment. They include children in institutional care, living on the streets or with employers, and those who are abused and neglected within their own families. They do not include children whose families are making their best efforts to provide for them with the limited resources at their disposal, but still cannot ensure their children's basic needs are always met (Family for Every Child 2014).

**Formal care** is defined as "all care provided in a family environment which has been ordered by a competent administrative body or judicial authority, and all care provided in a residential environment, including in private facilities, whether or not as a result of administrative or judicial measures" (UN GA 2010 Article 29).

**Foster care** can be defined as "situations where children are placed by a competent authority for the purpose of alternative care in the domestic environment of a family other than the children's own family that has been selected, qualified, approved and supervised for providing such care" (UN GA 2010 Article 29).

**Institutional care** can be defined as large-scale residential facilities involving children being cared for collectively in large groups. The distinction between institutional care and other forms of residential care rests not only on the size of the facilities, but also on the nature and quality of the care provided. Institutional care involves the use of shift-systems; children generally sleep together in dormitories; their lives are governed by set rules and routines; and children are commonly isolated from wider communities. All of these factors impact on children's protection, their ability to form bonds with carers, and the ease with which they are eventually able to reintegrate back into families and communities (Tolfree 1995; and UNGA 2010 Article 23).

**Neglect** can be defined as "deliberately, or through carelessness or negligence, failing to provide for, or secure for a child, their rights to physical safety and development. Neglect is sometimes called the 'passive' form of abuse in that it relates to the failure to carry out some key aspect of the care and protection of children which results in significant impairment of the child's health or development including a failure to thrive emotionally and socially". (Save the Children Resource Centre: <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/keyword/neglect>)

**Residential care** can be defined as "care provided in any non-family-based setting, such as places of safety for emergency care, transit centres in emergency situations and all other short and long-term residential care facilities including group homes" (UNGA 2010 Article 29).

**Reintegration:** "The process of a separated child making what is anticipated to be a permanent transition back to his or her immediate or extended family and the community (usually of origin), in order to receive protection and care and to find a sense of belonging and purpose in all spheres of life." (BCN et al. 2013, p.11)

## Glossary of key terms: Education

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**Access to education:** In this report ‘access’ describes the availability of education and the capacity of families to enrol and retain children in education, including by meeting the associated costs.

**Early childhood care and education or early childhood development (ECD) programmes** are designed to support the care, education and development of children pre-primary school.

**Formal education** includes all “learning opportunities provided in a system of schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions. It usually involves full-time education for children and young people, beginning at between five and seven years and continuing to 20 or 25 years old”. (INEE 2010, p.118)

**Informal education/informal learning:** “Forms of learning that are intentional or deliberate but are not institutionalised. It is consequently less organised and structured than either formal or non-formal education. Informal learning may include learning activities that occur in the family, workplace, local community and daily life, on a self-directed, family-directed or socially-directed basis.” (UIS 2012, p.80)

**Non-formal education:** “Education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided to guarantee the right of access to education for all. It caters to people of all ages but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway-structure; it may be short in duration and/or low-intensity, and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars. Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognised as formal or equivalent to formal qualifications by the relevant national or sub-national education authorities or to no qualifications at all. Non-formal education can cover programmes contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of-school children, as well as programmes on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development.” (UIS 2012, p.81)

**Quality education:** In this study ‘quality’ describes the desirable characteristics of learners (healthy, motivated students), processes (competent teachers using active pedagogies), content (relevant curricula) and systems (good governance and equitable resource allocation), as set out in the expanded definition of quality in the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO 2005)

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