

Strengthening Outcomes for Children: Enhancing the Care Sector's Impact

The Elevate Children Fundators Group (ECFG) Care Working Group commissioned Drs. Yusra Shawar and Jeremy Shiffman¹ to analyze the policy community addressing children's care (Care sector) and identify factors that affect their capacity to shape global priorities. Their report entitled *The De-Institutionalization Debate and Global Priority for Children's Care* was completed in March 2020. With support from the GHR Foundation, ECFG asked Strategy for Humanity to facilitate follow up communications and discussions with leaders in the Care sector.

The overarching desire is for the report's analysis and findings to help improve the Care sector's strategies for making the children's care agenda a higher priority globally.

The Need

Every day around the world, *families* are disrupted due to armed conflict, epidemics, migration, famine, poverty, parental death or incapacity, and more. These conditions pose great threats to *children*.

Orphans face elevated danger. There are an estimated 140 million orphans²—children under 18 years of age who have lost one or both parents to any cause of death—and millions more children at significant risk of separation.

For millions of children who are without parental care and face great risk, the absence of *quality care* (care that provides stability and security) has long-term physical, psychological, and social implications³ and poses significant challenges to their healthcare, education, rights⁴, well-being, and success later in life. These issues have severe implications that demand attention and resources. The COVID-19 crisis has only intensified the risks and needs.

The Report's Analysis

Recent global initiatives aim to strengthen and improve the care of children within families, prevent unnecessary family separation, and ensure quality care alternatives when family reunification is either not possible or inappropriate. Leaders within the Care sector generally agree that family-based care is best, and that very large residential facilities are objectionable (even harmful) and should be closed. Discussions center on *reform of existing child care systems* and the provision of 'alternative care'⁵ for children who are without parental care.

To continue momentum for improving conditions for children, the Care sector needs to resolve internal disputes that hinder maximum impact. Difficulties with *problem definition* are a central problem, including:

- Definition of *Institution*
 - Beyond large institutions, which residential care arrangements are institutional in nature?
 - What criteria should be considered to categorize an arrangement as an 'institution'?

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² UNICEF. 2017. Orphans. Accessed on June 25, 2019: https://www.unicef.org/media/media_45279.html.

³ Parkinson, Patrick. 2003. "Child Protection, Permanency Planning and Children's Right to Family Life." *International Journal of Law, Policy, and the Family* 17 (2): 147–72.

⁴ Maclean, Mavis, and Jacek Kurczewski. 1994. *Families, Politics and the Law: Perspectives for East and West Europe*. Oxford University Press on Demand; Assim, Usang Maria. 2013. "Understanding Kinship Care of Children in Africa: A Family Environment or an Alternative Care Option?" University of Western Cape. <http://etd.uwc.ac.za/handle/11394/3476>.

⁵ United Nations General Assembly. (2009). Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. Resolution A/RES/64/142. Accessed on July 20, 2019: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/142; UNICEF. 1989. "Convention on the Rights of the Child." <https://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=child>.

- Meaning of and strategy for *de-Institutionalization* (DI)
 - Should the strategy advance (1) immediate closure of all nonfamily-based institutions, or (2) a progressive approach that closes large institutions first but allows for smaller residential facilities in the interim with an eventual goal of family-based care for all children? Are either of these the best strategy for care reform?
- Acceptable forms of *alternative care*
 - Are there forms of nonfamily-based care (e.g. ‘family-like’ arrangements) that are acceptable, or are all nonfamily-based care options considered institutional in nature?

Divergent views on ‘problem definition’ and resource scarcity have caused competition for credit and led to questions about which groups are legitimately a part of the Care sector. When advocates in the Care sector present divergent approaches and conflicting positions, it is difficult for *policymakers* to act with confidence on policy and funding decisions. In addition, differences in messaging emphasis—whether on urgent de-institutionalization or the importance of family-care—also complicates determinations about the priority actions needed. These challenges are not unique and occur within different advocacy sectors, and how they are addressed matters.

The difficulties with ‘problem definition’ have impeded the Care sector from adopting practices that enhance advocacy efforts, such as:

- Creating and enabling effective *governance* processes that provide leadership, steer collective action, and stimulate trust;
- Building strong *coalitions* and attracting new allies that involve related sectors and appeal to broader audiences – like those addressing violence against children, early childhood development, and education;
- Identifying a powerful *positioning* of the issue that provides a clear message and direction

Strategic actions could help the Care sector gain greater support with policymakers and others whose resources are critical for progress on the issue.

The Opportunity

The Shawar and Shiffman analysis explores how the children’s care policy community understands the critical issues, the factors that shape internal tensions, and the impact their discord has on global action. Given the challenges, the analysis highlights the need for stakeholders to stand back and consider the policy positions, strategies, and merits of those with whom they disagree.

A critical issue is whether the Care sector can come together to build on its profound, shared concern about the well-being of children who lack adequate care, and to overcome deep division and disagreement on how to address this problem.

World events should provoke the Care sector to transcend differences. In 2019, the Care sector largely put aside their divide to reach agreement for the United Nations General Assembly Resolution on the Rights of the Child. In 2020, the Care sector faces two intensifying crises: (1) the spread of COVID-19 and its devastating impact on care for children, and (2) the escalating perils that children face due to massive displacement and migration around the globe. At the same time, the successful mobilization and advocacy of related sectors—e.g. violence, early childhood development, and education—offer opportunities to build on heightened interest and form new alliances.

The analysis can help the Care sector confront impediments and prioritize the pursuit of a more effective path for securing urgent, quality care for children globally.