GUIDELINES ON

CHILDREN'S REINTEGRATION

Inter-agency group
on children's reintegration

DEDICATION

We dedicate these guidelines to the memories of Alison Lane of JUCONI, Mexico and Indrani Sinha of Sanlaap, India, both members of the core group that created these guidelines. Through their tireless work with vulnerable children in Mexico and India, they showed us that it is possible to reintegrate children effectively even in the most difficult of circumstances. Their visions of how to enable children to return home to their families lives on in these guidelines.

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Better Care Network, CESVI , CPC Learning Network, ECPAT, Faith to Action Initiative, Friends International, Juconi Foundation, Maestral, Next Generation Nepal, Retrak, Save the Children, UNICEF, USAID and World Vision.

In addition to the 14 members of the core group, the guidelines have also been endorsed by: Associação Brasileira Terra dos Homens, Bethany Global, Challenging Heights, ChildFund International, CINDI, Elevate Children, Hayat Sende, Hope and Homes for Children, International Social Service, LUMOS, Partnerships for Every Child Moldova, Railway Children, RELAF, Sanlaap, SOS Children's Villages, Undugu Society Kenya and Women's Refugee Commission.

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FOREWORD

A future free from fear and violence is the noble vision of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations in September, 2015. Building on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children, the new global agenda commits to provide children with a nurturing environment for the full realisation of their rights and capabilities and includes a specific target - 16.2 - calling for an end to all forms of violence against children, leaving no child behind. But among the millions of children who are already being left behind are those pushed apart from their families by poverty, conflict or lack of access to schooling close to home. These children may be forced to migrate for work, or live alone on the streets, and many languish for years in institutional care. The protection of separated children from the violence and abuse they often face in these difficult situations can be strengthened by reintegration back into their families.

International law and policies recognise the importance of reintegrating separated children back into families and communities, while keeping in mind the best interests of the child. However, comprehensive guidance on what needs to be done has been lacking. As a result, policies are often not coherent, programming practice is of variable quality, and investment in reintegration has been inadequate. These guidelines are a valuable tool to overcome these challenges, to promote a caring family environment and enhance the protection of children. They have been developed by bringing together major child protection actors to pool their expertise and develop practical, accessible guidance on effective reintegration of children and their families. I hope these important guidelines will be widely shared and taken up at all levels of government and civil society thus helping to realise the vision of a world where every child grows up safe in a supportive family environment and free from violence.

Marta Santos Pais
Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General on Violence against Children

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These Guidelines provide a framework for anyone seeking to ensure family care for children. Children outside of family care face significant disadvantages; they may experience developmental impairments and lasting psychological harm, be less likely to attend or do well in school and be cut off from the social networks they need to flourish in adulthood. Global trends associated with child separation, including poverty, conflict and mass migration are separating children in every region, making these Guidelines broadly relevant. Being cut off from life in a family not only violates children's rights, it also weakens society as a whole. If child separation is not addressed effectively, it undermines achievement of national development targets – from education to growth.

These Guidelines build upon a solid evidence base, developed through extensive desk-based research which explored good practice in the reintegration of separated children in emergencies, former child soldiers, street children, institutionalised children, migrant children, and children who have been trafficked. They offer a valuable tool for policy makers, program designers, and practitioners, and provide a vital road map for reintegrating children.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why these guidelines are important

It is widely recognised that a safe and secure family is the optimal environment for the growth and development of girls and boys[1]. Maximum efforts should therefore be made to reintegrate the millions of children globally who are currently separated back into their families and communities[2]. Family reintegration is what the majority of these children and their families want (BCN et al. 2013), and a loss of family care can have a fundamental impact on child well-being and development (Family for Every Child 2014b). Despite the importance of family reintegration, to date, solid guidance for safe and effective reintegration is limited. These guidelines attempt to fill this gap. They explore cross-cutting principles of good practice in children's reintegration, and provide guidance on programme design for work with children, families, schools and communities. They are aimed primarily at child protection programme managers in low and lower-middle income contexts, though it is hoped that policymakers and those working in higher income settings will also find them informative.

1.2 Defining reintegration and the scope of the guidelines

For the purpose of these guidelines, reintegration is defined as:

> *"The process of a separated child making what is anticipated to be a permanent transition back to his or her family and 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."*[3]

Thus, these guidelines go beyond the mere physical reunification of the child with the family to consider a longer-term process of the formation of attachments and support between the reunified child and his/her family and community. The guidelines cover reintegration back into families of origin[4] and do not cover placement into alternative care or new families through adoption or similar practices. They also do not provide details of support to children who return to communities to live independently of families. It is acknowledged that for some children, return to their families may not be in their best interests and that in some cases family reintegration fails. In these instances, alternative care, adoption or supervised independent living may be needed. However, it is beyond the scope of these guidelines to also cover the complexities of best practice in these areas[5].

The Guidelines are intended to improve the reintegration of all groups of separated children in emergency and non-emergency settings, such as those who are leaving residential care, detention facilities or other institutions, those returning to families from foster care or the streets, and children who have migrated for work, been trafficked or used as soldiers. The guidelines can be used to support the reintegration of children affected by conflict and cross-border reintegration, including the reintegration of refugee children who have been separated from families. It should be noted that the guidelines are unable to provide detailed guidance

1. See the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, preamble (UN 1989).
2. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines children as boys and girls below the age of 18, and as such, these guidelines apply to all individuals aged under 18.
3. See BCN et al. (2013) for further discussion of this definition. It should be noted that reintegration is different from 'reunification' which refers only to the physical return of the child.
4. This includes return to parents or to extended family members.
5. For guidance on alternative care see the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (UN GA 2010).

on the specific needs of different groups of reintegrating children, and do not attempt to explore cross-border reintegration in-depth.

1.3 How the guidelines were developed

The guidelines have been developed by the Inter-agency Group on Children's Reintegration. The group was formed in 2011 to research and promote promising practices for supporting family reintegration. This document is based on 'Reaching for home', (BCN et al. 2013), an extensive literature review, which pooled knowledge of reintegration from a variety of agencies, as well as on consultations with 158 children and 127 service providers and policymakers from 66 non-governmental organisations, donors, faith-based organisations and United Nations agencies across over 20 countries. Annex 1 provides further details of the agencies consulted in the development of these guidelines, and of the drafting process.

1.4 Using the guidelines

Although this guidance is relevant to all separated children, its application will vary depending on context and on the circumstances and experiences of specific groups of children. It is vital that those using the guidelines adhere to the general principles included, but carefully adapt the detail of application. As is discussed below, collaboration is essential in ensuring successful reintegration. Governments have the prime duty for ensuring that all separated children have appropriate care; thus, child protection actors are particularly encouraged to work in coordination with governments.

The guidelines may be used in a variety of ways including as:

- a reference document for programme design and impact measurement;
- a resource when developing grant applications or training materials;
- a tool to support government, donors and other service providers in their efforts to reintegrate children;
- the basis for context or agency-specific guidance, policy or standards.

Each section of the guidelines begins with a short summary that highlights the key points. This is followed by more detailed explanation in the text, and further detail still in the text boxes. Throughout the document, there are also boxed examples exploring the reintegration process in different contexts and with children of various backgrounds. These examples are just that and do not attempt to cover the full range of experiences. Instead, the examples aim to spark thinking on ways to improve interventions. Where relevant, more detailed, global guidance is referenced in a footnote; in addition, agencies are urged to refer to national legislation and guidance. Efforts have been made to keep the guidelines as concise as possible, with the emphasis placed on what needs to be done as opposed to providing all of the detail on how reintegration processes should be supported.

The guidelines set out many challenges for both individual staff and agencies as a whole. By grappling with them, child protection actors will be better equipped to help separated children achieve their rights, and to do so in a manner that strengthens local child protection systems for all vulnerable boys and girls.

2.

REINTEGRATION IN INTERNATIONAL LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Summary

It is widely recognised that a safe and secure family is the optimal environment for the growth and development of girls and boys. Maximum efforts should therefore be made to reintegrate the millions of children globally who are currently separated back into their families and communities. Family reintegration is what the majority of these children and their families want (BCN et al. 2013), and a loss of family care can have a fundamental impact on child well-being and development (Family for Every Child 2014b). Despite the importance of family reintegration, to date, solid guidance for safe and effective reintegration is limited. These guidelines attempt to fill this gap. They explore cross-cutting principles of good practice in children's reintegration, and provide guidance on programme design for work with children, families, schools and communities. They are aimed primarily at child protection programme managers in low and lower-middle income contexts, though it is hoped that policymakers and those working in higher income settings will also find them informative.

These guidelines build on existing international legal and policy frameworks for children's reintegration, including:

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN 1989);
- The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, welcomed by the UN in 2009 (UN GA 2010);
-

3.
PRINCIPLES

3.1 Prioritise family unity and be child-centred

Summary

It is vital to recognise the central importance of family unity to child well-being and development and to actively explore reintegration with a child's family of origin as the first priority to pursue. Families and children must be at the centre of all reintegration support efforts.

Governments, NGOs, UN agencies and others with a responsibility to address children's rights must acknowledge the central importance of family unity to child well-being and development. This means that it is vital to actively explore as a first priority reunification with families of origin, whilst also recognising that reunification is not always in the best interests of the child (see section 4.2.1 for more details about decision-making on reintegration). This principle is important for several reasons.

- As noted above and below, the value of family unity is acknowledged in international law, including the UNCRC (UN 1989).
- Separation from safe and caring families can be extremely harmful to children. The lack of attachment with a consistent carer damages child development (including brain development); separation is usually traumatic; and separated children are frequently at increased risk of abuse and exploitation (McCall and Groark 2015).
- Children separated from families and communities can lose an important sense of cultural and ancestral identity (McCall and Groark 2015).
- Children have a right to participate in decisions that affect them, and reintegration is often, though not always, their preference (BCN et. al 2013; Centre for Rural Childhood 2013).

Families should be at the centre of all reintegration processes, and involved in decision making at each step of the way, with their strengths built on and weaknesses addressed. To ensure that reintegration is successful, it is as vital to invest in families as it is in children. Children should also be at the heart of reintegration efforts; they must be listened to, and acting in their best interests should be the primary consideration. They should be fully engaged in each stage of the process.

3.2 Embed reintegration in wider child protection systems

Summary

Safe and effective support for reintegration must be embedded within broader systems to protect children. There should be adequate funding to support reintegration, clear legislation and guidance on all of the stages of the reintegration process, and a skilled child welfare workforce able to support it. However, in contexts where such a fully-functioning system does not exist, efforts should still be

made to support the reintegration of separated children. In all cases, it is important to work with all parts of the child protection system, including government actors, community groups, religious leaders, and children and families. It is also vital to work with other systems, such as health, education, justice, and social protection.

Agencies should work towards properly functioning child protection systems that can adequately support the reintegration of all groups of separated children. Agencies should also recognise the multiple vulnerabilities of children and avoid focusing on single issues or groups (such as trafficking or 'street' children). Effective child protection systems include the following components (African Child Policy Forum et al. 2013; UNICEF et al. 2012).

- **National legislation and guidance:** There should be clear policies for all the stages in the reintegration process, and on other related areas (e.g. asylum, child labour, birth registration, legal identity, documentation) and governments should work to develop and integrate policies. In cases where appropriate legislation and guidance does not exist, civil society has an advocacy role to play.
- **A competent child welfare workforce:** This is likely to be a mix of professional personnel, para-professionals, and community volunteers[6]; all will need particular skills to contribute effectively to reintegration processes. Paid and volunteer staff need particular professional competencies and approaches (see Box 1 below). Agencies are encouraged to give careful consideration to the diversity of their workforces (i.e. ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, faith). Efforts should be made to encourage staff retention, thus enabling ongoing relationships with children and families. In some cases, it may be necessary to use external support to boost local capacities.
- **Adequate resource allocations and fiscal management:** Support for quality reintegration can be costly but can have dramatic, positive effects in the short and longer term on the individual child and family (and sometimes the wider community). Budgets should reflect all of the costs associated with reintegrating children. If funds are insufficient, organisations are encouraged to advocate for more funding and proactively consider how to meet the needs of the child until reintegration is complete, even if external funds falter, as it is dangerous to reintegrate a child without adequate follow-up support and monitoring. Donors are encouraged to support governments to fulfil their responsibility to reintegrate children. Donors should also offer flexibility in funding to allow reintegration to occur at each child's own pace, and should not set targets which encourage rushed reintegration or focus on quantity over quality. In order to minimise stigma, maximise benefits to at-risk populations, and prevent possible separation, agencies are encouraged to programme – as far as possible – in a manner that benefits all children in the community to which a child returns, and to allocate resources accordingly.
- **Service provision and case work:** As is discussed in section 4 below, reintegrating children with their families requires individual work with children and families and an array of services.
- **The engagement of a range of actors:** Governments have overall responsibility for coordinating reintegration efforts, allocating adequate funding to reintegration and ensuring that efforts are properly monitored. NGOs, community groups, families and children themselves also play key roles. These actors bring many strengths to reintegration processes and are particularly relied on in cases where government structures are inadequate or corrupt.
- **Collaboration with other systems:** As safe and effective reintegration is impacted by factors such as poverty and access to schooling, it is important to design and implement programmes in collaboration with actors in other sectors – such as education, social protection, justice, economic strengthening, law enforcement and health.
- **Supportive social norms:** Discrimination against certain groups of reintegrating children, or norms that fail to acknowledge the importance of the family, can damage reintegration efforts. This is discussed in more detail in section 5.1.
- **Monitoring and data collection:** It is vital to have high-quality evidence upon which to base decisions about reintegration programming. This is discussed further in section 6.

6. The social service or child welfare workforce can be broadly defined to describe a variety of workers – paid and unpaid, governmental and non-governmental – who staff the social service system and contribute to the care of vulnerable populations. The social service system is defined as the system of interventions, programmes and benefits that are provided by governmental, civil society and community actors to ensure the welfare and protection of socially or economically disadvantaged individuals and families. The term 'staff' is used to refer to all of these actors (see http://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/).

Although it is vital that agencies work towards developing the functioning child protection system outlined above, the absence of a well-funded and functioning child protection system should not be used an excuse for failing to effectively support the reintegration of children. Agencies are encouraged to build on the strengths that exist in all contexts and to find creative ways to support children's reintegration that respond to local realities; for example, through the use of community groups or trained volunteers. Example 1 below provides details of efforts to reform the child protection system in Cambodia to better support children's reintegration.

Box 1: Examples of the skills, qualities and approaches of frontline staff to support effective reintegration

To support effective reintegration, staff need to have a range of technical skills and to adopt appropriate approaches to reintegration. For example, staff will need to be able to do the following[7].

- **Acknowledge diversity.** Children's experiences of separation and reintegration will vary enormously depending on factors such as age, gender, reasons for separation, experiences during separation (such as ethnic discrimination) and the family's current situation.
- **Develop a warm, though professional relationship with the child:** Knowing that they can rely on a caring adult who clearly values them and provides a sense of belonging enables children to assume their full role in the process and to raise any concerns. Trust and continuity are vital for forming this relationship.
- **Recognise the challenges that children and families face in the reintegration process.** For example, children may be concerned about moving from a caring, well-resourced programme to precarious support at home, leaving peers, or no longer earning money. Families may fear changing family dynamics due to the re-entry of the child in the household, or challenges feeding an additional person.
- **Help children to speak out:** Such support includes encouraging children to voice any concerns and reassuring them of their ability to take decisions and build a greater sense of power and control in their lives. Particularly in contexts where it may be dangerous to speak out publicly, staff have a responsibility to create a safe and confidential space. Even very young children or those with disabilities which affect their ability to express themselves are able to participate in decisions, though managers will need to provide staff with more time and skills to support them.
- **Identify and build on strengths:** Help children, families and communities to identify their own human and financial resources, and develop a strategy to build on them.
- **Create local ownership:** It is essential to stimulate the community's responsibility for the returning child. This may occur in a number of ways – e.g. local champions speaking on reintegration, peer support to particular families and children, and/or specific roles for community and religious leaders. Here it is important to recognise that stigma can be an important barrier to reintegration and that community engagement is particularly important in addressing this stigma.
- **Act in a culturally knowledgeable way.** It is important to identify solutions that leverage local methods of care and protection, and which are in line with the children's, families' and communities' values and beliefs. Staff will need to be able to carefully negotiate solutions when the best interests of the child conflict with cultural values or practices.

In addition, staff will need certain qualities to work well with reintegrating children including empathy, respect, patience, perseverance and flexibility.

7. This is an illustrative and not exhaustive list. For more details about the competencies needed for frontline staff see for example frameworks developed by the Global Social Services Workforce Alliance. http://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/system/files/resource/files/Para%20Professional%20Guiding%20Principles%20Functions%20and%20Competencies.pdf

Example 1: Developing child protection systems to support reintegration in Cambodia

In Cambodia, USAID has funded UNICEF and NGO Friends International to collaborate with the Government of Cambodia to develop and strengthen child protection systems which support family reintegration. Changes have included: the development of policies, guidance and research to support de-institutionalisation and family reintegration; extensive mapping to help enable the regulation of residential care facilities; the development of strong networks for service delivery and referrals for reintegrating children; and improving the capacity of the child welfare workforce to support reintegration. An evaluation of this work has found that it is vital to hire and train social welfare personnel, as without case workers specifically working on reintegration, adequate preparation and follow-up does not take place. Here, it can be helpful to retrain staff working in residential care facilities who may have strong bonds with children, and who in some cases may otherwise block reintegration efforts as they may feel it is not in their interests to see all children returned home and facilities closed. The evaluation also found that CSOs can play key roles in reintegration in contexts where there is an underinvestment in state services. Establishing a network of CSOs can: assist in service provision for children being reintegrated across distances; enable the sharing of lessons learnt, and build relationships of trust rather than competition which helps in referral processes (Emerging Markets Consulting for USAID 2015).

3.3 Take a rights-based approach

Summary

All efforts to promote safe and effective reintegration must be based on a consideration of the full range of rights included in the UNCRC, and relevant national laws. All children, regardless of age, gender, ability or any other status, have a right to the preservation of family unity. They have a right to participate in all decisions that affect them, and decisions regarding their reintegration should be made with their best interests as a primary consideration.

The UNCRC has been ratified by nearly all the countries of the world. Its preamble acknowledges the **centrality of the family** as the best setting in which to raise a child, and as a core component of society. Article 9 states children should not be separated from their parents unless it is in their best interests.

The UNCRC includes four core principles which all apply to reintegration efforts and are outlined in Box 2 below.

Children's rights are indivisible and interdependent, with no one right taking precedence over another. Thus, agencies engaged in reintegration must recognise the full range of children's rights, and strive, as far as possible, to fulfil them. Realistically, resources are frequently inadequate and/or other obstacles exist, making it impossible to fulfil all rights simultaneously. Agencies may need to make difficult choices about which rights to prioritise in the short term, whilst still maintaining the eventual goal of fulfilling them all.

As one of the first steps, all efforts should be taken to **clarify any legal issues relating to the identity and documentation of the child** and his or her family; that said, under the UNCRC, all children in a territory – no matter what their status – are eligible for the protection of that State and its officers, including reintegration services, whether or not they have been legally documented.

Box 2: The core principles of the UNCRC and children's reintegration

- **Non-discrimination (Article 2):** All children have the right to develop to their full potential and to be actively protected from all forms of discrimination. This means that reintegration programmes should not discriminate against certain groups of children.
- **The best interests of the child (Article 3):** The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all decisions made during the reintegration process. This should include the decision about whether reintegration itself is appropriate.
- **Survival and development (Article 6):** All boys and girls must have access to quality basic services, apply to service provision for reintegrating girls and boys.
- **Participation (Article 12):** Girls and boys have the right to participate actively (given their age, maturity, interest, evolving capacities, etc.). This means that children should be able to participate both in decisions about their own individual reintegration and collectively to transform reintegration programmes and policies to reflect children's needs.

3.4 Do no harm

Summary

All reintegration processes should aim to benefit and not harm children. This includes consideration of issues such as preventing abuse by staff or other stakeholders, stigma, informed consent, and confidentiality. All agencies should carry out a risk assessment to identify and mitigate against the risks associated with each reintegration programme, and particular efforts will need to be made in programmes involving public advocacy or awareness raising. As the benefits of reintegration usually far outweigh the harm, the existence of some risk should not be used as an excuse not to reintegrate children.

All reunification and interventions that support reintegration should aim to benefit and not harm children. Agencies should carry out a **full risk assessment** to determine the harm that could be caused by reintegration interventions and to identify steps to mitigate risk to children, families and staff. These steps should include developing a **safety plan** with children so that they know who to contact if they face harm once reintegrated or if reintegration breaks down. Children must be involved in discussions around risk as they will have important insights. As the benefits of reunification usually far outweigh the harm, the existence of some risk should not be used as a reason not to reunify children.

Efforts should be made to put in place proper **mechanisms for safeguarding children from abuse or violence** through organisational child protection policies and procedures to reduce the risk of staff or other stakeholders abusing children at any stage in the reintegration process. This should include a complaints mechanism to enable children to raise concerns.

Throughout the process, **informed consent** ensures that individual children and families understand and agree to reintegration strategies and support. Thus, it is important to be clear about the services being offered – as well as the regulations governing such services (e.g. confidentiality protocols), benefits and risks – and then obtain permission from the parent/guardian and child to proceed. It is vital to consult children regularly and to continuously check their consent. For example, it is important to gain informed consent:

- at the start of service provision;
- when the agency starts to collect and store personal information about the child and family;
- when staff share information with a new service provider (i.e. referral);
- when the child moves to the next stage in the reintegration process.

In addition, workers may advocate strongly with parents where potential reintegration is in the child's best interests, but must accept the child or parent/caregiver's decision to refuse reunification (see 4.2.1). The case worker must consider the perspectives of the child seriously, but must take into consideration the evolving capacities of the child when making best interests determination.

Steps must be put in place to **store records in a way that maintains confidentiality**. Agencies must **carefully consider what information should be shared with the family and the child**. For example in cases when a child has been diagnosed with HIV or mental health problems but does not want their caregivers to know, owing to fear of rejection, or when there are issues within the family that may affect the child. Agencies must ensure that staff have the time and skill to discuss the issue sensitively, fully understanding the child or family's concerns. Although ideally information will only be shared with the child's consent, in some cases it may be necessary to share information without consent in order to protect the best interests of the child (e.g. to ensure that medication is taken regularly). Staff must then carefully explain to the child that caregivers will be informed, and help them deal with any consequences.

When reintegration programmes involve advocacy, awareness raising or media campaigns, it is important to consider the risks associated with children's involvement. Girls and boys may be made vulnerable by advocating against powerful groups, or by revealing personal stories on public platforms. Careful consideration should be given to children's best interests before they are engaged in these ways.

3.5 Engage a range of stakeholders

Summary

It is vital to involve a range of stakeholders in the reintegration process including children, families, communities, schools, the media, government actors, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. Mapping and coordinating reintegration and related services is important for effective collaboration.

It is important to carry out a broad mapping of relevant stakeholders in the reintegration process to identify strengths and gaps. This map may include children, families, communities, religious leaders, faith-based organisations, schools, the media, the private sector and both governmental and non-governmental agencies. Further details of the roles played by these groups can be found in Box 3 below.

Box 3: The roles played by different stakeholders in the reintegration process

- **Children:** Helping children to identify their strengths and needs is vital to the success of reintegration programmes. Children can provide support to one another and can advocate for broader change to address the root causes of separation or promote greater investment in reintegration.
- **Families:** Families have the primary duty of care and thus potential return to the care of the family of origin involves their active engagement. As well as parents and other main carers, it is also vital that siblings and extended families cooperate in reintegration processes. Agencies should seek to build on strengths within families, identifying and reinforcing positive attitudes and behaviours.
- **Government:** The national government is responsible for protecting all children's rights and has the ultimate duty of ensuring that reintegration is safe and effective through laws and policies, service provision, and adequate funding and staffing of reintegration processes. It is also

responsible for the effective running of a trained, staffed, independent judiciary, which can be important in the reintegration of some groups of children. Governments provide services such as education, health and social protection that are vital for successful reintegration.

- **Communities and religious leaders:** Communities – including faith-based groups – can play a key role in reducing the stigma and discrimination that affect many reintegrating children, and in protecting them from further abuse, neglect and exploitation. However, effective engagement may require social change, as existing norms may perpetuate stigma, discrimination and child maltreatment. Religious and secular leaders, as well as community-based child protection mechanisms, can play significant roles with the right levels of support.
- **Schools:** As section 5 outlines, resuming or starting education can be a key part of the reintegration process. Teaching staff and fellow students can play a vital role in ensuring that new students feel accepted, and school personnel can help to monitor and support reintegrating children.
- **Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs):** These agencies commonly develop innovative practices that could be scaled up through government programming, as well as provide technical assistance and training to government departments; where needed, they lobby governments to protect the rights of reintegrating children. They must however be accountable to children and their families by providing them with routine opportunities to feedback on the support and services rendered. NGOs and FBOs can inform children and families about government services, and in some contexts, they themselves are the direct providers of key services, such as informal education or parenting classes.
- **United Nations agencies:** UN agencies can act as a catalysing force for change for children. They can introduce national governments to new ideas from other parts of the world, as well as mobilise technical expertise and resources. As multi-lateral entities, UN agencies are in a privileged position to engage with national and regional government structures, advocate for children's rights, and facilitate the coordination of a wide range of actors.
- **Media**: Local media can play a useful role in alerting children and families to positive practices and/or the risks inherent in separation. The media can work to change attitudes and help to address the stigma and discrimination commonly faced by reintegrating children. As above (see section 3.4), any media coverage should adhere to strict ethical standards.
- **Donors:** Donors have an important role to play in ensuring that there is adequate funding for reintegration, and in funding advocacy campaigns to encourage policy change and greater investment in reintegration. How much funding donors allocate to reintegration, and the expectations placed on grant recipients, can have a fundamental impact on how successful these programmes are. For example, as noted above, if donors demand that reintegration takes place within inadequate time frames, or require programmes to simultaneously reach large number of children using only limited resources, this can lead to rushed reintegration which fails to meet children's needs and can leave them at serious risk.
- **Private sector:** The private sector can assist in reintegration processes in a number of ways including as service providers, donating goods in kind, or helping families to generate higher incomes. They can also harm reintegration processes; for example, by preventing working children who have been separated from their families from returning home. In some contexts orphanages may be run for profit and reintegration may be discouraged as it is not commercially advantageous. Of course, even those managing not-for-profit residential care facilities may have a vested interest in preventing reintegration if their funding streams depend on the number of children in their care.

Many other actors – police, health workers, teachers, etc. – have a deep knowledge of their community aT1 1 T:lti/Spa

4.

WORKING WITH INDIVIDUAL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Successful reintegration requires careful and often intensive work with children and families, to determine if reintegration is appropriate, prepare the child and family, reunite the child with the family and provide follow-up support. This section begins with an examination of the case work approach to this individual support and then explores each of stage of reintegration in turn. Individual work with children and families is always important, but should be complemented with broader work with schools, communities and policymakers to achieve the wider changes needed to support effective reintegration (see Section 5).

4.1 Case work and the pace of the reintegration process

Summary

Reintegration is not a single event, but a longer process involving extensive preparation and follow-up support. Adequate time should be devoted to each stage in the process to allow reintegration to happen at a pace that suits the needs of each child and their family. Children and families should be assigned a case worker to support them through the process, which should be documented in a single case file.

Reintegration should not be seen as a single, one-off event, but rather a longer-term process with different phases, including extensive preparation and follow-up, with proper support services provided to families and children at each step of the way. The timeline needs to suit the child and family, and an increase in the length of time it takes to complete one step in the process (such as planning support for reintegration) should not be to the detriment of another step (such as follow-up post-reunification). The needs of children and families vary greatly, and it is not advisable to place rigid restrictions around the time needed for the reintegration process as a whole or for a particular step in supporting that process.

In supporting children through the different stages of the reintegration process, **case work** is a key approach[8]. This involves the child and family being assigned a case worker (or in some cases one case worker for the child and one for the family) who provides individualised support and documents the process. Case work enables children and families to develop relationships of trust and to receive support based on a well-developed understanding of their particular needs. The documentation of the process means that the case can if necessary be handed over to another agency or case worker (e.g. if reintegration is across borders or vast distance or if staff leave). Case workers often do not deliver all of the services/support to children and families themselves, but are able to provide information about and referral to other providers. Example 3 illustrates the use of case work in the reintegration of children across distances in Nepal.

If at any stage it is determined that reintegration is not in a child's best interests, it should be halted. Where it is in the child's best interests, staff should continue to facilitate contact with the family as far as

8. For practical guidance on many of the steps and issues in this section (i.e. informed consent, data management), see Inter-Agency Guidelines for Case Management and Child Protection (CPWG 2014).

possible, and may need to regularly assess whether to reconsider reintegration. Agencies should then turn to temporary alternative care arrangements (such as foster care or supervised independent living) and ultimately, if reintegration is ruled out, placement in a new permanent family through adoption or *kafalah*.[9]

Example 3: Case work in the reintegration of children across distances in Nepal

In Nepal, INGO Next Generation Nepal (NGN) and their Nepali partner The Himalayan Innovative Society (THIS) frequently reintegrate trafficked children back to villages several days journey by foot and/or bus from Kathmandu. Before children return home, multiple visits are made to assess families and wider communities. Relatives are encouraged to meet children at neutral locations close to transit centres, and children make first supervised and then unsupervised visits home. Once they have returned to their villages, reintegration officers carry out monitoring visits. These children have often been away for many years, and may have forgotten local languages and traditions. They may have experienced violence in families and once separated, and family members or the wider community may have been complicit in their trafficking. In these circumstances, THIS and Next Generation Nepal argue that no shortcuts can be taken and that face-to-face assessments and gradual, supervised reintegration are vital.

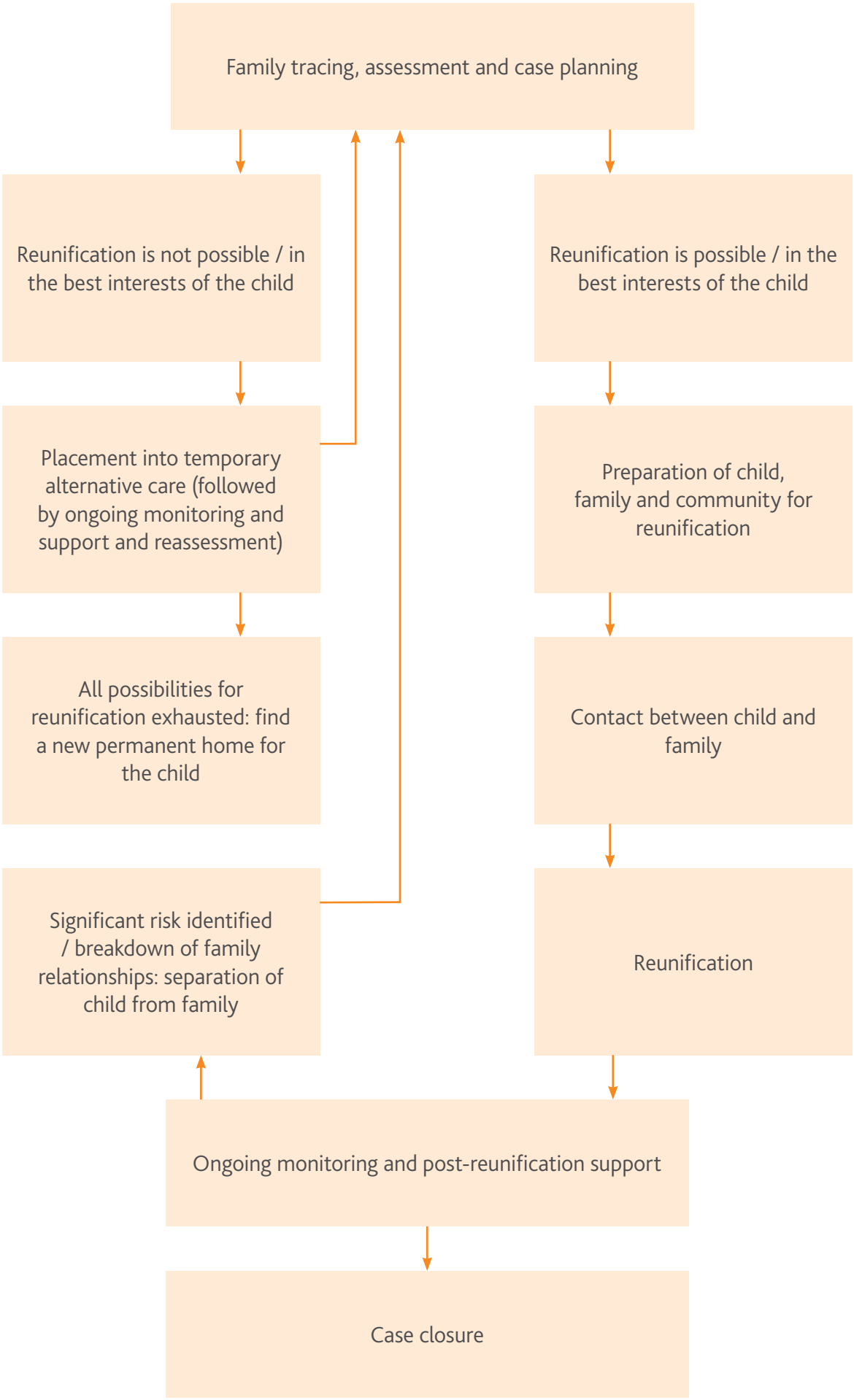
The work of THIS and NGN also highlights how reintegration across distances must not only include a consideration of physical distance, but also of differences in culture, standards of living and access to services between children's home communities and where they lived when separated. For example, in preparing children for reintegration, the agencies try to help children relearn the languages and traditions of their communities of origin, to cook and eat like they will do at home, and to transition back into government schooling. Knowing that health and rehabilitation services are likely to be minimal or non-existent in remote villages, efforts are made to improve the mobility of children with physical disabilities and to provide assistance with long-term health problems before they return (Lovera and Punaks 2015).

4.2 The stages in the reintegration process

This section explores each of the different stages in the support for the reintegration process, which are summarised in Figure one. Reintegration does not always follow a linear process, and children and families may need to repeat one or more steps.

9. See *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* (UN GA 2010) and *The implementation and operation of the 1993 intercountry adoption convention: Guide to good practice* (HCCH 2008).

Figure 1: Individual case management of the stages of the reintegration process



4.2.1 Tracing, assessment and planning

Summary

As a first step, a trained staff member should evaluate the child's well-being, identifying and quickly responding to any signs of abuse, violence, exploitation or neglect.

It is vital to carry out more in-depth assessments of children, families and communities to determine whether reintegration is in the best interests of the child. At this point, it is important to identify risks associated with reintegration as well as resources that children and families can draw on, considering all areas of the child's well-being, capacity and development. Children and families should have sufficient information to make informed decisions.

Once a decision has been made to go ahead with reunification, it is important to develop a plan with agreed objectives and strategies for meeting the child and family's needs for safe and effective reintegration. A family case conference can be an effective tool for developing a plan, helping to ensure that everyone involved in the reintegration process has realistic expectations and that the capacities and commitments within the family are considered.

Assessment of the child

An **individual assessment** should be carried out with each child to identify their specific needs which are likely to vary by factors such as age, gender and experience whilst separated. Further details of this assessment process can be found in Box 4 below. It can be useful to develop context specific criteria for assessment which examine factors that may affect the reintegration of specific groups of children and this should be done in full consultation with children and families. An example of such criteria from Tanzania is found in example 4 below.

Family tracing and Best Interests Determination

In both emergency and non-emergency settings, it is often necessary to carry out extensive work to trace a child's family. This tracing should take place after the initial assessment of the child, and may include identifying and tracing family members in different areas or even countries who could take care of the child. Extensive guidance on methods for family tracing can be found elsewhere (see for example Save the Children 2013).

In some contexts, there may be a legal requirement to carry out a Best Interests Determination (BID), and as it is always valuable to properly assess the best interests of the child, BID tools can be useful in the assessment process. Key parts of this process include creating a BID panel of experts to review the recommendations of the case worker and make a final decision; establishing Standard Operating Procedures amongst the relevant child protection actors (government, local NGOs and INGOs, UN agencies, etc.); agreeing on common forms and data management; and agreeing when a simplified process for collective/group decisions can be used (UNHCR 2008 and 2011).

Box 4: Details of good practice in the assessment of the child

- **Ensure the well-being of each child is quickly assessed by trained staff.** Any concerns about safety or physical or mental health (i.e. emotional or psychological distress, signs of abuse or trauma) should be appropriately responded to and children with disabilities may need particular support.
- **Build trust between the child and a case worker.** Allow time for children to get to know case workers to trust them sufficiently to share experiences, fears and wishes. At no point in the process should the child feel pressured to return home. If feasible and deemed best, staffing levels should enable children to receive support from someone of the same sex if they wish, and who speaks their native language.
- **Evaluate the child's present environment,** considering the positive and negative consequences of removing the child from this environment; discuss these with the child and caregivers. All actions should ensure that the child's rights to safety and ongoing development are never compromised.
- **Consider all areas of the child's well-being and the resources needed for successful reintegration:** Consider the child's physical, educational, behavioural, social, emotional, spiritual, relational, and material well-being. Identify the strengths that the child brings to the reintegration process and the resources/support that may be required to make reintegration successful.
- **Carefully consider if children should be involved in legal proceedings against their exploiters/abusers.** Prosecuting traffickers or others who exploit and abuse children can be important for achieving justice for children and preventing separation. However, involvement in this process can also have damaging consequences for reintegration. Court cases can take years to process, and this can in some cases delay return to families (as it may be a legal requirement for children to remain in the care of the state whilst court cases are underway) and may mean children having to relive traumatic experiences once they are settled back into communities and are beginning to recover. Publicity around court cases or just association with these proceedings can also lead to stigma. A child's best interests should be the primary consideration.
- **Include a range of perspectives in the assessment of the child.** E.g. Child, social workers, teachers, extended family etc.

Example 4: Guiding criteria for reunification with families used in Tanzania

In Tanzania, Railway Children have developed some guiding criteria to determine if a child is ready to leave the streets and enter a transit centre, and then to assess if that child is ready to return to his or her family. In most cases, achieving these criteria will be the result of emotional, relational and behavioural support in each stage of the process.

Criteria for taking a child from the streets to a centre

The child:

- has commitment and willingness
- understands what they will gain and lose in leaving the streets
- understands what the centre will be like and what it aims to achieve for the child
- understands what will be expected of them in the centre i.e. daily chores, classes, behaviour etc.
- is able to follow rules and instructions to some extent and is able to respond to authority
- is able to respect and interact positively with other children as well as adults
- is cooperating
- is able to care for their personal hygiene (dependent on age)
- is able to respect property
- has proven that they are reducing risky and dangerous behaviours
- is not addicted to drugs and if a frequent user has made some efforts to reduce drug use.

Criteria for taking a child back to their family

The above apply plus the child:

- recognises the importance of family and what can be gained if living with their family
- is committed to go back and live with their family
- is able to some extent to fit into their family and understands what is going to be expected of them.

Criteria for family to receive their child back home

The family:

- is willing and committed to taking the child back and taking responsibility for working to address problems
- parents/caregivers understand what has happened to their child and how this has affected their well-being and behaviour
- parents/caregivers are able to keep the child in mind and care about him/her
- parents/caregivers are able to cater for the child's basic needs
- the home environment is safe
- family is able to recognise the child's needs and rights
- a physical space has been prepared for the child (sleeping space etc.).

Between child and family:

- they have to some extent resolved the problems that led the child to run away
- there is positive interaction between child and family

Source: Railway Children Africa: Standard Operating Procedures (2016)

Assessment of the family

Once parents or other family members have been traced, an **assessment of the family** should occur. This should treat the family with dignity and respect and consider strengths and weaknesses in both the child's immediate and extended family. A basic model includes a preliminary assessment of:

- risk factors that affect the safety and well-being of the child and changes that need to be made;
- family strengths and resilience, including those of siblings;
- family members' perception of the reasons for separation and other problems;
- the family's level of readiness/capacity for change;
- the family's ability to care for the child;
- the family's economic situation.

It is crucial that agencies are prepared at all times to probe the issue of domestic or sexual violence against *any* child in the household, and to respond to any disclosure or concern at any stage in the reintegration process. Staff must be aware of signs of such violence and abuse and have the proper training to take immediate, effective action. This is just one of the reasons why all children in the household should be involved in the family assessment.

As with children, families have a choice about reintegration and should not be forced to take children back if they are not ready. Families need to have clear and accurate information made available to them in order to make informed decisions.

Assessment of the community

As explored in more detail in Section 5.1, communities play a vital role in children's reintegration and it

is important to assess their capacity to support children and families, and to challenge any stigma and discrimination they may face. Risks in the wider community should also be assessed. For example: low levels of service provision, including limited access to education; high levels of violence or crime, or the likelihood of children being stigmatised by community members.

Developing a plan

An individualised **plan** sets out a strategy for addressing the child's and family's needs and maximising their strengths, as identified in the assessment. The principles included in Box 5 below are proposed as a basis for such a plan.

Box 5: Principles for developing a plan

Plans should recognise that:

- all children and families have strengths to contribute;
- when appropriately supported, families and children can make well-informed decisions about child well-being and protection; and
- overall outcomes are improved when children and their families are centrally involved in the decision-making process.

Plans should also:

- be shared with all family members and acknowledged by signature or a similar sign;
- identify resources that the family can draw on, such as services or support in the community;
- set specific, measurable, time-bound objectives, which can be used a tool for checking progress, including prior to case closure;
- cover all important areas of well-being and the indicators to assess them;
- be developed with the child's safety and confidentiality in mind; and
- contain a contingency plan/ information about who children and family members should contact if the plan goes wrong and relationships breakdown.

Agencies are encouraged to use a team approach in developing a plan, as it enhances creativity and high quality decision making; however, it does require openness and honesty amongst team members. Where possible, encourage the child to choose some of the support team, and extend invitations beyond the immediate family and main agency.

Where possible, especially where dynamics are complex, it is recommended that a meeting is organised involving the child and family members. This may be done through family conferencing (see Box 6 below) where children and family members come together to develop a plan for the child with the facilitation of professionals. Where it is not possible or wise to bring everyone together, a series of individual meetings may be necessary. These meetings should be in person, though in some extreme cases where very long distances or security are an issue, discussions over the phone may be necessary.

All actors should recognise that plans are fluid, and should be revisited at key points (e.g. when a date for reunification is decided, when reunification occurs, when there has been a crisis in the family or amongst service providers). Global guidance on case management suggests plans should be reviewed at least every three months (CPWG 2014 and UN GA 2010).

Having a clearly articulated plan can be vital for managing expectations. For example, children may have high hopes of return to a family of love and prosperity or, conversely, a belief that nothing really can change; whereas parents/caregivers may expect material or financial assistance, and become reliant on agencies if appropriate steps are not taken. Helping the family to develop the plan themselves and take more ownership of their future

is valuable (e.g. by providing 'partial support', where the family pays a proportion of a particular expense and the organisation pays the remainder).

Case planning should include a consideration of the legal guardianship of the child and the point at which this will need to be handed back to the family (and to whom within the family).

Box 6: Family conferencing

Family conferencing includes a formal meeting involving immediate and extended family members, child welfare practitioners and other relevant officials. The process has a coordinator/facilitator, who is independent of case work decisions. A family conference allows for both immediate and extended family members to help make decisions about the best way to support the family to take care of their child.

The process often has four main stages.

- Extensive preparations (often five to eight weeks) involving the coordinator, who meets with all family members and service providers who will be invited to the conference. The goal is to prepare prospective participants by providing them with information about the conferencing process, as well as the strengths and concerns identified by the professionals involved with the family.
- A structured, decision-making meeting where professionals inform the family of the concerns they have.
- Private family time, where the family alone develops a plan that addresses the concerns that have been raised.
- Presentation of the plan to the professionals, who will then help the family to implement the plan as long the concerns they raised have been addressed and it does not put the child at risk (Ashley et al. 2006 and Schmid and Pollack 2009).

4.2.2 Preparation of children and families

Summary

Children and families need proper preparation before reunification occurs. Whilst boys and girls are waiting to return to families, they may need to be placed in temporary alternative care. This care should be safe, of high quality, and allow the child to form a consistent relationship with a trained caregiver. Agencies are strongly encouraged to work actively to ensure that children do not get stuck in alternative care.

Agencies need to work with families to address both the causes of original separation and the impact of harm caused by separation, and staff need to ensure that children and families will have access to all available forms of support necessary for safe and effective reintegration. For example, there may be a need for intensive work to address violence, abuse and neglect within families, and for household economic strengthening. It is important to assess children's mental and physical health needs, to offer counselling where necessary, and to ensure that there will be ongoing support within the community to meet these needs once children return home. Finally, it is vital to agree on mechanisms to carefully monitor child well-being on the child's return.

The time invested in preparing and supporting children and families is a major factor in achieving successful reintegration. The time this will take varies according to factors such as the length of time that the child spent separated, the causes of separation, and the child's experience during separation. Reintegration is an intrinsic

part of the healing process, so it is not necessary to wait until the child and/or family is fully healed before undertaking reunification.

Ensuring a caring environment pre-reintegration

Throughout the preparatory stage, it is important to consider the environment in which the child is living. In many cases, it will be necessary to remove children from situations of immediate harm and place them in some form of alternative care whilst they await reintegration. Agencies must choose the most appropriate form of care based on an individual assessment of the child, and this may, for example, include foster care, small-scale residential care or supervised independent living. In line with global guidance, where possible, alternatives should be sought to large-scale institutions, including dormitory style transit centres. Care should be organised in such a way that children are able to form bonds with a consistent carer (see UN GA 2010 for more details on global guidance on alternative care).

Children should remain in alternative care for as long as is needed to prepare them for reintegration or, where this is not possible, to find them a new permanent family. However, it is important to ensure that boys and girls do not become trapped in alternative care for long periods as this is only ever a temporary solution and does not provide them with the stable homes they need for a sense of security and belonging. Box 7 below outlines measures that can be taken to ensure that reintegration remains the overall goal, and to properly prepare children for reintegration whilst they are in alternative care.

Box 7: Considerations in providing alternative care for children whilst awaiting reintegration

- **Enable children to mix with local communities and not become isolated.** Whatever the form of care, children should be able to go to school in the neighbourhood, shop in the local market etc.
- **Balance meeting children's basic needs with creating culturally appropriate conditions.** Boys and girls should be as healthy and well-nourished as possible before they leave for a more food-insecure setting. Interim care should be designed to provide conditions similar to the level of the child's family, while providing an adequate level of care to minimise the risk of creating dissatisfaction with the home setting. Agencies may also want to consider helping children get used to the types of food and clothes associated with their home communities (see also example 3 above).
- **Engage children in culturally appropriate daily responsibilities and decisions,** such as cooking and cleaning, determining recreational activities or having some input in the daily schedule.
- **Speak openly of the shared goal of family reintegration.** Staff must be prepared for and thus comfortable with the temporary and professional nature of their relationship with each child. Whilst they should build the child's trust, they should also encourage the child to transfer those feelings to their permanent caregiver/parent.
- **Locate foster care placements and transit centres as close to home as possible.** Proximity often eases the reintroduction to parents or caregivers. There are exceptions to this guidance, as some children find that distance from their communities during the preparatory stage allows them time to heal, recover and prepare in peace and quiet. Agencies should strive to gauge each child's needs in this respect.
- **Develop conflict resolution mechanisms.** Some separated children are accustomed to a high level of autonomy and may resist guidance and boundaries. Effective mechanisms for dealing with anger and conflict can also be used in home communities.
- **Develop children's capacity to act autonomously.** Some separated children have spent prolonged periods stripped of their autonomy and ability to make decisions, and may need to be encouraged to engage in decision making about their lives once more. For example, ensure children are involved in developing/modifying their care plan, and create a children's advisory council to make recommendations to inform programme management.

- **Provide opportunities to express emotions safely** (e.g. to dance, to listen to or create music, to create a scrapbook, to act).
- **Create an atmosphere for healing and rehabilitation.** Children should have regular opportunities to speak to a consistent carer/case worker. Children who have been without any adult carer for long periods of time may need support in adopting behaviours that will fit with family and community expectations. Routine and predictability can give children who have led chaotic lives whilst separated a sense of control and reduce their anxiety.

Tackling discrimination and issues of identity

Many reintegrating boys and girls are discriminated against because of their life during separation, such as their association with armed forces or a criminal group, exposure to sexual abuse or exploitation, pregnancy out of marriage, or exploitative forms of work. They may also experience discrimination due to gender, disability, HIV status, caste, ethnicity, sexual orientation or other status. Tackling this discrimination as far as possible before they return home is vital to ensure their successful reintegration. These efforts require working with service providers (see Box 3), religious leaders and broader communities (see Section 5). However, discrimination may also take place within the immediate and extended family, especially as children may have altered significantly through the period of separation and have new 'markers' of their difference, such as tattoos, scars, or even an accompanying baby. Staff may need to mediate between the child and family and/or community members, helping them express their feelings and accept changes in the child.

Work with reintegrating children on issues of discrimination and identity is also important as the way they are seen by others will often influence how they see themselves. Reintegrating children commonly experience some sort of identity transition, such as from child soldier to motivated student, or from a sex worker to being a child once again. While children should not be expected to return to being exactly as they were prior to the separation, if reintegration is to be successful, a child needs to recognise that his/her previous role and 'identity' may have to change.

After months or years of separation, girls and boys may have forgotten or repressed their cultural traditions and religious practices. In some cases, a child's name and religion may have been deliberately changed in an effort to make them forget the culture or religion from which they came. Helping a child re-learn his or her culture, dialect and religion[10] is important, though this may well take longer than just the preparatory stage (see also example 3 above).

Addressing abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation in the family

Abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation within the family are extremely common reasons for children leaving home. Whilst more usually it is the separated child that has been abused, in some instances they may be the abusers and the safety of other children in the family should be considered. Frequently other family members will have also been affected. With intensive effort, it is often possible to tackle these issues, allowing the child to return safely to the family. Responding effectively requires the following steps.

- Prioritising children's safety, such as giving consideration to removing the abuser from the home if necessary and if this will not lead to further harm to the child (such as being blamed).
- A sensitive assessment of the impact of the abuse, particularly assessing the emotional and psychological well-being of the child and other family members, and the impact of violence and abuse on family relationships and dynamics.

10. Every child has the right to practise his or her own religion and all efforts should be made to support a child to do this. If a child was born with one religion, but during the course of separation has willingly converted to another religion, then the child's current religious preference must be fully respected by both staff and family.

- Ensuring that systems are in place to regularly monitor and support the child and family following reintegration, and that there is an agreed response plan if the situation deteriorates and separation is necessary for the safety of the child or other family members.
- The use of evidence-based and culturally appropriate therapeutic approaches for children or other family members experiencing significant distress. Adequate numbers of staff should be properly trained in these therapeutic approaches, and receive regular professional supervision (see example 5 below).
- Referrals to medical services if needed.

Meeting mental and physical health needs, responding to addiction

Many children experience physical and mental health problems as a result of their separation, or of experiences prior to separation, such as abuse or neglect in the family. These problems may include sexual and reproductive illnesses, injuries from work, and the effects of distress caused by separation from families or/and exploitation or abuse during separation. It is common for reunified children who initially seemed happy to later show signs of significant stress (e.g. anger towards caregivers, periods of non-communication, disobedience). Parents and caregivers may also experience mental or physical health problems which may have led to separation, and both children and adults may have addiction problems.

Meeting the range of health needs of the child or caregivers/parents during the preparatory phase includes:

- ongoing treatment of any health concerns, including addictions;
- training staff to recognise emotional and psychological distress, and to take mental well-being seriously, with referrals to appropriately trained professionals as necessary;
- an assessment of the extent to which mental and physical health challenges can be met by the family and community after reunification, and ensuring that support is in place to respond to health needs.

Example 5: Meeting the emotional needs of reintegrating children in Mexico

Mexican NGO JUCONI has found that many children on the streets come from homes with long histories of violence, with these children deeply traumatised by their experiences. JUCONI's reintegration programme focuses on working intensively with children and families to replace violent, destructive relationships with more constructive and caring behaviour. JUCONI helps children and families to gain insights into their behaviour, and case workers model examples of new, non-violent ways of interacting. This work is intensive and can take several years of specialised one-to-one support from trained staff. However, JUCONI have found that reducing family violence and ensuring children are loved and cared for is far more important to successful reintegration than improving material conditions at home (Family for Every Child and JUCONI 2014).

Supporting children with disabilities

Children with disabilities need particular assistance during all phases of the reintegration process. During the preparatory phase, it is important to properly assess children with disabilities using a qualified expert and to work to rehabilitate children as appropriate (e.g. providing physiotherapy or teaching children how to use aids for mobility, bathing, feeding, dressing etc. and for performing daily task as independently as possible). It is also crucial to identify ongoing support needs and to determine how these will be met, mapping existing services and support and connecting to local organisations working to support children with disabilities in their home communities. Agencies may need to: access physical aids (such as wheelchairs or hearing aids); train family members in children's care and support or teach them how to effectively communicate with children (e.g. sign

language training); ensure that schools and homes are accessible/adapt home environments; work to tackle discrimination (see sections 4.2.2 and 5), and promote integration into local schools. In general, the focus should be on making the environment accessible and inclusive, not on trying to 'fix' children with disabilities to make them fit into society. Agencies should link with any community-based expertise and resources, in particular disabled people's organisations, which are run by and for persons with disabilities.

When raising the possibility of reintegration, staff are advised to discuss openly any concerns with children and families, and to stress the agency's commitment to continue to support access to rehabilitation services, medical treatment (if needed) or other required services once home. Here it is important to stay positive and to focus on children's ability to live independently rather than on loss or deficit. It may be possible to link parents of children with disabilities together and peer-to-peer support can also be valuable for children with disabilities. It may also be important to offer respite care to provide caregivers and children a break.

Example 6: A community-based approach to reintegrating children with disabilities from institutional care in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, the INGO Hope and Homes for Children has successfully reintegrated 84 children under three years old from large-scale institutions. A significant proportion of these children have physical and/or intellectual disabilities as it is common in Bulgaria for mothers to be encouraged to place babies with disabilities in the care of the state. An evaluation of the programme suggests that its success can be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, the programme worked to change the view of disability as a medical 'problem' in need of specialised intervention. A professor of neonatology was brought in to assess over 120 children who had been categorised by institutional staff as needing special residential care, and reduced this number to 30. Families were also provided with legal support to challenge court decisions to take away their children. Secondly, the programme combined tailored material support, which included in-kind contributions from communities and local businesses, with efforts to enhance parenting skills and access to services. Thirdly, the programme not only provided individualised support to children and families, but also worked with wider communities, seeking to establish support networks for families and to involve communities in addressing the root causes of the original separation (Bilson and Markova 2014).

Planning for education and life skills training

Access to education has been shown to be essential to the successful reintegration of children. Returning to school is often an important part of returning to 'normal' and of being part of a community once more. In many instances, a lack of access to education is a key driver for separation, with children entering institutional care or going to live with distant relatives in order to access formal learning. A failure to give children access to quality schooling can lead to re-separation.

Quality, safe schooling can be used to help children learn necessary life skills, and teachers can help to keep an eye on at-risk children, making referrals where necessary. Efforts to ensure that children have access to school must start during the preparatory phase. Many children miss out on schooling whilst they are separated and need help to catch up before they can enter schools in their home communities. Details of actions that case workers can take to support children's education are included in Box 8 below. It should be noted that a lack of quality education in home communities can often create difficult dilemmas around the reintegration process. Children, families and case workers will need to consider if it is viable to return children to settings where there is no access to schooling or if other alternatives should be sought (such as encouraging the family to move closer to schools, or placement with relatives during the academic year).

Box 8: Case workers' support to children's education

- Have a qualified educator carry out an assessment of the child's existing levels of education and educational aspirations, in relation to literacy, numeracy etc.
- Carry out an assessment of the child's existing 'life skills' including problem solving, communication and other interpersonal skills, as well sexual health awareness, hygiene, financial literacy, household tasks, etc.; then work to address any gaps identified.
- Work to rebuild the study habits of children who have been out of school for long periods.
- Ensure that the child has access to education during the preparatory phase and is prepared for any difference between curriculums in the current context and the home community.
- Assess financial support needs for families to cover educational costs/transport to school and carefully consider the form of this support; consider whether to cover the educational costs of another child in the immediate or extended family to promote reintegration as a benefit that goes beyond the individual returning child.
- Educate teaching staff on the educational and psychosocial needs of the children who are reintegrating. Help them build rapport with individual children, and establish an ongoing relationship between case worker and teachers.
- Consider if vocational training may be a better option for some children.
- Work to increase physical, academic and social accessibility and support for children with mental and physical disabilities. Arrange for training of teachers and school administrators in inclusive education.
- Encourage the establishment of inclusive students' clubs.

See section 5 for guidance on working to transform schools and wider systems to support the education of all reintegrating children.

Household economic strengthening and material support

Poverty is a significant underlying factor in the large majority of cases of separation of children from families and a primary cause in many instances. Consequently, it is fundamentally important to understand the role that poverty may have played in any case of separation and to address it appropriately and effectively. Because families and the contexts in which they live vary widely, there is no single best way to address household poverty to support children's reintegration. Effective economic-strengthening measures can reduce both poverty and stress within a family. During the preparatory phase, it is important to take the following measures.

- Use information from the family assessment to determine the livelihood security of the household. What are their resources, capacities, sources of livelihood?
- Ensure that economic interventions are tailored to the household's capacities and the economic context. A household at the level of destitution needs support for basic consumption, such as a government cash grant or in-kind transfer.
- If market-based household economic strengthening is needed, seek relevant technical expertise. Steps to improve household economic stability may include provision of livestock or other productive assets, access to a cash-for-work programme, a structured savings and lending opportunity, relevant training for financial literacy or technical skills, support with health issues or disability, etc. Give attention to avoiding potential child protection issues (e.g. increased child labour, safety in workshops, employment initiatives that leave young children under-supervised).
- If new economic-strengthening initiatives are needed, seek reliable partners that have enabled poor families to achieve sustained economic self-support. If an appropriate partner cannot

be found, managers will need to consider implementing their own economic-strengthening programmes[11]; this may entail bringing in specialised staff or consultants.

In addition to economic strengthening, other forms of material support, such as new beds or housing repairs, may be offered to families based on the need to help ease the child's transition back into the household. However, as noted above, it is important to manage expectations and avoid unsustainable dependence on external actors.

For reasons of social harmony, economic-strengthening programmes must proactively strive to balance the needs of families with returnee children and those of impoverished families more generally. If there are several agencies working on reintegration in one setting, it is crucial that they agree on a common approach. In addition, agencies are urged to be vigilant to any inadvertent messages that may promote family separation (i.e. that a separated child brings home free gifts from NGOs).

Effective economic strengthening may hinge on access to other forms of support. For example, emotional or mental health problems can affect adults' ability to work regularly. A lack of employment opportunities close to home can lead to the main wage earner having to migrate for work, placing strains on relationships and care in the home.

Other forms of support

In addition to those outlined above, children and families may identify other support needs at the planning phase, and agencies should be open to meeting these needs as well. It should be remembered that as well as children changing during the period of separation, families may also have changed, due to, for example displacement or the death or birth of a family member, and children may need support to cope with different family dynamics. Families may feel isolated and need help identifying others in the community to support them. Separation may have been caused by a lack of capacity to look after children well, and parents and caregivers may need support rebuilding confidence and learning parenting skills.

Determining who will carry out monitoring and follow-up support

In order to ensure a smooth and continuous transition, it is important to establish prior to reunification who will monitor the returning child: an agency case worker, another worker (e.g. teacher, government social worker, community organisation), community volunteer, religious leader, etc. There are advantages to working with individuals from the community, such as their proximity to the child and family (especially in conflict-affected areas or if distances are great), and their ability to offer insight into the strengths of various relationships. However, owing to discrimination, community monitoring systems may not be appropriate for some children, and it is important to ask the child and family for their preferences. It may also be too much to expect non-professionals to monitor more complex cases. If agencies use a community monitoring mechanism, they should provide oversight, training and supervision. In general, it is a good idea for the case worker to make periodic visits that decrease in frequency over time, and for others actually living or working in the community of origin to act as closer observers, with a clear point of contact in case problems arise (see Section 4.2.4).

11. See the following resources for detailed guidance: *Children and economic strengthening programs: Maximizing benefits and minimizing harm,* Child Protection in Crisis (CPC) Network, Livelihoods and Economic Strengthening Task Force, 2013; *Child safeguarding in cash transfer programming: A practical tool,* Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP), Save the Children, Women's Refugee Commission and CPC Network, 2012; *Household economic strengthening in support of prevention of family-child separation and children's reintegration in family care,* Laumann, L., FHI 360, 2015.

4.2.3 Child's initial contact with family and reunification

Summary

Where contact between the family and child has been broken, re-establishing it is a significant part of the reintegration process and needs to be handled carefully, especially if there is blame or fear on either side. Children and families must be adequately prepared and contact should usually initially be done through remote communication (e.g. via phone, letter etc.), followed by short supervised face-to-face meetings, and then longer supervised visits to the family home. When children and families are ready, children can return permanently. Reunification involves the formal or even legal transfer of guardianship to the family, and the case plan for the child may also need to be transferred to another agency or department. Ceremonies of transition may also be valuable at this stage.

Initial contact with families

The process of reintroducing the child to the family and community should unfold gradually, according to each child's individual needs, and should not be rushed. Whilst many separated children are able to keep in touch with family members, others will have been out of contact for months or even years. In either instance, once family reunification is under discussion the first contact they have (by telephone, video message or face to face) takes on added significance. It is best to cover as many of the steps outlined in Box 9 below as possible, adapting each one to the best interests of the individual child (taking into consideration issues of blame, fear, etc.) and the realities of the setting, such as distance or the cross border nature of reintegration.

Box 9: Possible steps to facilitate initial contact with families

1. Enable remote contact through a letter/email, call, or video message: This initial contact can help break down emotional barriers, and enable children and families to get to know one another again. Including pictures and stories can be beneficial. There may be a need for several letters/calls before face-to-face contact is made.

2. Short face-to-face meetings between parents/carers and child: These meetings should happen under the direct supervision of a case worker. This first visit should be short and 'set up to succeed'. Staff need to have a clear objective of what needs to be achieved, though it may be wise to take no major decisions at this meeting. Where feasible, the parent should travel to the child, which provides a clear indication of the parent's commitment to reintegration, even though the agency may fund the travel. In some cases, such visits are unsafe and a neutral location is better, e.g. if the child was abducted and it is not yet safe to reveal his or her location.

3. Longer, supervised visits at the parents'/carers' home: The objectives of these visits are to assess family functioning and the child's ability to readjust to the community and lifestyle. The case worker must be prepared to intervene at any time if the child is facing significant challenges.

4. Longer, unsupervised visits at the parents'/carers' home: This type of meeting is only performed after a supervised visit has been successful. Furthermore, the case worker must be confident that the child will be able to readjust to the local lifestyle and that the parents/caregivers are able to care for the child.

Throughout this phase, it is important that agencies ensure that contact has been re-established with other siblings who may not be living with the parents and may, for example, be in institutional care separately from the reintegrating child.

Using the law to force parents or other caregivers to accept a child for reunification is never recommended. However, it is important to make them understand the long-term negative impact of denying reunification and to help them build a positive vision of what their relationship with their child could become. It is crucial for parents/caregivers to understand that if children are not helped to maintain this connection, and if they have no possibility of adapting to the local lifestyle, then they will be unlikely to return to the community, even after completing schooling. If the parents/caregivers or child refuse reunification, the case worker should revisit the contingency component of the plan. If that provides no appropriate option, then children will need to be kept or placed in alternative care and then, if reintegration is either not possible or appropriate, found a new permanent family through, for example, adoption or *kafalah*. In all instances, there should be ongoing contact with family members, providing it is in the child's best interests.

Even when reconnection has gone well, some parents/caregivers do not wish to take full legal responsibility, perhaps believing that their child can be better cared for by the state in residential or foster care. It is recommended that agencies proceed with caution as the interaction parents have with the case worker may only reinforce their belief that agency staff are better qualified than them to care for their child. Here, building the confidence of the family and their ownership of the process through family conferencing (see Box 6) may help.

Family reunification

Reunification is the step that passes care and/or formal guardianship of the child back to his or her parents or traditional caregiver. It may take place at the foster family's home, a transit centre, a neutral location, or in the child's community of origin. Since this event is emotionally challenging for children, it is recommended that they be given as much control over it as possible: choosing the case worker to accompany them, choosing what to wear, etc. Steps in this process are included in Box 10 below.

Box 10: Possible steps in the family reunification process

- **Transfer of care back to family.** As far as possible, parents/caregivers should state in writing their willingness to resume responsibility for the child and that they understand the implications of this. Where required, the case worker submits documentation to the appropriate authorities (e.g. child welfare panel, judge, gatekeeping commission, administrative tribunal, local authority) for formal approval. In some jurisdictions, legal guardianship is initially transferred temporarily and then reviewed at a later date.
- **Case transfer.** If reunification occurs across distances, the coordination of the case plan and the case file itself are often passed to another agency or government department. This must be done with the permission of the child and family, and in a clear, documented manner. It is recommended that (where possible) the case worker accompanies the child to meet the individual who will take over the case, reviews the paperwork with them, and involves local officials.
- **Reunification package and enrolment in services, including formal education**. In exceptional circumstances, material support may be offered at the point of reunification, though this should be handled extremely carefully. When access to the new community has been limited, the point of reunification becomes the opportunity to finalise arrangements of new services, e.g. enrolment

with the local school, nursery or health service providers.

- **Acknowledgement of transition.** Children benefit from receiving proper support to say farewell to their peers (e.g. from the street, in the shelter) and to discuss how they might stay in touch. The family and/or community who have been preparing for the child's return may want to acknowledge it in a public fashion through, for example, speeches or a more elaborate welcoming/transition ceremony. It is important that the child be informed of the community's expectations, and is happy to cooperate.

4.2.4 Post-reunification support

Summary

Reintegrating children benefit from follow-up support once they return to their home communities, including those who have returned home without agency intervention. It is essential that agencies carefully monitor children on their return to families. Face-to-face visits are essential, though this can also be partially done through calls. Communities can assist with monitoring, but case workers must also be involved.

Children, families and communities will need different forms of follow-up support which may include the continuation of: support to address the root causes of separation, such as violence in the home or household poverty; assistance accessing basic services such as health and education; work to address the stigma and discrimination commonly faced by reintegrating children; therapeutic support and mediation, and support forming new friendships. Addressing the root causes of separation within the family and community is vital for preventing re-separation, and, if handled carefully, can strengthen the wider efforts to prevent separation.

Reintegrating children and their families benefit from follow-up support. If the preparations have been extensive, if little post-reunification support was identified as being required in the plan, and if everyone feels ready for this transition, then the intensity of interventions and length of this stage may be minimal. In many cases however, there is much work to be done at the individual, family and community level. The first few months are usually of the greatest importance.

Follow-up support is as important as the work done during the preparatory stage. Less space is given to it in this document as much of the guidance included in section 4.2.2 also applies here, and thus should be revisited.

Monitoring child well-being

It is vital that each child's safety and well-being is monitored carefully after reunification. As outlined in section 4.2.2, a range of individuals and agencies may be involved in monitoring the child's well-being. Different forms of monitoring can also be used, based on the child and family's preferences and needs, available resources (at the agency, community and family levels), the distances to cover, protection concerns, etc. Monitoring may involve phone calls with the child, family or service providers, but should also include face-to-face visits. Where a large number of children are reintegrating, agencies may complement individual monitoring and support with collective support whereby the needs of a group of reintegrating children are met together (e.g. through peer-to-peer support). It is recommended that an inter-agency protocol sets out benchmarks for the level and types

of contact and support that each child should have following reunification. It is then important to monitor each child's safety and well-being to determine benchmarks are being routinely met and whether additional action is required.

During the follow-up phase, the case worker should speak with the child, parents, siblings, other relevant relatives and individuals who have a role to play in the child's welfare (e.g. teachers, child protection committee members, religious leaders). Staff will need to speak with each child privately to identify any concerns. They must look out for signs of abuse or neglect as families and communities can be particularly adept at hiding child maltreatment. It is important to recognise that the family situation may change over time, and that a good start to the reintegration process does not always mean that it will continue to go well. Agencies must ensure that the child or someone he or she trusts has a way to contact the case worker and an emergency plan if immediate intervention is necessary.

It should be noted that monitoring has the potential for unintended negative consequences (e.g. continuing to call attention to a child having been trafficked or having been part of an armed group). Workers will need to find a way to have discreet and confidential discussions. Detailed monitoring reports should be written up by the case worker and the findings discussed with a supervisor (and other service providers as relevant) on a regular basis.[12]

Follow-up support

Much of the guidance provided in section 4.2.2 on preparation also applies to this stage. Staff need to check that the post-reunification support agreed in the plan is being met and to monitor the full range of factors that affect a child's well-being, including the following.

- Ongoing *and new* support to address the root causes of violence in the home, such as addiction relapses, and other efforts to address abuse, violence and neglect in families (see section 4.2.2).
- Ensuring children and families have ongoing access to health care, education and other basic services (see section 4.2.2).
- Offering respite care when children and families may need short periods of time apart (see section 4.2.2).
- Monitoring the effectiveness of economic-strengthening support, and providing further support following the guidance offered in section 4.2.2.
- Continuing to support efforts to address stigma and discrimination through work with the community, including religious leaders (see Section 5).
- Providing guidance around creating new friendships, as well as reviving old ones.
- Working to build on the strengths and resilience that children may have gained during their period of separation. Children may feel that the skills they have learned and the pride they have as a survivor contrasts with how they are perceived by the community.
- Ensuring that children have a chance to discuss experiences and to receive therapeutic support where necessary (see 4.2.2); consider group support if numbers warrant.

Support may be delivered directly by case workers or through referrals to other agencies, though case workers should always coordinate the assistance provided.

Where problems are discovered, it is important that staff are able to take action. Action may include a formal review of the family's case plan (including possibly reconvening a family group conference), more regular monitoring of the family and child and greater support to the family and child, through, for example, increased financial support, further counselling or mentoring, more support to schooling or more effective economic

12. It might cover (i) how successful the reunification has been to date; (ii) whether or not further monitoring is needed and, if so, when and how often, or whether the case can be closed (see 4.6); and (iii) whether or not any other forms of intervention are needed to protect the child, including other forms of support for the child and/or family. Case information must be confidential and data storage protocols must be followed.

strengthening. Finally, if reintegration fails, the child needs to be placed in alternative care whilst other options are considered (see UN GA 2010 for further guidance on this).

Spontaneous or sudden reunification

Some girls and boys will return home themselves without the intervention of agencies, or may reunify suddenly, for example as an institution has closed down. Like all reintegrating children, they will benefit from post-reunification monitoring and support, and indeed may have particular need of this since they and their families were not prepared for reunification. It is important to carry out a full assessment and put in place plans to support these children and their families. Frequently, these children are given lower priority since the links with the family seem to have already been re-forged by the child; however, problems in such cases often come to light because the 'honeymoon period' is over and conflict within the family has increased.

Reintegration and prevention of separation strategies

The reintegration process is a clear opportunity for agencies to engage in the prevention of family separation. Visits to children's communities of origin as part of efforts to monitor and support reintegration offer an opportunity to identify the factors that lead to separation, and a chance to tackle some of the root causes of separation.

To reduce the flow of separated children in need of reintegration support, it is important that:

- agencies establish an internal mechanism to submit relevant information and inter-agency early warning systems that indicate when the factors leading to separation are increasing;
- programme managers regularly analyse agency data for trends on vulnerabilities to separation. This analysis should be used in a coordinated way across agencies to inform interventions aimed at addressing some of the common underlying causes of family breakdown;
- staff use the opportunities created by preparatory and follow-up visits to address the root causes of separation by, for example, raising awareness of the risks of separation or building the capacity of agencies in sending communities.

Throughout the reintegration process, it is crucial that agencies do not inadvertently promote family separation, by, for example, indicating that separated children will receive more support than their peers on returning home. There is a particular need to give careful consideration to the planning and communication of any material support (e.g. a bed, school fees). Agencies are encouraged to follow up with the community to find out how assistance has been interpreted; if there is any notion of it being an incentive to separate, then they are advised to take immediate action.

4.2.5 Case closure

Summary

Reintegration cases are closed when the child's safety and well-being are secure and the objectives of the most recent plan have been met. This can be a difficult process for child and case worker and should be handled with care.

Ending monitoring – or closing a case – occurs when the worker is confident that the child's safety and well-being are secure. Case closure should only be considered when the objectives agreed in the most recent version of the plan have been met – i.e. when there has been adequate progress against clear benchmarks – or if the child or parent/caregiver proactively requests it. In either case, the following process should be followed:

- review all observations and notes made throughout the monitoring period;
- consider with the child and family the overall progress they have made against the case plan's objectives;
- consult with other service providers (including teachers, health workers, etc.) to obtain a broad range of perspectives; and
- carefully assess the likelihood and potential severity of risks to the child.

Once all of this information has been taken into account, the worker may recommend that the case be closed with a final decision being made by a supervisor or inter-agency case review panel.

As the end point of the agency's intervention, case closure needs to be an explicit goal that is *reiterated at key points from day one*. Given many children's understandable fear of abandonment by the case worker and/or child protection system, it is recommended to provide an estimated timeframe for the closure process.

The child may have spent months or even years benefitting from the care and support of the agency and developed a close bond with specific workers. He or she should be sensitively informed that agency visits will soon cease, and when that will happen. All updated documentation should be retained confidentially in case re-separation occurs and cases have to be re-opened. Where relevant, it is important to link the child to any services offered to children leaving care.

Case closure can be difficult for a case worker. However, continuing to monitor a family when a child is safe is costly and contributes to their dependency on the agency. From the outset, agencies must prevent the 'our children' mentality from taking root in staff, whether paid or volunteer; they must actively discuss and monitor such perceptions with any community-based actors.

The length of time the agency works with the family depends on how quickly the family makes adequate progress against the clear benchmarks in the agreed plan, and there should not be any set time period or set number of visits. This flexible approach may require agencies to educate donors, local governments and other service providers.

5.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS

Summary

In addition to a case work approach with individual children and families, efforts with schools and wider communities are important for successful reintegration. Schools and communities can help both to tackle stigma and discrimination, and to monitor and support reintegrating children.

Whilst a case work approach with individual girls and boys and their families is vital, in order for reintegration to be successful, wider change is often needed to ensure that communities welcome returning children and that they and their families can receive the services they require. This section covers work with communities and schools, with the concluding section of these guidelines offering recommendations for policy change to support reintegration.

5.1 Working with communities

Communities play a vital role in children's reintegration, and whether or not they are willing to welcome, monitor and support returning boys and girls can have a significant effect on these children's well-being. The role of communities may be especially important in settings where formal social services are weak. Work with communities may include the following.

- Engaging with community leaders or groups (e.g. child protection committees, village or religious leaders) to explore their feelings about the returning children, encourage greater understanding of the challenges children faced whilst separated, and assist with efforts to reduce discrimination against returnees. Here, creative techniques for awareness raising can be useful (e.g. creating a theatre production that sensitively highlights the experiences of the children and the strengths they bring to their community).
- Asking neighbours to support children to (re)learn local languages or traditions.
- Convening meetings with communities to explore any tensions that may exist, recognising that these may arise from stigma and discrimination against reintegrating children, and from children who continue to behave in a way that the community rejects (e.g. sexualised behaviour, drug or alcohol use).
- Enabling a dialogue between the child/family and the community if the community feels that the child has acted in a way that breaks with traditions.
- The careful use of traditional or religious ceremonies, or community reparations if the child has acted in a way that the community considers to be dishonourable, ensuring that the child's overall well-being is prioritised and his/her strengths are also acknowledged.
- Where large groups of children are being reintegrated, offering peer-to-peer support, such as support groups or pairing each newly reunified child with a 'buddy' who is further along in the process. Here it may also be important to offer concrete support to schools to accommodate additional students (e.g. an additional classroom).

- Working with the community to prevent (re)separation – for example by raising awareness of the importance of family unity, forming parenting groups to mutually build parenting/caring skills, or creating cooperatives to increase incomes.
- Working with local media to change attitudes towards reintegrating children in the community. Here, reintegrating children and their parents/caregivers may welcome an opportunity to share their stories, although children and families should always be able to make informed choices about participating in this way (see 3.4).
- Processes of reconciliation, peace building and restorative justice in instances where returning children have been involved in/exposed to conflict or crime.

5.2 Working with schools

As noted above, education plays an essential role in the reintegration of separated children, and there is much that schools can do to support this process.

- Understand any discrimination that the child is likely to face in school at the hands of teachers, parents and students, and make efforts to tackle this discrimination. Reintegrating children should be involved in discussions around how much of their histories should be shared with these groups.
- Provide additional support to help reintegrating children who have missed out on schooling to catch up.
- Proactively prepare parents for the reintegration of large groups of children, reassuring them that returnee children and school personnel will continue to be supported, and that there will be opportunities to address any issues that emerge.
- Where large-scale reintegration is taking place to the same area, fund accelerated learning programmes (with specialised curriculum, teachers and resource materials) and/or school-based reintegration officers, who can work with individual students, as well as all staff, and the wider community (see example 7 below).
- Engage with students to help them understand problems that returning children have experienced and involve them constructively in helping children to reintegrate into the school and community.
- Ensure that schools are safe havens for children – work to reduce violence in schools and take steps to address situations where schools are used as recruiting grounds for trafficking, gangs or child soldiers.

Example 7: Working with teachers in the reintegration of children from residential care in Moldova

In Moldova the reorganisation of the child care system and the closing down of large-scale institutions have led to the mass reintegration of children back into their families, schools and communities. Many of these children were placed in residential care because they were perceived as having special needs and received a modified curriculum as a result. Knowing that children may struggle initially in mainstream schools, and recognising that how they were received in schools would be vital to their integration into communities, the NGO Partnerships for Every Child – Moldova trained teachers and teaching support staff in inclusive education and ways to support reintegrating children. This has helped to overcome school and community resistance and enabled a smoother transition back into communities (Family for Every Child and Partnership for Every Child Moldova 2014).

6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Summary

Careful monitoring of reintegration processes is vital both to ensure quality interventions that benefit children and for overall learning. Monitoring and evaluation should occur at three levels: the individual case, an agency's programme, and the overall, multi-actor reintegration efforts. Children, families and other stakeholders involved in the reintegration process should be consulted in the development of indicators. Learning should also be broadly shared to improve reintegration and wider child protection systems.

A strong evidence base is vital for improving learning around reintegration and enhancing reintegration programmes, and for providing proof of the value of reintegration.

Monitoring can occur at three interlinked but distinct levels:

- the individual case – in order to track child and family well-being and inform care plans
- the agency's programme – in order to track progress, quality and effectiveness of implementation and inform programme planning and development
- the overall, multi-actor reintegration effort – in order to identify coverage, gaps and effective good practice.

Monitoring and evaluation of reintegration requires work with all stakeholders to identify the core elements of 'successful' reintegration and to produce indicators of success. In line with the definition included in these guidelines, 'successful reintegration' should consider not just whether children have been reunited with families, but also if they have a sense of belonging and purpose in all spheres of life. Indicators may be developed by individual agencies or, in the case of a coordinated response, by a group of agencies working together. In either case, indicators should be developed with the involvement of[13]:

- children currently being reintegrated, asking them what they feel will help them in the future;
- children who have been reintegrated, asking them what was important to them in successful reintegration;
- local children in the community, asking them about what they feel would help a child to reintegrate in their community;
- families, asking about the kind of support that was important to them in the reintegration process;
- elders, religious leaders or other adults, asking them about the elements needed for a child to be accepted and included in the community.

13. Information in this section is taken from the forthcoming RISE/Retrak toolkit on monitoring and evaluating reintegration (RISE Learning Network 2016).

In addition to helping to develop indicators, these consultations can also improve understanding of reintegration in local contexts. Such consultations may involve the following questions being asked.

- How would you know if a child was integrated and accepted in their family and community?
- What does a well-integrated child look like? How do they act? What qualities would they have?
- What does a caring and protecting family look like? How do they act? How important is this for reintegration?
- What does a child with a strong sense of belonging and purpose look like? How do they act? How important is this for reintegration?

Some example indicators are included in table 1 below, which covers output indicators (the direct products or services provided) and outcome and impact indicators (which examine the success of efforts to reintegrate a child, and changes in child, family or community or the wider policy environment likely to enhance reintegration). These examples are designed to inspire a consideration of the range of factors that affect reintegration. Programme designers are strongly encouraged to develop their own indicators based on the specifics of their programme and on the perspectives of stakeholders involved in reintegration processes.

In implementing a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy it is important to plan and budget for M&E from the outset and implement it through all the stages of the reintegration process. Managers should encourage staff to be solution-oriented when faced with challenges in reintegration processes. It should be acknowledged that reintegration is extremely difficult and that reintegration processes may not always go smoothly. Any data gathered should feed into larger learning processes to improve the overall performance of child protection systems.

Example 7: Monitoring child well-being in reintegration programmes in Ethiopia and Uganda

In Ethiopia and Uganda, INGO Retrak have developed a model to monitor child well-being amongst reintegrating, street-connected children. The well-being assessments cover six aspects of child well-being using 12 measurable goals on areas such as food and nutrition, health, emotional well-being, and education and skills. Following informal conversations with children and their families and observation of the home environment by trained staff, child well-being is ranked against each of these goals from good to very bad. For example, children's emotional health may be ranked as good if the child is "*happy and content with a generally positive mood and hopeful outlook*". It would be ranked as very bad if the child "*seems hopeless, sad, withdrawn, wishes [he/she] could die, or wants to be left alone*". Children are assessed at regular intervals throughout the reintegration process and the support offered is tailored to reflect their needs as identified by the assessments. Retrak has also used the findings from the tool to strengthen their broader approach to reintegration. For example, the tool has shown how children's well-being decreases with the amount of time they spend on the streets, reiterating the need to intervene quickly with new arrivals and facilitate their return home as soon as possible. The tool has also shown how children's well-being improves during their reintegration, providing solid evidence of the value of investing in this process, which Retrak have used in their advocacy efforts (Corcoran and Wakia 2013).

Table 1: Example indicators for monitoring reintegration programmes

Stage in the reintegration process	Output indicator	Outcome and impact indicators
Tracing, assessment and planning	Number of cases of successful family tracing Number of individual assessments made of child/family/community to determine appropriateness of reintegration Number/percentage of reintegrating children who have a case plan Number/percentage of case plans which are reviewed regularly (every three months)	Child/family feels fully consulted around decisions about reintegration/ the case plan Child/family are clear about the case plan(e.g. about decisions regarding reintegration/the support they will receive) Child/family feel happy about decisions regarding the child's reintegration/the case plan
Pre-reunification support	Number of pre-reunification meetings, visits and calls Support received during the pre-reunification phase, for example: • Number and percentage of children who are engaged in life skills-building work/receiving catch-up schooling • Number of support sessions provided to children/families •Number of families/carers provided with support through parenting programmes • Income generation training or start-up support provided to families • Number and description of sensitisation activities carried out with teachers/community leaders/ wider community • Number of children placed in safe/ appropriate alternative care whilst awaiting reintegration • Number of children who are supported to get legal identity documents	Children demonstrate an increase in confidence and self-esteem Children demonstrate improved positive behaviours Children have improved their educational level during the preparation phase Children's households are economically stable Children report that they are hopeful for the future Children report that they are ready and willing to return home Families report that they are ready to receive children A reduction in stigma and discrimination within communities Children have a stable relationship with a consistent carer Children have legal identity documents

Reunification	Number and percentage of children who have been reunited with families	Children and families are able to accept reunification Families agree to a post-reunification support plan Children feel welcomed into their families Transfer of case files to local authorities
Post-reunification support	Number/regularity of follow-up visits and length of time that follow-up visits continue for Support received post reunification, for example: • Number of reported cases of abuse and neglect (and percentage of these that are responded to/who responds to these cases) • Number of community-based child protection committees supporting children (per 100 children in the population) • Number of social workers supporting children (per 100/1000 children in the population) • Number and percentage of reintegrating and non-reintegrating children who are accessing education • Number of loans provided to families • Number of children and their families receiving health care services, and description of services	Children have positive relationships with their parents/carers Parents and carers feel supported and are able to confront and challenge any shame or stigma they face Children feel safe in families Cases of child abuse are responded to appropriately Children have improved their educational level during the follow-up phase Children feel welcomed and accepted in the classroom Children/family members have an improved health status Children (and family members) have enough to eat all year round Children and young people do not face stigma and discrimination in the community Children and families are supported to access religious or spiritual support
Outcome and impact indicators of the process overall: • Children and families are able to accept reunification • Families agree to a post-reunification support plan • Children feel welcomed into their families • Transfer of case files to local authorities		

6. CONCLUSION

Giving separated children the opportunity to return to their family of origin is a fundamental right and of vital importance to child well-being; thus, governments, NGOs, faith-based organisations, UN agencies and others must support their reintegration. This can be a complex, often lengthy, process, and adequate support is needed for proper preparation and follow-up.

There are several key priorities in creating an environment that is fully supportive of reintegration.

- Create national level guidance and policies on children's reintegration that are in line with the UNCRC, and are guided by other relevant global policies and guidance, including these guidelines.
- Build a child welfare workforce with the necessary skills and attitudes to support children's reintegration.
- Establish a case work system that supports children and families through all stages of the reintegration process.
- Coordinate and collaborate with actors working in the child protection sector, and those working in other systems, including health, education and economic strengthening, and those supporting children with disabilities.
- Recognise and support the vital role played by communities in children's reintegration.
- Work to address the root causes of initial and re-separation, such as poverty and violence.
- Develop strategies to address discrimination against groups of reintegrating children.
- Evaluate reintegration programmes, and check for/address gaps in coverage.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

For the purpose of these guidelines, the key terms have been understood as follows.

Alternative care includes formal and informal care of children outside of parental care. When alternative care is offered as a temporary measure whilst permanent solutions are sought it should have the clear purpose of offering children a protective, nurturing environment whilst efforts are made to find them permanent homes. Alternative care includes kinship care, foster care, supervised independent living and residential care (UN GA 2010).

Best interests of the child: In relation to children's care specifically, the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children articulate several factors that need to be taken into consideration in determining best interests, including:

- the importance of understanding and meeting universal child rights (as articulated by the UNCRC) and the specific needs of individual children;
- balancing children's immediate safety and well-being with their medium and longer term care and development needs;
- recognising the problems associated with frequent placement changes, and the importance of achieving permanency in care relationships;
- a consideration of children's attachments to family and communities, including the importance of keeping siblings together;
- the problems associated with care in large-scale institutions.

In assessing best interests, it is important to consider the strengths, as well as the weaknesses, of families, to ensure that maximum efforts are made to build upon strengths. This includes an assessment of relationships and not just a consideration of material needs (UN GA 2010).

Best Interest Determination: A formal process with strict procedural safeguards designed to determine the child's best interests for particularly important decisions affecting the child. It should facilitate adequate child participation without discrimination, involve decision-makers with relevant areas of expertise and balance all relevant factors in order to identify and recommend the best option (UNHCR 2008).

Case work: The process of assisting an individual child (and their family) through direct support and referral to other services needed, and the activities that case workers, social workers or other project staff carry out in working with children and families in addressing their protection concerns (McCormick 2011).

Case worker/frontline staff: Any staff or volunteer who has the main responsibility of assessing and following a child's progress through the reintegration stages (i.e. direct work with the child).

Child welfare workforce: A variety of workers – paid and unpaid, governmental and non-governmental – who staff the social service system and contribute to the care of vulnerable populations. The social service system is defined as the system of interventions, programmes and benefits that are provided by governmental, civil society and community actors to ensure the welfare and protection of socially or economically disadvantaged individuals and families (Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, currently on website).

Economic strengthening: Actions taken by governments, donors and implementers to improve livelihoods. These programmes may include skills training, loan-led or savings-led microfinance, income-generation schemes, cash transfers, job or agricultural development, cash or food-for-work, financial education, value chain development, etc. (adapted from Chaffin 2014).

Family: Families take on many different forms and may include children living with one or both of their biological or adoptive parents, children living with step parents, children living with extended family members, such as grandparents, aunts or uncles or adult siblings, and children living with families who are part of wider kinship networks (Family for Every Child 2014a).

Kafalah: The Muslim commitment to voluntarily take care of the maintenance, education and protection of a minor, in the same way as a parent would do for his/her child; it allows for the maintenance of biological bonds (ISS/IRC 2007).

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 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).

Respite care: Planned, short-term care of a child, usually based on foster or residential care, to give the child's family a break from caring for them (Tolfree 2007).

Reunification: The physical reuniting of a child and his or her family or previous caregiver with the objective of this placement becoming permanent.

Social protection: Social protection is the set of public and private policies and programmes aimed at preventing, reducing and eliminating economic and social vulnerabilities to poverty and deprivation. (UNICEF, 2012).

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ANNEX 1.

THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE GUIDELINES AND THE AGENCIES INVOLVED

The process for developing the guidelines involved the following steps.

- Updating the literature review previously carried out by the inter-agency reintegration group (BCN et al. 2013) to gather the latest information on successful reintegration processes.
- Exploring factors which contributed to successful inter-agency guidelines and feeding these factors into the development process for these guidelines.
- Developing an outline of the guidelines, followed by a two-day meeting to revise the outline.
- Consultations on the guidelines with a total of 158 children and 18 young people in three countries.
- Developing draft 1 of the guidelines and sharing for comments.
- Developing draft 2 of the guidelines and discussing during a weeklong series of meetings in Moldova and Ethiopia with a range of stakeholders involved in reintegration processes. Shorter face-to-face meetings were also held in Rwanda and Nepal.
- Developing drafts 3 and 4 of the guidelines and sharing for comments.
- Finalising the guidelines and sharing for endorsement.

Table 2 below outlines the number of agencies and individuals who commented on the guidelines. In total, 26 individuals operated at the global or regional level, and 101 at the country level. Those operating at the country level were involved in reintegration processes in over 20 countries.

Table 2: Number of agencies/groups and individuals who commented on the guidelines

Type of agency / group	Number of agencies	Number of individuals
United Nations agency	2	7
Government	8	13
Donor	3	5
Consultancy company	2	4
International NGO	19	36
National NGO	26	40
Faith-based organisation	4	20
University	2	2
Total	**66**	**127**

The process for developing the guidelines was determined by a core group of 14 agencies chaired by Family for Every Child and including representatives from the following agencies:

Better Care Network, CESVI , CPC Learning Network, ECPAT, Faith to Action Initiative, Friends International, Juconi Foundation, Maestral, Next Generation Nepal, Retrak, Save the Children, USAID, World Vision and UNICEF.

In addition, a reference group commented on the content of the guidelines. This reference group consisted of representatives from the following agencies:

Associação Brasileira Terra dos Homens, Bethany Global, Catholic Relief Services, Challenging Heights, Chab Dai, Child Fund Uganda, Children Unite, Comic Relief, CMMB-Kusamala Project, EveryChild, ECPAT-Philippines, Global Social Services Workforce Alliance, Hope and Homes for Children, ISS-Switzerland and USA, KIWOHEDE, Le Strada, Lumos, Mission for Community Development, Partnerships for Every Child Moldova, Projeto Legal, Save the Children Zambia, Railway Children, Sanlaap, Shakti Samuha, Strive Initiative, Terre des Hommes, SOS Children's Villages International and SOS Children's Villages USA, Undugu Society Kenya, World Vision, Women's Refugee Commission.

Individuals on the reference group are as following:

Rebecca Surtees – Nexus Institute, Claire Cody – University of Befordshire, Luke Samuel Bearup – Deakin University.

These guidelines have been endorsed by:

Terra dos Homens
Better Care Network
Bethany Global
CESVI
Challenging Heights
ChildFund International
Children in Distress CINDI Networking for children affected by AIDS
CPC Learning Network
ECPAT
Elevate Children Funders Group
Faith to Action Initiative
Family for every child
friends international Together, building futures.
Hayat Sende
Hope & Homes for Children
International Social Service Service Social International Servicio Social Internacional
Fundación Juconi Junto con las niñas y los niños
LUMOS Protecting Children. Providing Solutions.
Maestral
Next Generation Nepal
Partneriate pentru fiecare copil Partnerships for every child
Railway children Fighting for street children
RELAF Por el derecho a vivir en familia y comunidad
Retrak No child forced to live on the street
Sanlaap
Save the Children
SOS Children's Villages International
Society Undugu
unicef
Women's Refugee Commission
World Vision

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GUIDELINES ON
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