Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation

Cote d'Ivoire

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Key Drivers Contributing to Child-Parent Separation in Cote d'Ivoire

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Foreword

Dear readers,

This research on the key drivers of child–family separation is an initiative of SOS Children Villages Cote d'Ivoire and its partners. The purpose is to contribute to improving interventions targeting Children without parental care or at risk of losing it, and in particular, to prevent child-family separation.

The research led by an international and Ivorian researcher investigates the main reasons leading to child-family separation in Cote d'Ivoire. The findings represent an important tool for decision-makers and practitioners for two main reasons.

First and foremost, this research contributes to filling key evidence gaps on the issue of child-family separation in Côte d'Ivoire. Indeed, building a better understanding of this issue – including which children are most at risk of separation, why they are separated and how this issue is addressed – is crucial to ensuring that responses are put in place that reach those children who are most impacted and working on the most relevant issues, by offering services and support tailored to their needs.

Secondly, this study took into consideration the views of children and young people affected by child-family separation as well as other key stakeholders. The research puts a spotlight on the voices and perspectives of children, young people, and primary caregivers themselves, which have often been missing in studies related to this topic.

The outcome of the research allows us as actors in the child protection system to tailor our responses and design programmes based on evidence, reliable information and data, rather than on preconceived ideas about the drivers of child-family separation.

The research highlights necessary actions and strategies in Côte d'Ivoire to improve the situation, urging the government to:
- Through the technical ministries responsible for child protection, to develop more opportunities to improve the living conditions of vulnerable families (financial resources, parenting skills, etc.)
- Invest in quality social services for children and & families, addressing mental health, poverty, violence against children, and other issues before, during, and after crises to address and prevent the separation of children from their families
- Facilitate the implementation of the national child protection strategy 2024-2028 with 30.25% of the overall budget dedicated to children and vulnerable families
- Strengthen the collection and analysis of data related to child-family separation within the country, notably in national household surveys or national census

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The outcome of the study provides evidence for political decision-makers in the following bodies: National Assembly, Senate, Government, Presidency of the Republic, community elect leaders, Municipalities, and Regional Council, among others). The results are also intended for the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights; and at this level, this could possibly contribute to strengthening jurisprudence. Last but not the least, the results of the research will be the very useful for the Ministry of Women, Family and Children since this ministry plays a key role in child welfare and protection.

We also hope that our peer organisations (international NGOs and local CSOs) will benefit from this research as a reliable tool for their planning and advocacy actions, for the benefit of children in Côte d'Ivoire.

KOALA Oumarou, National Director of SOS Children's Villages Côte d'Ivoire.

Acknowledgements

Our research was made possible due to the considerable efforts of the SOS Children's Villages team in Cote d'Ivoire. Our gratitude goes to the national Director of SOS Children's Villages Côte d'Ivoire, Oumarou Koala. We would like to thank Kounameya Kone, Désiré Aimon, Falaye Doumbia, Benson Djatchi, Bi Edmond Foua, Iness Anin, Sévérin Kouadio, and Lynda Astrid Phoebe GUIBONY. Many thanks go to the Children Villages' Managers of Abobo and Aboisso, Nadège Tioha and Nafiassou Koume as well as the logistics support team: Daniel Aido, Christiane Akebo and Yannick Assi as well as the finance support team led by Jizreel Azokly and Adama Karaboue.

We would like to offer a very special thanks to Yannick Kra, Evidence4change Coordinator, for without his energy and enthusiasm, the research would not have been possible.

A crucial element of our research has been the partnership with the University of Grand Bassam. The University and SOS Children's Villages Cote d'Ivoire entered into an agreement that allowed for the full participation of a national researcher, N'Dri Kan David who most ably facilitated the workshops with children and young people. He was accompanied by a research student, Ms Madoman Malika Ophelia Diomande. Thanks also go to Dr N'Da Koffi, the Dean of the School of Business and Social Sciences, and Professor Saliou Toure, President of the International University of Grand Bassam, who facilitated this partnership.

Our gratitude specifically goes to the professional stakeholders who kindly participated in interviews as well as the adult family members who gave their time to attend our research workshops and share with us their knowledge and ideas.

Most importantly, we want to offer our thanks to all the children and young people who shared with us their ideas about, and understanding of, family life that helped make our research findings so rich and informative. Their voices, and their recommendations for change that will positively impact the lives of other children, young people and their families, have been a primary contribution to the conclusions in this report.

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Definitions

Abandonment	A situation in which children are anonymously left in a 'public' place by persons unknown e.g., a child is left on the steps of a mosque or in front of a hospital. or on the street.
Adoption	A child who is officially placed in the legal custody of the person adopting them 'pursuant to a final adoption order, as of which moment, for the purposes of the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, the child is considered to be in parental care'.[1]
Alternative care	Care provided for children who are not living with parents. According to the UN Guidelines, this is care that is formally arranged including foster care, kinship care and placement in small scale residential settings or, informal care. All care in residential institutions even if not formally arranged, is alternative care.
Care Leavers	Children and young people who have left alternative care
Child	A child is any person under the age of 18 years unless the law of a particular country sets the legal age for adulthood younger, as provided for under Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Child. [2]
Children without parental care	For the purposes of this report, this is children not in the care of both parents. The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children note this to be 'All children not in the overnight care of at least one of their parents, for whatever reason and under whatever circumstances.'[3]
Family based alternative care	Refers to care arrangement whereby a child is placed in the domestic environment of a family, as opposed to institutional or residential care.[4]
Formal care	'All care provided in a family environment that has been ordered by a competent administrative body or judicial authority, and all care provided in a residential environment, including in private facilities, whether or not the result of administrative or judicial measures'.[5]
Foster care	'Situations whereby children are placed by a competent authority for the purposes of alternative care in the domestic environment of a family, other than children's own family, that has been selected, qualified, approved, and supervised for providing such care.'[6] This also applies to a formally arranged placement with family members i.e. formal kinship foster care..
Gatekeeping	A process by which the situation of a child is carefully assessed and decisions made about protection and care that is in their best interests. This requires adherence to the 'necessity' principle; no child should be separated from parental care and placed in alternative care unless necessary for their protection. Children should be placed in the most suitable alternative care, which should not include residential institutions, that meets their needs. This is a temporary measure and all efforts made to reunite a child with their parents, or other primary caregiver, as quickly as possible.
Informal care	Any private arrangement provided in a family environment, whereby the child is looked after on an ongoing or indefinite basis by relatives or friends also known as informal kinship care, or by others in their individual capacity. The arrangement is at the initiative of the child, his/her parents, or other person without this arrangement having been ordered by an administrative or judicial authority or a duly accredited body.[7]
Institutional care	'Large residential care facilities,'[8] where children are looked after in any public or private facility, staffed by salaried carers or volunteers working predetermined hours/shifts, and based on collective living arrangements, with a large capacity.[9]

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[1] United Nations General Assembly 2009
[2] based on Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989
[3] United Nations General Assembly 2009
[4] European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care 2012
[5] United Nations General Assembly 2009
[6] ibid.
[7] ibid.
[8] ibid.
[9] NGO Working Group on Children Without Parental Care 2013

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Kafala	A means of providing care for children as recognised under Islamic law and in Article 20 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. This may include providing financial and material support to a child in parental or alternative care, or may be an arrangement closer to adoption or fostering where a child is taken to live with another family[10]
Kinship care	'Family-based care within the child's extended family or with close friends of the family known to the child, whether formal or informal in nature.'[11] Informal kinship care is 'any private arrangement provided in a family environment, whereby the child is looked after on an ongoing or indefinite basis by relatives or friends … at the initiative of the child, his/her parents or other person without this arrangement having been ordered by an administrative or judicial authority or a duly accredited body.'[12] Formal kinship care is care in the same settings ordered by an administrative or judicial authority or duly accredited body.[13]
Orphan	For purposes of this report the term orphan refers to a child whose both parents have died
Other primary caregiver	Legal or customary primary caregiver of a child who is not their parent.
Reintegration	The process of a separated child making the transition back into his or her family[14]
Relinquishment	A process by which a parent/s or others with or without parental authority decide not to raise a child and hand them over to another 'carer' e.g., a child voluntarily taken to a residential facility. Relinquishment unlike abandonment is when the identity of the mother or father, or other caregivers are known.
Residential care	'Care provided in any non-family based group setting, such as places of safety for emergency care, transit centres in emergency situations, and all other short- and long-term residential care facilities, including group homes.'[15] A distinction is often made between residential institutions (described above) and small group homes. Small group homes are settings in which children cared for in small groups, usually of up to four to six children at most'[16], with consistent caregivers responsible for their care, in a community setting. This form of care is different from foster care in that it takes place outside of the natural 'domestic environment' of the family, usually in facilities that have been especially designed and/or designated for the care of groups of children. [17]
Separated children	Children who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.[18]
Small residential care settings	A 'public or private, registered, non-family-based arrangement, providing temporary care to a group of 4 to 6 children, staffed by highly trained, salaried carers, applying a key-worker system, with a high caregiver-to-child ratio that allows for individualized attention for each child, based on the professionally developed case plan, which takes into account the voice of the child.'[19]
Street connected children	Children living and/or working on the streets
Violence against children	For this report the term 'violence against children' will be used to denote all forms of abuse and exploitation including and physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, serious neglect and deprivation.[20]

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[10] Cantwell and Jacomy-Vite 2011

[11] United Nations General Assembly 2009

[12] ibid. Article 29b.i.

[13] ibid.

[14] Inter-agency group on Children's Reintegration 2016

[15] ibid. Article III, 29c. iv.

[16] UNICEF 2020

[17] United Nations General Assembly 2019

[18] United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child 2005

[19] UNICEF 2020

[20] Please see: https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/

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Young person	There is no legal or internationally agreed definition of 'young person'. The United Nations for statistical purposes, has defined 'youth', as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years.[21] In some countries, a young person is someone up to the age of 34 years (as for example, Cote d'Ivoire). For the purposes of this report a young person is defined as persons aged 18 to 25 years.

Glossary of terms

Adverse Childhood Experiences	ACEs
Demographic and Health Survey	DHS
Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting	FGM/C
Non-Governmental Organisations	NGOs
Orphans and vulnerable children	OVC
Trauma Informed Practice	TIP
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	UNCRC
UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children	UN Guidelines
World Health Organisation	WHO

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[21] Please see: https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf

1. Background

Clearly enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the right of a child, 'for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality', to 'grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.'[22] This is further endorsed in the 2019 UNGA Resolution, Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children[23] and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (UN Guidelines)[24]. In relation to alternative care, the handbook written to accompany the UN Guidelines, 'Moving Forward',[25] refers to the important principles of 'necessity' and 'suitability'. These principles recognise the primacy of preventing separation and removal of a child from the care of their parents. A further important premise is no actions should deprive a child of parental care unless it has been rigorously assessed as a necessary safeguarding measure. All decisions and actions must always be in a child's best interest. The UN Guidelines echo the UNCRC in highlighting the importance of efforts being primarily 'directed to enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents, or when appropriate, other close family members.'[26] To this end, the 'State should ensure that families have access to forms of support in the caregiving role.'[27]

Over recent years, researchers have made efforts to gather information about children living in 'vulnerable'[28] situations and risk of separation from parental care, as well as on the efficacy of family strengthening.[29] However, these studies often highlight a lack of information, due in part, to inadequate child protection data management systems that fail to gather information on the reasons why children are in alternative care, or at risk of being so.[30] As a result, there are perceived gaps in evidence that would help inform the development of effective universal and specialist programmes and services to address the underlying drivers of child-parents separation.

Studies have also examined the detrimental impact of adverse experiences in childhood, including separation of a child from parents, and extended family, as well as the impact of placement in alternative care.[31] Such studies illustrate the way these events can have harmful life-long consequences for children. However, despite efforts to develop national child protection systems that encompass the principles of 'gatekeeping'[32] and prevention of child-parents separation, children across the world continue to lose parental care. Furthermore, studies suggest many children

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[22] United Nations General Assembly 1989
[23] United National General Assembly 2019
[24] United Nations General Assembly 2009
[25] Cantwell et al. 2012
[26] ibid.
[27] ibid.
[28] Nankervis et al. 2011; OECD 2017
[29] Delap 2013; EveryChild 2009; Laumann 2015; Lodder et al. 2021; Namey & Brown 2018; Ortea et al. 2022; Wilke et al. 2022
[30] Martin & Zulaika 2016; Petrowski et al. 2017; Willi et al. 2020
[31] Bruskas & Tessin 2013; De Swart et al. 2012; Gale 2018; Howard et al. 2023; Simkiss 2019; Stein 2005; Stein 2012
[32] Casky, and Gale 2015

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experience separation from their parents that could have been prevented.[33] It is such findings that highlight the need for urgent action to prevent all unnecessary placement of children in alternative care.

Drivers of separation are thought to be complex and varied with studies placing emphasis on differing antecedents.[34] To develop effective and relevant strategies and programmes of service delivery that help prevent the unnecessary placement of children in alternative care in different parts of the world, it is essential to have a clearer understanding of which drivers are contributing to child-parents separation in differing contexts. And it is particularly important to collate such evidence by listening to the views of children, young people, and adult family members. This study has been prompted therefore, by a recognition that 'more research is needed to understand the effective approaches to antecedents to placement'[35] in alternative care. This is coupled with an understanding that the most detailed information that currently exists overwhelmingly originates in high income countries and the need for further primary evidence of risk factors as relevant to different countries, contexts, and socio-ecological systems.[36] It is with this understanding, that the research was undertaken in Cote d'Ivoire.

2. Aim and Scope of the Study

The primary aim of the research was to address gaps in evidence relating to the key drivers that contribute to the separation of children from their parents and placement in alternative care.

To collate this evidence, the following questions were considered:
- What are the key challenges facing families that create conditions in which child-parents separation and placement in alternative care is more likely to occur?
- Who are the children already in alternative care?
- What are some of the gaps in multi-level and multi-sectoral approaches and service delivery that could help prevent child-parents separation?
- What are the ideas of children, young people, family members, and other key stakeholders, about the current support to families and how it could be improved?

Alternative care is recognised in the UN Guidelines as both informal and formal care.[37] The difference being the former is a private arrangement that has not been ordered by an administrative or judicial authority or other accredited body. Traditionally, alternative care includes a variety of settings including kinship care, foster care, other forms of family-based placements, as well as residential care, either in a small group setting or in large institutions, and supervised independent living arrangements.

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[33] Chaitkin et al. 2017
[34] Bryson et al. 2017; Family for Every Child 2014; Laumann 2015
[35] Wilke et al. 2022
[36] Gale 2018; Martin & Zulaika 2016; Petrowski et al. 2017
[37] United Nations General Assembly 2009

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We realise that around the world, interchangeable definitions are being used in relation to children in alternative care. Some of the literature refers to separation of a child from parents or another primary caregiver or legal guardian. Some refers to the process of separating children from their parents as 'child-family' separation. Indeed references to separation from parents and from family are both used in the UNCRC. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the cultural construct and concept of 'family' can denote different household arrangements including the norm of different members of the extended family being considered a child's primary caregiver through informal or formal arrangements. As Kendrick highlighted, over 'recent years, there have been significant developments in sociological and anthropological thinking in terms of the nature of family and intimate relationships'[38] with growing acceptance of differing concepts of what form a 'family' takes in different geographical and cultural contexts.

The UN Guidelines do, however, clearly define children in alternative care as those being no longer in the care of a parent/s.[39] In this regard, Article 9 of the UNCRC also notes how 'States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine…that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child'.[40] In addition, Article 3 of the UN Guidelines require efforts to be primarily directed toward 'enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents'. Furthermore, Article 32 of the Guidelines clearly states how 'preventing the need for alternative care' should first and foremost be through 'promoting parental care'. This includes policies to 'promote the right to have a relationship with both parents', and to, 'strengthen parents' ability to care for their children' (Article 33). Most importantly, we are aware of research that reflects the voices of children and their clearly articulated wish to remain with, or to return to, their 'parents'. [OBJ]

Taking the differing guidance and terminology into consideration, it was decided to use the term 'child-parents separation' in this report in reference to situations where children lose parental care i.e., being separated from both parents and are placed in alternative care.

While discourse on the prevention of placing children in alternative care has been explored in previous research and reports,[41] our preliminary desk review found very little evidence that this topic had been directly informed by the voices and perspectives of children, young people, parents, and other primary caregivers themselves. Neither has the available research sufficiently provided for these voices to be jointly heard from different countries and contexts across the world. It was considered important therefore, that the scope of this study included efforts to address these gaps by collating information from different stakeholders across diverse socio-economic locations, and most especially, from children and young people. To this end, participatory research methodology

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[38] Kendrick 2012
[39] The UN Guidelines define children without parental care are all children not in the overnight care of at least one of their parents, for whatever reason and under whatever circumstances
[40] United Nations General Assembly 1989
[41] Casky & Gale. 2015; Family for Every Child 2014

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has been developed with the support of children and young people in El Salvador and Lebanon. This allowed the opportunity for children, young people, and adult family members, living in different socio-political and cultural environments in a further six low, medium and high income countries, including Cote d'Ivoire, to participate in exploring the drivers that contribute to child-parents separation and placement of children in alternative care. The knowledge of professionals with a responsibility to protect and support children and families in these countries has also been an important contribution to the collated evidence.

The research was not intended to comment on the situation of children whilst in alternative care. Neither was it expected to provide an evaluation of the services provided by SOS Children's Villages in each country. Other topics not covered by the research include the situation of migrant, asylum seeker, refugee unaccompanied and separated children, or children who are trafficked. We do recognise their plight however and draw attention to some of the existing documentation on the reasons children affected by migration become separated from parental care.[42] Furthermore, although important, as the focus of our study has been prevention of separation, issues related to reintegration and adoption are not considered. The situation of children deprived of liberty through placement in detention was also not included in the research.

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[42] International Organization for Migration 2015; International Social Services 2017; Marcus et al. 2020

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3. Executive Summary

3.1. Background

Clearly enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the right of a child, 'for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality', to 'grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.'[43] This is further endorsed in the 2019 UNGA Resolution, Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children[44] and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (UN Guidelines)[45]. Furthermore, the handbook written to accompany the UN Guidelines, 'Moving Forward',[46] refers to the important principles of 'necessity' and 'suitability' which recognise the importance of preventing unnecessary separation and removal of a child from the care of their parents. A further important premise contained within international guidance is that no actions should deprive a child of parental care unless rigorously assessed as being a necessary safeguarding measure. All decisions and actions must always be in a child's best interest and the 'State should ensure that families have access to forms of support in the caregiving role.'[47]

Over recent years, researchers have made efforts to gather information about children living in 'vulnerable'[48] situations and at risk of being separated from parental care, as well as on the efficacy of family strengthening.[49] However, there are still perceived gaps in the evidence that would help inform the development of effective universal and specialist programmes and services to address the underlying drivers of child-parents separation. With this in mind, this study set out with an aim of helping to address the need for further research 'to understand the effective approaches to antecedents to placement'[50] in alternative care. The study was also built on the understanding that the most detailed information that currently exists on this topic overwhelmingly originates in high income countries thus leaving gaps in knowledge and primary evidence as relevant to different contexts, and socio-ecological systems.[51] It is with this background, that the research was undertaken in Cote d'Ivoire with the aim of collating evidence in consideration of the following questions:

- What are the key challenges facing families that create conditions in which child-parents separation and placement in alternative care is more likely to occur?
- Who are the children already in alternative care?

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[43] United Nations General Assembly 1989
[44] United National General Assembly 2019
[45] United Nations General Assembly 2009
[46] Cantwell et al. 2012
[47] ibid.
[48] Nankervis et al. 2011; OECD 2017
[49] Delap 2013; EveryChild 2009; Laumann 2015; Lodder et al. 2021; Namey & Brown 2018; Ortea et al. 2022; Wilke et al. 2022
[50] Wilke et al. 2022
[51] Gale 2018; Martin & Zulaika 2016; Petrowski et al. 2017

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- What are some of the gaps in multi-level and multi-sectoral approaches and service delivery that could help prevent child-parents separation?
- What are the ideas of children, young people, family members, and other key stakeholders, about the current support to families and how it could be improved?

We realise that around the world, interchangeable definitions are being used in relation to children in alternative care and their separation from parents and family. The UN Guidelines clearly defines children in alternative care as those being no longer in the care of a parent/s.[52] Article 9 of the UNCRC also notes how 'States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents…except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine…that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child'.[53] Furthermore, Article 32 of the Guidelines clearly states how 'preventing the need for alternative care' should first and foremost be through 'promoting parental care'. This includes policies to 'promote the right to have a relationship with both parents', and to, 'strengthen parents' ability to care for their children' (Article 33). Most importantly, we are aware of research that reflects the voices of children and their clearly articulated wish to remain with, or to return to, their 'parents'.[54] With the differing guidance and terminology being taken into consideration, it was decided to use the term 'child-parents separation' in this research report in reference to situations where children lose parental care i.e., being separated from both parents and are placed in alternative care.

The research was not intended to comment on the situation of children whilst in alternative care. Furthermore, additional topics that have not been covered by the research include the situation of migrant, asylum seeker, refugee unaccompanied and separated children, or children who are trafficked although we recognise the challenges they face.[55] Furthermore, issues related to reintegration and adoption were not considered along with the situation of children deprived of liberty through placement in detention.

3.2. Research methodology

Our preliminary desk review found very little evidence that the topic of prevention of child-parents separation had been directly informed by the voices and perspectives of children, young people, parents, and other primary caregivers themselves. Neither has the available research sufficiently provided for these voices to be jointly heard from different countries and contexts across the world. It was considered important therefore, that the research methodology and scope of this study included steps to address these gaps by collating information from different stakeholders across diverse socio-economic locations, and most especially, from children and young people.

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[52] The UN Guidelines define children without parental care are all children not in the overnight care of at least one of their parents, for whatever reason and under whatever circumstances

[53] United Nations General Assembly 1989

[54] SOS Children's Villages 2020

[55] International Organization for Migration 2013; International Organization for Migration 2015; International Social Services 2017; Marcus et al. 2020

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We recognise the absolute importance of children and young people having a say in decisions affecting their lives.[56] To this end, participatory research methodology was initially developed with the support of children and young people in El Salvador and Lebanon. The results of their work informed the development of the research questions along with the methodology for participatory research workshops. This culminated in the writing of a series of research workshop handbooks that were then used to guide the participatory research with children, young people, and adult family members living in differing socio-political and cultural environments in different countries, including Cote d'Ivoire. The methodology allowed for the exploration of drivers that contribute to child-parents separation and placement of children in alternative care.

In total 133 participants took part in research workshops in two locations in Cote d'Ivoire, one urban and one rural. This included:

- 49 children aged 13 – 15 years old living with their own families (in vulnerable[57] circumstances) (26 girls and 23 boys)
- 36 young people aged 20-24 years old who had left alternative care (care leavers). (20 girls and 16 boys)
- 48 adult members of families living in vulnerable situations (41 female and 7 male)

A total of 11 semi-structured interviews allowed for the gathering of information from professional stakeholders including social workers, child protection workers, alternative care providers, lawyers, and providers of family support programmes. The information they provided has formed an important contribution to the research findings. Furthermore, an online survey was sent out to professionals seeking their understanding of reasons children are placed in alternative care. In total information from 50 responses has been used in the evidence and conclusions reached in our study.

3.3. Research findings, conclusions and recommendations

Research findings, conclusions and recommendations have been informed by the information children, young people, and adult family members provided during research workshops. These findings have been triangulated with the knowledge and understanding provided by professionals holding responsibility to protect children and support families, as well as information gathered during a desk review.

The research framework, analysis of findings, and development of recommendations have been guided by the UNCRC and the 2019 United Nations General Assembly Resolution, 'The promotion and protection of the rights of children' as well as the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. Recommendations are therefore addressed in reference to children's rights. Although these rights are indivisible, and all are essential to the well-being of children, we have chosen to develop

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[56] African Committee of Experts on the Rights & Welfare of the Child 2022; Clark and Statham 2005
[57] For the purposes of the research, a definition of 'vulnerable' was extracted from: Bauer & Wiezorek (2016) Vulnerable Families: Reflections on a Difficult Category. Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal, Vol 4, pp.11-28.

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recommendations based on a certain number of rights thought most applicable to the findings of the research and prevention of child-parents separation.

We recognise that the responsibility to address drivers of child-parents separation and prevention of placement of children in alternative care is primarily that of the Government of Cote d'Ivoire through the provision of national, regional and local services. To this end, our research has taken steps to consider some of the gaps in such provision. We also recognise that UN and other international bodies play a significant role in service provision alongside national and international NGO, CBOs and private enterprises, and these differing roles and responsibilities should be a consideration when reading the conclusions below.

A summary of findings includes analysis of the information provided by children, young people, adult family members, and interviewees, complimented by findings of a desk review, indicating violence against children is a prime factor leading to placement of children in alternative care in Côte d'Ivoire. Violence against children is described by UNICEF as taking many forms, 'including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and may involve neglect or deprivation.'[58] Other factors that render children vulnerable to protection violations in Cote d'Ivoire, include child labour, being street connected often after fleeing dysfunctional households, and being victims of harmful practices such as FGM/Cutting, forced and early marriage, and teenage pregnancy. Belief that some children may be possessed by evil spirits and labelled witches or wizards, including children with disability, is also a concerning factor.

Further causes, of family separation and possible placement in alternative care include issues related to disability (of child and/or parent), substance misuse, and absence of one or both parents for varying reasons including divorce/separation. Many of these drivers of child-parents separation may be directly or indirectly caused by issues related to poverty and are inextricably linked to poor access to basic and specialist services. We consider one of the most important findings is the need to urgently address the inter-generational aspect of violence, and of poor parenting ability, that are contributing to the perpetuation of family breakdown and separation.

It is also our understanding that there is a need to improve all elements of the national child protection system. Although the Government of Cote d'Ivoire has taken some steps to improve the normative framework, gaps remain in the legislation and policies for child protection as well as insufficient detail in strategic plans and statutory guidance. In addition, gaps have been identified in education and training of the social services workforce along with other professions involved in responding to and supporting families. This includes improved capacity in the use and understanding of child protection case management/gatekeeping tools allowing for more accurate child protection assessments and informed decision making. Insufficient numbers of social workers and child protection officers has

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[58] Please see: https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/

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also been noted along with the lack of resources necessary for professionals to effectively undertake their roles and responsibilities.

Protection
Articles of the UNCRC that afford children the right to protection include, safeguarding from violence, abuse and neglect (Article 19 and Article 37(a)), from sexual exploitation and abuse (Article 34) and, from sale, trafficking and abduction (Article 11, Article 35, Article 36, Article 39).

In particular, Article 19 requires:

> States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Recognition is given to Government efforts over recent years to better understand the manifestation of violence in Cote d'Ivoire through various studies. However, a conclusion of our research is that the continuing violence against children is a driver of family breakdown that can lead to child-parents separation. Children and young people, along with other research participants, identified the presence of violence within families, and their communities. They specifically wrote about experiencing and witnessing violence in the home. Violence in the home is also resulting in children running away from their families or placing them in positions that could activate a referral to social workers and child protection officers or come in contact with the police. This includes children who directly experience violence and serious neglect, as well as those who become street connected, are involved in child labour, exposed to drugs and alcohol, and become involved in other situations that place them at risk.

The high prevalence of violence against girls and women is a concern. This is in part, attributed to a culture of male dominance. Domestic violence, which is predominantly experienced by women, is a factor contributing to risks of children being placed in alternative care as for example, when separated from parents as a result of a breakdown in a marriage or partnership. Victims of domestic violence are facing difficult situations particularly when they have no-one to turn to, no support network, and nowhere to go that is safe for themselves and their children. In part, domestic violence is also resulting in women in particular becoming single-headed households with all the pressures and challenges this can bring. Research shows how female-headed households face specific challenges in terms of poverty, lack of employment opportunities and child care, and the stress of coping alone. Struggling with such issues, especially if also lacking support can, as in households with both parents, mean loss of coping mechanism that may spiral into poor and broken relationships between children and caregivers. Children are also becoming direct victims of domestic violence thus prompting child protection authorities to respond and remove them from parental-care.

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It should not be overlooked that some men are also struggling within the family home, especially with societal expectations that place responsibility on them to adequately provide for their families. This can also affect their mental health which, as previously mentioned in this study, can result in violence against children and partners. Men also need support that will help them maintain strong and caring family relationships.

Inter-generational violence is a particularly worrying phenomenon in Cote d'Ivoire. It has been recognised that violence can be a learnt behaviour[59] through 'observation, learning and imitation'[60] of adults, and/or being a victim.[61] Our perception is, with each generation in which families in Côte d'Ivoire repeatedly experience and witness violence and lack strong attachment to each other, that ongoing family dysfunction and breakdown will continue. It means within each generation there is the concern of an ever weakening ability to parent in a loving and caring and protective manner in some households. This can then lead to acts of violence, either between adults, and/or towards children.

Although not always directly related to issues of violence and neglect, children are also living in alternative care because they are orphans or abandoned. Children with disabilities are also being placed in alternative care when parents are unable, or do not want to, provide the care they need.

Recommendations
- There is an urgent need for investment in violence prevention programmes for adults and for children to help break the inter-generational cycle of violent behaviour. These programmes should be systematically applied in an ongoing and sustainable manner. To this end, provision of violence prevention programmes that reach children at an early age could be built into the school curriculum and comprise not just one-off 'civic' lessons, but continuous learning that promotes positive messages and behaviour throughout a child's school life. Violence prevention could also be built into family strengthening programmes that work with all members of the family.

- Article 2 of the UNCRC guarantees children protection from discrimination. Violence prevention programmes should include efforts to combat factors that contribute to the presence of abuse and exploitation including discrimination, stigmatisation, and lack of equality. They should incorporate clear messages that promote tolerance and understanding. Issues of gender equity, discrimination against persons with disabilities or from different religious, ethnic, or other specific backgrounds, acceptance of those identifying as LGBTQI+ are examples of topics such programmes should include.

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[59] Moylan et al. 2010

[60] Conteras & del Carmen Cano 2016:44

[61] Conteras & del Carmen Cano 2016; Bevans & Higgins 2002

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- To help inform policies and programmes that promote safe and united families, all professionals who hold responsibility for the well-being of children would benefit from a better understanding of the factors that are contributing to violence in the home in Cote d'Ivoire.

- In order to help break the cycle of inter-generational aspect of poor parenting ability, professionals would benefit from a better understanding of such topics as attachment theory, including the impact of separation from loved ones that children face when placed in alternative care, the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs),[62] and trauma-informed practice.[63] These topics should also be incorporated into programmes for parents and other caregivers as prevention of violence also requires sustained actions working closely with families to bring about an understanding of the harm being created when they use violence and finding ways to address such abusive situations.

- Those living in situations of domestic violence and gender-based violence, most especially girls and women, need someone to turn as for example, access to counselling and psychosocial services provided within a caring and safe environment. When rejected by extended family and the wider community, and with no-where else to go, crisis shelter centres, and other support services, for women and their children could offer immediate protection and help prevent situations from deteriorating to the stage where children may be separated and placed in alternative care. Access to child day care and after school clubs would also provide some respite for women. The building of stronger supportive social networks is also important.

- Men should be actively involved in family strengthening and other programmes that help them understand the importance of, and how to maintain, strong and caring family relationships. This should include awareness on issues of gender parity and prevention of domestic violence.

- Article 42 of the UNCRC requires States Parties to make the principles and provisions in the Convention 'widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.' Efforts to increase the awareness of child rights amongst the general public as well as the harm to children when they lack love, affection and are victims of violence - including impact of separation from parental care - can help strengthen the protective environment in the home and community. Messages might also include information about risk of violence and exploitation children face as for example, if spending time on the streets, engaged in child labour, and being exposed to drugs and alcohol.

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[62] Please see: https://www.eif.org.uk/report/adverse-childhood-experiences-what-we-know-what-we-dont-know-and-what-should-happen-next. See also: SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, University of Strathclyde 2021; SOS Children's Villages International 2022
[63] SOS Children's Villages International 2022 Safe

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Adequate standard of living and well-being

Article 27 of the UNCRC requires States Parties to recognise the right of every child to a 'standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.' The Article also calls on States Parties to take appropriate measures to support and assist parents with their responsibility toward children and 'shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.' Other articles within the UNCRC also include a right to health (Article 24), education (Article 28 & 29) and survival and development (6).

The 2019 United Nations General Assembly resolution[64] on the 'Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child' calls on States to 'improve the situation of children living in poverty, in particular extreme poverty, deprived of adequate food and nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, with limited or no access to basic physical and mental health-care services, shelter, education, participation and protection' (Article 1). Furthermore, the resolution clearly says that,

> financial and material poverty, or conditions directly and uniquely imputable to such poverty, never should be the only justification for the removal of a child from the care of his or her parents or primary caregivers and legal guardians, for receiving a child into alternative care or for preventing his or her reintegration, but should be seen as a signal for the need to provide appropriate support to their family, benefiting the child directly.

We have observed how issues related to poverty are a driver contributing to children's placement in alternative care in Cote d'Ivoire. Poverty is an inter-generational as well as a multi-dimensional issue with measurements of poverty taking into account not only financial means, but other factors that contribute to well-being.[65] Concerns raised by children, young people and adult family members during our research signalled many areas of their lives in which they are struggling with issues related to poverty. Our research findings also suggest a correlation between the ability to face such daily challenges as providing food, adequate shelter, paying utility bills, sending children to school, and finding adequately renumerated employment etc., with stress and tension within households. Costs of medicines and health services are also contributing to worry and concern. Apart from specific projects, often reliant on funds from such donors as USAID, there are few national social safety net programmes for citizens of Côte d'Ivoire. This is compounded by the absence of adequate access to basic and specialist services for many. Persons with disabilities particularly face multiple challenges including issues of exclusion that further compound their ability to access already scarce basic and specialist support services. As a result, the ongoing challenges facing parents can exacerbate

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[64] United Nations General Assembly Resolution 'Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child', December 2019 'A/74/395

[65] Please see: https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/multidimensional-poverty-measure#:~:text=The%20Multidimensional%20Poverty%20Measure%20(MPM,the%20%242.15%20international%20poverty%20line; https://ophi.org.uk/video-poverty-in-el-salvador-from-the-perspective-of-the-protagonists/

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feelings of distress, anger, poor mental health, and for some, an inability to cope. This may even lead to violence against children.

Findings also suggest the need for greater support for families and communities in rural areas. It is understood that violence and the breakdown in marriages/partnerships and family relationships in villages, is resulting in some women fleeing with or without their children, to the cities where they end up facing additional hardships. Some are also running away from such issues as FGM/Cutting and forced early marriage. They move to cities, particularly when lacking support from family and community networks, with the belief they will find more opportunities in larger urban conurbations. Though this is often not the case. In this respect, one concern is the focus of some NGOs on more reactive programmes that are based in urban settings rather than preventative services in more rural areas.

Although we have seen how issues related to poverty contribute to family breakdown and the presence of violence, nevertheless, it is recognised that there are families living in very difficult circumstances who are supportive and caring of one another and create a safe environment for children. This illustrates how strong loving relationships are an important factor in helping families stand up to the impact of poverty and other shocks experienced by households. And this in turn can contribute to a violence free household.

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Recommendations
- It is beyond the remit of this report to provide detailed recommendations as to government efforts to strengthen the country in terms of economics. It would be possible however, for different actors to instigate advocacy for change and share information that would help government policy makers, and others, gain a clearer understanding of efforts needed to prevent children's placement in alternative care. Especially information that takes into account the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty and the impact this has on families. This requires awareness raising that informs the establishment of an evidence based multi-sectoral and family-centred approach to the design, development and delivery of support to families with the understanding it is often more than one pathway or issue that contributes to family breakdown. One specific focus of such advocacy should include the development and availability of fully functioning of social protection systems that reach all those in need of safety nets.

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- Helping families address the many challenges they are facing requires closer multi-sectoral cooperation and improved coordination between Government and non-governmental bodies and agencies, UN entities, academics, faith-based leaders, the private sector, and donors, including those responsible for education, health, security, social protection and social welfare, justice, and child protection. There should be a concerted effort together, and within each organisation, body, or department, to assesses and recognise where each can most effectively contribute whether it be direct service provision, advocacy to effect change, signposting so that families know how and where to receive the support they need, fundraising, or even leading/supporting such coordinated response. Organisations should also look at the breadth of their outreach to ensure they are reaching vulnerable families including those residing in hard to reach and rural areas.

- Families need informed and coordinated access to service provision in a way that will address all the inter-related challenges they face. This should be available universally to address the concern that support often comes too late and so that vulnerability of families might be prevented. To this end consideration should be given to providing families with signposting to basic and specialist services as well as ensuring joined-up provision in a way that overcomes barriers of access e.g. access to all support coordinated in one location rather that family members having to move from agency to agency to agency to resolve their problems. In some countries for example, this is sometimes called a 'one-stop shop'. [66]

- Supporting families undertake the responsibility they seek to provide for everyone in the household could include increased access to sustainable income generation schemes and help in obtaining stable, well remunerated employment. This should be linked with the need for additional and easily available and free adult education programmes and other capacity building and training opportunities, especially those related to improved literacy for women. Such economic and training programmes require highly skilled facilitation and should be undertaken by organisations that have the particular focus and specialism to implement them.

- Article 18 of the UNCRC requires States to 'take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.' Affordable, or preferably free, day care for children would help women in particular find their way into the work force. It could also provide respite for those struggling with household responsibilities, are overwhelmed by challenges of everyday life, and would benefit from help in alleviating any pressure building up within families. This includes day care for infants as well as after-school provision.

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[66] Please see: https://www.undp.org/botswana/news/undp-supports-establishment-one-stop-shop-public-services-botswana And: https://www.undp.org/kazakhstan/stories/one-stop-shop-window-problem-solver-people-difficult-life-situations

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- Increased efforts are needed to ensure access to free health care services and/or provision of national health insurance schemes. This includes a particular need for readily accessible psychosocial and mental health services and counselling programmes. The latter should also be a consideration in the delivery of family strengthening programmes.

- Children should not be placed in alternative care solely for the reason of poverty. Alternative care should only be used when absolutely necessary for children in need of protection. There is also a need for further in-depth investigation and the use of evidence applied to developing legislation, policies and strategies that refocuses the funds currently used to run residential institutions toward programmes that allow children to remain in their own homes. There should be concrete and timely plans for the elimination of all residential institutions in Cote d'Ivoire.

Support with parenting

The preamble to the UNCRC states that the 'family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community'. This requires States to provide parents, and other primary caregivers, with the support needed so that children have the best protection and opportunities in life.

Children and young people feel happy when they have parents that love, respect and understand them. They wrote about the importance of parents being good role models. They want to feel loved, cared for, trusted, respected by their parents, have better communication within the family, and to live in an environment where there is unity, support and happiness When asked why families reach a situation where placement of children in care is a consideration, interviewees drew attention to lack of harmony and dysfunction in the family due to what they consider to be 'poor' parenting skills. They see the lack of parenting skills as a significant factor related to deterioration of child-parents relationships which in turn, may ultimately lead to violence against, or serious neglect of, children.

Interviewees also identified how lack of positive parenting skills is not only impacted by socio-economic circumstances as described above but can be an inter-generational phenomenon. Findings in our research indicate the negative experience some parents had during their own childhood is impacting their own ability to parent, as well as having a detrimental effect on other aspects of their life. One outcome being an inability to maintain harmonious, unified, supportive relationships in the home leading to family breakdown, and even the manifestation of violence. In relation to this situation, some professionals have recognised the lack of understanding of such topics as trauma-informed practice, and the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).[67] They do understand however, that violence, rejection, lack of love, care and attention can have a life-long impact on social, emotional, educational and physical development and would like the skills and knowledge to help address this situation.

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[67] Please see: https://www.eif.org.uk/report/adverse-childhood-experiences-what-we-know-what-we-dont-know-and-what-should-happen-next

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Many of the recommendations in this report will contribute to supporting those parents who are struggling with their role to better protect and care for their children. Below however, are additional specific recommendations towards achieving this objective.

Recommendations

- As with previous recommendations, actions are needed that will break any inter-generational cycle of poor parenting. This requires consideration of parenting programmes that take a holistic and family-centred approach and incorporate such topics as attachment theory, the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs),[68] and trauma-informed practice.

- It is important that professionals working with families are in receipt of training, knowledge and understanding that prevent them taking decisions based on negative social and cultural norms and beliefs and immediately classifying parents as being 'bad' parents when something goes wrong in the home. This requires a deeper understanding of the different factors impacting parents and their ability, family dynamics, what is necessary to maintain harmonious, unified, supportive relationships in the home, and ways to build on existing resilience and coping mechanisms.

Disability

Children with disabilities have the right to enjoy 'a full and decent life in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community (Article 23 of the UNCRC). Also contained within Article 23 of the UNCRC is provision of special care and assistance to ensure children with disabilities have, 'access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities.

All the issues covered in the report and in this conclusion, section apply equally to children with disabilities. However, there are additional risks that persons with disabilities in Cote d'Ivoire face. This includes serious concerns regarding the impact of stigma and discrimination. As a result, and due to lack of suitable investment, they face additional barriers when accessing basic and specialist services. There is also a lack of programmes that offer not just material but also emotional support to families. In addition, other risks that are heightened in the case of children with disabilities include those of violence, abandonment or placement in residential institutions that are segregated by the form of disability. Children whose parents are disabled are also vulnerable to placement in alternative care.

Recommendations

- Family support programmes should ensure the inclusion of families that have members with disabilities.

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[68] Please see: https://www.eif.org.uk/report/adverse-childhood-experiences-what-we-know-what-we-dont-know-and-what-should-happen-next.See also: SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, University of Strathclyde 2021; SOS Children's Villages International 2022

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- Violence prevention programmes, as previously mentioned, should inherently incorporate the subject of protection of children with disabilities.

- Advocacy and awareness raising programmes should promote an understanding and acceptance of disability, both within families and amongst the general public. Public information campaigns should speak about fair and respectful treatment of people with disabilities, the harm of stigmatisation, and topics that would help prevent violence and exclusion. Advocacy programmes by and with people with disabilities are important and help bring a specific focus to improving services, opportunities, and support.

- Inclusion in schools should not just offer children with disabilities an equal opportunity to receive an education, but they should also be a place of security.

- Children with disabilities, as with other children, should not be placed in residential institutions. Consideration should be given to any specialist support necessary to prevent the placement of children with disabilities in alternative care.

Education

Article 28 of the UNCRC requires States Parties to 'recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity'. States Parties must also 'take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.' Furthermore, Article 23(3) recognises education should be provided free of charge in a manner that responds to the special needs of a disabled child. Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[69] calls on States Parties to 'recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and based on equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an 'inclusive education system at all levels and life long learning'. [70]

Participants in our research illustrate the importance that is placed on education and the manner in which it is highly significant when preparing children for responsible adulthood. Our research suggests there are many children missing out on education due to associated costs e.g. uniforms, books etc. Issues of child labour, early marriage and teenage pregnancy may also be factors that mean children, and girls in particular, are leaving school earlier than necessary.

Not only is school education necessary for future well-being, as for example, gaining employment and an engaged member of society, but interviewees, as with previous research, suggest higher

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[69] United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006
[70] ibid. Article 24

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educational achievement may also be related to positive parenting, not least because of an increased understanding and skills to relate to, support, and communicate with others, including children.[71]

Recommendations

- Investment is needed in high quality and provision of free public education, including being free from costs of fees, materials and uniforms and other associated expenses, should be made available in all local communities.

- No child should be placed in a residential institution for reasons of gaining access to education.

Play and leisure

UNCRC Article 31 of the UNCRC directs States to the right of children to rest and leisure and encourages access to cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity. This right is highlighted in this report, not just because of the importance to children's development, but also the opportunity recreational pursuits can play in strengthening family life.

Children most emphatically wrote about the importance of time for recreation, both with parents, other family members, and friends. A sentiment repeated by young people and family members who highlighted the importance of spending time as a family, including eating and undertaking recreational activities together.

Time spent together is seen as being particularly important in the way it contributes to family unity and can help provide a respite from the stresses they may be facing. There might be parents who doing their utmost to provide for the family by working hard and long hours but do not also realise the benefits of trying to spend some time pursuing joint activities with their children and how this can help forge closer bonds.

Recommendations

- Activities that address important aspects of family unity and spending time together would add value to parenting and family strengthening programmes. This would include raising awareness amongst parents and professionals as to the important benefits of time spent as a family and how this can help forge closer bonds.

Addressing harmful social norms, attitudes and practices

Article 42 of the UNCRC requires States to make the principles and provisions in the Convention 'widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.'

Children and young people in Cote d'Ivoire want violence to end. They do not want to flee their homes because of violence, or to be forced into early marriage, or subjected to FGM/Cutting. They want

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[71] See for example: Fruehwirth and Gagete-Miranda 2019; Sutin et al. 2017

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parents to understand they need love and kindness and for the beating to stop. However, our research notes a lack of education and advocacy campaigns that would address such harmful social norms, attitudes and practices.

We also note the ongoing discrimination against girls and women, including an existing belief that men are justified in beating women.[72] In this respect, there are insufficient efforts to raise awareness with the aim of preventing gender-based violence. Furthermore, the research revealed other harmful beliefs, such as those of witchcraft, that pose risks to children and parents, and especially those with disabilities.

Recommendations
- Advocacy and awareness raising campaigns are needed to help eradicate harmful social and cultural norms and beliefs that place children at risk of harm. Such campaigns would greatly benefit from meaningful participation of children, young people and other primary stakeholders.

The child protection system and capacity of professional decision makers
Article 1 of the 2019 UNGA resolution on the 'Promotion and the protection of children's rights', calls on States Parties to ensure,

> adequate and systematic training in the rights of the child, including by encouraging States to take the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children into account for professional groups working with and for children, including with children without parental care, including specialized judges, law enforcement officials, lawyers, social workers, medical doctors, care professionals, health professionals and teachers, and coordination among various governmental bodies involved in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child

International guidance relating to decision making and 'gatekeeping'[73] is outlined in a number of international documents including the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care[74] and accompanying Handbook[75]. This guidance includes the use of case management tools that allow for rigorous multi-sectoral and participatory assessments upon which careful and well considered decisions can be taken. These decisions should always be in the best interest of the child.

Decisions making by professionals is not only influenced by such factors as their personal understanding, beliefs and experience, but also the strength of the national child protection system

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[72] Ministry of Planning and Development 2019 – according to the UNICEF MICS-5, approximately 52% of men aged 15-49 years old believe it is justified for a husband to beat his wife. In addition many teachers do not think it possible to teach large classes without using corporal punishment
[73] For further explanation of the term 'gatekeeping' please see: Csaky & Gale 2015
[74] United Nations General Assembly 2009
[75] Cantwell et al. 2012

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they work in and the statutory and other guidance they receive. Decision making, although ideally objective and undertaken within a structure of national legislation, policy and statutory guidance, are at risk of being too subjective with personal social and cultural beliefs becoming influencing factors. It is important therefore, that sufficient training is received and social work and child protection personnel have the knowledge and experience necessary to make the correct safeguarding decisions. The access to, or lack of, laws, policies and resources that guide and facilitate the work of professionals, and help them undertake their responsibilities, is a further factor that can impact well-informed decision making that meets the best interest of a child.

It is noted that some steps have been taken to amend legislation and develop new child protection policy in Cote d'Ivoire. However, the findings of our research signal the need for further significant investment in the development of a comprehensive child law and further amendments to other legislation that would bring it in line with the UNCRC and other international standards. Furthermore, strategic plans for the development of a comprehensive and effective child protection system, that is not just reactive but also prevents unnecessary separation of children from parental care, is lacking in detail. For example, there is little guidance for those responsible for policy implementation. This is exemplified by the 2023 National Policy for Child Protection that lacks detailed plans for implementation and clear guidelines as to the roles of different stakeholders.

Our research suggests that, although there are many people dedicated to their work, the social services workforce is operating within a sector that is fragmented, lacks coordination, and would benefit from a more cohesive and comprehensive multi-sectoral approach that is focussed on prevention of child-parent separation and family support. Furthermore, a particular need has been revealed for additional statutory guidance and better understanding of how to apply rigorous child protection case management. A contributing factor to this situation is insufficient employment and retention of the social services workforce resulting in high caseloads per social worker and lack of time to complete thorough child and family assessments. It has not been possible to assess the amount of training different government and NGO personnel have received on the use of child protection case management tools, and other statutory guidance and legislation, or whether there is sufficient understanding of how to evaluate the risks a child might be facing through any assessment findings. The evidence we have collated does suggest however, that investment in the social services workforce is urgently needed.

An assessment of the quality of social work training in higher education institutions is missing from our research. A further study would help address this gap and provide a better evaluation of the knowledge and capacities of all decision makers, including those with social work responsibilities and members of the police force and judiciary. Any future study should also consider the capacity of other professionals and the need for child protection training in all relevant higher education courses including those for police, teachers, health workers etc. Evaluation of the quality of ad-hoc and in-service training was also not possible within the remit of this research and again, a future review of standards of capacity building programmes would help inform any necessary provision.

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<u>Recommendations</u>

- We suggest an in-depth review of legislation and policies in Cote d'Ivoire to inform future developments in line with international conventions, standards, and consolidation and development of a comprehensive Child Law. This should include a focus on protection of children whilst applying gatekeeping principles that prevent unnecessary placement in alternative care. Consideration should be given to incorporating mandated provision of services and programmes that support families in difficult circumstances, ensuring financial and material poverty, or conditions directly and uniquely ascribed, to such poverty, are never the only justification for the removal of a child from the care of parents, primary caregivers, or legal guardians. Furthermore, legislation should require the gradual elimination of all forms of large residential institutions.

- To inform the development of future training and capacity building, it is recommended that an assessment of the quality of social work training in higher education institutions is undertaken along with a review of provision and standards of in-service capacity building. This should be coupled with a study of current skills, knowledge and capacities of all those responsible for making decisions about protection and care of children including social workers, police, judiciary, health and education workers etc. This should consider their understanding of risk thresholds in relation to protection and how to apply the principle of the best interest of the child.

- A review of the use of case management procedures would inform any further developments in line with international standards and help evaluate their current use including any gaps in the way they are understood and applied. This would also help inform further training on implementation of multi-sectoral child and family assessments.

- Training of those working in residential institutions may not only help alleviate some of the opposition to those employed in such settings, but also contribute to re-skilling. If sufficiently trained, they could be offered new roles in family strengthening programmes and, if family based care settings are developed, they might become providers. In addition, training on how to re-focus the use of funds towards family support programmes, and family based alternative care when necessary, would be aided by the undertaking and application of a cost benefit analysis.

- Steps should be taken to address the lack of resources available to members of the social services workforce to effectively carry out their roles and responsibilities. Consideration should also be given to such issues as professional burn out and making sure professionals are fully supported in their work, i.e., caring for the carers.

Data management systems

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Legislation, policy, statutory guidance, planning and programme delivery, should be informed by evidence. The 2019 UNGA Resolution, highlights this by calling on States Parties to,

> improve data collection, information management and reporting systems relating to children in Improving data collection, information management and reporting systems related to children without parental care in all settings and situations in order to close existing data gaps and develop global and national baselines.

In the first instance, the Resolution is referring to data related to children in alternative care, including the reasons for placement. It is further necessary to continue to collate evidence that includes consideration of the following:

- What is the situation of children affected by the issue of child-parents separation
- What are the main drivers of child-parents separation, and how are these influenced by various factors, e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic circumstances, and access to services etc.
- How are children at risk of separation officially identified and recognised (e.g. in official data).
- Which child protection and social protection services are available to children at risk of child-parents separation and what are the gaps.
- What are the ideas and proposals of children, and other key stakeholders, about responses to the issue of child-parents separation and how they could be improved.

It is encouraging that the Government of Cote d'Ivoire through the Ministry of Women, Families and Children is developing and using a child protection data management information system. However, current reports would benefit from further in-depth clarification and disaggregated data such as information on pathways into alternative care and reasons for placements, length of stay, reintegration etc.

Recommendations
- Ongoing development of local, regional and national child protection data management systems that provide clearer definitions and understanding of all the issues impacting children's protection and well-being including a more comprehensive explanation as to the reasons children are separated from parental care.

Participation
Article 12 (1) of the UNCRC requires,

> States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

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Our research suggests that children in Cote d'Ivoire are not participating in the process of completing a form of assessment in relation to their situation, or in decisions being made about their lives, including placement in alternative care.

Recommendations

- Children should be supported in a way that allows their full and meaningful participation in any decision making processes that will affect them, including their placement in alternative care.

- All children should be acknowledged as active citizens and afforded equal opportunity to contribute to their society. In this respect, policy makers and programme designers and implementers may need help understanding that children are experts in their own lives. This will require challenging any negative assumptions regarding children's capacities to engage and participate and providing them with opportunities that allow them to build and demonstrate such capability.

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4. The Research Framework

The research framework was informed by international child rights conventions, most especially the UNCRC and the 2019 United Nations General Assembly Resolution: 'Promotion and the protection of the rights of children' (A/RES/74/133).[76] Every child in the world has rights. These rights, including those of protection and participation, are universal and indivisible. The role of States Parties in upholding and realising the rights of children has also been taken into account when developing this research including the responsibility to 'develop and implement comprehensive child welfare and protection policies within the framework of their overall social and human development policy'.[77]

The research framework has also been informed by socio-ecological models such as that of Bronfenbrenner.[78] An adaptation of his model can be seen in Figure 1. This considers the impact of inter-relating factors affecting children and families at an individual interpersonal level (microsystem), structural level, including family and community level, (meso and exo systems), and institutional level (macrosystem). We have added an additional consideration to our research which is the influence of international normative frameworks and other global influences within the macrosystem.

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[76] Please see: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3837858?ln=en
[77] United Nations General Assembly 2009
[78] Bronfenbrenner 1977 See also: Bronfenbrenner 1986; Bronfenbrenner 1994

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Figure 1. An adapted graphic illustration of Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological systems theory
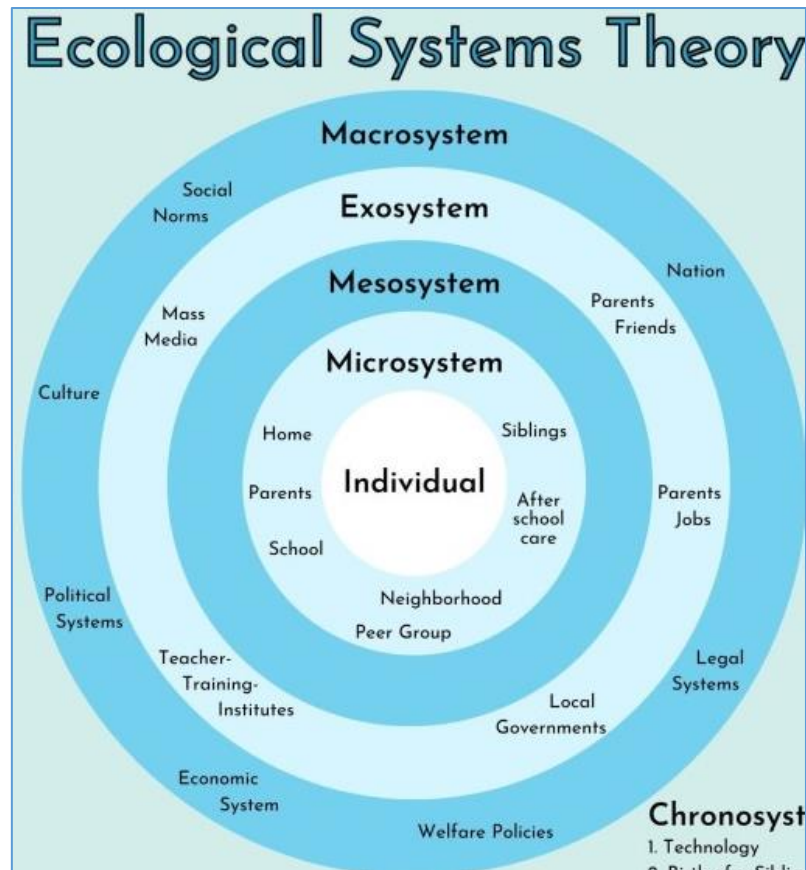
(Source: Drew 2023)

Based on this model, research questions used with respondents remained broad in order to extract information about the range of factors positively and negatively influencing and impacting family life.

The research framework also considered the functioning of different components of the national child protection system (Figure 2). This should include a suitable normative framework and programmes informed by rigorous data collection and analysis, as well as structures for the delivery of child protection services and those that help mitigate and respond to the multi-sectoral factors placing children at risk and families in difficulty. It requires efforts to ensure public awareness of child rights and child protection as well as a well-resourced and skilled work force and coordinated, inter-sectoral partnership working between the State, families, communities, NGOs, and the private sector. Utilising such examination of national child protection systems, we also adopted a research focus that sought evidence and understanding of how 'gatekeeping'[79] works in Cote d'Ivoire.

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[79] Csaky and Gale 2015

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Figure 2. Components of a national child protection system
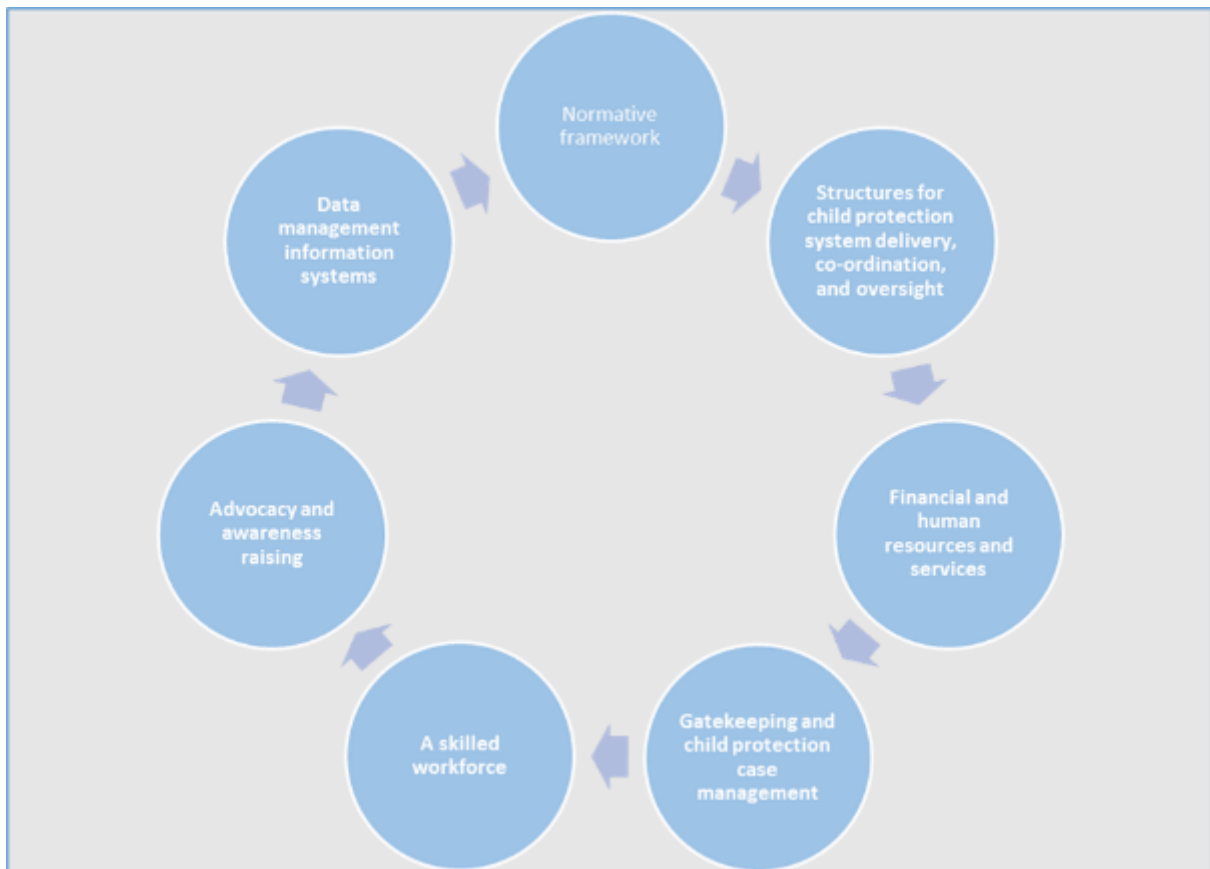
5. The engagement of the University of Grand Bassam University and national researchers

Creating a caring, safe and trusting atmosphere when conducting research with children and young people is essential. To this end, rather than the international Lead Researcher facilitating the workshops with children and young people in Cote d'Ivoire, the services of a national researcher were sought. This helped with easier communication between researchers and participants thus avoiding disjointed communication (as for instance if we had been working through a translator). It also removed any distrust or suspicion that being asked questions by a 'foreigner' might incur. Furthermore, it meant the person directly interfacing with children and young people had a much more informed understanding of the cultural and other influencing aspects of the environment participants came from. Care was taken to ensure national researchers not only had professional research skills but also the right aptitude and understanding to facilitate the workshops in a caring and careful manner. A national researcher was also present during the workshops with adult family members.

A vital element of the research programme therefore, has been a partnership between SOS Children's Villages Cote d'Ivoire and the International University of Grand Bassam facilitated through the work of a national researcher, Mr N'Dri Kan David. This partnership also allowed for a research ethics application to be made to the university. Full ethical approval was awarded.

6. Research methodology

6.1. Research participants

Invitations were issued to research participants involved in different government and NGO family strengthening and child protection programmes. Research participants in Cote d'Ivoire included:

- 49 children aged 13 – 15 years old living with their own families (in vulnerable circumstances[80]) (26 girls and 23 boys)
- 36 young people aged 20-24 years old who had left alternative care (care leavers). (20 girls and 16 boys)
- 48 adult members of families living in vulnerable situations (41 female and 7 male)
- 11 professional stakeholders including social workers, child protection workers, lawyers and providers of alternative care and family support services.
- 50 key stakeholders who responded to an online survey requesting information on reasons children are placed in alternative care and access to support services.

6.2. The research process

The research was finalised in Cote d'Ivoire in May 2023. Great importance was placed on the development and use of participatory research methodology to highlight the voices of children, young people and adult family members. Methods were also used that sought the views and understanding of professionals. All findings have been correlated with information drawn from relevant literature. The following methods were used to gather qualitative and quantitative data:

- **Desk review.**
A series of desk reviews were conducted by means of a systematic exploration of academic and other web-based databases and search engines[81] as well as hand sourcing additional reports and written materials. This included a review of the socio-economic and cultural environment, the functioning of the national child protection system, and provision of alternative care in Cote d'Ivoire. Further desk reviews sought information on topics that included participatory research methodology, prevention of family separation, gatekeeping, and family strengthening.

- **Co-design research workshops with children and young people in El Salvador and Lebanon.**
In recognition of the importance of children's right to participate in decisions affecting their lives, and understanding that they are 'competent social actors'[82] who should be 'actively involved in shaping their own social worlds',[83] steps were taken to achieve as high a degree of participation as possible

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[80] For the purposes of the research, a definition of 'vulnerable' was extracted from: Bauer & Wiezorek (2016) Vulnerable Families: Reflections on a Difficult Category. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, Vol 4, pp.11-28.
[81] Including Science Direct, Wiley online, Taylor & Francis online, Springerlink, JSTOR and Sage Journals, UNICEF, the Better Care Network and other agency websites, Google, and Google Scholar search engines.
[82] Gilchrist et al. 2013:577. See also Davidson 2017
[83] Gilchrist et al. 2013:577

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during the research.[84] To this end, in order to highlight their voices, and seek their knowledge and ideas, children and young people, were not only invited to join qualitative participatory research workshops, but efforts were made to engage them in the design of the research questions and qualitative participatory methodology. This included a series of co-design of workshops with a group of children and care-experienced young people in both EL Salvador and Lebanon. The resultant research questions for children and young people were:

Question 1: What makes children/young people in this family happy when they are at home? (based on a drawing of a house and a family that had been drawn by participants)
Question 2: What makes children/young in this family worried or unhappy when they are at home?
Question 3: What makes the adults in the family feel happy, strong and united when they are at home?
Question 4: What makes the adults in the family feel worried or unhappy when they are at home?
Question 5: What is needed to help families be happy, strong and united?

The questions and methods developed in the co-design workshops were then piloted in El Salvador and Lebanon. The results informed the development of qualitative research participatory workshops implemented in Cote d'Ivoire.

It is important to note that the research questions did not ask research participants to answer questions about their personal experience but to provide information that is representative of what happens to children, young people and other adult family members within their communities and country. These questions also informed those used in workshops with adult family members.

- **Participatory research workshops with children and young people in Cote d'Ivoire.**
One group of children aged 13-15 years old living with their families and one group of care experienced young people aged 21-24 years old were invited to help evaluate the research methods to be used in Côte d'Ivoire. These children and young people were invited to an Introduction Meeting during which they received information on the aims and objectives of the research and what their participation would involve. They subsequently agreed to participate in a series of research consultation workshops. During these workshops they undertook a brief evaluation of each participatory research exercise that had been co-designed with children and young people in El Salvador and Lebanon. They were asked whether or not they thought the research exercises were suitable to use with other children and young people in Côte d'Ivoire. The children and young people unanimously agreed the methodology was appropriate.

This process was followed by the implementation of workshops with other children and young people. In total 7 groups of children and young people participated in the research workshops held in the

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[84] Arnstein 1959; Beebeejaun et al. 2013; Blanco et al.2022; Bradbury-Jones and Taylor 2015; Bromark et al. 2023; Chevalier and Buckles 2019; Cossar et al. 2014; Cuevas-Parra and Tisdall 2019; Fouché and Light 2011; Garcia-Quiroga and Salvo Agoglia 2020; Grant 2017; Helm 2013; Holland et al. 2008; Jamieson et al. 2021; Lake and Wendland 2018; Lundy et al. 2011; Sabo 2000; Shamji 2007; Stuart et al. 2021

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urban setting of Abidjan and the rural setting of Aboisso. Workshops included different activities including ice breakers and energisers, a reminder of the aims and objectives of the research; reading of Information Sheets, signing of consent forms; and joint creation of workshop 'ground rules'.

Participants were split into two groups and invited to take part in a number of exercises that involved the drawing of imaginary houses and families and the writing down of answers to the five research questions (on pink and green post-its) (Figure 3). Children were able to privately answer questions 1 and 2 by placing their post-its into bags placed on the drawings. They placed their answers to the questions 3 and 4 on their drawings and were invited to present them to the whole group. In the workshops with young people, they placed all their answers on their drawings and were also invited to present what they had written. If appropriate, short discussions about what had been written were facilitated.

Figure 3. Examples of drawings produced by children and young people
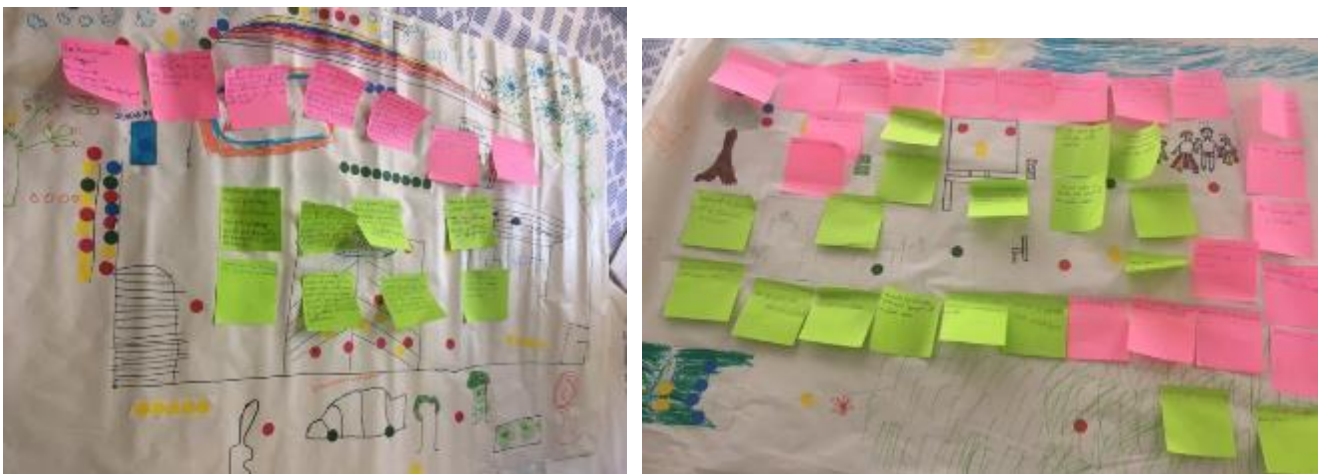
In order to seek children's ideas for solutions to the challenges families are facing, they were asked to think of themselves as a superhero and to depict this in drawings (Figure 4). They were then asked to write three things they would do with their superpowers to help families.

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Figure 4. Examples of children's superhero drawings

A problem and solution tree exercise was used with young people in order to gain and rank their ideas for solutions. Young people placed their post-its containing answers regarding what made young people and adult family members worried or unhappy on the trunk of a tree (Figure 5). Their solutions were written on the 'leaves'.

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Figure 5. Example of a problem and solution tree

Young people were asked to group the solutions into different categories e.g., money, health, education and then to rank them in order of importance. Participants presented their 'trees' to the full group and were offered the opportunity to briefly discuss their solutions.

At the end of each workshop, participants were invited to ask questions or asked if they wanted to discuss topics that had arisen during their time together. Workshops always finished with thanks and an energiser.

- **Family workshops**

It was also important to elevate the voices and ideas of adult family members. To this end, adult family members living in vulnerable circumstances were also invited to participate in research workshops. The research questions used with adult family members were:

Question 1: What makes families feel happy, strong and united when they are at home?
Question 2: What makes families feel worried or unhappy when they are at home?
Question 3. What is needed to help families remain happy, strong and united?

A total of 4 workshops were held with adult family members. Two workshops were held in the urban setting of Abidjan and 2 in the rural setting of Aboisso attended by 48 adults.

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Similar participatory research exercises were used to those developed by, and for, children and young people including drawings of homes containing a family and problem and solution trees (Figure 6).

Figure 6. A problem and solution tree produced by adult research participants
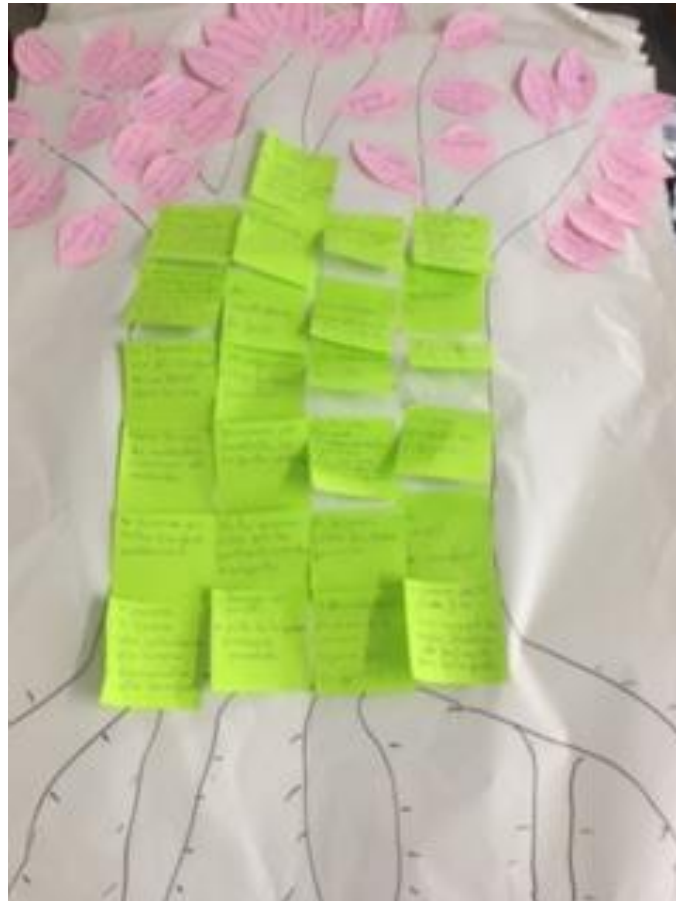
At the end of the workshops, participants were invited to ask questions or to discuss topics that had arisen during their time together.

- **Semi-structured interviews**

A total of 11 semi-structured interviewees were conducted with professional stakeholders. The principle research questions focussed on the reasons children lost parental care and are placed in alternative care. Interviewees were selected through a purposive sampling methodology and included professionals working in child protection, family strengthening and provision of alternative care. Purposive sampling methodology was chosen as it allows for intentional selection of knowledgeable participants that will generate theory and understanding of a specific social process and context.[85] Criteria for the selection of interviewees was prepared and based on this information, members of SOS Children's Villages Cote d'Ivoire team selected interviewees based on their

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[85] Arber 2006; Flick 2006; Ritchie et al. 2006; Robson 2002

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knowledge of different key professional stakeholders in the country working for government and non-governmental agencies.

- **Online survey**

An online survey for professionals working in the support, care and protection of children was designed and disseminated utilising the Qualtrics[86] data software programme. The questions sought information regarding the reasons children are being separated from their family and placed in alternative care, different types of services and support available to families. After cleaning the data a total of 50 responses were included in the final analysis.

6.3. Research ethics

Informed participation and consent

It was important that participation in the research was fully informed and voluntary. All prospective participants were provided with language, age, and respondent appropriate Information Sheets were provided to prospective participants when they were first invited to be part of the research. Age and language appropriate consent forms were also prepared in all countries. At the start of each research workshop, the content of the Information Sheets were discussed. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions before being asked to sign a consent form. A strong emphasis was placed on participants understanding that they were free to withdraw their participation at any time. This process was also repeated at the start of each semi-structured interview.

For the online survey, participants were provided with an Information Sheet in advance of their participation. The consent process was built into the survey and respondents could not move on to complete the questionnaire without first giving their consent.

Confidentiality and data protection

Research participants were assured confidentially and anonymity, unless providing information that suggested risk of harm to a child was revealed. All data used in reporting has been anonymised, and care taken not to reveal the identity of participants. Workshop participants were asked not to share personal stories, name anyone in any discussions, or share participant's information outside of the workshops. National researchers and the translator accompanying the international researcher signed third party confidentiality agreements.

Recordings of interviews were made using an encrypted recording device and uploaded to secure password protected folders. These are now held only by the international Lead Researcher. All data has been stored in an electronic format and held securely in password protected computer files.

Facilitation of participation and remuneration

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[86] Please see: https://www.qualtrics.com/uk/

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Care was taken to balance the available time researchers had to complete the field work with efforts not to disrupt the lives of participants. This included consideration of the times and length of workshops. All out of pocket expenses for participants such as transportation were covered.

Ethics and child safeguarding

All elements of the research process have been designed and conducted in a manner guided by professional standards and ethical principles.[87] Ethical clearance to conduct the research was sought and granted by the University of Grand Bassam.

All efforts were made to ensure participation in the research did not lead to harm, stigma, re-victimisation or discrimination. Careful consideration was given to the sensitive nature of the topic under consideration i.e., events that may cause distress in the lives of participants. In this regard, the study was designed in a way that did not ask workshop participants about personal experience. Through careful observation, researchers did their best to pick up on cues indicating any distress. Ground rules developed by the participants themselves at the start of each workshop also highlighted issues such as respect, trust, the importance of being able to talk freely and being listened to. All efforts were made to ensure the workshops were safe and welcoming. No other adults except the national and international researchers and a translator were present in the workshops.

The issue of child safeguarding was taken with the utmost seriousness and informed the design of an ethical research process that took all steps possible to ensure the rights and dignity of participants. An SOS Children's Villages social worker, or equivalent, (a 'responsible adult') was present at the same location as the research workshops with children and young people. They were available if any participant wanted to speak with them. If a researcher had a concern about the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person during the workshop or, something was revealed that suggested a child or young person was at risk of harm, the 'responsible adult' was informed. In the event of such disclosure, SOS child safeguarding procedures were to be followed. Children and young people were informed of this process. In addition a room was made available on the same premises as the workshops and designated a quiet and safe space children and young could use if they needed time alone.

Research analysis

All interviews have been transcribed and collated into a word document of which, in-depth reading was completed by the Lead Researcher. All the information provided on post-it notes by children, young people and adult family members during the research workshops have been transposed into digital word documents These document have been imported into the NVIVO 11 data analysis programme[88] and through a text query process, used to extract and collate 'instances' of similarities (and variances) and inform emerging and core themes. Linkages were identified in highlighted text and illustrated in word clouds and tree maps.

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[87] See for example, Social Research Association (2020)
[88] Please see: https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/

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The software programme, Qualtrics, allowed for the analysis of responses to the online survey.

6.4. Limitations of the research

Limitations of the research include the time available to researchers to conduct field work in part due to available budgets. With particular reference to the process of co-designing research questions and methods with children and young people, it is recognised that additional time would have allowed for an even greater degree of participation in the very initial research conceptualisation and methodology design.

A focus was placed on creative activities and writing exercises to gather information rather than discussion groups. Engagement in discussions was therefore, only a very small element of the research. It is recognised this may have limited the opportunity to seek clarification and/or conduct a deeper exploration of the issues raised. Furthermore, research workshops utilised group work methodology that obscured individual voices whilst providing collaborative answers. As a result the data does not allow for the capturing of individual participant's responses. In addition, as almost all research workshops, groups of children and young people comprised both girls and boys working closely together, an in-depth analysis of similarities and differences in their answers in terms of sex has not been possible.

We recognise that many children are living in informal alternative care with members of their extended family or other members of the community. The research methodology did not allow for the study of the situation of these children. Other children not included in the research include unaccompanied and separated children affected by migration or children in conflict with the law. Furthermore, we are aware of many studies that have focussed on the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic. This topic was raised occasionally by interviewees but was not a specific focus in our search.

Our research was limited to two locations in each country which may not have fully reflected the situation throughout. This includes information analysed in relation to national ethnicities or other specific socio-cultural influences is absent in the research findings.

Finally, and importantly, the notable lack of published quantitative and qualitative data on children in alternative care means it has not been possible to quantify placements according to the different reasons that led to such action.

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7. Context: Cote d'Ivoire

Figure 7. Map of Cote d'Ivoire

(Source: Nationsonline[89])

Cote D'Ivoire is a country located on the coast of Western Africa (Figure 7). It is bordered by Liberia, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Ghana.[90] The legislative capital of Cote D'Ivoire is Yamoussoukro however, Abidjan is the administrative and the officially designated economic capital of the country.[91] The country is almost equally split into urban (52.5%) and rural (47.5%0 conurbations (Figure 8).

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[89] Please see: https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/cote-dIvoire-political-map.htm
[90] Please see: https://www.britannica.com/place/Cote-dIvoire
[91] Please see: https://www.britannica.com/place/Cote-dIvoire

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Figure 8. Urban and rural distribution of the population of Cote d'Ivoire
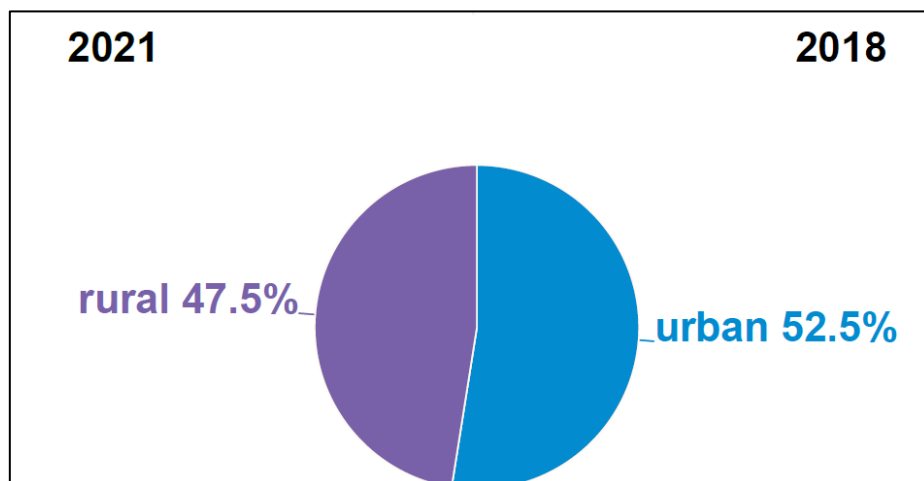
(Source: Please see https://www.britannica.com/place/Cote d'Ivoire/People)

Population

As of July 2023, the population of Cote D'Ivoire was estimated to be 29.3 million.[92] Population growth was 2.16% (2023 estimate).[93] In 2014, ethnic groups in Côte d'Ivoire included the following: Akan 28.9%, Voltaique or Gur 16.1%, Northern Mande 14.5%, Kru 8.5%, Southern Mande 6.9%, unspecified 0.9%, non-Ivoirian 24.2%.[94] The official language is French, however there are 60 native dialects of which Dioula is the most widely spoken.[95]

As seen in Figure 9, in 2021, 38.2% of the population was below the age of 15 years.[96] In 2020, estimations of life expectancy was 58 years.[97]

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[92] Please see: https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cote-divoire/
[93] Please see: https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cote-divoire/
[94] Please see: https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cote-divoire/summaries
[95] Please see: https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cote-divoire/summaries
[96] Please see: https://www.britannica.com/place/Cote d'Ivoire/People)
[97] Please see: https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/7c9b64c34a8833378194a026ebe4e247-0140022022/related/HCI-AM22-CIV.pdf

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Figure 9. Age breakdown in Cote d'Ivoire 2021
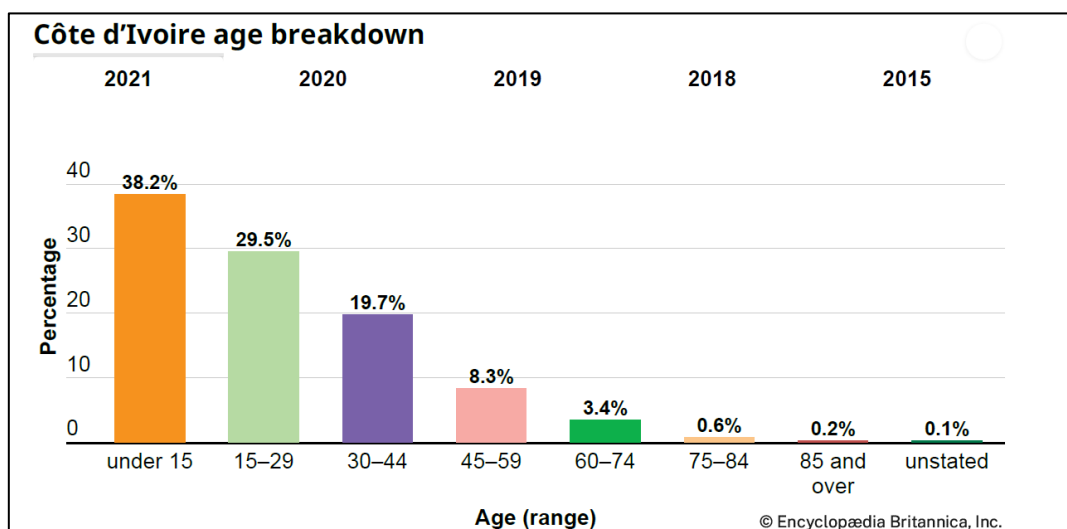
(Source: https://www.britannica.com/place/Cote d'Ivoire/People)

According to the UNICEF 2016 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)[98] for Côte d'Ivoire, 56% of children were living with both parents, 25% with only one parent, and 19% (almost 1 in 5) were living with neither parent. Of the latter, 6.3% were under 5 years old, 28.5% were aged 10 to 14 years, and 42.8% were 15-17 years old. The vast majority of children living outside parental care were not orphans. The study revealed that around 1 million children (8.6% of all 0-17 year olds) had lost at least one parent before they reached 18 years and approximately 125,000 had lost both parents. According to the Côte d'Ivoire Ministry of Planning,[99] the vast majority of children whose both parents have died, are usually taken in by extended family or others in their community.

Gender parity

UNDP[100] regularly reports on gender parity across the world. In 2023, Cote d'Ivoire was marked as a 'low' ranking country in terms of achieving gender parity taking in to consideration such measurements as fraction of life expectancy at birth spent in good health; population with completed secondary education or higher; youth not in education; employment or training; labour force participation; holding an account in a financial institution (e.g. a bank); share of women holding managerial positions and seats held (e.g. parliamentary seats). In 2019, women had lower literacy rates and was noted as higher than in other Sub-Saharan African countries.[101]

Governance

The World Bank views Côte d'Ivoire as having achieved political and social stability since the most recent national elections in 2021.[102] The World Bank further notes how different stakeholders have

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[98] Please see: https://dhsprogram.com/methodology/survey/survey-display-507.cfm
[99] Ministry of Planning and Development and UNICEF 2019
[100] UNDP and UN Women 2023
[101] Please see: https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/cote-d-ivoire/
[102] Please see: https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cotedivoire/overview

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committed to the national reconciliation process following a political dialogue between government, political parties and civil society.

Religion

In 2014, religious affiliation in Cote D'Ivoire included Muslim (42.5%), Catholic (17%), other Christian (22.8%), animist (2.2%), other (2.9%) and none (12.6%) (Figure 10).[103]

Figure 10. Religious affiliation in Cote d'Ivoire (2014)
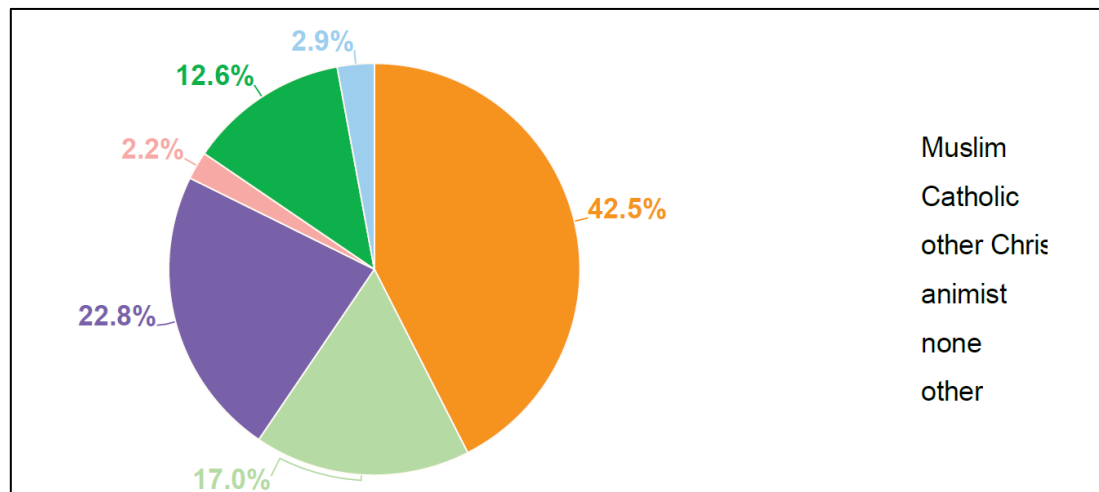
(Source: https://www.britannica.com/place/Cote d'Ivoire/People)

Economy and social protection

The World Bank classifies, Cote d'Ivoire as a lower-middle income country. As of July 2023, the World Bank noted how Cote D'Ivoire was experiencing one of the fastest sustained economic growth rates in Sub Saharan Africa in over a decade.[104] In 2022, the International Trade Administration of the United States, described Cote D'Ivoire as one of the most stable economies in West Africa.[105] It is understood that Côte d'Ivoire came through the COVID-19 pandemic better than many countries with the swift response of the Government being an important factor.[106]

In 2022, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was US$70 billion, an increase from US$62.98 billion in 2020.[107] According to the International Monetary Fund, the 2023 projected real GDP change was 6.2% with inflation expected to be 3.7%.[108] Growth in real GDP per capita averaged 5.5% between 2015 and 2019.[109]

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[103] Please see: https://www.britannica.com/place/Cote d'Ivoire/People
[104] Please see: https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cotedivoire/overview
[105] Please see: https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/cote-divoire-market-overview
[106] Please see: https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/cote-divoire-market-overview
[107] Please see: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CI
[108] Please see: https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/CIV
[109] Please see: https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/current/Global_POVEQ_CIV.pdf

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Some of the nation's economic capital is due to rich mineral and natural resources[110] whilst approximately 45% of the population work in agriculture. Côte d'Ivoire is one of Africa's most prominent exporters of cocoa, coffee, palm oil, cashew nuts and rubber.[111] The country provides 40% of all global production of cocoa beans.[112] There are also many people working in the informal sector with noted disadvantages including lack of access to loans or training.[113]

Although the country has seen some decline in poverty, with national poverty estimates falling from 44% in 2015 to 39.5% in 2018/19,[114] a monetary child poverty analysis conducted by UNICEF in 2022 showed approximately 46.5% of children were living in impoverished households.[115] Furthermore, in 2022, the National Institute of Statistics published data indicating 64.3% of children were experiencing at least 3 deprivations of poverty in relation to the 7 dimensions of well-being indicators used in the UNICEF MICS.[116] More children in the poorest households were likely to experience 4 or more deprivations of poverty. It was also noted how the lack of birth registration can preclude children and adults from accessing basic services. Amongst the extreme poor under 15 years of age, only 49.3% have a birth certificate.[117]

Employment
In 2022, the labour force participation rate of females was 57.5% and 73.2% for males.[118] The World Bank define vulnerable employment as situations where there are least likely to be formal working arrangements, social protection, and safety nets to guard against economic shocks thus those working in such employment are more likely to fall into poverty.[119] Data from 2021, shows high numbers involved in vulnerable employment with 81.4% of women 63.9% of men in this category.[120]

Health
The 10 top causes of death for females and males in Côte d'Ivoire as published by the World Health Organisation (WHO) can be seen in Table 1.[121]

Table 1. Deaths per 100 000 population. Cote d'Ivoire, 2019

[110] Please see: https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/International-financing/KfW-Development-Bank/Local-presence/Subsahara-Africa/C%C3%B4te-d%C2%B4Ivoire
[111] Please see: https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/International-financing/KfW-Development-Bank/Local-presence/Subsahara-Africa/C%C3%B4te-d%C2%B4Ivoire
[112] Please see: https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/explore-market-research/africa/cote-d-ivoire
[113] Please see: https://www.kfw-entwicklungsbank.de/International-financing/KfW-Development-Bank/Local-presence/Subsahara-Africa/C%C3%B4te-d%C2%B4Ivoire
[114] Please see: https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/current/Global_POVEQ_CIV.pdf
[115] UNICEF Côte d'Ivoire 2023
[116] National Institute of Statistics 2022
[117] National Institute of Statistics 2022
[118] Please see: https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/cote-d-ivoire/
[119] Please see: https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/world-development-indicators/series/SL.EMP.VULN.ZS
[120] Please see: https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/cote-d-ivoire/
[121] Please see: https://data.who.int/countries/384

Key Drivers Contributing to Child-parents Separation
Cote d'Ivoire

Top 10 causes of deaths per 10000 of the population in 2019 Female		Top 10 causes of deaths per 10000 of the population in 2019 Male	
Neonatal conditions	93.8	Neonatal conditions	121.3
Lower respiratory infections	67	Lower respiratory infections	98.6
HIV/AIDS	50.7	Ischaemic heart disease	54.1
Diarrhoeal diseases	38.1	Diarrhoeal diseases	49.3
Malaria	35	HIV/AIDS	48.9
Ischaemic heart disease	31.8	Stroke	47.1
Stroke	30.9	Malaria	38.7
Congenital anomalies	17.6	Road Injury	33.4
Tuberculosis	16.9	Cirrhosis of the liver	26.6
Maternal conditions	15.4	Tuberculosis	26

(Source: https://data.who.int/countries/384)

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning of 2020 until August 2023, the country reported a total of 835 deaths due to the virus.[122] In August 2023, there were 88,338 infected people representing 0.34% of the total population.[123] Although Malaria remains a significant cause of death in Côte d'Ivoire, in 2016, 40.8% of children aged younger than 5 years old and 47% of pregnant women still did not sleep under mosquito nets treated with long lasting insecticide.[124]

Data from the World Bank gender portal shows 480 women die per 100,000 live births due to pregnancy-related causes in Cote d'Ivoire, a rate of maternal mortality that has remained almost constant for the past 20 years.[125] Furthermore, 106 of every 1,000 girls who gave birth during 2020 were aged only 15-19 years old although, overall, the adolescent fertility rate has been decreasing.[126] A 2022 UNICEF report citing preliminary results from a 2021 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) said important progress had been made over the past decade in improvements to maternal and child survival.[127] The UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation reported under 5 mortality rates in 2021 to be at 71.61 deaths per 1,000 live births.[128]

UNICEF Cote d'Ivoire has been raising awareness regarding the increased risk of morbidity and mortality of mothers as a result of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C).[129] FGM/C brings risks of contamination with certain infections, including HIV/AIDS, and obstetric complications that can

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[122] Please see: https://www.worlddata.info/africa/ivory-coast/health.php
[123] Please see: https://www.worlddata.info/africa/ivory-coast/health.php
[124] Please see: https://www.unicef.org/cotedivoire/rapports/le-droit-des-enfants-et-des-femmes-%C3%A0-la-sant%C3%A9
[125] Please see: https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/cote-d-ivoire/
[126] Please see: https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/cote-d-ivoire/
[127] UNICEF Cote D'Ivoire 2022
[128] Please see: https://childmortality.org/all-cause-mortality/data?refArea=CIV
[129] Please see: https://www.unicef.org/cotedivoire/rapports/le-droit-des-enfants-et-des-femmes-%C3%A0-la-sant%C3%A9

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cause postpartum haemorrhage, obstructed labour and obstetric fistulas. In 2016, 36.7% of women aged 15-49 and 11% of girls under 15 years had undergone some form of FGM/C.[130]

According to Médecins Sans Frontiers the country's health system is one of the weakest in Africa with only one medical doctor per 10,000 inhabitants and a lack of medical infrastructure.[131] World Bank indicators show medical care provided by doctors and hospitals is only average in comparison to other countries of the world with only 0.4 hospital beds per 1,000 inhabitants.[132] According to UNICEF, in 2017, almost 33% of the population lived more than 5 kilometres from a health facility.[133]

The Ministry of Women, Families and Children published data extracted from a 2016 UNICEF survey showing 21.6% of children under 5 years were suffering from chronic malnutrition and 6% from acute malnutrition, In the same year, 16.7% of children were born with low weight.[134] The Ministry also recognised the health risks being posed because of poor water, hygiene and sanitation. Malnutrition in all its forms is reported to be an underlying cause of approximately 45% of annual deaths among children under 5 years (42,000 deaths per year or 115 deaths per day).[135] Stunting is also affecting the development of young children with 44.8% under 5 year olds not reaching their full developmental potential, and 37.2% not benefitting from their minimum nutritional needs.[136]

According to a 2019 report issued by the Ministry of Development and Planning[137] there were an estimated 50,000 children and young people with disabilities in Côte d'Ivoire. The report identified a lack of resources being made available to families to help prevent separation but also called for more 'transit-centre's' in which to place children with disabilities, especially those who have been abandoned or are street connected.

Education

Since the government passed a compulsory education law in September 2015 requiring any child over the age of six to attend school, it is understood that school enrolment has increased.[138] However, in 2021, only 52.7% of girls and 64.8% of boys had completed lower secondary school.[139] In the 2019/20 school year an estimated 4.1m children, approximately 98% of the eligible population,

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[130] Please see: https://www.unicef.org/cotedivoire/rapports/le-droit-des-enfants-et-des-femmes-%C3%A0-la-sant%C3%A9

[131] Please see: https://www.msf.org/c%C3%B4te-divoire

[132] Please see: https://api.worldbank.org/v2/en/indicator/SH.MED.BEDS.ZS?downloadformat=excel

[133][133] Please see: https://www.unicef.org/cotedivoire/rapports/le-droit-des-enfants-et-des-femmes-%C3%A0-la-sant%C3%A9

[134] Ministry of Women, Families and Children Child Protection Policy 2023b

[135] Please see: https://www.unicef.org/cotedivoire/rapports/le-droit-%C3%A0-la-nutrition

[136] Please see: https://www.unicef.org/cotedivoire/rapports/le-droit-%C3%A0-la-nutrition

[137] Ministry of Development and Planning and UNICEF 2019

[138] Please see: https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/reports/cote-divoire/2022-report/economy/adapting-to-the-times-sector-policy-prioritises-vocational-and-technical-training#:~:text=The%20system%20dates%20back%20to,gain%20access%20to%20higher%20education

[139] Please see: https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/cote-d-ivoire/

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attended primary school, an increase of 17.3% from 2015.[140] However, UNICEF report the percentage of students attending primary education or higher at any time during the academic year in 2020 was only an average of 77%.[141] At the same time, the number of schools increased although many were within the private sector.[142]

Data released by the Ministry of National Education, informs that in 2021-22, 297,865 students (70% of the student population) had to travel at least 3 km to get to school.[143] Furthermore, although education is supposed to be free, low attendance rates are in part attributed to the actual costs families must pay. According to UNICEF, they have to cover 37% of the cost towards preschool education and 31% towards primary school education.[144]

Article 6 of Act No. 98-594, provides persons with disabilities with the right to education, either in mainstream schools or, failing that, in specialized institutions according to their particular needs. However, according to UNESCO, whilst there has been an effort to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream classes this has been achieved for only very small numbers.[145] A report issued in 2019 noted that, despite new legislation and policy, approximately 48,000 children with disabilities were being excluded from the school system.[146] The reasons given for this situation included lack of specialised education institutions, equipment and qualified personnel, discrimination from other students and parents, and parents of children with disabilities not believing their child can be educated.

Drawing on information from a 2015 Ministry of National Education survey, a further report in 2023 highlighted the issue of violence against children in schools.[147] According to the students surveyed, 40% had been physically punished by teachers and 3.5% said they had had sex with a teacher.[148]

Shelter
World Bank data for 2012, showed only 37.3% of men and 29.5% of women owned a dwelling either alone or jointly (Figure 11).[149]

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[140] Please see: https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/reports/cote-divoire/2022-report/economy/adapting-to-the-times-sector-policy-prioritises-vocational-and-technical-training#:~:text=The%20system%20dates%20back%20to,gain%20access%20to%20higher%20education
[141] Please see: https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=CIV.ED_AN_AR_L1.&startPeriod=1970&endPeriod=2023
[142] Please see: https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/reports/cote-divoire/2022-report/economy/adapting-to-the-times-sector-policy-prioritises-vocational-and-technical-training#:~:text=The%20system%20dates%20back%20to,gain%20access%20to%20higher%20education
[143] Ministry of Women, Families and Children Child Protection Policy 2023b
[144] Please see: https://www.unicef.org/cotedivoire/rapports/le-droit-%C3%A0-l%C3%A9ducation
[145] Please see: UNESCO https://education-profiles.org/sub-saharan-africa/cote-divoire/~inclusion
[146] Ministry of Development and Planning and UNICEF 2019
[147] Ministry of Women, Families and Children Child Protection Policy 2023b
[148] Ministry of Women, Families and Children Child Protection Policy 2023b
[149] Please see: https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/cote-d-ivoire/

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Figure 11. House ownership status by sex (% of population aged 15-49) (2012)

House ownership status, by sex (% of population age 15-49)

Male

62.7% do not own a house

29.3% own a house alone

7.1% own a house jointly

0.9% own a house both alone and jointly

Female

70.5% do not own a house

7.0% own a house alone

19.2% own a house jointly

3.1% own a house both alone and jointly
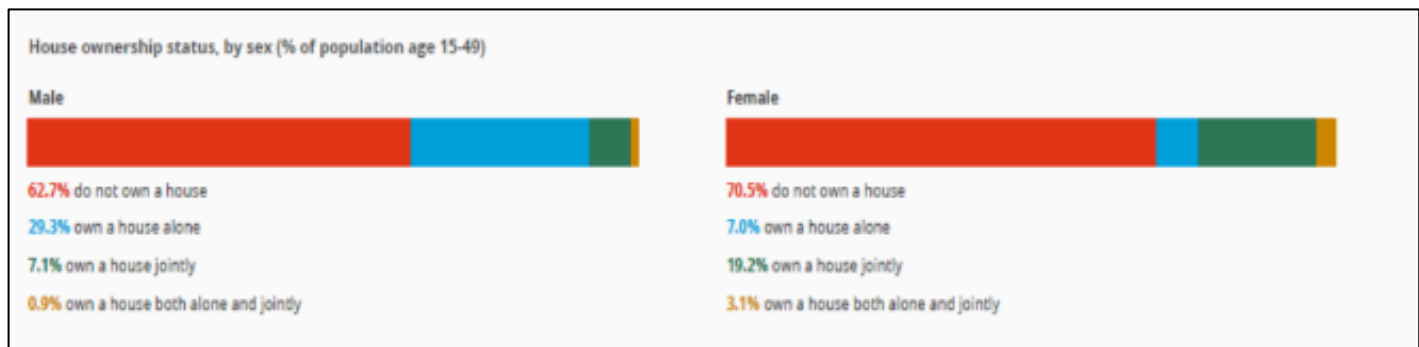
(Source: https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/cote-d-ivoire/)

8. Research Findings

The research had the primary aim of determining reasons children are placed in alternative care in Cote d'Ivoire. Following an analysis of the research data, a strong correlation has been identified between all the information provided by the different participants including children, young people, adult family members, and professional key informants. This section of the report provides a summary of the research findings and an understanding of some of the drivers that may lead to child-parents' separation in Cote d'Ivoire.

Overall our findings highlight two distinct influences related to placement of children in alternative care. The first is the impact of the wider society that families live in and how this influences outcomes and circumstances within a family that can subsequently lead to children being placed in alternative care (Figure 12). The second is the functioning of the national child protection system in which gatekeeping decisions are made.

Figure 12. Drivers associated with placement of children in alternative care
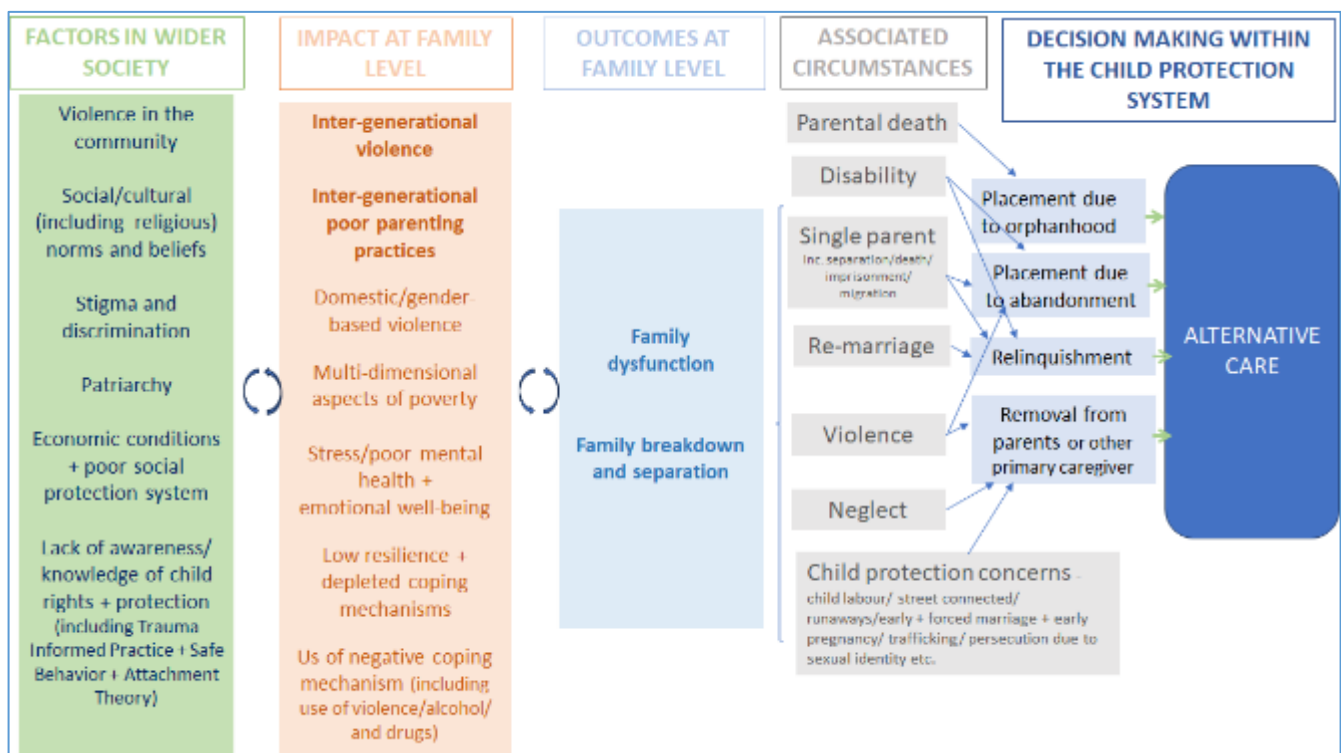
A brief summary of findings includes analysis of information provided by children, young people, adult family members, and interviewees, complimented by findings of a desk review, indicating violence against children is a prime factor leading to placement of children in alternative care in Côte d'Ivoire. Violence against children is described by UNICEF as taking many forms, 'including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and may involve neglect or deprivation.'[150] Other factors that render children

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[150] Please see: https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/

vulnerable to protection violations in Cote d'Ivoire, include child labour, being street connected often after fleeing dysfunctional households, and being victims of harmful practices such as FGM/Cutting, forced and early marriage, and teenage pregnancy. Belief that some children may be possessed by evil spirits and labelled witches or wizards, including children with disability, is also a concerning factor.

Further causes, of family separation and possible placement in alternative care include issues related to disability (of child and/or parent), substance misuse, and absence of one or both parents for varying reasons including divorce/separation. Many of these drivers of child-parents separation may be directly or indirectly caused by situations of poverty and are inextricably linked to poor access to basic and specialist services. We consider one of the most important findings is the need to urgently address the inter-generational aspect of violence, and of poor parenting ability, that are contributing to the perpetuation of family breakdown and separation.

It is also our understanding that there is a need to improve all elements of the national child protection system. Although the Government of Cote d'Ivoire has taken some steps to improve the normative framework, gaps remain in the legislation and policies for child protection as well as insufficient detail in strategic plans and statutory guidance. In addition, gaps have been identified in education and training of the social services workforce along with other professions involved in responding to and supporting families. This includes improved capacity in the use and understanding of child protection case management/gatekeeping tools allowing for more accurate child protection assessments and informed decision making. Insufficient numbers of social workers and child protection officers has also been noted along with the lack of resources necessary for professionals to effectively undertake their roles and responsibilities.

8.1. Circumstances at a family level that result in children being placed in alternative care

This section of the report provides a summary of the research findings in relation to circumstances within the family home that are leading to the placement of children in alternative care. This is followed by an exploration of some of the factors within wider society, including social, economic and cultural issues, that are directly and indirectly impacting the lives of families and contributing to family dysfunction, breakdown, and separation (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Factors at a societal and family level contributing to placement of children in alternative care
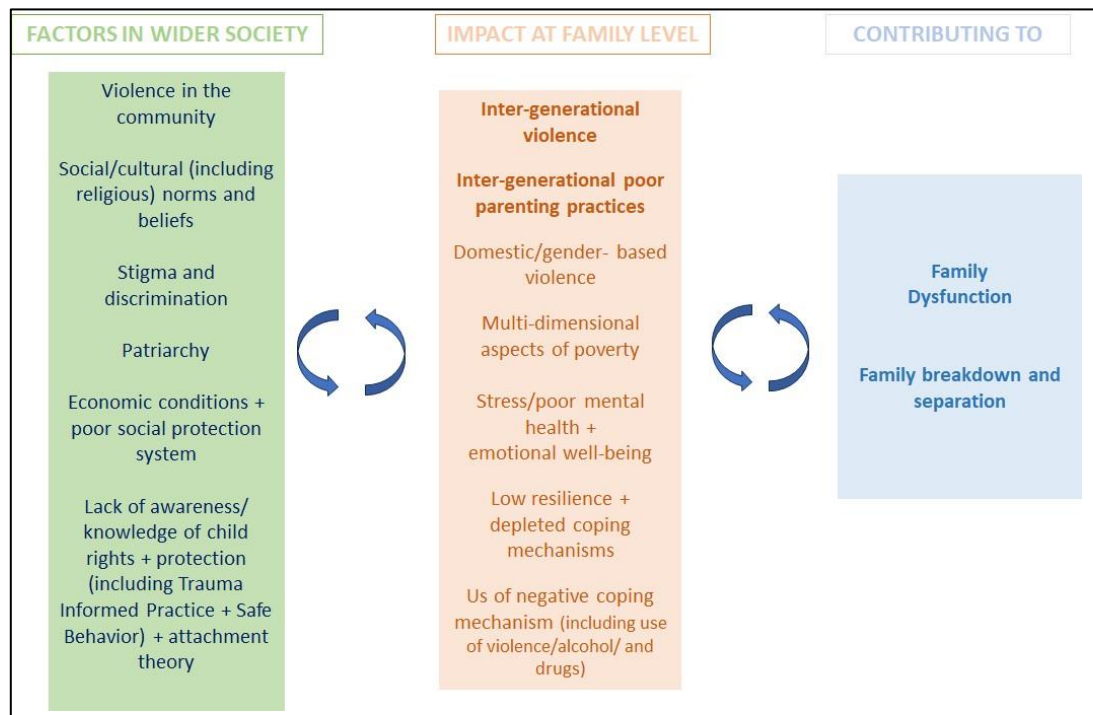
8.1.1. Violence

Violence manifests itself in all forms of physical, sexual and emotional violence inflicted on children as well as between adults in the family. As seen in Figures 14 and 15, when children and young people answered the question, 'what makes children or young people unhappy or worried at home?', the word *'beaten'* was frequently used. Other words that related to abuse included '*sex', 'sexual'*, '*violence'*, *'quarrels', 'angry',* and *'quarrelling'*. A small number of young people wrote about sexual abuse. Their words predominantly relate to being recipients of violence. In some instances, the use of the word '*parents*', also referred to witnessing violence between mothers and fathers. Overall, the words relating to violence comprised approximately one fifth of all the answers children provided and a tenth of those received from young people. Words relating to emotional neglect, poverty and other experiences in the family home are discussed later in this report.

Figure 14. Results of workshops with children: What makes children feel unhappy or worried when at home?

Figure 15. Results of workshops with young people: What makes young people feel unhappy or worried when at home?

Below are further details of responses relating to **violence in the home** provided by children and young people (Figure 16).

Figure 16. What makes children and young people worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by children and young people)

What makes children worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by children)
ill-treatment at home, they want to die

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when flogged
parents beat the children
being beaten for no reason
being punished
ill-treatment
being badly beaten
parents ill-treatment of children
parents shouting at children
quarrels

What makes young people worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by young people)
gender based violence
sexual abuse
rape
harassment
violence based on sex – a lot of people want sex
sexual violence
insecurity in the family – father is an alcoholic and beats the children when he comes home
being beaten
violence of the parents towards children

Conversely, when asked what makes children and young people happy when they are at home, frequently used words related to having parents that loved them, no quarrelling, tolerance, and peace amongst family members.

Figure 17 provides a selection of answers in reference to violence as provided by children and young people when asked what makes adults worried or unhappy at home.

Figure 17. What makes adults in the family feel worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by children and young people)

What makes adults in the family feel worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by children and young people)
when girls are molested
conflicts between parents
parents quarrelling
parents are angry, they argue
problems in the family
no understanding between parents
beating in the family
fighting a lot at home

infidelity
having a partner who is disrespectful
betrayal among parents
misunderstanding between parents
conflicts in family

Figures 18 illustrates the answers adult family members provided in relation to families being worried or unhappy at home due to abusive behaviour.

Figure 18. What makes families worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by adult family members)

What makes families worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by adult family members)
violence
violence against women when parents quarrel all the time
father is drunk
lots of violence between parents
misunderstanding between parents
violence in the family
quarrels in the family
father is unfaithful at the expense of the family
infidelity
repeated quarrels

In contrast, the words most frequently used in relation to what makes families happy when they are at home as provided by adult family members, related to love, understanding, harmony, respect and peace in the family.

When asked why children become separated from parents and placed in alternative care, interviewees identified violence as being one of the primary reasons.

"Cases of violence are many"

"Psychological violence, physical violence, emotional violence, verbal violence, all violence."

"Yes, most of the violence is physical. Children are beaten…some are sexually abused"

"We have all types of violence here, physical violence, sexual abuse…"

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"So, violence in the family mostly come from families where mothers and fathers are no longer together so children live with step mother or step farther and the second cases when they are orphaned, they lose one or both parents and have to live with another person a member of the family and those members of the family ill treat them. These are most of the cases that come here so far with violence in the family"

"*most of the violence is physical. Children are beaten, they don't have enough food, at home some are sexually abused…"* (interviewee when asked about separation of children with disabilities from parental care)

In an online survey disseminated for our research, respondents were asked about reasons children are separated from parents and placed in alternative care in Côte d'Ivoire. In relation to different forms of violence, physical abuse of children received the highest ranking as a reason children are 'often' placed in care (Figure 19). This was followed by different forms of violence between adults in a family. It is noted that a number of respondents answered 'I don't know' to several questions throughout the survey when asked about reasons children are placed in alternative care and this is discussed in the last section of this report.

Figure 19. Reasons children are being placed in alternative care: violence

Reasons children are placed in alternative care

	Because of physical abuse of a child	Because of violence (physical, sexual or emotional) between adult family members in the household	Because of sexual abuse of a child	Because of emotional/psychological abuse of a child	Because the child was born as the result of rape
■ Often	30	19	17	14	11
■ Sometimes	20	25	29	28	21
■ Never	0	2	0	0	3
■ I don't know	0	4	4	8	15

■ Often   ■ Sometimes   ■ Never   ■ I don't know
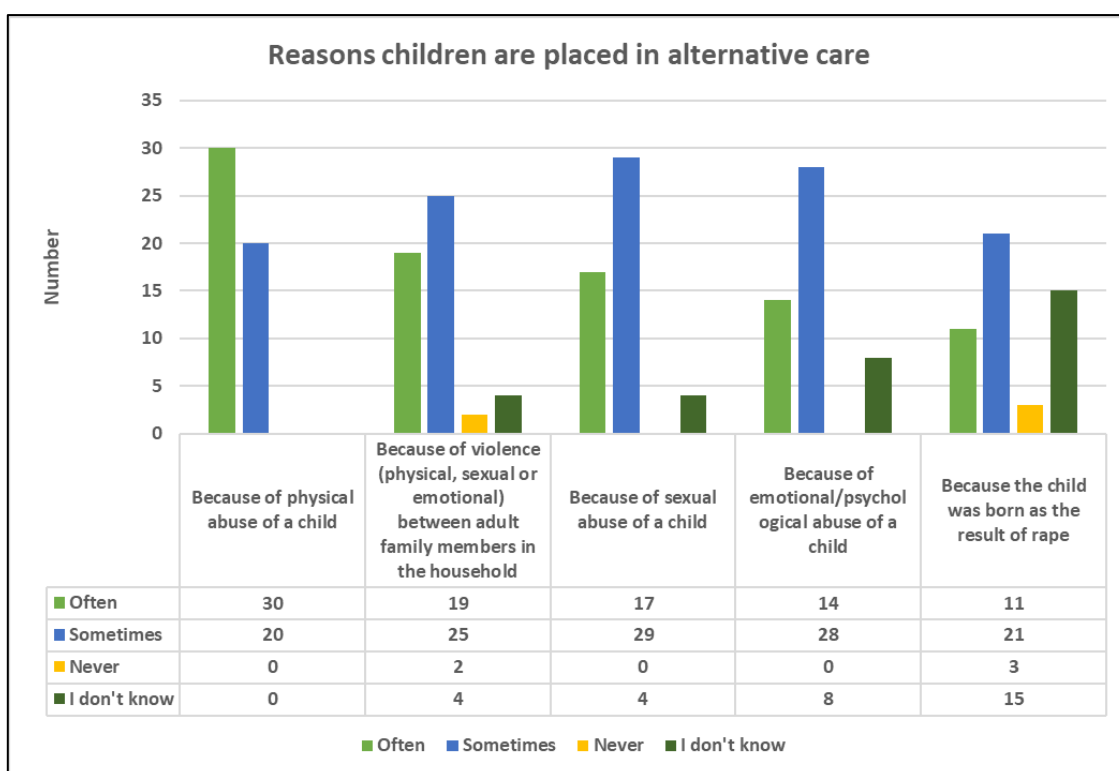
In 2020, the Ministry of Women, Family and Children published a survey[151] on violence against children in Côte d'Ivoire utilising 2018 data. Results suggest experiencing and witnessing violence in childhood is a common occurrence. For example, 41.7% of females 60.8% of males who took part in the study had experienced physical violence in childhood. For 29.9% of females and 40.1% of males, this violence had been inflicted by a parent, adult caregiver, or other adult relative. Of all young people aged 18-24 years old who took part in the survey, 45.3% of females and 52.3% of males reported having witnessed violence in the home during childhood.

Interviewees clearly understand sexual abuse of children, and especially of girls, is a reason children are at risk of being placed in alternative care.

> ".. *some [children]are sexually abused*"

> *"There are many cases of sexual based violence... we have a lot of cases and sometimes when this happens we have to take the victim away from the torture in order to protect and the torture is sometimes from the father or the tutor, the guardian, maybe the uncle, another relative. The person who takes care of the child."*

> *"Yes, there is, there are many cases of sexual violence."*

> *"So yes, because the reasons are sexual abuse"*

> *"Sexual violence. Gender based violence...We have rape, sexual aggression, so sexual abuse, that is not all the times having sex, it maybe intimidation and other means. There is forced marriage, ok so marital violence, domestic violence as well."*

As indicated in Figure 20 reproduced from the aforementioned study published in 2020 on violence against children in Côte d'Ivoire, 19.2% of female and 11.4% of male respondents aged 18-24 years old said they had experienced sexual violence before the age of 18.[152]

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[151] Ministry of Women, Family and Children 2020
[152] Ministry of Women, Family and Children 2020

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Figure 20. Prevalence of sexual violence prior to the age of 18 years among 18-24 year old respondents (data from 2018)
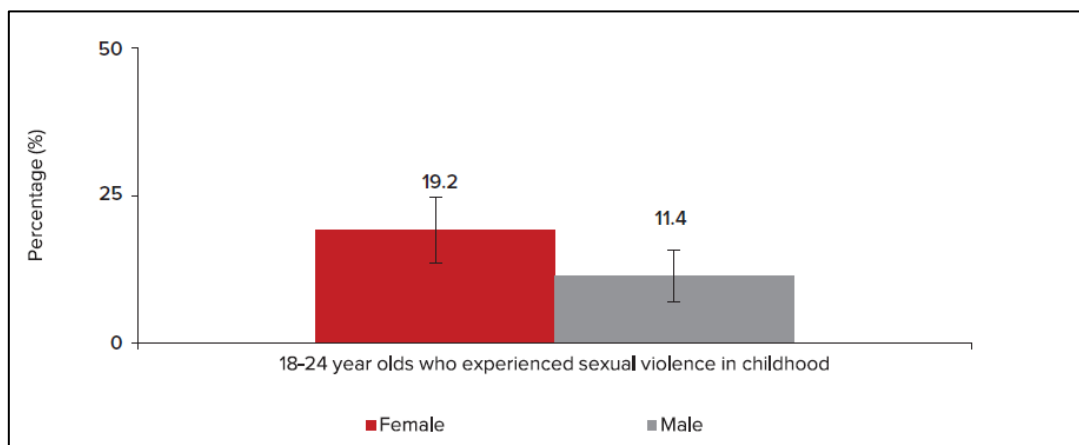
(Source: Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2020, page 45)

According to a study published by the Ministry of Women, Families and Children in 2023,[153] of 5,974 child protection cases responded to by the Ministry or NGOs in 2022, there were 2,212 cases of violence, 3,291 cases of neglect, 289 of exploitation, and 182 of harmful traditional practices. Cases of violence included 956 cases of rape, 697 of physical abuse, 371 of psychological or emotional abuse, and 188 sexual assaults excluding FGM. The study recognised the probability of there being even more cases across the country.

8.1.2. Physical and emotional neglect

8.1.2.1. Material neglect
When asked what makes children vulnerable to placement in alternative care, a number of interviewees referred to different forms of neglect.

> *"Another reason is the lack of responsibility of the parent, an irresponsible parent. Even if they are alive, they do not take care of the children they neglect them. Sometimes others like the neighbours that are around take care of the children. "*

> *"When the child is an institution for proper care the parent may find and come and take the child. Because the fact that the child is lost maybe cause the parent does not find him and so when they find him they ask why did you let your child out, why did you not take care of him, you are neglecting him, because neglect is another form of violence…but if it is a repeated habit then they will ask the church to take the child away from the parent because it is negligence"*

> *"Another reason is the lack of responsibility of the parent, an irresponsible parent. Even if they are alive, they do not take care of the children they neglect them."*

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[153] Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2023a

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"So sometimes it is by ignorance by the role of the parent. They ignore that when they give birth to the baby. They ignore it. They think they will just have sex and have a baby and that is it. But they don't understand the responsibility."

In 2023, the Ministry of Women, Families and Children published a report[154] illustrating data gathered from different sources. The data included protection incidences reported and responded to by government and NGO agencies. The study defined children impacted by neglect as those deprived of care including malnourished, unvaccinated children, or deprived of other forms of care (1046), 'victims of denial of resources' (791) and those undeclared in the civil registry (331). Children who had been abandoned were also accounted for under the term of 'neglect'. In addition, Figure 21 replicated from the study[155] shows cases of neglect of children with disabilities.

Figure 21. Cases of violence against children with disabilities (recorded 2022).
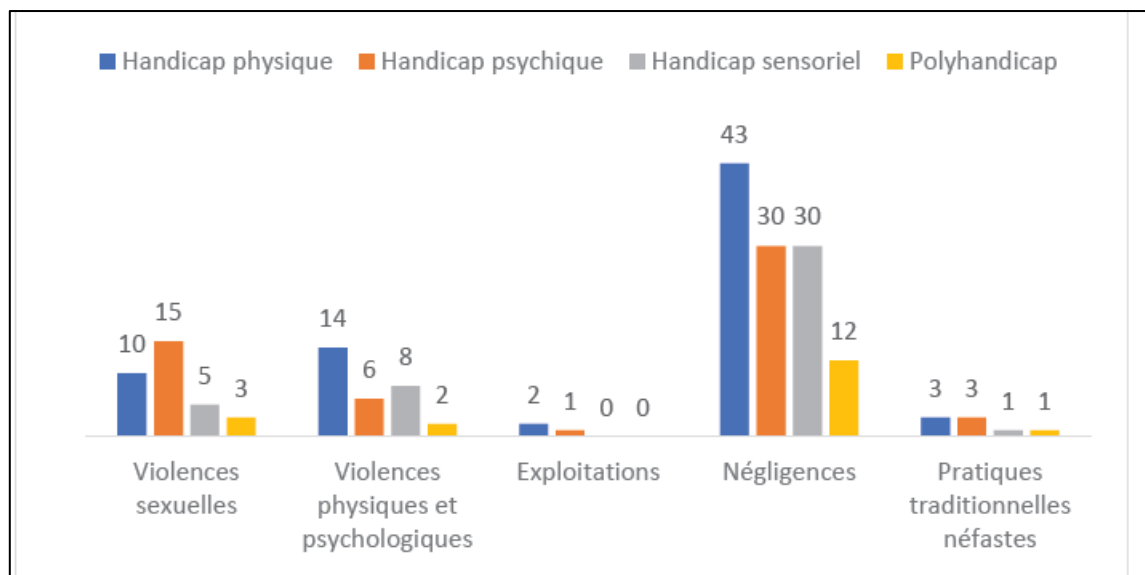
(Source: Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2023:47)

8.1.2.2. Emotional and psychological violence and neglect

The WHO defines **emotional or psychological violence'** as including, 'restricting a child's movements, denigration, ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection and other non-physical forms of hostile treatment.'[156] These actions can have a particularly negative impact on children's sense of self-worth and emotional well-being.[157] During our research children and young people participating in the research workshops wrote about such issues. They said children and young people are worried or unhappy if discriminated against or treated differently to their siblings. They are unhappy when they lack love and attention and when they are not trusted and respected.

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[154] Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2023a
[155] Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2023a:47
[156] Please see: https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children
[157] See also: Alliance for the Rights of Children, Adolescents and Youth in Kenya 2022

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They wrote about children and young people feeling lonely, not being understood, and sensing a lack of freedom. Information provided by children and young people is illustrated in Figure 22.

Figure 22. What makes children and young people worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by children and young people)

What makes children worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by children)

children lacking the attention of their parents

parents not loving their children

no love

parents insulting their child

parents disrespect their children

when the father makes negative comments to children

no peace and no tolerance

lack of attention

lack of trust

parents not respecting their promises

parents lying to children

discrimination in the family and children are not loved the same way

parents discriminating between their children

parents do not appreciate or congratulate their children

parents that do not admire their children

parents do not play with their children

isolation of the child

being lonely

children's rights are not respected

children don't have a right to give their opinion on topics related to them

not being fulfilled

being forced to do things they don't want to do

not having freedom

parents refusing their children to go out

searching my mobile phone

What makes young people worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by young people)

lack of love

feeling not loved by parents

lack of affection

repeated insults

neglect from parents

lack of respect from parents to children

father's disengagement from his own child

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parents not responsible for their children

parents are indifferent to their children

being in excess for the family

lack of listening and family warmth

lack of communication

not being free to speak at home

discrimination

parents who discourage you

pressure on children when they see everything their parents do for them

parents being upset due to their behaviour

lack of respect for women

lack of respect and consideration at home

lack of respect - when our values are not acknowledged

lack of confidence

not being able to rely on anyone

not to be able to ask for help

feeling alone

not being able to celebrate achievement

when parents watch over children too much

when a parent leaves or dies you might get a step parent who does not love you

living with a mother and not seeing his or her dad

not being with biological parents

Conversely, when asked what makes children happy, children who participated in the research workshops wrote about the importance of being, and feeling, part of a family. They feel happy if both parents are present. Spending time together and connecting as a family, as for example eating and going out together, was mentioned many times signifying the importance children place on these opportunities to bond with each other. Children feel happy when they do well at school and get good grades. They also wrote that children are happy if their parents are happy. Friendships are important to them and so is receiving gifts. Answering the question about happiness, young people also wrote about the importance of love, respect, tolerance, understanding and peace between family members. Some said young people are happy when they have more 'freedom', and when they are listened to.

When children and young people were asked what makes adults in the home worried or unhappy, many wrote about the expectations parents have of their children. This includes being unhappy when their children do not do well at school and their failure to achieve good grades. They are not happy when children are disrespectful, misbehave, mix with 'bad' friends, and are not home when expected. Although not discussed in the workshops, this might imply children and young people feel some pressure on the way they must achieve and behave if they want to retain a positive relationship with their parents.

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When interviewees were asked about reasons families are at risk of separation, a few spoke about factors related to emotional abuse.

> *"We have all types of violence here, physical violence, sexual abuse… we even have emotional."*

> *"And those that don't love their children it depends on the conditions when these children come in life ok. Sometimes the children are not wanted. The parents don't want them so when they are born they are accidents, they receive some judgements, and they are rejected by one or both parents."*

> *"Because…they don't care about the children. They may provide with money and provide with what they need, but they don't take time to take care of them."*

A survey conducted in 2018, and published in 2020, on violence against children in Côte d'Ivoire asked respondents about emotional violence. [158] Children and young people were asked if they had ever been told that they were not loved or did not deserve to be loved, wished they had never been born or were dead, ridiculed or put down, or told that they were stupid or useless. The study found 19% of females and 15.5% of males had experienced these forms of emotional violence inflicted by a parent, adult caregiver, or adult relative, during their childhood. [159] The study also noted a correlation between differing forms of violence with many children who experienced emotional maltreatment also being victims of other types of abuse.

Being victims or witnesses of different forms of violence not only creates the possibility that children will become separated from parents and placed in alternative care, but such experiences can also have a serious and long lasting impact on a child's mental health and well-being[160] as well as contributing to their use of harmful behaviour throughout their lifetime.[161] This is concerning because, it is clear from the collated information above, that children and young people in Côte d'Ivoire are experiencing and witnessing physical, sexual and emotional violence.

8.1.3. Orphanhood

For the purposes of our research, we define an orphan as someone whose both parents have died. However, in Côte d'Ivoire the term 'orphan' is used interchangeably for children who have lost one or both parents. When asked about reasons children are placed in alternative care, only one interviewee spoke about reasons children are taken into care when they are orphaned:

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[158] Ministry of Women, Family and Children 2020
[159] ibid.
[160] Kim et al, 2022
[161] Asmundson and Afifi 2019; Dube et al. 2001; Dube et al. 2002; Felitti et al. 1998; Kim et al. 2022; Moylan et al. 2010; Tarabah et al. 2015

> *"and the second case when they are orphaned, they lose one or both parents and have to live with another person a member of the family and those members of the family ill treat them"*

A few interviewees referred to their residential institutions as 'orphanages' however, during the course of the interviews it became apparent that the vast majority of children they accept into care had one or both living parents. In contrast, in our online survey, approximately 38 of 50 respondents think the death of both parents is a reason children are 'often' placed in alternative care and 27 of 50 respondents indicated this is a reason children are 'often' placed in care (Figure 23).

Figure 23. Reasons children are placed in alternative care: death of a parent/s

Reasons children are placed in alternative care	Often	Sometimes	Never	I don't know
Both parents have died	38	9	1	2
One parent has died	27	20	3	0
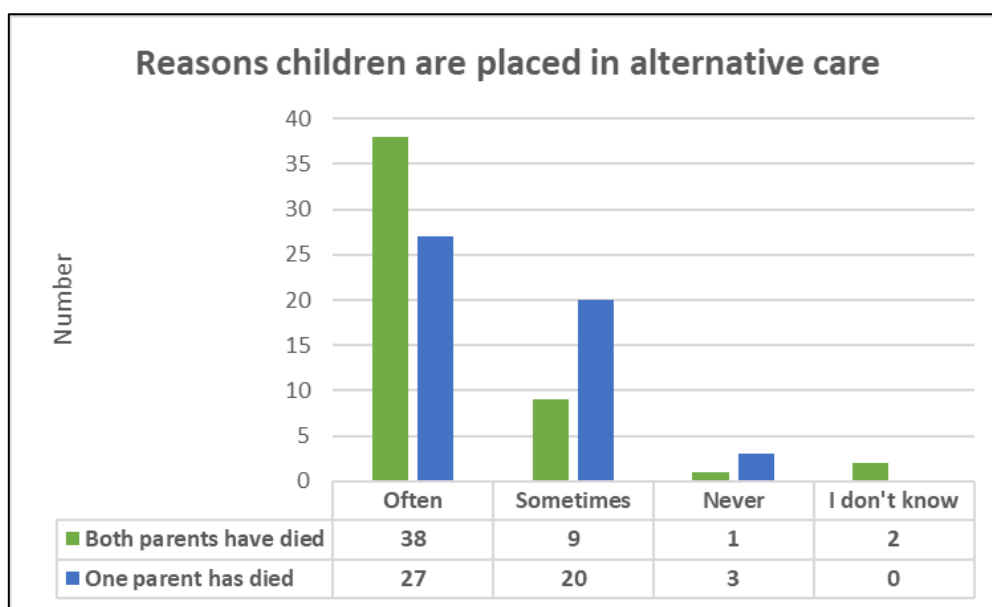
It is difficult to confirm the exact numbers of children who are true orphans i.e. both parents have died in Cote d'Ivoire in alternative care as the term OVC is used widely across Côte d'Ivoire to denote both orphans and vulnerable children as one group i.e. these are children who are orphans due to the death of one or both parents as well as children who are assessed as being 'vulnerable'. Data from a 2016 UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) has indicated that of a total number of 4,7639,122 OVC, 125,000 children (1% of all 0-17 year olds), were orphans due to death of both parents. [162] It is also understood that the vast majority of 'orphans' remain in the care of their extended family.

A study conducted by the National Council of Human Rights included information about entry into, and evaluation of services in, 73 residential care facilities in Cote d'Ivoire.[163] The authors of the study said almost 40% of the children were there because they were 'orphans' (Table 2). However, no definition of orphan was provided.

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[162] Please see: https://ghdx.healthdata.org/record/cote-divoire-multiple-indicator-cluster-survey-2016
[163] National Council of Human Rights, Cote d'Ivoire 2022

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Table 2. An example of data explains reasons for children have been placed in residential care in Cote d'Ivoire

Reason	Number	Percentage
Orphans*	1,165	39.2%
Abandoned	393	13.22%
Victims of protection violations (abuse, forced marriage, traditional practices etc.)	195	6.56%
Children removed from parental care	46	1.55%
Children who failed or dropped out of school	221	7.44%
Children with disabilities	493	16.59%
Children vulnerable due to HIV/AIDS	197	6.63%
Other including LGBTQ, migrant children, children addicted to drugs, runaway children)	262	8.82%
TOTAL	**2,972**	**100%**

(Source: National Council of Human Rights, Côte d'Ivoire 2022)
*No definition of orphan is provided

8.1.4. Abandonment

For the purposes of our research, we define abandonment as children whose both parents are unknown. Article 363 of the Penal Code[164] in Cote d'Ivoire defines the act of child abandonment as anyone who exposes or causes to be exposed, abandons or causes to be abandoned, in a solitary place, a child, incapable of protecting himself because of his physical or mental state. However, it is important to note that in Côte d'Ivoire the term 'abandoned' is not necessarily being used by professionals to denote only children whose parentage is unknown. During interviews, we clarified the definition we were using.

The information on abandonment provided by interviewees for our research mostly related the abandonment of babies, especially by young girls, and signifies a range of reasons for such actions including rape, early pregnancy, lack of support from the father of a child, and poverty:

> *"There are many reasons mothers abandon their babies. One of the reasons why parents abandon the baby is early pregnancy. Some girls they get pregnant early. They don't or cannot afford to take care of the pregnancy and they then abandon them. Another reason is the fathers of the babies who do not recognise the pregnancy. And the parent whose daughter is pregnant, they reject the daughter because she was not supposed to get at this age, so that causes her to get rid of her baby of her pregnancy."*

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[164] Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2023a:2

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"The parent irresponsibility- there are many cases of abandoned babies. Mothers that give birth to a new born baby and they go and throw them away in the garbage. We have a rate of three babies per month, three babies that are abandoned a month".

"Another case is the case where some children are abandoned those are children of young students who are the boarding girls they get pregnant when they go to school and their parents are ignorant of this, so they stay away from her parents until they give birth and then they get rid of the baby. They abandoned them somewhere. So, this one is fear that can explain the behaviour of the girls."

"Another reason why they abandon the baby, they may be living with the man they get pregnant but once they get pregnant and give birth, that one, he denies the baby and is not ready to get a baby and he gets separated from her. She becomes vulnerable so she makes the decision to get rid of the baby".

Two other reasons, first one is economic reasons they get rid of the babies because they cannot afford to take care of baby. And the second reason is when the baby comes as a result of rape. We have a lot of cases of that here. The mothers come here and say that they are raped and do not want the baby, so we have to take care of the baby here at the institute.

"Another reason maybe the women, the mother, maybe be mentally disabled and after she gives birth, they look for a close relative to take care of the baby. But most of the time they do not find a relative that can take care of the baby, so they have to take care of the baby at the institute. They are babies mostly who are abandoned. The percentage of babies is higher."

"There are many cases of abandoned children in the street because the young girls are forced to take to care of their babies when they cannot afford it, they are abandoned by the boyfriend and so there is a case where some are raped, and the pregnancy comes out because of the rape, and they also abandon their children."

According to a report published by the Ministry of Planning in 2019,[165] there is no systematic collection of data that accurately records the number of children who are abandoned each year however, figures in the Ministry of Women, Families and Children suggest 251 children were recorded as having been abandoned in 2022 according to the definition in the Penal Code.[166] The same study suggests reasons contributing to abandonment are multiple and include the child not being wanted, especially in cases where children are born as the result of rape, or parents lacking the means to care

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[165] Ministry of Planning and Development and UNICEF 2019
[166] Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2023a

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for them. Some children are abandoned because they are considered cursed or witches/wizards, especially when the mother dies during child birth, or if they are born with a disability.

Several interviewees mentioned the issue of witchcraft as a reason for abandonment.

> *"and some are treated as wizards, people think they are sorcerer, wizards and witches they sent them to some religious men for their deliverance and there they are ill-treated even more than when they were in the house."*

In 2023 the Ministry of Women, Families and Children wrote,

> the phenomenon of child witches has grown in recent years in our African societies. These children accused of practicing witchcraft are victims of physical and moral violence. They are often abandoned by their families and end up on the street where the risk of all kinds of violence is high.[167]

In 2023, a report published by the Ministry of Women, Families and Children[168] contained data related to 5,974 protection cases recorded and responded to by government and NGOs. This included 251 abandoned children of which 198 children were found in urban settings and 53 in rural areas. A breakdown by age can be seen in Figure 24.

Figure 24. Number of children abandoned by age (data collected 2022)
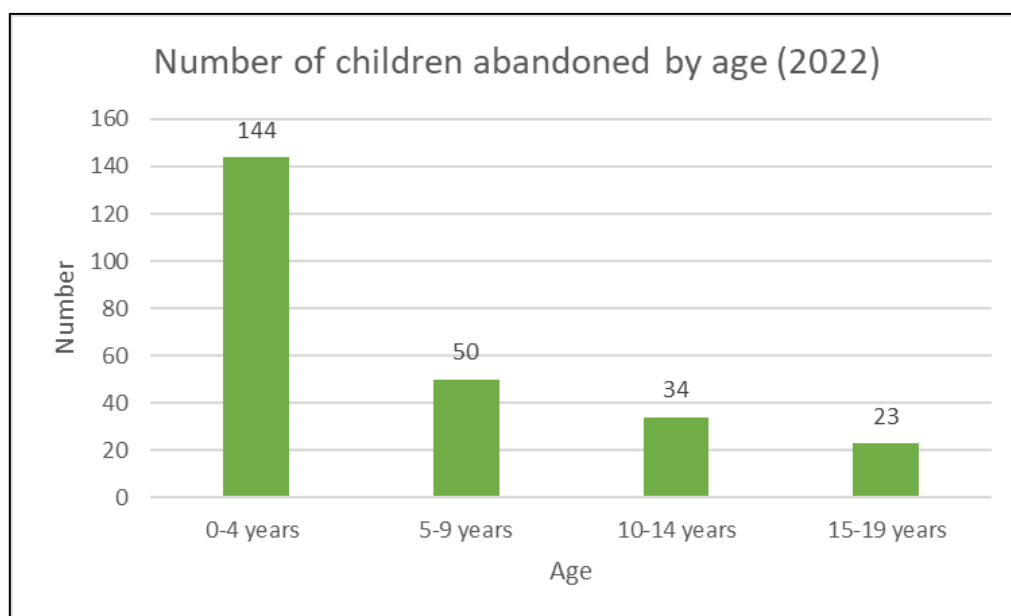
(Source: Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2023)

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[167] Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2023b:19. See also: Groce and McGeown 2013
[168] Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2023a

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8.1.5. Disability

Various studies and reports sourced during the research, highlight the overall lack of data on persons with disabilities in Côte d'Ivoire. Interviewees confirmed that children with disabilities do lose parental care and are often then placed in specialised institutions managed by government, NGOs, and private organisations.[169] Others spoke of the reluctance of some alternative care providers to accept children with disabilities into their programmes.

Below is a selection of the information shared by interviewees when asked about children with disabilities and placement in alternative care.

"We don't reject children with disabilities. Whenever we receive such children, we welcome them, but we gather all necessary information, and take them to other social centres. To those centres that are more trained to take care of disabilities. They welcome them"

"So here children with disabilities, many families prefer to keep the children home. They do not let them out. But what an institution like ours does is to sensitize the parent and let the children go toward a specialised centre"

"Actually, we don't have any of this in our programme. The other centres in general are reluctant to welcome these kinds of children. Children with disabilities. This is why, before they take children, they need to have all the information about the children and when they find out that it has any disability, they don't want to accept them, but they refer them to a more specialised institution"

"So the NGOs know what type of children as they are concerned, they will welcome only healthy children. They cannot accommodate children with disability as they don't have the equipment nor the training to take care of them. We have a baby that was abandoned with a disability which is with us because we did not find another place to send him so we will take care of him for now"

"In most cases they make the right decision but there are some exceptions. For example, children with disabilities they are not specialised in taking of them. So, when they take them, they take them to a more, another more, specialised centre" (interviewee when asked if the right decisions are being made about children who are placed in care)

"It is because they don't have the training to take care of such children that is why they don't welcome them"

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[169] Please see: https://www.humanium.org/en/ivory-coast-education-disabled-children/

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In 2015, Bayat condemned the treatment of children with disabilities in Côte d'Ivoire saying they lacked,

> any noticeable degree of human dignity or respect. In most institutions, at the very best, I found their condition suboptimal, often lying down on the dirt floor, non-stimulated, and ignored. Social workers and teachers alike frequently expressed their disbelief in any true learning capacity or finer human emotions and interests in these children.[170]

Bayat also wrote about the phenomenon of disabled children who are identified as 'snake' children.[171] These children are at risk of 'ritual abandonment or killing' based on the cultural norm that any deviance in health is considered a 'result of displeasure of one of the natural or ancestral spirits, or a result of possession of an evil spirit.'[172] Furthermore, 93% of the professional teacher and social workers that participated in Bayat's research admitted they had used corporal or emotional punishment as a way of disciplining children with disabilities.[173]

One interviewee also highlighted the high risk of abuse facing some children with disabilities, and how, "*most of the time children with disabilities are mocked, people laugh at them, …Those children are hidden by the parents because the parents don't want people to see them. So, they stay hidden till they die."*

It has not been possible to gather reliable data that would verify the number of children with disabilities residing in different 'specialised' residential institutions or the individual reasons for their placement there. It is clear that children with disabilities in Cote d'Ivoire are very vulnerable and do need support and protection within their family home.

8.1.6. Divorce/separation and re-marriage/new partnerships

Children and young people are aware of the violence and disagreements between adult family members and some are worried that this will lead to one or both of their parents, fathers in particular, taking new partners. They are worried that if a new partner is brought into the home so one parent will be forced to leave or, the unfaithful partner will leave and move in with their new family. In relation to this situation, there is a further concern regarding violence inflicted upon children by a new partner or step-parent and how this can lead to placement in alternative care.

> *"It was a young lady who has been beaten by her stepmother and she was brought here by the police. When she cannot do something at home she is beaten by the stepmother because the father is no longer at home with her mother and these cases are a lot. These are the type of cases they usually deal with"*

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[170] Bayat 2015:8
[171] See also: Ministry of Development and Planning and UNICEF 2019
[172] Bayat 2015:4
[173] Bayat 2015

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"Another reason is when mother or father are no longer living together and the stepmother, most of the time it is the stepmother, who no longer wants to stay with the children of a husband so because of this the children go outside and decide to stay there"

"So separation family separation. So one of the parents ill-treat the child they take another partner and that partner beat the child and this causes the child to leave the house. Another reason maybe the deceased of one or both parents and when the children are sent to foster parents and the foster parents do not take care of them well, so they have to be taken away"

"There are definitely cases of beating of children but all these relates to the situation of poverty when the husband and the wife are no more together the stepmother that comes in does not like the children and sometime and more often beats them"

"The cases I already encountered are the case of stepmothers. The man already has children before he gets married, and it is the stepmother does not want the child. It is not her children so she beats them. Secondly the children maybe not their child but the child of a brother or of a sister, a niece or a nephew who lives with them, and they also beat them. We have encountered many cases like that within their activities."

Children may also be at risk of losing parental care when marital breakdown leads to custody battles.

"Most of the time, the children are given to men because they have more money even when the women want to take the children, they cannot afford to take care of them. So, most of the time the guardianship is given to the men. And in the event the child stay with the mother who does not have money, then he lives in a difficult situation. On the other side when the man has the guardianship, and the man has to take care of his child legally, and the stepmother does not love the children, and there is a problem. So when they go with the father it is the stepmother that does not love the children"

"and one of the main reasons is violence, family violence, that cause children to come out of the family and there is also in the family the issue of step mother and step father that sometimes cause the children to leave the house."

Risk of parent-child separation is also attributed to situations of single-headed households, especially those that are female-headed. Becoming a single parent may be due to differing reasons including violence and infidelity as noted above as well death, HIV/AIDS and other illness.

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"The reason those women are widows most of them are because their husbands died because they were ill of sickness, the one who are widow because of war, we constantly have cases of this with the families we work with"

and the problem came when one of the partners died and the one that is remaining cannot afford to take care of the children anymore they have to take care of the children"

In the online survey, of 50 respondents a total of 18 (36%) thought single parenthood was 'often' the reason children are placed in alternative care (Figure 25). A total of 13 respondents (26%) thought the taking of a new partner by a mother or father 'often' led to the placement of children in care, and 19 thought this happened 'sometimes'.

Figure 25. Reasons children are placed in alternative care

Reasons children are placed in alternative care	Often	Sometimes	Never	I don't know
■ Either the mother or the father are by themselves (e.g. a single parent) and cannot cope	18	22	6	4
■ A parent has a new partner who does not want the child/children from a previous relationship	13	19	6	12
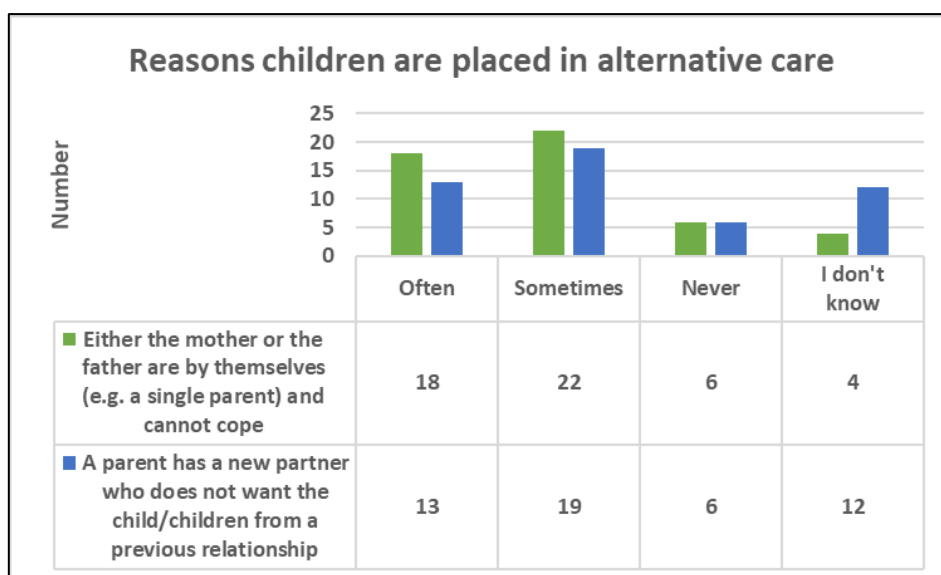
8.1.7. Access to education

When asked what makes children, young people and adult family members happy, many, particularly children and adults, wrote about the importance of education and achieving good grades. However, they identified costs associated with education including contribution towards fees, as a barrier to children attending school. Although public education is supposedly free, there are costs including the need to pay for books, uniforms and transportation.

In relation to questions associated with education in the online survey, a fifth of respondents (10) indicated parents being unable to afford costs associated with schooling is a reason children are 'often' placed in alternative care (Figure 26). However, a much higher percentage noted this and other reasons as 'sometimes' being the cause. Once again the large number of respondents who said 'never' or they 'don't know' is noted.

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Figure 26. Reasons children are placed in alternative care: education

Reasons children are placed in alternative care: education

	The child does not go to school on a regular basis as parents cannot afford to pay for uniforms, books, transport, etc.	The child does not go to school on a regular basis because they must go to work	There is no school in the local community so the child does not go to school	There is no access to education for children with disabilities	The child does not go to school because their parents do not think education is important	Schools do not accept girls
Often	10	6	4	3	2	1
Sometimes	15	25	17	12	21	3
Never	19	11	19	25	16	38
I don't know	6	8	10	10	11	8

As see in Figure 26, very few respondents think access to education for children with disabilities is a reason children are 'often' or 'sometimes' placed in alternative care. However, other data from Côte d'Ivoire, although not indicating a direct correlation between lack of access to education and placement in care, does highlight the many barriers to schooling for children with disabilities that might ultimately lead to placement in a residential 'special education centre'. For example, UNICEF noted[174] reasons for exclusion from education that included parents taking the decision not to educate their disabled child, and experiences of violence and discrimination at schools.

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[174] Please see: https://www.unicef.org/cotedivoire/rapports/le-droit-%C3%A0-l%C3%A9ducation

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9. Additional child protection concerns that can place children at risk of placement in alternative care

As a consequence of circumstances in the home, for example the result of inadequate parental care and protection, children find themselves in situations that place them at risk of placement in alternative care when also outside the home environment. Below are some of the concerns raised by interviewees as well as children, young people and adult family members during research workshops. Information has also been triangulated with details collated from the desk review and the online survey. It has not been possible to report on data that clearly disaggregates the number of children in alternative care due to each of the different circumstance described below.

9.1. Street connected children

Street connected children, including those living and working on the streets, face an increased risk of violence. Children on the streets also attract attention of police and child protection authorities concerned for their safety and welfare.. Many interviewees spoke about children becoming street connected as a result of fleeing violence and conflict in the home. According to the information collected during interviews, becoming street connected is a reason children are placed in alternative care.

"So children leave the house because of domestic violence to join friends in the street"

"When there is a case, when the police find a child on the street they know exactly the procedure and how to liaise with the institution in order to take care of the child"

"…children that are coming here because they are abused at home, they live in the street and some come just for an adventure, came from far places not knowing anyone here. And once they are here, they don't know where to go, so they end up in this centre"

"So most of them not all, but most of them come from the street"

"There are two reasons children come into care…Some children go to the street and some go to alternative care centres. But what are the reasons? The first reason is poverty, a parent cannot afford an education, a parent cannot afford food, so they go to the street to find food ok. And the second reason is they go to the street to sell stuff in order to bring money home"

"Most children find themselves in the street and taken care by care centres like us for the same reason. When children are in the street the people passing by can take

them and take them to the police station and at the police station, they have access to them and after that they take care of the children"

"The children go to the street because they find protection there. They meet other boys there and girls there and they think that they are more protected there, so they decide to stay there"

"And this about those children who live in the street and why they go there and into alternative care."

"there are other children who come here [to an alternative care facility] without a social investigation report, because those children are the ones that live in the street and they bring them here first in the process they gather all the information to let them know to the other social institutions"

The NGO ECPAT estimates 1 million children are living on the streets in Côte d'Ivoire.[175] In 2023 the Ministry of Women, Families and Children reported that 31,450 street connected children had been identified in Abidjan and eleven other large urban conurbations.[176] The reasons given for this situation included family breakdown and children fleeing home due to violence and poverty. However, a statistical report also published by the Ministry in 2023 said in 2022, there were 7,207 children aged between 5 and 17 years old in what was described as a street situation.[177]

Respondents to the online survey think children found on the streets does lead to their placement in alternative care (Figure 27). Almost half of the 50 respondents said they think a child living, working on the streets, or having run away from home, are reasons they are 'often' placed in alternative care.

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[175] Please see: https://ecpat.org/story/cote-divoire-eco/#intro
[176] Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2023b
[177] Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2023a

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Figure 27. Reasons children are placed in alternative care: being street connected
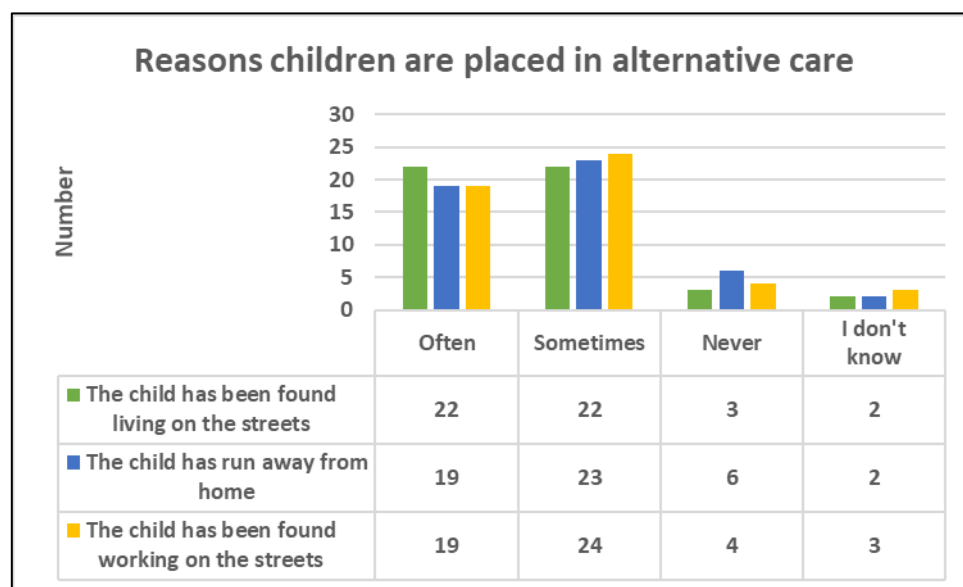
9.2. Child labour

During the research workshops only one young person mentioned being sent out to work. When asked about reasons children are placed in alternative care, very few interviewees spoke about child labour. One interviewee when asked about the children in their alternative care facility said,

> *"There is another case we usually deal with which is the case of young children that are taken from villages. Some families go to the village and say I want to go to the town with your daughter because I want to send her to school. But once they come here, they no longer send her to school but instead they start giving them work to do child labour. And those children when they can no longer stand it they run out of the house and they come to police station, or sometime they come here directly"*

Another spoke of girls who *"are exploited economically they are promised jobs or school and are forced to do jobs some jobs".* Furthermore, some respondents to the online survey, when asked about reasons children are placed in alternative care, agreed that child labour can be a reason.

In 2016, estimates from a UNICEF MICS study[178] showed 31.3% of 5 to 17 year olds (2.3 million children) were participating in child labour. Approximately twice as many children were engaged in economic activities in rural areas that those in urban settings. A 2018 report[179] issued by the US Government's Bureau of International Labor Affairs revealed children's engagement in domestic work, drug trafficking, mining, forced begging, and use as labour in the agricultural sector. The report also recognised a 'significant advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour'.[180]

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[178] Please see: https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-fr330-other-final-reports.cfm
[179] Bureau of International Labor Affairs 2018
[180] Bureau of International Labor Affairs 2018:1

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However, these efforts included the opening of a residential centre to house victims of child labour thus separating these children from parental care. The international NGO ECPAT currently reports[181] on the practice of 'confiage' where children are separated from parental care and sent to relatives or friends in exchange for their labour. The majority of these children are young girls from rural areas.

9.3. Exposure to drugs and alcohol

Only one young person referred to alcohol when asked what makes children and young people worried or unhappy when they are at home: *"father is an alcoholic and beats the children when he comes home"*. And only one adult family member wrote about the use of drugs. Three interviewees mentioned the issue of drugs and alcohol as reasons children are separated from parents and placed in alternative care.

> *"some are alcoholics, they drink too much some children are taken away from them"*

> *"most of the cases of violence they have are due to alcohol or mental illness"*

> *"Violence is sometimes due to alcohol or mental illness"*

Nineteen of the 50 respondents to the online survey think parental addiction to drugs or alcohol is a reason children are 'often' placed in alternative care and 20 believe this is 'sometimes the reason' (Figure28).

Figure 28. Reasons children are placed in alternative care: drugs and alcohol

Reasons children are placed in alternative care

	Often	Sometimes	Never	I don't know
One or both parents have an addiction to drugs or alcohol	19	20	3	8
The child has an addition to alcohol or drug addiction	7	20	7	16

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[181] Please see: https://ecpat.org/story/cote-divoire-eco/#intro
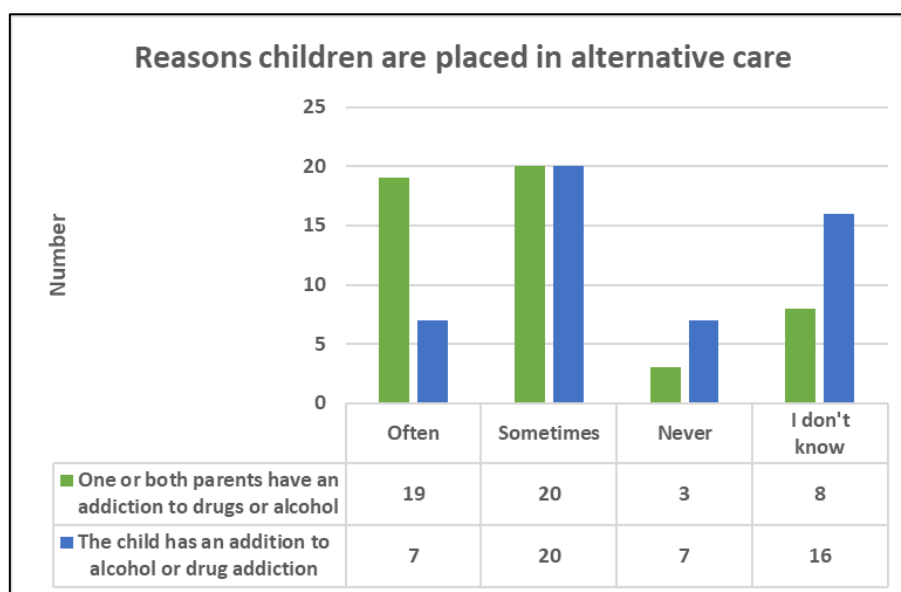
There are few reports on this issue but a study in 2014 suggested how, along with other West African countries, there was a growing dependency, including by young people, on cocaine and heroin in Cote d'Ivoire. [182]

9.4. Female genital mutilation/cutting and forced circumcision (FCM/Cutting)

Only one interviewee referred to concerns related to female genital mutilation/cutting. They do think the practice is decreasing due to awareness raising programmes however, it may also be a reason girls are running away from home. Current data provided by UN Women reports the prevalence rate of FGM/Cutting in Côte d'Ivoire is 36.7%[183] whilst data from the organisation '28 too many' shows a considerable decline in the practice over recent years.[184]

9.5. Sexual orientation and gender identity

We feel it is important to recognise the possible protection needs of children and young people who identify as LGBTQI+ especially due to the possibility some families may reject their children because of it. During our research, no-one spoke of issues related to sexual orientation or gender identity when asked about reasons children become separated from parents. However, amongst information provided by the National Council of Human Rights of Cote d'Ivoire in 2022 was a list of different reasons children had been placed in the alternative care facilities the Council reviewed.[185] This included 262 children defined as 'other including LGBTQ, migrant children, children addicted to drugs, runaway children'. The data was not further disaggregated. UNICEF in Cote d'Ivoire has also raised concerns regarding violence and discrimination faced by young people who identify as LGBTI and the way they are forced to conceal their sexual orientation to avoid being rejected by their family and others.[186] In addition, Human Rights Watch calls attention to acts of discrimination that are occurring in Côte d'Ivoire including physical assaults becoming a 'common' phenomenon'.[187]

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[182] West African Commission on Drugs 2014. See also:
https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/westandcentralafrica/stories/2022/unodc-commemorates-the-international-day-against-drug-abuse.html

[183] Please see: https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/fr/countries/africa/cote-d-ivoire?formofviolence=c1acf03e0c694de38a557407ce413e65

[184] 28 Too Many 2020

[185] Human Rights Council, Cote d'Ivoire 2022

[186] Please see: https://www.unicef.org/cotedivoire/rapports/inclusion-sociale

[187] Please see: https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2022/05/19/2022-country-profiles-sexual-orientation-and-gender

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10.   The multiple dimensions of poverty

Poverty is an inter-generational as well as a multi-dimensional issue with measurements of poverty taking into account not only financial means, but other factors that contribute to well-being.[188] Our research identified multiple dimensions of poverty, including for many families, a severe lack of financial resources coupled with insufficient access to government services, as being a major factor contributing to the placement of children in alternative care. One issue is the challenge of coping with poverty that may then lead to feelings of stress and anxiety. Feelings that can negatively impact family relationships and contribute to family dysfunction and violence. And ultimately, situations that can result in children losing parental care.

Children and young people told us they are very aware of challenges families are facing with approximately a quarter of all their answers related to issues of poverty. This includes families not having enough financial resources coupled and lacking basic needs such as food, adequate shelter and clothing. The lack of food, and even 'hunger', was mentioned numerous times in written responses. Below are some of the answers provided by children and young people in relation to issues of poverty when asked what makes children and young people worried or unhappy when they are at home (Figure 29).

Figure 29. What makes children and young people feel worried or unhappy when they are at home (as answered by children and young people)

What makes children feel worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by children and young people)
money issues
parents don't have money
financial problems and cannot meet needs
not having money to meet needs
sleeping in the street and eat from the garbage
hunger
not having food to eat at home
lack of health care
no employment
be obliged to stop education
lack of money for tuition
sickness and mother does not have much money to buy what they need
not being able to go to school
parents that can't pay the tuition of their children

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[188] Please see: https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/multidimensional-poverty-measure#:~:text=The%20Multidimensional%20Poverty%20Measure%20(MPM,the%20%242.15%20international%20poverty%20line

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not having new clothes and has to continue to wear old clothes
not having a shelter
not having a good house
no good living conditions
being obliged to put aside their dreams because they don't have money
not being able to pursue their dreams due to a lack of resources

The answers of children and young people correlate with the list of concerns provided by adult family members in relation to issues of poverty. Below are some of the answers adult family members provided when asked what makes adults worried or unhappy when they are at home (Figure 30). Approximately a third of all their answers related to issues of poverty.

Figure 30. What makes families worried or happy when they are at home (as answered by adult family members)

What makes families worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by adult family members)
poverty
lack of financial means
bad management of money
hunger
insufficient food each day
bad food
unemployment
lack of work for the mother and father
sickness
no work
getting sick so you cannot get money so children have to work
lack of money to buy good clothes for children and parents
lack of money to have good education bad hygiene
lack of good toilet and other bathing equipment
lack of leisure activities
lack of house
over-crowded house
security for children as in a good house that is not blown away by a storm for example
unsafe house
lack of money to move from place to place
when the father going out without leaving money at home

As with children and young people, lack of food was a concern mentioned numerous times by adult family members. Not being able to afford medical costs if anyone falls sick was also cited as a significant worry along with lack of employment and adequate housing.

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Interviewees frequently referred to the issue of poverty as being a principal driver associated with separation of children from parents and placement in alternative care. Below is a selection of their answers provided by interviewees when asked about reasons children are placed in alternative care.

"One of the greatest factors is poverty of the parent who cannot afford to take care of the children"

"…because parent lack financial means. So because of this the children sometime are taken away from the parent until the time family can take them back.

"There are three reasons, the first reason why children come here is the area. This area is a highly populated area many people living here and the cost of living is very high. They are very poor here. So many families cannot afford to take care of children so that causes them to be here"

"The reasons are many forms children are taken into care. The first one is the most important, is foundation, poverty. Families don't have much money to take care of the children"

"Around 80% are here for poverty reasons. "

"It is mainly because of vulnerable children. These reasons maybe are internal and external reasons. Internal to the family because parents do not have enough money to take care of the child"

In our online survey, 50 respondents answered questions about reasons children are separated from parents and placed in alternative care in Côte d'Ivoire. As noted in Figure 31, many think different issues related to poverty lead to such situations. For example, 28% (14) respondents think parents not having enough money for such basic commodities as food and water etc. is a reason children are 'often' placed in alternative care (Figure 31).

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Figure 31. Reasons children are separated from parents and placed in alternative care due to issues related to poverty

Reasons children are placed in alternative care

	Parents do not have enough money for basic commodities such as food and water, etc.	The child is being neglected i.e. not being fed enough or kept clean or properly clothed	One or both parents do not have a job	The family do not have a house to live in	Parents do not earn enough money in the employment they can get	The child is being left alone in the house whilst the parent/s go to work	The family live in a house that is in a very bad condition or not big enough	The mother or the father or both - have gone to find work in another part of their own country	The mother or the father or both - have gone to find work in another country
■ Often	14	11	11	9	6	6	6	4	3
■ Sometimes	17	21	21	24	16	12	14	18	20
■ Never	13	11	10	8	18	22	17	13	12
■ I don't know	6	7	8	9	10	10	13	15	15

Further information gathered during our research considered the issues of poverty and availability of services and support to children and families in the urban versus the rural areas of Côte d'Ivoire. Our findings suggest there is a lack of services that address basic needs in both locations. However, there are indications that lack of support in rural areas is leading to migration to the cities due in part to economic hardship and the diminishing strength of family and community networks. For example, extended families are not willing or able to support those who are facing difficulties. In the urban settings, it is the overcrowded and harsh living conditions, especially for those living in illegal settlements also recognised as slums, coupled with lack of opportunities for regular employment that are causing particular challenges.

A 2022 report by the National Institute of Statistics indicates poverty rates are higher in rural areas, especially those in remote settings with little infrastructure, and in Abidjan.[189] This includes lack of access to schools and health centres. The report highlights a correlation between poverty and such indicators as lower educational attainment, poor health, and food insecurity. Furthermore, when an

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[189] National Institute of Statistics 2022

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event in the household such as a serious illness, death, divorce or a separation occurs, the sources of family income also diminish.[190] This particularly effects families living under the poverty line.

A study published in 2009,[191] also recognised how poverty increases for persons with a disability. The research found approximately 63% of persons with at least one disability in rural areas, and 33% of those living in urban areas were 'poor'. The poverty rates among people with a disability was higher at 51.4% than those without a disability (48.9%).

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[190] National Institute of Statistics 2022
[191] International Monetary Fund (IMF) 2009

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11. A correlation between issues related to poverty and family dysfunction and breakdown

As previously indicated in this report, our research findings illustrate how some children are at risk of placement in alternative care as a direct consequence of the negative impact poverty can have on the unity of families. In this respect, there is a correlation between the ability to cope with such daily challenges as providing food, adequate shelter, paying bills, keeping children in school, and finding adequately renumerated employment etc., and stress and tension within households. These ongoing challenges can exacerbate feelings of distress, anger, poor mental health, and for some, an inability to cope. This in turn is diminishing resilience and impacting the ability to maintain strong relationships in the household with outcomes that include, family dysfunction, poor parenting ability, and even violence.

As also noted above, children, young people, adult family members, and all interviewees, wrote and spoke about such lack of financial resources and support services being a major challenge impacting family life. Adult family members who participated in our research workshops particularly highlighted the struggles of daily life and concerns about providing for their children. Interviewees made a direct linage between the stress caused by such conditions related to poverty with family dysfunction and violence in the home.

"So, of course stress is a worsening factor of violence. When someone is under pressure of stress he is likely to be violent. During COVID 19 during lock down when people could not go out and there was stress and the violence rate at this time was very high"

"The poverty condition causes violence because the family are not stable and because there is no money children are forced to go and work and look for money for the whole family and they might find themselves in the street"

"poverty of families. In these most of the people who support the families are women and most of these women are widows and they have a lot of issues"

"one is the condition of poverty of the family and the family because it is poor and does not have enough money so is more focused is seeking for money so they don't have time to give to the children, or take care of the children, because they search for the search for money on a daily basis."

Findings from previous studies also illustrate linkages between poverty, violence and family breakdown in other parts of the world.[192] Overall, we conclude that issues related to poverty and

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[192] See for example: Babatope et al. 2022; Berger 2005; Lau et al. 1999; Lodder et al. 2020; Malley-Morrison 2004

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insufficient access to basic and specialist services are contributing to the breakdown of family life in Cote d'Ivoire and as a result, children are becoming separated from their parents and placed in alternative care.

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12. The phenomenon of inter-generational violence and inter-generational poor parenting capacity

It is evident from the findings above that multiple and interconnected factors contribute to the circumstances within the family home that may lead to children's placement in alternative care. When examining these circumstances further, a specific theme has emerged in relation to the perpetuation of dysfunction and breakdown within, and separation of, families. This is the inter-generational aspect of violence, inter-generational poor parenting capacity, and the connection between the two (Figure 32).

Figure 32. Inter-generational violence and poor parenting ability and family separation
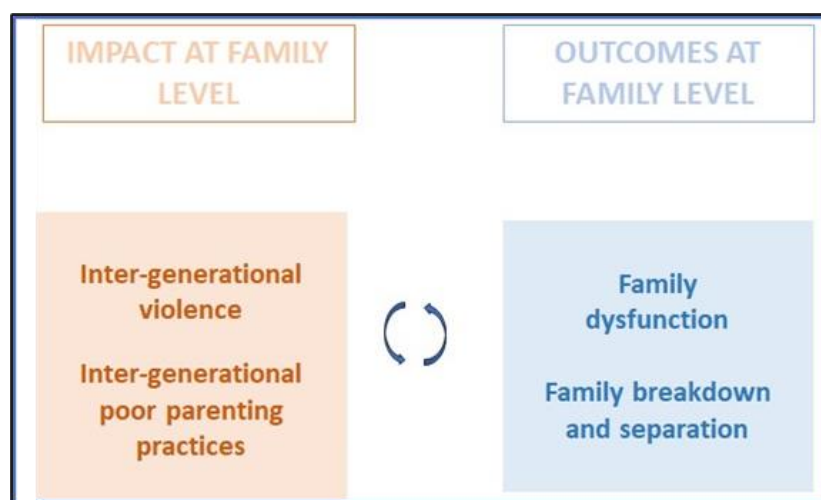
Many interviewees believe the lack of ability to adequately parent, and the presence of violence in the home, are inter-generational phenomena. Whilst discussing parenting skills and issues of positive bonding and attachment, they referred to the negative childhood experiences of parents that have subsequently impacted their ability to parent well. In this way, impaired relationships between children and their parents, violence, and family dysfunction is being repeated from generation to generation. Interviewees said:

"They don't know the reason why they are parents. They do not know what it implies. And maybe they went through such abuse when they were still young. You can only give what you have received."

"That is a serious issue the generation to generation that is transmitted. And like a child when his mates are playing, he is not going to play with them. Instead he stands aside and takes a stick and starts to hit the tree. And this is a sign that this boy has some behavioural disorder. And this need to be dealt with before he grows up with it because tomorrow the tree he is hitting maybe a human being."

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"So to the best of my knowledge about eighty percent of the parents who grow up in an abusive environment will reproduce the same when they grow up. And here in this centre we have what we call parental school. It consists of meeting or gathering parents and children together, during that class they talk and discuss about issues relating about been a parent and children rights. And it was at this occasion that one parent knew, learned, that it was that, what he was doing was bad. He grew up in an abusive environment and it was because of this abusive environment that now he was abusing his children, so he understood that he had to change, and the sessions helped him a lot to understand more."

"This may be explained by the fact that the parent themselves were abandoned when they were children. So when they grow up and become parent, they think that they can abandon the child as well. It is like someone who grows up in a violent environment, when he grows up and becomes an adult, he wants to reproduce the same violence around him"

"So, there are three reasons for violence in the house and community. The first one is bad habit of individuals that relay the mindset. And because of the past, because they did not help themselves, some have training some understand, they grow up with this. So they developed this bad habit from when they were a youngster."

In respect to learned behaviour, a study conducted by the Ministry of Planning and Development[193] in Côte d'Ivoire reported that,

> As the study on violence in urban areas shows, children tend to reproduce the methods of violent discipline that they are subjected to and easily resort to violence when a dispute arises with one of their children, peers or even an adult. Likewise, the risk of being circumcised is almost 30 times higher when the mother has already been circumcised – the prevalence rate of FGM/C is 21.6% among girls aged 0-14 whose mother has been excised – than when she was not…[194]

Other studies have also confirmed how both violence can be learnt behaviours and the inability to parent well passed down from one generation to another[195] For example, Conteras and del Carmen Cano noted how, through 'observation, learning and imitation'[196] of adults, and/or being a recipient of violence and neglect, there is a risk that children grow up to also display negative behaviours.[197] As stated previously in this report, interviewees have a concern that children in Côte d'Ivoire continue to experience and witness violence in the family as well as the places they learn and socialise. They also

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[193] Ministry of Planning and Development and UNICEF 2019
[194] Ministry of Planning and Development and UNICEF 2019:152
[195] Moylan et al. 2010
[196] Conteras & del Carmen Cano 2016:44
[197] Conteras & del Carmen Cano 2016; Bevans & Higgins 2002

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acknowledge how such adverse childhood experiences (ACES),[198] can contribute to learned behaviour that may be repeated both in childhood and in later life when also becoming parents. This, they believe, is contributing to the cycle of violence and breakdown within families in Côte d'Ivoire and children continuing to be separated from parental care as a consequence.

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[198] SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, University of Strathclyde; SOS Children's Villages International 2022

13. Factors in the wider society that contribute to vulnerability within families

Utilising a socio-ecological model to inform the research framework included consideration of factors in the wider society that can contribute to inter-generational violence, impacts affecting parenting ability, and family breakdown and separation (Figure 33). This section explores some of these factors in more detail.

Figure 33. Factors in the wider society contributing to vulnerability within families
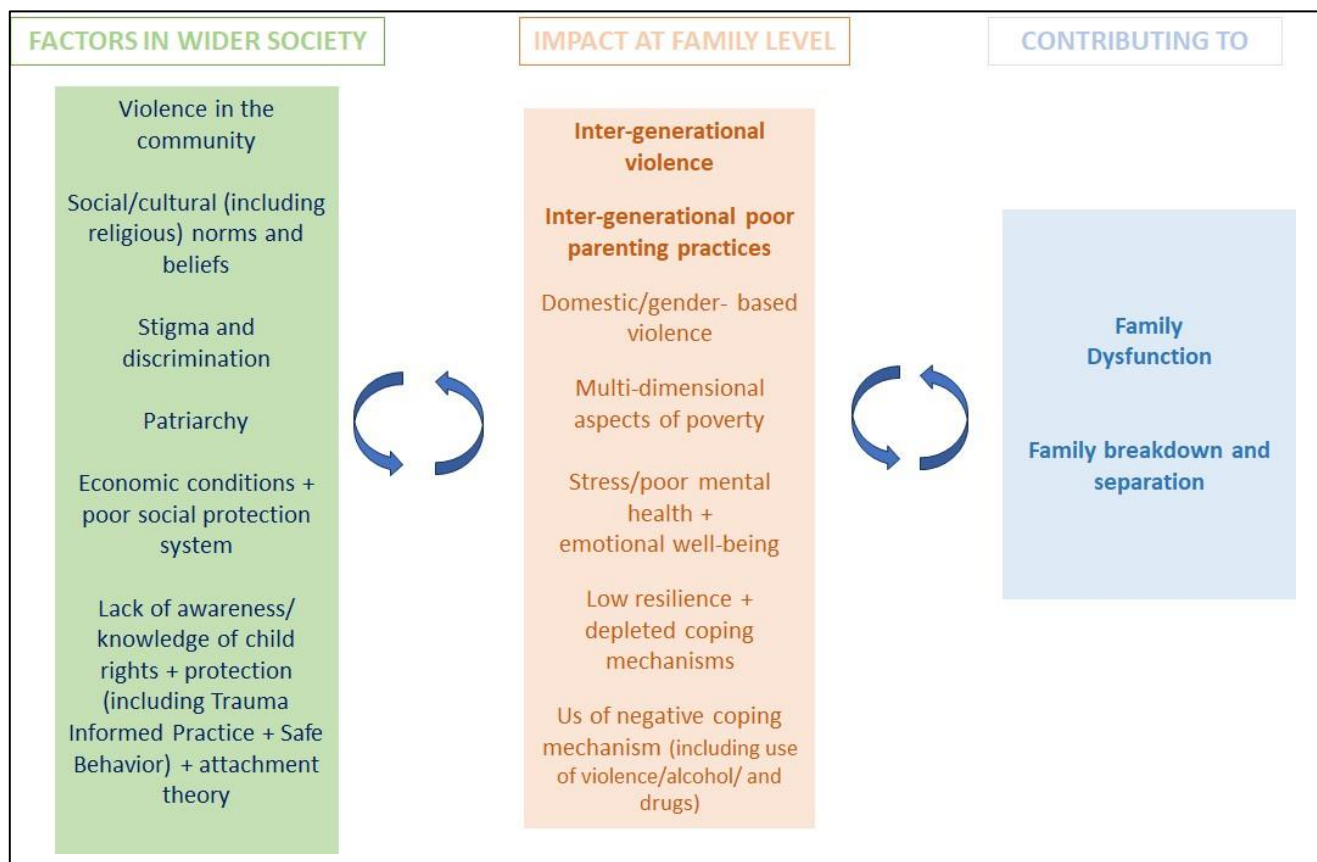
13.1. Living in a patriarchal society and gender based violence

UNICEF has defined patriarchy as a 'social system in which men hold the greatest power, leadership roles, privilege, moral authority and access to resources and land, including in the family.'[199] Patriarchy has further been described as 'a system of relationships, beliefs, and values embedded in political, social, and economic systems that structure gender inequality between men and women.[200]

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[199] UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia 2017
[200] Nash 2020:43

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Attributes seen as "feminine" or pertaining to women are undervalued, while attributes regarded as "masculine" or pertaining to men are privileged.' [201]

Interviewees spoke about living in a society where they believe there is some acceptance of a culture of male dominance in the household. They also recognise the persistence of domestic and gender-based violence.

"This is accepted in the society when men beat women in the family and even women themselves accept this situation because some of them think that this is an act of love from the husband when they beat them but this the change will come as a result of sensitization with time. Even when the man goes to the police station and complains that he has been beaten by his wife he will not even be accepted him because the policeman will drive him away from the police station because what is accepted is when men beat their wife not the other way."

"…this violence is still going on, sometime women are afraid to reveal it, but it still goes on. It is hidden maybe they are ashamed to talk about it."

"Ok, so to all regard, men are dominant over women in the culture even if the law here has made an effort to place men and women in the same level. But actually in the practice men are still dominant. In a couple, men are the ones making the decision. The women cannot make the decision unless they have to go ahead of the men."

"Mainly when the husband treated badly the wife. It may not only be the husband but the one that mistreated her, the boyfriend…men tend to be more dominant and beat their wife. It is forbidden here. Two or three years earlier the women abuse in family were called a physical abuse but since the law of 2019 the term sexual abuse has been clearly defined in criminal law… It is true the law states that we are equal men and women but in practice it is not so. For example, in some areas the women cannot talk to men directly like that. Or maybe having a meeting where women attend it is not possible."

"there are laws but most of the people ignore that law, the law protecting children and women's right, but people do not know that. Some women for example, when they are abused by men, they are reluctant to go and prosecute them because if my husband goes to prison who will take care of my children."

"There is … marital violence, domestic violence as well."

"So children leave the house because of domestic violence"

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[201] ibid.

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Some children and young people wrote about violence and discord between parents (Figure 34).

Figure 34. What makes children, young people worried or unhappy when they are at home?

What makes children worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by children)
conflicts between parents
parents are fighting
parents fight
parents arguing
parents quarrelling
parents are angry, they argue
no understanding between parents
parents are angry with each other

What makes young people worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by young people)
conflict in the family
when parents don't have agreement
parents quarrelling with each other

A number of adult family members also acknowledged the issue of domestic violence (Figure 35).

Figure 35. What makes children, young people worried or unhappy when they are at home?

What makes families worried or unhappy when they are at home? (as answered by adult family members)
lots of violence between parents
violence against women
violence between husband and wife
violence between parents
violence
when parents quarrel all the time

A study on violence against women and children in Côte d'Ivoire published by the Ministry of Women, Families and Children in 2023, said witnessing violence in childhood was common including when it occurs in the home. [202] Of all respondents in the study, approximately 45% of females and 62% of males reported having witnessed violence at home. The report noted that 7,919 cases of gender-based violence (women and girls) had been reported in 2022.

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[202] Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2023a

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In the online survey respondents were asked whether violence between adult family members is a reason for child-parent separation and placement in care. Of 50 respondents, almost half (22) think this happens 'often' and 25 think it happens 'sometimes' (Figure 36).

Figure 36. Are children being separated from parental care and placed in alternative care because of violence between adult family members in the household?
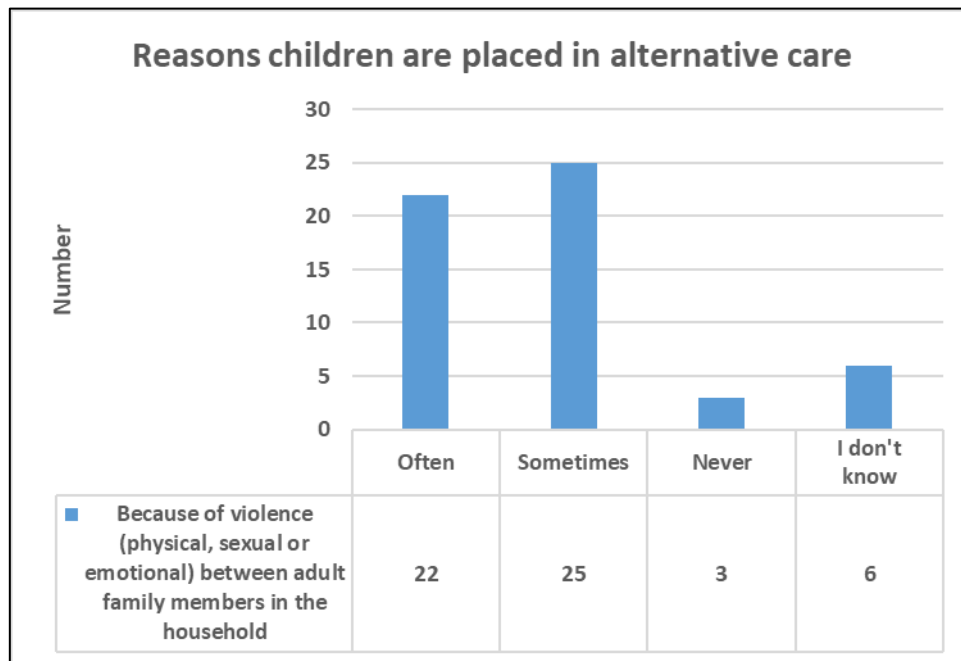
Survey respondents, when asked about support available to address issues of domestic and gender based violence, overwhelmingly they said, 'there is not enough help.' (Figure 37)

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Figure 37. Is there enough help?
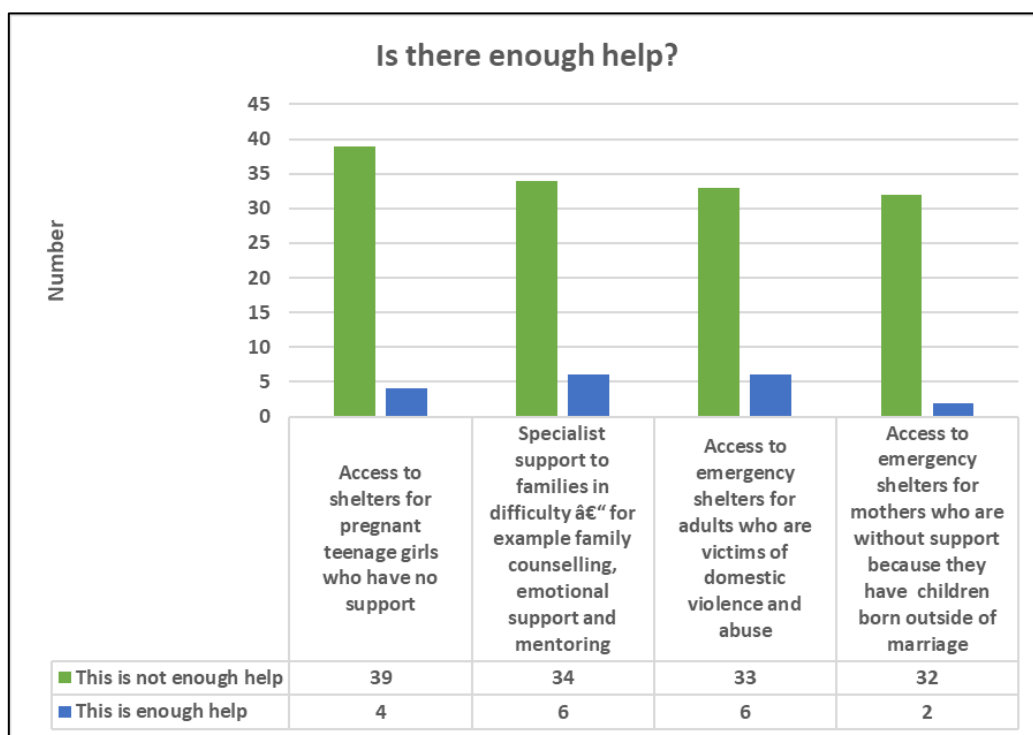
13.2. Violence in the community

An understanding of violence experienced in communities across Côte d'Ivoire is recorded by various observers including the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)[203] in the UK and Human Rights Watch[204]. These organisations note the rise in violence particularly in connection with national elections, land disputes and the increase in the number of criminal gangs. It is in the context of conflict, impoverishment of households, and poorly-managed urbanisation reports the IDRC, that 'young people see violence as a legitimate economic activity'[205] and children have become more exposed to violence in the community.

Ballet et al.[206] writing about impact of such violence on children in Côte d'Ivoire, explain how violence in society has led to increased probability of household poverty and diminished household standards coupled with the resultant loss of infrastructure, such as schools and health facilities. This has left such institutions 'unable to provide the services needed to ensure that children are protected'.[207] The authors went on to illustrate how living in areas of community conflict can also place children at higher risk of 'prolonged socio-psychological damage'.[208] They further recognise that beyond any

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[203] Please see: https://idrc-crdi.ca/sites/default/files/sp/Documents%20EN/crime_and_violence_in_cote_divoire_-_letter_-_rgb_-_online.pdf

[204] Please see: https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/02/cote-divoire-post-election-violence-repression

[205] Please see: crdi.ca/sites/default/files/sp/Documents%20EN/crime_and_violence_in_cote_divoire_-_letter_-_rgb_-_online.pdf

[206] Ballet et al. 2021

[207] Ballet et al. 2021:6

[208] Ballet et al. 2021:6

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immediate impact, 'conflict provides fertile ground for the emergence of future violence'[209] and, 'may have a long-term effect on social norms and the acceptance'[210] of such behaviour. Reference is made to 'urban youth' being survivors of conflict in the county, and alongside an unstable economy and internal migration, it is 'resoundingly clear how the drivers of violence are so central to understanding how children are at risk of physical, emotional and sexual violence. Above all, violence against children is a reflection of inadequate child protection arising from the failure to safe-guard children during pre- and post-periods of conflict.'[211]

13.3. Violence in schools

Whilst considering violence that happens outside a child's own home, such abuse in schools is a significant issue. Particularly, as already explained in this report, it is possible that experience of violence in childhood can unfortunately manifest itself in abusive behaviour throughout someone's life.

Information from children aged 13 to 17 years old who participated in a 2019 study in Côte d'Ivoire revealed 14.6% of girls and 14.1% of boys had experienced sexual violence in school in the 12 months prior to the research.[212] Ballet et al.[213] refer to research in Côte d'Ivoire that also exposed violence in schools documenting sexual and physical violence perpetrated by teachers as well as other pupils. A 2015 study[214] undertaken by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education found teachers being among the main perpetrators of sexual harassment and rape/sexual touching of more than 1 in 10 students. In addition, the organisation End Corporal Punishment[215] identify settings where children are being subject to corporal punishment which includes not only family homes and alternative care settings, but also schools.

13.4. Social and cultural norms and practices and lack of awareness of child rights and protection mechanisms

The subject of how negative social and cultural norms and practices can contribute to concerns about protection and other situations that lead to the placement of children in alternative care has been previously noted in this report. This includes stigma and discrimination against persons with disabilities as well as norms in society that allow for gender inequalities and the perpetuation of domestic and gender based violence. Social and cultural norms and practices are also placing children at risk as for example, the ongoing use of FGM/cutting, early and forced marriage, and the belief that children with disabilities are associated with witchcraft.

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[209] Ballet et al. 2021:6
[210] Ballet et al. 2021:6
[211] Ballet et al. 2020:7
[212] Ministry of Planning and Development and UNICEF 2019
[213] Ballet et al. 2021
[214] Please see: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247040
[215] Please see: https://endcorporalpunishment.org/reports-on-every-state-and-territory/cote-divoire/

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14. Decision making and the national child protection system

As previously noted, we consider the decision to place a child in alternative care to be influenced by two particular factors: the circumstances they are living in, and the decision making of those with responsibility for children, their safeguarding, and judgements about placement in alternative care. To this end, the research framework for this study included a focus on decision makers and factors influencing their decision making. Most especially consideration has been given to decision making within the context of a national child protection system (please see Figure 2).

Gatekeeping mechanisms and alternative care should be an integral component of a national child protection system. An effective system requires a holistic view of childhood, mitigation of the multi-sectoral factors placing children at risk and families in difficulty. It also needs effective partnership working between the State, families, communities, and NGOs amongst others, to build a protective environment that prevents violence and placement in alternative care. The laws, strategies and policies that mandate for the operating of a national child protection system must contain everything needed to protect the rights of children with prevention of unnecessary child-parents separation amongst primary aims. Likewise, effective functioning of Ministries and other bodies responsible for oversight and delivery of the system should place safeguarding alongside prevention of separation as a high priority.

We have taken all these important objectives and principles into account when developing our research framework and reviewing the child protection system in Côte d'Ivoire. We have used a research focus that seeks evidence and understanding of how 'gatekeeping' works in the country, steps to prevent unnecessary separation, and the support available to children and families when experiencing difficulties. The information provided in this section of the report is predominately the result of our desk review in relation to the national child protection system and alternative care provision in Côte d'Ivoire.

The literature review for this study reveals a child protection system in Cote d'Ivoire that is founded on legislation and policies requiring further development with a greater focus on consolidation of existing laws and clearer provisions on child rights and child protection. There is acknowledgement that the Government of Cote d'Ivoire is investing in the development of child protection policies and strategic plans. However, they appear to lack sufficient detail and are missing clear guidance for front line workers that would help them understand their roles and responsibilities in achieving targets and indicators. Newly developed policy suggests 'gatekeeping' practices and child protection case management will be further developed but there is a need for further clear strategic guidance and standards by which this will be achieved. Our research only allowed for two weeks in-country field work and it has not been possible to complete a fully accurate assessment of how well child protection case management tools are currently being used by child protection agencies. However, initial findings suggest there are gaps in the rigour and use of applying such gatekeeping

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mechanisms. In addition, the current child protection system remains reactive rather than preventive with a well-established reliance on residential care. In this sense, interventions do not sufficiently address the underlying causalities that are resulting in child-parents separation and, in particular, the drivers contributing to violence. Government social services programmes that support families are insufficient and reach only a small percentage of the population in need.

14.1. The Normative Framework

In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, national laws, bylaws and regulations, policies and statutory guidance should guarantee children's right to protection from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. They should reinforce the primary responsibility of parents for the care and protection of children, obligate the State to support families, and allow for intervention if and when necessary to support and protect a child.

International conventions and treaties

Table 3 lists a number of international conventions and treaties that have been acceded to, or ratified, or signed by the Government of Côte d'Ivoire.

Table 3. International Conventions ratified by the Government of Cote d'Ivoire

Convention	Year ratified/ Accession
Convention on the Status of Refugees	1961
Convention Concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour	1960
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	1992
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	1992
Optional Protocol to International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	1997
International Convention on all forms of Racial Discrimination	1973
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)	1991
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	1995
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	2012
Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children	2012
African Charter on Human and People's Rights	1992
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	1995
Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others	1999
ILO Convention on employment age (No.138)	2003
ILO Convention on the worst forms of child labour (No.182)	2003

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Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict	2012
Optional Protocol to the Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour	2003
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography	2011
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	2014

A National normative framework for child protection and alternative care

Decision making is influenced by the national legislation and policies of a country. There is no singular comprehensive Children's Act in current legislation. Provisions of particular relevance to children's rights and child protection are found throughout various Codes, Acts and Decrees. These include, but are by no means limited to, the legislation and policies listed in Table 4.

Table 4. A national normative framework for child protection and alternative care in Côte d'Ivoire

Legislation	Year
The Penal Code	1981
Act No. 95-15 on the Labour Code	1995
Act No. 68-595, the Code of Social Welfare	1968
Act No. 61-415 on the Nationality Code	1961
Act No. 92-464 on the Suppression of Certain Forms of Violence	1992
Act No. 95-685 on Education	1995
Act No. 64-375 on Marriage	1964
Act No. 83-799 on Civil Status	1983
Act No. 64-373 on Naming	1964
Act 70-483, the Minority Act	1970
Decree prohibiting physical and humiliating punishments in educational establishments	2009
Article 40 of Law No. 2010-272 - the State and local authorities should provide the care for children 'intercepted or found' including food, accommodation, health care, psychological support and providing for their physical rehabilitation and reintegration	2010
"Protecting children at school" – policy aimed at strengthening the child protection system in schools	2013
Decree establishing the terms of application of the law prohibiting trafficking and the worst forms of child labour	2014
Laws relating to the status of ward of the nation	2014
National Plan of Action for Child Protection Policy 2014-2018	2014
The National Strategy to Combat Gender-Based Violence - interventions to be implemented in terms of prevention, the fight against impunity, multi-sectoral support and data collection and analysis.	2014

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Laws relating to the status of ward of the State	2015
The National Community Animation Program for Child Protection - to strengthen community practices and mechanisms favourable to the protection and development of children through: i) the establishment of frameworks for exchanges and consultation on child protection (child forum) in 1,500 localities; ii) the creation of reinforced community mechanisms for monitoring, detection, mediation and referral; and iii) raising public awareness of the risks faced by children and the best way to report and refer cases of vulnerable children or victims	2015
The National Policy for the Judicial Protection of Children and Youth - a framework to provide services to child victims, witnesses, children in danger and in conflict with the law.	2015
Orders establishing list of hazardous work and light work authorized for children aged 13 to 16	2017
Law on combating human trafficking	2016
Law on the protection of witnesses, victims, whistle blowers, experts and other persons concerned	2018
Law establishing a special procedure for declaration of birth, restoration of identity and transcription of birth certificate	2018
Law relating to the reform of Civil Status	2018
National Action Plan to Combat Child Trafficking, Exploitation and Labour 2018-2020	2018
New Code of Criminal Procedure-establishing, among other things, protection measures for children who are victims of crime and children in conflict with the law	2018
Penal Code - introduces a definition of rape covering any form of sexual assault, including when it takes place in the absence of resistance from the victim; (ii) criminalizes domestic violence and marital rape (art. 403); (iii) criminalizes sexual offenses such as incest (art. 410), paedophilia (art. 414) and sexual harassment (art. 418), early marriage (art. 439), hazardous child labour (art. 433) and the failure to report acts of mistreatment committed against a minor or any person in a weak state (art. 305).	2019
The Minority Law – removes all discrimination based on gender with regard to the minimum age for marriage (the 1964 law sets this age at 21 for boys and 18 years for girls). Minimum legal age of marriage is 18 years for both (boys and girls) Article 29 - provides for removal of a child from their current home and a decision by a guardianship judge to entrust all or part of the rights of parental authority to a public establishment of social assistance or education, to a public establishment under the child aid service, or a judicial protection establishment for children, or an authorised private establishment. The Minority Law also has references to child protection concerns.	2019
Order No. 2019/0123 MFFE/CAB - determining the conditions for the approval of establishments associated with the public service for the promotion and protection of women and families including alternative care facilities and requiring establishments	2019

offering alternative care to obtain approval of the Ministry of Women, Family and Children	
The Constitution of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire	Revised 2020
Ministry of Women, Families and Children, National Policy for Child Protection	2023
Decree N° 2023/89 OF February15, 2023 - setting the norms and standards applicable to child alternative care establishments	2023
Decree N° 2023-90 OF February 15, 2023, regulating foster families	2023

The fragmented content of different laws that offer protection to children and/or mandate for the process of family support and alternative care has resulted in gaps in the legislation in terms of comprehensive protection and care for children. It also means front line workers need to be constantly aware of the many different laws that govern their work and subsequent amendments. When respondents were asked about this situation, some recognised the challenges this is causing They also think relevant professional stakeholders do not always have adequate knowledge of the law and therefore, are upholding it appropriately. Indeed, when asked whether all social workers were aware of the legislation, one interviewee replied: *"not all of them but maybe half."* They went on to say one Child Act or Child Law *"would be better. It would make their work easier."* Another interviewee said, a *"problem is the ignorance of the law, law about child protection and family protection. Most of the people they work with do not know those laws."* Others said although there were laws, they were not always enforced.

This lack of a singular child law or child act is a previously noted concern. In 2001, in the Concluding Observations to the government of Côte d'Ivoire, the Committee on the Rights of the Child urged the government to pursue legal reform including the development of a comprehensive children's code. In the 2019 Concluding Remarks of the Committee, concerns were also raised about lack of conformity of national legislation to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Below is a short precis of just three of the many laws considered to hold Articles relevant to child protection and rights.

The Constitution of Côte d'Ivoire recognises the right of citizens of Côte d'Ivoire to be protected from slavery, trafficking in human beings, forced labour, physical or moral torture, inhuman, cruel, degrading and humiliating treatment, physical violence, female genital mutilation as well as all other forms of degradation. This includes elimination of all forms of violence against girls and women. Child labour is also prohibited. School is compulsory and everyone has the right to an education and access to health services. Everyone has the right to free and equal access to justice. The State undertakes to guarantee the specific needs of vulnerable people and to protect people with disabilities from all forms of discrimination. The Constitution recognises the role of 'parental authority' and to protect children.

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The Penal Code

The Penal Code includes a number of articles that offer protection of a child defined as any person under the age of 18. The Code sets the minimum age of sexual consent at 15 years old for girls and boys and sex without consent is considered rape. The Code also prohibits trafficking and sexual exploitation of a child. There is punishment for people who do not report abuse that has been committed although it does not provide a mechanism or obligation for professionals working with children to report possible cases of sexual exploitation of children.

Changes relating to the 1970 Law on Minors

In 2019, a legal document 'Projet se Loi Relatif a la Minorite' set out changes to the 1970 Law on Minors. The aim was incorporation of the principle of the best interest of the child into law. Included is guidance on custody in case of parental separation, awarding legal Guardianship in cases where a parent/s gave the care of their child to someone else, or it is decided it is in a child's best interest to do so. A 'Guardianship Judge' may make a decision whether or not to consult with a child in these procedures. The law also allows for the removal of a child from parental care and removal of parental rights in the event of endangering their full development, safety, health or morality. Consideration of reinstating parental rights cannot be granted until one year has passed and reinstatement will not be considered if a request is not made within three years of separation. The exception being parents who can justify an impediment resulting from a case of force majeure. The Law also reduces the age of minority from 21 years to 18 years old.

Children can be subject to protection measures when their health, morals or education are compromised, or they are insufficiently safeguarded due to the immorality or incapacity of the father and mother or the legally appointed Guardian. These measures can be taken at the request of either the father and/or the mother, the Guardian, or the Public Prosecutor. The law also allows a Guardianship Judge to appoint a qualified person, a social assistance or education service, or the child protection service, to provide help and advice to the family and monitor the development of the child. Parents should cover the costs of this support and services unless unable to do so.

Even when asked about the adequacy of the normative framework, no interviewees spoke of any Government policies. For example, no–one referred to the **National Policy for Child Protection** launched in early 2023 by the Ministry of Women, Families and Children. The overall objective of the policy is to protect children against all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation and their equitable access to basic social services. This is to be achieved through coordinated efforts of government, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector. Due to its recent publication, it has not been possible to evaluate the implementation of the National Policy for Child Protection. However, the document seems to be lacking detailed information or guidance on how objectives are to be achieved or the roles and mandate for key stakeholders, such as social services workers, in delivery of the plan.

Standards for alternative care, 'Les Standards Nationaux des Establishments de Protection de Remplacement', have been disseminated by the Ministry of Women, Families and Children and

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UNICEF in 2023. They lay out the differing forms of alternative care and standards to be achieved by care providers.

14.2. Structures for child protection system delivery, coordination and oversight

Government bodies with responsibility for oversight of the child protection system in Côte d'Ivoire include different departments within the Ministry of Women, Family and Children. The Ministry has a structure comprising several committees and technical including the:

- Inter-Ministerial Committee to Combat Child Trafficking and Exploitation
- National Committee to Combat Violence Against Women and Children[216]
- Department of Social Protection
- Directorate of Planning, Studies and Documentation
- Directorate of Equality and Gender Promotion
- National Social Relief Fund Commission

According to the Ministry's website, specific responsibilities for child protection are held by the following directorates and sub-departments:

- Directorate of Child Protection
- National Program for the Care of Orphans and Children Made Vulnerable by HIV/AIDS[217]
- Program for the Protection of Vulnerable Children and Adolescents
- Directorate for the Coordination of Establishments and Services of a Social Character for the Protection of Early Childhood and Socio-educational Complexes
- Unit for the Fight against Child Trafficking, Exploitation and Child Labour[218]
- Central Adoption Authority of Ivory Coast

Previous evaluations of the child protection system in Côte d'Ivoire have expressed concerns that the Ministry has too many different directorates and departments working on protection and as a result, work on different forms of child violence and welfare is being executed in silos. [219]

14.3. Provision of Alternative Care

Decisions on whether or not to place a child in care is also influenced by the availability of alternative care places and how much of an accepted and/or promoted practice is it to utilise such provision. This is also dependent on the degree to which a government promotes the use of alternative care. Of concern is the Government' of Cote d'Ivoire's wish to build more residential care structures[220] for as seen in other countries, the perpetuation of institutions means inevitably more children will ultimately be placed there.[221]

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[216] Please see: https://famille.gouv.ci/mffe/?page_id=4753
[217] Please see: https://famille.gouv.ci/mffe/?page_id=4757
[218] Please see: https://famille.gouv.ci/mffe/?page_id=4761
[219] Child Frontiers 2010
[220] ibid.
[221] Chege and Ucembe 2020

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Within the Ministry of Women, Families and Children, the **Directorate of Child Protection,** comprised of several sub-departments, holds responsibility for child protection staff across the country and provision of alternative care. This includes Socio-Educational Centres that constitute a grouping of three structures: Social Centres, Early Childhood Protection Centres, and Specialised Education Centres. Depending on the function of the centre, these structures employ a number of social workers and/or 'educators'. Early Childhood Protection Centres offer pre-school education and although not their principle role, have protection in the title because they are thought to be in a position to detect protection concerns.

Social Centres have teams of social work teams whom, according to a 2010 report[222] are responsible for working with the community and especially to support children requiring protection, vulnerable families and individuals, mothers, and people infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS. According to one interviewee, the number of social workers based in the Centres has been significantly reduced over the years.

> *"Normally, in each Social Centre there are four departments, and each department should have four officers. But normally there should be sixteen as four times four is sixteen, but they only have eight. Some have more but the maximum is sixteen. There used to be sixteen in number in the past but some of them were successful in a test and were promoted so they went to other departments"*

The National Committee to Combat Violence against Women and Children also manages counselling offices situated in 15 Social Centres. The offices have inter-disciplinary teams offering psychosocial support and health and legal aid to women and child victims of violence.[223] They organise home visits, advise families in difficult situations and carry out 'social'[224] investigations. These services were not mentioned by any of our research respondents.

Standards for alternative care, 'Les Standards Nationaux des Establishments de Protection de Remplacement' were recently published by the Ministry of Women, Families and Children and UNICEF in 2023. The document lists the different residential alternative care settings including the following: (please note the following information has been subject to translation of documents written in French provided by informants in Cote d'Ivoire).

There are different forms of residential institutions, 'Structures Socio-educative de Base'. They have a mandate to work with children in difficult circumstances[225] and are run and/or subsidised by the Ministry as well as NGOs, faith based, and private organisations. This includes 'protection centres' that are segregated into 'nurseries' providing facilities for children aged 0 to five years, and

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[222] Child Frontiers 2010
[223] . Ministry of Development and Planning and Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2014
[224] . Ministry of Development and Planning and Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2014
[225] Child Frontiers 2010

'orphanages' for 6-18 years old. They include residential 'reception and accommodation centres' providing alternative care for different age categories: 0-8 years, 9-13 years and 14-18 years. Specialised Education Centres include residential institutions for children with physical disabilities and learning difficulties some of which are restricted to certain forms of disability. A form of residential facility is also available for female children who are pregnant and those 'rejected' by their parents. According to a document, 'Presentation de la Direction' released by the Ministry in 2021, there were 18,423 children in 351 'support structures' (translation of a Ministry document provided by the SOS Children's Villages team written in French).[226] However, in early 2023, according to the Ministry, there were 362 'structures', of which 71% are publicly managed and 29% in the private sector (although there no definition of 'private' was provided).[227] This number includes 4 day care centres for nursery children.

According to the 2023 national alternative care standards[228] all these facilities provide accommodation on both a short and long term basis. In 2019, the Ministry of Planning and Development reported an increase in the number of residential centres whilst calling for provision of even more.[229]

A decree of 2008 requires all residential institutions to obtain official approval from the Ministry of Women, Families and Children before operating and accepting children. Of concern are reports indicating the Ministry is failing in this undertaking and facilities continuing to operate without official approval.[230] Information gathered from respondents during our research suggests this is still the case. In 2022 a survey conducted by the National Council of Human Rights in Côte d'Ivoire identified 97 'alternative care establishments'. The Council surveyed 73 of which 64 were run by non-state providers.[231] Twenty institutions were not registered with the Ministry. Fourteen per cent were receiving funding from a government body. In total, there were 2,972 children living in the 73 residential institutions (1,416 girls and 1,556 boys). Respondents from 21 facilities said they did not have qualified staff and 35 did not have social workers. Furthermore, only 983 children (33%) had an official placement order awarded through a judicial process.

Overall the various information collected during our research suggests there is differing data being published in relation to the number of residential facilities in Cote d'Ivoire.

In terms of family-based alternative care, in February 2023 a Decree (No.2023-90) came into force governing provision of **Foster Care.** Only two interviewees spoke about foster care and it is understood this form of care is still a long way from being fully developed and utilised in Côte d'Ivoire.

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[226] Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2021
[227] Ministry of Women, Families and Children 2023a
[228] Decree N° 2023/89 OF February 15, 2023, setting the norms and standards applicable to child alternative care establishments
[229] Ministry of Planning and Development and UNICEF 2019
[230] Child Frontiers 2010; Ministry of Planning and Development and UNICEF 2019
[231] National Council of Human Rights, Côte d'Ivoire 2022

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> *"So there are not many here but here in Cote D'Ivoire this condition of foster family is not backed up by the law ye. But it is on the way because there was a decree that was signed not far away that tried to organise this but here in Cote D'Ivoire the status of the foster family is more focussed and valued by international partners, international NGOS which recognise them."*

14.4. Reintegration

Very few interviewees spoke about the return of children to their parents from alternative care and the information that was received suggested the number of children who are reunified is small.

> *"So there are two types of abandoned children when they are sent to an institution they are not taken back to the family as they have no family, the second ones, the ones that are separated from their parents who are taken care by the institutions for a time, just for a time. Meanwhile by the time they are in the institution, their institutions continue to work with the parents, giving them advice, showing them how they should take care of their children, showing them what they are exposed to when they keep on behaving this way. And when it is time for the child to spend, at the institution is up then the child is taken back to the family when all the conditions are met."* (interviewee when asked if children are reunified with their families)

> *"This is what they work for, the reasons for their activities when the children here they have a duty to look for their parent and to work so that the children may be reunited with their parents…It is rare, due to some reasons because one of the reasons is that children do not even have the right information. Because they want to stay and enjoy and they do not want to return. So based on this information they cannot find the parent and return them. Some of them have stayed here for years. But according to the policy the children have to stay a maximum of six months."*

Information collected during our research indicates some children in residential institutions regularly go home e.g. on weekends and for the summer holidays and to this end, a number of interviewees believe this means those children are still connected to their families and do not anticipate any negative impact on children's attachment to their families or other well-being outcomes. Especially as they believe residing in their care facilities is the best thing for those children as they receive such benefits as food, shelter and clothing etc.

14.5. Responsibility of other Stakeholders

The responsibility of Ministries

The protection and well-being of children so that they do not reach a situation where a decision must be made about alternative care, is also dependent on the services provided by other Ministries.

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Amongst Ministries recognised as holding responsibility for child protection is the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. This Ministry has responsibility for judicial protection services for children including mediation in cases of separation and divorce ordered by judicial decision, awarding of Guardianship, and removal of parental rights.[232]

The Ministry of National Education, Technical Education and Vocational Training has responsibility for creating programmes that will ensure protection in schools including the creation of a working group on child protection and various regional and local monitoring and monitoring protection committees.[233]

The Ministry of Women, Families and Children has also called on a range of other ministries to take responsibility for the delivery of the 2023 National Child Protection Policy.[234] This includes those with responsibility for Finance, Human Rights, Security, Interior and Defence, Health, Youth, Social Protection, Employment, Solidarity, Agriculture, Communication, Transport, Environment, Town Planning, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Water, Hygiene and Sanitation.

Decision making and pathways into care
There are different decision makers, and different pathways into alternative care, in Côte d'Ivoire. These processes are discussed below.

Reporting children for whom there is a protection concern
The first people responsible for making decisions are those who decide whether or not to report a concern about a child either to statutory authorities or an NGO. Interviewees said reporting of children for whom there are concerns is often done by the family themselves and by, neighbours. Cases are also reported to the police and social workers by members of the public and other professionals. Staff of NGOs and teachers were amongst those mentioned. Children themselves seek support.

> *"Children may come to the centre here by their selves or may be brought by their parent. One way or the other the social institution is informed. When the child is brought by the parent they are referred to the social centre and the social centre brings them here. In most cases these children are referred directly by the government and other governmental institutions like police and so on who bring them here. Sometimes children come here by themselves. They know there is a social centre here and they come here by themselves. And when they come here by themselves the social centre makes a report and lets the social institution know that they have welcomed some children into their care"* (interviewee who provides alternative care)

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[232] Ministry of Planning and Development and UNICEF 2019
[233] Ministry of Planning and Development and UNICEF 2019
[234] Ministry of Women, Children and Protection 2023b

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"Any person can report but most of the time it is the neighbours living around, they report this kind of cases"

"Sometimes children come here by themselves when they know about the institution. They come here by themselves, or they call the toll free number, and they call and then they are shown the way and they come here by themselves"

Only one interviewee mentioned telephone call centres. The Ministry of Family, Women and Children manages telephone hotlines that can be used to report cases of abuse, offer free counselling, and refer children to the relevant child protection authorities. This service has two numbers: 116 for reports concerning children and 1308 for reporting gender based violence. According to the Ministry of Planning and Development, between April 2004 to November 2009, a total of 3,345 calls were received and all cases are referred to local child protection boards.[235]

14.6. Child Protection Case Management and the role of social workers

Social workers and Child Protection Officers in local government departments, play an important role in deciding what is in the best interest of a child. Reported cases of children in difficult circumstances are initially processed by social work teams based in local Social Centres. An assessment should then be undertaken, referred to by one interviewee as a '*social investigation*'. After initial investigations, if the social worker thinks there is a child protection concern, they can pass the case to the Child Protection Department.

A question put to all interviewees was the efficacy of initial assessments and decision making by social workers and staff in the child protection department, and whether the right decisions for children were being taken in relation to placing them in care. Overall it is thought that the quality of assessments and decision making is not consistent with some interviewees thinking the quality of investigations are good but others saying there is insufficient information being gathered. Several questioned whether home visits are actually being undertaken or not. Some alternative care providers feel upon the arrival of a child, it is necessary to undertake a further assessment due to insufficient information.

"The social centre, that is the first whom the case is reported to...It is the social centre that goes to the family and try to check and see all the living conditions there before they report the case to the child protection department. The most important investigation is carried out by the social centre. And when the social centre thinks it worthy to report the case to the national child protection department, the child protection department now then sends the child to the appropriate centre. When they come to a centre like this, we also carry out another investigation. This one is not compulsory, but we do it just to find out more information about the children."

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[235] Ministry of Planning and Development and UNICEF 2014

"And sometimes we reject the children because we don't find relevant the argument in their report and we have to go and meet the children, the parent again, and ask them more questions. So instead of taking the children we maybe opt for a support to the parent giving guidance, given advice, monitoring them so that we may help them taking care the best way of the children." (interviewee working in a residential alternative care setting)

"There is a document called social investigation form that the social centre needs to produce for us before we allow the children in here. So, beside this children, there are other children who come here without a social investigation report, because those children are the ones that live in the street and they bring them here first in the process. They gather all the information to let us know" (interviewee working in a residential alternative care setting)

"The process goes this way, when a child is found on the street first thing he is brought to the police station. They call us [the Social Centre] and say we have a child here. And once we have the information we send a social worker to enquire about the child and take the child. And we bring the child and we provide him first assistance and what he needs and we also ask him some questions… We make a referral request to the judge and once we have the go ahead of the judge and then the child is placed in an institution like (name removed). But sometimes we don't even wait for the written order, a placement order."

"but what I would like to underline is for some reasons only the social workers sometimes know the barrier. The report. How do you understand when you receive a parent you make a report and you don't even know the living condition? So what they should do is before they complete the report they need to go and check on the living condition, the living environment of the parent, of the children. They don't do that. So instead of this, social workers should more practice this and put this into practice so that they can provide a better report that can be more realistic."
"on the paperwork is the name, not always the care, the reason for sending the children to the centre, the gender. There is not much information they collect apart from this one. And sometimes there might be fake information."

There are mixed views in relation to the efficacy of decision making.

"So generally, the decision made by the Ministry is a good decision. But before the decision comes in time, the children are put in host houses, and…we conduct an investigation"

"So not all of them but maybe half"

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"In most cases they make the right decision but there are some exceptions."

"So most of the time, based on our experience, the decision is coming out of the social workers to place the children to social care is a good one"

Some believe poor assessments and decision making is impacted by a shortage of well-trained and experienced social workers and other Child Protection Officers. This brings with it, pressure of high caseloads, lack of time and other resources, that would help them achieve higher standards of work.

So it is not because they don't know. It is because of the time they do not have. And they do not have the required equipment like the required vehicles. And on the ground there is an issue of security, the area of (location deleted) is a very insecure area. So if they don't have the required material they will be at risk to go and make the investigation without the proper equipment."

"There are not actually enough social workers. But gradually more workers coming from other training backgrounds are added. So the capacity are strengthened in the domain of social work and then they are added to the numbers. There is not enough money to train the social workers."

"but we are running out of social assistants and this is where the greatest problem is. And maybe we will also need training because where there are social workers, they will need more training."

Several interviewees spoke about social workers and Child Protection Officers who take the decision to first try and resolve situations with the parents. However, one interview indicated this might include just one meeting with parents who they summon to their office, even for those cases where violence is present. This raises concerns as one meetings is unlikely to resolve such situations.

"Sometimes we summon them here and we try to talk with them."

Cases specifically classified as gender-based violence are managed and decided on through an inter-sectoral partnership approach. The cases are brought to and discussed in monthly meetings of the local gender-based violence committees. Members of government and non-governmental organisations sit on these committees. This decision making process was described by an interviewee.

"We have a gender-based violence platform here with a lot of stakeholders. We have community leaders and other persons and we have monthly meetings and whenever there is a case that is identified. The gender-based violence platform includes community leaders and governmental organisations. It also includes governmental structures that deal with violence like the police and health like hospitals. So, we have

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a meeting once per month within the platform and during those meetings everyone who has identified a case of gender-based violence has to report it. And when one case has been identified they have to proceed the following way: they listen to the victim. If she needs some treatment at the hospital she has to be put into trust and if it is a sexual or physical violence we take her to hospital to be taken care of and after that make a psychological follow up to give her some advice. And if we can fix or solve the problem by ourselves we do that but if we have to direct her to another organisation we will also do that."

In conclusion, most interviewees showed an understanding of the formal process of case management and decision making that is undertaken by the responsible local authority staff in Côte d'Ivoire. However, several think there are alternative care providers that accept children who have not been through any formal decision making process. This is also suggested by findings in a survey[236] conducted by the National Council of Human Rights in Côte d'Ivoire. The aforementioned research found 20 out of 73 residential institutions included in the study did not have official authorisation to operate from the Ministry of Women, Families and Children and were not regularly monitored thus placing them in a situation where children can be directly accepted without any formal procedure.

14.6. Other decision makers

Role of the judiciary

Judges are important decision makers in Côte d'Ivoire. They play a role in custody cases and also issuing of placement orders for children going into alternative care. Although one judge was interviewed they did not want their statement to go on record. Other informants provided very little information about the role of the judiciary and only one interviewee specifically referred to judicial decision making:

> *"Of course, the Judges are involved in the decision but most of the time they have to make an emergency decision in an emergency. The child who is in danger needs to be secured first so after they do that, and all the paperwork will follow. The Government, Minister in liaison with the Judge will make all the paperwork and fix everything"*

Furthermore, very little reference is made to the role of the judiciary in child protection cases in any of the reports reviewed during our desk review.

The role of police

Very little information was provided by interviewees, or in written reports, as to the role of police and children at risk. It is clear however, that they play an important role when first responding to children in difficult circumstances, including children who are found in a street situation. Some did express concerns about the ability of the police to respond appropriately to child protection cases.

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[236] National Council of Human Rights, Côte d'Ivoire 2022

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"So on national scale within the Ministry of Internal Affairs there is a department that is in charge of fight against youth delinquency. And that department is the one that take care of youth affairs issues and they have a police district or youth station… that take care of all issues in relation to children. Apart from that in any police station of the national territory there is one police officer in the police station that is trained in children affairs. Any police station when you go there, there is a police officer that is in charge of children affairs"

"There are some deviances that sometimes happen with the police. They are a repressive force so that it might happen that they might deviate. But when they are trained, the police officer were trained, they are less likely to deviate. Those that do are those that are not trained and this is what happened. Sometimes when the situation happens the one who went through training are not on duty and those that are on duty were not trained and do not know how to take care of them. But we keep on raising awareness and they keep on training. And in every police station has a service for child protection. So those services in each police station they deal with every case that deal with children. We will train them so that cases are taken care of properly according to the law"

In 2019, the Ministry of Development and Planning recognised the gaps in competency within police departments when responding to child protection cases and calls were made for additional training, especially when responding to sexual and domestic violence.[237] The Ministry also recognised the need for additional numbers of sensitised and trained police.

The role of non-governmental organisations
As providers of support services to families and of alternative care, NGOs and private organisations, play a significant role in deciding which children they accept into their care and whether or not they first require official procedures to have been finalised that determine whether or not a child could remain safely in the care of their parents or wider family or not. Information drawn from the interviews with residential care providers suggest a few appear to be shifting their focus on prevention of unnecessary separation, whilst others feel justified in deciding to accept children into their care, even in the absence of any rigorous decision making process.

It has not been possible to assess the quality of family support services offered by NGOs. Neither has it been possible to assess the number of alternative care facilities being run purely as an opportunity to earn money and/or gain social recognition and standing within a community rather than upholding the central principle of necessity for a child's protection and other best interests. In the online survey only 4 of the 50 respondents think providers of residential care do persuade parents to relinquish

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[237] Ministry of Development and Planning and UNICEF 2019

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their children and 14 think this happens 'sometimes' (Figure 38). Many respondents said this never happened or they didn't know. These answers may have been impacted by the significant number of respondents who are working in residential alternative care facilities.

Figure 38. Reasons children are placed in alternative care: the persuasion of care providers

Reasons children are placed in alternative care	Often	Sometimes	Never	I don't know
Because someone from an alternative care facility has persuaded the parents that it would be best to put their child in that facility	4	14	13	19

Traditional community child protection mechanisms

Only a small amount of information was gathered about traditional community, or other informal, child protection mechanisms, in locations where more formal child protection committees are still to be established. It is understood that the mention of child protection committees (CPC) by interviewees, below is in reference to what are also known as gender-based violence committees.

> *"So most of the community the decision is made without letting the social worker know. This is usually because they have not yet installed or set up in all the community what they call child protection committee. Because in the long run they tend to set up in each community a child protection committee and this CPC will be the focal point for the community when there is a case that is identified or spotted. Then they are referred to first, when they have the CPC in each community then it will be easier for them to deal with this issue."*

> *"Is it unfortunate where the is no Child Protection Committee, the community try to fix the children issue by themselves based on tradition rules and other, but it is important to know that the CPC is installed by the representatives of the government in the rural areas, based on this it has the power and people resort to them. The objective in the long term is to have a CPC in most of the communities around in the area, so that the process for child protection maybe be dealt with easily and properly."*

In reference to informal decisions being made about children by families and communities in Côte d'Ivoire, a document published[238] in 2020 by the Ministry of Women Families and Children, reported the following:

> Studies have found that most incidents of violence are rarely disclosed to formal services and remain hidden, partly due to a culture of silence and shame, but also as formal services are difficult to access and are often under-resourced. Furthermore,

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[238] Ministry of Women Families and Children 2020:31

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norms and beliefs that violence against children in the home is a private affair, that physical violence is an acceptable means to discipline and educate children, and that children are expected to submit to the will of their parents, teachers, religious leaders, elders and other authority figures are pervasive.

14.7. Data collection and management information systems

The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children[239] advise States on 'development and implementation of coordinated policies. Such policies should be based on sound information and statistical data. The necessity of accurate and systematic data collection for information on characteristics and trends of child protection and alternative child care is crucial for the development and application of appropriate and evidence-based policy, practice and services.

The Ministry of Women, Families and Children has a Monitoring and Evaluation department and produces a statistical directory providing data on gender-based violence and violence against children. The 2022 directory suggests approximately 90% of social services departments in the country are now participating in data collection at a district, regional and central level.[240] Various data found within the 2022 directory has informed the content of this report. However, the directory would benefit from clearer definitions, further breakdown of data, and more disaggregated information about reasons for children's placement in care.

14.8. Training for decision makers

The efficacy of decision making and the use of case management tools to inform decisions can depend greatly on the understanding and knowledge of, and the training of child protection case workers. This includes not only the efficiency in collecting necessary information about a child and their situation, but also how to analyse assessments, understand risk thresholds, and make informed decisions.

It has not been possible to conduct an in-depth assessment as to the understanding and competency of child protection workers, nor the quality of higher education or other training opportunities that would provide them with the necessary skills. Some information collected during interviews shows mixed opinions regarding sufficient training for those working in child protection. A snapshot of opinions include:

> *"Yes the degree, it is at the university. They get good training and good education at the university level, but they still need improvement. Because things are moving all the time, so they need to be trained to improve their knowledge"*

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[239] UN General Assembly, Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 24 February 2010, A/RES/64/142, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/4c3acd162.html
[240] Ministry of Family, Women and Children 2023a

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"The training is needed in specific, in certain areas, like conflict management and in children's care because we manage a lot of conflicts here between husband and wife about the children"

"I will mention two main trainings, the first training is training on the investigation process and how they will carry out investigations and many need this training…If the social workers are not properly trained then I will have to call the parents directly and say that we have heard that you are ill-treating your child and your neighbour told us"

"The second training that is important for us is how to write and report because all the letters that are sent to the judge are sent with a report. Social workers need to know how to write a report. If they write a report with a lot of mistakes then this will not be taken into account, they will not consider this kind of report, so they need to be trained on the investigation process and to be trained on how to write a proper report"

"The social workers have a good university training at the university level. They have good teachers and training and most of those teachers were former social workers who retired and gone back to share their experiences and training with the new ones. The subject that they deal with their during the training are also a good subject. These subjects have evolved over the years and have improved. But still need more…because in the past some recruitment was from other institutions and those who were recruited received some training to work. But now they are no longer doing this. Hiring is from a competition, a test, they do a test where students are baccalaureate most of them have university degrees, a degree, that is taking into account is a baccalaureate degree and they are trained from three years (not a social work qualification)."

We recognise that only partial information was collected during this research relating to the topic of social services workforce decision making, along with analysis of the efficacy of delivering the child protection system and those working within it. It is suggested this topic requires further investigation.

Overall our findings suggest that decision making that is always in the best interest of the child is being hampered by gaps in the law and insufficient investment in the social workforce as well as the gatekeeping tools and processes they use.

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15. Solutions to challenges provided by research participants

It was very important to ask children, young people and family members who participated in our research workshops for their ideas regarding solutions to the challenges families are facing.

To do this, children were asked to draw themselves as superheroes and write the three things they thought most important to change for families using their superpower (examples are shown below as Figure 39). As each child provided their own answer, there was no overall ranking. They wrote about using their super powers to make children happy and help solve their problems, to defend people, stop conflict in families, heal people, steer children on the right path, fix problems, and bring parents back together again.

Figure 39. Examples of a super hero drawn by children
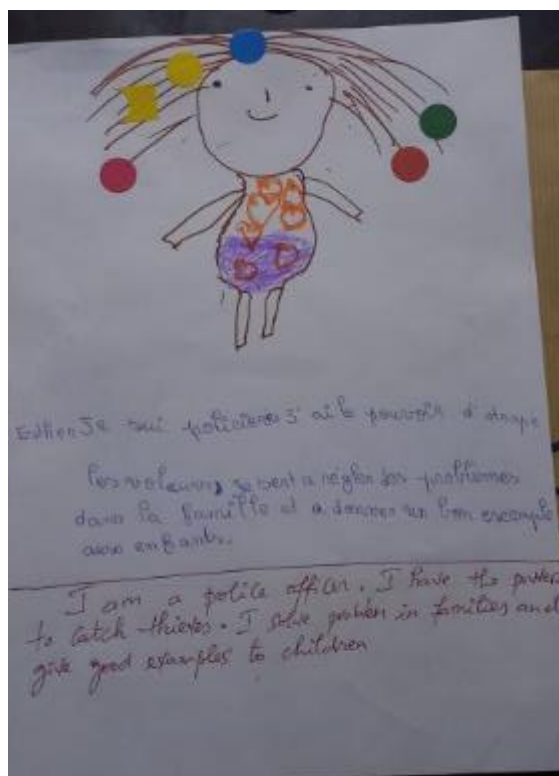
In the four workshops with young people, participants broke into two groups to speak about solutions to the challenges that families are facing. They grouped and ranked the topics in the order they thought they should be addressed. The principle solutions young people think are necessary to help address challenges in families are split between support that would help protect children and improve relationships and communication within the family, and more practical actions to address issues related to poverty. In this respect they would like improved health services, particularly psychosocial support, better education and access to training and employment, provision of food and better living

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conditions. They said children and young people's rights should be protected and families should spend more time together and have 'fun'.

When considering solutions, it is important to also consider the things that help make children and young people happy. We were told that children and young people are happy when they feel loved and there is sense of family unity, tolerance, respect, harmony and peace. It is important to children that their parents are happy. In particular, many children and young people want more family time together, to eat meals and spend leisure time together. Being able to go to school, achieving good grades, and having friends makes children happy. Having food is important and was mentioned many times. Young people would like more freedom and more opportunities to pursue recreational activities.
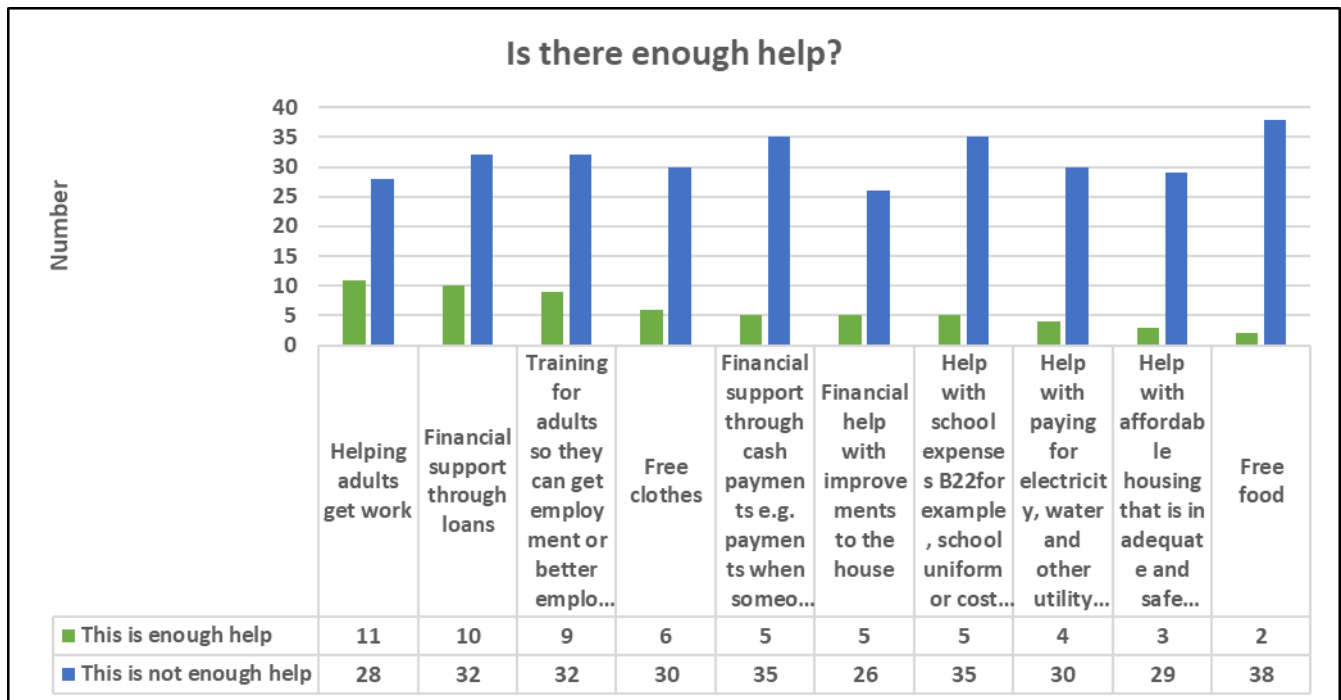
Adults attending the family workshops were also asked about solutions they thought would help address the challenges they had raised. Of 112 written answers, approximately half referred to issues of family relationships, improved communication, love and understanding and forgiveness. They want an end to violence, and more *"harmony in households",* to increase the help they offer one another, and forgiveness. One participant thinks it is important to "*raise awareness about the situation of the poor families and getting real understanding about what are the solutions."* The other half of all answers referred to issues of being able to earn, or be provided with, more financial resources. They want improved access to stable and well renumerated employment and more food. Improved access to basic services including better and free health services, and being able to afford to send children to school is important.

Interviewees were asked for their recommendations regarding actions and services that could help improve the situation for families and prevent child-parents separation. They stressed the need for more investment in parenting programmes that promote positive parenting skills and improve family relationships. Addressing structural poverty and economic empowerment is recognised as essential to helping strengthen families including more access to income generation schemes. Prevention of violence against children was a repeated theme and one interviewee said it is important to stop early and forced marriage. In this respect they thought more awareness raising would help families and communities recognise the protection violations affecting children's and there should be dissemination of messages that state all violence, including domestic and gender-based violence should stop. Improved quality and access to education was a frequently raised issue with education being seen as a hope for future generations to move out of poverty and have better lives. This means families being able to afford to send their children to school. It is thought more is needed to empower women, including education for those who are illiterate, as well as improvements to the law so women and children are better protected. Others spoke about the importance of improved support for people with disabilities. A further priority is improved coordination between all service providers.

Respondents to the online survey feel overwhelmingly that all forms of basic and specialist services and support for families who are at risk of separation is insufficient (Figure 40).

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Figure 40. Is there enough help?

Is there enough help?

	Helping adults get work	Financial support through loans	Training for adults so they can get employ ment or better emplo...	Free clothes	Financial support through cash paymen ts e.g. paymen ts when someo...	Financial help with improve ments to the house	Help with school expense s B22for example , school uniform or cost...	Help with paying for electricit y, water and other utility...	Help with affordab le housing that is in adequat e and safe...	Free food
■ This is enough help	11	10	9	6	5	5	5	4	3	2
■ This is not enough help	28	32	32	30	35	26	35	30	29	38

We asked survey respondents about support specifically for those experiencing challenges relating to domestic violence, in need of counselling and emotional support, pregnant teenage girls, and emergency shelters for mothers with children born out of wedlock. The vast majority of respondents think there is 'not enough' help. (Figure 41).

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Figure 41. Is there enough help?

	Free food	Financial support through cash payments e.g. payments when someone is unemployed or sick	Help with school expenses for example, school uniform or cost of books	Financial support through loans	Training for adults so they can get employment or better employment	Help with paying for electricity, water and other utility bills	Free clothes	Help with affordable housing that is in adequate and safe condition	Helping adults get work	Financial help with improvements to the house
This is not enough help	38	35	35	32	32	30	30	29	28	26
This is enough help	2	5	5	10	9	4	6	3	11	5

16.   Conclusions and Recommendations

The recommendations in this section of the report have been informed by the information children, young people, and adult family members provided during research workshops. These findings have been triangulated with the knowledge and understanding provided by professionals holding responsibility to protect children and support families, as well as information gathered during a desk review.

The research framework, analysis of findings, and development of recommendations have been guided by the UNCRC and the 2019 United Nations General Assembly Resolution, 'The promotion and protection of the rights of children' as well as the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. Recommendations are therefore addressed in reference to children's rights. Although these rights are indivisible, and all are essential to the well-being of children, we have chosen to develop recommendations based on a certain number of rights thought most applicable to the findings of the research and prevention of child-parents separation.

With regards such guidance, it is the responsibility of States Parties, and other bodies and organisations, to address drivers of separation and do everything possible so that children can remain with their parents in a safe and caring environment. This requires a society that is free from violence. It means combatting stigma, discrimination and marginalisation that individuals and families

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face on the basis of such issues as ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and birth status etc. It requires a strong national economy with programmes of poverty alleviation. The safety and security of all citizens, and systems and delivery of a range of basic and specialist services such as education and health as well as utilities, employment, and adequate shelter are also important. There should be a social protection system that provides for individuals and families when in need of such support including unemployment, sickness and disability benefits, pensions and other social safety nets. Furthermore it requires a strong child protection system, including the systematic application of gatekeeping mechanisms and a well-resourced and trained social services work force. It is also incumbent on governments to develop the necessary normative framework for child protection and family support. Overall, this approach is grounded not only in the fundamental spirit of the UNCRC but also in many specific UNCRC provisions, such as a right to health (Article 24), education (Article 28), support for the role of parents (Article 18), conditions for separating a child from parents (Article 9), right to social security (Article 25), rights for children with disabilities (Article 23), and protection from discrimination (Article 2).

We recognise that responsibilities to address drivers of child-parents separation and prevention of placement of children in alternative care is primarily that of the Government of Cote d'Ivoire through the provision of national and local socio-economic programmes and services. This is a significant responsibility. Our research has not included an in-depth analysis of all these different aspects of government responsibility but has considered some of the gaps in provision. We also recognise that UN and other international bodies play a significant role in service provision alongside national and international NGO, CBOs and private enterprises, and these differing roles and responsibilities should be a consideration when reading the conclusions below.

Noted throughout the report are the significant number of online survey respondents who answered that they did not know the answers to the survey questions, or that certain situations 'never' resulted in placement in alternative care. We suggest this requires further investigation as it may indicate a lack of knowledge, understanding and expertise amongst some professionals.

This remainder of this section of the report contains a significant number of recommendations and this may appear daunting. However, partnership working between government and non-government agencies can bring about change when responsibility is shared and each organisation works to its own strengths and expertise.

Protection
Articles of the UNCRC that afford children the right to protection include, safeguarding from violence, abuse and neglect (Article 19 and Article 37(a)), from sexual exploitation and abuse (Article 34) and, from sale, trafficking and abduction (Article 11, Article 35, Article 36, Article 39).

In particular, Article 19 requires:

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Recognition is given to Government efforts over recent years to better understand the manifestation of violence in Cote d'Ivoire through various studies. However, a conclusion of our research is that the continuing violence against children is a driver of family breakdown that can lead to child-parents separation. Children and young people, along with other research participants, identified the presence of violence within families, and their communities. They specifically wrote about experiencing and witnessing violence in the home. Violence in the home is also resulting in children running away from their families or placing them in positions that could activate a referral to social workers and child protection officers or come in contact with the police. This includes children who directly experience violence and serious neglect, as well as those who become street connected, are involved in child labour, exposed to drugs and alcohol, and become involved in other situations that place them at risk.

The high prevalence of violence against girls and women is a concern. This is in part, attributed to a culture of male dominance. Domestic violence, which is predominantly experienced by women, is a factor contributing to risks of children being placed in alternative care as for example, when separated from parents as a result of a breakdown in a marriage or partnership. Victims of domestic violence are facing difficult situations particularly when they have no-one to turn to, no support network, and nowhere to go that is safe for themselves and their children. In part, domestic violence is also resulting in women in particular becoming single-headed households with all the pressures and challenges this can bring. Research shows how female-headed households face specific challenges in terms of poverty, lack of employment opportunities and child care, and the stress of coping alone. Struggling with such issues, especially if also lacking support can, as in households with both parents, mean loss of coping mechanism that may spiral into poor and broken relationships between children and caregivers. Children are also becoming direct victims of domestic violence thus prompting child protection authorities to respond and remove them from parental-care.

It should not be overlooked that some men are also struggling within the family home, especially with societal expectations that place responsibility on them to adequately provide for their families. This can also affect their mental health which, as previously mentioned in this study, can result in violence against children and partners. Men also need support that will help them maintain strong and caring family relationships.

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Inter-generational violence is a particularly worrying phenomenon in Cote d'Ivoire. It has been recognised that violence can be a learnt behaviour[241] through 'observation, learning and imitation'[242] of adults, and/or being a victim.[243] Our perception is, with each generation in which families in Côte d'Ivoire repeatedly experience and witness violence and lack strong attachment to each other, that ongoing family dysfunction and breakdown will continue. It means within each generation there is the concern of an ever weakening ability to parent in a loving and caring and protective manner in some households. This can then lead to acts of violence, either between adults, and/or towards children.

Although not always directly related to issues of violence and neglect, children are also living in alternative care because they are orphans or abandoned. Children with disabilities are also being placed in alternative care when parents are unable, or do not want to, provide the care they need.

Recommendations

▪ There is an urgent need for investment in violence prevention programmes for adults and for children to help break the inter-generational cycle of violent behaviour. These programmes should be systematically applied in an ongoing and sustainable manner. To this end, provision of violence prevention programmes that reach children at an early age could be built into the school curriculum and comprise not just one-off 'civic' lessons, but continuous learning that promotes positive messages and behaviour throughout a child's school life. Violence prevention could also be built into family strengthening programmes that work with all members of the family.

▪ Article 2 of the UNCRC guarantees children protection from discrimination. Violence prevention programmes should include efforts to combat factors that contribute to the presence of abuse and exploitation including discrimination, stigmatisation, and lack of equality. They should incorporate clear messages that promote tolerance and understanding. Issues of gender equity, discrimination against persons with disabilities or from different religious, ethnic, or other specific backgrounds, acceptance of those identifying as LGBTQI+ are examples of topics such programmes should include.

▪ To help inform policies and programmes that promote safe and united families, all professionals who hold responsibility for the well-being of children would benefit from a better understanding of the factors that are contributing to violence in the home in Cote d'Ivoire.

▪ In order to help break the cycle of inter-generational aspect of poor parenting ability, professionals would benefit from a better understanding of such topics as attachment theory, including the impact of separation from loved ones that children face when placed in alternative

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[241] Moylan et al. 2010
[242] Conteras & del Carmen Cano 2016:44
[243] Conteras & del Carmen Cano 2016; Bevans & Higgins 2002

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care, the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs),244 and trauma-informed practice.245 These topics should also be incorporated into programmes for parents and other caregivers as prevention of violence also requires sustained actions working closely with families to bring about an understanding of the harm being created when they use violence and finding ways to address such abusive situations.

▪ Those living in situations of domestic violence and gender-based violence, most especially girls and women, need someone to turn as for example, access to counselling and psychosocial services provided within a caring and safe environment. When rejected by extended family and the wider community, and with no-where else to go, crisis shelter centres, and other support services, for women and their children could offer immediate protection and help prevent situations from deteriorating to the stage where children may be separated and placed in alternative care. Access to child day care and after school clubs would also provide some respite for women. The building of stronger supportive social networks is also important.

▪ Men should be actively involved in family strengthening and other programmes that help them understand the importance of, and how to maintain, strong and caring family relationships. This should include awareness on issues of gender parity and prevention of domestic violence.

▪ Article 42 of the UNCRC requires States Parties to make the principles and provisions in the Convention 'widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.' Efforts to increase the awareness of child rights amongst the general public as well as the harm to children when they lack love, affection and are victims of violence - including impact of separation from parental care - can help strengthen the protective environment in the home and community. Messages might also include information about risk of violence and exploitation children face as for example, if spending time on the streets, engaged in child labour, and being exposed to drugs and alcohol.

Adequate standard of living and well-being

Article 27 of the UNCRC requires States Parties to recognise the right of every child to a 'standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.' The Article also calls on States Parties to take appropriate measures to support and assist parents with their responsibility toward children and 'shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.' Other articles within the UNCRC also include a right to health (Article 24), education (Article 28 & 29) and survival and development (6).

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244 Please see: https://www.eif.org.uk/report/adverse-childhood-experiences-what-we-know-what-we-dont-know-and-what-should-happen-next.See also: SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, University of Strathclyde 2021; SOS Children's Villages International 2022
245 SOS Children's Villages International 2022 Safe

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The 2019 United Nations General Assembly resolution[246] on the 'Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child' calls on States to 'improve the situation of children living in poverty, in particular extreme poverty, deprived of adequate food and nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, with limited or no access to basic physical and mental health-care services, shelter, education, participation and protection' (Article 1). Furthermore, the resolution clearly says that,

> financial and material poverty, or conditions directly and uniquely imputable to such poverty, never should be the only justification for the removal of a child from the care of his or her parents or primary caregivers and legal guardians, for receiving a child into alternative care or for preventing his or her reintegration, but should be seen as a signal for the need to provide appropriate support to their family, benefiting the child directly.

We have observed how issues related to poverty are a driver contributing to children's placement in alternative care in Cote d'Ivoire. Poverty is an inter-generational as well as a multi-dimensional issue with measurements of poverty taking into account not only financial means, but other factors that contribute to well-being.[247] Concerns raised by children, young people and adult family members during our research signalled many areas of their lives in which they are struggling with issues related to poverty. Our research findings also suggest a correlation between the ability to face such daily challenges as providing food, adequate shelter, paying utility bills, sending children to school, and finding adequately renumerated employment etc., with stress and tension within households. Costs of medicines and health services are also contributing to worry and concern. Apart from specific projects, often reliant on funds from such donors as USAID, there are few national social safety net programmes for citizens of Côte d'Ivoire. This is compounded by the absence of adequate access to basic and specialist services for many. Persons with disabilities particularly face multiple challenges including issues of exclusion that further compound their ability to access already scarce basic and specialist support services. As a result, the ongoing challenges facing parents can exacerbate feelings of distress, anger, poor mental health, and for some, an inability to cope. This may even lead to violence against children.

Findings also suggest the need for greater support for families and communities in rural areas. It is understood that violence and the breakdown in marriages/partnerships and family relationships in villages, is resulting in some women fleeing with or without their children, to the cities where they end up facing additional hardships. Some are also running away from such issues as FGM/Cutting and forced early marriage. They move to cities, particularly when lacking support from family and community networks, with the belief they will find more opportunities in larger urban conurbations. Though this is often not the case. In this respect, one concern is the focus of some NGOs on more

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[246] United Nations General Assembly Resolution 'Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child', December 2019 'A/74/395
[247] Please see: https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/multidimensional-poverty-measure#:~:text=The%20Multidimensional%20Poverty%20Measure%20(MPM,the%20%242.15%20international%20poverty%20line; https://ophi.org.uk/video-poverty-in-el-salvador-from-the-perspective-of-the-protagonists/

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reactive programmes that are based in urban settings rather than preventative services in more rural areas.

Although we have seen how issues related to poverty contribute to family breakdown and the presence of violence, nevertheless, it is recognised that there are families living in very difficult circumstances who are supportive and caring of one another and create a safe environment for children. This illustrates how strong loving relationships are an important factor in helping families stand up to the impact of poverty and other shocks experienced by households. And this in turn can contribute to a violence free household.

It is clear not one agency can respond to all the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty leading families into crisis. However those in the child protection sector, as with other sectors, very often work in a silo rather than in partnership with other professionals (and indeed, alternative care is often seen as a separate issue/sector to child protection). There are gaps therefore, in terms of coordination and service delivery between Government and non-governmental bodies and agencies including those responsible for education, health, security, social protection and social welfare, justice, and child protection. Steps to address this are highlighted in Government policy but not sufficiently addressed in practice.

Recommendations
▪ It is beyond the remit of this report to provide detailed recommendations as to government efforts to strengthen the country in terms of economics. It would be possible however, for different actors to instigate advocacy for change and share information that would help government policy makers, and others, gain a clearer understanding of efforts needed to prevent children's placement in alternative care. Especially information that takes into account the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty and the impact this has on families. This requires awareness raising that informs the establishment of an evidence based multi-sectoral and family-centred approach to the design, development and delivery of support to families with the understanding it is often more than one pathway or issue that contributes to family breakdown. One specific focus of such advocacy should include the development and availability of fully functioning of social protection systems that reach all those in need of safety nets.

▪ Helping families address the many challenges they are facing requires closer multi-sectoral cooperation and improved coordination between Government and non-governmental bodies and agencies, UN entities, academics, faith-based leaders, the private sector, and donors, including those responsible for education, health, security, social protection and social welfare, justice, and child protection. There should be a concerted effort together, and within each organisation, body, or department, to assesses and recognise where each can most effectively contribute: whether it be direct service provision, advocacy to effect change, signposting so that families know how and where to receive the support they need, fundraising, or even leading/supporting such coordinated response. Organisations should also look at the breadth of their outreach to ensure they are reaching vulnerable families including those residing in hard to reach and rural areas.

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- Families need informed and coordinated access to service provision in a way that will address all the inter-related challenges they face. This should be available universally to address the concern that support often comes too late and so that vulnerability of families might be prevented. To this end consideration should be given to providing families with signposting to basic and specialist services as well as ensuring joined-up provision in a way that overcomes barriers of access e.g. access to all support coordinated in one location rather that family members having to move from agency to agency to agency to resolve their problems. In some countries for example, this is sometimes called a 'one-stop shop'. [248]

- Supporting families undertake the responsibility they seek to provide for everyone in the household could include increased access to sustainable income generation schemes and help in obtaining stable, well remunerated employment. This should be linked with the need for additional and easily available and free adult education programmes and other capacity building and training opportunities, especially those related to improved literacy for women. Such economic and training programmes require highly skilled facilitation and should be undertaken by organisations that have the particular focus and specialism to implement them.

- Article 18 of the UNCRC requires States to 'take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.' Affordable, or preferably free, day care for children would help women in particular find their way into the work force. It could also provide respite for those struggling with household responsibilities, are overwhelmed by challenges of everyday life, and would benefit from help in alleviating any pressure building up within families. This includes day care for infants as well as after-school provision.

- Increased efforts are needed to ensure access to free health care services and/or provision of national health insurance schemes. This includes a particular need for readily accessible psychosocial and mental health services and counselling programmes. The latter should also be a consideration in the delivery of family strengthening programmes.

- Children should not be placed in alternative care solely for the reason of poverty. Alternative care should only be used when absolutely necessary for children in need of protection. There is also a need for further in-depth investigation and the use of evidence applied to developing legislation, policies and strategies that refocuses the funds currently used to run residential institutions toward programmes that allow children to remain in their own homes. There should be concrete and timely plans for the elimination of all residential institutions in Cote d'Ivoire.

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[248] Please see: https://www.undp.org/botswana/news/undp-supports-establishment-one-stop-shop-public-services-botswana And: https://www.undp.org/kazakhstan/stories/one-stop-shop-window-problem-solver-people-difficult-life-situations

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Support with parenting

The preamble to the UNCRC states that the 'family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community'. This requires States to provide parents, and other primary caregivers, with the support needed so that children have the best protection and opportunities in life.

Children and young people feel happy when they have parents that love, respect and understand them. They wrote about the importance of parents being good role models. They want to feel loved, cared for, trusted, respected by their parents, have better communication within the family, and to live in an environment where there is unity, support and happiness When asked why families reach a situation where placement of children in care is a consideration, interviewees drew attention to lack of harmony and dysfunction in the family due to what they consider to be 'poor' parenting skills. They see the lack of parenting skills as a significant factor related to deterioration of child-parents relationships which in turn, may ultimately lead to violence against, or serious neglect of, children.

Interviewees also identified how lack of positive parenting skills is not only impacted by socio-economic circumstances as described above, but can be an inter-generational phenomenon. Findings in our research indicate the negative experience some parents had during their own childhood is impacting their own ability to parent, as well as having a detrimental effect on other aspects of their life. One outcome being an inability to maintain harmonious, unified, supportive relationships in the home leading to family breakdown, and even the manifestation of violence. In relation to this situation, some professionals have recognised the lack of understanding of such topics as trauma-informed practice, and the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).[249] They do understand however, that violence, rejection, lack of love, care and attention can have a life-long impact on social, emotional, educational and physical development and would like the skills and knowledge to help address this situation.

Many of the recommendations in this report will contribute to supporting those parents who are struggling with their role to better protect and care for their children. Below however, are additional specific recommendations towards achieving this objective.

Recommendations

- As with previous recommendations, actions are needed that will break any inter-generational cycle of poor parenting. This requires consideration of parenting programmes that take a holistic and family-centred approach and incorporate such topics as attachment theory, the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs),250 and trauma-informed practice.

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[249] Please see: https://www.eif.org.uk/report/adverse-childhood-experiences-what-we-know-what-we-dont-know-and-what-should-happen-next

[250] Please see: https://www.eif.org.uk/report/adverse-childhood-experiences-what-we-know-what-we-dont-know-and-what-should-happen-next.See also: SOS Children's Villages International and CELCIS, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection, University of Strathclyde 2021; SOS Children's Villages International 2022

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- It is important that professionals working with families are in receipt of training, knowledge and understanding that prevent them taking decisions based on negative social and cultural norms and beliefs and immediately classifying parents as being 'bad' parents when something goes wrong in the home. This requires a deeper understanding of the different factors impacting parents and their ability, family dynamics, what is necessary to maintain harmonious, unified, supportive relationships in the home, and ways to build on existing resilience and coping mechanisms.

Disability

Children with disabilities have the right to enjoy 'a full and decent life in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community (Article 23 of the UNCRC). Also contained within Article 23 of the UNCRC is provision of special care and assistance to ensure children with disabilities have, 'access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities'.

All the issues covered in the report and in this conclusions section apply equally to children with disabilities. However, there are additional risks that persons with disabilities in Cote d'Ivoire face. This includes serious concerns regarding the impact of stigma and discrimination. As a result, and also due to lack of suitable investment, they face additional barriers when accessing basic and specialist services. There is also a lack of programmes that offer not just material but also emotional support to families. In addition other risks that are heightened in the case of children with disabilities include those of violence, abandonment or placement in residential institutions that are segregated by the form of disability. Children whose parents are disabled are also vulnerable to placement in alternative care.

Recommendations

- Family support programmes should ensure the inclusion of families that have members with disabilities.

- Violence prevention programmes, as previously mentioned, should inherently incorporate the subject of protection of children with disabilities.

- Advocacy and awareness raising programmes should promote an understanding and acceptance of disability, both within families and amongst the general public. Public information campaigns should speak about fair and respectful treatment of people with disabilities, the harm of stigmatisation, and topics that would help prevent violence and exclusion. Advocacy programmes by and with people with disabilities are important and help bring a specific focus to improving services, opportunities, and support.

- Inclusion in schools should not just offer children with disabilities an equal opportunity to receive an education, but they should also be a place of security.

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- Children with disabilities, as with other children, should not be placed in residential institutions. Consideration should be given to any specialist support necessary to prevent the placement of children with disabilities in alternative care.

Education

Article 28 of the UNCRC requires States Parties to 'recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity'. States Parties must also 'take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.' Furthermore, Article 23(3) recognises education should be provided free of charge in a manner that responds to the special needs of a disabled child. Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[251] calls on States Parties to 'recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an 'inclusive education system at all levels and life long learning'. [252]

Participants in our research illustrate the importance that is placed on education and the manner in which it is highly significant when preparing children for responsible adulthood. Our research suggests there are many children missing out on education due to associated costs e.g. uniforms, books etc. Issues of child labour, early marriage and teenage pregnancy may also be factors that mean children, and girls in particular, are leaving school earlier than necessary.

Not only is school education necessary for future well-being, as for example, gaining employment and an engaged member of society, but interviewees, as with previous research, suggest higher educational achievement may also be related to positive parenting, not least because of an increased understanding and skills to relate to, support, and communicate with others, including children. [253]

Recommendations

- Investment is needed in high quality and provision of free public education, including being free from costs of fees, materials and uniforms and other associated expenses, should be made available in all local communities.

- No child should be placed in a residential institution for reasons of gaining access to education.

Play and leisure

UNCRC Article 31 of the UNCRC directs States to the right of children to rest and leisure and encourages access to cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity. This right is highlighted in this

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[251] United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006
[252] ibid. Article 24
[253] See for example: Fruehwirth and Gagete-Miranda 2019; Sutin et al. 2017

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report, not just because of the importance to children's development, but also the opportunity recreational pursuits can play in strengthening family life.

Children most emphatically wrote about the importance of time for recreation, both with parents, other family members, and friends. A sentiment repeated by young people and family members who highlighted the importance of spending time as a family, including eating and undertaking recreational activities together.

Time spent together is seen as being particularly important in the way it contributes to family unity and can help provide a respite from the stresses they may be facing. There might be parents who doing their utmost to provide for the family by working hard and long hours but do not also realise the benefits of trying to spend some time pursuing joint activities with their children and how this can help forge closer bonds.

Recommendations
▪ Activities that address important aspects of family unity and spending time together would add value to parenting and family strengthening programmes. This would include raising awareness amongst parents and professionals as to the important benefits of time spent as a family and how this can help forge closer bonds.

Addressing harmful social norms, attitudes and practices
Article 42 of the UNCRC requires States to make the principles and provisions in the Convention 'widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.'

Children and young people in Cote d'Ivoire want violence to end. They do not want to flee their homes because of violence, or to be forced into early marriage, or subjected to FGM/Cutting. They want parents to understand they need love and kindness and for the beating to stop. However, our research notes a lack of education and advocacy campaigns that would address such harmful social norms, attitudes and practices.

We also note the ongoing discrimination against girls and women, including an existing belief that men are justified in beating women.[254] In this respect, there are insufficient efforts to raise awareness with the aim of preventing gender based violence. Furthermore, the research revealed other harmful beliefs, such as those of witchcraft, that pose risks to children and parents, and especially those with disabilities.

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[254] Ministry of Planning and Development 2019 – according to the UNICEF MICS-5, approximately 52% of men aged 15-49 years old believe it is justified for a husband to beat his wife. In addition many teachers do not think it possible to teach large classes without using corporal punishment

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Recommendations

- Advocacy and awareness raising campaigns are needed to help eradicate harmful social and cultural norms and beliefs that place children at risk of harm. Such campaigns would greatly benefit from meaningful participation of children, young people and other primary stakeholders.

The child protection system and capacity of professional decision makers

Article 1 of the 2019 UNGA resolution on the 'Promotion and the protection of children's rights', calls on States Parties to ensure,

> adequate and systematic training in the rights of the child, including by encouraging States to take the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children into account for professional groups working with and for children, including with children without parental care, including specialized judges, law enforcement officials, lawyers, social workers, medical doctors, care professionals, health professionals and teachers, and coordination among various governmental bodies involved in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child

International guidance relating to decision making and 'gatekeeping'[255] is outlined in a number of international documents including the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care[256] and accompanying Handbook[257]. This guidance includes the use of case management tools that allow for rigorous multi-sectoral and participatory assessments upon which careful and well considered decisions can be taken. These decisions should always be in the best interest of the child.

Decisions making by professionals is not only influenced by such factors as their personal understanding, beliefs and experience, but also the strength of the national child protection system they work in and the statutory and other guidance they receive. Decision making, although ideally objective and undertaken within a structure of national legislation, policy and statutory guidance, are at risk of being too subjective with personal social and cultural beliefs becoming influencing factors. It is important therefore, that sufficient training is received and social work and child protection personnel have the knowledge and experience necessary to make the correct safeguarding decisions. The access to, or lack of, laws, policies and resources that guide and facilitate the work of professionals, and help them undertake their responsibilities, is a further factor that can impact well-informed decision making that meets the best interest of a child.

It is noted that some steps have been taken to amend legislation and develop new child protection policy in Cote d'Ivoire. However, the findings of our research signal the need for further significant investment in the development of a comprehensive child law and further amendments to other legislation that would bring it in line with the UNCRC and other international standards. Furthermore, strategic plans for the development of a comprehensive and effective child protection system, that is

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[255] For further explanation of the term 'gatekeeping' please see: Csaky & Gale 2015
[256] United Nations General Assembly 2009
[257] Cantwell et al. 2012

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not just reactive but also prevents unnecessary separation of children from parental care, is lacking in detail. For example, there is little guidance for those responsible for policy implementation. This is exemplified by the 2023 National Policy for Child Protection that lacks detailed plans for implementation and clear guidelines as to the roles of different stakeholders.

Our research suggests that, although there are many people dedicated to their work, the social services workforce is operating within a sector that is fragmented, lacks coordination, and would benefit from a more cohesive and comprehensive multi-sectoral approach that is focussed on prevention of child-parent separation and family support. Furthermore, a particular need has been revealed for additional statutory guidance and better understanding of how to apply rigorous child protection case management. A contributing factor to this situation is insufficient employment and retention of the social services workforce resulting in high caseloads per social worker and lack of time to complete thorough child and family assessments. It has not been possible to assess the amount of training different government and NGO personnel have received on the use of child protection case management tools, and other statutory guidance and legislation, or whether there is sufficient understanding of how to evaluate the risks a child might be facing through any assessment findings. The evidence we have collated does suggest however, that investment in the social services workforce is urgently needed.

An assessment of the quality of social work training in higher education institutions is missing from our research. A further study would help address this gap and provide a better evaluation of the knowledge and capacities of all decision makers, including those with social work responsibilities and members of the police force and judiciary. Any future study should also consider the capacity of other professionals and the need for child protection training in all relevant higher education courses including those for police, teachers, health workers etc. Evaluation of the quality of ad-hoc and in-service training was also not possible within the remit of this research and again, a future review of standards of capacity building programmes would help inform any necessary provision.

Recommendations

- We suggest an in-depth review of legislation and policies in Cote d'Ivoire to inform future developments in line with international conventions, standards, and consolidation and development of a comprehensive Child Law. This should include a focus on protection of children whilst applying gatekeeping principles that prevent unnecessary placement in alternative care. Consideration should be given to incorporating mandated provision of services and programmes that support families in difficult circumstances, ensuring financial and material poverty, or conditions directly and uniquely ascribed, to such poverty, are never the only justification for the removal of a child from the care of parents, primary caregivers, or legal guardians. Furthermore, legislation should require the gradual elimination of all forms of large residential institutions.

- To inform the development of future training and capacity building, it is recommended that an assessment of the quality of social work training in higher education institutions is undertaken along with a review of provision and standards of in-service capacity building. This should be

coupled with a study of current skills, knowledge and capacities of all those responsible for making decisions about protection and care of children including social workers, police, judiciary, health and education workers etc. This should consider their understanding of risk thresholds in relation to protection and how to apply the principle of the best interest of the child.

▪ A review of the use of case management procedures would inform any further developments in line with international standards and help evaluate their current use including any gaps in the way they are understood and applied. This would also help inform further training on implementation of multi-sectoral child and family assessments.

▪ Training of those working in residential institutions may not only help alleviate some of the opposition to those employed in such settings, but also contribute to re-skilling. If sufficiently trained, they could be offered new roles in family strengthening programmes and, if family based care settings are developed, they might become providers. In addition, training on how to re-focus the use of funds towards family support programmes, and family based alternative care when necessary, would be aided by the undertaking and application of a cost benefit analysis.

▪ Steps should be taken to address the lack of resources available to members of the social services workforce to effectively carry out their roles and responsibilities. Consideration should also be given to such issues as professional burn out and making sure professionals are fully supported in their work, i.e., caring for the carers.

Data management systems

Legislation, policy, statutory guidance, planning and programme delivery, should be informed by evidence. The 2019 UNGA Resolution, highlights this by calling on States Parties to,

> improve data collection, information management and reporting systems relating to children in Improving data collection, information management and reporting systems related to children without parental care in all settings and situations in order to close existing data gaps and develop global and national baselines.

In the first instance, the Resolution is referring to data related to children in alternative care, including the reasons for placement. It is further necessary to continue to collate evidence that includes consideration of the following:

- What is the situation of children affected by the issue of child-parents separation
- What are the main drivers of child-parents separation, and how are these influenced by various factors, e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic circumstances, and access to services etc.
- How are children at risk of separation officially identified and recognised (e.g. in official data).
- Which child protection and social protection services are available to children at risk of child-parents separation and what are the gaps.

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- What are the ideas and proposals of children, and other key stakeholders, about responses to the issue of child-parents separation and how they could be improved.

It is encouraging that the Government of Cote d'Ivoire through the Ministry of Women, Families and Children is developing and using a child protection data management information system. However, current reports would benefit from further in-depth clarification and disaggregated data such as information on pathways into alternative care and reasons for placements, length of stay, reintegration etc.

Recommendations

- Ongoing development of local, regional and national child protection data management systems that provide clearer definitions and understanding of all the issues impacting children's protection and well-being including a more comprehensive explanation as to the reasons children are separated from parental care.

Participation

Article 12 (1) of the UNCRC requires,

> States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Our research suggests that children in Cote d'Ivoire are not participating in the process of completing a form of assessment in relation to their situation, or in decisions being made about their lives, including placement in alternative care.

Recommendations

- Children should be supported in a way that allows their full and meaningful participation in any decision making processes that will affect them, including their placement in alternative care.

- All children should be acknowledged as active citizens and afforded equal opportunity to contribute to their society. In this respect, policy makers and programme designers and implementers may need help understanding that children are experts in their own lives. This will require challenging any negative assumptions regarding children's capacities to engage and participate and providing them with opportunities that allow them to build and demonstrate such capability.

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