



Session 1

**Presentation of research findings from the
“Global Report on Children’s Care and Protection
2024: Understanding and preventing the
separation of children from their families”**



**SOS CHILDREN’S
VILLAGES**



Session1: Global Report on Children's Care and Protection 2024: Understanding and preventing the separation of children from their families

Speakers



Ms. Rosalind Willi, Research and Learning Advisor, SOS Children's Villages International



Dr Chrissie Gale, Director of Child Consulting Ltd & honorary research fellow, University of Strathclyde



Dr Joumana Stephan Yeretian, Associate Professor, Saint Joseph University of Beirut Lebanon



Dr Charlotte Bredahl, Head of Research and Development, University College Copenhagen, Department of Social Work, Denmark



Ms. Mehrigiul Ablezova, Assistant Professor, American University of Central Asia Kyrgyzstan



Global Report on Children's Care and Protection

Understanding and preventing the separation of children from their families



<https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/publications/research-and-positions/global-report>





Introduction and background

A global research programme on understanding and preventing child-family separation, in cooperation with academic partners across the globe

Aim is to address key evidence gaps:

- Limited data on the factors that lead children to become separated and the dynamics behind
- A scarcity of research on the lived experiences of children, young people, adults in the family, and those working to support them
- Limited cross-country studies



Research components

1

Review of existing evidence

Systematic literature review on the drivers of child-family separation

Research, data, and policy review on child-family separation

2

New evidence generated through field research

8 country studies on the factors contributing to separation and placement in formal alternative care

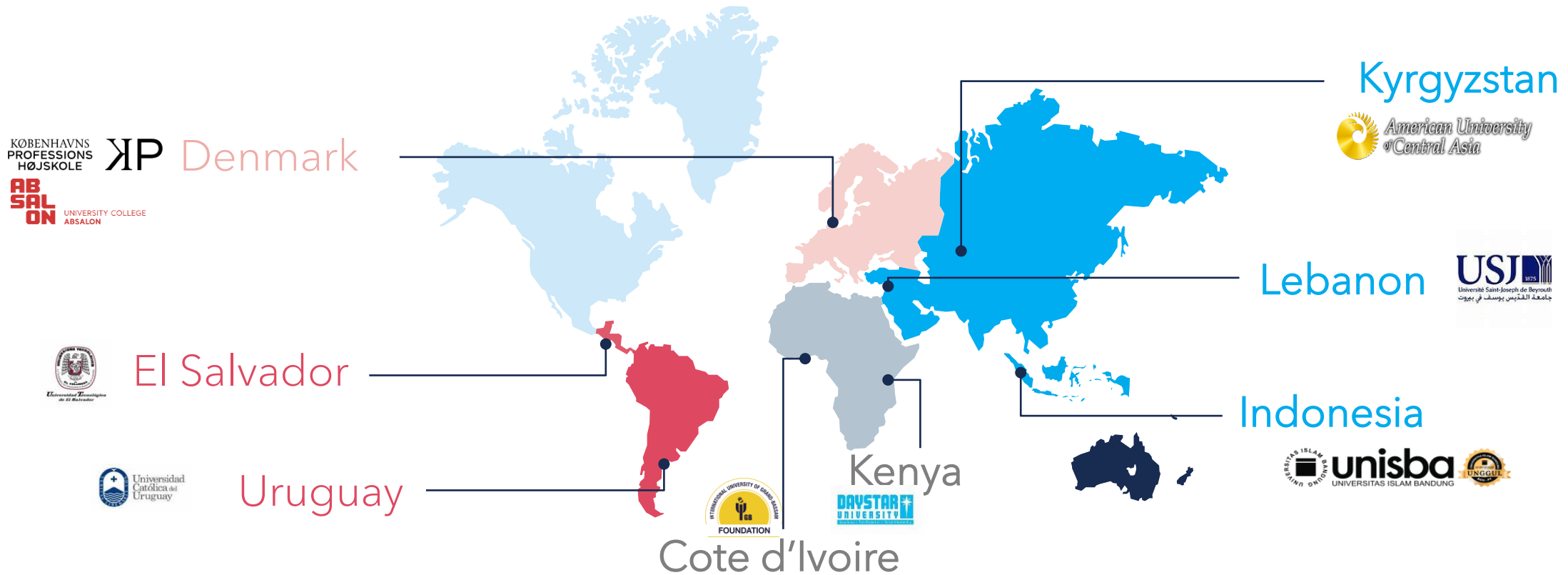
Follow-up research in 4 of the above country studies on child protection decision-making



Research partners

- American University of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan
- Brown University, United States
- Catholic University of Uruguay, Uruguay
- Child Consulting Ltd., United Kingdom
- Daystar University, Kenya
- International University of Grand Bassam, Cote d'Ivoire
- Technical University of El Salvador, El Salvador
- Saint Joseph University Beirut, Lebanon
- University College Absalon, Denmark
- University College Copenhagen, Denmark
- Universitas Islam Bandung, Indonesia

Eight countries



Lead international researcher

Dr. Chrissie Gale

- design of methodology, coordination & research



Local university partners in each country

- work with children and young people to design research; systems mapping & literature review

Aim of the research

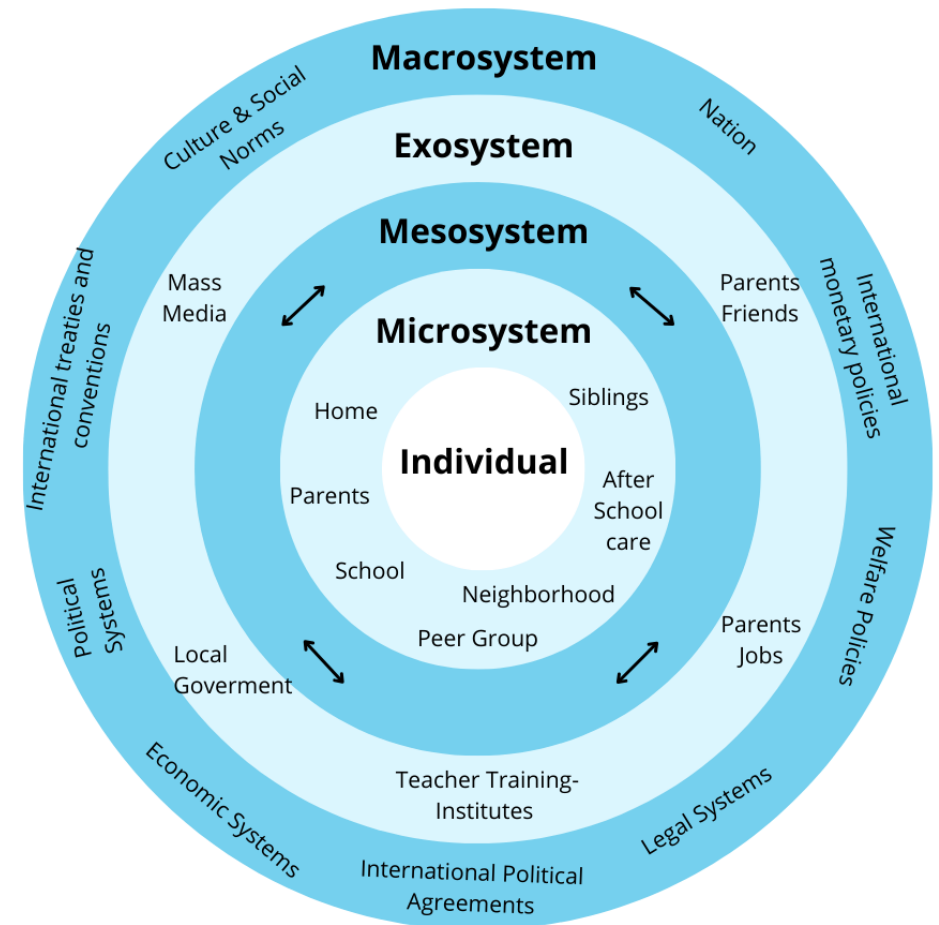
To understand:

- Why are children losing parental care and being placed in formal alternative care?
- What is needed to prevent child-parents separation?

Research framework

Informed by:

- All the factors impacting family life - ecological systems e.g. Bronfenbrenner
- Components of a national child protection system – impacts on decision making



Research methodology

Scoping of literature

Desk review

Participatory research/family strengthening/trauma-informed practice

Country desk review

Socio-economic/political/cultural background + national child protection system

Primary research

Participatory research workshops

*with children(13-15 yrs) and care-experienced young people (17-25 yrs) (#517)
adult family members (#290)*

Semi-structured interviews

with professional stakeholders (#95)

Online survey (Qualtrics)

for professional stakeholders (#231)

Research methodology

- Right of children to participate in decision making - competent actors actively involved in shaping their own social worlds
- Workshops in El Salvador + Lebanon - enabled consultation in developing research questions and methodology with children and young people + consultation and use in all other countries

— Research methodology – consultation with children and young people in Lebanon

Used games and energizers to keep them engaged and promote critical thinking and research strategies

You want to know who thinks they
are a very good cook
What is your question?

Question Card

Likes to sing	Likes going to school	Likes watching movies	Likes to write stories
Likes chocolate	Likes pizza	Likes to dance	Likes playing football
Likes to go swimming	Likes to read	Likes to play outside	Likes playing video games

Bingo Card

— Research methodology

- Utilised visually creative elements - to engage and encourage active participation and easy communication - artwork - non-verbal and fun
- Teamwork & individual reflection

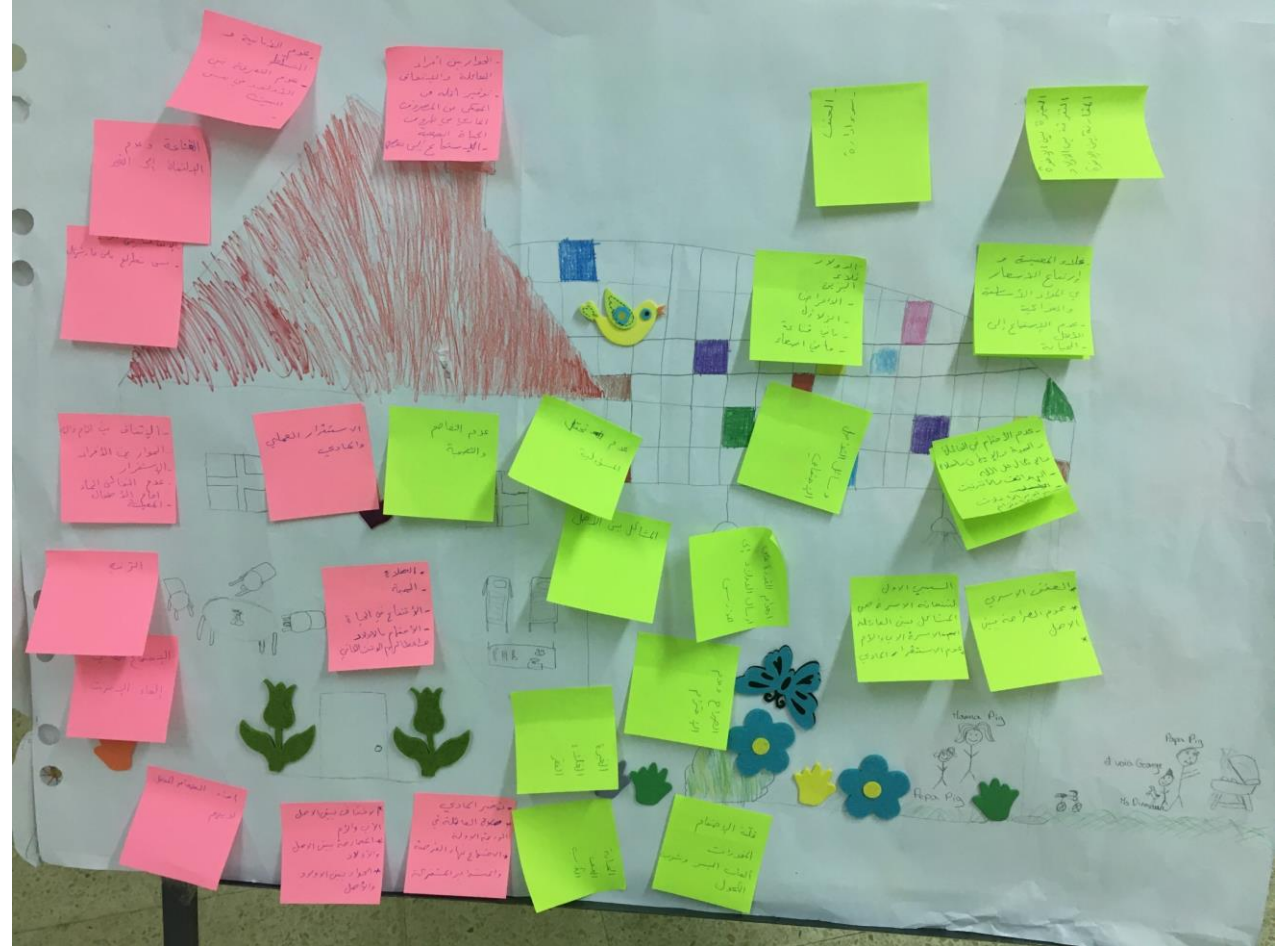
Draw a house



Sticky notes: Pink = HAPPY
Green = UNHAPPY/WORRIED

— Research methodology

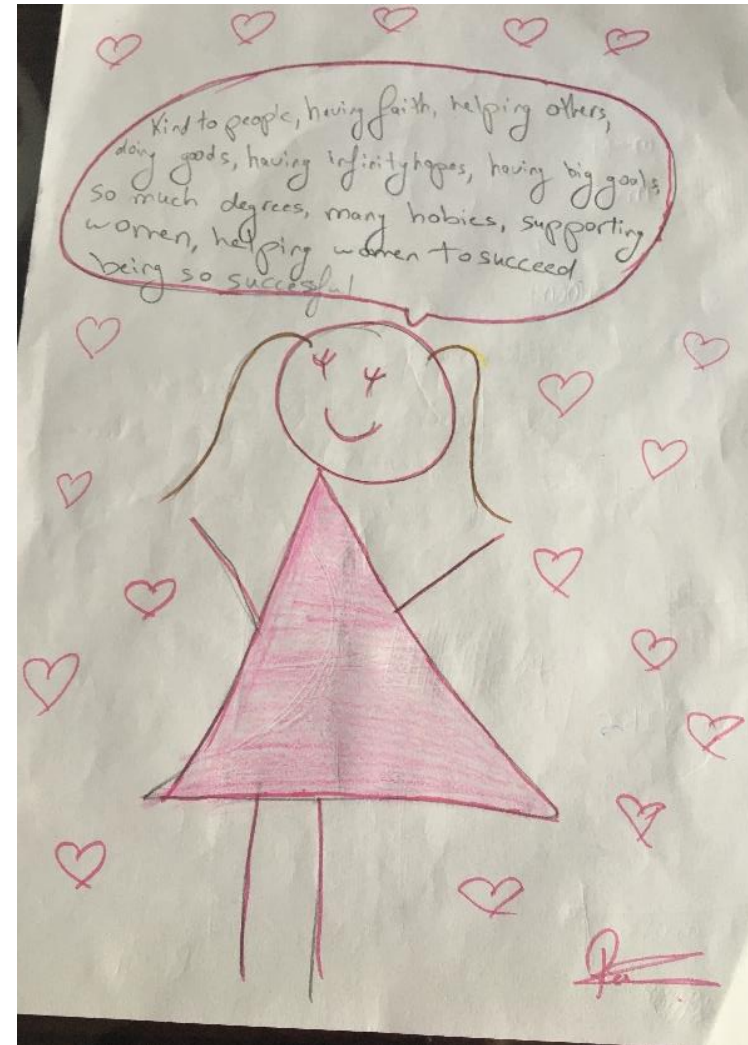
- Their evaluation + suggestions – which research exercises would be suitable to use with other children and young people
- The experience: their engagement and enthusiastic participation



— Research methodology :Children and young people's solutions



Solution Trees

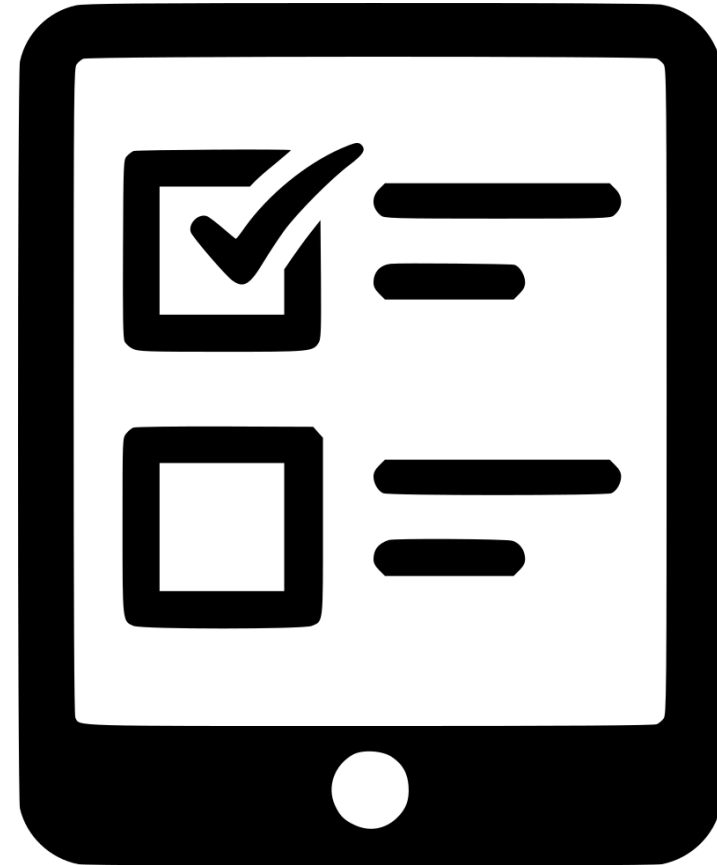


Super Powers

— Poll: What are the top three reasons children are placed in alternative care in your country?

Please select from the following:

1. Physical, sexual, and emotional violence against children
2. Other child protection concerns, such as child labour, early marriage, or migration-related separation
3. Lack of love and affection in the home
4. Child or parent has a disability
5. Poverty-related issues, such as inadequate food, shelter, or work opportunities
6. To gain access to education
7. Parents migrating for work



— Findings

- Strong correlation of data provided by all participants
- Contextual specificities (i.e. prevalence) - but common themes emerged from low, middle and high-income countries

— Findings: reasons children are placed in alternative care

All forms of
violence -
physical, sexual
and emotional

Issues related to
multi-dimensions
of poverty

Functioning of the
national child
protection system
and decision
making

— Multidimensional factors lead to child-parents separation

Factors within wider society

Violence in the community

Social/cultural norms and beliefs

Stigma and discrimination

Patriarchy

Economic conditions + lack of access to / poor provision of services + social protection system

Lack of awareness/ knowledge of child rights + protection (including Trauma Informed Practice + Attachment Theory)



Impact at family level

Inter-generational violence
Violence against children
Domestic/gender- based violence

Inter-generational depleted parenting ability

Multi-dimensional aspects of poverty

Stress/poor mental health + emotional well-being

Low resilience + depleted coping mechanisms

Use of negative coping mechanism (e.g. use of violence/alcohol/ and drugs)



Effects

Family dysfunction

Family breakdown and separation

— Findings: violence

- Presence of violence in the home - physical, sexual, emotional violence and serious neglect
- Witnessing and experiencing domestic abuse and gender-based violence
- Stigma and discrimination – children with disabilities at heightened risk
- Other protection concerns – street connected (often running from abuse in the home), child labour, early and forced marriage, etc.

“Both physical but also mental abuse. (...) violence in different forms. In worse cases sexual abuse.”
(Professional in Denmark)

— Findings – issues related to multiple dimensions of poverty

- Household poverty - lack or poor access to basic and specialist services e.g. education, food, warmth, clothing, adequate housing
- Residential institutions offering 'social care' and education - significant pull factor in many countries - rather than directing resources into prevention
- Stress of parents and depleted coping mechanisms - can lead to negative behaviour, breakdown in relationships + violence

Inter-generational violence
Violence against children
Domestic/gender- based violence

Inter-generational depleted parenting ability

Multi-dimensional aspects of poverty

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Low resilience + depleted coping mechanisms

Use of negative coping mechanism (e.g. use of violence/alcohol/ and drugs)

— Findings: labour migration in Kyrgyzstan

External migration

- Thousands of children being left behind- in 2018, 277,000 children had one parent, and 99,000 children had both parents working abroad - often referred to as 'left behind children'
- Parents leave their children in the informal care of extended family and in residential facilities - including those known as 'boarding schools' which also offer 'social care'

"Why they are sending children to boarding schools or foster families...One of the main reasons, because of the migration, because many people go out in order to earn some money." (professional stakeholder)

— Findings: labour migration

Internal migration

- Families migrating from rural areas to cities often face extreme poverty and lack necessary documentation, which limits access to basic services such as education, healthcare, and social protection
- These families live in some of the worst and most hazardous conditions in Kyrgyzstan (UNICEF Kyrgyzstan)
- Children of internal migrants particularly vulnerable - many at risk of dropping out of school - increased likelihood of involvement in child labour and becoming street connected
- 80% of street connected children from internal migrant families (2022 US Human Rights study)

— Findings: labour migration

- Placed in residential care by parents/family OR decision made by social services

"Mainly these are internal migrants which are coming from rural areas of our country to big cities...and these parents do not have houses for example. They are unemployed. They do not have the conditions not only to take care of their children but also to support themselves. And therefore, children are put in the institution... (professional stakeholder)"

— Findings: labour migration

Key efforts are being undertaken by Government of Kyrgyzstan:

- The National Development Program (to 2026) - relevant measures to mitigate effects of labour migration and strengthening support for families
- The Concept of Migration Policy (to 2030) - aim to reverse negative trends in labour migration through:
 - creation of improved domestic job market
 - reduction in socio-economic factors leading to external labour migration
 - reduction in people wanting to migrate for labour purposes

— Findings: negative coping mechanisms in Kyrgyzstan

- Some parents turn to alcohol and drugs when facing stressful situations – this negatively impacts family life and can lead to family breakdown and violence

"For example, the husband does not have enough earnings or maybe does not have employment. And then he starts drinking alcohol and they are losing their apartment... and they have no money. And then they are fighting with each other because of the problems. And then divorce." (professional stakeholder)

- As a result - children may be placed in alternative care

"Removal of children usually happens in situations where families are in difficult life situations like addiction in the families. Like to alcohol drugs etc." (professional stakeholder)

"...when the parents for example are using alcohol, the children are removed and stay in a residential home...." (professional stakeholder)

— Findings: use of residential institutions offering 'social care' in Lebanon

- Lebanon facing a protracted - and now - acute crisis
- Children, young people and family members told us about the challenges that families face - especially related to diverse aspects of poverty

poverty

bad financial situation

lack of accommodation, security and food

bad living environment

hunger

cannot secure everything needed for the family

basic needs like food, clothing and education not secured

have to sell the things in the house

lack of electricity

don't have heating during winter

child labour especially for Syrians

unemployed parents

children are sick and parents cannot provide treatment

unable to send their children to school

the house being destroyed

not being secure

- Findings: use of residential institutions offering 'social care'

- Hundreds of 'social care' places being offered in residential institutions - managed or funded by government and other care providers - many faith-based
- Institutions also known as 'boarding schools' - not only being used by parents to access education for their children - also food, clothing, medical care etc.

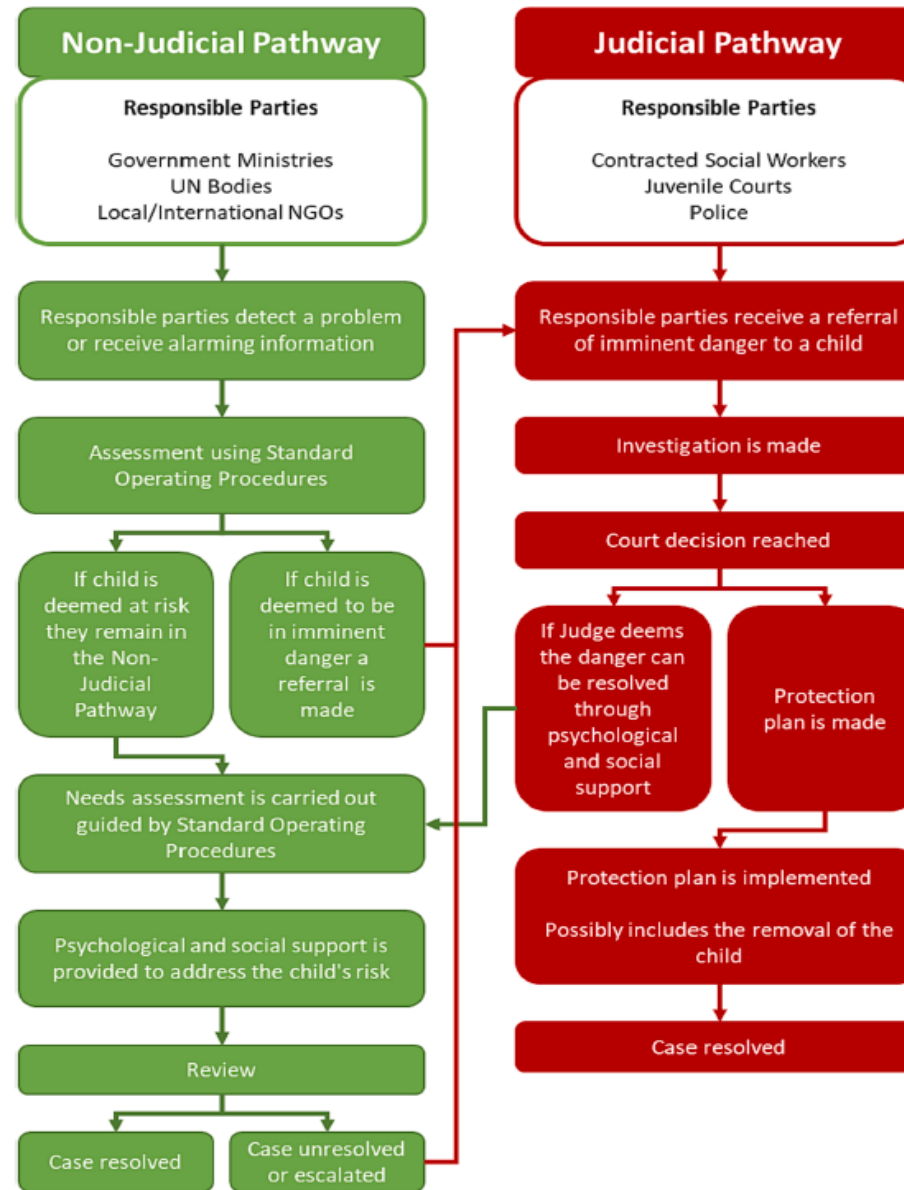


"Because you hear the mother saying I cannot vaccinate my children. I cannot pay for the vaccine...They are not warm. My children, if I put them in any alternative care at least they are warm. They are not cold at night...At least if they get sick they can provide medicine for them, education and a future.' (professional stakeholder)

Findings: use of residential institutions offering 'social care'

- Policies and procedures (SOPs) - provide a mandate for social workers to place children in social care residential institutions

Decision-making pathways in Lebanon



— Findings: use of residential institutions offering 'social care'

- Parents are directly relinquishing their children into residential institutions

"The stress of poverty is a main reason for delegating the responsibility of the children. And even if both parents exist this is not enough to cover the needs, the basic needs of the children. And can you imagine if there is only one caregiver in the family and this caregiver is incapable. They have no skills to work. They have no education. They are lost in their stress... So it is the economic first and the stress and the feeling that they cannot do anything for these children." (professional stakeholder)

Findings: use of residential institutions offering 'social care'

- Family support and strengthening programmes – mostly provided by NGOs
- Many professionals recognise need to prevent children losing parental care and need to refocus efforts and money

Findings: functioning of the national child protection system

Insufficient investment in all aspects of national system – e.g. workforce and services

Subjective/not fully informed decision-making

Funding + policy that allows/promotes unnecessary use of alternative care rather than prevention

— Findings: social services workforce capacity in Kyrgyzstan

- The Government of Kyrgyzstan has invested in development of legislation and policy to affirm the rights of children, especially girls, and improve service provision - including for children with disabilities.
- Law now requires 1 social worker per 3,000 of the population

— Findings: social services workforce capacity

However - our research found a lack of sufficient investment in social work and as a result:

- Not enough social workers - not enough with a specialism in child protection

"And only a small part of social workers are working with families and with children, but mainly they are dealing with old people...there are not enough and these social workers could have been working with the families to make preventative work....Turnover of the personnel is very high...Staff, personnel, are always changing." (professional stakeholder)

Findings: social services workforce capacity

- Lack of resources - for example not having transport to be able to visit families
- High number of caseload for each social worker
- High turnover of staff
- As a result – impacts ability to carry out responsibilities including rigorous assessment of a child and family situation and making the best decision for a child

— Findings: social worker decision making in Denmark

- Social workers – typical case load 35 cases
- 4.9 % of children live in relative poverty. Poverty is not the reason for separation
- Teachers and nurses (a.o) – responsible for making a referral of a child to the child protection system when worried about the well-being and development of a child
- 18% of all children subject to referrals to the child protection system before they reach the age of 7**
- 3.5% receive prevention support*
- 1% of children in alternative care



Statistics Denmark, 2023*
Statistics based on number of children born in 2016**

— Findings: social worker decision making in Denmark

Concerns in Denmark:



- Firstly: is our system capable of reacting in a timely manner to protect all children?
- Secondly: do we invest sufficiently in prevention work? Many would say that we do not
- Thirdly: do we place children in alternative care too late because we value prevention too highly?
- Fourthly: are decisions still too subjective?

— Findings: efficacy of decision making in Denmark

- Social workers experience efficacy of decision making rather differently
- Some feel certain that most placements are the right ones within their municipality
- All interviewees - commented that the efficacy of decision making comes with work experience and additional further education to complement their BA degree in social work
- The efficacy of decision making is threatened when social workers are newly educated and their case loads are too high

Findings: ways forward in Denmark

- Addressing economic considerations that weigh too highly in decision making about a child and their family
- Making sure children and families have a say in decision making
- Continuously improve the educational level of social workers
- Systematic work to avoid subjectivity and improve wise decision making based on knowledge - is a task that never ends

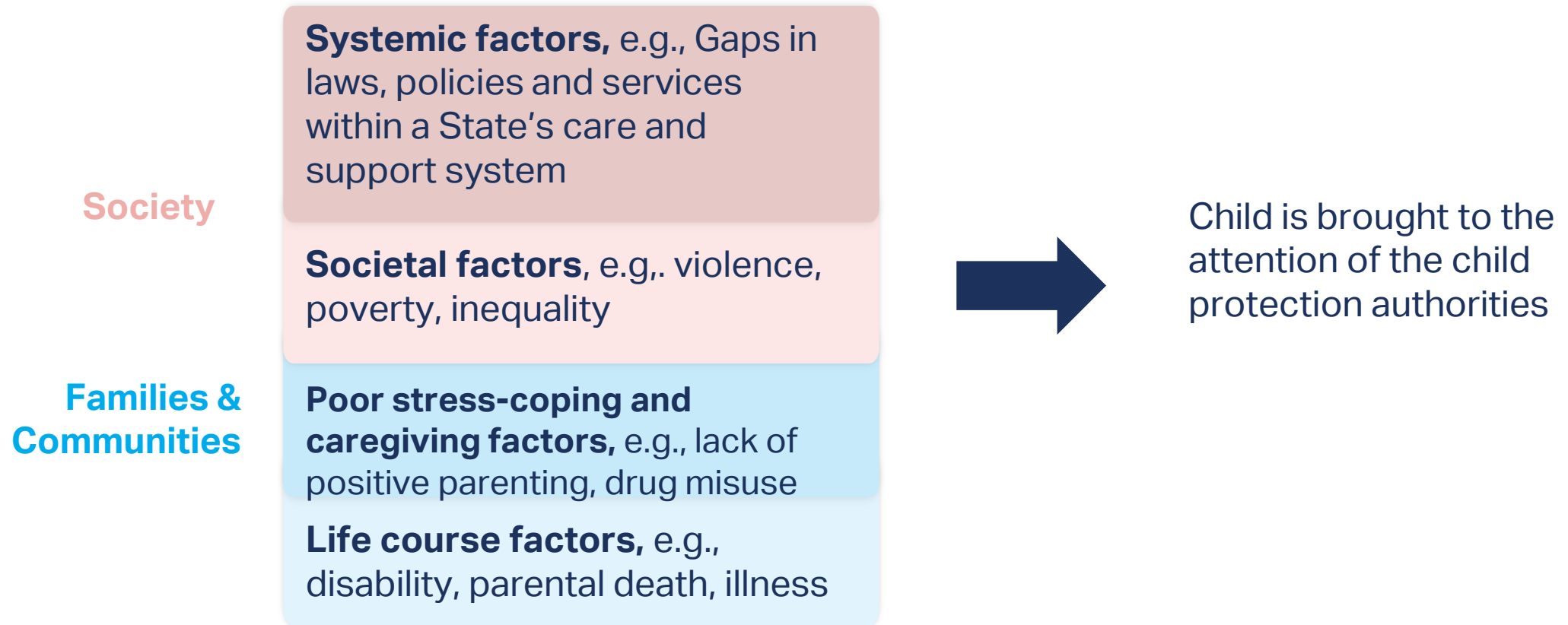
— Findings

Inter-generational aspect of violence and poor parenting

“taking out frustration and anger on your children because of how your parent raised you and filled your heart with hate and bitterness it affects the life of your child”

(Child in Kenya)

— Summary: multidimensional factors in a child's environment can contribute to separation



— **Summary: decision-making in the child protection system**

- Working conditions of the social services workforce
- The functioning of components of the child protection system
- Referral options linked to the availability, accessibility, and adequacy of services

— Three priorities for change



Safer and supportive
families and
communities



**1.
Enhance
preventive
child protection**



More equitable
and inclusive societies



**2.
Ensure
basic living standards
and social inclusion for
all**



More effective
care and support
systems



**3.
Implement
people-centred
policies and services**

— Recommendations



Enhance Preventative Child Protection	Ensure basic living standards and social inclusion	Implement people-centred policies and services
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Scale-Up Anti-Violence Programmes Targeting Adults and Children2. Expand Parenting Support Programmes3. Reform Child Protection Systems	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Develop Inclusive Social Protection Systems5. Ensure Universal Access to Support Services6. Promote Gender, Disability, and Age Inclusion	<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Improve Evidence-Driven System Design and Delivery7. Foster Multisector Collaboration and Coordination8. Promote the Participation of Children and Families