



# Media Release

## An estimated 35 million children without parental care in Africa need immediate protection and quality care services

**The Gambia, November 20, 2023.** A new report released by The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, part of the African Union, has shown an estimated 35 million children without parental care in Africa.

These children are routinely exposed to various forms of abuse including sexual, forced labour and trafficking, forced to be separated from their parents and family or flee their homes due to emergencies, coming in contact with the law, substance and drug abuse, mental health issues, and limited access to education, healthcare and nutrition.

"The findings of this study make it abundantly clear that we cannot continue with business as usual," said President Dereje Wordofa of SOS Children's Villages International at the event launching the report. "Instead, we must embrace a meaningful paradigm shift in how we conceptualize, invest, and take action to address these challenges."

The study indicates that a considerable number of African countries does not explicitly include provisions for the protection and care of children without parental care. More than 70% of countries in various regions of Africa lack explicit child protection policy frameworks and guidance.

To address the issues facing children without parental care, governments and various implementing partners have been undertaking programmes including the prevention of family separation through community empowerment, the provision of care and protection services, advocacy for child rights, reintegration and reunification of children back into families of origin, strengthening community structures and systems, and the care systems reforms to ensure adherence to international and continental policies and standards.

The study also reported that in the context of Africa, the most commonly practiced alternative care options for children without parental care across the five African regions include kinship care, foster care, kafalah, residential care and institutional care. Kinship care remain the most common type of alternative care for disadvantaged children in almost all countries with limited social protection and childcare systems. In most cases, it is informal.

Children who are in alternative care setting and included in the study provided positive feedback regarding their health and access to education while in contrast, children in streets situation encountered poor health and access to education. From the children in alternative care setting, 43% reported having some fear of losing their caregivers, while most of them worry about what the future holds for them when they will turn 18 and they will age out of alternative care being considered as adults of full age.

Young people with experience in alternative care from different African countries attended the launch event, which was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. They had an opportunity to highlight the challenges affecting them and give recommendations. Rokya, 27, from Senegal is optimistic that with the release of the report, things will change.



"Many thanks to the committee for conducting this important study, which shows the situation of children and young people without parental care in Africa, and which can help our States to take the necessary decisions to protect all children," said Rokya. "We are grateful to the committee for seeing our suffering and providing evidence for governments to act. This is the first time we've had such a study in Africa, and we're proud of it," she added.

The study – the first of its kind for the African continent - was conducted from 2020 to 2022, covering over 43 countries in the five regions of Africa. It was meant to provide baseline information to improve understanding of the situation of children without parental care in Africa. The report was produced by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, in collaboration with African Union member states, partner organizations - including SOS Children's Villages - and children and young people.

#### The study report recommends:

- State Parties should include children without parental care in national statistical databases and periodic studies such as demographic health surveys (DHS), multi-indicator cluster surveys (MICS) and national household surveys.
- A framework should be developed to assist Member States of the African Union in incorporating the issues of children without parental care in their policies and in formulating national-level policies, strategies and actions plans regarding children without parental care.
- National policies and legislation should ensure provision of appropriate high-quality care options that meet the needs of children without parental care. Policies should ensure the development and implementation of family-based and family-like care settings, with the aim of moving away from institutional care.
- Member states need to develop and implement quality standards for all alternative care options implemented in their countries. This means that governments should ensure the availability of suitable care options, effective gatekeeping mechanisms, case management structures and systems, and comprehensive national information management systems focused on children without parental care.
- State parties should enhance child protection and safeguarding systems to ensure that all children under the various care options are protected from all forms of abuse and neglect. This also calls for, among other measures, enhancing community-based structures and systems that monitor and facilitate appropriate case management, reporting and response mechanisms in collaboration with local governments.
- State Parties should establish systems for licensing and quality inspection of alternative care provision in all settings to ensure quality standards and the wellbeing of the children.

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#### For More Information

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