



# Monthly Review

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## EDITORIAL

### One size fits all: A family for all children, irrespective of the situation?

*'Recognising that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding' (Preamble of the UNCRC): Does this not create a strong incentive to be advocating for a family for all children in all circumstances?*

Advocating for the rights of children entails an individualised assessment of their needs and responding accordingly – the basic premise of tools, such as UNHCR's Best Interest Determination model. Is there an exception to such an approach when it comes to alternative care and adoption? Shall we go as far as to impose family-based solutions on all children deprived of their families? This Editorial examines the tensions of such decision-making – often well-intentioned, but arguably not without risks.

#### A family for all in alternative care, irrespective of the situation?

The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children clearly note the necessity of family-based care for children under three years and a move away from large-scale residential care, whose risks are now well known and evidenced. Given the latter, there is an encouraging movement against orphan tourism (see p. 4). Yet, the unanimously-accepted international standards steer away from ranking the breadth of options in between these two examples.

Should the UN Guidelines have gone further? As arguably the great majority of children's needs are met in a family and research overwhelmingly shows the harmful effects of large scale residential care, should they and therefore we, simply fit all placements within a family? Can families meet the needs of all children?

How do we cater for the child that does not wish to live in a family or a child living in street situations or an adolescent seeking an independent living arrangement? Is a family-based setting, for instance, most appropriate for a child – unaccompanied and separated – who has been travelling independently?

Surely, in these cases, we see the wisdom behind the UN Guidelines, as their response is a tailored approach to care placements, ensuring they meet identified needs. Arguably, a rights-based approach is more about ensuring that such children have access to a broad range of services, including by way of accommodation, that meet their needs, such as the innovative tool

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centralising such information in an application for a number of European Union States developed by Missing Children Europe (see p. 9).

Further noting that few families will ever have the capacity to solely care for children with disabilities – particularly with severe disabilities – unless they are well-resourced. Thus, the development of tools, such as the one presented on page 6, aimed at strengthening the capacity of professionals and families must be supported. Even when fully supported by the State, the use of small group homes in certain circumstances may be considered and beneficial. Indeed, to meet the severe medical and psychosocial needs of children may require the pooling of scarce resources in a tailored environment, such as this type of homes. Admittedly, the balance must be found against the development of poor quality residential care in the guise of small group homes and low staff/children ratios, as part of deinstitutionalisation strategies. These resources can be maximised through capacity-building tools, such as recently developed by USAID (see p. 6). One of the challenges here is the missing internationally agreed definition of what counts as a small group home. Indeed, there is a clear need for clarification about the role of community-based alternatives, such as small group homes for children with disabilities.

If we ignore such questions and more, do we not risk situations where we unnecessarily discriminate against the use of quality community-based arrangements, particularly those that are directly meeting the individual needs of children?



### **A family for all in intercountry adoption, irrespective of the situation?**

The issue of one family for all is likewise closely linked to intercountry adoption. Here, the principle of subsidiarity requires that efforts with the family of origin have been undertaken, and that domestic options have been explored. The debate then turns to whether, if the only available solution for children being large-scale residential care in some countries, is better than the opportunity to live with a family in another country (see Editorial in Monthly Review No. 204, August 2016). Is it helpful to promote a family at all costs? Of course, this will have to take place in an environment with a systematic and reliable system of assessment, preparation and support of potential families and children as well as supervision of residential care placements. Facilitating such an approach is one key factor in preventing risks that may lead to placement or adoption breakdowns (see Jeannin, C. (Ed.) (2018). *Towards a greater capacity: Learning from intercountry adoption breakdowns*. Geneva, Switzerland: ISS).

Furthermore, how does an individualised approach also take into account the child's views? In fact, there are cases where the family is not imposed, such as [\*Pini and Others v Romania, Applications Nos. 78028/01 and 78030/01\*](#), in which the European Court of Human Rights respected that the two adopted girls had not given their consent to the adoption and had rejected the latter. Only time will tell whether such a decision resulted in the institutionalisation of these girls, although, for now at least, their wishes have been heard.

Moreover, at a time of increased attention to migration movements, in particular in emergency situations, and strict border control in destination countries, is the resort to adoption a legitimate way of ensuring that a child, who is unaccompanied and/or separated, has a family? In this respect, it is worth remembering that intercountry adoption is not recommended in situations of crisis, including in relation to refugee children (see Conclusions and Recommendations of the Special Commissions of 2010 (Paras. 38-40) and 2000 (Para. 70)), and it could even be considered as forced migration in some very specific circumstances (see Editorial in Monthly Review No. 220, April 2018).

### **One approach for all respectful of all situations?**

In the midst of debates about a family for all children, ISS prefers to move the discourse towards the importance of promoting an individualised approach in line with international standards: an assessment taking into account the child's specific needs and his or her voice. This entails ensuring that there is a breadth of options that can respond to the various needs of children. Arguably, this is the only approach that can be truly in the best interests of each and every child.

The ISS/IRC team, July 2018

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## ISS NEWS

### ISS participation at ICAR6 in Canada

From 8 to 12 July 2018, the ISS/IRC, together with ISS Australia, actively participated in the Sixth International Conference on Adoption Research (ICAR6), held in Montreal, Canada. Over 200 researchers, as well as other professionals, presented their work on numerous issues relating to domestic and intercountry adoption, including customary adoption among indigenous communities, adoption by same-sex couples, adoption from foster care, etc. This intensive conference was an opportunity for ISS to share its work on intercountry adoption breakdowns, illegal adoptions and the search for origins.

For further information, see: <http://icar-adoption.com>.

### Search for a Consultant on migration, child protection and social work: Experiences and profiles of migrant children in Tunisia

With the support of the Service for International Solidarity of the Canton of Geneva and the European Union, ISS Switzerland is issuing a call for applications for a preliminary assessment in Tunisia, aimed at: assessing the extent of the phenomenon of migrant children; contributing to general awareness-raising efforts relating to the perception of migrant children; understanding the current responses and challenges for the care of these children; and drafting recommendations in order to ensure better respect for the rights of migrant children in laws, policies and practices. The preliminary assessment will take place as from September 2018 for a period of three months. All applications must be submitted by 31 August 2018 via e-mail to: [o.geissler@ssi-suisse.org](mailto:o.geissler@ssi-suisse.org) and [c.baumgart@ssi-suisse.org](mailto:c.baumgart@ssi-suisse.org). The Terms of Reference may be requested at the ISS/IRC: [irc-cir@iss-ssi.org](mailto:irc-cir@iss-ssi.org).

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## BRIEF NEWS

### Global Compact on Migration: Finalised text ready for its forthcoming adoption

On 13 July 2018 in New York, UN Member States finalised the text of the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*. This agreement resulted from the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and subsequent thematic discussions and consultations. Indeed, 'the agreement now forms a basis to improve governance and international understanding of migration, to address the challenges associated with migration today, and to strengthen the contribution of migrants and migration to sustainable development'. When formally adopted by Member States in December 2018 in Marrakesh, it will become the first comprehensive framework on migration. The overarching commitment to being child sensitive makes up one of the cross-cutting and interdependent guiding principles of the Compact as a whole. The latter is made up of 23 Objectives, some of which specifically relate to the protection and promotion of the rights of children and their families:

- ensure that support, counselling and information and basic services are accessible and child-sensitive;
- strengthen measures to prevent statelessness, including through birth registration;
- prevent and sanction child labour;
- address vulnerabilities in migration including in relation to children, and in particular unaccompanied and separated children;
  - respond to missing and smuggled migrant children;
  - ensure child protection authorities can properly respond to, and make a best interests determination for unaccompanied and separated children at international borders, including through appropriate training;
    - ensure alternatives to detention and promoting family-based care arrangements;
    - promote gender-responsive and child-sensitive return and reintegration programmes;
    - ensure that return and readmission processes involving children are carried out only after a determination of the best interests of the child, which take into account the right to family life, family unity and ensure appropriate accompaniment for the child on return, and appropriate care and reintegration arrangements; and
      - facilitate access to family reunification procedures, which promote and realise the right to family life and the best interests of the child.

ISS has been actively involved in the consultation process through the [Initiative for Child rights in the Global Compacts](#) – a civil society-led group, which has advocated to ensure that the rights of children, who are on the move or are impacted by migration, are respected and fulfilled. As part of this group, ISS has, in particular, advocated for: quality sustainable solutions; that the provisions of the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children are referenced and respected within the Compacts, as a benchmark for the provision of alternative care for children on the move; and that there is recognition of the utility of Private International Law instruments, such as the 1996 Hague Convention, in promoting cooperation and collaboration across borders for children on the move.

The final draft of the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* is available at: [https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/180711\\_final\\_draft\\_0.pdf](https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/180711_final_draft_0.pdf); UN press release available at: [https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/gcm\\_press\\_release\\_final.pdf](https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/gcm_press_release_final.pdf).

## PRACTICE

### Volunteering in residential care: Shifting approaches in the tourism industry helping to curb ‘orphanage tourism’

*Global campaigns, the good will of educational and tourist organisations, as well as government action, are all helping to protect children from the risks associated with ‘orphanage tourism’, and raise awareness of the damage that can be done to children unwittingly by well meaning volunteers.*

Global campaigns to end ‘voluntourism’ in orphanages are gaining momentum with a number of tourist and educational organisations announcing an end to organised volunteer trips to orphanages, and a number of governments have taken varying levels of action in this space. The work was spearheaded by [Better Volunteering](#), [Better Care](#), an interagency initiative co-facilitated by the Better Care Network and Save the Children UK (see Monthly Review No. 183, July 2014) and is now spreading to universities, travel companies and governments, as outlined below.

#### Examples of prominent campaigns

In Australia, the [Rethink Orphanages](#) network, represented by members from international aid, philanthropy, education and faith-based communities, seeks to shift the way the nation engages with overseas aid and development. The [Child Safe Movement](#), active in both Cambodia and across Europe, acts to both raise awareness of the harm caused by orphanage tourism, and to provide alternative pathways for volunteering with children. The Child Safe Movement also provides information for local communities and volunteering organisations.

#### University pledge

As part of the Better Volunteering, Better Care initiative, and in partnerships with the [London School of Economics](#), a number of universities have signed a [pledge](#) to not support volunteering in orphanages abroad and to not advertise such opportunities to students, nor facilitate/promote them. These universities include: Royal Holloway University London; [East London University](#); [London Metropolitan University](#); Queen Mary University London; Keele University (all in the United Kingdom); and the [International Institute of Social Services](#) (in the Netherlands). Additionally, the charitable organisation [Student Hubs](#), which works with a number of universities, and volunteering organisation [VSO](#) have also signed the pledge.

#### Action by travel companies

A number of travel organisations have also started taking steps to end ‘orphanage tourism’. In late 2017, volunteering company Projects Abroad announced it was severing all links with overseas orphanages due to fears of child trafficking and exploitation<sup>1</sup>. This announcement came on the heels of an announcement by the world’s largest school based volunteering agency, World Challenge<sup>2</sup>, announcing that it would no longer offer trips to orphanages in the developing world

and, in doing so, acknowledged research that shows the practice harms vulnerable children. Similar announcements, paired with comprehensive statements on their position, have been made by the volunteering organisation [Giving Way](#) and the large travel companies, [Intrepid Travel](#) and [Flight Centre](#). German company *wegweiser-freiwilligenarbeit* made a similar announcement in June 2018<sup>3</sup>.

In 2018, a New Zealand volunteer tourism organisation, IVHQ (one of the biggest in the industry), which had previously publicly announced it would continue to run orphanage volunteering trips, citing a belief that there was a need for them, reversed this position and announced an end to the practice<sup>4</sup>.

### Government action

The organisation Next Generation Nepal<sup>5</sup> has successfully worked with a number of Embassies to have advisory warnings on the risks of volunteering in orphanages in Nepal. This includes the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Denmark and Australia. The United States 2017 Trafficking in Persons report, specifically noted that under false promises of education and work opportunities, children were being taken to unregistered children's homes under false pretences, and were forced to pretend to be orphans to garner donations from tourists and volunteers<sup>6</sup>.

In 2017, the Australian Government launched a parliamentary enquiry into modern slavery, which specifically addressed the issue of 'orphanage tourism' (see Monthly Review No. 216, October-

November 2017). Specifically, the Committee recommended that<sup>8</sup>:

- a register of overseas orphanages be established by the Australian Government, with organisations that comply with child protection standards compatible with the UNCRC, that support reintegration, and family-based models of care be eligible for registration (Recs. 41-42);
- offences and penalties be introduced for 'individuals, businesses, organisations and other entities that facilitate, enable, organise, benefit from, or profit from tourist visits to overseas residential institutions, and/or who donate to or fund overseas residential institutions, that do not operate in compliance with' the above standards (Recs. 43-44);



- the Australian Government ensure that Australian aid does not support organisations that do not comply with the above standards (Recs. 38-40);
- the Australian government fund research into the prevalence of orphanage trafficking and exploitation (Rec. 34) ;
- the Australian Government engage in awareness-raising campaigns about the risks of orphanage trafficking and exploitation of children in institutions (Recs. 35-37).

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs has already launched a [campaign](#) to prevent Australians from inadvertently contributing to the exploitation of children through orphanage tourism, including providing guidelines on how to be a child safe volunteer. A Modern Slavery Bill is due to be introduced to the Australian Federal Government in the second half of 2018.

**ISS commends the efforts of the various organisations campaigning to end 'orphanage tourism' and the responses taken by schools, businesses, tourist organisations and governments to bring an end to this practice and to ensure that children receive appropriate alternative care, are not needlessly separated from their family, and are not exploited.**

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### References:

<sup>1</sup> 'Volunteering company cuts ties to overseas orphanages over child-trafficking fears', *The Guardian*, 7 November 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/08/volunteering-company-cuts-ties-to-overseas-orphanages-over-child-trafficking-fears>.

<sup>2</sup> 'Push to end orphanage volunteering as World Challenge stops trips for students', *ABC News*, 13 September 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-09-12/world-challenge-to-end-student-volunteer-trips-to-orphanages/8892142>.

<sup>3</sup> 'Volunteering in orphanages: why wegweiser-freiwilligenarbeit.com doesn't offer orphanage projects', *AAB Marketing*, last access on 23 July 2018, <http://www.aab-marketing.com/en/volunteering-sustainable-tourism/volunteering-directory-orphans/>.

<sup>4</sup> 'Kiwi company ends controversial orphanage placements', *New Zealand Herald*, 10 February 2018, [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=3&objectid=11989833](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c_id=3&objectid=11989833).

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://www.nextgenerationnepal.org/about/our-press-mentions/>.

<sup>6</sup> US Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, *2017 Trafficking in Persons Report, Nepal*, <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2017/271250.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Parliament of Australia, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in Australia, *Hidden in Plain Sight*, Part 8: Orphanage trafficking, available at: [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/Foreign\\_Affairs\\_Defence\\_and\\_Trade/ModernSlavery/Final\\_report/section?id=committees%2freportjnt%2f024102%2f25036](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/ModernSlavery/Final_report/section?id=committees%2freportjnt%2f024102%2f25036).

## An innovative tool for family care for children with disabilities

*This article presents the Practical Guidance for Frontline Workers in Low- and Middle-Income Countries working with children and their families, when facing a disability.*

**Family Care for Children with Disabilities: Practical Guidance for Frontline Workers in Low- and Middle-Income Countries**<sup>1</sup> is a resource of information intended for social service workers, who use case management practices to improve situations for children with disabilities and their families. This document was developed with the support and guidance of the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Displaced Children and Orphans' Fund, and through the collaborative participation and consultations of multiple experts from various countries, who work directly and indirectly with children, as well as draft reviews conducted by children with disabilities and their families.

### What is the purpose of this resource?

With the right information, any individual or organisation working with children and their families can work towards ensuring that children with disabilities have the same opportunities to grow and develop alongside their friends and family members. This resource is especially targeted at people, who work directly or indirectly with children and families, in either a government, non-governmental organisation, or community-based system. The Guidance's main objective is to help social service workers implement and enhance their current case management procedures, tools, and approaches to be more inclusive of children with disabilities and their families.

### Why is the Guidance helpful for social service workers?

The Guidance seeks to help workers to better advocate for children with disabilities and their families. It provides multiple resources of information, such as access to website links, which offer additional sources of information that workers can use to strengthen their case management practices under each section, through easily spotted 'Signposts'. The Guidance offers practical tips for workers and professionals to use in their field of work with children with disabilities and their families. For example, under the 'Understanding Disability' section, there is a segment dedicated to 'Helpful Tips for Policymakers and Planners' to help them build awareness as to persons with disabilities in the community. In the 'Case Management' section, the Guidance offers examples of questions a worker could use to ask a family or caregivers, while encouraging them to talk about their feelings, struggles, and emotions stemming from the impact of caring for a child with a disability. The Guidance also offers real-life case stories of children's experiences, and discussion questions to stimulate conversations and build one's capacity as a social service worker.

### Your experiences can be shared in this document

The authors acknowledge that the Guidance is a working document and requests that social service workers share their experiences, recommendations for additions or changes to the website, and knowledge of additional resources,

in order to expand the resource bank for social service workers at international level. Undoubtedly, this participatory attitude

encompasses the inclusiveness the Guidance strives to promote for all.

**The ISS/IRC welcomes the emergence of the Guidance as a resourceful and practical tool for social service workers and professionals working with children with disabilities and their families, in order to further promote an inclusive impact on children with disabilities and their families in all spheres of life.**

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#### Reference:

<sup>1</sup> Sammon, E. M. and Burchell, G. (2018). *Family Care for Children with Disabilities: Practical Guidance for Frontline Workers in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*. USAID, World Learning, Partnerships for Every Child. Available at: <https://bettercarenetwork.org/library/particular-threats-to-childrens-care-and-protection/children-with-disabilities/family-care-for-children-with-disabilities-practical-guidance-for-frontline-workers-in-low-and>.

## Giving a voice to young persons leaving care in India: Care Leavers' Association and Network (CLAN)

*The Indian organisation Udayan Care<sup>1</sup>, which has focused on aftercare as a continuum of care over the last 24 years through its practice, research and advocacy, presents, in this article, the establishment of a network of care leavers – called CLAN – in March this year.*

The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children provide that all childcare facilities should 'systematically aim at preparing children to assume self-reliance [as early as possible] and to integrate fully in the community'. Thus, the focus of actions should be on the acquisition of social and life skills through participation in the life of the local community, by the young person, transitioning from childcare institutions (CCIs) to attaining maturity; and ensuring that this transition is smooth and considerate of the gender, age and specific context of the young person. A support initiative has been launched by young care leavers in Delhi, India, that highlights the importance of preparation and aftercare support – yet scarcely implemented in India.

### The Indian leaving care framework and existing challenges

Based on the idea of capitalising economic opportunities presented by India's youth, there is a recognised need, in multiple government-produced legislation, including the *2014 National Youth Policy*, for greater public investment in the development and delivery of aftercare services. Yet, the most fundamental law<sup>2</sup> that governs this area defines aftercare half-heartedly as 'making provision of support, financial or otherwise, to persons, who have completed the age of 18 but have not completed 21, and have left any

institutional care to join the mainstream of the society'. The *2015 Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act*, along with its Rules and the *2014 Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)*, allow for several services and provisions on aftercare, whose actual implementation on the ground, however, remains very poor.

Despite the Indian leaving care system still being at its nascent stage, several governmental initiatives, as well as programmes, have been developed by organisations, such as SOS Children's Villages, Prayas Juvenile Aid Centre Society and Udayan Care<sup>3</sup>.

As part of the Current Aftercare Programme (CAP), Udayan Care, with the support of the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR), conducted a study covering 47 youth from 14 CCIs. This study revealed the following bottlenecks and needs:

- A total absence of any tracking or follow-up mechanisms undertaken of care leavers;
- 40% of care leavers had not received aftercare support at all, and those, who had received support, questioned the quality of services provided;
- 43% of care leavers were suffering or had suffered from mental stress over the previous year, due to family issues (40%), unemployment (40%) or domestic abuse (15%).

These results clearly highlight the need for early leaving care work that should ideally start between the age of 14 and 17 years in the CCI itself as preparation for life.

### Considering children's and young people's voices

As an important peer initiative, a Care Leavers' Association and Network (CLAN) was launched in Delhi at the Third Biennial International Conference on Alternative Care (BICON)<sup>4</sup>, held in March 2018.

CLAN is an independent group, led and made up of care leavers from different children's homes in Delhi, that represents support and advocates on behalf of all care leavers. CLAN acts as a platform for providing resources, advocating for policy and social change, and providing information and emotional support to other care leavers. Presently, CLAN's outreach activities have been initiated by self-motivated, voluntary alumni from civil society and government-run homes.

The Delhi research also led to the creation of SYLC – 'Support for Youth Leaving Care' – a group of like-minded people from civil society and experts, professionals and practitioners from the field of children's rights and child protection, to join hands as a collective that supports and informs the activities of CLAN. SYLC provides resources, structural, information and advisory support to CLAN, when needed.

Awareness of such initiatives by government officials has started. During the Third BICON, the importance of including a 'CLAN-like' structure at district level in India was recognised by officials of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).

In the same line of thinking, a specifically dedicated website<sup>5</sup>, designed by the Centre of Excellence in Alternative Care, was launched to provide care leavers with needed information on

resources and services concerning education, life skills, employment, accommodation and financial assistance. Udayan Care has also expanded its CAP research in multiple cities of India, with the support of UNICEF and Tata Trusts.

### The way forward

At this stage, SYLC and CLAN members are a handful of people in Delhi. The call for action is open to anyone, who would like to contribute and help care leavers remain motivated and develop towards strong individuals. CLAN members in Delhi are meeting regularly and are being supported by Udayan Care. They have, so far, developed their own logo, their own brochures, and have started visiting children in CCIs to engage with them and help them develop their own action plan for the future.

The Delhi CLAN hopes to inspire other cities in India to open their chapters of CLAN, and build gradually bridges and synergies with different state structures, in order to organise and debate the need to strengthen aftercare.

Much needs to be done to adequately prepare youth at the level of the CCIs and support members of CLAN. For instance, child protection professionals need, in parallel, to advocate equally for the strengthening and mainstreaming of aftercare services and should ideally become part of SYLC.

CLAN has a vision of a district-wide network that can organise their District Child Protection Units to expand resources for adequate aftercare. This may be a slow process, but it is set to emerge as a strong and empowered sustainable method of collective building with direct beneficiaries, especially in a country like India, where the voices of children and young persons are often not factored or listened to.

**The ISS/IRC strongly welcomes this important CLAN initiative that aims to support peers and involve children and young persons in the decision-making process, as well as the development of laws and policies affecting their lives and future prospects. In addition to being widely disseminated, such initiatives should benefit from the necessary governmental recognition and support.**

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### References:

<sup>1</sup> Udayan Care is a NGO that works to transform the lives of underserved children, youth and women, through meaningful interventions for their holistic development at every step of their life towards dignity in India. For further details, see: <http://www.udayancare.org>.



<sup>2</sup> *Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act*, 2015, <http://uphome.gov.in/writereaddata/Portal/Images/j-j-act.PDF>.

<sup>3</sup> An exhaustive booklet on the subject was published by Udayan Care in 2017. Available at: <http://www.udayancare.org/After%20Care.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.bicon.udayancare.in>.

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.aftercareindia.com/>.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY RESOURCES

### **Miniila: Remain connected thanks to a new smartphone application for unaccompanied children in Europe**

*Missing Children Europe – the European Federation for missing and sexually exploited children – has developed a smartphone application that seeks to connect unaccompanied children displaced in Europe with the essential services, support and information they are otherwise unable to access when forced outside the protection system.*

In April 2018<sup>1</sup>, at the second Lost in Migration conference, Missing Children Europe launched their smartphone application *Miniila*<sup>2</sup>. An initiative of Missing Children Europe, this project is funded together with the H&M Foundation and supported and advised by experts from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, Translators without Borders, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and Europol. The name – chosen for both its relevance and its easy pronunciation in a variety of languages – translates as ‘from ... to’ in Arabic. The app empowers children to make informed decisions and be better protected, rather than be forced to trust those, who would profit from their vulnerability.

#### **Using technology to meet a need**

In 2015, more than 10,000 unaccompanied children had gone missing in Europe, with thousands more continuing to go missing since. Support services exist, however, children are generally unaware of these services and/or unsure who they can trust. The children themselves have repeatedly stated that they lack access to food, shelter, medical assistance and critical information about their rights.

However, what these children often do have is a smartphone. *Miniila* has been developed in direct recognition of this fact, and seeks to utilise technology to give children access to child-

friendly, up-to-date and understandable information on their rights and available services – wherever they are in Europe.

#### **The App**

Missing Children Europe says that the app is the concrete result of some of the [recommendations made by child rights experts to the European Commission](#) and national leaders during the 2017 Lost in Migration conference. Children were involved in the development process, with one young boy, who helped design the app, saying ‘if it

*‘Children say that one of the things they lack the most while looking for protection is information that they trust ...*

*This crucial bit of technology will give children access to child friendly, up to date and understandable information on their rights...’*

[Miniila – A Helping Hand for Young Newcomers](#)

can help make some other kid’s journey a bit better than mine, the app will already be a success’.

#### **How it works**

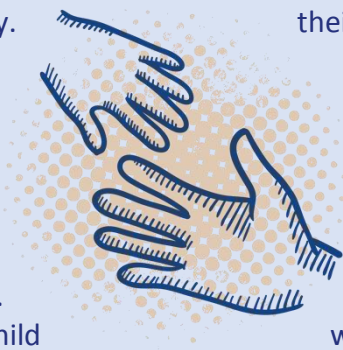
On signing in, users are asked to provide their location (which is not further disclosed) so that local services can be identified. The services are divided into different categories that are searchable on a map. The categories cover:

- available shelter and accommodation services;
- how to access health and education services;
- how to access asylum procedures and guardianship;
- what services are available to undertake family tracing;
- where to find food, clothing, free wifi, and toilet and shower facilities;

- what to do and who to contact in an emergency, when exposed to risk, or when a child is feeling unsafe; and

- what to do for fun, what cultural, religious and leisure activities are nearby.

All the services included in the app are from trusted NGOs and international organisations. The app is available in Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom. It is accessible in Arabic, English, Farsi, French and Tigriyani. Additional assistance is available if the child is having difficulty with the available languages.



### Get involved!

Non-profit organisations registered in their home State, who wish to have their services included in *Miniila* may contact the focal person in their country<sup>3</sup>. Organisations are asked to provide their name and address, as well as the name and e-mail address of the contact person, who will manage the organisation's information within the app. It is free to participate; however, organisations are asked to ensure that all information uploaded corresponds with reality and is regularly updated.

ISS commends this excellent initiative, which has the capacity to bring together the multitude of different services across Europe that respond to the needs of vulnerable children, and truly ensure that children on the move have access to the services and support they need. It is a tremendous step towards an organised platform for reliable information on children's rights which is targeted, child-friendly and in a language the child understands. It is available on the [App Store](#) and on [Google Play](#).

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### References:

<sup>1</sup> 'Missing Children Europe launches app to empower young newcomers in Europe to find safety'; available at: <http://missingchildreneurope.eu/news/Post/1152>.

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://miniila.com>.

<sup>3</sup> The list of contact persons in Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom is available at: <http://miniila.com/> (under 'Join us').

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## FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES AND TRAININGS

- **France:** **a)** *La place des origines dans la famille adoptive : quels accompagnements?*, Enfance et Familles d'Adoption, Paris, 24 September 2018; **b)** *L'adoption d'enfants à besoins spécifiques : de l'évaluation de l'adoptabilité à l'accompagnement post adoption*, Enfance et Familles d'Adoption, Paris, 25-26 and 27 (follow-up session) September 2018. For further information, see: <https://www.adoptiofefafa.org/>; **c)** *Adoption, attachement et mémoire du corps*, COPES, Paris, 10-13 September 2018; **d)** *Se séparer et être séparé*, COPES, Paris, 10-11 September and 1-2 October 2018; **e)** *La protection de l'enfance aujourd'hui*, COPES, Paris, 27-28 September and 5-7 November 2018; **f)** *Comment traiter de la maltraitance?*, COPES, Paris, 26-28 September and 5-7 November 2018. For further information, see: <http://www.copes.fr/>.
- **The Netherlands:** *Safeguarding children's rights in immigration law*, University of Leiden, 23 November 2018, Call for proposals until 31 July 2018 at: [immigrationlaw@law.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:immigrationlaw@law.leidenuniv.nl). For further information, see: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/events/2018/11/safeguarding-children%E2%80%99s-rights-in-immigration-law>.
- **United Kingdom:** **a)** *Beyond Together or Apart – brothers and sisters are for life*, CoramBAAF, London, 20 September 2018; **b)** *Life story work: Enhancing confidence in direct work with children and the creation of good quality life books*, CoramBAAF, London, 20 September 2018. For further information, see: <https://corambaaf.org.uk/training-events?theme%5B%5D=53>.

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