



# Reaching for home

Global learning on family reintegration in low and lower-middle income countries



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# Summary

## Introduction

This inter-agency, desk-based research aims to arrive at a clearer understanding of reintegration practices for separated children in low and lower-middle income countries. The research pulls together learning from practitioners and academics working with a range of separated children, such as those torn from their families by emergencies, children who have been trafficked or migrated for work, and children living in institutions or on the streets. Practitioners and researchers who work with these different population groups are for the most part unaware of the approaches and methods used in other areas of child protection, and this research aims to consolidate experience and create opportunities for dialogue and shared learning. The findings are based on an in-depth review of 77 documents, a short online survey involving 31 practitioners and policy makers, and key informant interviews with 19 individuals with expertise in children's reintegration.

## Defining reintegration and children's right to reintegration

There is no global definition of the term 'reintegration.' There is now general agreement that reintegration is a process and not an event, and involves more than the simple physical placement of a separated child back within a family. Some definitions focus on reintegration to family of origin, others indicate that reintegration may involve entry into a new community and/or new family through supporting adoption, foster care or independent living. For the purpose of this report, the narrower conceptualisation is used, with reintegration defined as:

*The process of a separated child making what is anticipated to be a permanent transition back to his or her immediate or extended family and*

*the community (usually of origin), in order to receive protection and care and to find a sense of belonging and purpose in all spheres of life.*

The exclusion from this definition of adoption or placement in alternative care is not in any way intended to diminish the validity of these options for children. However, these processes are qualitatively different from return to family of origin; they require both different forms of support and different research and analysis in order to develop useful recommendations.

Both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (welcomed by the UN in 2009) acknowledge the importance of supporting the reintegration of separated children back into their families. Article 39 of the UNCRC explicitly talks of children's right to social reintegration, and the Guidelines highlight that priority should be given to preventing separation from or promoting return to family of origin. Other international guidance around child protection in emergencies and child labour also highlights the importance of family reintegration.

## The stages of the reintegration process

This paper argues that reintegration is a process which unfolds over months, if not years. Over that period, the ultimate goal of reintegration is not just the sustained placement of the child with family members, but instead concerns itself with the child being on a path to a happy, healthy adulthood. The stages of the reintegration process include:

1. **Careful, rigorous and participatory decision making about the suitability of family reintegration**, and, if deemed appropriate, then the development and regular review of a reintegration plan.

1. In addition to literature based on global or regional experiences, the researchers reviewed country-specific materials from Afghanistan, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, Ethiopia, India, Liberia, Mexico, Moldova, Mozambique, Peru, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia.

2. **Preparing the child, family and community for reintegration.** Here, careful decisions must be made about how the child is cared for whilst awaiting reintegration, and whether children outside of alternative care can be supported through drop-in centres, or should be placed in alternative care. In relation to choices between different alternative care options, in line with global guidance, it is recommended that other options than transit centres are developed; this is owing to the fact that large group residential care facilities have been shown to be harmful to child well-being. Careful decisions also need to be made about the speed of reintegration, with some children able to return to families almost immediately and others requiring longer-term support. In preparing families, approaches that aim to build on existing strengths to address the root causes of separation have proven to be valuable. Coordinating responses from a wide range of community actors is a key part of the reintegration process. Support needs vary but commonly include skills development, economic strengthening, therapeutic support and counselling and mediation, and efforts to change attitudes to address the stigma that drove children to leave their communities.
3. **Carefully planned reunification,** with a recognition that the moment of first contact with family and community is an important one, and that children may have ambivalent feelings about returning home, even when they do so willingly.
4. **Extensive follow-up support.** This commonly includes household-level economic support, which must be offered through specialist agencies. Support for children's education is seen as vital, and both peers and siblings play a crucial role in successful reintegration. Given the overarching shift to a systems approach to protecting children, follow-up support is increasingly offered through a wider programme for all vulnerable households at the community level.

## Principles of promising practice

The paper suggests that, in addition to ensuring support through each of the stages of the reintegration process, there are several principles of promising practice for those attempting to ensure the successful reintegration of children.

1. **Respecting the individual's journey:** A standardised approach to reintegration fails to make contact with the range of experiences, needs and situations that separated children face. A child and his or her family need to be involved in establishing the benchmarks for success and allowed the time and, as far as possible, the resources it takes to achieve them.
2. **Rights-based and inclusive programming:** Staff and volunteers working in the field of reintegration should receive training in children's rights. There should be greater equity between the opportunities available to separated children with more attention paid to groups that are neglected and/or poorly understood in reintegration efforts, such as young offenders and children in residential care.
3. **Gendered perspective:** Reintegration programmes must adopt a gendered perspective to ensure awareness of and sensitivity to the special circumstances and experiences of separated girls, such as those relating to sexual health, stigma, and cultural gender biases. In addition, the reintegration of sexually-exploited boys must be given better consideration.
4. **Child participation:** Decisions about reintegration should be made with children, and not for children, resulting in more relevant and responsive reintegration support. Staff (and volunteers) need to be chosen, trained and supported to enable this approach with children, as it does not come easily to many adults, even when well-intentioned.
5. **Taking a holistic view of the child:** In developing reintegration programmes, it is important to consider the range of factors that affect child well-being including: household economic security; legal identity; education, training and employment; self-esteem and confidence; stigma and discrimination;

spiritual, cultural and religious connections; and exposure to violence, abuse or neglect.

6. **Standard operating procedures and national guidelines:** Individual agencies should develop written standard operating procedures (SOPs) that fall within national and global guidance. This is not a quick initiative, but a process that brings together staff, children, their families and others to develop common goals and procedures.
7. **Monitoring, reporting and evaluation:** Organisations should have an effective system to track the impact of their programme activities. This should include a strong record keeping system, ethical data collection methods for use with children that include sensitively and appropriately gathering their views, and robust mechanisms to assess the multiple components of child well-being.
8. **Coordination and collaboration:** This is essential in the context of low and lower-middle income countries where funding and resources will inevitably be in short supply. A clearly articulated need to coordinate efforts can be a catalyst for governments to get involved in reintegration efforts and to live up to their responsibility to protect and promote the well-being of their youngest citizens. It is also a reminder for agencies to respect other actors' specialisations, especially in providing quality therapeutic interventions and economic strengthening. A critical aspect of this principle is mapping the local community and devising a strategy to maximise its ability to support children.
9. **Cultural and family sensitivity:** Respect for local ways of knowing and doing is important for devising strategies of support that will address relevant issues, and avoiding formulised programmes. Wherever possible, local stakeholders should be included in the planning around a child's reintegration at the earliest possible moment to ground reintegration practices in the local reality and tap into existing local support structures.
10. **Local ownership:** Reintegration is primarily a social process and thus needs to be firmly understood and championed by local actors and the structures in which they operate. This entails tapping into the social and financial resources of the community that exists around the returned child. It means ensuring that measures of success

are created with local actors, including the children in question, and that creative and thoughtful ways of programming are enabled that shift power to the community in order to achieve improved relevance and sustainability.

11. **Long-term investment:** Reintegration support is not something that can be offered to children on a temporary basis, as it requires dedication, consistency and quality – all of which require a long-term investment in time, funding, and resources. That said, organisations should devise exit strategies to avoid dependence on the services of the agency, and to promote local ownership of reintegration processes.

## Moving forward

Many of the principles of promising practice outlined above are not currently adhered to. For example, commonly: the impact of reintegration programmes is poorly assessed or not assessed at all; local ownership and coordination between actors is weak, and the specific needs of girls are not recognised within programmes. Additional issues include the following.

- Insufficient attention is paid to addressing the root causes of separation, leading to re-separation in many cases.
- Limited attention has been given to assessing the cost-effectiveness of different interventions.
- Agencies face challenges in determining the degree to which programmes should be targeted to support just reintegrated children, or more inclusive of other vulnerable groups within the community.
- Cross-border and long-distance reintegration causes particular problems.
- There is limited knowledge of effective reintegration strategies for young offenders and children leaving care.
- Children's role in separation and reintegration is often poorly acknowledged and the experiences of self-reunifying children, who return home with no agency intervention, are not understood.
- There is limited political will for and investment in effective reintegration programmes.

In order to start to address these challenges, four broad recommendations can be made for those engaged in the design and development of reintegration programmes.

1. **Create more opportunities for dialogue across settings**, through the continuation of the inter-agency group on reintegration that developed this research and, for example, a common webinar series, an annual journal or a conference on family reintegration.
2. **Collectively strengthen the process of evaluating reintegration interventions**, through providing on-line monitoring and evaluation training to staff in country, enabling agencies in countries with high levels of separation to undertake peer evaluations and mentoring staff working with children on indicator selection. Here it is essential to involve children in the development of indicators of success.
3. **Undertake key pieces of high-quality joint research**, including more longitudinal research, and research on the following issues.
  - Factors to consider when determining whether children preparing for reintegration should be placed in a form of alternative care vs. receiving support through drop-in centres, and in determining the most appropriate forms of alternative care.
  - Groups of reintegrating children about whom very little is currently known e.g. reintegration from care and detention, the reintegration of girls, children with disabilities and children affected by HIV.
  - The role of information and communications technology in reintegration.
  - The economic strengthening of families at risk of and 'recovering' from separation.
  - The cost-effectiveness of different approaches to post-reunification support.
  - The role of siblings and peers in a child's reintegration.
4. **Develop a toolkit to inform and strengthen emerging practices around the world**. This could include a clear definition of family and broader social reintegration, clarification around themes, case examples of tested methodologies for assessment and evaluation, guidance on developing locally contextualised standard

operating procedures, as well as providing sample indicators with wide applicability.

Across all of future work on reintegration, the child protection community needs to mobilise to ensure that none of its interventions are unintentionally causing significant harm to children. A particular example is of the children trafficked across borders who are languishing for months – if not years – in shelters.

Achieving more successful reintegration processes that lead to better outcomes for children requires not only improvements in individual programmes, but also wider policy reform in areas such as child protection, social protection, health care and education. Ideally, such change will take place in an integrated manner through the wider reform of child protection systems. Actors across the sector should come together to advocate for more and better use of resources to promote the appropriate and effective reintegration of children. The aforementioned research, particularly around cost-effectiveness, could be used as an impetus for wider policy reform around children's reintegration. Areas for advocacy may, for example, include national governments being encouraged to develop and adopt evaluative methodology, standards, guidelines and/or standard operating procedures for reintegration interventions, and efforts to ensure that child welfare workforce strengthening includes specific measures to improve the capacity to support sustained reintegration.

*Reaching for Home* represents just the beginning of the tearing down of boundaries between ways of working to protect separated children, and of building bridges towards a more globalised approach to assist all of them in their reintegration journeys.

# Section I - Introduction

The family is the optimal environment for the growth and development of the vast majority of children (UN 1989). Yet, due to a myriad of push-pull factors, millions of girls and boys around the world are separated from their families and deprived of much needed parental care, love and support (DeLay 2003a). Their reintegration into their families and communities has become a priority for child protection agencies around the world. Yet a solid evidence base for many of the interventions carried out by these agencies is missing (Feeny 2005).

With that in mind, this inter-agency, desk-based research aims to arrive at a clearer understanding of reintegration practices for separated children in low and lower-middle income countries.<sup>2</sup> The research pulls together learning from practitioners and academics working with a range of separated children, such as those torn from their families by emergencies, children who have been trafficked or migrated for work, and children living in institutions or on the streets. Practitioners and researchers who work with these different population groups are for the most part unaware of the approaches and methods used in other areas of child protection. Rather than dividing the literature according to crude categories of children, this research offers the first attempt to share learning and promising standards of practice across the board. Through this consolidation of experience and knowledge, the research lays the groundwork for opportunities for dialogue and shared learning that will result in more effective programming and better support to enable separated children to move into the next phase of their lives.

## Methods used and scope of the report

A number of different methods were used to compile the evidence base for this report. Through a combination of recommendations by global experts and key informants, as well as a search of academic databases (including ProQuest Research Library, Science Direct, EBSCO Publishing, JSTOR and Sage Journals), almost 190 organisational reports and academic documents were compiled and included for a preliminary assessment, with 77 selected for more in-depth review.<sup>3</sup>

A short online survey was created and circulated to international child protection networks and field-based staff and consultants known to the researchers. Thirty-one people responded. Finally, the researchers conducted nineteen interviews with key informants (see Acknowledgments) in the field of reintegration. The selection of these grass-roots activists, practitioners and global experts was based on recommendations by interagency group members and other key informants.

There are some noteworthy limitations. Researchers were only able to read and interview in three languages (English, French and Spanish). This inevitably means that some enlightening material and informants were omitted, particularly from parts of Asia and the Middle East. Even from Latin America, despite much effort, it proved difficult to access materials in Spanish and it was not possible to draw from Portuguese sources. In addition, owing to the limits of time and resources, the researchers did not interview children to gain their perspectives, nor did they

2. In addition to literature based on global or regional experiences, the researchers reviewed country-specific materials from Afghanistan, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, Ethiopia, India, Liberia, Mexico, Moldova, Mozambique, Peru, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Uganda and Zambia.

3. That selection was made using the following criteria: i) relating to low-lower-middle income countries (as defined by the World Bank); ii) a significant focus being on children; and iii) useful to achieve a balance across the globe, populations and programme settings (i.e. in conflict, disaster and development settings). The only exception to these criteria was a small group of documents on reintegration from juvenile detention facilities in South Africa, as many children came from areas that would meet the low-lower-middle income country criteria. Please see the bibliography for the results.

find substantial documentation of their voices through the literature<sup>4</sup>; this is problematic given the importance of boys' and girls' agency throughout the reintegration process.

## Outline of the report

This document begins with an introduction to separation, narrows down the discussion to 'family reintegration' and then provides a definition of that term; it proceeds to examine the different stages of the process – determining suitability for reintegration, preparation, reunification, and post-reunification support –

using examples from the field to illustrate the range of activities in place. Throughout each stage, common practices and divergences in the literature and in the field are identified and discussed, including a brief examination of evidence about boys and girls who skip the first stage of this process and are only brought to the attention of a child protection agency once they are home. The report then looks at cross-cutting critical issues, and presents emerging principles of practice from the field, before concluding with a vision of shared learning to guide a stronger and more common approach to supporting the family reintegration of separated children.

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# Section II – Understanding separation and reintegration

## The issue of separated children

Poverty, disability, domestic abuse and armed conflict are just some of the factors that cause separation and force children around the world into precarious circumstances (Smith and Wakia 2012). Children may become separated from their families through street involvement, trafficking, incarceration, placement in residential care, incorporation into armed forces and groups, or in the aftermath of a natural disaster, amongst other reasons. In some cases, parents or other family members decide that children should be separated, and in other cases children leave home themselves.

All forms of separation increase the likelihood of a child's neglect and/or exposure to potential exploitation and abuse (Tolfree 2006; Tobis 2000). According to UNICEF (2006a): "Separation increases a child's vulnerability to health problems (inadequate nutrition, risk of disease) and psychological difficulties in forming

and maintaining relationships, building self-esteem and avoiding behavioural problems." (p. 35). It is clear that efforts to both prevent initial separation and to support the child returning to family and community life are needed.

## The right to reintegration and guidance on its fulfilment

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989) lays out the right of each child who has been separated from his or her family or usual caregiver to be protected, and to be supported in returning to the care of that family as appropriate. Article 39 stipulates that member states shall:

*"...take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading*

4. Two notable exceptions are *No Place Like Home?* (Delap 2004) and *Feeling and being a part of something better: children and young people's perspectives on reintegration* (Veitch 2013).

*treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child."*

The state is the ultimate duty-bearer in this regard; however, the responsibility and obligation to protect children and promote their reintegration fall on everyone in society.

In 2009, the United Nations welcomed the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (hereon referred to as '*the Guidelines*'), which established the primary goal of support for separated children to be the return to the biological family, or family of origin. Article 3 reads:

*"The family being the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth, well-being and protection of children, efforts should primarily be directed to enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents, or when appropriate, other close family members. The State should ensure that families have access to forms of support in the caregiving role."*

Other important international documents are also relevant for the reintegration of separated children. These include the Paris Principles and Commitments (dealing with children associated with armed forces and armed groups), the Interagency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children (used in emergency settings) and the Labour Convention 182 (on the worst forms of child labour).

Using this collective guidance, the global child protection community bases its interventions for separated children on the premise of 'the child within the family; the family within the community', though as discussed below there are cases when reintegration is not appropriate.

## Definitions of 'reintegration'

Despite its articulation as a societal obligation, the term 'reintegration' lacks a clear and concise operational definition. Over the years, various organisations involved in child protection have attached different meanings to it, as well as used other terms (e.g. transition/reinsertion/

rehabilitation/restoration/integration/follow-up) to refer to similar or even the same concept. This has caused widespread discrepancies both in the literature and in practice about what reintegration entails and how it should be achieved. As it stands, global practice lacks cohesion, resulting in a broad range of concepts and approaches, involving a wide array of actors, children, and settings.

In some cases, reintegration is understood simply as the physical placement of a separated child back within the family of origin. This view sees it as a singular event, culminating in the reunification of a child with the family, at which point reintegration has been achieved. In the case of juvenile offenders, despite growing efforts with such international instruments as the UN's Riyadh Guidelines and Rules for Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty, 'successful reintegration' all too often appears to be one-dimensional – the prevention of recidivism (Muntingh 2005).

However, there is a clear trend towards reconceptualising reintegration as a far more nuanced and complex process rather than an singular event, occurring in stages over time, stretching far beyond the reunion of the child with his or her immediate family (Reimer et al. 2007), and reaching deep into the community itself (Betancourt 2010; Chrobok and Akutu 2008; Hamakawa and Randall 2008; interview with P Onyango). DeLay offers the following: "Successful reintegration requires an emphasis on helping children re-create a sense of belonging and purpose in all spheres of their life: family, school, peers, and community." (cited in Williamson 2008, p. 12). For some child protection actors, the term is only used after the child is placed in the family (Terre des Hommes 2009), although the vast majority articulate a longer process that also includes a preparatory phase and the reunification itself (Asquith and Turner 2008; Reimer et al. 2007; interviews with L. Bhattacharjee, D. Godwin and C. Cabral).

Some actors question the possibility of children reintegrating when they either could not thrive in or did not know their family or community of origin (McBride and Hanson 2013; personal communication with E. Garcia Rolland, 8 August 2013). This may have been because of family or societal violence, neglect or abuse by parents,

etc. They prefer to aim towards and speak of social integration or (re)integration.

In addition, there is considerable debate around the diversity and constitution of the ‘family’ in the context of reintegration (Feeny 2005). As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the IRC’s guidance on determining the best interests of a child (UNHCR and IRC 2011) states:

*“Family structures vary significantly across cultures and thus, for instance, the nuclear family is not always the most common household composition. In many societies, the child ‘belongs’ to the extended family: childcare is shared among a wide social network and children can have multiple caregivers. It is important to understand factors like this when discussing family composition and relationships with the child during BID [best interest determination] interviews.” (2011, p. 20).*

*The Guidelines* indicate that reintegration exists only with the return of a child to the biological parents or family of origin (i.e. extended family members or ‘usual’ caregiver). However, the literature review and interviews for this research indicate that a significant number of actors consider a broader range of placements as successful end points of reintegration<sup>5</sup>; these include long-term foster care (including some interpretations of *kafala*)<sup>6</sup>, supporting an older child to live independently, and domestic adoption. They feel that this wider lens helps to account for the different circumstances and realities of separated children.

In order to focus the scope of this research, the report focuses on ‘family reintegration’ and uses the following definition:

***The process of a separated child making what is anticipated to be a permanent transition back to his or her immediate or extended family and the community (usually of origin), in order to receive protection and care and to find a sense of belonging and purpose in all spheres of life.***

Thus the report does not discuss independent living,<sup>7</sup> adoption, long-term foster care or programming for those institutionalised or fostered children who are aging out of alternative care. This definition stresses that reintegration is a process, which can be completely self-driven or assisted by various externally-guided efforts which may include planning and preparation, reunification with family and community, and support and follow up.

By excluding adoption and placement into all forms of alternative care, this definition neither aims to diminish the value of these options for some children, nor dismiss the idea that returning to families and communities of origin may not be in the best interests of the child, and that in some cases, periods in alternative care or adoption may be the most appropriate choices for children. However, in line with *the Guidelines*, it acknowledges that these processes of placement into new families or alternative care are qualitatively different from the process of reintegrating children back into their own families, requiring different forms of support for children and caregivers.

5. In the absence of a standard definition, and wishing to generate the widest perspective on the topic, the literature review used the following: “The process of a child without parental care making the transition back to his or her own parent(s) and community of origin, or where this is not possible, to another family who can offer care which is intended to be permanent though not through formalised adoption.” Key informants were asked to define the term, which was usually personal and not institutionalised.

6. A variety of means for providing child care for vulnerable children, recognised under Islamic law, which does not recognise adoption as the blood bonds between parents and children are seen as irreplaceable. *Kafala* may include providing regular financial and other support to children in need in parental, extended family or residential care. Alternatively, as referenced in the UNCRC, it may involve taking a child to live with a family on a permanent, legal basis, and caring for them in the same way as other children in the household, though children supported under *kafala* may not have the same rights to a family name or inheritance (Cantwell and Jacomy-Vite 2011; Ishaque 2008; ISS/IRC, 2007).

7. A handful of agencies did explicitly mention reintegrating children into independent living arrangements. While interventions to support this form of alternative care have many similarities to other reintegration efforts, there appear to be some notable differences: predominantly available in towns and cities versus rural areas; predominantly with older adolescent boys; and understandably more focus on community mediation and less on (extended) family. Further exploration is warranted to draw out lessons learned in programming across the contexts and population profiles.

**In summary**, separated children are a widespread and troubling phenomenon because they are vulnerable to neglect and a host of violations of their right to protection. Under the UNCRC, they have a right to family reunification and reintegration support. While there is no global definition of the term 'reintegration', there is agreement that it is a process and not an event, which helps

children transition to a new way of living within a community and usually – though not exclusively – within their immediate or extended family. This report, however, focuses only on reintegration into the immediate or extended family of origin, rather than encompassing adoption or alternative care (including independent living) as, whilst these may be valid choices for children, they involve different processes and require

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## Section III - Determining the suitability of reintegration and developing a reintegration plan

different forms of support.

In any discussion on reintegration, it must be noted that there are inevitably situations wherein returning a child to the original caregivers or extended family may not be in his or her best interests, or even possible at this point. This may be due to a history of abuse or other child protection concerns, or parental incapacity or death. In these cases, another care option must be sought which often aims to keep the child in a family-based care setting, either through long-term foster care or adoption. Best practice indicates that the use of large-scale institutions for children should be phased out, though smaller-scale group homes may offer an appropriate temporary care option in some instances (Delap 2011; UNGA 2009). Supporting the independent living of an older child or adolescent is also an option that has been used sparingly by agencies, where the child is seen to exhibit adequate maturity and survival skills to live on his or her own or with siblings, with support and supervision.

Decisions about whether a child should return

home or be placed in another care option must be made on a case-by-case basis, considering the best interest of the child (UNGA 2009). Ensuring best interests determination (BID) is a governmental responsibility, but it is intensely time-consuming and specific to each individual. As a result, it is often a process that falls by the wayside or is systematically or sporadically given to UN and NGO partners; this is particularly true in an emergency setting. The BID process hands tremendous power to the agency in question, and thus it is paramount that organisations use their full resources to understand the situation of each child they are trying to assist, the surrounding context, the full extent of the resources that can be brought to bear, and any agency (or worker) bias; the “importance of this analysis cannot be underestimated, for organisations risk enacting a grave disservice to the children they are trying to help if they do not at least make themselves aware of the preconceptions that may be distancing them from the child’s reality of experience” (Feeny 2005, p.8).

In line with the UNCRC, most agencies have created meaningful spaces for children to participate in decision making regarding their reintegration, sharing their thoughts and concerns. Good practice indicates that a child must express a desire to reintegrate with his or her family for the process to be initiated. If the child expresses reticence to return, all agencies surveyed explore these feelings to try to uncover the roots of resistance and see if there is potential to improve the situation. In these cases and where distance permits, measures such as mediation and conflict resolution have been used successfully with children and families (Williamson and Cripe 2002). There is a common recognition that the ability to explore these sensitive matters rests in large part on the skills and perceptiveness of the worker, as well as on the tools used (interviews with C. Cabral, R. Sen, D. Pop, and R. Smith).

Likewise, it is equally important for the parents or caregivers to express their willingness to be reunited with the child, as both have the right to decline. As one child suggests:

*“Before we are reintegrated our families should come and see us here, talk to us and give us the feeling that they want us back. The social workers also should guide us in the process.”*

(A child from residential care in the process of reintegration, cited in Family for Every Child and Partnerships for Every Child Moldova 2013)

Many organisations start by arranging a meeting with the parents or caregivers either with their own staff, or with a social worker from the community, wherein discussions take place to ensure that the family is not only willing and committed, but also possesses the tools and resources to be able to promote the rights and best interests of the child in the home (Smith and Wakia 2012). This process may take many visits; for example, one informant said that some agencies in Paraguay often contact up to 10 family members to get a sense of the family dynamic and context, which can take two to three months. Through this assessment process and a dialogue with the child, they then identify the most suitable living arrangement

(interview with M. Pilau). As long as there is a stabilised, safe family relationship or even one adult relative with whom the child has an attachment, preparations to reintegrate the child can commence (interview with C. Cabral).

Some agencies tend to have written tools (or guidelines with criteria) to help staff assess the current situation of a family and its potential to reintegrate the child successfully. For example, the IRC developed a tool to help screen families or potential caregivers called the Family Willingness and Suitability Scale (DeLay 2003a); while the Associação Brasileira Terra dos Homens (ABTH) and others in the Safe Families, Safe Children network use an ‘eco-map’ that places the family in the middle and maps what services it currently uses. Increasingly, agencies are approaching family assessment from a strengths-based perspective that helps the various family members articulate what they are contributing to a child’s development, and thus is more likely to engender good will between the family and case worker (interviews with S. Miles, D. Pop and C. Cabral).

In emergency settings, where NGOs and UN agencies often assume great responsibilities for individual children, a number of specific tools have been developed to assist to determine the best path of reintegration for a child based on his or her specific circumstances. UNHCR and IRC’s BID guidance (2011) and the interagency Alternative Care in Emergencies Toolkit (Melville Fulford 2013)<sup>8</sup> consider the main factors of the reason for separation, history of abuse, both the child and the family’s willingness to reunite, the material resources available to meet the child’s basic needs, the physical health and capacity of the family to care for the child, and the special needs of the child. Where resources exist and/or legislation mandates it, the assessment and planning for individual case management are done with workers from the relevant local government department (interviews with L. Gracie and M. Pilau).

For children who have been trafficked or recruited (voluntarily or not) by fighters, including gangs, and may be at risk of (re)abduction or

8. These can be found at <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4e4a57d02.html> and [www.cpcnetwork.org/admin/includes/doc\\_view.php?ID=745](http://www.cpcnetwork.org/admin/includes/doc_view.php?ID=745).

at the very least harassment, security may be a major consideration in the reintegration process. In order to feel secure, some children formerly associated with fighters will want assistance to acquire official paperwork signed by the relevant authorities before they return (LeGrand 1999). Liaising with the local chief, warlord or security forces can be an important step in

reassuring a child of the safety in returning to the home community, or the child and family may determine that it is too dangerous and delay the return or move elsewhere. Similarly, if a child and family decide to pursue a legal case against a trafficker who still holds power in their community, they may decide to relocate or postpone the child's physical return home

**Thus in summary,** it is of fundamental importance to undertake a thorough, participatory process to ascertain whether it is in a child's best interests to seek family reintegration and to develop a plan accordingly. This assessment takes time and requires the full resources that an

agency has at its disposal, as well as the skill, perceptiveness and knowledge of an experienced child protection worker. That plan should be reviewed during the reintegration process, as amongst other things, family dynamics, resource opportunities and security change.

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## Section IV – Preparation processes

(interview with P. Mohanto).

As mentioned above, those working on the reintegration of varied groups of children have demonstrated the need for well-thought-out planning and preparation as the first stage in the reintegration of a separated child. The child's age, the causes of separation and the relationship of the child to the family, the nature and duration of the separation, and the level of trauma endured are some of the factors that influence the content and level of intervention needed during this phase. In some cases of short separation, this phase may be very straightforward. In other cases, where the child has not been well-treated by the family prior to separation, has been in conflict with the family, or has experienced significant violence or abuse during the separation, the level of preparation needed prior to reuniting the child with his or her family will be far greater. In yet other instances, it is the family or community who does not wish to or feel able to receive the child, and thus, substantial engagement is targeted

at them. Perhaps as a consequence of these greatly varying circumstances, this research found a spectrum of efforts around preparation, some with very low intensity, and others with high levels of sophistication and intensity. This section outlines the range of common preparation activities, organised according to their focus on the child, family and wider community, highlighting examples of promising practice.

### Preparing the child

#### Determining children's identities

For separated children in situations of armed conflict or where the social welfare system is very weak, preparing for reintegration may begin with determining their identities (Bjerkan 2005). Older children may be able to provide tracing information, but children who are younger, are traumatised or have a disability cannot at times (de la Soudiere et al. 2007; DeLay 2003b). Under these circumstances, it can be a challenge

to establish and confirm the child's identity particularly if he or she lacks any written proof of identity (Melville Fulford 2013). This can be fairly common in low income and/or emergency-affected countries, where children may lack birth records or any documented proof of who they are. Thus agencies have to devise creative strategies to help them identify 'home' and 'self'.

### Creating transitional space

Children who are preparing for reintegration may be placed in some form of alternative care, or continue to live elsewhere and be supported through drop-in centres. Alternative care may include placements in temporary residential care (transit centres), or family-based placements. In this section, these differing options are examined. More space is devoted to transit and drop-in centres as the most common form of support, and therefore where the greatest amount of literature exists. However, this is in no way intended to diminish the value of family-based placements for many children. Overall, this evidence suggests no one size fits all approach, and the need for a range of options available for children.

#### Drop-in centres

Organisations assisting street-involved children towards reintegration often favour a drop-in centre approach; it is seen as model which honours the boys' and girls' independence, reduces agency dependence, keeps reintegration with the family as the central focus of all activities, and is a community-wide resource for all issues on family unity. For example, Retrak invites street children in Ethiopia and Uganda to attend daily activities at drop-in centres where they gain access to needed health care, education, food, counselling and recreation activities, but where initiating family connections and encouraging reintegration is the overarching goal (Adefrsew et al. 2011). Retrak also demonstrates high-quality practice in the collection of baseline data on all children who enter the centre, usually during one-to-one sessions with a social worker. This enables Retrak staff to "...understand the situation of each individual child, to decide on the level of intervention required and monitor the child's well-being" (Corcoran and Wakia 2013, p.14).

The model is also used in emergency settings. In refugee and internally displaced persons camps, organisations often establish 'child-friendly spaces' which serve as a central point for recreational and therapeutic services, as well as a meeting point for a separated child and his or her worker. In eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, self-demobilised (and other vulnerable) children can access reunification and reintegration support from such centres, which also provide a bridge into the wider community.

However as with residential programmes (see below), concern has been raised over 'charity-oriented', drop-in programmes that provide 'too much' for the children; the critique being that this can undermine reunification and ultimately reintegration efforts by enabling street-involved children in particular to continue living independently (Volpi 2002), particularly when boys and girls can use the services of multiple agencies simultaneously (Feeny 2005).

#### Transitional accommodation

Transit facilities (also known as interim care centres) provide temporary shelter and a safe space for children to live while they are supported towards reintegration. They are most commonly used with trafficked children and former child soldiers, although variations of this type of transitional housing do exist with other population groups, such as children living on the streets, those who were incarcerated or were domestic workers.

The goal of transit care, as stated by the majority of agencies, is to promote a smoother transition from separation to reintegration by preparing the child physically, mentally and socially. While it is somewhat controversial, where the child has been significantly harmed during the separation, whether due to exposure to abuse, sexual violence, substance abuse, or deprivations in basic needs, the use of good quality, transitory care is thought by some to be extremely beneficial (Williamson 2006; Jareg 2005). In some cases there may be also be legal requirements (e.g. with unaccompanied refugee children or children leaving juvenile detention) or security reasons (e.g. with former child soldiers or trafficked children) where temporary shelters are deemed necessary.

However, not all of the literature supports the use of transit centres, even for children who have experienced trauma. Some of the early literature on the reintegration of former child soldiers incorporated the assumption that the children had been damaged by the experience and needed to be psychologically healed through a structured programme and/or particular period of time in interim care. Experience shows, however, that family reintegration was not just the goal for these children *it was central to the process of healing* as well (Boothby et al. 2006; Williamson 2006). The research demonstrates that some organisations have been inclined to take the position *a priori* that time in a rehabilitation facility is necessary to heal ‘damaged’ children. Others have argued that determination of issues such as whether to place a child in a centre versus a foster family, should be based on a technically sound individual assessment, as opposed to a blanket assessment based on which category the child fits into (see also information below on ‘gatekeeping’ in regard to residential care in general, which applies equally to transit centres). It should be noted that many of the services provided by residential facilities could also be provided at drop-in centres or as community-based programmes, something which warrants further comparative research.

The advisability of the use of transit centres to prepare children for sustained and positive reintegration depends not only on the nature of the child and his/her experiences, but also on the nature of the transit centre itself. According to *the Guidelines*, not all residential care, including transit centres, is the same. Large-scale institutional care is acknowledged as harmful to all children owing to the lack of opportunity for attachment with a consistent carer and other issues, such as enhanced risk of abuse of a child, both of which would have immediate and longer-term negative impacts on reintegration. Instead, *the Guidelines* suggest that all residential care facilities, including transit centres, should be organised around small group care, allowing children to form bonds with carers and gain the individualised attention they need. The compliance to quality standards of care is central for all residential type of care. The recommendations in *the Guidelines* suggest that whilst small group homes may be suitable

for some children in some circumstances, alternatives must be sought to large-scale institutional type transit centres for all children.

In addition to the size of the facility and the way that care is organised, the research indicated several other elements to quality care within transit centres.

- **Engaging children in the daily running of the transit centre:** This may include creating and supervising a cooking/cleaning rota or it may be an advisory council to the management; it may be determining recreational activities or some input in the daily schedule. Participation is very important in a longer-term centre.
- **Developing multiple conflict diffusion mechanisms:** Some separated children are used to a high level of autonomy and may have significant anger and impulse control issues (e.g. children with addictions, former child soldiers, children who have lived on the streets for an extended period). Conflict diffusion mechanisms include skilled counsellors who can truly listen to concerns and reframe them as realistic immediate and short-term steps; space to exercise and to express emotions safely; and a means to dance, or listen to or create music (Armstrong 2008; McMillan and Herrera 2012).
- **Developing children’s capacity to act autonomously:** When working with trafficked children, participatory principles need to be role-modelled in the centres as the children may have spent many months or years stripped of their autonomy and ability to make decisions.
- **Creating culturally appropriate conditions in the transit centres that are comparable to those found at home:** This has been shown both to promote sustained reintegration and to lessen jealousy from peers (UNICEF 2006a). In situations where children perceived a higher quality of life in the centre (in terms of food availability, comfort, access to education and training, recreational materials and psychosocial support), they were much less likely to want to return home (LeGrand 1999; Simcox & Marshall 2011, p.10).
- **Balancing this with meeting children’s basic needs:** Agency workers (and donors) recognise the need to ensure that their

charges are as healthy and nutritiously fed as possible before they leave for a more food-insecure setting, even if life at home may mean periods of hunger and deprivation. They aim to strike a balance between the importance of providing high-quality transitional services and the risk of creating dissatisfaction with the home setting (interviews with S. Miles, P. Mohanto and D. Godwin).

*“I now have good clothes and a proper haircut; I have proper food now as compared to before. I now eat good fish.”* (Formerly trafficked boy, aged 12, living back at home in Ghana – cited in Veitch 2013)

- **Locating transit centres as close to home as possible:**

This eases the reintroduction to parents or caregivers over a period of time. Several informants spoke of an ideal scenario providing opportunities for the family and child to meet with increasing frequency and length, and with decreasing supervision. This proximity can be difficult in vast, insecure and/or under-resourced contexts or with cases of cross-border family separation; agencies, such as Retrak, have demonstrated that high rates of successful, sustained reintegration are achievable even when the distance is large. There are also, of course, other exceptions to this rule, and some children have expressed that distance from their communities helps during the initial stages of reintegration, as it allows them time to heal, recover and prepare in peace and quiet (Delap 2011).

- **Provide adequate services and support:**

Children who are preparing for reintegration may need varying services and support including counselling, education and vocational skills training and health services. These are discussed in more detail below.

There is a significant debate around the optimal length of time for a child to stay in a residential facility prior to reunification with the family (LeGrand 1999), and examples from across the globe. Many argue that a prolonged stay in this type of setting may lead to negative consequences for the child, not the least of which is additional separation from the family. For example, a longitudinal study of the reintegration programme at Lhanguene Rehabilitation Centre in Mozambique with

former boy soldiers indicates that a stay of over six months actually hinders children’s social development and reintegration (Boothby et al. 2006). Other organisations suggest that in some exceptional circumstances of entrenched inter-generational violence, an extended stay is essential towards properly preparing a child for the journey ahead (for example, JUCONI can support children up to a year or more in their centres).

Even with a similar population profile, results can vary significantly. For example, a transit centre run by Save the Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo housed former child soldiers for a period of only one to three months with comparable success (Bernard et al. 2003) to the Mozambique case study. Even in looking at one population profile (trafficked women and girls) in one setting (Cambodia), the Butterfly Project is finding wide variances in approaches to transit care, including the lengths of stay (interview with S. Miles).

These differing conclusions regarding how long a child should remain in residential care are likely to reflect both the different needs of individual children, and the quality and purpose of the care on offer. For example, in the JUCONI example cited above, extended stays in small group residential care are part of efforts to provide extensive therapeutic support to children and their families to help overcome high levels of family violence and develop more healthy intra-family relationships.

While there cannot be one length of time that is suitable for every child’s individual situation, it would appear that more rigorous comparative research is needed to evaluate the different approaches to the placement in and use of use interim care facilities and to establish a more evidence-based rationale for the time in transitional care. As a starting point, Melville Fulford (2013) lays out three main considerations in determining the length and level of intervention during this phase: the length of time the child has been separated, the experiences he or she has endured and their consequences on his or her physical and mental health, and the assessed capacity of the receiving adults.

## Family-based placements

Family-based placements for children in need of temporary alternative care whilst preparing for reintegration include informal kinship care and formalised non-relative foster care. As noted in the definition above, kinship care may be viewed as both an end result of reintegration processes, and a temporary form of care whilst children await return to parents or more permanent placements with other family members. Evidence suggests that temporary informal kinship care is commonly used in the context of emergencies where separated children are spontaneously taken in by kin whilst parents or family members are traced (Save the Children 2001; Abdullai et al. 2002). Evidence suggests that this community coping mechanism has many benefits. This form of care is commonly the preferred option for children separated from parents, and has been shown to often lead to better outcomes than residential care. It is also cost-effective (EveryChild and HelpAge 2012). However, this form of care also has risks. For example, children may be subject to abuse, especially if they are viewed as inferior to other children in the household, and in some cases, young children are not told that they have been separated from parents (Save the Children 2001; Abdullai et al. 2002). Research in some contexts suggests that it is harder to return children who have been living with kin to parents (Aldgate and McIntosh 2006; Winokur 2008), though this may be less of an issue in settings where temporary placements with kin are common.

Only a few agencies (such as IRC and Terre des Hommes Haiti) mention using formal foster care as a temporary form of care for children awaiting reintegration (interviews with L. Bhattacharjee, D. Goodwin, L. Gracie and R. Kofoed). In general this formal foster care, whereby carers are selected, trained, matched with children and carefully monitored, is an option open to relatively few children (EveryChild 2011). This dearth of foster families may be due to where an agency or ministry places its programmatic priorities (interview with P. Onyango). Evidence suggests that foster care can be a valuable care option for some children, offering opportunities for support from a consistent carer in a safe family environment. However, as with all forms of care it is not without its risks, and some have

raised concerns that children may create too close a bond with foster carers, a challenge which may have to be overcome when children are reunified with their families (EveryChild 2011).

It should be noted that evidence suggests that both kinship carers and foster carers commonly lack the support they need to provide high quality care for children and effectively prepare children for reintegration. Effective monitoring and regulation of these forms of care is also lacking in many contexts. The drop-in centres outlined above may be valuable sources of such support, and an effective means of identifying children in informal kinship care who may require further assistance in the reintegration process (EveryChild 2011; EveryChild and HelpAge 2012).

## Services and support

Whether residential or drop-in, children may be provided with a range of services which aim i) to identify and make a positive connection with the family, ii) to design an individualised reintegration plan, and/or iii) to promote better health and overall well-being. In addition to the services explored below, agencies commonly offer food, medical care, and recreational activities.

## Psychosocial support

Counselling, individual therapy, group work and other forms of psychosocial support are often used with boys and girls to help them understand their experiences and to prepare them mentally and socially for the transition ahead. One informant spoke of the post of 'reintegration officer' at each shelter her agency supports; this person is charged with meeting every child on the day of their arrival to explain the reintegration process and to explore the information the child has and the resulting emotions at a very preliminary level (interview with L. Bhattacharjee).

The research highlighted that the identification of the family of a separated child is not only a case of form filling but is often also a process of identity shifting. It may arise from the misspelling of a surname, which is perpetuated throughout the coming years, or something more poignant, such as learning that you are an older sister, or orphaned and now head of household. Hope and Homes starts its

interventions to deinstitutionalise an individual child with an explanation of the tracing and reintegration process, coupled with exercises to build awareness with the child of *who they are*, what family they have and what being part of a family means (interview with D. Pop). For many children associated with armed forces and armed groups, the demobilisation ceremony is an identity-shifting process (Williamson 2006).

Separated children have often lost their trust of adults, owing to experiences of neglect, abuse, or exploitation. These children have learned how to cope and protect themselves and are frequently not comfortable accepting guidance or support from others (Williamson 2008). Thus many organisations across the globe seek to address trust-building prior to reunification (Harris et al. 2011; Corcoran and Wakia 2013). Another commonly cited priority issue is strengthening the self-esteem and self-worth of separated children (Simcox and Marshall 2011; Volpi 2002), particularly that of trafficked girls (interviews with P. Mohanto and R. Sen). The research indicates a clear focus in anti-trafficking circles on promoting independence, self-sufficiency, and trusting one's own judgment (Surtees 2008; interview with L. Bhaattacharjee).

*“The social workers used to conduct frequent counselling with me and other children there. I gained enough confidence and self-esteem, and was able to make some important choices in my life.”* (14-year-old Tanzanian girl who lived in a care facility but is now with her family – cited in Veitch 2013)

When it can be accessed, more in-depth therapy (and more experienced therapists) are used, for example if a child has pre-existing mental health problems or has endured especially harsh conditions and trauma while separated. One report noted that the counsellors at World Hope International in Ethiopia described many of the girls they worked with as ‘hardened’ by their experience and in need of extensive counselling and support to address underlying issues (Simcox and Marshall 2011).

Helping children to develop trust, self-esteem, a realistic understanding of current and future options, etc. requires staff to have an open

attitude and well-honed skills; some of the skills they will likely need to develop are deep listening, handing over of power, and acknowledging agency in others. Staff need to be mentored and closely supervised in this process. It must be acknowledged that these approaches defy rapid programming and are extremely difficult to ‘take to scale’ across a country (Bodineau 2007; interviews with M. Wessells, A. Galappatti, L. Bhattacharjee and R. Smith).

### **Promoting health and overall well-being**

Street-involved and trafficked children are commonly exposed to alcohol and drugs and often require assistance to become clean and sober. Addictions counselling and detoxification programmes are primarily provided within a residential care facility, as opposed to on a drop-in basis. The Associação Promocional Oração e Trabalho (APOT) in Campinas, Brazil and the Instituto Mundo Libre in Lima, Peru are both heavily focused around the issue of substance abuse treatment and detoxification of street-involved boys and girls using ‘Therapeutic Community’ and ‘Tough Love’ approaches (Harris et al. 2011). These programmes demonstrate extensive planning and preparation work with the children prior to establishing contact with the family and community of reinsertion. In addition, detoxification and addictions counselling have had success with former child soldiers as they transition to civilian life (Bernard et al. 2003; Singer 2006).

### **Relevant skills training**

Some child protection actors (such as the international NGOs Retrak and War Child) have developed agricultural skills training components to their programming. The idea is that while programmes for separated children may be predominantly town-based, many of the beneficiaries actually hail from rural areas where farming is the way of life. Separated boys and girls living in the city may have fled from such hard labour but likely need those basic skills to reintegrate into their families and communities in a sustainable and respected manner. Indeed, if well taught, they may bring home valuable new insights into agriculture that can assist an impoverished farming community. Even if a child is from or wishes to remain in a city, urban gardening may prove a valuable source of income and/or nutrition.

## Preparation for reintegration from institutional care

*“My friend who used to live here with me called me after he was reintegrated back with his family. He told me that he is doing well and he has taken the 8th Grade national exam last year. Here I have made friends and they have given me valuable advice about life. He told me that his family is treating him well but they have become strict on him since he has left the institution and they check his every move. For me, when I go for vacation and holiday break my community and family treat me well, so once I leave this place I want to go back to my family.”*

(Child currently in residential care in Moldova anticipating the return home, cited in Family for Every Child and Partnerships for Every Child Moldova 2013)

The organisations working on child care reform have created a wealth of literature on their approaches to preparing institutionalised children – as well as families, communities and service providers – for reintegration (Cantwell et al. 2012; Delap 2011); that documentation informs the entirety of this research. There are, however, three specific points to be made that relate specifically to this group of children in this preparatory phase.

One is the importance of having strong entry (i.e. ‘gatekeeping’) and exit (i.e. reintegration) policies and procedures in place, and their interconnectivity (i.e. if all actors are clear on why a child is being taken into a residential programme then the root causes of the family separation can be tackled immediately). Regular case review processes are also important to keep the focus on the child’s return to the family and wider community. However, research in contexts such as Sub-Saharan Africa points towards a low investment in reintegration from residential care, with some facilities conceiving residential care as offering a ‘home for life’ for children (Meintjes et al. 2007; Solwodi 2011). An operational model whereby private residential care must ‘keep their numbers up’ may also be linked to the challenges associated with such an approach (Cantwell et al. 2012). As pointed out by Kenyan NGO Pendekezo Letu, providing for boys and girls in residential care is relatively contained; keeping them safe and protected

in poor communities and in families with often complex social problems may be perceived as more challenging (Delap 2011, p.35).

The second point relates to working with existing, long-term staff, in order to ensure consistency of messages to the children and continuity of care. Whilst encouraging strong but appropriate attachment to caregivers is of fundamental importance for children in residential care, especially those living in large-scale institutions, it is also important to ensure that this does not supplant relationships with parents (Delap 2011, p.26; interview with P. Mohanto). Where possible (i.e. through awareness-raising, training and coaching), one can use the staff members for reunification itself and follow-up support.

The final point relates to excluded children – minorities, those with disabilities and/or with HIV/AIDS – as they are disproportionately found in residential care. The preparation of the families and communities of these boys and girls may take longer, as rejection rates are higher (interview with D. Pop). Careful planning is needed over time to identify and ensure access to – or advocate for the creation of – appropriate services in the community (Save the Children 2005).

## Preparation for reintegration from detention facilities

*“From the street when we do anything wrong we are taken to police stations and imprisoned with adults. The adults tell us different techniques for stealing and we leave the station knowing more evil things and becoming addicted to different substances.”* (Boy cited in Kauffman and Bunkers 2012)

The research did not unearth much documentation on the preparation of children for life beyond detention facilities in low or lower-middle income countries. A few reports stress the importance of maintaining children’s connections with their families and communities, while noting that there are often few mechanisms in place to support this precursor to reintegration. In the case of Sierra Leone, for example, the detention centres are often located far away from children’s

communities of origin and children are often released with no means with which to reach home (Robins 2009). One global report on the treatment of incarcerated street children concludes that the current system fails, amongst other things, to: “work with children to develop more sustainable interventions based on expanding the limited choices and non-choices currently available to them as a way to break the ‘revolving door’ cycle of life on the streets or in

detention; [and] to capitalise on the potential of children’s resiliency and their peer relationships to contribute positively to their development” (Wernham 2004).

Further research is needed to see what counselling or guidance is offered to child offenders prior to their release, and what is maintained once they return home.

**Summary:** There are different models for preparing a child for reintegration; the strongest seem to retain a focus on permanent solutions, deal with the ambiguities of it being a transitory phase, and focus on skills and attitudes for community and family life. Rebuilding trust

in adults and, where necessary, providing quality therapeutic support is important to enable children to be reunified and move on with their lives. All of the above is a highly individualised process that must be designed and periodically reassessed within the parameters of the child’s best interests.

## Preparing the family

The reintegration of a child can be a confusing and stressful time for the various family members, who may well feel a range of emotions, such as joy, anger, shame, ambivalence, and stress. As a result, virtually all of the key informants and agencies cited in the literature include families to varying degrees in their activities to ensure they are prepared not just to receive a child, but to accept and adequately care for him or her. Several programmes explicitly stated that they were ‘family-centred’ in their approach to reintegrating children (McMillan and Herrera 2012; interview with C. Cabral). JUCONI offers a clear example of reintegration support that places equal importance on the readiness of the family to receive the child and on the child’s readiness to return, splitting its time and resources evenly between the family and the child to ensure that both parties are well supported (McMillan and Herrera 2012). One Brazilian programme (Family and Community Reintegration for Street Children and Adolescents) doubled the number of cases of family reintegration with street children by targeting the family and working closely with them to address their needs and concerns (Cantwell et al. 2012). Agencies that do emergency response are increasingly focusing on parenting skills; for example, IRC

currently has a technical priority on ‘healing families.’

### Written agreements with families

To promote accountability, some agencies draft a written agreement with the family that clarifies the responsibilities of both parties in working towards the sustained and happy reintegration of the child, in accordance with the UN Guidelines (DeLay 2003a; interview with D. Goodwin). For example, a Cambodian programme for trafficked girls notes the importance of written documentation in dealings with the family, and in some cases the village chief, to ensure that all involved are fully committed to the reintegration process (Simcox and Marshall 2011). In Uganda, the Transcultural Psychological Organisation (TPO) does an exercise to map expectations, responsibilities and resources, which culminates in a tripartite agreement between the family, child and organisation. Where possible, government resources are also committed.

### Psychosocial support and conflict resolution

Children who are perceived as victims (i.e. abducted by an armed group, orphaned, or in many cases trafficked) may be readily accepted, with families relieved to have the child home

safe and sound. However, many causes of separation may result in reluctance or resistance on the part of the family to embrace the returnee; this may be influenced by the extent to which a family member was complicit in the separation, or if the child is seen as culpable for his or her departure. Children who break the law or cultural code, run away to live on the streets, join an armed group, or come home pregnant and/or sexually active are often confronted by relatives on their return.

Child protection actors go to great lengths to address tension, conflict, or at the very least ambivalence between the family and the child prior to reunification. In addition to counselling families – as a whole or individually – as needed, many agencies undertake guided mediation sessions and other methods of conflict resolution. For example, a Peruvian programme works closely with the families of street children, prior to reunification, to address underlying tensions and potentially hostile feelings towards the children. This programme also aims to increase the family's understanding of children's rights and the dangers of life on the streets to prevent their return to that lifestyle, or a similar move by siblings (Harris et al. 2011).

*"I sent community elders to ask why [my father] hated me and to ask to be reconciled with my father. Later, he told the elders he hated me because I used to fight with other boys frequently. Now he has forgiven me and we are at peace."* (Ethiopian boy formerly living on the streets, aged 17, cited in Veitch 2013)

Family mediation can be complex and require much time and resources; in fact, it was cited as the top challenge by child protection practitioners who responded to the online survey. It is also an area where personalised methods can be used and innovation encouraged; for example, in post-conflict Sierra Leone, video messages were recorded between separated girls and their relatives (Williamson and Cripe 2002).

In instances where a child flees (or is removed) from the home due to physical violence, neglect or sexual and emotional abuse, agencies usually seek to assist parents with guidance and counselling to help them to develop the

tools and skills to raise their child and manage potential conflict in the home, or they may search for extended family members who may be willing and able to provide suitable care and protection (Smith and Wakia 2012; interviews with C. Cabral and M. Pilau). Workers may use a mix of individual counselling on positive parenting practices, group work, peer support networks, and referrals to services where they exist. In cases of family violence and addiction, breaking the family's isolation is often key to improvement (interviews with C. Cabral).

### Strengthening the household's economy

There is consensus in the literature and interviews that no family should be prevented from being reunited with their child because of poverty. Nonetheless, agencies surveyed understand that the household's financial status is an important factor in sustained reintegration. Indeed, evidence shows that despite good will to accept a child, reintegration can upset precarious domestic finances and may trigger re-separation or other protection problems (Save the Children 2005). Despite the growing evidence of its importance, assessment of finances is still not a routine procedure in the preparatory phase. Where it does occur, agencies use a variety of measurement tools, which are not standardised between actors in a country, let alone more widely. It would be useful to collate them and share approaches.

Increasingly, agencies are turning to collaborative resource mapping, whereby a worker leads the family through an exercise to identify the financial and material resources they currently have and could access. Families are often surprised by the amount of resources at their disposal and feel empowered to use them more effectively (interview with D. Pop). In addition, some agencies train their workers to identify and access social protection schemes that may be available to a child and/or that family (interview with R. Smith); it should be noted that this option was rarely mentioned, which perhaps speaks to the reality of low income contexts and/or gaps in training for frontline staff (interviews with A. Galappatti and D. Pop). Please see Section VI on post-reunification support, as most financial programming seems to occur at reunification or afterwards, whereas referrals happen at any stage.

**In conclusion,** there is a small but important move to strength-based assessment of a family's situation and guided processes to examine the root causes of the problems they face. Thus, social and economic assessment is a more structured and deeper process

that can lead to better understandings and/or written agreements between people who feel like partners in a common endeavour. It appears that psychosocial support is one of the most common interventions in this phase.

## Preparing the community and service providers

Community acceptance and support of a separated child increases not only the number who remain in the community (a common indicator of 'successful reintegration') but also their quality of life (Betancourt 2010). The community's perception of a returning child, whether they are sympathetic or hostile, has a significant impact on the course of reintegration and varies widely across the range of experiences that children have had. As such, the community represents both a potential ally and a potential impediment.

### Reducing stigma

Community-level stigma was commonly raised by organisations as a potential impediment to reintegration. Stigmatisation can have damaging effects on the emotional and social well-being of the child and/or the receiving family, which can ultimately lead to re-separation, or worse, serious mental illness and suicide. This has been reported across all population groups. In one extreme case in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), particular children – often with a disability and/or from extremely poor families – are deemed to be 'witches' by the (extended) family members and community, and are cast out of the village. Negotiating their return is very complex, as it touches on multiple layers of social and cultural norms and prejudices, as well as coping strategies in abject poverty (Guntzberger 2013 and interview with P. Onyango). In another case, formerly incarcerated street children reported discrimination in the practices of subsequent employers (Wernham 2004).

### Violent offenders and former child soldiers:

The reunification of former child soldiers and young offenders merits special mention as it

needs to be approached with particular care. Many of them – primarily boys – have committed acts of violence and looting, in some cases against their own family and community, as result of coercion or by choice. Upon their return, they can be met with hostility, resentment and rejection, which seriously threaten their ability to reintegrate. Societal perception and biases towards these groups, which are often based on inaccurate or incomplete information and misperceptions, can lead to very poor reception by the society resulting in social isolation (Bodineau 2011; Robins 2009).

Restorative justice strategies have proved successful in many settings (Wernham 2004); one example is the reconciliation and conflict resolution between former young offenders and the community through the judicial centres in Senegal (UNODC 2005); another is the various post-conflict truth and reconciliation commissions. It usually entails children taking responsibility for their actions and making amends with their adversary and/or community's input. The child may need to apologise and do community service (such as planting fields or cleaning a pathway). The overall aim is to reinforce positive social behaviours and strengthen social bonds.

Respect for local beliefs, value systems and traditions are cited as key for agencies to establish good rapport with communities (Simcox and Marshall 2011), though they must not be romanticised as prevention of harm must always be the dominant consideration. It has also been shown to be useful to bring communities together in a forum to discuss the issues that led to the separation of the returning child, to increase sensitivity and awareness about their situations (though this of course has to be handled with sensitivity and efforts made not to breach confidentiality in relation

to a child's individual case). This can serve the dual purpose of improving the acceptance of the child and helping to prevent other children from becoming separated. In communities where children are at a heightened risk of gang recruitment (or trafficking), this may involve helping communities be aware of the risks and signs.

In many cases, creating opportunities to dispel myths and misconceptions about these children through discussion groups goes a long way towards alleviating negative treatment and marginalisation. In Sierra Leone, IRC had success with a highly participatory, two-day workshop for local chiefs and leaders, with a focus on peace building and conflict resolution (Williamson and Cripe 2002). These workshops engaged local community members through role plays and in-depth discussions on the difficult issues of reintegration, asking them: "Whose responsibility are these children?"

Many rural African communities have sophisticated beliefs in a spirit world that is believed to be deeply connected to the world of the living. When individuals commit wrongdoings, they are sometimes understood to be inhabited by some kind of evil spirit. As such, returning child soldiers may not be welcomed back until traditional ritual cleansing ceremonies are performed by elders in the community. Many organisations working with children in Northern Uganda, Mozambique and Sierra Leone demonstrate respect for these cultural beliefs, and help to organise ritual ceremonies in accordance with local custom, as a means to promoting the successful reunification of the child (Baines 2005; Boothby et al. 2006; Williamson 2005; Williamson and Cripe 2002). Although, it was found that the child did not always believe in the power of the rituals being initiated, but understood that it helped to appease the elders within the community and thus made their lives easier (Chrobok and Akutu 2008). Similar reunification processes (where a direct rights-based approach is deemed counter-productive) happen with the aforementioned issue of 'child witches' in DRC.

### **Bias against girls:**

Girls are routinely identified as being at a higher risk of stigmatisation due to either actual or

perceived sexual experiences while separated. For example, gender-based marginalisation was commonly expressed among trafficked girls and victims of rape in Cambodia (Simcox and Marshall, 2011), and it may be important to work with families and communities on attitudinal change to ensure that trafficked girls are not forcefully married off immediately on return to prevent any rumours about their disgrace (interview with L. Bhattacharjee; School of Women's Studies 2012).

Girls who have been street-involved or involved with armed fighters often face community and family rejection on the assumption that they have had sex out of marriage, either voluntarily or forcefully. In some cases, the latter are labelled as 'damaged' or 'spoiled', lowering their status and desirability for marriage (McKay and Mazurana 2004), especially if they return with children (Ochen et al. 2012). According to Mbengue Eleke (2006, p.14,) writing about Sierra Leone: "Many girls were subjected to verbal abuse, beatings, and exclusion from community social life." Williamson's research (2005, p.14) found: "Many testified that although their parents and other immediate family members were happy to receive them, community reactions were not always positive." These girls themselves internalised this negative attitude, believing they had 'noro' or a form of spiritual contamination or bad luck as a result of their rape or wartime experiences (Stark and Wessells 2013). In this way the local beliefs, attitudes and traditions of the community can be seen as powerful factors in determining the degree of acceptance or rejection. Agencies' responses include undertaking general awareness-raising, community mediation and individual counselling to try and address the stigma girls face.

### **Working in the school system:**

Fear of stigmatisation by teachers and classmates is common amongst separated children, either because they have been following a different curriculum (e.g. children in residential care and refugee children) or because of being labelled unintelligent or a troublemaker. Based on her research with former child soldiers in Sierra Leone, Delap (2004, p.6) argues: "Community leaders and teachers should become positive forces in shaping

attitudes towards ex-child soldiers and single mothers.” Reintegration interventions often prioritise working with schools to create inclusive programmes that ultimately benefit children from a range of backgrounds; changing attitudes of the teachers in particular is a common aim of interventions. In Cambodia, the NGO World Hope International’s Assessment Centre had social workers meet with local school teachers to prepare for the return of trafficked girls and to improve their skills to manage potential difficulties and challenges (Simcox and Marshall 2011). This can be done through topic-specific workshops, specialised teaching materials, guided support to individuals, or school-based mediation; it is delivered both to teachers and school directors.

The Moldovan authorities have taken the step of creating specific teacher support staff in schools where there are a high number of children who are settling back into community life after institutionalisation. Their role is to help with the child’s integration and address any special needs (Family for Every Child and Partnerships for Every Child, Moldova 2013).

### **Using the media:**

The literature review uncovered an example of how the mainstream media – often seen as perpetuating negative stereotypes against separated children – was harnessed to reach a broader audience within the field of returning young offenders and promote reintegration. In Panama, UNICEF established a strategic alliance with the National College of Journalists to reduce the stigma and negative treatment of former young offenders. Journalists were invited to workshops which provided quantifiable and objective, factual information on juvenile delinquency as well as training courses on the UNCRC and on the management of this subject in the media. “Through this programme, UNICEF successfully transformed key members of the media into allies, sharing information prepared by UNICEF, and organising debates and programmes addressing this problem, with an objective and respectful focus on the rights of adolescents.” (UNICEF 2006b, p.57).

During Northern Uganda’s civil war, the radio – as the most accessible and available source of news and information in the region – was

also used as a vehicle for mediation and social change. Child protection organisations used its communication power to help encourage families and communities to accept returning child soldiers (Akello et al. 2006).

### **Engaging a range of stakeholders within the community**

One agency alone cannot meet the multi-faceted and long-term needs of reintegrated children in a community. There are multiple critical points of intervention that are likely to require a heavy investment of material, financial and human resources. Thus, there is a need for a concerted, coordinated approach to assisting separated children in their reintegration journey.

Various sources demonstrated the importance of mapping key stakeholders and resources in the community that would help determine the success or failure of a reintegration effort. This may be done at national or sub-national levels through formal child protection systems-building initiatives. However at a more localised level, this involves the use of community assessment tools, like community mapping, to identify the structure of the community, sources of risk and protection, and an overall clearer picture of how the community functions. What is available for a child in a given community depends on the socio-economic, cultural and political context. In low or lower-middle income countries, social services are limited or may not exist at all. Organisations working in these contexts have developed ways to ensure that reintegrated children are supported as much as possible with the resources available. For example, Hope and Homes have rolled out a series of community hubs in Rwanda, where vulnerable families in communities of origin for separated children can come together to solve problems, access agency services, and be referred to other service providers.

As mentioned earlier, schools and vocational training centres are sometimes targeted to ensure that the child receives the special care and attention he or she may need. Working with educators, social workers, and other health and social service providers in the community helps to create a stronger safety net for the returning child.

Leaders of local mosques, temples, churches or other religious centres can also play an important role in children's reintegration, by providing children and families with additional emotional and spiritual guidance (Smith and Wakia 2012; Derks 1998). In Mozambique, as well as other countries, local military, police, teachers and community leaders were targeted and encouraged to help support the return and reintegration of former child soldiers (Boothby et al. 2006).

Inviting family and community members to participate in community round tables is identified as good practice and an effective means to engage the wider community in recognising and responding to the needs of returning children (DeLay 2003a). Staff of the IRC Rwanda used this method of engagement successfully in conjunction with a self-evaluation tool called the Participation Wheel, which monitors levels of partnership and self-reliance in the programme (DeLay 2003a).

Using participatory methods with children and community members helps establish context-specific and realistic goals that ground reintegration preparation in the local reality (McKay et al. 2011; Hamakawa and Randall 2008).

Where multiple actors exist and where geographic coverage by agencies is 'thin', actors need to collaborate and coordinate to support the reintegration of a wide number and range of children and families in the reintegration process. Egyptian organisations working with street-involved children are not alone in pointing to a lack of coordination between and among government agencies and civil society organisations, with Ray et al. (2011, p.24) concluding: "Coordination between organisations working in the same locality helps to expand the range of services that organisations can offer together to different groups of children."

**In summary,** most agencies indicate recognition of the importance of targeting the community in preparing for the reintegration, and respond with a range of interventions to raise awareness, reduce hostility and identify and activate a local system of support to receive the child. They pay special attention to the school setting, and offer pedagogical

or materials supports to the teachers on an individual or collective basis. A balance of simplicity and creativity in engaging the media and in dialoguing with the community seem to bear fruit. As more formal and informal child protection actors are drawn into working on family reintegration, there is a growing need to map and coordinate resources.

## Section V - Reunification

The reunification stage of reintegration involves bringing the child together with the family. This may be a relatively uncomplicated process, for example, in situations where the child has not been separated for a long period of time or where there is an absence of tension or conflict. However, in other cases the act of reunification needs to be approached with thoughtful planning to ensure that the initial contact between the child and the family is positive and problem-free; it may even include a community celebration, photography, etc., as the reunification sets the tone for the reintegration process that follows.

The majority of agencies offer some guidance for how the child is reunited with his or her family. Some have staff members (often social workers) who accompany the child home personally; other models involve government workers or trained child protection workers who travel with the child. Still others make arrangements for the parents or caregivers to come to their centre to pick up their child and take him or her home. For example, the WHI Assessment Centre enlisted the support of trained social workers under Cambodia's Department of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth to reunify each child (Simcox and Marshall 2011). In an evaluation report of this programme, it was found that all cases had been linked with a social worker who had helped make the arrangements with families, village chiefs and the wider community to receive the child.

Some children experience great sadness over leaving friends, staff members and the general comfort of an agency, to return home. It has been described in the literature as a form of re-separation. This is especially the case for children who spend an extended period of time

at a centre or who have been institutionalised, and develop attachments to trusted workers (Family for Every Child and Partnerships for Every Child, Moldova 2013; Veitch 2013). This should be acknowledged and supported during and prior to reunification. For example, the IRC Rwanda tried to reduce children's distress by creating spaces where they were permitted to express their feelings and fears about leaving, and were given ample time to say goodbye to their friends. They were also provided with 'transitional links' between the centre and home, in the form of photographs and letters to help reduce feelings of sadness and potential abandonment (DeLay 2003a). Hope and Homes has instituted leaving ceremonies in its African work, as the children, staff and families place great importance on this formality.

Overall, the reunification process involves careful consideration for local culture, traditions and beliefs around the meaning and impact of a separated child on the community. Good planning and preparation prior to reunification is critical, as discussed previously, but equal attention must be given to the actual process and approach to reuniting the child with the family and the wider community. While the main focus on the literature around reunification tends to be on former child soldiers, separated children overall would benefit from a closer examination of the methods and meaning around the reunification process in promoting sustained reintegration, especially the use of cleansing or religious ceremonies. In addition, there has been very little investigation into if or how different approaches to reunification impact on long-term reintegration for young offenders, street-involved children or children coming home from residential care.

# Section VI - Post-reunification support

Research has helped to uncover the vast array of challenges and problems children face after they have returned home, typically after a short ‘honeymoon period’. These numerous and wide ranging problems represent obstacles to the child’s long-term reintegration and without follow up and support, may lead to further abuse and ultimately another separation. The value in organisations maintaining contact with reintegrated children and their families, long after their reunification, in order to monitor progress and offer support, has been well-shown in the literature (Jareg 2005; War Child UK 2006; Asquith and Turner 2008).

## Measurement of well-being

Organisations are adopting a more rigorous approach to following up with children and assessing their well-being post-reunification, including the development and/or use of well-defined indicators of successful/failing reintegration. These can be used to obtain a clearer picture of the progress of individual children and of the overall impact of programmes and interventions. Perhaps the most recently documented example of this use of standardised indicators is that of Retrak’s Child Status Index (CSI). The recent evaluation of this process suggested that these indicators can be useful for reintegrating children in low-income countries, and this has influenced the agency’s creation of standard operating procedures (Retrak 2013).

In addition, there are many examples of programmes establishing their own indicators for a specific context. For example, the IRC established a set of indicators to be used as a baseline at the point of contact, during each visit with the family, and a final time at the closing of the file. They were as follows:

- a child demonstrates satisfaction with family life
- the child is treated the same as the other children in the family
- the child attends formal or non-formal educational services

- the child participates in community activities
- at least one member of the family earns income, or provides enough resources to adequately sustain the family
- the child eats at least twice a day
- there are no protection concerns
- other relevant criteria (DeLay 2003a, p. 28).

The WHI Assessment Centre evaluated the impact of its pilot ‘New Steps’ programme on a more limited set of indicators, which includes measurement of self-perception and stigma:

- securing protection
- reducing stigmatisation
- enabling return to school or access to education
- ensuring economic security
- achieving positive perceptions of self-worth and confidence in the survivor (Simcox and Marshall 2011, p. 5).

As a final example, when working with girls formerly associated with armed forces, Save the Children in Cote d’Ivoire specifically identified a healthy, non-exploitative sexual life as one important factor to discuss in follow-up assessments (Hamakawa and Randall 2008).

Some studies or agencies combine global standardised instruments with locally crafted tools. For example, a study from Nepal used the Depression Self Rating Scale and Child Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptom Scale and locally-developed tools to measure the psychosocial well-being of reintegrated children (Kohrt et al. 2010).

It must be noted that very few agencies spoke of the child’s involvement in or control over which benchmarks would indicate to him or her that reintegration was on track or complete. One recent study compared how children and adult workers defined reintegration and created indicators of ‘success’ (Veitch 2013); the children put an added emphasis on their “self-confidence, the quality of relationships and the emotional support provided by family or community members, the ‘good conduct’ of

the child and the importance of a sustainable income for a child” (p. 38).

## Length and frequency of post-reunification support

As befits agencies aiming to tailor their interventions to children’s individual needs, there is wide range of programme durations and frequency of visits post-reunification. Retrak Uganda follows a child for up to two years ‘as needed’ and Pendekozo Letu in Kenya, which works largely with young girls, stays in contact for up to five years (Delap 2011); whilst the Mexican agency JUCONI – which works with entrenched street children – provides support for up to a decade, or even a lifetime (McMillan and Herrera 2012). The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) typically follows trafficked children for up to one year following reintegration; while the World Bank and Paris Principles and Commitments suggest that organisations commit resources to former child soldiers for at least three to five years (Bjerkan 2005; Bernard et al. 2003). Significantly, the research identifies a certain sense of pre-emptive case closure owing to programme financing constraints (Jareg, 2005); something that causes concern for child protection workers where protective systems – particularly formal ones – are weak.

Research in higher-income countries points to the fact that the impacts of separation (particularly if prolonged or where abuse occurred) can last well into adulthood, if not a lifetime; thus it can be argued that in some cases an individual’s case should be de-prioritised but not fully closed until he or she has made the full transition to adulthood. This would be marked by success in finding and retaining work that provides for the individual/family and success in key personal relationships, such as marriage and parenting (interview with A. Galappatti). However, financial and other constraints make this an unrealistic option in most cases.

Certain factors appear to influence the degree to which a child will be monitored post-reunification and with what amount of frequency. The safety of the girls and boys is obviously paramount. In the case of a child that was previously removed

from the home due to family violence or neglect, thorough and regular follow up is critical to ensure that problems and issues from the past do not reappear and threaten the safety or well-being of the child. As Cantwell et al. (2012) explain “...reintegration may not prove to be a linear process of readjustment” (p.63). Children who are reintegrated with extended family may need extended or closer follow-up (Williamson 2005).

Sheer distance and terrain are decisive factors for agencies which work with children from across the country or even neighbouring countries (interviews with P. Onyango and F. Diabate). In other contexts, instability or insecurity present an obstacle in maintaining contact and support for children and their families over a long period of time. This was certainly the case for NGOs working in Northern Uganda at the height of the conflict (Annan et al. 2006). Infrastructure may be damaged or weak, which can also limit the capacity of an organisation to offer quality support to a child. When faced with these challenges, it is important to reach out to other actors, including proactively supporting community-based child protection mechanisms. Another example is the work of Save the Children in the DRC, which was able to collaborate on post-reunification follow up both with a number of other NGOs in the area and local military officials (Bernard et al. 2003).

While there is agreement about tapering off worker contact if the reintegration is going well, there are a range of practices around the length of time optimal for follow up and constraints such as funding, staff turnover, and agency priorities (especially when phasing out of an emergency). The impact of these constraints across contexts and population groups – especially those facing high levels of stigma – merits closer attention.

## Types of post-reunification support

The research points to a wide range of post-reunification support, with varying levels of quality and intensity. It also indicates recognition of the value in targeting multiple stakeholders to maximise local support for the child. Below are

examples of the main programme initiatives that have been implemented by agencies.

### Economic-strengthening efforts

Overall, the research on the impact of economic-strengthening activities on children's reintegration is weak; the latest report states: "Most [economic-strengthening] interventions have not been evaluated rigorously for their impacts on children, and to our knowledge, none have been evaluated rigorously for their impact on preventing family separation or facilitating sustainable family (re)integration." (Chaffin and Kalyanpur 2013, p.12).

As noted earlier, family poverty is often a key factor in a child's separation and therefore remains an issue long after reunification (ILO 2010); however, historically it would appear that the assessment of a household's financial situation has often been done post-reunification, with actual programming being an add-on activity.

Agencies are often faced with the dilemma of how to support the financial burdens of families, within a context of budgetary constraints, and with a view to preventing agency dependence. They walk a fine line between ensuring good support and care for the child while also not compromising the family and the community's self-sufficiency (Adefrsew et al. 2011). Supporting the financial needs of children and their families is a complex undertaking, and has resulted in many different approaches and strategies; informants were quite candid about poor results from overly ambitious plans (interviews with M. Wessells, S. Miles, and R. Sen).

While research suggests the provision of escalating levels of assistance as needed, it is rarely available at every stage in a child's reintegration (Chaffin and Kalyanpur 2013). Most economic-strengthening assistance is extended at the family or household level to help improve their ability to care for the returning child (Adefrsew et al. 2011). Some groups – particularly working on trafficking – target the child, especially if he or she is 15 years or older. Assistance may be financial, (e.g. cash for school fees or livestock purchase), material (e.g. mattress or materials to build another

room) and/or income-generating (e.g. vocational training, small business management skills, small loan schemes).

The research encourages a little caution on the use of cash grants. These are occasionally given to older adolescents, though best practice argues against their use in situations of demobilisation (ILO 2010; Gislesen 2006). While families generally use them very wisely to support their returning children, the injection of cash can have unintended consequences; for example, it can be used to purchase alcohol which can lead to drunken behaviour and beating of children; or it can increase stress levels as the extended family for whom a parent may have some responsibility may try to claim it (McKay et al. 2006; interview with M. Wessells). Retrak provides families with small grants to help with the start-up of a business with the aim of helping the family provide care for the child (Smith and Wakia 2012). Assistance must also respond to and build upon the family's existing strengths, skills and capacities to take advantage of the assistance, whether in terms of training or materials.

Good practices around providing financial support for the child and the family were those oriented towards long-term sustainability, in terms of vocational training, microfinance and other income-generating support (Chaffin and Kalyanpur 2013). Africa KidSafe and its local partners across the continent have assisted thousands of children to reintegrate with their families, in part through developing household economic-strengthening initiatives. These microfinance initiatives are intended to help prevent 'poverty-generated movement' onto the streets (see the section below on the linkages between reintegration interventions and the prevention of separation). With that said, it is clear that good practice must involve a careful market analysis of the area in order to ensure that skills training and assistance is properly tailored to the community's current and foreseen economy (Chaffin and Kalyanpur 2013; ILO 2010; Delap 2004).

Some organisations provide children and families with a standard 'reintegration kit' or package, containing basic items to assist especially vulnerable households; this is

particularly true of demobilisation efforts of child soldiers as they transition to civilian life, as well as some children leaving the streets or residential care. The handover of money or donations is less common, as it has frequently been identified as counterproductive and unsustainable (Simcox and Marshall 2011).

Overall, the provision of finances and materials to a family to support their child's reintegration merits further study to understand its impacts, to improve targeting – given limited budgets – and to reduce agency dependence. In addition, the role of social capital in assisting a child's economic (and overall) reintegration is an underexplored area (CPC 2011).

## Educational and vocational support.

### Schooling

The literature and key informants repeatedly mention how sustained reintegration hinges in a large part on children being in schools or other learning environments, thus allowing them to be productive, participating members of society according to local, age-appropriate norms. Across the contexts, children have a strong – though not universal – desire to attend school (Stark and Wessells 2013; UNICEF 2010; Volpi 2002; interview with L. Bhattacharjee). Indeed, some children and adolescents' deep desire to pursue an education can drive family separation, even to the point of institutionalisation. For example, one informant raised the fact that the main reason older children cite for institutionalisation in Indonesia is to improve access to junior secondary schools (interview with R. Smith; similar point in interview with S. Miles); thus, finding reintegration solutions – and allowing for children's meaningful participation in those solutions – can be a sensitive and difficult process that requires high-level skills in analysis, problem-solving and interpersonal relations in order to identify and resolve root causes.

Effective practice suggests assembling allies in the community who understand the importance of supporting the education and training of children and of working together to promote inclusiveness. Collaboration with educational providers, social service workers, Ministry of Education representatives and community leaders is key to this end. Many agencies work closely with educators and school staff to

ensure that children with special circumstances (for example, children who have fallen behind in their schooling due to their separation and need extra time, or those that are much older than their classmates) receive the patience and support they deserve. This is often achieved through teacher training or modified curriculum for larger groups.

One form of direct support to schools has been in allowing teachers to choose a kit they can use for all children (Williamson 2006). Another approach has been to provide small monetary contributions to individual children or families with the aim of increasing educational accessibility. These types of grants have been used in the purchase of school materials, such as uniforms, books or bicycles to travel the distance to schools (Simcox and Marshall 2011); direct payment of fees by an agency is generally discouraged as it is seen as an on-going cost that family budgets must evolve to bear. Where the education system is functioning, there may even be an agency stipulation that children must be registered and attending school in order to receive its on-going support.

### Vocational Support

*“Now that I live with my mother, I know I have the skills to support myself when she is not able to provide for my needs.”* (A formerly separated girl from Tanzania, aged 13, cited in Veitch 2013)

It should be noted that some separated children question the usefulness of the education system in their reintegration journey (School of Women's Studies 2012), and tend to be more interested in vocational training. This form of reintegration support is predominantly used with older children and not their parents or caregivers. In fact, this research notes its primary – though not exclusive – use with those who are 15-17 years old, especially if they have completed primary school and/or will be living independently. As has been widely documented, child protection agencies have historically undertaken this speciality work without enough analysis or skill, which has meant programmes based on little to no market analysis and with poor quality training (Chaffin and Kalyunpur 2013; Williamson 2006). Over time, these 'one size fits all' (and gendered) training programmes have produced far too

many 'graduates' with inferior skills (School of Women's Studies 2012).

This research indicates that those lessons have been learnt and that child protection managers are increasingly decoupling their programmes from vocational training and instead partnering with specialised service providers to offer more tailored programming (ILO 2010). In doing so, they retain management over the child's overall case.

## Siblings, peer support and mentorship

*"It is much better to be at home [than in residential care], we meet our friends in different places."* (Girl)

*"In the residential school we were practically isolated: the school was on site, the canteen was on site, and we are like wild people, I have no words to describe it... We didn't have conversations with other people, we were very isolated. Now I go to school and talk to a lot of people."* (Girl)

*"I have made a lot of friends in the village and I am really happy."* (Boy)

(All quotes are cited in Family for Every Child and Partnerships for Every Child Moldova 2013)

The research unearthed very little consideration of the role or risks to siblings in the reintegration process. However, it is clearly an important relationship for the returning child. As Chrobok and Akutu's participatory research with ex-child soldiers in northern Uganda (2008) demonstrates: "What actually proved to be [the most fractious family bond] was the child's relationship with his/her brothers and sisters, commonly demonstrated through name-calling and rejection. At times, the rejection was so complete that siblings left to stay with relatives." (p.14).

One programme in Argentina decided to focus particular attention on siblings as the key familial relationship.

*"One of the most difficult issues is the resumption of communal life with brothers and sisters who may often feel that the returning child is taking over their space. Many youth who were interviewed said that they did not get on well with some family members. Relationships with other children in the family are often the most problematic, and the institution has designed specific programmes to deal with this issue."* (Cited in Wedge 2011).

Clearly, siblings' role as a positive, negative or ambivalent force in the reintegration process deserves further exploration.

A vast array of literature (Family for Every Child and Partnerships for Every Child, Moldova 2013; Kryger and Lindgren 2011; Betancourt 2010; Boyle 2009; UNODC 2005) concludes that how returning children are perceived and accepted by their peers plays a powerful role in determining their sense of belonging and happiness. While peer support and mentorship remain a relatively untapped resource, organisations are beginning to incorporate the peers and siblings of separated youth into reintegration support.

Some child protection actors have also recognised the value in linking children with mentors to help them adjust and adapt to their new surroundings. The concept of peer support or mentorship has been used with success in programmes around the world. For example, in the Philippines, in the absence of any formal reintegration assistance extended to formerly incarcerated children, Save the Children and FREELAVA (a well-known local NGO) partnered to support the reintegration of this group (Wernham 2004). This programme involves matching young offenders with young people who themselves had been previously incarcerated, to help guide, advise and support children attempting to reintegrate into the community. These mentors receive training in children's rights and reintegration practices. This programme has proved very successful and may have applicability in other areas and with different groups of children (UNODC 2005). In a similar vein, programmes in refugee camps and on the streets have formalised the use of peer outreach workers to identify cases of separation and to encourage them to take steps to 'reach for home'.

The research uncovered very little evidence of concerted attempts to harness the leadership potential of formerly separated children, though there is some emerging work that stems from the care leavers movement.<sup>9</sup> Four interesting examples did emerge: one from the Indian organisation Sanlaap, which used the programme PowerGirls to build the self-esteem of trafficked girls, in order for victims to become survivors and survivors to become leaders; another was Romeo Dallaire's work on building the leadership skills of former child soldiers (usually as they became young adults); the third example is of Retrak creating Children's Councils as a means to empower and better understand the needs and interests of boys and girls as they transitioned off the streets

(Adefrsew et al. 2011); and the final example was training trafficked girls and women to become community counsellors in their own right (Lisborg and Plambech 2009). These initiatives point to untapped potential on both individual and collective levels.

### Other types of support

Agencies mention a few other services that they continue to offer through this period. The first is psychosocial support to the family and child, especially after the 'honeymoon' period is over; this can include mediation within schools and in the community. The other main service is advocacy around access to services as new needs and opportunities arise.

**In summary,** several shifts in the approach to economic strengthening appear to be underway. First of all, it is usually offered at the household level, unless it is linked to vocational support for an older adolescent. Secondly, given the overarching shift to a systems approach to protecting children, one can see that it is increasingly offered through a wider programme for all vulnerable households and occasionally at the community level. Third, agencies are recognising the need to refer and partner with specialists. Thus fourth, the programming

is becoming more nuanced and varied, but remains patchy in its availability and quality. Another central approach is support to education, which takes many forms at the level of the teacher and administration. In particular, there is an effort to collaborate with multiple actors and to allow schools to choose from a range of material support. Finally, roles for peers and mentorship are underdeveloped and under-documented areas within the reintegration process, but what evidence does exist suggests peers can play a crucial role in sustained reintegration.

9. See Stephen Ucembe's initiative in Kenya (<http://www.crin.org/bcn/details.asp?id=27570&themelD=1002&topicID=1017>) and Ibrahim and Howe's (2011) work in Jordan.

## Section VII – Critical issues

This section explores critical issues that span all stages of the reintegration process, such as cost-effectiveness, local ownership, the perspective of girls, etc.

### Linkages with prevention of separation

Efforts to prevent separation should be integrated within reintegration programmes (Ray et al. 2011). Preventing separation can involve a series of wide-ranging measures that include strategies to combat poverty, reduce discrimination and stigmatisation, alter negative attitudes, and promote social policies that empower families to care for their children in the home. Within the context of reintegration, prevention activities typically aim to prevent the re-separation of a returned child, though may have a secondary (or even unarticulated) aim of preventing new cases within the family and community. Some examples to illustrate the range of preventative measures include the following.

- **Addressing the root causes of separation:** For example, in Tajikistan, UNICEF's Juvenile Justice Alternatives Project offers psychosocial support and constructive activities to young people who have committed or who are at risk of committing a crime to reduce offending and reoffending. The team works closely with the young person and his or her family to assess needs, develop an individual plan of action and reintegrate the child back into school by liaising with educators and administrators and providing remedial education (UNICEF 2010).
- **Improving admission policies to reduce entry to residential care:** For example, in Russia and Moldova, EveryChild worked on 'gatekeeping' projects, which aimed to improve the admission policies around the placement of children into care, to prevent unnecessary separations from families, and to ensure that reintegration plans exist where children are taken into care. The organisation worked with families at risk of losing their 'parental rights' to find a solution and prevent unneeded placement and was successful in promoting parental care; in doing so, they were working on the same parental [and community] skill sets needed for reintegration (Delap 2011).
- **Respite care:** For example, The National Working Group on Family and Community Living in Brazil has supported the development of a number of pilot projects in north-east Brazil, including 'Casa de Passagem Diagnostica', which provides short-term residential care for families in crisis to avoid separation and support family reintegration, or if not possible, to find another alternative (Cantwell et al. 2012). In the context of high usage of residential care for children, this group is working hard to support families to work through their conflict or issues and reunite with their children.
- **Family counselling:** For example, ABTH in Brazil and JUCONI in Mexico work with the entire family to complete a genogram: a history of the last three generations of that family; the worker uses it to identify patterns and to ask what people like about their family and thus wish to retain, as well as what they would change. Using this tool as the guide to systemic family therapy enables all family members to address the root causes of unresolved issues and hopefully, to prevent further family breakdown. This approach requires a high level of individual casework and may be best suited to children with complex needs and/or a history of violence.
- **Community-wide approaches:** For example, as mentioned previously, Hope and Homes has created a series of community hubs, specifically positioning them where the documented level of separated children reintegrating (amongst other indicators of social ills) is elevated. Using this community-based approach to providing information and intervention is one of the agency's methods to prevent family separation and other forms of dysfunction.

- **Advocating for broader change:** For example, in Sierra Leone, several agencies working on reintegration banded together to improve the legal framework for children, which ultimately culminated in the creation of the Child Rights Act in 2007 (Cantwell et al. 2012). This helps to demonstrate the importance of getting governments to act to improve the legal and professional context.

Overall, there is a limited focus on prevention. There is no question that more strenuous prevention activities are needed across the board, but the reality is that the funding is simply not there (Asquith and Turner 2008). Programmes that can report numbers and statistics are far more successful in securing donor funds. Across contexts and programming areas, donor satisfaction tends to increase when organisations can state exactly how many children were housed in a shelter and subsequently ‘reintegrated’. Prevention programmes are much harder to quantify as they tend to involve advocacy for policy change, community sensitisation and raising awareness, which are indeed more difficult to link to objective measures of success.

## Cost-effectiveness

In addition to the argument that children and parents have the right to family life, supporting separated children (particularly those living in residential care) to reintegrate into the family and community is cost-effective social policy. Across low and lower-middle income countries, the overuse of residential care of children has become ‘entrenched social policy’ (Tolfree 2006, p.4). This has the extremely damaging effect of not only depriving children of family and community-based care, but also of directing much needed funds away from processes like reintegration which are underfunded.

A few agencies have taken steps to document and compare the financing of residential care, community-based reintegration and prevention of separation programming (interviews with representatives of ABTH and Hope and Homes). Combining the rights and financing perspectives has been an effective advocacy strategy in countries as diverse as Rwanda and Paraguay (interviews with D. Pop and M. Pilau).

## Delivering the support

Agencies hire child protection or social workers to develop and implement each reintegration plan. All the informants spoke of the importance of a well-trained and supervised staff, able to build on truly respectful and positive attitudes towards children and their families. Developing this staff takes time and careful oversight; for emergency settings, this is particularly problematic. An additional fact is the difficulty in retaining workers, as the social service sector is usually poorly paid.

However, recognising the limits of their own funding and resources – especially when faced with large distances – many organisations have sought to involve local stakeholders and people working in other sectors to ensure that national protocols are adhered to and that appropriate steps are taken in contacting families and supporting reintegration. These stakeholders include government and other agencies’ social workers and psychologists, teachers, community and spiritual leaders, and peers; anyone who is in contact with the child is encouraged to be aware of the needs and interests of these boys and girls (Hamakawa and Randall 2008). Some organisations have reported that strong communication with the community about the children’s circumstances helps to promote accountability and the involvement of the community itself (interview with P. Onyango); however, stigma and privacy mean that for some population groups (such as sexually exploited and trafficked children) and individuals divulging information is inappropriate. Proper case management procedures and discussion with the individual child are necessary to make that determination.

Save the Children in Indonesia is exploring the possibility of community health workers observing levels of attachment between mothers and children, and then carrying out basic positive parenting intervention with the former as a strategy for both prevention of separation and strengthening reintegration. It is also interested in community volunteers being trained to use pictorial guides to instigate discussion groups about child protection, including reducing stigma against reintegrating children, educating people on the dangers of

allowing children to move to the cities for work, etc. (interview with R. Smith).

Given the wide geographic spread of family separation and the shortage of funds for social service delivery, some agencies develop their own set of volunteer monitors. Transcultural Psychological Organisation (TPO) Uganda has created a five-week child protection course for community volunteers, in areas where there are a high number of 'missing' or reintegrating children (note again the link between prevention and reintegration work). These volunteers run community awareness sessions (leading neighbours through a structured conversation about children's experiences), and make home visits after reintegration. In addition, they have established a neighbourhood watch approach, whereby older youth, women traders, etc. identify children-at-risk – especially those at risk of child neglect and the worst forms of child labour – and pass the information to trained social workers. In another model, the services at Hope and Homes' community hubs in Rwanda and Sudan are accessible to those most in need through their physical locations but also via a network of community-based volunteers, many of who are recruited through recommendations by reintegrating and other vulnerable children (interview with D. Pop).

## Promoting local ownership

Involving the local community in the support of a child's reintegration process has many positive impacts (Green and Wessells 1997; interviews with R. Sen and P. Onyango), a fact which is especially relevant for international organisations. Ochen et al. (2012) make a compelling argument for the importance of reintegration support that is owned by the local community, arguing for the "primacy of local indigenous" child protection structures; they make the case that reintegration agencies need to be conscious of their potential to compromise the power and legitimacy of local child protection structures.

Key informants stress that local NGOs, especially rural associations, are key to community acceptance, programme sustainability and ultimately, individuals' reintegration (interviews with R. Sen, D. Goodwin, and E. Giannini). However a counterview is that unless well-

selected and coached, local associations can be conservative and let their own sense of morality get in the way, for example by depriving a trafficked girl of her own agency or not being able to grapple well with concepts around the best interests of the child (interview with L. Bhattacharjee); however, this concern relates to the quality of training of any staff or volunteers (interview with M. Wessells).

One can go further and agree that:

*"While it may indeed be the case, as many claim, that there is too little specialised professional care for child victims of sexual exploitation and/or trafficking to meet the need, it may also be the case that there is considerable untapped capacity for supporting the recovery and reintegration of child victims within communities, families and the children themselves. Consequently, the long-term policies and strategy for combating and addressing the causes and effects of child trafficking and sexual exploitation in sustainable ways may lie in directing more effort and funding to unlocking that capacity."* (Asquith and Turner 2008, p.v)

One informant stated: "NGOs come and go, which leads to inconsistent support"; on many levels, greater capacity lies in the community and their various associations (interviews with P. Onyango and R. Sen). As discussed in previous sections, meaningful participation of children and their neighbours in reintegration programming can lead to much more relevant indicators of success, more realistic mapping of family and community resources, and more efficient delivery options through trained community staff and volunteers, and even local businesses (i.e. transport and telecommunications).

## Honouring children's agency in the reintegration process

Just as child protection workers may struggle to engage separated girls and boys as true partners in preparing and implementing their reintegration plans, the children themselves may find it difficult to accept the need for discussion and compromise (if used to great autonomy) or the necessity for them to state and act upon

their needs and desires (if used to commands). Staff need to respect and try to understand the feelings they do express and the choices they make. As Wedge (2011) writes:

*“Children use the limited powers they have in a situation to demonstrate their feelings; perhaps they sabotage their own reintegration or, despite clear indications that the reintegration process is not going well, they cling to ‘home’. In one case, a young boy remained resentful of his mother for having ever placed him in residential care; living together again, he would punish her by repeatedly soaking the family bed.”*

## Political will and funding

In low and lower-middle income countries, there is the reality of extremely limited financial resources and weak social infrastructure. Agencies working in these environments face high levels of poverty and limited social services, which can significantly inhibit their ability to provide children with reliable long-term support. It can be difficult for agencies to promote ownership of the reintegration process when the community is unsupported by its own government.

Indeed, across the board, the most significant challenge to implementing reintegration support is a lack of commitment on behalf of governments to children’s rights, especially their protection. This translates into a shortage of funding at every level and stage of the reintegration process, and weak formal child protection systems. One report noted: “Effective gatekeeping, reintegration and regulation rely on effective child welfare and child protection provision, and in many parts of the developing world, such systems simply do not exist.” (Delap 2011, p.28). In preparing a young offender for reintegration, one author points out: “How can states which regard themselves as being unable to afford universal child education and health services devote scarce resources to improving a juvenile justice system which affects only a minority of the child population?” (van Bueren 2006).

Another example comes from the context of Brazil, where the underfunding of reintegration for street-involved girls and boys has been

clearly documented (Harris et al. 2011); indeed, the APOT programme explains that this lack of funding prevents their ability to continue interventions past the point of reunification. Limited funding results in shortages of trained staff and reduced capacity to cover material costs, including the cost of travel to meet and follow up with children (Adefrsew et al. 2011). John Parry-Williams’ social workforce research in Malawi documented an average of only three professional social workers per district (cited in Delap 2011).

A child’s right to be assisted through the process of reintegrating with his or her family is not fully appreciated by governments around the world; thus, it is usually not reflected in their policies or practices. Where policies do exist, their implementation is often lacking due in large part to insufficient funding. The result is a patchwork of availability and quality in terms of the oversight of reintegrated girls and boys.

A final point worth noting about funding is that many organisations working in this field are NGOs and thus obtain some of their resources from private sources. This provides them with some flexibility in terms of meeting the reintegration needs of children and their families where governments have failed to act; it is important that these funds be used to strengthen national protection systems. It then becomes a matter of working within any constraints provided by their donors, and educating the latter on how those impact on young lives, especially with regards to institutional care.

## Geographic coverage

Large countries and/or difficult terrain also prevent organisations from maintaining good contact with reintegrated girls and boys (Kang 2008). Most organisations operate in urban settings to cater to the largest number of beneficiaries, to permit good contact and coordination with other service providers, and to retain professional staff. Unfortunately, the families may live hours away. The urban-rural divide creates obstacles for the organisation to be able to offer tailored and continued support for the reintegrated child. Even if reunification can be arranged and an initial visit to the

family's home made, it is a challenge for most organisations to find the funds to make repeated visits to follow up. Many organisations, like Retrak, support the reintegration of children throughout large countries with poor transport infrastructure, and therefore do not have the human or financial capacity to carry out regular, direct follow ups (Adefrsew et al. 2011; USAID 2012). In this case, linking and coordinating with other service providers and local leaders becomes the only viable approach; however, even this option can prove another challenge in the context of limited social infrastructure. Geography can also prevent families from taking advantage of support through microfinance groups and initiatives if they live too far from the locations where these are operating (Williamson 2008).

In Cambodia, one agency reported challenges around making regular follow-up visits with trafficked girls who had been reintegrated due to long distances to travel and limited funds (Simcox and Marshall 2011). Social workers working in this context tried to address this issue by ensuring that the girls and their families had the means and were encouraged to contact them if they had any questions or concerns. While not an ideal substitute to personal visits to assess the child, it did prove to be an efficient way to maintain connection with families and reintegrated girls within the context of limited resources. What is desirable in theory and on paper may not be feasible in practice. It is necessary at times to devise alternative methods to, at the very least, promote some degree of communication with children and their families. With this organisation, forming and maintaining strong ties with social service workers was key towards promoting good care and support at a distance following reunification. It seems that there has been little exploration and documentation of the potential of mobile phones for some follow-up contact, though a number of agencies promote the use of national child helplines (interview with D. Pop).

## Cross-border complexities

In the case of reintegrating trafficked children, there is often the added challenge of repatriation, given that some children move across international borders (Bjerkan 2005). This

complexity also exists for some refugee boys and girls, and those seeking asylum, as well as some demobilised children.

In the majority of trafficking cases, repatriation assistance is provided by the IOM, who may mediate the travel, arrange the documentation and cover the travel expenses. Repatriation is a necessary preliminary step in the reintegration of this group of children. For example, a centre in Serbia that dealt predominantly with children from that country housed them for an average stay of only one month (Bjerkan 2005), whilst foreign trafficked children in India may be stuck in a shelter for months, if not years (interviews with P. Mohanto and L. Bhattacharjee). A Bangladeshi child's quick trip to a nearby town for dubious employment opportunities can all too frequently lead to years in an anti-trafficking shelter, as the wheels of justice grind through the multiple steps for cross-border repatriation. There is a clear need for high-level advocacy for quicker legal processes and community living models to ensure the Do No Harm principle is upheld in these and similar reintegration processes.

## Targeted versus inclusive programming

There is a debate around the issue of targeted versus non-targeted, or inclusive assistance. This is an issue that has been raised in the field of former child soldiers, as well as with street-involved and trafficked children (Derks 1998). With the former, there is considerable evidence to support the fact that targeted assistance, that is material or training support given to children on the basis of their status as former child soldiers, can actually invite negative treatment from peers who grow resentful over their special treatment (Annan et al. 2006). In this context, many agencies have designed support programmes within communities that are more heavily based upon need rather than status. The Youth Reintegration Training and Education for Peace programme in Sierra Leone integrated the concept of inclusive support into its approach by having trainers and participants in the programme who were both ex-combatants and war-affected youth (Bernard et al. 2003). The IRC programme in Rwanda was also conscious of the dangers around 'stigma through privilege' (ibid, p.12).

This issue was also raised as a challenge by Retrak in its work in Northern Uganda. This organisation faced the issue of creating inequity under one roof through the payment of school fees for the reintegrated child but not for other siblings (Adefrsew et al. 2011). Many organisations in these two fields in particular struggle with the dilemma of widening their support for other children within the context of serious budgetary constraints. Stark and Wessells (2013) argue that a certain degree of targeting may be necessary from a funding standpoint and even helpful in ensuring that certain particularly vulnerable groups receive the support they need. But excessive targeting can be problematic and may even serve to cause more harm than good in a given community, in some cases causing “reverse stigmatisation” (p.14) and even violence against the individual. A greater emphasis on mapping and tapping into community-wide resources, coupled with a child protection systems approach that is adequately funded, would go a long way to addressing this challenge.

## Girls’ experiences

It would be inaccurate to leave the impression that reintegrating girls only face stigmatisation at the community level based on preconceived notions of their life experiences. In fact this is often combined with the marginalisation of girls – particularly those involved with street living and fighting forces – in reintegration programmes themselves (Ochen et al. 2012; Harris et al. 2011; Hamakawa and Randall 2008; McKay and Mazurana 2004). This seems to stem from misconceptions around who is actually in need of support. Several of the programmes reviewed and analysed in this report provide support to boys only (Harris et al. 2011). Overall, most agencies demonstrated minimal differentiation in their programming for girls compared to boys.

Certain agencies, however, do stand out in their focus exclusively on the unique experiences and challenges of separated girls. For example, Save the Children in Cote d’Ivoire targets girls formerly associated with armed forces, recognising the special circumstances and

needs of girls (Hamakawa and Randall 2008), while TPO has a similar girls’ reintegration programme in Uganda, and Calvary Chapel Liberia’s has a programme for former child soldiers. In the latter, reproductive health, gender-specific vocational training and extended stays for girls were provided in the transit centre, reflecting recognition of the need for a gendered approach to reintegration support (Williamson and Feinberg 1999).

One informant raised the problem of girls’ access to their customary rights – i.e. inheritance of land and possessions, even marriage if they were born through abduction – after separation (interview with P. Onyango). There seems to be little documented on this issue as it relates to girls and young women.

## Measuring the impacts of interventions

Measurement of the impact of reintegration efforts in low and lower-middle income countries tends to be weak across the board, with reports being descriptive instead of analytical. Selection of SMART indicators with children and families is rare, as are baseline surveys, and data is rarely disaggregated beyond the level of sex of the children.

As one specific example, the literature review and interviews reveal almost no documentation contrasting self-reunifying and indeed self-reintegrating children with those who receive more formalised services. The only reference comes from Uganda where the level of suicide and psychological distress appears to be higher amongst people who self-reintegrated after spending part of their childhood with the Lord’s Resistance Army (interview with D. Goodwin).

Finally, as mentioned above, there have been only a small number of longitudinal<sup>10</sup> and participatory studies, although these could ultimately shed much light on the effectiveness of various approaches to family reintegration.

10. Family for Every Child has undertaken just such research with its partners in Moldova and Mexico, while Professor Betancourt has been involved in research with former child soldiers for more than a decade.

## Issues working with young offenders and on residential care

Whilst no interviews conducted as part of this desk-based research focused on the reintegration of young offenders in low or lower-middle income countries, much of the literature discusses the issues of recidivism and prevention of reoffending above all else. The intent behind the programmes seems to be concerned with preventing the child from reoffending and thus endangering society, rather than with the rights, well-being and security of the child in returning home. Ensuring that the child is supported in terms of counselling, follow ups, provision of education or vocational training is less of a priority. In this way, the child is perceived more as a troublemaker and less as a child with rights. This has important implications.

The majority of the literature concerning residential care concentrates on the prevention of separation (or 'gatekeeping') or macro-level policy rather than reintegration practice. In fact, there is little documentation to date of reintegration from residential care in low or lower-middle income countries; where it exists, it sheds little light on differences according to age of the child, disability and the context in which it takes place. Instead, the focus of global and national child protection actors tends to be on movement to close residential care facilities with less attention to the support offered to children as they are reintegrated with their families. This trend led one report to conclude that in lower income countries in particular, reintegration programmes are actually not in place for children living in residential care facilities (Delap 2011). In fact, one informant went further to stress that deinstitutionalisation must not be 'reduced' to just reintegration, as that is only one facet of the process (interview with D. Pop), and that improved reintegration practices must sit within wider child care reform.

## Self-reunification and reintegration

Child protection actors regularly identify or are referred to girls and boys who have returned to live with their family without passing through a formal preparatory phase. Typically these include children associated – loosely or formally – with armed fighters, street children, and boys and girls separated during an emergency who were cared for and reunited solely through community efforts. As part of the growing child protection systems approach, workers screen those children and invite them to be added to their caseload; they conduct an assessment of what reintegration opportunities are needed for the child, family and community. Agencies may provide them with material assistance, such as clothing or a mattress, even though the physical reunification with their family and community has already occurred. Frequently these cases are given lower priority since the social links seem to have already been reforged; however, sometimes cases come to light because the 'honeymoon period' is over and inter-personal conflict is increasing.

The literature review and interviews reveal almost no documentation contrasting this group of self-reunifying and indeed self-reintegrating children with those who receive preparation for return. The exception is some work with girl mothers returning secretly from the fighting forces in West Africa; the absence of so many girl soldiers from those formal disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes can be understood as a reflection of these girls' active decision to avoid the formal preparations for reintegration, as that itself continued to stigmatise them (Gislesen 2006). Instead these girls wanted reintegration interventions to be framed as part of wider programming for vulnerable (and resilient) young mothers (McKay et al. 2006).

In conclusion, there is a need for further attention to the different needs of and lessons learnt from self-reunifying and re-integrating children.

# Section VIII: Principles of promising practice and conclusions

Given the wide diversity of experiences among separated children, there cannot be a one size fits all approach to supporting family reintegration. The specific context and individual experiences of each child must always be carefully considered and integrated into the design of reintegration support if it is to truly benefit that child. It has been accepted by many scholars and practitioners in the field that the wrong type of support can actually be detrimental to the reintegration process and to the child's overall well-being. Programmes need to be tailored to the unique needs and interests of the child.

With that said, the current practices and trends gleaned from both the literature review and interviews conducted for this report allow for the extrapolation of *principles* of promising practice that may be used to help guide future interventions across the board.<sup>11</sup> The list of principles cannot claim to be comprehensive but it does provide a pathway to help both to improve the practical ways children are supported through this process and to ensure that at a conceptual level their rights and best interests are always at the heart of reintegration activities.

## Principles of promising practice

### Reintegration as a process

Reintegration is a process, not a singular event in time or even a fixed period of time. Successful programmes and their funders must acknowledge the importance of the stages of reintegrating a child, beginning with thorough preparation (including an assessment that family reintegration is in the child's best interests), continuing with a thoughtful reunification plan, and ending with reintegration support. The impacts of separation last well into adulthood,

if not a lifetime, and point to the need for more longitudinal studies of reintegrated children into their own parenting years.

Reintegration efforts should address a range of actors in the community to promote the widest possible acceptance and support for the child. The child's journey is a unique process but arriving at the destination of 'successful reintegration' is the collective responsibility of everyone in society.

### Respecting the individual's journey

It is clear that a 'cookie-cutter' or standardised approach to reintegration fails to make contact with the range of experiences, needs and situations that separated children face. A child and his or her family need to be involved in establishing the benchmarks for success and allowed the time and, as far as possible, the resources it takes to achieve them. They are entitled to work with staff who truly respect them and have both the skills to help them identify and access opportunities that will enable them to reach those benchmarks, and the understanding that reintegration is not a linear process.

### Rights-based programming

Staff and volunteers working in the field of reintegration should receive training in children's rights and the UN *Guidelines* to understand the international context within which they operate. Skilled, knowledgeable social workers or other trained professionals are key to ensuring that the safety and well-being of children are promoted throughout this process (Harris et al. 2011; Smith and Wakia 2012).

In this vein, there should be greater equity between the opportunities available to separated children. The literature on preparing for a child's reintegration points to the need for a multi-

11. Owing to the dearth of quality research, this report is not able to speak of best or even good practice, but instead chooses to refer to principles of *promising* practice.

faceted approach with interventions targeting the child, the family, and multiple stakeholders within the wider community. However, there are noticeable trends between different groups of children, with some programmes and countries exhibiting high levels of commitment and intensity in their efforts to assist a child with the reintegration process, and others exhibiting a low commitment. Based on the literature, there is greater attention to the issue of preparing for reintegration in the support of former child soldiers, trafficked children and street-involved children, with much less attention within the areas of young offenders and children in residential care in low-income countries. This suggests that either this has not been a priority in support for these children on the whole, or that they are simply grossly under-documented.

### Child participation in decision-making

It is the child's right to participate in decisions that affect his or her life, and as such, meaningful opportunities for that participation must be created in the reintegration process. Decisions should be made *with* children, and not *for* children. Integrating children's knowledge and insight into planning will result in more relevant and responsive reintegration support. Staff (and volunteers) need to be chosen, trained and supported to enable this approach with children, as it does not come easily to many adults, even when well-intentioned.

### Holistic view of the child

Interventions that apply a holistic view of the child, as the centre of a system involving the family, community and society, are critical. Reintegration is much more than the reinsertion of a child into his or her family; it is about improving the social and economic conditions around that person. Promoting the child's acceptance by the family and wider society is a key component of reintegration. Home: the Child Recovery and Reintegration Network articulates the range of issues<sup>12</sup> that a holistic view must consider:

- household economic security
- legal identity
- housing

- legal assistance
- education, training and employment
- self-esteem and confidence-building
- psychosocial support and therapeutic support
- spiritual, cultural and religious connection
- family and community sensitisation and support.

### Gendered perspective

Reintegration programmes must adopt a gendered perspective to ensure awareness of and sensitivity to the special circumstances and experiences of separated girls. The provision of training or services to address the specific vulnerabilities of girls, related to sexual health, stigma, and cultural gender biases, will help make programmes more relevant and responsive to their needs. In addition, the reintegration of sexually-exploited boys in particular must be given due consideration.

### Standard operating procedures and national guidelines

Individual agencies should have written standard operating procedures (SOPs) that fall within national guidelines provided by the relevant Ministry; in emergency settings, the *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* (Child Protection Working Group 2012) provides just such a guide. This is not a quick initiative but a process that brings together staff, children, their families and others (Retrak 2013). If done well, it can lead to great benefits for both children and staff, as well as build external partnerships and momentum for the greater protection of children and of family life. SOPs should be grounded in the UNCRC and other relevant national child protection legislation and policies. Where national guidelines on reintegration do not exist (which still is common according to respondents), child protection actors should champion the issue and provide avenues for their development. In addition, a common system to track individual cases assists in the steady follow-through of the reintegration journey, and reduces the amount of misinformation and double counting of cases.

### Monitoring, reporting and evaluation

Organisations should have an effective system

12. See: <http://www.childrecovery.info/Long-term-recovery-and-reintegration.53.0.html>

to track the impact of their programme activities. This should include a strong record keeping system, ethical data collection methods with children that include sensitively and appropriately gathering their views, and robust mechanisms to assess the well-being of supported children. While this system can be established at any time, it is certainly a follow-on step from the development of SOPs and national guidelines.

Where it does occur, evaluation of reintegration efforts has tended to be weak and focused on a snapshot of specific programmes and not the holistic journeys of reintegrating children. In settings where multiple agencies work with separated children, peer evaluation should be encouraged. In addition, more rigorous analysis of the strengths and limitations of different approaches to reintegration for children facing different issues is needed. Programme evaluation will create a feedback loop to help organisations know what is working in a given context and what is not.

According to Asquith and Turner (2008):

*“Not only do the outputs of monitoring and evaluation processes inform planning, funding and resource-allocation decisions but, without them, objective evidence of good practice and comparative information is lost. As a result, it is hard to build up an effective body of knowledge to inform planning, capacity-building strategies, funding decisions and the learning agenda. To consider these activities as optional ‘add-ons’ is therefore short-sighted.”* (p.20)

Home: the Child Recovery and Reintegration Network is currently compiling and analysing different methods for monitoring and evaluating reintegration efforts.

### Coordination and collaboration

Within the context of low and lower-middle income countries, funding and resources will inevitably be in short supply. Despite the added effort, it is necessary to coordinate and collaborate with a range of other service providers in order to share responsibilities and to create a strong network of support around children (Harris et al. 2011; Smith and Wakia 2012). The clearly articulated need to coordinate

efforts can be a catalyst for governments to get involved in reintegration efforts and to live up to their responsibility to protect and promote the well-being of their youngest citizens. It is also a reminder for agencies to respect other actors’ specialisations, especially in providing quality therapeutic interventions and economic strengthening.

A critical aspect of this principle is mapping the local community and devising a strategy to maximise its ability to support children. In addition, mapping provides an opportunity to engage new actors in these reintegration efforts, as well as more general protection concerns. One untapped group in particular is faith-based organisations, especially if they support or run children’s residential facilities of any kind.

### Cultural and family sensitivity

Respect for local ways of knowing and doing is important for devising strategies of support that will address relevant issues. A strong understanding of social hierarchies, leadership structures, general community dynamics and the diversity of family models must be central to reintegration planning, to ensure that the right channels are taken to support the child and to mobilise all possible social and financial resources. For international organisations that operate in multiple country contexts and communities, there is a risk of trying to implement formulised programmes to maintain consistency of activities. There must be room for programmes to be adapted and tailored to the specific context in order to promote the success of interventions.

Wherever possible, local stakeholders should be included in the planning around a child’s reintegration at the earliest possible moment. Including the views and voices of key members of the community – educators, social service providers, parents, leaders, children etc. – through participatory methods of inquiry, will only help ground reintegration practices in the local reality and tap into existing local support structures.

Moreover, assessments and other interventions should build on the strengths of the child, the family and the community to ensure the best possible transition and stabilisation back home.

## Local ownership

Reintegration is primarily a social process and thus needs to be firmly understood and championed by local actors and the structures in which they operate. This entails tapping into the social and financial resources of the community that exists around the returned child. It means ensuring that measures of success are created with local actors, including the children in question, and that creative and thoughtful ways of programming are enabled that shift power to the community in order to achieve improved relevance and sustainability. This is a challenging, long-term process and must be done while balancing the best interests of the individual child.

## Long-term investment

The research points to the need for long-term investment in the reintegration of children. Reintegration support is not something that can be offered to children on a temporary basis, as it requires dedication, consistency and quality – all of which require a long-term investment in time, funding, and resources. That said, organisations should devise exit strategies to avoid dependence on the services of the agency, and to promote local ownership of reintegration (UN General Assembly 2009). This is especially a problem in resource-poor contexts where social infrastructure may be weak and cannot address all the needs of vulnerable groups equitably.

## Moving forward: opportunities and challenges

This paper has argued that reintegration is a three-part process for children which unfolds over months, if not years. We must not lose sight of the fact that over that period, the ultimate goal of reintegration – even ‘family reintegration’ – is not merely the sustained placement of the child with family members, but instead concerns itself with the child’s development into happy, healthy adulthood.

The common challenges outlined in this research create an opportunity for dialogue and learning across agencies working in this broad field of family reintegration. They also highlight the potential for improved quality processes around reintegration practices. There are ample similarities across the board to

explore the possibility of developing a common framework of approaches to reintegration support. These can be summed up as six broad recommendations.

### **One: Create more opportunities for dialogue across settings.**

To achieve a higher-quality approach to the field of reintegration, more interagency dialogue is needed. For example, there appear to be synergies for learning around safety (i.e. release from gangs, armed forces and jail, post-trafficking), stigma (i.e. disabilities and girls), processes for setting indicators, children’s participation throughout, family-strengthening approaches, and economic-strengthening by context. The establishment of the inter-agency group on reintegration that commissioned this paper is a good starting point in this process. The dialogue could be increased through a common webinar series, an annual journal or conference on family reintegration, continued interagency research, etc.

### **Two: Collectively strengthen the process of evaluating reintegration interventions.**

There is a pressing need to improve the quality of programme evaluations. Capitalising on children’s eagerness to shape the indicators of successful reintegration must be made the norm across programmes. This recommendation can be tackled by providing online monitoring and evaluation training to staff in country, enabling agencies in countries with high levels of separation to undertake peer evaluations, mentoring staff working with children on indicator selection, and encouraging national governments to develop and adopt evaluative methodology.

### **Three: Undertake key pieces of high-quality joint research.**

A number of issues have emerged as needing more interagency attention. There is the clear need to undertake longitudinal studies of children who received structured, child-focused reintegration support, as well as contrasting their outcomes with girls and boys who self-reunited and reintegrated; this will provide frontline workers, managers and donors with more evidence about what works where and when, and its financial and human resource implications. Gaps in the literature, specifically

around programming for girls, children with disabilities, children affected by HIV/AIDS, and children formerly in detention or spending different lengths of time in residential care, must be addressed to better account for the range of experiences. It will also be valuable to compare the experiences of self-reunifying children with those who are part of formal programmes and processes. A few other areas stand out.

- Factors to consider when determining whether children preparing for reintegration should be placed in a form of alternative care versus receiving support through drop-in centres, and in determining the most appropriate forms of alternative care (considering the impacts of these different approaches on child well-being and outcomes).
- What role can information and communications technology best play in the reintegration of separated children?
- The economic strengthening of families at risk of and 'recovering' from separation, especially as it relates to issues of social capital.
- The cost-effectiveness of different approaches to post-reunification support.
- The role of siblings and peers in a child's reintegration, as well as encouraging the leadership potential of formerly separated children.

#### **Four: Develop common tools.**

Without prescribing specific courses of action, the development of a toolkit, with practical application in the field, would help inform and strengthen emerging practices around the world (Cody 2012). This type of manual would build on existing global materials<sup>13</sup> to include a clear definition of family and broader social reintegration, clarification around themes, case examples of tested methodologies for assessment and evaluation, and guidance on developing locally contextualised standard operating procedures, as well as providing sample indicators with wide applicability. With that said, the challenge in establishing universal definitions, common indicators, and good practices is in balancing the need for responsible interventions with the need for context-driven approaches that carefully

integrate both local views, customs, and realities and the child's perspective. This will require a fine balance between using evidence-based practices and continuing to promote solutions that are respectful of local practices and ownership.

#### **Five: Build the common national child protection system and its workforce**

The quality of the worker and the resources that he or she can bring to bear are central components of family reintegration. Actors across the sector can come together more effectively to advocate for more and better use of resources. Some of this can be achieved by pooling the training opportunities available through agencies, investing in national schools of social work, establishing mentorship programmes, etc. Some of it will stem from the aforementioned research providing a stronger evidence-base about cost-effectiveness. In all of this general work around child protection system strengthening it is essential that particular efforts are made to specifically build capacity to promote sustained family reintegration. For example, social workers must be specifically trained in the value of reintegrated children.

#### **Six: Do No Harm**

Finally, the child protection community needs to mobilise to ensure that none of its interventions are unintentionally causing significant harm to children. A particular example is of the children trafficked across borders who are languishing for months – if not years – in shelters.

In conclusion, it is hoped that *Reaching for Home* represents just the beginning of tearing down boundaries between different groups working on the protection of all separated children and building bridges towards an improved global approach to assist them in their reintegration journeys.

13. These include in particular *Moving forward: Implementing the 'Guidelines for the alternative care of children'* and the *Alternative care in emergencies toolkit*.

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# Annex 1: Template for key informant interviews

## Introductions

- Introduce myself, my role and review the study's objective of building learning between organisations working on the reintegration of children in different circumstances.
- I will be asking you some questions about your overall experiences of reintegrating children in different settings and with different organisations and as we talk, I'll be taking notes. If you have any questions as we go along, please don't hesitate to ask. I may use terms that may be different from what you use, so please let me know if anything I say is confusing. At any time, let me know if you want to go back to a question to add to or change your answer.

## 1. Profile of beneficiary children

i. Tell me about the children you reintegrate

Probe as needed:

- Where are the children being reintegrated from?
- Types of groups targeted? (age, gender, disability, etc.)
- Where are the children being reintegrated to?
  - Acceptable definition of 'family'?

## 2. Definition

i. How do you define reintegration? (Is this official or just ad hoc?)

ii. At what point do you consider a child reintegrated?

**The following questions will be asked as discussion warrants.**

## 3. How is the decision made to reintegrate children?

Probe as needed:

- How are children identified for reintegration?
- How is the decision made whether to reintegrate a child or not, to whom, and who is involved in that decision?

- What happens if child disagrees with the case worker's decision?

## 4. What are the most important aspects of preparing the child, the family and/or the community for re-unification?

Probe as needed:

- Role and type of supervised care (outreach, day centres, residential, foster families) in the process.
- Extent of and types of child, family and community preparation activities (e.g. use of social protection/ livelihoods support; family strengthening activities; counselling; awareness raising in the community; involvement of schools/role of education etc.).
- How/if a relationship with the family is maintained over time as part of the preparation for reintegration.

## 5. In your opinion, what are the most important characteristics about a family going through the reintegration process?

## 6. How does the child physically return to the family or community?

Probe as needed:

- Process of reintroduction;
- Distances involved.

**All the remaining questions will be asked.**

## 7. What post-reunification support do you believe is most important, and to whom is it provided?

Probe as needed:

- Over what period of time?
- Who does it?
- Approaches to on-going family strengthening, including if/how the relationship is maintained with the family over time.
- Direct support to children themselves.
- How is prevention of first and secondary separations addressed throughout the

reintegration programme (insights on the impact on siblings/peers and their decisions to leave and an examination of which root causes are addressed and how).

- Role of education, livelihoods and social protection.

## 8. How do you think the reintegration experience and the support needs vary amongst the children you work with?

(Variation of experience according to gender, age, separation experience, disability, HIV status, rural/urban, etc.)

## 9. Programming challenges and successes

- i What have been the main challenges you have faced regarding your reintegration programming?
- ii What have you done to overcome these challenges?
- iii. What is the most innovative aspect of your work on children's reintegration?
- iv. What advice would you give to others developing reintegration programmes?
- v. Over the years of your work, have you seen unintended outcomes of reintegration efforts – either positive or negative? How do you view them?

## 10. How do you work with the government and other service providers?

(challenges/opportunities)

Probe as needed:

- How do you ensure geographic coverage?
- Are any inter-agency tools used to promote coordination?
- What – if anything – is missing in the combined approach?

## 11. How has reintegration changed over time? What circumstances caused the changes?

Thank you and wrap up.

Follow-up email will thank them and ask them to share any relevant documentation.

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