35 million at risk children in Africa given extra protections for first time – SOS Children's Villages

Thursday 27 November, 2025

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Landmark new guidance for children without parental care rolled out across 55 African states

Around **35 million children without parental care across Africa will now have a new standard of protection, which unpacks the already existing provisions in the Africa's Child Rights Treaty** – the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)**.**

This new standard, General Comment Number 10 on Article 25 of the Charter will be launched at the 46th session of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC – the Committee), in Maseru, Lesotho.

The General Comment is being launched following a multi-year partnership between the Committee, an African Union's organ legally mandated for the follow up of the implementation of the Charter, government representatives from Africa countries, SOS Children's Villages, child focused organizations, academic institutions, child rights scholars and children and young people. **SOS Children's Villages, the world's largest charity supporting children without, or at risk of losing, parental care, has been the lead partner with significant technical and funding support.**

The General Comment on Children without Parental Care paves **the way for care reform across Africa, by promoting effective, tailored support for children without parental care and tackling the root causes of institutionalisation**. It is completely tailored to fit African cultural contexts and needs of the children without care in African countries.

Currently, institutional care remains prevalent across Africa, while the common risks faced by children without parental care include exposure to sexual and other forms of abuse; substance and drug abuse; exposure to hazardous work; mental health issues; inadequate food consumption; limited access to education and health-care services; and living in environments unconducive to children's emotional and physical well-being.[1]

The General Comment sets out how:

1. **Care reform must be a priority** to ensure that children receive high-quality, family-based care.
2. There must be steps in place to **prevent children from being separated from their families** (i.e. early identification, targeted support, and community-based interventions to strengthen families and prevent separation due to factors such as poverty, violence, or lack of access to services.)
3. **Family-based care must be promoted**, and alternative care must be a last resort, with the aim of being eventually eliminated where possible to avoid any risk of institutionalisation.
4. **Children must participate in the decisions which shape their lives**, and should therefore be included in the development of care policies and practises.
5. **Legal and policy frameworks must be strengthened** to protect the rights of children without parental care (e.g. establishing of robust gatekeeping mechanisms, monitoring and periodic review of care placements, and the development of national care reform strategies)
6. There must be active **efforts to ensure stakeholders and those implementing the policy are made aware of it, and are supported to implement it**.

The General Comment also sets out guidance for specific protected groups, for instance children with albinism or disabilities.

Firew Bekele, Head of Advocacy and Communications for Eastern and Southern Africa for SOS Children's Villages International, who worked with the Committee on developing this document, said, *"This General Comment will now serve as a basis for child rights advocates in the continent on how they engage member states of the African Union in fulfilling their responsibility of creating the appropriate*

legislative and other necessary measures to protect the rights of the 35 million children without parental care."

"The document is a big win for children, young people and child focused civil society organisations who have been collaborating for more protection and support from duty bearers."

In September, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in the UK launched the Global Charter on Children's Care Reform, which was officially endorsed by SOS Children's Villages UK.

Alison Wallace, CEO of SOS Children's Villages UK, said, "*This is a groundbreaking achievement which will change the lives of millions of the most vulnerable children in Africa. It shows the value of care reform which is evidence based, context specific and which has 'buy in' from participating countries.*

"As a charity that supports children around the world, SOS Children's Villages is working to reform care globally by helping governments to expand foster and kinship care, and to ensure that alternative care for children becomes temporary, and not the norm.

"From our work with the FCDO to help implement the UK's Global Charter on Care Reform, to the work of our colleagues in creating this landmark legislation for children without parental care across Africa, at SOS Children's Villages we are leading by example in showing that it is possible to advocate for global leadership to come together and change the ways things work to promote the best interests of the children most in need." **- ENDS-**

For interviews, photos or more information please contact media@sosuk.org or +44 7594016912

Notes to editor:

[1]Continental Study of Children Without Parental Care in Africa, 2023,

About SOS Children's Villages

Working in over 130 countries, SOS Children's Villages is the world's largest non-governmental organisation focused on supporting children and young people who don't have, or are at risk of losing, parental care. Today, 1 in 10 children and young people around the world are separated from their families, neglected or forced to live in an abusive environment.

We go beyond meeting the physical needs of each child, focusing on providing love and support. Because when a child or young person is safe, loved and respected, they can thrive, not just survive.

Company Contact: