

Better Care Network Netherlands



'Reintegration and aftercare for child survivors of (sexual) exploitation'

Overview of materials and tools

Background

Sexual Exploitation of Children

Sexual exploitation of children (SEC) is a global problem that often remains hidden from view. It causes severe and lasting harm to children's physical, mental, and reproductive health, as well as their social well-being, education, and ability to build safe relationships and find meaningful work in supportive communities later in life. This exploitation can result in children facing stigma, isolation, lack of support, and limited choices, making them more susceptible to further exploitation. Addressing the needs of these children requires a holistic, adaptable, and personalized approach.

Challenges with reintegration and aftercare

The international Convention on the Rights of the Child states that 'the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding'. While this doesn't guarantee an absolute entitlement to a family for a child, it does indicate a preference for alternative care options that mimic a family setup if it's in the child's best interests.

One reason behind this preference is [the adverse effects](#)

associated with a childhood spent in institutional care.

Nonetheless, numerous children who have fallen victim to sexual exploitation find themselves spending varying periods of time in forms of institutional care such as rescue centers or children's homes. There are various risk factors that can lead to this situation:

- Specific mental health issues such as severe violent or withdrawn behaviours.
- Specific physiological health issues such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and others.
- Shame and stigma associated with child sexual exploitation that is further challenged by the mind-set and attitudes of families and communities in accepting and supporting these children.
- Instances where children who have experienced sexual exploitation become pregnant or have their own infants.



- Victims denying that they've experienced sexual exploitation, often because they were manipulated into such situations.
- Situations where families or communities have coerced children into sexual exploitation, or where such exploitation is normalized.
- Lengthy and insensitive judicial processes that hinder recovery and reintegration processes.
- The inability of family members to take care of a child due to poverty.
- Limited financial resources, expertise and time available to provide support to children who have experienced sexual exploitation.
- Children sometimes being trafficked into institutional care.
- Procedural limitations, such as laws stating that a child cannot be placed in a (temporary) alternative family environment and must instead be taken to a children's home.

What are the factors for successful reintegration?

A study of the International Justice Mission states the following factors required for successful family reintegration of a child who has been a victim of sexual exploitation.

1. A comprehensive pre-reintegration assessment and planning:

This step determines both the survivor's readiness to return to their family and the family's ability to provide sustained care.

2. Availability of comprehensive community-based intervention:

Ensuring survivors and their families receive comprehensive and holistic services is vital. When survivors return to their family and community, they might encounter the same risk factors that initially made them vulnerable to exploitation. Therefore, interventions must address these factors to minimize the risk of re-victimization.

- **Psychosocial Support:** Shifting survivors' mindsets and educating them and their families about child sexual exploitation is crucial. It is essential to address beliefs that promote exploitation for easy money, lack of awareness about the crime, neglect, and survivors' perceptions about victimization.
- **Economic support / Financial and Livelihood Assistance:** Survivors often face the same socio-economic challenges that



made them vulnerable initially. Economic empowerment, such as access to sustainable livelihood programs, stable income, starting capital, skills training, and job placements, is necessary for successful reintegration.

- **Educational Assistance:** Ensuring survivors can complete their education is important.

3. Continuous monitoring of survivor and family:

Regular home visits, assessments, and monitoring are necessary to track the social functioning and situation of survivors.

4. Efficient mechanism on prevention and reporting of sexual exploitation of children:

Collaborative advocacy and awareness campaigns involving government, institutions, communities, and NGOs are vital. These efforts should disseminate information about child sexual exploitation, including the laws against it and its harmful effects, aiming to influence community attitudes and beliefs.

Through this overview, our aim is to inspire organizations and equip them with tools to enhance the potential for reintegrating children, offer family-based care solutions, and provide aftercare to both the children and their families.

Facts and figures on sexual exploitation of children

- This [ECPAT summary paper](#) explores the key manifestations of SEC. These include the exploitation of children in prostitution, the sale and trafficking of children for sexual purposes, online child sexual exploitation, the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism, and some forms of child, early and forced marriage. None of these contexts or manifestations are isolated, and any discussion of one must be a discussion of SEC altogether. Notably, these contexts and manifestations of SEC are becoming increasingly complex and interlinked as a result of drivers like greater mobility of people, evolving digital technology and rapidly expanding access to communications. Now more than ever, the lines between different manifestations of SEC are blurred and children may be victimised in multiple ways.



International legislation and regulations

- [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(1989\)](#): 'Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community' (preamble). This Convention has been ratified by 196 countries, with the exception of the United States.
- The United Nations General Assembly adopted a [resolution on children without parental care](#) in 2019. This resolution builds on the 2009 UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. The resolution and the guidelines state that every child has the right to be taken care of by his or her own parents. It is vital that member states commit themselves to keep families together or, when that is not possible, to provide family replacement care as close as possible to the child's place of residence. Member States should discourage care in large-scale children's homes and avoid unnecessary separation of parents and children. When a child is separated from their parents, this should be temporary and for the shortest possible period. Member states must address the causes of children's institutionalisation and end the driving forces maintaining them – including forms of tourism which involve visits or stays in children's homes. The needs of children who are victims of sexual violence are addressed in Article 18 of the UN Guidelines. It stipulates the necessity for social programs that not only offer support to the victims and their carers, but also provides education surrounding the prevention and identification.
- SOS Children's Villages has a helpful summary of the [2019 UN Resolution on the Rights of the Child focusing on children without parental care](#).
- There are also various other relevant laws and regulations at regional level, such as the [African Charter on the Rights and Wellbeing of the Child](#).

Online community

- The [RISE Learning Network](#) aims to promote and facilitate learning on recovery and reintegration approaches that improve outcomes for children and adolescents affected by sexual exploitation. After registering, you can access resources, discussions and opportunities for action in relation to supporting children affected by sexual violence.

Reintegration and aftercare

- A research study by [International Justice Mission](#) outlines the factors that contribute to successful reintegration of survivors, including the interventions and support services that need to be provided at each level of system. It also identifies alternative care options for survivors who cannot be reintegrated to their family and community. For reintegrated child survivors, support services for the parents are also crucial to ensure the successful reintegration of the child. Support may include psychoeducation to help them build their parenting skills, educating them about the importance of parental monitoring and supervision, raising awareness of the impact of sexual exploitation, and family counselling.
- Three research publications by Family for Every Child, co-led by young adults from Nepal, Uganda and Madagascar who were affected by childhood sexual exploitation, share first-hand experiences of the reintegration process:
 - o [Report Nepal](#)
 - o [Report Uganda](#)
 - o [Report Madagascar](#)

- [Seeing Things from both Sides](#) is a comic to help young people and professionals understand each other's views about young survivors' participation in efforts to address child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Prevention

- [Breaking the Cycle](#) is a project that aims to build the capacity of youth organizations working in the area of gender-based violence. The project is a response to the need for specific, innovative methods and programs working with youth in preventing and resisting gender-based violence. The project is intended to build, initiate, and strengthen new and existing programs combating gender-based violence in different parts of the globe, and to provide tools for working with young people.
- [The Manual Keeping Children Safe Tools](#) contains activities for children aged 4 to 11. The manual provides educators with age-appropriate activities (ranging from 60 to 90 minutes) to ensure that children become aware of their rights, ways of





practising their rights, safeguarding mechanisms in place to protect them and how they can access them. By the end of the course, it is expected that children will have:

- gained an awareness of children's rights;
 - explored feelings associated with being safe/not safe and become more able to identify situations that are safe and those where personal safety may be at risk;
 - identified simple strategies for keeping safe e.g. say 'no', get help;
 - identified people who help to keep them safe throughout the day
 - explored appropriate personal safety strategies.
- 'You Love Me, You Love Me Not' is an awareness-raising storybook for children about sexual abuse of boys and girls, an issue which is often hidden in our societies and shrouded by taboo and shame. Created by the NGO Butterflies, based in Delhi, India, it has been used in their work on prevention of child sexual abuse since 2006. The book also contains guidance for parents and care givers. 'You Love Me, You Love Me Not' presents the true life, anonymised stories of five children. It describes different situations in which children can be abused, in some instances within children's own families or home networks, in others within the school circle.

Case management

- Case management provides a framework for the professional management of child protection projects. It is important that individuals implementing a case management system are well supported and understand it fully. Case management is an important resource in providing the highest quality service

to vulnerable children in very challenging circumstances. In this RISE webinar, Yashoda Upreti from Terre des hommes Foundation in Nepal, shares how the organization uses case management to provide a transparent monitoring and quality control system that facilitates a process to sustain actions to promote child protection, relying on teamwork and a strong child-centred approach. The webinar recording can be accessed via [this link](#).

Counselling

- This [Handbook for Social Workers in Primary Counselling Skills](#) is a compilation of handouts created for ready reference of social workers attending the three-phase training in Primary Skills in Counselling. Written in simple language, these handouts support the experiential training undertaken by social workers. The handbook has a thematic progression from a basic orientation about mental health to an understanding of child and adolescent psychology, from some basic skill development in counselling, to developing specific skills in handling trauma survivors, culminating in mental health care needs of social workers themselves. Thus, it traverses a full circle from what is mental health to a checklist to ascertain the mental well-being of the social worker. The document is available in both English and Bangla.

Monitoring and evaluation

- This [Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluation of Reintegration](#) is primarily for individuals working at agencies that oversee, manage and support children and young people in their reintegration back into families and communities. The toolkit is available in English, Spanish, Russian and Portuguese.
- The RISE Learning Network organized a webinar with a panel of experts who shared their experience on conducting child-centred monitoring and evaluation of reintegration programs. The webinar recording can be watched via [this link](#).

Caring for boys

- The publication Caring for Boys Affected by Sexual Violence explores both sexual abuse experienced by boys, including sexual exploitation, as well as harmful sexual behaviour of boys, referred to collectively as sexual violence. The full report is available in English, Spanish, and Arabic. A summary of the report is also available in English, Spanish, Russian and Arabic.
- 'Bridging the Gap' is a toolkit for supporting boys affected by sexual exploitation and abuse, developed by the Down to Zero Alliance. The objectives of the toolkit are to educate, raise awareness, increase knowledge and the development of skills, approaches, and confidence to work with boys affected by sexual exploitation.

General information about alternative care for children

- What is the best way to help children without a safe home? What do you need to know about orphanages in the global South? Why is care in families usually better than care in a children's home? What is important to consider when you want to volunteer in a children's home? These questions are answered in Children without a 'home'. A free publication of Better Care Network Netherlands with short chapters with real-life examples. This completely revised version contains the latest scientific insights and new practical examples and is available in Dutch and English.



Tips?

Do you have tips or additions? Or questions about the care you provide? We would love to hear from you and think along if desired. You can contact us via info@bettercarenetwork.nl

Do you want to know more?

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Alternative Care Options if Family Reintegration is Not Possible

There are cases where reintegration to the family and community is not in the best interest of the child. For example when:

- return to the family presents an immediate risk to the child's safety and wellbeing
- the child was assessed to be vulnerable in the community
- the environment is not suitable the child's well-being
- the parents are not yet prepared for the return of the child and do not have the capability as well as resources to provide for the needs of the child.

In these cases, other short- or long-term placements or alternative permanent options must be sought:

- Independent Living Program: an alternative permanent option for survivors who are 18 years old and above who cannot be reintegrated to their family. Survivors should be assisted and provided with skills training, job placement, livelihood project, or capital assistance to prepare them for independent living.
- Kinship Care: often the most viable option and has the highest potential to become a permanent home other than reintegration to the biological family, if there is an identified relative who would be willing to care and commit to protect the child. It is very importance to conduct proper assessments, to deliver comprehensive support services, and regular monitor the child and their relatives.
- Foster Care (nonrelatives): comprehensive services should be provided to the child and foster family.
- Short-term residential Care: if family reintegration is impossible and other family-based alternative care placement options are already exhausted, this is an option, but for a short period, in small groups and while working towards other family-based options.