

Position paper by Save the Children and UNICEF Netherlands

Subject: Position paper by Save the Children and UNICEF Netherlands on the initiative paper "A good intention is not always a good idea: a proposal to combat orphanage tourism" on the occasion of the round table discussion on orphanage tourism in the Lower House of the Dutch Parliament on 27 March 2019.

Appreciation for the initiative

Save the Children and UNICEF Nederland warmly welcome this initiative paper which places the subject of orphanage tourism prominently on the Dutch political agenda. Following the example set by Australia, this development makes our country one of the international leaders in this field. The gravity and scope of the problem worldwide certainly warrant this level of concern.

Serious attention needed

The number of orphanages worldwide is steadily growing. Unfortunately, one of the main causes of this growth is orphanage tourism. The demand for volunteer work in orphanages fuels the increase in orphanages. In turn, the number of children living in orphanages also increases. Around eight million children worldwide live in orphanages. However, according to estimates, 80% of these children still have one or even both living parents. Given the specific vulnerability of these millions of (young) children, and the serious consequences facing them in the long term, serious attention to this problem is desperately needed.

Scientific evidence of the harmful (cognitive) impact of orphanages

Contrary to what the initiative paper states (p. 8), the many cognitive disadvantages that children suffer are in fact often related to growing up in institutional settings. Numerous (international) studies have shown the negative effects that growing up in an institution can have on children, and in particular children under the age of three. For every three months that a child spends in an orphanage, the child loses one month in development.¹ This is mainly the result of the inadequate standards of care within residential care institutions. As a rule, they have too few caregivers and are unable to give children the affection, attention, personal identity, and social connections that families and communities can offer.² Research shows that children living in institutions have a greater chance of stunted growth and a lower IQ because they lack stimulation and attention.³ Residential care homes are often unsafe for children. Children in institutions are particularly vulnerable to neglect, violence and abuse, much of which goes unnoticed and unreported. Countries with a long tradition of institutionalised care often have problems with young adults leaving institutions and trying to reintegrate into society, resulting in higher rates of homelessness, aggression,

¹ Csaky, C (2009). Keeping Children out of Harmful Institutions: Why we should be investing in Family-Based Care, Save the Children. Nelson, C., Zeanah, C., Fox, N. (May 2009). The Effects of Early Deprivation on Brain Behavioural Development: Bucharest Early Intervention Project. Oxford University Press.

² Everychild (2005) Family Matters: A study of institutional childcare in central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, Everychild, London

³ K Browne (2009) The Risk of Harm to Young Children in Institutional Care, Save the Children UK & the Better Care Network

employment difficulties, criminal activities, depression and higher rates of suicide.⁴ Unfortunately, orphanage tourism serves to maintain this state of affairs.

The factors leading to orphanages and orphanage tourism

One of the proposals in the initiative paper is to make combating orphanage tourism part of government policy in the coming years. Although we very much welcome this, we would also like to emphasise the importance of tackling, among other things, poverty and discrimination. The fight against orphanages and orphanage tourism is important and worth pursuing, but in a sense it is also about tackling symptoms rather than causes.

Parents send their children to orphanages under the assumption that the children will have a better life there, with education, sufficient food and a roof over their heads. As long as poorly targeted policies and funding continue to fail to address the root causes - including poverty, discrimination and lack of alternative forms of care - parents will continue to send their children to orphanages.

Alternative forms of care: in everyone's interest

In addition, we ask for explicit attention to be given to specific policy and sufficient funding for alternative forms of care. Apart from the argument that growing up in an orphanage is not in the best interests of a child, there are other important arguments for investing in alternative care, such as the moral responsibility of governments and the high costs of institutionalised forms of care. The good news is that this investment is possible. As organisations, we have developed numerous successful programmes which prove this.⁵ Reforming and deinstitutionalising care systems for children can be stimulated by giving support to communities. For example, through the development of alternative forms of highly quality care such as kinship care (extended family), foster families and national adoption.

To develop these alternative forms of care, it is important to support governments in the redesign of their care systems. Legal and policy changes must be implemented, care personnel and social workers must be retrained, and governments must redirect their budgets (no longer to institutional care, but rather to alternative forms of care such as foster families and kinships care). In many countries this will also mean that the issue of social work must be transformed. Governments must work towards deinstitutionalisation strategies whereby new policies are developed for children who need alternative care. In addition, alternative forms of care are up to ten times cheaper than institutional forms of care.⁶ It is therefore also desirable from an economic point of view that alternative forms of care are supported and financed.

This applies equally to children with disabilities. Often it is argued that these children are better off in institutionalised forms of care. This is not true. Children with disabilities are, after all, more vulnerable than children without disabilities. There are plenty of examples of

⁴ Tobias, D. Moving from Residential Institutions to Community-Based Social Services in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The World Bank. 2000. P.33.

⁵ <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/institutional-care-last-resort-policy-brief-2014>

⁶ C Desmond (2002) Approaches to Caring: Essential elements for quality service and cost-effectiveness in South Africa Evaluation and Program Planning 25:447-458. For a country case study on this see D Larter and E Veverita (2005) Expenditure on the Residential Care of Children in the Republic of Moldova: A Financial Analysis Based on 2005 Budget Data

good practice available. See, for example, the Eastern European Community-Based Services for Children with Disabilities programme.⁷

We therefore call upon the proposer of the initiative and the members of the Lower House to urge the Dutch government to make a commitment, through its good offices and influence worldwide, to promote the *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, endorsed by the United Nations.⁸ This year the guidelines are 10 years old, adding further momentum to the cause.

Maintenance of the orphanage industry via the EU

One of the action points proposed in the initiative requests the House to urge the European Commission not to provide subsidies for volunteer work in orphanages. We would like to add a further request to urge other European institutions, such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Council of Europe, to discuss, develop and finance alternative forms of care of children and prevent and prohibit institutional forms of care. For more information and recommendations in this regard, see the report "Putting Child Protection and Family Care at the Heart of EU External Action".⁹

About Save the Children

As the world's largest independent children's rights organisation, with a permanent presence in more than 120 countries, international cooperation is very important to us. This year we celebrate our 100th birthday. Our ambition is that by 2030 every child - both boys and girls - will survive, learn and be safe. We help children in need, make sure that their voices are heard, and work according to **common approaches**: scientifically based methods that are made available free of charge to third parties who want to help us achieve our 2030 goals.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is the children's rights organisation of the United Nations. Present in almost all countries in the world, we provide assistance to children in need, advise governments on the correct implementation of children's rights, and monitor compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Save the Children and UNICEF, together with several other organizations, founded the Better Care Network in 2003 because of the urgent need for more joint action in tackling orphanage tourism, among other things.

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⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cs3IL_TzQrs&list=WL&index=97&t=51s

⁸ The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children can be found at: https://www.unicef.org/protection/alternative_care_Guidelines-English.pdf

⁹ https://lumos.contentfiles.net/media/documents/document/2018/01/Joint_paper_Lumos_Hope_Homes_-_EU_External_Action_-_V2.pdf