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# Monthly Review

*The ISS/IRC team wishes you Happy Holidays and looks forward to pursuing its mission together with you for children without parental care in 2016!*

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## **SPECIAL ISSUE:** **Committing to children and families in order to prevent separation**

### **EDITORIAL**

#### **‘Recipe’ for a truly festive season for children and their families**

*As we started the year focusing on the year of the family, this issue of the Monthly Review likewise concludes with the same theme, concentrating on better investment to prevent unnecessary separation.*

The harsh realities for thousands of children separated or at risk of being separated from their loved ones, often become more acute during the festive season – a time of family reunions, celebrations and scrumptious meals. The most successful meals often follow a *récipe*: willingness to prepare the meal and investment into quality ingredients. Similarly to ensure that children are able to remain with their families, international standards must be respected; political will must exist and targeted investment must occur. Given the importance of the family as the fundamental unit of society, this Monthly Review discusses these essential steps for this recipe of keeping families together.

#### **Respect of international standards**

A first ingredient in ensuring a festive season is that international standards are implemented in national systems. Despite universal acceptance that ‘as far as possible, every child has the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents’ (Article 7(1) UNCRC) as well as international standards outlining protections for support to families in meeting their responsibilities towards the child, access to basic services such as adequate housing and health, education and social welfare service – such rights are systematically contravened due to multiple factors. For example, children may be removed unnecessarily from their families or parents feel compelled to abandon or relinquish their children – due to lack of available support of all kinds to do so – and, in many societies, prevailing discrimination in its many forms. International standards remain an empty shell without force if not applied or even misapplied.



## Political will to act

This situation can and must be changed. Family breakdown and separation can be prevented through targeted investment and support to families in their caregiving role. Actions that recognise the multi-dimensional nature of children's vulnerabilities including that of their family are required. Investment in social protection measures to strengthen families at risk, tailored to the specific issues and circumstances faced, must be encouraged to help secure the care of children within families. Clearly, a second essential ingredient therefore is political will to better protect children and their families through better investment.

## Better and targeted investment

To encourage such political will, a side event was organised in the broader framework of the Human Rights Council's (HRC) annual day on the rights of the child in 2015 – dedicated 'towards better investment in the rights of the child'. This event built on the HRC's resolution adopted in March 2015, [Rights of the child: towards better investment in the rights of the child](#), reflecting support from the 190 plus States represented.

Yet, once political will is established, how does one define investment priorities with finite resources? To this end, the [Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children](#) were used as an international recipe to identify primacies. Instructions were clear for all participants – definitions of family were avoided to ensure the focus remained on safeguarding children's rights in whatever environment they should find themselves in. This approach covers challenging situations, including separation, cross-border movements and multiple family contexts.

In opening, Professor Benyam Dawit Mezmur, Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and Vice-Chairperson of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child provided an international overview on the importance of States Parties investing in children and families, a pressing concern. This complements the Committee's efforts in drafting a new [General Comment](#) on this theme.

However States do not bear the burden alone and shared responsibilities for intelligent investment are required, for example by working with civil society as highlighted in the African region (see p. 3).

Assuming then there is cooperation between the various stakeholders in country, the obvious question of direct support to families of origin arises, especially during infant years. For this purpose social support schemes in the African context were showcased, such as the research published by Family for Every Child in Ghana and Rwanda (see p. 14).

However, as we all know, despite all efforts to keep children in families of origin, alternative care may be necessary. In this case, better investment into other forms of family based care is required. To illustrate this, a presentation on the need for investing in formal foster care systems as part of family-based solutions in Asia was shared (see p. 6). Arguably, such investment into quality family-based care is even more vital when countries embark on deinstitutionalisation strategies, as is the case in Eastern Europe (see p. 9). Likewise the necessity of adequate resource allocation can only be reiterated as 2015 has seen an increasing number of children on the move – for example with the 'European Refugee' crisis – which, of course, is occurring worldwide. In such circumstances, support for children to return to their families of origin as unaccompanied and separated children is equally significant as illustrated by research in Latin America (see p. 11).

**The ISS/IRC can only echo the concluding remark of Professor Benyam Dawit Mezmur, that 'investment into children and families to prevent unnecessary separation is not only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do'. Our hope is that the upcoming period will be a truly festive season for all children and their families. We look forward to working with you all to reach our common goal that children are able 'grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding' (Preamble of the UNCRC).**

The ISS/IRC team, December 2015

