



**GLOBAL THEMATIC  
REVIEW ON THE  
LINKAGES BETWEEN  
EDUCATION AND  
INSTITUTIONALISATION**

**NGO POLICY BRIEF**



# **BACKGROUND**

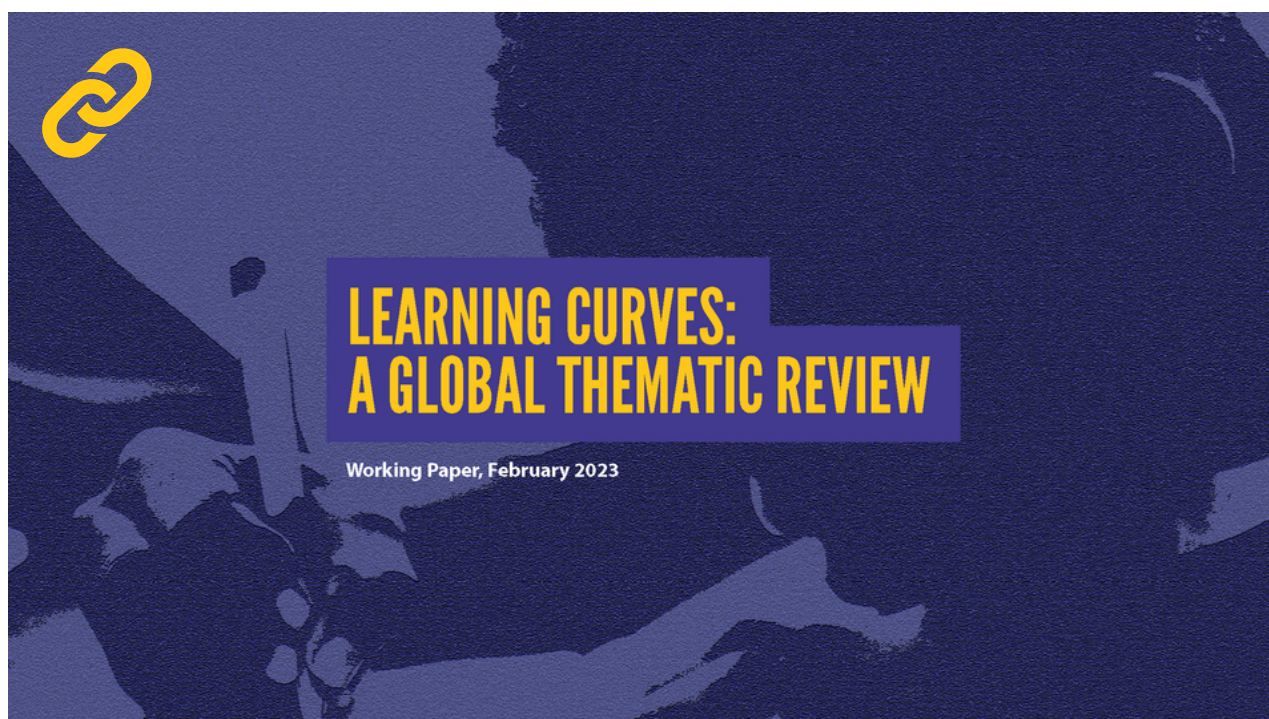
**Decades of research have shown how important it is for children to grow up in safe, loving families rather than in institutions. For children to thrive, they need more than basic health, nutrition and hygiene: they also need individualised, nurturing care from a trusted adult – care that institutions, by their very nature, cannot provide.**

The right of all children to live with their families is enshrined in a number of treaties, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)<sup>1</sup>, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).<sup>2</sup>

Every child also has the right to an education: education plays a key role in children’s development and, in a wider context, in promoting democracy, peace, development and economic growth. Its importance is set out in the CRC, as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)<sup>3</sup>, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).<sup>4</sup>

Despite this, an estimated 5.4 million children worldwide live in institutions<sup>5</sup>, which cannot meet their needs and neglect their rights<sup>6</sup>. This includes a significant number of educational institutions, which, whilst ostensibly designed to provide access to education, can replicate the institutional norms and practices which evidence has proven can fundamentally harm children.

**Learning Curves: A Global Thematic Review was published by Lumos in 2023. This working paper explores the interconnections between the institutionalisation of children, and education.**



# **LUMOS'S POSITION ON RESIDENTIAL EDUCATION**

**Decades of research have shown how important it is for children to grow up in safe, loving families rather than in institutions. For children to thrive, they need more than basic health, nutrition and hygiene: they also need individualised, nurturing care from a trusted adult – care that institutions, by their very nature, cannot provide.**

The evidence included in the thematic review takes a global view of residential education but does not specifically discuss the effects of elite residential education on children's development, for which there is a small evidence base.

In many instances, processes of colonisation led to residential education being exported and used to educate oppressed populations, and to impose colonial values and norms. Today, in some contexts, residential education settings continue to cause harm to and violate the rights of children.

This Thematic Review recognises this legacy while exploring broader issues around residential education, to achieve a global picture.

## **KEY FINDINGS OF THE GLOBAL THEMATIC REVIEW**

### **Drivers of Admissions to Residential Care and Residential Education Settings**

The study identified four major drivers of admission to residential education settings:

- 1. A lack of non-residential options, or a desire to access opportunities that residential services can bring.**
- 2. Poverty.**
- 3. A lack of accessible, inclusive services for children with special educational needs or disabilities**
- 4. Discriminatory treatment of marginalised or disadvantaged communities.**

Other factors included abuse, neglect, behavioural issues, and conflict with the law.



# The Impact of Residential Institutions on Children's Education and Lives

## 1. School attendance and access to education

Both residential education and residential care settings were found to enable access to education and learning opportunities. However, in some cases children were found to be missing out on education entirely; this was particularly the case for children with disabilities or those whose behaviour posed challenges.

## 2. Academic progress and relationships in school

Both residential education and residential care settings were found to enable access to education and learning opportunities. However, in some cases children were found to be missing out on education entirely; this was particularly the case for children with disabilities or those whose behaviour posed challenges.

## 3. Health and well-being outcomes

Studies in the literature review identified both positive and negative outcomes for physical health and mental and socio-emotional well-being for children in residential education. Studies identified that disrupted family relationships and dislocation of children from their home communities could have an adverse impact on children's sense of identity, emotional development and mental health. These harms to children's health and wellbeing have been well documented in decades of research into the impact of institutionalisation.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

## 4. Safety for children in residential education settings

The literature identified only negative safety and harm-related outcomes, including bullying among children, increased rates of child labour, physical, sexual and verbal abuse, and other forms of violence.

These are well recognised issues in residential care settings; for example the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children has found that violence is prevalent in many institutional care settings around the world<sup>10</sup>. Lumos's own research into institution-related trafficking has found that children living in institutions are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation<sup>11</sup>.

## How Policy and Practice can Unlock Children's Rights to Both Education and a Family Life

- 1. A legal and regulatory framework is vital to ensure all children can access non-residential education.**
- 2. A multisectoral "whole system" approach, delivered at all levels between government and families, can help address the broad range of social and educational drivers of residential admissions.**

# LUMOS'S POSITION ON RESIDENTIAL EDUCATION

- In many parts of the world, families are having to choose between their child's fundamental rights: the right to access education, and the right to a family life.
- Access to community-based, inclusive, high-quality education is key to successful care reform.
- Socio-economic vulnerability increases the risk of unnecessary separation of children and families, and drives entry into residential education settings.
- Being in residential education can and does harm children's health, wellbeing, and development, as it does in residential care institutions.
- Understanding and addressing norms, attitudes, and practices is a key lever for change.
- Reform processes should involve both the social care and education sectors, with joint planning and collaboration.
- Multi-sector-level interventions are a good way of enabling effective transfer of resources from residential to non-residential services, and between sectors when needed.
- Funders play a key role in enabling care reform.
- There is currently a lack of good-quality research into the relationship between education and residential care on a global scale.
- There is also a lack of data on the comparative educational outcomes (and costs) for a child in fully inclusive, local education and a child in residential education.
- The developmental harm caused by residential education cannot be effectively mitigated, either by efforts to address specific aspects of institutional care, or improve children's outcomes in other ways.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## For Civil Society: Education Sector

- **Build and maintain strong working relationships with colleagues in the care reform sector. Ensure that children’s right to family life is not seen as secondary to their right to access quality, inclusive education.**

This might include:

- Considering the role of residential education in the organisation’s work.
  - Adapting an organisation’s approach to ensure that children’s rights to education and family life are both recognised and upheld.
  - Raising awareness amongst staff so that they have an increased understanding of care reform and its relevance to education.
  - Becoming involved in initiatives promoting care reform, and involve colleagues from the care reform sector in education initiatives where possible
- **Ensure that the provision of high-quality and inclusive education within geographic reach of a child’s family is a key priority area when working to ensure access to education for all.**

This might include:

- Work with teams in-country to understand how to remove the barriers that impede access to quality, community-based inclusive education.
  - Collect and promote examples of good practice in this area in the contexts in which you work, and find opportunities to highlight and promote these approaches.
  - Work with children and young people with disabilities, and their carers to understand the barriers that reduce access to quality, community-based education.
- **Ensure that children living in remote rural areas can access education within easy reach of their family.**

This might include:

- Work with teams in-country to understand the barriers that reduce access to quality, community-based education.
  - Collect and promote examples of good practice in this area in the contexts in which you work, and find opportunities to highlight and promote these approaches.
  - Work with children and young people living in remote areas of otherwise challenging geographies, and their carers, to understand more about the barriers to education within easy reach of family for this cohort of young people.
- **Use existing relationships with key decision-makers in the education sector on a national, regional, and global level to promote a more complete understanding of the linkages between institutionalisation and education and the importance of ensuring that children’s right to education and their right to family life are both being met.**

## For Civil Society: Care Reform Sector

- **Build and maintain strong working relationships with colleagues in the education sector. Ensure that stakeholders understand the connection between care reform and access to education, and work together to improve access to community-based, non-residential education.**
- **Ensure that access to education, including community-based quality inclusive education for children with disabilities, is a key priority area when engaging with governments on care reform reform.**

## For National and Local Governments

- **Governments should ensure that efforts to progress both care reform and access to inclusive, quality education are mutually reinforcing. Care reform should take into account common drivers and issues whilst at the same time understanding context-specific factors.**
- **Undertake care reform holistically, recognising that lack of access to education is a key driver of institutionalisation and ensuring the existence of alternative educational options.**
- **Prioritise support for families, including developing appropriate strategies to directly address family poverty and economic well-being and appropriate support for families caring for children with disabilities.**
- **Involve children and young people as key stakeholders in the care reform process, including its design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.**
- **Ensure the necessary legislation, policy, and regulations are in place to enable care reform, in particular the development and strengthening of family and community-based services.**
- **Assess the financial, human, and material resources tied up in the system of residential services. Ensure these are ringfenced and transferred towards community and family-based alternatives as part of care reform.**
- **Plan and implement a targeted communications strategy to address norms, attitudes, and practices within communities, service providers and gatekeepers, which influence decisions to place children in residential services and which may reflect discrimination towards marginalised groups.**
- **Strengthen education systems, including progressing inclusive education:**
  - **Build and sustain strong working relationships between departments responsible for education and welfare provision, including social protection.**
  - **Ensure high-quality, community-based, non-residential inclusive education is available to all children.**
  - **Develop policy and practice frameworks which recognise the links between education and institutionalisation within the development of inclusive education systems.**

## For Private Donors and Funders

- **Implement policies/guidelines which underline a commitment to care reform and are designed to keep families together and oppose the institutionalisation of children.**
- **Ensure that resources are given and used to support sustainable care transformation and rights-based child protection interventions grounded in evidence.**
- **Ensure donations to educational projects and interventions do not contribute to the perpetuation of institutional care of children, that they prioritise quality, inclusive community-based education, and facilitate better collaboration between the education and care reform sectors.**

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