

1

Children in Institutions

The Global Picture



The global picture of children in institutions

There are millions of children living in institutions worldwide. One estimate puts the total at up to **eight million**¹ - though, given gaps in global statistics and indications that there are many unregistered children's homes, the true figure may well be much higher.²



The orphan myth

We assume these institutions, or 'orphanages', are there to support orphans, **but over 80% of the children have a living parent**.³ The majority could be reunited with their families given the right support.

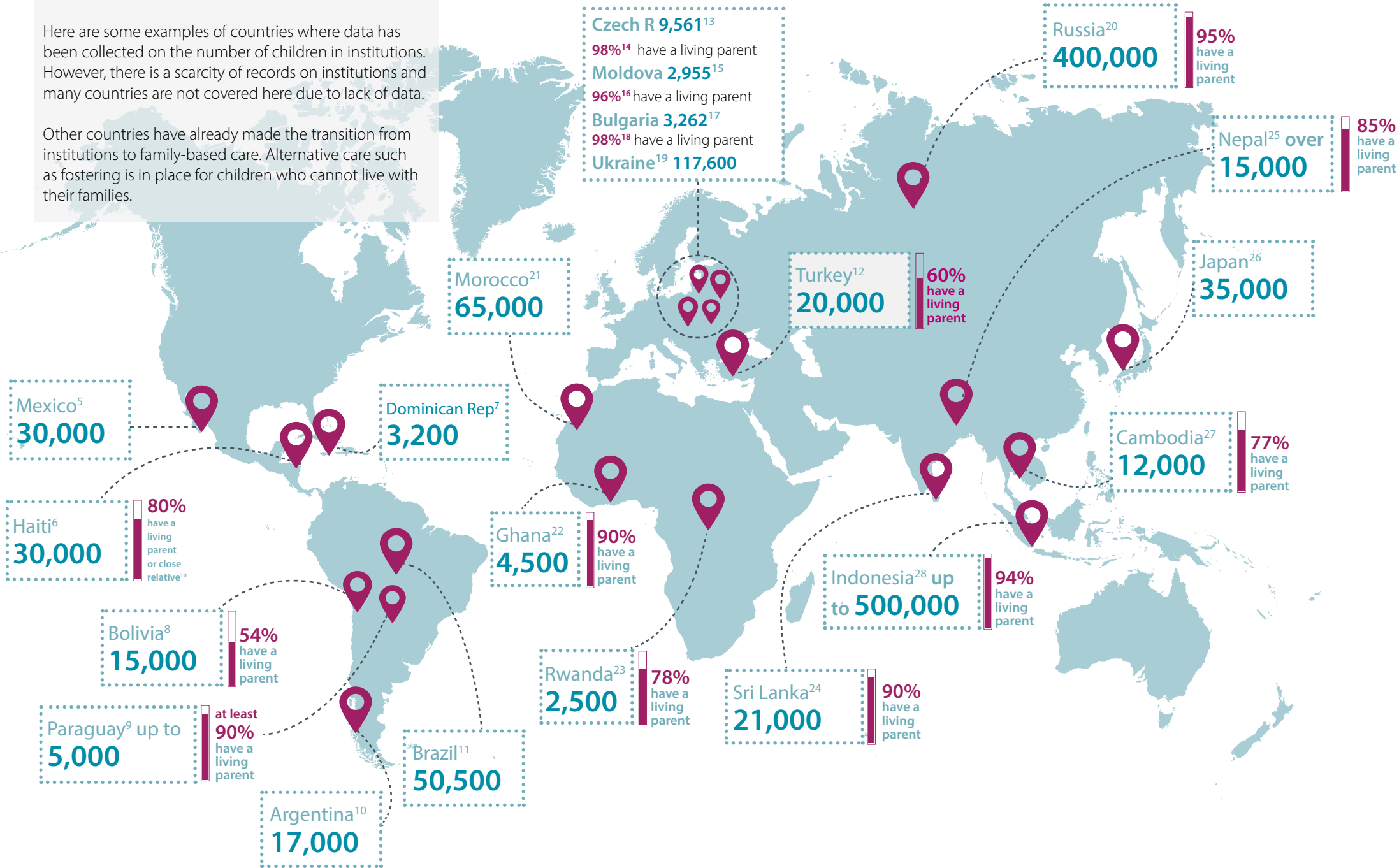
Although some institutions are well-resourced with dedicated staff, they cannot replace a family. **Eighty years of research has shown the negative impact of institutionalisation on children's health, development and life chances.**⁴

1. Children in Institutions: The Global Picture

Children in institutions: countries with data

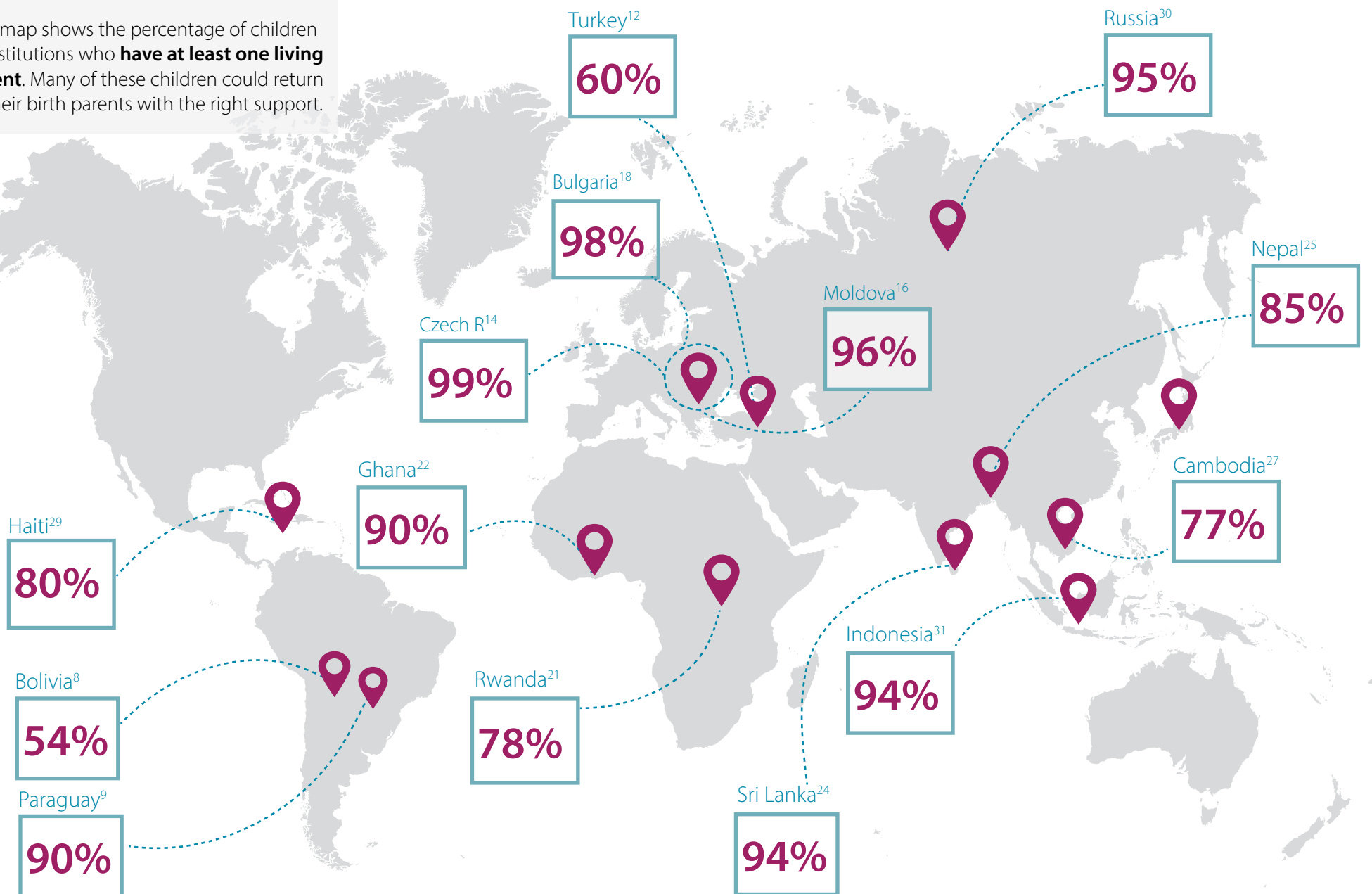
Here are some examples of countries where data has been collected on the number of children in institutions. However, there is a scarcity of records on institutions and many countries are not covered here due to lack of data.

Other countries have already made the transition from institutions to family-based care. Alternative care such as fostering is in place for children who cannot live with their families.



Dispelling the Orphan Myth

This map shows the percentage of children in institutions who **have at least one living parent**. Many of these children could return to their birth parents with the right support.



POVERTY

Poverty is recognised as the main driver of child institutionalisation in most countries.³² Parents who cannot afford to feed, clothe or send a child to school have little choice.

52% of children in institutions in Sierra Leone were there due to poverty.³³

In a study of maternity hospitals in Europe, staff in 75% of hospitals stated poverty as a possible cause of abandonment.³⁴

In China, babies are often abandoned because their parents cannot afford healthcare for them.³⁵

DISABILITY, LEARNING DIFFICULTY, ILLNESS

Children with disabilities are at a high risk of institutionalisation.³⁶ This is often because families do not have access to the right support services³⁷ or because there is no inclusive education in the local area.

Social attitudes may also have a negative impact.

In some countries parents are encouraged to place babies with disabilities in institutions.³⁸ In others children with disabilities are considered unlucky or cursed.³⁹

45% of children in Russian institutions have a disability.⁴⁰

DISCRIMINATION

In Europe, Roma children with no disabilities are often **incorrectly placed in remedial 'special schools'** for mentally disabled children, according to a European Commission report.⁴¹

90% of the 11 million 'abandoned or orphaned' children in India are girls.⁴²

RECRUITMENT, CHILD TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION

In some countries poor parents are offered money to give up their children. **Corrupt institutions and unethical adoption agencies profit from the children through donations to their orphanage or through child trafficking.**⁴³

In Malawi, over 50% of institutions reported directly 'recruiting' children by encouraging parents to place their children there.⁴⁴

CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Some children cannot live with their parents due to child abuse or neglect. However, institutions also have a poor reputation in these areas.⁴⁵ These children need family-based alternative care which is protective and carefully monitored.

In many countries with institutions a relatively small proportion of the children are placed due to abuse or neglect, compared with other reasons.⁴⁶

In a survey of 11 European countries, 14% of children were admitted due to abuse or neglect.⁴⁷

THE SOLUTION

Institutionalisation of children is not a necessity – it is a choice. There are cost-effective alternatives that allow children to live in a protective family environment.

1

PREVENTING SEPARATION

Services in the community can prevent family separation and stem the flow of children into institutions.

Examples include schools, healthcare, financial and legal support, services for parents and children with disabilities, parenting guidance, child protection and social protection, among many others.⁴⁸

Fortunately, evidence suggests it is much cheaper to support a family with social services than to provide for a child in an institution.⁴⁹

2

REUNITING FAMILIES

80% of children in institutions have at least one living parent and reasons for separation include poverty, disability, access to education and emergencies.⁵⁰ Many children can return to live with their birth families when the right community-based services have been put in place. However, it is critical to carefully prepare institutionalised children for the move and to ensure that each child goes to a protective environment that is in their best interests.

3

ALTERNATIVE CARE

Where it is not possible to return to their birth family (including cases of abuse or neglect), children can live in family-based alternative care with relatives, foster families or adoptive parents.⁵¹ **All these potential caregivers must be carefully screened, trained and monitored to ensure the placement is protective and in the best interests of the child.** Small group homes are sometimes necessary for a minority of older children.

THE TRANSITION

Many countries have already set up systems using a family-based model like this. Lumos provides experience and support for governments to divert resources into higher quality and more cost effective care, enabling children to live with a family where they feel loved and needed.

Read more: www.warelumos.org/the-solution

Further reading:

[Keeping children out of harmful institutions \(Save the Children, 2009\)](#)

[Children, Orphanages and Families: A summary of research to help guide faith-based action \(Faith to Action Initiative, 2014\)](#)

[Global Facts about Orphanages \(Better Care Network, 2009\)](#)

[Harvard Centre on the Developing Child](#)

[Video from Neil Boothby, US Government's Special Advisor on Children in Adversity](#)

[Lumos website](#)

References:

1 The number of residential institutions and the number of children living in them is unknown. Estimates range from 'more than 2 million' (UNICEF, *Progress for Children: A Report Card on Child Protection Number 8, 2009*) to 8 million (Cited in: Pinheiro, P., *World Report on Violence against Children*, UNICEF, New York, 2006). These figures are often reported as underestimates, due to lack of data from many countries and the large proportion of unregistered institutions.

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3 Ibid. Csáky, 2009, p vii.

4 Berens, A., Nelson, C., *The science of early adversity: is there a role for large institutions in the care of vulnerable children?*, The Lancet, 2015.

5 There were 29,310 children in 703 institutions in 2007. However, a better monitoring system for numbers and

conditions in institutions was recommended by the report which provided this data.

RELAF and SOS Children's Villages International, *Informe Latinoamericano Situación de la niñez sin cuidado parental o en riesgo de perderlo en América Latina: Contextos, Causas y Respuestas*, 2010, pp.68-72.

See also the English summary: RELAF and SOS Children's Villages International, *Latin American Paper, Children and adolescents without parental care in Latin America: Contexts, causes and consequences of being deprived of the right to family and community life*, 2010, p16.

6 UNICEF *Annual Report 2012* for Haiti, TACRO, 2012, p3.

7 This figure only includes children under 15 years. See note 5: RELAF, 2010.

8 UNICEF, *Key Information on Child Protection*, UNICEF Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office, 2007, p2.

9 The 2002 census reported that there were 5,000 children living in 'collective homes' including institutions. A UNICEF report in 2006 gave 'orphanhood' as the main reason for 10% of children being placed in institutions in Paraguay. However, this could include those with one living parent or social orphans. See note 5: RELAF, 2010.

10 17,063 children in 642 institutions. Data from UNICEF 2005 'Deprived of freedom' cited in: RELAF 2010, English summary, p16.

11 See note 5: RELAF, 2010.

12 UNICEF, 'Children First: Reuniting children with their Families', http://www.unicef.org/turkey/dn_2006/cp42.html [accessed 30 Oct 2014]

13 This is a Lumos calculation based on official statistics from Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic published in 2014. Available at: www.uiv.cz www.mpsv.cz and www.uzis.cz.

14 This is an estimate based on data from 4,314 children. *Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic, Education System Statistical Yearbooks for the year 2014/2015*, Prague, 2015.

15 This is a Lumos calculation based on information provided by the Moldovan Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health for the end of the year 2014.

16 This is an estimate based on data from a sample of 10 institutions across Moldova. Moldovan Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Lumos, *Strategic Review of the system of child protection in the Republic of Moldova*, 2014.

17 Government of Bulgaria, *Fourth monitoring report for the*

implementation of the National Action plan, 2014.

18 Cited in: National network for children, *Academy for journalists*, 2014. Available at: www.nmd.bg

19 - UNICEF & Ukraine Presidential Ombudsman Office, Report of the *Ukrainian President's Commissioner for the Children's Rights*, 2013.

20 Altshuler, B., et al., *Alternative Report 2013 on children's rights by a Coalition of Russian NGOs*, 2013.

21 Up from 38,000 in 2001. UNICEF, Child Rights Statistics: Morocco (Annex), 2008.

22 Study by the Social Welfare Department of Ghana, 2009, cited in: IRIN News, 'West Africa: Protecting children from orphan-dealers' 27 May 2009.

23 3,323 children and young adults were reported as living in institutions in 2012, though 25.9% were aged over 18. Hope and Homes, *National Survey of Institutions for Children in Rwanda*, 2012, p9.

24 UNICEF estimates from 2007: 19,000 children had living parents out of approximately 21,100 children in institutions. UNICEF, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Report on Voluntary Residential Institutions for Children in Sri Lanka: Statistical Analysis*, 2007, p17.

25 Nepal Child Welfare Board, 2013.

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27 Exact figures: 11,945, 23% orphans, from: UNICEF, *Residential Care in Cambodia*.

28 Numbers are not known, but estimated between 225,750 and 516,600. DEPSOS, Save the Children and UNICEF, *Someone that Matters: The quality of care in childcare institutions in Indonesia*, Save the Children UK, 2007, p19.

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30 See note 20: Altshuler, B., et al., 2013.

31 UNICEF & Terre des Hommes, *Adopting the rights of the child: A study on intercountry adoption and its influence on child protection in Nepal*, 2008.

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Children Out of Harmful Institutions, Save the Children, 2009, p20.

34 The University of Nottingham, *Child Abandonment and its Prevention in Europe, The European Commission's Daphne Programme*, 2012, p11.

35 BBC, 'China baby hatch suspended after hundreds abandoned', BBC News, 2014.

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39 Chiwaula, L., Dobson, R., Elsley, S., *Drumming together for change: A child's right to quality care in Sub-Saharan Africa*, SOS Children's Villages International, CELCIS, University of Malawi, 2014.

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42 The Guardian, 'From India with Love', 2007, cited in Csaky, C., *Keeping Children out of Harmful Institutions*, Save the Children, 2009.

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45 See note 2: Csáky, 2009, p5.

46 Browne, K., *The risk of harm to young children in institutional care*, Save the Children, 2009.

47 Ibid. Browne, 2009.

48 See note 2: Csáky, 2009.

49 Carter, R., *Family Matters: A study of institutional childcare in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, Everychild, 2005.

50 See note 2: Csáky, 2009.

51 UN General Assembly, Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 24 February 2010, A/RES/64/142. For more information on the implementation of the UN guidelines, see: Cantwell, N., Davidson, J., Elsley, S., Milligan, I., & Quinn, N., Moving forward: implementing the United