

## MEDIA RELEASE:

### An estimated 35 million children without parental care in Africa need immediate strengthened protection systems and quality care services

**Addis Ababa, November 08, 2023.** The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC/the Committee), in collaboration with African Union Member States, partner organizations, children and young people, launches the first of its kind Continental Study on Children Without Parental Care (CWPC) in Africa. The study, conducted from 2020 to 2022, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, covered over 43 countries in the five regions of Africa. Primary and secondary data collection methods were utilized in various Government entities, organizations, leading academicians, child rights advocacy groups, children and young people.

#### Some of the findings include:

- There are an estimated 35 million children without parental care in Africa
- These children are routinely exposed to various forms of violence including sexual, forced labour, trafficking, unprecedented separation from parents and family or flee, natural man-made disasters, getting in contact with the law, substance and drug abuse, mental health issues, limited access to education, and healthcare
- The study identified various causes and drivers for the situations of CWPC including war and conflicts, climate change and natural disasters, pandemics, poverty, loss of parents due to death, child trafficking, socio-economic and cultural factors.
- The policy frameworks of a considerable number of African countries do not explicitly include provisions for the protection and care of CWPC. More than 70% of countries in various regions of Africa lack explicit comprehensive child protection policy frameworks and guidance. (For example, in East and West Africa region, up to 80% of the countries lack explicit policies on CWPC. The majority of Southern African countries (70%) lack comprehensive CWPC policies and 87.5% of the countries in Central Africa region lack policies, strategies, and action plans to address protection issues for CWPC.)

- To address the vulnerabilities of CWPC, Governments and various implementing partners, have been undertaking programmes which include: the prevention of family separation through community empowerment, the provision of care and protection services, advocacy for child rights, reintegration and reunification of children back into families of origin, strengthening community structures and systems, and the care systems reforms to ensure adherence to international and continental policies and standards. The most commonly practiced alternative care options for CWPC across the five African regions include kinship care, foster care, kafalah, residential care and institutional care. The availability of these options varies by region.
- The study reported that, in the context of Africa, with appropriate regulatory provisions and support, kinship care option provides significant opportunity to ensure that children remain within family setting when they encounter the risk of loss of parental care or family separation.
- The study captured the perspectives of children regarding, among others, their health, education, and nutrition in different settings including Governmental, private, faith-based, community-based and street situations. Children who are in alternative care setting, provided positive feedback regarding their health and access to education while in contrast, children in streets situation encountered poor health and access to education. From the children in alternative care setting, 43% reported having some fear of losing their caregivers, while most of them worry about what the future holds for them when they turn 18. As many as 96% of children in alternative care expressed gratitude for receiving care, while many children also felt abandoned and unwanted.

#### **The study report recommends:**

- African regions should integrate CWPC into their discussions and encourage State Parties to consider the provision of various alternative care options,
- State Parties should include CWPC in national statistical databases or periodic studies such as demographic health surveys (DHS), multi-indicator cluster surveys (MICS) and national household surveys.
- A framework should be developed to assist Member States of the African Union in incorporating CWPC issues in their policy frameworks. A guiding framework should be developed to assist Member States in formulating national-level policies, strategies and actions plans regarding CWPC.
- National policies and legislation should ensure provision of appropriate high-quality care options that meet the needs of CWPC. Policies should ensure the development and implementation of family-based and family-like care settings, with the aim of moving away from institutional care.
- Member states need to develop and implement quality standards for all alternative care options implemented in their countries. This means that

governments should ensure the availability of suitable care options, effective gatekeeping mechanisms, case management structures and systems, and comprehensive national information management systems focused on CWPC.

- State parties should enhance child protection and safeguarding systems to ensure that all children under the various care options are protected from all forms of abuse and neglect. This also calls for, among other measures, enhancing community-based structures and systems that monitor and facilitate appropriate case management, reporting and response mechanisms in collaboration with local governments.
- Regarding, programmatic responses to the issues facing CWPC, African regions are encouraged to gain a well-informed understanding of CWPC issues through the promotion of regional learning and information-sharing. A key focus should be on social protection measures that address the root causes and the drivers of CWPC. African regions should identify best practices in their member states and adopt these as common benchmarks.
- State Parties should establish systems for licensing and quality inspection of alternative care provision in all settings to ensure quality standards and the wellbeing of the children.

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### Note to Editors:

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) is an African Union Organ mandated to monitor the implementation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) as well as promote and protect children's rights in Africa. Following the entry into force of the on November 29, 1999, the Committee was established in July 2001, in accordance with Article 32 of the Charter. To date, the Charter has been ratified by 50 of 55 Member States of the African Union. The mandate of the Committee is derived from Articles 32-45 of the Charter and provides among others to undertake research and studies on children's rights issues.