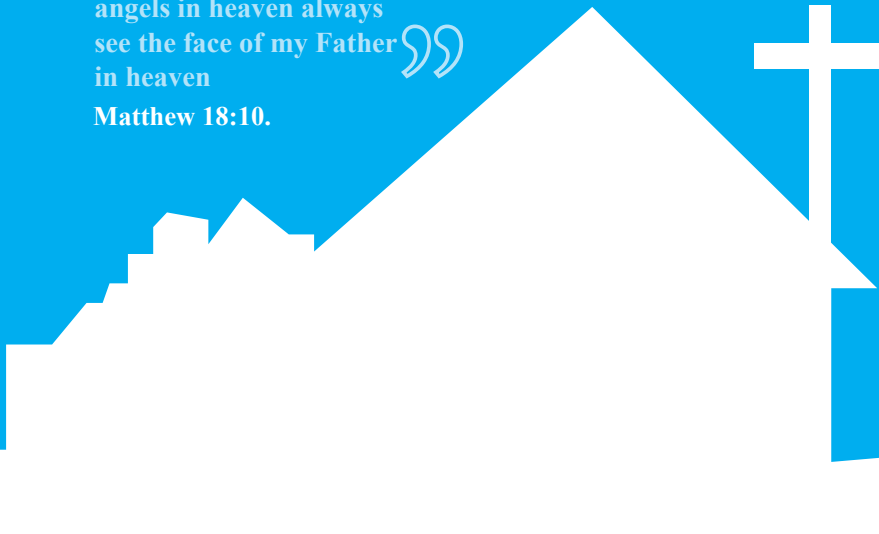




MINISTRY OF GENDER, CULTURE  
AND CHILDREN SERVICES  
STATE DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN SERVICES

“ See that you do not despise  
one of these little ones.  
For I tell you that their  
angels in heaven always  
see the face of my Father  
in heaven ”  
Matthew 18:10.



# Protecting and Safeguarding our Children

Faith for Life

Christians Handbook

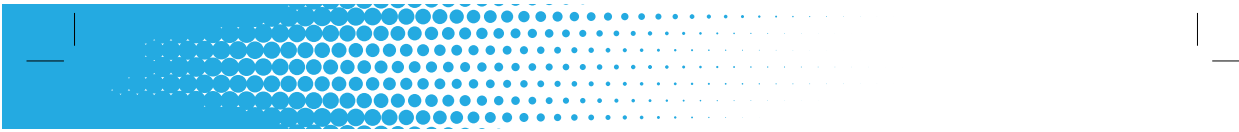


INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL *of* KENYA



for every child

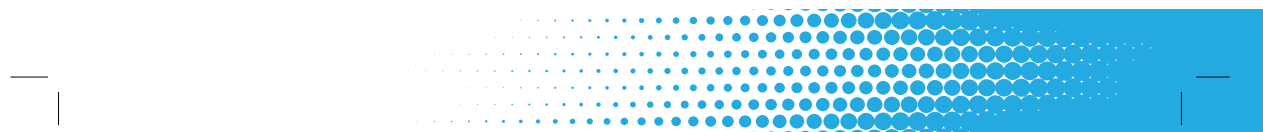


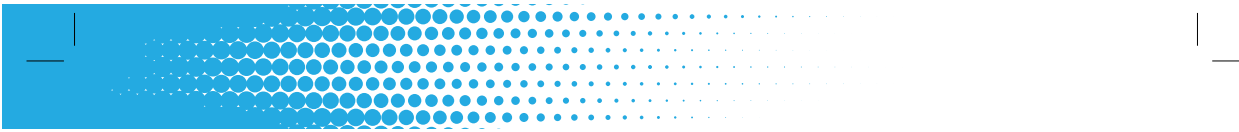


# **Protecting and Safeguarding Our Children**

*Faith for Life*

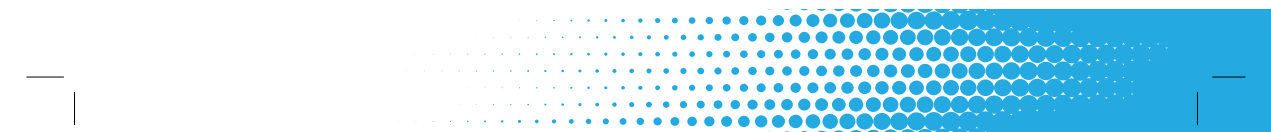
**A Handbook for Faith Leaders in Kenya**





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## FOREWORD

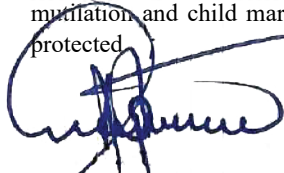
Children are the heartbeat of our nation. They carry our hopes, embody our values, and represent the future of a just and peaceful Kenya. As a government, we have a solemn duty to ensure that every child is nurtured in safety, dignity, and love, free from fear and harm.

The Constitution of Kenya, through Article 53, clearly articulates the rights of children that include the right to protection from abuse, neglect, harmful cultural practices, and all forms of violence. The enactment of the Children Act (2022) was a bold step toward aligning our national framework with international commitments, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Yet, laws alone are not enough. It takes collective moral courage and partnership across all sectors of society to make child protection a lived reality. In this effort, faith communities are indispensable allies. Religious leaders and places of worship are not only spiritual anchors but also moral compasses in our communities. They influence attitudes, guide behaviour, and can powerfully shift social norms that perpetuate abuse and silence.

This *Protecting and Safeguarding our Children, Faith for Life Handbook*, developed by the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK), is both timely and transformative. It provides information on child protection that is intended to advance, protect, and uphold children's rights against abuse, and exploitation. It provides practical guidance supported by references from the holy scriptures and aligned with national and international legal standards, to create child-safe spaces in all spheres of worship and community life.

As the ministry responsible for gender and child welfare, we are proud to support this initiative. We reaffirm our commitment to working hand-in-hand with faith actors, civil society, and all stakeholders to end violence against children, eliminate harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, and build communities where every child is valued, heard, and protected.



**Ms. Hanna Wendot Cheptumo**  
Cabinet Secretary  
Ministry of Gender, Culture and Children Services  
Republic of Kenya



## INCEPTION

Children are at the very heart of UNICEF’s mission and continue to drive our mandate. The protection of children’s rights is not only upheld by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – the most widely accepted human rights treaty in history, to which the Government of Kenya is a signatory – but is also a moral obligation that requires the collective effort of all sectors of society.

Since Kenya signed the CRC in 1990, the government has achieved significant milestones in advancing and safeguarding the rights of children. Landmark legal and policy measures have been put in place, including Article 53 of the Constitution and the enactment of the Children Act of 2022. Notably, the prevalence of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation has declined considerably, dropping from 38 percent in 1998 to 15 percent in 2022 (KDHS, 2022). Despite these achievements, many children continue to face serious protection issues such as child marriage, sexual and gender-based violence, neglect, and exploitation. These challenges persist even in environments that should be safe havens – homes, schools, and places of worship within the community.

UNICEF is privileged to work in partnership with both the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya and the State Department for Children Services. These institutions are committed to addressing and ultimately eliminating harmful social norms like child marriage and female genital mutilation, which threaten the safety and well-being of children throughout Kenya. This collaboration highlights the vital importance of a united approach in safeguarding children’s rights and promoting their well-being within Kenyan society.

As we look ahead, let us reaffirm our shared responsibility to nurture, protect, and empower every child in Kenya. By standing together – across faiths, communities, and sectors – we can break the cycle of harmful traditions and ensure that every child grows up in an environment of dignity, respect, and opportunity. The journey is ongoing, but with unwavering dedication and collective action, we can transform our vision for children into a lasting reality.



Dr. Shaheen Nilofer  
Representative  
UNICEF Kenya



## FOCUS OF THE PUBLICATION

Children are a sacred trust and a blessing from God. Their safety, dignity, and well-being are a shared responsibility of families, faith communities, and society at large. The *Protecting and Safeguarding our Children, Faith for Life Handbook* is, therefore, a vital tool in strengthening the role of religious leaders and institutions in upholding the rights and protection of children in Kenya.

This handbook is a UNICEF-supported publication, reflecting sustained support for this initiative and building on years of collaboration among faith communities, UNICEF and the Government of Kenya. It provides scripturally grounded guidance aligned with national and international child protection frameworks, affirming that protecting children from abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence, and harmful practices is both a legal obligation and a divine calling across all faiths.

The initiative recognises that faith leaders are uniquely positioned to influence social norms, challenge harmful beliefs, and foster values of compassion, equality, and justice. By using messages anchored in the holy scriptures, this handbook empowers religious leaders to speak out and act boldly against practices that endanger children, such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, child pregnancy, neglect and violence, and to promote positive parenting, family-based care, inclusion of vulnerable children, and the registration of every child at birth.

We appreciate the tireless efforts of our partners, the State Department for Children Services and UNICEF, whose collaboration and technical input have made this work possible. We also extend our gratitude to faith leaders who contributed to the review and validation of this edition.

As the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya, we reaffirm our commitment to creating safe and nurturing environments for all children. We call upon faith leaders to use this handbook as a guide in sermons, teachings, and community programmes to ensure that every child grows up protected, valued, and given the opportunity to thrive.

May this handbook inspire us all to translate our faith into action by building families, congregations, and communities where every child is safe, loved, respected and protected.



**Sheikh Abdullahi Salat**  
Chairperson  
Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK)



## ACRONYMS

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
CBO	Community-based Organisation
CCI	Charitable children's institution
CSAM	Child sexual abuse material
ECD	Early Childhood Development
F4L	Faith for Life
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender-based violence
GoK	Government of Kenya
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IGM	Intersex genital mutilation
IRCK	Inter-Religious Council of Kenya
KDHS	Kenya Demographic and Health Survey
OCSEA	Online child sexual exploitation and abuse
SDCS	State Department for Children Services
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TWG	Technical Working Group
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAC	Violence against children
WHO	World Health Organisation



## ABOUT THIS MANUAL

The *Protecting and Safeguarding our Children, Faith for Life Handbook* has essential information that religious leaders and faith communities need to intervene on child protection. It has essential scriptural references and support that emphasise interventions on:

- i. Overview of Child Protection
- ii. Violence Against Children
- iii. Harmful Practices
- iv. Positive Parenting
- v. Family-based Care
- vi. Birth Registration and Certification
- vii. Inclusion of Vulnerable Children

The Handbook equips religious leaders and faith communities with essential knowledge and guidance to protect children and promote their well-being. It supports and complements the efforts of the Government of Kenya, UNICEF and other actors in strengthening community and family-based child protection systems. Faith communities are urged to embrace these teachings to help them address child protection challenges within their communities.



## **CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF CHILD PROTECTION**

### **Introduction**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines a child as any human being below the age of 18 years. Traditionally, Kenyan communities defined childhood according to physical development or social milestones. For girls, childhood ended at puberty, while for boys, it ended at the rite of passage, such as initiation/circumcision. Over time, however, Kenya's legal and policy frameworks have aligned with international standards, recognising that childhood extends to all persons under the age of 18, irrespective of culture or gender.

Child protection refers to measures and structures that protect children from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect, and other forms of harmful practices. Unhealthy practices are normalised discriminatory actions committed regularly over such long periods that societies begin to consider them acceptable. Equally, children need to be protected from unnecessary family separation and supported to grow up in family environments.

The primary goal of child protection is to ensure that all children are safe and free from all forms of violence. It is the responsibility of parents, caregivers, teachers, religious leaders, community members, organisations, civic leaders, and governments to ensure that children are protected from harm and their rights are respected.

Kenya has taken important steps to strengthen the protection of its children. The Children Act (Cap 141) gave full effect to Article 53 of the Constitution. The Act enshrines the principle of the best interests of the child as the guiding consideration in every decision or action affecting a child. It provides a framework for children's care and protection through prioritising family-based care instead of institutionalisation, clarifying parental responsibility, responding to emerging concerns such as online abuse, child trafficking, radicalisation, and other risks.

This legal foundation aligns Kenya with regional and international standards and affirms the State's commitment to protect every child, everywhere, at all times.

### **Rationale of child protection**

Child protection seeks to create a safe environment that promotes the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being of every child. It is both a human rights obligation and a moral imperative shared by families, communities, faith institutions, and the Government. All major faiths uphold the sanctity of life and the duty to care for the vulnerable, reminding us that protecting children is not only good governance but also an act of faith. Faith-based organisations, with their moral influence and reach, play a vital role in shaping values, preventing harm, and nurturing safe families and communities.



### Correct practices to be promoted

- I. Create safe and welcoming spaces for children in homes, schools and places of worship.
- II. Speak openly about child protection during sermons, teachings, and community gatherings to raise awareness.
- III. Encourage parents and caregivers to spend time with their children and guide them with love and positive discipline.
- IV. Be alert and act quickly when a child is in danger or shows signs of abuse.
- V. Work together with local leaders and child protection officers to prevent harm and support affected children.

### Key messages

- I. Every child deserves to be safe at home, in school and within the community.
- II. Protecting children is everyone's duty. Parents, faith leaders, community members and the Government must all play their part.
- III. Children should be listened to and respected, and their opinions considered in decisions that affect them.
- IV. Any form of child abuse must be reported immediately to the police, chief, children officers, or by calling the 116 toll-free helpline.

### Supportive scriptural references

- **Proverbs 22:6:** *“Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”*
- **Mark 9:37:** *“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”*
- **Ephesians 6:4:** *“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”*
- **Mark 9:42:** *“If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.”*



## CHAPTER TWO: VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

### Introduction

Violence against children refers to any form of physical, emotional, sexual or psychological harm inflicted on a child. It can happen in homes, places of worship, schools, communities, online or institutions and it can include acts of commission (things done to a child) or omission (things not done to protect or care for a child). It can be physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and exploitation, neglect or deliberate deprivation. Approximately 75% of the world's children experience violence. According to the Violence Against Children (VAC) Survey of 2019, about one in every two children experiences some form of violence in Kenya. Physical violence is the most common for both boys and girls while sexual violence is more common among girls. Nearly two out of five 18 to 24-year old females (38.8%) and over half of 18 to 24-year old males (51.9%) experienced physical violence before 18. Nearly three in ten females (28.9%) and two in five males (37.9%) experienced physical violence by a parent or other adult relative in childhood.

### Types of violence


1. **Physical violence** includes beating, slapping, pushing, shaking, pinching, punching, kicking, beating with an object, corporal punishment and threatening someone with a knife, gun, or other weapon.
2. **Sexual violence** is any sexual activity done or attempted by an adult or a child on another child.
3. **Child online abuse** encompasses a wide range of harmful behaviours and interactions facilitated partly or entirely by digital, the Internet and communication technologies. It can be sexual or non-sexual.
4. **Child marriage** is a union of two in which one or both are younger than 18.
5. **Female genital mutilation** comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of female genitalia or any other injury to the female genital organs or any harmful procedure to the female genitalia for non-medical reasons.
6. **Emotional violence** is the regular and deliberate use of a range of words and non-physical actions to manipulate, hurt, weaken, or frighten a person mentally and emotionally, and/or distort, confuse, or influence a person's thoughts and actions within their everyday lives, changing their sense of self and harming their wellbeing.

### Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA)

Refers to all child sexual abuse crimes that are committed using information communication technology (ICT) or the Internet. Sexual abuse and exploitation can either happen online or offline with the help of the Internet.

In Kenya, internet usage among children has grown significantly. For example, about 67% of children aged 12 to 17 were internet users in a 2022 UNICEF survey. According to the Kenya Housing Survey of 2023/24, around 58.6% of youth aged 18-34 used the Internet. The national usage rate stands at about 35%. Digital advancements have granted children rights to education, play, and social interaction, but they have also posed challenges, causing harm and depriving children of their rights.

Many children face online risks such as meeting strangers they first encountered on the Internet or sharing explicit images under pressure or threats. These situations can lead to grooming,



exploitation, and the spread of harmful content. Religious leaders should guide children on safe online behaviour and encourage parents to talk openly with their children about responsible internet use.

#### **Forms of OCSEA**

- Online grooming means establishing an emotional connection with a child through electronic means to manipulate him/her. This may facilitate sexual contact or other forms of child abuse that promote, induce, or normalise sexual activity or behaviour among or with children.
- Sexting is the sharing of sexual, naked, or semi-naked images or videos of oneself or others or sending sexual messages. It is online abuse if a child receives such images.
- Sexual extortion refers to the use of images, video or information of a sexual nature by an adult to blackmail a child to extort sexual favours, money, or other benefits from her/him under the threat of sharing the material.
- Child sexual abuse materials (CSAM) or child pornography includes “any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities, or any representation of the sexual parts of a child primarily for sexual purposes”, as well as the use of a child to create such a representation. CSAM can be broadened to include sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism; online enticement; trafficking of children for sexual purposes; child sexual molestation; misleading domain names or words; and solicited or unsolicited obscene material sent to a child. Children should also have limited usage of mobile phones and the Internet.
- Live-streamed child sexual abuse refers to video communication from a live broadcast stream in which a child or children consciously interact sexually with another person remotely over the Internet without permanently recording the communication.

#### **Other forms of online child abuse**

**Cyberbullying** is harassment within the digital space, which can take place on social media, messaging, gaming platforms and mobile phones. It is a repeated behaviour aimed at scaring, angering or shaming those who are targeted, mainly through blackmailing and extortion

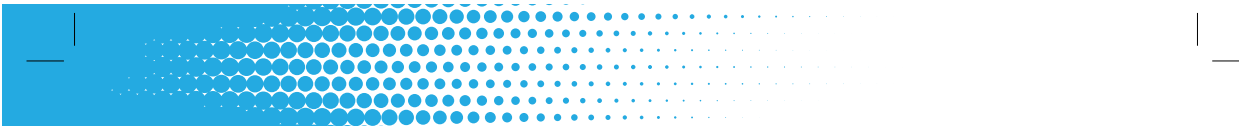
**Cyberstalking** is threatening or otherwise fear-inducing conduct that involves invasion of a person’s relative right to privacy and manifests in repeated actions over time using digital media.

**Exposure to obscene materials** includes any book, magazine, newspaper, film, video, audiotape, printed material, electronic or social media, or other media targeted at or is likely to fall into the hands of children and which consists wholly or mainly of picture stories with or without additional written matter or video films and cassette tapes which contain pictures or writings portraying harmful, morally repugnant or sexually explicit information, such as the commission of crime; acts of violence; or incidents of repulsive or indecent representation or immoral characters.

**Online radicalisation** is a process through which individuals are initiated into adopting extremist beliefs and attitudes through the Internet, social media, and other forms of online communication.

#### **Child pregnancy**

Child pregnancy refers to a girl becoming pregnant before the age of 18. In Kenya, this is a serious child protection issue because children are not physically, emotionally, or socially ready for pregnancy or parenting. Child pregnancy often results from situations where a child has been sexually abused, exploited, coerced, or married early. A child cannot give legal consent to sexual



activity; therefore, most cases of child pregnancy indicate a form of sexual abuse, defilement, or exploitation. Child pregnancy threatens a child's health, future opportunities, and overall wellbeing.

### **Contributing factors to child pregnancy**

Multiple social, cultural, economic, and personal factors can expose girls to high risk. They include:

#### **1. Cultural and social factors**

- Child marriage and harmful cultural norms: In some communities, girls are married early due to tradition, dowry expectations, or family pressure.
- Gender norms and inequality.
- Acceptance of transactional relationships: Girls may be encouraged or pressured to accept gifts or money in exchange for relationships with older men ('sponsors').

#### **1. Family and community factors**

- Poverty and lack of basic needs: Girls may engage in sex to meet needs like food, clothing, or school supplies.
- Weak parental supervision and guidance: Absence, neglect, or poor communication leaves children vulnerable.
- Alcohol and substance abuse: Households or communities with high substance use increase the risk of abuse and unsafe behaviour.

#### **2. Education and information gaps**

- Many children lack age-appropriate information about their bodies, rights, and safety.
- Girls out of school are more exposed to early pregnancy, exploitation, and abuse.

#### **3. Online exposure**

- Online ostentatious presence and peer pressure on social media.
- Exposure to harmful content.

#### **4. Violence and abuse**

- Defilement and sexual violence.
- Incest.
- Coercion and manipulation by older partners.

## Effect of child pregnancy

Child pregnancy has long-term, sometimes life-threatening consequences.

- **Health effects:** Child pregnancy exposes girls to serious health risks, including difficult childbirth, fistula, anaemia, and even death. It also increases the chances of premature birth and infant loss, leads to emotional challenges such as stress and depression, and often limits access to proper antenatal care and support.
- **Educational impact:** Child pregnancy commonly results in dropping out of school or extended absence, reduces opportunities to continue schooling, and limits future employment opportunities and economic independence.
- **Emotional and social impact:** Girls who become pregnant often face stigma, shame, and isolation, lose important friendships and support networks, and experience emotional trauma and reduced self-esteem.
- **Family and community impact:** Child pregnancy places a financial strain on families, causes tension within family relationships, and contributes to ongoing cycles of poverty and early marriage in the community.

## Legal protection

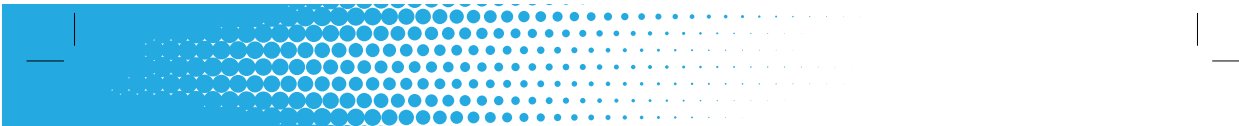
- Sex with anyone under 18 is defilement and child marriage is illegal; no child can give consent.
- Parents, guardians, leaders and community members who allow, support, or fail to report child abuse or marriage can be punished by law.

## Penalties

- Defilement attracts severe sentences up to life imprisonment depending on the child's age.
- Facilitating child marriage or failing to report abuse leads to fines, imprisonment, or legal action.

## Effects of violence against children

Individual level	Family level	Community level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Death</li><li>• Physical injury</li><li>• Health complications</li><li>• Teenage pregnancy</li><li>• School dropout</li><li>• Child marriage</li><li>• Mental health issues (anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts)</li><li>• Drugs and substance use</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dysfunctional families</li><li>• Separation</li><li>• Inter-generational cycle of violence</li><li>• Families with weak social structures and limited adherence to</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase of children with anti-social behaviours.</li><li>• Increase in the rate of crime.</li><li>• Radicalisation leading to adoption of extremist ideologies and behaviours.</li></ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child trauma<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>	<p>positive cultural norms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inter-generational cycle of violence<sup>2</sup>.</li> <li>• Low community development.</li> <li>• Encourages child trafficking.</li> <li>• Increases child labour.</li> </ul>
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**Correct practices to be promoted**

- I. Promote love and non-violent discipline in homes, schools, and places of worship.
- II. Teach parents and caregivers to model positive behaviour and uphold values such as respect, integrity, and responsibility.
- III. Guide children on safe online use and encourage open conversations about internet safety and peer influence.
- IV. Speak out and report any suspected abuse immediately to the police, chief, children’s officer, or through the 116 toll-free helpline.
- V. Encourage leaders, families, and communities to prevent child abuse, exploitation, and child pregnancy through awareness and moral teaching.

**Key messages**

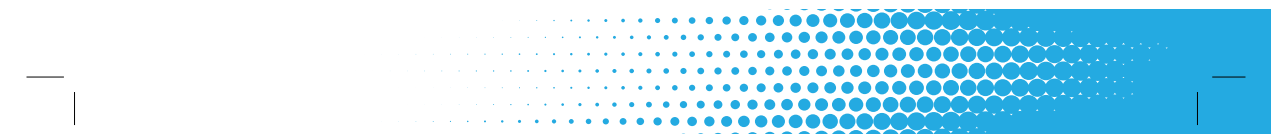
- I. No child should face any form of violence.
- II. All faiths reject violence against children and call for compassion, care and protection.
- III. Violence against children is a crime and can be prevented when families, leaders and communities work together.
- IV. Every child deserves a safe environment and guidance to make right choices.

**Supportive scriptures**

- **Psalm 127:3:** *“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.”*
- **Matthew 18:6:** *“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”*
- **Ephesians 6:4:** *“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”*
- **Isaiah 54:13:** *“All your children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of your children.”*

<sup>1</sup>Children who witness or experience violence at home and in the community are more likely to become violent

<sup>2</sup>Children who witness or experience violence at home and in the community are more likely to become violent





## CHAPTER THREE: HARMFUL PRACTICES

Globally, millions of children continue to be exposed to harmful practices that violate their rights, dignity, and well-being. Such practices include female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, virginity testing, girl-child beading, degrading initiation rites, forced male circumcision, breast ironing, and gender-based child preference. Other forms include acid attacks, stoning, honour killings, forced feeding, witchcraft rituals, child labour, sexual organ alteration, debt bondage, intentional HIV/AIDS transmission (cleansing), child trafficking, disinheritance of orphans, branding or tribal marking, and corporal punishment. These practices have far-reaching and often lifelong consequences for affected children. They undermine children's physical and mental health, limit their educational and economic opportunities, and perpetuate cycles of discrimination, poverty, and inequality.

In Kenya, Section 23 of the Children Act (Cap 141) identifies the following as harmful practices: Child marriage, FGM, forced male circumcision, virginity testing, child beading, organ alteration or removal for intersex children without medical advice. Eliminating harmful practices is essential in ensuring that all children grow up in safety, dignity and with full respect for their rights.

### **Child marriage**

Child marriage is a union of two in which one or both are below 18 years of age. This practice denies children their childhood and exposes them to emotional, social, and health challenges at a time when they are not ready for adult responsibilities. As a result, many children are forced to drop out of school, face domestic violence, and experience serious health risks linked to early pregnancy and childbirth.

Child marriage has far-reaching consequences on children's well-being, education, and future livelihoods. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive solutions, including access to education, enforcement of protective laws and community awareness. By safeguarding children's rights and keeping them in school, communities and nations can promote healthier, more prosperous futures for all.

### **Rationale**

Child marriage remains a significant barrier to the realisation of children's rights and national development goals in Kenya. These practices undermine progress in education, health, gender equality and poverty reduction. According to the 2022 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS), one in seven adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 has already begun childbearing, a situation that exposes them to heightened risks of maternal mortality, school dropout, and lifelong socio-economic disadvantage. Child marriage and pregnancy also perpetuate intergenerational poverty by limiting children's access to future education and employment opportunities. Addressing these issues is, therefore, essential to achieving Kenya's Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to good health, quality education and gender equality. A comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach involving legal enforcement, community sensitisation, education and access to health care services are necessary to protect and empower children, ensuring they realise their full potential as contributors to national development.

### Myths and misconceptions

Myth and misconception	Fact
Child marriage protects girls.	In reality, it increases risks of violence and health complications.
Pregnancy means readiness for motherhood.	Fertility is mistaken for emotional, physical, emotional and social readiness for pregnancy or parenting.
Fertility denotes physical, emotional and social readiness for pregnancy or parenting.	Most faiths in Kenya condemn it; it's a harmful cultural, not religious, practice.
Marriage is the only solution after pregnancy.	This belief denies girls a second chance at education, career development and professional growth.
Life ends after pregnancy.	With support, child parents can still thrive and return to school.

### Push and pull factors

Child marriage is influenced by a combination of push and pull factors that operate at the household, community, and societal levels.

#### Push factors

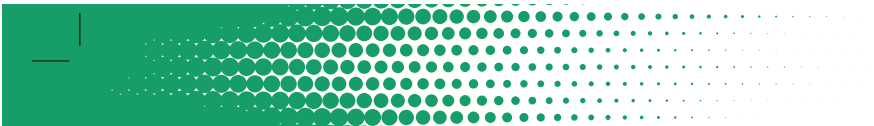
- i. **Poverty:** Economic hardship drives families to marry off daughters early to reduce financial burdens or gain dowry.
- ii. **Lack of education:** School dropouts and poor access to education increase vulnerability.
- iii. **Child pregnancy:** Families marry off pregnant girls to “protect family honour”.
- iv. **Cultural pressure:** Traditions and social norms encourage child marriage as a rite of passage.
- v. **Gender inequality:** Discrimination limits girls' opportunities and autonomy.

#### Pull factors

- i. **Perceived security:** Some families believe marriage offers safety and social status.
- ii. **Economic gain:** Dowry and bride price motivate families to consent to child marriage.
- iii. **Social approval:** Some communities often celebrate child marriages as culturally acceptable or honourable practices.

### Parental action and inaction

Parental action and inaction both influence child marriages and pregnancies in Kenya. Inaction occurs when parents fail to guide or monitor their children and avoid sex education due to taboos. Some parents expose children to inappropriate sexual behaviour within the home through open intimacy, infidelity or inappropriate sexual conversations in their presence, normalising premature sexual activity and eroding moral boundaries. Conversely, positive parental action includes setting good examples, providing moral and spiritual guidance, discussing sexuality openly, supporting education, and creating a safe and respectful home environment that discourages child sexual activity and exploitation.



## **Consequences of child marriage**

Child marriage has far-reaching health, educational, social, economic and psychological consequences that affect individuals, families and national development, thus undermining Kenya's commitments to children's rights, gender equality and sustainable development.

The consequences include:

### **1. Health consequences**

- Increased maternal and infant mortality: Children who become mothers face higher risks of complications such as obstetric fistula, premature birth and maternal death. Infants born to child mothers are more likely to have low birth weight and die in infancy.
- Exposure to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Mental health challenges: Child marriage and/or pregnancy often leads to depression, stress and anxiety due to unpreparedness and social isolation.

### **2. Educational consequences**

- School dropout: Children are often forced to leave school, limiting future education and employment opportunities.
- Reduced literacy and life skills: Drop out reduces access to information and essential life skills, hindering social and economic empowerment.
- Gender disparity in education: Child marriage and pregnancy disproportionately affect girls, reinforcing gender inequality in education outcomes.

### **3. Social consequences**

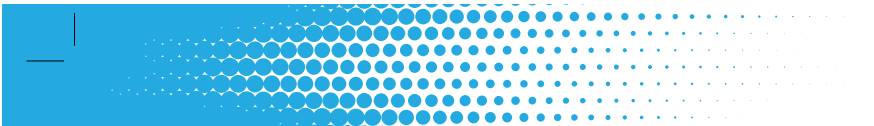
- Stigma and discrimination: Child parents face social rejection, shame and exclusion from peers, family and community structures.
- Domestic violence: Children in unions are more likely to experience gender-based violence and have limited ability to seek support.
- Loss of childhood and social isolation: Child marriage denies children the opportunity to enjoy their formative years, develop socially and participate in community life.

### **4. Economic consequences**

- Perpetuation of poverty: Child marriage and pregnancy trap children and their families in cycles of poverty due to reduced education and job prospects.
- Increased dependency: Lack of skills and income-generating capacity increases economic dependency and vulnerability to exploitation.
- Reduced national productivity: When large numbers of children leave school early, the country loses a significant portion of its potential workforce and innovation capacity.

### **5. Psychological and emotional consequences**

- Low self-esteem and trauma: Many child parents experience long-term emotional distress from rejection, abuse or loss of autonomy.
- Hopelessness and limited aspirations: Child parenthood often leads to loss of confidence and ambition, restricting personal growth and leadership potential.
- Inter-generational impact: Children of child parents are more likely to experience poor health and limited education.



### Prevention strategies

- **Promote children’s education:** Keep children in school through scholarships, mentorship and menstrual hygiene support.
- **Parental involvement:** Educate parents on the importance of supporting children’s aspirations.
- **Economic empowerment:** Offer livelihood programmes and cash transfers to reduce financial motives for child marriage.
- **Mentorship and safe spaces:** Create community clubs and forums where children can learn, share and find guidance.
- **Community sensitisation:** Engage leaders to promote children’s rights and challenge harmful norms.

### Female genital mutilation

FGM refers to all procedures involving partial or total removal of female genitalia or any other injury to the female genital organs or any harmful procedure to the female genitalia for non-medical reasons.<sup>3</sup> FGM is generally practiced on girls and women of different ages. In some cultures, it is performed from as early as a few days after birth to shortly before marriage. It is one of the most severe forms of gender-based violence (GBV). According to the KDHS report of 2022, the prevalence of FGM in Kenya is 15% while it is highest among the counties in Northern and North Eastern Kenya.

The practice of FGM is often justified by cultural and some communities’ belief that it is a religious requirement (KDHS 2022). The socio-cultural justifications for FGM are rooted in local cultures and the traditions passed from one generation to another. Culture and the preservation of cultural identity serve as the underlying impetus for continuing the practice. FGM has largely been justified for marriageability; hygiene and aesthetics; enhancing chastity among women; preservation of virginity; fear of stigmatisation from the practitioners of the act and control a woman’s sexual feelings. Additionally, FGM is erroneously linked to religion. Some adherents of religion believe the practice is compulsory for them, a flawed link that gives religious leaders an important role to play in dissociating FGM from religion.

#### Actors and perpetrators of FGM

These are individuals, groups, or institutions who directly perform, facilitate, encourage or enable the practice, whether through physical involvement, decision-making, organisation or promotion of the act.

- **Religious leaders:** Some religious leaders justify FGM using flawed theological interpretations or cultural-religious beliefs, presenting it as a faith-sanctioned rite of passage.
- **Community/cultural leaders:** In some communities, FGM is considered a cultural rite of passage. Some of these leaders get prizes and rewards, hence the motivation to support or perpetuate the practice.

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<sup>3</sup> Section 2 FGM Act

- **Mutilators/ traditional circumcisers:** They are paid a fee for performing FGM. They encourage the practice for economic gain and the conviction that they are promoting the community's culture.
- **Girls/peers:** Under the influence of cultural beliefs, some girls 'willingly' undergo the cut while others comply for fear of stigmatisation and rejection. Some girls also exert pressure on their peers to undergo FGM to be accepted.
- **Parents:** Some parents play a crucial role in decisions around FGM as their beliefs, social pressures, and desires to maintain cultural traditions often influence whether their daughters undergo the practice.
- **Women:** Women who have undergone FGM justify it and motivate young girls to undergo the procedure. They instill fear and discriminate against uncut girls.
- **Men/suitors:** Some men have been socialised to marry girls who have undergone FGM for fear of being ridiculed and abused by their peers.
- **Healthcare workers:** Some unethical healthcare practitioners secretly perform FGM for economic gain.
- **Family members:** Grandparents, aunts, uncles, in-laws and siblings, among others, persuade and secretly procure FGM for girls and women. Others threaten the girls with curses and intimidate parents who refuse to subject their daughters to FGM.
- **Emerging perpetrators (modern forms)** who include:
  - i) Cross-border facilitators:** These are individuals or networks who transport girls across borders (e.g., to Tanzania, Somalia, or Ethiopia) to evade prosecution in Kenya.
  - ii) Digital promoters:** Those using online platforms to share FGM-promoting content or to arrange procedures secretly.

### Myths and facts about FGM

A myth is a belief that people pass down through generations to explain things like nature, culture or human behaviour, though it's not based on proven facts. A fact, on the other hand is a statement that can be verified or proven to be true or false through observation, measurement, or reliable evidence.

Myths, misconceptions and community beliefs	Fact
FGM is a religious requirement for the girl child.	FGM has no scriptural justifications (Biblical, Quranic and Bhagavad Gita).
A girl who has not undergone FGM has uncontrollable sexual desire and highly likely to become promiscuous.	FGM makes no difference to a woman's sexual desire but may hinder her enjoyment and satisfaction. Sexual desire mainly arises from the state of the mind and hormones.
A girl who has not undergone the cut attracts calamity or bad omen.	Calamities can befall anybody even in communities that practice FGM.
FGM guarantees good marriage opportunities and ensures fidelity in marriage.	FGM does not guarantee a good marriage.

A girl who has not undergone FGM cannot transition into being a mature woman.	FGM does not qualify a girl to be mature.
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### Consequences of FGM

- i. Extreme pain: FGM causes girls extreme pain and stress.
- ii. Severe and excessive bleeding: In some cases, this can lead to death.
- iii. Risk of infection: FGM may cause serious infections such as tetanus and HIV, among others.
- iv. Increased risk of complications during childbirth.
- v. Difficulty in passing urine and menstrual flow due to damage to the urinary tract and/or reproductive organs.
- vi. Emotional distress, fear, and feeling of helplessness.
- vii. Post-traumatic stress disorder whose symptoms can include flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, and depression for a long period after FGM.
- viii. Sexual phobia fuelled by fear and difficulties during sexual intercourse.
- ix. The clitoris is sensitive: A woman's sexual pleasure is greatly decreased by its removal.

### Push factors of FGM

FGM is largely practiced as a social norm. Social norms are the shared beliefs, rules, and expectations within a community about how people should behave in certain situations. They represent what a group considers normal, acceptable, or appropriate conduct—even if those behaviours are not documented in any law or policy. These social norms enhance the push factors of FGM, which include:

- **Cultural beliefs and traditions:** FGM is often viewed as a respected cultural rite of passage marking the transition from girlhood to womanhood.
- **Social pressure and fear of stigma:** Families fear rejection, ridicule, or social isolation if their daughters remain uncut.
- **Desire for social acceptance and marriageability:** In many communities, circumcised girls are considered 'clean', mature and more desirable for marriage.
- **Religious misconceptions:** Some believe FGM is a religious requirement, even though no religion mandates it.
- **Control of female sexuality:** FGM is used to suppress women's sexual desire to ensure virginity before marriage and fidelity afterward.
- **Influence of elders and traditional leaders:** Elders and community custodians of culture often promote FGM to preserve tradition and identity.
- **Gender inequality and patriarchy:** The practice reflects unequal power relations that value women's obedience and purity over their rights and health.
- **Economic incentives:** Traditional circumcisers and those who organise ceremonies often earn income from the practice, motivating them to continue.
- **Ignorance of health and legal risks:** Many families are unaware of the medical, psychological, and legal consequences of FGM.

- **Intergenerational transmission:** Mothers who underwent FGM may view it as normal or necessary and pass it on to their daughters.

### **Penalties for FGM offence**

#### **The Anti-FGM Act**

- I. **On the performance of FGM by medical personnel or trainees,** Section 19 (2) provides that: “If in the process of committing an offence under subsection 19 (1) a person causes the death of another, that person shall, on conviction, be liable to imprisonment for life.”
- II. **Section 25 provides that:** “Any person who uses derogatory or abusive language that is intended to ridicule, embarrass or otherwise harm a woman for having not undergone female genital mutilation, commits an offence and shall be liable, upon conviction, to imprisonment for a term not less than six months, or to a fine of not less than fifty thousand shillings, or both.”
- III. **Section (29) provides that:** “A person who commits an offence under this Act is liable, on conviction, to imprisonment for a term of not less than three years, or a fine of not less than two hundred thousand shillings, or both.”

#### **The Children Act**

- I. Section 23 provides that: “No one is allowed to subject a child to harmful cultural practices such as child marriage or FGM, and anyone who does so can be jailed.”

### **Forced male circumcision**

This comprises all procedures involving partial removal of the male genitalia foreskin or injury or any harmful procedure to the male genitalia for non-medical reasons, that is performed with or without any undue influence, inducement, enticement, coercion, or intimidation on a male child without consent.

### **Girl beading**

This is a cultural practice among communities that sanction non-marital sexual relationships between men in the warriors' age group and girls aged between 9 and 15 years who are not yet eligible for marriage.

### **Intersex genital mutilation (IGM)**

IGM refers to non-consensual, medically unnecessary surgeries or procedures performed on intersex infants or children in an attempt to make their genitalia appear more typically male or female. IGM happens when doctors or parents decide to “normalise” a child’s body by surgically altering their genitals or reproductive organs without the child’s informed consent.

### **Virginity testing**

Virginity testing is a gynaecological examination conducted under the belief that it determines whether a woman or girl has had vaginal intercourse. Virginity testing is often performed by inspecting the hymen for tears or its size of opening, and/or inserting fingers into the vagina (the “two-finger” test). Both techniques are practiced under the belief that the appearance of the female genitalia can indicate a girl’s or woman’s history of sexual activity (WHO, 2018).



### Correct practices to be promoted

- I. Use faith teachings to speak openly against harmful practices and promote compassion, dignity, and equality for all children.
- II. Encourage communities to replace harmful cultural practices with positive, faith-based or cultural alternatives that celebrate children safely.
- III. Teach parents and caregivers to value and protect their children, keeping them in school and away from child marriage or FGM.
- IV. Report anyone promoting or performing harmful practices to local authorities or through the 116 toll-free helpline.
- V. Work together with elders, faith leaders, and government officers to raise awareness and protect children from all forms of harmful practices.

### Key messages

- I. No culture or religion supports harmful practices such as FGM, child marriage, virginity testing, girl beading or forced circumcision.
- II. Harmful practices damage children's health, dignity, and future and are punishable by law.
- III. Protecting children from harmful practices is a moral and spiritual duty of parents, faith leaders, and communities.
- IV. Every child deserves to grow up free from practices that cause pain, fear or shame.

### Supportive scriptural references

- **Luke 17:1-2:** *He said to his disciples: "Things that cause sin will inevitably occur, but woe to the person through whom they occur. It would be better for him if a millstone were put around his neck and he be thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin."*
- **Leviticus 19:28:** *"Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord."*
- **Psalm 82:3-4:** *"Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."*
- **Isaiah 54:13:** *And all your children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of your children.*
- **Matthew 18:6:** *If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.*
- **Matthew 25:40:** *The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*
- **Mark 9:42:** *Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.*



## CHAPTER FOUR: POSITIVE PARENTING

### Introduction

Parenting is the process of interactions, behaviours, emotions, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and practices associated with the provision of nurturing care from birth to adulthood (UNICEF, 2017). It involves providing for and promoting the child's physiological, emotional, social and intellectual needs till maturity. Parents, guardians, and caregivers bear the greatest responsibility to raise children most acceptably.

Positive parenting describes behaviours and actions by the parents and caregivers that help develop a child to be physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy. It is about putting the child's best interest at heart and includes listening to the child, giving them a voice and a choice in making decisions that affect them, providing consistent and nurturing care, setting age-appropriate boundaries and responsibilities, and protecting children from harm, including not using violent discipline.

### Positive parenting approaches

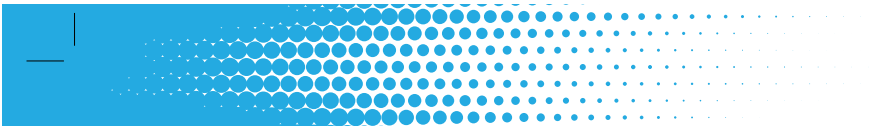
The Government launched the National Positive Parenting Programme in 2023. The IRCK was a member of the technical working group which contributed to its development. The current training manual contains 15 modules. Positive parenting is demonstrated through everyday actions that build trust, empathy, and respect between parents and their children.

Key approaches include:

- Listening actively to children and valuing their opinions.
- Providing positive reinforcement to encourage good behaviour.
- Setting clear, consistent, and age-appropriate boundaries.
- Being a positive role model through words and actions.
- Offering praise, love, and encouragement frequently.
- Involving children in family decisions that affect them.

### Benefits of positive parenting

- Positive parenting enables children to adapt good behaviour, morals and values.
- It enables children to uphold family and national values and being respectful members of family and community.
- Positive parenting encourages parents to treat children with respect, rather than subdued passive recipients of orders.
- Children feel loved, valued, and secure.
- It provides for improved emotional regulation and confidence.
- It enhances better school performance and social skills.
- Bolsters stronger family bonds built on mutual respect.
- Reduces cases of violence and conflict at home.



### **Parenting and self-care**

Caring for children requires emotional strength, patience, and balance. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to practice self-care to maintain their own physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Self-care enables parents and caregivers to respond calmly and wisely to challenges. Examples include:

- Taking regular breaks to rest and reflect.
- Seeking support from family, community, or faith leaders.
- Engaging in activities that reduce stress, such as prayer, exercise, or hobbies.
- Maintaining healthy relationships and open communication at home.

### **Negative parenting approaches and consequences**

Positive parenting entails eradicating negative parenting practices that include harsh punishment, neglect, humiliation, verbal or physical abuse, harm children's self-esteem and emotional development. These consequences include:

- Fear and withdrawal in children.
- Poor academic performance.
- Low self-esteem and anxiety.
- Increased risk of violence and substance abuse in adolescence.
- Broken family relationships and loss of trust.

### **Correct practices to be promoted**

- I. Encourage parents to guide and correct children with love, using patience, listening and positive reinforcement instead of violence.
- II. Promote open conversations in families, where children can express their thoughts and feelings without fear.
- III. Support parents to spend quality time with their children, showing care, attention, and interest in their daily lives.
- IV. Remind parents and caregivers to care for their own emotional and spiritual well-being, so they can better nurture their children.
- V. Use sermons and community gatherings to teach family values, emphasising kindness, forgiveness, and respect within the home.

### **Key messages**

- I. Parents and caregivers are the first protectors of children and have a duty to nurture them with love, care and guidance.
- II. Violent discipline harms children emotionally and physically. It should never be used.
- III. Positive parenting builds strong families by promoting respect, trust, and open communication between parents and children.
- IV. Parents should be good role models, teaching children honesty, responsibility, and faith-based values.



### Supportive scriptural references

- **Proverbs 22:6:** *Train up a child in the way he should go: And when he is old, he will not depart from it.*
- **Ephesians 6:4:** *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*
- **Colossians 3:21:** *Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*
- **1 Corinthians 13:11:** *When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.*



## CHAPTER FIVE: FAMILY-BASED CARE

### Introduction

All faith communities acknowledge that family is central to life. The country's Constitution recognises the family as a natural and fundamental unit of society and a necessary basis for social order. The country's supreme law bestows the responsibility of childcare on the child's biological family. Children are best nurtured and protected in family environments, as opposed to institutions. Children raised in a family unit are better nurtured than in institutions. The development of children in institutions is often delayed mentally, socially, physically and emotionally. The institutionalisation of children has been driven by orphanhood, violence and abuse, poverty, disability, neglect and abandonment and harmful practices. Children in institutions are six times more likely to be abused than their peers in families. This includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse (UN World Report on Violence Against Children, 2006).

### Promoting family and community-based care for children

It is recommended that children be raised by their biological parents and communities. Separation of siblings is discouraged and should only happen if the child's ultimate safety and well-being are at risk. All actors are encouraged to identify and address challenges affecting families as a way of preventing separation. If a child can't live with their biological families, alternative family-based care options should be explored, based on the child's circumstances and best interests. The best alternative family-based care is kinship care where a child is looked after temporarily or in the long-term by their maternal and paternal relatives such as grandparents, aunts/uncles and adult siblings. Kinship care is the most culturally appropriate and widely understood form of alternative care as it is based on existing community practices. Other alternative family-based care options include foster, guardianship, kafala among the Muslims and adoption.

#### Eligibility for alternative family-based care

- A child whose parent/s are deceased.
- A child whose parent/s are incapacitated (physically or mentally).
- A child whose parent/s are imprisoned.
- A child whose parent/s whereabouts are unknown.
- A child who has been disowned or abandoned by parents or caregivers.

### Care reform strategy in Kenya

Care reform is a change process within the systems and mechanisms that provide care for children separated from their families or at risk of separation. Kenya has a 10-year Care Reform Strategy (2022 to 2032), and has three enabling pillars of holistic and sustainable care reform. The pillars are:

- **Prevention of separation and family strengthening:** It involves measures and services that strengthen families and prevent children from being separated from their families.
- **Alternative care:** This involves strengthening and expanding family and community-based alternative care options for children who are unable to live in parental care. Family-based alternative care includes kinship care, kafala, foster care, guardianship, adoption and traditional approaches to care.

- **Tracing, reintegration, and transitioning to family and community-based care:** This relates to the safe and sustainable transition of institutionalisation, unaccompanied and separated children to family and community-based care.

#### **Negative impact of institutionalisation**

- Poor cognitive development and academic underachievement: Lack of exposure to parents on soothing or engaging their babies leads to children's brains failure to develop in the way that they should. Children raised in institutions experience delays in IQ, language, speech, and vocabulary development.
- Poor self-confidence, low self-worth, self-esteem, lack of self-identity and social stigma associated with living in an institution.
- Increased risk of sexual, emotional and physical abuse.
- Long periods in an institution make it harder for a child to assimilate back into a family and community, and deny them access to the life-long attachments and community support systems that family relationships and communities can provide.
- Problems with forming and maintaining relationships in childhood and adulthood.

#### **Benefits of family-based care**

- Supports the child in learning about and participating in his/her care and decision-making.
- Promotes an individual and development approach.
- Honours cultural diversity and family traditions.
- Do better in school and are less likely to drop out.
- Healthy parent involvement and intervention in the child's day-to-day life lay the foundation for better social and academic skills.
- Maintenance of relationships with siblings and extended family members.
- Positive parenting encourages parents to treat children with respect rather than subdued passive recipients of orders.
- Provides identity and sense of belonging to the child, hence building family values and traditions.
- A child raised in a family will get material and spiritual support that will mold good character

#### **Correct practices to be promoted**

- I. Support and strengthen families to prevent child abandonment, neglect, or separation.
- II. Encourage kinship care or culturally appropriate alternative family care options instead of institutionalisation.
- III. Keep siblings together whenever possible to maintain emotional support and family bonds.
- IV. Involve children in decisions about their care in ways appropriate to their age and understanding.
- V. Guide and monitor caregivers to ensure children's safety, education, emotional well-being, and spiritual growth.



### Key messages

- I. Children grow best and thrive in loving families and communities, not in institutions.
- II. Families and communities are responsible for nurturing, protecting, and guiding children's development.
- III. When biological families are unable to care for a child, relatives or approved caregivers can provide safe and loving alternatives.
- IV. Keeping children with siblings and preserving family connections strengthens their identity, self-esteem, and sense of belonging.

### Supportive scriptural references

- **James 1:27:** *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*
- **Deuteronomy 10:18:** *He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.*
- **Psalms 68:6:** *God sets the lonely in families; he leads out the prisoners with singing.*
- **Matthew 18:5:** *And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.*



## CHAPTER SIX: BIRTH REGISTRATION AND CERTIFICATION

### Introduction

Birth registration is a fundamental right that every individual should access. Article 53 1(a) of the Constitution stipulates that every child has a right to a name and nationality from birth. It is the official recording of a child's birth by the Government, which provides numerous benefits to both the individual and society as a whole. The registration ensures the legal recognition of a child's existence and identity. In Kenya, birth registration is governed by the Births and Deaths Registration Act, which mandates that all births be registered within six months of occurrence. The birth registration process in Kenya begins with the notification of the birth to the relevant authorities. This can be done by the parents, guardians, or any other person present at the birth. For cases of abandoned children, the institutions with custodial orders will seek notification through the legal processes and procedures. The notification should be made to the health facilities, chiefs and assistant chiefs' offices.

### Birth registration

- The registration agents will record the details of the birth, including the date, time, place, and particulars of the child and parents.
- Is a permanent and official record of a child's existence in the civil register and provides legal recognition of his/her identity.
- It is required for a child to get a birth certificate—his or her first legal proof of identity.
- Is the only legal way for a child to get a birth certificate.

Once the birth is registered, a birth certificate is issued to the parents. The important legal document serves as proof of the child's identity and age. It is required for various purposes, such as enrolling in school, obtaining a passport, and accessing government services, and protects a child from exploitation, abuse and violence.

Birth certificates protect migrant and refugee children against family separation, trafficking and illegal adoption. Without it, these children are at a higher risk of statelessness, meaning they do not have legal ties to any country, including a nationality. Moreover, without a birth certificate, many children can't get routine vaccines and other healthcare services. They may be unable to attend a school or register for exams, may face difficulties in accessing their rights and entitlements, and may be unable to prove their age, which puts them at a much higher risk of being forced into child marriage and child labour. As a result, their future job opportunities are limited, which makes them more likely to live in poverty. In young adulthood, children will need this official identification for basic but important transactions like opening a bank account, registering to vote, applying for a passport, joining the formal job market, buying or inheriting property, or receiving social assistance.



### **Benefits of birth registration**

- Provides an official record of a child's existence and a legal recognition of their identity.
- Establishes a person's legal identity by providing proof of a person's existence, age, and parentage.
- Essential for national planning and development. It provides governments with accurate data on the population, which is crucial for planning and implementing policies and programmes that address the needs of the population.
- Ensures access to healthcare services and vaccinations, which are often contingent upon proof of identity.
- Helps in identifying vulnerable populations, such as children living in poverty or remote areas, and ensures that they receive the necessary support and services.
- Helps in promoting gender equality. By registering the births of both boys, girls and intersex, authorities can ensure that all sexes have equal access to rights and opportunities.
- Facilitates participation in the legal and electoral processes when the child reaches adulthood.

### **Benefits of a birth certificate**

- It is the primary identification document that verifies a person's identity and age.
- It is necessary for applying for a passport, ID, driver's licence, and other official documents.
- It is required for school enrollment and accessing education programmes and job opportunities (employment) across all stages of life.
- It is a proof of parents' inheritance, insurance claims, and legitimate children. The birth certificate supports children's access to their rights and entitlements.
- It is a necessary document to access government services and benefits for a minor.
- In case of dispute over the custody of a child, it can be used in court to prove parentage.
- In case of divorce of the parents, it can be used to ensure continued financial support for the children
- Some employers may require a birth certificate as part of the hiring process to verify a person's identity, age, citizenship, and eligibility to work.
- It's an essential requirement for inheritance as it serves as a legal proof of identity and parentage.

### **Correct practices to be promoted**

- I. Register every child within six months of birth at the relevant government office.
- II. Obtain a birth certificate immediately after registration as the child's first legal proof of identity.
- III. Ensure equal registration for all children without discrimination.
- IV. Encourage communities to support parents or guardians in registering births and following up on certificates.
- V. Educate communities about the importance of birth registration and certificates.



### Key messages

- I. Every child has the right to be registered at birth, giving them a legal identity and protection.
- II. Birth registration and obtaining a birth certificate are essential for accessing education, healthcare, social services, and protection from exploitation.
- III. Unregistered children are at risk of statelessness, child labour, child marriage, trafficking, and exclusion from basic rights.
- IV. Parents, guardians, and communities are responsible for ensuring all children are registered without delay or discrimination.

### Supportive scriptural references

- **Numbers 1:18:** *They assembled the whole community on the first day of the second month and registered by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one.*
- **1 Chronicles 5:17:** *All these were recorded in the genealogies during the reigns of Jotham king of Judah and Jeroboam king of Israel.*
- **Nehemiah 7:5:** *So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, officials, and the common people for registration by families.”*
- **Luke 2:1–5:** *In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world... Joseph went up to Bethlehem to register with Mary, who was expecting a child.*



## CHAPTER SEVEN: INCLUSION OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN

### Introduction

Inclusion of vulnerable children means ensuring that every child, especially those facing disability, poverty, displacement, family loss, illness, or other challenges, is welcomed, valued, and supported to participate fully in family, faith, and community life. It requires removing barriers, addressing stigma and discrimination, and providing protection, care, and equal opportunities. This approach recognises the inherent dignity and worth of every child and affirms our shared moral duty to nurture, uplift, and safeguard all children, without exception.

### The principle of inclusion in child safeguarding

An inclusive approach to child protection means ensuring that every child—regardless of disability, special needs, or intersex status—receives love, protection, and equal opportunity. While all children need safeguarding, some face greater risks due to stigma, discrimination, poverty, or family circumstances. Vulnerable groups may include children with disabilities, intersex children, child-headed households, children living and working on the streets, children in conflict with the law, refugee and displaced children, children affected by HIV/AIDS, and those at risk of harmful practices such as child marriage or FGM.

Children with physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental disabilities often face barriers to participation in community life and are at increased risk of neglect and abuse. Many are wrongly viewed as a burden or curse, leading to isolation and limited opportunities. Children with mental or intellectual disabilities, in particular, are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence. Faith communities, families, and society have a moral and legal duty to protect these children and ensure they are included in worship, education, play, and community activities. By creating safe, welcoming, and accessible environments, we ensure that no child is left behind and we fulfill our responsibility to nurture, value, and safeguard every child.

Some children face higher risks of exclusion, discrimination, or abuse. Religious leaders must be particularly attentive to the protection and participation of:

- **Children with disabilities and those with special needs:** Physical, sensory, or intellectual disabilities can increase vulnerability to neglect or abuse. Faith spaces should be made physically accessible, and spiritual messages must affirm the worth and dignity of every child, regardless of ability.
- **Children from minority or marginalised communities:** Ethnic, linguistic, or faith minorities may experience exclusion. Faith leaders should actively promote respect and inclusion across all communities.
- **Children affected by poverty or those living on the streets:** Many children face survival challenges that expose them to exploitation. Religious institutions can provide psychosocial, spiritual, and material support through inclusive outreach programmes.
- **Children living with chronic illnesses:** Stigma remains a major barrier to inclusion. Faith leaders can use their influence to combat myths and promote compassion and acceptance.
- **Children in conflict/contact with the law:** Children in conflict with the justice system should be protected from abuse and all forms of discrimination. Faith communities can play a vital role in reunification and reintegration.

- **Refugee children:** Refugee and internally displaced children often lack protective environments. Religious leaders can offer or refer them to support services.
- **Children facing harmful practices:** Cultural and gender norms sometimes perpetuate harmful practices such as forced male circumcision, girl beading, child marriage and FGM. Faith leaders should use scriptural and moral teachings to challenge these practices and safeguard all children.

#### **Barriers to inclusion**

Understanding and addressing barriers is essential for effective safeguarding. Common barriers include:

- **Physical barriers:** Inaccessible facilities that prevent the participation of children with disabilities.
- **Attitude barriers:** Stigma, stereotypes, or misconceptions, for example, beliefs that disability is a curse or punishment.
- **Communication barriers:** Limited access to information in appropriate formats, such as sign language, braille, or simplified language.
- **Cultural and gender norms:** Practices that silence children, or prioritise certain groups over others.

Faith leaders must recognise these barriers within their institutions and communities and work intentionally to dismantle them.

#### **The role of faith leaders in promoting inclusion**

Religious leaders hold moral authority and community influence that can transform attitudes and practices. They can promote inclusion in several ways:

- **Teaching and preaching inclusion:** Use sermons, prayers, and teachings to emphasise equality, compassion, and shared humanity.
- **Modeling inclusive behaviour:** Ensure all children feel welcomed and valued in religious services and community activities.
- **Advocating for non-discrimination:** Speak out against stigma, exclusion, and harmful norms that lead to neglect or abuse.
- **Creating safe and accessible spaces:** For example ramps, braille material and sign language interpreters.
- **Building partnerships:** Collaborate with parents, caregivers, community leaders, and child protection officers to identify and support vulnerable children.
- **Enhance child participation:** Establish child-friendly programmes for children to express concerns and contribute to decisions that affect them.
- **Enforcing child protection laws, policies and activities in places of worship.**

In many Kenyan communities, faith institutions are already demonstrating inclusion—for example, mosques offering sign language interpretation during Friday prayers, or churches creating disability-friendly Sunday schools. Such practices embody true safeguarding in action.

#### **Challenges facing children with special needs:**

- Stigma and discrimination, often arising from cultural beliefs and practices.
- Physical abuse.
- Greater likelihood of being exploited sexually.
- Human trafficking.

- Denied reasonable access to key services and basic rights.

#### **Correct practices to be promoted**

- I. Make faith spaces, schools and community areas physically and socially safe and accessible for all children.
- II. Educate communities to value every child, regardless of disability, illness, or background.
- III. Identify children at higher risk and provide care, guidance, and protection.
- IV. Involve children in decisions affecting them and create platforms for them to express their views safely.
- V. Encourage and work with parents, caregivers, community leaders, and child protection authorities to safeguard and promote inclusion of all children.

#### **Key messages**

- I. Every child has equal dignity and the right to participate fully in family, faith, and community life.
- II. Children with disabilities, chronic illnesses, or special needs are more vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and exclusion. Protecting them is a shared responsibility.
- III. Homes, schools, and places of worship must be safe, accessible and welcoming to all children.
- IV. Promoting inclusion and protecting vulnerable children strengthens families, communities, and society as a whole.

#### **Supportive scriptural references**

- **Psalm 82:3-4:** *Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.*
- **Matthew 19:14:** *Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these'.*
- **Matthew 25:40:** *The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'.*
- **Matthew 25:35-36:** *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.*



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# Christians Handbook

