



Rapid Needs Assessment of Orphanages in Syria

March 2025





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Introduction (Crisis context)

This Rapid Needs Assessment, conducted in March 2025 by Child Houses, examines the conditions, services, and protection environment of orphanages caring for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) across Syria. Child Houses is a child protection organization, operating through a child rights-based approach and firmly believing that every child has the right to grow up with a loving and safe family. The organization focuses particularly on unaccompanied and separated children, striving to create a safe and inclusive environment for them through a range of social, economic, and environmental interventions tailored to their unique needs and circumstances.

The assessment comes in the context of prolonged conflict, mass displacement, and a shifting political landscape, all of which have deepened the vulnerability of children in institutional care. With a mandate focused on family reunification and foster care placement, Child Houses seeks to create a safe and inclusive environment for children through a range of social, economic, and environmental interventions tailored to their unique needs and circumstances.

Child Houses also plays an active role in advocacy and policy influence, aiming to establish a supportive legal and structural framework that ensures long-term protection and well-being for children. Through its work, the organization is committed to building a better future for the most vulnerable children by delivering protection and care, enabling access to their fundamental rights, and upholding their best interests in every intervention.

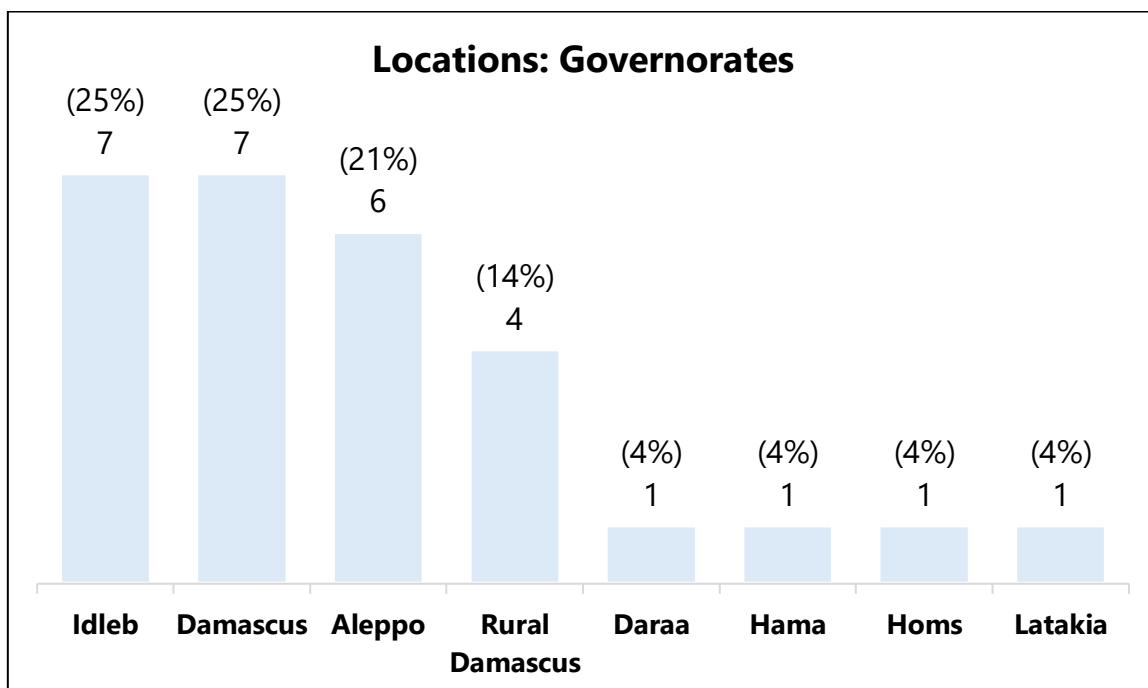
The assessment aims to generate evidence on the situation of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), including their family connections, care arrangements, and institutional environments. It also examined the quality of services, staffing qualifications, infrastructure conditions, and protection mechanisms, with the goal of informing future child-centered interventions and promoting family- and community-based alternatives.

As detailed in the Key Findings section, this report presents a descriptive analysis of children's demographics, education, family status, service availability, and institutional care standards. These findings are intended to guide programming and policy responses that improve outcomes for children living in orphanages.

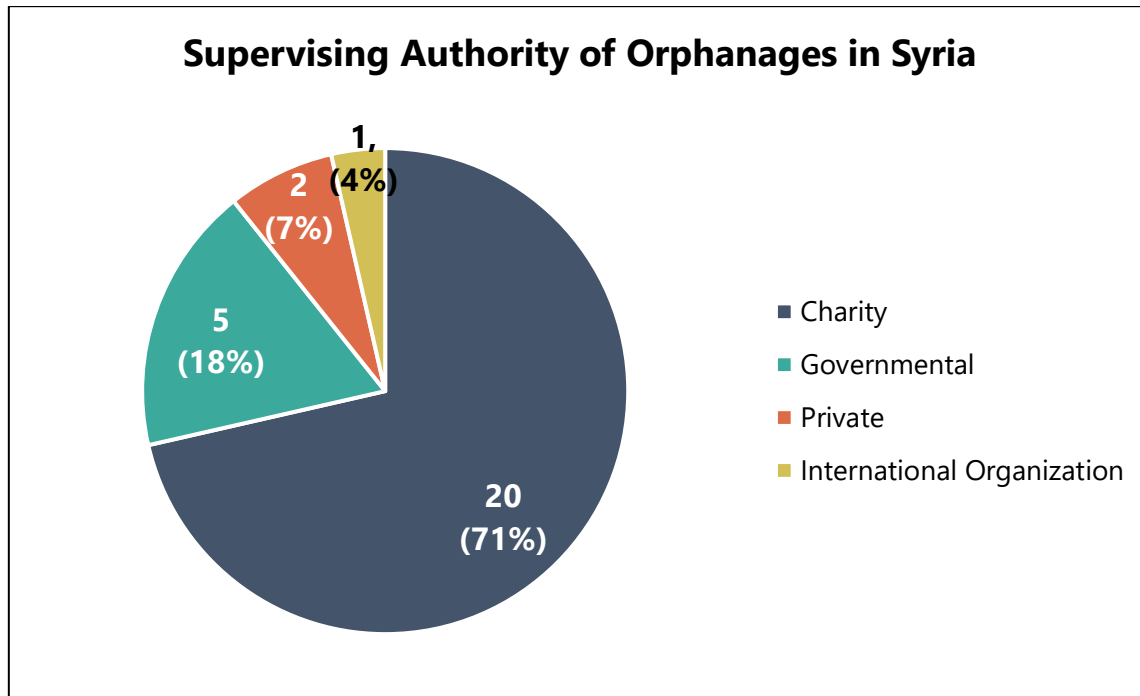


Methodology

The assessment achieved full coverage of all 28 orphanages officially registered under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (وزارة الشؤون الاجتماعية والعمل), representing 100% of the ministry's institutional care facilities. This comprehensive inclusion ensures that the findings accurately reflect the conditions, services, and challenges within the formal orphanage system across the eight assessed governorates.



Data was collected through structured interviews with key personnel from orphanages in Damascus, Rural Damascus, Aleppo, Idleb, Homs, Hama, Daraa, and Latakia. Interviews were conducted primarily in person, with one conducted remotely due to the respondent's unavailability. Informants included 22 orphanage managers, 3 supervisors, and 3 administrative staff with direct operational oversight and insight into children's care.



Collected data was compiled and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The analysis focused on descriptive statistics to summarize service availability, infrastructure conditions, and protection mechanisms. Responses related to children’s family connections and care arrangements were analyzed to identify trends and potential for reunification or foster care. Thematic analysis of qualitative responses is further elaborated in the Suggestions from Orphanage Staff section.

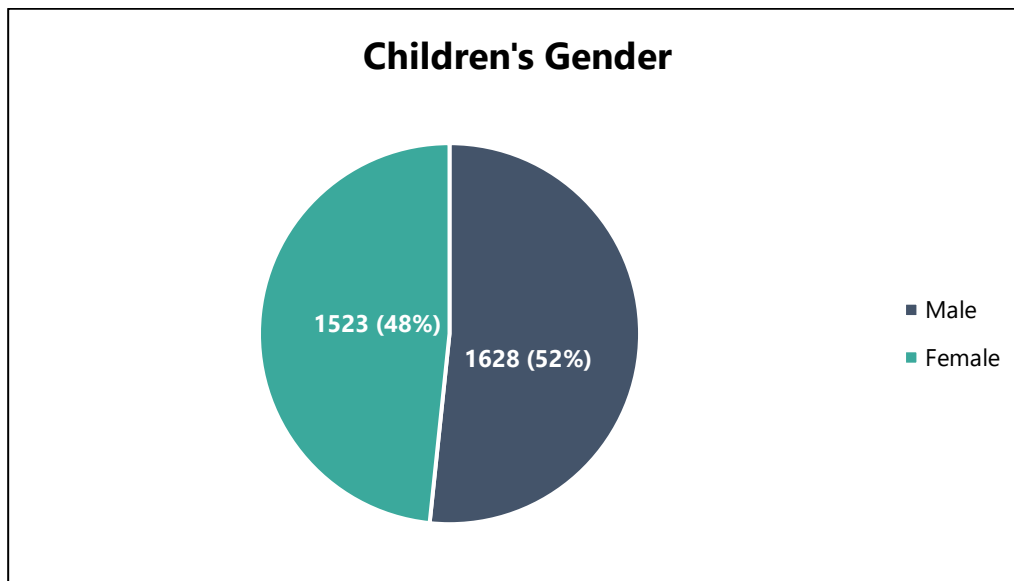
The assessment encountered minimal limitations, as most interviews were conducted in person, allowing for direct observation of facility conditions. All respondents were adults in managerial or supervisory roles; no children were interviewed. The assessment adhered to child safeguarding principles throughout data collection, ensuring confidentiality, non-harm, and institutional privacy.



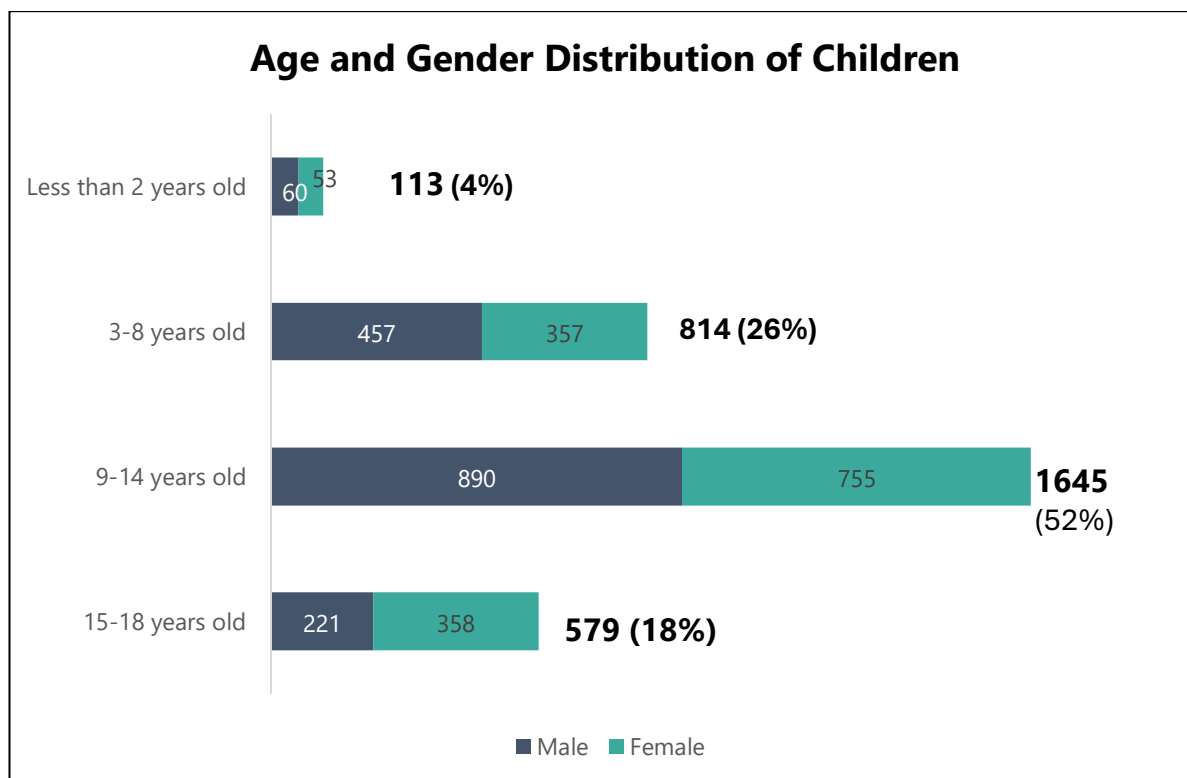
Key Findings

Children

Children's Demographics



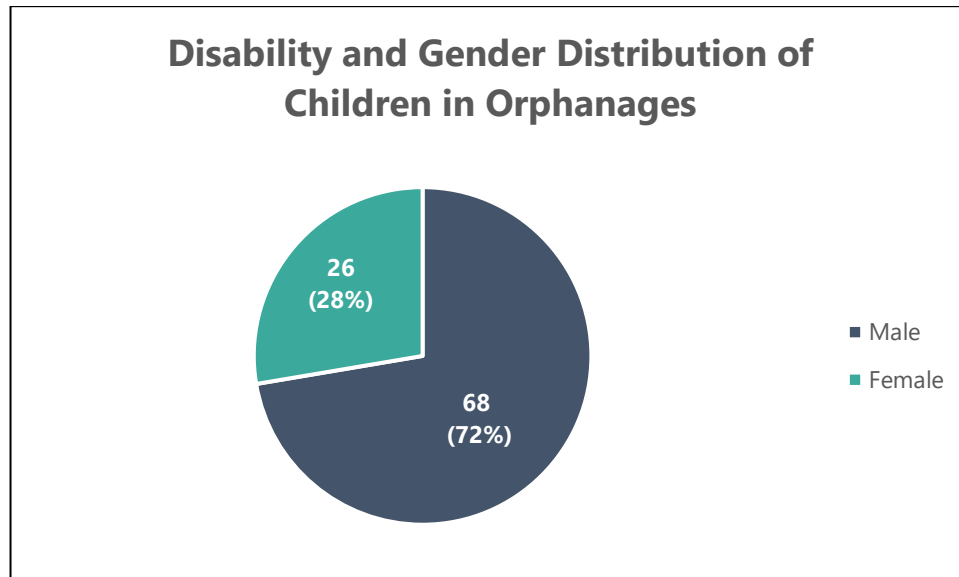
The assessment captured data on 3,151 children residing in the 28 assessed orphanages, with a relatively balanced gender distribution: 1,628 males (52%) and 1,523 females (48%)



The largest age group was children aged 9–14 years, who made up 52% of the total population (1,645 children: 890 males and 755 females). This indicates a strong concentration of school-age children in institutional care and underscores the need for structured educational, psychosocial, and developmental support tailored to this age group. Children aged 3–8 years constituted 26% (814 children), while adolescents aged 15–18 accounted for 18% (579 children), pointing to a significant need for age-appropriate life skills, vocational training, and preparation for independent living.

This age distribution is further reflected in the education section, where school-age children (9–14) show the highest enrollment yet face gaps in psychosocial support. Similarly, adolescents (15–18) face limited access to vocational training, as discussed later in the report.

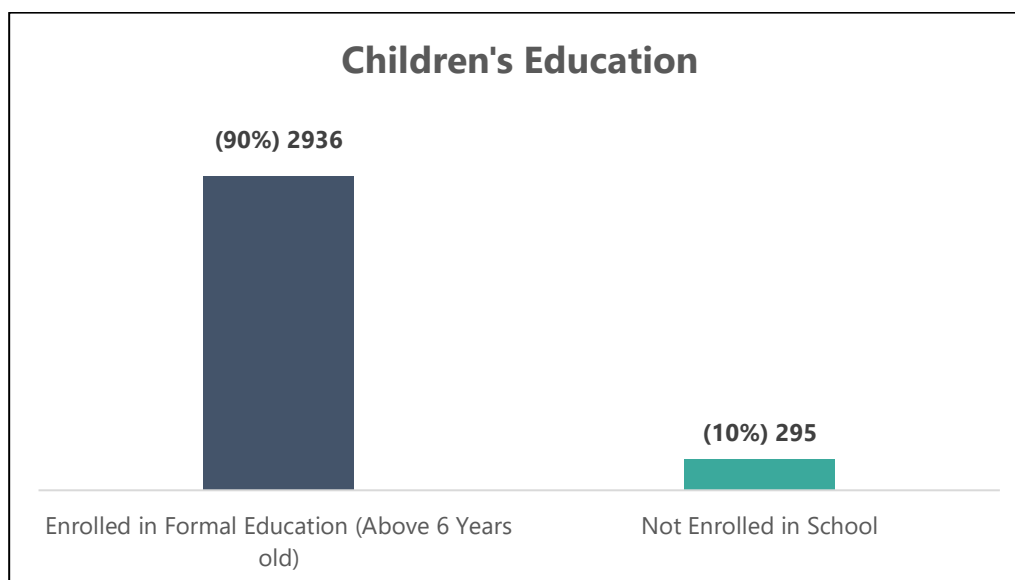
Although infants under two years represent only 4% of the total population (113 children), their presence remains critical. Given their developmental vulnerability, this group requires urgent prioritization for foster care placement or family-based alternatives to avoid the long-term effects of institutionalization.



The assessment identified a total of 94 children with disabilities across the 28 orphanages, comprising 68 males (72%) and 26 females (28%). While this group represents approximately 3% of the total child population (3,151), their needs are often complex and require specialized care, accessibility accommodations, and trained staff. The gender disparity may reflect differences in identification, reporting, or access to services. The presence of children with disabilities underscores the importance of inclusive programming and infrastructure adjustments within institutional care settings to ensure equal access to services, protection, and participation in daily activities.

This finding connects with later sections on infrastructure and staff training, both of which reveal major gaps in institutional capacity to support children with disabilities.

Children's Education



Out of the 2,936 school-age children (aged 6 and above) residing in the assessed orphanages, 295 children (10%) were reported to be out of school or had dropped out of the education system. While the majority of children benefit from formal education through either boarding arrangements or external partnerships, this gap remains a significant concern.

As outlined in the previous section, children aged 9–14 represent the largest age group in orphanages. This population is particularly affected by educational gaps and therefore requires urgent, targeted interventions. Over one-third of institutions lack structured psychosocial support services. This absence likely contributes to educational disengagement, as many children struggle with emotional and behavioral challenges that go unaddressed.

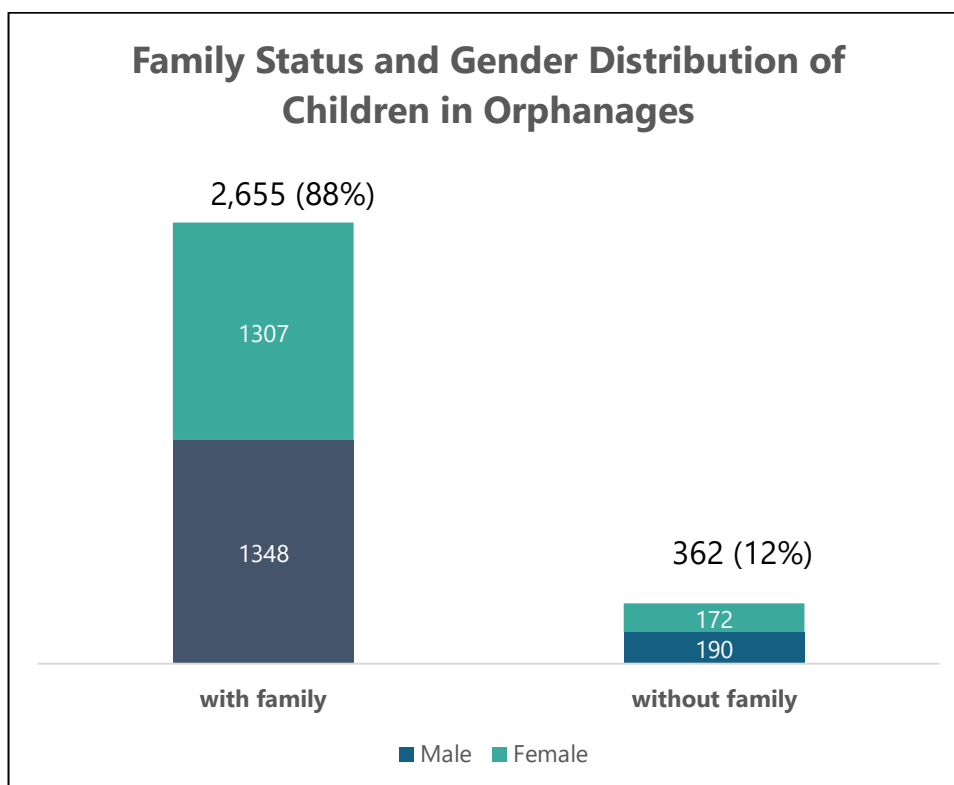
Furthermore, the limited availability of vocational training and adolescent-focused skill-building opportunities in only 39% of facilities hinders older children, particularly those aged 15–18, from gaining the tools they need to transition toward independent living. These challenges are explored in more detail in the Vocational Trainings section, which highlights additional gaps in adolescent programming.

These gaps reflect a broader lack of integrated support systems within orphanages and highlight the need for trained staff who can link education with psychosocial and life skills development as part of a comprehensive child protection approach. This reinforces the broader issue of under-trained staff, many of whom lack the capacity to deliver child-



focused, integrated education and psychosocial care, an issue further discussed in the Staff Training section.

Family Status



Out of the 3,017 children for whom family connection data was reported, the majority, 2,655 children (88%), were identified as having living family members or were identified as having living family members or some form of contact or knowledge of their relatives, including 1,348 males and 1,307 females. However, 362 children (12%), comprised of 190 boys and 172 girls, were reported to be completely unaccompanied or without any known family ties. Although the proportion of unaccompanied children is similar across genders, unaccompanied girls face heightened protection risks, including potential exposure to neglect, exploitation, and early or forced marriage.

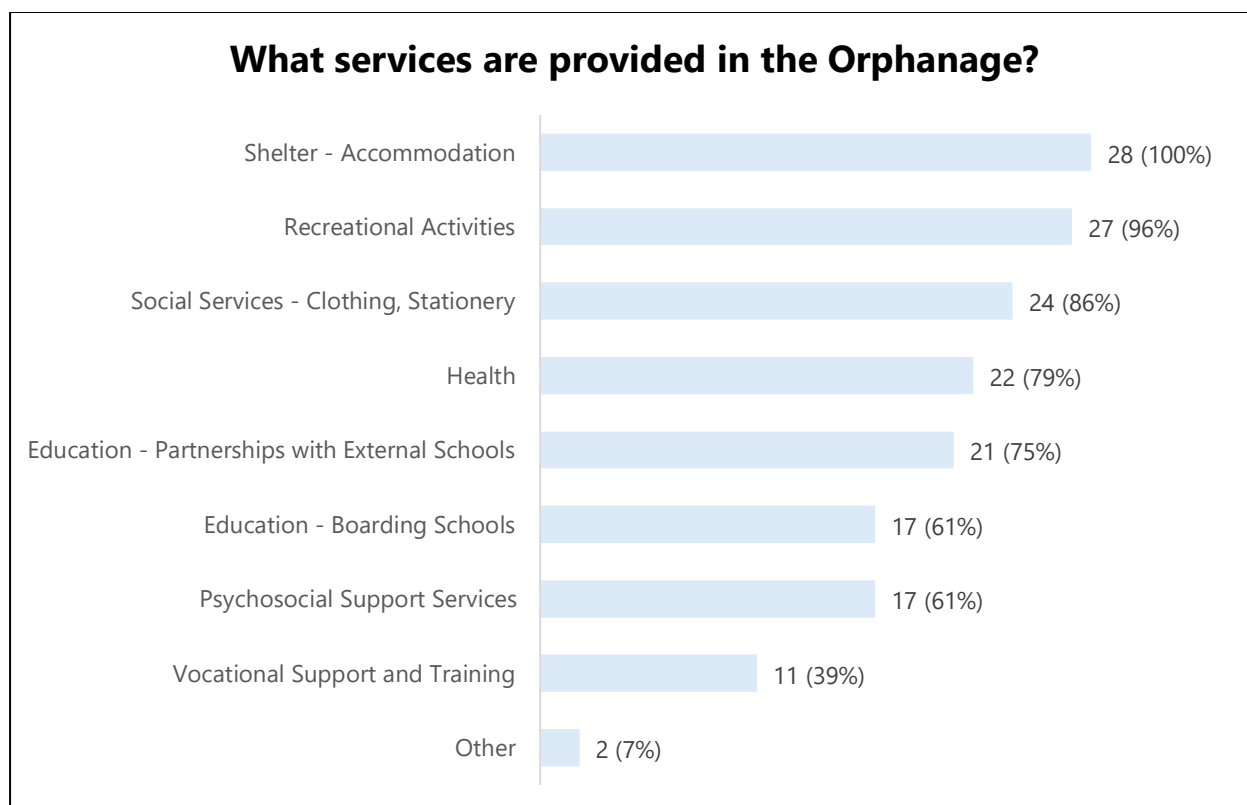
These findings have critical implications for care planning and protection interventions. This group of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) represents a priority for targeted case management, psychosocial support, and alternative care planning. Meanwhile, the large number of children who do have family connections presents a strong opportunity for family reunification, assuming that safe reintegration pathways and parenting support, such as caregiver training and follow-up are available. These opportunities are further addressed in



the Recommendations section, which emphasizes the need to strengthen family tracing, parenting support, and safe reintegration protocols.

The data underscores the need for a dual approach: strengthening reunification mechanisms for those with family, while expanding foster care options for those without.

Services provided in the orphanages



All assessed orphanages (28 out of 28, 100%) reported providing shelter and accommodation for children, underscoring their role as primary care institutions. The majority also offered essential services such as recreational activities (27, 96%), health services (22, 79%), and basic social support including clothing and stationery (24, 86%). Educational support was delivered through a combination of boarding schools (17, 61%) and external school partnerships (21, 75%). Several institutions relied on both models to ensure learning continuity.

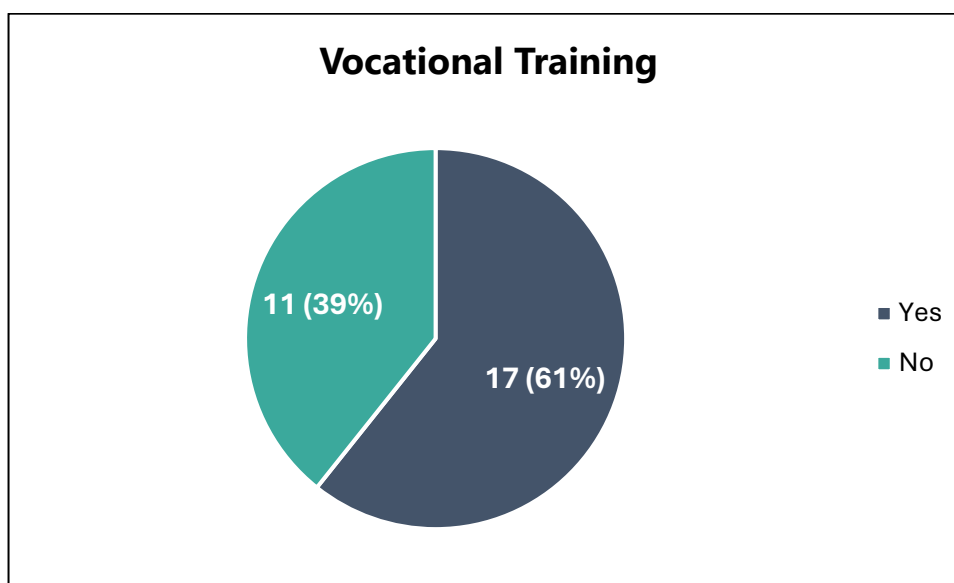
Psychosocial support services, however, were reported by only 17 institutions (61%), leaving over a third (39%) of the facilities without structured mental health or emotional support activities. Given the high levels of trauma and instability experienced by many children in institutional care, this gap reflects a serious child protection concern. In many cases, the lack



of trained staff in psychosocial care and child protection contributes directly to the absence of these services, leaving vulnerable children without the support needed to recover, build resilience, and develop healthy emotional coping skills. As previously discussed in the Education section, this gap in mental health services may contribute to school dropout and emotional disengagement. It also reflects training gaps further explored in the Staff Training section.

Vocational training was reported by 11 out of 28 orphanages (39%), reflecting a significant gap in skill-building opportunities for adolescents. These findings highlight a broad but uneven service provision landscape, where most institutions lack structured programs that prepare youth for life beyond care. The limited availability of diverse and developmentally appropriate training poses serious risks to long-term outcomes, particularly in fostering life skills, emotional resilience, and pathways to independent adulthood.

Vocational Trainings



As previously noted in the Services section, vocational training was reported by 11 out of 28 orphanages (39%), highlighting a notable gap in adolescent-focused programming. Among these, most facilities provided only one type of training, with very limited diversity in available options. Specialized or technical training such as computer or robotics programs were nearly absent, and soft skills or life skills development were largely unaddressed.

This lack of comprehensive vocational offerings is particularly concerning given that adolescents aged 15–18 account for 18% of the orphanage population. Without structured opportunities to build practical, technical, or emotional skills, these youth face significant



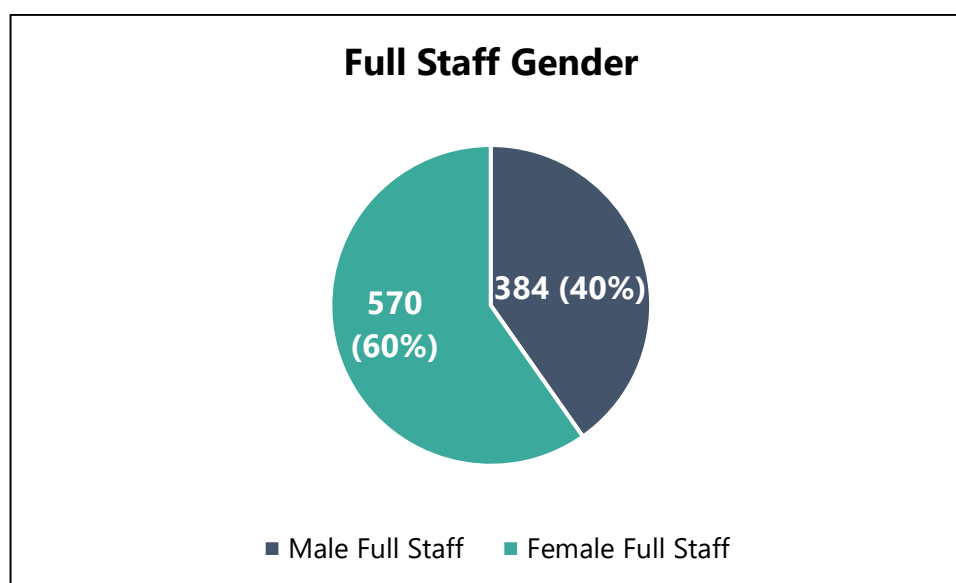
barriers when transitioning out of institutional care. The current landscape of services remains uneven, and the absence of developmentally appropriate, skill-building interventions limits children's readiness for independent adulthood.

These findings underscore the urgent need to invest in more inclusive and varied training programs, particularly those that bridge psychosocial support with career preparation and life planning.

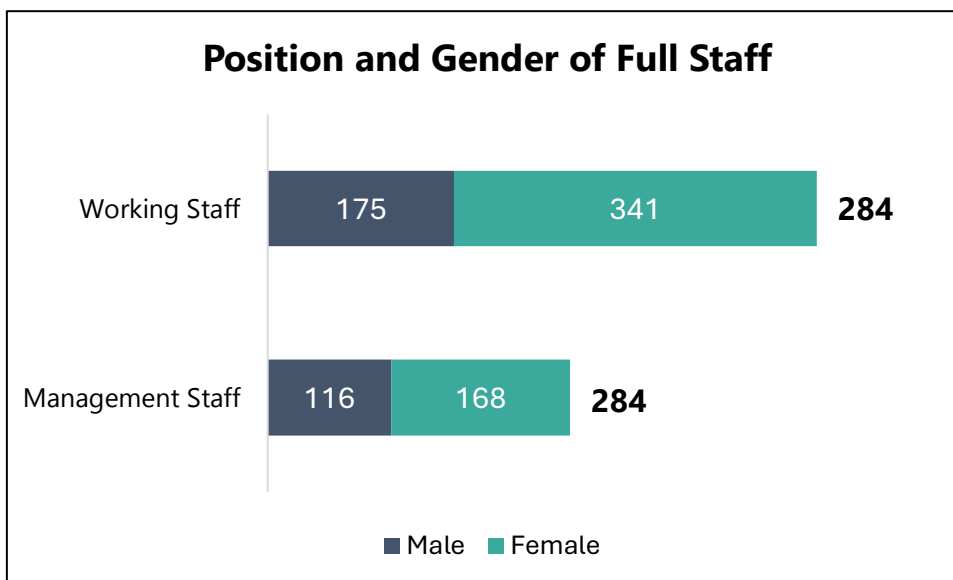
Staff

Staff's Demographics

A total of 954 staff members were reported across the assessed orphanages, comprising 384 males (40%) and 570 females (60%).

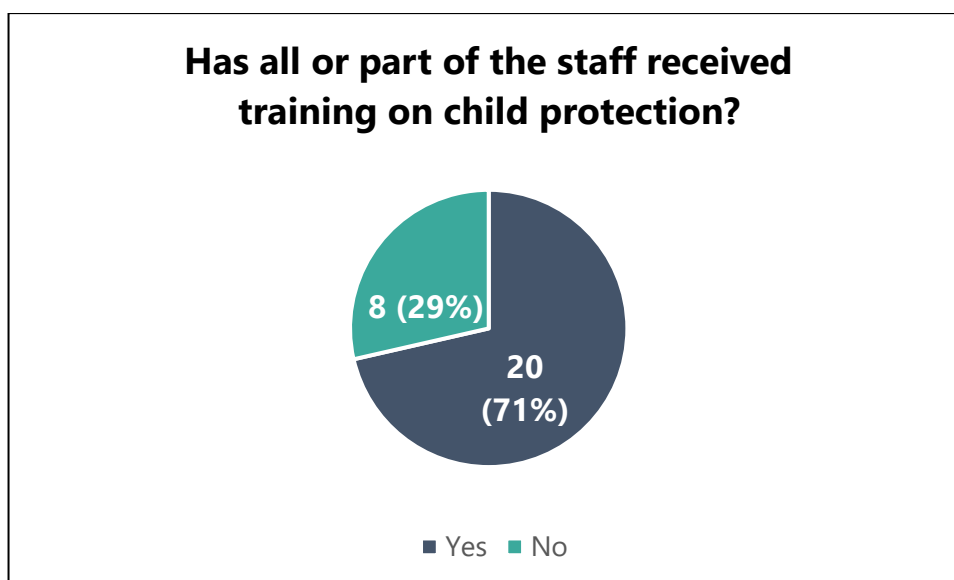


Of these, 284 individuals (30%) were identified as management staff, 116 males (12%) and 168 females (18%), while 516 (54%) were categorized as working staff involved in daily care and service provision 175 males (18%) and 341 females (36%).



The remaining 154 staff members (16%) were not classified under management or working categories, and likely include support staff, part-time workers, or administrative personnel whose roles were not distinctly reported.

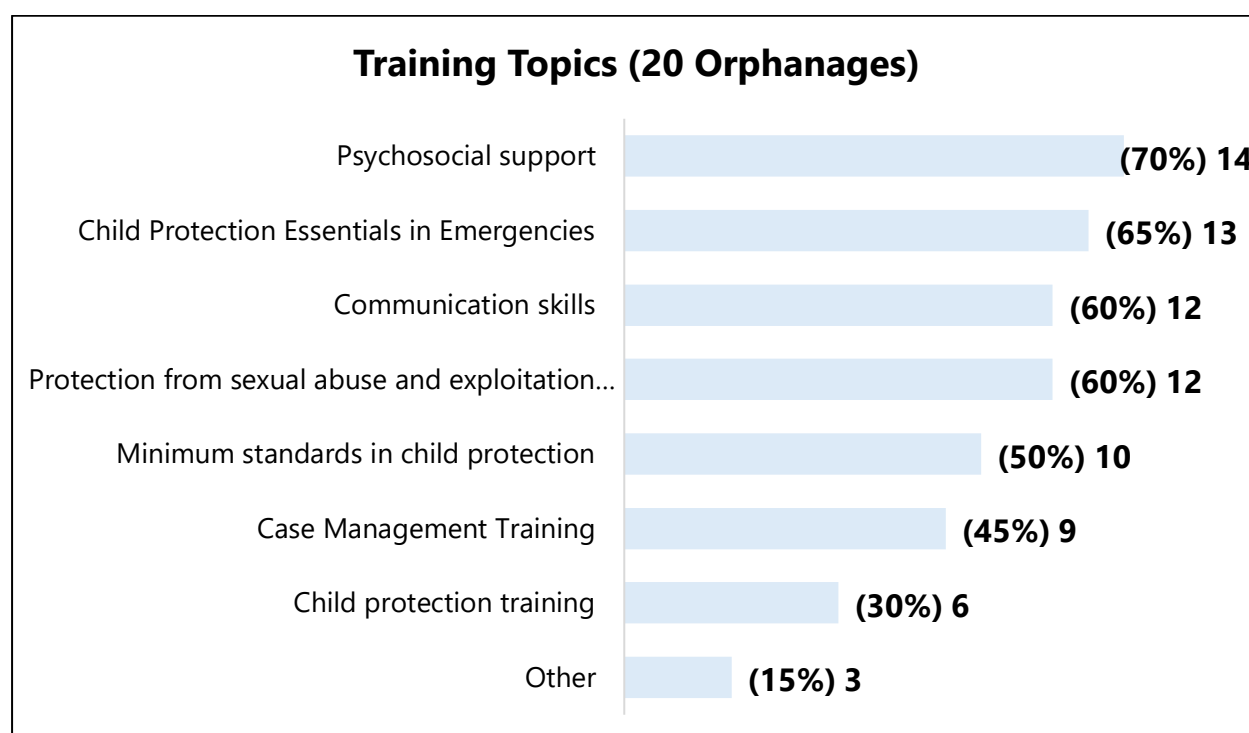
Staff Training



Out of the 28 assessed orphanages, only 20 (71%) reported that their staff had received some form of child protection training, while 8 institutions (29%) indicated that no staff had been trained on the topic. This gap in foundational training is concerning, particularly given the complex protection needs of children in institutional care. The absence of trained staff



limits the ability of orphanages to identify, prevent, and respond to cases of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, ultimately compromising the safety and well-being of vulnerable children. As seen in earlier sections, this lack of training also correlates with weak or absent psychosocial support services, gaps in personalized care, and the inconsistent availability of complaints and reporting mechanisms, reinforcing the urgent need for professional development as a foundation for quality child protection.



Among the 20 orphanages that reported providing child protection training to staff, the most common topics included psychosocial support (14 institutions, 70%), child protection essentials in emergencies (13, 65%), protection from sexual abuse and exploitation (PSEA) (12, 60%), and communication skills (12, 60%). Fewer institutions covered core frameworks such as minimum standards in child protection (10, 50%) or case management (9, 45%), while only 6 facilities (30%) reported offering general child protection training. A small number (3 institutions, 15%) provided training under “other” categories. The emphasis on psychosocial and emergency topics is notable, but the limited coverage of structured case management and protection standards reflects an incomplete approach.

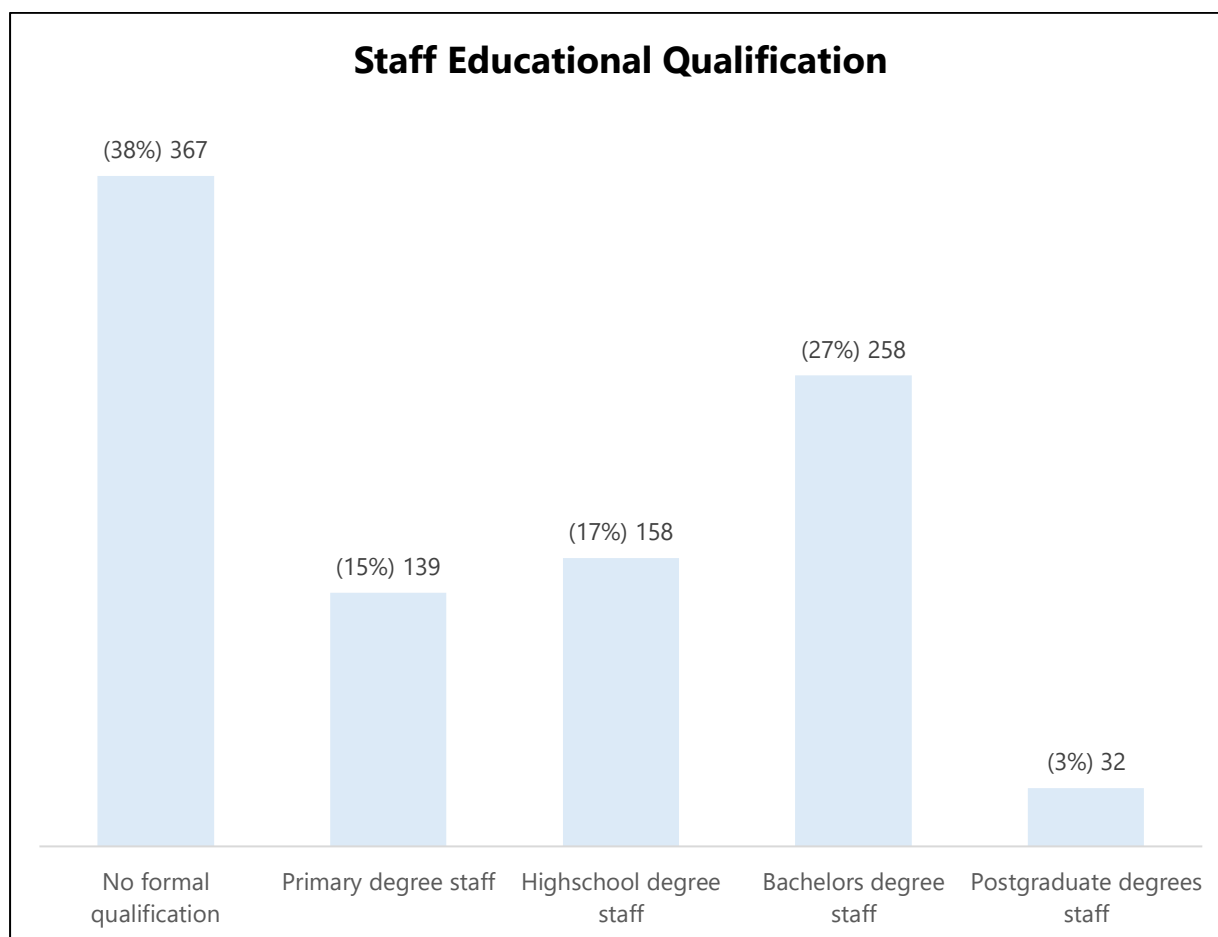
This variation suggests that while some staff have been exposed to important thematic areas, there remains a lack of consistency and depth in training coverage across institutions. Core



competencies essential for quality care, such as structured case management and adherence to protection standards, remain insufficiently addressed in most facilities.

These gaps reflect broader concerns about the preparedness of orphanage staff to identify and respond effectively to protection risks, especially in the absence of dedicated child protection specialists in many facilities. This is further evidenced in the limited implementation of protection policies and feedback systems, as detailed in subsequent sections.

Staff Qualifications

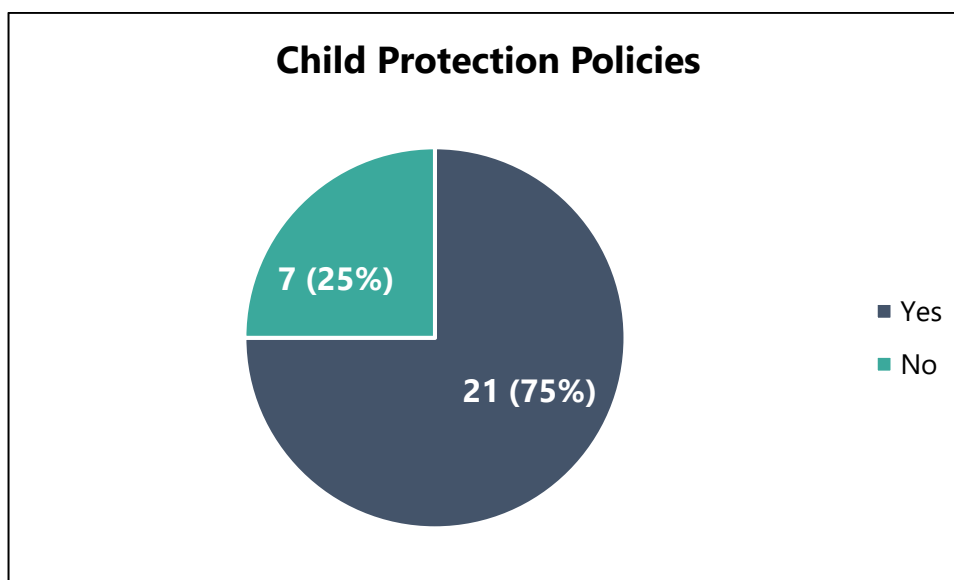


A review of staff educational qualifications across the 28 assessed orphanages revealed that the majority of reported personnel held at least a secondary-level education. Among the 954 total staff, qualifications were available for 587 individuals (62%). Of those, 258 staff members (27%) held a bachelor's degree, 158 (17%) had completed high school, 139 (15%) had completed primary school, and 32 (3%) held postgraduate degrees. Educational



background data was not reported for 367 staff (38%), who are likely to hold minimal or no formal qualification. In total, only 30% of all staff appear to hold university-level education, while the remaining 70% either had only basic education or likely none reported. Staff with limited or no formal education may face challenges in delivering technical services such as psychosocial support, structured case management, and child protection interventions, especially without targeted supervision and ongoing training. As discussed in the Staff Training section, formal qualifications must be complemented with ongoing training to ensure staff are equipped to provide safe, child-centered care.

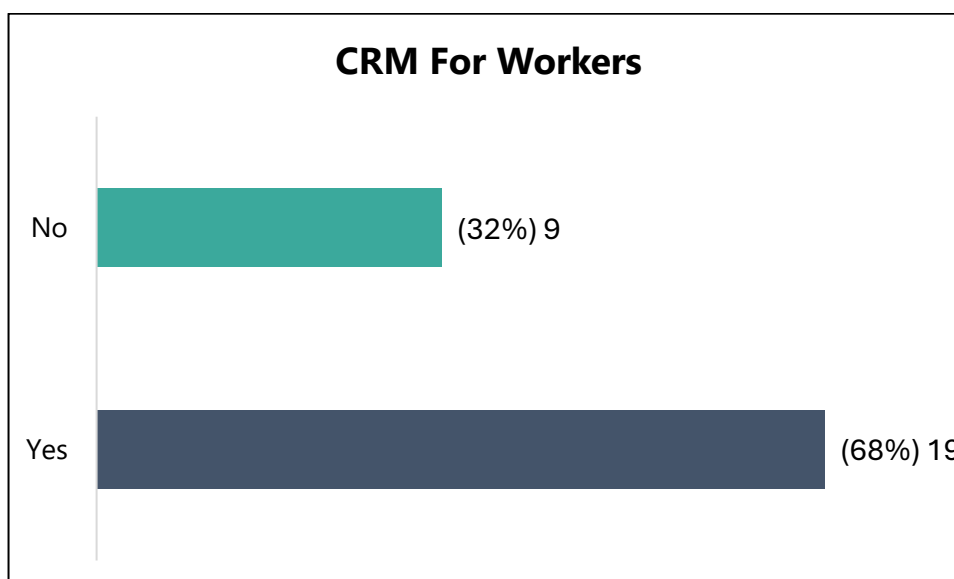
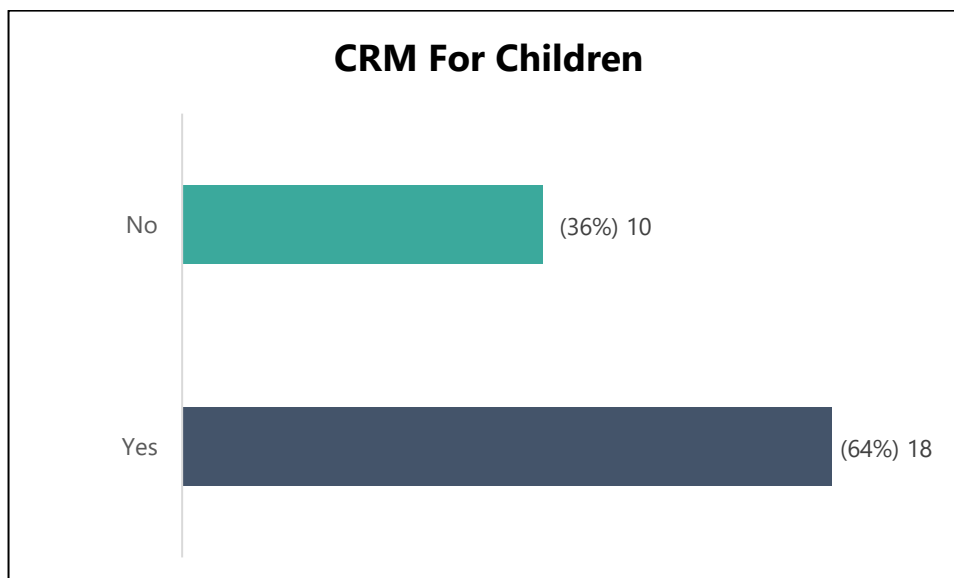
Child Protection Policies



In response to whether clear child protection policies were in place to prevent abuse and sexual exploitation, 21 out of 28 orphanages (75%) reported having such policies in place, while 7 (25%) reported none. While it is encouraging that a majority have formal protection frameworks, the absence of clear policies in a quarter of the facilities raises serious protection concerns, especially given the elevated risks faced by unaccompanied and separated children, who are often more vulnerable to neglect, abuse, and exploitation.

In such cases, the absence of clear institutional safeguards can result in unclear reporting pathways, delayed responses to incidents, and limited accountability for violations. This policy gap is compounded by insufficient staff training in child protection, case management, and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), as discussed in the Staff Training section. Without trained personnel to implement existing policies, even documented procedures may remain ineffective.

Complaints and Reporting Mechanisms

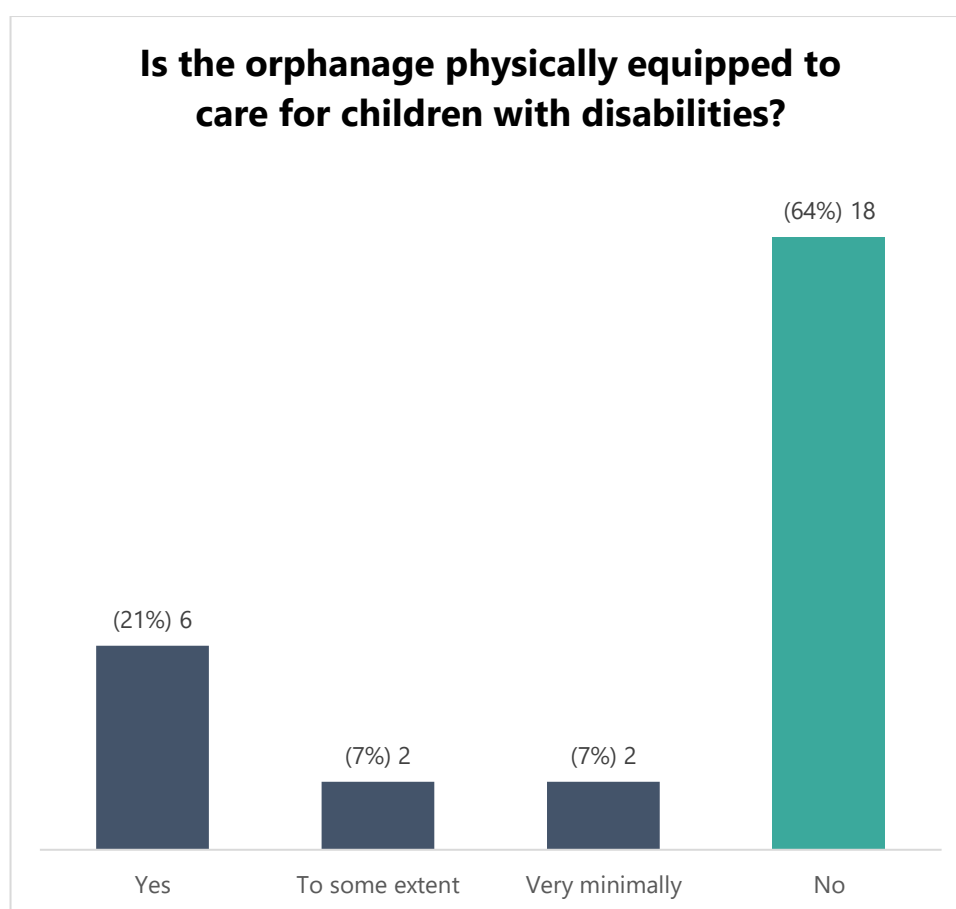


The availability and consistency of complaints and reporting mechanisms (CRM) varied notably across the assessed orphanages. 18 out of 28 institutions (64%) reported having a dedicated CRM in place for children, while 10 (36%) lacked such mechanisms. For staff, 19 orphanages (68%) reported having internal channels for reporting concerns, while 9 (32%) did not. This means that one-third of orphanages still lack structured reporting systems, particularly for children, whose ability to report abuse or misconduct is already limited by power dynamics and institutional dependence. The absence of formalized, accessible, and child-friendly feedback pathways poses a serious risk to child safety, inhibits the early



detection of harm, and undermines institutional transparency. Without safe, confidential mechanisms in place, both children and staff remain vulnerable to unchecked abuse, neglect, or retaliation. These findings reinforce earlier gaps identified in child protection policies and staff training, underscoring the urgent need to strengthen accountability systems as part of a comprehensive protection framework within residential care settings.

Infrastructure

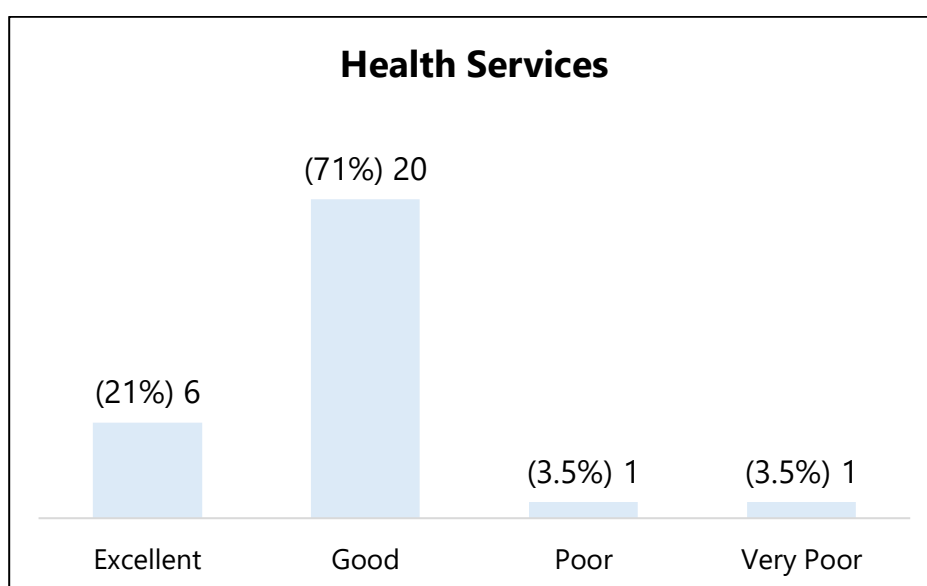


Only 6 out of 28 orphanages (21%) reported that their facilities were physically equipped to care for children with disabilities. Another 4 institutions (14%) indicated limited accessibility, with 2 describing their facilities as 'to some extent' accessible and 2 as 'very minimally' accessible. While the majority, 18 orphanages (64%), stated that their facilities were not physically prepared to accommodate children with disabilities. This widespread inaccessibility highlights not only physical infrastructure limitations, but also deeper gaps in awareness, inclusive planning, and institutional commitment to accessibility.



The lack of staff trained in child protection and psychosocial support, many of whom are not equipped to assess or advocate for inclusive care, further undermines institutional readiness. Without adequate training and technical guidance, orphanages remain ill-prepared to accommodate children with disabilities, leaving them at heightened risk of exclusion, neglect, and unmet developmental needs.

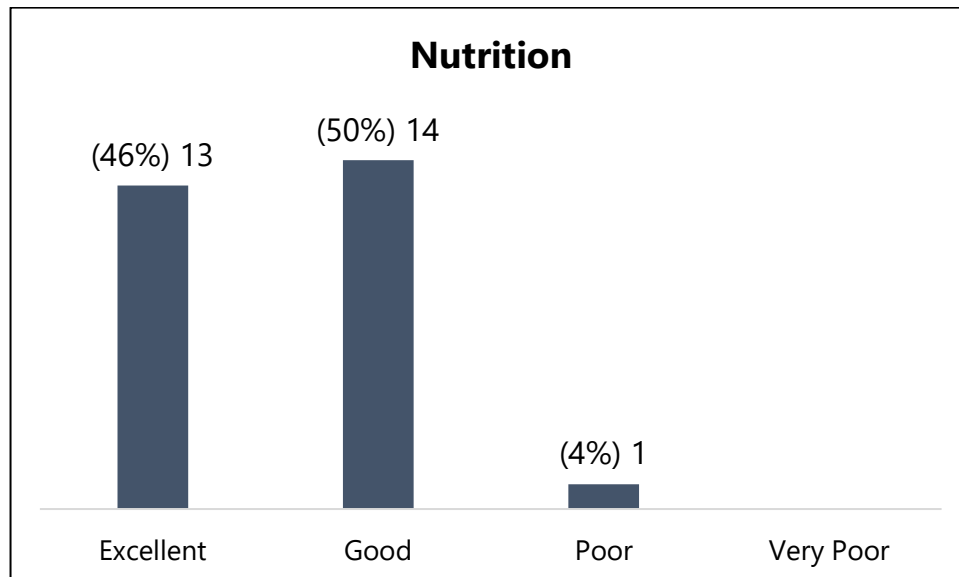
Health Services



When asked to rate the quality of health services in their facilities, 20 out of 28 orphanages (71%) described them as “good,” while 6 (21%) rated them as “excellent.” However, 2 institutions (7%) acknowledged serious shortcomings, one rated their services as “poor,” and the other as “very poor.” Although most orphanages provided a positive self-assessment, the fact that only 6 out of 28 rated their services as “excellent” raises concerns about overall consistency and adequacy. This suggests that health care may still fall short in areas such as specialization, continuity, or accessibility, particularly for children with chronic conditions or disabilities. These findings highlight the need for clearer health care standards and stronger oversight to ensure that all children receive timely and appropriate medical attention.



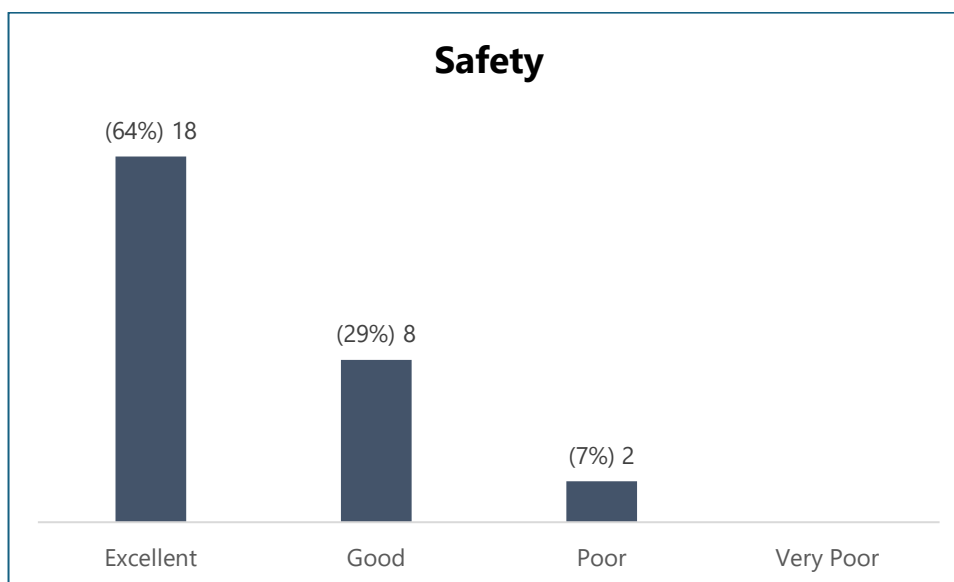
Nutrition



When asked to evaluate the quality of nutrition provided to children, 13 orphanages (46%) rated it as “excellent,” while 14 (50%) described it as “good,” suggesting that the majority of institutions perceive their nutritional services as adequate. However, 1 institution (4%) rated its nutritional services as “poor,” pointing to possible localized challenges related to funding, procurement, or inadequate meal planning. Although the high proportion of positive ratings is encouraging, these self-assessments should be interpreted with caution, particularly in light of broader service inconsistencies in psychosocial support, protection, and individual care. To ensure sustained, high-quality nutrition, regular independent monitoring and technical guidance from qualified child health and nutrition professionals remain essential.



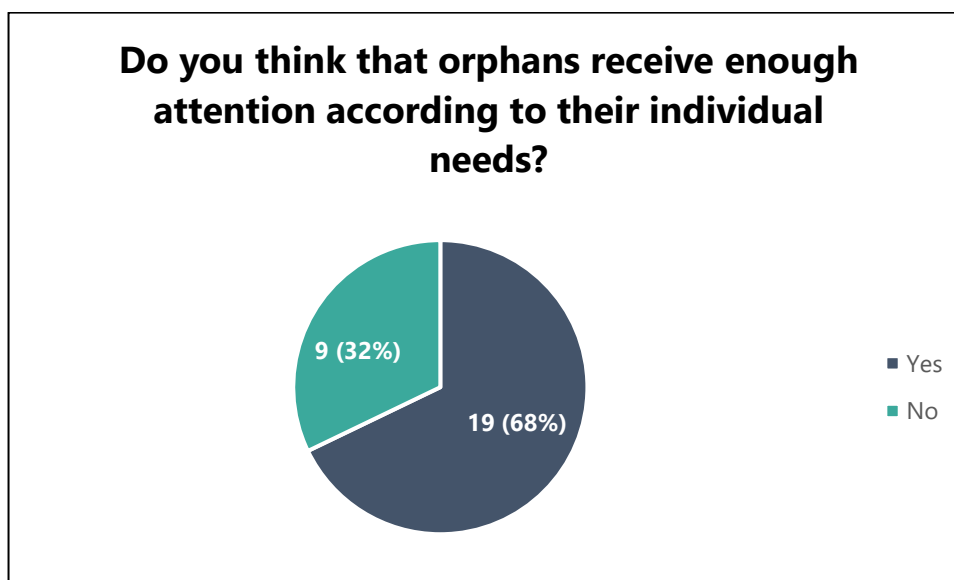
Safety



In terms of overall safety, 18 out of 28 orphanages (64%) rated their facilities as “excellent,” while 8 (29%) described them as “good.” Only 2 orphanages (7%) rated safety as “poor,” highlighting a small but important subset of institutions where children may be exposed to unmanaged or unaddressed risks. While the high percentage of positive responses may reflect confidence in physical infrastructure or staff presence, it stands in contrast to earlier findings that revealed weaknesses in child protection training, complaints mechanisms, and formal safeguarding policies. This contrast suggests that while facilities may appear safe on the surface, deeper systemic and procedural weaknesses, particularly in accountability and prevention, could compromise actual child safety, especially for unaccompanied children or those with disabilities. Ongoing safety assessments, inclusive training, and routine child-centered safety audits are needed to ensure that safety is not only perceived but actively upheld across all institutional operations.



Personalized Support for Children

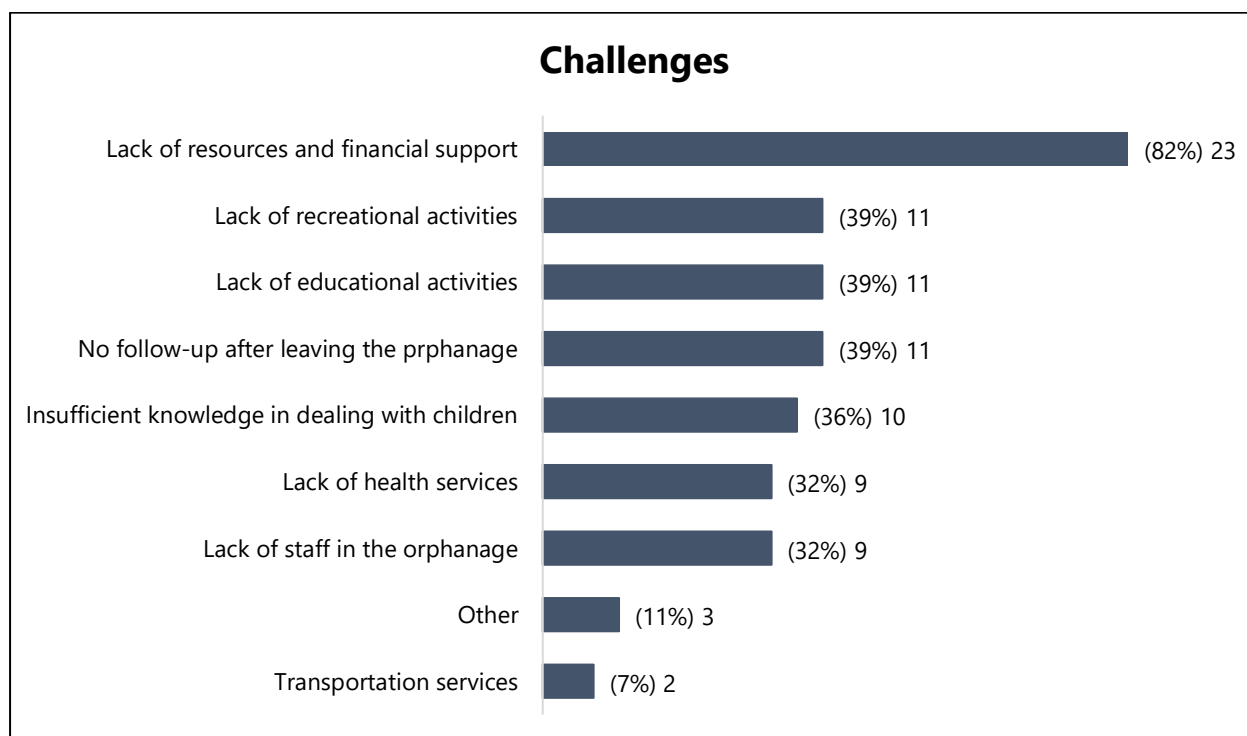


When asked whether children in their care receive adequate attention based on their individual needs, 19 out of 28 orphanages (68%) responded positively, while 9 (32%) acknowledged that children do not receive sufficient individualized support. Although the majority expressed confidence in their care practices, the fact that nearly one-third of institutions reported gaps is significant, especially when viewed alongside earlier findings on limited staff training, insufficient psychosocial support, and high child-to-staff ratios. Without adequate preparation in case management, child development, and trauma-informed care, staff may be unable to identify and respond to the diverse and complex needs of children in institutional settings. These findings underscore the need for improved staffing strategies, targeted professional development, and the consistent integration of individualized, child-centered approaches to ensure that every child is seen, supported, and cared for with dignity.



Challenges and Suggestions

Challenges Faced by Orphanages



When asked to identify the most pressing challenges facing their institutions, 23 orphanages (82%) cited a lack of financial resources and overall support, making it the most frequently reported barrier. This shortage underpins many of the other challenges reported, including limited access to health services (9 orphanages, 32%), recreational activities (11, 39%), and educational programming (11, 39%). A significant number of institutions also reported insufficient knowledge among staff in dealing with children (10, 36%), echoing earlier concerns about gaps in child protection training and individualized care. Furthermore, 11 orphanages (39%) highlighted the absence of follow-up mechanisms for children after leaving the institution, indicating a lack of transitional support for reintegration or independent living. Staffing constraints were also noted by 9 facilities (32%), reinforcing previously documented issues around staff qualifications and child-to-staff ratios. Less frequently mentioned but still relevant were transportation challenges (2 institutions) and other context-specific issues (3 institutions). These reported challenges provide essential context for understanding service gaps, reinforcing the urgency of sustainable funding, staff



capacity building, and the development of holistic care models that extend beyond institutional walls.

Suggestions from Orphanage Staff

The qualitative data analysis revealed three core issues across the assessed orphanages: a lack of protective and child-friendly environments, insufficiently trained staff, and the presence of children who could potentially be reunified with their families or placed in alternative family-based care. Respondents consistently emphasized the urgent need for specialized personnel, particularly in psychological and medical support, as well as for structured recreational and psychosocial activities. Several responses highlighted the importance of gender separation within facilities, improved infrastructure, and consistent funding to ensure continuity of care. Additionally, concerns were raised regarding the politicization of orphanages, with recommendations to protect these institutions from conflict-related interference. Some respondents also noted the need for coordination mechanisms to support children with family ties outside the institution, indicating opportunities for reintegration.

Recommendations

This rapid needs assessment highlights several urgent priorities within Syria's orphanages, with a particular focus on strengthening child protection, ensuring staff preparedness, and supporting family-based alternatives to institutional care. While many institutions demonstrate commitment and effort in meeting children's basic needs, systemic and structural gaps continue to undermine children's safety, development, and long-term well-being.

1. Strengthen child protection systems and create safe environments:

Despite a majority of institutions reporting basic safety and protection policies, major risks remain due to inconsistent implementation, limited complaints mechanisms, and inadequate safeguarding procedures. Protection must be embedded into daily practice through enforced standards, regular safety audits, and the establishment of confidential, child-friendly reporting pathways. A dedicated focus is needed to ensure that every child, particularly unaccompanied girls and children with disabilities, is protected from harm within care settings.

2. Invest in training and capacity building for orphanage staff:



The lack of trained personnel was a recurring theme across nearly every domain of care. While some institutions provide basic child protection training, most staff lack adequate preparation in psychosocial support, case management, trauma-informed care, and inclusive practices. Targeted, ongoing professional development is essential for staff to provide individualized support and to ensure that institutional care is grounded in the principles of dignity, participation, and resilience-building.

3. Prioritize family tracing, reunification, and family-based alternatives:

With 88% of children identified as having living family members, there is a clear opportunity to reduce reliance on institutional care by investing in family reintegration. This includes building systems for safe family tracing, assessing home environments, and delivering parenting support for reintegrating families. For children whose reunification is not immediately possible, temporary foster care and community-based alternatives should be strengthened as part of a broader shift away from long-term institutionalization.

To respond effectively to the challenges outlined in this assessment, stakeholders must commit to a coordinated, child-centered approach that balances immediate service delivery with long-term reform. Sustainable funding, staff support, and structural investments are critical, but must be grounded in the principle that every child deserves not only shelter and food, but safety, connection, and a future rooted in care and belonging.