# HANDOUT – FAMILY SEPARATION: ROOT CAUSES/ RISK FACTORS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Root causes and risk factors for family separation will depend on the context but those commonly found are listed below. Some root causes, risk factors and protective factors are common to all types of prevention - primary, secondary and tertiary prevention, whereas others are more specific and relate to only one type of prevention.

## Root Causes/Risk Factors:

* Lack of economic opportunities/ limited/ reduced household income
* lack of services, including education and family support services
* harmful social norms and traditions
* conflict, violence and insecurity
* natural disasters
* displacement of populations
* detention (of parents/carers/ children)
* Sickness (of parents/ carers/ children)
* Parents/caregivers migrate to earn income due to lack of economic/ livelihood opportunities;
* Families under stress (e.g., from poverty, death/disability of parents) might consider giving up their children to residential care, sending their children away to earn an income or to fight with armed forces or armed groups, or children might make these decisions due to economic necessity or perceived injustice/identity concerns;
* Parents/carers send their children away from insecurity;
* Children and/or caregivers with chronic physical or mental health problems or disabilities: family breakdown or abandonment of children may be more likely due to increased stress;
* Divorce of parents/caregivers; violence, abuse or exploitation in the family/home;
* Discrimination or rejection of children, for example from a new partner and/or the belief that they will be better cared for by others;
* Children in single headed households;
* Children left without adult caregiver (e.g., detention of caregiver);
* Child marriage;
* Lack of access to safe education leading to children leaving or being sent away from home or making children vulnerable to child labour, recruitment etc.;
* Families in a minority group which is under threat or from marginalised groups or communities;
* ‘Children on the move’ i.e., amongst communities who are forcibly displaced or moving in search of better economic opportunities related to climate change, conflict, natural disaster, persecution or marginalisation;
* Children living away from their birth family: Children in many countries are sent away or live apart from their immediate families on a long-term basis, whether to ‘children’s homes’ or facilities for those with disabilities or extended family, often to provide labour e.g., as household help or tending livestock;
* Evacuation, transportation or medical treatment without following procedures;
* Accidental separation as a result of the emergency and/or during population movements as well as recruitment, detention or trafficking of children;
* Injury, death, capture, kidnapping, abduction, detention or arrest of family members related to conflict or political unrest;
* Poorly managed emergency response e.g., refugee and IDP camps with potential for accidental separation or where there is poor targeting of aid leading to deliberate separations in order to receive additional aid;
* Residential care providers offering (or perceived to be offering) free education, better services or other incentives.

## Protective factors:

* Supportive communities and social/traditional norms contributing to the protection of children and family unity
* Awareness among communities of child protection, impact of family separation and knowledge of caregivers and children to preserve family unity in case of emergency
* Availability of /access to socio-economic support: cash transfer schemes, social protection programmes, livelihood opportunities, safe, quality education
* Availability of basic and specialised services and multi-sectoral programming to support children and families
* Effective child protection systems at national and community levels; adequately resourced social workforce
* Enforcement of legal and normative framework that protects children from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence;
* Legislation and policies providing for the protection of children and promoting family support
* Gatekeeping measures to limit placement of children in residential care
* Emergency preparedness plans in place
* Safe and nurturing family
* Positive relationship with caregiver
* A sense of connection and belonging within the family and community
* Social pressure – positive socio-cultural norms which support family unity;
* Knowledge of harmful outcomes e.g., related to family separation.