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## Fostering and managing change in Algerian nurseries

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**HANDICAP  
INTERNATIONAL**

### About...

#### Handicap International

"Handicap International is an independent and impartial international aid organisation working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster.

Working alongside persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, our action and testimony are focused on responding to their essential needs, improving their living conditions and promoting respect for their dignity and their fundamental rights."

[www.handicap-international.org](http://www.handicap-international.org)

### About... this brief

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This brief is an introduction to lessons learned document on the nurseries project conducted in Algeria. The full version is available at:  
English version:

[http://www.hiproweb.org/uploads/tx\\_hidrtdocs/AlgeriaSdLL05.pdf](http://www.hiproweb.org/uploads/tx_hidrtdocs/AlgeriaSdLL05.pdf)

French version:

[http://www.hiproweb.org/uploads/tx\\_hidrtdocs/AlgerieDsExp05.pdf](http://www.hiproweb.org/uploads/tx_hidrtdocs/AlgerieDsExp05.pdf)



### Handicap International in Algeria

Handicap International has been working in Algeria since 1999. Its actions take place in a context of development with the aim of improving the living conditions, social inclusion and participation of people with disabilities.

According to its mandate, Handicap International is also required to respond to emergency situations, as was the case during the Bab El Oued floods in 2001 and the Boumerdes earthquake in 2003.

Handicap International responds to requests and expressed or evaluated needs, working directly with partners. In 2011, Handicap International worked with some twenty State, voluntary and institutional partners.

Its scope of action includes social, economic and educational inclusion, as well as mental health, rehabilitation, relief for victims of antipersonnel mines and disability prevention.

The inclusive approach is the cornerstone of projects and is based on the Rights of People with Disabilities in accordance with international legal instruments, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Ottawa Convention on the Antipersonnel Mine Ban, all of which have been ratified by the Algerian State.

In 2011, six projects were in progress:

- The Maghreb ICRPD Monitoring and Implementation Project
- The Inclusive Education Project
- The Neuromuscular Diseases Project
- The Mine Action Project
- The Mediterranean Programme entitled "Mediterranean, From One Bank to the Other" ("Méditerranée, d'une rive à l'autre")
- The Early Childhood Project

# Why Handicap International works with children deprived of family care in Algeria



## The support system of children deprived of family care in Algeria

In Algeria, children temporarily or permanently deprived of family care are cared for by State-run institutions and eligible for special assistance pursuant to the law on child and youth protection.

Children aged 0 to 6 from 22 Children's Homes are placed in *kafala* or in a foster family in the framework of remunerated care.

There are currently 35 Homes for children and young people in the country, spread over 27 wilayas with a total capacity of 2,748 beds.

In addition to these Children's Homes, 18 institutions are directly run by the voluntary sector.



## What is *kafala*?

*Kafala* is a method of adoption without kinship: in other words the child is placed with a type of foster family.

This family ensures the protection, education and upkeep of the child.

However, the child does not take the name of the adopting person, nor can he or she claim an inheritance.

## Context

Since gaining independence, the Algerian State has relied on a strong social policy, geared towards protecting the most vulnerable children and young people.

The Algerian State ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 19 December 1992 and draws essentially on following Articles:

### Article 20:

"1. A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State.

2. States Parties shall in accordance with their national laws ensure alternative care for such a child.

3. Such care could include, inter alia, foster placement, *kafala* of Islamic law, adoption or if necessary placement in suitable institutions for the care of children. When considering solutions, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background."

### Article 21:

"States Parties that recognize and/or permit the system of adoption shall ensure that the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration."

### Article 23:

"States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community."

## Why intervene

At the beginning of the 2000s, the Handicap International team in Algeria learned from observations, reports and video documentaries about the situation of children deprived of family care: extremely high mortality in some nurseries, disease and psychological distress linked to a lack of medical, sanitary and nutritional care and no care for children with disabilities. To compound matters, there was also a significant shortage of educational, psychological and emotional support.

In 2002, the programme officially endorsed a response targeting children deprived of family care by establishing the need for dialogue with the public authorities as the vital prerequisite.

2004 marked the start of work in Bouira nursery, considered a "pilot project". This direct response was implemented in the institution and on its team, while upholding dialogue with the Ministry for National Solidarity and the Family.

# How Handicap International works with children deprived of family care in Algeria



## Personalised project

The notion of a psycho-educational project refers to the idea of a personalised project for each child.

The shift is gradually made:

- from a more or less collective organisation method (whereby children enter the institutional organisation and each place is governed by shared provisions),
- to a method whereby children receive care on the basis of their own needs (educational, interpersonal, medical and paramedical) and in keeping with their situation.



## What implies “Working on a protection system for children”

Working on a protection system for children with or without disabilities implies:

- drawing on positive factors,
- bridging gaps,
- ensuring consistency and synergies between the various stakeholders,
- limiting negative factors.

## The main thrusts of Handicap International response

Handicap International decided to support the structural, functional and architectural improvement of targeted nurseries based on three mainstays:

- Training of caregivers and awareness-raising among supervisory staff in nurseries.
- Redevelopment of premises to adapt them to the children’s health and interpersonal needs, and improve working conditions for caregivers.
- Elaboration with a view to implementing a child-centred site project.

These three mainstays are designed to place each child with his or her specific needs, talents and weaknesses at the centre of concerns and decisions in the institution.

Between 2003 and 2010, Handicap International spearheaded a response in four of the country’s nurseries: Bouira, Ain Taya, Béchar and Tamanrasset.

In 2005, Handicap International began taking part in workshops and seminars organised by the Ministry for Solidarity and UNICEF, giving rise to the 2010 culmination of two years of work on the reform of the protection system for children deprived of family care.

Today, the reform of the system for children deprived of family care has given rise to the following priorities:

- Define an active policy against to prevent abandonment and provide parental support,
- Set up a policy for the early assessment and personalised follow-up of all children deprived of family care,
- Define the legal, administrative and support methods for alternatives to placement: *kafala*, placement with a foster family,
- Foster de-institutionalisation,
- Ensure the child’s balanced development in a nursery by providing high quality care which takes into account the child’s needs and rights.

Since 2009, Handicap International has been a driving force for prevention and support action for children with disabilities in nurseries.

## The main lessons learned



### Testimonies of the Ain Taya caregivers

“We feel that we are not like other caregivers, we have learned things which have revolutionised our work.”

“We no longer see children with disabilities in the same way; the techniques that we have learned empower us. We observe rapid progress and this reinforces the idea that we must keep going even if it's difficult at times.”

“Today, we no longer see children in the same way. Even working with older children with disabilities no longer scares us. It makes us happy to see the progress some people have achieved.”

- **Take context into account:** similar experiences in other countries cannot be transposed per se; they must be tailored to the social and cultural practices of each context. The approach can only be sustained in the long-term if it is genuinely appropriated by the public authorities and the institution's teams.
- **Working at all levels of the system in the child's environment to create a protective environment:** at political level with the different ministerial departments, at institutional level via the site project, by training managers and caregivers, and by improving the overall living conditions of children.
- **Forging partnerships:** not only with the Ministry for Solidarity and UNICEF, but also with associations and NGOs like the Algerian Association for Children and Voluntary Foster Families (AACVFF) and the NGO SOS Children's Villages. Partnerships were responsible for the synergy between Handicap International and these NGOs to build their capacity and raise their profile.
- **Offering caregivers high-quality training and professional support:** when they see the effects of changes in their practice on children as well as on themselves, they become fervent supporters of the approach.



### Outlook

#### At a ministerial level:

- Efforts to reorganise care for children deprived of their family paves the way for the drafting of a strategy to determine its implementation method.
- A global think-tank is initiated on social work, its stakeholders and its services. This will be subject to reorganisation based on preventing abandonment, alternatives to placement in an institution, training protection stakeholders and improving local services.

#### At the level of Handicap International:

- The “Early Childhood” project is incorporated into a broader project in association with the Maghreb ICRPD Project to tackle issues of de-institutionalisation, and the implementation of the site project and the individual plan.
- Prevention and monitoring for children with disabilities is sustained and Handicap International is recognised as the legitimate focal point for these issues.