



INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE

ALTERNATIVE CARE

Casework, technical assistance and advocacy

What is alternative care?

Alternative care options are **protection measures for children without parental care**, meaning children who are “not in the overnight care of at least one of their parents, for whatever reason and under whatever circumstances.” Therefore, children on the move, as being children “who are outside their country of habitual residence or victims of emergency situations” are equally to be considered children without parental care (para. 29 a. Guidelines). The term ‘alternative care’ covers a wide range of care options (both formal and informal): kinship and foster care, other forms of family-based or family like care placements, small group homes, residential care and supervised independent living arrangements.

What safeguards are foreseen by the Alternative Care Guidelines?

The international community saw the need to develop a set of guidelines, approved by the UN General Assembly in 2009: the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. This instrument establishes **orientations for policy and practice** aimed at enhancing the implementation of the UNCRC and other international instruments related to children deprived of parental care or who are at risk of being so. Albeit being a non-binding international instrument, the Guidelines shape how policy-makers, decision-makers, professionals and other practitioners approach both the prevention and the provision of alternative care for children. Proof of this is the fact that the CRC Committee regularly refers to the Guidelines in its Concluding observations. The Guidelines are founded on two main pillars, namely:

- **The necessity principle** (ensure care is genuinely needed); and
- **The suitability principle** (out-of-home care should be provided in an appropriate manner)

Finally, the determination of the **child’s best interests** remains a key principle and component of any alternative care process.

How to implement the principle of necessity?

Family breakdown and separation are often the result of a multitude of factors, which are individual to each situation. To cope with this, a legal framework and a national policy should be based on **three basic levels of prevention**:

- **Level 1** aims at guaranteeing access to basic services (health, education, etc.) by all families and **level 2** should be aimed at providing specialised services to vulnerable families (single mothers, families with special needs children, etc.).
- **Level 3** promotes family reintegration as an objective to be achieved, provided that it is possible, adequately prepared and monitored. Further, a robust gatekeeping mechanism is necessary to prevent unnecessary family separations. Such mechanism should systematically determine a child’s placement after considering family support and other services, and to decide from the available range of options, which is the alternative care arrangement that best corresponds to the child’s individual situation.

How to ensure suitable alternative care (principle of suitability)?

If it is determined that a child does indeed require alternative care, the care setting must meet **general minimum standards** and match the **individual child’s needs**. When developing this **range of options** and choosing a care setting, the following **priorities** should be considered: *Family solutions* (see CRC Preamble, para. 53 Guidelines); *Permanent solutions* (see para. 60 Guidelines); *Community-based and national solutions* (see art.21-b UNCRC; para. 11, Guidelines), *Consensual solutions* (see para. 57 Guidelines), *Individualised solutions* (see art. 3 UNCRC; para. 6 Guidelines); and should be *periodically reviewed* (see art. 25 UNCRC; para. 67 Guidelines).

Guiding international standards and ISS internal documents:

- [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- [UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children](#)
- [UNICEF Best Interests of the child in ICA](#)
- [Moving Forward Handbook](#)
- [ISS thematic factsheets on alternative care and adoption](#)
- [ISS Manual on CoM](#)

Further implementation tools and initiative

- [MOOC Getting Care Right for all Children](#)
- [Tracking Progress Initiative](#)
- [MOOC Children on the Move](#)
- [Childnomics](#)
- [Better Volunteering, Better](#)

Casework services may include:

- counselling to persons interested in fostering a child
- provide necessary referrals to competent authorities
- preparation of background reports for the child, family of origin and prospective foster carers/guardians/kinship carers
- evaluation of cross-border placements/transfer of protection measure

Technical assistance and advocacy may include:

- dissemination of information to professionals (e.g.: Monthly Review, over 100 country situation analysis, comparative studies and thematic publications)
- training of professionals on ethical alternative care procedures
- evaluation missions at the request of countries about alternative care
- support in national law and policy reforms
- active participation in expert consultation groups
- work with UN and regional treaty bodies