



Family Based Alternative Care Position Paper September 2022

Empowering
family-based care
for every child around the world



At different stages of their lives, children may be forced into situations that deprive them of their family environments temporarily or permanently.

Factors like the death of parents or close relatives, neglect and abuse, abandonment, poverty, chronic diseases, and different conditions of disability contribute significantly to children being deprived of their family environment. Against this background, regional and international bodies have been calling for states and communities to strengthen families and provide appropriate quality alternative care to children who cannot remain in and with their families.

IFCO is aware of various alternative care options, institutional and family-based care, which can be used to provide care for children whose families are unsuitable or unavailable.

However, IFCO believes that family-based care, in its various forms, such as foster care and kinship care, is most appropriate for children needing alternative care.

Thus, IFCO desires that every child needing alternative care is placed with an alternative family, be it a foster family/ foster carer or kinship care for the child's harmonious and full development.

Necessity principle - strengthening families

As much as IFCO believes in family-based alternative care for children, the organisation also strongly supports initiatives and actions taken to strengthen families as an initial step in protecting children. **Separation or removal of children from their original families should be done as a measure of last resort.** Efforts should be taken by state authorities and communities at large to ensure that families are supported and provided with services that enable them to continue discharging their childcare roles.

It is in families where children acquire identity, a sense of belonging, and connectedness. Collectively, we should strive to see families thriving and being the basic unity on which children and societies proudly stand. Children should be placed in out-of-home care only when it is necessary.

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Suitability principle – deinstitutionalisation of alternative care

Sometimes all that is left for a child might be going into care; at this juncture, what a child needs is suitable or appropriate alternative care options. The needs of the child coming into alternative care should be the driving force behind any form of child placement.

Thus, states and communities must design and establish a continuum of alternative care services stationed to serve the varying needs of children entering care systems.

IFCO believes that family-based alternative care should be prioritized in establishing the alternative care system to avoid the automatic institutionalisation of children needing care. Over time most children needing alternative care have automatically found themselves in institutional care because, most times, it is the kind of care readily available for children.

Therefore, IFCO believes that it is high time that investment in family-based alternative care should be a priority going hand in hand with the initiatives to strengthen families in the first place.

In the spirit of the UN Guidelines for Alternative Care for Children, institutional care should be limited to cases where such a setting is appropriate, necessary, and constructive for the individual child concerned and in their best interests.

IFCO is aware of the social, cultural, and economic variances in different parts of the globe, which might influence and determine how alternative care systems for children are developed. Nevertheless, the fact that families are essential for the growth and development of children is common around the world.

The diversities should inspire us, who have a responsibility toward children, to research and determine how family-based care, compatible with our social, cultural, and economic stand, can be developed and optimally used for the benefit of children and families needing care.

Moreover, states and communities should aspire to exploit the benefits built out of international and regional cooperation in the child protection agenda.

***Together we can soar to unimaginable heights to create
a bright tomorrow for our children in care.***