

The Alternative Care Framework, Uganda

Uganda is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child and to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, both of which state that every child shall be entitled to the enjoyment of parental care and protection and shall, whenever possible, have the right to reside with his or her parents.

Keep the family together, prevent separation

In an ideal world, no child would be separated from her or his parents and alternative care (non-parental care) would not be required. Preventing separation through family support is usually better for the child, better for the family and cheaper than alternative care. When that is not possible, alternative care needs to be arranged in line with the Alternative Care Framework.

Emergency response

When abandonment or separation does happen or when a child is at risk of abuse or neglect, immediate steps need to be taken to ensure the child's safety and well-being, while an assessment takes place. Temporary care can be provided with an extended family member, a foster family or in a children's or babies' shelter.

Reunification and kinship care

Reunification with parents or with extended family is usually the best outcome to aim for. Evidence demonstrates that children fare best with their families and communities. Reunification involves fixing the problems that caused the separation or that put the child at risk. Regular monitoring of the child's safety and well-being continues after reunification. In Uganda, many thousands of children are supported and thriving in kinship care.

Foster Care

In foster care, the natural parents remain the legal guardians but the child lives temporarily with another family. This option can be used to provide the time needed to create the environment where the child can return to his or her family. It can also provide time to find the right permanent solution with a new family.

Domestic Adoption

When all efforts to enable reunification or kinship care have been exhausted, domestic adoption may be considered. Adoption is the process where the legal guardianship of a child is transferred from her or his parents (or from the state) to new parents via a foster care order that can be consolidated into a full adoption order after three years of foster care. All efforts should be made to find a suitable family in the child's country of origin so not to dislocate the child from her or his cultural heritage and national identity.

Intercountry Adoption

If all efforts towards reunification and domestic adoption have not been successful, as a last resort, intercountry (international) adoption can be considered. The child's nationality, language and culture are likely to change and cause disruption. The intercountry adoption process is governed by the Children's Act and the Alternative Care Framework.

Special Needs Respite or Residential Care

In the case where a family does not have the resources to look after a severely disabled child, short, medium or long-term respite care can be the solution to help the family cope. This care can be provided in the family home or at a residential facility. The natural parents remain as guardians, but professional support is provided to care for the child.

Orphanages

Long-term residential care in orphanages, children's homes or children's villages should be avoided. Building orphanages diverts resources from developing the proper solution based on the approved Alternative Care Framework.