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## NEWSLETTER

### Global guidance: How to support kinship care – Lessons learnt from around the world

Earlier this year, Family For Every Child launched a new publication, *How to support Kinship Care – Lessons Learnt from around the world*. ISS warmly welcomes this new tool, for which it has had the privilege to provide input, thanks to the ground expertise of its global network.

Sometimes, children cannot be looked after by their parents, and live with relatives or friends of the family. Such situation is known as kinship care, a form of care widely used across the world. The [Alternative Care Guidelines](#) enshrine that kinship care should be explored as a preferable option for children deprived of parental care. However, research has shown that nationally, little support and official recognition is available (see

support kinship care and on how to adapt it to national and local contexts.

#### **An enabling environment for kinship care**

Providing beneficiaries of kinship care with adequate support encompasses having an adequate understanding of their actual needs. The latter can be achieved through studies on a variety of aspects surrounding this kind of care: e.g. the number of children, the reasons for their placement into kinship care, overall strengths and weaknesses in the existing care and protection system, but also views of children and their carers on kinship care. Responses to the above will contribute to frame an enabling environment for kinship care (see graph).

Diagram 2: The enabling environment for kinship care



Newsletters, n° 262 and 267).

By recognising the variety of needs of children and kinship carers and emphasising that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions, this global guidance provides suggestions and lessons learnt on how to

#### **Pathways to services and support and the formalization of kinship care**

Informal kinship care arrangements may become formal through two main means (see [Alternative Care Guidelines](#) (para. 56):

- An assessment by social services to determine the suitability of kinship care arrangements, often involving the courts, and followed by monitoring and support by social service workers; and

- A legal registration of kinship care arrangements that recognises the rights and responsibilities of kinship carers, but does not involve social work or court assessments, endorsement, or on-going engagement.

The formalisation of the care arrangement is valuable for providing clarity in terms of legal responsibilities for the child, allowing carers to make key decisions about the child's life. However, it can also be resisted by kinship carers if they are mistrustful of the state. "Overall, support should always be made available to kinship carers based on their needs, and regardless of legal recognition or social services intervention. This means that access to financial support or other services should not be dependent on the type of kinship care arrangement. Kinship care families should have some choice in selecting the form of care most suitable to meet their needs. This means having information about the different kinship care arrangements available in their context." (at 9 of the [summary](#)).

### **Services and support for kinship care**

In addition to the necessity of being in a loving and caring family other areas in need of support were underlined by children and carers consulted for the purpose of the global guidance: safety and child protection; health; education; meeting material needs.

In line with the needs expressed, the publication addresses several key aspects such as: support for improved decision making processes; provision of information about available services and support; addressing poverty issues in kinship care; meeting emotional, physical and mental health needs; improving education for children in kinship care; supporting other children in the household; enabling contact with parents and siblings; efforts to explore and ensure a return back to parental care; and supporting young people leaving kinship care to leave independently.

### **Variations in support to kinship care**

As mentioned above, better understanding needs to adjust approaches and tools is key. It is important to consider that support needs for kinship care families vary by a range of factors, including the following:

- *Context* such as conflict and disasters, which increases both reliance on kinship care and the vulnerability of kinship care households;
- *Disability*: a disproportionate number of both kinship carers and children in kinship care with disabilities have been observed.
- *Race and ethnicity* which must be taking into account in responses to kinship care especially in terms of cultural diversity and discrimination.
- *Characteristics of the kinship carer* (e.g. grandparents, older sibling, distant relative carer) which are each associated with specific support needs.
- *Age of the child*
- *Reasons for entry into kinship care and social norms around kinship care*. "In many lower income contexts, kinship care is widely used and socially acceptable. It may be the result of violence in the family, but is more commonly a response to parental migration, poverty or lack of access to services. The focus of services and support in these settings is often different from those in higher income countries where kinship care is not socially normative and most usually represents a painful rupture in the family because of violence, abuse or parental death" (p.82).

### **Conclusions**

Kinship care is a complex form of care, requiring a sophisticated response. Although it is the first option that should be explored when children cannot be cared for by their parents, it remains widely underrecognised by governments and care systems across the world. Social work intervention should focus on strengths and work to build the family's trust through care or actions plans, developed in collaboration with social service workers, the child and the family.

**Examples of ISS' promotion of cross-border kinship care through various channels:**

- **advocacy:** such as the work done by the Brazilian NGO *Terra dos Homens* Brasil, ISS Brazil (see p.118).
- **casework:** ISS Network's support of cross-border kinship care around the world such as ISS UK (CFAB – see p.129) and ISS USA (Newsletter n°262 -September/October 2022).
- **training/capacity building:**
  - \* ISS UK and other ISS members, through training and the development of case management guidance (see p. 129);
  - \* ISS global webinar series on cross-border family links and the 7 principles for protecting children's rights in practice (see ISS News on p. 6).
- **research and standard setting:**
  - \* ISS Equity in Permanency - [Principles and Recommended Practices for the promotion of International Kinship Care](#) (see below\*\*);
  - \* Study on *kafalah* as a family-based form of alternative care (see p. 124 – and [2020 ISS kafalah study](#));
  - \* Work with kinship care families affected by disability ([ISS Programme - A better future is possible](#));
  - \* Development of tools such as the [ISS 2023 Guidance for Family Reintegration in Haiti](#).



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