Launch of tool to better protect millions of children deprived of their families

A handbook for the implementation of UN-approved alternative care guidelines – the first global resource of its kind - is to be launched at the Human Rights Council in Geneva and online this Thursday (7 March). Launches in New York, Asia, Africa and Latin America are in the pipeline.

Where: Room XXII, Human Rights Council, Palais des Nations, Geneva
When: 14h-15h30, 7 March 2013
Speakers: Maria Nazareth Farani Azevedo (Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Brazil), Representative (Permanent Mission of Namibia), Jean Zermatten (CRC Committee Chairperson), Jean-Claude Legrand (UNICEF Regional Advisor CEE/CIS), Nigel Cantwell (International child protection consultant) and Mia Dambach (ISS/steering group member)

Attendance: To attend this event, you will need an UN accreditation badge. A temporary badge can be arranged by contacting mia.dambach@iss-ssi.org by 4 March 2013.

Other Launches: For other events see www.alternativecareguidelines.org

Access: The handbook as well as other resources can be accessed in English, French, Spanish and Russian at www.alternativecareguidelines.org from 7 March 2013.

Over two million children around the world live in care institutions. At least 80% of these have one or both parents who are alive. Many children are in danger of becoming unnecessarily separated from their families, while many more are in need of alternative care. These children are subject to higher risks of exploitation, abuse and other violations.

The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (Guidelines), unanimously welcomed at the UN General Assembly in 2009, after five years of negotiations with States and other stakeholders provides ‘orientations for policy and practice’ to address this situation. The Guidelines are essentially grouped around two principles: that such care is genuinely needed (the necessity principle) and that, when this is so, it is provided in an appropriate manner (the suitability principle). The acceptance of the text marked a fundamental policy shift indicating to States that as a priority they should invest in capacity building of families as well as in mechanisms to prevent separation.

Since the approval of the Guidelines, the continuing challenge has been their implementation. The Chairperson of the CRC Committee, Jean Zermatten remarked “as with all internationally agreed standards and principles, however, the real test lies in determining how they can be made a reality throughout the world for those that they target – in this case, children who are without, or are at risk of losing, parental care”. Challenges in the field include how to develop comprehensive strategies with limited resources, how to effectively engage key stakeholders and importantly, how to ensure the child and his or her family are able to truly participate in the decision making process.

Further direction has been an on-going request by professionals. Funded by a global consortium, a handbook titled ‘Moving Forward: Implementing the ‘Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children’ was developed to provide such guidance. The core text was drafted by an international team led by CELCIS, supervised by an expert steering group. Hundreds of professionals from Governments, NGOs, UN agencies and academia fed into the drafting process which includes promising practices from over 40 countries. The handbook was field tested in Argentina and Malawi facilitated by RELAF, Family for Every Child and the Better Care Network Malawi.

The handbook provides practical guidance on moving forward on the road to alternative care provision for children. It highlights implications for policy-making where national governments should provide leadership as well as provides links to what is already being effectively done on the ground. Project Leader from RELAF (Latin America), Matilde Luna confirms that “the handbook
provides child protection specialists and decision makers with inspiration for the design of national policies to better implement the Guidelines in Latin America. It builds on the trail-blazing progress that the region has continued to make with respect to alternative care in our region”.

Child protection agencies¹⁰ call upon governments and civil society to uphold the Guidelines’ principles as well as use the handbook to better support families to prevent unnecessary separation and better protect children in need of alternative care. The handbook provides insight and encouragement to all professionals on what can feasibly be done in resource constrained contexts.


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Notes to editors:


² Ibid.

³ Accepted by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution A/RES/64/142

⁴ For brief background, see Cantwell, N.; Davidson, J.; Elsley, S.; Milligan, I.; Quinn, N. (2012). Moving Forward: Implementing the ‘Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children’. UK: Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland, at section 2a

⁵ See foreword, ibid

⁶ The main funders of the project were International Social Service (ISS); Oak Foundation; SOS Children’s Villages International; and The U.S. Presidents Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief through USAID (provided to UNICEF). Additional funds from the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Save the Children has allowed this project to be widely disseminated.

⁷ The handbook team was led by Nigel Cantwell, an independent consultant on child protection and Jennifer Davidson, Director of the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS). CELCIS, based at the University of Strathclyde aims to improve the lives of all children and young people living in and leaving alternative care through working closely with Governments, NGOs, practitioners and academics.

⁸ The Steering Group was comprised of ATD 4th World, Better Care Network, Family for Every Child, International Social Service, RELAF - Latin American Foster Care Network, SOS Children’s Villages International and UNICEF.

⁹ Members of the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child’s Working Group on Children without Parental Care (Geneva) and the NGO Committee on UNICEF Working Group on Children without Parental Care (New York)