

CARING FOR SEPARATED CHILDREN: NEW GUIDELINES CALL FOR REINTEGRATION AS A FIRST RESPONSE



Leading aid and development agencies have come together for the first time to create new Guidelines on the Reintegration of Children. The Guidelines call for greater investment in reintegration, and advocate for it to be pursued as the primary response before other permanent care options are considered. They are intended to help governments, donors, NGOs, faith-based organisations and practitioners working in a broad range of circumstances to make the right choices for separated children. They set out the principles for effective reintegration and provide practical guidance and case studies to demonstrate how reintegration can and should operate. They can help organisations to design high quality programmes; train practitioners to respond more effectively to the needs of reintegrating children; and pursue national level systemic change in support of reintegration. The Guidelines are also a comprehensive starting point for more context specific policies and guidance.

Separated children are an increasingly urgent priority as all regions of the world grapple with unprecedented levels of conflict, disasters, mass migration, poverty and violence. Separated children are amongst the most vulnerable in the world. They are less likely to attend or do well in school; less able to access health and other basic services; more likely to engage in anti-social and criminal behaviours; and are far more vulnerable to violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. The future prospects of these children are often severely limited. As adults, they are often less able to access employment, more likely to experience poverty and to be dependent on the state.¹ The challenges faced by separated children hinder several mainstream development goals including those around growth, employment, poverty reduction, health, education and humanitarian preparedness and response as well as those more directly associated with violence.

Reintegrating separated children back into their own families and communities is most often the best way to prevent and remedy the many challenges they face. A safe and secure family is key to a child's wellbeing and development² and a foundation for economic and social resilience in adulthood. Most separated children can and should be reintegrated back into their own families and communities, where it is in the child's best interests. It is what most separated children and their families want,³ and the importance of growing up in a family is supported by international legal and policy frameworks. With the right support, children can be effectively reintegrated in all settings, including resource-poor contexts.

Reintegration is a sustained and complex process that must be handled carefully in order to be effective. It is not a one-off event, and involves extensive preparation and follow up. It requires investment in both the case management of individual children and in the broader child protection, education, justice and social protection systems that surround them. And it requires a rights-based approach in which children are at the centre. For a minority of children, reintegration may not be in the child's best interests and decisions must be made on an individual basis.

There are several key priorities in creating an environment that is fully supportive of reintegration. These include:

- Creating national level guidance and policies on children's reintegration that are in line with the UNCRC, and are guided by other relevant global policies and guidance, including the new Guidelines on the Reintegration of Children.
- Building a child welfare workforce with the necessary skills and attitudes to support children's reintegration.
- Establishing a casework system that supports children and families through all stages of the reintegration process.
- Coordinating and collaborating with actors working in the child protection sector, and those working in other systems, including health, education and economic strengthening, and those supporting children with disabilities.
- Recognising and supporting the vital role played by communities in children's reintegration.
- Working to address the root causes of initial and re-separation, such as poverty and violence.
- Developing strategies to address discrimination against children that have reintegrated.
- Evaluating reintegration programmes, and checking for and addressing gaps in coverage.

1. Family for Every Child (2014) Why Care Matters: The impact of care on children and society, London: Family for Every Child

2. See the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, preamble (UN 1989).

3. Better Care Network, et al. (2013) Reaching for home: Global learning on family reintegration in low and lower-middle income countries. London: Family for Every Child.

The *Guidelines* were spearheaded by an interagency working group that has worked since 2011 to conduct an extensive literature review⁴; consult with 158 children, 127 service providers and policy makers from 66 organisations across over 20 countries; and field test the *Guidelines* in two countries.

The *Guidelines* are available in English, and will be available in French, Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian from October 2016. Please go to: <http://www.familyforeverychild.org/our-impact/guidelines-on-childrens-reintegration>

For more information please contact Emily Delap, Chair of the Inter-agency Group on Children's Reintegration via emily.delap@familyforeverychild.org.

The *Guidelines* have been endorsed by:



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4. Ibid.