

Kinship Care: an Alternative Child Care and Support Mechanism

Description

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The Ministry of Women and Social Affairs issued a directive namely “Alternative Childcare and Support Directive Number 976/2023” done as of October 2023(hereafter the Directive). The Directive embodies five family based care alternatives namely family preservation and strengthening, reintegration and reunification, kinship care, foster care, and adoption. Our focus shall be on kinship care, what kinship care is about and how kinship is implemented.

Kinship care is defined in the Directive as “a private arrangement within an extended family whereby a child is looked after on a temporary or long-term basis by his maternal or paternal extended family, without it being ordered by an administrative or judicial authority”. For the purpose of kinship care service, extended family members include grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and older siblings. Where a child is transitioning from any other form of alternative care into kinship care, the need for the transition must be examined and approved by the relevant bureau, Community Care Coalition or Child Protection Expert.

In order to implement Kinship care service for a child, that child is unable to live with their biological parent/s for any reason. Also where it has been determined that it is not in a child’s best interest to remain with his biological parent(s) or where the biological parent(s) are untraceable or deceased.

Kinship care could be formal or informal. Where children or families need support for informal kinship care, registration with relevant bureau or local authority (kebele) could be made to help link the family with support services. Steps should be taken to ensure the protection of children in informal care from abuse, neglect, child labour and all other forms of exploitation. The relevant bureau or relevant authority should encourage and enable informal caregivers. This needs the consent of the child and parents to formalize the care arrangement after a suitable lapse of time. The kinship care should promote the child’s welfare and protection including financial and other support. The standards and services for care of vulnerable children outlined in the Directive will be applicable for kinship care as well.

Where a kinship family is registered, then the kinship child and family are provided with support. In addition to support, monitoring shall be conducted in accordance with case management procedures with the aim of providing ongoing support and assessment to establish that the placement remains in the child’s best interest and their needs are being met.

Kinship care can be an appropriate form of short or long-term care. Efforts to reunify and reintegrate a child with biological parent(s) shall be done as far as possible. Where biological parent(s) are known, the Child Protection Expert or caseworker should ensure a full assessment of the parent/s to explore options for eventual reunification and reintegration. In accordance with the results of the assessment, the officers will determine the most suitable kinship household, and who will be matched with the family who can be best able to meet the unique needs of the child. The child should participate in the

matching process and the children in the host family must also participate in the decision.

To sum up, kinship care, as one form of family based care, allows a vulnerable child to remain within the family circle of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and older siblings. With registration of kinship family, the child under kinship care and the child's host family can be monitored and eventually supported. The ultimate aim is for the child to grow with his/her biological parent(s). Efforts to reunify and reintegrate the child with biological parents shall be a task of the child protection expert. Till then the kinship care has to be monitored in order for the kinship care to rise to the level of meeting the best interest of the child.

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