



Is your business or organisation doing the right thing for children?

ORPHANAGE DIVESTMENT RESOURCES FOR THE TRAVEL AND VOLUNTEERING SECTORS

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ReThink
ORPHANAGES

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Introduction

Increasingly, businesses and organisations in the travel and volunteering sectors are coming to understand that children are being separated from their families in order to be placed in residential care institutions, commonly known as orphanages, and that tourist visits to orphanages and volunteering with these vulnerable children is harmful. Many of these businesses and organisations have taken the decision to transition away from engaging with orphanages. A number of operators in both sectors have taken these steps successfully, and others are now taking action.

The purpose of these resources is to provide a roadmap to operators in the travel and volunteering sectors to stimulate and support this action. By deciding to read and use these resources, you are taking the first step in transitioning away from relationships

with orphanages towards family-based care, and to taking action for children’s rights, we thank you.

We all want to do the right thing for children, and international standards are clear on everyone’s role, including businesses and organisations in the travel and volunteering sectors. Among international standards, important starting points are the [United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children](#), the [2019 UN General Assembly Resolution on the Rights of the Child](#), the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights \(UNGPs\)](#), and the [Children’s Rights and Business](#)



Diagram from UNICEF "CHILDREN ARE EVERYONE'S BUSINESS: WORKBOOK 2.0"

Principles. The leading international standards regarding business and sustainability, and valuable children’s rights and business resources are available from UNICEF and other leading child protection organisations.



For volunteer-involving organisations, the [*Global Standard for Volunteering for Development*](#) is the leading standard.

Taking steps to ensure your policies, practices, operations and activities, and your value chain and partner organisations, support appropriate family and community care are an important part of your role in respecting children's rights.

Tour operators and volunteer-involving organisations can be the educators and gatekeepers to child-safe travel. There is a growing and positive trend of tour operators and volunteer-involving organisations that promote ethical, child safe and responsible tourism and volunteering practices. This trend supports tourists and volunteers who want to engage in positive activities and make a positive impact on the lives of children and their families.

The purpose of these divestment resources, created in consultation with organisations that have successfully transitioned as well as leaders in tourism, volunteering and child protection, is to provide a roadmap, based on practical experience and evidence.

The fundamental issue that these resources seek to address is that support for orphanages through [*tourism and volunteering*](#) is encouraging the ongoing use of orphanages, despite the known harms, and is undermining care reform efforts. There is a positive alternative to orphanages - a continuum of care that includes family and other forms of family-based alternative care.

These resources focus on visits by tourists and volunteer placements in orphanages - however we note that more attention is also needed to the way other forms of support such as donations and child sponsorship also contribute towards the perpetuation of children being separated from their families.

The resources are designed for use by all operators that currently offer or facilitate interaction with orphanages, including visits by tourists, 'voluntourism' placements, and placements of all lengths for both skilled and unskilled volunteers. These distinctions are unpacked in the section on Alternatives.



THE SHIFT AWAY FROM ORPHANAGE VISITS AND VOLUNTEERING

It is estimated that between [5.4 million children](#) live in orphanages around the world, and approximately [80% of these children have at least one living parent](#). [Decades of research](#) show that living in residential care institutions is harmful to children, which is why there is a global effort to move away from this model of care towards family and community-based care models.

Increasingly, governments are advising their citizens not to visit or volunteer in orphanages, as both the [United Kingdom](#) and [The Netherlands](#) did in 2019.

Also increasingly, governments are spotlighting concerns related to orphanages in corporate responsibility frameworks, for example, Australia's [Modern Slavery Act](#) recognising orphanage trafficking as a form of Modern Slavery, and in the US State Department's [2018 Trafficking in Persons Report](#).

RESPONSIBLE DIVESTMENT

As the trend of ending relationships with orphanages grows, the challenge that many operators are facing is how to transition away from relationships with orphanages in a way that is responsible and protects the wellbeing of children.

These resources provide operators with the tools and information they need to make this transition responsibly. They include a step-by-step guide to the divestment process, a statement of the case against orphanage visits and volunteer placements, an outline of the child protection issues relating to residential care, as well as communication tools, advice on recommending alternatives to orphanage visits and placements, and links to further information and resources.

The resources have been developed by the Orphanage Divestment Action Group, a cross-sector alliance representing the travel, volunteering, and child protection sectors, convened by the [Better Care Network](#), in partnership with [ReThink Orphanages](#).

To learn more about the issues these divestment resources address, visit [ReThink Orphanages](#).



A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Throughout these resources, we use the term ‘orphanage’ to refer to a range of different types of residential childcare institutions (RCIs), including institutions that are referred to as children’s homes, children’s villages, or children’s centres.

We refer to two different types of interaction with orphanages – ‘visits’ by tourists and ‘volunteer placements’ by volunteers. We recognise that there is a grey area between the two, and that much of the same advice applies to both types of interaction, so in these resources we will refer frequently to ‘visits and volunteer placements’.

We use the terms ‘organisation’ and ‘operator’ to refer generically to actors that facilitate visits to orphanages, whether from the travel or volunteering sectors, for-profit or non-profit. Where appropriate, we refer to more specific types of organisation or operator, for example ‘tour operator’ or ‘volunteer-involving organisation’.

The term ‘partner’ or ‘local partner’ is used to refer to the receiving organisation for visitors to an orphanage. This could be the orphanage itself, an associated NGO or destination management company, or another type of locally-based actor that works with organisations to facilitate orphanage visits.

The term ‘suppliers’ is used to refer to organisations’ value chains.

For more detail on the terms used in these resources, refer to the [Glossary of terms](#).

COLLABORATIVE WORKING

To develop these resources, the Better Care Network convened an Orphanage Divestment Action Group made up of experts with experience in the travel, volunteering, and child protection sectors and a shared commitment to improve the availability of resources to support the travel and volunteering sectors in transitioning away from relationships with orphanages. We are grateful to the members of this group for all their contributions to the creation of these resources.

Throughout the resources, we include quotes and case studies from members of the Group, to highlight their experience at various stages in the divestment process. In featuring these case studies we aim to bring the process to life by illustrating achievements and challenges. We recognise that members of the Group are at different points in a long-term divestment process. We are grateful to those who have shared their experiences.



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1. Understanding and communicating the case against orphanage visits and volunteer placements



TEN FACTS

1. It is estimated that 5.4 million children live in residential care around the world.
2. It is also estimated that 80% of children living in orphanages have at least one living parent - the term 'orphan' is misleading.
3. Many children who grow up in orphanages, even those that are well resourced, suffer disproportionately from attachment disorders and developmental delays, and lack the life skills and stability that come from growing up in a family environment. These problems can continue into adulthood.
4. Children who grow up in orphanages are at a much higher risk of becoming victims of violence, trafficking and exploitation. Young adults leaving institutional care are more likely to become victims of trafficking, exploitation, unemployment and homelessness and are at increased risk of suicide.
5. Children should be raised in families or family-based care, not in orphanages where they are exposed to the detriments of institutionalisation. Family is the fundamental unit of society, and the environment in which children best develop, thrive and have their holistic scope of needs met.
6. Poverty, discrimination, abuse, neglect, trafficking, illness, situations due to displacement or migration, and a lack of access to basic services are some of the reasons why children are placed in orphanages. Families may be faced with impossible choices and send their children to live in residential care institutions believing this is the only way to access basic services such as education and health care.



7. Orphanage visits and volunteer placements can cause particular psychological harm to children, exacerbating attachment disorders. Without an attachment to a consistent caregiver, the children are quick to form relationships with volunteers as they arrive, only to feel abandoned once again when they leave.
8. Orphanage tourism and volunteering, as well as other support from high income countries such as donations, are acting to financially sustain the orphanage model of care, weaken the global care reform effort and perpetuate the cycle of children being separated unnecessarily from their families.
9. New orphanages have been established to meet the demand of tourists and volunteers, and children are recruited from families, and in some cases trafficked into orphanages, to provide experiences for visitors.
10. The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, endorsed by the United Nations in 2009, state that governments should direct efforts towards supporting parents to provide care for their children, prevent separation and, where alternative care is necessary, prioritise family and community-based solutions.

THE HARMS CAUSED BY ORPHANAGE CARE

Research carried out by UNICEF, Save the Children and others has shed light on the reality of orphanages and other forms of residential care institutions for children. We now know that approximately 80% of the 80% of the millions of children who live in these institutions have at least one living parent, and some research puts this figure closer to 90%

Decades of research by child psychologists shows that living in residential care institutions is physically and psychologically harmful to children, and can lead to significant cognitive and developmental delays. The research also shows that children in institutions are more likely than their peers who are raised in families to suffer from neglect and abuse, including sexual exploitation. More recent research has drawn attention to cases of children being trafficked into orphanages, and from orphanages.

Children in institutions may suffer from neglect and, often, abuse. And there is evidence of children trafficked into orphanages and from orphanages. Children have a right to participate in decisions that affect them, however children are rarely consulted or asked about how tourists and volunteers affect them, or what concerns they have about their presence in their lives.



GLOBAL ACTION

The [*United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*](#) affirms that every child has the right to grow up in a loving family environment.

Evidence about the harms caused by orphanage care, along with the voices of children and care leavers, has inspired, and informed, a global effort to move away from the use of residential care in response to issues such as poverty and child vulnerability, towards approaches that support and strengthen families and communities. This can include employment skills and job training, day care and after-school programmes for children and healthcare services. This effort is being successfully led in many parts of the world, including [*Rwanda*](#), which hopes to be the first African country to be orphanage-free.



Orphanages no longer exist in many countries, mostly in the Global North, because of the recognised harm they cause. But as a ‘Western’ export, they do still exist across Africa, Asia, South America and parts of Eastern Europe. In some countries such as Vietnam and Nepal, orphanages were established in response to conflict or natural disaster, but have long outlasted the circumstances that created them. Some countries, like Cambodia, have decided to reform the orphanage sector, but they face the challenge that orphanages are a lucrative source of money from tourists and volunteers.

In the explanatory memorandum of the [*Modern Slavery Act*](#), the Australian Government recognises orphanage trafficking and the exploitation of children in orphanages as captured under the definition of modern slavery in the Act. The inclusion of orphanage trafficking in the explanatory memorandum is a significant step in acknowledging the specific existence of ‘orphanage trafficking’ and the heightened risk of exploitation to those children living in institutions. Businesses that have orphanages in their supply chains or operations will have to assess for the risk of orphanage trafficking and exploitation in orphanages. Australia’s [*Smart Volunteering*](#) advice aims to ‘prevent Australians from inadvertently contributing to child exploitation through the practice of orphanage tourism, including by participating in misleading volunteer programs.’



The US State Department highlights the link between child institutionalisation and human trafficking on its travel advice pages, and its [2018 Trafficking in Persons Report](#) dedicates a section to the link between child institutionalisation and trafficking. In 2019 the United States Government launched its [Children in Adversity Strategy](#), which gives particular attention to strengthening families.

In 2019, the governments of the [United Kingdom](#) and [The Netherlands](#) updated their travel advice, taking a strong stand against orphanage visits and volunteer placements. In addition, the harm caused by orphanages was recognised by the UK Government in a cross-government policy statement launched at the Global Disability Summit in July 2018. The full speech can be found [here](#). As a result, the UK Aid Direct enacted [a regulation against funding orphanages](#). The UK recently reviewed its modern slavery legislation and included a recommendation to provide guidance on orphanage trafficking as a new form of modern slavery.

The positive alternative to orphanages is a system in which children should be supported to be raised in families. In cases where it is not in the child's best interests to remain with their own immediate or extended family other forms of family-based alternative care, such as foster care, are preferable to orphanage care and should be explored. Read more in [Chapter 4: Global Care Reform](#).



WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN TOURISM, VOLUNTEERING, AND THE PROBLEMS WITH ORPHANAGES?

If you look at the map of orphanages in a country like Cambodia or Uganda, you will see that they are concentrated around major tourist sites. According to [UNICEF Cambodia](#), the number of known orphanages rose two-thirds between 2005 and 2011 - which mirrored the rise in tourists over the same period.

Orphanages have become a profitable business in many countries because they are an effective way to attract money from well-meaning visitors and donors from high-income countries. As a result, many orphanages are established with the intention of attracting visitors. Because they need children, the operators of orphanages may convince or coerce families to give up their children and place them in orphanage care and exploit the children once in care. In some cases this includes intentionally keeping children in poor conditions so that they will attract more generous donations from visitors. Often, orphanage operators work through middle-men who recruit children and bring them to the orphanage.

Visits also expose children in orphanages to potentially dangerous interactions with adults. Because of poor child protection policies and practice, and weak or absent processes for vetting visitors, children are exposed to adults who seek opportunities to abuse or groom children for abuse. For example, adults may intentionally use their access to children in orphanages to establish a relationship, obtain the child's trust and the trust of the staff, and give the child gifts or take them out, in order to abuse the child at a later stage. Children in orphanages are often at high risk of abuse and exploitation because of their vulnerability and the unequal power dynamics between child and adult, including pressure to submit to adults requests to ensure the continuation of donations.

It is true that some orphanages are well-run by people with good intentions. However, all orphanages are harmful, simply due to the nature of institutional care, and an orphanage can never provide children with the same level of stability and long-term support that a family can. There is no such thing as a 'good orphanage', regardless of good intentions.

Well-meaning support for orphanages - through donations, volunteering, tourist trips and faith-based mission work - is perpetuating the unnecessary separation of children from their families to place them in harmful situations. We explore alternatives to orphanage visits and volunteer placements in [5. Alternatives to orphanage visits and volunteer placements](#) - an exploration of the issues.



HOW ARE THE TOURISM AND VOLUNTEERING SECTORS RESPONDING?

Increasingly, tour operators and volunteer-sending organisations are learning that children are being separated from their families in order to populate orphanages, and that tourist visits to orphanages and volunteering with these vulnerable children is harmful.

As a result, they are looking for ways to transition away from relationships with orphanages in a responsible way.

We have worked with a group of organisations to identify common approaches and challenges and produce a set of resources to encourage and support others to take leading action.





2. Step by step divestment guide

In recent years, awareness has increased among travel businesses and volunteering organisations that children are being separated from their families in order to be placed in residential care institutions, commonly known as orphanages, and that tourist visits to orphanages and volunteering with these vulnerable children is harmful. As a result, organisations in the travel and volunteering sectors are increasingly deciding to transition away from relationships with orphanages.

The problems with orphanages and the harmful effects of visits and volunteering for vulnerable children are set out in [2. *The case against orphanage visits and volunteer placements.*](#)

This practical step-by-step guide to divesting responsibly builds on the experience of a number of organisations that have transitioned away from relationships with orphanages. Across different ways of working and many different contexts, the process of divestment typically followed these six steps:





These steps also align with international standards and guidance on child protection, sustainable development and business due diligence. For example, OECD guidance for responsible business conduct outlines:

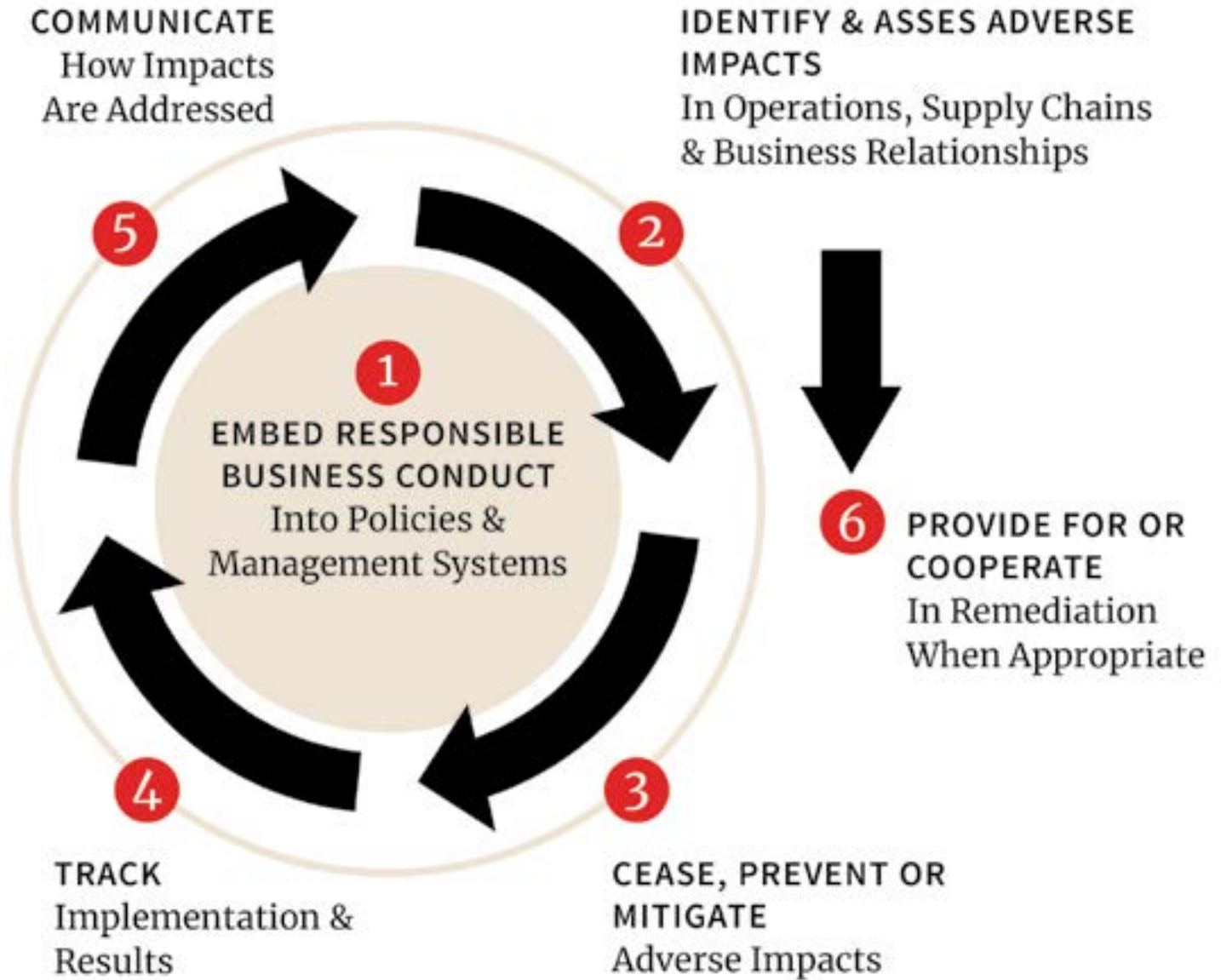


Diagram from "OECD DUE DILIGENCE GUIDANCE FOR RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS CONDUCT"



If your scoping identifies serious concerns about child welfare or safety in a particular orphanage, these concerns should be brought to the attention of local authorities and child protection experts. In cases where they are very serious, you may decide that divestment needs to be abrupt, that you should cease the step-by-step divestment process at this point and hand the case over to the relevant local authorities.

1. SCOPING

Understanding your organisation's involvement in orphanages, and understanding the orphanages themselves.

The first step in divesting is to understand what types of relationships your organisation has with orphanages, and what support you provide to them. At a minimum, identify orphanages you have relationships with, where they are, and whether the relationship is direct or via an intermediary like a destination management company, a local supplier, or another type of partner.

CASE STUDY ON SCOPING INVOLVEMENT IN ORPHANAGES - PROJECTS ABROAD

In summer of 2017, Projects Abroad decided to stop sending volunteers to orphanages.

Scoping out the orphanages was not difficult for us, since we already had thorough documentation on each of these institutions and a solid understanding of the staff and children, based on our existing relationships with them. Because of these relationships with our local partners, we were in a strong position to facilitate change. The aim was to contribute to the process of preventing new children from entering residential care, to assist children already living in residential care with returning to their families, or to help them find homes in family-based care environments.

However, in 2017 there were very few relevant case studies or practical frameworks available on how to do this. Since we were committed to withdrawing from residential care institutions as responsibly and ethically as possible, and to ensuring that children were not inadvertently harmed in the process, we joined ReThink Orphanages and hired a child protection specialist who analysed the information we put together and drew up an exit strategy and set of recommendations for Projects Abroad. This enabled us to withdraw entirely from orphanage volunteering by early 2018.



Larger companies and organisations may want to start this first step in particular countries of operation. For this, tools to explore child protection data and concerns globally are helpful, such as the [Children's Rights and Business Atlas](#), developed by UNICEF with the Global Child Forum, which includes country-level data on children's rights and business issues. These [Country Analysis Briefs](#) are a useful resource in understanding the child rights context in countries you may work in. The KidsRights Foundation's [KidsRights Index](#) is another useful resource. It ranks how countries adhere to and are equipped to improve children's rights. It can also be helpful to conduct desk reviews for reports on particular country child protection and alternative care concerns, such as through BCN or UNICEF publicly available country annual reports.



Do you facilitate visits or volunteer placements in orphanages, or provide financial support? Does your partner, local affiliate, value chain partner or foundation do so? If so, what type of visit or placement, and how much financial support? How dependent are orphanages on the support they receive from your organisation?

Consider your supply and value chains. Do you work with suppliers that are involved in orphanage visits or volunteer placements? Does your decision to divest mean that you will stop working with these suppliers, or encourage and support them to end their relationships with orphanages?

If you work with local guides or project leaders that represent your company or organisation, you might want to know whether they are taking groups to orphanages. They could be doing this informally, at the request of guests, rather than offering visits or placements as part of a formal, written product or programme. To find out, survey your local staff and volunteers, in addition to reviewing the literature on their formal offerings.

These are difficult questions to answer, and it might not be possible to answer all of them. The most important thing is to understand at a basic level how your organisation is linked to orphanages, if at all.

Be aware that orphanages operate under many different names such as 'residential care institutions', 'children's homes', 'children's villages', 'children's centres' or simply 'centres'. Some institutions will not refer to themselves as an 'orphanage' at all. As guidance, if they have paid caregivers providing overnight care in a group living arrangement, then they are operating a residential care program.



UNDERSTANDING THE INSTITUTIONS TO WHICH YOU ARE SENDING PEOPLE

Once you have scoped your relationships, you might decide to immediately begin the process of divestment from any residential childcare institution with whom you have a relationship.

You might also decide to do more research, and there are some questions that you can ask of orphanage management and staff, local NGOs and others with knowledge of the orphanage, and the relevant government authorities before you take further action -

- ❑ Is the orphanage officially registered? Are the competent authorities aware of its existence? If not, you have a responsibility to make them aware.
- ❑ Why are children living there?
- ❑ Do the children have immediate or extended families?
- ❑ If so, do they have access to their families?
- ❑ Do they have a dedicated primary caregiver within the facility?
- ❑ Do the children, including those with disabilities, have contact with the local community and services outside the facility?
- ❑ Does the facility have child-centred care plans in place for each child?
- ❑ Does the facility have professional staff, trained in relevant disciplines?
- ❑ Does the facility have the legal documents, such as identity documents or care orders for the children in their care?

This research can be done by looking at the organisation's website and any marketing materials they have produced, requesting policy documents, governing documents and annual reports, and through site visits and discussions with staff and volunteers.

If you want to carry out a more in-depth and comprehensive scoping of a partner, the [*ReThink Orphanages Partnership Due Diligence Assessment Tool for Residential Care Service Providers*](#) provides a framework and guidance on how to do this. For tour operators, [*Roundtable Human Rights in Tourism*](#) has developed [*The «Get started» tool*](#) aimed at small- to mid-sized tour operators. The tool elaborates similar steps to these. The Get Started tool helps these operators to identify human rights risks and integrate measures to protect human rights in their operations and along the value chain. It also provides practical and concrete answers to common questions, and hands-on recommendations. While the «Get started» tool looks at a wider set of issues than these divestment resources, it includes things like advice on identifying and mitigating risk, which can be applied to relationships with orphanages.



HOW TO INTERPRET THE FINDINGS OF YOUR SCOPING

Once you have gathered, as far as is possible, the answers to these questions, how do you decide what they mean and what action you should take based on them?

Consider the following questions as you make a decision about the orphanage relationships you have identified:

1. Are you confident the organisation is operating in accordance with national laws, international norms and good practice principles?
2. Are there any areas of concern and can those concerns be addressed? If so how? Do you need to seek more information or clarity from your prospective partner or do more research yourself before you can make an informed decision?
3. Are you confident a partnership with this organisation will allow you to meet all legal and regulatory requirements imposed on your charity?
4. Do you have the capacity to sufficiently monitor this partnership to ensure ongoing compliance?
5. Are there any serious concerns or risks to children that need to be reported and addressed?
6. Should this relationship be recommended to your board for approval or renewal?¹

These can be difficult questions to answer, especially for operators that have close or long-running relationships with orphanages. It can be tempting to think that the orphanage you support is 'one of the good ones'. However, whilst there are some well-run orphanages, there is no such thing as a good orphanage for children.

Work through these questions systematically, facing them squarely and honestly, and try to maintain objectivity throughout this step. It can be helpful to involve outside organisations, for example local child protection organisations not connected to the orphanage, to accompany you on this step.

¹ From the ReThink Orphanages Partnership Due Diligence Assessment Tool for Residential Care Service Providers p.10.



2. SECURING BUY-IN FROM SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND BOARD

The decision to divest is an important and complex one, especially in managing reputational risk, and the decision to divest may be met with resistance from colleagues and partners. Clear communication to manage change across an organisation will be required, along with identification of the financial and other resources needed to support the process. Clear and sincere buy-in from senior decision-makers is essential.

Start by preparing a strong case and rationale for divestment and a top-level briefing for senior managers and board members. This can form the basis for future messaging and policy documents.

The business case will be informed by the scoping and will differ between organisations. Draw from the document: [1. Understanding and communicating the case against orphanage visits and volunteer placements](#) to provide context. Explain your organisation's involvement in orphanage visits or placements.

Try to understand the origins of your organisation's relationship with orphanages. For example, did it begin with a personal connection? If it is linked to a connection made by a member of senior management, this will need to be handled with particular sensitivity.

Prepare a risk analysis that sets out the risks of not divesting, including reputational, legal and financial risk. This analysis should consider the moves made by governments in opposition to orphanage visits and volunteering, as well as public campaigns such as [#HelpingNotHelping](#), [Children Are Not Tourist Attractions](#), and [The Love You Give](#). Source information about the country or countries where the orphanages are located. An understanding of the care landscape, and any plans to improve care, will help you to rebut the argument that orphanages are needed in some countries. The risk analysis should also include the risks of transitioning, including the risk of harm to children in orphanages with whom you have relationships, and the potential reputational risk associated with drawing public attention to your historic relationships with orphanages.

If you get this risk analysis right, you will secure a strong mandate from senior leadership that will form the basis for the next steps in this process.



3. IDENTIFYING KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND MAKING A PLAN

Divestment will involve a range of internal and external stakeholders. Some will need to change the way they work, and others will become champions for divestment within the organisation.

Start by mapping these stakeholders, identifying their involvement in orphanage visits and volunteer placements and how they will be impacted by divestment. For this step, the [Roundtable Human Rights in Tourism «Get started» tool](#) and UNICEF's [Global Child Forum/ UNICEF Children's Rights and Business Atlas](#) are useful resources.

Consider the entire organisation - staff (full-time and contracted), travellers, and volunteers - and external stakeholders such as suppliers and your supplier's contracted staff. You will need to think about how to communicate with prospective customers and volunteers, including people who are interested in visiting or volunteering in an orphanage. You can find guidance on this in the communications tools section. You should also consider past customers and volunteers, including those who you have supported to visit an orphanage in the past.

The next thing to do is to consider how you will need to communicate with your audiences. What channels will you use, and what messages will be most effective for each group? Who will require more in-depth communication or training?

Think carefully about how each group will receive your messages. Who will be resistant, and why? How can you address their reluctance or concerns, and get them on board?

Think about who can continue to support and guide the partner organisation once your relationship with them has ended. Consult the local government and international child protection organisations, such as country offices of [UNICEF](#), members and affiliates of [ECPAT](#) or contact members of the [Better Care Network](#).



ENGAGING WITH LOCAL PARTNERS THAT RECEIVE VISITORS

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

The term 'partner' or 'local partner' is used to refer to the receiving organisation for visitors to an orphanage. This could be the orphanage itself, an associated NGO or destination management company, or another type of locally-based actor that works with organisations to facilitate orphanage visits.

Orphanage visits and placements usually involve a sending organisation – a tour operator or volunteer-sending organisation, and a receiving organisation – the orphanage. In between, you will often find intermediaries like destination management consultants or incoming agencies. This section is for sending organisations that have direct relationships with orphanages.

Responsible divestment by the sending organisation means engaging the receiving organisation in conversation around the issue of orphanage visits and placements, and encouraging them to move away from residential care.

Organisations that have been through this process suggest a staged approach over the course of a number of months, moving from education and conversation to behaviour change.

Begin by broaching the subject through open, informal one-to-one conversations. Open up the conversation by posing questions.

Raise some of the issues around residential care, and orphanage visits and placements, and invite your partner to consider and reflect on the case against such visits and placements. Tell them that you are moving towards divesting from relationships with orphanages, and that you want to do this in partnership with them to ensure that it is done responsibly.

Following these initial conversations, send a formal letter or email, from senior management. Use clear and unequivocal language to communicate your decision to divest, and present your rationale. Ground your rationale in credible research and evidence from established organisations with a track record in child welfare.

The letter should set out a timeline for divestment, and a notice period at the end of which you will no longer send visitors to your partner's orphanage. Make it clear what the local partner needs to achieve at key points along this timeline.



These targets could include stating their intention to begin a process of deinstitutionalisation, setting out a plan for this process, and engaging with child protection organisations and government to take the first steps.

Some organisations recommend a minimum notice period of four months, but this period depends on the nature of the relationship, and for many four months is too short. As a general rule, the length of one contracting period is the right amount of time.

The letter is the first stage in the formal divestment process with your local partner. It can be difficult to predict how local partners will respond to this communication, even if you have prepared the ground with one-to-one conversations. They may accept the rationale and ask for support in transitioning. They might resist, saying that their orphanage is the exception to the rule, or that the children in their orphanage depend on them and have no alternatives. Be prepared for these questions, and take a strong line in responding to them, again basing your responses in credible research and evidence.

In many cases, local partners will have to consider the views and interests of other supporters, including donors, before they make a decision on how to proceed. You might offer to reach out to these stakeholders, communicate the case for divestment, and ask for their support in making the case for change.

Close the letter by inviting the partner to respond, and suggest a conversation to explore the issues raised in the letter, clarify the timeline, and answer the partner's questions.

The initial letter is the first step in an ongoing conversation with the local partner. This may include:

- ❏ Educating them on the dangers of orphanage care and visits and volunteer placements
- ❏ Answering their questions on your decision to cease sending tourists or volunteers to their orphanage
- ❏ Signposting them to organisations that can help them to move away from orphanage care.

As part of this phase, some organisations organise in-person workshops between staff of the sending and receiving organisations, or support the local partner to receive training in child protection from an organisation in their country that has expertise in this area.



As an operator sending tourists or volunteers to an orphanage, you are not responsible for ensuring that the orphanage continues on the road of deinstitutionalisation, but you should connect the orphanage with authorities and organisations that can lead, guide and orient them on this journey. Some organisations are suggested in [6. External Resources](#). You might consider forming a partnership with a local organisation that works in family support or transition. Support for this partnership could be promoted as part of your corporate social responsibility, or fundraising activities. You will find more information on how to do this in [section 5 of these resources Alternatives to orphanage visits and volunteer placements](#) - an exploration of the issues.

By the end of the notice period, you should:

- ❏ Have opened up a constructive conversation with the partner about orphanage care and visits or placements, educated them on the dangers, and encouraged them to move in a more responsible direction.
- ❏ Be confident that you can stop sending visitors to a partner without impacting on the welfare of the children living there. Your local partner should share this confidence, as a result of your communication with them.
- ❏ Have a clearer idea of how your organisation can support poor and marginalised children without supporting orphanages, including in communities where your organisation previously supported orphanages.
- ❏ Have connected the partner with the relevant local authorities and with child protection organisations in-country, to support them on the next stages of their journey.

WORKINGABROAD'S EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNICATING WITH LOCAL PARTNERS

WorkingAbroad has taken a strong stance against orphanage volunteering. When this decision was taken, we communicated it with our overseas partners. Over the course of several Skype calls and email exchanges, we explained the dangers associated with unskilled volunteers, we shared our press release and resources from Better Care Network. It was important to talk to our partners about alternative, responsible, ways to support vulnerable and marginalised children, including through skilled volunteering. In the end, our partners respected the decision we had taken on orphanage volunteering, and understood why we would not be continuing to support these types of projects.'



ISSUES TO CONSIDER THROUGH THIS PROCESS

You will need to confront the issues of shame and judgement. Many people who operate and work in orphanages are deeply invested in the idea of orphanage care, and in the work that they do. One approach to this issue is to explain that you and your organisation had the same beliefs in the past – this is why you decided to send visitors to orphanages – but since then you have learned more about international standards and best practice, and have seen compelling research that has inspired you to question these beliefs and move away from relationships with orphanages. You are asking your partner to consider that evidence, reflect on the same questions and to collaborate with local efforts and reforms for family and community-based care.

You will also need to achieve clarity on the difficult question of where your responsibilities as a tour operator or volunteer-sending organisation begin and end, which responsibilities lie with the local partner, and which are the responsibility of others such as government and in-country child protection bodies. Our advice is that it is your responsibility to withdraw your support from an orphanage, to do so in a way that minimises negative effects on the children who live there, and to encourage the orphanage to use your divestment as an opportunity to reconsider and reform their model of care. As an operator, it is important to consult local expertise to pace and sequence your divestment, and you will likely be able to withdraw your support in a staged, gradual way as set out in this document, and by communicating effectively with all stakeholders. The [communication tools section](#) is designed to help you with this. You can also do this by building links between the orphanage or orphanages you work with and government bodies and NGOs that can support them through a deinstitutionalisation process. Be aware that some orphanage managers will embellish the impact that they and their organisations have in order to appeal to the emotions of companies and donors, and make them feel obliged to continue their support. You should be prepared to challenge management on these claims, and to make the case that it is not in the interest of children to remain in orphanage care.

You will likely discover child protection issues or concerns as a result of the scoping process, or through conversations with local partners, and some of the concerns may be quite serious. It is crucial that you report any such concerns to the relevant authorities, even if you are uncomfortable with the idea of reporting, or unsure whether they warrant reporting. If in doubt, report your concerns. The [ChildSafe Movement maintain a useful register](#) of contact details for reporting child abuse around the world, and a group of European countries have a [common platform](#).



Your relationship with an orphanage presents an opportunity to set them on a path to deinstitutionalisation, or to pivot into community-based care or family reunification activities. You might decide to support them in these efforts, or to support organisations in the community that work in these areas. Your responsibility at this point is to connect your partner with local government and with child protection organisations who will be able to provide support and advice once your relationship with the partner has ended. It is not your responsibility to transition the orphanage or outwork/oversee the reintegration process for the children in care. This question will be addressed in more detail in the section on alternatives to orphanage visits and volunteer placements: [5. Alternatives to orphanage visits and volunteer placements](#)

CASE STUDY ON WORKING WITH LOCAL PARTNERS THROUGH THE DIVESTMENT PROCESS - PROJECTS ABROAD

Projects Abroad has local offices overseas and full-time staff in each location. When we decided to stop sending volunteers to orphanages, our overseas staff received training (and a set of Q&As) outlining how best to communicate this change to our partners and volunteers. The communications approach differed from country to country, depending on the local culture, but the basic messages were the same: that Projects Abroad was moving to support family-based care wherever possible.

Depending on the specific situation, it took up to four months to inform the orphanages and authorities, and to answer all their questions. We were working closely with child protection experts and organisations, who provided technical advice and support to ensure that our existing partners running care institutions were able to access support to transition away from residential care.

Some orphanage directors and owners were interested in learning more about our concerns, and asked for more resources or for direct communication with child protection organisations. To give one example, we successfully invited orphanage directors in Kenya to take part in workshops run by specialist organisations (Lumos and Hope and Homes for Children), enabling them to learn more about de-institutionalisation and to receive links to organisations that help reintegrate children to families at a local, governmental, and international level. As a result, one of these partners in Kenya has now successfully reintegrated four children with their families.



4. CHANGING POLICY AND PRACTICE

Building on the mandate you have received from senior management, develop your organisational position on orphanage visits and volunteer placements, and create or revise policy documents to reflect this position. At the centre of this is a strong organisational statement on orphanage care. You can find a sample statement in 3. Communication tools. Other resources, such as Save and Children and UNICEF's [*Children's Rights in Policies and Codes of Conduct: A tool for companies*](#) are also useful for this step.

Create a short, standalone policy document that sets out your organisation's position on orphanage care. This should include a strong statement on your organisation's commitment to ending all support to orphanages, including through visits, volunteer placements, and financial donations. Promote this policy document on your website and promotional materials, so as to set expectations at an early stage with tourists and volunteers.

Revise your organisation's child protection policy to reflect this commitment. Think about other relevant policies within your organisation that should reflect the decision to divest.

Communicate your policy and practice changes in your annual report, statements on corporate responsibility, and other relevant reporting. This should include your national and international reporting frameworks, for example those in line with the EU Non-Financial Reporting Directive or [*Global Reporting Initiative Standards*](#), and Modern Slavery Act Statements.

There are organisations that can support you in developing these policies. See the [*External Resources*](#) section for these.

CASE STUDY – VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS AND DEVELOPING A POSITION PAPER ON RESIDENTIAL CARE OF CHILDREN

AVI (Australian Volunteers International) is a not for profit international development agency and manages volunteer programs providing opportunities for Australians to work with partner businesses, government and community organisations in developing countries according to the needs of the partner to achieve their own development goals.

In 2017 AVI developed AVI's Position on Residential Care, to highlight the issues and numerous risks to children who live in residential care settings and to clarify AVI's approach to partnership with residential care services. The position paper was developed by AVI's Child Protection/Safeguards Advisor in consultation with country office staff, AVI Child Protection Focal Points and the Australian Government (DFAT). The position paper was reviewed by the CEO and AVI Board, for endorsement.

AVI's Position on Residential Care sets out how AVI will engage with organisations who are working with children and their families who may be at risk of family separation and vulnerable to being referred to residential care.

The position paper states that AVI is unable to support, develop or engage in any programs, work or business development that involve residential care institutions (RCIs) or organisations with a residential care component that are not committed to transitioning to alternative care.

The position paper confirms AVI will place volunteers into RCIs or into partner organisations, where the volunteer assignment is specifically nominated to support transition (de-institutionalisation), and where the partner organisation:

- ❏ expresses its stated commitment to transition
- ❏ shares evidence which supports this commitment

In placing volunteers to support de-institutionalisation, AVI acknowledges in the position paper that placements supporting transition require a set of specialised technical skills to assist with case management strengthening (including family tracing), reintegration planning family/community outreach. AVI also acknowledges that as an agency supporting capacity development and volunteers with specialist knowledge and skills, it is in a unique position to support longer term transition away from institutional care.



The position paper further outlines how a due diligence and risk assessment process will be implemented to enable careful vetting of all potential partner organisations in relation to residential care and vetting of their requests for volunteer assignments. Current partner organisations are reviewed if residential care programming is being implemented or planned. Risk assessments are also conducted as part of all potential partner organisation engagement in line with the AVI Child Protection Policy and AVI's Position on Residential Care.

To support AVI's volunteers, targeted assistance is provided to volunteers who are assigned to agreed roles within partner organisations involved in residential care of children. Assistance includes technical support from AVI's Child Protection/Safeguards Advisor, provision of relevant resources, pre-departure and on-going training support.

As part of communications and advocacy, AVI's Position on Residential Care is made available to all partner organisations, and the content informs AVI's capacity development and awareness work with partner organisations, through formal training and technical support. The position paper is available on AVI's website and AVI contributes to media that supports this position, including issuing press releases and publicly advocating this position through available forums.



5. COMMUNICATING INTERNALLY

Once policies are created, they will need to be shared internally with staff, travellers, volunteers, suppliers and others. You should also create and roll out training on the new policies, tailored to the particular needs of each stakeholder group. Policies should also be included in all relevant contracts with partners.

Consider carrying out a survey to gauge levels of information and attitudes to orphanage visits and volunteer placements amongst your staff, and use that to pitch your messaging to these audiences.

Some organisations have introduced a code of conduct which is signed by staff when they have completed their training.

Finally, organisations should monitor their practice and that of their partners to ensure that visits and volunteer placements are no longer occurring, and should put a policy in place for what actions to take if visits or placements do happen, or if policies are broken in other ways. Monitoring of social media can be useful for this, because travellers and volunteers are likely to tag themselves at orphanages if they visit them.

CASE STUDY ON INTERNAL COMMUNICATION - G ADVENTURES

In 2018 G Adventures became the first international tour operator to become ChildSafe Certified by Friends-International's ChildSave Movement division, in all its global operations destinations. This required a lot of work to look at the types of activities being included on tours and to remove anything that did not follow the CHILD WELFARE AND THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY: GLOBAL GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES produced by ChildSafe and G together for the industry, and which became the guide for developing G Adventures' own internal Child Welfare Policy. In regards to communications, there were two main areas of work that needed to be completed: a sweep of all public-facing marketing and communications materials, including photography, videos and messaging and an internal communications and training program. A robust training module was developed in house and in partnership with ChildSafe that focuses first on creating awareness about the issues around Child Welfare in the travel industry - from popular activities that G was no longer supporting such as voluntourism and orphanage tourism, to the company's stance on how to interact with children responsibility in regards to taking photographs, not visiting school classrooms, not giving gifts, and other guidelines on interactions. The mandatory training module is interactive with videos and quizzes and contains the company's policy which all staff must sign, acknowledging their commitment to abide by it. To date over 85% of G Adventures' global 2000 employees have completed the training and it continues to be mandatory for all new staff as part of their onboarding process. Finally, a task force of five global employees was established that meets quarterly to review any and all issues as well as develop new processes as needed. All staff, customers and members of the public can send any questions or concerns to the task force via childwelfare@gadventures.com.



6. DOCUMENTATION AND REVIEW

The final stage in the process is to document the process that you have gone through, including any challenges you faced and how you overcame them. This documentation can be kept for internal use, or you might share experiences or case studies with Better Care Network and the ReThink Orphanages coalition to support other organisations to follow in your footsteps.

Carry out a review six months to a year after you cease sending visitors to orphanages. Identify any changes to tourist or volunteer numbers, and any positive or negative feedback you have received as a result of divesting.

Internally, carry out a follow-up survey to assess levels of information and attitudes to orphanage visits and volunteer placements amongst your staff, and track these results over time.

Finally, follow up with your overseas partners to understand what changes they have made. Have they moved away from the model of orphanage care? Have they connected with local government and NGOs to receive support into the future? Have they sourced visitors from other sending organisations? What impact has your decision to divest had on the children in the orphanages you previously sent visitors to?

To demonstrate leadership, influence peers and contribute to sustainable change for children, consider publicising the change you have made - issue a press release, or share your experience through travel or volunteering networks and conferences and join the [*ReThink Orphanages coalition*](#).



3. Communication tools

As outlined in the previous step-by-step chapter, building on the experience of members of the Orphanage Divestment Action Group, this chapter provides examples and templates of policy statements, letters and other communications to a local partner, which may be an orphanage directly, frequently asked questions and videos or other materials that will facilitate and complement your own communications.

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1. SAMPLE ORPHANAGE VISIT AND VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT POLICY

[download as a word document](#)

LOGO

Our position on orphanage visits and volunteer placements and volunteer placements

[Name of Organisation] is committed to safeguarding the well-being of all children and young people who come into contact with our staff, and those who are impacted by our work. We recognise the risks and harms associated with orphanage care, and the particular risks associated with orphanage visits and volunteer placements.

We make the commitment with this policy that [Name of Organisation] will not support or facilitate orphanage visits and volunteer placements, and we will not work with suppliers or partners who do so. Nor will we support orphanages and other residential care institutions for children in other ways, for example through donations. We will take a public stand against orphanage visits and volunteer placements, and support and encourage other organisations in our sector to make the same commitment.

What our policy is based on

In recent years, a solid and compelling body of evidence has been built by leading child protection and children's rights organisations about the problems with orphanages as a model of care, and the harms associated with visits to and volunteer placements in orphanages. Our policy is built on that evidence, and on:

- The United Nations [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- The United Nations [Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children](#)
- United Nations [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#)
- [The UNWTO Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics](#)
- [Forum's Global Standard for Volunteering for Development](#)
- [The Code's Voluntourism Policy](#)
- The positions of leading organisations such as [UNICEF](#), and [Save the Children](#) and the [ReThink Orphanages](#) coalition on orphanage tourism and volunteering.

This policy aligns with our [\[Child Protection Policy\]](#) and [\[other organisational policies\]](#).

Principle

All children have a right to live in a supportive, protective, caring environment that empowers them to reach their full potential. The reality of orphanages is that they separate children from their families, denying them their right to a family, and often uses them to profit from the good intentions of tourists and volunteers.

The phenomenon of orphanages can be directly linked to the tourism and volunteering sectors. Visits to and volunteer placements in orphanages are harmful to children. It perpetuates the needless separation of children from their families for them to be placed in situations where the harmful effects can last long into adulthood.

[\[Name of Organisation\]](#) is committed to ensuring that we do not contribute to children being separated from their families and placed in orphanages.

What does this mean for [\[Name of Organisation\]](#)?

This policy applies to all staff, tourists and volunteers of [\[Name of Organisation\]](#), and to our suppliers and partners.

[\[Name of Organisation\]](#) will not enter into any relationship with a residential care institution, commonly known as an orphanage. This also applies to establishments referred to as children's homes, shelters, safe houses, children's villages and transitional homes.

Where such relationships currently exist, we will divest responsibly, following the guidance developed by the Orphanage Divestment Action Group.

[\[Name of Organisation\]](#) is committed to ensuring that all employees and volunteers understand about the harmful effects of orphanages on children, and the harmful effects of orphanage visits and volunteer placements; that they are effective and proactive in communicating this message to customers, suppliers and other organisations in our sector.

To put this commitment into action, we have taken the following steps -

1. All staff and volunteers to receive training on child protection, including training about the problems with orphanages and the harmful effects of orphanage visits and volunteer placements.
2. We have put in place reporting procedures so that staff, volunteers and customers can report any interaction with orphanages, and any situation where children are at risk of abuse or neglect.
3. [\[Name of Organisation\]](#) has signed/committed to [\[The Code/other\]](#)



Learn more

The person responsible for this policy in [Name of Organisation] is [Name], [Job title]. They can be contacted via [Contact details]. If you have any questions or comments on this policy or related issues, do not hesitate to contact them.

You can anonymously report any suspicious activity by emailing [Email address]. All reports will be treated confidentially.

To learn more, follow these links:

[Child protection policy]

[Child protection handbook and training]

[Orphanage care training]



2. ORPHANAGE VISIT AND VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT SECTION OF CHILD PROTECTION (OR OTHER) POLICY

[download as a word document](#)

LOGO

[Name of Organisation] recognises the harmful effects of orphanages as a model of care for children, and the risks associated with orphanage visits and volunteer placements. As part of our commitment to safeguarding the well-being of all children and young people who come into contact with our staff, and those who are impacted by our work, we have developed an Orphanage Visit and Volunteer Placement Policy.

There is a solid and compelling body of evidence on the harmful effects of orphanages, and the particular harms caused by visits and volunteer placements to orphanages. Based on this, [Name of Organisation] has committed to end any support or facilitation of orphanage visits and volunteer placements, as well as other forms of support to orphanages such as donations. Where such relationships currently exist, we are committed to divesting responsibly, following the guidance created by the Orphanage Divestment Action Group. We will not work with suppliers or partners who have relationships with orphanages. This will include amending our supplier contracts going forward to include clauses that preclude suppliers from offering orphanage visits or volunteer placements. We will take a public stand against orphanage visits and volunteer placements and support and encourage other organisations in our sector to make the same commitment.

We are committed to ensuring that all employees and volunteers understand the harmful effects of orphanage care, and the particular harms caused by orphanage visits and volunteer placements, and that they are effective and proactive in communicating this message to customers, suppliers and other organisations in our sector. To this end, we have introduced training for all staff and volunteers, and reporting mechanisms for staff, volunteers and customers.

To learn more, read our Orphanage Visit and Volunteer Placement Policy.



3. LETTER TO LOCAL PARTNER ORGANISATION

[download as a word document](#)

LOGO

Dear [Local Partner],

As you know, in recent months we have been considering our organisation's position on orphanage volunteering/visits, and asking ourselves some challenging questions about our relationship with orphanages like yours. I want to thank you for helping us to explore those questions, and to come to a better understanding about what our position should be.

We have taken the decision to transition away from all relationships with residential care institutions for children. This is based on our firm belief that children should be raised by their parents, families, or foster carers from their own community. This is in line with the evidence supporting the global effort to move away from orphanages as a model of care.

We have come to better understand the harm that short-term visits and volunteer placements can do to children living in orphanages.. We do not doubt the good intentions of the tourists and volunteers who visit orphanages, or those of people like you who hosts them, but cannot continue to support orphanages - or these types of visits and volunteer placements - where the harm has been widely documented.

This is not a decision that we have taken lightly. We are committed to ending our relationship with your organisation in the most responsible way possible. The welfare of the children is our highest priority.

From [date, e.g. six months in the future], we will cease all visits and volunteer placements to your organisation, and to all other residential care institutions for children.

Over the next [six months], we would like to work with you and your colleagues in a slow, careful process of transition to ensure that we minimise the negative effect of this decision on the children in your orphanage. We hope to be able to continue a constructive conversation with you about the harmful effects of orphanage care, and introduce you to organisations working in [your country] on child protection and care reform. We hope that your orphanage will, in time, become a community hub for children and families, helping to keep them together.

As a next step, can I suggest a Skype call between our management team and yours the week of [suggest week]?

I thank you for your support, and look forward to working with you through this period of transition.

Yours sincerely,



TALKING ABOUT ORPHANAGE VISITS AND VOLUNTEER PLACEMENTS

Any organisation that makes the decision to divest from relationships with orphanages will face questions and challenges about the value of orphanages, orphanage visits and volunteer placements. This could come from a range of stakeholders, including colleagues and managers as well as customers, volunteers, and overseas partners.

FAQ covers the most common questions and suggests responses to them. It is designed to be used in conjunction with [*2. The case against orphanage visits and volunteer placements.*](#)

Orphanage visits and volunteer placements can be a very sensitive topic. It can be challenging for people who have visited or supported an orphanage, or if someone close to them has. It can be challenging to confront the fact that, despite good intentions, you could have done harm.

Explain why orphanage visits and volunteer placements can be harmful, referring to the extensive research conducted over the last few decades. It can also be helpful to talk about how your own views about orphanage visits and volunteer placements have changed, and how your organisation's position has evolved in response to the evidence.



Consider the possibility that you may be communicating with someone who has lived in an orphanage or has experience with child protection services. Sensitivity is key.

You may find it helpful to learn that, once explained to them, the majority of people are receptive to the issue and are keen to learn about other ways they can support children overseas.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

When communicating with people about orphanage volunteering, you will often find that they have legitimate questions about the issue.

Here are the most commonly asked questions, and suggested answers.

Q: What Is An Orphanage?

A: The word ‘orphanage’ describes a residential institution where a group of unrelated children live together and receive care from paid staff members. Orphanages no longer exist in countries such as the UK, USA and Australia, but do still exist across Africa, Asia, South America and parts of Eastern Europe.

The term ‘orphanage’ itself is quite misleading, as it implies that all children living there are orphans. However, we know that this isn’t true and that around 80% of children growing up in these types of facilities have one or more living parents. Other names used to describe an orphanage are: children’s homes, shelters, safe houses, children’s villages, transitional homes and residential care institutions.

Q. Why is residential care potentially harmful to children?

A: While residential care has a place and is necessary in some circumstances, as a general rule it should only be provided on a temporary basis, for example while efforts are made to promote family reintegration or to identify family-based care options for children. Removing a child from their family and community is an extreme intervention, which can have detrimental effects on a child’s development. The harmful effects of growing up in an orphanage, include:

- ❑ Lack of individualised care provided by a consistent caregiver, which is fundamental for children’s wellbeing and healthy development,
- ❑ Attachment disorders and associated developmental delays,
- ❑ Poor social skills and decision-making skills, which affects their ability to function in society when they leave care,
- ❑ Higher risk of experiencing abuse, neglect, exploitation and harsh discipline,
- ❑ Higher risk of experiencing homelessness, trafficking, mental health challenges and suicide when they leave care.



No matter how well-run a home is, it is generally accepted that any form of residential care will have some adverse effects on a child. For this reason, family-based options are the preference.

When children aren't able to stay with their families or it's not in a child's best interest, family-based alternatives should be sought out. These include -

- ❏ Kinship care - where a child grows up with relatives
- ❏ Foster care - where a child grows up in a family that is not their own, but ideally is from the same community as them
- ❏ Emergency foster care - this can be required if a child needs to leave quickly for reasons of safety, but should only be temporary whilst a longer term care plan is arranged.
- ❏ Adoption - the permanent legal transfer of parental rights and responsibilities for a child.

Q. Why is residential care not a preferred place for children?

A: Although an orphanage may meet a child's physical needs, there is overwhelming evidence that it consistently fails to meet a child's social, psychological and emotional needs. For the past 60 years child development specialists and researchers have concluded that residential care cannot properly meet children's emotional or social needs.

Q. What is the connection between tourism and volunteering and of orphanages?

A: Orphanages have become a profitable business in many countries because they are an effective way to attract money from well-meaning visitors from high-income countries. As a result, many orphanages are established with the intention of attracting these visitors. Because they need children, the operators of these orphanages convince or coerce families to give up their children and place them in orphanage care. In some cases, children are intentionally kept in poor conditions so that they will attract more generous donations from visitors.



Q. Surely not all orphanages are bad. Can't I visit, or volunteer in, a good orphanage?

A. Orphanages may sound like a quick fix solution for caring for children, but years of research into child development shows that even the very best run institutions cannot match the care provided by a family. In short, there are no 'good' orphanages. Instead of supporting orphanages, the solution lies in helping to strengthen families by resourcing the provision of local services that some families struggle to access - such as schools, health centres and day care facilities for children.

Q. When an orphanage is officially registered, or run by a registered NGO, can we assume that this is one of the 'last resort' orphanages and it is OK to support them?

A. Official registration and NGO status are no guarantee that an organisation or institution is responsibly run, or that you should support it. In many countries, registration simply means that the organisation's financial and governance affairs are in order, and does not reflect on the care provided or the welfare of the children in an institution. Few countries, even in high income countries, have robust, well-resourced monitoring and inspection functions, and in some cases governments are incentivised to register NGOs and independent operators because state-supported services are overwhelmed.

Q. Isn't visiting or volunteering in an orphanage a good way to provide care and affection to poor and marginalised children?

A. Visits and volunteering are no substitute for the secure and stable relationships that children need, and that could be provided by their families and communities. Many children in orphanages experience attachment disorders because of the trauma of being separated from their families, and these are compounded when they repeatedly form emotional relationships with visitors and volunteers, only for those relationships to be severed. This can be experienced by children as a repeated cycle of abandonment.

Q. I will volunteer for several months or a year in the orphanage. Can I avoid any attachment issues this way?

A. Taking on longer-term placements can be one way to reduce the risk of attachment issues, but this approach does not remove the possibility that you will cause or exacerbate attachment issues in children you come into contact with. The length of your volunteer experience also doesn't change the fact that you will be supporting a form of care that even in a best case scenario is detrimental to children's development and often means that children have been separated from their families.



Q. What about the children who don't have families or homes to return to?

A. In the few cases where children do not have families or extended relatives to return to, shelters or other short-term child protection centres which provide immediate support for highly vulnerable children are available. Their role is highly specialised and should only ever be a short-term solution. It is never appropriate for international volunteers to work at a shelter. When a child can not be reunited with their immediate or wider family, alternative family-based care, such as foster care, will be identified. In emergency situations, such as a conflict, which lead to children being separated from families, family-tracing and reintegration must be the focus.

Q. What happens to the children in the orphanages if they close down?

A. This is not a sudden decision or process. Local charities and organisations work with orphanages and local authorities to find out why the children are there in the first place and will set out to make sure the children are reunited with their families or extended family, with the appropriate support available to prevent future family separation. Alternatively, they will work to identify appropriate foster care placement.

Q. In some orphanages, the only interaction children get is from tourists and volunteers. Surely this is better than nothing?

A. Sadly, no. First, children in orphanages are vulnerable and require specialist care, which should only be provided by qualified and trained professionals. Consider this in the context of your own country – children with special needs would never be cared for by unqualified members of staff or volunteers. Secondly, children should be cared for by local people, not outside visitors, as they are more likely to speak the same language as the child and be able to support them for a sustained period of time.

Q. If orphanage visits and volunteer placements are wrong, why do so many organisations still offer them?

A. Travel and volunteering organisations are increasingly recognising the problems with orphanage tourism and orphanage volunteering. Many have never run orphanage volunteering programmes, and a growing number are removing orphanage volunteering or tourist trips from their programmes. Travellers and volunteers can end this practice by making the decision not to visit or volunteer in orphanages.



Q. If people shouldn't visit orphanages, but they want to do good while travelling, what should they do instead?

A. Travelling and volunteering overseas can provide a brilliant experience, but the main purpose of volunteering should always be to contribute something meaningful to a community or project. Tourists, and especially volunteers, should think about the skills they have and where these could be best used. Children need stable, individual and often specialist attention, which is difficult for tourists and volunteers to provide. As appealing as it may sound to interact with children, only properly qualified people should be responsible for teaching or caring for children overseas. Encourage people to look for volunteer programmes that benefit the whole community and create lasting change for people living in poverty. Check out the [10-point volunteering checklist](#) on the [ReThink Orphanages website](#) for guidance on how to choose a placement overseas or read [The Essential Guide to Volunteering Abroad](#). There are many ways for people to do good while travelling that do not involve visits or volunteer placements. This [article from Good Travel](#), for example, encourages travellers to be conscious of how they behave while travelling, and to be deliberate in how they spend money. Businesses will find [G-Adventures Child Welfare Guidelines](#) and the resources of the [ChildSafe Movement](#) helpful.

Q. If I can't visit or volunteer in an orphanage, can I do a fundraiser to support instead?

A. Governments across the world have agreed to family-based care in the knowledge that it is the better option for children. However, care reform efforts are being undermined by the continued support from well-intentioned people - through visits, volunteer placements, and donations. Some orphanage owners even exploit the children in their care by deliberately keeping them hungry and sick in order to elicit more donations. Donating is a great thing to do, but make sure you're supporting an organisation working to support family-based care, and not an orphanage.

If you feel unsure about answering a question, point volunteers in the direction of one of these websites:

- [ReThink Orphanages](#)
- [Learning Service](#)
- [#HelpingNotHelping](#)
- [Child Safe Movement](#)
- [Hope and Homes for Children](#)
- [Comhlamh](#)



VOLUNTEER CHECKLIST

People generally volunteer to do something meaningful and experience a new culture. However, some volunteer-sending organisations may be more concerned with creating a ‘life-changing’ experience for the volunteer, with less focus on the purpose and the needs of local communities. Here’s what to look for to make sure your time overseas is spent making a genuine difference:

10-POINT VOLUNTEER CHECKLIST

- TRACK RECORD**
Look for evidence of past achievements and how programs are monitored and evaluated.
- INTEGRITY**
A growing number of organisations have ceased orphanage volunteering. [*Find out who.*](#)
- ACCOUNTABILITY**
Some organisations recruit volunteers for their own programs; others act as ‘volunteer brokers’ and may not have end-to-end accountability for the project or your safety.
- SELECTIVITY**
Expect to apply to volunteer and be vetted as if you were applying for a job or university. You should also receive pre-departure support and possibly training.
- CREDIBILITY**
Emotive language like ‘saving the world’ or ‘giving children the love they need’ may be used to recruit volunteers, but it suggests a worldview that focuses on the perceived deficits of local people. You should instead choose an organisation that works on the basis of partnership and mutual learning.
- THE ‘NEED’**
Make sure your role will enhance local capacity – e.g. by providing training to, or working with local people to meet a short-term skills gap.



SUSTAINABILITY
Check there's a project end date, not a long-term dependency on volunteers.

SKILLS MATCH
What do you have to offer? Skills in high demand include digital, monitoring and evaluation, fundraising, language and computer skills.

SUITABLY QUALIFIED
Avoid placements for which you are not skilled or qualified – e.g. teaching or caring for children or providing medical care.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY
How will you apply your learnings back home? Employers will be interested in evidence of impact, not just the fact that you have volunteered overseas.



VIDEOS

A number of organisations have developed videos to communicate the harms associated with orphanage care, and what tourists and volunteers can do. These include -



THE LOVE YOU GIVE
the untold story of orphanages



CHILDSAFE MOVEMENT/FRIENDS INTERNATIONAL
Don't Create More Orphans



FORGETMENOT AND THE UMBRELLA FOUNDATION
Dear Volunteer



A MESSAGE FROM J.K. ROWLING (LUMOS)



THE VOLUNTOURIST
documentary



#HELPINGNOTHELPING
short campaign film



4. Global Care Reform: summary background on alternative care for children

INTRODUCTION

The [*United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*](#) affirms that every child has the right to grow up in a loving family environment. It recognises the family as the fundamental unit of society, and the environment in which children best develop, thrive, and have their needs met holistically. In support of this recognition, the Convention on the Rights of the Child along with the [*Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*](#) establishes the right to family-life as a fundamental right of all children.

The UN's [*Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*](#) build on the Convention. These guidelines seek to ensure that children do not find themselves in out-of-home care unnecessarily, and that when they do, this care is of a type and quality that corresponds to the rights and specific needs of the child.

The travel sector in particular should be aware of the principles of children's rights and business. The [*UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights \(UNGPR\)*](#) provide an authoritative global standard for preventing and addressing the risk of adverse impacts on human rights linked to business activity.

In recent years there has been a global effort to move away from residential care as a response to the issues affecting children towards supporting and strengthening families and communities. Family strengthening is the provision of local services to meet the economic, educational, psychological, health and other needs of families to prevent family separation, and enable families to fulfil their caregiving roles for children. This can include employment skills and job training, day care and after-school programmes for children and healthcare services.

CHILD RIGHTS AND ORPHANAGE CARE

This recognition of the importance of families, as central to children's rights and wellbeing, is at the heart of the shift away from institutions, including orphanages, as a model of care for children. Families should be supported to care for their children, and where it is not in the child's best interests to remain with their own family, including with members of their extended family, there are other forms of family-based alternative care in the community, such as foster care.



Orphanages are associated with a range of negative impacts on children’s development. Therefore, support provided to orphanages through donations, visiting and volunteering, perpetuates a system of care that is not in the best interests of children, and in fact harms those it intends to help.

This document will explore this issue further, and look at the implications for the travel and volunteering sectors. It will unpack:

- ❏ The harmful effects of orphanage care on children
- ❏ Orphanages as a response to demand from visitors and volunteers
- ❏ The cycle of harm perpetuated by ongoing support for orphanages
- ❏ The positive alternatives to orphanages
- ❏ The care reform agenda, promoting a shift towards family-based care for children, in accordance with their rights, best interests, and how to support these reforms

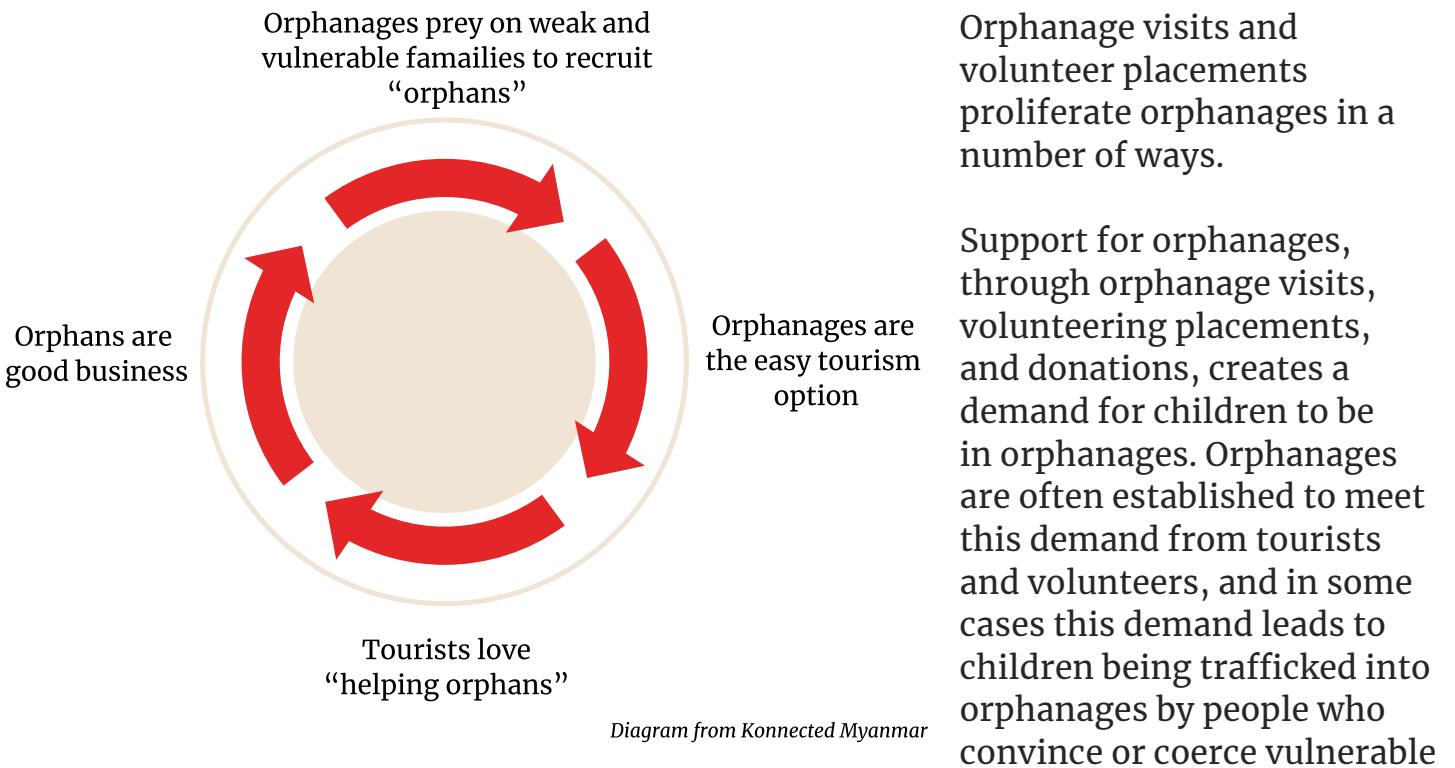
HOW ORPHANAGES HARM CHILDREN

Decades of research has proven that growing up in an orphanage is harmful to a child’s development and well-being. Some of the effects faced by children of growing up in an orphanage are:

- ❏ Many children who grow up in orphanages, regardless of how well resourced they are, experience attachment disorders, developmental delays and lack the life skills and stability that come from growing up in a family environment.
- ❏ While in care, children are more vulnerable to trafficking, abuse and exploitation. When they leave care, they are also at much higher risk of becoming victims of violence, trafficking and exploitation.
- ❏ Adults who have experienced living in care face a higher risks of homelessness, mental health challenges and suicide as adults.



SUPPORTING ORPHANAGES PERPETUATES THIS CYCLE OF HARM



families to give their children up. Often, families receive payment or the promise (which is very rarely fulfilled) that their child will receive care or an education in an orphanage.

These children, branded as orphans, have families and communities that could care for them. Studies show that at least 80% have one or both living parents, and an even higher percentage have other family who could care for them if provided with the right support.

In this sense, orphanages create ‘orphans’, incentivising the separation of children from their family and using false claims of orphanhood to elicit sympathy and generate profit. Orphanage visits and volunteer placements also contribute to the perception of demand, and play a role in fuelling the orphanage industry.

The role that travel companies and volunteer-involving organisations play in this process contravenes global frameworks and, in many places, government directives, and creates reputational and legal risk for those operators that still have relationships with orphanages.



ORPHANAGE VISITS AND VOLUNTEER PLACEMENTS CAUSE HARM AND EXPOSE CHILDREN TO RISKS

There are many reasons why short-term visits (i.e. orphanage tourism) and volunteer placements to orphanages are a bad idea.



Children need secure and stable relationships for healthy development and are already vulnerable in this respect due to the trauma of being separated from their families. Allowing a revolving door of visitors and volunteers to interact with children in orphanages deepens this trauma. It can compound existing attachment issues, cause psychological harm and make it harder for children to learn to trust and develop healthy social relationships. This is because it puts children in a position where they are repeatedly forming emotional relationships with visitors and volunteers, only for those relationships to be severed when they leave. This can be experienced by children as a repeated cycle of abandonment. Young children in

institutions are at most risk of attachment related development delays and are also most 'popular' with orphanage visitors and volunteers.

One of the symptoms of [attachment disorders](#) is indiscriminate friendliness and affection-seeking behavior. Volunteers and visitors are rarely well equipped to recognise this behavior in children as a sign of an attachment disorder. Therefore, they respond by offering lots of affection, which reinforces both the issue and behaviors that can leave children highly vulnerable to being preyed upon. Indiscriminate friendliness or affection-seeking is one of the reasons why young people who leave orphanages are more at risk of being trafficked or exploited. Insecure attachment to adult caregivers in childhood is linked to behavioural difficulties and mental health issues in later life, including depression and anxiety.

Orphanage visits and volunteer placements also expose children to child protection risks. Opening the doors to visitors provides an avenue for those with intent to abuse children.



Tour operators in particular should consider the fact that, unfortunately, some tourists engage in behaviours and conduct overseas that they would not engage in at home – either out of lack of respect for the country, or because they think they can get away with behaviours when they are overseas. Tour operators and others can play an important role in deterring this type of behaviour by restricting access to vulnerable children through orphanage visits.

While there is growing awareness on the need for child safeguarding, unfortunately few orphanages or similar organisations have child *safeguarding* policies and measures in place. In many cases, vetting and background checks of tourists and volunteers are poor or non-existent, even in cases where these visitors are interacting directly with children. Even where vetting exists, background checks are insufficient to protect children from abuse, as a high percentage of child abuse is not reported or prosecuted. In recent years, *research* and *individual cases* have brought to light the very real risk that visitors and volunteers groom and abuse children.

Visits also infringe on the right to privacy and dignity of the children and perpetuate the unequal power relationships between tourists and children whereby children receive gifts or money from tourists, increasing their level of risk. Many orphanages allow tourists to take photos of children and put them up on social media sites. This breaches the child's right to confidentiality and places them at risk of exploitation. Very few orphanages have child friendly reporting processes or staff reporting processes, where concerns for the safety or wellbeing of a child can be raised, for example in response to an incident involving a tourist visit.

However, even where an orphanage has in place rigorous child safeguarding standards and measures, tourist visits and unskilled, short term volunteering are not a child centred or child safe practice, and can place the child at risk of harm.

POSITIVE ALTERNATIVES: A CONTINUUM OF CARE

An orphanage is never the best place for a child.

Most children who currently live in orphanages don't actually need alternative care and could be reunited with their families who can care for them if given the right support. If the funding and other support that is currently directed into orphanages was redirected to strengthening families, there would be no demand for children to be separated from their families.



Some children, however, may need alternative care temporarily until issues that led to separation can be resolved, or they may need it for a longer period of time.

For these children, there are better options than orphanages. Children who have lost their parents may be able to live in kinship care, with extended family members such as aunts, uncles or grandparents. If that is not possible, foster care or adoption might be suitable options. These are all forms of ‘family-based care’ in the community and are part of the continuum of alternative care, which gives priority to family-based forms of care over residential ones.

GLOBAL CARE REFORM TRENDS

To work towards a reality in which children can be raised in families, countries are implementing what is referred to as ‘care reforms’. Care reforms involve reforming the systems and services that support children and families in each country to:

- ❏ Reduce and eventually eliminate the reliance on institutional care (deinstitutionalization),
- ❏ Increase support to families and prevent separation (family strengthening)
- ❏ Develop the full range of family-based care options
- ❏ Assist children currently in orphanages to reintegrate back into communities and families (reintegration and reunification).

Whilst many countries are in the process of reforming their care systems, it is a complex process that takes time. As such, orphanages cannot all be immediately closed and children returned to families overnight. Despite this, we must take active steps as the institutional system does need dismantling for the situation to change.



The reality is the ongoing support for orphanages from countries in the Global North - through donations, volunteering, tourist trips and faith-based mission work - is weakening the global care reform effort. Well-meaning support for orphanages continues to perpetuate the cycle of children being separated unnecessarily from their families and takes valuable resources away from other services that better meet children’s needs.



A critical process in deinstitutionalisation is the redirection of resources away from institutions towards family and community services. This is where travel and volunteering companies can play an important role in care reforms. You can support deinstitutionalisation processes, by redirecting volunteering and funding efforts away from orphanages towards:

- ❏ Family strengthening initiatives, strengthening families 'ability to care for their children;
- ❏ Community initiatives that strengthen communities' capacity to meet the needs of children locally, for example through inclusive education services.
- ❏ Support for building alternative care arrangements, where relevant.

Learn more about the care reform agenda, through organisations like Better Care Network and those in the the ReThink Orphanages Coalition.



5. Alternatives to orphanage visits and volunteer placements – an exploration of the issues

As they transition away from supporting orphanages, operators want to know what they can offer to customers who are motivated to do good or give something back while travelling.

Volunteering with and supporting children as a tourist when travelling overseas is a very popular and well-intentioned thing to do. However the reality is that the children that volunteers are placed with are often highly vulnerable, and children are frequently exploited to attract support from well-meaning tourists.

The starting point for operators is to consider what types of visits and volunteer placements countries are ethical, responsible, and sustainable. The following resources should be used to guide organisations' decision making:

- ❏ For tourism operators: [Child Welfare and the Travel Industry](#), [Global Good Practice Guidelines](#) (ChildSafe Movement)
- ❏ For volunteering operators: [Global Standard for Volunteering for Development](#) (Forum)

INTERACTING WITH CHILDREN AS A TOURIST

In reality, tourists will come into contact with children, but they should not participate in 'child-centred activities'. [Children are not tourist attractions](#), and interaction under any circumstances exposes children to a myriad of risks, as well as commodifying children and reinforcing North-South stereotypes. As well as prohibiting this type of visit, operators can provide general information on [child-safe tourism practices](#) such as not taking photos of children and not giving money to children who are begging. They can also inform customers about how to report to local authorities or [Childline International](#) if they observe concerning behaviour by foreigners with children.

You can help customers and volunteers to understand that they can help local communities by visiting and supporting the local economy. Tourism contributes to economies in many ways, including through creating employment and opportunities for local people. Make tourists aware that just by being an ethical and responsible tourist, conducting themselves appropriately in-country and interacting with communities in a safe and respectful way, can make a positive and lasting contribution.



Operators can contribute in this way by, for example, supporting tourists and volunteers to visit a market or cooperative.

VOLUNTEERING FOR CHILDREN, NOT VOLUNTEERING WITH CHILDREN.

All international volunteer placements should be driven by demand from a community or organisation for a volunteer with specific skills that cannot reasonably be sourced locally due to skill shortage or resource limitations. Placements should never be driven by the interests of the volunteer. The emphasis should be on volunteering for children, rather than volunteering with children. With very few exceptions, volunteer placements should never involve direct interaction with children.

As a general rule, the role of an international volunteer should be to work alongside local counterparts, building their capacity by sharing knowledge and skills. In some cases, local professionals will work with children, for example as teachers or medical professionals. In these cases, international volunteers will spend most of their time working directly with their local counterparts, but this work might bring them into contact with children from time to time. Volunteering operators should enable volunteers to see their placements as a learning experience, and for the purpose of awareness raising or advocacy when they return home. International volunteering is an opportunity to learn about the global nature of poverty and the connections between social responsibility and poverty and inequality.





It is sometimes argued that it is possible for volunteer-involving organisations to offer responsible, impactful placements for volunteers to work directly with children, where volunteers have the necessary skills, and placements are designed as part of a sustainable programme with strong child protection policies and procedures are in place. See for example this blog post on the organisation [KickStart Ghana](#).

In developing this divestment resource, members of the Orphanage Divestment Action Group were consulted on what circumstances it is acceptable and responsible for international volunteers to work directly with children, and how international volunteers can work to improve the lives of poor and marginalised children. The responses are summarised as follows:

- ❏ Placements that involve direct interaction with children should be avoided. Where they do exist, they should be long-term, to avoid inconsistency, disruption to services and repetition, which is rarely in the child's best interest. Some organisations recommend a minimum placement length of three months for this reason. Another approach is for volunteer placements to be aligned to the duration of a project, like a summer school. Even volunteers undertaking longer-term placements should avoid working with children who have experienced trauma, are separated from their families or are in a child protection programme.
- ❏ In cases where an international volunteer might come into contact with children through their placement, it is important that the volunteer in question is properly assessed, vetted and supported by their sending organisation, that they have the necessary skills for, and professional experience of working with children, and that they are trained in child safeguarding. They should be well supervised by their host organisation.
- ❏ Volunteer placements should not be focused on direct interaction with children, such as primary caregiving or classroom teaching. Rather, placements should focus on building the skills of local people who work with children. This could mean a volunteer delivering workshops for local teachers, or training teachers in a university or teacher training college.
- ❏ Placements like these might bring volunteers into contact with children occasionally, for example through supervising teaching practice for trainee teachers, but this should be the exception rather than the focus of the placement.
- ❏ Where contact with children does occur, volunteers must be skilled and experienced at working with children. As a general rule, if a volunteer is not trained and vetted to interact with children through their work in their home country, they should not do it overseas.



- Any volunteer that interacts with children overseas must be screened according to child safeguarding standards and their references should be checked as part of a thorough recruitment and vetting process. They should be trained in child safeguarding and sign a child safeguarding policy and code of conduct. Child friendly reporting mechanisms must be in place. The volunteer should be supervised, and both the volunteer and their supervisor must produce ongoing monitoring reports.

CHILD SAFEGUARDING

Child safeguarding standards apply even when visiting or volunteering does not involve direct contact with children, as some contact will likely occur, at the community level overall or for example partnerships with women's economic programs where mothers bring along their children. All volunteers, even those who will not be working directly with children, should be recruited and screened according to child safeguarding [leading resources](#), attend pre-departure training and in-country induction. Volunteer-sending organisations should assess the child protection risks of each volunteer placement, including access and length of engagement with children and vulnerable adults, and decide on the level of vetting needed for each role.

Upholding high standards in behaviour in both the volunteering role and personal time is important for all international volunteers. All volunteers should be trained in child safeguarding and sign a child safeguarding policy and code of conduct. Child-friendly reporting mechanisms should be in place, and all volunteers and their supervisors should provide ongoing monitoring reports. In cases where volunteers will have occasional contact with children, risks can be mitigated through clear roles and responsibilities, and appropriate supervision.

Questions about some forms of volunteer interaction with children remain an ongoing topic of conversation amongst professionals in child protection, development cooperation, and the travel and volunteering sectors. To join the discussion, email info@rethinkorphanages.org

TRAVEL AND VOLUNTEERING TO PREVENT FAMILY SEPARATION

It is sometimes suggested that visits and volunteer placements can indirectly help to strengthen families and communities by, for example, strengthening the local economy by supporting local businesses. This type of support does not involve interaction with children, but can have the effect of empowering families to care for children in their homes, preventing the circumstances that lead families to relinquish their children or place them in care.



For tourists, activities that strengthen local economies, such as visits and volunteer placements to markets or cooperatives, can help to provide sustainable livelihoods to families and communities, and avoids bringing visitors into contact with children.

Some tour operators support local communities in low income countries by providing avenues for young people to build careers in the tourism and hospitality sectors. See for example Planeterra's [*New Paths for Youth*](#). Tour companies might consider how their customers might support such projects, for example by eating in a restaurant where trainee cooks and hospitality staff are on work placement. This would also serve to promote the company's corporate social responsibility work.

For volunteers, there are a range of activities in this area but they are only suitable for volunteers with highly specialised skills and experience working in a capacity building role, in line with the good practice guidance for volunteering set out earlier in this section. These include livelihoods projects, improving the quality of education and health care provided in communities, and more focused activities like family reunification and promotion of child protection and child rights.



6. External Resources

BETTER CARE NETWORK

An international network of organizations committed to supporting children without adequate family care around the world. BCN works by fostering collaboration, research and information sharing on family strengthening and alternative care, and advocating for changes to national, regional, and global policies to improve children's care situations.

THE RETHINK ORPHANAGES COALITION

A global, cross-sector coalition working to prevent family separation and unnecessary child institutionalization by shifting the way countries in the Global North engage with overseas aid and development.

BEYOND ORPHANAGE VISITS

A page that brings together some of the best resources about the issue of orphanage visits, to assist travel and volunteering organisations to properly understand the problem, to consider some of the responsible alternatives, and to consider how to safely and responsibly transition towards more ethical approaches.

SCOPING RESOURCES

RETHINK ORPHANAGES PARTNERSHIP DUE DILIGENCE ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR RESIDENTIAL CARE SERVICE PROVIDERS

Developed specifically for charities seeking to partner with overseas organisations who provide residential care services for children. It is designed to help them determine whether their partner or prospective partner is operating in accordance with standard notions of good practice and international norms.

ROUNDTABLE HUMAN RIGHTS IN TOURISM «GET STARTED» TOOL

Designed for small- and medium-sized tour operators, the «Get started» tool helps to identify human rights risks and integrate measures to protect human rights in their operations and along the value chain. It includes practical and concrete answers and hands-on recommendations to questions.

GLOBAL CHILD FORUM/UNICEF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND BUSINESS ATLAS

The Children's Rights and Business Atlas helps businesses and industries assess potential and actual impacts on the lives of children and guides the integration of children's rights into due diligence practices and procedures. Includes [Country Analysis Briefs](#).



RESOURCES FOR OVERSEAS PARTNERS

While travel companies and volunteer-sending organisations do not have a responsibility to support orphanages through a process of deinstitutionalisation, you might share the details of organisations that can inform and support them in this process. Here are some global organisations that you can reference regardless of where the orphanage is located.

UNICEF

UNICEF works in over 190 countries and territories to save children's lives, to defend their rights, and to help them fulfil their potential, from early childhood through adolescence.

ECPAT INTERNATIONAL

ECPAT's mandate is to end the sexual exploitation of children through prostitution; trafficking; online and in the travel and tourism sector. We advocate for change with governments and the international community, work to better understand the problem through research and prioritize the needs of child victims and survivors.

LUMOS

Lumos rescues children from orphanages and reunites them with families. They change education, health and social care systems so all children and families can access the care and protection they deserve.

HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN

Hope and Homes for Children is a global expert in the field of deinstitutionalisation.

SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children works to improve the lives of children through better education, health care, and economic opportunities, as well as providing emergency aid in natural disasters, war, and other conflicts



RESOURCES FOR COMPANIES

UNICEF [*Integrating children's rights into your business*](#)

A set of tools on children's rights due diligence for companies including guidance on policy commitments and codes of practice, child rights impact assessments, corporate reporting and stakeholder engagement.

Save the Children and UNICEF [*Children's Rights in Policies and Codes of Conduct: A tool for companies*](#)

A tool that recommends ways for businesses to incorporate children's rights into their policies and codes of conduct, based on the Children's Rights and Business Principles.

European Coalition for Corporate Justice [*A Human Rights Review of the EU Non-Financial Reporting Directive*](#)

A useful guide to business reporting requirements on social issues

The Code [*Does your business include voluntourism products or orphanages in tourism programs?*](#)

Childsafe [*Child Welfare and the Travel Industry: Global Good Practices Guidelines*](#)

Roundtable Human Rights in Tourism [*Human Rights in Tourism – An Implementation Guideline for Tour Operators*](#)

Lumos' [*resources for businesses and organisations*](#)

VOLUNTEERING GUIDES

ChildSafe Movement [*Be A ChildSafe Volunteer*](#)

Australian Government [*Smart Volunteering*](#)

Comhlámh Children First: [*Where Do I Start?*](#)

Kinnectd [*Ethical Volunteering with Vulnerable Children information sheet*](#)

The Code [*Does your business include voluntourism products or orphanages in tourism programs?*](#)

ReThink Orphanages - [*volunteer checklist*](#)



LEARNING RESOURCES

LUMOS ONLINE LEARNING

Includes resources on deinstitutionalisation, and a knowledge portal with resources from other organisations.

ReThink Orphanages: [*learning resources for schools Schools*](#)

[*Learning Service*](#): ReThinking Volunteering Travel

RESOURCES FOR FAITH-BASED TRIPS AND MISSIONS

Faith to Action Initiative [*Short Term Missions Guidance to Support Orphans and Vulnerable Children*](#)

CAFO [*Wise Short-Term Missions*](#)

ACCI [*Ethical Short-Term Missions and Volunteering*](#)

CARE REFORM AND DEINSTITUTIONALISATION RESOURCES

[*Moving Forward*](#): implementing the guidelines for alternative care for children

[*A Goal Within Reach*](#): ending the institutionalisation of children

[*Gatekeeping*](#)- making decisions for the better care of children

[*Opening doors*](#): Deinstitutionalisation of Europe's Children

[*Keeping children out of harmful institutions*](#) - why we should be invested in family based care

[*10 Steps Forward to Deinstitutionalisation*](#): building communities to support children's rights



CHILD RIGHTS

The [*UN Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)*](#) was adopted in 1989 and articulates the basic, non-negotiable human rights that all children have, touching on all facets of children's lives – from education and health to protection from violence and freedom of expression. The Convention is a core human rights treaty within the international human rights system that has been ratified by nearly all States, not just as an aspiration, but as a legally binding commitment for which they are held accountable.

While the CRC does not specifically address the role of business in realizing children's rights, it builds the legal foundation for the Children's Rights and Business Principles (CRBP) and the CRC General Comment no. 16.

[*UNICEF \(2007\): Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child*](#)

UNICEF has developed this Handbook to provide a detailed reference for the implementation of law, policy and practice to promote and protect the rights of children, and to give a concise description of the role, powers and procedures, and developing activities of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Handbook includes [*Implementation Checklists*](#) for each article and the two Optional Protocols to the Convention, and their guidelines for reporting.

[*UNICEF \(2016\): Mapping the Global Goals for Sustainable Development and the Convention on the Rights of the Child*](#)

This interactive document aims to encourage an in-depth and broad-based exploration of the links and synergies between the SDGs and the CRC.

TRAVEL ADVICE WITH REFERENCE TO ORPHANAGE VISITS AND VOLUNTEERING

[UK FOREIGN OFFICE](#)

[US STATE DEPARTMENT](#)

[AUSTRALIA DEPARTMENT FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE](#)

[NETHERLANDS MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS](#)



PAID RESOURCES

ABTA, the Association of British Travel Agents, has a number of resources that are available to ABTA members, and offered for sale to non-members. These include:

[ABTA VOLUNTEER TOURISM GUIDELINES](#)

[ABTA MODERN SLAVERY GUIDELINES](#)

[ABTA EVERY CHILD EVERYWHERE CHILD SAFEGUARDING TRAINING TOOL](#)

BOOKS

[LEARNING SERVICE: THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO VOLUNTEERING ABROAD](#)



OTHER RESOURCES

[Getting Care Right for All Children: Implementing the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children](#)
[Future Learn and Strathclyde University online course](#)

[UNICEF Moving Forward; Implementing the Guidelines](#)

[UNICEF Child Protection Mapping](#)

[2019 UNGA Resolution on the Rights of the Child](#) – focusing on children without parental care (and has a reference on eliminating trafficking in orphanages and addressing voluntourism)

[2019 Secretary General's Report on Status on the Rights of the Child](#) (focusing on children without parental care, and has reference to voluntourism)

Community Living for Europe: Structural Funds Watch - [Opening up communities, closing down institutions: Harnessing the European Structural and Investment Funds](#)

[Everychild Scaling down Reducing, reshaping and improving residential care around the world](#)

[Guide of Contributions and Examples from Residential Care Institutions' Experiences](#)

[Family Care Guidance for Children with Disabilities](#)

[Decisions for the Better Care of Children The Role of Gatekeeping](#)

[Cambodian Policy on Alternative Care](#)

[FREE Online Course on Alternative Care](#)

[Working paper on alternatives to detention](#) (migration and children on the move)



7. Glossary of terms

A number of extensive glossaries and terminology guides exist for the issues addressed in these resources. In particular, we recommend:

Better Care Network's [*Glossary of Key Terms*](#)

The Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children's [*Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*](#)

Save the Children's [*Child Protection and Care Related Definitions*](#)

Below is a short glossary of terms used in these resources, largely drawn from Better Care Network's Glossary of Key Terms.

ADOPTION

The legal transfer of parental rights and responsibilities for a child which is permanent.²

ALTERNATIVE CARE

A formal or informal arrangement whereby a child is looked after at least overnight outside the parental home, either by decision of a judicial or administrative authority or duly accredited body, or at the initiative of the child, his/her parent(s) or primary caregivers, or spontaneously by a care provider in the absence of parents.

ATTACHMENT

The formation by a child of significant and stable emotional connections with the significant people in her/his life. This process begins in early infancy as the child bonds with one or more primary caregivers. A failure by a child to establish these types of important connections before the age of about five years may result in the child experiencing difficulties with a wide variety of social relationships for significant periods of time in her/his life.

² Manual for the Measurement of Indicators for Children in Formal Care (Draft), UNICEF, August 2006



CARE LEAVER

A young person, typically over the age of 16 who is leaving or has left a formal alternative care placement. Depending on each country's laws and policies, he or she may be entitled to assistance with education, finances, psychosocial support, and accommodation in preparation for independent living.

CHILD

Every human being below the age of 18 unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

CHILD ABUSE

A deliberate act of ill treatment that can harm or is likely to cause harm to a child's safety, well-being, dignity and development. Abuse includes all forms of physical, sexual, psychological or emotional ill treatment.

CHILD CARE

Care of a child provided for compensation by an individual, other than a parent, for less than twenty-four (24) hours in a day. It typically allows the parent to go to work while their child is looked after in a day care facility or in the home of a childminder.

CHILD PROTECTION

Measures and structures intended to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence affecting children.

Children Without Parental Care (or children deprived of family care)

All children not living with at least one of their parents, for whatever reason and under whatever circumstances. Children without parental care who are outside their country of habitual residence or victims of emergency situations may be designated as unaccompanied or separated.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

A set of universal entitlements for every child and young person below the age of 18 enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These entitlements apply to children of every background and encompass what they need to survive and to have opportunities to lead stable, rewarding lives. They fall into four categories: the right to survive, be safe, belong and develop.



COMMUNITY BASED CARE

Care that is as close as possible to family based care and where the community is involved in the process of a child's recovery. Foster and extended families are examples of community-based care.

COMMUNITY BASED SUPPORT

A range of measures to ensure the support of children and families in the community.

DEINSTITUTIONALISATION

The process of closing residential care institutions and providing alternative family based care within the community.

EMOTIONAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development (e.g. humiliating and degrading treatment such as bad name calling, constant criticism, belittling, persistent shaming, solitary confinement and isolation).

EXTENDED FAMILY

The wider network of family members that might include grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins etc.

FAMILY BASED CARE

The short-term or long-term placement of a child into a family environment, with at least one consistent parental caregiver, a nurturing family environment where children are part of supportive kin and community.

FORMAL CARE

All care situations where the child's placement was made by order of a Competent Authority, as well as residential care, irrespective of the route by which the child entered.



FOSTER CARE/FOSTERING

The full-time care of a child or adolescent within a non-related family who agrees to meet the developmental, psychosocial, medical, educational and spiritual needs of a child who is not able to live with his/her own parents or extended family.

Formal foster care describes arrangements that have been ordered or authorized by an administrative body or judicial authority; it usually involves an assessment of the family for the child and the provision of some kind of continuing support and monitoring.

Informal foster care is a private arrangement made between the two families. Specialized foster family care provides for children with special needs (a child with HIV/AIDS or psychiatric disorders, for example).

Crisis intervention foster family care is when there is an emergency and a child lives with a family until the crisis is over or another plan is made for the child.

Spontaneous fostering, where a family takes in a child without any prior arrangement. This is a frequent occurrence during emergencies and may involve families from a different community in the case of refugee children.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

All basic services that are provided by the state including health, education, justice, social welfare, police, agriculture, water and other services.

GROUP/SMALL FAMILY HOME

A type of residential care in which 10 children or less live in a house with a care worker(s), and are cared for in an environment that is as family-like as possible, typically with 2-3 children per bedroom.

HARM

Harm is the result of the exploitation, violence, abuse and neglect of children and can take many forms, including impacts on children's physical, emotional and behavioral development, their general health, their family and social relationships, their self-esteem, their educational attainment and their aspirations.

INSTITUTION

A large institution is characterized by having 25 or more children living together in one building. A small institution or children's home refers to a building housing 11 to 24 children.



INSTITUTIONAL CARE

The short-term or long-term placement of a child into any non family-based care situation. Other similar terms include residential care, group care, and orphanage.

INTERIM/EMERGENCY CARE

Care arranged for a child on a temporary basis (e.g. while her/his own family is being traced where accidental separation has occurred).

KINSHIP CARE

The full-time care, nurturing and protection of a child by someone other than a parent who is related to the child by family ties or by a significant prior relationship. Informal kinship care is any private arrangement provided in a family, whereby the child is looked after by kin.

Formal kinship care describes arrangements that have been ordered or authorized by an administrative body or judicial authority; it usually involves an assessment of the family for the child and the provision of some kind of continuing support and monitoring.

LIFE SKILLS

Various skills children and young people can learn regarding social development and living and coping independently. This includes self-awareness, problem solving, learning to negotiate, decision-making, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, conflict resolution, empathy, coping with emotions and stress management as well as money management, raising a family and running a home.

LIVELIHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Efforts to improve the capacities, capital (human, social, productive and economic) and activities needed to sustain life. This definition of livelihood is broad in that it includes all types of income generation, employment, enterprise development and production that help to supply enough food, clothing and shelter to lead a healthy and dignified life.



NEGLECT

Deliberately, or through carelessness or negligence, failing to provide for, or secure for the child, their rights to physical safety and development (e.g. abandonment, the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm as much as is feasible, the deliberate failure to carry out important aspects of care which results or is likely to result in harm to the child, the deliberate failure to provide medical care or carelessly exposing a child to harm).

ORPHAN

Orphans are children, both of whose parents are known to be dead. In some countries, however, a child who has lost one parent is called an orphan.

ORPHANAGE

This term refers to an institution providing residential care for children who have lost both parents. This term is not representative, as in practice these facilities often admit many children who are not actually orphans.

Throughout these resources, we use the term 'orphanage' to refer to a range of different types of residential childcare institutions (RCIs), including institutions that are referred to as children's homes, children's villages, children's centres or centres.

OVC

Orphans and other vulnerable children. This term is generally avoided as it implies that all HIV- and AIDS-affected children are 'vulnerable'; second, it can isolate HIV- and AIDS-affected children from other vulnerable children in the community; and third, it ignores other vulnerable children. The terms 'vulnerable children', 'children affected by HIV and AIDS', or 'children associated with fighting forces' are preferred.

PARENT

A child's biological mother and father or another adult who has adopted the child.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse involves the use of violent physical force so as to cause actual or likely physical injury or suffering (e.g. hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, female genital mutilation, torture).

RESIDENTIAL CARE

Care provided in any non-family-based group setting



RESPIRE CARE

Planned, short term care of a child, usually based on foster or residential care, to give the family a break from caring for a child.

REUNIFICATION

The process of bringing together the child and family or previous care-provider for the purpose of establishing or re-establishing long-term care.

SAFEGUARDING

The values and procedures to be upheld by those working with children and young people in order to protect them from all forms of abuse, exploitation and violence.

SEXUAL ABUSE

All forms of sexual violence including incest, early and forced marriage, rape, involvement in child pornography, and sexual slavery. Child sexual abuse may also include indecent touching or exposure, using sexually explicit language towards a child and showing children pornographic material.

SUPPORTED INDEPENDENT LIVING

Where a young person is supported in her/his own home, a group home, hostel, or other form of accommodation, to become independent. Support/key workers are available as needed and at planned intervals to offer assistance and support but not to provide supervision. Assistance may include timekeeping, budgeting, cooking, job seeking, and parenting.

TRAFFICKING

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. In the case of a child, however, the entire question of consent is irrelevant.

VISIT

A component of a 'trip'. A 'trip' is made up of visits to different places. The term 'tourism visit' refers to a stay in a place visited during a '[tourism trip](#)'.



VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Children whose rights to care and protection are being violated or who are at risk of those rights being violated. This includes children who are poor, abused, neglected, or lacking access to basic services, ill or living with disabilities, as well as children whose parents are ill, who are affected by fighting forces or who are in conflict with the law.

YOUTH

Within the UN system, young people are identified as those between 15 and 24 years of age. However, this can vary considerably between one context and another.