

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (77) 33

ON PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 3 November 1977,
at the 277th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is the achievement of greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and of facilitating their economic and social progress ;

Bearing in mind the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of the Child and especially its second, fifth and sixth principles ;

Bearing in mind Articles 16 and 17 of the European Social Charter, concerning the right of families to social, legal and economic protection and the right of mothers and children to social and economic protection ;

Bearing in mind the conclusions of the 13th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Family Affairs held in 1973 ;

Realising that children who grow up in environments that do not meet their fundamental physical, emotional, intellectual and social needs are put in jeopardy of their lifelong welfare ;

Affirming that preventive measures in the widest possible sense should remain the first strategy to avert this danger ;

Aware that in spite of these measures many children will continue to need temporary or long-term placement outside their families ;

Anxious to ensure that placement of children is carried out in the best possible circumstances,

Recommends the governments of member states :

I. General principles

1. To recognise that all arrangements for placement should be based on the following principles :

1.1. The need for placement should be avoided as far as possible through preventive measures of support for families in accordance with their special problems and needs ;

1.2. A request for placement should be considered as a warning signal of a difficult family situation ; consequently efforts to meet the child's needs should always be related to an understanding of the problems of his family and arrangements for the child should as a rule be coupled to specific arrangements for helping the parents ;

1.3. The arrangements made for the child (including a decision to leave him in his family or to place him) should try to ensure the highest possible degree of satisfaction of his developing emotional needs and his physical wellbeing as well as any preventive medical, educational or other care necessary to meet any special problems he may have ;

These arrangements should provide, as far as possible and when this is in the best interests of the child :

- maintenance of links to his family ;
- stability of care and bonds of affection, taking into account the child's developmental stage in regard to the formation of emotional attachments ;
- respect of his individuality ;
- a cultural and social environment which is appropriate and acceptable to society ;
- integration into a local community and preferably the same one as the family's ;
- for adolescents opportunities for assuming responsibility, for achieving independence and for taking up adult roles ;

1.4. The decisions about the child's placement should normally be taken after advice given by a multidisciplinary team ; similar advice should be available at each review ;

1.5. A plan for the child should be drawn up based on an assessment of the family, of the child himself and of the possible solutions available, in the light of the objectives mentioned above ;

This plan should incorporate in particular :

- a decision on the best initial mode of placement for the child ;
- a review of the child's situation after a period which will vary according to age and individual circumstances (being shorter in the case of very young children), but which should not normally exceed six months, after which there should be further reviews at regular intervals ;

1.6. Long-term placement of very young children in residential units should be avoided as much as possible ; thus adoption in the light of the European Convention on the Adoption of Children should be facilitated and encouraged to the greatest possible extent.

II. Policy

2. To ensure in the framework of their policies for family welfare that placement decisions are taken according to sound procedures and in a favourable context, in particular by :

A. *Family support*

2.1. Considering, in the framework of general economic and social policies, the implementation of measures to assist all families in rearing children well ; and developing more specific measures of family policy such as preparation at school of children of both sexes for home and family life ;

2.2. With a view to reducing the need for residential care on the sole grounds of handicap, providing the families of children with physical or mental handicaps with the necessary emotional support, with financial allowances, and also with technical, medical and educational support in decentralised forms ; such support could, for example, be provided through day care facilities, services in the home, schemes for reducing parental burdens, transport services, material aid ;

2.3. Providing facilities for the special assistance of families with acute psycho-social problems affecting the development of the child ;

B. *Management of placements*

2.4. Encouraging the participation in the management of a child's placement of the following :

- the service or organisation responsible for the placement, i.e. the placement agency ;
- the parents ;
- the child, who should be given an opportunity to discuss his situation progressively as he matures in understanding ;
- those caring for the child (foster parents or staff of residential units);

- social and other workers concerned with the family ;
- personnel of the statutory preventive public health services ;
- pre-school and school personnel, paediatricians, psychologists, and any other specialists involved ;

2.5. Ensuring that the professional staff involved in the management of the placement work, as far as possible, as a multidisciplinary team ;

C. Organisation

2.6. Subjecting all organisations responsible for placement to strict regulation and supervision, to ensure the maintenance of high professional standards ;

2.7. Integrating the organisations responsible for the placement of children with those responsible for assisting families or ensuring their closest co-operation in each case ; and securing the decentralisation of responsibility in different organisations and services necessary to achieve co-operation at local level, so as to create areas of responsibility which can be better supervised ;

2.8. Ensuring that financial arrangements do not establish an accidental bias towards the choice of one particular form of placement ;

2.9. Generally seeing that the organisation responsible for placement is capable of adaptation to new techniques and knowledge ;

D. Modes of placement

2.10. With a view to enabling them to match each placement to individual needs, making available to placement agencies an array of modes of placement from foster homes to various kinds of therapeutic care in residential homes (examples are given in the appendix) ;

2.11. Progressively providing the best possible geographical distribution of places so as to facilitate maintenance of links to the natural family and to promote co-operation with the biological parents, unless considered undesirable for the child ;

2.12. Progressively making support services (psychologist, psychiatrists, specialised equipment, etc.) equally available to all staff of all types of residential units and to foster parents ;

2.13. Promoting foster care as being frequently the best mode of temporary placement, especially for young children and therefore ensuring :

- education of the public on the value of foster care ;
- the development of schemes for recruiting foster parents ;
- careful selection of ordinary and specialised foster parents to be based, *inter alia*, on the assessment of each member of the household ;
- thorough preparation of foster parents including discussion on child development, the problems of foster children and the specific situation of the child to be placed with them ;
- definition of the obligations and rights of parents in whose care children are placed and the requirements they must satisfy ;

2.14. Providing for strict control of fostering arrangements and making fostering, especially private fostering, conditional upon notification and licensing ;

2.15. Discouraging, with a view to its elimination, illegal fostering by promoting general measures of support for families and extending the authorised machinery for placement ;

2.16. Providing for the development of small family-type residential units for children when fostering is not possible, and in consequence :

- a. progressively running down larger residential institutions ;
- b. ensuring that all residential units, including any larger institutions retained for the time being :
 - are organised in sub-units of a family type ;
 - receive children of mixed ages and both sexes ;
 - have mixed staff to provide identification objects of both sexes ;

- provide opportunities for keeping siblings together ;
 - encourage co-operation with biological parents ;
 - provide opportunities for experiments whereby parents and children can live together for a short time within the unit ;
 - provide special units for adolescents when needed ;
- c. encouraging the running of all residential units in close contact with the surrounding community, all personnel being considered as members of the caring team and the children being encouraged, according to their capacity, to participate in the running of the units ;

E. *Staff and training*

- 2.17. Recognising that the staff of placement agencies and of residential units are faced with an extremely delicate and laborious task, for which they must be suitably selected and trained, especially in child development and family social work ;
- 2.18. Ensuring that the staff of placement agencies will be adequately trained and experienced in making placement decisions ;
- 2.19. Ensuring that the training of the staff of placement agencies, of residential units and of field-workers include work in multidisciplinary teams, and also with parents, foster parents and children ; considering to this end introducing a common element into the initial training of different disciplines and facilitating inter-disciplinary joint discussion groups as part of in-service training ;
- 2.20. Providing a basic preparatory training with particular emphasis on knowledge of children for all foster parents using individual and group methods, and more extensive training for certain kinds of foster parents ;
- 2.21. Providing for the continuous training of all staff of residential units as a means of improving their professional knowledge and of giving them psychological support ; providing to this end, *inter alia*, training courses for all the staff of a unit at the same time, reliefs for living-in staff and resources for regular staff meetings ;
- 2.22. Providing for the further training of foster parents using individual and group methods as a source of psychological support and emphasising the importance of knowledge of child development ;
- 2.23. Ensuring that the training of foster parents takes place with the participation of the ordinary child care team as well as of any necessary specialists.

III. **Research**

3. Having due regard to the principles of confidentiality and privacy in respect of those concerned,
- 3.1. To encourage active research and evaluation on all modes of placement ;
- 3.2. To promote further research on local, national and international basis as well as the international exchange of information on problems of placement such as :
- the extent of and trends in needs of placement ;
 - the effects of different placement modes especially long-term placements ;
 - direct and indirect costs of various modes of placement.

IV. **Others**

- 4.1. To acknowledge, in the field of child welfare, the need to promote consultation and co-operation among bodies associated with social welfare, health, educational and legal matters, as well as among the professional groups concerned ;
- 4.2. To encourage associations of foster parents ;
- 4.3. To encourage communication with children so that their wishes and feelings may be taken into account so far as is practicable in policies of placement.

List of placement modes

(The following list is not exhaustive, but indicates a variety of measures which can be made available.)

- a.* Closer supervision and support of the child in its own family ;
- b.* Appropriate day-care placements (can be combined with *a*) ;
- c.* Placement in the extended family (i.e. a supervised placement by an authorised organisation as distinct from care arrangements made spontaneously on the sole responsibility of the parents) ;
- d.* Ordinary foster care (for which selection, preparation and continued support are nonetheless needed) ;
- e.* Specialised foster care (implies a more intensive training to deal with particular problems of the foster children and generally an increased remuneration) ;
- f.* "Seasonal" residential units (implies that the child returns home for part of the year) ;
- g.* Short-stay residential units for whole families ;
- h.* Small residential units where the staff (generally a couple) are permanently resident and the children are within the range of an ordinary family in number and, as far as possible, in age distribution ; often known as "family group homes" ;
- i.* Specialised residential units (say of about twenty-five children) with special facilities (psychiatric, pedagogical, technical) for the treatment or care of a particular category of children ; such units should be organised in sub-units of type *h* ;
- j.* Placement of adolescents in small, mainly self-governing communities of their own age group, under light but skilled supervision, or in a flat of their own.