



# RELAF

Red Latinoamericana de  
Acogimiento Familiar



Matilde Luna, Project Leader,  
Red Latinoamericana de Acogimiento Familiar  
(RELAF) Latin American Foster Care Network.

*Matilde is a psychologist, Master in Childhood and Family, UBA University of Buenos Aires. She has a wide experience working with children and their families, as well as teaching, researching and training. She is regularly consulted by Latin American governments such as those from Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Haiti and Peru (among others). Matilde is also the author of numerous publications in the field.*

*RELAF (Latin American Foster Care Network, for the Right to community and family-based care for children and adolescents) promotes and supports the strategies of governmental and non-governmental organisations for the restoration of such a right, since it considers the lack of policies relating to this issue to represent a kind of social, political and institutional violence that affects thousands of children and adolescents in Latin America.*

The current objective of the RELAF project is to create and strengthen the active network of regional stakeholders in order to contribute to the processes of deinstitutionalisation of children and adolescents and the prevention of the separation of children and adolescents from their birth families and communities. Furthermore, it promotes family-based care in Latin America to achieve the implementation of the Right to Community and Family-Based Care.

RELAF works with Latin American governments and NGOs by addressing requests for technical cooperation, training, supervision of projects, to name a few, as well as carrying out tasks to have a bearing on national policy decisions relating to the implementation of the right to community and family-based care. It works in favour of practice reviews and achieving an improvement in the public, political and legal frameworks to establish a Human Rights approach in concrete practices.

This paper will be a brief presentation about RELAF (Latin American Network for the Right of Children to live in a family and a community) and about our central goals, advances and challenges. Our work is focused on achieving, in Latin America, the fulfilment of the right of children and adolescents to live within a family and to integrate into a community. In this sense, currently large quantities of children are being institutionalised,



which is one of the obstacles for the fulfilment of, not only the right to a family, but of basic rights in general. This is due to the deficient conditions that the children live in, within these institutions.

We cooperate with NGOs, international agencies, governments and individuals. We have the capabilities to combine the individual efforts of actors who deal with the issue of children without appropriate parental care, who work in different types of organisations and have a distinct level of responsibility. We are democratic and pluralistic and respect the differences and social, cultural and political characteristics of each actor, in their own context. The only requirement for the members that make up our network is that they adhere to the Convention on the rights of the child and they are committed to its implementation. Additionally, we act in order that there be the progressive adoption of a human rights approach with regards to care for children.



We participate in global initiatives, consider ourselves to be part of the global community and believe that we can increase our potential to change if we act together. Our active participation, working together with other partners, has achieved global results: the adoption of the Guidelines and the tools for its application, such as the Handbook for the Monitoring and Implementation of the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.

We have provided training and technical cooperation in 14 countries. We work with government authorities, NGOs, practitioners, children and adolescents. We participate in international events. We have organised RELAF Seminars in 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2013, with over 2500 attendees from more than 23 countries.



*We have regional and global strategic alliances, with which we work jointly in actions of advocacy.*

We also have key partners, with which we carry out different projects in the whole region. Currently we plan a new partnership with FICE

In the last 6 years, we have worked in these countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Morocco, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Martin, Uruguay and Guyana.



We also produce knowledge on the state of the issue in our region, such as: our publications that bring together information and investigations into the situation of children without parental care and publications on the guidelines and standards of alternative care. Together with UNICEF, we have produced friendly versions of the United Nations Guidelines for practitioners and children. In the last three years, we have worked to implement them in workshops with 500 boys and girls in 7 countries, as well as with hundreds of carers and personnel from residential care institutions.



### Our newsletters, guides and pieces of research



*Our materials and our web site are originally produced in Spanish, but most of them are translated into English and other languages. Here there are some examples:*

**Relaf's website and newsletter, available at: [www.relaf.org](http://www.relaf.org)**



**Relaf's Report** "Situation of children without parental care in Latin America: context, causes and consequences". We have published other pieces of research which are available in English, such as:

- Report on Discrimination to children in institutions.
- Report on Migrant Children
- Report on Serious situations of violation of Human Rights in residential care institutions.

These are the Friendly versions of the United Nations Guidelines for the alternative care of



children; standards to prevent the separation and to provide alternative care. They were translated into English, French, Portuguese and Russian.



We are concerned about institutionalisation. This is due to the fact that the number of children living in the institutions is very large. Additionally, this is because serious problems have been identified with long and unnecessary stays (children can spend years there, when alternative care should be temporary and only when necessary), including the breakdown of the bonds between their birth families and communities and themselves. Furthermore, “macro-institutions”, places where hundreds of children of all ages live, are still present in our society.

### The regional context

It is estimated that in reality, there are more than 400.000 girls and boys that live in institutions, although the lack of systematised information, and the invisibility of this issue, prevents us from having reliable information. *These are some photos of institutions: Babies’ Home in Peru and in Argentina*



With respect to the youngest children, we are working on a Regional Initiative “Put an end to the internment of



children below the ages of 3 in residential care institutions”, as the institutionalisation of babies is particularly damaging. For this, we are bringing forward a shared agenda with UNICEF, in the region, to train governments and civil society, and we have already had produced a tool to support this goal: a Guide to guide the concrete experiences of deinstitutionalisation.



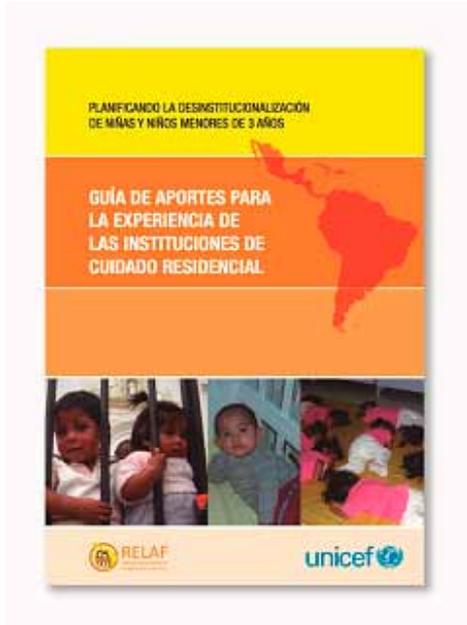
As part of the Regional Initiative, we have carried out a pilot test in Chile. Also, we presented the initiative in

Mexico in our RELAF Seminar, and we launched it through the “Call for Action to put an end to the internment of children below the ages of 3 in residential care institutions” at the Ibero-American Presidential Summit of



Presidents and Heads of State, which was held in Panama in October.

*This is a photo of a working group meeting of the Pilot project in Chile.*



## PLANIFICANDO LA DESINSTITUCIONALIZACIÓN DE NIÑAS Y NIÑOS MENORES DE 3 AÑOS

*Guía de aportes para la experiencia de las instituciones de cuidado residencial*



**“Planning of the de-internment of children under the age of three. Guide of contributions for the experience”**. This publication is named “Planning of the de-internment of children under the age of three. Guide of contributions for the experience”.

It gathers experiences of de-internment from 7 countries. It is a very useful tool to train those who are able to carry out concrete initiatives in different social contexts.



We launched the Regional Initiative through the “Call for Action to put an end to the internment of children below the ages of 3 in residential care institutions” at the Ibero-American Presidential Summit of Presidents and Heads of State, which was held in Panama in October, in the presence of the presidents of many countries.



To end the presentation, here there are some comments by children living in institutions and our conclusions on them. When we work with children, they always express their high regard for family, parents and siblings. Although those children do not live within a family, they don't cease to want to live in one. This is what makes our work even more urgent, to fulfil the Right to live in a family. Moreover, it is a fundamental Right that must be respected. Beyond that, we know the effects that the early-age deprivation of family has on children's physical, social and cognitive development; it is the aim that children should be heard by all of us.

Although we have been able to make substantial advances in the fulfilment of rights in Latin America, this remains a relevant pendent debt with regards children's rights.

More information available at: [www.relaf.org](http://www.relaf.org)