

Call to Action

End the placement of children under three years of age in institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean.



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Inter-American
Commission on
Human Rights **IACHR**



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CALL TO ACTION

According to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, State Parties have the obligation to ensure that girls and boys grow up in a family environment and only use institutional care as a last resource. Although international standards stress that children should only be placed in institutional care in exceptional circumstances and for a very limited period of time, most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean rely disproportionately on the institutionalization of children.

While all Latin American and Caribbean States have ratified the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and have advanced in the adaptation of national laws and institutions to its standards, approximately 240,000 children under 18 years of age live in residential care.

The lack of official data disaggregated by age masks the reality of children in institutions. However, the little information that is available clearly demonstrates the seriousness of the problem.

The World Report on Violence against Children has documented that violence is six times more common in institutions than in foster homes. Young children are even more vulnerable to suffering the negative consequences of institutionalization than older ones.

We therefore urge all Latin American and Caribbean countries to support this call by putting an end to the placement of boys and girls below the age of three in residential care institutions and accelerating their reintegration into a family environment.



WAY FORWARD

Ending the institutionalization of children requires the implementation of immediate reforms to national child protection systems. Among the actions required are:

◇ Adoption of relevant legislation to limit the placement of children under three years of age in residential care, with rare exceptions for a predetermined and very limited period of time.

◇ Technical and financial resources for early childhood policies and programs, including day care and parenting programs to avoid family separation and, ultimately alternative family-based care programs with competent personnel for children at risk of family separation.

◇ Programs and measures explicitly directed at reuniting children with their biological or extended families, and, for children whose best interest does not permit them to remain in that environment State Parties should establish foster care and other family-based alternatives.

◇ Standards and protocols to guide interventions towards children at risk of family separation.

◇ Public information and awareness campaigns.

◇ Mechanisms to monitor conditions in residential care institutions and the implementation of alternative forms of care.