

Institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation of children

The *Lancet* Group Commission on institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation of children¹ provides powerful scientific support for the dangers of placing children in institutions compared with raising children in families or foster families. However, we believe that this support is undermined in a follow-up policy analysis by Philip Goldman and colleagues,² who justify placing children in group homes for so-called short-term placement “with the objective of child reintegration” and if “reintegration is not possible or in the child’s best interests.” The latter category includes children with physical or psychiatric needs—ie, children with disabilities.

The Validity Foundation, European Network on Independent Living, Disability Rights International, the International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, and the International Disability Alliance welcome the opportunity to provide a response to this important study.

The authors’ rationales for placing children in group homes are deeply problematic. Once children are in group homes, temporary placement tends to become permanent, especially for children with disabilities in countries that do not invest in supporting families.^{3–5} The *Lancet*’s own scientific findings on the harm caused by institutions (including small group homes) refute the possibility that such placement can ever be in the child’s best interest.

Anything less than the right to family life for children with disabilities is discrimination under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).^{5,6} The CRPD Committee has said that the core of the right to independent living for children is the right to grow up in a family and that “large or small group homes are especially dangerous for children.”⁷

The *Lancet* Commission incorrectly suggests there is UN General Assembly support for placement of children in group homes, citing recommendations endorsed for, not by, the General Assembly. The worldwide disability movement strongly opposed part of the recommendations because this position violates the CRPD⁸ and was not, in fact, adopted by the UN General Assembly.

We declare no competing interests.

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- 2 Goldman PS, Bakermans-Kranenburg M, Bradford B, et al. Institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation of children 2: policy and practice recommendations for global, national, and local actors. *Lancet Child Adolesc Health* 2020; 4: 606–33.
- 2 Rosenthal E. The right of all children to grow up with a family under international law: implications for placement in orphanages, residential care, and group homes. *Buff Hum Rts L Rev* 2019; 25: 101–86.
- 3 Disability Rights International. A dead end for children: Bulgaria’s group homes. 2019. <https://www.driadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/Bulgaria-final-web.pdf> (accessed Sept 14, 2020).
- 4 UN Human Rights. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 19—living independently and being included in the community. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/ConventionRightsPersonsWithDisabilities.aspx#19> (accessed Sept 14, 2020).
- 5 All children have the right to family—joint position statement. July 9, 2019 <https://validity.ngo/2019/07/09/all-children-have-the-right-to-family-joint-position-statement/> (accessed Sept 14, 2020).
- 6 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. General comment no 5 (2017) on living independently and being included in the community. Oct 27, 2017. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CRPD/C/GC/5&Lang=en (accessed Sept 14, 2020).

- 7 Autism Europe, Inclusion International, Inclusion Europe, Validity, TASH, European Disability Forum, Disability Rights International, International Disability Alliance, Child Rights International Network, International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus. UN Disability and Child Rights Groups on Behalf of Children without Parental Care. Key recommendations. Sept 12, 2019. https://www.driadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-09-12_UNGA-Right-to-Family-Life.pdf (accessed July 6, 2020).
- 8 UN General Assembly. Seventy-fourth session. Agenda item 66 (a). Promotion and protection of the rights of children. Resolution adopted 18 December 2019. <https://undocs.org/A/RES/74/133> (accessed July 6, 2020)



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