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EXECUTIVE BRIEFING

This report contains the results of an interim internal evaluation carried out by the Foster Family Latin American Network (RELAF) technical team over the actions developed during the April-December 2015 period in the framework of partnership with Hope and Homes for Children (HHC). Our target is to view the results achieved in 2015 and to learn for the future actions, particularly with regards to the 2016 plan.

RELAF's goal is to "promote the processes of deinstitutionalization in the frame of the construction of protection subsystems for the rights of children without parental care in Latin American and Caribbean countries", with actions in three levels: Global, regional and national/local.

In the first part of the report we will look at the results achieved by the organisation. The second part shows the progress achieved within the administrative side of the organisation and the con-solidation of the work team. The report highlights how both of these strands strengthen the basis for the creation and launch in 2016 of the Center of Excellence for the right to family and community life in the region.

In brief, we describe the results of the RELAF work in 2015:

- At a global level: Engaged in two core work groups: The Steering Committee of the Better Care Network (BCN) and the NGO Group for the CRC Work on Children Without Parental Care.
- At a regional level: We took part in three sub regional events with a positive impact on the public agendas of the regional governments; concluded and launched three studies and two practice tools; started and finished a regional mapping; began two regional studies; elaborated two pieces of audio visual material; and strengthened an active network of regional actors (Latin American Consulting Board) formed by 25 experts in the field from 12 regional countries.
- At a national level: Signed agreements of cooperation in three countries; contributed with technical material for public policies in five countries; began a pilot project for deinstitutionalization in one country (ongoing); provided technical support for the transformation of an institution that houses 150 children (ongoing); participated as an expert in eight events (conferences and semi-nars); delivered 18 training workshops involving over 1000 participants; carried out three work-shops with children; held meetings and undertook advocacy in eight countries of the region.

These results could only be achieved with the invaluable support of HHC which has specifically enabled the addition of technical staff, the strengthening of the previous base team, and the upgrading of the logistic and administrative platform in Montevideo (Uruguay) and Buenos Aires (Argentina).



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

RELAF's goal is to "promote processes of deinstitutionalization in the frame of the creation of subsystems of protection for the rights of children deprived of parental care in Latin American and Caribbean countries".

For the achievement of our complex objectives, it is necessary to identify the diverse dimensions to reach in a progressive way. In the next set of charts we can see the general actions, the national Systems of Protection and finally the Subsystem, the conditions which must be created for its functioning and the main points that we emphasise.

INTEGRAL PROTECTION NATIONAL SYSTEM. SNPI

SNPI is a group of organisms, institutions, procedures and entities at a national, regional and local level laid out in the national laws on infancy oriented to respect, promote, protect, restore and re-establish the rights of Children and Adolescents and repair the damage after the violation of their rights.*

**Estudio el Sistema de Protección Integral en Santa Fe, Argentina" RELAF y UNICEF 2013.

NECESSARY CONDITIONS					
PRESIDENCY	DECENTRALIZATION	PARTICIPATION	HR INDEPENDENT PROCEDURES	BUDGET	MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES
SUBSYSTEM					
Children and Adolescents penal law offenders protection subsystem	Children and Adolescents with disability protection subsystem	Children and Adolescents victims of abuse subsystem	Children and Adolescents without parental care protection subsystem.	Others	



CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS PROTECTION SUBSYSTEM WITHOUT PARENTAL CARE

The Social Protection and Inclusion National legislation determines and dictates to the institutions as concerns the promotion, protection, restitution and repair of damages to Children and Adolescents under the threat or loss of rights in a family environment and community.

NECESSARY CONDITIONS

LEADING AGENCY			DECENTRALIZED BODIES	PARTICIPATION CIVIL SOCIETY CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS	HR INDEPENDENT MECHANISMS	BUDGET	MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT MECHANISMS
• National and International adoption	• Alternative care programmes	• Family Strengthening	• Local mechanisms	• Single dimension • Collective dimension	• Compliance and Enforcement of the right to live in a family and a community	• Budget National planning Control and Implementation	• Constant control of in-out subsystem data Regular assessment and adjustments

SPECIFIC POINTS

Subsidiarity and Standards	Residential Care Foster care mechanisms of assessment of suitability and property Monitoring mechanisms	Variety of programmes over comprehensive strengthening and family capabilities	Identification of responsible local authorities Defining suitability	Civil society various roles: supply of alternative care, control, participation in definition of public policies, children and adolescents in alternative care: individual expression mechanisms Identification of specific collectives: adolescents, young children	Mechanisms for: national system Local systems Inter-american system Universal System	Sizing of necessities Subsystem Transition costs	Qualitative and quantitative investigations on specific subjects / baselines design over the state and situation of the subsystem Identification of monitoring data
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CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

- » Deinstitutionalization
- » Adjustment and redesign of SSPNASC: Programmes, plans and pilot projects
- » Rules and regulation tools: Identification of legal frameworks; Identification of HR requirements; Creation of set of regulations; Protocol of action and supervision
- » Training on Human Resources at all levels
- » Establishment of National plans of protection for Children and Adolescents without parental care
- » Creation of National and local networks



GLOBAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL ACTIONS

GLOBAL ACTIONS

At a global level RELAF is engaged in two core work groups:

1) Steering Committee of the Better Care Network (BCN): RELAF was invited to be a member of the steering body of the BCN last year, joining organizations such as USAID, Save the Children UK and US, UNICEF, and Firelight Foundation. We have participated in the presentation of the Strategic Plan for 2014-2017, whose main priorities are: a) Supporting the implementation of the UN Guidelines on Alternative Care and creating child care related policies; b) Facilitating the development and implementation of a comprehensive child care research agenda that informs policy and practice; c) Contributing to positive changes in social norms and behaviors that will result in improved care practices for children; d) Maximizing its role as an international network.

RELAF's inputs were hugely valued, and included presentation of the mapping of the situation of children without parental care in the Latin American and Caribbean region (which is being developed with the support of Hopes and Homes for Children). Also, the importance of Relaf's work in the analysis of the issues of both migration and disability as causes for the lack of adequate care was mentioned, as well as our agenda for 2015.

We have also engaged with BCN's Better Volunteering, Better Care initiative by providing information around RELAF's activities in LAC related to volunteering work. Therefore we have included this theme in our cooperation with UNICEF about large scale (or macro) institutions. We have been supporting the establishment of the BCN webpage Spanish section. The tasks carried out by BCN on child care and protection and alternative care at international level are extremely relevant and impactful. RELAF's membership as part of its Steering Committee and the consequent participation in the planning of its agenda for the coming years therefore represents a crucial part of our participation in global children's rights partnerships and coalitions. This is an important step in positioning RELAF at the global level and will provide opportunities to engage in, learn from and lead on global and regional exchange and action on children without adequate family care.

2) the NGO Working Group on Children Without Parental Care (Child Rights Connect ¹): RELAF has been part of the Working Group since its establishment in 2009. Its new mission is to promote and contribute to the dissemination and implementation of the UN Guidelines on Alternative Care of Children on a global, regional and local level. In addition to representation on these global working groups, RELAF has been contributing to developing an interagency Tracking Tool to help assess the progress of Governments in domesticating the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. This is an inter-agency

¹ We are joining this group with representatives of the co-convenors, plus the Quaker UN Office, International Foster Care Organisation, Plan International, Save the Children Alliance, ATD Quartmonde, Everychild, Hope & Homes for Children, Family for Every Child and the International Federation of Social Workers, on the current membership list.



initiative led by BCN and Save the Children to develop a standardised tool for tracking and reporting on country implementation. Furthermore we have been cooperating in the dissemination of 'Moving Forward' and support for translation and launches.

We also engaged with key persons from other Treaty Bodies (e.g.: CEDAW, CRPD, CAT etc) to ensure references are made to the Guidelines during the sessions and in concluding observations, particularly with regards to Paraguay. We have supplied ideas and content to support planning of the Alternative Care Conference in Genève, 2016.

We engaged in the planning process, (contributing ideas, content and bibliography), regarding the themes for the development of an online learning initiative (MOOC) on Alternative Care. It going to be hosted on the FutureLearn platform in 2017.

REGIONAL ACTIONS

RELAF's actions at a regional level this year have worked around three fundamental pillars:

- a) Participation in regional events;
- b) Developing research studies and practice tools;
- c) Strengthening the active network of regional actors.

a) Participation in regional events: This line of action has been ongoing and has resulted in, and from, RELAF's growing capacity to put the problems of children deprived of parental care on the agenda of the highest authorities of our countries, creating the opportunity for Governments to identify local needs and efficiency of their national subsystems. This stimulates common understanding and goals at national levels in each of the countries involved, from which point RELAF is able to develop concrete actions. In 2015 RELAF participated in three sub regional events, all of them with high relevance in terms of political agendas.

- **Buenos Aries (Argentina), May 2015: Public Consultation of the Social Participation Forum of the Institute of Public Policies for the Human Rights (IPPDH).** The consultation called by IPPDH, Citizen Participation Support Unit of MERCOSUR, gathered organisations and social movements from the countries of MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador and Suriname). The goals of this meeting were: the generation of a space for reflection and debate over the strategic agenda of the IPPDH; identifying the main issues, challenges and possibilities within MERCOSUR regarding human rights; and raising proposals to contribute to the implementation of a IPPDH plan of action 2015-2017 under inter governmental authority collaborating with MERCOSUR countries for the development of public policies on human rights. It also introduced the Citizen Participation Support Unit (UPS), created in 2013 for the consolidation and deepening of the participation of organisations and social



movements in the region. RELAF contributed to the sharing of information on public policies of the MERCOSUR countries and the development of protection systems for child rights.

- **El Salvador, May 2015: Meeting on the situation of migrant children in the Northern Triangle of Central America, Mexico and USA.** The meeting tackled themes such as the causes for migration (such as armed violence and lack of opportunities), and saw the participation of representatives from governmental bodies, transnational cooperation agencies and organisations from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico, USA and the UK. RELAF presented the “Handbook of Human Rights Standards on Migrant Children” and the “Report on the Situation of Migrant Children in Central America and Mexico”, both of which played a central role in the discussions. RELAF took advantage of its time in El Salvador, participating in several activities including a visit to the Centre of Repatriation by Land and to a group of families and children who had experienced migration. Faced with the humanitarian crisis caused by the rise in the numbers of migrant children in the region, the materials elaborated by RELAF with the support of Save the Children and UNICEF are a great contribution to further developing the knowledge on existing issues and transforming public policies for the protection of migrant children.
- **Asunción (Paraguay), November 2015: XXV Ordinary Meeting of the Permanent Committee by NIÑ@SUR.** RELAF contributed to the creation and development of the meeting about alternative care and migrant children in MERCOSUR. The introduction of alternative care has been a goal achieved by RELAF alongside the Pro Tempore Presidency of Paraguay. RELAF made the main presentation in the seminar: “Alternative Care of children and adolescents in the region: progress, difficulties and challenges” and on “Protection of childhood against violence in the new agenda for sustainability and development: Promoting the right treatment and the prohibition of any type of physical punishment and humiliation of children and adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean”. The conclusions and recommendations of the seminar on alternative care were approved in the States Ordinary Meeting, with RELAF thereby contributing to the agreements at a sub regional level in MERCOSUR. Finally, a decision was made to enable IPPDH to draw out the “Guidelines for the warranty and strengthening of children and adolescents’ human rights to live in a family and alternative care”. Caribbean”. The conclusions and recommendations of the Seminar on Alternative Care were approved in the States Ordinary Meeting, contributing RELAF in this way to the agreements at a sub regional level in MERCOSUR. Finally, a decision was made to entitle IPPDH (Institute of Public Policies for Human Rights MERCOSUR) to draw out the “Guidelines for the Warranty and Strengthening of children and adolescents’ human rights to live in a Family and Alternative Care”

b) Development of research studies and practice tools: The studies carried out this year add to RELAF's publications from previous periods, all of which contribute important knowledge and diagnostics in a region that is usually lacking data and reports on this issue. In this sense, RELAF is now in a pioneering position in relation to raising awareness in the region,



seriously strengthened again in 2015. The practice tools constitute a basic input for technical cooperation in the countries. The materials are used in the field, both as training materials and in meetings designed to influence policy implementation, dissemination of information and academic activities. It is important to point out that in 2015, with the implementation of the “Model for the prevention of the separation and institutionalisation in early childhood” we noted the possibility and importance of reaching a broader scope of stakeholders to enable policy development and practice, and particularly those sectors identified with the protection of early childhood such as health and education.

1. Regional mapping of child protection systems and deinstitutionalization in Latin America and Caribbean.

This mapping aimed to acquire a regional view on the processes of implementation of public policies for the strengthening of the family and the provision of alternative care. Its development and methodology included construction of a matrix and the definition of categories to collect and analyse country-specific information regarding the state of protection systems and, specifically, the situation of children and adolescents deprived of parental care or at risk of losing them. This mapping was undertaken in the first semester of the year and allowed us deeper insight and evidence-based action and technical cooperation in the countries we worked in. The mapping was presented in the meeting of the Steering Committee of the Better Care Network.

2. Completion of existing studies: 2014 - 2015.

2.1. Set of studies in cooperation with UNICEF for Latin America and the Caribbean (LACRO).



“Early childhood in the family. Guide of experiences of reference for the preservation of the early links”

This guide holds a series of programmes, practices and public policies proven to have had good results in the protection and restitution of the right to family and community life of children in their early childhood. The experiences examined are mainly latinamerican. Nevertheless, some processes from Western Europe are included (Italy, Spain) and Eastern Europe (Romania, Bulgaria).



“The forgotten ones: children in “homes”. Large Scale institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean”

This study has been carried out with the objective of alerting on the validity in Latin America and the Caribbean of the mechanism of fostering in large scale institutions and work for the countries in the region to adapt the international human rights regulations and standards and promote the strengthening of childhood policies for prevention of separation and placement of children to foster families as a way of alternative care.



2.2. Set of studies carried out in partnership with UNICEF for Latin America and the Caribbean (LACRO) and Save The Children.



"Migrant Children and adolescents returned. Analysis of the settings and the responses of the services and policies of protection in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico."

This study assesses the policies and services of the governmental and non-governmental entities in charge of the protection of children and adolescents' rights returned to their original countries in the Northern Triangle and Mexico with a focus on the actions aiming to restituting the right to a family life and community integration. The study was presented in the "Meeting of the migrant childhood in the Northern Triangle, Mexico and USA".

3. Launch of new studies: 2015 - 2016.

3.1. Studies carried out with UNICEF for Latin America and the Caribbean cooperation (LACRO).

Research "Development of a Baseline and Monitoring for Deinstitutionalization in Latin America and The Caribbean" The study involves building a tool for the establishment of baseline data and monitoring system to measure the progress of deinstitutionalization in the region, focussing on two key issues: children under 3 years old and large scale institutions. In 2015 the tool was used in two countries; Uruguay and Paraguay. In 2016 the report will be finalised with a presentation of preliminary results in Paraguay and Uruguay. It was produced in the framework of the meeting of Niñ@sur Initiative². Furthermore, we plan to continue its application in three other countries in the region in 2016: Panama, Ecuador and Cuba.

Research on "institutionalized children with disabilities" The study involved mapping the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the situation of children with disabilities in institutions within the region. It is an opportunity to identify their vulnerabilities and alternative methods for the protection of the rights of disabled children. The study, that will finish in 2016, has a regional scope and highlights three case-studies: Costa Rica, Jamaica and Uruguay.

² The Niñ@sur Initiative was created by the Meeting of Senior Officials on Human Rights and Foreign Ministries of MERCOSUR to specifically promote compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other instruments of universal and regional human rights. The initiative seeks to establish a regular system of coordination between the authorities of Human Rights and the area of childhood and adolescence and the States Parties and Associates of MERCOSUR.



4. Technical Tool Kits for guidance on deinstitutionalization practices and processes: 2014 - 2015.

4.1. Technical Tool Kits published with the cooperation of UNICEF for Latin America and the Caribbean (LACRO).



"Care of small children: Model of prevention for the abandonment and institutionalisation"

The model of prevention of abandonment and institutionalisation of little children has the objectives of prevention of unnecessary separation from their respective families and original backgrounds, and the care in family environments in the case that the children need to be separated from their families or face abandonment. The document includes a framework of intervention with tools of intervention, aimed to operators and professionals.

The model has been applied last year in Panama. It is expected to launch at a regional level in 2026 in the Semirar: "1000 days of protection and equality"; and continue its application in Panama, Ecuador, Chile and Uruguay.



"Foster Care. Guidelines for the practices"

This guide is an instrument that sets work regulations for the practice to place a child in a foster family. It is aimed at the technical teams of the programmes formed by professionals and agents.

The tool was launched in 2015 from the social networks and the Internet and training courses were given in Panama and Ecuador. In 2016 we are committed to continue to implement this material in other countries of the region, particularly Cuba and Chile.

c) Audiovisual material

The forgotten ones: children in "foster homes" and large scale institutions.

Continuing our work to raise awareness on the existence of macro (large-scale) institutions in our region, in the frame of technical cooperation between RELAF and UNICEF LACRO, we conceptualised an audiovisual document that highlights the incidence of macro institutions and supports advocacy for their eradication. The material will be an animated clip which aims to build social awareness and disseminate key messages regarding children living in large scale residential institutions.

Casa Hogar Soná Video (Veraguas Province, Panama): Made in the framework of cooperation between UNICEF Panama and RELAF for the Panamanian Government. It shows the violation of rights to which girl children are subjected in the Casa Hogar institution where RELAF is leading in a DI Pilot Project.



d) Strengthening the active network of regional actors: An important space for regional work is RELAF's Latin American Consulting Board formed by experts in the field with a strong commitment to promoting the right to family and community life in Latin America and their countries. At present the Board is formed by experts from, or in, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.

In 2015 we coordinated a programme of dynamic and sustained communication and feedback with the Board, both informing and responding to the actions taken by RELAF and enabling constant review of country situations. Members of the Board are also key figures for the local work and in some cases they act as focal points of RELAF providing technical support and boosting advocacy and action in their respective countries.

Lastly, during October and November 2015, the RELAF team organised and implemented a series of training activities for the permanent team and the Latin American Consulting Council in order to build their capacity and also to update the training material used with stakeholders across the region. This training was implemented through the Microsoft Skype platform / Lync Web App: <https://meet.lync.com>

Highlighted Results: RELAF has achieved the inclusion and awareness of children deprived of parental care in the regional agenda. Likewise, the production of studies and tools for the practice keeps strengthening RELAF in its role in the formation of a Centre of Excellence on the subject in the region.

Lessons learned: The lack of information and the under-reporting of the situation of children and adolescents in the region is really worrying. RELAF will have to make major efforts in creating the conditions in the countries where our baseline and monitoring tool will be applied in order to generate the necessary commitment to adapt the subsystem on alternative care based on a solid and trustworthy diagnosis of the situation.

Challenges: Results found in social sciences and mental health that show the institutionalisation compromises the development of children and adolescents provide very strong and irrefutable evidence to drive deinstitutionalization. Nevertheless the process of decision making about the much needed transformation is heavily affected by the lack of public investment, systematic organisation of mechanisms of prevention and provision of appropriate alternative care. A regional study measuring the economic impact on public spending that investing in the prevention of separation and abandonment and the updating of alternative care would have, will have an impact on the strengthening of the processes we have to lead, giving the relevant authorities solid arguments to obtain the necessary funds for the transformations.



NATIONAL LEVEL

In 2015 actions were taken in eight countries. In addition, action was supported through virtual media for two more countries. All these actions were part of ongoing work from previous years. We have classified the 10 countries according to the intensity and quantity of activities.

Group 1. Countries with multiple and intense activities in the field.	Panama Paraguay Uruguay
Group 2. Countries with medium level in number of activities in the field.	Argentina Mexico Ecuador Cuba Chile
Group 3. Countries with virtual activities.	Guatemala Haiti



PANAMA
(Group 1)

2015 Actions

Technical input to public policy

The process of technical cooperation in Panama, which aims to “contribute to the adapting of the subsystem of protection of rights for the prevention of separation, deinstitutionalization and promotion of family care and community” has been implemented through an agreement with UNICEF Panama. The work plan, still in its implementation stages, cover the following lines of action:

»**Study that led to the Report on Adoption:** Explored the status of compliance of the procedures of the new adoption law in Panama based on international human rights standards and suggested improvements to ensure that adoption is a restorative measure of the right to family life.

»**Pilot test:** institutional restructuring of Malambo Home: This institution relies on the Catholic Church. It is a 125-year institution. At present it houses 122 children of all ages, being recognised by key actors and society as a reference in the field of child care deprived of a family. For its transformation 3 lines of action were planned: 1) Technical support for the deinstitutionalization



of children and adolescents (resolution of cases). The initial goal is to reduce 50% of the amount of children living in the institution by the end of 2016. 2) Revision and strengthening of the 4 community programmes. 3) Offering alternative care through the foster care model.

» **Deinstitutionalisation Pilot Project in Casa Hogar Soná:** The institution is based in Sona, province of Veraguas. It is a public home established in 1990 and depends on the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES). The institution shelters on average 30 girls of all ages and from all over the country. This means that many of the children are now located far away from their families and communities, making the reintegration process even more complex. Many of the girls don't know why they are there and their case files are incomplete or non-existent which accounts for the weak or nonexistent family reunification work. At the beginning of the pilot test there were 32 institutionalised young girls in Casa Hogar Soná. In order to promote their deinstitutionalisation an agreement was created between MIDES and The National Secretariat for Children, Youth and Family (SENNIAF) Veraguas to revise all the cases. Case files were developed, case management and placement plans were made, and strategies and actions were undertaken for each child. This process also included training the professionals in charge of leading the family reunifications. The result of all this was the family reunification of 27 young girls.

» **Strengthened SENNI AF and civil society.** RELAF carried out 15 trainings which covered the following six themes: 1) Right to live in family and community: National and international regulatory frameworks; 2) UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children; 3) Working with birth family and community; reintegration; methodology, identifying local psychological, social and cultural issues; 4) Foster Care; General and legal framework; 5) Adoption; 6) Model of prevention of separation and early intervention; Deinstitutionalisation and prevention of separation.

» **Workshops for children.** 3 workshops were delivered for children in June-December: 1 in Panama City (Child-friendly versions of the UN Guidelines on Alternative Care); 1 workshop on children's rights in Casa Hogar Soná; 1 workshop on sexual and reproductive health and rights in Casa Hogar Soná.

» **Advocacy and technical assistance meetings with civil society organizations:** Relaf has assisted the REDNANIAP NGO (National Network for Child and Adolescent Support in Panama) to support the process of advocacy to promote the development of a Law on Protection of Children's Rights. This is important as Panama is one of the few countries of the region that still has no National Law of protection in conformity with the Convention on the Rights of Children.

» **Organization / participation in events:** RELAF participated in the International Exchange Conference on the Protection of Children (UNICEF), with a Presentation entitled "UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. A perspective from Childhood". The event was addressed to the high authorities of childhood in Panama and its main goal was to create a debating field with regional and international experts, RELAF being one of them, to contribute to the drafting of the Law for the protection of the rights of children and adolescents in the frame of the creation of the whole system.

Highlighted results

RELAF has started raising awareness in the Panamenian political and public agenda of the problems of children separated from their families or at risk of separation, of institutionalisation as the only response by the Panamenian system, and of the necessity of the development of alternatives for deinstitutionalisation to begin. This resulted in strong advocacy comprising multiple actions and advocacy meetings with key actors of public policy for children: Office of the First Lady, MIDES, SENNI AF, Judiciary and others.

Lessons learned

The situation in this field is extremely grave regarding the levels of violation of basic rights and their invisibility. Some of the obstacles for the guaranteeing of general rights are: a "guardianship model" framework either in governmental entities as in the civil society, norms and repressive practices such as a "curfew", patriarchal culture that tolerates violence against young girls and the non-existence of entities with a broad view towards



promoting and enforcing the rights of children. This feeds a system of unnecessary separations of children from their families of origin, the lack of placement review and revision, and the lack of mechanisms to prevent entry to and exit from institutions.

Fragmentation, confrontation and lack of dialogue between social civil organisations and the government is equally challenging, inhibiting them from creating mechanisms for the protection of rights. It is for this reason that part of the task of the first year has been assigned to building bridges for communication and dialogue, a necessary condition for the protection of Panamenian childhood.

Challenges

The greatest challenge RELAF faces in Panama is to achieve the closing down of Casa Hogar Soná. Despite the achievement of the family reunification of 27 young girls another group of girls have been institutionalised six months into the pilot project leaving us with 40 girls at present, 8 more than at the beginning of our pilot. This results in a great challenge: to obtain a commitment by all actors involved in the institutionalisation of the girls (MIDES, SENNIAF, Judiciary Power, Police) to close the doors of this home for good. Experience is giving us a positive message that this model could be adapted for other organisations that aim to go in the same direction of deinstitutionalisation: Aldeas Infantiles and Ciudad del Niño have asked for technical support to their own organisations for the deinstitutionalisation process. In this sense, achieving the goal of reintegrating all the young girls and supporting the institution to offer a different service to the community is key to show that transformation is possible and to promote some other similar processes.



PARAGUAY
(Group 1)

2015 Actions

Technical input to public policy

- » **Statement on the National Adoption Draft Law:** RELAF issued a statement rejecting the Draft Law on adoptions that was being discussed in the Parliament of Paraguay. RELAF advised congress members that the project should be rejected for being a major setback in human rights that, if approved, would lead to a deterioration of the ability of children and adolescents to exercise their right to a family and community life.
- » Technical analysis project "Guidelines for the alternative care of children and adolescents in foster care programs and shelter entities" and 7 protocols annexed to the bill. This Regulation establishes guiding principles and standards in response to the Paraguayan State's commitment before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH). It aims to modify the "Regulations for the authorization and operation of Shelter Homes for adolescents and children in the special protection system" in order to reconcile it with the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. Also, the regulatory standards draft is in line with the National Policy on Special Protection for Children separated from their families (PONAPROE).
- » Supported the relaunch of the "Paraguay Network for the Right to Family and Community".

Research

Study entitled "Development of a baseline and monitoring for deinstitutionalization (DI) in Latin America and the Caribbean". Paraguay is one of the pilot countries in the region to implement these tools and to establish a baseline research ("regional actions").



Leading results

The statement to congress members about the disapproval of the Adoption Draft Law resulted in halting its passing. Technical support to the "Guidelines for the alternative care of children and adolescents in foster care programs and shelter entities" and 7 protocols was a wonderful result that strengthened the technical capacity of the Paraguayan state in the implementation, monitoring and supervision of the alternative care system.

Challenges

The major challenge in Paraguay is to achieve real results in the process of eradicating the institutionalisation of children under 3 years old. In 2014 Paraguay supported the regional "Call for Action" regarding young children but there have not been any improvements yet. The relaunching of the Paraguayan Network is important in this process, and is a key space for advocacy.



Technical input to public policy

» Meeting with representatives from the Instituto del Niño y el Adolescente del Uruguay (INAU), UNICEF, RELAF and HHC. Uruguay is the country in the region with the highest rate of institutionalisation of children and adolescents. In the light of this situation, the meetings focussed on this problem and advocated for the State's commitment to the adaptation and transformation of public policies and programmes promoting deinstitutionalisation and guaranteeing the right of a community and family life of children and adolescents in line with guidelines on the alternative methods for the care of children.

Technical cooperation

Signed MOU with UNICEF. In Uruguay we are following the main objective of raising awareness and mobilising civil society organisations. Many civil social organisations are dependent on the State, especially through residential care programmes which passively contribute to the status-quo and support the alarming situation of institutionalisation. One of the main goals is the mobilisation of these actors so they can clearly see the problematic as a sheer violation of human rights, strengthen themselves politically and technically to influence the transformation of this situation from a human rights perspective, and perform their role in both participation in, and enforcement of, a stronger system. Work was done on the coordination within civil society and on a training plan aiming at the construction and implementation of technical standards based on a human rights approach.

Delivered a workshop for NGOs: 2 training workshops were organised "Towards a model of care alternatives in Uruguay. A development from the perspective of the civil society" in two locations: Maldonado y Paysandú with a total of 20 people participating. In March 2016 a third workshop will take place in the city of Rivera. This capacity building initiative aims at developing, identifying and strengthening one of the important players in the Uruguayan system of comprehensive protection: civil society.



Organization / participation in events

» International seminar "Right to grow up in a family. Towards an alternative care model to institutionalization" hosted by UNICEF, INAU and RELAF.

Research

» Study entitled "Development of a baseline and monitoring for deinstitutionalization (DI) in Latin America and the Caribbean". Uruguay is one of the pilot countries in the region to implement these tools and to establish a baseline research ("regional actions").

» Study of "Institutionalized children and adolescents with disabilities" including fieldwork ("regional actions").

Highlighted results

One of the main results was the RELAF secured a place as a specialised negotiator with the State and civil society.

Lessons learned

Uruguay is the country with the highest rate of institutionalisation in the region. Placement in institutional care is identified as the usual solution not only in the policies on childhood but also in other sectors of public policy - resulting in a culture of institutionalisation deeply rooted at social and political levels. It is particularly important to start new dialogue channels with the press and the media in general to achieve long-term results.

Challenges

Strengthening RELAF's position as a negotiator and consultant for key actors (State, NGOs, the press, community in general). Considering the high rate of institutionalisation and the culture of institutionalisation mentioned, it is a great challenge to undertake specific actions to prevent unnecessary separation. Finally, we need to keep strengthening and positioning the actors of civil society through technical workshops and cross-sectorial networks, press releases, training programmes, etc.



Technical input to public policy

» Supported the launch of the Federal Foster Care Network at the II Interprovincial Meeting of Foster Care. This year the most challenging result was the launching of the Federal Foster Care Network. 27 Foster Care Programmes from 16 provinces are involved. This is a space with a lot of potential for advocacy for DI processes. The launch took place in the II Encounter, where RELAF contributed to UNICEF Argentina's participation.

» Technical support to the creation of the National Draft Law "Teenagers Leaving the Child Care Protection System". The project expects to reach more than 700 technical practitioners from local and provincial public services, private services and projects, who will receive specific methodology for comprehensive support to adolescents in preparation for leaving the care system.



Organization / participation in events

- » Organised a conference entitled "Deinstitutionalization of children. The European experience" and workshop with approximately 100 key participants from government agencies and civil society at the Argentinean National Senate.
- » Participated in the Provincial Forum "Childhood and adolescence in the territory" (Santa Fe) alongside approximately 500 participants.

Highlighted results

Argentina is a federal country. Although we have not yet achieved the national authorities adhesion to our organisation, the launching of the Federal Foster Care Network is an important result with a view to achieving that goal, being an inter-provincial space with significant representation in the provinces (16 out of 23 Argentina provinces are participating). The results achieved by this network, in relation to raising awareness on the adequacy of alternative care in Argentina at a national and provincial government level, will also serve the interest of generating better conditions for planning future actions for deinstitutionalization which can be technically led by RELAF.

Lessons learned

Technical support to the provincial governments or NGOs working in the provision of alternative care in the provinces, is a strategy that could enable future actions with national significance.

Challenges

The major challenge is still raising awareness at a national level on the problems related to children deprived of parental care and deinstitutionalization. After having launched the Federal Foster Care Network, and having strengthened its effectiveness and sustainability, it is an important and strategic challenge to advocate for the adaptation of the sub-system of protection of the rights of children deprived of parental care in Argentina.



Technical input to public policy

- » Participated in the 18th Convention organized by The Mexican Network of Child Friendly Cities (RMCAN) which gathers 110 municipalities for the promotion of child and adolescent rights. The RMCAN Conventions take place every three months in order to facilitate exchange of experience and tools to implement public policies related to the protection of the children and adolescents rights. A member of RELAF'S Latin American Consultative Council presented "Children and adolescents deprived of parental care: promotion and strengthening of the right to living in a family and community" at the conference. The network has been working for four years and for the first time the conference was centered on the issue of alternative care, and its inclusion in the agenda being the result of RELAF's work.



Technical cooperation

Signed a technical cooperation agreement with the DIF (National System for the Integral Development of the Mexican Family). This relates to the City of Mexico, which enacted the Alternative Care for Children and Adolescents Law in March 2015 and this agreement is the result of many years of work developed in Mexico by RELAF to promote the processes of Mexican adaptation of the protection system.

Within this agreement, RELAF is participating in the process of technical preparation for the pilot programme within the framework of the implementation of the Alternative Care Law in Mexico DF. In the framework of the pilot programme for the deinstitutionalization of children under 3 years-old in Mexico, 8 technical work teams were organised to deal with alternative care invited by DIF-DF, civil society (Juconi, RELAF, Quinta Carmelita, Aldeas SOS and UAM – X) and UNICEF. In the first meeting of one of the work teams in October, RELAF shared experiences of deinstitutionalisation in Latin America, its lessons and obstacles. The objective of these work teams is to build the technical foundation for implementation of a pilot programme for the deinstitutionalisation children under 3 years-old from a residential care centres.

Highlighted results: RELAF has been an important reference in the process of the drafting of the Law on alternative care in DF. This is in addition to the agreement with the DIF DF, which generates a fertile ground to implementing the desired actions.

Lessons learned

The drafting of the Law was a point of agreement and dialogue with the child and family authorities in DF that acted as a platform for the creation of concrete agreements for implementation.

Challenges

The challenge is implementing the pilot programme in DF for which funding is still needed. Its implementation in a city like DF will have a strong capacity to influence in the adaptation of other states, and even at a national level.



Technical cooperation

Technical assistance from RELAF and UNICEF to the Ministry of Social and Economic Inclusion (MIES) and civil society to strengthen public policies and programme implementation in the field of foster care: A two day evaluation took place to assess the current situation of the implementation of the pilot and plan for the 2016 cooperation, was undertaken with approximately 20 participants. Since 2014, three civil society organisations (Danielle Children's Fund Ecuador - DCF-EC, located in Ambato, Tungurahua Province), Fundación Cristo de La Calle (Ibarra, Imbabura Province) and Fundación Inés Chambers (Guayas Province) are being supported in partnership with MIES to pilot foster care in unrelated families. In the evaluation of the pilot, RELAF assessed the foster care programs have adequate technical quality, have had significant achievements in spreading in their



communities, have trained human resources and have made other significant advances which have established a basis for the technical standards and replication of foster care.

Highlighted results

One of the central objectives of the participation of RELAF in the analysis of the pilot project was the identification of priorities for the adaptation of the sub-system of protection of the rights of children and adolescents deprived of parental care by MIES, UNICEF and RELAF. This identification was attained and is at present the base of the proposal of agreement between RELAF and UNICEF Ecuador to give technical assistance to the Government of Ecuador through its governing organism on public policies on children and families, MIES. This aims to orientate and contribute to the creation of a sub-system of protection for children deprived of parental care in compliance with international guidelines and conventions.

Lessons learned

The underreporting and the lack of qualitative and quantitative information about children and adolescents in alternative care is a worrying situation all over the region, and Ecuador is no exception. It is necessary to have an accurate diagnosis of reality to be able to promote the necessary actions. The proposal of cooperation with UNICEF has included a line of action to address this.

Challenges

It is necessary to deepen the levels of co-responsibility and strengthen the collaborative actions from all actors that shape the system of integral protection and in particular the sub-system of children and adolescents deprived of parental care. This includes a well defined public policy from the State acting as a guarantee for the rights (executive, legislative and judicial powers) and contribution from civil society, families, children, academia and media, among others. The adaptations promoted from 2016 and their sustainability in time will need strong political commitments from all sectors. Particularly relevant is the coordination and joint work of the governing body with other areas of public policies (health, education, among others) to achieve the prevention of separation at decision-making and technical levels, with an intersectoral, inter-jurisdictional and inter-territorial view of public policies.



Technical input to public policy

RELAF has been in contact with Cuban authorities for some years now with the aim of promoting new agreements for the adaptation of the system of integral protection in the country. In 2015 RELAF and Cuba officials shared instances of analysis in relation to the advances and pending issues in the country for the protection of children separated from their families of origin. The implementation of a foster care programme has been understood as necessary. Even if the rate of children in alternative care is very low, all children under care are at present in institutions.



Highlighted results

Identifying the need to implement a foster care programme at a national level has been a significant result of our process of analysis and agreements.

Obstacles

Although RELAF planned to create a baseline study in Cuba, unfortunately it was not possible. The difficulty was the access to public information in Cuba.

Lessons learned and challenges ahead

The residences that provide alternative care for children and adolescents are very legitimised by the society and are part of their revolutionary identity. The “foster homes” (which we would classify as institutions) have a high-standard infrastructure in the care of children. They are constantly monitored and supervised. The public officers feel proud of the service these institutions provide. Even though this may not seem a great challenge in quantitative terms, it is an important challenge in cultural and political terms.



Technical input to public policy

Conducted advocacy meetings with: UNICEF; National Council for Children; SENAME; President of the National Council for Children, Ms. Estela Ortiz.; National Director of SENAME: Host Family Program and other key actors and civil society organizations (FIPI, Chilean Foundation for Adoption, etc.). Following this, the President of the National Council for Children, Lic. Estela Ortiz requested a meeting with RELAF in Buenos Aires and continued to strengthen this partnership for more direct influence on the improvement of the system of comprehensive protection of rights and deinstitutionalization processes in Chile.

Technical cooperation

International Academic Committee for the Family reunification Project at ODISEA. Since March 2015, RELAF has been a member of this committee and has made technical revisions of the materials being used in the project, and participated in a review meeting in Chile. The ODISEA project (Opportunities for the development



of sensitive, efficient and affective interactions) is an initiative of the Ideas Foundation for Chilean children with the objective of carrying out a pilot programme aimed at family reunification of children between 0 and 14 years old who are institutionalised in protection residences within the SENAME network. The project is at present in the phase of training of the technical teams from the institutions taking part in the project.

Organization / participation in events

Meeting: RELAF participated in the meeting “Ideas, dreams and plans for the challenges in today’s childhood and adolescence” and delivered two presentations to approximately 150 participants: “The deinstitutionalization in Latin America: lessons learned from the advocacy role of RELAF” and “How to convene host families? Latin American experiences”.

Lessons learned

A very complex political scenario is showing at present in Chile, mainly because a Protection for the Rights of Children and Adolescents Law has not been passed in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Years ago, the President set up a public organism, called the National Children Council, whose main objective is to establish a law and to promote DI processes. Unfortunately, the organism could not achieve that objective and it is losing strength. The Children National Service (SENAME), in this process is getting stronger again, which is not seen as positive because of its questionable approach to the field.

Challenges

Given this scenario of high complexity in relation to the governing of the system of protection, we consider that the best way to cooperate with the adaptation of the system in Chile is by resuming the deinstitutionalization process initiated with a pilot test in 2012, with a focus on the prevention of separation, through an agreement with UNICEF.



Technical cooperation

Undertook a technical review of the Temporary Foster Care Program Manual for the Ministry of Social Welfare of the Presidency. This technical assistance was provided virtually online. RELAF revised the Manual and made specific contributions for its adaptation focussing mainly on rights, in line with the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.



Obstacles

Whilst the revision of the Manual has contributed to the strengthening of foster care, during 2015 RELAF could not finalize agreements of cooperation as planned. In previous years RELAF has had substantial interventions in Chile, but at the moment conditions of instability in terms of authorities, human resources for programme implementation and decision making have not been conducive to the signing of agreement or securing commitment to DI. However, RELAF continues to work in line with the specific demands from the relevant actors.



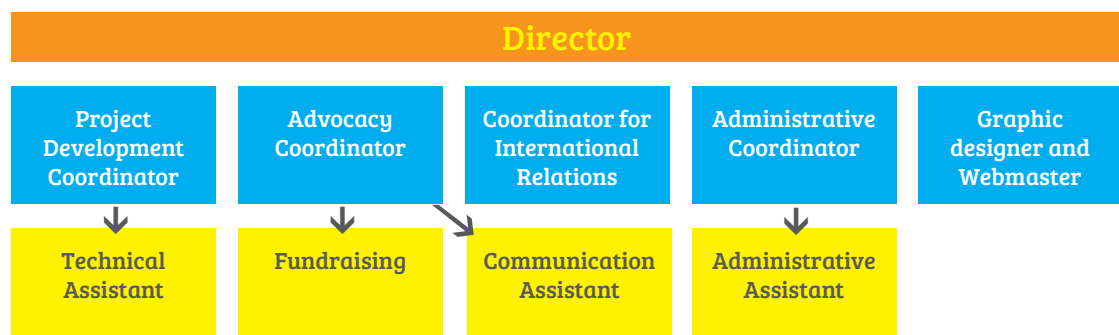
Technical cooperation

Supported the Haitian process of construction of its system of integral protection of rights. This is ongoing since 2012 when the child-friendly versions of the UN Guidelines on Alternative Care were conducted. During 2015 RELAF worked with LUMOS to prepare RELAF's participation in their event and to organise the agenda with key stakeholders (government, civil society and international cooperation) but this was postponed. Regardless of this, the consolidation of links with key actors has been achieved.

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCES

TEAM MEMBERS

During 2015, RELAF underwent significant organisational change with regards to its team composition - the most significant change it has lived through since its initial constitution in 2008. This has both strengthened and expanded the team. At the beginning of 2015, RELAF had a team formed by seven people: Director, Managing Director, Advocacy Manager, Communications and Fundraising Manager, Technical Assistant, Administrative Assistant, Graphic Designer. HHC's support allowed the growth of this team taking on 4 new staff and changing the organisation chart:



The new members of staff allowed the development of communication and funding work, breaking down one position into two: Communications Assistant and Fundraising Assistant. This allows each of the members of staff to deepen their specialisation in their own areas. Furthermore, whilst RELAF already had a technical assistant introducing RELAF into global spaces, the addition of a Coordinator specialised in International Relations now enables us to consolidate and strengthen the position of RELAF at a global scale, bringing international visibility to our Latin American experience.

Among the strengths, the team has a base of highly qualified professionals specialised in the subject of RELAF's work. The original staff have been part of RELAF from its beginnings, and they share the pride for all the results achieved by RELAF that have taken the organisation to take the position it has today in terms of its recognition and expertise. All the members of staff are professionals with vast experience in alternative care and investigation. The Director, in particular, is the author of five books (the first one published in 1994) and numerous pieces of research on foster care and the protection of the rights of children deprived of parental care. She is a professor in universities in Argentina, Ecuador and Guatemala, as well as an expert consulted by international bodies, NGOs and Latin American and Caribbean governments. Together, these staff are responsible for the training and capacity building of new team members, and all new staff undertook a relevant induction process this year.

Among the critical challenges during the expansion of the team was the difficulty recruiting for the position of Coordinator of the Center of Excellence in Montevideo. Despite the very high number of applicants and relevant professional experience, the employment conditions offered by RELAF were not attractive to the candidates. RELAF reconsidered the composition of the team in this light and, along with the nature and intensity of the workload, has decided to make this a full time position to be recruited in 2016.

MONTEVIDEO OFFICE

Due to the Argentinian context, adverse to the functioning of NGO's whose funds come from international cooperation, in 2015 we established a new office in Uruguay and undertook the administrative and physical set up of a new office. In July we were provided with an office space by the Institute of Legal and Social Studies of Uruguay (IELSUR) to temporarily set up a new office in Montevideo until the Centre of Excellence is launched (Plaza Independencia 1376, 8th floor). The office in Buenos Aires remains as a technical support office. Note that the coordination of the Committee on the Rights of the Child Uruguay (CDNU) also works in the same place, which makes it a strategic point of work and synergy in our vision, stance and work on children's rights.

Challenge: Given the recent change of government in Argentina, RELAF is facing the challenge of assessing the impact of the new context in the management of NGOs that work in Argentina.



COMUNICACION

RELAF's communications area is in charge of the following tasks, which were all achieved during 2015:

Social Media:

» Enlargement of RELAF's social networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, G+, Flickr and YouTube). Below are the respective statistics, starting on October 18th when our Communication Assistant was in post.

	TWITTER		FACEBOOK	LINKEDIN	G+	FLICKR
	Following	Followers	Likes	Contacts	Plus	Followers
18. 10. 2015	217	229	5938	84	0	0
14. 12. 2015	936	347	6673	282	15	115

» Sharing all of RELAF's projects and actions in every social network mentioned above.

Newsletter:

- » 6 newsletters in Spanish. <http://relaf.org/boletines.php>
- » English translation of the 6 newsletters. http://relaf.org/nove_engl.php
- » Every time we release a newsletter, it is sent in Spanish to 2600 people and in English to 537 people.

Audiovisual:

- » Photographic record of RELAF's activities which is used to document and promote actions undertaken.
- » Video editing (Promotional video of the golf tournament fundraiser "Juguemos Por Los Chicos")
- » Scriptwriting support (for example, reviewed all the recorded material from Panama, scriptwriting of the first version of the documentary about "Casa Hogar Soná")

Website:

- » Regularly updated Website



Press:

» Created, curated and updated an information database (notes, news) on children and deinstitutionalization: <http://www.scoop.it/t/relaf>

Challenge:

Following the recruitment of the Communications Assistant and nascent agenda of activities in 2015, we identify the development of a communication strategy as a priority action for 2016.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROJECTIONS 2016

RELAF maintained and strengthened its position as a regional benchmark on a global level, which is demonstrated in its incidence in work areas shared with other international organizations such as the NGO Group for the CRC (currently Child Rights Connect) and its admission in the Steering Committee of the Better Care Network.

Its continued presence in the countries of the region was guaranteed, especially by the work of technical cooperation and participation in national and regional events, the latter with great capacity to influence the agenda of governments.

In some countries, as shown, the high impact processes have been promoted in relation to the construction of the sub system of protection of children deprived of parental care, as is the case of Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Transformations of this magnitude have strengthened RELAF as possessor of specific knowledge and experience, which is an important background for interventions in different countries and contexts.

A challenge for RELAF is to promote and install the ability to register the processes on two levels: first the acknowledgement of responsibilities by States (systematization and monitoring strategies in the context of public policy), and on the other hand quantitative registration processes in which RELAF acts. Regarding this, the "Baseline" tool and expanding the work team, especially having a communication specialist, set the trend. In this sense, we have installed this trend of generating reliable information as an important outcome of the 2015 task.

The materialization of numerous publications continues to strengthen the place of RELAF as a reference and information center and knowledge on the subject in Latin America and the Caribbean, which added to the experience of transformation in the countries sets us in an ideal position to launch the Center of Excellence.



As regards internal actions, the results are part of the preparation process that we are moving towards, together with HHC, to provide better responses to the needs of adequacy of systems for the comprehensive protection of rights in Latin America and the Caribbean initiating and deepening the process of de-institutionalization in the region.

As is known, the transformation of a team is a process that requires time and knowledge to build a common approach. For our organization it has been a challenge. HHC's support for the support of the team's base is essential so that it can boost global, regional and national actions. Facing 2016, the realization of the RELAF Seminar: "De-institutionalization and prevention of separation within subsystems rights protection of children without parental care", creation of new studies and tools as well as the support of established lines of action will be an opportunity to move forward gradually but firmly in fulfilling the mission of the organization and its partner, HHC.

