

# COUNCIL OF EUROPE

## COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RECOMMENDATION No. R (81) 3

### OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS TO MEMBER STATES CONCERNING THE CARE AND EDUCATION OF CHILDREN FROM BIRTH TO THE AGE OF EIGHT<sup>1</sup>

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 23 January 1981  
at the 328th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members and that this aim is to be pursued, in particular, through common action in the social and cultural fields ;

Bearing in mind the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of the Child (1959) ;

Having regard to Recommendation 874 (1979) of the Assembly on a European Charter on the Rights of the Child ;

Having regard to the Declaration on the care and education of the child from birth to eight adopted by the Conference on the theme "From birth to eight : young children in European Society in the 1980s", which was organised by the Council for Cultural Co-operation in Strasbourg from 17 to 20 December 1979 ;

Recalling that this conference was one of the Council of Europe contributions to the International Year of the Child (1979) ;

Considering the importance of the care and education of children from birth to eight,

Recommends that the governments of member states :

- a.* take account, in their policies on the care and education of young children, of the principles set out in Section I of the appendix hereto and take the measures concerning their implementation set out in Section II of the appendix.
- b.* ensure that this recommendation is distributed as widely as possible among interested persons and bodies.

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1. In accordance with Article 10.2.c of the Rules of Procedure for the meetings of the Ministers' Deputies, the Representatives of *Ireland* and of the *United Kingdom* approved the adoption of this text but reserved the right of their governments to comply with it or not.

**I. Principles concerning the care and education of the child  
from birth to eight**

*A. The rights of the child*

The child must enjoy the fundamental rights as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, as well as the right to develop his physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual potential to the full and to be respected as an individual in his own right.

The child will normally depend primarily on his family to recognise and secure these rights. The family operates within a wider social framework from which it should be able to obtain the support it needs to fulfil its obligations. In providing such support, care should be taken not to undermine parental responsibilities towards the child.

All services with a contribution to make to the development of young children—especially health, education and social services—should work with, and through, the family to provide continuity of experience for the child.

*B. The care and education of young children*

The care and education of pre-school children should fulfil the following criteria. They should :

- meet the child's need for security and affection and social life, including leisure activities, with other children and adults ;
- provide the conditions for good physical and mental health ;
- stimulate the child's creative and intellectual development and his capacity for expression ;
- help the child to become integrated into his environment and to cope with life, and encourage the child's independence, initiative and free play ;
- respect the child's cultural and psychological identity and recognise his uniqueness and individuality ;
- open up both family and pre-school circles to the wider society to enable the child to meet other people of all ages.

Educational provision should be made available for all children whose parents wish them to have it during at least two years preceding the start of primary school. The lack of financial means should not be a barrier to children who need such educational provision.

Support services—including health, social services and education—have an important role to play in the development of all children, but the form of provision should take account of their particular needs, which differ according to their stage of development, their personal capacities and their cultural backgrounds :

- i. children who live in urban areas have great need of care and education owing to living conditions in towns : lack of space, pollution of various kinds, dangers in the streets, parents' absence (time spent at work plus travelling time) ;
- ii. children who live in rural and sparsely populated areas are more difficult to cater for. It is therefore necessary to find untraditional and flexible solutions to bring pre-school education to these children ;
- iii. children who live in circumstances of extreme socio-economic deprivation have special needs ;
- iv. children of cultural minorities, whether native or immigrant, should receive an education which promotes their integration into the regional or national community, as a basis for mutual enrichment ;
- v. handicapped children should, whenever necessary, have available to them establishments which meet their special needs.

In association with the child care and child psychological services, health services should operate within pre-school care and education provision to detect, assess and treat handicapping conditions.

*C. People and agencies participating in the care and education of young children*

All those contributing to the care and education of young children (including the family in the widest sense, the community and self-help groups, volunteers, teachers) should be able to benefit from the findings of up-to-date research and knowledge of developments in the concept of early education and, whenever appropriate, to participate in such research.

Professionals need initial training supplemented by in-service training. Both should be of the highest possible quality.

## **II. Role of member states**

Taking into account the importance of care and education of children from birth to eight in the European society of 1980s, member states should :

1. organise the care and education of young children, in close co-operation with parents, as a means of complementing family up-bringing and as a first stage in life-long learning. This should be done by :
  - providing adequate funds,
  - improving family, social and labour legislation,
  - planning education systems in such a way as to maintain continuity and to educate children to become creative and innovatory adults ;
2. prepare parents and future parents for the responsibilities inherent in the education of young children ;
3. assume responsibility or provide support for organisations and institutions caring for young children, especially for those children whose need is most obvious ;
4. promote and encourage research and the training of staff in order to provide children with care and education, under the best possible conditions, supervised by highly qualified staff, who, as far as possible, should operate in multidisciplinary teams ;
5. ensure that the various national, regional and local administrations co-ordinate family and child care services to guarantee continuity of experience for the child.