

# COLLABORATIVE EFFORT ADDRESSES THE RIGHT TO FAMILY LIFE IN DIFFERENT EUROPEAN COUNTRIES



In April 2017 in Pierrelaye, France, ATD Fourth World organized a meeting on the right to family life. The meeting convened ATD groups from various European countries that have been thinking about the family and also taking action on the issue of family support.

The “right to family life” has been defined in a number of internationally adopted documents. The UN’s 1948 [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) asserted in Article 16 that, “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.” The more recent [European Convention on Human Rights](#) states in Article 8 that, “Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.” However, in many ways parents living in poverty do not enjoy these rights.

The April meeting grew out of the process of researching and writing [Extreme poverty is violence – Breaking the silence – Searching for peace](#). During this participatory action-research, in interviews, families living in extreme poverty often talked about violence suffered: violations of their rights, contempt, refusal to listen to their opinions, disrespectful procedures for the placement of children, etc.

ATD Fourth World groups in Europe have been working on this issue, some for many years. Attending the meeting were delegates from a number of these groups that have been focusing their discussions and activism on issues concerning child placement in

foster care:

- Belgium: “Agora” meetings between government officials, professionals, and parents with children in foster care. “Agora” meetings address implementation of Belgium’s Youth Protection Act.
- France: Family and Early Child Care Network, a group that addresses issues around family and foster care.
- Great Britain: [Social Worker Training Program](#)
- Luxembourg: [Merging Knowledge](#) sessions with professionals on the issue of child placement and the right to family life.
- The Netherlands: Working Group on the Family, a parent group that provides support to families facing foster care placement.
- Switzerland: History Seekers for the Future of Children, a group that studies the history of child placement in Switzerland (and its aftermath today), following the federal government’s apology regarding [internment and coercive measures for the purpose of assistance to poor families](#).

Most of the meeting participants had been placed in foster care as children or had children currently in care. All insisted strongly that foster care placement for reasons related to poverty must stop.

The meeting started by bringing parents (and a few other people involved with them) together as they are the people directly affected by policies and programs that address family and foster care issues. It is important that they have the opportunity to explore together their own experience, what they find unfair, and what solutions they see based on what they themselves have experienced.

It emerged from discussions at the meeting that situations involving child placement across Europe are very similar. Families living in extreme poverty are rarely included in discussions about the placement of their own children. Parents are not seen as having anything of value to contribute to these decisions. They want to be supported to enter into dialogue with the institutions or agencies involved. They also try to find people and places that are respectful and that help them with their young children.

The violence of child placement in care is a recurrent theme for families that experience poverty. Parents involved with ATD brought this issue to the attention of the United Nations in February 2017 in a meeting for NGO’s on “[Children Without Parental Care or at Risk of Losing It](#)”. They raised it again in a recent [meeting with the French Ambassador to the UN](#) in New York. Parents in Great Britain collaborated on an article on this issue that appeared in the [February 2017 European Journal of Social Work](#).

In the coming years, ATD will be expanding this participatory research with families experiencing poverty.

[More information here about ATD's work on the right to family life.](#)