



OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

BELGIUM

COUNTRY FACT SHEET

The majority of children deprived of parental care in Belgium are placed in institutional care. Children with disabilities are among those who are the most discriminated against as the overall plan for persons with disabilities, according to the UNCRPD concluding observations from 2014, is missing. There is no deinstitutionalisation (DI) strategy for children living in institutions¹. Deinstitutionalisation in Belgium is considered as an austerity measure, and stable employment of professionals working within institutions is a priority for the state. Due to the influx of unaccompanied migrant and refugee children, more institutions have been now opened or extended.

Belgium is organised into three communities: the French community, the Flemish community and the German community. As a result, there is no centralised data on institutional care; in many instances, it is either unavailable or difficult to obtain. Support for children with disabilities is also treated differently in various regions of Belgium.

There are 5,583² children in institutional care in the French community and approximately 2,031 of these children have disability. 372 children are between the age of 0-3; this figure, however, excludes 300 babies and children that live in hospitals³.

There are 7,917 children in institutional care in Flanders of whom 7,286 are children with disabilities and 466 are children below the age of five.

¹ There is only a mental health reform called project 107.

² Figure does not include unaccompanied refugee and migrant children.

³ According to the figures of the Aid to Youth, each year about 300 children between the age of 0 and 6 stay in hospitals in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation due to the lack of available places in alternative care settings.

KEY DEVELOPMENT IN 2017



IN 2017, BELGIAN GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED PLANS TO RESUME CHILD DETENTION AND STARTED

CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW CLOSED CENTRE FOR MIGRANT FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN.

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU



TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE THAT BELGIUM IS NOT DETAINING CHILDREN ON THE BASIS OF THEIR OR THEIR PARENTS' MIGRATION STATUS. IMMIGRATION DETENTION, EVEN FOR A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME, CAN HAVE DETRIMENTAL EFFECTS ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH; IT VIOLATES CHILDREN'S FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS.

There are also eight boarding schools for children with disabilities in Flanders. Children with disabilities are often enrolled in the boarding schools during the week and then transferred to the other institutions at the weekend. According to the data available, there are four institutions in Flanders sheltering these children during weekends⁴. To avoid institutionalisation, children can request personal assistance budget but the waiting period is almost five years whereas placement in the institution can only take up to nine months⁵.

Not only institutions are not getting closed in Belgium; more of them are getting opened due to the increase in the number of unaccompanied migrant and refugee children arriving to Belgium. In a span of a few months in 2016, three new institutions have been opened or extended to accommodate unaccompanied migrant and refugee children.

In 2017, the authorities started construction of a new closed centre near Brussels Airport, specifically for migrants' families with children. This triggered the campaign of over 100 NGOs against child detention in Belgium "We do not lock up a child. Period." There is also a lack of foster care options in Wallonia Brussels for these children.⁶

The fact that institutionalisation is still associated with the low-cost alternatives presents the biggest challenge for DI reforms in Belgium. Given the large number of people working in residential care in Belgium, this sector is viewed as a priority for the state due to steady employment and because of this, DI is often considered as an austerity measure.

Although Belgium could substantially benefit from the use of European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) to support the transition costs from one type of care to another, Belgium has not prioritised the use of ESIF for deinstitutionalisation reforms. European Social Fund, in particular, is being used for tackling unemployment. Institutional care in Belgium is funded by the national budget whilst deinstitutionalisation reforms focus mainly on the decrease of places in the institutional care settings.

4 <https://issuu.com/kinderrechten/docs/a9c39559-b9a1-4be1-9bef-7c9ada4bc0dd/3?e=6593254/5817228>

5 <https://www.gripvzw.be/nl/artikel/77/cijfers-jaarverslag-jeugdhulp-beschamend>

6 <http://www.youdontlockupachild.be>

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE MEMBER STATE



TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN IN MIGRATION ARE NOT DETAINED. IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR MIGRATION STATUS, CHILDREN SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO THE MAINSTREAM SERVICES AS WELL AS QUALITY FAMILY AND COMMUNITY-BASED CARE.

FAST FACTS & LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

- **THERE ARE 5,583 CHILDREN LIVING IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE IN THE FRENCH COMMUNITY OF WHOM 36% ARE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES. OUT OF 7,917 CHILDREN LIVING IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE IN FLANDERS, 92% ARE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**
- **EACH YEAR, ABOUT 300 CHILDREN BETWEEN THE AGE OF 0 AND 6 STAY IN HOSPITALS IN THE WALLONIA-BRUSSELS FEDERATION DUE TO THE LACK OF AVAILABLE PLACES IN ALTERNATIVE CARE SETTINGS.**
- **THERE WERE 1,035 UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN IN BELGIUM IN 2016; THIS IS 1,800 CHILDREN FEWER THAN IN 2015.**



NATIONAL PARTNERS OF THE OPENING DOORS IN BELGIUM

In Belgium the campaign is supported by La Porte Ouverte, the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) and Equal Rights for Each Person with Disability (GRIP).

The Opening Doors for Europe's Children campaign supports national efforts to develop child protection systems that strengthen families and ensure high-quality family and community-based alternative care for children, by leveraging EU funding and policy and building capacity in civil society.

It is a partnership between 5 international organisations and civil society across 16 European countries. For more information go to www.openingdoors.eu