



**OPENING DOORS
FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN**

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

ESTONIA



COUNTRY FACT SHEET

In 2004, the Estonian Government began transformation of all larger institutions into small group homes. This process should be completed by the end of 2017. The existing small group homes were set up to offer an appropriate alternative to institutions, however, the legislative proposal that enters into force in 2017 reverses a maximum number of children in each unit from target 6 to the original 8. The Government states that reducing target number of children in the state-run small group homes per unit is not financially possible yet. Such reversal cannot guarantee the best interest and human rights of children. Small group homes do not meet quality criteria of care in Estonia as they are not adequately equipped, the staff has not been sufficiently trained, and the homes have simply become the replacements of the previous institutional care settings.

The deinstitutionalisation reform in Estonia focuses on building small residential care settings (Small Group Homes). However, SGHs are not always built and equipped to provide quality care for children. Often, small group homes are built next to one another in the same location and not as independent facilities located in different areas in the community. Staff have not undergone training or obtained an additional qualification (in the case they worked in an institution before) on the specific care skills required in order to meet the specific needs of children and understand the trauma children have been through. This is due to the lack of educational courses in general for the alternative care sector within the country.

By the end of 2015, there were 1,068 children in 38 residential care settings in Estonia including 37 children with severe physical disabilities placed by their parents, indicating the absence of support services available to parents in order to help them care for their children at home. Institutional care in Estonia is defined as residential care. There is no difference made between the two. This number therefore refers to both large institutions and community care settings such as small group homes. It is of great concern that there is no legislation in Estonia which prevents placing children aged 0-3 years into a residential care setting, a practice which takes place >>

**OUT OF 1,486 CHILDREN IN
FAMILY-BASED CARE,
205 CHILDREN ARE LIVING IN
FOSTER CARE**





>> quite often in Estonia and is not monitored. Furthermore there is no legislation which limits the period of time 0-3 year olds can be kept in temporary out-of-family care. At the end of 2015 there were 45 children aged 0-3 years in residential care settings¹.

By the end of 2015, there were 1,486 children in family-based care in Estonia. However, only 205 of these children were placed in foster care families, illustrating that foster care in Estonia has been severely underdeveloped. Despite policy framework regulations, family-based forms of care are not properly controlled yet and only focus on the physical environment in a family-based setting and not on the developmental needs of the child. The responsibility of coordinating family-based care lies solely with the local authorities in Estonia, and social workers lack the knowledge as well as the resources to be able to support carers appropriately. As a result, foster and kinship carers do not receive adequate or sometimes any support. Kinship care has not been defined or regulated properly and is included under laws related to the legal guardianship of children by those who are not part of the child's family.

With regard to young people leaving care, there is a disparity in the financial support given from the state budget to residential care and foster care/kinship care leavers.

The state provides young people with the opportunity to live in a residential care setting until they graduate from their studies – e.g. potentially until they graduate from their Master's degree if they study full-time (until the age of 24-25 years). This is a positive result as residential care providers can continue to provide support to care leavers, which includes preparing them for independent living. However, this does not apply to foster care/kinship care leavers for whom state financial support stops at the age of 19 and when they are in full-time education. Otherwise, financial support stops at the age of 18 and no additional financial support is provided to help young people continue their studies.

¹ Number indicates infants aged 0-2 years until they reach the age of 3 years

FAST FACTS & LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

- **IN 2015 1,486 CHILDREN WERE IN FAMILY-BASED CARE IN ESTONIA. ONLY 205 OF THESE CHILDREN WERE IN FOSTER CARE FAMILIES.**
- **THERE ARE 1,068 CHILDREN IN 38 RESIDENTIAL CARE SETTINGS IN ESTONIA. THIS NUMBER INCLUDES BOTH INSTITUTIONS AND SMALL GROUP HOMES.**
- **FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING RESIDENTIAL CARE ENDS WHEN THEY FINISH THEIR STUDIES WHEREAS FOR FOSTER CARE AND KINSHIP CARE LEAVERS STATE SUPPORT ENDS AT THE AGE OF 19 AND ONLY IF THEY ARE COMMITTED IN FULL TIME EDUCATION.**
- **THE NEW LAW TO BE BROUGHT INTO FORCE IN 2017 REVERSES BACK THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER RESIDENTIAL CARE SETTING OR SMALL GROUP HOME FROM TARGET 6 TO THE ORIGINAL NUMBER OF 8 CHILDREN.**
- **A CARE LEAVERS' SUPPORT PROGRAMME WHICH WAS RUN BY AN NGO UNTIL RECENTLY WAS TAKEN OVER IN 2016 BY A STATE AGENCY AND FUNDED THROUGH THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND. HOWEVER, EXPERIENCED NGOS IN THE FIELD ARE NOT PERMITTED TO APPLY FOR SERVICE PROVISION DUE TO STRICT AND INADEQUATE REQUIREMENTS IN THE CALL FOR PROPOSAL.**

OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN ESTONIA

Igale Lapsele Pere has a vision to create positive and lasting difference in the system of alternative care for children and young people and unite foster carers across the country. To find out more visit www.kasupered.ee



NATIONAL PARTNERS

In Estonia the campaign is supported by: Child Advocacy Chamber Coalition Members (Lapse Huvikaitse Koda), EATL – Association of Alternative Care Workers (Eesti Asendusliku Töötajate Liit), Lighthouse Foundation (SA Tuletoorn)

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 15 European countries. For more information go to www.openingdoors.eu