



OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

ESTONIA



COUNTRY FACT SHEET

Estonia has taken important steps towards the transition from institutional to community-based care. Although the alternative care reform started in 2004, institutional and residential forms of care still prevail nationwide in Estonia. The reasons might be historical, but they are also related to institutional and organisational arrangements and financing¹. In 2014, the Ministry of Social Affairs presented the Green Paper on Alternative Care introducing a systematic approach to the development of alternative care in Estonia that would ensure the welfare and rights of all children in care. Since mid-2016, the European Social Fund supported provision of the counselling services for foster and kinship carers and the training of managers and staff of residential care settings on the ground.

The Green Paper on Alternative Care aims to promote family-based care, high quality services and support to the care leavers in their transition to independence. In 2015, the Action Plan to improve quality of alternative care was developed by the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs together with the Estonian National Insurance Board and the National Institute for Health Development. The Action Plan will be implemented until at least 2020. Following the main strategic targets in the Green Paper on Alternative Care, the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs prepared amendments to the Social Welfare Act which come into force as of 1 January 2018. Under these amendments, management and funding of the entire system of alternative care services will be transferred under the responsibility of local authorities².

KEY DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS CHILD PROTECTION REFORM



IN 2017, EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND SUPPORTED PROVISION OF THE COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR FOSTER AND KINSHIP CARERS AS WELL AS TRAINING OF MANAGERS AND STAFF OF RESIDENTIAL CARE SETTINGS ON THE GROUND.

¹ In 2013, the Ministry of Social Affairs carried out a basic analysis of the concept of alternative care.

² In 2017, following general countrywide local administration reform, the number of local authorities has decreased from 220 to 79 in Estonia.

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU



TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE THAT EU-FUNDED INVESTMENTS ARE USED IN LINE WITH THE GREEN PAPER ON ALTERNATIVE CARE FOR CHILDREN AND THAT CIVIL SOCIETY IS ALWAYS MEANINGFULLY INCLUDED IN THE CONSULTATIONS.

There are 1,068 children in 38 residential care settings in Estonia. There is no difference between the terms institutional care and residential care³.

In the last years, the reform of child protection system has focused mainly on building small residential care settings (small group homes). However, the quality of care for children in these settings is not always sufficient. Small group homes are often built next to each other in the same location instead of functioning as the independent facilities located in various parts of the community. The new law which entered into force in 2017 reverses a maximum number of children per residential care unit or a small group home from target 6 to the original 8. Until the end of 2017, not all staff working in these units have been appropriately trained in order to meet specific needs of children and to understand the trauma which those children have been through.

Out of 1,536 children in family-based care in Estonia, only 205 (13%) are placed in foster care, which illustrates that foster care has been underdeveloped in Estonia. The responsibility of coordinating family-based placements lies solely within the responsibility of the local authorities in Estonia. Social workers often lack capacity and resources to support carers appropriately (depending on the municipality). In 2017, the European Social Fund (ESF) funds⁴ supported provision of services to guardianship families and adoptive parents which have been developed and delivered by different organisations (i.e. counselling via the internet or over the phone, individual psychological counselling, mentoring, different forms of group counselling). In 2016-2017, PRIDE preservice training, which is acceptable by the state as the main training for adoptive and foster families and is a prerequisite to start providing the service as a foster parent, has been comprehensively updated and brought in correspondence with Estonian context through the ESF measure “Improving the quality of alternative care”.

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 an alternative care setting up to the age of 18; in case of continuous studying, this support is provided until the end of the academic year when a young person turns 19. Starting from 2018, the state will provide support to a young person until he or she graduates from a full-time study in higher education (e.g. potentially graduating from a Master’s degree at the age of 24-25). This is a positive result as residential care providers can continue provide support which includes preparing care leavers for independent living. However, this does not apply to foster care leavers who do not continue studying or to young people leaving kinship care who receive state financial support until the age of 19 (depending on the decision and available financial resources in the local municipality). A care leavers’ support programme, which was run by an NGO until recently, was taken over by a state agency in 2016 and is now funded through the European Social Fund. However, there is no appropriate monitoring system to ensure the quality of services provided. There are also concerns regarding programme’s sustainability after the end of support from the Municipal Support Fund.

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE MEMBER STATE



TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE EU-FUNDED REFORMS THROUGH RING-FENCING OF THE NATIONAL BUDGET AND THAT THESE INTERVENTIONS ARE ALSO CONTINUED AFTER THE END OF THE FUNDING PERIOD.

³ e.g. Small Group Homes

⁴ Operational Programme for Cohesion Policy Funding 2014-2020 measure “Improving the quality of alternative care”



Lastekaitse Liit
Estonian Union for Child Welfare

OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN ESTONIA

Lastekaitse Liit (Estonian Union for Child Welfare) is a non-profit umbrella organisation that contributes to ensuring children’s rights and shaping a child-friendly society. Founded in 1988, the union participates actively in a variety of national and international networks. Member organisations operate throughout Estonia. Estonian Union for Child Welfare follows the four core principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in its activities: non-discrimination; adherence to the best interest of the child; the right to life, survival and development and the right of the child to be heard. To find out more visit www.lastekaitseliit.ee

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