



# OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

## HUNGARY



### COUNTRY FACT SHEET

For the last 30 years, deinstitutionalisation has been part of the Hungarian child welfare and protection system. During this time, there have been significant developments in family and community-based care. However, children in Hungary are still entering care principally because of poverty<sup>1</sup> and due to the lack of community-based preventive and early intervention services. 36,1 % of Hungarian children are living at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion and 40,000 to 50,000 children are regularly or occasionally starving. Hungary is one of the 12 Member States which have been recognised by the European Commission as a country with an identified need for deinstitutionalisation reforms. However, Hungary's Action Plan for Social Inclusion does not include measures for the transition from institutional to family and community-based care. Civil society in Hungary is concerned that the EU funds for deinstitutionalisation of children will not be used towards strengthening child welfare system, strengthening families, gatekeeping or reunification efforts but partly for the modernisation of children's homes or building smaller institutions.

The Act XXXI of 1997 on the Protection of Children and Guardianship clearly defines the need for family strengthening programmes and prevention services in order to ensure that children grow up in their biological families and, where this is not possible, that the family-based or family-like care has been prioritised. Despite this, according to the newest data of the Ombudsman, 30% of the children are separated from their families for financial reasons and 36,1% of children between the age of 0-17 are at risk of poverty and social exclusion<sup>2</sup>. The range of support services in the community are severely under-resourced and often non-existent, especially in rural, remote and poor areas where needs are the highest.

<sup>1</sup> Presentation of Dr. Zsuzsanna Györffy at the Child Rights Conference of the Ombudsman's Office, 16 November, 2017, Budapest

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion)

#### KEY DEVELOPMENT IN 2017



IN 2017, HUNGARY ISSUED TWO CALLS FOR PROPOSALS UNDER THE OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN'S DI THAT FOCUSED ON REPLACEMENT AND MODERNISATION OF CHILDREN'S HOMES.

## KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU



**TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE THAT THE STRUCTURAL FUNDS ARE USED IN LINE WITH THE ACT XXXI OF 1997 ON THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND GUARDIANSHIP. EU INVESTMENTS SHOULD BE USED TOWARDS PREVENTION OF SEPARATION OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY REINTEGRATION; WHERE NEEDED, THEY SHOULD SUPPORT QUALITY FAMILY AND COMMUNITY-BASED CARE ALTERNATIVES TO INSTITUTIONS.**

Local authorities tend to refer clients to institutional care – under the financial authority of national Government – rather than invest in community-based services. By the end of 2016, there were 20,551 children in the alternative care system of Hungary of whom 6,183 were living in institutions. According to the Act XXXI of 1997, all children under the age of 6 should have been deinstitutionalised by 2014. However, as of 31 December 2016, 541 children under the age of 3 were still living in institutions for children. Children at a very early age are often placed into institutions that are specifically designed for older children.

Although foster care is widespread – over 60% of children in alternative care lived in foster families in 2016 – only 6% of foster carers are formally employed and therefore professionally recruited, trained and supported to provide a high standard of care for children. According to a recent survey on foster care, many foster children and parents lack professional support, the allowances are very low and children with special needs do not get the services needed. Furthermore, there is no clear accountability even in cases of severe breakdown or suspected abuse and neglect.

There were 2,590 young people between the age of 18 and 24 in aftercare support in Hungary in the past two years. Due to recent changes, young adults are entitled to receive aftercare support only until the age of 21 if they do not attend higher education, whilst previously this age was 24. For care leavers in higher education, aftercare services are provided up to the age of 24 (in any form of education) and up to the age of 25 for universities and colleges.

As part of the deinstitutionalisation reform, Hungary opened 41 small group homes (SGHs) in 2015 to meet the needs of children deprived of parental care – a total of 200 SGHs across the country. Each small group home has a capacity to accommodate 12 children. It is of concern, however, that the majority of SGHs are located in remote areas with no transportation available for children to access basic services or mainstream education. There is a lack of special programs or adequate equipment to address children's complex developmental needs. Other factors such as proximity of a facility to the biological family are not taken into consideration and make reintegration even more difficult. In many instances, staff in the SGHs is underqualified, staff numbers fluctuate, supervision of staff is needed and the burnout rate is high. Given the low standard of care, children often run away. The prevalence of violence and substance abuse are also widespread.

The number of unaccompanied children has decreased since 2015 to about 850 but their needs have not been met. There are 3 detention centres for children in pre-trial detention or sentenced for correction, accommodating about 200 children; one more centre is under construction.

Hungary has recently issued two calls for proposals for children's deinstitutionalisation under the Operational Programmes focusing on the "replacement of children's homes, resettlement of children's homes and modernization of children's home". Despite the existing challenges regarding small group homes for children as described above, Hungarian government seems to continue investments in this form of alternative. The "Compass – Home for Children" (EFOP-2.1.1-16-2016-00009) project involves increasing child protection services from 600 to 800. The first infrastructure development under this project – a "20-person special home for children" that will consist of three housing units for the education of boys with various psychological problems – will be completed by 2019<sup>3</sup>.

3 Crowther N, Quinn G, Hillen Moore A, 2017. Opening up communities, closing down institutions: Harnessing the European Structural and Investment Funds

## KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE MEMBER STATE



**TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE THAT STRUCTURAL FUNDS ARE USED FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM FOCUSING ON HIGH QUALITY PREVENTION, FAMILY STRENGTHENING AND THE PROVISION OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY-BASED CARE FOR CHILDREN. STRUCTURAL FUNDS SHOULD NOT BE USED FOR RENOVATING RESIDENTIAL CARE SETTINGS AND FOR ESTABLISHING ISOLATED, REMOTE PLACEMENTS OF CHILDREN IN ANY FORM OF ALTERNATIVE CARE.**



## OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN HUNGARY

Family Child Youth Association since its foundation in 1993 has been supporting the rights, welfare, and protection of children and family strengthening, helping professionals, raising awareness, conducting research and publishing materials accordingly. Participating in several EU and domestic projects, providing training, adapting good practices, translating and publishing materials in different related areas. To find out more visit [www.csagyi.hu](http://www.csagyi.hu)

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](http://www.openingdoors.eu)