



# OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

[WWW.OPENINGDOORS.EU](http://WWW.OPENINGDOORS.EU)

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

## LITHUANIA



## 2016 COUNTRY FACT SHEET

Despite efforts to reform the child care system in Lithuania since 2007, the number of children in institutional care still remains high. The government has adopted Strategic Guidelines and an Action Plan to implement the de-institutionalisation process through the financial support of amongst others EU Structural and Investment Funds. It is essential that in the coming years the Lithuanian government speeds up the process to de-institutionalise its child protection system according to the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.

Official statistics show that a high number of children grow up in families at social risk. Although the Lithuanian legislative framework recognises the importance of developing services to strengthen families and prevent unnecessary placements into care, the preventative system remains underdeveloped. Support measures mainly focus on the provision of financial assistance and the inspection of physical conditions (e.g. food, clothing) through home visits. There is rarely a focus on supporting the emotional well-being of children and helping parents to build their parental skills and improving their relationship with their children. Key problems include a lack of social workers to support these families. Social workers do not receive appropriate training and often have to deal with too many cases.

Despite the fact that commitments have been made to implement DI processes for children, the child protection system still depends heavily on institutional care and quality alternative care solutions remain underdeveloped. A particular concern is that there is a lack of professional foster carers who are immediately available to take children in their care in emergency situations. There are also not enough foster carers who provide short-term care to children who can >>





**IN 2014, 19,665 CHILDREN LIVED  
IN FAMILIES AT SOCIAL RISK**

>> potentially be reunited with their biological family or who will be placed in an adoptive family. Young people leaving care are not adequately supported to transition to independent living. There are no legal requirements or standards to help young people during the leaving care process. Support is often limited to financial assistance.

The Lithuanian government has undertaken important steps to develop a policy framework to implement the DI process for children. It has adopted Strategic Guidelines on DI in 2012 and an Action Plan on DI in 2014. Importantly, the Lithuanian Civil Code was amended in 2015 and now explicitly prohibits the placement of children under the age of 3 in institutional care for longer than 3 months. Despite these policy changes, the implementation of the DI process remains very slow. There also seems to be a focus on improving physical conditions of residential care facilities rather than on creating innovative approaches to keep families together and to provide family and community based care solutions, such as professional foster care. It is foreseen that the DI process will be funded through EU Structural and Investment Funds and the State Budget.

## **FAST FACTS & LATEST DEVELOPMENTS**

- **THERE ARE CURRENTLY 3,276 CHILDREN LIVING IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE IN LITHUANIA.**
- **IT IS PARTICULARLY WORRYING THAT 359 CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 3 ARE PLACED IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE. IT IS KNOWN THAT INSTITUTIONAL CARE HAS DAMAGING EFFECTS ON THE COGNITIVE, BEHAVIOURAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF VERY YOUNG CHILDREN – EFFECTS THAT LAST INTO ADULTHOOD.**
- **IN 2014, 19,665 CHILDREN LIVED IN FAMILIES AT SOCIAL RISK.**
- **ALTHOUGH EFFORTS HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO REFORM THE CHILD PROTECTION IN LITHUANIA, THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE HAS NOT DECREASED SIGNIFICANTLY.**
- **LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF INSTITUTIONAL CARE ON CHILDREN HINDERS THE AMBITION TO EFFECTIVELY DEVELOP INNOVATIVE, QUALITY CARE SOLUTION AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES.**



### **OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN LITHUANIA**

SOS Children's Villages Lithuania is a member of the international association SOS Children's Villages International. In 1991 SOS Children's Villages first started to work in Lithuania to respond to the needs of children without or at risk of losing parental care.

Over 130 children have grown up in SOS families in Vilnius, and presently 105 children and youth without parental care have found a new home with SOS families or professional foster families of SOS CV Lithuania.

Furthermore, SOS CV Lithuania is supporting 280 families at social risk, and their 584 children with the specific aim to avoid family separation. SOS CV Lithuania advocates for the rights of children without or at risk of losing parental care in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. To find out more visit [www.sos-vaikukaimai.lt](http://www.sos-vaikukaimai.lt)

### **NATIONAL PARTNERS**

In Lithuania the campaign is supported by: VILTIS: Lithuanian Welfare Society for Persons with Mental Disability, Global Initiative in Psychiatry, Institute of Family Relations

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)