



OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

POLAND



COUNTRY FACT SHEET

Despite several positive developments over the last few years, measures for the transition from institutional to family-based care – as specified in the National Programme for the Prevention of Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020 – have not been implemented yet. The transition plans are not underpinned by a strategic vision or state goal for the closure of institutions, the awareness of them is generally low, and it is unclear to civil society organisations whether the programme remains active. There are resources available from European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund 2014-2020 to address the issues of social inclusion and poverty reduction in Poland. However, measures articulated in the National Strategic Policy Framework on Poverty Reduction (NSPF) and the Guidelines on the use of EU funds propose the re-organisation of institutional care provision, not a genuine shift to family and community-based care, in particular through establishment of small care settings hosting 14 children per unit. The Government's Office of European Funds organised broad consultations with civil society during the development of the Partnership Agreement and Operational Programmes in 2013. Since then, civil society organisations reported the lack of continuity in terms of their involvement, with more recent experience pointing to participation as tokenistic.

Poland's Partnership Agreement acknowledges that institutional care continues to dominate service provision and that such models often do not provide residents with the right to independence, limit or prevent their participation in community life and constitute solutions which are more costly than the services provided at the level of local communities. As a consequence, it is necessary to promote measures aimed at setting up and development of deinstitutionalised forms of care for children. However, there is a continuous support for institutional forms of care, in particular for children with a high degree of mental disability and children who suffer from diseases that require round-the-clock medical care and access to specialised medical devices.

KEY DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS CHILD PROTECTION REFORM



ACCORDING TO THE ACT ON FAMILY SUPPORT AND THE SYSTEM OF FOSTER CARE, FAMILY STRENGTHENING IS A PRIORITY IN POLAND.

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU



TAKE MEASURES TO MONITOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE DURING THE 2014-2020 BUDGET PERIOD AND TO ENSURE INVOLVEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY, IN PARTICULAR.

In 2015, there were 25,170 children with disabilities living in 467 institutions under the power of the Ministry of Health. Meanwhile, within the educational system, there are institutions where children stay for longer periods of time and have limited contact with family members – and thus, fulfilling the criteria of institutional care. These are, for example, Youth Sociotherapeutic Centers (hosting 4,224 young people), Youth Care Centers for delinquent youth (sheltering 4,754 young people), Special Care Centers (1,387 children), Special Educational Care Centers (12,980 children), Rehabilitation Care Centers (5,483 children) and Social Support Homes (3,672 children) in 2016. Some of the children living in educational institutions may be at the same time enrolled in children homes – this explains the difficulty to estimate the actual number of institutionalised children in Poland. This number, however, is much higher than the official number of children living in institutional care in Poland and may be similar to the number of children living in foster care.

In 2016, there were 70,336 children in the foster care system in Poland, out of whom 52,822 children (about 75%) were placed in various types of foster families, including kinship care, non-related and professional non-related foster care. According to the Act on Family Support and the System of Foster Care, family strengthening is considered a national priority in Poland. New services have been introduced such as family assistants, supportive families, day care services and social workers. These services, however, are underdeveloped and poorly financed. Furthermore, the methodology of social work is based on the “diagnostic” approach rather than on family strengthening or a solution-focused approach. The role of family assistants ends once the child is removed from his/her family; such practice reduces probability of child’s reintegration to his/her biological family.

In the last six years, the number of small group homes (SGHs) has tripled in Poland as a result of the introduction of the new Act on Family Support and the System of Foster Care. Under the law, each setting can host up to 14 children per unit. Many large institutions were divided into smaller semi-autonomous units. However, this division did not change the reality of children’s everyday life. In many places two to five new SGHs were built close to one another, which created new care complexes resembling previous large-scale institutions although located in more modern and smaller-sized buildings. Apart from foster families, there are also two types of “family group homes” which are also managed by foster parents. Their aim is to largely accommodate bigger sibling groups. In December 2016, there were 926 children living in such homes.

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE MEMBER STATE



TAKE ACTION TO CONTINUE DEVELOPMENT OF GOOD QUALITY, PLANNED AND PROFESSIONAL ALTERNATIVE CARE OPTIONS FOR CHILDREN.

OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN POLAND



Child and Family Foundation was established in January 2015 by child care and family support practitioners and specialists who had worked for the benefit of children for many years. The Foundation is focusing on the stable development of children in family environments. It acts for the benefit of children and families endangered with the internal crisis and separation of children, as well as for the reintegration of children placed in all forms of foster care. It aims at strengthening families based on their internal and external resources. It promotes professional family foster care. It accepts the existence of institutional care only as a form of temporary services for teenagers who could not be placed in foster families due to emotional disorders requiring very professional and therapeutic assistance. The activities of the Foundation focus on the introduction of innovative methodologies in the work with children and families, capacity building programs and on lobbying legislative changes aimed at strengthening community support for children and their relatives. To find out more visit www.fdir.pl

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