



# OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

## POLAND



## 2018 COUNTRY FACT SHEET

Poland is one of the 12 countries that have been identified by the European Commission with a specific need for deinstitutionalisation reforms<sup>1</sup>. Despite positive developments in the last years, there is still a long way for deinstitutionalisation reforms for children in Poland. Although the implementation of the National Programme for the Prevention of Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020 has already started, also with the support of EU funding, there are concerns that EU funding is being allocated towards the development of smaller institutional care settings rather than a broader deinstitutionalisation process. In addition, although foster care is one of the most important alternative care options for children in Poland, quality is not guaranteed and children are not adequately supported. Civil society calls for better monitoring of EU funding and better preventative measures in the communities to ensure that children are adequately protected in their biological families.

Preventative measures focusing on family strengthening have been at the centre of deinstitutionalisation reforms in Poland recently. Family Assistants Programme, 500+ Programme, Infant+ Programme, Mother 4+, Good Start Programme and Day Care Centres are some of the programmes launched to support families and prevent separation. Despite good intentions, these programmes have not always been successful. For example, the Family Assistants Programme (introduced by the Act on Family Support and the System of Foster Care of 2011) was launched to support families at risk. Currently, there are 3,976 family assistants, which indicates 1,8% increase compared to 2016. However, the work of family assistants focuses on life skills rather than emotional and attachment competencies needed to strengthen relationships in a family or to reintegrate children with their families. Our evidence shows that there is a need for capacity building of family assistants as well as coordination of their work with other specialists such as foster care specialists, psychologists etc.

Similarly, the newly established day care centres are envisaged to support children in vulnerable situations. However, they have low outreach and function currently only in 18% of all communes in Poland. Furthermore, the work of these centers should be broadened and focus on both children and parents to strengthen parental skills and prevent family separation.

<sup>1</sup> Common Provisions Regulation, ex-ante conditionality 9.1 on poverty reduction aiming at active inclusion

## KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU



**PROVIDE EFFECTIVE OVERSIGHT ON THE USE OF EU FUNDS, INCLUDING PROHIBITION OF INVESTMENTS FOR THE MAINTENANCE, CONSTRUCTION OR REFURBISHMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL CARE SETTINGS**

In 2017, the number of institutional care settings grew by 3.7% in comparison to 2016. This increase came as a result of the regulation that implied a reduction in the number of children in institutional care to 14 children per setting. Therefore, many new institutions were established either through the division of old, bigger institutions (but practically remaining under the same roof) or as part of the new group homes in some counties. The new settings are often built next to each other forming in this way larger complexes of institutions. European Structural and Investment Funds have been systematically used either for the refurbishment of old institutions or the construction of new homes.

In 2017, the total number of children living in institutional care settings was 41,200. It is of great concern that 3,200 children below the age of 10 years still live in institutional care and there is no plan to address this issue. In addition, there were approximately, 15,000

children with disabilities living in institutional care settings predominantly run by the Ministry of Education. In 2017, 12,077 children with various forms of disability attended special education due to the lack of inclusive education. 75% of these children actually live in special education boarding schools and have scarce contact with their birth families.

When it comes to foster care, in 2017, there were approximately 55,761 children in 37,201 foster families. The number of foster families dropped by 0.7% in comparison to 2016. This may be due to the lack of public awareness, inadequate professional support and low remuneration of foster families.

Apart from cities and counties such as Gdynia, Gdansk, Tarnowskie Gory and Warsaw, the professional guidance for foster families is of low quality, lacking support of psychologists and other specialists. Family foster care coordinators are overloaded as each of them supervise up to 15 foster families. Another challenge for foster carers in Poland is the reunification aspect of children with their biological families. Often when a child is placed to a foster family, he/she stays with foster parents for several years and contact with biological family is limited to a minimum, taking place in the offices of local family support centres. As a result, foster families and biological families are in conflict and the reunification of children with their biological families almost impossible. Following these developments, civil society calls for an update of the National Strategy on Family Foster Care as well as legislative changes.

## KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE MEMBER STATE



**TAKE MEASURES TO DEVELOP THE NATIONAL STRATEGY ON FOSTER CARE THAT WILL RECONSIDER THE ROLE OF FOSTER CARERS AS THE CRUCIAL PART OF FAMILY STRENGTHENING AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAMMES**

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