



OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

BELGIUM



COUNTRY FACT SHEET

The majority of children deprived of parental care in Belgium are placed in institutional care. Children with disabilities are among those who are the most discriminated against. There is no deinstitutionalisation (DI) strategy for children living in institutions¹. Deinstitutionalisation in Belgium is considered as an austerity measure, and stable employment of professionals working within institutions is a priority for the state. Due to the influx of unaccompanied migrant and refugee children, more institutions have been now opened or extended.

Belgium is organised into three communities: the French, the Flemish and the German community. As a result, there is no centralised data on institutional care; it is mostly either unavailable or difficult to obtain.

In 2013, there were 5,583² children in institutional care in the French community and approximately 2,031 of these children had a disability. 372 children were between the age of 0-3, however, this figure does not include 275 babies and children placed in hospitals³.

In 2015, there were 7,917 children in institutional care in Flanders of whom 7,286 were those with disabilities and 466 children were below the age of 5. There are also 8 boarding schools for children with disabilities in Flanders. Children with disabilities are often enrolled in the boarding schools during the week and are then transferred to the other institutions at the weekend. According to the data available, there are 4 institutions in Flanders sheltering these children during the weekends⁴.



**IN BELGIUM, THERE IS NO
STRATEGY FOR
DEINSTITUTIONALISATION**

¹ There is only a mental health reform called project 107

² Figure does not include unaccompanied refugee and migrant children

³ http://www.lacode.be/IMG/pdf/Analyse_synthese_enfants_places_a_l_hospital.pdf

⁴ <https://issuu.com/kinderrechten/docs/a9c39559-b9a1-4be1-9bef-7c9ada4bc0dd/3?e=6593254/5817228>



AS MANY AS 92% OF CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE IN BELGIAN FLANDERS ARE DISABLED

>> Although community-based care does exist in Belgium, the number of children in community-based settings is unknown. There are 43 Small Group Homes in Wallonia and 8 in Flanders, however, there is no information about the quality of care provided in these settings.

There were 9,697 children in both foster and kinship care in 2014 in Belgium⁵: 3,639 children in Wallonia, 6,058 children in Flanders and 59 children in the German-speaking community. In Wallonia Brussels, however, the foster care figures haven't evolved in the last 3 years. More than 332 children in foster care in Flanders are in need of further support. 7,000 children are on the waiting list for services and support to meet their needs and the level of disability.

Not only institutions are not closing in Belgium, but more are opening due to the influx of unaccompanied migrant and refugee children. In a span of a few months in 2016, three new institutions have been opened or have been extended to accommodate unaccompanied migrant and refugee children. There is also a lack of foster care options in Wallonia Brussels for these children⁶.

The fact that deinstitutionalisation is still associated with the low cost alternatives presents the biggest challenge for DI reforms in Belgium. Given the large number of people working in residential care in Belgium, this sector is viewed as a priority

for the state due to steady employment. DI is often considered as an austerity measure. Another obstacle preventing implementation of the DI reforms is perception that institutional care supports family reunification whereas foster care does not. The argument being that the stable relationships formed between foster parents and a child may become an obstacle to child's reintegration into the family.

⁵ The percentage of kinship care families and foster care families is 60%-40% in Flanders and 75%-25% in Wallonia
⁶ <https://madrane.be/accueil-des-mineurs-etrangers-non-accompagnes-mena-soutien-a-trois-nouvelles-structures/>

FAST FACTS & LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

- **BETWEEN 2013 AND 2014 APPROXIMATELY 13,500 CHILDREN WERE IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE IN BELGIUM**
- **OUT OF 7,917 CHILDREN LIVING IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE IN FLANDERS IN 2015, 7,286 OF CHILDREN WERE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**
- **IN WALLONIA BRUSSELS 275 CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 6 WERE PLACED IN HOSPITALS IN 2015, DUE TO THE LACK OF AVAILABLE PLACES IN ALTERNATIVE CARE SETTINGS**
- **THERE WERE 1,965 UNACCOMPANIED AND REFUGEE CHILDREN IN BELGIUM IN 2015**
- **DUE TO THE RECENT INFLUX OF UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN, THREE NEW INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES HAVE BEEN OPENED AND EXTENDED TO ACCOMMODATE THOSE CHILDREN IN WALLONIA BRUSSELS**

Do you have recent information on this topic? Please feel free to contact us at laporteouverte.info@gmail.com



OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN BELGIUM

La Porte Ouverte is the only association for foster families in the Wallonia-Brussels region, Belgium. Its mission is to serve 'the best interest of the child' in all foster care situations. La Porte Ouverte advocates for the rights of children in foster care, it supports foster families by building the capacity of foster parents, encouraging peer-to-peer learning and sharing best practices. They also encourage the creation and run activities for foster care children and their families. To find out more visit <http://laporteouverte.eu/>

NATIONAL PARTNERS

In Belgium the campaign is supported by the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) and Equal Rights for Each Person with Disability (GRIP).

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 15 European countries. For more information go to www.openingdoors.eu