

OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

POLAND



COUNTRY FACT SHEET

During recent years Poland has reformed its institutional care system. EU Structural Funds have been used to provide family and community-based care and the idea of deinstitutionalisation has become a popular term in Poland. However, the aim of DI in Poland is understood as reducing the numbers of children living in institutions rather than providing quality care for children. In 2015, there were 50,308 children living in institutional care in Poland among which 25,170 were children with disabilities living in 467 institutions under the power of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, 5,621 children with behavioural problems in 93 institutions under the Ministry of Education and 1,530 in 32 “correctional centres” under the Ministry of Justice. Apart from the Act on Family Support and the System of Foster Care there is no national action plan or strategy for deinstitutionalisation in Poland. The Child and Family Foundation is strongly lobbying for one.

According to the Act on Family Support and the System of Foster Care, family strengthening is a priority in Poland. New services have been introduced such as family assistants, supportive families¹, day care services, social workers etc. However, the services are underdeveloped and poorly financed. Furthermore, the methodology of social work is based on the “diagnostic” approach rather than on a family strengthening approach or a solution-focused approach. The family assistants’ role also ends once the child is removed from his/her family, a practice which reduces the probability of the child’s reintegration to his/her family.

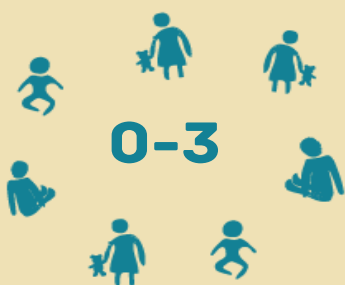
In the last 5 years the number of Small group homes² (SGHs) has tripled in Poland, as a result of the introduction of the new Act on Family Support and the System of Foster Care, which was responsible for ensuring the establishment of units for no more than 14 children. Many large institutions were divided into smaller semi-autonomous units. However, this division did not change the reality of children’s everyday life. In many places 2 to 5 new SGHs were built close to one another, which created new care complexes resembling the previous large institutions although located in more modern and smaller buildings.

¹ Neighbours or relatives supporting the family at risk.

² In Poland there is no separate statistical data related to Small group homes. Their numbers are included within the number of other child care institutions.



**25,170 OUT OF 50,308 CHILDREN
IN INSTITUTIONS ARE CHILDREN
WITH DISABILITIES**



The Act on Family Support and the System of Foster Care also secured the establishment of 6 new regional institutions for 45 children with serious behavioural problems. The construction of these facilities was financed by the state budget. The caregivers employed in SGHs are required to have a Master's degree in pedagogy or social sciences, however they are usually not specifically trained to work in SGHs. Such training is provided by NGOs, specialised in the field to only some of these facilities.

With regard to family-based care there were 56,986 children in foster care and 31,951 children in kinship care in 2015. During recent years the number of foster care families has decreased due to many scandals published in the media, lack of support, bureaucratic requirements and the monitoring performed by foster care coordinators which is often viewed as obtrusive by foster carers. In addition children's needs are more complex, there is very little specialised support, very few in-service trainings, and almost no psychological supervision provided to foster families.

FAST FACTS & LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

- **50,308 CHILDREN ARE LIVING IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE OF WHOM 25,170 ARE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND 19,517 LIVE IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF CARE INSTITUTIONS MANAGED BY THE SOCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM.**
- **1,300 CHILDREN AGED 0-3 YEARS ARE LIVING IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE ALTHOUGH IT IS ILLEGAL.**
- **88,937 CHILDREN WERE LIVING IN FAMILY-BASED CARE IN 2015**
- **THIS YEAR THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUNDS OPERATIONAL PROGRAMS IN THE MAZOVIAN REGION, WHICH INCLUDES THE CITY OF WARSAW AND THE SILESIAN REGION ARE AIMED AT PROMOTING THE DEINSTITUTIONALISATION OF THE SYSTEM. HOWEVER THESE FUNDS MAY ALSO BE USED TO SUPPORT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW SMALL GROUP HOMES ACCOMMODATING 14 CHILDREN PER HOME.**
- **THE CHILD AND FAMILY FOUNDATION SET UP A WORKING GROUP OF LEADING SPECIALISTS IN THE FIELD WHICH PREPARED LEGISLATIVE CHANGES AIMED TO IMPLEMENT DI. THE GROUP PREPARED RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE MINISTRY OF FAMILY, LABOUR AND SOCIAL POLICY'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS DEINSTITUTIONALISATION HAS BEEN POSITIVE, HOWEVER BUDGETARY RESTRAINTS ARE OFTEN CITED AS AN OBSTACLE TO IMPLEMENTING SUCH CHANGES.**



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