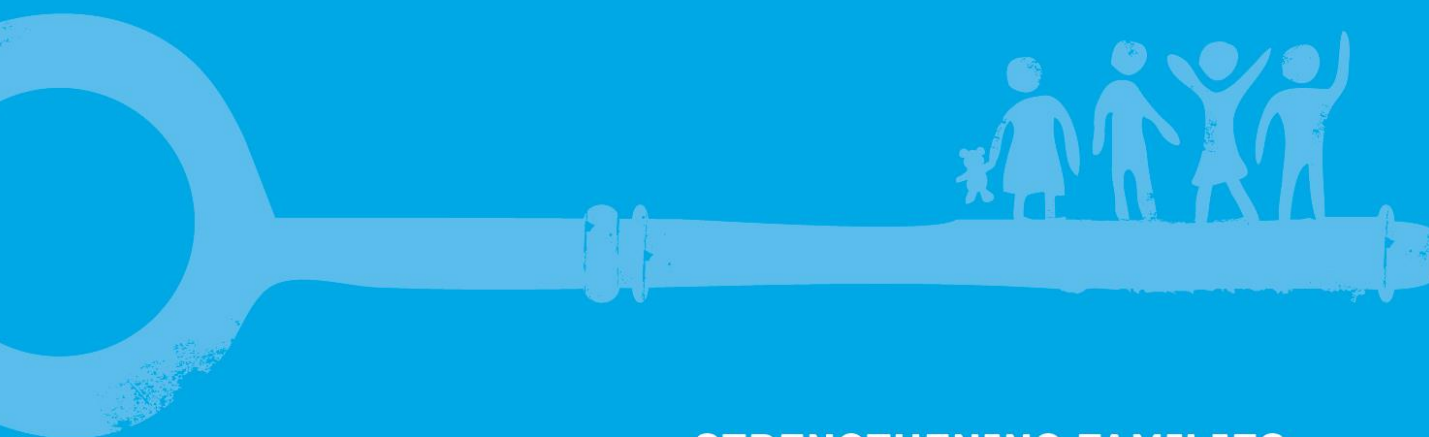


# **OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN**

**Mapping institutional and residential care  
for children in Greece**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



**STRENGTHENING FAMILIES.  
ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.**

## Research context, aims & methodology

This mapping exercise has been carried out by Katerina Nanou of Roots Research Center in Greece, with support from Vodafone and partners of the Opening Doors campaign - Hope and Homes for Children UK and Eurochild. The research was carried out between January and August 2015 and refers to the situation of children in institutions in 2014.

The researcher identified 85 children's institutions or residential care<sup>1</sup> settings in Greece. The mapping is based on the results of a questionnaire survey sent to 76 respondents<sup>2</sup>, of which 62 replied to all 19 questions and 8 sub-questions. For the remaining 14 respondents, the researcher received partial or no answers and therefore supplemented the data with information gathered from secondary sources, such as the Centre for Social Welfare, Prefecture of Attica or the institutions' websites.

## About the Opening Doors for Europe's Children campaign

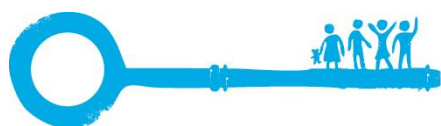
The Opening Doors for Europe's Children campaign is jointly coordinated by Eurochild and Hope and Homes for Children UK. It operates at EU level and in 12 countries across Europe, and calls on the EU and national governments to prioritise the transition from institutional to family-based care. In Greece the campaign is coordinated by Roots Research Centre and supported by several other partners.

See: [www.openingdoors.eu](http://www.openingdoors.eu)

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<sup>1</sup> In its working paper adopted in October 2012, Eurochild refers to institutional care as "care settings that are not built around the needs of the child and display characteristics typical of an institutional culture (depersonalisation, rigidity of routine, block treatment, social distance, dependence, lack of accountability)." The mapping also includes some residential care settings which may be considered compliant with the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children in so far as they are small, organised around the rights and needs of children and reflect as close as possible a family or small group situation. However these are the minority of the sample. The survey does not include children in emergency residential care settings such as facilities for unaccompanied minors.

<sup>2</sup> SOS Children's Villages (which operate 7 villages, homes and youth houses around Greece) and the Ark of the World (which operates 4 child protection settings around Greece) replied to the questionnaire with total numbers for all their settings/units, rather than for each one separately, which reduced the sample of the study to 76 respondents.



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## Key Findings

### **1) Institutions remain the predominant form of care for children in the child protection system and for children with disabilities, even for very young children**

During the year 2014, an estimated 2,825 children and young people were in institutional care, compared to only 309 children in foster care. Four of the institutions accommodate around 100 children. Only 2 appear to have fewer than 10. Most of the institutions are estimated to house around 30 children. Despite all the international literature documenting the negative consequences of placing children under three into institutional care, 182 children in institutional care are babies and toddlers aged 0-3.

### **2) Institutions are mostly privately run and there is no public supervision of quality**

Only 28 of the 85 institutions are publicly run – approximately one third. The remaining 57 are privately run, either by for-profit (30), NGOs (13), churches (6) or other associations (8). Only a few institutions applied quality standards such as Quality4Children<sup>3</sup>, and there is no public supervision of private children's institutions.

### **3) The three main reasons for children's placement into institutional care were reported as being disability, neglect and abuse**

Of the 2,825 children in institutional care, 883 of them had a disability. Respondents to the questionnaire survey reported disability as one of the main reasons for children's placement in institutions.

A majority of children in institutions are Greek, although children from many other nationalities have been placed through the child protection system – primarily Albanian, Bulgarian, Romanian, and Nigerian.

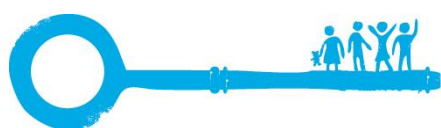
### **4) While family reunification, adoption or foster care is a priority for some institutions, many children can expect to spend the rest of their childhood and even early adulthood in institutional care**

In 2014 respondents reported that 124 children left the institutions to be reunited with their biological family. Over the same time period, 84 children were adopted from the 11 publicly- and privately-run institutions that had adoption programmes, and only 32 children were placed into foster care.

Relatively few young people left institutional care to become independent upon reaching majority (69). By contrast an estimated 760 young people living in children's institutions are

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<sup>3</sup> Quality4Children seeks to improve the situation of children without parental care and supports their development by means of out-of-home care quality standards.



over the age of 18, reflecting the lack of support and preparation for young people leaving care and transitioning to independence.

## **5) Many institutions rely heavily on private funding and a volunteer workforce**

Several institutions reported that their most important source of funding was donations and private sponsorship. A majority of respondents also reported that they rely significantly on volunteers to support salaried professionals, with an estimated 26 volunteers per institution on average. Some institutions appear to be run almost entirely with the support of volunteers. When asked about the most pressing financial needs, most respondents referred to the need to maintain or upgrade buildings and infrastructure rather than staffing or professional training.

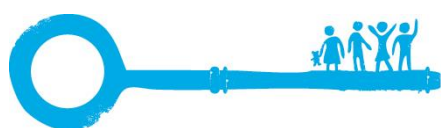
## **Key recommendations**

### **1) We urge the Greek government to develop a national strategy and implementation plan to reform its child protection system based on international standards and in consultation with key stakeholders**

The 2009 UN Guidelines on children in alternative care and accompanying tools provide the foundation for national reforms. The government should also refer to the guidelines developed by the European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care. The EU structural funds should be used to catalyse reforms through strategic investments in community-based services and high quality care alternatives.

### **2) As part of its strategy to transition from institutional care to family- and community-based care, a number of actions should be prioritised:**

- Support the transition of out of institutions for children under the age of three, including the implementation a moratorium on new placements
- Undertake an in-depth assessment of all children in institutional care and their families in order to inform the development of a transition plan, including identifying funding need for transition
- Support the development of a coordinated community based gatekeeping and the development of community based services to strengthen families
- Support the development of high quality alternative care options, including changing the legislation for foster care to reduce the procedural burden and allow direct placement (rather than being first placed in an institution).
- Strengthen the case management system and establish a national data base

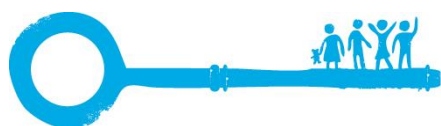


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**3) We recommend Government, NGOs and Civil Society coordinate action including raising awareness of the general public on the harm of institutional care, and the alternatives available to families and children without parental care.**



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