



**OPENING DOORS
FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN**

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

CROATIA



2018 COUNTRY FACT SHEET

Although the process of deinstitutionalisation (DI) has started in Croatia in 2006, the transition from institutional to family- and community- based forms of care shows slow signs of progress. This is mainly due to a lack of commitment from the State, a lack of know-how in the area of community-based social services by the state providers, prejudices against foster care and inefficient use of EU funding to support DI reforms.

In December 2018, a new Operational Plan for deinstitutionalisation for the period of 2018-2020 was released by the Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy. The 2018-2020 Action Plan will follow 2011-2016(2018) Master Plan on Deinstitutionalisation to continue the process of transformation, expanding the transition to new user groups to ensure regional equity, accessibility of services and social inclusion. Despite the renewed commitment of the government towards deinstitutionalisation reform, there are concerns about the use of EU funds allocated for DI reform, as well as their efficient oversight.

According to the 2017 Report of the Children's Ombudsman in Croatia¹, poverty is the main factor that separates children from their families. Evidence in the report also shows that the number of children in institutions has increased, that children under the age of seven are still being institutionalised, and that there is insufficient number of foster families and community-based services available, especially in the rural areas.

In 2017, there were 818 children living in homes for children without parental care in comparison to 796 children in 2016. It is of worry that the number of children between 0-7 years of age in institutional care had also increased, despite moratorium on their institutionalisation². In 2016 their number totalled 189 children, compared with 231 children in 2017³. There were 268 children with disabilities living in institutions for children and people with disabilities in 2017 compared to 340 children in 2016⁴. The majority of children (63%) have multiple disabilities, with more than half of them having a low social and economic status. The average >>

¹ <http://djete.hr/en/izvjesca/izvjesca-o-radu-pravobranitelja-za-djecu/#>

² According to Croatian legislation, children under the age of 3 can only be placed in institutions in exceptional circumstances and for the shortest period of time

³ 2017 Annual Report of Ombudsman for Children in Croatia

⁴ Statistics from the Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy, December 2018

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU



TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE THAT THE MONITORING MECHANISMS ON THE USE OF THE EU FUNDS ARE IN PLACE, IN LINE WITH 2018-2020 ACTION PLAN FOR DEINSTITUTIONALISATION

>> duration of placement for these children lasts four years. 30% of children are placed in the institutions situated further than 150 kilometres away from home and 40% of children live in the institutions more than 100 km away from home.

There are 356 children with emotional and behavioural disorders living in 10 homes for children with behavioural problems and 2 reformatories. These homes are based in local communities and children follow mainstream education. The recently adopted 2018-2020 Plan on Deinstitutionalisation states that the goal of a 40% reduction in placements for children and youth with behavioural problems, set in the 2011-2016 (2018) Master Plan for DI, has not been reached. As of December 2018, the number of children and young people with behavioural problems living in institutions have decreased by 16.5%⁵.

Due to delays with the Family Law which regulates the adoption procedures, national adoption of children in Croatia has significantly declined. Out of 500 children who have been put up for adoption in 2017, only 78 children were

adopted nationally. At the same time, only 1 child was adopted from the largest home for children without adequate parental care when the annual average number of adoptions for this institution is 30 children⁶.

Family-type homes and organised housing are two forms of quality community-based care provided to children deprived of parental care and children with disabilities in Croatia. The Law on Social Welfare defines a family home as a service for 4 to 10 children who live with the family of a service provider. In reality, family home is a foster care setting for a larger number of children with obligatory employment of the professional caregiver.

Although foster care placements have increased in Croatia, there is still insufficient number of foster families across the country. Support services for foster families are rare or non-existent in some areas. The new campaign “Every child needs a family” led by UNICEF in collaboration with Croatian government and the Forum for Quality Foster Care aims to increase the number of caring foster families for children without parental care. It has a particular focus on foster care provision for children at an early age⁷.

When it comes to unaccompanied and separated migrant children, those who are younger than 14 years old are placed in homes for children without adequate parental care. Children between 14-16 years of age are placed in homes for children with emotional and behavioural disorders, and those above 16 years of age are placed in reception centres together with adults. Civil society in Croatia is particularly concerned regarding this unequal treatment of children that has resulted in 133 escapes from institutions or reception centres in 2017⁷. To address this issue, a letter of complaint was sent to the Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy.

The deinstitutionalisation process in Croatia is mainly financed from EU funds, such as the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, the national budget, local authorities budget, private foundations and the World Bank. Civil society is concerned about the efficiency of EU funding, as there are delays in using the EU funds for deinstitutionalisation reforms. In addition, although the Croatian government simplified application procedures for EU funding last year, the documentation for European Social Fund projects remains complicated and not in line with the GDPR.

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE MEMBER STATE



TAKE MEASURES TO AVOID THE DELAYS WHEN ALLOCATING FUNDING TO IMPLEMENT THE DEINSTITUTIONALISATION REFORM IN CROATIA. FUNDING SHOULD BE AVAILABLE TO NGOS AND TRANSPARENT EVALUATION PROCEDURES SHOULD BE IN PLACE

5 <https://mdomsp.gov.hr/UserDocImages/Vijesti2018/Proces%20transformacije%20i%20deinstitucionalizacije/Plan%202018-2020.pdf>

6 “Adopta”, CSO for adoption

7 2017 Annual Report of Ombudsman for Children in Croatia



OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN CROATIA

FICE Croatia aims to improve life quality for children, youth, families but also professionals and communities. Special focus of its work is on children and youth in risk, as well as children and youth in alternative care. Through activities of support, experience and knowledge exchange, networking and advocating, FICE Croatia tries to strengthen and improve social services and realise its aims. To find out more visit www.fice.hr

NATIONAL PARTNERS

SOS dječje selo Hrvatska (SOS Children’s Village Croatia), Udruga za kreativan socijalni rad, Udruga Ardura, Forum za kvalitetno udomiteljstvo – udomitelji za djecu, Igra – udruga za pružanje rehabilitacijsko-edukacijske i psiho-socijalno-pedagoške pomoći, Suncokret-OLJIN, Iskra – centar za edukaciju i savjetovanja, Most, Centar za pružanje usluga u zajednici “Izvor” Selce, AMBIDEKSTER KLUB.

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