



**OPENING DOORS  
FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN**

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**STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.**

**ESTONIA**



## **2018 COUNTRY FACT SHEET**

Estonia took important strides towards the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care. In 2014, the Ministry of Social Affairs released the Green Paper on Alternative Care introducing a systematic approach to the provision of alternative care in Estonia that would ensure the welfare and the rights of all children in care. Since mid-2016, the European Social Fund has supported the deinstitutionalisation reform through implementation of the “Improving the Quality of Alternative Care” programme. It includes provision of counselling services for foster and kinship carers, training of employees in residential care settings and local authorities, and practical support to those working with youth care leavers and the care-leavers themselves. Furthermore, it is set in the law that family-based care should be the first option for children in alternative care and that it should be promoted by local municipalities.

In 2017, there were 968 children in 40 residential care settings<sup>1</sup> in Estonia<sup>2</sup>. This number has slightly decreased compared to 1,013 children in residential care in 2016. Over the past years, the child protection system reform has focused primarily on building small residential care settings (small group homes). However, the quality of care for children in these settings, although continuously improving, has not been sufficient enough. Small group homes are often built next to each other in the same location instead of functioning as independent facilities in various parts of community. To support staff members working with children in the residential care, a study on the practical needs of the caregivers in residential care was developed and an obligatory training programme was

<sup>1</sup> There are ~40 child welfare residential care settings in Estonia; their size varies and most of them function as small group homes. For more information, see <http://andmebaas.stat.ee/Index.aspx?lang=en&SubSessionId=95fd544a-3840-4a53-a972-d65ca81cf70b&themetreid=6>

<sup>2</sup> In Estonia, there is no difference between the terms institutional care and residential care

## KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU



**TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE THAT THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM AND NEW SERVICES CONTINUE TO BE SUSTAINED AFTER THE EU-FUNDED INTERVENTION HAS ENDED**

introduced in 2016 with support from the European Social Fund programme “Improving the quality of alternative care”. The new training programme applies a child-centred approach, and the care-givers learn how trauma impacts child’s growth and development and how to respond. By mid-2017, 450 staff members from residential homes for children received individual or group counselling and training.

Out of 1,560 children in family-based care<sup>3</sup> in Estonia, only 169 (11%) are placed in foster care, which illustrates that foster care has been underdeveloped in Estonia. The responsibility of coordinating family-based placements lies solely within local authorities in Estonia. To increase the number of children in foster care and to improve the quality of care provided, the countrywide register of foster families is expected to be

launched. The social insurance board will ensure the quality of foster care across the country by providing assessment and registration to all foster carers. In addition, local authorities will have to support foster parents either through material support or through remuneration. Moreover, an awareness raising campaign started in November 2018 with the aim to recruit more foster parents. As part of the campaign, fifteen theatre plays will take place across Estonia, explaining the needs of children without parental care and various options how to support them.

There is a disparity in state financial support provided to young people leaving either residential or foster/kinship care. The state provides young people with accommodation in an alternative care setting up to the age of 18. In case of continuous studying, this support is provided until the end of the academic year when a young person turns 19. Since 2018, further support for those care leavers who pursue full-time higher education until the age of 25. However, these measures only apply to young people from residential care and not to foster/kinship care leavers (for whom state financial support stops at the age of 19 if they’re enrolled in full-time education or at the age of 18 if they are not). To support the transition from care to independent living, a new ESF-funded project has launched, including training of care leavers aged 16-19 and practitioners working with youth care leavers<sup>4</sup>. An informal training programme will support development of social and communication skills of young care leavers between 16-19 years of age.

## KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE MEMBER STATE



**TAKE MEASURES TO CONTINUE TO PROMOTE FAMILY-BASED CARE AND SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL FOSTER FAMILIES, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO PROVIDE EMERGENCY FOSTER CARE FOR CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 3**

<sup>3</sup> Kinship care

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Lapsed\\_ja\\_pered/Asendushooldus/toolkit\\_leaving\\_and\\_aftercare.pdf](https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Lapsed_ja_pered/Asendushooldus/toolkit_leaving_and_aftercare.pdf)



**Lastekaitse Liit**  
Estonian Union for Child Welfare

## OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN ESTONIA

Lastekaitse Liit (Estonian Union for Child Welfare) is a non-profit umbrella organisation that contributes to ensuring children’s rights and shaping a child-friendly society. Founded in 1988, the union participates actively in a variety of national and international networks. Member organisations operate throughout Estonia. Estonian Union for Child Welfare follows the four core principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in its activities: non-discrimination; adherence to the best interest of the child; the right to life, survival and development and the right of the child to be heard. To find out more visit [www.lastekaitseliit.ee](http://www.lastekaitseliit.ee)

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)