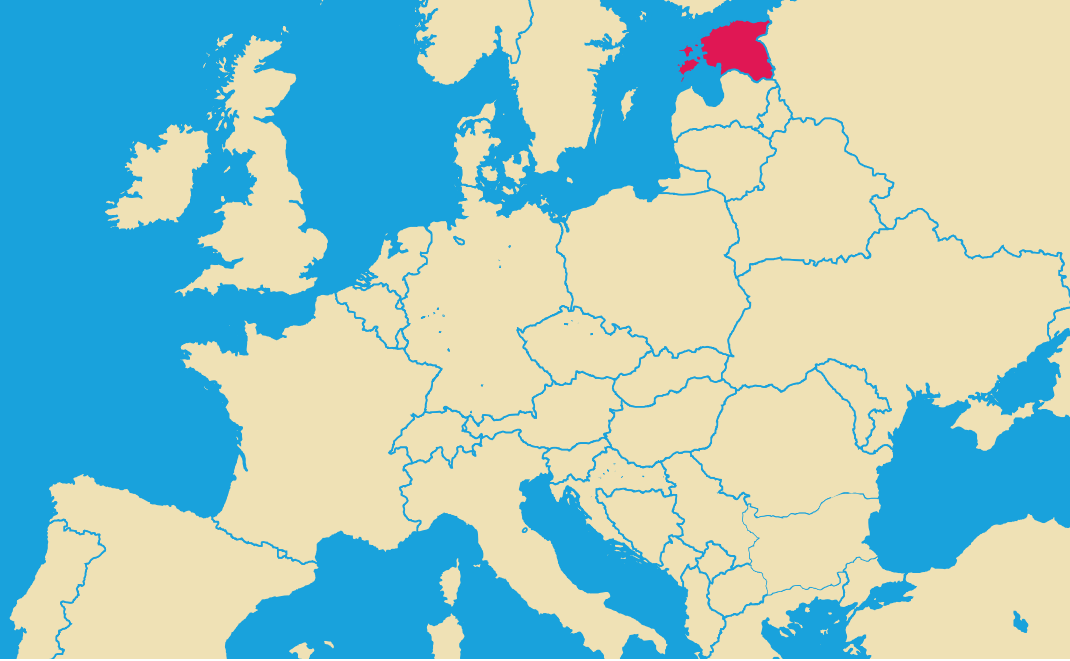


OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

ESTONIA



COUNTRY FACT SHEET

In 2004, the state in Estonia began transforming all large institutions into small units. This process should be finished by 2017. However, the new law which was to be brought into force in 2017 reducing the number of children to 6 per residential care or small group home unit was reversed back to the original number of 8 children. The Estonian government stated this was not yet financially possible to achieve for state small group homes. Small group homes are not providing quality care in Estonia as they are not adequately equipped, the staff have not been trained and the homes are regarded as simply replacements for old institutions.

The deinstitutionalisation reform in Estonia focuses on building small residential care settings (Small Group Homes). However, SGHs are not always built and equipped to provide quality care for children. Often, Small group homes are built next to one another in one location and not as independent facilities located in different areas in the community. Staff have not undergone training or obtained an additional qualification (in the case they worked in an institution before) on the specific care skills required in order to meet the specific needs of children and understand the trauma children have been through. This is due to the lack of educational courses in general for the alternative care sector within the country.

By the end of 2015, there were 1,068 children in 38 residential care settings in Estonia including 37 children with severe physical disabilities placed by their parents, indicating the absence of support services available to parents in order to help them care for their children at home. Institutional care in Estonia is defined as residential care. There is no difference made between the two. This number therefore refers to both large institutions and community care settings such as small group homes. It is of great concern that there is no legislation in Estonia which prevents placing children aged 0-3 years into a residential care setting, a practice which takes place quite often in Estonia and is not monitored. Furthermore there is no legislation which limits the period of time 0-3 year olds can be kept in temporary out-of-family care. At the end of 2015 there were 45 children aged 0-3 years in residential care settings¹.

**FROM 1,486 CHILDREN IN FAMILY
BASED CARE 205 WERE PLACED
IN FOSTER CARE FAMILIES**



¹ Number indicates infants aged 0-2 years until they reach the age of 3 years



YOUNG PEOPLE IN FOSTER CARE STOP RECEIVING SUPPORT WHEN THEY REACH 18 YEARS OF AGE

By the end of 2015, there were 1,486 children in family-based care in Estonia. However, only 205 of these children were placed in foster care families, illustrating that foster care is an area which has not at all been developed in Estonia. Although, there is a policy framework that regulates family-based forms of care, it is not properly controlled and only focuses on the physical environment in a family-based setting and not on the developmental needs of the child. The responsibility of coordinating family-based care lies solely with the local authorities in Estonia and social workers lack the knowledge as well as the resources to be able to support carers appropriately. As a result, foster and kinship carers do not receive adequate or sometimes any support. Kinship care has not been defined or regulated properly and is included under laws related to the legal guardianship of children by those who are not part of the child's family.

With regard to young people leaving care, there is a disparity in the financial support given from the state budget to residential care and foster care/kinship care leavers. The state provides young people with the opportunity to live in a residential care setting until they graduate from their studies – e.g. potentially until they graduate from their Master's degree if they study full-time (until the age of 24-25 years). This is a positive result as residential care providers can continue to provide support to care leavers, which includes preparing them for independent living. However, this does not apply to foster care/kinship care leavers for whom state financial support stops at the age of 19 and when they are in full-time education. Otherwise financial support stops at the age of 18 and no additional financial support is provided to help young people continue their studies.

FAST FACTS & LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

- **IN 2015 1,486 CHILDREN WERE IN FAMILY-BASED CARE (FOSTER AND LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP/ KINSHIP CARE) IN ESTONIA. ONLY 205 OF THESE CHILDREN WERE IN FOSTER CARE FAMILIES.**
- **THERE ARE 1,068 CHILDREN IN 38 RESIDENTIAL CARE SETTINGS IN ESTONIA. THIS NUMBER INCLUDES BOTH INSTITUTIONS AND SMALL GROUP HOMES.**
- **THERE ARE 430 CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES LIVING IN RESIDENTIAL CARE SETTINGS.**
- **FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING RESIDENTIAL CARE ENDS WHEN THEY FINISH THEIR STUDIES WHEREAS FOR FOSTER CARE AND KINSHIP CARE LEAVERS STATE SUPPORT ENDS AT THE AGE OF 19 AND ONLY IF THEY ARE COMMITTED IN FULL TIME EDUCATION.**
- **THE NEW LAW WHICH WAS TO BE BROUGHT INTO FORCE IN 2017 TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN TO 6 PER RESIDENTIAL CARE SETTING OR SMALL GROUP HOME, WAS REVERSED BACK TO THE ORIGINAL NUMBER OF 8 CHILDREN.**
- **A CARE LEAVERS' SUPPORT PROGRAMME WHICH WAS RUN BY AN NGO UNTIL RECENTLY WAS TAKEN OVER IN 2016 BY A STATE AGENCY AND FUNDED THROUGH THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND. HOWEVER, EXPERIENCED NGOS IN THE FIELD ARE NOT PERMITTED TO APPLY FOR SERVICE PROVISION DUE TO STRICT AND INADEQUATE REQUIREMENTS IN THE CALL FOR PROPOSAL.**

OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN ESTONIA

Igale Lapsele Pere has a vision to create positive and lasting difference in the system of alternative care for children and young people and unite foster carers across the country.

To find out more visit www.kasupered.ee



NATIONAL PARTNERS

In Estonia the campaign is supported by: Child Advocacy Chamber Coalition Members (Lapse Huvikaitse Koda), EATL – Association of Alternative Care Workers (Eesti Asenduskodu Töötajate Liit), Lighthouse Foundation (SA Tule torn)

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