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.
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