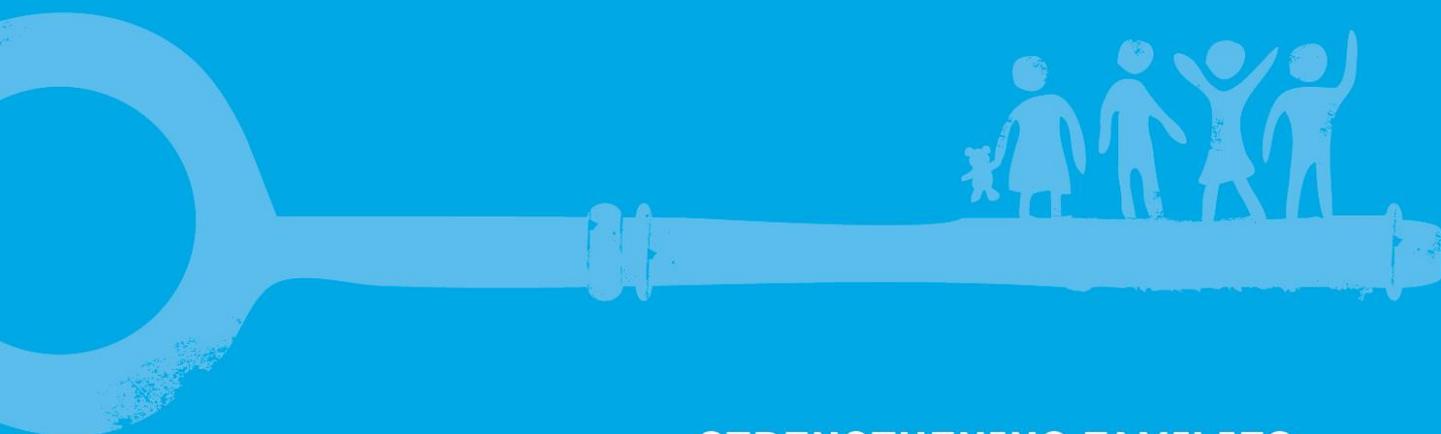


OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

The Ukrainian Government must provide long-term vision to protect children in current emergency

POLICY BRIEFING



**STRENGTHENING FAMILIES.
ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.**

In recent years, the Ukrainian President and Government have established closer and lasting relationships with the European Union (EU). High level political statements have been issued endorsing the highest European standards and committing to a comprehensive process of reform. However, practice shows that the Government still falls short of achieving meaningful progress for one of its most important vulnerable groups of citizens – the protection of children and families.

The worsening economic situation (aggravated by an increase in utilities prices, the cut of maternity benefits and rising inflation) is pushing Ukrainian families into very difficult living conditions. **According to UN data, more than 80% of Ukrainians live below the poverty line.** The most affected category is families with children. The lack of adequate social support puts families at risk of separation from their children. The existing child protection agencies have limited capacity to work on preventing family breakdown. To aggravate the situation, a 2014 Government decision abolished 12 000 community social worker positions.

On the other hand, Ukraine has the largest system of institutional care in Europe with around 700 institutions hosting more than 80 000 children. Despite the extensive evidence proving that institutional care is harmful to children and a clear violation of their rights¹, **the Government still supports the post-soviet system of institutional care.** In 2013, the Government spent 5.7 billion UAH (approx. 240 million EUR) to fund institutions and in 2015 this amount has further increased. There is no clear vision and commitment to change the situation and relocate these resources towards family support services and family based alternatives in communities.

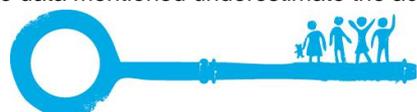
The humanitarian crisis linked to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine has worsened the situation and exposed significant gaps in the capacity of child protection agencies and the child protection system at large. **A large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) – around 1.46 million people, including 184 900 children²** – are struggling to cope with daily life, without adequate support from the Government and relevant agencies. Internally displaced families face problems with accessing housing, finding a job, or registering for social benefits due to imperfect and long bureaucratic procedures. Local authorities are not sufficiently funded nor sufficiently pressured by the Government to provide services to children and families. As a consequence, institutionalisation presents itself as the easiest option for local authorities to deal with children at risk.

To protect children's lives, local authorities removed around 14 000 children from non-government controlled territories and placed them in different institutions around Ukraine. The majority of these children have parents, with which they have lost contact as a result of the move, and with little prospect of reunification. There are no data regarding the exact number of children that are internally displaced, let alone sufficient information to be able to adequately meet their needs.

Up to 500 000 children (including more than 3000 children in institutions) are believed to remain in the non-government controlled territories. The government does not support these children through humanitarian aid, nor is it negotiating for their transferral to

¹ Eurochild and Hope and Homes for Children, *Deinstitutionalisation and Quality Alternative Care for Children – Lessons learned and the way forward*, October 2014, available at: http://www.openingdoors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/DI_Lessons_Learned_web_use.pdf.

² The data mentioned underestimate the actual situation as there are a lot of unregistered families and children.



Government controlled territory. The situation is dire, with children living in institutions and in vulnerable families, especially those who are severely ill, lacking basic material provisions such as food, medicine, and clothing. Their only support comes from volunteers. There is a real risk that children become involved in military actions or become victims of trafficking and exploitation.

The assistance by international donors and charity organisations is mainly focused on providing humanitarian aid to IDPs. Coordination within state agencies, donors and civil society organisations is still insufficient (with some categories of IDPs left without any support) and interventions lack long-term vision to provide holistic support to children and families and build their long-term resilience. The Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine should develop a long term vision to address the situation and lead a coordinated response.

The closer relationship of Ukraine with the EU, which encompasses political association and economic integration, represents a unique opportunity for implementing a nationwide child protection reform with a focus on dismantling the obsolete system of institutions and creating a wide range of services to support vulnerable children and their families with respect for their fundamental rights.

Based on the above, **we call on the European Union to support a comprehensive reform of the child protection system in Ukraine.**

- To include child protection reform, with a focus on the transition from institutional to family-based care, as a priority for its financial and technical assistance to Ukraine, coherently with the provisions included in other EU funding instruments such as the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund;
- To ensure this is a requirement for any project funded by the European Union or co-fund together with other donors.

In particular we ask the EU to put pressure on and support the Ukrainian government:

- To prioritise child protection reform as a key responsibility of all relevant state agencies, to meet all European³ and international⁴ standards concerning the rights of children without or at risk of losing parental care.
- To ensure consultation and partnership with civil society organisations in order to draw on their experience and involve them as key stakeholders in the process of reform;
- To prepare a long-term response to the situation of internally displaced children and families, including children left behind in non-government controlled area;
- To ensure proper coordination of all types of humanitarian response provided by different donors and key international organisations.

³ European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care, *Common European Guidelines on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care*, November 2012.

⁴ See UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.



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About Opening Doors for Europe's Children

The Opening Doors campaign operates at EU level and in 12 countries across Europe, calling on the EU and national governments to prioritise the transition from institutional to family-based care. We believe that the end of institutional care for children in Europe is possible and within our reach – putting the best interests of children back at the heart of Europe's child protection systems.

About Eurochild



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

Eurochild advocates for children's rights and well-being to be at the heart of policymaking. We are a network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. We influence policies, build internal capacities, facilitate mutual learning and exchange practice and research. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation of all our work.

About Hope and Homes for Children



Hope & Homes for Children

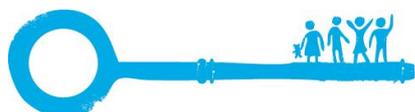
Hope and Homes for Children is an international organisation working on the eradication of institutional care in three key spheres: service development, capacity building and policy. We close institutions, reuniting children with families or placing them in alternative family-based care; we work in partnership with other agencies – including governments – to develop services such as fostering, adoption and a wide range of prevention services; and we work with governments to underpin family-based care systems through the development of policies and legislation. Our years of experience show us that our model is adaptable to different conditions in countries around the world because it covers these three vital elements of childcare reform.

About Hope and Homes for Children Ukraine



Ukraine
Hope & Homes for Children

HHC Ukraine aims to reform the state childcare system through piloting models and developing legislation in partnership with authorities and NGO's. In 1998 they developed family type homes and introduced work on the prevention of child abandonment in Ukraine. Now they focus on deinstitutionalisation which includes the closure of institutions and the creation of a wide range of supportive and preventive services for families and children.



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