

# **OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN**

**ENSURING EU FUNDS AND  
POLICY MAKE A POSITIVE  
DIFFERENCE FOR CHILDREN**

**WWW.OPENINGDOORS.EU**



**LOOKING BACK. LOOKING FORWARD.**

Strengthening families. Ending institutional care.



**Eurochild**  
Putting children at  
the heart of Europe



**Hope & Homes  
for Children**

# INTRODUCTION

**Opening Doors for Europe's Children** was launched as a pan-European campaign in June 2013 and ran – until 2015 – in 12 countries: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine. **The campaign was jointly led by Eurochild and Hope and Homes for Children.**

Now in its second phase, the campaign brings on board new national and international partners. **SOS Children's Villages International**, the **International Foster Care Organisation (IFCO)**, and the European branch of the **International Federation of Educative Communities (FICE Europe)** have joined **Eurochild** and **Hope and Homes for Children.**

Opening Doors is also expanding geographically, bringing the number of countries from 12 to 15. The campaign will operate in western European countries (Spain, Belgium and Austria) to break the myth that the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care only concerns Central and Eastern Europe.

The aim of the campaign is to support national efforts to end institutional care for children and to strengthen families by leveraging EU funding and policy and building capacity of civil society organisations. The core team in Brussels facilitates dialogue with the EU institutions and manages capacity building and information exchange among the national partners.



# BUILDING ON MOMENTUM

In 2013, deinstitutionalisation (DI) was already firmly on the EU political agenda. Important changes in EU policy and the regulations that govern how EU Funds are spent had been achieved. The campaign set out to convert these developments into changes on the ground and, therefore, to improve the lives of children growing up in institutional care.



reforms. Furthermore, the ex-ante conditionality “Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination” requires Member States to have a strategy in place (or action plan) for the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care in order to benefit from the funding.

At the same time, many national governments have already made significant progress towards DI. For example, in Romania the number of children growing up in institutional care fell from more than 100,000 to less than 9,000 over the last decade.

Meanwhile, many other governments – e.g. in Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Latvia, Ukraine and Lithuania – have committed to a phased programme of reform, and several other governments have legislated against the placement of children under the age of 3 in institutions and partnered with NGOs to close some institutions.

The ‘Opening Doors for Europe’s Children’ campaign is designed to ensure civil society organisations are aware of, and can use, European policy and funding instruments available to influence reform at their national level. The European Union supports civil society involvement. For example, the code of conduct governing how EU funds are used requires key stakeholders to be involved in monitoring how projects are developed and implemented – what’s known as the ‘partnership principle’.

Opening Doors for Europe’s Children helps build the capacity of national organisations to be better informed about how to use these instruments. It also helps feed information to EU officials responsible for overseeing national policy developments and use of EU funds for DI.

The campaign presents a united front across relevant civil society organisations, transcending from individual efforts at the national level to a consolidated position on deinstitutionalisation reforms across the EU.

## WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT THAT THE EU SUPPORTS DEINSTITUTIONALISATION REFORMS?



There is an estimated 1,000,000 of children growing up in care in Europe. This includes large numbers of children with disabilities, but also children separated from their families due to poverty, discrimination and lack of support services. Almost all of these children have living biological parents who, with the right help, could take care for their children. There are also much better ways to care for those children for whom it is in their best interests to be separated from their biological families. Such alternatives include foster care or family-like group homes and need to take into account the best interest of the child.

An underpinning value of the EU is to “combat social exclusion and discrimination... promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child” Lisbon treaty, art 3.

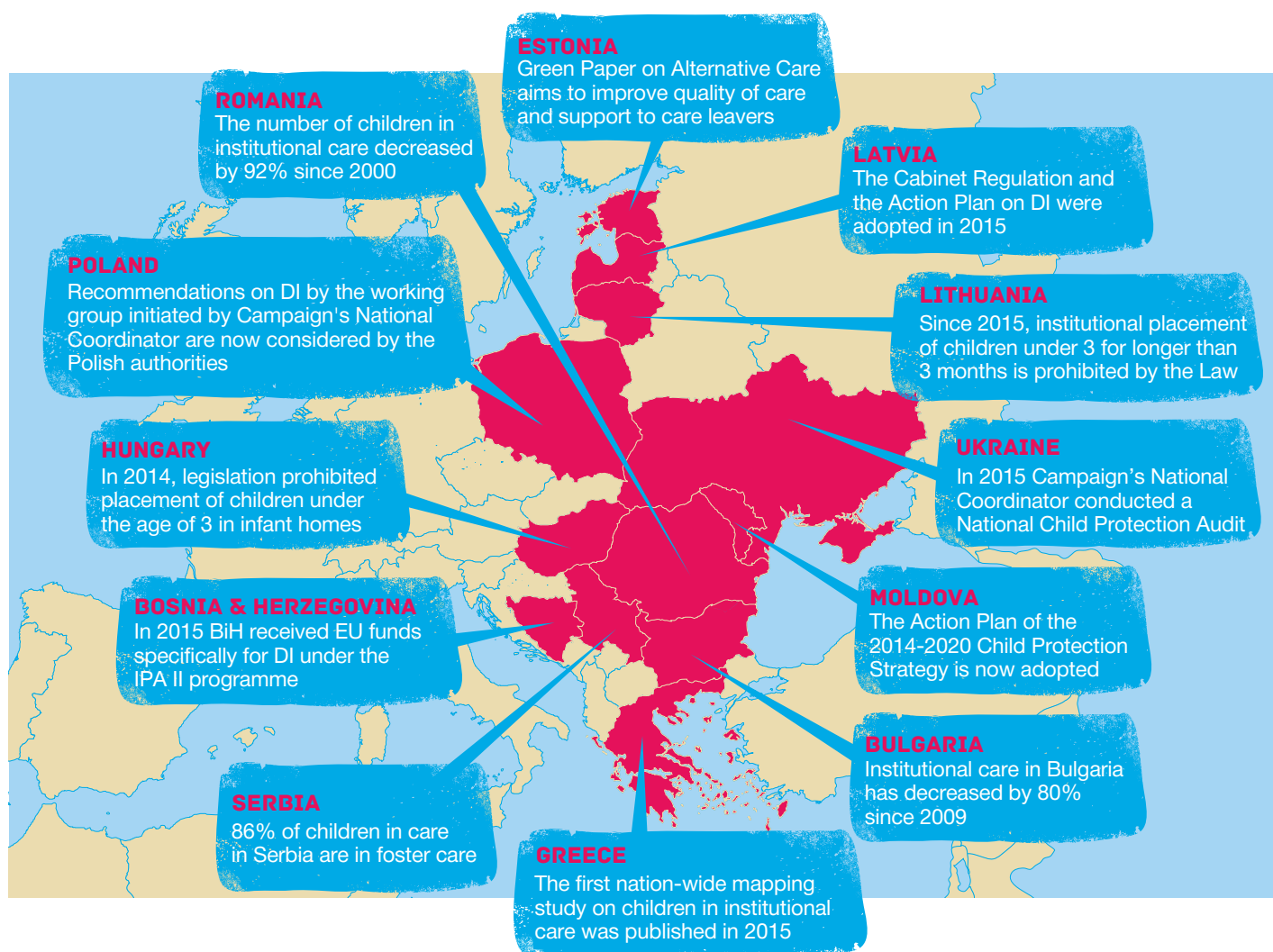
Young adults leaving institutional care are more likely to fall victims of trafficking, exploitation, unemployment, homelessness and depression. With no experience of family life, many struggle when they become parents themselves, putting their children at risk of institutionalisation and transmitting the problem from one generation to the next. Investing in family- and community-based services rather than in large scale institutions will not only break this cycle of disadvantage, but it will also help to foster integration and help build socially cohesive societies.



# LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN DEINSTITUTIONALISATION ACROSS EUROPE

Information about latest developments towards reforms on deinstitutionalisation and the systems of child protection across the 12 campaign countries have been primarily sourced

from official state sources on a national level and provided by the Opening Doors National Coordinators. Among many, recent developments in deinstitutionalisation on the ground include:



# PHASE I (2013-2015): WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)**, the national campaign coordinator influenced EU and national government officials to ensure that part of the EU's funding programme – the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) – was allocated to support deinstitutionalisation reforms. BiH has still 1500 children growing up in institutions and a severe lack of community-level family support services. Deinstitutionalisation was finally approved as one of 9 priority areas to be funded through the IPA 2014 round, and approximately 1 million Euros has been set aside for this purpose.

In **Bulgaria**, our national coordinator, the National Network for Children, has been working with the broader Coalition for Childhood to support implementation of the national strategy for deinstitutionalisation. The EU played a critically important role in stimulating deinstitutionalisation reforms both through political pressure and funding. In this spending round more than 34,000,000 Euros of structural funds have been allocated to support the transition from institutional to community- and family-based care. The number of children growing up in institutions has fallen by almost 5,000 since 2011. So far, the emphasis has been put on closing institutions and developing other alternatives such as small group homes, independent living and foster care. More attention has been paid to preventing children entering the care system, for example, by investing in family support services and early intervention programmes.

At the beginning of the campaign in 2013, there was a lack of any reliable data on the number of children in institutional care in **Greece**. It was coupled with lack of political will to reform the system and invest in quality alternatives. The Opening Doors

campaign has helped build a momentum for change, and the path is now open to use EU Structural Funds to support deinstitutionalisation reforms. An important achievement of the campaign was the publication of our mapping study “Mapping institutional and residential care for children in Greece” (available on [www.openingdoors.eu/resources](http://www.openingdoors.eu/resources)), which has provided the first comprehensive picture of how many institutions and residential care settings exist in Greece and what are the numbers of children living there.

In **Ukraine**, the Opening Doors for Europe's Children campaign has helped to raise awareness about the need for deinstitutionalisation reforms and has brought together a coalition of 28 civil society organisations from across 22 regions. All of them have committed to advocate in their regions towards closing institutions and creating quality alternatives for children and their families. In 2015, the President approved the National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights; DI was defined as a priority in the field of child protection.

**Use of European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF):** in early 2015, we released a report<sup>1</sup> assessing the extent to which EU Member States have used ESIF funds to catalyse reforms of child protection systems focused on strengthening families and ending institutional care. Overall, the results were encouraging: DI was explicitly mentioned in the Partnership Agreements (PAs) and Operational Programmes (OPs) of eight Opening Doors countries surveyed except Greece<sup>2</sup>. However, only two Opening Doors National Coordinators (in Bulgaria and Romania) were fully satisfied by the level of attention accorded to DI in the PAs and OPs.

1. “Are European Structural and Investment Funds opening doors for Europe's institutionalised children in the 2014-2020 programming period?”, Opening Doors Campaign, January 2015.

2. The surveyed countries were Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania (until 2015 the campaign also operated in four non-EU countries not covered by the mentioned survey).

# PHASE II (2016-2018): A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

In Phase II, the Opening Doors for Europe's Children campaign will support national efforts to develop child protection systems that strengthen families and ensure high-quality family and community-based care for children, by leveraging EU funding and policy and building capacity of civil society organisations. Working with a network of national partners in each participating country, the campaign builds partnerships to advocate for change in national policies and public investment that strengthen families and support the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care. It builds the capacity of civil society organisations to leverage existing EU policy recommendations and coordination tools, as well as EU funding programmes to support progress at national level.

In the context of the current refugee and migrant crisis, Opening Doors for Europe's Children will call for quality alternatives to institutional care for migrant, unaccompanied and separated children.

The second phase of the Opening Doors for Europe's Children campaign is expected to run until end 2018. Its objectives are to ensure that:

1. Deinstitutionalisation (DI) is retained as a priority for the EU institutions. EU officials encourage Member States to use EU funding and policy coordination tools to strengthen child protection systems, in particular family- and community-based care.
2. National civil society partners have the knowledge, expertise and capacity to advocate for DI on national level and to leverage and monitor EU funding and influence to support national efforts to strengthen child protection systems.
3. The Opening Doors campaign is a reputable, well-known force for change providing a platform to promote DI reforms in Europe, based on broad international partnership and credible and respected national coordinators.



# THE LEADING CAMPAIGN PARTNERS

The Opening Doors for Europe's Children campaign is a collaborative effort between five international partners who share a common vision of strengthening families and ending institutional care and believe that by working together they can achieve greater impact.



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**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.

**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.



**The International Foster Care Organisation (IFCO)** is an international network dedicated solely to the promotion and support of quality alternative family-based foster care across the world. Since its foundation in 1981, IFCO has consistently championed the right of the children to live in a family. Through our global regional and national events, trainings, seminars and conferences we provide a multi-cultural platform where young people, foster carers, social workers, academics, researchers, volunteers, media, policy makers and others meet, collaborate, exchange information and support each other on a global basis.

**FICE Europe**, founded in 1997, is a regional member organization of the global network FICE International. The members of FICE Europe involve organizations, professionals and individuals working in the field of child rights and the alternative forms of care for children in particular. Believing that the family is the best place for every child, but also facing the reality in which many children cannot stay within their biological family, FICE Europe is committed to and is constantly working on strengthening families, as well as on improving the quality of services for children in all alternative forms of care. FICE Europe stands for the principle “every child matters”, making every effort that each and every child in his individual circumstances receives the best available assistance and support.



**SOS Children's Villages International** is the umbrella organisation of more than 130 affiliated national SOS Children's Village associations worldwide. SOS Children's Villages is a non-governmental and non-denominational child-rights organisation that provides direct services in the areas of care, education and health for children at risk of losing parental care, and those who have lost parental care. The organisation also builds the capacity of the children's caregivers, their families and communities to provide adequate care. SOS Children's Villages advocates for the rights of children without parental care and those at risk of losing parental care. Founded in 1949, its operations are guided by the spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.



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**Developed by:**



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