



# OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

## LATVIA



## COUNTRY FACT SHEET

Since 2015, important regulations and plans have been adopted by the Latvian government to reform the system of child care and develop family and community-based care solutions. The EU and national funds have been used to proceed with implementation of these plans which will continue in 2018 on the normative basis. However, there are still over 1,200 children who live in institutional care facilities in Latvia. Furthermore, 2,887 children are growing up in vulnerable families at the direct risk of being separated and enter alternative care. It is crucial that the Latvian government speeds up the implementation of the DI process and ensures that this happens in a sustainable way and according to the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.

2015 marked an important year to start deinstitutionalisation (DI) reform of the child protection system in Latvia. In 2015, first documents that determine the start of transition from institutional to community-based care were approved, namely the Cabinet Regulations on the Implementation of Deinstitutionalisation and an Action Plan on DI.

Three key groups have been targeted by the DI process in Latvia: persons above the age of 18 who have mental disorders, children with functional disorders who live in families, and children and young people in child care institutions. Regarding children and young people in institutions for children, the DI plan set the following targets by 2022: 60% decrease in the number of children who stay in the long-term institutional care for more than 3-6 months; 40% decrease in the number of children who live in institutions (specifically, from 1,799 in 2012 to 720 in 2022).

### KEY DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS CHILD PROTECTION REFORM



AS A RESULT OF THE PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN ON THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONAL CARE, SUPPORT SERVICES FOR FOSTER CARERS WILL BE DEVELOPED IN 2018 TO SUPPORT DEINSTITUTIONALISATION REFORMS.

## KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU



**TAKE ACTION TO ADDRESS MONITORING OF THE QUALITY OF IMPLEMENTATION OF DEINSTITUTIONALISATION REFORM IN LATVIA**

The implementation of DI reforms in Latvia started in 2016. After conducting individual needs assessments and developing individual support plans for all children in institutional care in 2016-2017, there is an ongoing work on the regional DI plans which will lay foundation for the new community-based services in municipalities for all three target groups. Since 2017, important steps have been taken to improve the provision of alternative care. The EU funding (including €47 mln from European Social Fund and €44 mln from European Regional Development Fund – plus 15 % co-financing from state & municipality), State budget and other institutional donors have been allocated to implement these plans.

In addition, the government allocated €3 million from the national budget to improve the remuneration, social contributions, guarantees and support to the foster families. Furthermore, professional foster care will be introduced in the country; training and selection processes of foster families will be reviewed.

To raise awareness about the needs of 1,200 children who currently live in the institutions for children, a public awareness campaign under the slogan “Repair Childhood” was organised at the end of 2017 by the Ministry of Welfare, several NGOs and mass media. The first stage of the campaign concluded in 2017 and, as a result, €372,645 raised during the campaign will be used to support alternative care givers, such as candidate foster families, guardians or adoptive parents as well as families who already take care of children without parental care. The campaign will continue in 2018 through implementation of different society-oriented educative and supporting activities in order to find community-based, family-like care solutions for children who still grow up in institutions for children.

Poverty, low social skills of parents and a lack of quality social services to prevent family breakdown are still compounding factors that cause children’s placements in alternative care in Latvia. Municipalities are currently responsible for the development and provision of services to prevent family separation. Due to disparities in human resources and financial capacity between the 119 local municipalities, the availability, quality and diversity of social services and family support measures differ greatly from municipality to municipality. Particularly in rural areas, there is a lack of specialised social workers who can respond to the individual needs of children and families at risk of breakdown. In addition, there is insufficient understanding of community-based services by the policy and decision makers at state and municipal level as well society overall. Investments into the infrastructure have not been always aligned with the concept of community-based services and municipalities face difficulties with reorganisation and closure of the child care institutions.

We welcome that the Latvian government has undertaken efforts to reform the child protection system in Latvia. We acknowledge the important steps made to improve the foster care system and welcome the open and cooperative approach towards NGOs and other stakeholders. To further reform of the alternative care system in Latvia, we call upon the government to provide practical information on how the system of foster care will be improved in 2018. Sufficient attention should also be paid to develop family-like care and to ensure that children with serious health problems who are currently in institutional care are also offered a quality care solution. Furthermore, DI plans should be developed by the municipalities based on a unified understanding of the DI process in Latvia – which has to be a complex process, including prevention services and services to support leaving care process.

## KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE MEMBER STATE



**TAKE ACTION TO ADDRESS IMPLEMENTATION OF DEINSTITUTIONALISATION AS A COMPLEX PROCESS (NOT ONLY CLOSING INSTITUTIONS) INCLUDING PREVENTION, SOCIAL WORK WITH FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN, DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES, IMPROVED SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR OUT-OF-FAMILY CARE AND SERVICES FOR LEAVING CARE.**



## OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN LATVIA

SOS Children’s Villages Latvia is a social charity non-governmental organization providing “long-term family based care for around 150 children who have lost their parents and carries out family strengthening programs supporting more than 700 children in 350 families each year. SOS Children’s Villages Latvia started its work in July, 1997. They are a member of SOS – Kinderdorf International, operational in 133 countries worldwide. To find out more visit [www.sosbernuciemati.lv](http://www.sosbernuciemati.lv)

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)