



OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

LITHUANIA



COUNTRY FACT SHEET

Since 2007, Lithuania has embarked on reforms of the child care system and deinstitutionalisation. The Government of Lithuania adopted Strategic Guidelines for 2010-2020 and an Action Plan to implement these reforms. In 2014, the transition from institutional to family and community-based care gained new momentum through the institutional care reform called Reformation (Pertvarka)¹. Initiated by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour under the slogan “Family – for children, community-based services – for persons with disabilities”, the reform has a clear focus on prevention of children and people with disabilities entering institutional care. The reform targets 26 institutions through the financial support of, amongst others, EU Structural and Investment Funds.

The aim of the reform is to ensure a sustainable environment and conditions for each child (including children with disabilities) to grow up in his/her biological family. Where this is not possible, children should be accommodated in foster or adoptive families or, where appropriate, family-like care facilities. Another aim of the reform is to ensure conditions for community living for every person with mental or (and) intellectual disability by providing high-quality community-based services for them and their family members. The reform targets 26 institutions, including 5 institutions for children under 3 years of age, 11 institutions for children, 3 institutions for children with disabilities, 7 institutions for adults with disabilities.

¹ <http://www.pertvarka.lt/en/>

KEY DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS CHILD PROTECTION REFORM



LITHUANIA CONTINUED FILLING THE GAPS IN THE CURRENT CHILD CARE SYSTEM REFORM THROUGH DEVELOPMENT OF QUALITY ALTERNATIVE CARE OPTIONS, IN PARTICULAR PROFESSIONAL FOSTER CARE.

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU



TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE THAT THE USE OF EU FUNDS FOR DEINSTITUTIONALISATION IS MONITORED WITH PARTICULAR FOCUS ON QUALITATIVE, NOT ONLY QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS.

By the end of 2016, there were 3,186 children (34,98% of total number of children deprived of parental care) living in institutions for children in Lithuania. Although the total number of children in institutional care decreases year by year, the number of children under the age of 3 in institutional care increased: from 359 in 2015 to 373 children at the end of 2016. Importantly, after the 2015 amendments, the Lithuanian Civil Code now explicitly prohibits placement of children under the age of 3 in institutional care for longer than 3 months.

As of 31 December 2016, there were 18,756 children growing in 9,676 socially dysfunctional families in Lithuania. Over the last five years, the number of such families has decreased by 7% (713 families) including 12% (2,547 children) among them. Besides the efforts of state and municipal authorities to improve the quality of social services, the decrease in numbers can be also due to the fact that the total population of children is decreasing at almost the same pace.

In 2016, professional foster care was finally determined by law. This could be considered as one of the biggest achievements in filling the current gaps in the system of child care and child protection in Lithuania.

During current funding period, €76 million of structural funds have been allocated for the transition from institutional to community-based care in Lithuania. Out of €76 million, €38 million have been allocated for the development, piloting and implementation of the new social services; the remaining amount is used towards the development of infrastructure. The first stage in the implementation of the reform will include measures towards restructuring and the provision of services, including increased availability and improved access to the existing services. In particular, 1) evaluation of individual needs of the residents in institutions participating in the reform; 2) evaluation of motivation and competencies of the co-workers of institutions participating in the reform; 3) development of the package of methodological documents describing new types of services; 4) preparation of plans of individual needs of the residents of institutions participating in the reform, 5) preparation of transition plans for institutions; 6) plans of development of services and infrastructure in the regions; 7) education of society; 8) increase availability of community-based services by provision of new types of services (pilot models). More than €5mIn was allocated for the implementation of the first stage of the reform.

In 2018-2020, the second stage of the reform will aim to develop regional infrastructure of services and the provision of new forms of services to beneficiaries. Efforts to find publicly available information about the foreseen funding for the second stage of the implementation of the reform, which will come both from the EU and national budget, were unsuccessful.

It has to be noted that the implementation of the reform is moving forward despite several emerging difficulties. The political will to implement reform at the national level is finally in place. There is less political will in some of the municipalities to pilot social services in the first stage of the implementation of the reform. Some municipalities are actively and successfully involved in the reform, but some of them have critical point of view to the need of pilot services. Due to the small size of pilot projects and specifics of infrastructure there is no possibility to pilot services in all municipalities equally. Some of institutions have been closed by simply replacing children to smaller units in the community.

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE MEMBER STATE



TAKE ACTION TO PROVIDE MORE TAILORED GUIDANCE FOR THE LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES ON IMPLEMENTATION OF DEINSTITUTIONALISATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES FOR FAMILIES AT RISK AND CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF PARENTAL CARE AND TO ENSURE THE TRANSPARENCY OF FUNDING.



OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN LITHUANIA

SOS Children's Villages Lithuania is a member of the international association SOS Children's Villages International. In 1991 SOS Children's Villages first started to work in Lithuania to respond to the needs of children without or at risk of losing parental care. Currently the organization is providing a wide spectrum of social services for children in families at risk, day care centers, different types of care: family based care, community based care, professional foster care, youth care. To find out more visit www.sos-vaikukaimai.lt

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