



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



**POSITION PAPER TO THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**IN PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT**

**MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK**

Prepared for the Estonian Presidency Conference 'Dignity and Independent Living= DI', Tallinn, Estonia, 12-13 October 2017

The Opening Doors for Europe’s Children campaign – a pan-European campaign of five international partners and national civil society organisations from 16 European countries – acknowledges the pivotal role that the European Union has played in making progress towards ending the institutional era for children in Europe.

The Opening Doors Campaign **welcomes the current ex-ante conditionality 9.1**<sup>1</sup> that includes “*measures for the shift from institutional to community based care*” on the use of EU Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) with regard to deinstitutionalisation and **the European Code of Conduct Partnership (ECCP)**<sup>2</sup>, which implies close cooperation between the European Commission and public authorities, social partners and organisations representing civil society.

We also **welcome** that the European Commission Recommendation “Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage”<sup>3</sup> **recognises the importance of reforming child protection systems** and calls, among others, on EU Member States to prioritise and use ESIF for the transition from institutional to community-based care.

In addition, the recent European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>4</sup> reaffirms the necessity to provide **reinforced and targeted support to children from disadvantaged backgrounds**, such as children in alternative care.

Because of the EU’s leadership, important steps have been taken to reform child protection systems and better protect the rights of one of the most vulnerable groups of children in Europe.

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1 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32013R1303&from=EN>  
2 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R0240&from=EN>  
3 [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/c\\_2013\\_778\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/c_2013_778_en.pdf)  
4 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0250&from=EN>

However, our experience of working with and for children and families in 16 European countries shows that **strengthened EU investment is critical** to end the use of institutional care for all children in Europe.

We are **concerned** that during the current Multiannual Financial Framework **only 12 EU Member States**<sup>5</sup> can benefit from European Structural and Investment Funds to reform their child protection systems, whereas institutionalisation is a problem across the Europe.

Provisions of ex-ante conditionality 9.1 on the transition from institutional to community-based care **should be extended to all EU Member States, as well as enlargement and neighbourhood countries.**

In addition, we want to ensure that **EU funds are used to support national deinstitutionalisations strategies and action plans** that will strengthen child protection systems so that they become sustainable after the EU-funded intervention has ended.

Finally, we want to ensure that civil society and service users **participate meaningfully** during the entire cycle of EU funding programmes, and that Monitoring Committees operate in a **more transparent** way.

As a coalition representing 124 civil society organisations working towards improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of children living in institutions across Europe, we have three key demands to the European Union in their preparation for the next Multiannual Financial Framework:

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<sup>5</sup> The European Commission established “identified needs” in 12 Member States: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Croatia.

## 1. Strengthen and expand the existing ex-ante conditionality 9.1 on the transition from institutional to community-based care.

- A. Continue and strengthen the current ex-ante conditionality 9.1 for the use of European Structural and Investment Funds, which mentions “*measures for the shift from institutional to community based care*” in the next Multiannual Financial Framework funding cycle and extend its application to all EU Member States.
- B. Extend the provisions of the ex-ante conditionality to the use of EU funds applicable to enlargement and neighbourhood countries.
- C. Develop specific instruments and mechanisms to ensure that ex-ante conditionalities are not a one-off exercise at the beginning of the programming period, but are monitored and revised throughout the implementation of the funds.

## 2. Promote the appropriate allocation of EU funds for deinstitutionalisation reforms.

- A. Develop a rigorous and transparent monitoring system to ensure that EU funds are used to support national deinstitutionalisation strategies and action plans which are aligned with the EC Recommendation “Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage” and the European Pillar of Social Rights. Data should be regularly collected to track how funds are used by states to support the transition to family- and community-based care.

- B. Encourage states to ring-fence domestic budgets to ensure that the child protection system and new services continue to be sustained by domestic means after the EU-funded intervention has ended.
- C. Ensure that EU funds are used for strengthening child protection systems that will allow migrant and refugee children to enjoy the same protection as all other children in the country. Specifically for unaccompanied or separated children the provision of quality family- and community-based care should be guaranteed.

### 3. Improve the implementation of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership.

- A. Ensure active and meaningful participation and involvement of civil society organisations and service users during programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of EU funding programmes.
- B. Introduce the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP)<sup>6</sup> as an ex-ante conditionality to ensure effective implementation. Failure of Member States to respect the ECCP should be sanctioned by payment suspensions as provided for in the guidance related to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Structural and Investment Funds.
- C. Ensure that Monitoring Committees operate in a more transparent and meaningful way. Civil society organisations should be considered as equal stakeholders with voting rights and the advisory role of the European Commission should be clarified and if necessary expanded.

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6 See: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R0240&from=EN>



#### International partners:

Eurochild  
 FICE Europe  
 Hope and Homes for Children  
 International Foster Care Organisation  
 SOS Childrens Villages International

#### National coordinators:

FICE Austria (Austria)  
 La Porte Ouverte (Belgium)  
 Hope and Homes for Children Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia and Herzegovina)  
 National Network for Children (Bulgaria)

FICE Croatia (Croatia)  
 Igale Lapsele Pere (Estonia)<sup>7</sup>  
 Roots Research Center (Greece)  
 Family Child Youth Association (Hungary)  
 SOS Childrens Villages Latvia (Latvia)  
 SOS Childrens Villages Lithuania (Lithuania)  
 CCF Moldova (Moldova)  
 Child and Family Foundation (Poland)  
 Hope and Homes for Children Romania (Romania)  
 The Network of Organizations for Children of Serbia – MODS (Serbia)  
 FICE Spain (Spain)  
 Hope and Homes for Children Ukraine (Ukraine)

## ABOUT US

The Opening Doors for Europe's Children is a pan-European campaign that aims to support 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 five inter national organisations and civil society across 16 European countries. For further information please see [www.openingdoors.eu](http://www.openingdoors.eu)

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<sup>7</sup> Until September 2017. From October 2017, the Opening Doors for Europe's Children Campaign in Estonia is coordinated by the Estonian Union for Child Welfare (EUCW).