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Towards the deinstitutionalisation of the State childcare system in Lithuania
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| **Theme:** | Family policy, Children and Youth, Education |
| **Title:** | Towards the deinstitutionalisation of the State childcare system in Lithuania |
| **Category:** | Policy debate |
| **Abstract:** | The broad reaction of the mass media to the incidents in boarding schools, the President’s criticism of the Minister for Social Affairs and Labour for delaying the reform of the residential State childcare system and a recent Report of the National Audit Office have relaunched discussions on deinstitutionalisation of the State childcare system in Lithuania. The Minister for Social Affairs and Labour has assured the public that deinstitutionalisation will be achieved by 2020, i.e. 10 years earlier than originally planned. |
| **Description:** | Before 31 December 2013, there were 10,146 children in care in Lithuania (1.9 percent of total children): 5,906 children were taken care of in families (58.2 percent), 3,821 (37.7 percent) were in care institutions, and 419 children (4.1 percent) in foster families. According to data from the childcare institutions, the amount allocated for organising childcare in residential childcare institutions in 2012 totalled over EUR 32.4 million. 

The average cost of the guardianship of one child per month in a childcare institution in 2012 was EUR 732.7, in a foster family EUR 301.2, and in a family EUR 150.6. The National Audit Office highlighted that the childcare allowance (EUR 150.6) was not differentiated according to the needs of the child (age and health status) and had not been changed for almost 15 years. 

The amount allocated to infrastructure development of residential childcare institutions over the period 2004-2013 totalled EUR 15 million. Investment in the development of the institutional care network is one of the major constraints on deinstitutionalisation. 

In Lithuania, discussions on deinstitutionalisation started in the Autumn of 2005, when a group of NGOs launched a monitoring report on “Child’s Rights Monitoring in Residential Care and Education Institutions”. Independent experts have stressed that the approach to institutional care must be ultimately changed. In the course of the immediate reform, large residential care homes should be replaced by family care or at least by small family-type care homes that would ensure adequate socialisation and would prepare children for independent life within society. 

On 16 November 2012, the Minister for Social Affairs and Labour issued an Order on the “Guidelines for Deinstitutionalisation of the Social Care Homes for Disabled Children Deprived of Parental Care and Adult Disabled Persons”.

On 14 February 2014, the Minister for Social Security and Labour adopted an "Action Plan for the Transition from Institutional Care to the Provision of Services in Families and the Community for the Disabled and Children Deprived of Parental Care 2014–2020". Unfortunately, this Plan does not include a list of concrete measures with the necessary resources for their implementation.

In January 2015, the President of the Republic criticised the Minister for Social Affairs and Labour for delaying the reform of the childcare system. She said that the Ministry for Social Affairs and Labour has been implementing the reform for ten years without any apparent success. Inherited from the Soviet times, residential childcare institutions have become tools for accumulating additional financial resources.

In February 2015, the Minister for Social Affairs and Labour announced the start of the Reform from the 1st of March and promised that by 2020 the residential childcare institutions will have closed. She also promised that the Ministry would allocate an additional EUR 50 million for the reform of residential childcare institutions.

**Outlook & Commentary:**

It is not obvious that the proponents of deinstitutionalisation have succeeded in accumulating enough political power to overcome the legacy of the existing system. The majority of childcare homes belong to municipalities that have their own interests and are independent enough to resist the process of deinstitutionalisation. The National Audit Office also highlighted the lack of trained guardians – the annual number of children deprived of parental care is about 2000, while only 300 guardians have been properly trained.

In the first place, it is necessary to address the issue of institutionalisation of young children and develop alternative services to eliminate fully institutional placement of children aged 0-3. It will also be crucial to take effective measures to promote alternative care in families (family members or qualified and prepared caregivers) for children deprived of parental care.

**Further reading:**


President of the Republic of Lithuania (12/01/2015). The Social Problems are Solved Irresponsibly: https://www.lrp.lt/lt/spaudos-centras/pranesimai-spaudai/socialines-problemos-sprendziamos-neatsakingai/21597

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