



Peer Review on “Furthering quality and accessibility of Foster Care service”

Peer Country Comments Paper – Lithuania

Ensuring safe home for children: foster care that meets the best interest of the child

Online, 20-21 May 2021

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Foster care situation in Lithuania	1
3	Assessment of the policy measure.....	2
3.1	Legal framework and practical measures	2
3.2	Requirements, professional foster care and support provided by the foster care centers.	3
3.3	Establishment and role of Foster Care Centers	4
3.4	Funding of foster care	5
3.5	Changes in child rights protection system.....	6
4	Assessment of success factors and transferability	6
5	Questions	7
6	List of references	8
	Annex 1 Summary table	9
	Annex 2 GIMK programme content	11
	Annex 3 Requirements for the foster parents	13
	Annex 4 Example of relevant practice.....	14
	Annex 5 Example of relevant practice.....	15

1 Introduction

This paper has been prepared for the Peer Review on "Furthering quality and accessibility of foster care service". It provides a comparative assessment of the policy example of the Host Country (Croatia) and the situation in Lithuania. For information on the host country policy example, please refer to the host country discussion paper.

2 Foster care situation in Lithuania

Foster care - as an organised form of protection for children without adequate parental care - has a long history in Lithuania, same as in Croatia. For many years, institutional care, including large institutions¹, was a common and often prevalent form of child care. More active actions and measures to promote family- and community based care started to be introduced in 2009. These actions include advocacy from the civil society organizations as well as actions at the European Union (EU) level to promote the transition from institutional care to services and care in the family and in the community. Today, the family and community-based care is the priority measure in Lithuania to protect children from placement in institutional care. The deinstitutionalisation process started in Lithuania in 2012 when the Ministry of Social Security and Labour has prepared and approved the Guidelines of Deinstitutionalisation², followed by the Action plan³ developed for the period of 2014-2020⁴. The Plan envisaged the transition from institutional care to family and community-based services for persons with disabilities and children left without parental care. There were and still are several prevention initiatives and changes implemented in the general child rights protection system too, aiming at reducing the number of children who have to be removed from their biological families and thus protecting them from entering foster care. For instance, measures like case management, mobile teams for work with families in crisis (in cases of severe child rights violations such as violence and abuse), child's temporary custody without limiting parents' rights and obligations were introduced. Different services are being developed, like strengthening the social assistance to families raising very young children, children with disabilities, or expecting a child; implementation of programmes such as the Multidimensional Family Therapy Program⁵, Family Conference method⁶ and others.

The general aim of foster care, as set out in the legislation⁷, is to provide for the upbringing and care of the child an environment where they can safely grow, develop and improve. As of 22 April 2021, there are a total of 6622 children in foster care of which 2959 children are in kinship care, 1605 children are in foster care families, 307 children are in family-based residential facility and 188 children are in a family of professional foster parents⁸. A total number of 1563 children are in the residential care, of which 866 children are in child care institutions, and 697 children are in

¹ More than 97 placements of children.

² 2012-11-16 Order No. A1-517 by the Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania on "Strategic Guidelines for Deinstitutionalization of the Social Care Institutions for Disabled Children, Children Left Without Parental Care and Adult Persons with Disabilities".

³ The plan covers coordinated actions to promote the transition from institutional care to family and community-based services for adults with intellectual and / or mental disabilities, children and young people with intellectual and / or mental disabilities and children left without parental care, including infants, as well as the development of support for families and foster parents.

⁴ The Action plan was later prolonged and currently covers the period of 2014-2023.

⁵ More information: <http://www.mdft.org/MDFT-Program/What-is-MDFT>

⁶ More information:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256332557_Family_Group_Conferencing_A_Theoretical_Underpinning

⁷ Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania, Third Book: Family Law, Chapter XVIII, Article 3.248.

⁸ According to data of 22 April 2021 from Family Support Information System (Socialinės paramos šeimai informacinė Sistema, SPIS: <http://vitrinos.spis.lt:8080/vtas.html>)

community-based children foster home⁹. There are 3524 foster families in total, of which 2362 are families of relatives of the child and 1162 are families of regular foster carers (not related to the child). There are also 56 family-based residential facilities and 217 professional foster parents¹⁰. Placement of a child under three years of age in institutional care is only possible in exceptional cases¹¹ with the consent of the state institution for the protection of the rights of the child¹². In general, children under three years of age cannot be placed in the children care institution.

3 Assessment of the policy measure

3.1 Legal framework and practical measures

Foster care in Lithuania is regulated by the Civil Code and the governmental regulation on the organization of children's foster care¹³. These laws and regulations regulate the procedures of the recruitment and preparation (incl. training) of the foster parents, criteria to become a foster parent, establishment of the foster care and the appointment of a foster parent, quality control and duties and responsibilities of a foster parent. The foster care can be either temporary (when all efforts are made to help child's biological family and in turn, help the child to get back to his/her family) or permanent. Foster care can be established in the family, at a Foster Care Center (professional foster care), in a family-based residential facility or child care institution¹⁴. Professional foster care is the most recent form of an alternative care.

Foster care types and forms.

1. **Foster care in a family**¹⁵ (so called **regular foster care**). A foster care of no more than three children (the total number of children in the family including own children must be no more than six children except when there is a need to place brothers and sisters together) brought up in the family environment. This includes both kinship care and foster care in a family not related to the child.

2. **Foster care in a family-based residential facility**. A form of foster care when a legal entity (foster care household) fosters four or more children (the total number of children in a family-based residential facility including own children cannot be more than eight except when there is a need to place sisters and brothers together. The number can be also less than eight children if children with disabilities are placed in the facility) in a family environment.

⁹ According to data of 22 April 2021 from Family Support Information System (Socialinės paramos šeimai informacinė Sistema, SPIS: <http://vitrinos.spis.lt:8080/vtas.html>).

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Exceptional cases are described in detail in the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania and include specific criteria. These criteria are: 1) when the child needs specialized health care and (or) nursing services, the provision of which cannot be ensured by establishing foster care of the child in a family, Foster Care Center (professional foster parents) or social family; 2) the separation of the child with siblings would harm his/her best interests; 3) foster care is established due to the urgent removal of the child from his/her family and there are no possibilities for the child to establish care in the family, Foster Care Center (professional foster parents) or social family. In all these cases, the foster care of a child under the age of three may be established only with the consent of the state institution for the protection of the rights of the child (the state institution for the protection of the rights of the child must approve the care of a child under the age of three in a child care institution). The foster care of a child under the age of three in a child care institution may continue for a maximum of three months. If the reasons specified before (mentioned criteria) are no longer applicable, the foster care of a child under the age of three in a child care institution may continue for a maximum of three months from the moment these circumstances have disappeared.

¹² State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania.

¹³ Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania, Third Book: Family Law & 2002 March 27 Resolution No. 405 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on the Approval of the Regulations on the Organization of Child Foster Care.

¹⁴ Institutional care means placements in community-based children foster homes –placements at the large institutions are not possible in Lithuania since January 1st 2020.

¹⁵ Foster care family/foster care parents.

3. Professional foster care. In this case, foster care is established at the Foster Care Centre that also gets the status of the legal representative of the child. In these cases the child is placed in the family of a professional foster parent who is not the legal representative of a child but provides care and ensures that all needs for the child's healthy development are met. Professional foster care was established with the aim to prevent children from being placed in institutional care, especially when there is a need to immediately remove the child from his/her family and no close relatives can take care of the child. Before, these children were usually placed in the institution until foster care parents could take care of them. Now the child is placed into the professional foster care, so the child is immediately in the family environment without the need to experience institutional care. Unlike Croatia where professional foster care is subdivided into standard and specialised foster care, there is only one type of professional foster care in Lithuania. Yet, there are plans to develop specialized professional foster care in Lithuania as well, to develop the care services for children with disabilities, behavioral problems and similar needs. The requirements for foster parents (regular or professional foster parents) are the same (please, see part "Requirements, professional foster care and support provided by the foster care centers"). The same requirements (with slight differences) apply to the members of the family-based residential facility too. Overall, compared to Croatia the requirements are, in some way, less strict, especially for professional foster parents because the main idea is that it is more important to provide foster parents with adequate support and assistance as well as to explain them clearly their responsibilities according to different foster care types than to have strict requirements regarding their education or other aspects.

4. Foster care in a care institution. If the child is left without parental care and there are no other options available, the child can also be placed at child care institution (since January 1st 2020 – only in the community-based children foster home). Due to the deinstitutionalization process, there is now a growing number of community-based children care small institutions (not more than 8 children can be placed at the institution). Whilst few large child care institutions are still left in the country they are in the transition process to become community-based children foster homes.

Temporary and permanent foster care

Foster care can be either temporary (short-term) or permanent (long-term). The purpose of a short-term foster care is to help the biological family, so the child can return to the family in a short period of time. Short-term foster care can be established up to 12 months, with the possibility of extending it for an additional 6 months and is established by an order of the municipality's administration director. Permanent (long-term) foster care is established for a child who is not under parental care and cannot return to his/her biological family (for an indefinite period). In this case, child's care, upbringing, representation and defense of his/her legal and legitimate interests are entrusted to another family, household or a child care institution. A long-term foster care is established by a district court¹⁶ order as per the statement of the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service or the prosecutor.

3.2 Requirements, professional foster care and support provided by the foster care centers.

Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania sets up criteria that indicate who is not eligible to become a foster parent. These criteria apply to all potential foster parents; does not matter if they are close relatives, regular foster parents, professional foster parents or members of the family-based residential facility, (see Annex 3 "Requirements for the foster parents"). In general, there are no specific requirements for a person who wishes to take a child into care, such as being married or to legally own an apartment,

¹⁶ According to the child's place of residence.

house or other form of accommodation. The most important condition is that a person who wishes to foster a child would ensure the adequate care and support for the child's growth and development. Also, standard procedures (with no exceptions, according to different types of foster care) for all potential foster parents apply. For example, everyone who wishes to become foster parent or adopt a child needs to submit a written application and pass an initial assessment performed by the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. During this process the candidate's compliance with requirements related to person's age, criminal record, health and termination of his/her parental authority or duties as foster parent is checked.

After successful pass of the initial assessment, all foster parents (except close relatives) must complete a mandatory training programme called the Training and consultation programme for foster parents, professional foster parents, adoptive parents, and community-based child care home staff (hereinafter – GIMK Programme)¹⁷. The GIMK programme is the main training course (mandatory for all foster parents, except close relatives), and additional (specialized) training course that is mandatory only for professional foster parents. There is also a shorter version of the GIMK programme for the child's close relatives¹⁸, although they are not required to complete the programme (see Annex 2 on more information about the GIMK programme). During training programme, GIMK programme trainers (there are always two of them) organize at least two meetings with the family of a potential foster parent to collect more information about the person, his/her family, lifestyle, views related to children upbringing (e.g., in relation to corporal punishment), and other information that is important to assess if a person is ready to foster a child. At least one of such meetings must happen at the home of the potential foster parent. More meetings can be organized too, if the trainers feel the need to collect more information or find out more about specific issues. After the training and the meetings, GIMK programme trainers prepare an exhaustive conclusion in which they describe strong and weak qualities of the person and his/her environment. In their conclusion they give their assessment of whether the candidate can become a foster parent or not. The negative statement does not mean that a person can never become a foster parent, but to do so he/she must solve the problems and challenges identified in the assessment of the GIMK programme trainers.

If the assessment is positive, a person is approved as a foster parent and waits for the placement of a child. Professional foster parents cannot choose children who will be placed in their family (but they can refuse the placement). Regular foster parents can either apply for a foster care of a specific child (if they already know the child) or await proposals of the children that they can foster.

3.3 Establishment and role of Foster Care Centers

Although foster care, including care in family settings was in place in Lithuania for a long time, for many years only financial support was provided to foster parents plus fragmented counselling, additional trainings and group meetings performed by the GIMK trainers. The discussions with the foster parents, as well as information and experience of the non-governmental organisations (hereinafter – NGOs), showed that despite the importance of the financial support, foster parents need in addition constant assistance from the professionals who can help with various challenges faced during foster care. These challenges can be related to problems with child's upbringing, behavior, understanding child's needs, dealing with exhaustion and

¹⁷ Between 2008 and 2018 all foster parents were trained according to the Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education (PRIDE) training program developed in the United States of America. Since 2012, the PRIDE program was renamed to GIMK programme to adapt it to the existing situation in Lithuania. GIMK programme was adjusted few times, for instance with the introduction of professional foster care, the programme was complemented with the specialized part covering additional sessions for those who wish to become professional foster parents.

¹⁸ Close relatives are child's brothers, sisters and grandparents.

similar. For these reasons, in 2015 NGOs emphasized the need to provide foster parents with the additional support next to financial support. For example, support which will emphasize on dealing with foster care issues, such as the child's adaptation in a new family or child's challenging behavior due to traumatic experiences. As a result, in the same year, NGOs started to provide services to foster carers, such as; psychological counselling, social counselling, self-support groups, legal assistance and other similar forms of assistance. In 2018, such support and assistance became a nation-wide model, legally established in the Social Services Law. Under this law¹⁹, Foster Care Centers are established as one of the service available to foster parents, adoptive parents, members of a family-based residential facility and professional foster parents in every municipality²⁰.

As of today, there are in total 66 Foster Care Centres across 60 municipalities. Foster Care Centres are also responsible for the promotion of foster care and adoption, for the organization of the GIMK programme training, identification and selection of new foster parents (regular and professional foster parents) and adoptive parents. All foster parents are assigned to a Foster Care Centre which is required to offer support to every family who is taking care of a fostered child. However, not all families receive intensive or long-term assistance and services. On the other hand, adoptive parents are not required to use the services of Foster Care Centers unless they feel that they need the support. This practice is carried out to respect confidentiality of the adoption process and avoid disclosing data to Foster Care Centres if adoptive parents do not voluntarily contact the centres to request the support.

Establishment of the professional foster care

Another outcome of the Action plan developed in 2019 was the establishment of professional foster care. Professional foster parents in Lithuania are not required to have any specific education, and they can also have another job if that does not obstruct performing their duties, which is the main difference between requirements in Lithuania and Croatia. A professional foster parent is not a legal representative of the child (this role is carried by the Foster Care Center) instead he/she is more of a service provider. A professional foster parent can take care for up to 3 children at one time, and the total number of children in his/her family, including their own, cannot exceed 6 children. The professional foster parent enters into a cooperation and service agreement with the Foster Care Center and carries out his/her activities on the basis of an individual certificate of activity.

3.4 Funding of foster care

Each child fostered in a family is entitled to a state budget amounting to EUR 160 per month²¹. If the foster child also receives an orphan's pension and/or a child support payment, the value of the allowance from the state budget is equal to the value of this benefit minus the value of pension or child support payment. A foster parent is also paid a supplement to a foster care allowance, which is an additional EUR 160 per month for each child cared for. Municipalities are able to pay additional care allowance for foster parents. Each municipality can arbitrarily decide the amount of the allowance (no minimum or maximum amounts apply). In addition, each foster child receives child allowance (the so called "child's money" – "vaiko pinigai" in

¹⁹ In addition to the establishment of the Foster Care Centers in the Law on the Social Services, their activity, roles, duties, responsibilities, other aspects were comprehensively described in the bylaw – "Description of the organization and monitoring of the quality of activities of Foster Care Center and professional foster parent taking care for a child", developed by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

²⁰ Except for Vilnius City municipality and two other municipalities (Šiauliai and Vilnius region municipalities) that have more than one Foster Care Centre.

²¹ Paid to the account of the foster parent, but the benefit must be used for the needs of the child.

Lithuanian²²) until the age of 18. The allowance can be extended until the age of 21 if the child participates in a general education program.

In the case of professional foster care, state budget allowance and child's money are paid to the Foster Care Centre which must ensure that these benefits are used for the needs of the child. Professional foster parents are paid for the provision of their services by the municipalities. Each municipality can set the amount of the payment, although the law recommends paying professional foster parent not less than the minimum national monthly wage²³ (regardless of the number of children a professional foster parent actually cares for). Generally, foster parents are paid a higher amount if they take care for children with disabilities or infants. Also, their overall payment depends on the number of children they take care for (for each child, a professional foster parent receives a fixed additional payment set by the municipality). Professional foster parents also receive a fixed payment for the time they are waiting for a child to be placed and have no other children placed in their family.

3.5 Changes in child rights protection system.

It should be mentioned that to limit the number of children in the care institutions and in care system in general, the competent authorities promote family and community-based care, and develop services and other measures to protect children from being separated from their biological families. The system of protection of children's rights underwent a major reform in 2018, which led to centralization of the system, unified assessment of the possible violations of the rights of the child, and the introduction of new measures such as case management and mobile teams service²⁴. Moreover, in 2019 the system of the protection of children's rights was further amended, which resulted in additional new measures such as the temporary custody of a child without limiting parental rights and obligations of the parents. Since 1 January 2020, in cases of serious violations of children's rights (e.g., violence, abuse, dangerous behavior of the child him/herself that parents are not able to deal with or do not want to deal with, etc.), the child is initially placed in the care of relatives, family friends or other persons close to the family and the child. The placement can be of the child alone or together with both parents or one parent (the placement together with the parent/s can be applied only if there is no abuse, violence or other mistreatment of the child or the possibility of such from the parent). Such a measure can last up to 30 days and can be extended once for the same period. During this time, intensive services are provided to the family. If the child has no relatives or friends, or if the parents cannot agree among themselves who could take care of the child, temporary custody can be set up at the crisis center. In the crisis center the child can be placed either with one or both parents if this does not pose danger to the child. Such decisions are made by child rights protection specialists together with child's parents.

These and other measures seem to have an impact on the declining number of children placed in foster care.

4 Assessment of success factors and transferability

According to Lithuania's experience, it would be useful for Croatia to reconsider the high standards set for professional (specialized) foster parents. As mentioned, in Lithuania there are no requirements for foster parents to have specific education. The analysis of other countries also shows that education does not play a major role in the

²² Child's money amount to EUR 70 per child per month. An additional EUR 41,2 per month per child is paid to families raising or fostering children with disabilities or 3 and more children.

²³ The minimum national monthly wage in Lithuania in 2021 is EUR 642.

²⁴ Mobile teams are the teams of three professionals (psychologist, social worker and a professional for the addictions treatment) under the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service. Mobile teams provide mobile intensive work for families in crisis, where serious violations of the rights of the child have been identified, such as violence and abuse.

success of professional foster care, not even in cases of specialized professional foster care. Although it can be useful to involve people who have a background in working with children, it is highly important to develop quality support that makes foster parents feel equipped to deal with situations for which they are not prepared or take care of child needs they do not fully understand. Lithuania is currently working on the concept of developing specialized professional foster care too (therefore, Croatia's experience in this area can be useful), but there is no plan to design requirements in accordance to education. The focus will be on the specialized programmes and adequate support to the specialized professional foster parent, so he/she is fully "equipped" with necessary services and assistance to take care children with different needs. Specialized programs are planned to be implemented to prepare foster parents for specialized professional foster care, e.g., TFCO Programme (Treatment Foster Care Programme). The TFCO is a programme for foster parents based on the specialized training to care for a wide variety of children and adolescents, usually those with significant emotional, behavioral, or social issues or medical needs.

The prevention of the placements of children under three years old in the institutional care based on Lithuania's experience might be useful as well considering that the infants and young children are especially easy traumatized by the placements in institutions. Lithuanian examples of measures that were developed to support children and their parents in crisis situations can be useful too. These measures contribute to less children in the care system in general, and in turn, increase prevention and minimize the dependency on the institutional care.

Finally, it might be useful for both Lithuania and Croatia to mutually learn from their experience related to the provision of services to foster parents and children placed in their families. For example, to look at the model implemented for Foster Care Centers in Lithuania, and the model of social welfare centers, care institutions and NGOs providing services to foster families in Croatia. This could help to identify successful examples as well as challenges and ways to overcome them, and in turn, strengthen support for foster parents.

Additionally, for Lithuania, it would be useful to further explore the social guarantees that professional foster parents have in Croatia (such as the right to pension, compulsory health insurance, and unemployment benefits) as these are currently limited in Lithuania for persons working under individual (independent) certificate which also minimizes the motivation to be involved in such activity.

5 Questions

- In Croatia, specialized foster parents are obliged to have particular education. What was the motivation to choose such criteria? The proper support, assistance, services and preparation of the foster parents seems to be more relevant than the education.
- Where there any assessments to implement some specialized programmes like Treatment Foster Care Programme to support specialized foster care?
- Is it obligatory for foster parents and children in care to receive support services from welfare centers and other service providers in this field, or foster parents only apply for services on a voluntary basis? If the services are voluntary, are foster parents motivated to use them? In addition, are there special services or other support available for foster families with children with special needs, e.g., due to disabilities or behavioral challenges, or similar?

- What are the numbers of the breakdowns²⁵ in the foster care families, and did the numbers decline after introducing services provided by welfare centers, children's care homes and other service providers for foster families?
- Foster parent in Croatian law focuses on the accommodation aspect – why is this the case, considering that the main aim of foster care is to provide a child with appropriate care, upbringing and to meet child's needs?

6 List of references

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Lietuvos Respublikos šeimynų įstatymas / Law on the Family-based residential facilities of the Republic of Lithuania.

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Socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministro 2018 m. sausio 19 d. įsakymas Nr. A1-28 "Dėl Globos centro veiklos ir vaiko budinčio globotojo vykdomos priežiūros organizavimo ir kokybės priežiūros tvarkos aprašo patvirtinimo" / 2018-01-19 Order No. A1-28 by the Minister of Social Security and Labour "On the description of the organization and supervision of the quality of the activities of the Foster Care Center and professional foster parent taking care for a child".

²⁵ For example when a child placed in the foster care family is send back to the institution or another foster care family due to the crisis or other reasons when the foster parent is not able and (or) does not want to take care of the child anymore.

Annex 1 Summary table

Situation in the peer country

- Family and community-based care is seen as the priority measure to protect children from placements in institutional care.
- As of April 22, 2021 there are in total 6622 children in Lithuania in foster care system, with the majority placed in the family-based care (76%) and community-based children care homes (~11%).
- There are four types of foster care in Lithuania: 1) foster care in a family (both kinship care and foster care in a family not related to the child); 2) foster care in a family-based residential facility; 3) professional foster care (legally – foster care in a Foster Care Center); 4) foster care in a children care institution (community-based children foster home).
- Lithuanian law bans the placement at the institution of children under 3 years old – such placements are only possible in rare exceptional cases.

Assessment of the policy measure

- Family-based foster care is well developed in Lithuania, including professional foster care established in Lithuanian law. Some challenges are still in place, similar to Croatia, e.g., low motivation of foster parents to take care children with disabilities or challenging behaviours.
- Deinstitutionalisation process started in Lithuania back in 2012, with the Action Plan for the Transition from Institutional Care to Family and Community Services for Disabled Persons and Children Left Without Parental Care developed for the period of 2014-2020, later prolonged to 2023. Several measures – like establishment of Foster Care Centers, piloting of professional foster care and other – were developed during implementation of the plan to protect children from institutional placements. This helped to significantly minimize the number of children in institutional care.
- Foster Care Centers are one of the measures to promote and strengthen foster care – they do provide a range of services to foster parents, professional foster parents, family-based residential facilities, adoptive parents and children placed in their families.
- Child rights protection system in Lithuania went through few reforms to introduce measures that help to keep the child with his/her biological family. It seems that these measures helped to minimize children's separation from their families, and in turn, declining number of children in care in general.

Assessment of success factors and transferability

- There are few aspects related to professional foster care that can be shared between countries, for instance the requirements for professional foster care in Lithuania that might improve the situation in Croatia, and social guarantees available to professional foster parents in Croatia that might be useful experience for Lithuania.
- Both Lithuania and Croatia have institutions/service providers that must ensure proper assistance and help to foster parents and children placed in their families. Sharing experience in this field might be useful for the improvement of such services in both countries.
- Measures implemented in Lithuania, such as mobile teams, temporary custody without limiting parental authority can be another great example for Croatia in relation to additional measures aimed to minimize the removal of children from their biological families.

Questions

- In Croatia, specialized foster parents are obliged to have particular education – what motivation was behind choosing such criteria?
- Where there are any assessments of the possibilities to implement in Croatia specialized programmes like Treatment Foster Care Programme, to support specialized foster care?
- Is it obligatory for foster parents and children in care to receive support services from welfare centers and other service providers in this field, or foster parents only apply for services, when they feel the need? Are foster parents motivated to use this? Are there any specific services or other support for foster families with children with specific needs like disability or behavioral challenges?
- What are the numbers of the breakdowns in the foster care families, and did the numbers decline after introducing services provided by welfare centers, children's care homes and other service providers for foster families?
- Why is the description of the foster parent in Croatian law focuses on the accommodation aspect which is not a primary function of the foster parent?

Annex 2 GIMK programme content

Training and consultation programme for foster parents, professional foster parents, adoptive parents, and community-based children care home staff (GIMK Programme) is the only legal training program in Lithuania for potential foster parents, professional foster parents, members of the family-based residential facility, adoptive parents, and employees of community-based children care institutions.

Training according to GIMK programme can be only held by specialists approved by the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour who must complete specialized training and get certified by the Service.

GIMK programme aims at development and strengthening of five skills necessary for a person wanting to foster or adopt a child, become professional foster parent or work in the community-based children care institution, such as:

- 1) skill to ensure a safe environment for a child and meet all child's physical needs;
- 2) skill to meet child's needs and compensate for developmental difficulties;
- 3) skill to ensure child's contact and maintenance of the relationships with his/her biological family;
- 4) skill to help a child to establish safe and lasting relationships;
- 5) cooperation skills needed to solve the problems of the child and the family.

Foster care type	Content of the GIMK programme	Participation
Close relatives of the child	Training Program for the Preparation to Foster the Child of the Close Relatives of the Child – 6 sessions in total Covered topics: 1. Introduction to the Training Program 2. Child development needs 3. Attachment 4. Loss 5. Maintenance of the relationships with child's biological family 6. Upbringing of the child	Voluntary
Regular foster parents	Main training – 7 sessions in total Covered topics: 1. Introduction into GIMK programme 2. Openness and cooperation 3. Compensation of the child's developmental disorders 4. Child behavioral problems and disorders. Strategies to overcome them 5. Exhaustion. Prevention and intervention 6. Trauma and crises of foster children 7. Preparing for change	Mandatory
Adoptive parents		

Professional foster parents	Main training + additional (specialized) training (6 additional sessions)	Mandatory
Employees of community-based child care institutions	Specialized training's topics: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Team work2. Organization of the child's meetings with the biological family3. Strengthening the child's psychological resilience and identity4. Understanding the child's behavior and meeting child's needs5. Learning difficulties and motivation of foster children. Standards of community-based children care institution6. Ensuring consistency in care planning. Return of the child to his/her family or transfer of the child to the family of adoptive parents or permanent foster parents.	

Annex 3 Requirements for the foster parents

	Regular foster care	Kinship care	Family-based residential facility	Professional foster care
Preconditions	Permanently residing in the territory of the Republic of Lithuania	Same requirements as in case of regular foster care except:	Same requirements as in case of regular foster care	Same requirements as in case of regular foster care
	Minimum age – 21 years old			
	Maximum age – not older than 65 years old	1) A foster parent is related to a child	+ the founder of the family-based care facility must additionally meet	+ who has no history of the termination of the
	Is not related to a child	2) In case of the close relative of a child –	one of the following criteria:	cooperation and service agreement between
	Has proper conditions to take care for a child and ensure safe environment	child – minimum age criteria do not apply	(a) has at least 3 years experience of child's foster care prior to the establishment of the facility	him/her and Foster Care Centre due to the improper performance of the
	Is not found by the court as incapacitated or of limited capacity in relation to the foster care	3) In case of the close relative of a child – the maximum age criteria do not apply if a close relative wants to temporary foster a child younger than 10 years old	(b) has at least 3 years experience of working with children left without parental care, children with special educational needs, children with disabilities and / or families at social risk;	contract/duties
	From whom a child is/was not separated		(c) has a university degree or equivalent and at least 1 year's experience in direct work with children in the fields of social work, social pedagogy, special pedagogy, psychological assistance and pre-school education.	Completed GIMK programme
	To whom parental authority is not or has not been restricted	4) In case of the close relative of a child – no precondition of foster care training		Main training + additional (specialized) training and received positive assessment (conclusion)
	Was not removed from his/her duties of the foster parent due to the reasons established in the Civil Code ²⁶			
	Has no crime record ²⁷			

²⁶ In the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania, paragraph 3.246 part 3.

²⁷ According to the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania, paragraph 3.269 part 6 this includes conviction of an intentional crime against humanity, human life, liberty, sexual freedom and integrity, the child and the family, public safety, morality, a crime that is dangerous to human life or health, a crime that resulted in severe health problems or

Annex 4 Example of relevant practice

Name of the practice:	Foster Care Centers
Year of implementation:	2018 – ongoing
Coordinating authority:	Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania, together with the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Services under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, and Department of Supervision of Social Services under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour
Objectives:	To develop Foster Care Centers in all Lithuanian municipalities, to increase the availability and quality of the services they provide to foster parents, professional foster parents, adoptive parents and children placed in their families.
Main activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the Foster Care Centers model and its' establishment in the law. • Establishment of Foster Care Centers in every municipality in Lithuania. • Ensuring the quality of the services of the Foster Care Centers through training, educational meetings and other activities. • Additionally, in order to improve the availability and quality of services provided to foster parents, professional foster parents, adoptive parents and people who are interested in adoption, foster care or work of a professional foster parent, an Adoption and Care Call Line was established. From 2021 January 25 every working day from 12:00 to 20:00 experienced care and adoption specialists are available through call, e-mail and the online chat program, and provide information and consulting services to target groups mentioned above.
Results so far:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 66 Foster Care Centers established in total in every municipality in Lithuania (and in three of them – more than one Center). • Each family of a foster parent (regular foster parents, professional foster parents) are assigned to a Foster Care Center, and kept in constant touch with. • Foster Care Centers provide a range of services to foster parents, professional foster parents, adoptive parents, members of the family-based residential facilities, children placed in their family and people who are interested in adoption, foster care or work of a professional foster parent, incl. psychological counselling, social counselling, assistance, help with challenges related to child's upbringing, training and other.

crime related to the possession of the psychotropic, toxic or potent substances, regardless of whether the conviction has lapsed or been revoked in accordance with the procedure established by law. The right of a person convicted of other criminal offenses to be the foster parent of a child is assessed through evaluation of the nature and danger of the committed criminal offense and considering the best interests of the child.

Annex 5 Example of relevant practice

Name of the practice:	No children under 3 years old placed in the institutional care
Year of implementation:	The ban to place children under 3 years old (with some exceptions) in children care institution was established in 2015, with some additional changes in 2018
Coordinating authority:	Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania
Objectives:	To ensure that no child under 3 years old is placed in the residential/institutional care
Main activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To establish the ban of children under 3 years old to place in residential care in Lithuanian Law. Such ban was established in the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania, with some exceptions (see footnote 11 section 2) • It was also established in the law, that children under 3 years old can be placed at the institution only when approval from state child rights protection system is received. There still are cases in practice when the municipality asks for the approval/permission to place the child under 3 years old at the institution, but the state child rights protection system does not agree that this is in the best interest of the child, and the municipalities are forced to look for other solutions, i.e., find family-based care for a child. • Professional foster care was established to ensure that there are more possible alternative care opportunities other than institutional care, where children can be placed after being removed from their biological families. • Foster Care Centers were established to provide foster parents not only with financial benefits but also with services and support that play a crucial role too in motivating people to become foster parents, incl. professional foster parents. • There were few initiatives implemented by the non-governmental organisations, e.g., SOS Children Villages Lithuania that piloted the model of professional foster care and motivated people to become professional foster parents. Later, this experience was transferred to other municipalities too, as well as used as communication message to broad society.
Results so far:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently, only 18 children under three years old are placed in institutional care. • Usually, children with severe disabilities are placed in the residential care, as well as children who live together with their underage mothers which themselves are in institutional care.



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