

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across Europe hundreds of thousands of children are growing up in institutional care. The consequences are devastating for children, devastating for families and ultimately, devastating for society as a whole.

The Opening Doors for Europe's Children Campaign seeks to improve the quality of life of children and young people in, at risk of entering, or leaving institutional care across Europe by promoting the transition from institutional to family-based care, also called deinstitutionalisation (DI). Through coordinated advocacy at national and EU level we aim to support reforms that will prevent separation of children from their families and will offer high quality alternatives where separation is in the child's best interest.

Explicit mention of deinstitutionalisation as a funding priority for European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), may provide the much needed financial incentive to catalyse comprehensive systems reform in EU Member States. At the beginning of any DI process it is necessary to ensure 'double-running costs'. EU money is ideally suited to support such transition costs, since after completion of DI, the overall burden on public expenditure is likely to be equal to or less than the cost of running an institutional system, with much improved outcomes for children and families.

This report is based on the outcomes of a survey addressed to eight National Coordinators of the Opening Doors campaign.¹ It aims to assess the extent to which EU Member States have used ESIF to catalyse child care systems reform by evaluating Partnership Agreements (PAs) and Operational Programmes (OPs) and the extent to which the ex-ante conditionality and Partnership Principle were honoured. Given that the Common Strategic Framework for ESIF funds makes a strong link to the European Semester process, we also considered that from the DI perspective.

KEY FINDINGS

The overall trend is encouraging. Deinstitutionalisation remains a priority for investment and is explicitly mentioned in the PAs and OPs of all countries surveyed except Greece.

However, only the National Coordinators in Bulgaria and Romania were fully satisfied by the level of attention accorded to DI in the PAs and OPs. Across all other countries, there were concerns about the limited approach to DI in the documents.

Half of the survey respondents felt that the ESIF budget allocation for DI was satisfactory (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Romania). For three National Coordinators, the budget allocation for DI was unclear (Hungary, Lithuania, and Greece), whilst the National Coordinators in Poland felt the budget allocated was insufficient.

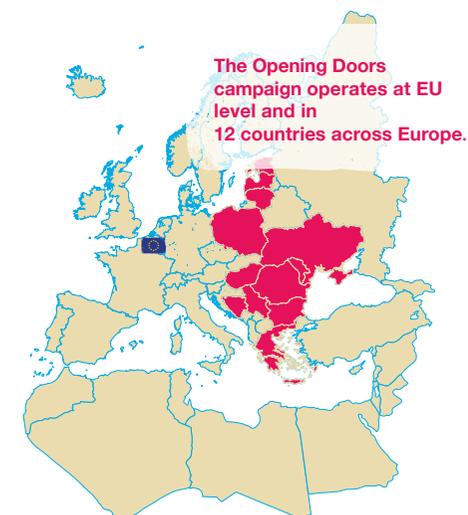
Survey respondents felt that the ex-ante conditionality which encourages investment in deinstitutionalisation reforms has broadly been respected so far. In Poland, however, the National Coordinator felt that the legislation is ambiguous, leaving open the possibility to invest in institutional care.

The extent to which National Coordinators had been consulted during the negotiations of the PAs and OPs varies significantly. In Bulgaria and Romania the National Coordinators appear to have had quite significant involvement and influence, whilst elsewhere the links with government during the negotiation phase were weaker. In Hungary, for example, involvement of civil society organisations (CSOs) was limited to an online questionnaire. The National Coordinator in Greece reported a total lack of engagement with CSOs in general.

In terms of access to information, Opening Doors National Coordinators in Bulgaria, Romania and Latvia were generally happy with the communication channels in place through which they had been kept informed of progress in development of the PA and OPs. The Polish National Coordinator also reported that they were informed of the next important steps towards implementation of the OPs. However, National Coordinators in other countries reported a complex situation and information that was vague, limited, or difficult to access.

In Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania, organisations involved in the national Opening Doors campaign will be directly involved in monitoring ESIF implementation in their countries. Across the other 5 countries, National Coordinators reported that they expect to monitor implementation informally.

With respect to the European Semester, DI features explicitly in the 2014 National Reform Programmes (NRPs) of Bulgaria, Latvia and Romania and the 2014 National Social Reports (NSRs) of Bulgaria and Romania. In 2014 the only country receiving a Country Specific Recommendation (CSR) explicitly mentioning DI was Romania, whilst the CSRs for Latvia and Bulgaria relate indirectly to DI. Perhaps not coincidentally, these three countries reported (relatively) high satisfaction concerning the level of attention and the budget allocation for DI.



¹ Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania (note the campaign also operates in four non-EU countries not covered by this survey)