

## ***De-Institutionalization in Lithuania as the Result of Social Education***

Dalia Stražinskaitė, Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, Lithuania

The European Conference on Education  
Official Conference Proceedings 2015

### **Abstract**

The process of de-institutionalization concerns children, who are deprived from parent care, elderly people and people with disabilities. The presentation seeks to estimate possibilities in alternative families, but not in Lithuanian institutional foster homes, to foster children, who are deprived of parental care, but. A proportion of foster children of all children under the age of 18 in 2012 amounted to 1.9 per cent in Lithuania and was one of the largest in Europe. Research and statistical indicators show that the process of De-institutionalization in Lithuania is very sluggish. The question is raised whether the people of Lithuania is aware of the problems faced by children growing in institutions? The education of adults and cultural activities are recommended in order to overcome communication gap.

Keywords: De-institutionalization, foster care, foster child, communication, social change.

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## Introduction

An institution could be defined as any residential care where: a) residents are isolated from the broader community and/or compelled to live together; b) residents do not have sufficient control over their lives and over decisions which affect them; and c) the requirements of the organization itself tend to take precedence over the residents' individual needs (Guidelines, 2012). The process of de-institutionalization concerns children, deprived from parent care, elderly people and people with disabilities. The case of foster children is the most sensitive one. Where the child's own family is unable, even with appropriate support, to provide adequate care for the child, abandons or relinquishes the child, the State is responsible for protecting the rights of the child and ensuring appropriate alternative care, with or through competent local authorities and duly authorized civil society organizations.

The presentation explores the case of De-institutionalization in Lithuania. It seeks to estimate possibilities to foster children, who are deprived of parental care, in alternative families, but not in institutional foster homes in Lithuania. The question is raised whether the public is aware of the problems faced by children growing in institutions? The presentation is divided into 3 parts. The first introduces the context of Lithuanian alternative care system and statistical evidence. Second one overlooks the potential problems that face the foster children. Third explores the research of attitudes and knowledge of adult people on needs of foster children.

## De-institutionalization in Lithuania

The idea of de-institutionalization in Europe is supported by large number of non-profit organizations. In 2012 a network of organizations and individuals *Eurochild* has issued the working paper *De-institutionalization and quality alternative care for children in Europe*. The Working Group on Children without Parental Care of the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child initiated the document *Moving Forward: Implementing the 'guidelines for the alternative Care of Children'*. European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care issued the paper *Common European Guidelines on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care* and the *Toolkit on the Use of European Funds for the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care*. The European Union has put regulations in place which made it clear that EU Structural Funds should be spent on the transition from institutional to community based care.

Children without parental care in Lithuania may be fostered in state or municipal institutions, households, families or be adopted. Unfortunately, the listed alternatives must be assessed differently. In recent decades, scientists agree that even a short period spent in the institution can negatively affect children's intellectual and emotional development and need positive discrimination involving practice. Having no family history and lacking of parental support, they form a sense of inferiority, which sometimes manifests by aggressive behavior (Tsvetanska, 2010). Growing up in foster homes they live a lonely, unstable and difficult life. They form

an incredibly large part of the convicts in prisons or homeless people on the streets (Sinclair, Wilson, 2005).

In the end of 2013 the number of children in the institutional care was 3821. Currently, Lithuania has 95 child care institutions, of which: 5 infant homes; 7 state orphanages; 4 orphanages for children with disabilities; 52 municipal child care homes; 10 municipal care homes; 17 non-governmental child care homes. A proportion of foster children of all children under the age of 18 in 2012 amounted to 1.9 per cent in Lithuania and was one of the largest in Europe. Research and statistical indicators show that the process of De-institutionalization in Lithuania is very sluggish.

In order to overcome social exclusion ideology the Ministry of Social Security and Labor approved 2014-2020 year action plan for the shift from institutional care to family and community-based services for disabled and deprived of parental care children . The plan aims to reduce the percent of children accommodated in childcare institutions from 57 to 25 percent.

The transition from institutional care to family and community-based services for the disabled and deprived of parental care for children 2014-2020 year action plan has three main goals. The first objective – to ensure a sustainable environment and conditions for each child (and a disabled child) to grow in his own family, or adoptive or foster family, and to receive community assistance (Plan, 2014: 3). For this purpose the formulated 18 challenges are grouped into three sub-groups - to strengthen the comprehensive assistance to communities; to support individuals and families, who adopt or foster children and provide social services for children with disabilities; and gradually reorganize the infant homes, the homes for children with disabilities and child care homes (Plan, 2014: 4). The sequence of these tasks would seem logical and consistent. It would be impossible to close immediately all the children's homes without having an adequate community infrastructure and without sufficient number of foster parents and guardians. The second objective of the plan is intended for integration of people with disabilities, the third objective - to promote the moral values of society change, forming a positive public attitude to the system reform and to ensure the transparency of its processes . The authors of the plan believe that this would be enough to develop society's tolerance for disabled people, positive parenting skills, awareness of the institutional care and damage-institutionalization process (Plan, 2014: 8).

### **Depiction of the foster child's case**

Child care system is designed to help those children whose parents are unwilling or unable to take proper care of them. In Lithuania all parents who have abandoned their babies had addiction problems (compared with 58 percent in the UK. (Wade et al, 2011). In addition, in Lithuania we find a tendency of same risk group parents abandoning more than one child. 40 babies from home growing children are from families who had 3-7 children(Radzevičienė, 2003).

The children in care homes have deep and serious prenatal, postnatal problems and those caused by inadequate training and require intensive and specialized therapy, and special education. In order to describe the "typical" child who lives in care home we need to identify serious developmental, emotional, behavioral and health problems, he often has difficult or moderate cases of disability and special education needs. Among the main reasons why adolescent child cannot grow up in the family home and is placed in care institutions, the most common is the deprivation, emotional or physical abuse or sexual abuse. The specific child may have experienced more than one form of unfair treatment, in addition, that forms self-abandonment (Wade et al., 2011). For those cases where the child experiences trauma and post-traumatic stress scientist Bessel A. van der Kolk (2005) introduced the term developmental trauma (Blaustein et al., 2010). It is obvious that a single traumatic experience, such as a natural disaster, do not work as hard as chronic interpersonal stress. Physically abused children are almost two times more aggressive than those who haven't experienced violence and about one-fifth of them are prone to criminal behavior, alcohol or drug use. And these indicators have almost no impact on gender (Wade et al., 2011).

In order to evaluate Lithuanian case we suggest the data of Table 1, provided by Lithuanian child care home trade union association president V. Konovalovienė. The table shows that less than one in two children in children homes is a child with special needs and requires special therapeutic and educational support. Disabled children end up in care institutions not only and not so much because of disability, but like other children: risk due to neglect. In addition, disabled children rarely return to parent families are eligible for adoption, and more likely to care institutions. Even in the age of 18 disabled young people often remain in foster care. (Sinclair, 2005).

| <b>PROBLEM</b>   | <b>Number of cases</b> | <b>%</b> |
|--|------------------------|----------|
| intermediate or hard disability                        | 606                    | 17       |
| special needs  | 1875                   | 50       |
| mental illness   | 318                    | 8        |
| emotional, behavioral and social development disorders | 899                    | 20       |
| medical assistance was provided to                     | 148                    | 3        |
| Minimal care   | 278                    | 7        |

Table 1. The common problem of children in child care homes (Konovalovienė, 2013).

### **The attitude toward children in institutions**

I want to present the results of online interview made with 176 persons in November 8-26, 2013. (3 questionnaires were uncompleted, 2 fully charged). The questionnaire consisted of 12 closed questions, including 7 of the scale and type 4 semi-closed questions. I do not go through all the questions in this presentation. Objectives of the study were to determine the opinion of the respondents in relation to child care; identify potential group of foster parents, indicate their expectations of children in

care problems; assess what guided views with respect to children in care and what stereotypes prevail.

The test sample consisted of individuals from 23 to 69 years, mean age 43 years, mostly in the age group 35-40 years. The respondents were asked about ever considering foster child care. The results of table 2 show whether respondents of the survey considered about being foster parents. The detail analysis of answers of those who are considering about foster child reveals that most of them are families without children (8 out of 13 occurring in the sample - 61.5 percent.), single people (17 from 51 to 33.3 percent.), families with minor children (21.3 percent) and families with adult children (7 of 24 - 29.2 percent.).

| Had You ever considered about foster child care? | Number of cases | %          |
|--|-----------------|------------|
| No   | 88              | 50         |
| Yes, but I'm not sure                            | 49              | 28         |
| Yes, but I've decided to refuse care             | 29              | 16         |
| Yes, I am or was foster parent                   | 10              | 6          |
| <b>At all:</b>                                   | <b>176</b>      | <b>100</b> |

Table 2. The number of respondents considering about foster care.

What makes us upset is that half of respondents do not consider about fostering a child. The Figure 3 is suggested to look at the reasons why foster parenting is refused. As we can see from it, the financial problems are not the main ones. More of them are the lack of content in that position and uncertainty for the future.

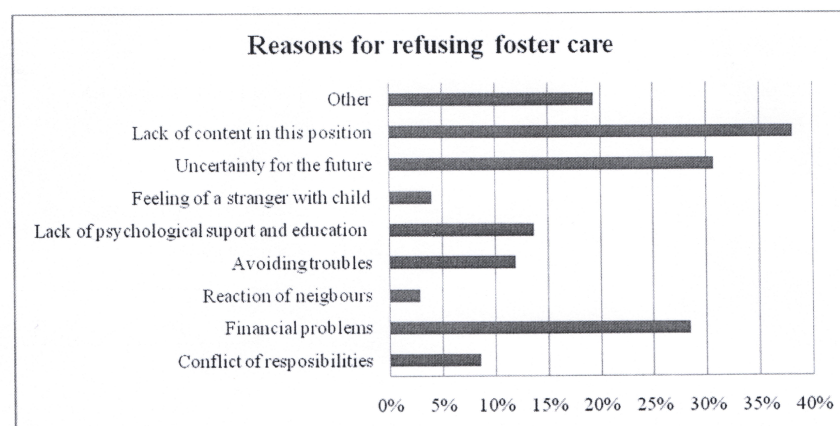


Figure 3. Reasons for refusing foster care.

In order to reveal whether the public is prepared to problems that face children in children homes let's look at the figure 4. I can find evidence that question "would you care for a child who ..." perplexed many readers of questionnaire. Full of comments, "never thought about it, yet I could not answer; we were not discussing it; I would be afraid of not being able to see these problems; I am too big egoist, I have little love; maybe I'm self-centered, but I think I would lack the knowledge to grow a "different" child; I am afraid that I cannot give them adequate assistance,

there love is simply not enough... ;should seriously reflect on it, but it would be difficult to resolve, at one time or because it is not suitable for any conditions or pre-theoretical, psychological, lack of knowledge, or a child is made available to other alternative care perhaps better than mine, and so on. Others stressed the link between the child and guardian "should be thrust regardless of the child's shortcomings, I think it is important interrelationship." There were 13 of those who thought they could deal with any problematic situation: "I resolve to take care of the child, I would agree with all the options." However, just 72 did not agree with any option.

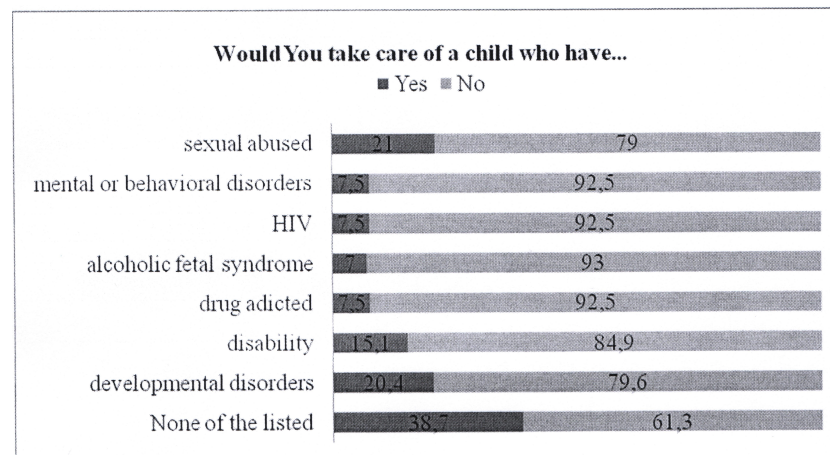


Figure 4. Preparing to care for problem child, %.

## Discussion

The basic characteristics of public care for children in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are: 1) increased need for care for children outside their families, 2) high proportion of children in children's institutions, and 3) weak tradition of alternative forms of childcare such as foster care and family-like homes (Laklija, 2011). However, there are differences among them, depending on their socio-economic policies. The socio-economic regimes in the Visegrad countries differ from the Baltic States in some major aspects: first, they have offered more protection to population to compensate for some of the social costs of transformation; second, they have achieved better results in building complex, competitive export industries; third, they preserved a far more inclusive democracy (Towards..., 2011). The number of children in alternative care is one of the symptoms of low citizenship and responsiveness.

Neoliberal economics shapes their values. This is the world reigned by narrow, selfish interests; isolation and competing individuals; financial capital; amenities and unfounded "inherent" free-market fundamentalism. Freedom in the neoliberal worldview is merely the freedom to choose the most understandable abstract concept to market, cleansed of power, politics and social welfare issues (Giroux, 2013). This procedure has an important socio-educational component. Through the games, reality TV, celebrity culture, television news, radio and other media influence and create a virtual environment, such things, wishes and desires which reflect the

"free market" corporate worldview (Giroux, 2013). Social responsibility is accompanied by organized infantilism and distancing themselves from responsibility (Giroux, 2013). The individual in existing neo-liberal social order is without commitment, disdainful of social responsibility and has lost contact with the public good (Giroux, 2013: 87).

Speaking about social responsibility and ethics, E. Levinas referred to "silent appeal of another face ". Sigmund Bauman tells us another thing: present society "is getting bigger areas of human behavior clearly released from the social modeling, maintenance and administration, shifting an increasing proportion of previously public responsibility to individual men and women" (Bauman, 2007). Transferred to individuals, this task becomes insurmountable (Bauman, 2007). Foster care system in Lithuania gives an example of privatization of social responsibility. The system of de-institutionalization doesn't work if determination to care for abandoned or disadvantaged children, as opposed to institutional care with alternating adult cases, lies on the shoulders of a specific person. Therefore, community cooperation networks are necessary. But neoliberalism opposed forms of collective identity and the curricular practices, which is based on an identity (Apple 2013: 9). It is necessary to form a new cultural and political vocabulary, develop a citizenship that is able to identify the corporate and academic interests, which creates a coercive apparatus (Giroux, 2013: 86). Effective de-institutionalization process cannot be realized solely on peaceful dialogue. It intertwines different interests, such as employment, buildings, power, desire to show off profiting on child's fate and the impact on society. Conflicting approaches outdoors require additional effort to wrest the location and uncommitted life potential guardians and foster parents, transform individualistic and consumerist society values.

## **Conclusion**

The process of deinstitutionalisation is one of the most significant events in Europe in the next seven years.

Previous research claims and home care workers' testimony shows that a large number of problems occur for children in foster care, e. g. bad health, special needs or disabilities. The results of online interviews suggest that approximately half of respondents never considered fostering a child. The reasons of care refusal are not only financial ones, but the feeling of insecurity in themselves and their future. Many of respondents would not agree to take care of a child with any problem, including disabilities, effects of alcohol, drugs and so.

The education of adults and cultural activities are recommended in order to overcome communication gap.

## References

- Bauman, Z. (2007). *Consuming Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Apple, M. W. (2013) *Can education change society?* New York: Routledge.
- Blaustein, M. E., Kinniburgh, K. M. (2010). *Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents*. N.Y.: The Guilford Press.
- Common European Guidelines on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care (2012). Brussels.
- Eurochild. (2010). *Children in alternative care*. National Surveys.
- Giroux, H. (2013) *America's Education Deficit and the War on Youth*. New York: Montly review press.
- Goodyer, A. (2011) *Child-centred Foster Care*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Konovalovienė, V. (2013). *Socio-economic problems of children in care homes: the round-table discussion*.
- Laklija, M. (2011). *Foster care models in Europe: results of a conducted survey*. Zagreb.
- Moving Forward: Implementing the 'guidelines for the alternative Care of Children'*. (2012). Glasgow: CELCIS.
- Plan (2014). *Perėjimo nuo institucinės globos prie šeimoje ir bendruomenėje teikiamų paslaugų neįgaliesiems ir likusiems be tėvų globos vaikams 2014-2020 metų veiksmų planas*. Approved by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour in 2014. 14 February. Order No. A1-83.
- Radzevičienė, L. (2003). Kūdikių namų auklėtinių tėvų socialinės reabilitacijos aspektas. *Socialinis darbas*, nr. 2(4), p. 56-66.
- Schooler, J., Smalley, B. K., & Callahan, T. (2009). *Wounded Children, Healing Homes*. Colorado: NavPress.
- Sinclair, I., Baker, C., Kate, W., Gibbs, I. (2005). *Foster Children : Where They Go and How They Get On*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 288 p.
- Towards a Lifelong Learning Society in Europe: the Contribution of the Education System* (2011). Tallin: Institute of International and Social Studies.
- Tsvetanska, S. (2010) *Social stratification in the classroom: challenges for teachers. Policies and practicies for teaching sociocultural diversity*. Strasbourg: Council of



Europe Publishing.

United Nations. (2009). *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*.

Wade, J., Biehal, N., Farrelly, N., Sinclair, I. (2011). *Caring for Abused and Neglected Children: Making the Right Decisions for Reunification or Long-Term Care*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

[http://vaikoteises.lt/lt/global/globa\\_institucijoje/kas\\_yra\\_vaiko\\_global\\_institucijoje.html](http://vaikoteises.lt/lt/global/globa_institucijoje/kas_yra_vaiko_global_institucijoje.html)

**Contact email:** [dalia.strazinskaite@leu.lt](mailto:dalia.strazinskaite@leu.lt)