Poland’s information

*With reference to the Call for submissions – Day of General Discussion "Children’s Rights and  Alternative Care" on the issue of children in alternative care of the 30th of April 2021, the Republic of Poland hereby provides information on the topics contained therein.*

The situation and number of children placed in institutional and family forms of foster care is constantly monitored by the Ministry of Family and Social Policy. Having in mind the well-being and safety of the child, and thus the need to ensure an environment of natural development, family forms of foster care are supported and promoted as the most appropriate form of childcare, being the most similar to the family environment.

When placing a child in foster care, one should always take into account the primacy of family care over institutional care, including in relation to sick and children with disabilities. Therefore, placing a child in a care and educational institution is a last resort, and in the case of younger children, it may be used only in the situations specified in the Act of 9 June 2011 on supporting the family and the system of foster care. Decisions on the placement and choice of the form of foster care are always taken by the family court and the court, taking into account all the circumstances, indicates the scope, manner and place where the child will be brought up.

Standards for the de-institutionalization of foster care have been defined in the Act on supporting the family and the system of foster care. The general directions of changes are set out in the Pan-European guidelines for the transition from institutional care to the care provided at the local community level.

Currently, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy is working on an amendment to the Act on supporting the family and the foster care system. It is planned to introduce mechanisms ensuring an increase in the number of candidates for foster families, professional foster families and foster family homes. Work is underway on the Deinstitutionalization Strategy.

Moreover, there are activities aimed at supporting the process of deinstitutionalization of foster care at the powiat (district) level. The employment of family assistants and family foster care coordinators is subsidized, recommendations are made regarding the implementation of the process and inspections are carried out. The progress of deinstitutionalization is regularly monitored (periodic and ad hoc statistical research).

Thanks to EU funds (the 2014-2020 financial perspective that is currently ending), it is possible to implement measures for the development of family forms of foster care in all regions of Poland. Similar activities will be implemented in the next financial perspective within the new pool of European funds.

The Polish government makes every effort to raise the living standard of children, including those placed in a foster care. An expression of this was the granting of the 500 + childcare allowance and the Dobry Start (Good Start) benefit for children placed in foster care, recently also a tourist voucher. These funds are used to cover the costs of raising children, especially to meet the development of their interests, educational needs, leisure, as well as support for the beginning of adult life.

The Ministry of Family and Social Policy, taking into account changes in the mode of teaching children due to the Covid-19 epidemic, implemented (May-December 2020), in partnership with voivodes, the project “Support for children placed in foster care during the COVID-19 epidemic”, on which there was allocated a 130 million PLN budget. As part of the project, computers and software enabling remote learning were purchased, as well as personal protective equipment. The computer equipment went to over 33,000 foster care entities.

Summing up, an emphasis should be placed on:

* activities aimed at the development of family forms of care: foster families and foster family homes ensuring organizational and financial conditions for their development and functioning,
* accelerating the training of candidates for foster families,
* enabling non-governmental organizations to run foster families at the request of the local government,
* introducing an ICT system that will facilitate the placement of children in foster care,
* stabilization of the professional situation of foster parents,
* intensive prevention - development of services for families raising children, in order to strengthen the potential of the family and reduce the likelihood of separation of the child from the family and, for the cases where it happened to be necessary to separate the child from the family, development of services aimed at the child's return to the family environment as soon as possible,
* changes in the area of ​​institutional foster care, consisting of increasing opening of facilities to local needs and the provision of therapeutic and specialist services,
* enforcing the absolute prohibition of placing children under the age of 10 in care and educational facilities and, if possible, placing the siblings together in foster family homes,
* strengthening the process of gaining independence by a child reared in a foster family, especially by developing the system of assistants helping to gain independence and by providing measures to fulfill housing and employment needs.