Background Document

Launch of the ‘OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE’S CHILDREN’ Campaign

Led by Hope and Homes for Children and Eurochild
Sponsored by Mairead McGuinness MEP

Brussels, European Parliament, 6 June 2013 (10h30 – 12h30)
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Institutional care is damaging to children. Children growing up in institutions are denied the individual attention and nurture they need to realise their full potential. Most have low academic achievement and many fall victim to trafficking, exploitation, unemployment, homelessness and depression on leaving the care system. Institutionalisation is a violation of human rights. It is also a waste of taxpayers’ money. Dealing with the consequences of institutional care for children is far more costly in the long-term than preventing family breakdown and ensuring high-quality alternatives for children who cannot be cared for by their biological parents.

Astonishingly, EU money has, in the past, been used to support institutional care for example in refurbishing institutions or investing in their infrastructure. Thankfully awareness-raising within the EU institutions and member states has halted this trend. There is now widespread recognition of the need to invest in the transition from institutional to community-based services (also known as Deinstitutionalisation).
Many national governments are moving to reform their child protection systems by closing institutions, strengthening family support and prevention services and developing family-based alternatives. There is a great deal of knowledge and experience within Europe. However, austerity measures and the overall European economic outlook threaten to undermine progress as investment in children and vulnerable families is weakened.

The new EU budget 2014-2020 and the European Commission Recommendation ‘Investing in children, breaking the cycle of disadvantage’ create a unique momentum to eventually eradicate institutional care for children across Europe. Structural funds and EU accession funds can inject necessary funds to support systemic reforms that will transform the lives of hundreds of thousands of children and families across Europe.

The ‘Opening Doors for Europe’s Children’ campaign led by Eurochild and Hope and Homes for Children seizes this momentum. The campaign is being implemented at EU and national level, in partnership with organisations from 12 European Countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine.

The campaign will be launched at a public event hosted by Mairead McGuinness MEP at the European Parliament in Brussels on 6 June 2013. At the launch we will hear testimonies of young people and families from European countries who have direct experiences of institutional care systems. The event will also bring together prominent experts to address human rights, social and economic perspectives on Deinstitutionalisation (the process of transition from institutional to family-based care) and draw on the lessons learned at national and international level.

For more information:

Michela Costa
Advocacy Officer - DI Campaign Coordinator

Eurochild

Avenue des Arts, 1-2
B-1210 Brussels
T: +32 (0)2 211 05 59
F: +32 (0)2 511 72 98
michela.costa@eurochild.org
www.eurochild.org

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