

Ending the Institutionalisation of Children Globally – the Time is Now

“My sister and I lived for a couple of years in that institution, where we saw sadness and suffering in each child’s eyes. We were not happy about living there either. We got lucky when some extraordinary people helped our grandmother to take us back home into the family. They had great confidence in my grandma and gave us hope. A year has passed since we came home to our grandmother and started going to the mainstream school, which we like a lot. It has been a really good year for my sister and me, with lots of positive moments. Every day we can feel the love of our grandmother who is taking good care of us. I have my grandmother, my sister and other relatives near me, whenever I need them. This is an amazing feeling”.

Raluca and her sister Angela were reunited with their family in Moldova

The time is now

Twenty-five years ago, the Berlin Wall was breached. A wave of revolutions followed across Central and Eastern Europe, revealing the plight of millions of malnourished, traumatised and severely neglected children, living in institutions, deprived of vital love and care. Contrary to popular belief, most of these children were not orphans. Instead they had been separated from their parents by State authorities due to poverty, or discrimination on the grounds of disability or ethnicity.

Simultaneous with the revolutions of Eastern Europe, the UN Convention the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was launched – a timely reminder for all countries of their

obligations to protect children from harm and ensure their rights to family life and inclusion in the community.

Fast forward 25 years and many of these countries have been transformed; many have joined the EU or are on track to join. Most countries in the region have begun to tackle the issue but much remains to be done to fulfil the dreams of freedom and democracy for the most vulnerable that were envisaged by the brave people who came out on the streets to topple dictatorships. It is a shocking truth that across the European Region, one million children remain in institutions. Conditions may have improved, but outcomes are still dire.

What is wrong with institutions?

An estimated 8 million children worldwide live in residential institutions that deny them their rights and cannot meet their needs. More than 90% of those children are not orphans. Research from across the world has demonstrated the significant harm caused to children in institutions who are deprived of loving parental care and suffer life-long physical and psychological harm. Babies, in particular, fail to develop as they should without one-to-one parental interaction and recent research demonstrates the severe impact of institutionalisation on early brain development.¹ For children with disabilities the situation is even worse. One study found that 26% of young children with disabilities died in the institution – 100 times the mortality rate of their peers without disabilities.

For those who do survive, future life chances are extremely poor. One study of young adults who were raised in institutions found they are:

- **10 times more likely to be involved in prostitution as adults.**
- **40 times more likely to have a criminal record;**
- **500 times more likely than their peers to commit suicide.**²

In 2011, 72% of child runaway cases in the Czech Republic were disappearances from institutions.³

An International Organisation for Migration study in Moldova found that girls who grow up in institutions are 10 times more likely than their peers to be trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation.⁴

1 Nelson, C. and Koga, S. (2004) Effects of institutionalisation on brain and behavioural development in young children: Findings from the Bucharest early intervention project, paper presented at the International Conference on 'Mapping the number and characteristics of children under three in institutions across Europe at risk of harm', 19 March 2004, EU Daphne Programme 2002/3 and WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen, Denmark 2 Pashkina (2001). Sotsial'noe obespechenie, 11:42–45. Cited in Holm-Hansen J, Kristofersen LB, Myrvold TM eds. Orphans in Russia. Oslo, Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR-rapport 2003:1). 3 http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/missing_children_study_2013_en.pdf 4 <http://www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home.html>

Why EU funding matters

The European Union has played a pivotal role in changing attitudes and shifting systems of care and support from institutions to community services. However, large sums of European funds have in the past been used to renovate existing institutions and build new ones. The intentions of this process were good, but failed to understand that institutions cannot provide proper environments in which to raise children. Investments in institution buildings have not resulted in a significant improvement in children's health, development, future life chances and access to rights.

For example in Bulgaria in 2007, €140,000 of European Aid funding earmarked for deinstitutionalisation was spent on renovating one institution for children and adults with severe disabilities. In spite of improvements to the building, in 2010, the same institution was the subject of an investigation into high levels of mortality due to malnutrition, highlighted in a report of the UN Committee against Torture.

In one county in the Czech Republic from 2008 – 2012, more than €5.6 million of EU Funds was spent on renovating baby institutions, children's homes and institutions for children and adults with disabilities. In spite of this expenditure, the Czech Ombudsman has since highlighted bad practice and serious concerns regarding abuse and neglect in these institutions.

Since 2009, many partners, including Lumos, have advocated for changes in legislation which would ensure that EU funds support the reform of the care systems in the Member States and are not used to maintain outdated and harmful institutional models of care. This has resulted in a major shift in emphasis in how EU structural funds can be used. On 20 November 2013, the anniversary of the signing of the UNCRC, the European Parliament confirmed new regulations which will mean that countries should use structural funds to dismantle institutions and replace them with community based services and which effectively forbid the use of funds to renovate or build new institutions.

Institutions are unnecessary and are proven to harm children. Funding and resources exist to change systems of health, education and social services.

The time to end institutionalisation of children is now.

Ending Institutionalisation: A Human Rights Priority

Institutionalisation is internationally recognised as an abuse of the human rights of children.

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) guarantees the rights of all children to grow up in their family, to access education and health care, have an adequate standard of living, be protected from harm and be included in the life of their communities.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), (the first international Convention ratified by the European Union itself,) requires States to ensure that people with disabilities have access to services, 'necessary to support living and inclusion in the community; and to prevent isolation or segregation from the community' (Article 19).

The construction of new institutional settings and the reconstruction of new institutions or renovation of existing ones represent a breach of both the UNCRC and UNCRPD.

These human rights milestones represent a shift in attitude, recently being reflected in European policies and funding. Twenty-five years after the shocking

revelations of millions of citizens languishing in institutions, the European Union has now committed to putting fundamental European values of human rights, liberty, solidarity and opportunity at the heart of the regulations for the EU's main tool to promote innovation, skills, employment and social inclusion.

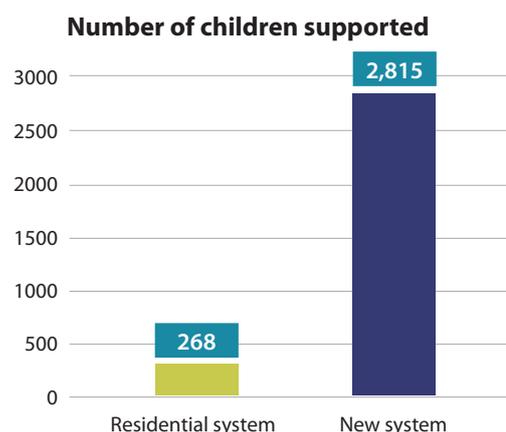
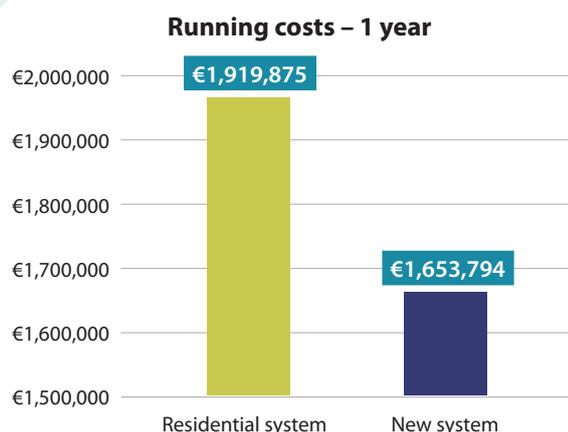
The European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) Regulations (Ex ante 9.1):

- effectively prohibit EU funds from being used to renovate or replace existing institutions
- require EU funds to be used in line with the provisions of the UNCRPD
- prioritise and actively promote funds to be used to dismantle institutions and replace them with community and family based services.

The new Structural and Investment Funds regulations provide us with a real opportunity to end the harmful practice of institutionalisation in the EU.

A better use of public money – a Bulgarian example

In one region in Bulgaria the cost for complete deinstitutionalisation is estimated at €2,597,745. The ongoing running costs will be €1,653,794 per year, compared to the cost of running the current residential system which is €1,919,875, supporting more than 10 times the number of children.



Beyond the borders of the European Union

Institutionalisation is a problem beyond the borders of Europe

An estimated eight million children live in institutions globally. More than 90% are not orphans. Although war, disaster and HIV/AIDS all play a part in institutionalisation, poverty remains the primary reason for separating children from their parents. For example, in Haiti, of 30,000 children in institutions, 80% have a living parent(s) known to the authorities.⁵

Progress is being made

In Moldova, a combination of programmes with funding from USAID, the EU, the World Bank and others such as Lumos and the World Childhood Foundation, have delivered amazing results. In spite of chronic constitutional crisis and dire economic crisis, over the past six years:

- Numbers of children in institutions have reduced by 70%
- The infant mortality rate has reduced from 14 deaths per 1,000 live births to 9 deaths per 1,000
- Numbers of children with disabilities educated in inclusive schools has increased from zero to 3,500
- Money saved from reducing numbers in institutions is funding all the new community services.

In Rwanda significant progress has also been made and the government has committed to closing all its institutions, replacing them with family and community based services.

The EU plays a major role in pre-accession, neighbourhood and developing countries

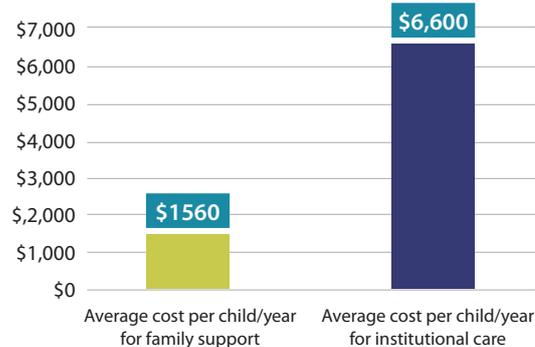
In influencing policy, diplomatic efforts, encouraging democracy and the respect human rights, as well as funding development work, the EU has an opportunity and a duty to encourage countries to replace institutions with community based services and ensure children can be raised, as far as possible in their families, included in their communities.

Huge challenges remain

In Ukraine, 120,000 children live in institutions. In some, conditions are dire and mortality rates are high. Ukraine has just asked for a \$35 billion bailout for the next two years. It will spend \$1 billion on keeping 120,000 children in terrible institutions that harm their health and development. Most of those children could be at home with their families for a fraction of the cost.

In Haiti, 30,000 children live in institutions.⁶ The primary reason is poverty. A package of health, education and social support to keep a child in a poor family for one year costs 25% of an institutional placement.

Cost to support a family to care for their child versus cost for institutional care in Haiti



Must those in poverty or affected by war and disaster wait?

There is a myth that ending institutionalisation for children is not possible in lower income countries, because they cannot afford the change. The reality is that community based services are more cost effective as well as higher quality than in institutions. Major funders should provide investments to develop infrastructure and services. Governments and others running institutions should transfer their budgets to run community services. The long-term cost benefit is proven; children raised in families rather than institutions are much more likely to be net contributors to the economy than those raised in institutions.⁷

Is there ever a need for institutions?

Developed countries that have deinstitutionalised their care systems find that a very small number of children may require highly specialised residential care; this should be provided in the community in small units that feel as close to a family home as possible. This should ideally be temporary, the aim being to reunite children with families.

Many international development organisations are challenging the received wisdom that ‘orphanages’ are needed in the immediate aftermath of war or disaster. More demonstration work is needed to prove that family and community responses can be delivered in emergency situations.

What is needed to end the institutionalisation of children globally?

- Better understanding and prioritisation of the issue. While many remain convinced that ‘orphanages’ are “good” or “necessary”, moving to a system based on families and communities will be strenuously resisted.
- Coherence of strategy, priorities and funding within the EU and across all EU funding. Institutions should never be used to raise children. All EU policies and approaches to supporting development for children internationally should put family care first, and support the dismantling of institutions and their replacement with community based services
- Joint action and alignment of policies and funding with other major funders. The EU, World Bank and bilateral funders such as USAID and the UK’s Department for International Development, as well as major trusts and foundations, should work together on joint initiatives to assist countries to transform the way they provide health, education and social support for children and families. The Global Alliance for Children provides an opportunity for such action.
- Sharing of knowledge and expertise. Closer coordination of the efforts of funders, governments and NGOs will provide opportunities to learn from each other and therefore accelerate and improve the quality of reform programmes.

We call on all policy makers, politicians and fund managers in the EU to:

- ensure full implementation of the Structural and Investment Funds Regulations relating to ending institutionalisation; monitor closely the development of partnership agreements and operational programmes, as well as outcomes, to ensure compliance
- ensure the spirit of the Structural and Investment Funds Regulations is implemented across all EU funding; institutions are never the right answer for children. All EU funding outside the EU should seek to put family care first and end institutionalisation.
- Forge links with other major funders, such as the World Bank and bilateral government funders, to jointly plan and implement change for children, ending institutionalisation, reinvesting funds in early childhood development, inclusive education and child protective services.

Together this is one form of child abuse we can eradicate in our lifetime.

⁷The New Economics Foundation ‘A False Economy: how failing to invest in the care for children will cost us all’ 2008; Jess, K. ‘Värdet av Unga KRIS – en samhällsekonomisk utvärdering’ Mälardalens högskola, Akademin för hälsa, vård och välfärd, april 2010 http://www.arvsfonden.se/upload/utvarderingar/unga_kris_ekonomisk_utvardering.pdf [Accessed April 2014]

“My name is Razvan and I lived in the residential institution for more than two years, feeling like I was nobody’s child.

“But now I want to tell you that I feel happy. I am happy because I live in a family, happy that I go to a school where you really can learn different things, and happy that my mother decided to offer me the possibility of the warmth of a family.

“And what could be more beautiful than a family”

Razvan, aged 13, reunited with his family by Lumos

About Lumos

Lumos is an international non-governmental organisation working to end the institutionalisation of children around the world. It works to transform education, health and social care systems for children and their families and help children move from institutions to family-based care. We are a founding member of the Global Partnership for Children with Disabilities in Development and the European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care.⁸ Lumos recently joined the Global Alliance for Children⁹ and sits on the Leaders’ Council.

Over the past five years, Lumos has:

- Supported 12,000 children to move from harmful institutions to families or supported independent living;
- Saved the lives of more than 430 children suffering from malnutrition, severe neglect or a lack of access to medical treatment;
- Trained 15,000 social workers, medical professionals, teachers, carers, civil servants and policy makers;
- Helped redirect €367 million and ensure that it was spent on community based services, rather than institutions.

For more information visit our website wearelumos.org
find us @Lumos on Twitter or email us on info@lumos.org.uk

⁸ European Commission, Report of the Ad Hoc Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care, Brussels, 2009. Available at: www.ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp [Accessed November 2013] ⁹ <http://www.globalallianceforchildren.org/about>