

“Empowering the child protection system in Portugal to progress deinstitutionalization through the strengthening of family support and reintegration, foster care and care leaving services”

Brief information about the EU-funded TSI project in Portugal



Project Context

An estimated 72 percent of children in alternative care in Portugal are living in residential facilities. The evidence shows that large-scale residential care harms the physical, psychological, and cognitive development of children, it increases the risks of them developing attachment problems and it limits their long-term life chances. The long-term outcomes for children with disabilities in large-scale residential care is particularly concerning with there being a higher likelihood of them experiencing violence and early death. International and European human rights frameworks and policies – such as the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Guidelines on Deinstitutionalization, and the EU

Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2021-2024 – call for such care placements to be deinstitutionalized. Similarly, the concluding observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child’s combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Portugal in 2019 reinforce these policy positions.

The Government of Portugal has responded positively to these recommendations. It has made it a priority in its Child Guarantee National Action Plan to promote deinstitutionalization and increase foster care and improve care leaving services. It has also made it a priority in its National Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2021-2024 to pursue deinstitutionalization and strengthen the foster care system.

Project Expected Impact and Outcomes

At the request of the Social Security Institute, the European Commission is supporting the development and dissemination of family support and reintegration, foster care and care leaving resources through the EU Technical Support Instrument (TSI). The technical support provided to Portugal is part of a broader multi-country initiative involving Croatia, the Czech Republic and Ireland, aimed at enhancing the protection of children's rights across these countries.

The main expected goal of the project is to empower the child protection system in Portugal to progress deinstitutionalization through the strengthening of family support and reintegration, foster care and care leaving services.

The Social Security Institute will focus on achieving the following outcomes under the TSI project:

- **Outcome 1**
The Government has strengthened its ability to assess and improve the child care system, emphasizing family support and reintegration, foster care and care-leaving services. This ensures that children are cared for in families and communities.
- **Outcome 2**
The Government has improved its capacity to draft and implement standardized foster care standards, as well as procedures, tools and indicators to monitor progress and outcomes for children.
- **Outcome 3**
The Government has developed comprehensive guidance and toolkits for stakeholders involved in providing family support, reintegration, foster care and care-leaving services.

Project Outputs

Through the TSI project, UNICEF Europe and Central Asia will work with the Social Security Institute – in the Department of Social Development – to conduct an assessment of Portugal's current care system, as well as research into EU and non-EU best practice in children's care. Using the findings of this combined research, the Social Security Institute – in collaboration with its national and district partners in Government and civil society – will develop and disseminate new resources and toolkits to support the social service workforce in transitioning from residential care to family and community-based care. These resources will be focused on improving family support and reintegration, foster care and care-leaving services.

Specifically, this will include the following outputs:

- An assessment of the childcare system in Portugal with particular focus on residential care, family support and reintegration, foster care and care leaving services.
- Research and learning on best practice and lessons learned in EU and non-EU countries regarding family support and reunification, foster care and leaving care services.
- A set of recommendations for the childcare system reform in Portugal, with particular focus on family support and reintegration, foster care and care leaving services.
- The establishment of thematic working groups to lead the design of standards and procedures and/or guidance and toolkits on family support and reintegration, leaving care services and foster care.
- The development and dissemination of foster care quality standards, procedures, tools and monitoring indicators, as well as a capacity building programme and the revision of the existing foster care training programme, to assist the new standards and procedures being effectively implemented.
- The development of comprehensive guidance and toolkits for stakeholders in the provision of family support and reintegration and care leaving services.

Project Partnerships

- This is part of a multi-country TSI initiative involving Croatia, the Czech Republic and Ireland, demonstrating a collaborative effort to enhance child protection systems and uphold children's rights, emphasizing the shared commitment of all participating countries.
- Technical support is provided by the Child Protection Section of UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in cooperation with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM).
- The project is led by the Social Security Institute on behalf of the Portuguese authorities.