



Foster care models in Europe

- results of a conducted survey -

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Forum for quality foster care

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Results of a conducted survey: Foster care models in Europe

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is well-known that the European countries, together with Canada and Australia, have the most advanced systems of care for children who lack an adequate parental care. However, the practice of foster care is unevenly developed in the different regions of Europe: the Scandinavian countries are its champions, while foster care is much more conservative and less developed in the Mediterranean countries of the European Union (Greece, Portugal), as well as its new members from Eastern Europe. There are several reasons behind this. For starters, we cannot understand foster care unless we look at it in terms of its complexity and interdependence on various social, economic and political relations. Accordingly, given the characteristics of public care for children in Europe, we can single out the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Western Europe and Nordic countries. They differ not only in their historical and political origins and foundations of their social policies, and hence in the care for children who lack an adequate parental care, but also in terms of practical solutions to various aspects of foster care (Laklija, 2011).

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 (Ajduković, 2004, according to Laklija, 2011). Following the fall of communism in the 1990s, there is a slow change in the socialist countries related to the political and ideological heritage and policies on institutionalised care, which is now gradually being deinstitutionalised. Today, decision-makers in those countries follow the experience of developed countries and work towards increasing the number of foster families. In the process, they are supported by the *World Bank*, *European Union*, *UNICEF*, *Caritas*, *Save the Children*, *Open Society Institute*, *Sida* and other organisations. In addition to Hungary and Poland, Romania is a good example of successful changes in that area (Laklija, 2011).

The main characteristics of care for children **in the countries of West Europe** are: 1) a relatively small proportion of children placed in institutions, 2) a well-developed foster care system, and 3) a wide range of other alternative forms of care (Ajduković, 2004, according to Laklija, 2011). However, there are differences even among them, depending on their socio-economic policies. For instance, the countries with liberal democracy (United Kingdom) have financial possibilities, but lack the government policies supporting foster parents (Curtis, Dale and Kendall, 1999, George, Oudenhoven and Wazir, 2003, according to Laklija, 2011.). Accordingly, the practice shows that the most developed countries of the West have conceded foster care to informal mechanisms in the society and that the government's role is in comparison negligible. There are also notable regional differences in the rights of foster parents, resulting in lowering the competence for foster care to the local level (Ajduković, 2005, according to Laklija, 2011).

On the contrary, in the socio-democratic systems with a strong social policy, i.e. in the so-called **Nordic countries**, the government plays an important role in the promotion and professionalisation of foster care. However, they are also being increasingly confronted with the same political and economic constraints as the liberal-democratic countries (George, Oudenhoven and Wazir, 2003, according to Laklija, 2011.).

Responsibilities that the government has to ensure in order for foster care to be successful are very complex and numerous. It is therefore not surprising that these tasks are carried out by a very different set of institutions in different countries (public agencies, private agencies, religious organisations, non-profit organisations, etc.) (Laklija, 2011). Accordingly, in order to recruit new foster families on the global level, the role of civil society and "for-profit" organisations is being given more and more importance, which is intended to help local governments to recruit new and retain existing foster parents.

This July the Republic of Croatia adopted a new Foster Care Act that introduced a number of changes to the existing foster care practice, following the process of decentralisation and deinstitutionalisation that had already begun. Since the Act will need to be accompanied by a series of ordinances that will regulate individual aspects of the foster care practice (such as professionalisation, education, licensing, recruitment, etc.), a need arose to gain a deeper insight into the existing foster care models in Europe. For this purpose, a qualitative survey of foster care models was designed within the framework of the "Joint Efforts towards the Realisation of Children's Rights in Croatia" project, and the results will be presented below. On top of the survey, the project also entails working visits, regional discussions, youth work and an international conference.

2. OBJECTIVE AND SURVEY QUESTIONS

As already mentioned above, the main objective of this survey was to gain insight into the existing foster care models in Europe. In line with the survey's main objective, there were eleven survey questions to be answered:

1. What types/forms of foster care exist in different countries?
2. Does legislation acknowledge the institution of foster care for adults?
3. How is professional foster care regulated in the countries that participated in the survey?
4. What are the rights of professional foster parents?
5. What requirements have to be met by a person in order for him or her to become and act as a foster parent?
6. Are there any differences in terms of requirements/responsibilities of foster parents with regard to the type of foster care they provide?
7. What are the responsibilities of foster parents and professionals in terms of reporting about the state of foster care?
8. How do the countries that participated in the survey regulate the processes of recruitment, licensing, education and monitoring of foster parents?
9. How is the support system to foster families regulated?
10. How is the operation of foster care agencies regulated?
11. What strengths and possibilities for improving the existing foster care models in their countries were identified by the survey participants?

3. METHODOLOGY

For survey purposes, we have selected a qualitative approach to data collection and processing. A questionnaire was developed to examine foster care models of the participating countries. The questionnaire consisted of a series of open-ended questions covering some of the observed aspects of foster care practices in the countries that participated in the survey. Participants were asked to respond to all the questions in as detailed and informative manner as possible, and if they lacked some information, to indicate so in the questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain insight into legislation and practices concerning foster care, in order to be able to use that insight into the models of participating countries to identify the existing foster care practices in those countries and obtain their recommendations for improving foster care practices.

3.1. Survey participants

The questionnaire was sent to 30 addresses of potential survey participants that were selected by snowball sampling. The selection of countries to be contacted for this purpose was carried out in cooperation and consultation of the Forum for Quality Foster Care with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, UNICEF Office for Croatia, Faculty of Law - Department of Social Work and other interested parties. People who have completed the questionnaire are employed by ministries whose competence covers the area of foster care or representatives of local and regional governments or NGOs. Out of the 30 sent requests for participation, we received 14 completed questionnaires from 12 different countries, which means that we have access to model "descriptions" from twelve European countries. Representatives of the following countries participated in the survey: Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Scotland, France, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Italy, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

3.2. Survey procedure

During May, a letter requesting participation in the survey and a questionnaire were sent to the addresses of 30 potential survey participants. Survey participants were asked in the call letter to submit their completed questionnaire by the end of May. The procedure of data collection continued until mid-July, and the analysis of collected data was carried out in the second half of August and in September. All survey participants who submitted the completed questionnaire were left with the possibility of attending a conference on the European foster care models (Zagreb, 26 October 2011), with full or partial costs covered.

4. RESULTS

Before moving on to the presentation of obtained results, it is important to mention some of the methodological limitations of the survey. Since this was a qualitative survey that could not have been carried

out by means of the interview method due to objective circumstances (distance and finance), and given that the subjects filled out the questionnaire themselves, it is possible that some of the observed aspects of foster care were not given sufficient importance or were not even mentioned and sufficiently elaborated because they were implied. At a later stage of analysis that might have led to the formation of wrong results and conclusions based on the obtained data. In addition, survey participants are a heterogeneous group in terms of their roles, status and power to influence social policies in their home countries (e.g. representatives of ministries, local and regional self-governments, civil society organisations, etc.). This status difference and the position of the employee who was authorised to complete the questionnaire could have affected their willingness and ability to examine the existing foster care practices in their home country in a critical manner.

4.1. Types of foster care

According to data presented in Table 1, today we can identify many types of foster care for children in Europe which should meet the various needs of both the children as well as their families. When we talk about types of foster care, then both relevant publications (see Laklija, 2009) as well as the obtained results of this survey list the following:

a) kinship foster care

Kinship foster care refers to a situation where childcare is assumed by the adult relatives of the child. As this is the oldest form of care for children without an adequate parental care, many societies have a tradition by which caring for children who lack an adequate parental care is assumed by either the child's extended family, the family with whom the child was close from earlier (friends, neighbours), or the child's godparents.

b) traditional foster care

Traditional foster care provides care to a child without an adequate parental care whose psycho-social development does not deviate significantly from the development and growing-up of children of the same age.

c) specialised foster care

Specialised/treatment or therapeutic foster care implies specifically trained foster parents who use different therapeutic methods and approach techniques in their daily interactions and work with the fostered child. This type implies foster care for children with serious emotional and mental, as well as physical disabilities and behavioural problems.

d) professional foster care

Professional foster care can be provided as an independent professional activity. For this type of foster care, foster parents are expected to meet specific requirements, such as being an expert in one of the "welfare" fields (social work, social pedagogy, psychology, speech pathology, medicine, etc.), professional worker in social care and/or trained to provide additional specialised care services.

e) Crisis foster care

Crisis foster care provides temporary care for a child during some crisis situation, i.e. until the end and/or recovery from a crisis and until the establishment of the family system control, when the child returns to his or her biological family.

f) Respite foster care

This type of foster care is usually used for short stays (weekend, half-day stay) of children with disabilities in specialised foster families, in order to relieve their biological families of their challenging everyday psychological and physical care tasks for a short period of time.

g) back-up families

Families that provide social support (informational, emotional, instrumental, etc.) to a child's biological family in difficult circumstances or at the time of need that might temporarily threaten the functioning of the family and child's well-being.

g) "private" foster care

Type of foster care allowing biological parents to find a foster family for the placement of their child themselves, independently of the social welfare system, with the proviso that in some countries, depending on the duration of such placement, they might be required to notify the competent social care authorities.

Practices of placing children in foster care in the countries that participated in the survey are very diverse and result in the development of different types of foster care. This is why in addition to the previously mentioned types of foster care, there is also a possibility of placing a mother and a child together (e.g. in Serbia) or foster care aimed to prepare/train a ward for other types of foster care (e.g. in Slovenia). Based on the circumstances of placing a child in a foster family foster care, we can distinguish voluntary placement with the parent's consent and placement by court order (e.g. in Italy).

Table 1 Types of foster care

	SWEDEN	FINLAND	THE NETHERLANDS	SCOTLAND	FRANCE	POLAND	HUNGARY	AUSTRIA	ITALY	SLOVENIA	B&H*	SERBIA
Kinship	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X		X
Traditional	X					X	X					
Specialised					X		X	X		X		X
Professional		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Crisis			X	X	X			X		X		X
Respite foster care				X						X		X
Back-up families	X											
Private				X								
Placing a parent together with the child												X
Preparation/training for other types of foster care										X		
Day									X			
Weekend			X		X					X		
Temporary /Short-term	X		X	X								X
Long-term			X	X	X							
Voluntary, with parents' consent									X			
By court order									X			
Professional foster care in family homes / residential foster care		X							X			
Other types of independent placement of a child and a parent		X										
other types of placement in the family					X							X

* The Social Welfare Act does not specify different types of foster care

Based on the duration of foster care (Table 1), we can distinguish temporary foster care, such as day and weekend foster care, and long-term foster care. Long-term foster care refers to the placement of children who were permanently separated from their families at the time of placement, and for whom it may be assumed that they will be in foster care until they become independent. However, long-term foster care can also begin as foster care during a crisis event or as short-term foster care, which then turns into a long-term foster care until the child's independence.

Some of the listed types of foster care have not previously existed in Croatia. In fact, before the adoption of the new Foster Care Act in July 2011 (OG, 90/2011) there were no legal, organisational and other prerequisites that might have been used as the basis to start developing and implementing the listed types of foster care (e.g. professional foster care). Since the foster care legislation in the Republic of Croatia governs not only foster care for children but also for young adults until the end of their full-time studies (not after 26 years of age) and adults, the aim was to determine whether the legislations of the participating countries acknowledge the institution of foster care for adults.

Table 2 Is there foster care for adults?

SWEDEN	- yes, there are foster families for drug addicts (but they are not very common), and organisations that support the so-called "strengthened" homes for either children or adults
FINLAND	- yes, there is legislation that covers the care for the elderly and the disabled (Family Carer Act)
THE NETHERLANDS	/
SCOTLAND	- yes, it is generally a form of short-term or respite care designed to give biological families a short break from caring for adults with complex physical needs or mental health problems
FRANCE	- yes, there are foster families that provide care for the elderly and the disabled
POLAND	- yes, the law provides for that option
HUNGARY	- yes, foster parents may provide care for young adults under 21 or even older if they cannot secure their own subsistence, or in case they are pursuing full-time studies while they remain under the age of 25.
AUSTRIA	- no, there isn't
ITALY	/
SLOVENIA	- no, there isn't, but the Centre for Social Work may extend foster care after children are no longer minors if they are not capable of leading an independent life due to physical or mental problems or if they pursue their studies at the latest until they turn 26, subject to their previous consent
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	- yes, according to the legislation on social security, placement in a foster family is also possible for adults who need constant care and assistance in order to have their basic needs met, which is not possible within their own families or otherwise - unfortunately, this form of care for adults did not "come to life"
SERBIA	- yes, for the time being the Centres for Social Work handle the placement of adults into foster families - a part of adults refer to children who remain in foster care after they reach the age of majority

The obtained data show that when we talk about foster care for adults, it mainly refers to young adults who remain in foster families after reaching the age of majority, because they are not capable of taking care of themselves independently or they are continuing their education (e.g. in Hungary, Scotland, France, Slovenia). Foster care for adults who need constant care and assistance in order to have their basic needs met is provided for by the legislation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Serbia. Scotland is an interesting example because they have a form of the so-called short-term foster care or respite care designed to give biological families a short break from caring for adults with complex physical needs or mental health problems. Sweden is another interesting example, because there are foster families for drug addicts.

4.2. Professional foster care

According to the existing foster care models, foster parents are classified as one of the following: specially trained and prepared "volunteers", "volunteers" who have not been previously trained in foster care, relatives of foster children or professional foster parents. Changes in requirements for foster parents, criteria for the selection of children to be placed in foster care and the relevant legislation challenge the old conceptualisation of foster care as a voluntary activity and raise the question of professionalisation of foster care. In that regard, we were interested in the way how professional foster care is regulated in the countries that participated in the survey and what the rights of professional foster parents are.

Table 3 Is there professional foster care and how is it regulated?

SWEDEN	- no, foster care cannot be considered a job - foster parents are not "professionals" even though they are paid for their services (they don't receive any salary but a remuneration - a taxable income, and a non-taxable amount for the child's living expenses)
FINLAND	- yes. In professional foster families, at least one foster parent must be competent and have specific knowledge related to health, social or education system
THE NETHERLANDS	- yes, they work under a contract. They are mostly people with previous work experience in children's homes
SCOTLAND	- yes, , most foster parents are professional foster parents
FRANCE	- yes, all foster parents are professional foster parents
POLAND	- yes. Such foster parents have to have at least secondary education (higher education is preferable).
HUNGARY	- yes, professional foster parents must meet the qualification requirements laid down by a special regulation in order to become eligible to provide care for children who require special care such as those with serious mental or physical disorders or severe dissocial personality disorders, young people addicted to psychoactive substances, etc.
AUSTRIA	- yes, foster parents can become employed by an agency such as "EFKÖ", which entails receiving a monthly salary, joining a supervision group, and going through a certain training
ITALY	- yes
SLOVENIA	- yes, foster parents can decide whether to provide foster care as their only job or in addition to their regular job, and sign an employment contract thereof - regardless of their status, all foster parents have the same responsibilities The Foster Care Act specifies the conditions for providing foster care as a profession:

	- the person must not be employed, they must not perform any other activity as their only or principal job which is used as the basis for their mandatory pension and disability insurance, and they must meet the minimum standard (there must provide care for three children - the standard may, under certain conditions, be lowered)
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	- there is no professional foster care - foster parents are entitled only to remuneration which is paid to help them meet the needs of the foster child and for professional assistance and support of the guardianship organs
SERBIA	- in part. Specifically, professional foster care in terms of exercising all rights arising from employment does not exist, but foster care is a contractual relationship.

The results shown in Table 3 indicate that there is the practice of professionalised foster care in most countries that participated in the survey, which - as shown - lay down specific requirements that foster parents who want to provide foster care as their only or main job need to meet. Although not all participants in the survey provided information on how foster care is regulated, i.e. what requirements have to be met by foster parents to make them eligible for providing professional foster care, we can observe that those requirements (in addition to general requirements for foster parents) primarily refer to the level of education (e.g. in Poland), specific knowledge, skills and expertise of foster parents in the field of health, social and/or educational system (e.g. in Finland, the Netherlands, and Hungary) and minimal standard referring to the number of wards (e.g. in Slovenia). Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sweden particularly stand out because those countries do not have professional foster care, but foster parents are nevertheless entitled to remuneration.

Table 4 Rights of professional foster parents resulting from their status of foster parents

SWEDEN	- there is no professional foster care
FINLAND	- right to remuneration/salary, compensation during temporary disability and right to leave of absence
THE NETHERLANDS	- salary and pension - allowance for living expenses - training on average once every six weeks - annual leave
SCOTLAND	- all foster carers receive allowances to cover the cost of caring for a looked after child (the amount is usually dependant on the age of the looked after child). Independent foster care agencies pay higher rates to foster carers. - since all foster parents are regarded as "professionals", many local authorities, NGOs and private agencies run schemes which attract additional fees for foster carers. This may be linked to the child's particular needs but is often a reflection of the skills, abilities, length of experience or professional expertise the foster carer has.
FRANCE	- salary, contributions for health, pension and social insurance, leaves, holidays
POLAND	- salary, contributions for health and pension insurance, holidays - access to professional support
HUNGARY	- professional foster parents sign an employment contract and have social insurance
AUSTRIA	- foster parents are not employed, but they receive remuneration - they have social insurance mainly through family members - they may not go on holidays or sick leaves - they have the same rights as the parents as long as they have custody of the child * foster parents who have signed a contract with an agency such as "EFKÖ" receive a monthly salary and have social, health and pension insurance
ITALY	- allowance for the costs of caring and family allowance

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tax credits for foster families (achieved by a court order) - legal protection and support for parenting (maternity and paternity leave, leave for caring for a sick child, etc.).
SLOVENIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in addition to a salary, foster parents who provide foster care as their only job are also entitled to social security contributions (pension, disability and health insurance, insurance against injury at work, insurance for parental protection and unemployment insurance) - funds are provided from the government budget and are not subject to income tax
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there is no professional foster care
SERBIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - they receive remuneration for their work, contributions for pensionable service (1 year of providing foster care equals around 3 months of pensionable service) - foster parents and their family members have health insurance on the basis of foster care, unless that right is exercised on some other basis - foster parents of a child aged up to 5 years are entitled to a paid leave from work to provide child care for a period of 8 months (regulated by the Labour Act)

If we go a little deeper into the analysis of foster care "professionalisation models" of individual countries (Table 4), it is clear that the rights of professional foster parents vary among them according to: the aspect of employment or contractual relationship, the scope of paid contributions and rights from the health, pension and social security systems, insurance coverage for members of their families, rights to tax credits, use of leaves (maternity and paternity leave, leave for caring for a sick child, etc.) and holidays. Furthermore, countries that participated in the survey grant a different level of rights to professional foster parents in terms of the custody status of foster parents (e.g. foster parents in Austria who are legal guardians of the foster child are entitled to all the rights implied by being a parent), and based on the fact whether they enter or not into employment/contractual relationship with local authorities, NGOs or private agencies (e.g. Scotland, where independent foster agencies, for instance, have more generous remunerations for foster parents).

4.3. Requirements for becoming a foster parent and foster parents' responsibilities in providing for a fostered child

If a person or family want to become foster carers, there are regulations of the countries that participated in the survey that lay down the requirements that have to be met by the prospective foster parents. Table 5 shows the responses of the survey participants.

Table 5 Statutory requirements for becoming a foster parent

	The following are eligible to become foster parents:
SWEDEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a stable, healthy and mature person - willing to devote him or herself to the child's needs - there are no prescribed requirements related to the foster parents' level of education, but if they foster children with behavioural disorders, foster parents should have specific skills
FINLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - person with specific knowledge and skills

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - trained and has experience or personal qualities that make him or her suitable for the role of foster parent
THE NETHERLANDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 18 years old or older - passed a "preparatory training" - ready to cooperate with the FCC (Foster Care Centre) - no criminal record - single, married couple or domestic partnership, as well as homosexual couples
SCOTLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - capable of understanding the child's heritage, ethnic origin, culture religion and language - single, married couple or domestic partnership, as well as homosexual couples - there is no upper age limit, but people need to be mature enough to be able to understand and answer to the child's needs - in good physical and mental health
FRANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there are no requirements related to the level of education of foster parents - in good physical and mental health and housing conditions - assessment of psychological abilities and social skills
POLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - single people or couples - a healthy person - adequate housing conditions - completed at least secondary education (required only for professional foster parents) - capable of meeting the child's needs, empowering and encouraging affection between the child and his or her biological family and working in a team
HUNGARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - turned at least 24 years - full legal and business capacity, and no criminal record - at least 18 years older than the foster child, but not older than 45 (exceptions allowed in order to protect the child's best interests) - physical and mental health - successfully completed a "preparatory training"
AUSTRIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - good financial situation, with their own source of income - satisfactory relationships among family members - good "crisis" management skills - physical and mental health - communicative and flexible - developed reflection skills (experiences, emotions, etc.) - in terms of marital/partnership status, there are differences depending on the region: some are more restrictive, and some more liberal, allowing the option of foster parents being cohabiting couples, singles and same-sex couples (e.g. in Vienna)
ITALY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - families/couples with or without children and singles - no prescribed age limit or requirements referring to the economic, employment and educational status
SLOVENIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - adult (over 18) - permanent residence in the Republic of Slovenia - completed at least professional or vocational education (exception) - the person or a household member must not be deprived of parental rights - they must not be deprived of their business capacity
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - adult (over 18) - married couples, domestic partners, singles - physical and mental health - adequate housing and other conditions necessary for the care of child's needs <p>A child may not be placed in a family where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - one of the partners is deprived or has a limited business capacity or is deprived of his or her parental rights

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - family relationships are disturbed - some members have a negative social behaviour - a child's health would be jeopardised due to an illness of some other family member
SERBIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not deprived of parental rights - not deprived of business capacity - was not under investigation/convicted of crimes against life and body - not recorded as a person who was prosecuted for domestic violence - adequate health condition - adequate housing conditions - sufficient level of foster care competences

The participants' responses (Table 5) show that the majority of countries covered by the survey stipulate as a requirement that the foster carer must be an adult of legal age, with legal and business capacity, physically and mentally healthy and with satisfactory housing conditions. In terms of age requirements, we can single out Hungary which prescribes a minimum age of foster parents at 24 years, as well as Sweden and Italy, which do not specify any age limits, but stress the importance of maturity assessment of people in terms of understanding and responding to children's needs. Furthermore, foster carer can be a single person, a married couple, or a couple who live in cohabitation on condition that they come from a family/partnership with harmonious family relationships. According to the submitted responses, the Netherlands, Scotland, and some federal states of Austria allow those living in same-sex unions to become foster parents.

Special requirements related to employment status or financial situation of foster parents are not mentioned, except in the case of Austria, where there is a requirement that foster parents have a good financial situation and their own source of income. Potential foster parents are expected to have a certain degree of professional qualification (e.g. Slovenia requires at least professional and exceptionally vocational education). Countries where there are no prescribed requirements related to the foster parents' educational status (e.g. Sweden, Finland, Poland) expect foster to have completed certain trainings, i.e. to possess specific knowledge and skills needed to look after a child. Also, in all the countries covered by this survey, potential foster parents are required to have successfully completed the so-called "preparatory training" which involves, for example in France, a psychological evaluation and assessment of social skills of foster parents. According to the participants, foster parents should be those who are willing to understand and respond to the child's needs and cultural heritage, who are communicative, flexible, and cooperative. The example of Austria stresses the importance of foster parents' additional knowledge and skills in "crisis management" and reflection. In terms of other requirements, it is pointed out that a person must not be deprived of his or her parental rights, that they must not have a "criminal history" or be recorded as a person who was prosecuted for domestic violence.

Table 6 Differences in terms of requirements/responsibilities of foster parents with regard to the type of foster care

SWEDEN	- there are no differences, special attention is always given to the process of "matching" a child with a foster family
FINLAND	- the special needs of the child are taken into account when determining remuneration and required support to foster parents
THE NETHERLANDS	/

SCOTLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - skills, knowledge and experience of foster parents are taken into account in the process of "matching" a child with a foster family - there are no specific qualifications and requirements for different types of foster care
FRANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all foster parents generally have the same status and undergo the same training, but it can be more or less specialised depending on the needs of the looked after child
POLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - professional foster parents must have completed secondary education and they have at their disposal a higher level of support from the foster care coordinator and team - foster parents who look after a child with disabilities are provided with additional training
HUNGARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - if there is a need for specific types of care, further education, training and treatment is provided
AUSTRIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - at the national level there is an act that takes into account the specific circumstances and needs - foster parents are provided with special psychological support and guidance (coaching) if they foster a child with behavioural disorders
ITALY	/
SLOVENIA	foster parents sign a contract with the Centre for Social Welfare which regulates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the scope of foster care for the child - rights and responsibilities - amount of cash benefits - duration and terms of termination of the contract - any other important characteristics of foster care for a specific child
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there are differences in requirements/responsibilities of foster parents with respect to the category of their foster child, but the law does not specify specific responsibilities of foster parents depending on the type of wards and therefore all rights, requirements and responsibilities are regulated by the written Agreements of Placement concluded between the Centre for Social Work and foster parents
SERBIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there are no differences in requirements for foster children. - the only difference lies in the intensity and type of support provided by the authorities

As shown by the obtained results (Table 6), there are no specific qualifications and requirements for different types of foster care (except when it comes to professional foster care), and if there is a need for specific types of care, further education, training and treatment is provided. Consequently, when placing a child in foster care, special attention is paid to the process of matching a foster parent with a child (e.g. in Sweden and Scotland). Specific needs of the child are taken into account when determining remuneration (e.g. in Finland), required support (e.g. in Finland and Serbia) and additional training of foster parents (e.g. in France, Poland and Hungary). It can be concluded that foster parents who are recruited for a specialised type of foster care are provided with various forms of support and education in order to develop specific knowledge and skills needed to provide foster care. Responsibilities of foster parents are regulated at the national or federal level by regulations, whereas the specific duties of foster parents are laid down by contracts on foster care and/or placement of a specific child which are concluded with the competent local authorities, NGOs and private agencies.

Table 7 Responsibilities of foster parents and professionals in terms of reporting about the state of foster care

SWEDEN	- foster parents do not have to make written reports, and the duties and responsibilities of
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	<p>foster parents are laid down in the contract signed by the foster parents as well as in the individual plan of care for foster child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a social worker responsible for placing a child is in charge of collecting and archiving documentation and reporting to the Social Welfare Committee twice a year
FINLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a social worker assigned to a child needs to make a plan and programme of work that needs to be followed and revised as necessary - foster parents do not have to report about the child they foster - following the individual plan and programme of work replaces the need to report
THE NETHERLANDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - responsibility to meet once every 6 weeks with the assigned social worker, who is required to write reports (on a daily basis) - foster parents may fill in a list of observations in special circumstances
SCOTLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the agency (local authority, NGO, or private) must carry out a review of foster carers at least once a year, at which the foster carer will have an opportunity to give her/his views concerning care for the specific child
FRANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - they can and have to participate in every working meeting - they are responsible for writing reports and reporting to social workers
POLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - it is necessary to submit reports to family courts once every six months - they are supervised by the court's social workers as well as foster care centres that are responsible for their certification/licensing - they cooperate with care coordinators during the development and implementation of the Individual Plan of Work
HUNGARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - social worker, foster parent and the child develop the Individual Care Plan - the foster parent has to submit reports (written and oral), depending on the custody status
AUSTRIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there are no regulations at the national level, Y-W-A-social workers are usually required once a year to visit families, talk to foster parents, parents and the child and write a report - foster parents do not have to write and submit reports, but they are required (at least once a year) to report to the assigned social worker about the child's growing up and development
ITALY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - foster parents have a responsibility to provide child care in accordance with the defined objectives of individual projects developed for each individual child
SLOVENIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - foster parent needs to participate in the so-called "Individualised Project Group" (IPG), appointed by the Centre for Social Work upon the placement of a child in a foster family. The IPG's role is to plan follow-up activities (training of foster parents, child monitoring...). IPG meets according to the plan and needs (at least once a year) and writes a report - an individual plan is developed for each child in foster care, tailored to their age, development and needs. The plan is updated and revised as necessary.
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - foster parents report to the competent institution about the foster children in writing (two to four times a year)
SERBIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - foster parents, unless they are also child's legal guardians, do not have to write reports to the Centre for Social Care that placed the child in the family - family counsellor has to submit a report to the Centre for Social Care once every 6 months, reporting about the work of foster parents, degree to which the purpose of foster care is achieved and overall progress of the child in foster care

Regulation of the foster parents' responsibilities in terms of reporting to competent agencies and social workers varies in the observed countries. As a consequence, foster parents in Sweden, Finland and certain federal states in Austria do not have to write and submit any reports, while those in the Netherlands, France and Bosnia-Herzegovina are explicitly expected to write them. Examples of Hungary and Serbia imply the

practice that foster carers have no reporting responsibility unless they are also child's legal guardians. In all the countries, foster parents are required to cooperate with the competent institutions and social worker, and competent authorities are in turn required to monitor foster families. In addition, foster parents are required to work together with social workers on the development of the so-called Individual Plan of Work/Change or Individual Plan and Programme of Work (names vary according to the country) and to cooperate with each other in its implementation. Since the Individual Plan of Work/Change defines, monitors and evaluates the foster parents' responsibilities, it is a kind of "substitute" for the classical form of written reports, which have very often been known to allow reporting in an established, mechanical way. The foster parents' responsibilities are also laid down in the contract that foster parents conclude with the competent local authorities, NGOs and private agencies. Another responsibility of the assigned social worker in some countries (Sweden, Finland, Poland, Hungary, Italy and Slovenia) is to assemble and coordinate a team designed to help him or her to develop the Individual Plan of Work/Change for a foster child, monitor its implementation, provide support, evaluate and revise the adopted plan and report on the effects of measures and the quality of foster care.

4.4. Processes of recruitment, licensing, education and monitoring of foster parents

Recruitment of foster parents is of paramount importance, since recruitment of motivated and qualified foster parents accompanied by training and support contributes to the development of a successful foster care model. Since it has been established that the processes of recruitment, licensing, education and monitoring of foster families by the authorities are important and interconnected, we were interested in whether there were any differences in the way how competent authorities and organisations approached their implementation (Table 8).

Table 8 Differences in the process of recruitment, licensing, education and monitoring of foster parents with regard to the types/forms of foster care they provide?

SWEDEN	- there is no difference, all foster parents go through the process of assessment, regardless of their kinship status with the foster child
FINLAND	- nongovernmental organisations and the organisation called Perhehoitokumppanit recruit, educate and employ foster carers and offer their services to the local community (municipality) - municipalities or municipality associations and the regional administrative agency supervise the work of agencies
THE NETHERLANDS	- there is a short training for weekend foster parents - special trainings are organised for those foster parents who wish to engage in specialised foster care
SCOTLAND	- foster carers who are related to the child do not need to undergo training, or the process of recruitment and licensing
FRANCE	- there are differences in the status of foster parents based on whether they are paid for providing care or they volunteer: volunteers do not need to undergo a special training/education

POLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - until now, training has been mandatory only for foster parents who are not related to the child, but it is likely that the legislative changes will introduce this obligation for the relatives as well - there are special training modules for different types of professional foster care: e.g. foster parents of infants have to go to special child care trainings to children's homes or hospitals
HUNGARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there are no differences in the recruitment of the so-called traditional and professional foster parents. After 300 hours of training, foster parents take an "examination" and if they want to become professional foster parents, they must undergo 60 hours of additional training - traditional foster parents sign a contract of foster care, whereas professional foster parents sign a contract of employment - if the foster parent is also the child's legal guardian, the office responsible for monitoring the guardianship has the right to monitor the care provided by foster parents
AUSTRIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - at the national level, there is an act that takes into account specific circumstances and needs, and for example, foster parents who are related to the child do not need to undergo training or the process of recruitment and licensing. However, they are subject to monitoring.
ITALY	/
SLOVENIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the difference between related and "unrelated" foster parents exists only during the procedure of obtaining a license for providing foster care - there are no differences in terms of requirements for providing child care and other responsibilities of foster parents laid down by the Foster Care Act (training, participation in the Individual Project Group)
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - given that the legislation on social security does not define different types of foster care, consequently there are no differences in the process of recruitment, education and monitoring of guardians/foster parents
SERBIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all interested foster parents must first undergo an assessment of their general eligibility - during their training, foster parents become familiar with the various forms of foster care and if they are interested in any of them, they are referred to additional training - there are verified training programmes for emergency foster care, foster care for children with Down syndrome, with intellectual disabilities, victims of trafficking and infants - during the current drafting of the Ordinance on Foster Care, introducing special licences for special forms of foster care is being considered (but there is no consensus)

Based on the obtained responses, it can be seen that there are differences between countries in the process of recruitment, licensing, education and monitoring of foster parents with regard to the types/forms of foster care they provide. When it comes to kinship foster families, the examples of Scotland, Poland and certain federal states of Austria show that they are not required to undergo training or the process of recruitment and licensing, but they are subject to monitoring. The Swedish model shows that the law is equal for all, i.e. that all foster parents, regardless of their kinship status with the foster child, undergo the same procedure. In the case of Slovenia, the difference between related and unrelated foster parents exists only during the procedure of obtaining the licence. In France, there are differences in training based on the working status of foster parents, with volunteers not being required to undergo a special training/education. In Hungary, these differences are evident in terms of education, where professional foster parents, after the mandatory training - which is the

same for everyone - and taking the exam, are required to attend a few extra hours of training. They are also evident in terms of different contracts, with professional foster parents signing a contract of employment and the so-called traditional foster parents a contract of foster care. In the Netherlands, special trainings are organised for those foster parents who wish to engage in specialised foster care, and short trainings for weekend foster carers. There are special training modules for different types of professional foster care in Poland as well (e.g. foster parents of infants have to go to special child care trainings to children's homes or hospitals). Similarly, in Serbia there are verified training programmes for emergency foster care, foster care for children with Down syndrome, with intellectual disabilities, victims of trafficking and infants.

As evident from Table 9, the processes of promotion, recruitment, education, licensing and monitoring of foster parents, as well as specific associated tasks, are carried out by a range of very different institutions and organisations (e.g. public authorities, private agencies, non-profit organisations, etc.), with their mutual cooperation.

Table 9 Who is in charge of activities related to the processes of promoting foster care, recruitment, education, licensing and monitoring of foster parents

	PROMOTION	RECRUITMENT	EDUCATION	LICENSING	FOSTER PARENT MONITORING
SWEDEN	- social welfare committee and private agencies	- social welfare committee and private agencies hired for that purpose	- social welfare committee and hired private agencies	<i>Foster parents are not licensed</i>	- social welfare committee and hired private agencies
FINLAND	- NGOs (e.g. Save the children, SOS Children Villages) and Perhehoitoliitto (Family Care Union)	- municipalities or municipality associations, NGOs (e.g. Save the children, SOS Children Villages) and the "Perhehoitokumppanit" company	- municipalities or municipality associations, NGOs organising PRIDE courses (Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education)	- municipalities or municipality associations	- municipalities or municipality associations and Regional State Administrative Agencies
THE NETHERLANDS	- Regional Foster Care Centres	- NGOs providing services related to foster care	- Regional Foster Care Centres	<i>Foster parents are not licensed</i>	- Regional Foster Care Centres
SCOTLAND	- local authorities, NGOs and private agencies	- local authorities, NGOs, private agencies	- local authorities, NGOs, private agencies	- local authorities, NGOs and private agencies	- local authorities, NGOs, private agencies and national registration and inspection authorities
FRANCE	- employer signing the contract with the foster parent	- General Council, NGOs and hospitals	- <i>L'Aide Sociale a l'Enfance</i> of the General Council, NGOs and hospitals	- General Council	- employer hiring the foster parent
POLAND	- County Family Support Centres, Adoption and Foster Care Centres and NGOs	- County Family Support Centres, Adoption and Foster Care Centres and NGOs	- County Family Support Centres, Adoption and Foster Care Centres and NGOs	- County Family Support Centres, Adoption and Foster Care Centres and NGOs	- Family Courts, County Family Support Centres and NGOs
HUNGARY	- Office for Social Security and Guardianship of the State Office	- Office for Social Security and Guardianship of the State Office	- Office for Social Security and Guardianship of the State Office	- Office for Social Security and Guardianship of the State Office	- Office for Social Security and Guardianship of the State Office
AUSTRIA	- Youth-Welfare Authorities (Y-W-A) and NGOs	- Y-W-Authorities and NGOs (e.g. Institut für Soziale Dienste, Eltern für Kinder...)	- Y-W-Authorities and NGOs	- Y-W-Authorities	-Y-W-Authorities and social workers at the Regional Youth Welfare Offices

ITALY	/	/	/	/	/
SLOVENIA	- Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs - Centres for Social Work	- Centres for Social Work	- Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and Association of Centres for Social Work, in cooperation with the Faculty of Social Work - Centres for Social Work	- Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (at the proposal of the Candidate Selection Commission or the Centre for Social Work)	- Centres for Social Work
B&H	- NGOs in cooperation with the Ministries of Social Policy and Centres for Social Work (of cantons)	- NGOs (Save the Children and Hope and Homes for Children B&H), in cooperation with the Ministries of Social Policy and Centres for Social Work	- NGOs in cooperation with the Ministries of Social Policy and Centres for Social Work (of cantons)	<i>Foster parents are not licensed</i> but they get certificates for engaging in foster care	- mostly professionals from the Centres for Social Work supported by NGOs
SERBIA	- Centre for Foster Care	- Centre for Foster Care, Centre for Social Work	- Centre for Foster Care	- Centre for Foster Care and Centre for Social Work	- Centre for Foster Care

Education of foster parents is a complex, demanding and important process of preparing foster parents for their role. The models of the countries covered by this survey show that the educational process can usually be distinguished into the so-called mandatory preparatory training (often including assessments of potential foster parents) and the so-called mandatory additional training during the foster care (Table 10). Bosnia and Herzegovina is an exception because their Social Security Act does not stipulate mandatory training of foster parents.

Table 10 Organisation of training for foster parents

SWEDEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - training programme is different in different municipalities (larger municipalities can organise training on a regular basis and additional training) - according to the resources of each municipality, foster parents can be provided with supervision, as well as the possibility of networking - training is mandatory in some municipalities (but this has not yet become a legal requirement) - training is organised by municipalities on their own or in regional cooperation
FINLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there is the so-called PRIDE training programme (Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education), which consists of 8 group meetings in a total duration of 24 hours (foster parents get information about foster care and requirements to get involved) - mandatory for all foster parents with an option of foster parents' participation in the monitoring
THE NETHERLANDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a selective training for foster parents at the outset is mandatory for all potential foster parents, and it is taught by teachers-volunteers - the Foster Parents' Centre and Associations of Foster Parents are responsible for creating the plan of training
SCOTLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - training begins during the process of assessment and preparation for the role of foster parents, and takes place over several months - all foster parents have to attend additional training, and new training needs can be identified during the regular annual review of foster parents - the agencies which provide the fostering service are also responsible for creating and updating a training plan.
FRANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - training is mandatory for all foster parents and it takes 300 hours. Two months before the placement takes place, foster parents attend 60 hours of additional training - once the contract has been signed, every foster parent is required to attend trainings related to the specific needs of the foster child in the period of next three years - "the employer" hiring the foster parent is responsible for creating the training plan
POLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - training programme must be licensed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy - the programmes usually used include the PRIDE programme and the British programme "Choosing the Foster", carried out for that purpose by the specially trained and licensed coaches
HUNGARY	/
ITALY	- foster parents undergo group training
AUSTRIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there is no single programme at the national level, but there are different programmes of federal states - mandatory for all foster parents, with the training plan being adopted by the County Y-W-Authorities - the initial presentation of information is followed by training consisting of cycles of different modules (in total there are 7 of them, three hours each), three-day intensive

	<p>training and three specific modules (e.g. in the field of medicine) - training takes place over three days with a total duration of up to 50 hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - during the training, foster parents have to contact the RAP social worker at least three times - the training process takes between three and six months - training is the responsibility of a RAP social worker
SLOVENIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there are training programmes at the national and local level - foster parents have to attend training at least once every five years, otherwise their license is withdrawn. The training should include relatives. - training takes 20-25 hours (including lectures, workshops and exchange of experience) - at the national level, training of foster parents is planned and carried out by the Association of Centres for Social Work, in cooperation with the Faculty of Social Work - elements of the foster parent training programme are laid down by an Ordinance - at the local level - Centres for Social Work have to organise a short training at least once a year, encouraging and organising group work and support
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - training is carried out by NGOs in collaboration with the Centres for Social Work - type , intensity and content of training depend on the needs and the number of interested foster parents, but also on the organiser - according to the Social Security Act, training for foster parents is not mandatory
SERBIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - preparatory training related to candidate assessment (2 verified programmes: 'Safe steps to foster care' and PRIDE) - regular mandatory and additional annual training of 10 hours (topics: care standard, dealing with the child's life, preparations for the placement and adaptation of the child, adolescence...) - their mandatory annual training can take place through seminars - training for families who have engaged in foster care before the adoption of the Family Act (2005) which prescribes mandatory training - failing to attend additional training is not a sufficient reason for taking away the licence, but at the time of licence extension this fact is taken into account during assessment - training plan for foster parents is included in the institution's work plan. The idea is that it should be developed by a counsellor together with the family - such a plan would reflect the needs of the foster family - in addition to group trainings, counsellors provide individual training services

Training programmes can be distinguished based on whether they are regulated at the state (e.g. Poland) and/or "local" level (e.g. Sweden and Austria). Accordingly, certain countries require that the training programme is licensed by the relevant ministries (e.g. Poland) and governed by special regulations (e.g. Slovenia) on the one hand, while on the other some countries leave its designing, planning and implementation to local authorities, NGOs and private agencies (e.g. Scotland, the Netherlands, France), or faculties for social work (e.g. Slovenia). Training is mostly organised (especially the mandatory one) to last several days for several hours, during which foster parents are familiarised with different modules covering the topics related to foster care (including lectures, workshops and exchange of experience), and they are required to have contact with the assigned social worker (e.g. Austria, where foster parent is required to have at least three meetings with the social worker during the training). Finland, Poland and Serbia implement the so-called PRIDE programme (Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education), which consists of eight group meetings in a total duration of 24 hours. In addition to PRIDE, Poland also implements the British programme "Choosing the Foster", and Serbia the programme "Safe Steps to Foster Care". Such trainings are usually organised in groups with the possibility of individual consultations with the assigned social worker and

participation in supervising groups (e.g. Finland and Sweden). Which of these forms of training and support to foster parents will be available depends on financial resources of the local communities (e.g. Sweden, where different municipalities are often networked to organise training together). Additional training is organised on a regular basis and based on identified needs. French legislation provides that upon signing the contract, every foster parent is required to attend trainings related to the specific needs of the foster child in the period of next three years, while legislation in Slovenia stipulates that the training should include the family and foster parents' relatives.

Table 11 Organisation of licensing for foster parents

SWEDEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - potential foster parents undergo a detailed assessment (which among other things includes checking various registers and interviews with contact persons, as well as recommendations from the person listed for that purpose) - methods of assessment differ from region to region, but the most commonly used method is called Kälvesten, which is based on interviewing three generations - some municipalities implement the PRIDE model, which integrates both recruitment and training
FINLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - foster parents must successfully pass a training and obtain a licence from the Commission in their municipality or association - professional foster parents must obtain a licence from the Regional State Administrative Agency
THE NETHERLANDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - even though foster parents are not being licensed, NGO foster centres monitor their work - foster parents begin with the training and fostering their first child, with secured monitoring and contact with a social worker
SCOTLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all foster parents are registered and have signed contracts with local authorities, NGOs or private agencies - foster parents (single or couple) undergo extensive processing, they are required to have at least two contact and recommendation persons who can be interviewed by the agency - health check and criminal background check of each family member over 18
FRANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - licence is awarded to foster parents after an interview and a visit to the potential foster family by the General Council's Chairperson for a period of five years with the possibility of its extension - Children's Public Health Service is responsible for the licensing process - foster parent may be awarded a licence, but that does not mean that he or she must immediately be offered a contract
POLAND	<p>Certificates are awarded to foster parents by foster care organisations (public or private) licensed for that purpose, and the process consists of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promotional campaign aimed at recruiting new foster parents - introductory group or individual meetings - group training (at least 12 meetings of 4 hours each) - individual consultations in the prospective foster parent's home - the assessment instruments used: the analysis of strengths, needs, eco-map, genogram, family plan, etc., and the opinion of psychologists and other specialists as needed - meeting were a decision is made that the person is still interested in providing foster care and is awarded a certificate - the process of harmonising the needs of the child and foster parents and

	<p>appointing a competent coordinator (family care coordinator) - social worker</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - decision approval by the Family Court - while the foster care coordinator works with the foster family, a "Family Assistant" works with the child's biological family, and they are all together involved in the development of the Individual Plan of Work for the foster child. The foster care coordinator implements the individual plan and coordinates the team.
HUNGARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a territorially competent social and guardianship office of the State Office issues licences based on the collected documentation, with foster care networks - as service providers - subject to separate requirements prescribed in the special legislation - license which is granted includes the following information: institution/organisation that issues it, tax reference number, information about foster parent, place of foster care, maximum number of children and young people in foster care, information on whether it is employment (professional foster care), if it allows fostering children with disabilities, and its period of validity
AUSTRIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there is no regulation at the national level (differently regulated by Youth Welfare Authorities) and in federal states (Federal Leander)
ITALY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - after the initial collection of information, the person should address the territorially competent Social Services Department that takes the person through the process
SLOVENIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a potential foster parent first contacts the local competent Centre for Social Work, where he or she obtains the necessary information - if the person decides to become foster parent, he or she needs to submit an application for foster care license to the Centre for Social Work - the Centre for Social Work checks whether the person meets the requirements from the Foster Care Act, i.e. assesses their and their family's eligibility - Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs defines the annual needs for new foster families and sets a deadline for submitting applications (deadline is usually in September) - candidates who qualify shall be sent to training lasting 10-12 hours (twice a week). The content of the training is laid down by an Ordinance entitled "Pravilnik o pogojih in postopkih za izvajanje zakona o izvajanju rejniške dejavnost". - after the training, the Ministry issues a licence and registers the foster parent - the procedure may be shorter if it is determined that it would be important that a certain child is placed with a certain person (licence is issued for that child)
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - B&H has not yet introduced the process of licensing/obtaining/renewing foster care licence. - training of potential foster families is carried out by NGOs in cooperation with the Centres for Social Work, and it is used as the basis for the Centre for Social Work to issue a certificate to a family for practising foster care
SERBIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the recently adopted Social Security Act completely transferred the licensing of foster parents to the Centres for Foster Care and Adoption - those interested in foster care submit an application to become foster parents together with the documents that will establish whether the legal requirements are met - when they obtain an opinion on their compliance with the requirements, the candidates are referred to preparation, training and further evaluation - based on the opinion of the team on whether someone is or is not eligible to provide foster care, the Centre Director makes a decision which is used as a basis for issuing the license or a decision rejecting the application, which can be appealed against to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

	- based on the family counsellor's monitoring of foster families and the degree to which the purpose of foster care is achieved, and based on his or her opinions, the license is renewed every two years or, in case of any disputable elements, additional group assessment is organised
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Table 11 shows that a successfully completed training is a requirement for obtaining a license or certificate for foster care, and that continuous and regular additional training in one of the requirements which are taken into account when considering the possible extension of the license or permit for foster care. The type of foster care that foster parents intend to provide determines which authority is responsible for awarding the license (e.g. Austria). In addition to training, another integral part of the licensing process is the process of assessment of foster parents that is intended to check their compliance with the (previously discussed) requirements of foster care. Assessment of foster parents consists of an analysis of responses of potential foster parents to a set of instruments specifically designed by the so-called "coaches" (for example, Poland, which uses SWOT analysis, analysis of needs, eco-map and genogram technique, family plans, etc.), opinions of psychologists and other relevant experts. In Scotland, all adults living in the foster household are subject to health checks and criminal background checks, while Sweden uses the so-called Kälvesten method, which is based on interviewing three generations in the family. The practice of assessing foster parents in Scotland and Sweden is also specific because potential foster parents when they are applying need to provide names of two contact/recommendation persons which may be interviewed by the agency in order to determine the individuals' eligibility for the role of foster parents. Monitoring of foster parents, implementation of the Individual Plan of Work/Changes and degree of achievement of the purpose of foster care are used as the basis to make a decision about taxing away or extending a license, certainly taking into account the opinion of the social worker assigned to a foster child, the so-called care coordinator, and Family Assistants (if any) who work with the child's biological family while the child is in foster care (e.g. Poland). If the need arises, the procedure for taking away the license/certificate and terminating the contract may be initiated before its date of expiration.

4.5. Support system and the possibilities of improving foster care practices

Since it is well-known that the availability of social support sources has a positive effect on the outcome of foster care and keeping foster parents within the foster care system, the aspect of regulating social support for foster families, both in terms of formal support from professionals or informal support in the form of interactions between foster parents and/or family members, also arises as an important topic in our survey. Table 12 shows how the support system to foster families is regulated in the selected countries.

Table 12 Organisation of support system for foster parents

SWEDEN	- support of the assigned social worker is available during business hours, and in the evening/ at night/ weekend/ holiday support is provided by an on-call social worker - some forms of support are provided by private agencies 24 hours a day, including weekends and holidays, and in some municipalities those support services are provided
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	in cooperation with the municipality itself
FINLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support for foster parents is provided through annual additional trainings and expert assistance, as well as supervision of their work if necessary - mentoring by experienced foster parents, the so-called principle of "peer" support - through foster care interest groups (e.g. Family Care Union) - each child has been assigned their own social worker who coordinates the available types and sources of support
THE NETHERLANDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - there is a 24-hour support, seven days a week - foster parents can always reach a social worker. Each social worker has a mobile phone.
SCOTLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - each foster family has been assigned their own social worker with whom they are in contact on a regular basis, by phone and other means of communication - many foster agencies provide additional educational programmes and support groups for foster parents - there is a variety of counselling options (psycho-social, medical, legal, financial, etc.)
FRANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - foster parents can contact the General Council, organisations and trade unions - multi-professional teams provide specialised support and monitoring - some forms of support are provided 24 hours a day - experienced foster parents often provide support to those with less experience
POLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - availability of support varies from region to region, some areas (such as Warsaw) have secured different types of systematised support, as opposed to provincial areas where support comes down to the local Support Centres for Foster Families - under the new law, all regions will have the responsibility and obligation to develop specialised support teams and assign foster care coordinators to each foster family
HUNGARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the so-called foster parent's counsellor is a person who represents the so-called employer (institutes or network), providing support and advising foster parents on the one hand, and monitoring them on the other. One foster parent's counsellor can be responsible for no more than 45 children or 30 families, and can work 40 hours a week. - if necessary, foster parents may also be provided with support from professionals of other profiles (social pedagogues, psychologists, neurologists, etc.)
AUSTRIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - foster parents will be supervised by Y-W-As - they have the support of Y-W-As social workers during the week and at weekends - support provided to foster parents equals the support provided to families in general (family counselling, crisis centres, SOS phone lines, etc.)
ITALY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support is provided in accordance with law by the institutions, organisations and networks engaged in foster care - foster parents may associate themselves into self-help groups
SLOVENIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - foster parents may address the Centre for Social Welfare - there are no special on-call support services for foster parents. However, most foster parents have the phone numbers of "their" social workers
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - on weekdays, foster parents may contact a social worker who is the child's guardian, and other members of the expert team from the competent Centre for Social Work (psychologist, counsellor, sometimes a lawyer) - at weekends, during holidays and during "non-working hours" support can be provided to foster parents at their request by an on-call social worker - the above is not laid down by law and it depends on the goodwill and agreement between foster parents and competent professionals
SERBIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - foster parents can contact their family counsellor and/or child's case manager at any time (they are given the official cell phone numbers and information about how to react in certain situations, as well as about what service is responsible for what) - NGO Familia provides phone support service - if the family counsellor is unavailable, support is provided by his or her supervisor

Under the law, support is provided by the institutions, nongovernmental organisations, individuals and networks engaged in foster care. In terms of providing support, foster parents are provided with additional training, supervision (e.g. Finland, Scotland, Austria), individual consultations with the assigned social worker and specialists of other profiles (in all countries covered by the survey), and access to a variety of family services (e.g. Scotland, Austria). They are encouraged and supported to network into self-help groups (e.g. Italy), and so is the practice of being mentored by experienced foster parents under the principle of the so called "peer support" (e.g. Finland and France). On weekdays and during business hours, most foster parents are guaranteed support from the authorities, while in the afternoon and at night, at weekends and during holidays, this support is organised in different ways. For instance, foster parents in the Netherlands and Serbia are given cell phone numbers of their assigned social workers, foster parents in Sweden and Bosnia and Herzegovina are supported by an on-call social worker, whereas different foster agencies in Scotland provide additional support to foster parents. Slovenia is an interesting example, because there are no special support services, but most foster parents still have the phone numbers of "their" social workers. Just as in terms of training, availability of support depends on the financial resources of the local community. This is why Poland, for example, under the new law, plans to develop and introduce specialised support teams and introduce a foster care coordinator for each family. The standard for a foster family coordinator implies not being responsible for more than 45 children and 30 families, with a 40-hour working week.

Since agencies play an important role in providing support to foster parents throughout the process of foster care, their legal framework and authorities responsible for their monitoring are shown in Table 13. According to the obtained responses, in Hungary, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia there are no agencies dealing with foster care, while the legal framework for their establishment and operation exists only in Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands. In Austria there is no regulation at the national level, but this issue is regulated differently in individual federal states, in accordance with the provisions of the Hague Convention. In Scotland there are three types of agencies: local government agencies, NGOs and private agencies.

Table 13 Framework for the operation of agencies engaged in foster care

SWEDEN	- there are such agencies, they are financed by municipalities, there are no specific requirements for their licensing - in other words, the Social Welfare Committee is responsible for the child and the quality of care
FINLAND	- there are such agencies, municipalities or municipality associations and the regional administrative agency supervise their work
THE NETHERLANDS	- legal framework is the Child Protection Act - ministries secure funds for NGOs engaged in foster care, and the Children's Ombudsman supervises their work and the work of the ministry
SCOTLAND	- there are three types of agencies: local government agencies, NGOs and private - they need to be registered, pay annual fees and subject to regular monitoring - agencies have contracts with the local authorities responsible for placing children. Such formal contracts govern the quality of care, but also financing.
FRANCE	- there are authorised providers of services to foster parents, they are often NGOs - licence is awarded by the General Council for Children Protection and the Prefect for Children with Disabilities

	- monitoring is carried out by the General Council for Children Protection, Social Service and the Prefect for Children with Disabilities
POLAND	- there are no foster care centres that are not public. They must be registered with the Provincial Offices, and they operate based on the contracts with the County Offices that finance them - Provincial Supervising Office supervises their activities.
HUNGARY	- There are no foster care agencies, but foster parents provide their services within the foster networks, which consist of at least five foster parents
AUSTRIA	- there is no regulation at the national level, but this issue is differently regulated by the Youth Welfare Authorities, i.e. at the federal state level (Federal Leander) - legal framework for the operation of agencies is the Hague Convention
ITALY	- there are centres that provide services to foster parents
SLOVENIA	- there are no foster care agencies
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	- there are no foster care agencies
SERBIA	- there are no foster care agencies for the time being - Under the new Social Security Act, NGOs or agencies may engage in some services referring to foster care (including training, consultations, etc.) - under the Social Security Act, foster care is under the responsibility of institutions established by the Government: Regional Centres for Foster Care or Centre for Social Work

Supervision of agencies in the field of foster care is carried out by different authorities: municipalities/ municipality associations of regional administrative bodies (Finland), Children's Ombudsman and ministries (The Netherlands) and the Social Welfare Board (Sweden). Agencies enter into contracts with local authorities responsible for their financing (Sweden, Scotland). Besides securing funding for the operation of agencies, such contracts ensure the quality of their services.

Table 14 Identified strengths and possibilities of improving the existing foster care models

	STRENGTHS OF THE EXISTING FOSTER CARE MODEL	POSSIBILITIES OF IMPROVING THE EXISTING FOSTER CARE MODEL
SWEDEN	- focus on child protection and their right to be informed, as well as securing good cooperation with the child's biological family	- strengthen the continuity in the social worker's contact with the foster child and foster family (the so-called follow-up) - further development and improving of the assessment procedures for foster parents and their families - keep in mind that children in foster families may be victims of abuse - respect the child's right to be heard and their opinions on issues that affect them
FINLAND	- possibility of organising different types of foster care	- greater transparency and free flow of information
THE NETHERLANDS	- high-standard management of foster families by social workers (defined maximum number of children per family per social worker)	- improving the legal status of foster parents - increasing the number of professional foster parents

SCOTLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - good legislation that regulates the establishment of agencies and special ordinances that prevent the recruitment of unsuitable people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - higher-quality and regular recruitment of new foster families (rural and urban) - foster care should be more flexible and allow the placement of children with disabilities in the so-called respite care, which allows a short break for the biological parents
FRANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high-standard training and management of foster parents during the process of child care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - adapt foster care to the diverse needs of children in foster families (teenagers, children with behavioural problems and developmental disabilities, etc.) - improve cooperation between institutions, foster families and the child's family
POLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - foster care is planned and goal-oriented - there is a guaranteed support and assistance of the foster care coordinator (social worker) - there are so-called foster care centres - there are prevention measures being implemented in the work with the child's family - there is a guaranteed service of the so-called family assistant for families in crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promotion of foster care should be a part of the national policy - promotion should make use of the modern communication technologies - promotion of best foster care practices - greater support for the biological family aimed at their reunion - more professional foster parents - a more comprehensive training in terms of affection, teamwork, planning and developmental psychology - introducing the assessment of the social status of foster parents
HUNGARY	/	/
AUSTRIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - clearly stated obligations and responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased budget - more professional staff aimed at providing support to foster parents
ITALY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - process of deinstitutionalisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - need for a systematic organisation of interventions in the child's biological family
SLOVENIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introducing the so-called Individual Project Group (with the Centres for Social Work) in order to create an Individual Plan of Change/Work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introduce amendments to the Family Act (e.g. transferring decisions to the court, limiting the measure of child isolation for a period of three years...) - improve the working methods between the child-foster family-biological family, and the training process for foster parents - discuss the question of salary for foster parents
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - insist on the process of deinstitutionalisation - focus on the prevention of child separation from their families, raising awareness about the importance of growing up in the family - promoting foster care - working on the legislation concerning foster care, professionalisation and development of specialised forms of foster care
SERBIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the rights of foster parents (remuneration, health and pension insurance, fee for child support and the establishment of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - improve the practices concerning kinship foster families

If we sum up the results shown in Table 14, it can be concluded that the strengths of the existing foster care models were identified in the area of child rights and the rights of all parties involved to be informed, the diversity in types of foster care tailored to the needs of individual children, availability of both formal and non-formal social support and the prevention of separation of children from their biological families. The results of this survey support the thesis of the necessity and importance of improving foster care as a form of child care. The possibilities of improving the existing foster care models were observed in the field of taking on the activities designed to promote foster care and recruitment of new foster parents, as well as the respect towards the child's right to express their own opinion. The need to develop and/or improve kinship, specialised and/or professional foster care, the assessment process and continuous training in order to develop specific knowledge and skills of foster parents were identified as well. The responses of the survey participants revealed the necessity of providing professional support to foster parent and encouraging cooperation among different sectors.

5. INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION: Guidelines for considering the possibilities of improving care for children in foster families

- created based on the analysis of foster care models in several countries of Southeast Europe and the European Union -

1. Particular attention should be paid to promoting and protecting the rights of children in foster care. The practice of the system, particularly the courts, is such that the rights of parents often come before the rights of children.
2. The competent authority should draw up a document that would clearly define the rights and responsibilities of children in foster care, foster parents and their families, as well as the child's biological family.
3. Particular attention should be paid to the step-by-step approach to the planning, preparation and implementation of placing the children in foster families, and their return to their biological families or some other form of care.
4. Decisions referring to the children in foster care should be made based on assessments and guided by the best interests of the children, aimed at securing a stable environment, safe relationship with the persons who look after them and their families, and in order to prevent negative outcomes of foster care for all children.
5. Assessment of the child/foster parent and harmonising/matching the characteristics/needs of the child and his or her potential foster parent, and the preparation for the placement should be carried out thoroughly and carefully. The instances of unsuccessful placements and frequent moves of the child from one type of care to another or from one foster family to another, on top of having an adverse effect on the child's growing up and development and the experience of developing relationships of affection, also leads to foster parents deciding to quit from further fostering.
6. Whenever possible, brothers and sisters that have already established a certain relationship should not be separated, and the placement of children should be planned as close to their family i.e. their place of residence as possible, in order to facilitate contacts with the child's family and maintain the child's social network.
7. Each child in foster care should have his or her own Individual Plan of Change to answer to the specific needs of that child. In addition to professionals (case managers and a team of the institution/ Department), the process of creating an Individual Plan should include the child (taking into account their age and ability to understand the circumstances), the child's parents/guardians, foster parents/other members of the foster family, persons supporting the child, and other professionals who provide specialised services.
8. It is important to monitor and take into account the nature and quality of contacts of the biological family with the fostered child and his foster parents.
9. In order to prepare the child for the return to his or her family, it is necessary to work simultaneously with his or her foster and biological families.
10. Particular attention should be paid to developing the child's sense of identity, and to this end it is important to encourage foster parents to help the child keep a diary, i.e. a journal of their life. The

social worker who manages the child is responsible for making sure that the diary/journal of life, as well as all other personal belongings, follow the child.

11. It is necessary to work systematically on the promotion of foster care and to secure support "infrastructure" across the country, including both urban and rural areas, in order to ensure regional coverage and availability of foster parents and therefore level the opportunities and rights of children from different regions in terms of contacts with their families (they often have low income, and are unable to cover travel expenses to visit the foster family).
12. Particular attention should be paid to taking the views of children/young adults into account, i.e. their perspective on their life and circumstances of their current situation, through the various aspects of their life and time perspective - experience of the past and present, as well as expectations for the future.
13. Decisions referring to the child who is placed in a foster family should be based on professional principles of the qualified and trained experts, respecting the principle of involving all interested parties and keeping in mind the best interests of the child.
14. Foster parents should be able to express their own opinions and influence the creation of care policies, both for the specific child and in other institutions and organisations involved in providing this type of care. Court practice has shown that foster parents are rarely involved in the proceedings as a party, e.g. in the case of the child's reintegration into his or her biological family.
15. In order to protect the child's best interests, it is necessary to systematically carry out comprehensive assessments of foster parents in terms of their suitability to work with children.
16. All foster parents, depending on the type of foster care they provide, should undergo a mandatory training, and as long as they provide foster care they should participate in various forms of additional trainings in order to help them identify and respond to the child's identified needs more easily.
17. Training content and methods of work should be an integral part of the certified programmes that can be carried out only by qualified coaches.
18. Competent authorities should set clear criteria for the professionalisation of foster care in terms of required qualifications/specialisations, but also of rights and responsibilities of those who provide professional foster care.
19. The competent authority should clearly regulate the rights and responsibilities of foster parents who are related to the fostered child, as well as support mechanisms and their monitoring.
20. Based on available resources, the government should develop a clear policy on employment of professionals of different profiles and allocation of human and material resources to ensure optimal implementation of the basic principles of foster care and protect the best interests of children. This requirement stems from an observed lack of qualified personnel in the field, specialists and social workers who manage the cases of individual children.
21. It is necessary to develop and provide a system of support for foster parent while they look after foster child/children, and ensure its availability 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by opening various communication channels (crisis phone, mobile support teams, etc.).
22. From the aspect of deinstitutionalisation, it is necessary to reorganise the homes/institutions into smaller care units and/or regional support centres.

23. All organisations (governmental and private) and all persons involved in the care of foster children must be in possession of relevant licences previously issued for that purpose, and their work should be continuously monitored and supervised by authorised bodies.
24. It is important to encourage the networking of foster parents into different groups and support networks.
25. When working with foster families and biological families, it is necessary to use different methods of working with families.
26. The government should develop and implement a comprehensive policy preventing the separation of children from their families, raising awareness about the importance of growing up in the family and promoting foster care as a form of care for children without an adequate parental care.

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