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## Foster Care in Portugal

Paulo Delgado  
Escola Superior de Educação do Porto  
[pdelgado@ese.ipp.pt](mailto:pdelgado@ese.ipp.pt)



# Presentation structure

- 1. Foster Care at the present time
- 2. Research Project «Foster care in Portugal»
- 3. First results
- 4. Challenges for the future



# 1. Foster Care at the present time

Law definition:

Consists in the attribution of a child or young person to a singular person or a family, having the suitable skills, aiming his/her **integration in a family environment and providing the adequate cares to his/her needs and well-being** and the necessary education to his/her integral development.

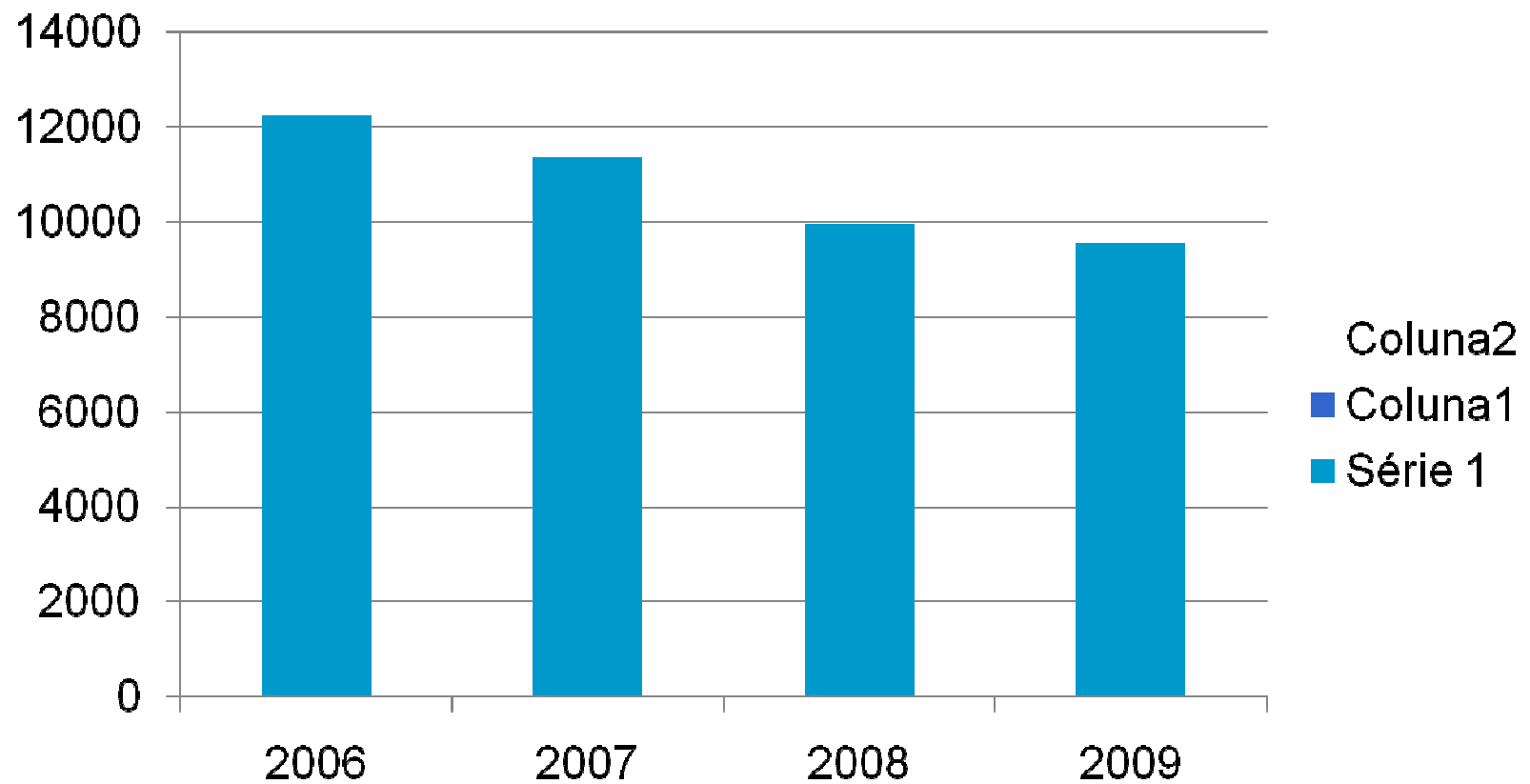
(Art. 2º, Decreto-Lei n.º 11/2008).



## Types of Foster Care. Aims.

- Kinship Care is no more considered as a Foster Care type
- Principal aim: The return of the child to their family
- Legally, there's no Long Term Foster Care.

# Nr.º of children looked after and accomodated





# System Traits

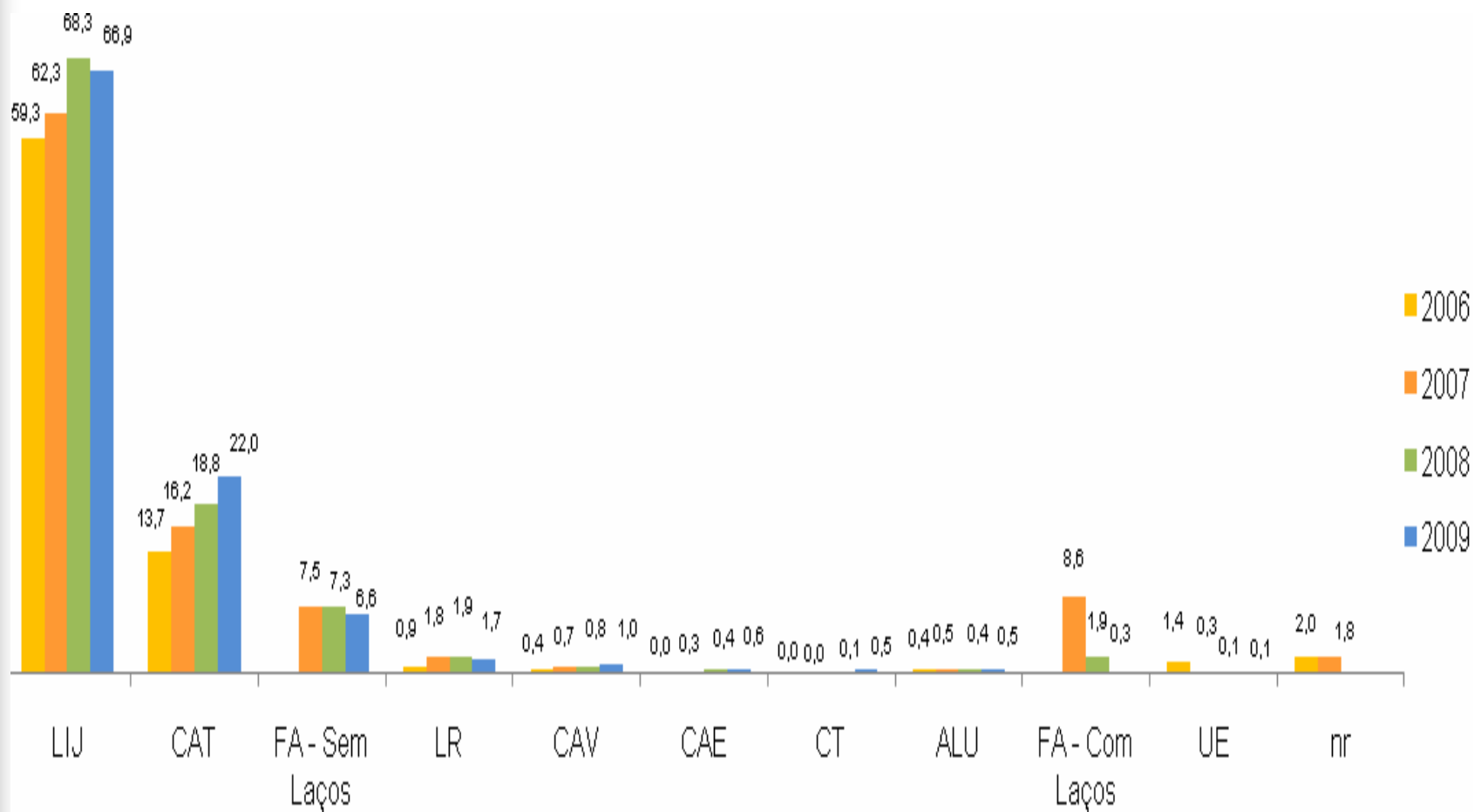
- Large number of children in Care
- Long duration of the shelter period
- Low mobility, once only a few children finish the shelter period
- Slight movement of deinstitutionalization
- Increase of children placed in residential care and decrease of Foster Care in the system.



# Foster Care expression

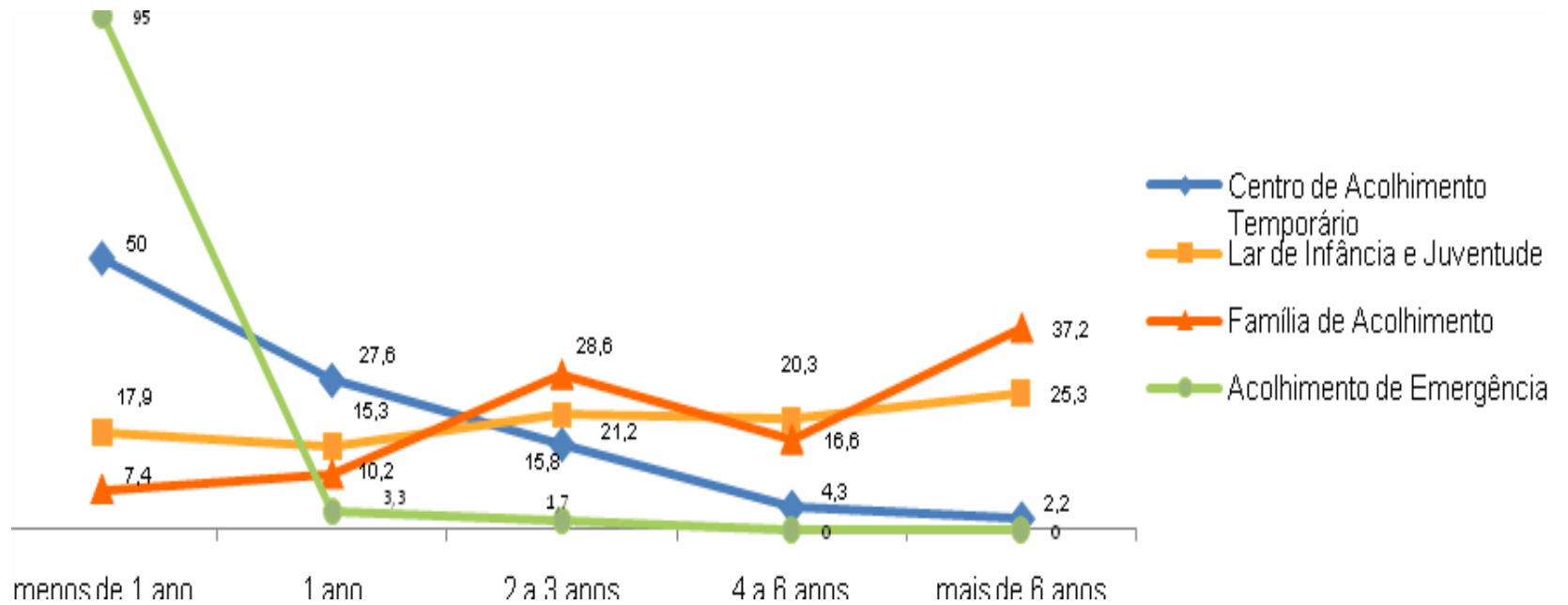
- Although the most recent political words on the topic tend to oppose to institutionalization, following the direction given by several countries, Foster Care takes a small proportion in a child protection system based in strong institutionalization.

# Residential Care / Foster Care





# Permanence





# Payments

- All the carers receive the same (double fee if they care for children with special needs)
- Necessary equipment and furniture
- Extraordinary expenses.



# The process of becoming a foster carer

- Higher standards for Foster Carers recruitment and approval
- Trying to increase the social, economical and educational level of foster carers.
- Adoption is a distinct process with distinct goals.



## Some important changes

- A new period to prepare admission and to prepare cessation;
- Periodic and intensive support during stay.
- The new law admits the possibility of contact between the ex-foster carers and the child, after the cessation.



## State of the art

- Step by step, there have been some signs of change in the Portuguese scene:
  - Foster Care has been object of significant attention by the media
  - The politicians tend to support deinstitutionalization in their public speeches
  - Child and Young People Protection practice in order to assure their proper development as human beings.



## 2. Research Project

### «Foster Care in Portugal»

- This project intends to adapt to the Portuguese reality the research line developed by Del Valle, López, Montserrat e Bravo in 2008 - «Family Foster Care in Spain. An evaluation of the results»
- The referred team (*Grupo de investigación en familia e infancia* - GIFI), from the University of Oviedo (Universidade de Oviedo), is supporting us in the project development .



## General aim

- The practical need for this project is justified as a mean of providing both the policy decision makers and the field work teams a valid portrait of the reality in order to guide the application of the new legal framework.



# Specific goals

- Describe in detail the profile of the direct actors involved in the process
- Determine the process and stages of each case
- Analyze the degree of satisfaction of the carers and foster children with the experience
- Analyze the educational history of the children in Foster Care
- Understand in which ways can long term Foster Care grant safety and stability that children need.





## Methods

- The methodology of this project will combine a descriptive and qualitative approach with a quantitative analysis
- This study will focus on the 5 districts of the country that represent 75% of the population of 631 foster homes in 2009: Porto, Braga, Vila Real, Aveiro, Viana do Castelo (from more significant to less significant).



## Two main sources for data collection

- Data collection through the reports on each case, using the table as applied in the previously mentioned GIFI project with same changes
- Semi-structured interviews to the foster carers (developing a sample by each of the 5 districts). Our aim is to interview a quarter of the carers integrated in the previous phase.



# Group interviews with children

- The essential goal is to give voice to the leading role of the measure, listen to His/her opinions and their proposals in an open conversation (two meetings per group)
- The group interviews will be taken in every district and will join the possible number of children, from 6 to 12, according to the number of existing cases.



# Caregiver Burden Scale

- In order to determine the degree of extra burden that fostering a child caused to the substitute family (Caregiver Burden Interview, de Zarit, Reever e Bach-Peterson, 1980).
- This instrument has been applied and verified by Del Valle et al. (2008).



# Diachronically perspective

- The Framework contains several questions that aim to compare the child's situation in the beginning of the care period with the current situation.
- This evolutive perspective is obtained by the triangulation of the different points of view of the main actors: the professionals in the *Foster Care Team*, the carers and the children themselves.
- The interviews will be an essential piece of the data collection process, hence they allow us a retrospective look on the past and a vision of the future, and give us an idea of the feeling of belong and safety that foster care might offer.



### 3. First results

- Porto District: Data collection through the reports of all cases using the table: 289 in May 2011
- This district represents more than 40% of the country total.



## H.1 Family structure

	Frequency	Percent
Couple	131	78,9
Only the Woman	34	20,5
Only the man	1	0,6
Total	166	100



## H.2 Carers age

	<b>Nr.</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Woman	165	28	79	54
Man	132	31	77	56





## H.3 Do they have children of their own?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	155	93,4
No	11	6,6
Total	166	100



## If yes, what is the total number of children of the family

	Frequency	Percent
0	10	6,1
1	31	18,8
2	74	44,8
3	30	18,2
4	16	9,7
+ 4	4	2,4
Total	165	100



## H.5 Education level of the carer (woman)

	Frequency	Percent
No education	6	3,6
4years	107	64,5
6 years	25	15,1
9 years	17	10,2
Secondary education	6	3,6
University	4	2,4
Total	165	99,4
Missing	1	0,6



## H.6 Carers Profession

- Woman: house keeper (63,9), retired (6,6), pensioner (6)
- Man: retired (23,3), building construction (8,4), unemployed (5,4), pensioner (4,2), driver (4,2)



## G.2 Does the family make any visits?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	164	56,7
No	124	42,9
Total	288	99,7
Missing	1	0,3



## G.3 Place of the visit

	Frequency	Percent
Carer's home	87	30,1
Home of the family	62	21,5
Other	11	3,8
Total	160	55,4
Missing	129	44,6

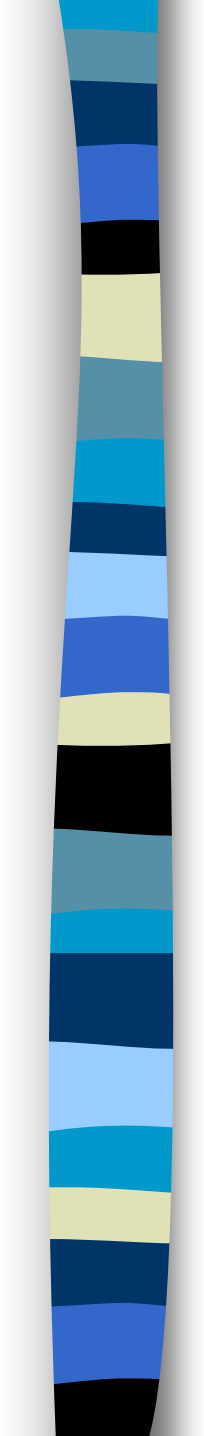
## G.5 Who makes the visits?

	Frequency	Percent
Both parents together	34	11,8
Each parent separately	12	4,2
Just the father	24	8,3
Just the mother	65	22,5
Other relatives	32	11,1
Total	167	57,8
Missing	122	42,2

## G.6 How frequent are the visits?

	Frequency	Percent
Weekly	37	12,8
Every 15 days	35	12,1
Monthly	27	9,3
Weekends	7	2,4
Holidays	23	8,0
Other	38	13,1
Total	167	57,8
Missing	122	42,2





## G.13 What effect do you consider the visits and going outs have on the child?

	Frequency	Percent
Positive	128	44,3
Negative	31	10,7
I don't know	1	0,3
Total	160	55,4
Missing	129	44,6



# Evolution and evaluation of the child - Health

	Frequency	Percent
Improved	162	56,1
Stayed stable	93	32,2
Got worst	1	0,3
Total	256	88,6
Missing	33	11,4
Total	289	100



# Evolution and evaluation of the child - School

	Frequency	Percent
Improved	114	39,4
Stayed stable	43	14,9
Got worst	5	1,7
Total	162	56,1
Missing	127	43,9
Total	289	100



# Evolution and evaluation of the child - Behavior

	Frequency	Percent
Improved	138	47,8
Stayed stable	87	30,1
Got worst	8	2,8
Total	233	80,6
Missing	56	19,4
Total	289	100

## J.2 Currently, how do you evaluate the results of Foster Care?

	Frequency	Percent
Successful	234	81,0
Some success	45	15,6
Some problems	6	2,1
Serious problems	1	0,3
Total	286	99,0
Missing	3	1,0
Total	289	100



## 4. Challenges for the future

- Promote and divulge Foster Care
- Materialize legal solutions and procedures
- Improve the processes: recruitment, selection, training, support, cessation and leaving care.
- Reinforce the payments and reconsider the effect of fostering allowances on tax and benefits:



## Challenges for the future (cont.)

- To establish long term foster care
- To hold responsible for, to inform and support the parents and families of the child;
- Improve child's participation in all matters affecting the child in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (art.º 12º Convention on the rights of the child)

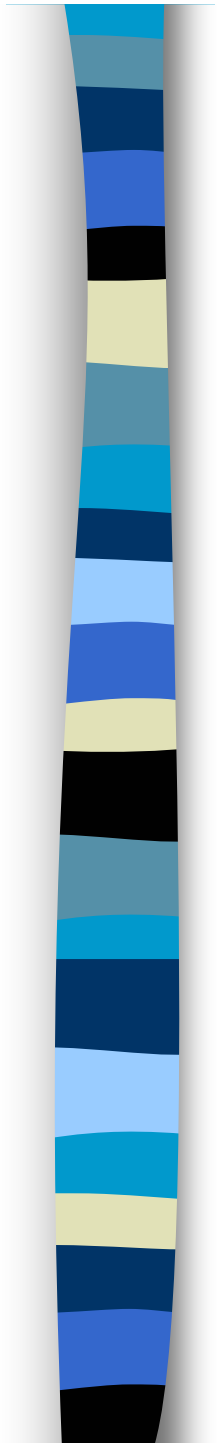


## Final reflection

“Humans might choose between having prosaic relationships, cold, economic and guarantee, or magic ones, trying to reach something wonderful and amazing, without loosing a sense of realism.”

■ Zeldin, 1994, p.385







# Conclusion

- The main goal of this study is to understand at what measure Foster Care can be an appropriate context for children development. This question does not have a prompt and even less easy response, given the number of variables implied. For example, the question of the contact with biological families, that has so many effects in the development of the shelter period.