

# Deinstitutionalization of child care

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# Child care system in the '90s

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- Dependent on residential system;
- Lacking prevention community services;
- Few family-based alternatives;
- Social norms: institutions considered good solutions for children;
- Fragmentation, lack of coordination in policy development and implementation;
- Poverty and access to education – main factors that forced families accept institutionalization of their children.

# Context – first attempts

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- In 2000-2003, first ideas regarding the closure/reorganization of residential institutions, presented by international and local NGOs but aggressively rejected without discussion by the authorities and residential institutions.
- The persons from inside the system used arguments related to the employment of the staff of institutions, problematic future of children after the closure of institutions, the use of institutions' buildings, etc.
- P4EC and other organizations brought examples of international researches results that demonstrated severe effects of institutionalization on the children; although at that moment this didn't produce visible effects, it offered local and national decision makers ground for thinking.

# Context – the launch of the reform

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- **In 2006**, the main form of child care was residential, there were 67 large institutions with approximately 12 000 children in placement;
- **In July 2007** the National Strategy and Actions Plan of the residential child care system reform 2007-2012 was launched;
- **Between 2007 and 2010** only one institution was closed, one was reorganized, and only a few non-governmental organizations took interest in the support of the reform;
- **In 2010** the Reform promotion council was created;
- **Between 2010 and 2012**, 20 institutions were closed, reducing by 54% the number of children in institutions;
  - The reform mainly covered children of school age, placed into institutions due to educational and social reasons, and did not cover sufficiently young children and those with disabilities.
- **In 2014**, 43 institutions with 3909 children, including 35 institutions cu 3088 children are subordinated to the ME.

# Context – the role of P4EC in the reform

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<b>Raion</b>	<b>Residential institution</b>	<b>No. of children</b>
<b>Ungheni</b>	Residential school for orphans and children left without parental care, Ungheni town	113
	Auxiliary school for children with special educational needs, Sculeni village	71
	Rehabilitation centre for children with lung disease, Cornesti town	38
<b>Fălești</b>	Residential school for orphans and children left without parental care, Falesti town	115
	Auxiliary school for children with special educational needs, Socii Noi	
	Auxiliary school for children with special educational needs, Albinetul Vechi	53
<b>Călărași</b>	Auxiliary school for children with special educational needs, Călărași town	51
<b>Cahul</b>	Auxiliary school for children with special educational needs, Crihana Veche	71
	Residential school for orphans and children left without parental care, Cahul town	36
<b>Telenești</b>	Residential school for orphans and children left without parental care, Cazanesti village	155
	Auxiliary school for children with special educational needs, Telenesti town	73
<b>Sîngerei</b>	Auxiliary school for children with special educational needs, Sîngerei town	105
<b>Total</b>		77
		<b>958</b>

# Reconfiguration of the child care system

## the key concept

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- **The main idea** – most children receive services at the community level; a smaller number of children are provided specialised services; and only a very small number are in residential care (highly specialised services).
- **Changes were achieved at all levels of service provision**, so that:
  - The children who had been placed previously into residential care – that should be provided only to children with very complex needs – now mainly receive specialised services or attend community settings,
  - Other children who had previously stayed out of the care and protection system, although needed the services, are now included into the system.

# Reconfiguration of the child care system

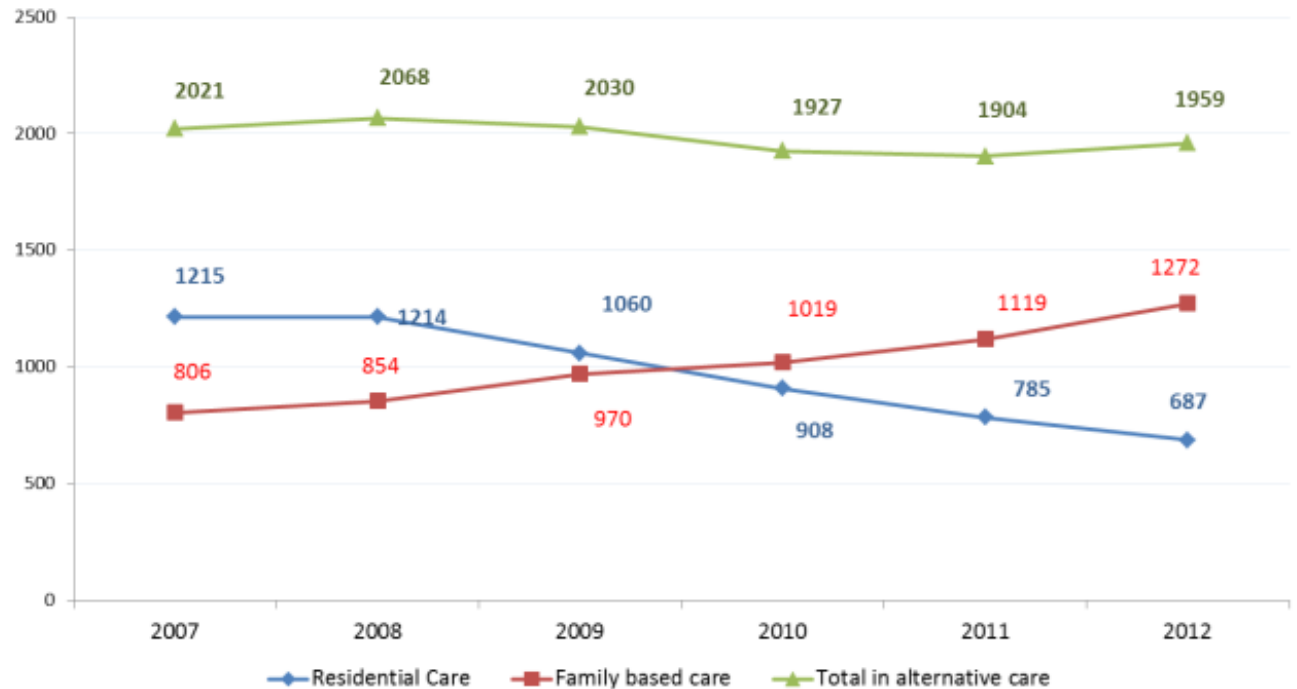
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## RESULTS:

**1. declining residential care (number of children dropped by 50%)**

**2. family-based alternative services overcome residential care**

**3. fewer children are placed into alternative care, compared to the total number of child population**





# Reconfiguration of the child care system

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**2007**

**11,544  
children in  
residential care**

**6,562 children in  
alternative  
family-based care**

**Community  
care**

**2012**

**6,057  
Children in  
residential care**

**10,060 children in  
alternative family  
based care**

**15,222 in  
community care**

# General approach

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- **Cause-effect analysis** of the children's separation from families and their placement into residential care;
- **Development of the theory of change** on which the interventions of development were based;
- **Development of the deinstitutionalization concept;**
- **Identification of the main components of the intervention** that together ensure long-term effect: the child's upbringing in a strong family.
- **Planning of intervention strategies for each component**, based on baseline evaluation:
  - Social services survey
  - Abuse and neglect survey
  - Revision of the existing legislation in the context of the implementation of Guidelines on alternative care of children
  - Opinion survey of professionals and the wider society regarding the child's separation from family and his institutionalization
  - Training needs assessment of all stakeholders
  - Evaluation of financial resources in the residential system and other services

# Theory of change

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- **Securing the child's right to grow up in a strong family** requires a variety of approaches and strategic interventions at various levels and areas of the child protection system, starting with the child and finishing with the policy level.
- It includes not only **the development of a wide range of child-centred and family-and-community based services**, but also:
  - A research-based policy framework,
  - Necessary professional skills,
  - Committed resources,
  - Coordinated partnerships between public and civil society organizations,
  - Change of the system, but also of social norms – both processes are absolutely necessary,
  - Transformation of the child care system in a wider context of social protection,
  - Opportunity for children and families to be heard – strengthening children and families to demand the fulfilment of their rights and to participate in decision-making processes and contribute to the change of the system.

# Approaches

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- **Complex approach to the reform** of the residential system, through its connection to national child protection policies, to the existing system of social and educational services.
- **Consultation with all stakeholders**, especially children and families.
- **The LPA's role of leader** in the process of system reorganization, development of well-coordinated partnerships, ownership for decision-making.
- **Ensuring conditions for the up-bringing and development of every child**, away from residential care – the main condition of deinstitutionalization.
- **The main interest of the child** – is the core of the DI process that ensures a strong family for each child. The institution's interests are considered absolutely inferior to the main interest of the child.
- **Family's poverty and special educational needs of the child** – cannot be reason for child's separation or non-returning to family.
- **Avoiding children's transfer from one institution to another**, only family reintegration or placement into alternative services, with a clear plan of assistance and concrete term of placement.
- **Mobilization of existing resources** at the local level, to ensure effectiveness of reintegration.

# The concept of deinstitutionalization of the child care system includes

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- Early identification and response to risk of child's separation from family.
- Development of family support services (primary and secondary).
- Development of separation prevention service (gate-keeping).
- Development of family care alternatives.
- Targeting cash benefits to the most vulnerable families with children.
- Deinstitutionalization of children from residential care.
- Closure/transformation of residential institutions.
- Promotion of school inclusion.
- On-going monitoring of children's assistance in families, institutions, and other services.
- Promotion of multi-disciplinary professional response to the needs of children.
- Retargeting money resources from the residential system to social and educational services.

# Work stages

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- **Preparing the process:** producing the methodology and performing complex evaluation of the institution, producing the institution transformation plan, deciding on the status of the institution, setting moratorium on child institutionalization.
- **Preparing children for reintegration:** personality development programs – the children were trained to make changes in their lives, their capacities were built to set relations in new educational environments, empowering them to decide on their own life.
- **Preparing the family for the child's reintegration:** building parents' skills, replacing the family's dependence on the state's support in child care, in certain cases – elimination of resilience to receive the child into the family.
- **Preparing the institution's staff for change,** supporting them in professional recycling and employment.
- **Reorganization of the institution itself** into another service/bringing the institution to the minimum standards of quality or closing it, depending on the decisions made.

# Preparing the institution's reorganization/closure

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- **Evaluation of the children's situation** for the examination of opportunities for reintegration or placement into alternative family, performed by a trained multidisciplinary team.
- **Evaluation of the family's situation** in order to analyse the capacity of the family to offer adequate care, according to the needs; grouping families according to probability of successful reintegration of children.
- **Analysis of available social and educational services in the community and region (raion)**, where the children and their families can be included within the DI process; identification of needs for services that should be developed or extended.
- **Analysis of the services provided within the institution:** educational process, extra-school activities, child care.
- **Human resources evaluation:** qualification of the staff, on-going training, work experience, style of communication with children.
- **Analysis of financial resources:** dynamics of indicators, current expenses, per-student cost, average number of students and average number of staff in the institution.
- **Technical evaluation of the estate** in order to determine the degree of technical wear and possibility to further use the construction.
- **Making the report on the institution**, formulating the conclusions and recommendations for every child and for the institution, including the staff, material basis, estate, and budget of the institution.

# Deciding on the reorganization/closure

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- **Deciding on the status of the institution** based on a choice from three options:
  - Institution recommended for closure;
  - Institution recommended for reorganization into another type of service; and
  - Institution recommended for further activity, aligned to minimum standards of quality.
- **Transferring the institution** from subordination to the Central Authorities to the Local Authorities in the case of an institution subordinated to the Ministry of Education.
- **The moment of closure** of the residential institution is of crucial importance:
  - Fast closure of the institution causes big risks for children and staff;
  - Slow closure causes unreasonable loss of financial resources, staff's psychological burning, demotivation of local authorities to continue the process of institution's closure.
- **Stopping child entry into the institution** – the end of preparing stage.



# Deinstitutionalization of children

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- **Goal:** provide secure family, school, community reintegration of children.
- **Reintegration plan** as part of the individual plan of assistance.
- **Group the children**, depending on reintegration possibilities:
  - Children who spent in institution less time, who usually integrate easier;
  - Children with learning capacity corresponding to their age, but with pedagogical delay;
  - Children, whose parents/care-givers want and are able to provide family care.
- **Secure tight collaboration around the child** between community social assistants, specialists, and mayoralty.
- **Rigorous monitoring** of all cases of reintegration and out-of-family placement, and of the child's school inclusion process.

# Preparing the family for the child's reintegration

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- **Goal:** support the family to ensure adequate care of the child, meeting the child's needs.
- **Determine the level of support for each group of families** – group families depending on the degree of their preparedness for the child's reintegration:
  - Families that are ready for the child's returning home;
  - Those that need support to create conditions for the child's returning;
  - Those that have neither conditions, nor capacity to provide adequate care to the child.
- **The community social assistant, in collaboration with the local multidisciplinary team** are responsible to prepare the family, mobilize necessary support, and monitor the reintegration.
- **Practical, financial, and psychological support** provided to families for the children's reintegration.

# Preparing the staff for the closure/reorganization of the institution

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- **Identifying the support strategy** – grouping institution’s staff:
  - Staff who reached retiring age;
  - Qualified staff who can be reemployed through transfer;
  - Staff who can be employed in the new services;
  - Staff who need requalification/additional training to be employed into the new services.
- **Reducing resilience to change:**
  - Awareness-raising regarding the reform, DI, trends in national policies;
  - Training in change management;
  - Involvement of the staff in the evaluation of children and support of the DI process.
- **Orientation to new professions** – familiarizing with:
  - Children’s needs and rights;
  - Alternative methods to meet the children’s needs;
  - Social services for children;
  - Support services within the educational system.



# Closure/reorganization of the residential institution

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- **Closure:**
  - Preparing and organizing children's deinstitutionalization and reintegration;
  - Making a decision on the reallocation of released financial resources;
  - Making a staff reorientation plan;
  - Training the staff for the employment into new or existing services;
  - Deciding on the use of the released estate.
- **Reorganization of the institution into another type of service (Cahul model):**
  - Identification of drawbacks in the child care system and deciding on the creation of the service;
  - Producing necessary documents, in line with the new service' minimum standards of quality;
  - Training the staff for the employment in the new service;
  - Adapting and equipping the areas, to meet the requirements of the new service;
  - The staff after the institution's closure – priority in the employment for the new service.
- **Preserving the institution** and aligning it to the minimum standards of quality:
  - Identifying existing drawbacks in the functioning of the institution, based on the evaluation;
  - Adjusting the provided services to the minimum standards of quality;
  - Planning on-going training for the staff;
  - Introducing new work technologies in the practice of the institution;
  - Linking the children with other community and raion services, according to their individual needs.

# Lessons learned – advantages and challenges

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- Promotes a child-and-family centred system
- Scientifically-based approach – focussing resources and efforts
- Based on existing resources and skills
- Supports retargeting of resources from institution to community
- Can be replicated
- Is measurable
- Requires specialized professional skills
- Is an intensive process that requires resources for transition period
- Is implemented in conditions of resilience (building capacity to attend children in a different manner versus finding new roles, especially at the level of institutional staff)
- Needs investment to cover gaps, to develop new workforce in addition to the existing one.

# Lessons learned – system reform

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- **Residential system reform in the Republic of Moldova is a crucial and irreversible process, its successfulness is conditioned by:**
  - Clear political ownership (any hesitation impacts the success of the reform)
  - Leadership/strategic coordination – the process started with high intensity, along with the creation of the reform steering committee; LPAs with high level of leadership finished the reform with benefits for children, families, child protection system.
  - Professional skills at all levels
- **The residential system reform implies collaboration at the local and national levels**
  - The collaboration at the national level with the MLSPF, ME, MF, and MH was focused on the strengthening of the child protection system and on the development of social policies centred on the prevention of child's separation from family and protection of children without parental care.
  - Local collaboration ensured ownership for responsibilities and mobilization of resources for the reorganization/closure of residential institutions and development of special and educational services for children.
- **Reducing new entries into the system, through the system preventing child's separation from family – the strategy that ensured the success of the reform.**

## Lessons learned – reintegration of children

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- **Getting ready – is the key of success.** Preparing the child for DI, preparing the family for the child's coming back home, the community for the child's school and social inclusion.
- **Preparing stakeholders, based on the results of the complex evaluation** of the child's needs and of the family's capacity to meet them, which is the foundation of the individual plans of assistance and support before and after the child's reintegration into family.
- **Post-reintegration monitoring** – to prevent repeated risks and separation of the child.
- **Successful reintegration depends on the child's school inclusion;** many children have SEN, the development of their personality may be affected under the influence of the institutional environment.

## Lessons learned – transforming the institution

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- **Methodology of complex evaluation of the institution, and making informed decisions**, produced, piloted, and improved within the project. It proved efficient and may be applied for the closure/reorganization of any institution for children.
- **Duration of the process of residential school reorganization** should be optimized. If this process is very fast, apart from the risks associated with the child's reintegration process, there are risks for the staff, efficient use of financial resources.
- **Redistribution of staff** as a result of closure of specialized institutions: a major concern caused by unawareness of the methodology of work with children without disabilities, as well as the effects of long-lasting activity in an environment with isolationist institutional culture.
- **The use of buildings** released as a result of institution's closure – an important concern, but is should not be done to the detriment of the child and against common sense.



## Thoughts on returning home

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- *“It’s ok at the boarding school, but it’s better home, with the parents”* (boy, Calarasi).
- *“I was very happy [when I was told I’d go home]. I was very glad to know that I will live permanently with my family”* (Girl, Ungheni).
- *“I wanted to go home, because I missed my parents; but I don’t have friends at home any more”*. (Boy, Ungheni).

## Concerns regarding the new school

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- *“I don’t think I will cope. We will study new subjects there: physics, biology, and foreign languages. We studied only Russian at the auxiliary school”. (Girl, Calarasi).*
- *“I think they will put us in the back rows and we won’t learn anything there”. (Boy, Calarasi).*
- *“I’m ashamed to tell people what school I used to attend. I’m very much afraid that other children will mock me because I attended auxiliary school”. (Boy, Falesti).*

## Freedom and friends ``at home

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- *“We were almost isolated at the residential school: the school was on the territory, the canteen was on the territory, and we were like savage people, I don’t have enough words to describe the situation... we could not communicate with other people, we were very isolated. Now I go to school and can talk to many persons”. (Girl, Falesti).*
- *“I am well. I think we have more freedom, not in the sense that you can do whatever you want – parents control us, especially me. I can spend my free time with my friends, I can do many things that I didn’t even imagine I could do at the residential school; this is it”. (Girl, Falesti).*
- *“I made many new friends here in the village, and I am really happy”. (Boy, Ungheni).*

# Opinions of care-givers about their children being at home

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- *“I am at peace now; they helped me a lot. We were like strangers when the kids lived in the boarding school... it’s easier now [since my daughters came home]. When you have peace in your soul, you see life in vivid colours”. (Mother, Ungheni)*
- *“I’m happy my children are with me now, they can help me around. I see them around, I see them growing up, and I can help them. When they have problems they can talk to me. I am their support and they are mine.” (Mother, Ungheni)*
- *“He wants many things, but we don’t have enough money to buy everything he wants. It’s more complicated [since he came home] to buy enough food... [but now] I’m more at peace. It’s easier now, we are not concerned about him. I missed him.” (Father, Ungheni)*

# Recommendations

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- **Continue the reform!** More courage, determination, and professionalism for all stakeholders.
- **Clear responsibilities for different elements of the process** for branch ministries and local public authorities.
- **Local public authorities are legally responsible for every child** who needs protection and care outside family, but also for children who are at risk; LPA decide on the deinstitutionalization of every child in a participative manner, using the capacity of the Gate-keeping Commission.
- **Reintegration of children is on-going process**, it doesn't depend on the decision of ministries or LPAs to close an institution.
- **We shouldn't close institutions over night** – transferring children from one institution to another. This process requires thorough evaluation, trained planning, human resources, and political and professional ownership.
- **The role of NGOs in this process.** NGOs are not the guardianship authority, and decision regarding the children's reintegration or institution closure are not made by NGOs. Non-government organizations come with technical, methodological support, technologies, and... cover the expenses for the transition of an institution to a care system based on family and community.