



## Interview

**Valentina Buliga, Minister of Labour, Social Protection and Family:**

***"We rely on the early identification of vulnerable families and children, on preventive rather than reactive interventions"***

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## The number of adopted children is decreasing

The number of children adopted by families from Moldova decreased by 50% within 2006-2010, according to data of the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family. 162 minor children were adopted in 2010 in the country.

Statistics show that the number of children adopted by foreign families is also decreasing. In 2006, 51 children were adopted, while in 2010 – 45 children.

Most Moldovan children are adopted by families from Italy and the USA.

## Children with disabilities return to schools

A large reform of the system launched by the Ministry of Education with support of international organisations intends to transform the schools in inclusive institutions where all children from the community can study, including those with disabilities. The first results of the reform were discussed at the meeting of the network "Journalists – friends of the child", held by the Center for Journalism Investigations with support of UNICEF Moldova.

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## The National Board for Assessing and Accrediting Social Service Providers will be established

A draft law on the assessment and accreditation of social service providers has been submitted to the Government to be examined and approved. The draft developed by the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family provides for the procedures of assessing and accrediting social service providers and the mechanism of procuring this type of services.

“If a child is placed in a substitute service, we must be sure that the service will be of the highest quality. In this context, one of the ministry’s priorities is to enforce the regulatory framework and create a viable mechanism of service providers. The

draft law has been endorsed after being consulted with civil society and submitted to the Government to be examined and approved. The creation of the accreditation mechanism will enable competition between public and private service providers”, Viorica Dumbraveanu, head of Family and Child Protection Department within the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, told us.

The assessment and accreditation of social service providers will take account of the conditions children benefit from, such as food, clothes, counseling, as well as the beneficiaries’ opinion on the services they receive.



## Psycho-pedagogical assistance services – in every district centre

So far, psycho-pedagogical assistance services for children and parents have been created in 12 districts. According to the Ministry of Education (MoE), other eight structures will be created in the near future. By 1st January 2012, these services should exist in most district centres. According to Valentin Crudu, head of department in the MoE, this service aims at providing and enforcing children’s rights to development, education, protection, integration in community and socialisation. Psycho-pedagogical services will be provided both to children who are in a difficulty of development, knowledge,

learning, etc. and to their families. This service will also be addressed to professionals working with children in difficulty, educational institutions, local public authorities, healthcare institutions, social services, etc. The beneficiaries will have a large range of support services, counseling and education.

One of the goals of the service is to develop, promote and implement programmes for preventing children to get in difficulty, which can lead to institutionalisation.

The service will be funded from the district/municipal budget, donations, grants, etc.

## Alternative forms of protection for children without a family – constantly increasing

**The number of Family-Type Homes and Foster Families is permanently increasing, according to data of the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family. Currently, 119 foster carers are employed in the country. They have 166 children in care. The 80 Family-Type Homes accommodate 309 children.**

Family-Type Homes are institutions created on the basis of a complete family that provide family care to orphan children or to children without parental care. Three to seven children can be placed in this service.

Families that want to provide this service must meet a number of criteria and attend several trainings. The parents-educators are paid for this work. These families also have some facilities for the payment of utility bills. In addition, the state provides a monthly and an annual allowance for every adopted child.

The Foster Care (FC) service is a family alternative for children without parental care, because they are orphans or cannot live temporarily with their biological parents. FC entails the temporary care of no more than three children in an alternative family.

Foster carers can become people under 60 who provide upbringing or temporary care to a child at home, with a view to reintegrate the child in his/her biological family.

According to a study conducted by CCF-Moldova „Orphan children who are raised in family-type homes have greater chances of social integration and professional successes, as compared to those raised in residential institutions.”

## Four young people from Orhei boarding-school have their own house

**“Goodbye, bed! Goodbye, wardrobe! Goodbye bathroom! Goodbye, boys!” - this is the way that Constantin was saying goodbye, being eager to go home.**

For him, as well as for the other three young men from the Home for children (boys) with severe mental disabilities in Orhei, “home” means “Supported living” service, where the four boys were transferred recently.

“Supported living” from Orhei is the first service of its kind in the Republic of Moldova and was created by the Orhei District Council and the Department for Social Assistance and Family Protection, in partnership with Keystone Human Services International Associa-

tion of Moldova (KHSIMA), under the “Inclusive Community – Moldova” Programme. The social service “Supported living” is designed for adults with mild mental disabilities, who have a high degree of independence and can easily integrate into the community, with reduced support, focused on developing their independent living skills. The “Supported living” service from Orhei is equipped with the necessary items needed by the four tenants, offering them a safe, accessible and comfortable environment, like

in a family. They have chosen themselves whom to share the room with, but also the clothing, shoes and items for personal use. They also took part in the purchase of furniture in the house. For Ion, whose personal things you can count on your fingers - two magazines about cars, five pencils and a bag of nuts - even arranging clothes in the wardrobe is a very exciting moment. “Here, in the wardrobe, I have enough room for everything,” said Ion, showing shelves and clothes pegs. “I did the shopping and chose myself the ones I liked.”

In the beginning, the young men will be helped in their daily activities by four support specialists, working in shifts. The transfer to the “Supported living” service will allow the boys to adopt an active lifestyle and to enjoy equal living conditions in the community. Thus, with increasing independent living skills, they will be able to find jobs. The first day at home was full of new emotions and experiences for the boys who spent almost all their life in residential institutions. “I have never eaten at a table with flowers on it... it is so pleasant. We feel like in a real family here”, says Ion, who was abandoned by his family and spent 7 years in the boarding-school of Orhei.

The “Supported living” service operates on the basis of the Framework Regulation and quality standards developed by the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family with the support of KHSIMA and approved by the Government last year. Every “Supported living” service is developed under a social design that is built on the basis of the needs of beneficiaries living in this house. The beneficiaries are placed in the service according to the Decision of the multidisciplinary Commission for the protection of adults in difficulty, including those with disabilities and according to the decision of Social Assistance and Family Protection Department of the district.



**Valentina Buliga, Minister of Labour, Social Protection and Family:**

*“We rely on the early identification of vulnerable families and children, on preventive rather than reactive interventions”*

*- The deadline for implementing the Strategy on reforming the residential childcare system expires in 2012. What direction should the authorities follow to finalise this complex process?*

- I think there are no more doubts that deinstitutionalisation must be conducted until the end. At the same time, it is important to make sure that the money existing in the education system will follow the child and will contribute to the child's social and educational integration. We must not forget about the importance of family consolidation – the responsibility of parents for their own children must be raised at the highest level. The Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family as the central guardianship authority is required to provide the necessary support to the family – provide jobs and counseling in cases of crisis. In the last decades, the family in Moldova was seriously affected by poverty, unemployment and migration. The family values lost their weight and a huge number of children were placed in residential institutions. After the reorganisation of this system, the state must support the families and provide new qualitative services to children who stayed away from the society for many years.

The post-deinstitutionalisation services must be able to diminish the impact of institutions on children to the highest extent. The state policy in this field is based on individual needs assessment and the provision of an in-

dividual solution to every case. We intend to identify families and children in difficulty at the earliest stage, so that interventions are preventive rather than reactive. These changes will facilitate the settlement of problems at the initial stage, when interventions are the most efficient. At this stage, parents must be supported to find a job or receive money in cash (for the poor). These interventions can eliminate some of the main causes for children's institutionalisation.

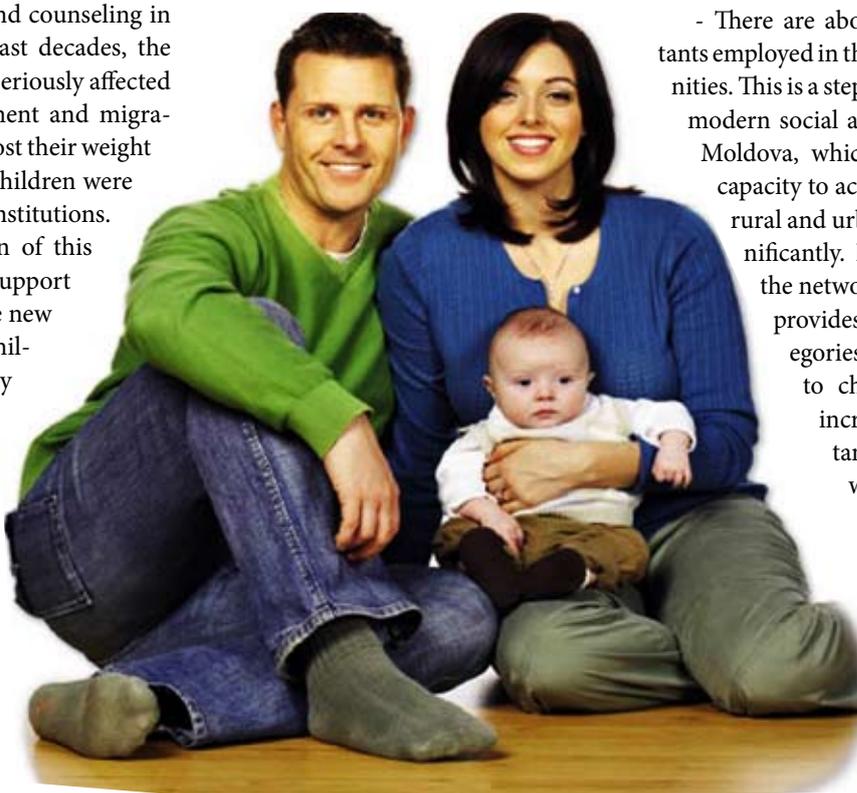
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*- How does the state respond to the needs for social protection of families and children in difficulty?*

- There are about 1200 social assistants employed in the Moldovan communities. This is a step towards introducing modern social assistance practices in Moldova, which increased people's capacity to access social services in rural and urban communities significantly. It is very useful that the network of social assistants provides services to all categories of people, not just to children, because this increases the social assistants' capacity to work with adults before their children get in difficulty, instead of waiting until children are placed in residential care to intervene.

In addition, the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection





and Family is developing different types of alternative services to the residential system. These are Family-Type Homes and Foster Care. At the same time, the Ministry is promoting policies to reintegrate children in the extended family by establishing the guardianship/trusteeship. All families at risk receive the social support benefit. I would like to mention that about 90% of beneficiaries of this benefit are families with children.

*- When will the mechanism for redirecting funds from the residential system to the social protection and educational one be in place?*

- The draft Regulation for redirect-

ing funds has already been developed by representatives of the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family and Ministry of Education. At the same time, the civil society was also involved in the finalisation of

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the development process. Currently, the draft is to be examined and endorsed by central line authorities in line with the procedure set out by the legislation.

*- This year, an inter-agency working group to amend the legislation in the field of child and family protection was created. What stage is the work of this group at?*

Indeed, an inter-agency working group was created in the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family to identify procedures for the implementation of the UN Guidelines on the alternative care of children. In this context, several proposals were formulated to amend and complete some provisions of the existing regulatory acts and procedures to develop new legislative acts were initiated.

*- In the context of reforming the residential institutions, community social assistants have an extremely important mission to monitor the reintegration of children in the family and prevent situations of difficulty for the family. How efficient is this activity?*

- In the last years, community social assistants became responsible for a large number of problems of the most vulnerable groups of people – older people, people with special needs, children and families in difficulty. One professional, no matter how trained he/she is, cannot handle them all.

In 2012, we will not have the possibility to increase the number of social assistants or to reduce the number of population they must cover. We wish this to happen in 2013-2014. The reduction of the number of population per social assistant will enable us to increase the quality of services and prevent crises in the family.

It should be noted that the social assistant is not a decision maker at community level, therefore it is necessary to consolidate the cooperation of social assistants with local public authorities and ensure more active involvement of local public authorities at the 1st level in the improvement of situation of people in difficulty, given their duties as guardianship authority that is stipulated in the legislation.

*- Thank you for the interview.*

# Children with disabilities return to schools

A large reform of the system launched by the Ministry of Education with support of international organisations intends to transform the schools in inclusive institutions where all children from the community can study, including those with disabilities. The first results of the reform were discussed at the meeting of the network “Journalists – friends of the child”, held by the Center for Journalism Investigations with support of UNICEF Moldova.

Until several years ago, the Moldovan educational system had only one solution for children with special needs – residential institutions that isolated them from the family and community. Although things started to change, parents who choose to give their children to mainstream schools have to face a number of obstacles. The first problem is with the entrance in schools, which is not adapted for the access of people who use wheelchairs. Other challenges are waiting for parents and children inside the school, where they face an unfriendly environment, teachers and directors who refuse to accept children with special needs.

The approval, in July this year, of the Programme on developing inclusive education for 2011-2020 will align the educational system in our country to the practice of developed countries where children with special needs are studying with other children in inclusive classes. The Moldovan educational system will be adapted and individualised subject to the needs of all children.

According to the deputy representative of UNICEF Moldova, Sandie Blanchet, all schools must be ready to accept any child, with or without disabilities. “Most children have special educational needs, because no one is excellent at all subjects. Moreover, research shows that when there are children with disabilities in the class, all children have better results, because they become more attentive, patient and sympathetic”, Sandie Blanchet said.

Valentin Crudu, head of department at the Ministry of Education stated that the Inclusive Education Programme is

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being piloted with the support of several NGOs in over 300 institutions. At the end of the piloting, which will last four years, the best model of inclusive education will be selected and replicated at national level.

“The new formula of funding per child, which will be applied to the Moldovan schools will enable us to provide more funding to schools that will have children with disabilities, because their expenses will be higher. In all institutions of this kind, support teachers will be employed and recovery activities will be delivered. Funds will also be necessary to modernise and adapt the infrastructure of institutions so that children with special needs can move around in the





school freely". In this context, Valentin Crudu declared that the infrastructure of all district schools that are being formed will be adapted to the needs of children with disabilities. At the same time, every district council planned up to 1 million lei for the next year for developing inclusive education.

Stela Grigoras, executive director "EveryChild" Moldova who was present at the event, said that the reform of the educational system with regard to the creation of inclusive schools will not succeed as long as the attitude of teachers, social assistants and the community is not changed. "We need teachers who know how to work with the child individually, treat them as a personality, be able to assess their possibilities and support them", Stela Grigoras said. In this context, the EveryChild director stated that the organisation she represents contributed to the social and educational inclusion of over 400 children from boarding-schools and auxiliary schools. Most children managed to reintegrate very well, some of them even to become the best in the class.

Lucia Gavrilita, executive director of "Speranta" (Hope) Center said that the efforts of the Government in the last years to improve the situation of

children with disabilities are more and more visible, but a larger involvement of the state is necessary.

"The guarantee of the quality of inclusion of these children is the social services. The authorities must develop a funding formula that will allow budgeting all supportive services for children with special needs. From my own experience I know that without providing ways of access to the institution, personal assistants,

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rolling chairs or adapted furniture, the quality of educational services for these children will be deficient. We do not want that children with disabilities who are accepted in the school are placed at the last desk and forgotten there during the classes", Lucia Gavrilita declared.

The Programme for inclusive education development in the Republic of Moldova for 2011-2020, approved by

the Government in July 2011 aims at changing the attitudes towards children with special educational needs, changing the organisation of the educational process, the use of new approaches in assessing the school performance, etc.

In Moldova, there are over 17,000 children with disabilities of whom about 3500 are under 7. Moldova is the third in the Central, Eastern Europe and CIS by the rate of institutionalisation, with 6900 children in residential care. Almost half of all children placed in institutions are considered with disabilities.

According to the study "Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices" conducted by UNICEF in 2009, one in five citizens of the Republic of Moldova considers that young children with disabilities should be placed in special institutions.

Less than half parents (45.8%) would accept that their own children plays with a child with disabilities, while 41% of the population would not accept the integration in mainstream schools (as compared to 34% in 2003) of children with special educational needs. At the same time, only one teacher out of two accepts children with disabilities in mainstream schools, while every third pupil rejects this idea.

## A loving family for two orphan children

Alina is 15 and did not know until now what celebrating a birthday means. Only recently, she had the opportunity to take part in such an event in the family that took her and her sister in guardianship. The girl was so impressed that her eyes are still shining when she tells how nice it was – all children from the neighborhood gathered, ate a lot of tasty food, danced and had fun. Alina did not see parties like that at home or at the auxiliary school of Sculeni, Ungheni where she lived until last year.

Alina and her sister Valentina were placed in residential care for the reason that they did not have good school results and their family was very poor. Their older brother, Sergiu also studied at Sculeni auxiliary school.

After reorganisation of the auxiliary school, the two girls went to their parents' godparents who established guardianship on them.

Alina tells us that she feels better than ever in her relatives' house. The family that replaced their parents gives the girls the best it has. The girls are well dressed and have everything. The family has many poultry and livestock therefore their menu is diversified every day.

"Life made me play a role in these girls' life", the girls' godmother says. She was interested in their situation when they were at the Sculeni auxiliary school too. The girls used to come here every weekend and spent all their holidays here.

No one is waiting for them in their house anymore. After the mother's death, the father started using alcohol then got ill from tuberculosis.

The older brother, Sergiu visits them often in their new family. The two guardians tell us with satisfaction that after a series of efforts they managed to find a job for the boy. It was more difficult than they expected because the boy received a certificate, not a diploma at the graduation.

The community social assistant tells us that the family where the two girls are growing is a model one and provides the whole necessary support to the two girls.

"Although the family is quite in a bad situation, because both spouses are disabled, they share everything they have with Valentina and Alina and treat them as

their children", the social assistant says.

Alina remembers the auxiliary school without any pleasure. "We were always told that we are mean. The clothes were too small for us and we used to tie our shoes with wire so that they do not fall from our feet. Children who had parents were better dressed, while we had scarce

clothes", Alina says.

In the mainstream school, like in the auxiliary one, the girls are studying in the same class, even though the difference between them is two years.

To Alina, the difference between the mainstream school and the auxiliary school is that here she is free to leave the territory of the school and that she does not live with permanent fear. Although learning is difficult for her, she is doing her best to overtake her younger sister who has better results. The support teacher of the two girls says that Alina and Valentina integrated well in the class and now work is being done to increase their performance.

