

# The future begins in the family



Newsletter of the Project "Protecting children of Moldova from family separation, violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation", implemented by Partnerships for every child in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family and the Ministry of Education



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## Child and family protection strategy will be finalized till the end of this year

**By the end of the year, the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family (MLSPF) will finalize the draft Child And Family Protection Strategy of the Republic of Moldova for years 2013 - 2020**

In the process of Strategy development, parents, children, specialists, and all interested citizens are consulted. The process is coordinated by the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family, monitored by the National Child's Rights Protection Council, and supported by the Prime-Minister's cabinet.

By now the first round of child consultation regarding the strategy has been finished. In November a range of regional consultations were held in northern, central, and southern regions of the country, covering various topics and inter-sector matters, where numerous specialists in-charge with child and family protection participated: social assistants, doctors, police officers, and teachers. Direct beneficiaries of the strategy – families with many children, mono-parental families, as well as those affected by migration and those that raise small children – participated in consultations.

According to Viorica Dumbraveanu, Head of Family and Child Rights Protection Department of the MLSPF, "The family and child protection strategy will be a framework of child and family protection policies, mainly focused on preserving the child in a family environment, on family support that will be provided while the child grows up and receives education. At the same time, the strategy will be focused on the prevention of children's institutionalization. A rather courageous, as we think, engagement is to gradually stop institutionalization of children under 3".

The strategy will be finalized by the end of this year, and followed by a concrete actions plan that will provide necessary finances.

The new child and family protection Strategy of Moldova intends to combat domestic violence, abuse of women and children, work and sexual exploitation,

to create qualitative community services, and to increase welfare of families.

The strategy is a logical continuation of the residential child care system reform 2007-2011 that registered significant progress for children. There are twice as fewer children in institutions in present, compared to when the reform started. The children were helped to return to their own biological families or were placed into alternative family-type settings: community homes, family-type homes, foster care families.

The progress, however, was slower for children with disabilities and those under 3. There are still about 200 small children in Moldova, who live in institutions, although they stay there can

be dramatic: a common rule says that a child's three months' stay in an institution means one month's delay of his development.

In what follows, the residential child care system reform will focus on ensuring sustainability and intensification of alternative services development, diversification of these services, to cover the whole variety of the child's special needs. The reform will also include the implementation of a sustainable and flexible mechanism of cooperation between institutions at all administrative levels: social protection, health, education systems, to ensure early intervention, prevention, assistance, and integration of children in difficulty.



# The number of children in boarding schools dropped twice, compared to 2007

**An evaluation report of the residential child care system in 2007 – 2012 reveals that the number of children in boarding schools decreased by 54%.**

**The most of the children returned to their biological families or were placed into alternative forms of protection.**

The report was launched within the conference “Child care system reform: Thoughts about the future”. According to the research, in spite of the efforts made, there are over 5 500 children remaining in institutions, who need increased actions within the reform, to have their needs met. The progress was slower in the case of disabled and small children.

Experts pointed out that more efforts should be made to increase the number of alternative family services and community centers supporting families in difficulty. They recommend that budget savings are planned and retargeted as a result of residential institutions closure, in order to increase the funding of community services for children and vulne-



**The goal of the reform was to reduce by 50% the number of children in institutions, and to reorganize residential institutions, to develop alternative family-type care services, like family-type homes and foster care placements.**

nable families.

The Government of the Republic of Moldova approved the National Strategy and Actions Plan for the residential care system reform in July 2007. At that time, 12 000 children lived in large-scale orphanages and residential schools in Moldova. The goal of the reform was to reduce by 50% the number of children in institutions, and to reorganize residential institutions, to develop alternative family-type care services, like family-type homes and foster care placements. During the mentioned time, over half

of the institutionalized children found families, while 11 out of 67 institutions were closed. Besides, 105 social day-care centers for families and children in difficulty, and 36 placement centers were opened, 80 family-type homes covering 342 children, 164 foster care families covering 239 children, were instituted, and 1140 community social assistants were employed.

According to the data presented by the Ministry of Finance, inefficiency of the residential child care system was highlighted by the fact that over 70% of expenses dealt with the running costs of

the system, while only 30% reached children directly.

**During the mentioned time, over half of the institutionalized children found families, while 11 out of 67 institutions were closed.**

## The national Conference of professionals and service-providers in Foster Care

Over 110 foster care-givers and 60 child and family protection specialists from the country met on the 19th of November in Chisinau, to participate at the National Conference of professionals and service providers in Foster Care. The event was organized by the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection, and Family, in collaboration with Partnerships for Every Child.

The results and lessons learned of the EU-funded pilot-project for children with disabilities and their families in Orhei and Chisinau were discussed at the Conference and proposed for the national replication. During one and half year of project implementation, 21 children with disabili-

ties from pilot sites were provided respite foster care. Temporary, or respite foster care gives possibility to parents who have disabled children, to place them for a given time into a fostering family, while the parents can use this respite time to have some rest or solve certain personal problems. The children are matched with the fostering family prior to their placement.

The participants of the national conference share their experience in providing the service and opted for the project's replication in the whole country. They also pleaded for more social guarantees from the state.



**Dirk SCHUEBEL, Head of EU Delegation to Moldova:**

*"This project is an important achievement for the Republic of Moldova"*

The project results are impressive. When we saw so many foster care-givers, children's care-givers participating at the conference, we understood that it has been a success. This is a very important achievement for the Republic of Moldova, that started from a very general care and came to a more specific form of support to persons with special needs. This project that is part of the European Instrument for Human Rights, and it was selected for the Republic of Moldova. It can be a very good example for the country. I am very satisfied with the collaboration we had within this project. Partnerships for Every

Child and the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family had good results and a worth being congratulated.



**Valentina BULIGA, Minister of Labor, Social Protection and Family:**

*"I'm sure we will manage to extend this service in the whole country"*

We hope that this project extends in the whole country, because there are about 14 000 children with disabilities in the Republic of Moldova. These children's families have hard times, and that is why this service is worth to be supported by the local public authorities. We wish that foster care becomes well known in all areas of the country where this service is needed.

I am sure that we will manage to develop this service and to replicate it in the country. We have legal framework, quality standards in place, so we have possibilities for this. What is needed is willingness, understanding from the local public authorities.

Social sector and children's needs should become a priority for authorities – local and national.



**Stela GRIGORAȘ, Chief Executive of Partnerships for Every Child:**

*"Authorities should involve more actively"*

We are at a stage when almost entire community accepts that foster care is the best alternative for children who cannot live with their parents for some reasons. This service

has been working for centuries in the world, but in the Republic of Moldova it is relatively new – it started in 2000. Since then, a relatively big number of families involved in the provision of this service, giving love and affection to hundreds of children. In present we have both methodology and legislation that well cover this service. What we need now is willingness of local public authorities to diversify types of foster care placements.

I think that the project we are implementing will give us an opportunity to develop respite placement, because the evaluations we performed revealed strengths and things to be improved.

We consider that this service is extremely good for children with disabilities and for their families. Lacking support from the authorities, these families are exposed to big risk of separating from their children and placing them into residential care.

The project implementation was preceded by two studies. One of them, performed at the international level, aimed to identify and analyze support models for families with disabilities, used by various states. We found that these families live in permanent stress, because one of the spouses cannot work, having to stay permanently at home, while the other parent has to bear financial burden. Other children of these parents don't receive necessary attention, because most of it is focused on the child with disabilities.

The results of piloting revealed that a respite period is very benefic for these families, and the parents have the possibility to solve the problems they face – to go to a doctor or follow medical treatment.

We hope that this event will give a start to national replication of the service, and that the legal base is revised. Supporting the efforts of the Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family, we revised the framework regulation and minimum standards of quality, to make sure that they meet more efficiently the needs of this new type of placement. Once these documents are approved and financial norms are revised, we hope that the local public authorities will involve into the implementation of respite foster care.



**Viorica DUMBRĂVEANU,**  
**head of the Department of Family**  
**and Child's Rights Protection**  
**of the Ministry of Labor, Social**  
**Assistance and Family:**

***"Families that have children***  
***with disabilities greet respite***  
***placement"***

The number of foster care parents in our country increased from 42 in 2007, to over 160 in 2011. This is considerable success, especially taking into account that the process of a foster care parent's recruitment is extremely difficult and complex. This conference will present positive practices and will, in fact, demonstrate the results of this form of respite placement in Chisinau municipality and Orhei raion. We will further review the framework regulation of this service's organization and functioning, its minimum standards of quality, so as to adjust the foster care services to the needs of children with disabilities.

The pilot results point out to the fact that families await this type of place-

ment and need it.

Respite placement is also extremely efficient from the financial point of view.

Thus, the costs of raising a child in a residential institution or a temporary placement center are much higher, because apart from direct costs per child – food, medical care, etc. – they include indirect costs, such as salaries for the staff, building running costs, etc. The government provides a 30% bigger quantum for all allocations in the case of children with disabilities. This is a very necessary condition, because many of these children need diapers, special food, or adapted housing. If we talk about a child in a wheelchair, obviously, not all foster care-givers have their house adapted for their placement.

At the moment, significant investment is made to train foster parents and prepare the environment to meet care needs of the children who will be placed into this service. The Ministry currently revises the allowances for children placed into various types of services, not only Foster Care, in order to provide a better focused attendance of children's needs.

I also want to mention that this service is implemented within a sustainable partnership between local public authorities that expressed their readiness to implement this type of placement, and Partnerships for Every Child that supports the local public authority in the implementation of this placement. In fact, the project supported by Partnerships for Every Child laid the foundation of this service in the Republic of Moldova.



**Valentina COZMA,**  
foster parent, Durllesti,  
Chişinau municipality

“I have been working as foster care-giver for over one year. The first child I in placement is a boy whose mother is bed-ridden and who couldn't give necessary care to her child. It is important for us that they boy feels free and protected. We try to be good parents to him. We give him all we have the best, and he pays back with love, too. In November I will also take into placement children with disabilities. On the 21st an epileptic girl will be placed into my family. It may seem that it's not so severe, but this category of children need care 24 out of 24 hours, because crisis may occur at any time, and if there's nobody around the child, he may suffer, even a tragedy may happen when he falls down”.

## **The national Conference of professionals and service-providers in Foster Care**

**Elena CRACIUN,**  
foster parent,  
Step Soci village,  
Orhei raion:

“I had 13 children, including with disabilities, in placement in one and half year. Other 2 children are expected to come soon to our family. Since 2005 we had about 100 children in care – along with our 5 biological children. We were trained in time how to take care of children with special needs. We had meetings with specialists who trained us how to provide necessary medical care”.



# Children at risk are protection by a new draft law



**Interview with Mrs. Viorica DUMBRAVEANU,  
head of Family and Child Rights Protection Department of the Ministry  
of Labor, Social Protection and Family (MLSPF)**

*- The Ministry recently produced the Draft Law on special protection of children at risk and children separated from parents. What are its main stipulations, and what can it change in the child social protection system?*

- The most important aspect is that this draft law comes to cover all existing drawbacks in the legislation on children and their social protection. We have been operating for years with notions that didn't have very clear definitions in the legislation, such as "child at risk", "child in difficulty", "child's best interest", etc. In these conditions, everyone interpreted these notions in their own ways. This situation frequently created difficulties when we tried to analyze the essence of a certain child's problem. The draft law clarifies all these definitions.

Current legal provisions on the identification and protection of a child in difficulty are very general and do not stipulate any clear regulations and a mechanism of actions that professionals should follow. These provisions contain certain conflicts of competence between the first and the second levels guardianship authorities. Very often, when a situation of a child's difficulty was identified, the case was referred from one institution to another, and we were unable to identify the responsible authority. The draft law clearly defines and delimitates attributions of guardianship authorities of the first and the second levels.

We can mention that there had also been a legal drawback in what concerns the status of children abandoned or lacking parental care. The notion of child without parental care was not clearly defined, nor was the legal background that allowed determining this status, or what documents there were needed to determine it. On the other hand, a range of other norms, such as the Housing Code, certain aspects and regulations of the educational system, provided a variety of guarantees for this group of children. This situation allowed for certain cases when extensive interpretations were given, or, on the contrary, some people's rights were broken under restrictive interpretations.

The draft law clearly defines the status of child at risk, of child separated from parents, of child who temporarily remained without parental care, including aspects that regulate the loss of this status.

*- Does the draft law contain a case registration and referral mechanism? What new approaches are proposed in this sense?*

- The draft law provides for the creation of a self-notice mechanism and, at the same time, notice registration procedures, so that we avoid situations when the case is referred from one specialist to another. All professionals are obliged to register the notices about the situation of a child at risk. A decisive role here belongs to the guardianship authority that produces the decision on the evaluation of the given child's situation.

Not only the self-notice procedure and compulsory registration of these cases, but also the duty of inter-sector cooperation between the guardianship authorities is regulated under a cooperation mechanism.

*- Does the new draft law also stipulate sanctions for the mayors who didn't take action in due time?*

The law also provides responsibility enforcing levers for the authorities in charge of child protection, that do not perform their duties accordingly. The next step that the MLSPF will make is to produce a draft law on the amendment and completion of a range of norms adjusted to this law. These legal acts include the Contraventions Code that will contain contravention responsibility for professionals who do not perform their duties. Besides, certain amendments will be included into the Criminal Code. We cannot provide very many details about this draft law, because it needs to be consulted with the civil society. Obviously, such a project will contain very explicit stipulations regarding responsibility of persons that are found guilty of destructive actions or of inaction.

After this law is approved, we will focus our efforts to build the capacities of the first level guardianship authorities, regarding the implementation of this legal act. We suggest explaining to the mayors that they have opportunities and that much can be done in this sense, using existing tools, but they need to be consolidated at the community level.

*- Thank you for the interview!*

## How children see the perspectives of the foster care service

**O**ver 40 children participated at the National Conference of practitioners and professionals involved in foster care service delivery in Moldova. The conference was held on the 19th of November in Chisinau. Children in foster care and members of Advisory Boards of Children (ABC) from Calarasi, Ungheni, and Falesti raions, shared their views at a separate workshop on positive practices and perspectives of FC service development in the Republic of Moldova. The children met with Mrs. Valentina Buliga, Minister of Labor, Social Protection and Family, and with Ambassador Dirk Shuebel, Head of European Delegation to the Republic of Moldova.

**At the end of the conference, the children came up with recommendations and proposals for the service improvement.**

*Cristina DIACONU,*  
*ABC member, Ungheni raion:*

“Children from Ungheni ABC performed recently an assessment of the foster care service in our raion. We were very glad to see that the children who benefit of this service are happy and protected. Supported by foster parents, they achieve better results at school, they communicate freely, they make plans for the future.

We have children in our raion who were placed into foster care after many years of living in residential institutions. All children we talked to told us that they feel very well in FC families. Because there are up to 3 children in foster care, the foster parent has a possibility to develop strong emotional relation with the child and give him more attention.

We consider that this service has very big potential and it should be developed and supported by local public authorities. We also made a set of recommendations to improve the situation of children in FC. So, we believe that at the training stage, not only the foster care should participate, but his/her spouse as well. The children should be announced about their placement into the Foster Care service, and if it is possible, informed about the causes and term of placement. Another proposal of ours is that teachers, especially class head teachers from the child’s community school are informed and trained to provide necessary support”.

*Tatiana BRAGA,*  
*Călărași ABC member:*

“The monitoring we performed in Calarasi showed that the children who are placed into Foster Care families feel much better than when they lived with their own families or in residential schools. In their previous settings they suffered much of cold, hunger, violence.

The children are respected, cared, loved in the fostering families. They have the best conditions, and this allows them to develop, to be appreciated, to feel real personalities. From our observations we can say that now these children can talk about themselves, they can say what they feel, what they like, what they don’t like, without any fear that they won’t be listened to, or will be beaten. Their placement into this service was a very good choice, because the situation in the families they lived

before their placement was very difficult. Some children were beaten, maltreated, exploited, forced to assist violent scenes.

We consider that Foster Care should exist in all communities where children in difficult situations live”.

*Cristina CIUPERCA,*  
*Fălești ABC member:*

“We monitored foster care to see how children feel in this service. To invite them to dialogue, we organized numerous games and activities, we told them about our lives, we asked them to be sincere with us. So, we tried to find how they feel in their families, in the schools they attend, and in their current communities. We also inquired what their roles are in their new families and communities, we asked them if they maintain relations with their biological families, about their plans for the future. The main conclusion of the monitoring is that foster carers treat these children very well.

We also made some suggestions about what can be done to improve the service. We believe that more meetings should be organized between the children in Foster Care and their biological families. When the child returns to biological family, it is important that his situation is closely monitored by the social assistant and other specialists from their communities. We also think that the government should financially motivate people who want to become foster care-givers”.

