



**PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS  
OF CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF PARENTAL CARE  
OR WHO ARE AT RISK OF BEING SEPARATED  
FROM THEIR FAMILIES**

**QUALITATIVE STUDY**



# PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN DEPRIVED OF PARENTAL CARE OR WHO ARE AT RISK OF BEING SEPARATED FROM THEIR FAMILIES

## Qualitative study

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# INTRODUCTION

## Study Context

According to the stipulations of the *UN Guidelines on alternative care of children*, stated also in the *Convention on the Children's Rights*, the child protection system has to direct their effort in priority to “ allow the child to stay or to come back to his parents care, or when appropriate, to other close members of the family”. (Art. II (A) 3).

The role of the state and of the civil society in this respect is extremely important, because “ In case when the child's family is not able, even with appropriate support, to provide the care he/she needs, abandoning and rejecting the child, the state is responsible for his/her protection and assuring the proper alternative care, with or through the competent local authorities and the properly authorized civil society organizations.” (Art. II (A) 5).

In the Republic of Moldova, a child rights to protection and family environment are stated in the Family Code, the Law on social assistance, as well as in other regulations, norms and standards that support the development of social service providing organisations or those who promote the services' quality.

According to the assessment of the child care system in Moldova, developed by Oxford Policy Management (OPM) and EveryChild, with the UNICEF Moldova support in 2009, the child and family protection has been developed during the recent years according to the National Strategy on Child and Family Protection and the Action Plan for the period of 2003-2008.

In 2006, in the Republic of Moldova the child care system reform was officially launched. The reform's objectives included the creation of a network of community social workers, development of family support services and family based alternative care, as well the reorganization of the residential child care institutions. Also in 2006, a gatekeeping system to prevent institutionalization was piloted, which aimed to ensure that children are placed in institutions only when there are no other solutions for these children. Currently, this system is being expanded nationwide.

## The Study description

Every Child Moldova requested the Institute for Marketing and Polls IMAS-INC Chisinau to conduct a study entitled “Protecting the rights of children without parental care or who are at risk of being separated from their families,” in the framework of the “ Protecting children in Moldova from family separation, violence, abuse, neglect & exploitation “ Project, implemented by EveryChild Moldova with the USAID financial support.

The study focused on a number of directions:

- Analysis of the general public attitudes and perceptions regarding the situation of families and children in need, the child's separation from the family through institutionalization and the provision of alternative care services.

We aimed to identify opinions and attitudes towards children and families in difficulty, towards the child separation from the family and his/her institutionalization, as well as towards the child abuse, neglect and exploitation. For this purpose we organized a number of focus groups with general public and specialists in child protection in Chişinău, Călăraşi, Cahul, Ungheni and Bălţi regions.

- Analysis of the attitudes and perceptions of the specialists and the opinion leaders regarding the situation of families and children in difficulty, the child's separation from the family through institutionalization and alternative services.

We had a number of in-depth interviews with opinion leaders and decision makers in order to determine their attitude towards families and children in difficulty, as well as their vision on solutions offered at each level.

- The current situations in the residential institutions versus the care of children without parental care in family based alternative services (foster care, family type homes, guardianship etc.)

We undertook study visits in the auxiliary boarding schools and boarding schools from Călărași, Ungheni and Fălești regions. Also, at this stage, case studies in family-based alternative services were carried out: family type homes, foster care and guardianship in Chișinău, Călărași, Ungheni and Cahul. Both during study visits and case studies, we observed the children-adults relationships, children behavior, care and educational conditions.

During the study we observed the public opinion attitudes and perceptions towards children separation from their families and their institutionalization, the necessity of alternative care forms developed at the community level that would ensure a harmonious and complete upbringing of the child, including the services that would prevent family separation, child abuse and neglect.

### **The study objectives**

- Investigating the situation of families and children in difficulty in the Republic of Moldova.
- Identifying factors that determine child separation and institutionalization. Perceptions on ways to solve/overcome the problems the families face.
- Describing people's attitudes and behaviours towards the abandonment and institutionalization of children.
- The perception regarding the awareness level of the harmful effects of the residential institutions on child development.
- The current situation in the residential institutions, the description of the environment, including from the psycho- emotional point of view.
- The description of peoples' attitudes and behaviour towards the growth of the child in families other than their biological ones (foster care, family type home, guardianship etc.).
- The public perception on services that could prevent child separation from the family and services that would facilitate families' reunions and children integration.
- The perception of the awareness level of the state, community and family role in the upbringing of the child. The alternative services offered in the system.
- The description of peoples' attitudes and behaviour towards the abuse, exploitation and neglect: the circumstances, the environments in which the abuse take place or those favoring the abuse (family, residential institution, social services), identification of the difficulties, reporting, methods of solving etc.
- The family, specialists and service providers' attitudes towards child abuse and neglect.
- Determining the attitude towards the child's opinion and the child's participation in the decision - making process.

### **Procedures**

**First Stage-** seven focus group sessions with the participation of 6-8 persons were organised.

The participants were selected according to several criteria:

- Education: at least middle one;
- Spoken language: Romanian/Moldavian or Russian;
- Sex: women and men in equal number;
- Locality: Chișinău, Călărași, Cahul, Ungheni, Bălți;
- Other characteristics: for specialists groups - employees engaged in child care and protection field, social workers, teachers, doctors, inspectors for minors.

Nr.	Nr. Participants	Category	Locality
FG 1	7	Specialists	Chişinău
FG 2	8	General public	Chişinău
FG 3	8	General public	Călăraşi
FG 4	8	Specialists	Călăraşi
FG 5	8	Specialists	Cahul
FG 6	8	Specialists	Ungheni
FG 7	6	Specialists	Bălţi

The group discussions were based on a moderation guide developed on the base of the study's objectives. An open and free atmosphere was created for the participants of the focus groups, so that each of them had the opportunity to express his/her ideas and opinions. The focus group sessions had a duration of between 90 and 120 minutes.

**The second stage** –12 in-depth interviews with the opinion leaders (journalists, priests, civil society representatives - NGOs, experts), ministries and local authorities' representatives.

Category	Nr. Participants	Locality
Journalists	2	Chişinău
Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family	1	Chişinău
Ministry of Education	1	Chişinău
APL (mayors)	2	Chişinău (suburbs)
Priests	1	Chişinău
NGOs (Amici dei Bambini, CCF)	2	Chişinău
Central Government representatives (others than ministry representatives)	2	Chişinău
Placement Center „Vatra”	1	Chişinău
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	

The in-depth interviews were based on an interview guide elaborated on the study objectives. The interviews duration was between 30 - 40 minutes.

**The third stage** –8 study visits at the residential institutions - auxiliary boarding schools for children with special educational skills and boarding schools for orphans and children without parental care.

Nr.	Institution	Locality
1	Auxiliary boarding school for children with special educational needs from Călărași	Călărași
2	Auxiliary boarding school for children with special needs and hearing difficulties from Hârboveți	Călărași
3	Auxiliary boarding school for children with special educational needs from Sculeni	Ungheni
4	Boarding school for orphans or children without parental care from Ungheni	Ungheni
5	TB Rehabilitation Center for children „Cornești”	Ungheni
6	Auxiliary boarding school for children with special educational needs from Socii Noi	Fălești
7	Boarding school for orphans or children without parental care from Fălești	Fălești
8	Social services complex „Împreună”	Cahul

During these visits we carried out 14 in-depth interviews with the institutions' staff (institutions' managers and persons in contact with children), as well talks with children from these institutions. We observed children's living environment, the spaces where they study, play and spend their free time etc. As well, we paid special attention to the relationships between children and teachers/ other institutions' staff. The duration of the visits were between 120-180 minutes.

Also at this stage, we carried out 10 case studies of children in alternative services - foster care, guardianship and family type homes.

Nr.	Form of protection	No. of children when the visit	Children ages	Locality
1	Family type home	5 children	5-14 years	Chișinău
2	Foster care	1 child	10 years	Chișinău (suburb)
3	Guardianship	1 child	6 years	Chișinău
4	Guardianship	2 children	9-11 years	Chișinău (suburb)
5	Family type home	3 children	10-13 years	Călărași
6	Foster care	1 child	12 years	Călărași
7	Guardianship	1 child	16 years	Călărași
8	Family type home	6 children	7-13 years	Ungheni
9	Foster care	4 children	8-13 years	Ungheni
10	Guardianship	1 child	10 years	Ungheni

The case studies included: visits, discussions with the family/ carers, observations on the physical and psycho- emotional environment, discussions with children. As well as in the case of the residential institutions, we observed the children's living environment and the relationships between children and other family members/carers. The duration of the visits were between 120-180 minutes.



**Difficulties and limits**

During the study, the IMAS team did not face difficulties that would influence the quality of the results and conclusions, neither at the data collection stage, nor at the analysis stage.

We want to emphasize that the study's data are qualitative and do not represent the whole population of the country. The results and conclusions represent the opinions of the participants of the study, and these can be interpreted in terms of trends but cannot be extrapolated to all specialists in Moldova or to the population in general.

## MAIN CONCLUSION

### Families and children in needs

The dominant concept on family is a traditional one - a family is the relationship between two life partners, formalized and blessed by the Church. However, a lot of participants discussed about the family “mutation” even put the question mark on the family as a social institution.

There is a certain dose of skepticism regarding the family future, especially on behalf of the specialists (teachers, inspectors for minors, social workers). The problems that the families face can lead to the following consequences: lack of authority of parents in front of children, the parents incapacity to transmit to children the life models/values, the rising number of children delinquents, non-adapted children and children with low morality, the exodus of the children with their parents from the country, decreasing the birth rate and the population aging.

Talking about the families in needs, we have to mention that, in the majority of cases, this phenomenon appears and develops in a negative social climate. Once the family loses the faith in the future there appears an overly relaxed, non-involvement behaviour, “social laziness” characteristic both to the family and the community where the family lives.

Among the most important causes to the problems that families face we can identify 2 categories: on one hand, the functional causes - poverty and migration, on the other hand, psycho-cultural causes - mentality and attitudes towards the family, the lack of proper education regarding family creation and family life, upbringing of children etc.

According to the specialists, children in difficulty are those children who experience a violation of at least one of their rights. In a family in difficulty, the child is also in difficulty, in most of the cases the child is deprived of proper care and education.

The analysis of the problems faced by the families of the Republic of Moldova highlighted several dimensions of the concept “a family in difficulty”. Depending on the duration, gravity and behaviour of the families in difficulty, we can distinguish: the real difficulty, the chronic difficulty and pseudo - difficulty. For many families, once assumed the role of “a family in difficulty”, especially under the influence of such labeling (“difficult”, “uneducated”, “vulnerable”), this state of affairs transforms from temporary to long term and permanent. Some families start depending on social services, and with time, the “chronic difficulty” they have will transform in a “pseudo-difficulty”.

The family itself is considered responsible for the difficulties it faces. The business environment and the community, in the majority of times, are indifferent to the problems of the families in difficulty. Ordinary people said that they got rarely involved in other families problems, especially if those who are neighbors or community families, other than their relatives. Even in the case of families where there domestic violence, poverty, abuse and neglect towards the children - the other people prefer not to notify the authorities about the situations they know, either due to the lack of trust in state institutions, or due to personal beliefs.

Although the majority of participants consider that the state institutions and local authorities play an important role in protecting families and children in difficult situations, some specialists say that family and child protection does not represent a priority for the state. Just those directly involved in child protection can notice the efforts the state does in this direction, the other specialists - doctors, teachers, social workers, as well as the general public - they rather observe the lack of a coherent and functional state polices in this area.

The NGOs role is more seen as a support for the social services.

Most participants consider that educational institutions should exercise their educational function in relation to the whole family, especially if the family is in a difficult situation. In this respect, it is necessary to improve the relationships between the school, family and community. Some specialists, as well as the general public, have blamed the school for the lack of involvement in the problems of children from vulnerable families. The general public also insisted on the necessity to modernize the school, especially in rural areas.

The Church is also an important actor that, according to a lot of participants, is insufficiently involved in the support and protection of children and families in difficult situations. Although considered an important actor, the Church is seen rather absent, especially in the role of supporting the social cohesion in the community. As well as the community schools' role in education, the participants expect a bigger involvement of the Church in education/guiding families and children at risk.

In participants' opinions, material aid is just a temporary solution for the families in difficulty. The social services rather have to strengthen the family's capacities to solve difficult situations.

Children in difficulty often do not want to talk about the problems their family face. During the visits in the residential institutions and alternative services, a lot of children were very nervous when talking about their families - trembling, hoarse voice, twisting fingers.

### **Institutionalisation of Children**

The majority of participants consider that institutionalisation has a negative impact on children. The analysis of opinions on children that grow in residential institutions can be summarized in the following way: children are always waiting for their parents - they do not smile, they do not have the necessary life skills, they are not able to love and are also at risk to abandon their own children, because they have been deprived of parental love and abandoned. The children that live in families are more adapted and prepared for life.

According to the majority of participants, the society attitude towards children in boarding schools is a negative one. The general public, as well as opinion leaders, say that those children that grow in boarding schools are stigmatized by the society and labeled as being "different" from the other children. Mostly, these children are associated with: future delinquents, non-adapted persons for the life in a society, children with "not too good genetics" (allusion to the drug addicted, alcoholic parents etc.).

However, a lot of ordinary people, even some specialists (teachers, pediatricians, social workers), if they had a chance to choose between upbringing a child in a family that is not able to offer proper care and education to the child, and place him/her in a residential institution, they would prefer child placement in the boarding school.

Some of the specialists directly involved in work with children in difficulty (social workers, experts in child protection) are convinced that the residential institution need to be reformed and salute development of family-based alternative services in the Republic of Moldova. Most specialists (teachers, psychologists, pediatricians) know about the existence of these services, but they are little known by general public and the opinion leaders.

A lot of specialist and directors of the residential institutions say that the children from the general and auxiliary boarding schools come from vulnerable families and are non-desired children.

The institutionalisation has a lot of negative effects, not only on families and children, but also on the community. Placing a child in a residential institution is a "convenient" solution for a lot of the social actors - "no child" - "no problem!". The family doesn't have to look after the child anymore, the local authorities do not have to look for solutions for the family, the community is not disturbed by the presence of a street child or by his begging at the church door anymore, and the school has one less difficult child.

According to the opinion of the residential institutions directors, the most important things they could give to children are: education and training, supervision, professional orientation, housing, food and clothes. The majority of directors and teachers also added that the biggest child need is parental love. A lot of institutions directors admit that no institution can fulfill this need.

The children's living conditions in the residential institutions can be described as following: rigid schedules, lack of personal and personalized space, insufficient attention a teacher can give to each child. As a consequence, most children learn from an early age to solve all their emotional problems alone; the children do not manage to form all the life skills they need, especially those of money management; the children do not have any parental role models, they are not educated for the family life.

The opinion leaders also think that the effects of institution on child development are rather negative: children do not develop life skills, ability to manage money, no time planning skills, skills to perform domestic activities etc.; the boarding schools' graduates mostly are not capable to integrate in the society; becoming adults, some of them are not able to form a family due to the difficulty to express attachment, responsibility and love.

The majority of the directors of the residential institutions talk about the necessity to reorganize the boarding schools, and even though they do not completely agree with the way it is implemented; they just comply with the requirements of the reform. Some of them said that they need to reform their institutions because they are not "seen with good eyes" by Europe.

Among the fears of the directors of the institutions: the care for the institution's employees - the risk of remaining unemployed, lack of a sufficient number of alternative services and their supervision, uncertainties coming from the local authorities (delays on decisions on reorganization process).

In general, institution directors' opinions regarding children's reintegration in their families or their placement in family based alternative services are built on fears and negative opinions towards these forms of protection. The directors are not against of these alternatives, however, indirectly, many of them exhibit a high enough resistance to the institutional reform.

It was problematic to identify children's opinions regarding their life in the residential care because of the presence of the directors of institutions during these discussions. Responding to questions, children often looked towards the director / educator, seeking approval / disapproval from him/her. Even under these conditions we could identify a reserved attitude towards the institution. Older children, from final grades, said that the institution gave them little freedom and they are forced to undergo a strict schedule. Younger children, in elementary school are attached to their families

### **Abuse, neglect and exploitation**

Mostly, the study participants described the abuse as physical violence and emotional neglect. The most mentioned were the physical and psychological abuse. The attitude towards the abused children is one of compassion. The parents that abuse their children are seen to create a life of hostility and rejection from the majority of the study participants.

A lot of specialists noticed the society's indifference towards the children abuse. It happens rarely that a sign from the community comes out regarding abuse cases. There are cases when persons that know a case of abuse don't know which institution to inform and look for help. One reason for the inaction of the community towards the abuse is the distrust in state institutions; many people believe that the claim that they will put forward will not solve the situation.

### **Child voice**

The specialists and the general public think that child's voice is important in the decision-making process regarding his/her future. It has to be heard, not necessary respected, as in some cases child wills are in conflict with what's good for him/her. Especially the lawyers and child protection specialists mentioned that from the legal point of view, child's voice matters in the judiciary processes starting with the age of 10.

The imposition of adults' opinions and failure to hear and respect the child's voice are commonly found in the residential institutions. Some executives/directors of these institutions recognize that it is impossible to hear and take into account all children's wishes. For example, in case of children' dream to embrace a profession of a lawyer, doctor, etc., a compromise between desires and possibilities is reduced to limited planning the child's future, he was brought "back down to earth" by directors or educators. Children are oriented by the staff from residential institutions to become locksmiths, mechanics and cooks. Sometimes, after graduation they are encouraged to return to their families in rural areas, being told that there will be better and they

will be able to adapt easier, thus limiting the chances of children to a better future. There are, however, some solutions to the child's voice: procedures to hold discussions with children, finding a compromise between the requirements and possibilities, educating tolerance.

### **Solutions and perspectives**

Though the general public believes that laws and punitive measures applied to families who do not exercise the parental roles and responsibilities have to be more severe (towards parents who abandon their children, abusive or negligent parents, etc..), many specialists have noted that at the legislative and conceptual levels, the child family protection system is well-formed in Moldova. What is missing are the mechanisms and functionality and better cooperation of institutions involved in child protection process.

Often, representatives of central government, those who are developing policies to protect children or monitor their implementation, do not have close contact with the field and often they are unaware of what actually happens in institutions, families, and community. In this sense for a proper execution of duties and tasks it is recommended that policy makers do working visits in the field.

Most experts consider that prevention is the best solution to address the problems faced by families and children in difficult situations. They note, however, that currently much of their work is directed towards dealing with the consequences and intervention in situations already consumed.

The level of expertise and staff training at both central and local level must be improved. In this respect, the curriculum of higher education and continuing training of specialists that work with families and children in difficulty must be revised and refined to be directed towards the development of professional skills to be adapted to conditions in the field.

The employment of specialists in the child protection system, both locally and centrally, has to be made exclusively on the competences basis. It requires an increase in the number of social workers and social pedagogues in the field.

Expanding social services for children and families in rural areas, especially for those with special needs and those in difficulty, is a necessity: community centers for minors, mandatory training for young families, education of spiritual values among children, activities to prevent the child abandonment, legal and psychological support services to families in need.

Raising public awareness on the problems of families and children, informing on possible interventions, educating the civic spirit, trust in authorities and spreading of models of success.

## FAMILY TYPOLOGY

*“A person I know tells me:*

*- You know, I have lived in Italy for five years. Here children are not babysat. They are looked after till they are 18 years of age and then goodbye!*

*... I asked her:*

*- Okay, but what did you give to your daughter till the age of 18? What did you give her?! “*

*(Child Protection Specialist, Cahul),”*

**The dominant concept regarding the family is a traditional one.**

**Families are faced with a number of issues, including the material, but also the mutation at the values level.**

**As a social institution, the family is under a question mark, and the family’s future is uncertain. The changes that may occur are rather negative such as: the inability of parents to transmit values and role models, the increasing number of delinquent children, non-adapted children and those with low morality and the exodus of children from their parents.**

**The effects of such changes may be decreasing birth rates, and the society in Moldova can become an “old and sick” one.**

For most participants, the family is the foundation of a society; the family represents the “basic cell” of a country. Some participants confirmed that the situation of the family reflects the condition of the society - in an unstable society the family is vulnerable too. Therefore, a healthy society requires healthy families, said some participants.

*The family is the unique element of the society. Several good families found a village, and several villages form a country. It is a society. [F, 48 years, Housewife, Călărași].*

*I think that the family is a society’s footprint. The family is the same as the society. As we are at the moment in crisis... (therefore the families also are in crisis) [M, 48 years, Retired military, Chișinău].*

*What does it mean for me? For me the family is everything. If in the family everything is all right...[...] all this mood goes to the society. You are in this mood at work, in this mood you come home and you think like this. The family climate means a lot. If there is understanding and peace, there is also prosperity... [F, 47 years, Democratic Party Secretary, Călărași].*

*The family is the main hub of the population. The population of the republic is constituted from many families. It is important to maintain the family. [M, mayor, Chișinău suburb].*

Some of the opinion leaders from the Republic of Moldova think that a lot of citizens do not know what a family is, do not appreciate the family values. For this reason, a lot of young families face difficulties in maintaining the family and good parenting of their children.

*...people do not know what a family is, the experience they have, the dreams that the family is based on. The members of our society are not ready to found a family, especially for the upbringing and education of children, because they do not have elementary notions about what a family is and they do not know their rights, that is really important, because this being the starting point. [F, NGO representative].*

*The values have changed. The whole society and the civil society, above all, those who actually think and meditate, should see where it goes and cry at every corner: Stop! [F, primary, Chisinau suburb].*

Beyond the concept of family as a “cell” of the society, both specialists and general public, said that for them family signifies the meaning of life, a refuge, a place where it is warm, where there is love, understanding and stability. In addition, the family means responsibility and obligations.

Some specialists consider that a healthy family should exercise all its functions. One of the main features mentioned is the social bond between generations, the glue that allows the transmission of values and models from one generation to another. Incomplete families and those in difficulty are generally considered dysfunctional by the most participants.

*... I grew up in my family and had seen my grandmother who was holding all us united, she was calling everyone on holidays. This is what I see at my mommy. This is what I do. Everything depends on family traditions, family values. [Deputy Director for Education, Primary school, Ungheni].*

*The family is that place where always you will be understood and all your mistakes will be forgiven. [Specialist, Directorate of Social Assistance and Family Protection, Ungheni].*

*For everyone the family is a refuge, a place where we always come back, no matter how far we go, and it is the best place ever. [Social worker, Regina Pacis Foundation, Chişinău].*

*[...] the family is what everyone desires to have. I mean the children, adults, our parents, because each of us needs, especially children, family warmth, love, and a home with all the family members. This is my opinion. [Specialist, Directorate of Social Assistance and Family Protection, Cahul].*

*In my opinion, a family means that the child has to grow up with his both parents. [Deputy Director, Lyceum, Bălţi].*

Currently, the prevailing traditional concept of family - the relationship between two life partners formalized and enshrined by the Church. To found a family one needs (in order of their mentioning): house, stable income (job), love. Other items needed are: confidence in the future, a proper education, responsibility, respect, a joint plan, good understanding between partners, patience, health, and political stability.

*In order to found a family, both material and spiritual things are needed. A healthy family is when the partners decide to found a family based on love, but this happens rarely. [M, 44 years, auto mechanic, Chişinău].*

*First of all, it is a responsibility ... you start a not so short journey [Inspector for Minors, Police station, Ungheni].*

*The most matters the relationship between those 2 persons who decide to found a family [Social Worker, Temporary Placement Center for Minors, mun. Chişinău].*

All participants agreed that there are differences between recently founded families and the old ones. Many acknowledge that the family, as a social institution, undergoes significant changes. Some experts even question the perpetuation of “traditional family”, of the biological one.

*[...] first of all, having a family means security and continuity. Having a family means having a sure place, where you can find the solution to many problems. As a social institution, a Moldavian family currently is under a large question mark. [Family Pediatrician, Center of Family Pediatricians, Bălţi].*

*In the society from where we come families have lived and suffered hunger, but they never left (abandoned) their children... . This depends on the moral values, as well as education. This is also the result of the urbanization. [F, mayor, Chişinău suburb].*

THEN families where characterized by:	NOW families are characterized by:
<p>The need to officially register the marriage</p> <p>Divorces were rarely recorded, avoiding being stigmatized, either by the work colleagues or by the society members</p> <p>The family members used to face their problems together</p>	<p>Instability (which is a reflection of the society situation)</p> <p>The cohabitation is more accepted and expanded</p> <p>The relationships are becoming more difficult</p> <p>Avoiding the responsibilities and looking for more simple solutions (family breakup)- crește numărul divorțurilor.</p> <p>Increase in the number of divorces</p>

In conclusion, nowadays families are considered very instable, superficial and vulnerable. It takes longer for people to decide to found a family, and once founded, in a lot of cases it breaks up. The relationships between partners are more difficult, there is less tolerance and fewer skills to live together and to face the difficulties together; though some living skills can be developed in cohabitation. The cohabitation is a family type more expanded and accepted. It is becoming “normality”.

Some participants, specialists and general public see the cohabitation as a negative thing. Some ordinary people say that this is a “trial period” for the future family, others are more reserved when talking about the number of the potential partners. The specialists are against the cohabitation mostly because of the children that often become victims of the conflicts between the partners.

In the past, families were often maintained through coercive pressure of the social environment (parents, relatives, colleagues, neighbors). Traditions, especially in rural areas, once played an important role in the family.

*From my grandmother stories, they could struggle with family problems, they could solve them together, but now, if there are problems in the family, they do not try to solve them, they simply leave [Social worker, Department of Social Assistance and Family Protection , Cahul].*

*Before there were traditions. If you get married soon - well done. Otherwise - you will be in the village's gossip / talking subject. But now there is no tradition like this. The tradition has changed [M, 35, Farmer, Calarasi].*

*Now there is more instability in family relationships. This is the mirrored situation of the society. In any case, the examples that I know, there are few families where there are stability, love, and understanding. Unfortunately, today many refuse to found a family, I think, for selfish reasons [...] avoiding to assume such a responsibility, [M, 44 years, Depositary, Chisinau].*

*I think that compared to the previous period, the ex-Soviet period, cohabitation is now accepted by society and is seen as absolutely normal, the family has lost its value, especially among young people, and among persons over the middle age [Lawyer, Directorate for Child Protection, Chișinău].*

*Now I would say that a family is easier to be founded, but it's harder to maintain. It's not a secret that many young people marry and then divorce because of a misunderstanding. I think that the misunderstanding comes out of the actual situation: we do not have jobs [M, mayor, Chisinau suburb].*

There is more pragmatism when someone decides to found a family. Many participants say that in terms of social instability, the decision to found a family shall be based primarily on material reasons (place to live, assets, income) and less on the spiritual. Some people say that families in the past, even if they faced the same difficulties and shortcomings, had the courage to overcome the problems.

*You didn't graduate school, you do not have an apartment, and you do not have a job, be patient and wait. This is the way the youth nowadays see the situation. They are very pragmatic and first of all want to have something on their own. "I will buy an apartment, I will work..." [Inspector for Minors, Călărași].*



*Here the state simply left the area of protection of families, children and left the family, especially the young ones. Students who graduated from an institution before knew that they have an ensured job and founded family was earlier. Now the state has washed its hands. So it is! [M, 44, Geography Art Museum, Chisinau].*

## CONCERNS OF THE FAMILIES FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Based on the difficulties currently faced by families of the Republic of Moldova, their concerns are directed towards providing a decent living and necessary conditions for raising and educating children. Children's education is important for many parents, but for some parents children's education begins (and often ends) by providing the child with everything he/she needs (food, clothes, school supplies, etc.).

The vast majority of participants said the material concerns (values) predominate which has led to a massive population leaving the country to work abroad. Parents tend to earn material goods under the pretext that they do it for children. The cause of this phenomenon is the "inversion of values" to younger generations and the desire to earn quickly.

*None of the youth thinks of taking care of the earth. They all want to be lawyers, economists, bankers and have big, quick money. If they invest 10 lei they want to gain 100 lei. They do not even think of a 5% rate - just the 100%. From this we would conclude that this is a generation that does not know the money value [F, mayor, Chisinau suburb].*

*They now focus on having a house, a job and health. [Pedagogue, Horodiște village, Călărași].*

*Families concerns are to raise and educate their children. The child should to go to the kindergarten, to school and to ensure the child a better life. [Child Protection Council Secretary, Cahul].*

*To be able to offer a child the proper education, a proper treatment in case it is needed. [F, 32 years, shop assistant, Chișinău].*

*To go to school dressed like all the others, to have a mobile phone, and to be able to give money for school if it is needed. [M, 44 years, auto mechanic, Chișinău].*

*It is clear that education is good if the child receives it from the parent from the beginning, but as soon as financial problems appear, the parents leave and become detached from the child's problems. [F, 40 years, Housewife, Călărași].*

For some families one or both parents leaving for abroad meant an improvement of the material situation and children were provided with everything needed. However, as stated by some participants, these parents are still away from children, even if children are already enough assured from the material point of view.

*... We, Moldovans are a particular nation. If other nations bring in other values such as spiritual, moral, we put the material ones first. But there are many families who are not in need, they are not starving, those poor do not go abroad, those who have everything they need go [...] I do not understand why a family with only one child should have a flat in Iasi and two flats in Chisinau? [Specialist, Directorate of Social Assistance and Family Protection, Calarasi].*

Many participants, especially the specialists, are skeptical about the future of families in Moldova. Many participants see the future of families in dark colours. The problems are related in particular to massive migration abroad and the inability of parents to give children a proper education.

Those who are optimistic (general public) foresee a good mix of the Moldovan traditions with European models.

However, **the majority opinion flow, particularly among specialists is that in the future:**

- parental authority in front of children will decrease,
- parents will not be able to provide adequate upbringing to their children - to transmit values, life patterns,

- children will not have the necessary life skills - a generation of consumers without adequate socialization,
- the number of child delinquents, non-adapted children, children with low morality, children brought up without parental care will increase,
- more parents will take away their children to countries in which they are located
- Moldova will have an aging population, the birth rate will decrease - we will become “a sick and old society.”

*Everything in life must be compensated. If they have gone thinking that it is better to support the family from the material point of view, in 10-15 years everything will “compensate”. He earned money, but lost more. In my sense, this is a great tragedy to our society [Inspector for Minors, Police, Chisinau, sect. Centre].*

*I see no future for these families. [F, 48 years, Housewife, Călărași].*

*Now the parent-child relationship has lost authority and this is visible. The child sees the parent only as an insurer in material terms, not to impose some limits, to provide education or obligations. Distance child upbringing does not exist. Upbringing on internet doesn't work. [Lawyer, Child Protection Directorate, Chișinău].*

*We will have more orphan children [Pedagogue, Horodiște village, Călărași].*

*In order for a child to take a role model he should take it from their parents and not the group from the street or on television. Or, in the future I see very few parents that are able to educate their children within the traditional values of the Republic of Moldova. We try to take over what is in the West because people are just consumers ... the altruism and the morality will be weakened [Jurist, Directorate for Child Protection, Chișinău].*

*Lately, in addition to all the diseases we have, a new disease has appeared, and unfortunately, every day, it gets bigger and bigger : our children from Moldova are taken abroad by parents , mother or father, and the families break up. They are taken abroad, healthy children who could have done much for the society. In such tempo, if we do nothing, we will remain in a sick society with sick children, with retired persons [Specialist, Directorate of Social Assistance and Family Protection, Ungheni].*

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN NEED

„- Vadim, who helps you with the homework?

- Alone...

- OK. Then show us what you did for homework.

- I didn't do anything. My mother told me to go to sleep.

- You came from school and went to sleep?

- No. My parents got drunk.

- What? Your mother too?!

- Yes.

- Do you have a sister, a brother?

His mother has another 1-year old and 11 month old children - this is what the boy told me”.

(Pedagogue, Călărași)

**The causes of difficulties faced by families, the problems and the effect act as a vicious circle. Families in real difficulty face problems that are different from those of families in chronic difficulty or pseudo-difficulty.**

**Children in difficulty are the children who have at least one of their rights violated. In a family in difficulty the child is also in difficulty, and is often, deprived of adequate care and upbringing.**

**Children in difficult situations are often unwilling to discuss issues that their families face.**

Analysis of the problems mentioned by the participants of the problems faced by families in the Republic of Moldova has allowed the outlining of several dimensions of the concept of “family in difficulty”. Depending on the duration, severity and behavior of the families in difficulty we can distinguish: the real difficulty, chronic difficulty and pseudo-difficulty.

### The real difficulty

The real difficulty is usually temporary and is due to unexpected events in the family, such as: death of one or both parents, incurable disease, accidents, birth of a child with a disability, divorce, loss of a job or of a housing etc. Children may be at least temporarily deprived of the care and attention of their parents who are preoccupied with their own problems.

In such situations, in most cases, the family has the necessary resources and the will to overcome the created situation. Such families are receptive to the help offered by the community members, social network or specialized services and do not abuse this help. The family needs support and without adequate support it is likely that the difficulty will turn into a chronic difficulty.

*We have families where children are born with disabilities, they really need support because it is a tragedy ... there are even families with good enough material possibilities, they do not need as much material help as they need the psychological help and networking, centers where to take their children for socialization [Lawyer, Directorate for Child Protection, Chisinau].*

*The incomplete families also are part of the families at risk. Families in which the parents have serious diseases, mental health problems, tuberculosis, that due to their health situation are not able to take care of their children. [Psychologist, Boarding School, Bălți].*

## The chronic difficulty

The chronic difficulty is the continuing difficulty experienced by the family for a long period of time (often for many years). In such families, the problems and difficulties are often transmitted from one generation to another. For example, delinquent parents give birth to children who also fall into this group of risk or, as some opinion leaders and some directors of residential institutions mentioned, children who grow up in institutions they take in their turn their children to institutions.

The chronic difficulty appears because of the unresolved problems that in time take the form of a “snowball”. Problems are associated with symptoms such as alcoholism, drug abuse, violence and abuse. Children are constantly deprived of parental care and attention, often neglected, they leave school, start begging etc.

Families in situations of chronic difficulty are usually registered with specialized services and are known as “difficult families,” “uneducable families” or “vulnerable families”. Even if they have support and specialized services, this usually does not help them to overcome the difficult situation they find themselves in. Once assumed the role of “the family in difficulty”, especially under the influence of this labeling, the family can become dependent on social services and turns into a “pseudo-difficult” family. For much families and those in difficulty, this situation changes from a transient / temporary in a permanent and long- term, assumed as such.

*A child in difficulty is one that has no suitable environment for upbringing, whether parents are alcoholics, drug users or either the children don't go to school is the parents' fault. I find it hard to talk like that, but they are street children who just walk and beg. [F, 32 years, shop assistant, Chisinau].*

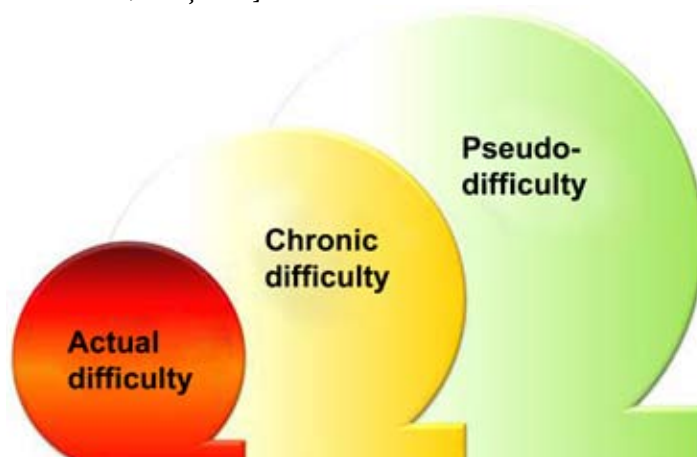
*Families in difficulty are those that fail to meet their obligations, parents are not employed, the child doesn't attend school. If the child left the school, the child is in difficulty ... [Secretary Council for Child Protection, Cahul].*

## The pseudo - difficulty

The pseudo-difficulty is characteristic for families that have a false representation about the situation they are in. The family is accustomed to the situation of being “difficult” and does not strive to improve the situation. These families have low willingness to solve problems and self-victimization appears. Often family members are able to work, but refuse to work under different reasons.

Often families in pseudo-difficulty situations expect support from the various state institutions and NGOs in the field, even if there is no actual need for such support. Family efforts and energy are more directed towards searching and requesting assistance of any kind, rather than solving real difficult situations. These families are “dependent” of the welfare system.

*We have a group of families who have a false representation of difficulty. This is how the State has educated them, because actually they are not in difficult situations. They come from generation to generation - the mother was registered, later on her daughter gave birth and she was registered and waits. [Lawyer, Child Protection Directorate, Chişinău].*



Speaking of families in difficulty, we should mention that this phenomenon occurs and develops in a social environment, most often negative. Once the family lost confidence in the future, there appears the behavior of negligence, non-involvement - "social laziness", characteristic for both the family and the community in which the family lives.

*People are passive and discouraged of everything. They do not want to see a future [F, 39 years, Chief Accountant, Calarasi].*

According to the specialists, children in difficulty are those who have at least one of their rights violated. In a family in difficulty the child also is in a difficult situation, often being deprived of proper care and upbringing.

*The child in difficulty is the child who has one of his rights violated: the right to a family, the right to rest, and the right to information. [Specialist, Directorate of Social Assistance and Family Protection, Călărași]*

*The rights violation. Any right. [Social worker, Child Protection Directorate for, mun. Chișinău].*

The attitude toward families and children in difficulty is always one of pity and compassion. Some participants say that other families' difficult situations make them to be kinder to their own families, others are most likely to offer help.

*Feelings of pity, of compassion. And I question myself how I could help them. [F, 32 years, Shop Assistant, Chișinău].*

*Pity. You would like to help them, but you can't. [M, 35 years, Local consultant, Călărași].*

*It mobilizes when you see a child in difficulty, it mobilizes to make a bigger effort for your own children. [M, 48 years, Retired Military, Chișinău].*

## **PROBLEMS OF THE FAMILIES IN NEED**

In addition to material problems mentioned by most participants, families in difficulty face numerous health problems. Medical workers confirmed that the number of cases of children with mental delay is increasing, but also that of mental health problems.

Lack of housing is a problem for families from both rural and from urban areas, but especially for those returning from prisons and boarding schools. Access to information and the social services is a particular problem for families from rural areas.

*Some of them have no responsibility and do not want to work [Psychologist, Călărași].*

*I see so much selfishness in my beneficiaries, especially women. She thinks of herself, but does not think about her child. She thinks "I need", but not what her child needs [Social worker, Social Assistance and Family Protection Directorate, Cahul].*

*...Because there is no education regarding the conception of a child. For most of the families giving birth to a baby it is so, at first glance, simple. "Everybody has children. Why, cannot I raise one? "But then she meets with difficulties ... [M, 44, auto mechanic, Chisinau].*

As a result, families in difficulty face a number of effects such as alcoholism, violence, abuse, child abandonment and the school abandonment.

Among the most important causes of the problems listed by the participants, we can identify two categories. On the one hand causes of a functional nature - poverty and migration, and on the other hand causes of psycho-cultural nature - mentality and attitude towards the family, lack of adequate education on family life, child upbringing raising etc.

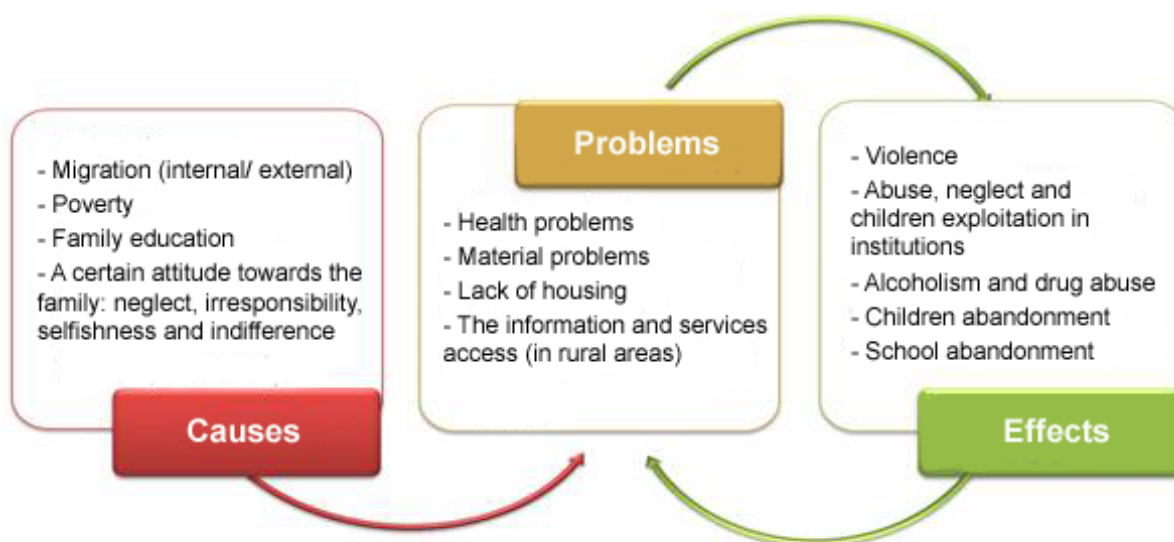
According to one of the representatives of the central government, the ignorance of human, family and child rights is a cause of difficulties in which families in Moldova are. This lack of knowledge makes the family vulnerable to difficult situations.

*Parents, in their turn, have not educated their children to learn human rights. Respectively, little attention was given to this in school. In fact, all the problems in the society arise from the lack of legal culture of population and the lack of knowledge of human and families rights - what a family means and what means to grow up in a family environment ... [F, Representative of the Central Government, Child Rights Protection].*

On the other hand, some interviewed opinion leaders noted that, in most cases, poverty and the lack of jobs is more a justification for difficult situations in which the families are, especially of the families where the father and / or mother are able to work, but instead of working, they abuse alcohol or live an indecent life. The respondents consider that in many cases the cause of the difficulty is laziness, unwillingness to make any efforts to overcome the situation.

*Why does she not have a house, why she has no food, why she reached this level? Then look: either she started to drink or to take drugs. What was the reason? Either she had a break up, lost feelings, destiny or laziness. It is easier to get drugs and have euphoria; being stupid she went where she went [F, mayor, Chisinau suburb].*

*Poverty is not an excuse; it is a screen that hides all the family [F, Placement Center, Vatra].*



## THE SOCIAL ACTORS' ROLE IN SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN NEED

Many of the interviewed participants from different groups and the opinion leaders said that the family itself is responsible for children / the family in difficulty, parents being responsible for their children's lives first. The parents are the first example and model for their children and they should be fully responsible for the way they look after their children, consider some participants.

*Everything starts and ends in the family [Inspector for Minors, Călărași].*

*The responsibility lies on both parents. [Specialist, Directorate of Social Assistance and Family Protection, Ungheni].*

*The family is the only one responsible. Again we go back to education. The community, the country needs to educate their people. [...] If you came to the conclusion that you want to have 2-3-5 kids, then think about how to educate, how to care for them. It is not difficult to conceive a child, it's harder to care for and educate [M, mayor, Chisinau suburb].*

*The teacher is guilty that my child is bad, but I forget about me smoking in front of the child, that I shout and beat at home, that I consume alcohol next to him, that I am lazy and I sleep till noon, that I do not clean the house. How can the child be good?! [F, mayor, Chişinău suburb].*

However, the family is part of the community that also plays an important role. But often the community is indifferent of the problems families in need face. Ordinary people say that rarely they get involved in other families' problems, especially if they are neighbours or community families, others than their close relatives. The specialists in child rights protection noted that the community involvement is very low; usually the neighbors "do not see and do not inform anyone".

*I do not get involved. Nobody is getting involved in my family. I do not get involved in their family [Inspector for Minors, Police, Cahul].*

*Everyone is completely careless. Only in cases that the person is a close relative, brother, sister and they are in difficulty - maybe they could get involved, but in the other cases - they didn't see and know anything [M, 44 years, auto mechanic, Chişinău].*

Some specialists consider the role of the community is not only to report problems of families, but also to put pressure on the state institutions responsible for child protection.

*The society has to "pedal" the Government. "What happened to the report?" Next year to ask again... [M, 35 years, Farmer, Călăraşi].*

Although most participants consider that the state and the local government institutions have an important role in protecting families and children in difficulty, some experts said that protection of children and their families is not a priority for the state. Only those directly involved in child protection note the state efforts in this direction, the other professionals - doctors, teachers, social workers and the general public - rather note the lack of a coherent and functional state policy in this area.

A lot of specialists note an active involvement of the civil society in child protection, but consider that the NGOs rather have to offer support and should not replace the state institutions' tasks.

*The state and family. The NGOs are able only to support and help [Specialist, Directorate for Social Assistance and Family Protection, Cahul].*

*The NGOs do not have to get involved, they have to offer support, help. [Specialist, Directorate of Social Assistance and Family Protection, Ungheni].*

*There are mechanisms that partially operate in our country, invented long time ago - foster care, placements in various residential and non-residential institutions, all kinds of aid. There are different forms. They operate with greater or lesser efficiency in our country, but they do exist. Other forms of support can be invented, but the most important is the willingness of the state institutions that were created specifically for that [M, Journalist].*

According to one of the central government representatives, collaboration between state institutions, NGOs, community and educational institutions would be the most functional solution for Moldova.

*There are some state constitutional rights and obligations through which family members should have guaranteed a decent living. From this we should start - this is the obligation of the state and it must have different programs, strategies, and actions in this area; it has to be felt that the state is concerned about the family. Also it should be done in partnership with NGOs, not separately. It needs a sustainable and flexible partnership between the state and the NGOs and civil society, because it can bring effective results and may have greater impact than what each part can separately achieve [F, Representative of the Central Government, Children's Rights Protection].*

Specialists and one of the central authority representatives see the state role in:

- developing and implementing policies and protection programs for children and families from the Republic of Moldova,

- developing mechanisms to ensure functioning of laws (not just the promoting the legislation),
- management and control of the social services (medical, educational etc.), ensuring collaboration between existing services,
- building and maintaining the public confidence in state institutions by providing efficient and functional services.

*The state is like a coordinator of all these services [Specialist, Directorate for Education, Youth and Sports, Bălți].*

*The program does exist, but legislative mechanism is missing. The idea is OK, we want to do a lot, but when we start the process, we realise we do not have this, we don't like that, we don't know where to get that. And in the end we did nothing. [...] It is about a set of that would set all these mechanisms into motion [F, 50 years, Civil servant, Călărași].*

*According to the changes in the Family Code, in the first place, the mayor is the guardianship authority in the community. They adopted the law, but there are no mechanisms. No trainings for the Town Halls, they have done absolutely nothing. Even if the mayor wants to do something, if he/has has a different educational background, here he will not be able to do anything. The law was passed just to tick a box. Many laws haven't been brought in compliance with this law, although it dates from 2009 [Specialist, Directorate of Social Assistance and Family Protection, Ungheni].*

*In order to analyze they (the officials) must get out in the field to see everything. Up there no one hears and sees us. We are facing all these problems and they remain here with us [Social worker, Sipoteni com, Calarasi].*

One of the national experts interviewed expressed his dissatisfaction with the lack of a mechanism to punish parents who violate children's rights. In his words, there are several legislative proposals which were not paid attention to.

*We have proposed that the new Code of Administrative Offences include the punishment for violation of child's rights. But now we have no penalties [F, Representative of the central government, Child Protection].*

The general public sees the state role in rather pragmatic and punctual aspects such as:

- provide jobs to citizens,
- creating playgrounds and interest clubs/centers for children,
- children protection from vices and addictions - prohibiting the cigarettes sale in the school areas, placing the casinos and electronic games outside the town etc.

*What kind of responsibility, support we get from the state? Before we used to have lots of playgrounds and sport fields. Nowadays, they built houses on all the children's playgrounds. Instead of the sport, volley, basketball courts, that there were many through the neighborhoods. [M, 48 years, Retired military, Chișinău].*

*The state has to ensure job, occupation for children [...] the fact that people sell cigarettes in the school yard is the state's responsibility. [F, 32 years, Shop Assistant, Chișinău].*

*It is also the casino issue, so many times it was discussed that it will be a special area for them outside the city. But the game machines are right next to schools and kindergartens [F, 39 years, accountant, Chisinau].*

Humanitarian aid provided by the state to families in need is called into question because of the perverse effects they create: dependence, giving birth to a large number of children without assuring them with proper upbringing.

Specialists consider that the material support should be one-off and not continuous, to strengthen family



capacities to overcome the difficulties that should provide families the “rod, not the fish.” Furthermore, experts noted that sometimes these materials are offered as an aid to those “who do not deserve.” Local public authorities are seen by experts as the main actors able to verify the effectiveness and necessity of aid. One of the national experts says that it is impossible to verify the material aid used. In his opinion, “parasitizing” of some families is inevitable and it is “normal” as this phenomenon occurs in other European countries too.

The specialists working in social services consider themselves responsible for the child and family protection, however their efforts are currently focused on the *intervention* on consequences of and on already occurred situations. Due to limited resources, very little of the current work of social services aims at *preventing* family problems and difficulties.

Some experts say that the child protection system has made good progress. Especially the experts from Chişinău consider that state institutions just need to improve their collaboration in order to be more effective.

*There is a collaboration system. It has been submitted to the police, to various NGOs. There are some problems to be solved, issues related to financing, but the system is already formed, at least we have something to work on [Social worker, Municipal Directorate for Child Protection, Chişinău].*

*The people who work with children, ie. doctors, teachers, have to know that if a problem appears, they are the ones to solve it, they should not to leave it for later [Pediatrician, Territorial Medical Association Center, Chişinău].*

Most participants consider that educational institutions should exercise their educational function in relation to the whole family, especially if the family is vulnerable. In this respect, the relationships between school, family and community should be improved. Some experts, as well as the general public, blamed the school for not getting involved in the situation of children in difficulty. The general public also insisted on the need to modernize the school, especially in rural areas.

*The teacher should go in the family and maintain relationships with family; yes, they keep relationships but only with good families where mom and dad are “taxpayers” (making additional payments to the school). To these, the vulnerable families, the teacher comes only after the child drops out of the school for too long and says “please, expel him, he is an embarrassment for our school!”. That is the attitude [Lawyer, Directorate for Child Protection, Chişinău].*

*From school to parents the relationship is more powerful, but from parents to school - not so much [Inspector for Minors, Calarasi].*

*Being at our place, each of us should be doing the job well. I start from the masters. In the morning, if the child comes to school without his homework done, do not start with bad marks, punishments or bad words. Ask for the reason. Maybe the child did not sleep at night, maybe there was an argument between his parents. Be his second parent! [Deputy Director of Education, Primary School, Ungheni].*

The Church is another important actor, which according to many participants is not involved enough in protecting children and families in difficulty. Although considered to be a very important player, the Church is perceived rather absent, especially in its role as social glue in the community. Experts expect from the Church, as well as from school, more involvement in educating/ guiding families and children at risk.

*The lady raised a problem that hurts me very much. We all complain that we lose Christianity. Sorry to say this, but our clergy is waiting to be paid, which is not expected by other sects and denominations with other orientations [Deputy Director, High School, Balti].*

The interviewed priest also thinks that the Church’s role in the protection of children and families in difficulty could be a significant one. The low involvement of the Church is caused by the existence of a lot of “infiltrated” priests that are not committed to the Church and to the assumed role.

*In order for the Church to engage in this fold of profligacy and destruction, some have thought about this thing too. They put at the Church leadership people infiltrated in the Church, all sorts of agents, all sorts of people who are not able to produce anything [M, Priest].*

Some interviewed opinion leaders were concerned that educational institutions, especially schools no longer assume the role of promoting universal human values. Currently, children study many subjects, make a lot of practical activities, but from the list of school subjects the subject on rules of behavior is missing.

*It's a mistake in school: we can make children smart people, but we do not teach them to say "Hello" frankly, being sociable, to help when needed, to appreciate the cleanliness, to arrange the bed after them, to wash dishes, to participate at the yard cleaning and work on the land - they do not teach them these things! And yet they (the parents) object when we organize village cleaning days. "Why did you take my child and you made him to collect the garbage?" [E, mayor, a Chisinau suburb].*



The business environment also is less visible in supporting children and families. Few participants reported cases of involvement of business in charity or other forms of social support. Corporate social responsibility is not present, especially because of the problems, which, according to participants, facing the business segment in the Republic of Moldova.

*Few charity campaigns are undertaken [M, 48 years, Retired military, Chişinău].*

*In fact, they (businessmen) are harassed by different controls ... however, they should donate. But their sense of making donations is not developed [Specialist, Directorate of Social Assistance and Family Protection, Calarasi].*

*Usually people who have power and money help when they, themselves, have a serious problem. When, God forbid, something happens to a child, then they may help [Pedagogue, Horodiste village, Calarasi].*

Raising citizen's awareness on the problems of families in difficulty is considered necessary and effective. Some officials noted that some media campaigns have shown real results.

*The information campaigns are a must. There was a TV campaign "Take a child from the orphanage." Many couples come to find out what are the conditions for being potential adoptive parents. In the middle of discussions we ask: "But where did you learn about this?" "On television, do you know that advertisement?" And soon you get pictured better picture. So, definitely, awareness is important [Lawyer, Directorate for Child Protection, Chişinău].*

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION

„... even after the moratorium was imposed, a lot of this kind of mothers come to us:

- Please, it has to be a way to leave him in a boarding school; I want to get rid of him, to have some rest. Give me the paper to sign to give him to the boarding school”.

(Lawyer, Child Protection Directorate, Chişinău)

**Most participants consider that the institutionalization has a negative impact on children: children always are waiting for their parents - do not smile, do not have the necessary life skills, cannot give love and are also likely to abandon their children, because they were deprived of love of their parents and abandoned.**

**Children in families are seen as more adapted and prepared for life.**

**The general public and opinion leaders argue that children who grow up in institutions are stigmatized by society and labeled as “different”.**

**Placing children in residential institutions is a “convenient” solution for many social actors. “No child - no problem!”**

**Mostly, the institutionalized children learn from an early age to solve alone their emotional problems, fail to form all their life skills and have no parental role models because they are not educated for a family life.**

**Most institutions’ directors talk about the necessity to reorganize the residential institutions and boarding schools even if they do not fully agree with the process, many of them comply with the reform.**

**The opinion of the institutions’ directors on the idea to reintegrate children into their families or placement in alternative service is built around some fears and negative views of these forms of protection.**

**Some specialists directly involved in work with children in need (social workers, child protection specialists) are convinced that residential institutions should be reformed and welcome the development of alternative services in Moldova.**

**Most specialists (teachers, psychologists, pediatricians) are aware the existence of these services, but they are less known to the general public and opinion leaders.**

Analyzing the causes that determine child separation from his family, they can be classified in 3 categories:

- Causes which do not depend on the parents – ie. their death.
- Causes that depend on the parents - a voluntary abandonment of the child / voluntary separation from the child, both parents going abroad.
- Deliberate separation of the child by the family protection services - violent or negligent parents or caretakers (risk to the child’s life).

If in the case of the first category of causes the separation from the nuclear family cannot be prevented, then in the second category the specialists in child protection play an important role in abandonment prevention.

Professionals, especially those from Chisinau, and representatives of NGOs in the field note that intentional child separation from his family by the care services or in other words, the forced child removal from the family, is the last solution to solving children’s problems, and should only occur in those cases when the child being in the family presents a risk to his life.

*I think that the child has to leave the family only when it becomes dangerous for him to be there [Psychologist, Boarding School, Bălţi].*

*If the parents do not get along with their children, are so far from each other that it would be better to be separated. For example, families of drug addicts, alcoholics and other groups [F, 50 years, civil servant, Calarasi].*

*There are some parents who have two cars in the house yard, three-storey house, work abroad, but their child lives in a boarding school. He is there the whole week. Others say that they take him to the boarding school only for a week, because at the local school he is naughty, does not come to the lessons. [Social worker, Budești].*

*I know personally families that left for Italy, but their children live in a boarding school and they pay no contributions [Family Physicians (GP), Center of Family Physicians, Ungheni].*

The interviewed priest said that, under any circumstances, nobody has the right to separate the child from the family. His attitude towards NGOs and other international institutions concerned with the protection of children is rather hostile. The best solution for families in difficulty is to intervene in these families to help them overcome the difficulties.

*No one has the right to separate the child from the family. But because the state is actively involved, and not just the state - and the West, and various organizations from the OSCE, from UNESCO, NGOs, who are like wolves waiting to eat the sheep. They want to do good things. For whom? Whoever has problems, they solve their problems inside the family. Give them money. Do not separate them, do not interfere with talks about rights matters. Who is interested in human rights being from a troubled family? [M, Priest].*

The future of the children living away from their parents is rather perceived as a negative one. Both the general public and some opinion leaders say that street children end up either as beggars or criminals, or go to the boarding schools. Few participants in these groups have mentioned the possibility of a child reintegration in an extended family or using other alternative forms to institutionalization. Many ordinary people think that these children have problems to integrate into the society or even in a family due to his lack of education.

*The children without a family have serious problems with the integration in the society [F, 40 years, Housewife, Călărași].*

*I was observing a child and thinking that one of these days he could end up in prison - he is already there. They do only stupid things. Even at home, with the proper education, you are afraid your children to do the same things. [M, 35 years, Local Counselor, Călărași].*

*The children separated from their families have no future [F, 48 years, Housewife, Călărași].*

*A child without the parents presence, no parent talking to him, patting his head, no kisses on his forehead when he goes to sleep, that's how a child grows up into something you do not know. [M, Priest].*

Some residential institutions directors think that without the residential institutions children would end up dropping school, being homeless or in conflict with the law.

*If there were no boarding schools - primarily, the criminality would be at a very high rate [M, Director, Boarding School for orphans or children without parental care].*

*The child would be wandering around. The homelessness would be at the highest rate. It is already high. Nobody shows it, but it does exist. [M, Director, Boarding School for orphans and children without parental care].*

## PROS AND CONS OF THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION

For many ordinary people, as well as for some specialists, institutionalization is seen as a solution.

A number of experts consider that boarding school is a necessity, but not in the way it works now: many accept that the boarding school must be reformed. In this respect, many directors of residential institutions have taken measures in order to improve the living conditions: bedrooms with a smaller number of beds, workshops for children, closer relationship with the child's family and a greater openness to the community.

In addition, according to the specialists, the residential institutions have to be a temporary solution. The boarding schools have to be replaced with some multifunctional centers, in which the child will get protec-

tion and support services for a short period of time, as long as reintegration solutions in the biological or extended family are sought. In each group of specialists, at least one has this kind of opinion (especially those from the child's rights protection directorates, child protection councils).

*Negative, look at the living conditions in which they are gathered together there; institutions now? – NO, But, maybe YES if the conditions will change... [Social worker, Municipal Directorate for Child's Rights Protection, mun. Chişinău].*

*Boarding school is a solution when there are a small number of children, as it is in our case. It is not even a boarding school anymore, it is a center, a complex that offers social services for a short period of time, while centre's social workers, community social workers work to find for the child an alternative placement to the residential institution. Once the child goes to the institution and everyone forgets about him: his/her parents, the institution, and they leave him/her to live there, then what we do about him? In addition, the child has not even formed the most basic life skills. He/she knows he/she got the food served on the table, the table then cleared and cleaned. That is why we speak about the reform [Specialist, Department for Child Protection, Cahul].*

#### **Specialists Pro-institutionalization arguments are:**

- residential institutions are being closed, but no alternatives have been created yet,
- there is a risk to get the situation out of control - street children, beggars, vagabonds,
- there are "difficult" children that cannot be reintegrated in families or in alternative forms of protection.

#### **Opinion Leaders Pro-institutionalization arguments are:**

- the boarding schools are a solution for children with disabilities such as: deafness, impaired vision, mental retardation, etc.
- in the boarding schools children from difficult families receive adequate care food, clothes, education. Just as the general public, some experts and opinion leaders consider that:
  - some of those who grew up in institutions had become decent and educated people,
  - living conditions in boarding schools are better than on the street or in degraded families.

*The children I've seen get better situation. Live better. And in a lot of cases they become decent, educated and people with life perspective. [Inspector for Minors, Călăraşi].*

*It is better for a child to live in an orphanage than everyday to see alcoholics, to suffer from head lice, scabies and poverty [Psychologist, Călăraşi].*

*At least there is food. There is a schedule. But who knows, maybe at home he used to go to sleep starving [Pedagogue, Horodişte village, Călăraşi].*

*The Soloneţ institution is now closed. Now these children go back to their families, where they get no supervision, no protection. This is how they commit another crime. If his first punishment was conditioned, the second one will get him to a prison in Lipcani, and when he comes back from Lipcani, he is a different person, with a different "qualification" and is part from another category [Jurist, Directorate for Child's Rights Protection, mun. Chişinău].*

*I think that the existing boarding schools have to be only used for placing a child for a short period of time [Family Doctor (GP), Center of Family Physicians, Ungheni].*

*I would like to say something pro boarding schools. You would wonder why? This is because the boarding schools do not work only with children. There a lot of children in the school class, but they have time to work always with the families. Children's parents always get phone calls and asked questions from the boarding school. So their existence is a good thing. Now we have to restructure, rename them and everything will change. Because boarding schools' staff work with parents and families. [Specialist, Directorate of Education, Youth and Sports, Bălţi].*

*[...] we are heading towards deinstitutionalization, but once you throw out the water, you can also throw out the child. We just have to analyse what we need, how many boarding and specialized schools we need. If the child has a visual problem, we cannot place him in a school with not trained staff, teachers and with no conditions for a blind child. That's why in the Republic of Moldova we need at least a school for each type of disability - specialized schools for blind, deaf and dumb children, with trained teachers and ready to teach them the life skills. This is not bad. Unfortunately, at the moment we just throw the water away with the child inside [F, mayor, Chişinău suburb].*

Most opinion leaders have an ambivalent attitude regarding the institutionalization of children. On the one hand, they recognize that residential institutions have more negative effects on children. On the other hand, they note that in some cases, boarding schools can offer children what they do not get in the family. NGO representatives consider that sometimes children who grew up in institutions will repeat the child abandoning behavior of their parents.

*In order for a child to survive - the boarding schools are a good thing. But in order to provide proper education for a citizen of our republic - the boarding school has negative effects. The child could be educated in a golden palace, but he/she will always have that soul injury. He/she will always be a child with a hurt and, maybe a tightened soul. He will get his food on time, he will be an educated child, with knowledge in biology, physics, maths, but the soul cannot be educated, and it will always be lonely. [M, mayor, Chişinău suburb].*

*If we examine the both positive and negative aspects, we could say that the positive one would be that: the state gives them food, clothes, a bed to sleep on, also the warmth they cannot get in their family. On the other hand, the negative aspect would be that children do not live in a family environment and grow up with no idea of what a family is [F, Central Government Representative, Children Rights Protection]*

The general public thinks that the boarding school has negative effects on children development. According to a big number of ordinary people, the children from boarding school lack love, psychological comfort, proper nutrition, personal space, life skills education.

*From early age, the child feels the lack of their parents and family love, and as a result, he cannot transmit it further to his children or other people and to the society [F, 39 years, Accountant, Chişinău].*

*In the boarding schools there are a lot of crimes and eccentricities, but we pay attention to other things. The teachers steal from children all the help they get from the state or other organisations [M, 48 years, Retired military, Chişinău].*

*However, I will go for the family, it does not have to be only the biological one. If in the biological family the child sees violence and bad things, then he needs an extended or adoptive family. The best place for a child is the family. In the boarding school they do not have the proper nutrition and they are not dressed like all the other children. Children have no equal access to education access, they are disadvantaged children [F, 32 ani, Vânătoare, Chişinău].*

*Institutionalized children often grow up and do not perceive the life's reality. Life consists of obligations, and rights and responsibilities to people, to God, to everyone. They grow with the awareness that someone always must give them, and they get older children, but uneducated and with no life skills. They all expect someone to give them everything, but the child has to be educated for the life that will come [F, 50 years, civil servant, Calarasi].*



The specialists that are **against** the institutionalization state the next arguments:

- The big number of children in the boarding schools, therefore, the impossibility to provide the needed care and attention to each child
- There are different types of abuse
- The lack of an educational model for founding a family and raising of children - repeating the abandonment with the future children of those who grow up in the boarding schools.
- The child placement is a protection form of the child, certainly not of the family.
- The boarding school is a good way to reduce parents' responsibility towards their children. "The child was taken. No child, no problem. It's over."
- The boarding school children do not have the necessary life skills for an independent life.
- The boarding schools children do not have a functional parental model, no family model.

*It is unreal that a teacher, an educator in a boarding school supervises 600 children in one night. Unreal, it is not human! But still this is the situation. In addition regarding the building, I'm an adult and when I enter that building I feel chlorine entering my eyes and I cannot breathe, the walls are like in the prison Nr.13, blue or green and this aggressive attitude towards children "Wait! " There is not a warm family environment for a child [Lawyer, Directorate for Child Protection, Chişinău].*

*I think that when a family has a difficulty, it is at risk, but we only help the child. Of course we want to save the family. But saving the child, we destroy the family. Why? Because the child gets used to live without his parents, and parents get used to live without their child and later on it will be very difficult to reunite the family. The child already will be in trouble and these problems will only increase if he/she is away from the family. So I think that the help should be granted to the family, so that the child has the opportunity to be raised in this family further on. Do not get him to an orphanage or a boarding school, but help the family. [Psychology, Boarding School, Balti]*

*The children from the boarding schools go on visits, but they cannot imagine a normal and good/healthy family. It is not difficult to organize these visits. But, unfortunately, they cannot imagine how to found and how does a normal family look like [Specialist, Directorate of Education, Youth and Sports, Bălţi].*

In the participant's opinion, there are differences between the children from the boarding schools and those who grow up in a family. The analysis of these opinions shows that there are behavioral differences. The children from the boarding schools always wait for their parents - do not smile, do not have the proper life skills, are not able to love and may in the future abandon their own children, because they were deprived of the parental love and were abandoned. The children that grow up in families seem to be more adapted and prepared for life.

### **The differences between the children from boarding schools and those from a family**

<b>Children from Boarding Schools</b>	
<b>Positive attributes</b>	<b>Negative attributes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They are much more responsible</li> <li>- They are more friendly with other children</li> <li>- They help each other a lot</li> <li>- They are more self - confident</li> <li>- They do better in life</li> <li>- They are more " firm"</li> <li>- They learned lessons from real life</li> <li>- They are more resilient</li> <li>- They are much stronger</li> <li>- They are more friendly and less selfish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They are tougher and more violent</li> <li>- They are more introvert, more solitary</li> <li>- They are insecure</li> <li>- They feel envy</li> <li>- They are shy, grief and solitary</li> <li>- They do not smile</li> <li>- They cannot show love</li> <li>- They do not show their love in the founded family</li> <li>- They have no life skills</li> <li>- Some of them abandon their children, as their parents did.</li> </ul>

Children from families	
Positive attributes	Negative attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They are more confident</li> <li>- They have a family model</li> <li>- They have the necessary life skills to found a family.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They are self-important</li> <li>- Are more selfish.</li> </ul>

The majority of the participants consider that the society's attitude towards the children from the boarding schools is a negative one.

The general public and opinion leaders state that the children from the boarding schools are stigmatized by the society and labeled as being "different" from the others. Mostly, they are associated with criminals, misfit person for the life in the society, children with "not too good genetics" (allusion to the drug addicts, alcoholics parents.)

The people's feeling towards these children is one of pity and compassion, but also some vigilance - "they are traumatized children", "you never know what they can do".

*In my home village there is a special school. Those who didn't get all the material were marked for the whole life "this child went to the special school". A lot of children were abandoned by their parents [M, 48 years, Retires Military, Chisinau].*

*If I had a chance, I would get a child from the boarding school, but it is a genetic matter, is transmitted genetically [M, 35 years, Local Consultant, Călărași].*

*People think they are different from the other children [F, 50 years, Civil Servant, Călărași].*

*There is a classic phrase, when with the child something is wrong. "You look like a child from a boarding school" [Specialist, Directorate for Social Assistance and Family Protection, Călărași].*

The specialists state that some of the civil servants involved in supporting children (pedagogues, mayors, policemen, and doctors) have a negative impression about the children from the boarding schools, especially about the children from "families in difficulty". Mostly, the specialists mentioned the hostile attitude of the teachers and directors of educational institutions.

Ministries and NGOs Representatives confirmed the existence of the stigmatization of children from the boarding schools even by the mainstream schools' teachers. They also think that these attitudes and behaviors can be changed, training teachers to have children from the residential institutions in their group.

*The children from a small group home must go to the community school, but there study only 1st or second grade children, well-behaved and well-dressed children. Although it is against the law, the director of the nearby school categorically refused to receive them, and the director and I presented our case in all the courts. [lawyer, Directorate for Child Rights Protection, Chișinău].*

*Unfortunately, children are marginalised by their teachers. When we were integrating children in schools, they often were offended, called with bad words, even by the Deputy-Director. "Get them back to the boarding school, you brought them as burden on our shoulders!" [Specialist, Directorate for Child Rights Protection, Cahul].*

*There was a case of a little girl that refused to go back to the center, even if her situation was complicated. The reason was that some of the specialists called her an alcoholic daughter. We do not need to look far away, we must start with the specialists that are not properly trained. This would be one of the problems. [Social Worker, Children and Old people asylum, Bălți].*

*Often, assisting at hearings at the police department, I hear that even the staff in charge of the children say that - "it is impossible to make out of him/her a decent man". This is called stigmatization. [Social Pedagogue, Directorate of Education, Youth and Sports, Bălți].*



A lot of residential institution directors admit that children from these institutions are seen “with different eyes” by the community and the general public, especially when children are from the auxiliary (special) schools. The institutions’ directors that enrolled children at the community school admitted that they have adaptation and inclusion problems.

*We made an experiment: A little boy that today is in the 7th grade, was more mentally developed and could learn faster than other children. And he went to the community primary school together with all the other children. After 3 days he said: “I do not want to go back there”. They are humiliated, isolated, oppressed. And they are also neglected by the other children. But not only by the children, also by the pedagogues. [M, Director, Auxiliary Boarding School for children with special educational needs].*

In addition to this situation, children themselves from the residential centers (small group homes) who attend community schools, they do not want to discuss their situation with the others for fear of being marginalized. They do not trust the other children that they will have an adequate attitude towards them.

*Even our children that study at the regular schools do not want to know where did other children come from [Social Worker, Regina Pacis Foundation, Chişinău].*

*The fact that they are from a boarding school creates a complex in them meaning that something is wrong with them [Social Worker, Department of Social Assistance and Child Protection, Cahul].*

As well as the decision making factors (local authorities, ministries’ representatives), the residential institutions directors have an ambivalent attitude towards the institutionalization / de-institutionalization process.

The majority of the interviewed residential institution directors admit that the family has a primary role in raising and educating children and that a child’s place is in the family, only with one condition: these families must exercise all their functions. It is important to mention that this condition of exercising the functions concern the institutions’ representatives only for the duration of the children’s stay in institution, after graduation the children are sent home in the community.

*The family has a very important role to play. Starting with the 1st grade we can identify if the child has his parents with him. We can see the family traditions and education where the child come from. [...] It is more beneficial for a child to grow in a family. [F, Director, Auxiliary Boarding School for children with educational special needs].*

*The family has the primary role. According to the living and financial standards in our society, we conclude that the parent does not have the possibility to educate the child at the level he/she needs, to give the child material support, to show the right way in life, to give a profession and the future support. [F, Director, Auxiliary Boarding School for children with special educational needs].*

*There are pluses and minuses. I totally agree that a child does not have to be separated from his family, but to live in a normal family. In case when in the family he/she receives no education, life skills and training, love, care, he/she gets absolutely nothing, then it is better for the child to grow up in that kind of school. The plus of these kinds of schools is that the child is looked after, receives care and warmth [M, Director, Auxiliary Boarding School for children with special educational needs].*

## **THE ALTERNATIVES TO INSTITUTIONALIZATION**

Some specialists state that, child separation from the family has to be a temporary one. They admit that once the family gets over the difficult situation, the child has to return to the family. Some child protection specialists state that the effort has to be directed on family reintegration and prevention of child separation from the family.

*If one can influence the child’s mom and dad’s mentality, the child can remain in the family. No matter how bad it is, the problems can be discussed with the family. [Pediatrician, Territorial Medical Assistance, Center, Chişinău].*

*The purpose of the child protection directorates, placement centers and of the specialized institutions is not the maintenance of the family in difficulty, but only supporting them when they are at risk. The case was*

*solved, the risk removed, now the family has to act independently [Social Worker, Regina Pacis Foundation, Chişinău].*

One of the interviewed central authority representatives expressed concern regarding the violation of the Regulation on the period of a child with a family being in an institution. In this case we need urgently to interfere to help the family to break the deadlock and to reintegrate the child.

*Here we have a massive violation of children's rights, I mean those children who have a family but live in the residential environment for 9 years. I mentioned that this year I am planning to analyse the 3rd and 4th standard, which are about the period of stay in an institution that is violated [F, Central Authority representative, Child's Rights Protection].*

Even if the residential institutions offer children significantly better living conditions than they would have had in their families, some residential institutions directors admit that no institution, no protection form can meet the biggest children need: the love and care of their parents.

*We have absolutely everything. When you visit us, you will see what conditions they have - our children do not have something like this at home. But the school no way can replace the parents. [M, Director, Boarding School for orphans and children without parental care].*

*Any other extended families or family type children's homes - they cannot replace the parental love children need. Maybe rarely this could happen, but I haven't had the chance to see one yet. [M, Director, Boarding School for orphans and children without parental care].*

According to some residential institutions directors, children reintegration from the auxiliary schools is even more difficult. The main problem in this case is the school integration and the implementation of some additional specialized support and help services for learning the scholar curriculum. A solution would be opening some day care/ rehabilitation centers and the involvement of some pedagogues ready for intensive work with children with special educational needs.

*It would be great to open day care centers were children could come after lessons and do their homework with a pedagogue's help. [...] Besides these, there should be opened rehabilitation, recovery centers [F, Director, Auxiliary Boarding School for children with special educational needs].*

In many of the specialists' opinion, the best solution to prevent institutionalization of children would be the development of alternative services. Other people state that today there are sufficient alternative services, they just must be further developed and supported. The public is not so well informed about the alternative services, but they think that the government needs coherent policies for the prevention of institutionalization of children.

*This has to be a state policy [M, 48 years, Retired military, Chişinău].*

*There are children who are placed in alternative services. We have got foster care, family-type children's homes; we establish the guardianship where it is needed, the adoption, in case the child has an adoption status [Specialist, Directorate for Child's Rights Protection, Cahul].*

The residential institutions' directors have an ambivalent attitude towards the alternative services. While some agree with the idea of developing more diverse forms of alternative care, others have some doubts about their functionality.

Amongst the stated concerns there are: the risk that these children can be abused and exploited due to the lack of a proper control from the local authorities, a short period of placing a child in an alternative service - often insufficient to find reliable reintegration solutions or adapting to the new life style.

*The more diverse they (alternative forms of care) are, the better it is. [M, Director, Boarding School for orphans and children without parental care].*

*I think that they are beneficial and the proposals are very good. It is for sure that not all the children can be placed in the alternative care services. But as soon as a part of them are placed, it is already well [F, Director, Auxiliary Boarding School for children with special educational needs].*

The majority of the interviewed opinion leaders know about existent alternative services, although they do not make an evident difference between different types (guardianship, foster care, family type homes). Generally, the attitudes towards these services are positive. However, some of the respondents demonstrated certain distrust towards them.

*It is better for the child to live in a family type small group home, center, family type children's home, than in a boarding school [M, Lawyer].*

*What family-type homes? They appeared like the mushrooms after the rain. The houses well decorated, with carpets, toys, food, the "mother and father" wait children to come. Something like this does not exist! Very often they receive children only because of the money matters, to receive about 500 lei. And their attitude is not so good [F, mayor, a Chişinău suburb].*

The impediments mentioned by the institutions' directors in the alternative services development are:

- the indifferent attitude of the people towards children and families in difficulty - the lack of desire to solve others problems,
- poverty - low level of allowances for children upbringing.

*People say "If his family does not want and accept the child, why we, that are not his family, have to accept him, to look after him, or to adopt him?" I said it once, and I repeat it: the society is not ready yet [M, Director, Auxiliary Boarding School for children with special educational needs].*

## **Guardianship**

Guardianship is one of the forms to reintegrate/place the child in an extended family. Two aspects of the guardianship captivated specialists' attention. The first one relates to the "bureaucratic" procedure of the guardianship establishment. Some guardianship applicants often give up the process due to the exhausting procedure. Another aspect is the supervision of families who have children under guardianship.

*We have a lot of cases where the parents die, the child is orphan, and in order to give the guardianship to the relatives, there is a list of 21 mandatory documents to be provided in line with the law. And when the auntie finds out about the 21 documents, among them would be a medical examination with a list of doctors they do not have in the village - this is becoming difficult [lawyer, Directorate for Child's Rights Protection, Chişinău].*

The majority of the guardians we visited, at the beginning they wanted to adopt their children, but in the end chose the guardianship due to some material advantages (child allowance, admission facilities to higher education).

Within the visits of the families who have children in guardianship, some guardians admitted that there is a difference in attachment with the received children and their own children. The guardians that do not have their own children accept the other children better, understand them better, forgive quickly and are more affectionate/ closer to children placed with them.

In the majority of the visited families we saw children sincere, gay, and active. Many of them approached the guardian, being embraced and patted.

## **Foster Care**

The majority of the specialists from the localities where foster care was developed know the specifics of the service and are pleased with its efficiency.

The positive things mentioned by the institutions' directors about foster care are: the professional training of the foster parents and their voluntary commitment to raise and educate children.

*Children are under the supervision of persons who have been trained and who voluntarily assumed the responsibility for the child's future. Yes he/she is remunerated, but is voluntary. Here, we are working for*

*the government. They assumed the responsibility and now they have not only the will, their consciousness obliges them, because they decided to do this themselves [M, Director, Boarding School for orphans and children without parental care].*

During the visits to foster parents we noticed that they focus on children's education, especially from the socialization and values point of view. The foster parents teach them: to behave in the society (visiting someone, on the street, at school), what is good/proper/accepted and what is bad/disapproved; they teach them general human values: respect for elders, friendship, and mutual support; provide parental models: this is what the mother, father does, this is the relationship between brothers and sisters etc.

The majority of the visited foster parents told us that, at the beginning, children had some behaviour issues (stealing from home, placing food under the pillow and other behavioral deviations at home and in the society). Over time, children follow the behavior they see in the family and behave adequately.

### **Parent and baby centres**

The specialists state, that children can be abandoned in the next few days after their birth that if the mother is in a vulnerable situation. The specialists also say that any support provided to the family from the specialists directly involved in child protection is welcome if it aims to prevent the family separation.

*We used to have about 7-8 abandoned children in the maternity hospital before the Parent and baby unit was opened. This year we have 2 children. Last year it was 3 children. It means that the alternative services have positive results [Specialist, Directorate for Child's Rights Protection, Cahul].*

*I used to work at the Parent and baby unit and I met mothers that stated: "I went to the maternity hospital with nothing for the child, as I was going to leave him there and did not buy anything in advance. But afterwards, when I got to the Parent and baby unit, I now care about them, I will not abandon my baby now [Psychologist, Lyceum, Cahul].*

### **Family-type homes**

Even if there is limited knowledge about the family-type homes, a lot of people consider this alternative as a reasonable one. The participants fears relate to these homes' legitimacy, and lack of material interests of the careers in their activity is questioned - "is it business or charity!?" The interviewed opinion leaders think the same thing.

*There could be family-type children's homes with few children. And the government must organize these homes [F, 39 years, Accountant, Chişinău].*

*I keep thinking if the family-type homes are a business or charity [F, 48 years, Housewife, Călăraşi].*

*I hope that a lot of people take a child home in order to educate a citizen, with love towards children. Unfortunately, the mass-media information says that a lot of people take children home in order to have some additional money and use the children to do the household works, especially in the rural areas [M, Mayor, a Chişinău suburb].*

In specialists and opinion leaders vision, children need a family model and to develop all the necessary family life skills. This is the reason why the family-type children's homes are an alternative that would reconcile the family and residential institution idea. In some of the specialists' opinions, these family-type placement forms are a family substitute - "it is like a family".

*I think that our boarding schools would need something like a temporary family program: a family for a weekend or a family for a holiday. There are a lot of decent families glad to receive a child. There are periods when children from residential institutions should go to his/her family on weekend or for a holiday. But there are children that have nowhere to go [Specialist, Directorate of Education, Youth and Sports, Bălţi].*

One of the difficulties faced by the specialists from our country is finding families that would like to host this type of protection. The visits we had at the family-type homes and the discussions we held with the foster

parents showed that they accepted voluntarily to receive and take care of children. The majority of the foster parents mentioned that their motivation in raising and educating children was “making good things”. Many of the foster parents were educated in large families, and after founding their own family always wanted “a house full of children”.

Some residential institution directors admit that the most family-like living conditions are provided in the family-type homes, and that the residential institutions could not provide these conditions. Others, as well as for other protection forms, consider that in the family-type homes educators and foster parents do not give love and attachment to the children placed with them and that the attitude is different from that shown to their own children. There is also an opinion that children are exploited and used for hard work in the family-type homes.

*I have heard. I even talked to these families. I participated at a seminar in Cahul, and also these parents were there, and I approached and talked to them. For sure, the family-type homes are closer to the family conditions than the boarding schools. I really do not know if there are a lot of persons willing to take children in their families, especially the disabled ones. But it is definitely a really good option [F, Director, Auxiliary Boarding School for children with special educational needs].*

In comparison with foster care, in family-type children's homes there are more than one child, consequently, the time given to each child is more limited. However, children show behaviors of being attached to the carers, the little ones come in the carer's arms, lean on them, are patted.

Usually the educators have good relationships with the school, and one of the difficulties they face is that they are not always able to help with the homework.

The children placed in the family-type homes are (re)educated especially under the group influence. Those who have been in a family longer than others, usually, have beneficial effects on the newcomers and help them to get into the family culture.

## **Adoption**

Child adoption is a service known by all the participants. Ordinary people think that few children are adopted in the Republic of Moldova, and the specialists confirm this trend. Some of them state that the adoption in the Republic of Moldova is not a tradition, and people are not sufficiently informed/ sensitized on this protection form. The presentation of the general public on the adoption procedure is reduced to the fact that it is a difficult one.

*I have heard that the adoption procedure is a complicated one [F, 40 years, Housewife, Călărași].*

*The adoption in the Republic of Moldova is not considered to be a tradition. It has to be promoted so that people are sensitized [F, 50 years, Civil servant, Călărași].*

*Those people who intend to adopt a child have to be really good, because we often see children from the boarding schools crying and often they cry in the new family. The local authority structures in charge of the children have to check their situation, also the school directors or the class tutor have to verify the child situation at home. Because I know 2 cases when the adopted children are not visited by anyone, no one knows and thinks about them [Lyceum Director, Călărași].*

Some of the residential institutions' directors confirmed that the poverty, population mentality, as well as the attitudes people have towards the children separated from their families lead to a low adoption rate. Children from the auxiliary schools are rarely adopted.

*We had an orphan child and since when he got in our institutions, we have been trying to give him for adoption, us together with the social assistance department, but we failed, people do not want children from our school (special school) [M, Director, Auxiliary Boarding School for children with special educational needs].*

The specialists discussed the new law on adoption of children. Some of them think that this law will make the adoption procedure more complicated. Others think that the law is good, only that the enforcement

mechanisms are missing. The interviewed decision makers stated that the law is clearer and that it provides concrete steps someone has to take in order to adopt a child. Another problem would be child supervision after the adoption.

*The state developed a new law called the Law on the legal status of adoption. It was in the mother's interest, not in the child's. If, in the present, the child's adoption status may be determined from the age of one year, after this law now it will be no earlier than at the age of two. It means that little children could not be adopted [Lawyer, Directorate for Child's Rights Protection, Chişinău].*

## THE EFFECTS OF THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION

A lot of specialists and residential institutions directors state that the majority of children from the boarding and auxiliary schools come from vulnerable families, being unwanted children. They are not wanted at home, in their families, in their community, as well as in community schools etc.

Child placement in the residential institutions represents a “convenient” solution for the social actors - “no child - no problem!” The family does not have any more to look after the child, the local authorities do not look for a solution for the family, the community is not disturbed by the child presence on the streets or about his begging at the church door, and the school have a difficult child less.

Consequently, the society develops a number of passive attitudes towards the problems of children in difficulty and institutionalization:

**indifference** – „it does not bother me, it is not my business, not my problem”,

**compensation** – „it is better to be in a boarding school, than to suffer hunger and not to be properly dressed”,

**social laziness (negligence)** – „if he/she is already in a boarding school, why should we do something else!?”

*I analyse children that are in our school and often they come from vulnerable families. First of all, they were conceived in these families. Secondly, they are unwanted children. The family does not care about their education. I could mention a lot of cases where children grow independently [F, Director, Auxiliary Boarding School for children with special educational needs].*

In some of the respondents' opinions, the children's placement in the residential institutions is just a way to “use the state”. Parents put on the state's shoulders all the responsibility for upbringing of their children, and they adopt an attitude that the state is obliged to take care of them.

In the opinion of the directors of the residential institutions the most important things that a boarding school offers to the children are:

- Training and education
- Professional orientation
- Housing, food and clothes

The majority of the institutions directors are aware that the most children miss their parents' love and care. Some of them admit that, no matter how good their intentions are, nothing can substitute the parental love.

A lot of directors do not see the institution's role as being, in the first place, a bond between the child and the family, even if they say that they maintain the relationship with the child's parents and other family members. The institutions emphasize more one the material provisions for the child - clothes, food etc.

*We bought for children food they did not have at home with their parents, they ate chocolate with a bigger validity term, they almost got to the situation to say: “Mr. Director, we do not want anymore oranges, tangerines, bananas” [M, Director, Boarding School for orphans and children without parental care].*

*First of all - they need parental love and care. We try to replace all that love, but no matter how much we try, no one replace a mother [F, Director, Auxiliary Boarding school for children with special educational needs].*

*They just need the parental warmth. They do not need anything else [M, Director, Boarding School for orphans and children without parental care]*

The majority of the opinion leaders state that the institutionalization effects on children are negative ones. The consequences of placing a child in a boarding school mentioned by the opinion leaders are the following:

- children do not have developed the life skills; money management, time planning, household activities etc.
- very often, the boarding schools graduates are not able to integrate in the society,
- becoming adults, some of them can not found a family due to the difficulty to show attachment, responsibility and love.

*Children are not ready at all. They do not know how much work it takes; people work with them in the institutions, they are prepared for the graduation, but from our experience, from those cases we worked with, we realized that it needs a lot of effort and work. The child does not know where to go, how to enroll at a course, which are his/her rights, privileges; they do have rights and privileges, the problem is that they do not know them; they do not know who to call for help, do not know they could benefit of a social scholarship, a free place in the campus, and if he/she gets to the campus, unfortunately he/she is not accepted [F, NGO representative].*

*In the ex-Soviet Union there was a different educational policy - the larger the residential institution, the bigger the number of children. It is obvious that a big institution cannot ensure that the child acquires all the life skills he needs. This child does not have the same activities as a child in a family has. [M, Ministry of Education representative].*

*We can see that the consequences of institutionalization are destructive for the children. There have been international studies, the statistics says that only 10% of these children integrate in the society, have a job and respect rules agreed by everyone. The main consequences would be the child's incapacity to decide, to see the most important things and less important things in life, the incapacity to manage the money they have, to establish and maintain relationships, to show attachment to someone or in relation with someone, incapacity to commit to someone, and unfortunately, sometimes they are tempted to have conflicts with the law or some social norms [F, NGO representative].*

## **The institutional life**

A child's normal day in an institution is based on a strict routine. The majority of children from the boarding schools wake up at 7 am, followed by the personal hygiene, exercise and breakfast. The lessons at school start at 8 am.

After lunch, children have some "free time". During two hours, they have to be involved in different activities together with their teacher, either they are involved in extra-curricular activities, depending on the interest in the workshops available at the boarding school, or they just do what they want.

Between 4pm and 6pm, children prepare their homework in the classrooms, being supervised by their teachers. They have dinner at 7pm, followed by a number of "educational activities" organized and developed by the teachers. They go to sleep at 9pm.

This kind of program creates discontent among the older children that ask for more liberty of deciding on doing what they want and when they want.

*The life in boarding school and in family are different. We do not have a lot of possibilities. Today I want to ride a bicycle, but what shall I do if I do not have it?! To go to the director and say: "Mr. Director, give me a bicycle..." [F, 16 years, pupil, boarding school].*

The attention an educator can offer to a child is really short. They have to supervise at the same time 11-20 children, and some of the educators admitted, they give to a child about 20 minutes per day.

The key person for every child is the educator. The majority of the educators say that they know better than anyone else the children they work with- "everything they do". Actually, children talk with the educator about the superficial things, like: a fight the child had with someone and why, what grades they had at school etc. A lot of children said that at the moment when they have difficulties/anger, family personal issues - they try to solve them on their own and tell nobody about this (not to friends or educators).

*If you have some personal problems, family problems, you cannot tell about them to a friend or a teacher. You solve them alone or with the family. But problems regarding school or if "someone has upset me", then you tell the teachers, and the friends. Sometimes I ask for the teacher's help. Sometimes I do not ask for someone's help- I try to find an answer for this problem on my own. Mostly on my own...[F, 16 years, pupil, boarding school].*

The children from the boarding schools or auxiliary schools rarely have time just for them, a moment when they are alone with themselves. Especially in the auxiliary schools, where often children have behavioral problems, one of the main teacher's concerns are to continuously supervise the children, always to look after them.

Starting with the living conditions, the bedrooms for 2-8 children, in some schools up to 12-24 children - they have a limited personal and/or personalised space. Usually, in the bedroom each child has a bed and a shelf in the closet. Also they have their personal place in the classroom, where they keep their books and copybooks.

In the visited bedrooms we rarely noticed personal children's belongings, photographs, toys or clothes.

In the majority of the institutions, during the lessons all the bedrooms are locked, as well as the spaces for spending their free time.

The directors mentioned few minor abuse cases among children, the most of cases of child abuse are in the family. The institutions directors said they do not know some severe cases of abuse in the schools they run.

*The abuse does exist among them. An older child can force a younger one to do something for him, pressuring him. Always was like this, in every group [F, Director, Auxiliary Boarding school for children with special educational needs].*

The children from boarding schools affective life oscillate between positive and negative emotions. The positive emotions - happiness, interest - usually are due to other people's visits, presents, especially on holidays. The negative emotions - hate, envy, fear, anxiety - usually they are due to the traumatic events from their family lives, events they usually avoid to talk about.

*...they all have problems, even if you will talk to some of them, the ones you want, do not talk about their family problems, because they respond emotionally. They could also become aggressive as they think you humiliated them with something [M, Director, Boarding School for orphans and children without parental care].*

### **The relationship with the family**

The described above schedule is respected every working day of the week. Then, on Saturdays, Sundays and on holidays, the majority of the children go home to their parents or relatives. Some of the children stay at the boarding school. It is really painful for the children that stay at the boarding school seeing other children going home. Teachers mentioned reactions of anger, sadness, isolation, aggressiveness, jealousy among the children without parental care.

The educators are responsible to keep in touch with the child's biological/extended family, if it does exist and to convince the family to take the child home for short periods of time. However, some children, even if they have parents, either they do not want to go home, either return earlier to the boarding school due to the bad conditions and careless attitude from their families. Other parents manifest carelessness towards the child and do not respond to the educators' message.



*They do have parents, but avoid visiting them. They say “Mr. Director, I won’t go there. You can give me to do anything you want, but I am not going there” [M, Director, Boarding School for orphans and children without parental care].*

*Every teacher calls the family or those in charge with the child in 2 weeks prior the holidays start. But there are cases when no one comes to get them. And they stay here. [...] Definitely it is the biggest tragedy, when children go home, and there are children that have to stay here, no one coming to pick them up. They stay at the window, waiting for someone to come. [M, Director, Auxiliary Boarding School for children with special educational needs].*

## **Life skills**

One of the major critics of the institutionalization is raising children without the basic life skills (self help and care etc.). Instead, they learn to be dependent, do not make an effort in order to obtain something, to wait everything “ready”.

Some institutions tried to compensate these lacks through practical cooking lessons, usually at the girls’ technological educational lessons. In the majority of the institutions the table is laid and cleaned by the pupils on duty that are taking turns. They do not participate at the washing up.

Doing laundry is also on the institution’s responsibility; they usually have washing machines. However, a lot of institutions directors stated that children are encouraged to wash little clothes by hands (socks, underwear).

*We have a future plan - if we will be working in the future - to set a room where they could cook their own food [F, Director, Auxiliary Boarding School for children with special educational needs].*

*Children from the boarding school are used to get everything, unfortunately, always for free, the food is already served... They wait for the presents, if someone comes to visit them, especially the little children. Sometimes I think that this process of waiting is present until the moment of the graduation [M, Director, Boarding school for orphans and children without parental care].*

The money management is a real problem for children from the institutions. The institution’s staff state that it is very difficult, almost impossible to teach them to manage their money. A lot of children do not have pocket money, due to their parents’ inability to maintain them. But those children who get money from their parents, they misspend it, usually on toys and sweets.

The effects of this kind of behavior are crucial for those who graduate and have to live independently. Some of the directors mentioned some unjustified spending by the graduates when they receive their deserved allowances. That’s why teachers mostly use maths lessons exercises that involve money management. However, these methods are used seldom and often are insufficient.

In other cases, the community social workers get involved to help the graduates to buy a house and the really necessary things. The interviewed directors mentioned that these successful cases are more an exception.

Children are not used to think critically, to question themselves, to face the reality. A lot of them have a stereotyping thinking and often, answer questions with “what they have to” say.

*All the organized activities are necessary and I like them. [...] What would be my greatest wish? I don’t know, I did not think so much about it. Before coming here, I used to have a lot of wishes... My greatest wish is to study very well and to become a doctor. This is my greatest wish of mine [F, 15 years, pupil, boarding school].*

Life skills that the boarding school is not able to form are the family related ones. Some of the institutions directors mention that children in institutions do not receive a proper education for founding and maintaining a family.

## The professional orientation and children future

Many of the institutions directors and teachers admitted that, once they get to the last studying year, every child is professionally directed. A lot of children are advised to go to a professional school or take some short-term courses, in order to be able to earn their own living as soon as possible.

Many of the residential institutions own or have held greenhouses, agricultural land plots, mini-farms. The residential institutions directors assured that they involved only those children who wanted to work and the time they want to work, and the products collected are used exclusively for children consumption in the institutions. More than that, children developed necessary life skills for the rural life: plant growth, land dressing, animal care. However, there is no control on their work inside the institutions and on the final destination of the products.

*... One year ago we found sponsors and started building a greenhouse. We wanted to teach children some gardening skills. They are children from rural areas. It would be great when they go home to start a little business, to raise something, to know how to grow tomatoes and cucumbers seedling [M, Director, Auxiliary Boarding school for children with special educational needs].*

The majority of the residential institutions directors keep in touch with children, being aware of their fate, especially in the first year after graduation. Some directors are proud of some achievements and successes of their graduated pupils.

*A child told me once "Mr. Director, I would like to become a surgeon"! "Ok, but you think you will become a surgeon?" ... And we the directors and teachers start telling them the reality. "You know, I do not want to be a surgeon anymore". Sometimes we have to get them "back to earth" and to tell them: "Considering that you are still a little girl, but you have left from your parents a little land share, a house and you must go back there". They do not have all of them to become directors, reporters or something [M, Director, Boarding School for orphans and children without parental care].*

*The graduating students have 3 choices: those who are good at school have the possibility to attend a college or lyceum. Those who are not so good at school go to professional schools. And those who did not study at all, who are not friends with books, they go to a vocational school, where they study 8 months and then they can find a job [M, Director, Boarding School for orphans and children without parental care].*

## THE REFORM OF THE INSTITUTIONS

Even if the institutions' directors realise that a child's place is in the family, they think that the residential institutions are necessary and useful. Knowing the difficult material situation of the families, parents going to work abroad - children need protection and support services.

In this context, many of the interviewed directors have in mind some transformation plans of the institutions they run: from a residential institution for children - into a center offering social services to children and families. According to the directors, some placement services could charge a fee. Among the services mentioned by the institutions directors there are:

- Social apartments for young people in difficulty,
- Day care centers, inclusively for those from the community,
- Temporary placement centers,
- Rehabilitation children centers for children with deficiencies or disabilities.

*Earlier I said that the space allows us to make a family school. For instance, life is life and we are not all educated the same, and when the situation is bad, why not to receive the mother with her child in our home (institution)? We might slowly help improving the family situation, because this is the reality [M, Director, Boarding School for orphans and children without parental care].*

*... about the fact that the majority of parents go abroad and leave children in elders' care, it is possible to provide services for children without parental care. It could be called a temporary center, or something like this, but it would be a way out [M, Director, Boarding school for orphans and children without parental care].*

Some directors comply with the institutional reform, even if they think it has to be slow and gradual process, so that children, the families and the society are prepared for such a change. The reorganization of institutional care is accompanied by a number of concerns:

- Concern for the employees – there is risk for them to become unemployed and to emigrate,
- The lack of a sufficient number of alternative services,
- Lack of long-term control and supervision of children reintegrated and placed into alternative services,
- The quality of the education of children with deficiencies,
- The lack of response from the local authorities regarding the transformation plans.

Many of the residential institutions have a lot of assets, equipment, spaces they could use for the community well-being. The majority of the institutions were arranged and repaired due to some grants and funds (the roof repaired, window replaced, etc.), have a variety of professional workshops (carpentry, tailoring, hairdressing, IT). Considering that a lot of children are from the rural areas, many institutions have built greenhouses in order to teach them to grow plants. In the directors' opinion, these resources need to be used.

*We have a good material base - hairdressing, IT, carpentry, tailoring, crocheting and a lot of other things. Children from urban areas can come here and have activities. We can omit the vagrancy, the internet - cafés... [M, Director, Boarding School for orphans and children without parental care].*

Many of the auxiliary school directors are concerned that, once closing down the institutions, children with severe retardation could not be integrated in the community schools and could not be able to learn the main life skills- reading, writing, self care. In this case, children need special care and social services focused on their needs.

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS ABUSE, EXPLOITATIONS AND NEGLECT

„- *My mother hates me...*

- *Why? Give me the reasons for this situation.*

- *I do not talk about the boarding school, but in general.*

- *Why would you think that your mother hates you? She cannot hate you! She is your mother!*

- *She says that I am ugly, bandy...*

*And this case is not only for one mother. This is abuse. And she does not only beat her up... “*

*(Social worker, Cahul)*

**Mostly, the participants of the study described the abuse in terms of physical violence and emotional neglect.**

**Frequently, physical and psychic abuse was mentioned. The attitude towards abused children is a compassionate one.**

**The parents who abuse their children create rejection and hostility among the study participants.**

**Many specialists mentioned the society's indifference towards child abuse. Abuse is rarely reported by a member of the community. There have been identified two causes that justify this behavior: (1) people do not know whom to ask for help, (2) distrust in the state's institutions - a lot of people think that the complaint will not solve the problem.**

Both the specialists and the general public confirmed the existence of different types of abuse: emotional, psychological, physical and sexual. Mostly, the interviewed opinion leaders had the same opinion. They stated that in the Republic of Moldova different types of abuse are identified, and, in most cases, one type of abuse provokes another one.

*The abuse can be of different types: physical abuse, violence, when adults use physical force, psychological and economical abuse. An economical abuse is when the child is made to do a work that exceeds his/her labor capacities. The psychological abuse is child neglect, letting the child to drop out of school [M, 48 years, Retired Military, Chişinău].*

*Unfortunately, we meet all the abuse types, and not mentioning the verbal, moral abuse [Specialist, Directorate for Social Assistance and Family Protection, Călăraşi].*

However, in the most cases, the participants described the abuse in physical and psychological terms. A psychological abuse would be verbal abuse, emotional neglect etc. The physical abuse mostly is associated with beating and physical aggression.

### Physical abuse - using the physical force

*When the child is beaten up by the parents [F, 39 years, Accountant, Chişinău].*

*One child was late for the lessons, and he came accompanied by his father - a Roma family. I wasn't aware of the situation, as I was not the tutor of that class. And I told his father "your son is always late for lessons, never does his homework". The child looked at me with little eyes ready to cry and his father told him "Prepare your hands". And then he left. At the beginning I did not understand the meaning of what he said. At the break, I asked the child "Why you have to prepare your hands?". He said the following: "Tonight he will press my hands in the doors' break". I told the tutor about this situation. She said that his father always punishes the child in this way... [Pedagogue, Cahul]*

## The psychological/emotional abuse - emotional neglect, verbal abuse, humiliation

*A psychological abuse would be considered calling the child “stupid”, the child doing nothing bad... And this has a strong influence on the child’s mental health, especially if the child is still in the growing process [M, 44 years, Cerographer at the Arts Museum, Chişinău].*

The child exploitation is understood as forcing children to labor and other activities that are detrimental to them. It is about work that does not allow the child to study or for what the child is not physically ready yet. Some people among the general public think that moderate “household” work it is beneficial for the child education. They also mentioned that very often this work is exaggeratedly called “exploitation”.

*If the child is abused by someone who makes money out of this labor, this is bad, this is abuse. When the child works within the family, sweeps the yard, brings water, grazes the yearlings - this is called education [M, 44 years, auto mechanic, Chişinău].*

*Exploitation is when a child babysits the younger brother and does not go to school. The child is forced to stay with the brother, sister, because their mother is busy somewhere [Lyceum Director, Călăraşi].*

Both specialists and the opinion leaders expressed their negative attitude towards any forms of abuse. While some participants from the general public groups consider that a “slap with an educational purpose” in some cases is benefic for the child.

*In our country we have traditions of slapping a child - it is normal to say “where the father beats, it grows” [M, 48 years, Retired military, Chişinău].*

Some specialists groups mentioned the abuse in residential and medical institutions, and even in main-stream schools. This type of abuse must be prevented, the responsibility being totally of the institution’s staff. They meant the pedagogical abuse, when teachers humiliate the children.

*I would mention also the pedagogical abuse. This type of abuse also exists, even if we do not want or have fear to admit it, but it does exist, and nowadays we can see plenty of violence in school [Lyceum Director, Călăraşi].*

Mostly the participants have compassion for children abused by their parents. The general public manifests rejection and hostility towards the parents of these children. Especially, because in their opinion these children will follow their parents example and will repeat the violence against their own children.

*I feel anger, hate for the persons that do something like this [F, 37 years, Housewife, Chişinău].*

*What is the guilt in this entire situation?! [F, 37 years, Housewife, Chişinău].*

*When he grows up, what kind of person will he be? [M, 48 years, Retired Military, Chişinău].*

## ABUSE CAUSES

Specialists, general public and opinion leaders described a lot of cases of abuse in a family. Some participants consider that the violence is specific for Moldova. This was proved also by the existent in the popular vocabulary proverbs and sayings. The causes of abuse mentioned by the participants are the following:

- Education.
- “Inherited” violence.
- The lack of severe punishments for the child’s rights violation.
- The replacement of the general-human values with the material ones.
- Prejudices.
- The lack of faith and spiritual values.
- The attitude towards the child - “the child as a property”.
- The financial situation.

*If there is judicial rule and punishment exists, the person has to be punished. In our country, unfortunately, it is rarely implemented. This is now part of our human nature “if I break the law, I won’t be punished,*

*they will overlook this problem”. And really we overlook some facts that have to be signaled [F, Central authorities representative, Child’s Rights Protection].*

*The violence gives birth to violence; the child repeats what he/she saw at home [Psychologist, Călărași].*

*People say that violence is also transmitted: from father to son, the child does the same thing he/she saw. Especially on the male line, the violence towards the wife, the child is also factor transmitted genetically. In addition, the alcohol, psychic degradation, lack of education [Family Physician, Center of family physicians, Bălți].*

*This is a trend for our nation, it is fashionable. “the unbeaten child sits crosswise” [Specialist, Directorate for Social Assistance and Family Protection, Călărași].*

Both the participants of discussions and the opinion leaders consider that all the society is responsible for the family abuse and neglect: from the state bodies to every single person. In their opinion, the biggest responsibility lies with the family, because there the children learn how to get along with their close persons.

*Generally, I think that the family is responsible for everything [Deputy Director, Lyceum, Bălți].*

In some of the participants’ opinion, it is very difficult to prevent the abuse in the family, especially the physical and sexual one. They think that in an institution the abuse prevention possibility is bigger, and they have to use this opportunity.

*The abuse is almost impossible to prevent, especially the sexual abuse [Social Worker, Directorate for Child’s Rights Protection, Chișinău].*

*Especially within the family. You cannot go and visit a family, as you do not know what you could find there. There are also so called “good” families where there is abuse of children [Social Worker, Temporary Placement Center for Minors, Chișinău].*

*An example would be the abuse at school, in hospitals. We can identify some cases. If there is one doctor on duty - at one floor there could be up to 5-6 on duty doctors - nurses, how on earth a sexual act between the children in the room could happen? What does this mean? [Inspector for Minors, Police Station, Chișinău].*

The general public sees especially the parents fault for the existence of violence in the Republic of Moldova. However, some participants, especially those among the general public, admit that parents sometimes “accidentally” show violence and this is not because they are used to educate the child in this way. Others cannot see the limits between “a strong slap” and the proper violence.

## HOW ARE THE ABUSE CASES SOLVED!?

The majority of the specialists mentioned that our society is just at the beginning of learning what the abuse is and where they have to ask for help if they know an abuse case. They also mentioned that today people know better where to go for help and to inform about an abuse case.

*Today we identify a new phenomenon: people learning to ask for the police help. This is a situation that before was not really wide-spread. Before if I had one or two requests, I thought I have a lot of work to do. Now, all day the phone keeps ringing with new requests, you cannot even go out [Inspector for Minors, Călărași].*

One of the central authorities’ representatives is a little bit more skeptical about general public knowledge of human rights, as well as about the institutions they have to ask for help.

Mostly, the authorities find about the abuse cases from the following sources (in order of their frequency):

- Professors.
- Teachers.
- Doctors.

- Social workers.
- Other children.
- Relatives, neighbors.
- The school psychologist.

*Mostly we find out about the abuse cases from doctors [Lawyer, Directorate for Child's Right Protection, Chişinău].*

*In case children trust someone, they could tell him/her about the abuse [Social Worker, Elders and children asylum, Bălţi].*

However, often the community is indifferent to these situations. Rarely the victim's relatives or neighbors ask for help at the specialized institutions in order to solve an abuse or violence case. Mostly, people ask for help when it is the last solution or when this situation becomes stressful for everyone around.

*People have their own problems on mind [Inspector for Minors, Călăraşi].*

*The neighbors rarely ask for help. And they ask for help only in case the noise and sounds bother them, or when the windows shake due to the noise [Inspector for Minors, Călăraşi].*

*They ask for help only when they have no other option [Social Worker, Town Hall Budeşti].*

One of the interviewed central authority representative concern was related to the fact that the law enforcement representatives often do not trust children when they confess they were abused or exploited. In this respect, the expert suggested the need to employ qualified persons in order to work with these children, because they cannot be treated as other victims or adult witnesses. In addition, people do not trust the jurisdiction.

*Always, in all the cases, the police officers never believe that the child is telling the truth. They do not know how to treat a child, what is important, and the officers must know this fact and not to treat them as they do with the adults. The child has to attend together with his parent and with a psychologist. Yes, they may be telling lies, but a parent and a psychologist can identify these [F, Central authority's representative, Child's Rights Protection].*

*People are not content at all, and especially, they do not trust the police, prosecution and the court. We are now in the middle of a survey, we visit schools, ask children if they trust the police, the prosecution or the court, and the answer is zero, no one trusts them. They do not act immediately as they received the report. They could start to work on the second, third day, after a week, a month, and unfortunately, they are inefficient, that's why people do not trust them [F, Central Authority representative, Child's Rights Protection].*

The specialists noticed that sometimes also their colleagues from educational institutions, hospitals are indifferent.

Both specialists and opinion leaders mentioned the existence of few courts in charge for solving the abuse and violence cases. As well as the existence of some properly designed laws and mechanisms. However, a lot of cases are not solved because the laws "contradict each other" or because the implementation of the judge's decision is not supervised.

*About "abuse", now there is the possibility to apply a protection order. It does not really work [Jurist, Directorate for Child's Right Protection, Chişinău].*

*The court issues orders, but how to carry them out? The abusive parent have to leave home for 6 months, But he refuses to leave saying that this is his property. And also there is a law providing the right to the property. They contradict each other. In addition, the police have to supervise and ensure. Once the order gets to the police department, it remains there...[Lawyer, Directorate for Child's Rights Protection, Chişinău].*

The specialists groups mentioned the 45th Law on family violence. Some of them think it is useful, while others think it is “sensitive” and difficult to use.

*There is the 45th Law on solving violence problems. Often, this mechanism does not work [Specialist, Directorate for Social Assistance and Family Protection, Călărași].*

*Generally, people are taken to court for family violence, even as a penal case, especially after the 45<sup>th</sup> Law came into force. There are families that had some restrictions imposed and the case was solved. Last month when we visited the family, we noticed that the family lives together without some problems they had at the beginning, I think the father takes a medicine based treatment with the neurologist. The children are very pleased and say that their father does not consume alcohol and doesn't manifest violence in the family [Inspector for Minors, Călărași].*

Among the shortcomings of methods used in dealing with abuse cases the participants mentioned the temporary placement of children in residential institutions during the process. But this situation can last up to a few years.

*In an abuse case, according to our previous experience, in order to obtain a final and irrevocable sentence, generally a process can last up to 4 years. During this period the child lives in an institution [lawyer, Directorate for Child's Rights Protection, Chișinău].*

Normally, the specialists that deal with abuse and domestic violence cases try first of all to intervene in the family with educational/training activities. They try to talk with the child's parents, relatives in order to help them to return to a decent life style. Only in hopeless cases are children separated from the family.

*We went straight to the facts'; we talked with both the mother and the grandmother. One of their neighbors called us telling that the mother was hardly beating her child with an aluminum ware. Thanks to our discussions, she calmed down. It was a sort of revenge: “you are like your father, as bad as your father!” [Social Worker, Sîpoteni com., Călărași].*

*Since the new law was issued, from last year, the system is functioning better. And we had fewer cases like these. It is a fact that the problems can be solved without deprivation of parental rights [Inspector for Minors, Călărași].*

Specialists are rather pessimistic regarding solving the abuse cases. Few specialists think that in the Republic of Moldova almost no one solves the abuse cases, and often, children have to confront their problems on their own.

*Actually, the majority of cases are not solved, only for the reasons that we are not informed, or people do not want personally to ask for help. Hence, the majority of the cases remain unsolved by the judicial system, from the police to court [Inspector for Minors, Călărași].*

## SOLUTIONS

Both specialists and the general public consider that, in order to prevent and solve the abuse problems, we need all social actors' involvement.

The majority of the participants of group discussions and opinion leaders talked about raising public awareness and making the society responsible and more sensitive to other people's difficulties. This can be achieved by establishing a trust-based relationship between the state and its population. They will inform the adequate services about an abuse case if people trust the state institutions:

- The trust that they will benefit from witnesses protection;
- The trust that actions will be taken in order to solve the case;
- The trust that he/she does the right thing.

*People do not trust either the justice or the police. [...] Unfortunately, if the neighbor hears the child being beaten up, why should he call the authorities? He knows they will not come, or if they come, the poor neighbor will have to go through all the courts. That's why they just say “this is not my problem!” [Jurist, Directorate for Child's Rights Protection, Chișinău].*



<b>The state</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Severe punishments for the abusers</li> <li>• Strict control of the families in difficulty</li> <li>• Bureaucracy liquidation in solving the abuse cases</li> <li>• Creation of a team that would be ready to act always (at night, on holidays)</li> <li>• Temporary placement centers in the localities</li> <li>• Witness protection</li> </ul>	
<b>Local public authorities</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring families from the rural areas</li> </ul>	
<b>Mass-media</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less movies with violence scenes</li> <li>• Reflection of solved cases in mass media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articles about children's rights</li> <li>• Radio and TV shows for children</li> </ul>
<b>Community</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public organizations</li> <li>• To be more sensitive to the families around them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not to be indifferent</li> </ul>
<b>Family services</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the family - child educational and persuasion methods</li> <li>• Psychological service for parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent seminars in schools and kindergartens on children educational methods</li> </ul>

## NEEDED SPECIALISTS SKILLS

Among the needed skills and knowledge of a person working with children, our participants mentioned a lot the socio-human ones. Also the children specialists must know how to establish a relationship with the child. The skills and knowledge mentioned by the participants are the following:

### Abilities:

- abilities of communication with children
- the power to persuade

### Attitude:

- showing a tolerant attitude towards every child

### Knowledge from different fields:

- psychology
- pedagogy
- judiciary
- medicine

The participants of specialist groups admitted that existence of subjects and fields they would like to be trained in. Mostly, they were talking about: psychology, communication in difficult situations, working methods with the parents etc.

*I would like training in psychology, all the persons working with children have to benefit of training in the field. Not just one training, but systematic, monthly psychology courses. [Specialist, Directorate for Child's Rights Protection, Cahul].*

*The psychology of a child from a vulnerable family, his/her behavior, what he has in mind. Sometimes we talk to them, but we feel we have no access to them. This is the moment when we feel impotent and think that maybe the child did not understand what I said [Lyceum Director, Călărași].*

## CHILD'S VOICE AND HIS PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

*„We listen to them, and we want them to get used to being listened to and to think that they also can make mistakes, like we do. By discussing we always solve the problems. When an adult did a mistake he has to say: “Now I did it wrong. Let's think how to do it better”. The trust in that adult will increase ...”*

*(Psychologist, Cahul)*

**Both the specialists and the general public consider that child's voice is very important at deciding about his/her future.**

**Child's opinion has to be heard, not necessarily implemented, as in some cases child's wills are against his/her welfare.**

**Some residential institutions directors admit that it is impossible that all children's wishes to be heard and accomplished, but there are some solutions: procedures involving children discussion, looking for a compromise between requirements and possibilities, tolerance education.**

The majority of the participants and opinion leaders agreed that children's opinions are very important and must be heard. The decision has to be made according the fair aspects of the situation, because not all the time the children's wishes coincide with what is good for them.

*I think the child has to be listened to, and we have to consider the reasons why he/she wants to stay with his mother. This means to be able to see a big picture. But his/her opinion always must be listened to. Maybe sometimes we have to pay attention to their reasons [F, 39 years, Lecturer, Chişinău].*

*He/she must be listened to. But like I said, it is different from one case to another. It is a must to hear the child, to give him/her moral support, but the conclusion has to be done attentively [M, mayor, a Chişinău suburb].*

The specialists mentioned that, in order to find out which is a child's real will, this requires work with special trained persons. Also, children could say something just from fear. There are only few specialized persons in this field, that's why the decision-making process according to a child's will could be done very subjectively.

*The child must be heard. The child must express his/her opinion. Probably the specialists know better how to act [Inspector for Minors, Police Station, Chişinău mun. sect. Centru].*

*The specialists should work in private with every single child. To be able to hear exactly the child's opinion, not being influenced by others [Pedagogue, Horodişte village, Călăraşi].*

Another important mentioned aspect was the age criteria. Both the specialists and the general public think that child's opinion and wishes have to be taken into consideration starting from a certain age.

*Starting with a certain age, when the child understands everything, we have to consider his/her opinion. Sometimes he/she wants a lot of things, and this is not right [Pediatrician, Territorial Medical Association Center, Chişinău].*

*By law, the children opinion is taken into consideration starting with the age of 10 [Inspector for Minors, Călăraşi].*

The majority of the participants mentioned that unlike children that grow in families, in the institutions children are not listened to and heard. These children do not have the possibility to talk with a parent or simply an adult. One way to get everything out from children's minds is having a diary or to write on a piece of paper all they would like to say. Few participants consider they could talk to the institutional teacher or psychologist.

*Write everything down on a piece of paper or in a copybook [F, 37 years, Housewife, Chişinău].*

*Some of them complain to the teacher... [M, 44 years, Auto mechanic, Chişinău].*

The majority of the opinion leaders agreed that in the residential institutions children's voice is not heard at all. Their opinion does not interest almost anyone. More than that, the Church representative consider that children are heard only when the boarding schools are the focus of some important persons or institutions.

*It happens only when the television comes and films them, when the prime-minister, the president visits them. All the children look great, all get filmed, and children are happy and smile by force [M, Priest].*

## HOW CAN CHILDREN MAKE THEM HEARD?

There is some optimism regarding possible way to make children voices heard. The participants showed some methods that could help children's voice to be heard. In the table below we see the solutions mentioned by the groups' participants.



*I think a child has to know his/her rights and know where to ask for help. To be informed [F, 39 years, Accountant, Chişinău].*

*There are programs, NGOs that check out these schools and take actions, they are analysed at the administration and can be stopped [M, 48 years, Retired military, Chişinău].*

*To have mass-media's access in institutions [Specialist, Directorate for Social Assistance and Family Protection, Călăraşi].*

Some opinion leaders think the responsibility to listen and hear the children belongs to teachers, educators, ombudsmen.

*The child's voice is very important, even the ombudsman role is to make children's voice heard by the important decision-making factors. The ombudsman is like children's spokesman [F, Central Authorities representative, Child's Rights Protection].*

*Probably it has to be a case referral system. Maybe a hot line where children can call, if we talk about children from institutions, but we do not know if they have access at the phone [F, NGO representative].*

## SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

„Child protection does not mean that we have to give them money. Child protection is the help to the family and it is not a material help”

(Child Protection Specialist, Ungheni)

The specialists consider that both at the legal and conceptual level, the Moldova family and child protection system is well organized. However, there is something missing; the mechanisms and the functionality, a better cooperation between the institutions involved in the child protection process.

More attention has to be paid to the prevention of difficulties. However, child protection specialists interfere more in already well developed situations.

The civil servant that participates at the law and policies development must have a stronger bond with the regions.

The expertise level and staff training have to be improved, both at the local and central levels.

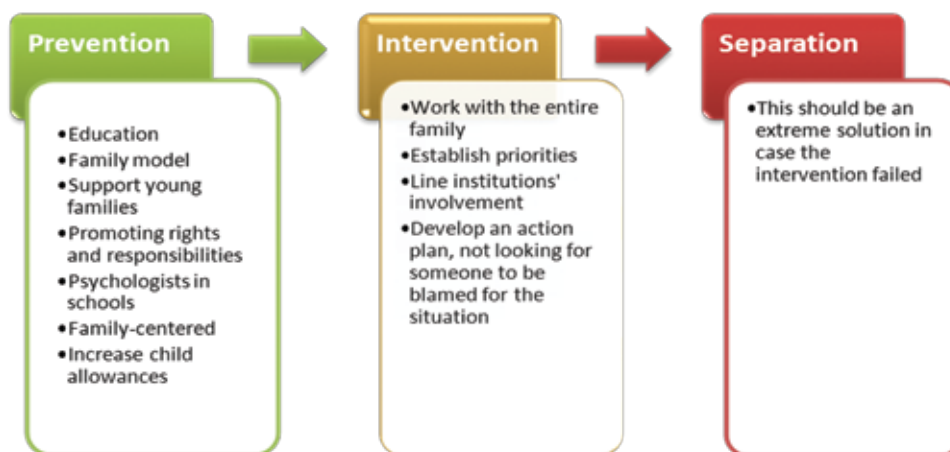
Staff employment in the child protection system has to be done exclusively on a skills basis, both at the local and central levels.

The social services for children and families have to extend also in the rural areas, especially for those with special needs and in difficulty. Raising public awareness on children and family problems, information on interfering methods, civic education, trust in the institutions and promotion of successful models.

In several group discussions the participants' opinion, as well as of the NGOs representatives, was that the difficult situation faced by the families and children from Moldova could and has to be prevented. The prevention is the first stage in the struggle with the difficulties the families face. The correctly planned intervention is very important, in cases when family already is in difficulty. Child separation from the family is considered to be an extreme solution that must be used only when the family cannot be helped anymore.

*We have to start with the parents, to help them. First of all, there are psychologists needed in work with parents. There were cases where the parents could not solve one child situation, not necessarily an abuse case, and it was enough to find some books or articles about psychology, how to talk and to explain something to the child and they solved the situation [F, 39 years, Accountant, Chişinău].*

*Everything depends on the family, if we want good results and to raise a good person. We, the specialists, have to support and help the family. The focus is on the specialist, the family being on the second place. The priorities need to be changed [Inspector for Minors, Police Station, Chişinău mun., sect. Centru].*



Some specialists groups mentioned of people working with the families in difficulty have a severe workload. Mostly, in child protection institutions the specialists work both with the prevention and the intervention matters. Due to the increased need of intervention, the specialists do not have time for the prevention activities.

*Child protection does not mean to give them money. Child protection is the help to the family, as it is not a material help, is something different. Another thing I did not mention. The same specialist could never, but never to be in charge of both prevention and consequences. But in Moldova they do it - a single specialist has to do [Specialist, Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection, Ungheni].*

Another discussed aspect by some participants was about the material support for families in difficulties. Several specialists are against this help, as it creates a certain dependence and families stop doing something on their own. One solution proposed was Romania's experience in this domain.

*There were a lot of observations and indignation regarding this material support. Why? Because people live really well! This is not a support, it is encouragement for alcoholism. There are families that receive this support and party after that [Social Worker, Town Hall Budești].*

*Romanians did something different - all the Roma people get on the street and have to sleep the roads. The persons that do public work, those get the material support [F, 47 years, Democratic Party Secretary, Călărași].*

*The state is not the one who controls the public money offered to a citizen as a material support. They have to find methods and criteria on how this money can be used by these persons. If I would have the chance to decide, I would give them nothing, but there are children in those families and they really need help [F, Central authority's representative, Child's Rights Protection].*

## WHAT WOULD THE SPECIALISTS CHANGE IN THE PROTECTION SYSTEM?

### The legislation

- To be developed by people from the field, that have strong bonds with the local level,
- More drastic,
- More functional,
- To respect the family's/society's needs,
- Town halls to have more responsibilities.

*Laws must not be developed in the office [M, 35 years, Local consultant, Călărași]*

*As I said before, the laws have to be more drastic [Pediatrician, Territorial Medical Center, Chișinău mun.].*

### Raising society's awareness

- Seminars with pupils/students about families in difficulty,
- Solved cases and some successful models reflected in mass media,
- Raising trust in the institutions.

*There is a lot of work to do and it is a big problem - society's attitude towards the children in difficulty and prophylactic work with the teenagers [Social worker, Regina Pacis Foundation, Chișinău].*

### Staff/ staff training

- Train specialists starting with universities,
- Including optional courses at the universities, taught by practitioners,
- Institution/organization staff training,
- Training of more social workers and pedagogues,
- At least one psychologist in each educational institution,
- Employment of persons qualified in the field, according to severe recruitment procedures

*If we discuss about the social assistance at the faculty level, we have it in 3 institutions: USM, Pedagogical University and ULM. There are possibilities to include optional courses, why it is not done at the dean or head of department level? To select some teachers from the child protection field and have post-graduate studies to create some optional courses with practical participation of students. Actually, the law on education stipulates optional courses, but they keep including only theoretical [Lawyer, Directorate for Child's Rights Protection, Chişinău].*

### **System development/ improvement**

- Mechanism that would allow law enforcement (access to the documents, transportation, material resources, financial coverage etc.)
- Adequate staff remuneration,
- The alignment of all the protection system in the republic (differences between the child protection system in Chisinau and the rest of the republic),
- The elaboration of some mechanism that would take children's opinions into consideration,
- Inclusive education.

*I would change the child protection institution. In Chisinau there is one system, here is another one. It needs a viable structure [Specialist, Directorate for Social Assistance and Family Protection, Călăraşi].*

*There need to be more social pedagogues, psychologists and social workers, but under excellent selection criteria, not just to be [lawyer, Directorate for Child's Rights Protection, Chişinău].*

*We have got the law, it comes into force, but still do not have the mechanisms. Elaborating the law, they do not take into consideration our real possibilities and how it will be applied [Jurist, Directorate for Child's Rights Protection, Chişinău mun.].*

*People working with children need to be financially motivated, I mean remunerated. It is a really difficult work [F, 32 years, Shop assistant, Chişinău].*

### **Special services for children/families**

- Building of institutions/extracurricular classes,
- The elaboration of a development program for children,
- Mandatory trainings for young families,
- Education of the spiritual values in children,
- Abandonment prevention activities,
- Offering some judicial and psychological services to families in difficulty.

# THE IMAS-INC CHIȘINĂU COMPANY PRESENTATION

## Who we are

Our company was founded in 2001, as an IMAS S.A. Bucuresti branch, IMAS -INC Chisinau has 19 years of the mother company, as well as 10 years of experience in carrying out qualitative and quantitative studies on the market of the Republic of Moldova.

Whether they were international or local partners, everyone enjoyed the accuracy of the data we provide. We are the ones who imposed new qualitative standards of data collecting in the Republic of Moldova and we did not stop here. We intend to reach new levels, attentively recruiting our team members - employers and collaborators - by specializing every employee and by quality control measures at every projects level and all this work is done knowing how important is to base your decisions on reliable data.

## Vision

Within each quantitative research project we focus on 3 aspects that we do not only respect, but also continuously improve them: data accuracy, the value and respect of the deadlines. Based on a well-structured and organized collecting data department (5 regional coordinators, more than 200 experienced interview operators), on a severe work control (2 branches in Chisinau, plus other locations in the republic, 55 laptops, 30 PCs, PBX, servers etc.) and experienced researchers , quantitative studies can be conducted locally and internationally, regardless of sample volumes required.

## Solutions

Using a wide range of qualitative and quantitative services, our company is able to meet any market studies, audience, social policy research. Along with the gathered experience over the years, in addition we can say that our company benefits of computer assisted computer interviewing (CATI) or using the portable computers (CAPI), this being in premiere in the Republic of Moldova.

## Offered advantages

- Gathered and proved experience in studies carrying out in the last 10 years on the market of the Republic of Moldova;
- Methodological expertise for high-difficulty rating polls, exit-polls;
- Excellent trained human resources at all levels : management, researchers;
- The capacity to organize and plan the operations, discipline in their execution (procedural documents);
- Modern, fast and low cost modern interviewing techniques - CATI, CAPI;
- Needed facilities to carry out research projects at the highest standards;
- Consulting after completing the research projects;
- And the last, but not the least, the best price-quality ratio.

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