



The reform must be continued after 2012

**The** outcomes and challenges of the reform in the residential child care system were the subjects of a roundtable held by EveryChild Moldova and Radio Moldova.

Page 10-11

## ! Interview

# Residential system reform – an imperative call

*Interview with Mihail SLEAHTITCHI,  
Minister of Education*

*- Mr. Minister, the term of the strategy on the reform in the residential child care system expires in 2012. What measures will the Ministry of Education take to finalise this complex process?*

- To finalise the reform of the residential child care system, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the development partners will extend the activities laid down in the

National Strategy and National Action Plan on the reform in the residential child care system. A new Action Plan will be drawn up and the Framework-Plan for the transformation of the residential child care system will be revised, so that 13 residential institutions are closed down/reorganised within 2011 – 2014.

Page 8-9



## The reform of residential facilities brings children back in the family and community

4 years after the launch of reform of the residential system, the number of institutionalised children has decreased by almost 5000

According to Valentin Cru-  
du, head of Pre-univer-  
sity Education Department  
at the Ministry of Education,  
the objective of the residential  
system reform is to reduce by  
50% the number of children  
in residential care by 2012 and  
to develop alternative services  
for children. While there were  
11500 children in residential  
institutions at the beginning  
of the reform, this number de-  
creased to 6700 by 1st September  
2011.

Part of the deinstitutiona-  
lised children were reintegra-  
ted in their biological families,  
others were placed in alterna-  
tive services – Foster Care, Fa-  
mily-Type Homes, community  
centers, etc.

According to Valentin Cru-  
du, an important element of  
the reform is the development  
of inclusive education. The  
Ministry of Education shall  
finalise the action plan on im-



plementation of a programme  
in this field, approved by the  
Government. “This program-  
me will enable the inclusion  
in mainstream schools of chil-  
dren with different disabilities  
and special educational needs  
who are currently studying in  
auxiliary schools”, the official  
from the Ministry said.

The Programme on Inclu-  
sive Education Development  
for 2011-2020, approved by  
the Moldovan Government  
makes inclusive education one  
of the educational priorities.  
This document entails provid-  
ing conditions for inclusion  
of deinstitutionalised children  
from residential care and the  
school enrollment of children  
with special educational needs  
in mainstream education.

The national strategy on  
the reform of the residential  
child care system started in  
2007 and finalises in 2012.

## Tens of children were reintegrated in the family in Floresti and Ialoveni

The results of the deinstitutiona-  
lisation process and of the inclu-  
sive education piloting programme in  
Floresti and Ialoveni were discussed at a  
roundtable on “Implementing govern-  
mental reforms in the field of child rights  
protection” attended by representatives  
of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of  
Labour, Social Protection and Family, Mi-  
nistry of Health and Ministry of Finance.

The local authorities were also pre-  
sent at the event, as well as the represen-  
tatives of the Community Association  
“Lumos Foundation Moldova”, which  
supports the implementation of reforms

in the field of child rights protection.

At the opening, the Vice-minister of  
Education Tatiana Poting, said that re-  
forms in education are necessary, becau-  
se they benefit not only children, but the  
entire society too. Partnerships between  
central and local authorities and non-  
governmental organisations are also  
necessary and welcomed, because they  
lead to the implementation of reforms.

Within 2010-2011, 154 children who  
had previously been placed in residential  
institutions in Marculesti, Ialoveni and  
Chisinau, were included in mainstream  
educational institutions.

All teachers involved in the develo-  
pment of inclusive education in Floresti  
and Ialoveni districts received speciali-  
sed training in this area.

According to participants in the “ro-  
undtable”, the priority tasks related to  
child rights protection are to develop  
family support and early intervention  
services for families in difficulty, inclu-  
sive education services for children with  
special educational needs and social  
services for children at risk (foster care,  
family-type homes).

## UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children – in a child-friendly language

A premiere in Europe is the fact that the Republic of Moldova will adapt the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children in a child-friendly language. According to Natalia Semeniuc, child participation consultant at “EveryChild” Moldova, the key message of the paper is that every child must grow in a family and, when this is not possible, the state must provide protection to the child in family-type alternative services.

The document will be published within the “Protecting children in Moldova from family separation, violence, abuse, neglect & exploitation” Project.

The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children were approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations. The Republic of Moldova is one of the first countries in the region to align to this international document.

The provisions of the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children aim at improving the enforcement of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the relevant provisions of other international instruments on the protection and well-being of children without parental care or at risk of getting in this situation.

The “Alternative care” of children refers to any type of child care that substitutes the biological family. The alternative care may represent residential care or family-type care, as well as foster care, family-type homes or guardianship.

After the joining of Moldova to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993, our country undertook to develop a system that would serve the best interest of the child and would respect children as subjects of rights not as objects of care.

In line with the UN recommendations, our country should diversify and

develop types of social services and introduce the necessary changes for institutions in charge for child protection, such as the policy and legal framework, the financial flows and budgeting, professionals, administration bodies, quality assurance systems to reflect the modern approaches to family-based child care.

***The “Alternative care” of children refers to any type of child care that substitutes the biological family. The alternative care may represent residential care or family-type care, as well as foster care, family-type homes or guardianship.***



# Residential system reform – an imperative call

Interview with Mihail SLEAHTITCHI, Minister of Education

Continued from page 1

*- In 2007, when the reform of the residential system was launched, there were over 12 thousand children in 68 residential institutions. How many institutions have been closed down so far? How many children have returned in their family and community?*

- As a result of reform, 11 residential institutions subordinated to the Ministry of Education have been closed down and one has been reorganised in a Facility of social services for children and young people in difficulty (Cahul). Currently, there are 50 residential institutions subordinated to the Ministry of Education where 4814 children are placed.

Of the 11 institutions that have been dissolved, 4 are auxiliary schools, 4 are boarding-schools, 1 is a children's home, and 2 are special institutions. After the closure of the 11 institutions, 600 children have been reintegrated in their biological/extended family and 100 have been placed in family substitute services.

*- How prepared are families, communities and schools to accept children who have been isolated from the community for years?*

- The reintegration of children in families and communities is a complex process and its success depends on how professionals manage to prepare children and parents, the school and the whole community in order to identify situations that determined their separation and its consequences.

The Ministry of Education, with support of UNICEF and in partnership with non-governmental organisations that are active in this field and local public authorities, have provided multiple trainings to parents, professionals, local authorities and other stakeholders involved in child rights protection; support services have been created (day centres, resource centres for inclusive education within schools); psycho pedagogical assistance services have been established in 5 districts/municipalities.

During the reform, inclusive education services have been created in 158 pre-university institutions (nurseries, schools) for about 990 children.

An important activity carried out with the support of EveryChild/USAID is the inclusion of child participation as a platform for consultation, monitoring and evaluation of local policies on child protection by creating Advisory Boards of Children. The members of the Boards take part in children's needs assessment so that the voices of children without parental care are heard.

In addition, the personnel of all residential institutions that are being reformed has been informed about the goal, risks and opportunities of reform, as well as about the best practices existing in this field. Fa-

**During the reform, inclusive education services have been created in 158 pre-university institutions (nurseries, schools) for about 990 children.**

milies where children are reintegrated are reassessed and monitored.

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

- The success of deinstitutionalisation depends on a series of institutional, organisational and human factors and one of the most important is to secure ongoing and stable funding targeted to the final user – the child in difficulty and his/her family.

In this context, it is necessary to find a way to transfer the funds from residential institutions to district budgets. This challenge has two variables: part of the funds must be transferred from education to social care and from the central budget to local budgets. In this way, the financial responsibility for the child's education and care is transferred to the local authority where the child has the residence. This is achieved through the financial reallocation of funds from residential institutions to

district budgets, for the exclusive development and funding of family-type services, subject to the number of children in difficulty. The change does not take place immediately, but as the number of children in residential care decreases. This is one of the priorities of the reform in residential child care system. In this context, 7 residential institutions that were in the state property have been transmitted to the territorial-administrative units for free with the consent of the district councils that received them.

At present, the Ministry of Education, in partnership with the Ministry of Finance and NGOs active in the field, is drawing up a by-law that sets out the mechanism for redirecting funds from the residential system to the social and educational system.

*- In your view, what are the weaknesses of reform? What aspects will the Ministry of Education focus its efforts on at the next stage of reform?*

- The reform of the residential child care system entails a number of actions intended to enforce the right of the child to grow up in family environment. Any reform implies a difficult process of change, which is based on a new mindset concerning the upbringing and education of the child, by reducing the number of residential institutions, increasing the access to community-based and family-type services, reducing the number of children in residential care through prevention of institutionalisation and reintegration of children in families or family-type services.

In this context, there are several challenges of the reform in the residential child care system.

It is about the resistance to change by groups of professionals, civil society, etc. The statement that the reform is required and is supported by very strong legal and economic reasons is not sufficient. Every change is initiated by central public authorities, different social actors, but must also be supported and implemented by local authorities and professionals. It is also well known that

the attitude and practice are aspects that are hard to change and require a lot of time.

Other problems are generated by the poorly developed network of primary and specialised social services. A system that, for decades, relied only on residential care and did not provide other responses to children in difficulty requires time and resources to become socially flexible and varied. The situation differs from one territorial-administrative unit to another, from rural areas to urban ones, but some gaps can still be detected in the social service system, such as the shortage and lack of the following services: day care for children with severe disabilities; home-based care, respite care and family-type services for children with disabilities, for children under 1 and for minor mothers and for children in conflict with the law (specialised foster care, family-type homes, the latter having a discriminatory aspect in that they do not accept children with disabilities); consultancy and family counseling; family support to prevent separation of the child from the family and to provide post-reintegration assistance; inclusive education, etc.

In this context, it should be noted that the success of reform is conditioned by the need to create and develop community-based and specialised services. Every community must develop a minimum system of social services, subject to the size and needs of the community, without which child protection is impossible.

The economic crisis is also a challenge in the reform of the residential system. The transfer of children from residential care to substitute services with the provision of complex support, including financial support requires funds and resources. Therefore, it can be counterproductive to talk about short-term savings and cost reductions. Considerable resources will be required for re-qualifying groups of professionals in the social, medical and educational field; money will be necessary to employ and train the personnel; for recruitment, training and development of substitute services, etc.

If the development of alternative services is not associated with the progressive closure of the existing institutions, it may happen that new services will run in parallel with residential institutions. Moreover, at the early stage of implementation, there is a risk of double expenses for the two systems operating in parallel. Such a system cannot be supported on long-term - especially, in case of an economic crisis, because the authorities might prefer to dissolve the new services in favour of the old services that are already in place.

*- Please list several objectives that are to be reached under the reform in terms of its utility?*

- We will continue implementing the Programme on Inclusive Education Development in the Republic of Moldova for 2011-2020. In addition, we intend to extend the

reform in auxiliary and special residential institutions. The National Strategy and Action Plan on the reform of residential child care system for 2007-2012, which expires in 2012 focused on boarding-schools for orphan children and children without parental care. Since 2009, the reform of residential care has extended on special boarding-schools and auxiliary schools, only 8 institutions being included in this process. In this context, it should be stated that a priority for the education system is the need to highlight the continuity of the residential system reform with focus on auxiliary schools and boarding-schools (24 auxiliary schools and 7 special boarding-schools where 3000 children are placed) within the Country Programme Moldova-UNICEF 2013-2017.

Another area we will focus our efforts on is the update of the procedure for training teachers for mainstream preschool, primary and secondary education: extending the components that refer to the activities delivered for children in difficulty, etc.

Work is being done on developing a mechanism for supporting poor families that have children of school age, based on a direct link between the amount of the allowance and the degree of attendance of the education institution.

In addition, we will make efforts to extend the volume and diversity of specialised services addressed to children in difficulty, especially in rural areas.

*- Thank you for the interview.*



# The reform must be continued after 2012

The outcomes and challenges of the reform in the residential child care system were the subjects of a roundtable held by EveryChild Moldova and Radio Moldova.

**Valentin CRUDU,**  
*head of Directorate for Mainstream  
Preschool, Primary and Secondary  
Education of the Ministry  
of Education:*

“The national strategy on the reform in the residential child care system was launched in 2007. The goal of the reform is to reduce by 50% the number of children in residential care by 2012 and to develop alternative services for children. While there were 11500 children in

residential institutions at the beginning of the reform, this number decreased to 6700 by 1st September 2011. This means that over 5000 children left the residential system in four years. While 1000-1200 children were entering the residential institutions five years ago, this number has decreased by 50%. In addition, there are many institutions where moratorium has been established on admission in the first forms. These are the institutions to be transformed in line with the order of the Minister of Education.

Part of the deinstitutionalised children were reintegrated in their biological families, others were placed in alternative services – Foster Care, Family-Type Homes, community centres, etc.

An important element of the reform is the development of inclusive education. By the end of this year, the Ministry of Education shall finalise the action plan on implementation of a programme in this field, approved by the Government. This programme will enable the inclusion in mainstream schools of children with different disabilities and special educa-

tional needs who are currently studying in auxiliary schools.

Starting with 2013, the education system in Moldova will adopt a new formula of funding – per child. This will enable us to provide more funds to schools that will have children with disabilities, because their expenses will be higher. In all institutions of this kind, support teachers will be employed and recovery activities will be delivered. Funds will also be necessary to modernise and adapt the infrastructure of institutions so that chil-

dren with special needs can move around in the school freely.

In 2012, at the end of implementation of the National Strategy on the reform in the residential child care system, an international conference will be held where the outcomes will be presented and the plans for the future will be outlined. We will make suggestions to extend the term of the national strategy on the reform in the residential child care system for the following five years”.



**Stela GRIGORAS,**  
*director of "EveryChild" Moldova:*

“The success of any reform depends on the extent to which its promoters manage to change people’s mentality and attitude. There is still work to do in this regard, although there are no more voices today saying they disagree with the need and importance of these changes.



In the districts where the reform has been implemented, many children have been reintegrated in their families and included in the mainstream education. However, problems existed and still exist. One of them is the school inclusion of deinstitutionalised children. We consider that a legislative framework to facilitate this process is necessary. There are deficiencies with the social community-based services as well. This type of services must be consolidated and further developed to handle the large number of children at risk of being separated from their family, and children who are to be reintegrated from the residential system in community-based services.

Another problem we need to focus on is the redirecting of funds from the residential system to social services. These resources would significantly contribute to the development of services for children and to the consolidation of community schools so that they can provide training to all children with different educational needs.

With the support of our organisation, local authorities of Falesti, Calarasi and Ungheni districts managed to reintegrate over 300 children in the biological or extended family and include them in the mainstream educational system. All schools from these three districts were included in an intensive capacity building programme in inclusive education.

Unfortunately, the current legislation does not stipulate any ways of redirecting funds from the residential system to NGOs that develop social services. The efficiency of this practice is proven by the



experience of developed countries that launched these reforms many years ago.

Our authorities will identify the available resources within the system that are used inefficiently sometimes and will support the families at risk so that child separation from the parents is prevented”.

**Viorica DUMBRAVEANU,**  
*head of Family and Child Protection Department within the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family:*



“Every case of family reintegration is a huge effort of a group of professionals who assessed the situation of the biological and extended family and identified an alternative form of

child protection if necessary.

Unfortunately, many children cannot be reintegrated in their biological or extended family. The success of reform of residential institutions depends directly on how we manage to open and develop social services. We acknowledge that the budgets are limited and it is important to redirect the funds from the residential system to social and educational services.

The budget of residential institutions must be reduced because of the reduction in the number of children and must be redirected to the development of social and educational services with a view to provide inclusive education and to cover children with special needs.

I would also like to refer to the quality of social services. When a child is deinstitutionalised, we need to make sure that the service the child will be placed in is of high quality. In this regard, we have already submitted a draft law on the accreditation of social service providers to the Government. This initiative is envisaged for 2012 on the agenda of the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family.

A significant role in reducing the number of children in residential institutions is played by prevention of institutionalisation. It is necessary to develop and implement the early intervention service at a national level. We are glad that there is national collaboration in promoting this service between the social, medical and educational sectors. A specific group of children aged 0-6 will receive this support.

The material and social aid must be provided to families in difficulty at the stage when institutionalisation can be prevented rather than at the stage when the child is already in a residential institution and we are looking for possibilities to deinstitutionalise and bring them back in the community”.

# Irina's chance

Until one year ago, Irina had lived in an auxiliary school for children with mental disabilities. Since she is sociable and likes to be in the middle of attention, the teenager with golden hair managed to make a lot of friends. No game or funny activities start without her.

The immense verbal flow, developed vocabulary and logic are in contradiction with the status of the institution, which should teach children with mental disabilities, according to the Ministry of Education. Irina does not have any mental health problem and the reason for her institutionalisation was poverty and bad school performance.

At the end of the 1st form, Irina's file, along with the files of other children who were not very good at learning, was sent to the Medical-Psycho-Pedagogical Commission that decided to transfer Irina to the auxiliary school located in the village.

Irina has her own explanation for her bad performance in the 1st form. "I have never been to the nursery. Other children could read and write, but I was lagging behind. The teacher placed me at the last desk and was nearly not speaking to me as if I hadn't existed".

"Parents did not oppose to the authorities' decision to transfer the child to the auxiliary school, especially, because they were not required to buy clothes and food for her anymore, and could spend the little money they were earning on alcohol", Svetlana Cambur, social assistant at the district Social Assistance and Family Protection Department, Ungheni.

Although the family lives in the same village where the auxiliary school is located, Irina used to go home only at the end of the week and even then – half-heartedly. The persistent smell of alcohol and the misery in the house were causing disgust and embarrassment. Even now, she can't forgive her parents and does not accept to talk to them by telephone at least, although the foster carer wants the girl to maintain the link with her parents.

Her life before leaving the auxiliary school is a bunch of unpleasant memories – the drinking bouts alternated with

a strict regime that was not adapted to the requirements and needs of a child from the auxiliary school.

There were no games and fun. "There was a room with toys in the school, but we were not allowed to go there, save when there was a commission in visit. Even then we were searched when we were leaving the room so that we do not take any toys with us. When somebody was coming to inspect us, they were giving us better food and clean clothes".

The girl remembers that many children were doing day work for educators and teachers and were paid for this. The boys were used to harvest the corn, weed

out or hoe the soil on the land of employees of the auxiliary school.

The day when she left the residential institution and met the woman that replaced her mother will always be in her memory. The first thing she did in the new house was to wash with soap, in a real bathtub, which she never did before. At the auxiliary school, children washed themselves in washbasins and the soap was missing most often.

Gradually, with the help of the family she lives in, Irina fills in the gaps in education and learns new life skills that, as she confesses, she would never have acquired if she had stayed in the institution until graduation.

She integrated at school quite well. Although she faces difficulties, she is eager to learn and is helped by the support teacher and her classmates. She likes to learn and every good mark she gets is a small victory and an event for the entire family.

