

The child and the family

This social policy magazine published by the EveryChild Consortium in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, funded by the European Union

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In the Republic of Moldova a project funded by the European Commission within the TACIS programme is being implemented. Its purpose is capacity building of the central and local authorities in social policy reform in the field of child and family protection. The project is implemented by The EveryChild Consortium in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection.



Beyond ambition and interest

Our purpose is to bring the future back home as soon as possible

We are honoured to have an occasion to point out several important moments within our activity in the sensitive field of the helpless child. For too long the Republic of Moldova was in the zone of social helplessness. But with the arrival of the 21st century there came with it a strong wish to make a qualitative leap towards an ordered society. This project is not the result of a personal ambition. It is a result of the efforts made by the Republic of Moldova in the reformation of the social protection system in general and specifically of the child in difficulty. We have to recognise (and we do it with great satisfaction) that the efforts in this work of reform are joint; they include contributions from the experience of the voluntary sector and from the representatives of the State, Central and Local Public

Authorities. The range of good activities and positive experiences gained in this field should of course be enriched. This can be done only with joint efforts. The old mentality and envy that is often especially characteristic of we Moldovan's, cannot serve as an impulse for the development of our society. On the contrary, these are the qualities that bring much prejudice and this makes us all suffer.

The objectives of our project coincide with the objectives of the National Strategy on the protection of the child and family in difficulty. This means that the project will develop and implement modern, European standards of child protection.

The Authorities of the country have repeatedly pointed out on different occasions that "we must bring Europe back home". Generally civil society supports the

top European management message. This desire means that each of us should work for the future of our country, for the future of our children. Nobody else will do this work for us. Nobody will come to make order in our homes, if we ourselves, in the Republic of Moldova, do not become aware of this fact.

We are proud to have the possibility to help our country to overcome this period of need and poverty. We are convinced that each of us, no matter what our social position and political or religious allegiances, share the same feelings. It remains for us to just be open and sincere in our intention and to search together for new ways to solve the problems that concern us. Only together we will succeed to bring the future back home. It is a pity to have a home but no future.

Staff of the Project

An additional sociological argument

To find out the answers to some general questions of national interest, the matters should be investigated profoundly from the inside. The reasons for the increase in the number of children abandoned and placed in children's homes in the Republic of Moldova are: poverty; mentality; and migration of the population. This is the singular and possibly most essential conclusion of the qualitative research, "Institutionalisation of children in the Republic of Moldova and its alternatives" carried out by IMAS during October – December 2004 within the Capacity Building in Social Policy Reform project, funded by the EU and implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in collaboration with the EveryChild Consortium. The rationale for this research lay in the description of the attitudes and behaviours towards the field of care provided to children and families in difficulty in RM, and gathering the perceptions regarding the risk factors that lead to the decision to place children in institutions, proposals for solutions and alternative forms of child protection. The research was conducted in Chisinau, Ungheni, Balti, Cahul, Orhei and Leova and had as its target the decision makers in the child protection system at the central and local level, residential institutions and their staff, families and children in difficulty and alternative services developed in the Republic.

The results of the research demonstrate that:

-The family is recognised by the participants of the study as the best possible environment for child development, but that the specialists do not have the tools, funds and specialised institutions at their disposal to enable the child and family to be fully supported (risk factors were vaguely formed, large generalised definitions, a lack of tools to measure and monitor the needs for each category separately, and a lack of statistical data/research)

-The child protection system is not focused towards the prevention of abandonment and the support of families to keep children at home. The main protection measure used is institutionalisation. -Standardisation within institutional care (space, time, activities, socialisation, and disguised discrimination) has medium and long term effects regarding the future for children in institutions

-There is a lack of policies/programmes directed at prevention and at the same time a lack of political commitment for real reform of the system -Fragmentation of the system leads to the creation of major difficulties in the development and direction of policies and specialised services

-Alternative services are more efficient but the lack of a legislative framework makes their development more complicated.

We are losing contact with society

In the Republic of Moldova there are 68 residential institutions out of which: 63 are under the Ministry of Education, 2 under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 2 under the Ministry of Health and one belongs to the Municipal Directorate for the protection of Children's Rights.

There are 12,016 (August 2004) children in state care.

- Most of the children in residential institutions have live parents, 71% of them are temporarily deprived of parental care (8,500 children) and only 6 % are orphans (721).

- At the point of placement in the residential institution most children are aged between 7 and 10 years. Only 2% are children younger than two years old

- 20% of institutionalised children lose contact with their biological family. As a rule disabled children are placed long distances from their family and home

- The average duration of placements in residential institutions is 7-8 years.

- There is not an efficient system to prevent the institutionalisation of children. 48 % of children end up in institutions through their parents' request.



EU requires improvement in services for children

***An interview with Jon Barrett –
EU project Team leader***



- The project “Capacity building in Social Policy Reform” funded by the EU in RM is in the middle of its implementation. Could you tell us about your achievements so far?

- Our Project is now in the second year of its implementation. So it is the right time for an evaluation of the outputs planned in the plan of action. When we speak about social development projects, we should take into account the needs of our local partners. We do not keep only to the EU principles and opinions. We first of all take into account our partners' wishes so as to establish an efficient collaboration. I am satisfied with the results attained so far within the project. Some days ago we had a review meeting of all the activities that were organised over the last year, setting at the same time new benchmarks for the year 2005. It should be pointed out that during the implementation of a social development project like this, it is very important to bear in mind that society is in a permanent state of change, and services are also subject to change. I consider this a big challenge, and there is always room for better things to happen. There is always time for us to try and achieve our goals and to enjoy the results attained. My work consists of searching and finding solutions to issues, and at the same time helping our partners to strengthen their capacities to manage problems by themselves. Social development is in perpetual change, it cannot be static.

- You said that you are flexible regarding your partners' wishes. But you are using EU money to work. You came here to bring the European mentality, legislation, and even habits. It would be more reasonable if the partners conformed to your standards. Even the Central Government of the RM mentioned European integration is a major objective for our country. How do you find your partners, are they very bureaucratic?

- Our partnership is based on a mutual commitment. Our collaboration will result in the achievement of our common objectives. The fact that President Voronin declared that

Moldova takes the direction of European integration is important to RM. As important as the EU attitude towards countries aiming to develop and become integrated. Obviously it is very important to the EU to develop good partnership relationships with neighbour countries in

□ **Social development is in perpetual change, it cannot be static**

particular. But let us come back to our issues, as a lot of work should be done to create and consolidate partnerships. It is essential for us to achieve good working relations with local partners, within the aim of contributing to the improvement of social welfare. In saying this I refer first of all to children in difficulty.

- Would you please be more specific about the Plan of action for the year 2005. What are the provisions of the project for this year?

- The major goal of our project is to reduce the scale of residential care in the Republic of Moldova. We will continue to keep to these objectives during 2005. We will try to develop a range of community based social services. As at present there are not too many alternatives to institutional care, we would like to prepare the basis for a conceptual change. Another area of our activity will continue to be changes in legislation – regulations, standards, acts that would cover all these changes legally. Another important domain is finance. It is impossible to implement services without sustainable financial support. The EU funds this process for now, but we need commitment on the behalf of local partners and central government of the Republic of Moldova to take over these services and ensure their sustainability. During the second year of project implementation we will work on strengthening the Memorandums

of understanding signed with our main partners: the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the Ministry of Education. On the basis of these Agreements we will be able to provide these ministries with technical support and equipment. This will help us to initiate the reform process that is going to be taken over and continued by local authorities. To offer proper training to people involved in this process we will also need political commitment. We hope that the newly elected parliament will start thinking about this issue. On our part, within the project, we try to approach the issues related to child welfare in order to raise awareness and push into the foreground this major concern. The EU needs to be sure that children in the RM are provided with high quality social services. The evidence will be when Moldova assumes full commitment and responsibility for such services. So there is a need for some changes on a structural level.

- What are the problems the project was confronted with during its implementation?

- All development projects are confronted with problems, especially during the inception phase. It is natural for things to be that way. We are used to this state of things. I will not complain, as it is not in my nature. The most important thing is to start to build the future for the young generation in difficulty.

In November the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection signed Memorandums of Cooperation with the EveryChild Consortium

Responsibilities and cooperation for children's destiny

This act presupposes the collaboration of three bodies with the purpose of implementing the objectives of the National Strategy on child protection. It is about working on the modification of the legal framework according to international standards and norms, developing admission criteria for the placement of children in institutions, developing and strengthening human resources in this field, developing financial mechanisms to promote and support efficient models of

child and family protection.

As a result of the Memorandum the implementation of the project "Capacity Building in Social Policy Reform" will engage all parties in the development of a range of social services for the prevention of abandonment and institutionalization of children; their reintegration within their families and communities in the selected pilot regions; and reorganisation the residential institutions in accordance with minimum quality standards.

Oxana DOMENTI,
presidential adviser
in social problems



The anxiety of civil society towards the difficult social problems our country faces, especially those of the child and family in difficulty is just normal. We have to admit that this anxiety is also felt within state structures as the difficulties children face are extremely painful. There is a wish to reform the whole system this field. We have to concentrate on the details so that our reform can be the least painful and the most efficient.



Ana
FEUCHTWANG,
director of
EveryChild, UK

Arguments for the European integration of Moldova – social policy reform

The Republic of Moldova is not the only country from Eastern Europe which faces problems in child protection. Reform of this field is a long process. Countries of the European Union passed through this process many years ago, while others are in the process of reform. Moldova has an advantageous position because it can successfully assimilate the experience of these countries. This reform would be an additional argument in the process of European integration. I am convinced that through the plenary commitment of the authorities and Moldova's wish to enter the EU in 4 to 5 years time we will have obvious progress. I am optimistic because I can see and feel in Moldova the will to change things for the better, in the best interest of the child.

The number of children who need help is greater and greater and the risks are more and more varied

Unfortunately, we were absolutely unprepared for this, so we are not ready to face these situations. Increasingly the legislation is not appropriate so we are unclear in terms of the institutional framework which should take care of these children. We are not aware of the institutions

which would take care of each category of children at risk. There are of course many institutions which refer to the protection of the child in difficulty and even if there were attempts to concentrate these kinds of activities in a single central public authority we have not yet succeeded. Due to this, there isn't any coordination among all these institutions and it is coordination that would make it possible to improve the situations faced by the child at risk. With the vision of supporting the child the Ministry of Labour elaborated the Draft Law on the protection of the child in difficulty, which would solve many of these problems. This draft law is currently in the Parliament. The deputies should now return to its consideration.

Tatiana GRIBINCEA,
Head of the Department,
of Social Assistance



Statistics show that the largest percentage of the unemployed comprise of those who leave boarding schools



Veronica MIDARI,
national coordinator within Capacity
building in Social Policy Reform Project

- Ms Midari, what would be the financial advantages of the alternative system of child care?

- There are many advantages, unfortunately in Moldova the advantages of alternative child care are not known. From the financial point of view this system would use existing money. At present the cost to place one child in a residential institution under the Ministry of Education is approximately 9,000 lei per year. If these sums of money were better monitored and used more efficiently, we could take care of children within their families. Instead of sending the child to the institution we could support the family by means of allowances; the social worker can monitor the correct distribution of money so that financial resources provided by the state are directed at balanced nutrition and purchase of necessary foodstuff for the child's nutrition. In this way the problem is solved a lot faster and more efficiently.

- Is institutionalisation an adequate means of solving the problem?

- 95 % of children in boarding schools in Moldova are there because their parents have no possibility of keeping them at home, but placing the child in an institution is not an adequate means of solving the problem. We are the only country in the world where a strange phenomenon takes place; parents give their children away into state care. The country would be in a winning position both financially and from the human point of view which cannot be compared with money at all, if an alternative was created to the present obsolete way of solving the problem. We are talking about the future of Moldova as we are talking about a

child, who tomorrow will be able to work, that's why today we should invest in them, so that the child could develop to its fullest potential both mentally, emotionally, intellectually and physically.

- If the parliamentarians had the possibility to see with their own eyes the sadness of a child from the boarding school, to know the real situation there, do you think it would be possible to bring about change in social policies for the child in difficulty?

- Only by comparison one can understand the problem better. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection intends to organise a study visit for parliamentarians to the regions where alternative child care services are being provided. This is absolutely necessary for our deputies to realise the advantages of these services, but we'd also like to organise a visit to a boarding school where the deputies could see the sadness and unhappiness of children. Sociological studies show that the average period for a child's placement in an institution is seven to eight years and psychologists identified that in this period the child acquires the syndrome of an institutionalised child; which means the lack of opportunities for building attachment, inadequately developed life skills, a lack of understanding of the habits of family life and skills for independent living. Statistics show that the biggest

percent of the unemployed comprise of those who leave boarding schools and the morbidity rate is also much higher. The parliamentarians should know the proposed alternative services better and it seems to me that some of them do not vote to pass the law on child in difficulty, not due to bad intentions, but only because of the lack of information. It is normal that the parliamentarians show reticence when they don't know the alternative systems of child protection. However, it is curious that it has been already five years since the creation of the Social Investment Fund, which is an autonomous governmental structure, using the money from our country's loan from the World Bank. They have been implementing alternative services and parliament pretends to not notice them.





Child protection problems relates to our future generation

Marian Lupu, president of the parliament, considers that the draft law for the child in difficulty which has remained un-passed in the parliament for the last two years, will be a priority for the newly formed parliament.

- By all means it will come back to this problem. This draft law is well known. The document was considered by the Government and in the Parliament. The reason why this draft law didn't go further in this process was the lack of coherence between the contents and the actions to be undertaken as a consequence of this law. On the one hand there was financial support and financial capacities to provide these movements but on the other hand I have never supported abstract, unbalanced positions. At the moment when the new Executive will be set up this draft law will be re-considered after the modifications and amendments made by the Ministry of labour and other ministries. This draft will then be presented to the parliament and examined with much seriousness, as the child protection problem relates to our future generation. We are speaking about children, the most important topic of discussion for our country. And it is a subject for the short term outlook.



Lidia GUTU,
*deputy in the Parliament
of the Republic of Moldova*



Reforms in social protection require political will

From the legislative point of view we managed, together with the deputies, to hold parliamentary discussions on the need for a law on the child and family in difficulty, even if the adoption of this law was not possible. The draft submitted by the Ministry of Labour and social protection was given for re-examination in the parliamentary commission so we were still able to build the awareness of the deputies towards these sensitive problems. From now on not a single

deputy, not a single Ministry officer or local public authority employee will be able to say that the problem, such as the one of children in difficulty, is a minor problem that can wait. As this issue was discussed in our Parliament, it means that this problem exists. Of course there is a wish for further continuity, the continuity that can take place only if there is a political will and conscientious of the need for change. We hope that what has started well will be continued.

**Carolyn
HAMILTON,
EU Expert**



There is a place only for improvement

However, there are too many institutionalised children and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child refers to Moldova too

Moldova has laws that provide child protection, especially the Family Code. But these existing laws are focused more on taking children away from the family and placing them in state institutions when there is a situation of risk. What you do not have at the moment is a legal framework that would stipulate state involvement to a lesser extent. There is no legal framework for the community based services that would help families before their children are abused or neglected. It is about preventive work with families. You should have this kind of legislation as in 1993 Moldova ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which requires that all signatory states review their legislation and adapt it according to the Convention. It is a difficult task for Moldova as the Convention is not a static instrument.

Ideas about how children's rights can be better implemented are permanently changing so States should constantly adjust their legislation. In order to keep pace with European legislation Moldova should revise once again the sectors where children's rights are not fully implemented. In 2002 the UN Committee for children's rights examined the report presented by the Republic of Moldova and presented its conclusions which explained their concerns regarding the high rate of children placed in state care, the lack of children's advocates and the lack of a mechanism for resolving complaints, which is necessary in a country that has a great number of institutionalised children. We are now working with the Ministry of Labour on regulations for a new law on social assistance and ways of elaborating standards for general social services. At the same time, we are working with the specialists of the Ministry of Education on the revision of legislation regarding guardianship and trusteeship which represents the principal mechanism for child protection.

It is not equitable for the state to provide shelter and food to the children who carry mobile phones in their pockets



Interview with Stela GRIGORAS, EveryChild Moldova director

- Ms Grigoras, our president Mr Voronin said recently that in the following four years Moldova will have to become transformed into a European state with efficient social protection. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in collaboration with the EveryChild Consortium have already been implementing a European project that comes to support children in difficulty. I know our neighbouring countries could not follow the European path until they brought their child protection policy up to western standards. What is your opinion regarding this field? Is there sufficient political will to reduce the number of children in institutions, boarding schools?

- First of all, I would like to mention that civil society, particularly the NGOs who work in the child and family protection field have saluted before the European message of President Voronin to bring Europe back home and to create a European future for our children. Civil society in this field wishes to be actively involved in developing and implementing the European standards of social protection in our country. Incontestable proof of this fact is demonstrated by the activities carried out within the Capacity Building in Social Policy Reform project which was conceived to predominantly support the central and local authorities in the reorganisation of the child care system at the community level, so that high quality services provided to children are brought back to the villages and cities of Moldova. Moldova's Europeanisation should start with child protection in those places where it is very difficult, i.e. in every village

and city, from Giurgiulesti to Criva.

It should be done in such a way that local authorities have all the necessary levers to decide on the child's fate according to their best interests, so that the child's placement in a boarding school is the last resort, as happens in countries with European traditions.

Ms Grigoras, I insist that you comment on the political will at the local and central level to implement these European standards in the field of the protection of the child in difficulty?

- In the Republic of Moldova the problems of the child in difficulty are divided between four ministries: Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Interior. I do not want to assert that decision makers within these ministries are not responsible and that they do not feel for the situation of children in difficulty, but unfortunately as our popular old proverb says 'the child with many midwives remains with an uncut umbilical cord'. Despite all of this we are glad that new times are coming and they are more humane and just. We'd like to emphasise that local authorities - I am referring now to the administrations of the Orhei, Cahul and Ungheni Raions as pilot regions within our project - wish to get actively involved in addressing these problems, but due to the fact that a proper legal framework has not been adopted, and the fact that they need to have control of the financial levers, the fate of many children left without parental care is solved just in boarding schools, as this is the prevailing child protection system in our country. I would like to point out that the wish to bring about change in the best interests

of the child prevails in the above mentioned Raions and other communities as well.

- The president of the Parliament Marian Lupu, when referring to the lack of a legal framework concerning the protection of the child in difficulty, said that he would come back to this daft law very soon. Do we know when?

- As I said earlier, it seems that new times are coming, with more rights for our children. It would be great if Parliament came back, as Mr Marian Lupu mentioned, very soon to the examination and adoption of the Law on the child in difficulty. This decision would stimulate even better collaboration and mutual trust between civil society and the central authorities of Moldova. And not least it would form an additional argument for the benefit of the implementation of European standards in the social protection of children, as this Law regulates the existence of alternative social services developed by the voluntary sector in different localities; services that continue to operate on the basis of regulations drawn up by the local administrations. However, these regulations do not constitute proper legal coverage which would allow the sustainable development of alternative types of care for children in difficulty. It is important that in the future, the law takes into consideration the prevention of the abandonment of children; to do so it is necessary to support the family in difficulty so they can bring up their own children within the family. In circumstances where the biological family is not able to take care of their children then the law should anticipate the support and development of the child in the extended family, as the family is

recognised as the best environment for child development. However, specialists at the local level do not have the tools, funds and specialised institutions at their disposal, which would support child development within the family or in family type care.

- Ms Grigoras, in order to achieve these objectives it is important that parents are aware of the fact that their child's place is with their mother and father and not in the boarding school?

- Of course a profound reform in this direction cannot be done without the widespread support of our people, beginning with simple people from the villages and finishing with decision makers at the central level. Moreover, I personally consider that a change in the mentality and attitude towards the problems of the child and family does not only represent a departmental or governmental one, but one of the national interest. To produce a real change in attitude and deeds it is necessary that the actors involved in this process think first of all about the best interests of the child, the country's future, and not about the departmental or group interests. As a consequence, state structures should stop promoting just the old system of child care and demonstrate openness and transparency in collaboration with civil society. Alternative types of care for children which are considered by the specialists to be more efficient and which correspond to the interest of the child should be promoted and discussed not just within specialist circles, but by the whole society. I would love if public television, for example, would have discussions regarding these types of problems



where they could invite specialists at the local and central levels, representatives of non-governmental organisations and even parents, teachers and mayors from rural localities. Why not? Why not discuss openly and sincerely what the advantages and disadvantages are of institutionalisation. Why is there always an aura of mystery and secrecy behind the boarding schools? Reforms cannot be done without involvement of the human factor; on the contrary they need to be done together with people, and for people. Only in this way can they be sustainable.

- Ms Grigoras, research in this field was carried out by IMAS. Reasons for the increase in the number of children in difficulty identified by the participants of the research are: poverty, migration

and mentality. In a word, parents go abroad and children go to boarding schools. It means that parents should also bear responsibility for that.

- When I said that the whole society should be involved in discussing these problems I meant that parents and communities should bear the responsibility for the fate of each child left without parental care. It is not at all reasonable for the state to allocate from the money of our poor budget 1500 lei for each child whose parents left to earn big money abroad. It is not at all reasonable that during the time when there are children really deprived of the possibility to have a piece of bread on their table and a roof above their heads, the state provides shelter and food to the children who carry mobile phones in their pockets, who receive money from their parents abroad. Some of the parents who want to go abroad ask managers of the boarding schools to place their children there. Statistical data shows that 95 % of children placed in the boarding schools have living parents. This means that we should work with these parents. The effects of the education of their children in boarding schools should be explained to them and that if they want their children to have a bright future then they should bring them up in the family. The mayors of every village should hold the responsibility to employ a social worker who would monitor each case and each family. There are many problems. However, the priority is to create a system of child and family care at the community level so that local authorities can have all the levers to solve the fate of children in difficulty in their best interests.



The parent and the child, the tree and the branch

The Orhei pilot region was visited by a group of specialists to carry out an assessment of the present situation in this sphere of activity. There are several opinions on this topic

What makes us work

At the beginning of the project we also have some fears. First of all the fear which dominates is the loss of our jobs. After all these years of working in this boarding school, after all the efforts made, after we have gained enough experience in this area we could end up unemployed. In our conditions it is a bit difficult to be appreciated in other arenas and even to get a new job and place of work. However, during these several days of discussions with local and international experts I understood that there will be a need for us in the future too. It makes us happy and makes us work even harder. In these 4 days I personally learned many useful things especially from Ms Claire and the experiences the UK passed through in this direction. Sooner or later parents will come to take their children back from the boarding schools by their own will. Till then we need to work everywhere to explain and to convince. It is not a secret that at the moment there are children in the boarding schools whose parents have quite a good income. However, we consider that if this project was supported throughout the country and moreover at the government level we could be witnesses of major qualitative changes for the wellbeing of the child in difficulty. In many cases it is not just dependent upon what we do. It also depends on the legislative side of affairs.

Parascovia CULIUC,
educator at the Orhei boarding school

I am saying with all sincerity that this project initiated by TACIS is welcome for the Republic of Moldova. For such a small country, twelve thousand children in boarding schools are too many. This figure and the situation in general place us in an unfavourable light. As a director of a boarding school I can't confirm that it is so bad here. I have to recognise that any child feels better in the family. The fact that



I am very impressed by the participants activeness and readiness to learn new things during the seminars, which have been organised as part of the process of reforming social policy in child and family protection, as well as introducing different methods and alternative ways of providing social assistance

Claire WARRINGTON,
EU Expert



I am also deeply impressed by the openness shown by the Local Public Authority in the Raion of the pilot region. The local social assistants are good specialists and know their work well, particularly the reality that negatively affects the family and the child in the region.

The specialists will learn more about the western experience in the field of child and family protection and this will contribute greatly in the reduction of the number of children at risk.



Nicolae COBISNEANU,
the director of the boarding school in Orhei

many people are not able to build their homes well is the other theme for discussion. First of all we are interested in the child and their good upbringing. We don't have another way out. I am convinced that good changes are expected in this sphere. Education and medicine are possibly the most fundamental fields in the recovery to social normality. We will see the result

of this project at the beginning of the next school year. From our part we have prepared the ground for the meticulous assessment of every child. We don't want the child or the parent to be harmed. It is enough to make one mistake and the consequence is – the child will suffer, and this should not be allowed in any circumstances. Ensuring the utmost objectivity and correctness is the only way the child, the family, the school and the state will win.

*Elena Solerenco,
educator*

Institution is nothing but an interruption in the child's life

I came to this methodical training with a hope – to build upon my knowledge on the integration of children with their families. At the same time, we wish to learn as much information as possible about new methods of work in this field. Without grand words, I would like to tell you that I learnt many interesting things regarding the integration and care plans of the child with the family, starting with the assessment of the child, parents and family as a whole. The child has rights and we should make all efforts to respect them. One of the main rights is of course to have an adequate family environment, in other words biological family so that the child can enjoy having their Mum and Dad, their home and food. Whatever we say, in the family the child becomes more fulfilled from all perspectives than in an institution. Often an institution is nothing but interruption in the child's life. Their development as a personality takes place in a forced environment. And one of the most acute problems is poverty in these families. In the families where parents have a hard life and are not employed the result is the same, the child hangs out in the street, and at best is placed into an institution. So the problem actually has many ramifications; the social, moral, education and by all means the economic ones. If the child has ended up in the boarding school then there is a reason for this. This is the biggest problem. This reason should be found and resolved. I remembered alcoholic families. I would like to say that no matter how much a drunkard the mother or the father is, children would still want to be with them. It is human nature. The involvement of civil society regarding this problem would be welcome – first of all mayoralities which would usually come with pasta as material aid. Pasta is good but this is not the way we will eliminate the problem. We are saying that the future belongs to children. How could it belong to children if they remain at the mercy of fate, with their grandmother or a neighbour? There should be a law. A law that would wake parent's up to their responsibility towards their own children. I think that this project seeks solution to all these questions. However we should be extremely prudent to not take children where they could be harmed.

At a local level there is a wish to change social policies

Interview with Valeriu POPA, chief of Social Assistance Department, Orhei region

- Mr Popa, you are the chief of the Social Assistance Department of Orhei region, what is the attitude of the Orhei region administration regarding the alternative system of child protection?

- Together with the experts from the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection who are being trained in the Capacity Building in Social Policy Reform project we have managed to develop a regional strategy of reform. The Local Public Administration is very receptive towards the possibility for reform that this project offers. The fact that six social workers were employed and trained proves that at the local level there is a wish to change social policies. The Strategy of reform has already been approved by the Orhei Raion Council and if the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection accepts this we can start



the implementation of this project in the pilot region. What is interesting is that the directors of the residential institutions are open.

- At present what activities are you carrying out in Orhei within the project?

- Many of the children placed in residential institutions in Orhei are there due to the fact that their families have not had the possibility to bring them up at home. In order to have a clearer picture of the financial situation of the families at risk we are currently carrying out an assessment. The child protection specialists from Orhei also meet with the families of children placed in residential institutions to gauge the family's attitude regarding the child's reintegration. Most children placed in the boarding school are placed just at the family's request. A social worker's job is a special one; they have to convince parents who have decided to place their child in the boarding school that actually the family has the possibility to bring the child up at home. The work to inform these families that the situation in the boarding schools is not so rosy is very difficult, as they gave their children away into state care by their own volition. At present we are at the stage of preparing these families for their children's return.



In the next few lines you will read the story of some children deprived of their childhood. You might find it shocking. It really is so. But we can't escape from the reality. The author doesn't try to thicken the colors or make it seem worse than it really is.

A Prayer from a boarding school

Vica and Ruslan

They do not care any more. They tell about their life in the children's home easily, with jokes. There is no point for them to lie, because they understand that there is nothing I can decide and nothing I can change. There is no point for me to change their names, because I do not know their families, the families of their director or the educators from their boarding school, and I do not want to find them out. I really can change nothing. They have been free from the institution for three years. The concrete fence and twelve kilometres across the field to the closest highway that separated the children from the big life could be easily taken for a prison guard. And what is the actual difference? Well, it is probably that a prisoner has been punished by the state, while the abandoned and orphaned child has been shown much favour.

"I have got a bad habit: if I have a loaf of bread in my hands, I eat it all at once. I eat, and I eat, and eat. I notice that people look strangely at me. Maybe, it will pass one day", says Ruslan. They were given too little bread: a slice for breakfast and two for lunch. "Millet porridge with water three times a day, as if we were birds. I cannot see this porridge any more", he says. There was tea without sugar, Lentil soup or soup with lard. "Why lard?" children would ask. Usually, children do not like fat. "Where have you seen a pig without fat?" would be the answer. Children used to steal from each other. The most enterprising used to rush into the dining room first and grab the bread of the others. There were no compensations. If you let it slip, blame yourself and keep your eyes open. Vica was always around the kitchen. She washed the dishes, took away the plates, and swept the floor in the kitchen. They gave a second helping for it. Children used to put their names on the list to wash the floor or the dishes in advance. There were always volunteers. Begging for a second helping was driving the educators and cooks out of their minds. "Have not you had enough



to gorge?" This question was frequently asked. "Can you imagine, once I was taking away the plates and a child from the lower school stood near the cook with an empty plate. He was just standing and looking at her, saying nothing. And she said to him: "What are looking at? Look here!" and she raised her skirt".

Once a year, sometimes twice, a committee used to come. What committee? Who knows, the children had no idea. This is not important. The important is that during these two days the committee was around, there was an afternoon snack in the boarding school, as well as chicken legs and red-beet soup for dinner. There were no other good reasons for chicken and red beet to appear on the table. There have never been dairy products and fruit in the food allowance. Once a year, the

Christmas Caravan brought oranges. In summer, the faithful from the neighbouring villages could bring something. In winter, children could find frozen apples by the fence of the tinned food factory. They gathered them and defrosted on the radiator. "We were hungry all the time".

Shower from a Radiator

Vica and Ruslan remembered how they were once taken to the public baths. It was in 1991. They have not been to the baths since then. According to sanitary and hygienic standards, there were showers in the boarding school, but they did not work. Either there were repairs in the boiler-room, or the coal was stolen. The director said: if you want to wash yourselves, ask in the kitchen. They did not give water in the kitchen, even to Vica, who had managed to establish the most diplomatic relationship with the cooks, systematically washing floors and dishes. Children used to take off the tap on the radiators and pour the water into a wash-basin. Two people washed themselves in the same water. They used to agree among themselves: today I am washing my hair first, next time you are. It was only after the boarding school, when Vica got rid of the lice.

Along with the lice, there was also the rash. Children used to catch cold all the time. The staff doctor would measure their temperature and say that nothing terrible happened. When the jaundice appeared, they urgently did the laundry. Once a year, a gynaecologist used to come. Americans came and treated teeth, throat, ears and nose. This was all the medical care.

Foreigners with gifts used to come. The majority of them trusted the happily smiling director: «Do not worry, we will not offend anybody». They really did not offend themselves. Something, of course, was left for children. If they gave soap, the educator would tell: «Here you have soap for your room, which is for two weeks». The soap ran out in three days. «All children wanted to wash themselves with



the soap, and we had to wash our clothes too». If foreigners gave out their presents themselves, we had something. «Once the French came and said they wanted to give a box over to every child personally. Nobody knew what was in the boxes, because they were sealed up. It was written on them for whom the gift was: for a boy or a girl and for what age. We were so happy. I had a sewing machine. It was a toy, but it sewed. In the morning, the educator took it away from me and gave me an old doll. They took the toys away from all the children, saying we would break them anyway. And once, the Americans gave a set of towels to each of us. The towels were very nice, a bath towel, one for the face and a small one for hands. The educator said that we should hide them in a separate room, so that nobody could steal them. The next day, half of the towels were gone. She was outraged, but she was the only one who had the key from that room», Vica says.

Old sweaters, trousers, and skirts were left for children. We had things to wear. There was a problem with the footwear. We used to wear summer shoes or sneakers (thanks to Americans!) in winter. Our hands and feet used to freeze. They used to swell up and chap. «We outwitted the labour education teacher and asked her to teach us to sew mittens. They were from chintz, because we did not have other fabric, but we were very glad anyway».

Psychological Punishment

«We had many children who were enuretic. We had a bad tempered educator, who shouted at one girl because of it all the time. We

were about 4 or 5 years old at that time. She once wrapped the wet bed-sheet around her head and made her sit like that», tells Vica. «And I always slept badly. I could not fall asleep, no matter how hard I tried. The educator used to marshal us in a row and made us hold our arms up in front of us. And she beat us on the arms with a wooden stick from the gym. Although I was the only one who did not sleep. And the worst «offenders» were sent to the mental hospital». «How was it?»

«I better tell about it. Vica was not there, but I was», says Ruslan. «I was once treated in a health centre as I am from a family with tuberculosis. The food was very good. And as in the boarding school we wanted to eat all the time, I had an idea of escaping to that health centre. I told the boys about it and they wanted to come with me. We went there by foot, it was very far, but we found it. The director was very surprised, but he let us stay. He called the boarding school and he agreed with the administration that we would stay in his centre for the summer. And in autumn he sent us back, but he did not give our documents to us, he said that they would be sent by car. But we got back earlier than the car did. And the director of the boarding school got angry and said he would not accept us without the documents. We slept in the garden, lived there for ten days and ate apples. One day, pupils from the upper school came - the director sent them - and took us to the boarding school. They shaved our hair off and took us to the mental hospital. In the mental hospital they undressed us, bound to beds, let the patients in and told them to beat us. They gave us pills. It was horrible, everything hurt, legs and arms got crooked, and we had a terrible headache. We begged for an injection to sleep. They gave us

the injection and we wanted to sleep badly, but they brought the drug-addicts and they did what they wanted with us. And they did so several times. And in a couple of days, we were taken back to the boarding school. One girl was sent to that hospital for rudeness, I would not say she was rude, but she could stand up for herself. After that she became meek. As soon as she disobeyed, they used to say: «Katya, would you like to visit the hospital again?» and she would become as if she was of stone. We were afraid of our educators, but the hospital was the most frightening...»

«The other children's parents probably thought we were all crazy. They were afraid of us. Because as soon as somebody appeared in the yard, we used to start shouting: «Mummy! Daddy!» and went on like that until they left, although we knew that they were not our mummies or daddies. Some children got lucky: foreigners came and adopted them. The Americans, Italians adopted many. They also used to dash aside. We used to beg all the time: «Adopt us, adopt us, please!» Some people wanted to adopt me too. But they changed their mind at the last moment. You know, I was so miserable, so thin», says Vica.

«And as for me, do you know what I used to do every Christmas from the 2nd until the 9th form? - tells Ruslan. My birthday is at Christmas. So, when everybody was already sleeping, I used to go out and tip toe into the drawing room, move the curtain aside so that I could see the window, put my hands together and pray to God: «Good gracious Lord, give me a mummy. Please, give me a mummy...» I prayed like that every year... You ask us about our dreams? No, we did not have any special ones, only to have parents».

Somewhere there are people who smile

Leaders of the EU Project “Capacity Building in Social Policy Reform” organised a training and information seminar for the specialists in the field in Ungheni. Ungheni is a pilot region of the project and the problems are as severe as in most of the regions. Educators and social workers had the possibility to ask questions and to get answers. We also asked questions and you can read the answers of those who from 8 am till 9 pm work with and for children deprived of parental warmth. Nevertheless, in Ungheni we saw children who smile, which is a sign that we have real chances to enter Europe and normality.



We must reform the system, but not by the scheme: “cut the grapes and fight with drunkenness”

About children and their place under the Sun

The educational establishment, which is called Ungheni boarding school, dates from 1960 and was built to house 520 children, it has two bedrooms and the whole infrastructure required for the educational and living process. At the moment we have 332 children institutionalised from about ten Raions of the Republic, but most of them are children from Ungheni and its suburbs. Of these 58 children are orphans, others come from various situations, being more or less poor, and whose parents are not able to provide them with all necessities. Frankly speaking, our school has the statute of a semi-residential one as many children attend classes and then go back to their families. Our institution has 53 teaching staff. We provide four meals a day to the value of 12 lei. We organise 23 three circles from beekeeping to computers. Very soon we will have a modern boiler-room and a repaired and equipped food house. This would be a brief CV of the

school. As for the problems addressed by the EU specialists regarding children and their place under the Sun, I am saying with all sincerity that we are on the same wavelength as them – the child’s place is, and must be, within a healthy family environment. Only in this way are we going to be close to the European values. And we must strike while the iron is hot and not through directives and emergency orders. We need to be aware of the necessity of the reforms and to promote them wisely – but not by the

The family – this is where there are answers to all the problems the child in difficulty faces. This is the point at which we have to start and where we should reach in the end.

the assessment of every child to see what the integration possibilities are in the near future. My colleagues are absolutely right. The family – this is where there are answers to all the problems the child in difficulty faces. This is the point at which we have to start and where we should reach in the end. My observations show that many children get used to the fact that somebody has to provide them with things and services as though it should be so. It is wrong, and we are trying to convince them that they should also do something useful, something interesting. An internal questionnaire revealed some striking realities – half of our children do not have a TV set at home. Most of them have suffered from violence and scenes of humiliation. We will not win if we don’t build parents’ responsibility for their children. And the poverty we face all over the place hits helpless children first. We understand and recognise that Ungheni boarding school is not a heaven on the Earth, but we make all efforts to save children from the thought of despair and sense of hunger.

Arcadie PLESCA,
director of Ungheni boarding school

scheme:
“cut the grapes and fight with drunkenness”. Since the 1st of September we have managed to reintegrate 18 children with their families. Now we are preparing a full programme for



*Larisa Bubnova,
principal specialist, social
assistance and child
protection department,
Ungheni*

During the days of information and training I first of all became acquainted with UK experience in the protection of families at risk and children in difficulty. The sharing of experience as well as kindness of the international expert Claire Warrington made us think that we have the power to reduce as wisely as possible the number of institutionalised children. Of course, we are starting from the idea that every child can be happier and more satisfied within the family. We are not aiming to take the child and force him to stay where he doesn't feel good. We would like to study meticulously each case separately, identify the reasons that placed them in a vulnerable situation and identify ways of financial and moral support for each of them. My personal opinion is that these aims are achievable.

We are in need of will, horizontally and vertically, as well as much work. It is important to start so that later we can harvest the fruits of our work. We cannot and do not have the right to claim that parents are bad or something like that. In many cases these parents don't know how to cope with life's problems. Our role is to get involved and to support them during crisis situations. I will give you an example. Some children are placed in boarding schools simply because there is no school in the village. It seems to me that this is not a serious reason. Instead of organising return transport facilities the easiest way is chosen – institutionalisation. I consider that the most important issue regarding child protection is real work with actual families.

We have gathered together to discuss the problem of children's reintegration with the biological family. Nobody doubts that this issue is generally in the forefront of our society. In the same way nobody doubts the fact that in the family the child feels better than anywhere else. Let's not forget the simple truth, there are children who are in temporary need of a shelter, whether we call it boarding school or children's home. First of all I am thinking about orphans or those ones whose parents have mental disorders. We often ask ourselves what would be the task to decrease reliance on institutional care. I consider that we should go to those families who we are calling vulnerable, so that we can be sure about the realities of the family, if the parent is or isn't capable of bringing up their children, to give them minimal essential material and intellectual support. After that we are looking for improvement and resolution of the problems. An example – we have five children (brothers and sisters) from one family in the Glodeni region. Returning from a party, the father hit the mother and she died – it is a criminal case. As a result the children were brought to our institution. We have many cases like that. That is why I am saying that things are a lot more complicated than they seem at first sight. Or, the example when grandparents take children under their guardianship. Nothing special, it is just once they become ill and helpless the children will remain without supervision. I do not deny the fact that there are fears among teachers about job losses. I would also like to say something else; we adults are coping and will continue to cope. It is children who suffer the most as they don't know what life is.



*Valentina Moraru,
Educator at the boarding
school, Ungheni*

*Liliana MALER,
educator at the boarding school
from Ungheni*



In comparison with my colleagues I am relatively new in the child protection sphere. Anyway, I like what I do and consider that I am useful in the social sphere. I participated with much interest in the seminar organised within our institution as everything changes in our world and as result we should also change, for the better of course. We should be more interested and receptive when it comes to the experience of others in solving the problems in this field. And our biggest problem is, and in time will be more real, the destiny of the children we bring up and offer life skills to.





A week of British social work

A team of representatives from the Social Assistance system in RM, involved in the implementation of the “Capacity building in social policy reform” project made a study visit to Great Britain with the aim of sharing experience with regard to alternative services for children and families at risk. We are stating the opinions and the impressions of the participants to the Moldovan-British assembly. Svetlana Rijicova –Local Expert in Professional Training will come with the conclusions made during these meetings, as the British experience is a working model that could be replicated in our country without reserve.



The group of Moldovan specialists who took part in the study visit comprised of representatives of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Ministry of Education and the Universities where social workers are being prepared. Moldovan specialists had the possibility to see with their own eyes how alternative social services work, what the costs are, as well as the benefits children in difficulty receive within these services. It is the second study visit organised within the Capacity Building in Social Policy Reform project and in the following months the representatives of local authorities, child protection specialists, managers of residential institutions, and specialists in finance will go on other study visits to Great Britain and Romania. The purpose of the project is to support local and central public authorities to reform the child care system, so that public money can follow the child, through supporting families at risk to prevent child abandonment. At present the most widely used state service for the protection of the child and family in difficulty is institutional care. Although alternative social services have been developed in the Republic they cannot be extended to the national level due to the lack of a legislative framework. Three pilot regions

were selected with the aim of developing services that can be replicated at a national level– Orhei, Cahul and Ungheni – here the child care system will be subject to reorganisation according to the project objectives. The experience of these three regions will be replicated throughout the country. The need to reform the social protection system for the child and family in our country fits within the context of the increase in the number of children placed in residential institutions, street children, trafficked children and those

children left without parental care due to their parents going abroad to work. At the central level the responsibility for child protection is distributed between the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Internal Affairs; at the local level between the Directorate of Education and Sport, the Social assistance and family protection department, the Directorate of Health and the Commission of minors with a bias within the Commissariat of Police.



We can reduce bureaucracy. We just have to want to do it.

The UK experience in the development of social services for children and families was studied by the finance specialists who are working on the elaboration of reallocation mechanisms of public money towards community services



*Eugenia
VEVERITA*

Economic liberalism in providing social services

The main purpose of the study visit was to see the existing social assistance services in the UK. our questions were answered regarding the mechanisms of financing social work services in Great Britain. We could see that only by unifying the social services that are provided at the local level, through the development of concentrated services, can bureaucracy be reduced and provision of social services increased. The consequence of this is the implementation of efficient management of the budgetary resources available. It is interesting that social protection services are provided by representatives of civil society and the state, in its turn, is the one that purchases these services depending on their quality and cost. If the state authority has to achieve a social goal, the local public authority is the one to implement the actions to achieve that goal and those representatives of civil society who have a performance guarantee in the field are financially supported by the local community. It is of course about a different financial mentality, it is economic liberalism which is applied according to free market principles. Beyond the mentality change that one experiences when meeting another culture, it is this type of sharing of experience which brings a better understanding for the participants of the project, those who actually have to implement social policy reform in our country.

It is good that we had the possibility to observe at first hand the new types of social services provision that could be replicated in Moldova. What impressed me most was the fact that social services provided by civil society are purchased by the state. The state is the one that purchases, depending on the efficient cost for the beneficiary of these services, those social services which have both

Public money should be used efficiently

It is really useful to see how, in reality, the alternative social services for children in difficulty work. To see how public money is spent in such a way that people can benefit from good services, at a good price, with good levels of efficiency. It is obvious that not everything implemented in Great Britain can be replicated in our country. England is a country with old traditions of providing social services to children in difficulty; it has much greater financial resources than Moldova – the country which doesn't have great possibilities to allocate budgetary resources for such a big problem as children in difficulty.

*Mariana SEMENIUC,
Ministry of Finance*



However it is very clear that good management of public money, the reduction of the existing bureaucratic system as well as the introduction of some of the positive practices that we saw in Great Britain will help us to have an efficient and modern social protection system and it will make our country move closer to the European community – which is the wish manifested by the government of our state.



Sharing experience makes the better management of public money possible

*Alina SURDU,
Chef of economic – financial directorate of the Ministry
of Health and Social Protection*



quality and efficiency to protect the citizen. Financial resources in our case follow the child in difficulty and the example of Great Britain is the most useful for us. I am glad that I had the possibility to see alternative child protection services working and I consider that it is good for the whole financial component of the project to benefit from sharing experience. I had the

opportunity to learn new skills in the management of public money, which makes it possible to reduce some expenses and leads to more efficient management of budgetary resources in the best interest of the child.

When Roma's mother was arrested and imprisoned the boy was just a year and a half. The child left without parents was placed in Chisinau Children's Home. At the age of almost three, after about a year spent in the Children's Home, the child was

taken by a family from a village very close to Chisinau. This family was working in the Foster Care Project launched by EveryChild Moldova in collaboration with the Municipal Directorate for the Protection of Children's Rights.



A story about a boy who has finally found a caring family

The Foster Care family is a simple family. Maria is a teacher in a kindergarten. Her husband, Anatol, works as a tractor driver in a water agency. They have two children of their own. They have a house and good household. What else would they have needed to be entirely happy? Probably they, themselves, didn't know that it was Roma who was lacking in their family.

Let's start from the beginning. Roma's mother, as we mentioned above, was initially arrested for theft and subsequently found guilty with committing a crime – murdering a child. She was living with her partner who had a girl of four-years. Both of them were drug abusers. Her partner's violent behaviours was quite frequent. For instance, when Roma was nine months he was beaten so severely that all his body was covered with terrible bruises. During the interrogation the police found that a girl, who had disappeared without trace, was burnt by those two in the oven in the most barbaric way. Supposedly the man being furious with her or feeling the lack of drugs, hit her on the head and after numerous attempts to bring the girl back to life decided "to wipe away the traces"...

Despite Roma's young age certain images his parents' behaviour were left in his mind – for instance the times when they were injecting themselves with drugs. It is amazing, but the psychologists say that it is real. If to take into consideration only this thing, not to mention the possibility of imprinting in the child's mind

the moment when the girl was actually burnt, it is awful. It is even more terrible when thinking that the child with such a psychological trauma was practically thrown into the sea of kids from the Children's Home. Where during the year of his placement he did not learn to walk, to speak, not to mention his psychological rehabilitation.

Now Roma is four and a half. He is a lively, playful, sweet boy and the most important thing is that his eyes express happiness. Maria and Anatol together with their two kids are special people who managed to surround him with an adequate atmosphere for his development.

"The fact that we decided to have Roma in our family was also a challenge for us. I remember that even a week after we had taken him in placement we went to the hospital because he was allergic, had chronic quinsy and on the top of everything he had asthma. Although he was almost three years old he couldn't walk properly, couldn't talk, he didn't have elementary skills to sit at a table, was afraid of darkness and even the pillow... The first year was quite difficult, every other week he would fall ill, when it didn't happen it was like a real holiday for us. I suppose that without the support of my husband and children who accepted him as their little brother I wouldn't have coped."

It is interesting that in Maria's family the article about the case of Roma's parents was kept by accident. At that time this case scandalised the whole of Chisinau.

I should say that the final objective

of the Foster Care service is the reintegration of the child with his/her biological family or extended family members. We try to maintain the child's identity. In this context Maria made contact with Roma's grandparents, and visited Roma's mother in prison where she is serving 21 years of imprisonment for her crime.

When asked what she is going to do if she fails to reintegrate Roma with his extended family Maria answered without thinking much: "We are going to bring him up, register him with us, we'll sort it out somehow." To be understood correctly children taken in foster care are in no way given back to children's home or boarding school, they stay with foster carers until the optimal solution is found including adoption.

During my visit to this family I was convinced that Maria's affirmations are not just words. It is an indescribable feeling when you see this child's eyes sparkling – it can be best understood by people who have visited children's homes. I was amazed by the attitude of the Foster family's children, the attitude that sometimes you would not see between real blood brothers. It is family, beginning with a capital "F". Nowadays one wouldn't often see so much tolerance, decency and patience. And, obviously, everything comes from the heart for if there's no heart, there's nothing. We would just need not more than 13 thousand hearts of this kind from the approximately 4 million citizens officially registered in the Republic of Moldova and thus we could affirm that the future of this country is secured.

The future begins in the family



The visiting card of the international organisation EveryChild is one that places in the foreground the right of the child to grow up in the family or in a family environment, their right to health, education and a sustainable environment. These are rights that can be seen in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The visiting card of the international organisation EveryChild is one that places in the foreground the right of the child to grow up in the family or in a family environment, their right to health, education and a sustainable environment. These are rights that can be seen in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. EveryChild has been working in Moldova since 1995, the principal idea of all, the projects we

are implementing here is sustainability, so that our experience can be taken over and funded by the Moldovan authorities. As in other countries we started from the local authority. Initially it was Chisinau, and then we extended our activity in Cahul, Ungheni and Orhei. At present we are implementing a national project jointly with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the Ministry of Education. The aim of this project is to build the capacity of governmental institutions so that they can be capable of providing children with services which are

an alternative to institutionalisation. We are pleased to have collaboration with governmental institutions and we are aware that there is room for improvement in achieving a more efficient collaboration. The social policy reform in the protection of the child in difficulty, and by this I mean decreasing the number of institutionalised children, refers to joining the European Union. Moldova has a beneficial position as it can utilise the experience of others in this field and has enough time to solve the problems of the child in difficulty. Romania's experience is the best one. The Romanian state managed to set up unique legislation in this field, without instructions and regulations that excessively bureaucratised the child protection system. We believe that in approximately four to five years time, through the plenary commitment of the Moldovan authorities and Moldova's desire to adhere to the European Union, a change in social policies for the child in difficulty will be made possible. Then the number of children in residential institutions will be fewer, which means that Moldovans will be aware that the country's future begins with the upbringing of their children within the family.

Joanna BASKOTT,
EveryChild regional director,
Great Britain



The best interest of the child must be the primary consideration

There is a succession of British experiences that can be applied with success in Moldova. During my career I was involved in the development of foster care services, family support, adoption and other similar services. I now notice after the implementation of these services that children in difficulty feel better within the family and the community. At the same time the reform process of the services for children is a long term one and one

which requires a lot of work and will. It is a change of mentality for all those involved, a change of mentality at the ministerial level. There is also a need for commitment and energy from the people who are working with children. There is a need for political support, which will allow the people involved in the field of social assistance for

Ian SPARKS,
EveryChild expert, UK



children, to promote reform. The fact that the Republic of Moldova signed an action plan with the European Union that foresees a series of recommendations in social protection of children in difficulty means Moldovan social policy is moving closer to European policy. Even if there is a cultural,

economic and historic difference, now the priority is the best interest of the child. The best sign Moldova can give to Europe is the concrete actions your country takes.



Petru BURLACU,
Vice-president of the Cahul Raion Council

If the boarding schools situated on the territory of Cahul region were under the local public authorities I can assure you that more than half of them would be closed. This is because when you are in a situation to find financial resources for maintaining one or another institution you are asking yourself if this is so necessary, how well does it actually meet the needs and what would the alternative mechanisms be for solving the problems, in our case those of children and families in difficulty.

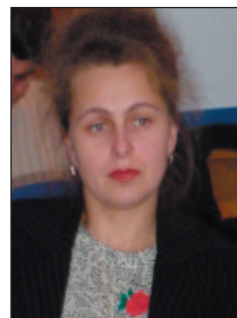
I consider that making the community responsible through the mechanisms and financial instruments is the essential factor for the reorganisation of the child protection system in Moldova.

Moreover I would like to tell you that personally I am a graduate of the boarding school. But, the conditions in the times when I studied in the '80's and those now are completely different.

Reforms should be done gradually

Tatiana TINTIUC,
Ministry of Education

The Residential care system for children in difficulty should by all means be reformed. However, this system needs a gradual reform. If western countries promoted social policy reform for children in difficulty as far back as the '70's, in our countries these changes started to take effect only recently. I would like to declare that the official position of the Ministry of Education is that we are not ready to close boarding schools that are under our body and to start applying alternative child protection methods, the methods that are not yet well known in our country. Even if there are certain beneficial results in applying alternative child protection services, at the moment the Ministry of Education cannot start this process. Many



employees within the residential system assert that many children, who have benefited from the services developed as an alternative to institutionalisation for a certain period of time, return to the boarding school in the end. Alternative services for the protection of

the child in difficulty have been developed in European countries over a long period of time in order to achieve the success they have these days, our country cannot make this leap in two or three years. We as government representatives should consider child protection reform very carefully.

Money should follow the beneficiary and not the other way round

When it is about children we can't just be upset, we need to make concrete steps. The social challenges which appear in our country should make our parliamentarians think, as these problems are extremely complex and are permanently evolving. I am sure it is necessary to make the passing of laws regarding children and family more efficient, and to accelerate the establishment of a legal framework so that the national legislation is in line with international law. Scientists consider that the decentralisation of the system would bring important benefits, but in order to do this the money should follow the beneficiary. The accent should be placed on individual needs because social work should be personalised. In order to personalise services provided to our citizens we need specialists. Today one social worker should provide assistance to 50,000 people. Thus professionals should be employed because in the field of social protection there are many people who do not have a corresponding specialist. Working with people is difficult and working with those who have problems is especially difficult.

Marcela DILION,
PhD in Sociology at the State University

Terminus stations

Study visit: Chisinau – Bacau

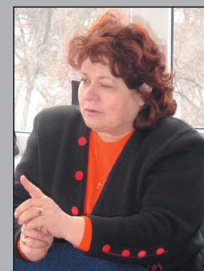
In the first week of April, a group of specialists from the social protection field and Internats from the Republic of Moldova took part in a study visit to Romania, Bacau Judet



Our delegation comprised the directors of the residential institutions and specialists in child and family protection, most of them implementing the Capacity Building in Social Policy Reform Project implemented by the EveryChild consortium in the pilot regions of Cahul, Ungheni and Orhei. The aims of the visit were to study at first hand the advanced experience of the region, to share opinions and to seek information regarding the methods and strategies developed to normalise societies in difficulty. The participants' itinerary comprised the following localities Onesti, Tirlu Oana and Slanic Moldova where there are institutions which are organised in a different way. "Generally Romania started on a different social path quite energetically. They also faced big problems, but little by little through commitment and will, by levels of local and central power they succeeded in modifying the system modification. Modification lies in the fact that children in difficulty are no longer placed in institutions en-masse; there is a selection and assessment mechanism, the so-called boarding school being the last method used for children's upbringing and support. Beginning in 1994 the pilot region of Bacau successfully took over alternative methods of child protection and the result is that at the moment they are at the stage of closing down the old type residential institutions", declared Mariana Lupasco, project coordinator. She also said that the European Union imposed strict conditions on Romania, the criticism of the European Commission making the moral and financial support of the local authorities more efficient.

"Taking over the European experience and its further management with ones own forces is called sustainability. This is what we would like to do in our country", also declared Mariana Lupasco. The process is quite difficult as we are used to guiding ourselves by the argument "the more haste the less speed". This is where the need for the study visit and sharing of experience with our neighbours comes from – to see how much they rushed and where they reached. The latest developments in Chisinau politics suggest that we have the same terminus station, like Bucharest to Europe with a well developed social system.

*Emilia
MOCANU,
director of the
boarding school
for orphan
children, Cahul*



Change of mentality – necessity for a step forward

I visited with pleasure the institutions which provide child protection services in Romania, I confirmed once again that the experience of the teachers and staff from the old institutions were used and old educators after they had been re-trained, been familiarised with new communication skills with children in difficulty and mastered the techniques of alternative child protection services could keep their jobs. There was a need for retraining, change of mentality, becoming aware of the fact that child's interest comes first. This is what actually should be done and implemented in our country.



For 12 thousand children the state and the institutions are family

The general public in the RM has been under the influence of electoral euphoria lately. Nevertheless, over this period our society had on the agenda some other major issues, which were maybe of much bigger importance than the disputes between two or three parallel parties. It is probably already known that a very ambitious project is being implemented in Moldova which will result in insuring a better future for our children – the future electorate.



The European Community came with the idea, the money and the logistics for the project. But we should take into account that this is only an initial investment, later on we will have to build upon the capacities ourselves. We speak about 12,000 institutionalized children who in 90 % of cases have living parents. Unfortunately, due to different reasons these parents are not able to fulfill their responsibilities. The State and the institutions are, for these children, mother and father. And it shouldn't be this way, as it is not the right way for things to be. The family is the only environment where a human being can be happy, especially in their early years; even if it is not a perfect one it is much better than an institution. The family is the beginning of all the good things a man can have in life – character, health, skills and abilities. These were the subjects of the debates that took place last week in Cahul at a meeting with decision makers and professionals in the field of child welfare, organised by the EveryChild Consortium. One of the designers of this project is the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. This representative of the central Government is very active in lobbying for the implementation of a real, sustainable reform in this domain, instead of a set of mimed changes. I will continue with quoting some of the participants at the conference in Cahul and I will start with Vasile Pascaru, the deputy head of Ungheni council, who said that the Project of the European Community for Moldova is a real attempt to shift from old standards to new practices. Usually this shift is a very difficult one and could be compared to a revolution in mentalities. This is the reason why society should be permanently informed about all the changes.

Nobody will be excluded and nobody came with the confusion of war. In a way Tatiana Tintuc, the representative from the Ministry of Education is right when saying that we can't get rid of all residential institutions overnight. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that all her reproaches are groundless. As it was underlined so many times during different meetings on all levels by the leaders of this project, nobody insists on the urgent closure of large scale institutions. But, we should all be aware that it is high time for the system to change. The reform of the child welfare system will take place in our country as well, even with the disapproval of the MoE, especially because this is stipulated in the EU's new action plan for Moldova, recommended by Brussels. To be more precise we will quote an extract from this document that oversteps the corporative interests of the MoE. Chapter nr 2.3 "Social and Economical reform and development" of the

EU Action Plan - Moldova states the following: "Redirect public expenditures to significantly address child poverty and to increase primary school enrolment develop community based child protection measures in particular in the countryside in collaboration with local government"

We can see the same words written in the strategy of the project "Capacity building in social policy reform", the only difference residing in the fact that the project operates with concrete information and actions to be taken. European integration is not only a declaration of supreme feelings towards other European governments; it also implies a huge amount of things to be done including policies for children at risk. For example, Romania was also confronted with the need to undertake an urgent reform in the field of child care. Our neighbours have taken some concrete steps in this respect and are waiting for the results to come in 2007. We are still balancing between the interests of different ministries. Our major interest doesn't consist of eliminating something. As the international experts mentioned, our major interest lays in, reducing to a minimal level the rate of children entering institutionalised care. Who should take the decision for the child to enter an institution? This is the question that Veronica Midari, the national consultant of the project asked. Undoubtedly the MoE should take this decision but it is imperative that other bodies, such as the Mayoralties and Raion councils who know more about the individual cases of children at risk and their life difficulties are also involved. This year is going to be a crucial one – if we want to enter the EU we should start the reform in the field of children at risk.

Specialists' point of view

Children under 12 years and especially those younger than 7 years should stay within the family provided the family does not place their safety at risk. If this is not possible then they should be placed in a family type care service. When placed in state care, the duration of their stay there should be as short as possible. Subsequently, these children then have to be reintegrated with their biological or extended families obeying all the procedures of a comprehensive family and environmental assessment and ongoing monitoring of their situation.



A mark of mentality



Anatol MAMALIGA,
expert PR

That's it... and from the very beginning Or who will bring the future back home

Governments come and go but the situation of children and families in difficulty is getting worse. The state continues to subsidise children from the boarding schools with 1,500 to 1,600 lei per month even if many of them carry mobile phones in their pockets, receiving money from their parents who left to go abroad and earn big money. At the same time hundreds of children, maybe thousands of them have neither a roof above their heads nor a piece of bread to satisfy their hunger.

Thus the bright future of our country is built with horrible torment. When analysing the situation carefully, it would seem that each actor involved in the system of child protection respects their obligations, the most thick-skinned ones in the chain of weakness remain the parents, mothers; those who gave birth to the innocent souls and instead of respecting their responsibilities for the child's upbringing they are throwing them into the abyss of misery and despair. Are just mothers guilty? No, categorically not. Above all it is about the arrogance and cowardice of each of us, beginning with a simple street cleaner and finishing with high officials of the state. We are those who, having the citizen's confidence vote, the second after the elections forget that actually the policies we are pursuing should serve the best interest of the citizen and not the petty interest of the group, party or department. Who will be capable of ending this moral disaster that burns up our future? Who could bring back love, hope and confidence in the future to the souls of thousands of Moldovan children? We must find the response to this question today. Tomorrow will be too late.

There are efforts made to protect the child in difficulty and these efforts will be paid

Within the Capacity Building in Social Policy Reform in child and family protection Project being implemented in the Republic of Moldova we are aware of the fact that at the moment in Moldova the implemented services have the mark of a paternalistic obsolete mentality. Of course it is more convenient to solve the child's problems by placing them in state care. But what would one do when the state hasn't sufficient financial resources to keep these children? The times of placing children in institutions are over. Legislation in the child protection field and also the psycho-pedagogical formulas that should be applied by the social worker in order to reintegrate the child with the family are under permanent development, under permanent evolution. Conceptual evolution of the child protection system

leads to the idea that the child comes first and the best interest of the child is what dictates policies implemented by the state. The Republic of Moldova is signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child where these recommendations are stipulated. Unfortunately, old mentalities, convenience and lack of knowledge in the field make Moldova have a huge number of children in state care. We cannot decrease the number of institutionalized children without having experienced social workers who can put in practice alternative child protection services. That is why within the project we are developing training seminars for trainers, seminars that will help these mentalities change. It is good that both trainers and didactic staff from Moldova still have affection towards children, it is love for your future. And this love, even if the salaries in



the social sector and academic world are not great, still exist. There are efforts made to protect child in difficulty and these efforts will be paid back. We are also glad that there is a wish to learn. Even if many of the specialists from social services do not have professional studies in this field, they find the time to read books in this sphere and the interest for attending seminars organized within this project is great. The good things I see make me think that what we do within this project is not in vain and the foundation of social policy reform will make it possible for Moldova to have a better future. It is a start, we have already begun, it is just up to Moldovan authorities to continue it.

Dave SUGDEN,
EU Expert

