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# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS REPORT ON THE FEASIBILITY OF MERGING PROFESSIONAL PARENTAL ASSISTANCE (PPA) AND FAMILY-TYPE CHILDREN'S HOME (FTCH) SOCIAL SERVICES

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Need to know more? Contact Changing the Way We Care at, [info@ctwwc.org](mailto:info@ctwwc.org) or visit [changingthewaywecare.org](http://changingthewaywecare.org).

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# ACRONYMS

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ATU	Administrative Territorial Unit
CCF	Child, Community, Family Public Association
CPA	Central Public Authority
CPCD	Commission for Protecting Children in Difficult Situations (Gate-Keeping)
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CTWWC	Changing the Way We Care
FTCH	Family-Type Children's Homes
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IAP	Individualized Assistance Plan
Keystone Moldova	Keystone Human Services International Moldova
LPA	Local public authority
MDT	Multidisciplinary Team
MLSPF	Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Family (former name)
MLSP	Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (current name)
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
PA	Public Association
PE	Parent-educator
P4EC	Partnership for Every Child
PPA	Professional Parental Assistance (Foster Care)
TSSA	Territorial Social Assistance Structure
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## CONTEXT

The aim of the Changing the Way We Care initiative in Moldova (hereafter CTWWC) is to contribute to the completion of the deinstitutionalization process of children in institutions and to strengthen families and family-like services so that children can enjoy a safe and nurturing environment. In the Republic of Moldova, the CTWWC initiative is implemented in partnership with three civil society organizations that play a key role in the implementation of child protection reform at the national level: Keystone Moldova, CCF Moldova, and Partnerships for Every Child. As part of this collaboration, CCF Moldova has produced a comparative analysis report on the feasibility of merging the two forms of alternative family-based services, namely Professional Parental Assistance (PPA) and Family-Type Children's Homes (FTCH).

## INTRODUCTION

Based on the standards and recommendations of national and international mechanisms, the right of every child to grow up in a protective family environment is a priority, as enshrined in international law (Art. 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), UN Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children (2009)), and national legislation (Law No. 338 /1994 on the Rights of the Child, Family Code No. 1316 /2000, Law No. 140/2013 on special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents, Law No. 123/2010 on social services, etc.). According to the overwhelming opinion of the interviewees (policy makers, experts, service staff and people with lived experience in institutions, and families), alternative care for children, especially those under 3 years of age, should be provided in the family, an action that would allow alignment with the international standard set out in the UN Guidelines, Chap. II, B, p. 21.

In recent years, considerable efforts have been made to reform the institutional child care system and to create and develop an integrated system of social services with a focus on alternative family-based childcare services through the implementation of policies in this area (National Strategy and Action Plan for the Reform of the Residential Childcare System for 2007-2012, approved by Government Decision No. 784/2007; Child Protection Strategy for 2014-2020, approved by Government Decision No. 434/2014). The reform of the childcare system remains an objective for the next political cycle, and the National Programme for Child Protection for 2022-2026, and the Action Plan clearly state the priority of diversifying and expanding family-based alternative care services.

This report analyses the existing family-type social services: Professional Parental Assistance (hereafter PPA) and Family-Type Children's Homes (hereafter FTCH). These two social services have co-existed in the country's social protection system for about 20 years. Although in the beginning there were a number of aspects that differentiated the two services, in recent years many similarities and unifying aspects have been identified, especially with regard to minimum quality standards.



The many similarities mentioned above have led to frequent transformations of Family-Type Children's Homes into PPAs (as children 'left' the system and parent-educators wanted to reduce their workload) and conversely, when a child over the age of three was placed in the family of a Professional Parental Assistant by mutual agreement, the PPA was transformed into a FTCH.

The experts who participated in the qualitative study noted that both services have advantages and disadvantages. However, neither can 'cover' all the needs of children in the institutional care system who need to be reintegrated or to be placed in family-based alternative care.

In order to identify the conditions for increasing the effectiveness of alternative family-based care services, the present study was initiated, which will either prove the feasibility of merging PPA and FTCH or provide strong arguments for maintaining the current situation.

It is important to emphasize the relevance of this issue in 2023, in the light of the action plan of the National Programme, which calls for the development of guidelines, tools, and instructions that, in the case of a merger of PPA and FTCH, would become a "new" family-type service, thus avoiding duplication and streamlining the work of family-type alternative care.

The main purpose of the study is to identify the rationale for combining the two PPA/FTCH family care services in terms of the quality of child care and the best interests of children.

### **Goal and Objectives of the Study**

The goal of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the regulatory framework of alternative family services and to develop recommendations on the possibility and feasibility of combining the social services "Professional Parental Assistance" and "Family-Type Children's Home" or keeping these two services in the system.

The study had the following objectives:

- Analysis of the legal framework, existing national data, and studies on family-type foster care services targeted in the research;
- Analysis of the regulatory framework on the financing of family-type foster care services (PPA and FTCH) at the national level;
- Identification of difficulties in financing family-type foster care services PPA and FTCH; and
- Analysis of quantitative data on PPA and FTCH family-type foster care services at the national level, based on the CER 103 Statistical Report, to understand the coverage area and need.

This report contains the analysis of the regulatory framework for PPA and FTCH services, the CER-103 reports, (<https://social.gov.md/informatie-de-interes-public/rapoarte/>) and the opinions gathered in discussions with child protection professionals and providers of these two types of services.

**Chapter I** is an analysis of the main characteristics of the PPA and FTCH services, in particular information on the organization and functioning of the PPA and FTCH services, the salaries of professional parental assistants and parent educators, and the allowances for children placed in PPA and FTCH.

**Chapter II** reflects the views on the appropriateness of merging PPA and FTCH services or maintaining the current situation from the perspective of: (1) representatives of central public authorities, (2) heads of Territorial Social Assistance Structure (hereafter TSAS), (3) service managers, (4) professional parental assistants/parent educators, (5) civil society, (6) children/beneficiaries of PPA and FTCH foster care services.

**Chapter III** presents the conclusions with reference to the organization and functioning of the PPA and FTCH services, as well as recommendations on whether or not to merge Professional Parenting Assistance and Family-Type Children's Home social services.

## Evaluation methods and techniques

The following methods were used for data collection: analysis of secondary sources of information (reports, legislation); analysis of primary sources of information, interviews, and focus group discussions. The study's methods included:

- Analysing the current operating practices of the services under review and the relevant national regulatory framework.
- Conducting interviews with MLSP representatives according to the developed interview guide (Annex 2).
- Conducting four interviews with TSAS managers according to the developed interview guide (Annex 3).
- Organizing a focus group discussion (hereafter FGD) with TSAS managers/specialists responsible for foster care services: PPA and FTCH, according to the developed interview guide (Annex 4).
- Organizing FGD with caregivers providing PPA and FTCH services, according to the developed interview guide (Annex 5).
- Organizing one FGD with representatives of NGOs working in the field of child protection, according to the developed interview guide (Annex 6).
- Conducting four interviews with beneficiaries/children placed in PPA and FTCH services according to the developed interview guide (Annex 7). (Note: In order to ensure ethical and effective interviewing of children/youth, confidentiality and anonymity of children, secure online connection and finding the child/youth in a comfortable environment were ensured.)
- Analysis of statistical data according to the CER-103 report (comparative data for the last six years).
- Quantitative analysis of data on how PPA and FTCH services are administered/managed in 37 Administrative Territorial Units (hereafter ATUs).

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The report presents the main findings of the comparative analysis of the two family-type foster care services – Professional Parental Assistance (PPA) and Family-Type Children's Home (FTCH) – from the perspective of merging the two services or keeping them separate in the national social welfare system.

The main research methods used were analysis of the normative framework, statistical data, relevant literature, and interviews and focus group discussions with various stakeholders, including young people placed in these services.

The main findings are:

1. From the point of view of the regulatory framework (aim, objectives, beneficiaries, standards), the services show significant similarities, with some differences, including: the number of children in placement, the non-inclusion of children with disabilities as beneficiaries of placement, the maintenance of the status of beneficiary of services after the age of 18, professional groups, the definition of types of placement, etc.
2. In terms of organization and operation, the procedures for recruitment and training of staff, assessment, placement of children, and review, the PPA and FTCH services are identical.
3. Parental allowances in PPA and FTCH are identical.
4. Challenges in providing both services are virtually identical, the main ones being: limited financial resources for service provision and planning for service expansion, lack of staff with direct responsibility for PPA/FTCH; and in 10 of the 36 districts that have approved one or both services, there are no staff responsible for service provision, so the roles are combined by other professionals.
5. Respondents identified a common problem in the process of promoting, recruiting and retaining suitable candidates.
6. Both services are failing to place children with special developmental needs, i.e. children aged 0–2, children with severe disabilities, children with special emotional needs, Roma children, large sibling groups, etc. For example, children aged 0–2 are the least represented in family-type services.
7. Professionals consider the PPA service to be better suited to the needs of children, mainly because of the smaller number of children.
8. At the same time, many professionals considered it appropriate to merge services by 'taking the most positive aspects of both'.
9. Children/young people who are or have been placed in PPA/FTCH do not know which service they have been placed in; instead, they mentioned the importance of the human and professional qualities of the caregivers and the relationship they build during the placement.

In order to improve the quality of and access to family-based care services for children at risk, following the analysis of the legal framework and the opinions gathered in the consultation process from the various actors involved in the provision of services and their beneficiaries, it is recommended that the PPA and FTCH services be merged, that the legal framework of the PPA service be revised and that the most positive aspects of both services be taken into account.



The main benefit of merging the two services is to provide quality services to children from the most vulnerable groups, to which they currently have limited or no access, by standardizing procedures and improving quality through the adoption of positive practices from both family services. The administrative and managerial staff of the merged service will ensure the smooth running and organization of a single service in a more efficient and qualitative way. Clearer communication with prospective carers will lead to more homogeneous and consistent promotion of the merged service, as professionals will no longer have to promote two similar services, which leads to: duplication of effort, diffusion of financial resources, and confusion among stakeholders as well as professionals in related fields and the general public. A merged family-based alternative social care service will be able to gain greater recognition and visibility at local, regional, and national level, which will lead to increased awareness and thus increased confidence in the service, attracting new staff/carers and partners.

The report's conclusions and the authors' recommendations were presented at the meeting of the working group for improving the methodological framework for the organization and operation of family-type placement services, approved by order no 86, of October 22nd, by the Minister of Labor and Social Protection, in May and at the national workshop in June, which was attended by about 80 representatives of social work departments. The authors took note of the suggestions and recommendations made by the participants in both consultations. **When deciding whether to merge, it is important to consider the potential risks, the likelihood of their occurrence and the severity of their impact.** For this reason, the authors recommend a number of actions to improve the effectiveness of the merged service, of which the most important are:

1. Revise the legal framework of the APP service in line with international best practice in order to facilitate access to the service for children separated from their families or at risk of separation.
2. Initiate a gradual reorganization, through the establishment of a moratorium on the development of CCTFs and the regulation of the transitional period, towards a one common family service, maintaining the salary guarantees of the parent-teachers in the CCTF.
3. Revise the method of financing and guaranteeing the financing of the APP social service from the state budget, which would allow for the efficient provision of this service at the local level.
4. Elaborate the methodology for calculating the reference cost of the APP according to the complexity of the care, by type of beneficiary, correlated with a concrete indicator (for example, the subsistence minimum) and the annual indexation of the targeted benefits.
5. Extend the age at which children are entitled to the daily allowance for children enrolled in an educational establishment from first grade until the end of their studies.
6. Develop a flexible salary scale for carers, so that their salary is linked to the number of children they look after and their profile (children aged 0-2, children with disabilities, children with complex emotional needs, etc.).
7. Revise the normative framework regarding the salary of carers, ensuring the differentiated payment of the salary according to the complexity of the care, by type of beneficiary.

8. Regulate the number of children that can be placed in a family in such a way as to ensure the quality of the service rather than the quantity, taking into account (a) the age of the children placed (the matching process is essential (e.g., it is not recommended to place a young child in a family where there are already 2 or 3 children); b) the health status of the children (type of disability and/or chronic illness); c) the living conditions (number of rooms, access to utilities, access to resources, support network, etc.); and the only exception being groups of siblings, in which case the children must be placed together (with the consent of the caregiver and on the basis of their abilities).
9. Create a support services for carers.
10. Create/expand the network of additional care services for children placed in foster care, depending on the complexity of the care, by type of beneficiary (children aged 0–3, children with disabilities, children with deviant behaviour, children with complex emotional needs, and sibling groups).
11. Harmonize the legal provisions regarding the age of the beneficiaries of the APP service. It is recommended to extend it until the end of studies, but without exceeding the age of 23 years, as currently stipulated in the Framework Regulation on the organization and operation of social service family-type children's homes (HG no. 51/2018).
12. Review/update/develop the training curriculum for administrative staff and caregivers, in order to standardize the training programmes and carry them out continuously throughout the country. Carry out the initial and continuous training process for caregivers, depending on the complexity of the care, by type of beneficiary.
13. Approve the training curriculum for caregivers involved in different types of placements and expand the content based on the identified needs of children and caregivers.
14. Ensure that the alternative family-type social service within the Social Work Department is managed by a person – the service manager – paid by the unit, who will only deal with the organization and operation of the service in question, without accumulating other additional tasks.
15. Revise the legal framework so that, in the case of a couple, with the consent of the spouses, both are recognised as carers, in order to solve the problem of holidays and other unforeseen situations in which the employee is unable to carry out their duties.
16. Identify ways to pay carers on rest days and national holidays.
17. Organize national campaigns to promote the family-type service and the importance of raising and caring for children in a safe and protective family environment.

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