



KEEPING CHILDREN IN FAMILIES: CHILD CARE REFORM IN MOLDOVA

Results and Impact | 2025

Credit: UNICEF/2025/Moldova/Keystone Moldova

This project supports Moldova in ensuring that every child grows up in a safe, supportive family environment – by strengthening prevention, family support, and community-based care.

The initiative is implemented with the support of the Government of Sweden, in partnership with UNICEF Europe and Central Asia, and by the UNICEF Country Office in the Republic of Moldova, in close collaboration with relevant national and local stakeholders, through a cross-sectoral approach that brings together the social assistance, education, and health sectors, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, the Territorial Social Assistance Agencies/Territorial Social Assistance Structures, as well as the structures responsible for child protection in the Municipality of Chișinău and in Gagauzia, local public authorities, social service providers, and non-governmental partners - Partnerships for Every Child (P4EC), CCF Moldova, and Keystone Moldova.

10,271  children

 4,936 boys
 5,335 girls

supported to prevent family separation and strengthen families' resilience to risky situations

including 62 children with disabilities and 81 young children

327  children in residential care assessed

155  children deinstitutionalized

189  children received support for family reintegration or placement in family-based care

1586  professionals trained

The **Child Care Reforms Project** aims to strategically support Moldova in advancing integrated child protection systems and comprehensive childcare reforms to ensure that children grow up in safe and supportive family and community environments. The project focuses on strengthening governance, improving the quality and equitable accessibility of child- and family-centred social services, and reinforcing the capacities of national and local actors responsible for planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating childcare and child protection services.

Through this intervention, the project contributes to the development of effective, sustainable, and integrated policies, programmes, and services that strengthen families, prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families, promote safe and diversified family-based alternative care, and support the transition from residential care to community-based services. By fostering effective intersectoral collaboration across different levels of governance, the project seeks to ensure that childcare reforms are responsive to the diverse and often complex needs of children and families, including refugee children from Ukraine, while remaining aligned with child rights principles and broader reform priorities.



Output 1: Gatekeeping and statutory family support services have the capacities to prevent unnecessary separation of children from their families

To strengthen the quality and consistency of the system for preventing the separation of children from their families, the project implemented interventions at both service and institutional levels, structured around three interconnected pillars: strengthening gatekeeping mechanisms, expanding family support services, and scaling up parenting programmes.



Gatekeeping Mechanisms

Training and tools for Gatekeeping Commissions (GKC)
Strengthening decision-making to reduce unnecessary separation
Promoting prevention as a key function



Family Support Services

Enhancing support for vulnerable families
Strengthening case management and direct service delivery
Institutionalising training and mentoring approaches



Parenting Programmes

Scaling up PEACE and other structured parenting programmes
Promoting positive, inclusive, and gender-sensitive parenting practices
Embedding parenting into centre-based services

These pillars were operationalized through structured training, mentoring, tailored tools, and the direct delivery of services. As part of this effort, the following activities were implemented:

- Development of the curriculum and training materials for the Commission for the Protection of Children in Need, covering the following components: the organization and functioning of the Commission; the regulatory

and institutional framework for child protection; child development; prevention of family separation; and the promotion of the social inclusion of children in need.

- Training of 368 members of the Commission for the Protection of Children in Need and 40 child protection specialists from the Territorial Social Assistance Structures (STAS) responsible for coordinating the Commission's work (346 women and 62 men).

- Development of the curriculum and training materials for specialists delivering the “Support for Families with Children” service, covering the following topics: the organization and functioning of support services for families with children; child well-being and family protective factors; and trauma and its effects on children.
- Training of 137 specialists responsible for delivering family support services (135 women and 2 men).
- Provision of supervision and mentoring to 551 professionals (497 women and 54 men) on case management, intervention methods and techniques, legal support, decision-making in the best interests of the child, and children’s participation in decision-making.
- Implementation of the PEACE parenting programme, which promotes non-judgmental, gender-transformative parenting practices, as well as peer support. The programme reached 51 parents and caregivers (49 women and 2 men), as well as 58 children (26 girls and 32 boys).

Overall, the results confirm that both gatekeeping mechanisms and family support services require continuous strengthening of their preventive function as a core component, supported by practical tools, clear standards, reflective

368  Commission members trained

137  Family support specialists trained

551  Professionals mentored

practice, and structured professional supervision. Parenting programmes continue to demonstrate that beneficiary-centred, non-judgmental, and gender-sensitive approaches can effectively strengthen protective factors and reduce the risk of child-family separation when integrated into a broader child protection framework. Together, these complementary interventions have contributed to measurable progress in reducing the risk of children being separated from their families.

As a result, 10,271 children (5,335 girls and 4,936 boys), including 62 children with disabilities and 81 young children, received support aimed at preventing separation from their families and strengthening families’ resilience to risky situations.



Output 2: ATAS/STAS in Orhei, Hincesti, Chisinau and Balti have capacities to deinstitutionalise children placed in residential care

The project has made significant progress in strengthening the capacity of local authorities and professionals to support the deinstitutionalization of children nationwide, achieving the following results:

- The implementation of regional operational plans for the deinstitutionalization of children was launched through the organization of a national training workshop for multidisciplinary teams, which brought together 216 team members and regional coordinators (197 women and 19 men), contributing to a better understanding of deinstitutionalization procedures, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and strengthening multidisciplinary collaboration based on a trauma-informed approach. Participant feedback confirmed the high practical value of case-based learning, while also highlighting the need for continued knowledge-building.

661



619 women

42 men

Professionals in the child protection system

received capacity building regarding the deinstitutionalization of children

- The specialists were from Territorial Social Assistance Agencies, members of local multidisciplinary teams, and employees of residential institutions.

- The project provided targeted and in-depth support, covering all stages of the deinstitutionalization process, including child and family assessment, multidisciplinary planning, reintegration, and post-deinstitutionalization monitoring:

327



164 girls

163 boys

Children in residential care assessed

including 86 children with disabilities and 156 young children

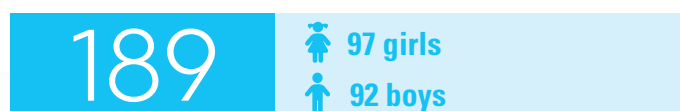
The assessments focused on children's development and identified specific support needs, with particular attention to children with disabilities, developmental delays, and complex medical and psychosocial conditions. The assessment of children in residential care highlighted multiple interrelated causes of institutionalization, including neglect, abandonment, substance abuse, domestic violence and poverty. Families faced overlapping vulnerabilities, including unemployment, unstable income, and limited support networks, often requiring complex, multisectoral child protection responses. At the same time, a gender-sensitive lens remains essential given the heightened risk of poverty, inadequate care, and protection concerns in households headed by single women.



A major issue identified through the assessments was the limited contact between children and their biological families: only 30 per cent of children received visits or maintained telephone contact with their parents, while 70 per cent had no contact at all, significantly weakening emotional bonds. Medical assessments also identified specific needs, particularly among children with disabilities and those with complex emotional difficulties, for whom specialized services remain insufficient or inaccessible. These findings underscore the urgent need to develop community-based preventive and rehabilitative services to reduce reliance on institutional care.

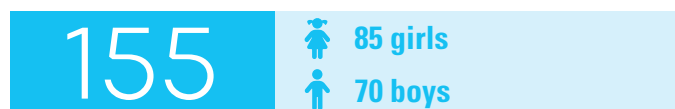
The data show that nearly 50 per cent of children in institutional care are eligible for adoption. Although many children are adoptable, the severity of their needs and the limited capacity of foster care and adoption services continue to constrain placement options. The continued placement of children in residential care also points to persistent gaps in gatekeeping mechanisms, underscoring the need to strengthen prevention services and expand foster care capacity.

- With the support of the project, 178 families underwent comprehensive, multidisciplinary assessments as part of the child deinstitutionalization process. These assessments aimed to identify needs, risks, and available resources at the family level to inform individualized interventions and tailored support measures designed to ensure the child's safe reintegration and well-being within the family environment.



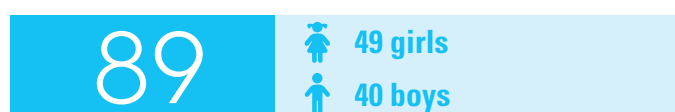
Children received support for family reintegration or placement in family-based care, including 25 children with disabilities and 83 young children

- They received integrated services and individualized support to facilitate their reintegration into their families or, where appropriate, their placement in family-based care.



Children deinstitutionalized
including 19 children with disabilities and 65 young children

- To assess the sustainability of reintegration through indicators such as children's safety, stability of care, and continued access to education, health, and social services, underscoring that successful reintegration requires early preparation, individualized support, and coordinated action across child protection and other essential services.



Children benefiting from post-deinstitutionalization monitoring
including 10 children with disabilities and 52 young children

- At the community level, the project strengthened local support mechanisms for the reintegration of children and the prevention of institutionalization by facilitating community support groups and reinforcing intersectoral collaboration. In total, 54 group activities were organized, involving 507 professionals, caregivers, and family members. In addition, as part of the deinstitutionalization process, 26 local support groups were established, which conducted 32 sessions and supported 409 children (207 girls and 202 boys) who were undergoing deinstitutionalization or at risk of institutionalization.



Through the engagement of local public authorities, multidisciplinary teams, specialists from the education, health, and social assistance sectors, as well as members of the extended family and other relevant community actors, the project promoted a coordinated and child-centred approach. These groups played an essential role in

facilitating children's reintegration into the community, contributing to stronger shared responsibility at the local level, increased community engagement, and a reduced risk of re-institutionalization.

54 
Group activities
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26 
Local support
groups established

507 
Participants involved

409 
Children supported through
groups, 207 girls and 202 boys

Output 3: A network of community-based and family-based alternative services is available to children without parental care in project areas

The project has made significant progress in strengthening the quality of care for children in alternative family-based settings and enhancing the capacity of services that support young people transitioning out of the care system, achieving the following results:

- A concept for the organization of support groups for professional foster parents was developed, and 10 sessions were held with the participation of 29 caregivers. These activities contributed to strengthening caregivers' resilience, improving the stability of foster care placements, and highlighting key challenges related to parenting, emotional attachment, and foster care dynamics.
- A training programme based on a trauma-informed approach was developed and implemented in Chişinău for

staff of the Chişinău Assisted Social Housing Service, helping to strengthen their capacity to respond to the needs of children and young people through empathetic, child-centred interventions.

- The quality of professional foster care services was strengthened through the organization of 47 mentoring sessions involving 76 child protection professionals. These activities focused on strengthening capacities in candidate assessment, implementation of service procedures, placement planning, case monitoring, and the management of challenges specific to children and adolescents in foster care, while also supporting the professional integration of newly recruited specialists.

45 
Prospective foster
parents trained

25 
Foster parents
approved

17 
Active foster parents

19 
Children placed
in foster care



The regulatory framework for family- and community-based social services was strengthened, in partnership with the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, with a view to aligning it with European standards and enhancing the quality, relevance, and sustainability of services:

Community Home:

Support was provided to revise the regulatory framework and quality standards to strengthen the relevance, quality, and sustainability of services for children with disabilities and to align them with European best practices. The process included technical consultations, the drafting of amendments, and the promotion of updated provisions related to funding, accessibility, the protection of children's rights, and quality of care. The amendments were approved by the Government in December 2025.

Professional foster care:

Support was provided for the revision of the Social Service Regulation to establish a care model better suited to the needs and profiles of children. The process contributed to defining a child-centred model aligned with the level of support required and the types of foster parents and laid the groundwork for the development of minimum quality standards for social services, as well as an operational manual. At the same time, a comprehensive analysis was conducted of the costs of caring for children placed in professional foster care and of the financial incentives for caregivers within the service, which will inform the revision of the regulatory framework and budget planning.

Supervised Independent Living:

A cost analysis was conducted in Chisinau municipality, providing insights into how the service is organized and operated, as well as into the financial considerations involved in scaling it up nationwide. The costing methodology developed under the project informed the revision of the regulatory framework and contributed to the Government's approval, in December 2025, of the Regulation and minimum quality standards, thereby strengthening the service's role in supporting the transition of young people from alternative care to independent living.

- Strengthening the national mechanism for the prevention of and response to gender-based violence in alternative care settings through:
 - ▶ Training 90 professionals (30 professional foster parents, 30 supervisors of family-based services, and 30 community social workers and child protection specialists) on gender-based violence in alternative care, practical tools for supporting child survivors, and approaches to ensuring care in safe family environments.
 - ▶ Conducting a rapid assessment on GBV in alternative care services, involving 106 professionals (100 women and 6 men), to evaluate the current level of integration of the GBV dimension within alternative care services and identify strengths, gaps, and priority areas for system strengthening and improvement within the child protection sector.



Output 4: Children have access to a safe participation and consultation mechanism

Significant progress has been made in strengthening mechanisms for children's participation within the social welfare system through the development of a conceptual framework, the strengthening of institutional capacities, and the establishment of dedicated platforms for consulting children:

- **Institutionalizing children's participation:** A detailed concept for the establishment of a national platform for children's participation was developed and submitted to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, defining the operational framework, required resources, and technical support mechanisms.
- **Strengthening system capacity:** Training was provided to 44 national coordinators from all Territorial Social Assistance Structures, ensuring a shared understanding of the principles of child participation and strengthening their skills to facilitate inclusive, child-centred participation.
- **Implementing the model:** Mentoring support was provided to 47 specialists within the STAS to facilitate the practical application of the child participation and consultation model, including in the recruitment of children, the organization of activities, and the integration of the platform into existing social service structures.
- **Development of implementation tools:** The project supported the drafting of the Practical Guide for Implementing ABC, which was subsequently validated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and includes methodologies, tools, and concrete steps for the standardized and sustainable implementation of child participation.
- **Expansion and initial results:** The Territorial Social Assistance Structures initiated the establishment of Children's Advisory Councils, marking significant progress in institutionalizing mechanisms for consulting children in the planning and delivery of services.



Credit: UNICEF/2025/Moldova/CCF Moldova



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