

CHILD CARE REFORM IN GEORGIA

UPDATE ON PROGRESS OF ENDING THE USE OF LARGE INSTITUTIONAL CARE FOR CHILDREN

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Only five Large Child Care Institutions Remain in Georgia, Down from 41

Since 2005, the government of Georgia has made incredible progress in the area of child care reform. From the outset, the reform was committed to eliminating the use of large institutional care for children and to ensuring every Georgian child has the opportunity to grow up in a supported family environment.

Guided by the National Child Action Plan (CAP) 2008-2011, the government of Georgia began the process of ending the use of large institutions in the country. A specific plan of action covering 2011-2012, was then developed and implemented.

Comprehensive changes have been introduced at all levels of the system and a new gate-keeping policy is being rolled-out across the country to try to ensure children come into care for the right reasons.

A child care coordination council involving relevant line ministries, key donors, and NGOs has been established to facilitate and monitor the process. Based on the strong political will of the government and financial and technical support from UNICEF and other actors, the stage was set to achieve sustainable results.

Children outside of family care

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is clear that children are best raised in families. However, all children separated from their families have the right to adequate care and protection from the State.

Georgia inherited a soviet style system of large institutions. Like other countries in the region, children in these institutions suffer from lack of adequate care.

It is internationally recognized that large institutions are the least appropriate option of alternative care. Why?

- Access to health and education services is not guaranteed.
- Children under the age of three are particularly at risk of long-term impairment.
- Children with disability are over-represented and the quality of care is inadequate to meet their needs.
- International evidence shows that the vast majority of children living in institutions have families—income poverty and access to basic services are often the primary reasons why children end up in institutional care.
- The cost of providing care in large institutions is higher than supporting children to live in families.

Appropriate alternatives include small group homes, foster care and preventing family separation.

UNICEF is contributing to the development of a continuum of social services to replace the system of large scale institutional care and is committed to providing family based alternative care for children who experience or are at risk of abuse, violence and neglect.

Key objectives of the child care reform

1. Systematically close all large scale institutions.
2. Reunify children from closed institutions with their families when in the child's best interest and with sustained family support.
3. Develop and strengthen family based alternatives (foster care and small group homes) for those children who can not be reunified safely with their family
4. Expand the quality of social workers in the country to manage the individual cases, and establish a supervision system for social workers.
5. Reform child care policies, legislation and funding flows to support the new child care system.

Changing attitudes and building awareness

Reform of the child care system has been complemented by a strong advocacy and public awareness campaign. Led by government, and supported by UNICEF and other actors, 'A Family for Every Child' campaign was launched with the aim of raising awareness of the importance of every child growing up in a family environment.

Extensive involvement of the Minister of Health Labor and Social Affairs, a champion of the reform, ensured excellent media coverage across the country. A number of documentaries were developed and the billboard campaign was launched. Trainings and round tables with participation of journalists and civil society organizations were organized.

Progress achieved at service delivery level

The reform has witnessed a dramatic change in the way government delivers child care services.

Previously, day care centers and large institutions were managed, run, and staffed by the government. In the new system, the government is outsourcing the functions of running day care centers, early intervention services for families caring for children with disabilities, and small group homes to NGOs.

Foster care is now the dominant form of alternative care in the country, with 960 children in foster families. The number of Small Group Homes housing no more than 8-10 children in the country is now 45. Small Group Homes are now the last resort for children who can not be with their families or for whom a foster care family is not possible. Staff members of the large institutions were given the opportunity to become foster parents or caregivers in the new small group homes.

Within the reform framework, UNICEF ensures that the government is actively involved at all stages and that NGOs are selected in a strategic and competitive manner. Minimum standards for service delivery are in place, and systematic monitoring of the outsourced services is being strengthened. The government initiated new or expanded services via NGOs and met the running costs.

Combined, the EU, USAID and UNICEF have partnered to contribute over \$15 million to technical support and critical transitional costs.

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განიერ სამოქალაქო ტივის სახლი







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ცხელი ხაზი 1505

Training of professionals working with children



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Currently, 250 trained state social workers are in place and their numbers are growing. Over the last two years the number of state statutory social workers has increased by over 25%.

Quality of social work is also improving. In 2012, training focused on increasing social workers' effectiveness. In close collaboration with the Georgian Association of Social Workers, new social work forms have been developed, updated and tested

and social workers have now received training in how to use the new forms. A new gatekeeping policy is also in place, spelling out when children should be taken into foster care and small group homes, and when they should not.

Specific trainings for social workers for children with disabilities have been conducted in partnership with the First Step Foundation a national NGO focusing on services for children with disabilities.

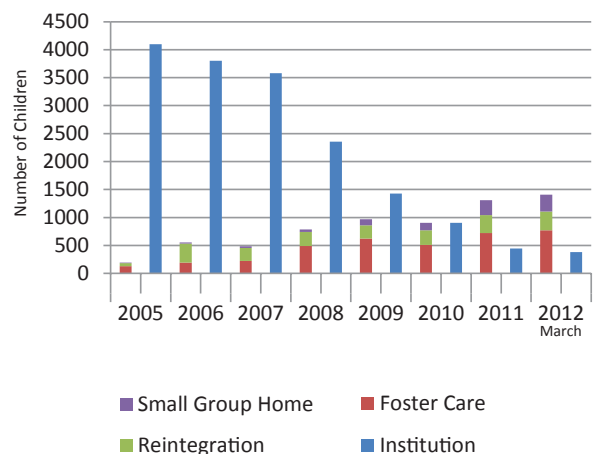
Impact of the child care reform

In just a few years, the results of the reform have been visible and dramatic. Today, the number of children living in large institutional care have been reduced from over 4000 to 250. During 2011-2012, 23 of the remaining 28 institutions were closed.

During the past 12 months, approximately 33 per cent of all children from institutions have been reunited with their families, when in their best interest. In 2010, the government re-doubled its efforts by introducing a reunification package of \$50 per month per child for families who take back their children, health insurance for the child and free day care (if needed) has been made available.

Foster care has also been expanded and strengthened. For those children who could not be reunified with family or placed in foster care, small group homes that house no more than 8-10 children are replacing large institutions. Over the past two years, the number of small group homes (SGH) has expanded from 15 to 45, housing approximately 350 children.

**Shift from institutional care
over the last five years**



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INNOVATION

One innovation within the reform has been the 'My Friends' programme initiated by the Deputy Minister of Labor Health and Social Affairs. The programme links private businesses and corporations working in Georgia with newly established small group homes. Once matched up staff members spend time with the young people, providing support and acting as mentors.

PARTNERSHIPS

UNICEF works in partnership with the Ministry of Labor Health and Social Affairs (MoLHSA), key donors and bilateral organizations including the European Union, USAID, Polish Government, Ana Muntz Foundation in the Netherlands, UNICEF Luxembourg National Committee, international and local NGOs, community and faith based organizations.

CHALLENGES

While the successes are clear – significant challenges remain:

- Prevention of unnecessary family separation will be needed to be strengthened.
- The two institutions for children with disability and the two infant homes require an expansion of specialized services and better linkages with the health system.
- Support services to foster caregivers and development of a foster care network will need to be developed.
- Children living and/or working on the streets require specific linked efforts.
- There is a gap in aftercare services and children who turn 18 and leave foster care or small group homes as adults need support.

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