

**DEVELOPMENT OF INTEGRATED SOCIAL CARE SERVICES FOR VULNERABLE  
FAMILIES AND CHILDREN AT RISK IN MOLDOVA**

**UNICEF- EU/TACIS PROJECT**

**PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT**

**FOR**

**UNICEF MOLDOVA**

**Presented to UNICEF Moldova**

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The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the UNICEF Moldova. The author remains solely responsible for any errors that may remain in this report.

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## **Abbreviations and acronyms**

APSA	Association for Promotion Social Assistants
CO	Country Office
EU	European Union
EC	European Commission
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
MEY	Ministry of Education and Youth
MSPFC	Ministry of Social Protection Family and Children
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
TACIS	Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States
TdH	Terre des Hommes
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WB	World Bank

## 1. Executive summary

Main goals of the evaluation were:

- Evaluate the project in respect to narrow project goals defined in the original project proposal;
- Evaluate the project in regards to the wider child protection system reforms; and
- Advise on the next steps in the field of child protection in Moldova.

Methodology of the Evaluation was based on:

- Extensive review of materials produced by the project, including the documents prepared by national and international experts, drafts of respective laws, training modules as well as a battery of tools prepared for pilot sites;
- Semi-structured interviews with key project stakeholders and selected beneficiaries; and
- Focus groups with social workers in three pilot regions.

Intended results of the UNICEF TACIS II project were:

- Further development and strengthening of the policy and legislative framework for the development of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk;
- Development and testing of new models of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk in 6 selected communities; and
- Strengthening of the institutional and human capacity to ensure effective provision of quality integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk.

Measurable improvements in policy and legislative framework are:

- The number of new placements in boarding schools was decreased by 50%, from 321 in October 2006, to 156 in October 2007 across the country;
- The closure of the A.I.Cuza boarding school was approved by the Government;
- National Strategy and 2007-2012 Action Plan for the Reform of the Residential Childcare System that aim at reducing by 50% the number of children living apart from the family environment were adopted;
- The Gate keeping Regulation was adopted;
- Rapid assessment of all residential institutions was completed; and
- In Family Type Homes (FTH), monthly allowance per child was increased from 180/200 to 450 lei and the annual allowance was increased from 1000 lei to 3000 lei per child.

Measurable results in the field of strengthening of the institutional and human capacity include:

- A sophisticated training needs assessment has been conducted in partnership with key stakeholders;
- The expert group was established by the Ministry of Education and Youth (MEY) with a wide representation to analyze and approve training modules;
- Eleven modules developed by the project covered such areas as case management and supervision in child and family protection systems; family reintegration and prevention of institutionalization and other topics;
- Training courses were delivered to 1,235 social assistants and other staff;
- The training material developed within the project has been used to train 542 community social assistants;
- Major steps in the development of an on-line database system on children recipients of social services were undertaken: a needs assessment conducted, concept of the IT system was developed and approved by all line Ministries involved into the project, the necessary hardware was procured for the country, training was delivered to 80 people and the field testing has been conducted in one raion.

Measurable results in the area of models of social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk include:

- Models of integrated social services for vulnerable families and children at risk were successfully implemented in six raions;
- Gate keeping regulations approved and tested in all 6 raions;
- Social assistance teams employed;
- 264 children successfully reintegrated;
- Institutionalization of 468 children prevented; and
- 20 Family Type Homes created and 68 children placed in FTHs.
- Raional public administrations were highly satisfied with the models and committed to continue funding of the social assistance teams from local budgets. In two raions these decisions have been already approved.

Measurable results in the field of public awareness campaign include:

- Campaign adopted a positive approach motivating people to act in the interest of the child;
- 3 video spots were broadcasted in target project regions 855 times and 3 audio spots were aired 2,963 times;
- 48 journalists made 19 visits to boarding schools, reintegrated families, and family-type homes that led to increased coverage of the project and its objectives; and
- 88,000 Brochures for families; 45,000 Posters for communities promoting family as the most healthy environment for the child; and 41,000 Leaflets on promotion of family-type children's homes were distributed across the country.

Factors that contributed to project's success are:

- Strong Government commitment to reforms of child protection system;
- Dedicated and knowledgeable project management and staff; and
- Strong support of raion and primaria level administrations and dedication of social assistants, parent teachers, boarding schools' management and staff in six pilot regions.

Core recommendations to the Government:

- Transfer the child protection component of the boarding schools and Family Type Homes from the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Youth (MEY) to jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Protection Family and Child (MSPFC). Ensure that all cost savings generated as a result of closure of boarding schools are directed by MSPFC and local authorities to development of alternative social care arrangements for children at risk;
- Continue implementation of the Master Plan for de-institutionalization and report annually on the progress to the National Council on Child Rights and the public. Establish a permanent inter-ministerial working group to coordinate efforts in implementation of the Master Plan; and
- Conduct government-wide legislative and policy review to clarify accountabilities of line ministries, raional and primaria level administration in the field of child protection.

Core recommendations to the UNICEF:

Establish a core expert team that would:

- Provide expert advice to support the Government in implementation of the Master Plan relying on evidence based research and inter-jurisdictional analysis;

- Review and analyze the experiences of 6 pilot raions and develop “best practices” summary to inform the Government’s policy work;
- Explore with the MEY a set of required legislative and policy changes to support de-institutionalization of children with special needs placed in residential institutions; and
- Conduct a public awareness campaign to contribute to changes in public views and attitudes towards institutionalization of children.

If the recommendations listed above are implemented, the Government of Moldova would be able to materialize the principles outlined in the 2007-2012 National Strategy for the Reform of the Residential Child Care System:

1. The principle that best interests of the child should be respected;
2. The principle that every child should have a family-based environment;
3. The principle that parents should be responsible;
4. The principle that the child’s opinion should be respected;
5. The principle of non-discrimination and equal opportunities;
6. The principle of de-centralization and community responsibility;
7. The principle of partnerships between the state structures and the civil society;
8. The principle that the existing human potential should be used within the system.

The Government would be able to meet its target and reduce by 50 per cent the number of children living apart from the family-based environment as well as reorganize the residential care institutions according to the Master Plan for Transformation.

## **2. Background**

According to official data, the number of children in need of social protection is on the increase in Moldova. Along with traditional categories of children at risk or in difficulty, new categories have emerged such as

“social orphans”, children left without parental care and supervision in the community due to migration-out, street children, children which do not go to school, children which are victims of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation (including trafficking), children in conflict with the law, and children infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

A significant number of children in Moldova live in institutions. Out of a total number of about 900,000 of children more than 12,000 children are currently placed in 68 residential institutions. The causes for children institutionalization vary: 36% of children were placed in institutions because of their diseases and disabilities, 16% after their parents' death, 27% because of parents' poverty, 8% in response to family problems and 4% - because of parents' unemployment. Some children are institutionalized because of the lack of primary educational institutions in the localities where they live (0.2%). Often children are institutionalized when they are left without permanent supervision by parents who went to work abroad (Government of Moldova, *Annual Evaluation Report on the Implementation of the Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 2006*, Chisinau, 2007). Another important factor contributing to institutionalization is a very limited availability of social community-based services for children at risk and their families.

These phenomena required new modalities of approach, revision and completion of legal and institutional framework. The broad strategic goals of the TACIS II project were to support the ongoing social sector reform process in the Republic of Moldova and to contribute to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Moldova's Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EGPRSP), and the European Union-Republic of Moldova Action Plan by further developing and ensuring effective implementation of a more efficient, inclusive and integrated child and family protection system in Moldova.

The overall objective of the project was to promote the development of a protective environment for children so as to:

- a) prevent the placement of children in residential care institutions; and
- b) reduce the number of children already living in residential care.

Special emphasis was placed on developing integrated models that:

- a) involve in a participatory way all relevant actors, including families and children, at different levels of society;
- b) recognizes the duties and responsibilities of all actors in an effort to promote and respect children's rights for all children in all circumstances without discrimination;
- c) ensure that social care services can provide a range of services which adequately meet the needs of vulnerable families and children; and that
- d) these services are fully integrated into the child protection system in a sustainable way.

### **3. Project Description and Purposes**

The main results that the project intended to achieve were:

- a) further development and strengthening of the policy and legislative framework for the development of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk;
- b) development and testing of new models of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk in 6 selected communities; and
- c) strengthening of the institutional and human capacity to ensure effective provision of quality integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk.



### **3.1 Component 1: Strengthening Policy and Legislative Framework**

The expected outcome of this component was:

- The policy and legislative framework promotes and facilitates the development of integrated social services for vulnerable families and children at risk.

It was planned to undertake the following activities:

- National management and planning framework (strategy and plan of action) for the reform of the social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk developed and approved in accordance with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and other relevant international instruments;
- Advocacy and awareness raising events organized to facilitate dialogue on critical issues in the reform process and promote new policies and laws;
- Existing legislation reviewed and improved to provide for family and community-based social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk;
- Existing financial mechanisms for the provision of social services (residential care and community based services) analyzed and reviewed to facilitate and encourage the development of integrated social care services;
- Early-identification and gate-keeping procedures to prevent institutionalization of children at risk and encourage referral to community-based social care services developed and approved;
- Social care standards for different categories/groups of services defining quality of service provision, scope, activities, expected outcomes, professional requirements, duration, revision and termination developed and/or revised;
- Professional Codes of Conduct for all staff employed in social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk developed and approved, included in contracts with non government service providers;
- Regulations spelling out the rights of service users and procedures for dealing with violations of these rights within social care services developed and approved;
- Standards/regulations establishing the parameters for social care service development and financing at national and local level developed and approved;
- Standardized procedures for evaluation and monitoring of social care services developed and approved;
- Licensing and accreditation criteria for government and non-government social care service providers developed and approved.

### **3.2 Component 2: Strengthening Institutional and Human Capacity**

The expected outcome of this component was:

- Strengthened institutional and human capacities to manage and carry out the reform process and develop integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk.

It was planned to undertake the following activities:

- National institutional capacity to manage and carry out the reform process to develop integrated social services at the community level (National Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Ministry of Education etc.) strengthened;

- Local authorities capacities in the 6 selected districts to elaborate a evidence-based strategic plans for the development of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk strengthened through training and technical assistance;
- Human resource strategy and plan for the development of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk designed and tested in the 6 selected districts;
- Competence appraisal implemented and training needs identified (including capacity gap analysis) for the personnel of relevant ministries, district departments involved in social assistance to vulnerable families and children at risk, relevant non-governmental organizations, service providers and parents;
- Training methodologies and modules for staff training and re-qualification (managers and educators of residential care institutions, staff working in community-based social care services, child protection inspectors, social workers etc.), including in-service training developed and tested in the 6 selected districts;
- Capacity of national and local authorities to monitor and evaluate the situation of vulnerable families and children at risk strengthened, including effective follow-up and implementation of policies and laws; and
- Capacity of academic institutions (Universities and Colleges) to teach social work and act as resource centers strengthened (i.e. curriculum development etc.).

### **3.3 Component 3: Developing and Testing New Models of Integrated Social Care Services**

The expected outcome of this component was:

- Integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk developed in 6 selected districts

It was planned to undertake the following activities:

- Mapping of existing services and needs, including social assessment of the situation of vulnerable children and families in each of the 6 selected districts;
- Evidence-based strategic plans for the development of integrated social care services in 6 districts, including: detailed description of management structure, multi functional staff's plan, responsibilities, minimum requirements for qualification, detailed description of basic social services package, developed and approved;
- Common database on vulnerable families and children at risk in the 6 selected districts developed as an ongoing monitoring and planning tool;
- New local level structures established in the 6 selected districts, on the basis of the presently existing local level structure (i.e. Child Protection Departments), to manage the development of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk;
- New integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk created in 6 pilot districts according to the approved plans;
- Supplies provided for the provision of social care services;
- Lessons learned and disseminated at the national and district level.

## **4. Purpose and Methodology of the Evaluation**

## 4.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

The project is a significant effort to introduce legislative and policy changes in the area of integrated social services for vulnerable families and children at risk as well as to implement models of social service delivery at the local level. UNICEF Moldova and its two key partners in implementing the project, the Ministry of Education and Youth (MEY) and the Ministry of Social Protection Family and Child (MSPFC) have identified two main goals for this assessment:

- Evaluate the project in respect to narrow project goals defined in the original project proposal; and
- Evaluate the project in regards to the wider “child protection system reforms” picture in reference to strategic goals defined in adopted strategies and policies, domestic, as well as international.

Core tasks of the assessment are as follows:

- Evaluate the whole project, as well as sub-projects implemented by TdH and APSA and all documents produced during the project and identify measurable achievements of the project and sub-projects in regards to goals specified in the original project proposal;
- Evaluate the impact of the project in regards to the overall reforms in child protection sector in Moldova, including sub-projects implemented by TdH and APSA in regards to the overall reforms in child protection sector in Moldova;
- Assess value and usefulness of documents created as the result of the project, government structure ownership over these documents (were they adopted, implemented by the government structures, especially the line Ministries) and their alignment with EU and internationally accepted standards of best practices in service provision for children in need and children at risk.
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the project implementation, methodology, activities conducted, and consequently their results/impact in a “bigger picture” of reforms
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the sub-project (TdH, APSA) implementation, methodology, activities conducted, and consequently their results/impact when viewed from a wider child protection reform perspective
- Assess effectiveness and efficiency of structural organization for implementation of reform activities and determine the most efficient mechanism/ manner/ management structure that would inter-connect current and planned activities aimed at completing the reform processes, especially in regards to assuring children’ needs being addressed in their communities and families and preventing out-of-family environment placement in the future. Assess if the outsourcing (TdH, APSA) was the most effective and efficient way.
- Provide recommendations for further actions (especially comments on organizational aspects, methodology and actions proposed by the line Ministries); advise on next steps in the field of child protection to increase the probability of success and decrease the probability of failure, of course in regard to defined strategic goals, i.e. reforms, as defined by domestic and international documents Provide recommendations on how to position in the future in order to achieve the most sustainable changes with the greatest impact on the national level.
- Provide a short review: “before – now – after”, which should elaborate three questions and give answers: Where was child protection system in Moldova before TACIS II project started? Where are we now after the implementation of this project? Where could we be if the Recommendations from the report are acted upon?

The timing of this evaluation is critical as the project will be ending in December 2008 and the Government made a commitment to implement a series of major reforms in the field of child protection targeting de-institutionalization and prevention of institutionalization. Key audience for this evaluation

report is the Government of Moldova, UNICEF and EC. As a result, the evaluation puts special emphasis on developing policy recommendations for further reforms of child protection sector in Moldova.

## **4.2 Methodology of the Evaluation**

The evaluation carried out an inventory and document review of all relevant project and non-project documentation. The documentation that was examined included strategy papers, funding proposals, project progress reports, reports prepared by the international experts, legal drafts of respective laws, drafts and background materials prepared for the Government, training modules as well as a battery of tools prepared for pilot sites to support reintegration and prevent de-institutionalization (e.g. assessment protocols).

Qualitative field instruments included:

- semi-structured interviews with key project stakeholders; and
- focus groups with social workers in three pilot regions.

Interviews were conducted with officials from the MSPFC, MEY, local administrations and elected officials, donors community, staff and management of residential institutions, NGOs, parent teachers and social assistants. Three field trips were undertaken and focus groups with social assistants employed by the project were conducted. During field visits extensive semi-structured interviews were conducted with social assistants, management of internats, parent teachers and children. The interviews were conducted to gather relevant information in order to assess implemented reform activities from the perspective of actual service users and service providers. Questionnaires utilized to capture the information in the process of semi-structured interviews and focus groups are listed in Appendix 1 and 2.

## **5. Findings: Measurable Project's Achievements**

### **5.1 Measurable improvements in policy and legislative framework: Component 1**

The project achieved measurable and significant improvements in developing policy and legislative framework promoting and facilitating the development of integrated social services for vulnerable families and children at risk:

- The number of new placements in boarding schools was decreased by 50%, from 321 in October 2006, to 156 in October 2007 across the country;
- The closure of the A.I.Cuza boarding school was approved by the Government on November 14, 2007;
- The Gate keeping Regulation was adopted in 6 pilot regions;
- The assessment of all 68 residential institutions was completed;
- In Family Type Homes (FTH), monthly allowance per child was increased from 180/200 to 450 lei and the annual allowance was increased from 1000 lei to 3000 lei per child according to the Governmental decision No.1110 of 15.10.2007; and
- Local finance departments included the expenditures for FTHs in the proposals submitted to the Ministry of Finance. The expenditures for FTH for 2008 were approved and planned by the Ministry

of Finance, even if FTHs are not yet created. Until now, the Ministry of Finance took into consideration only the existing FTHs and did not budget for new FTHs..

The project made a significant impact at the overall reforms in child protection sector:

- The project supported the Government in adopting a 2007-2012 National Strategy for the Reform of the Residential Child Care System that confirmed the Government's long-term commitment to reform of the residential child care system and established specific targets to be achieved by 2012. The Government committed to reduce by 50 per cent the number of children living apart from the family-based environment by 2012. Other objectives of the Strategy include:
  - Bring the legal and institutional frameworks for child and family protection in line with the international policies;
  - Ensure the access for children and families to quality family-type and community-based social care services;
  - Increase the professionalism of human resources within the child protection system;
  - Develop an efficient and flexible financial mechanism for re-directing financial resources from the residential system to family-type and community-based services;
  - Strengthen the capacity of the child and family protection system to monitor, assess and supervise at all its levels;
  - Raise the public opinion and conduct social mobilization on the need of the reform of the residential child care system.

The Strategy assigns the Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Child to play a major role in coordinating and monitoring all the actions, programmes, initiatives and policies in child and family protection area at the national level.

- The project supported the Government in adopting a Master Plan for de-institutionalization that outlines the steps that will be undertaken to reduce the number of children in residential institutions by 50% by 2012. More specifically, the Master Plan aims to achieve by 2012:
  - 50 % reduction in institutional placements: Institutions with placement capacity for 6.000 children (including temporary shelters for crisis intervention and respite care);
  - Ratio between foster (and FTH) care and institutional care 1:3: Foster care and family type homes placement capacity for 2.000 children.
  - Ratio between family support and family substitute care 1:1 (Day care and family outreach capacity for 5.000 children (3.000 children with disabilities and /or behavioral problems); Psycho social support capacity for 3.000 parents/children per year (2.000 related to disability and behavioral problems); (Standard unit of psycho social care calculated as 80 hours/per client/per year); Inclusive education opportunities for 3.000 children).
- The project made a significant contribution to preparing a *Draft Law on Amending the Family Code* that if passed by the Parliament would:
  - set abandonment as a reason for defining the situation of child remained without parental care;
  - change the approach from "placement of a child" to "choosing the appropriate form of protection";

- introduce a new article “the prevention of separation of children from their parents” that would introduce the obligation of the state to identify, to monitor and assess the vulnerable families;
  - set the body in charge of child protection at local and raional level;
  - emphasize that the task of ensuring the maintenance of the child resides with his/her own family as a priority;
  - introduce possibility of choosing among new forms of protection (not regulated before): foster care, placement in non state centers etc.;
  - put the priority on the child’s best interest;
  - introduce the obligation of monitoring and assessment of children placed in any form of protection at lest once in six month.
- The project contributed to development of the draft Governmental decision on maintaining the adjustment to the salaries of managers of boarding school so that managers’ salaries should not depend on the number of children in institutions. That addresses the issue of resistance to reforms on the part of the boarding schools’ management.
  - The project has developed relevant documents for transformation of Hincesti boarding school, including the MEY’s decision to create the Day care center within boarding school Carpineni and introduce regulations on the activity of the Day care center.
  - The project developed relevant draft legislation for Local Council on protection of children’s rights to support the national Council on protection of children’s rights and regulate local Councils, including such issues as members’ responsibilities, nature of cases they deal with and procedure for managing the cases.
  - The project supported the Government in drafting A Law on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence.
  - The project conducted analysis of the adoption system in Moldova, including the legal framework.

## **5.2 Measurable results in the area of strengthening of the institutional and human capacity: Component 2**

The project achieved measurable and significant improvements in strengthening institutional and human capacities to manage and carry out the reform process and develop integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk:

- A sophisticated training needs assessment has been conducted in partnership with key stakeholders. The main activities included: questionnaire administration, focus-groups, meetings with such main partners as TACIS I project team, national and international training experts, representatives of ministries, local authorities, teaching staff of universities/colleges, specialists and service providing personnel, and visits to the selected regions. Based on questionnaire analysis, staff categories that require training in the field of child protection and wellbeing have been identified;
- Based on the training needs assessment, Training and Career Development Strategy was developed and further approved by the Project Coordinating Committee on 28 September 2006;

- The expert group was established by the MEY with a wide representation to analyze and approve training modules. The group included representatives from the Ministry of Education and Youth and Ministry of Health and Social Protection; TACIS I project; higher education institutions that prepare social workers; civil society, and practitioners;
- Eleven modules developed by the project covered such areas as Change Management in Child and Family Protection System, Introduction to Social Assistance; Case Management and Supervision in Child and Family Protection System; Family Reintegration; Institutionalization Prevention and Family Support; Child Evaluation and Communication; Alternative Protection Forms and Services for Children in Difficulty; Practical Guide for Foster Parents; Creation and Development of Social Services for Socially Vulnerable Families; Conflict Mediation and Resolution; Role of LPA in Creation and Development of Social Services for Socially Vulnerable Children and Families;
- A Trainer's Guide has been developed for all the modules to present the teaching methodology on topics of each support material;
- Training courses were delivered to national trainers from TACIS I (10 trainers); teaching staff from higher education institutions (10), representatives of NGOs (5), co-trainers from selected regions (12 persons). 1,235 social sector and related staff (social assistants, monitoring team, managers of residential institutions, educating staff from residential institutions, etc.) have been trained within the project;
- The training material developed within the project has been used to train 542 community social assistants;
- 54 seminars, 137 training days, 860 training hours have taken place. The training material developed within the project has been also used to train 542 community social assistants;
- Major steps in the development of an on-line national database system on children recipients of social services were undertaken: a needs assessment conducted, concept of the IT system was developed and approved by all line Ministries involved into the project, the necessary hardware was procured for the country, training was delivered to 80 people and the field testing has been conducted in one raion.

The project shared technical expertise of countries engaged in a similar reform process (Bulgaria, Armenia etc.) in several bi-and multilateral meetings with the main stakeholders of the reform. The project organized participation of public servants from relevant ministries in capacity building conferences (e.g., Child Rights, the Role of Families and Alternative Care Policies", organized by the High Level Group for Children under the Council of Europe; "Deinstitutionalization – Dissemination of a Good Practice Model", organized by Hope & Homes for Children and the Romanian Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Families).

The project contributed to strategic change in the area of human resources in social services. When the Government announced about its intention to provide funding and hire social assistants at the local level, the project made a strategic contribution and jointly with the Association for Promotion Social Assistants trained all 542 newly recruited social assistants. The project made also significant steps to ensure that the training models developed are incorporated into the national training system for social care professionals by developing and supplying training materials to universities and colleges that have programs in social work. The following courses have been included in the curricula of institutions that prepare social assistants: "Change Management"; "Alternative Protection Forms and Services for Children in Difficulty" and others. University programs incorporated such courses as "Family

Reintegration and Support”, “Institutionalization Prevention”; “Conflict Mediation and Resolution” and others.

### 5.3 Measurable results in the area of models of social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk: Components 3

Models of integrated social services for vulnerable families and children at risk were successfully implemented in six raions:

- Gate keeping regulations were approved and tested in all 6 raions. The gatekeeping commissions were established and demonstrated their effectiveness in prevention of children institutionalization by adopting innovative approaches to addressing challenges the families were facing;
- Social assistance teams established and well trained;
- 264 children were successfully reintegrated;
- Institutionalization of 468 children was prevented; and
- 20 Family Type Homes (FTHs) were created and 68 children placed in FTHs (See Table 1 for detailed information on quantitative measurable achievements of the project in six pilot regions).

**Table 1. Activities and results at the local level**

nr.	Activities / Raion	Falesti	Hincesti	Telenesti	Floresti	Balti	Straseni	total for all raions
1.	Project implementation agriments between Raional Councils and	12/10/2006	07/12/2006	13/10/2006	13/10/2007	09/11/2006	09/10/2006	6 agreements



	UNICEF							
2.	Local Steering Comities created		19/01/2007		29/01/2007		05/02/2007	6 Seering Comities
2.1.	I meeting	02/02/2007	21/02/2007	12/02/2007	05/02/2007	08/02/2007	27/02/2007	18 meetings
2.2.	II meeting	26/03/2007	30/03/2007	27/03/2007	28/03/2007	02/04/2007	30/03/2007	
2.3.	III meeting	01/08/2007	20/08/2007	03/08/2007	29/06/2007	29/06/2007	10/08/2007	
3.	Implementation action plan approved by Raional Councils	15/02/2007	22/03/2007	22/02/2007	14/02/2007	22/02/2007	05/02/2007	6 Local Action Plans
4.	Gate keeping Regulation approved	15/06/2007	07/09/2007	21/09/2007	06/09/2007	29/09/2007	30/10/2007	6 Working Commissions
	Family support Regulation approved							
5.	Center for Social assistance for children and families Regulation approved	16/11/2007						1 center
6.	Social assistance team employed	8	8	8	8	8	8	48
6.1.	from which in boarding schools	2	2	1	2	1	1	7
7.	<b>Social assistance team activity</b>							
7.1.	Cases of reintegration evaluated by social assistance team (children/family)	199/117	260/168	208/126	178/126	267/199	240/169	1352/905
7.2.	Cases of prevention evaluated by social assistance team (children/family)	210/86	128/50	48/21	179/60	135/78	85/49	762/336
8.	<b>Gate keeping Comision activity</b>							
8.1.	Gate keeping Comisions meetings	8	9	8	9	10	12	56
8.2.	Cases of reintegrartion examined (children/family)	36/21	78/55	73/45	57/37	68/54	69/55	
8.3.	Number of children reintegrated (children/family)	27/15	63/44	56/35	40/27	26/22	50/39	264/185
8.4.	Cases of prevention examined (children/family)	130/42	133/53	62/21	125/50	111/54	59/31	
8.5.	Prevention of institutionalisation (children/family)	124/39	90/33	48/15	103/39	74/34	36/20	468/177
9.	<b>Family type homes</b>							
9.1.	Identification and evaluation							62
9.2.	Family type homes created	7	7	2	3	0	1	20
9.3.	number of children placed in FTH	28	22	6	9	0	3	68
10.	<b>Round tables</b>							
10.1.	Round tables organised at the local level (nr. Meetings/nr.participants)	10/223	10/284	8/273	11/358	6/132	9/236	54/1506

The project made a significant long-lasting impact on reforms in the area of de-institutionalization and prevention of institutionalization at the local level as the raional public administrations were highly satisfied with the models and committed to continue funding of the social assistants' teams from local budgets. In two raions these decisions have been already approved by the end of November, 2007. The project developed forms and procedures to support the process of de-institutionalization and prevention of institutionalization. Effective referral procedures were established, assessment forms were developed and tested, the processes for monitoring child's conditions were tested. The social

assistants gathered information about a child and family from a range of sources, including other professionals, relatives and neighbors, during a social work assessment. The individual files that they created and maintained provide a structure for analyzing the information and coming to an understanding of what is happening to the child and family, a view about their needs and the action to be taken, including the services and interventions that are required to respond to those needs. Follow-up assessments were regularly conducted that collected the information necessary to monitor the progress of children and young people who are looked after.

To a large extent that success of local models stems from active participation of all stakeholders, including raional and primaria level administrations and social workers themselves. Participation of various actors encouraged greater dialogue, and contributed to building of a sense of ownership of the project so that at least in two raions the administrations have decided to fund positions of social assistants created during the project through the local budgets once the project is completed. In the long run, the models tested at the local level can become models for replication across the country.

The project has also contributed to changes in people's mindsets regarding children institutionalization. Many interviewees, including internat staff, parent teachers, social assistants, and local administrations shared anecdotal stories indicating that people do not any longer believe that placement of children in institutions guarantee the best education and excellent life opportunities for children.

#### **5.4 Public awareness campaign: Measurable results**

The project put significant efforts into changing mindsets of parents, extended families, public at large as well as decision makers in the area of de-institutionalization and prevention of institutionalization. The project designed and implemented a powerful A FAMILY FOR EVERY CHILD Campaign. The campaign approaches residential child care reform from human dimension. Spots and other campaign materials motivated people to act.

Measurable Campaign Results:

- Campaign adopted a positive approach motivating people to act in the interest of the child;
- 3 video spots were broadcasted by 4 national and 3 local channels (in target project regions) 855 times.
- 3 audio spots were broadcasted by 4 radio channels 2.963 times;
- 48 journalists made 19 visits to boarding schools, reintegrated families, family-type children's homes in project pilot, as well as other regions. Within just 4 months of Campaign, 200 minutes of reports, programmes, interviews, investigations on the Reform were broadcasted by Moldovan TV channels, and 733 minutes of journalistic material by Radio.
- 88,000 Brochures for families; 45,000 Posters for communities promoting family as the most healthy environment for the child; and 41,000 Leaflets on promotion of family-type children's homes were distributed across the country.

The campaign influenced people's behavior and actions. For instance, within three weeks of spot broadcasting four applications for creation of family-type children's homes were filed only in the raion of Falesti. The applicants informed that their decisions were influenced by the videos produced within A FAMILY FOR EVERY CHILD Campaign.

## **6. Conclusions and Lessons Learned**

### **Factors that contributed to project's success**

- Strong Government commitment to reforms of child protection system;
- Dedicated and knowledgeable project management and staff;
- Strong support of raion and primaria level administrations and dedication of social assistants, parent teachers, boarding schools' management and staff in six pilot regions; and
- Ability of the project management and team to achieve real and sustainable results under tight deadlines.

### **Challenges that the project faced**

- Delayed project start and establishment of team did not allow to initiate some planned activities on time;
- Activities listed in the original proposal were too ambitious to accomplish in two years, given local elections, a significant amount of time that needed to implement models at the local level, policy and legislative complexities resulting from administrative reforms implemented in Moldova where a new Ministry responsible for social care was established only in 2007 and a lack of clarity in accountabilities of local and national authorities for various aspects of social care.
- The project did not explicitly link Components 2 and 1 of the project. As a result, extensive experience in implementing six models of social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk did not provide enough information and feedback to policy/legislative processes.

## **7. Recommendations**

**Recommendations to the government** on what should be done next in the field of child protection to increase the probability of success and decrease the probability of failure:

- **Eliminate key institutional disincentives to de-institutionalization.** Some key institutional roadblocks to de-institutionalization still remain. As the boarding schools and FTHs are under the jurisdiction of the MEY, the Ministry lacks any incentives to use the cost savings generated as a result of boarding schools' closure for development of alternative social care arrangements because social care is within the jurisdiction of the MSPFC. To address this major institutional obstacle, it is recommended to transfer the child protection component of the boarding schools and the Family Type Homes from the jurisdiction of the MEY to jurisdiction of the MSPFC. It is advisable also to ensure that all cost savings generated as a result of closure of boarding schools are directed by MSPFC and local authorities to development of alternative social care arrangements for children at risk.<sup>1</sup>
- **Continue implementation of the Master Plan for de-institutionalization and report annually on the progress to the National Council on Child Rights and the public.** To support this process, it is advisable to establish a permanent inter-ministerial working group to coordinate efforts in implementation of the Master Plan. The Government should ensure that the nature, sequence and timing of implementation is evaluated through the child protection perspective and closure

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<sup>1</sup> Implementation of this recommendation would require significant reforms of the budgeting mechanisms utilized by the Government. Currently, the line ministries do not have enough flexibility to develop their own budgets and reallocate funds within their broad envelopes to address the ministry's priorities as the actual budgeting is done by the Ministry of Finance.

decisions are made only if new alternative arrangements are created in the best interest of the child.

- **Clarify accountabilities of different levels of the government for child protection.** Accountabilities of national, raional and local administrations for child protection are not properly spelled out as it is often unclear which level of public administration is responsible for child protection in such areas as supervision of social assistants, development and enforcement of standards, and quality controls. New accountability systems should focus on enhancing child and family well-being, rather than solely on administrative processes.

Clarified accountabilities should reflect the centralization/decentralization model of public administration that would be adopted in Moldova. The Government is moving towards the decentralized model, which means the delegation of tasks, responsibilities, resources and decision-making authority to raions and local levels. There is no doubt that decentralization can improve resource allocation and services provision by bringing decision makers and service providers closer to residents. It can lead to a higher level of responsiveness and customization where local public administrations develop and implement unique solutions to specific local problems. However, as the existing evidence suggests, decentralization does not automatically lead to improved outcomes for the disadvantaged groups, including vulnerable families and children at risk. It can be partially attributed to limited authority provided to the local public administration, misalignment of responsibilities among the central and local governments and service providers, and lack or limited capacity of public administrations at the local level. Some local public administrations may tend to ignore the interests of children at risk and would rather prefer investing funds into infrastructure projects. To prevent that from happening, the national government has to establish effective oversight and compliance mechanisms protecting the interests of children at risk and children living in internats, foster parents families and FTHs. It may be advisable for the national government to be prescriptive in developing policy standards covering the availability, duration, intensity, range, and quality of services that are needed to support de-institutionalization and development of alternative social care placements. Support and guidance of local planning should be provided in such areas as decision making, planning, resource mobilization and management, human resources management, communication and coordination, and participatory approaches to decision making. It may be also appropriate to introduce raion level positions of social assistants-consultants who will be supporting social assistants at the primaria level.

- **Introduce strong safeguard instruments.** The MSPFC should define basic standards and services provided by FTHs, foster parents families and other social care providers; ensure fiscal and programmatic accountability; facilitate local planning; train frontline social assistants and supervise and evaluate effectiveness of new social care placement options in the short and long term. Gatekeeping commissions should be mandatory at the local level and the MSPFC may consider developing some additional regulations regarding the gatekeeping commissions. The MSPFC may develop specific procedural guidelines requiring social assistants at the local level monitor the child conditions in alternative placements. Social assistants should be trained and effectively supervised to conduct investigation and assessment of child protection referrals and children in need; supervise children in FTHs and foster care; conduct training and support for approved foster carers; and prepare children who will be leaving care.

- **Expand alternative social care placements and services.** Alternative care arrangements should not be limited only to FTHs and foster parents families arrangements but include also such supports and services as subsidized and “emergency” housing, local public services, health and day-care centers, youth development programs, etc. Particular emphasis should be made on development of intensive programs and services targeted at preventing institutionalization and early intervention programs that respond to emerging problems in families. Potential interventions may include job training programs for low income single mothers or cash/in-kind supports to grandparents raising grandchildren.
- **Increase salaries of social assistants and strengthen their capacity.** Social care workers suffer a range of labour market disadvantages as their salary levels are relatively low. Poor pay and conditions reduce incentives for workers to enhance their skills, and thereby improve service quality. Poor conditions also exacerbate turnover, as workers with higher qualifications and/or better opportunities move out of the social care sector. It seems, then, that to protect the interests of both newly hired social assistants and care service users, including children, salaries of social assistants may have to be increased. The national authorities may need to develop in partnership with raion level administrations strategies to address the recruitment, retention, support and training of foster carers, FTH parents teachers as well as social assistants and other social care sector employees. Of particular concern is this evaluation’s finding that a significant share of social assistants does not have qualifications in caring fields. The national and local governments need to ensure that workers receive access to workplace training and educational opportunities to enhance and sustain their capacity to deliver quality services. Moreover, the potentially high turnover rates may require the Government to maintain high levels of investments into pre-service and in-service training of newly recruited social assistants.
- **Encourage local innovative approaches promoting de-institutionalization and prevention of institutionalization.** At the community level, the Government could create incentives to encourage demonstration projects and other experiments in the area of establishing alternative social care services. At the individual level, the MCPFC may explore the possibility of utilizing conditional cash transfers to poor families contingent upon their maintaining good living conditions for their reintegrated children and requiring them to send children to school.

## Recommendations to the UNICEF

Establish and maintain a core team (3-4 persons) strategically positioned with both the MEY and MCPFC that would:

- **Provide expert advice to support the Government in implementation of the Master Plan** relying on evidence based research and inter-jurisdictional analysis. Support the Government in monitoring and reporting to key government stakeholders and donors on the country’s progress with regard to implementation of a Strategy and a Master plan;
- **Provide technical support in transitioning the social care component of boarding schools to the jurisdiction of the MSPFC.** Conduct inter-jurisdictional research, analyze the situation and trends in Moldova and develop policy options and recommendations to the Government on separation of education and social care components of the boarding schools (e.g., accountability, funding, staff transitions). Strengthen capacity of the MSPFC in policy and programmatic areas as

the transition of social component would require changes in regulations, policies, and accountability regimes. Monitor the developments in the field of child protection and social services and contribute to updating the existing training materials developed for social assistants;

- **Review and analyze the experiences of 6 pilot raions and develop “best practices” summary to inform the Government’s policy work.** For instance, the project sites teams have developed forms that are used to record the information, decisions, actions and plans at each stage in the process of work with children and families. They are clearly linked to the key processes of assessment, planning, intervention and follow-up. The team could review all the forms and exemplars developed, conduct brief consultations with children and families, groups of practitioners, managers, policy makers and academics and recommend them to the Government to be adopted as official Guidelines. It would be important to ensure that the forms are designed to work within a national database, which supports single data entry of information, so that information once entered into the system will transfer from one record to another.
- **Focus on changing the mindsets of parents, decision makers at the national and local levels, teachers and other staff.** The foremost barrier to de-institutionalization is an insidious obstacle: people’s beliefs that putting children in residential institutions is a very good solution to any family problem. During this evaluation some anecdotal evidence was provided illustrating that sometimes parents consider placing their children in internats when they have temporary financial difficulties. Some parents believe that their children can obtain better education in internats and placing them there would improve their children’s opportunities in life. It may be appropriate to conduct a nation-wide public opinion survey focusing on parents and public perceptions of institutionalization and build a public awareness campaign relying on the results of the survey. This survey can be developed to test empirically the observations listed above, improve our understanding of parents’ and other citizens’ perceptions of institutionalization as well as explore potential policy and programmatic solutions to address them. The campaign will contribute to changes in public views and attitudes towards institutionalization of children that would have a diverse audience and will send a clear message that children are treated the best with the family. The UNICEF may also support the Ombudsman office to prepare a report on children in residential institutions. Although the Ombudsman’s power is characterized by non-binding dimension of his decisions, the Ombudsman’s report can scrutinize the current policies regarding institutionalization and provide specific recommendations to the Government.
- **Explore with the MEY a set of required legislative and policy changes to support de-institutionalization of children with special needs placed in residential institutions.** There is a need to ensure that Moldova adopts a legislation encouraging inclusive education. Numerous studies conducted by OECD, the World Bank, UNICEF, and other international organizations convincingly demonstrate that Inclusive education, with access to education in the mainstream local community school, provides the best opportunity for the majority of children and youth with disabilities to access education. A significant number of children placed in facilities for children with special needs in Moldova have only minor challenges and can be easily integrated into mainstream schools with or without necessary accommodations and/or modifications.
- **Support greater coordination of child and family policies across the government to ensure that policies and programs developed by the government and recommended by donors are well aligned to support de-institutionalization and prevention of institutionalization.** The

goals of de-institutionalization and prevention of institutionalization of children can be achieved if policymakers and donors are able to see the individual, family, and community connections. As this project convincingly demonstrated, the tasks of de-institutionalization require a steadfast commitment on the part of the government and donors, beyond the scope of this project, to advance innovative approaches through multi-sectoral interventions to mitigate the underlying factors that cause institutionalization of children. It would be appropriate to emphasize prevention strategies that will offer support before problems reach the point where institutionalization is the only remaining solution. To some extent a high rate of children in residential institutions can be attributed to parents' poverty that could be addressed through the so-called "benefits strategy" (increasing the adequacy of benefits for low-income families with children) and the so-called "work strategy" (promoting policies to increase employment among poor families) that would reflect the circumstances of Moldova. The UNICEF could stay actively involved into any donors' projects aimed at reforming the social benefits policies to ensure that they support the goals of de-institutionalization and prevention of institutionalization.

- **Develop a draft protocol for closure of residential institutions** relying on experiences of TACIS I and TACIS II projects and clarifying (or creating, where necessary) procedures, roles, and responsibilities.

If the recommendations listed above are implemented, the Government of Moldova would be able to materialize the principles outlined in the 2007-2012 National Strategy for the Reform of the Residential Child Care System:

1. The principle that best interests of the child should be respected;
2. The principle that every child should have a family-based environment;
3. The principle that parents should be responsible;
4. The principle that the child's opinion should be respected;
5. The principle of non-discrimination and equal opportunities;
6. The principle of de-centralization and community responsibility;
7. The principle of partnerships between the state structures and the civil society;
8. The principle that the existing human potential should be used within the system.

The Government would be able to meet its target and reduce by 50 per cent the number of children living apart from the family-based environment as well as reorganize the residential care institutions according to the Master Plan for Transformation.

## **8. Appendix 1: Questions of Semi-Structured Interviews**

### **Semi-Structured Interviews with UNICEF and Project Management and Staff**

- What are the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Child; the Ministry of Education and Youth; the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Local Public Authorities and other line ministries in the area of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk?

- What is the lead ministry responsible for child protection? What is the legal framework in the area of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk?
- Is there a central agency in charge of developing and implementing the policy framework regarding the development of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk? What is the role of the Cabinet of Ministers?
- What are the actual and projected budget allocations for social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk? What are the trends? Which budget lines support social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk? What are the roles of the central and local budgets?
- What are the current available social payments to low-income parents and guardians?
- What are specific project's accomplishments in the area of further development and strengthening of the policy and legislative framework for the development of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk? What are specific measures of success (e.g., specific laws and regulations adopted, development of plans of actions, increased budget allocation for integrated social service delivery)?
- What were the key challenges the project faced in the area of further development and strengthening of the policy and legislative framework for the development of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk?
- What are the available qualitative and quantitative indicators of success of the project in the area of development and testing of new models of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk in 6 selected communities (e.g., number of children reintegrated with their families, number of children in foster care)?
- Please provide more information on these models. Are they different? How? How they were developed? What was the mechanism of stakeholders' involvement into the design and monitoring of implementation of the models of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk in 6 selected communities?
- What is status of the information system to record and monitor cases? Is it possible to monitor the cases following child placement or family reintegration? Is this system central or locally based? Who and how is responsible for monitoring the cases?
- What are the child assessment, transition and other case management tools introduced?
- What is the line Ministry responsible for funding, establishing standards and supervising social workers? Is it a joint responsibility of national and local authorities? If yes, how responsibilities are divided?
- What are the challenges associated with recruitment, retention, and training of social workers? How does the Government plan to address them? Are there official professional qualifications for social workers?
- What are the mechanisms in place that ensure that social services provided focus on the needs of children?
- Are there national level job descriptions and staffing ratio of social workers?
- Which Ministry is responsible for national training programmes and capacity building of social workers and other related services?
- Are NGOs involved in delivery of social services? If yes, which Ministry is responsible for licensing, establishing service standards and enforcing them?
- What is the role of parents/guardians, foster parents in decision making regarding their children?
- How did the project address the task of prevention of institutionalization of children? What are specific accomplishments?
- Have been the models of services for vulnerable families and children at risk implemented in six regions in Moldova systematically analyzed? How does the implementation of these sub-projects



inform policy making at the national level? Are policymakers presented with a range of integrated service delivery models reflecting the specifics of Moldova to choose from?

- Do you believe that outsourcing (TdH, APSA) was the most effective and efficient way to implement new models of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk in 6 selected communities?
- In your professional view, does the plan of actions adopted by the government in the area of integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk (e.g., 2007-2012 National Strategy for the Reform of the Residential Child Care System and Master Plan for De-Institutionalization) address the core challenges and opportunities in the area of developing a comprehensive integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk?
- In your professional experience, what next steps should be undertaken by the Government, donors and NGOs to further develop the integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk?

### **Semi-Structured Interview with Sub-Projects Management**

- What were specific purposes of your sub-project? Are they measurable?
- How do you measure success of your sub-project? What are the main measurable project achievements?
- Do you collect the aggregate data on users to identify gaps, trends, and develop further plans of action?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your sub-project in terms of its implementation, methodology and activities conducted? What is the impact of your sub-project on a wider child protection reform?
- What are the documents that have been created by the project? How would you describe the usefulness of these documents for your staff and stakeholders?
- How would you assess the impact of your sub-project on the overall reforms in child protection sector?

### **Semi-Structured Interviews with Senior Management from the Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Child**

- How is the project positioned in the Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Child's policy framework on child protection?
- What national legal instruments, policies, laws, and practices still provide incentives to institutionalisation? Are all of them addressed in the 2007-2012 National Strategy for the Reform of the Residential Child Care System and a Master plan? What are the major obstacles to de-institutionalization from the perspective of your Ministry?
- How does the government plan to address the issues of training, recruitment and retention of social workers?
- What is your evaluation of project's achievements and limitations?
- What can be the next steps to improve the integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk?
- How exactly has the project influenced your Ministry's policies? Please provide specific examples.
- How do you see the future of foster family type of placement? Is there an expectation that a national legal framework establishing foster family type of placements will be introduced in the near future?

- What are strategic Ministry's plans regarding decentralization of services for vulnerable families and children at risk?
- Are there official professional qualifications for social workers? If yes, what are the standards? If not, what are the plans of the government in this regard?
- Is there a referral system in place connecting social workers, health care providers, employment services and school authorities?
- What is the core legislative act determining national and local responsibilities for child protection? Is there a stipulation in the law that service delivery must be based on the needs of children?

### **Semi-Structured Interviews with Senior Management from the Ministry of Education and Youth**

- How is the project positioned in the Ministry of Education and Youth policy framework?
- What national legal instruments, policies, laws, and practices still provide incentives to institutionalisation? Are all of them addressed in the 2007-2012 National Strategy for the Reform of the Residential Child Care System and a Master plan? What are the major obstacles to de-institutionalization from the perspective of your Ministry?
- What is your evaluation of project's achievements and limitations?
- What can be the next steps to improve the integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk?
- How exactly the project has influenced your Ministry's policies? Please provide specific examples.

## **8. Appendix 2: Questions Used in Focus Groups**

### **Focus Groups with Social Assistants**

- What is your case load right now?
- How do you keep record of your cases?
- What are the most common types of challenges that you encounter in your work?
- In your professional experience, what are the main factors that lead to increase in the number of children in need of social protection?
- How would you assess your knowledge and skills to perform the tasks assigned?
- What type of assessment do you conduct to support child's de-institutionalization?
- Is there an established referral process?
- What are the follow up procedures after child's placement in foster family/family type home or reunification with family? What are the procedures in place if you determine through your follow-up that child placement is not in the best interests of the child?
- Do you work with employment agencies, health care providers, school authorities?
- Do you have your job description? Do you find it accurate?
- Are you provided with sufficient resources (e.g., office equipment, transportation) to perform your functions?
- Would you like to receive more training to perform your functions better? What are the primary areas of your concern?
- What can be done to improve integrated social care services for vulnerable families and children at risk?