

The Regional Coalition for Child Protection
November 9th, 2015

TO:

Riccardo SERRI, Deputy Head of Division of Human Rights, Strategy and Policy Implementation,
European External Action Service

Dear Mr. Serri,

We write this letter as a reaction to the horrors that severely disabled children in the Republic of Moldova have to face every day because of the irresponsible and deficient management of the institutions they are placed in: starvation, neglect, lack of adequate medical treatment, sexual abuses and other forms of violence – common challenges that these already vulnerable children are forced to go through.

We call on the EU to encourage the Moldavian authorities to comply with the international standards and regulations in the field of the human rights. These standards have agreed by the Republic of Moldova in the process of association to the EU. The Moldavian Government needs to improve the way it treats its younger citizens!

WHY INSTITUTIONALISING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IS HARMFUL

The **institutionalisation of children (in orphanages)** is still seen in Moldova as a valid response to dealing with difficulties faced by vulnerable children and by their families. Because of reduced quality of care, scarce number of care-givers, poor infrastructure, societal segregation and reduced educational opportunities, these residential institutions are far from being a beneficent solution for children. Studies such as the Bucharest Early Intervention Project has shown that **for each 2.6 months spent in an orphanage, a child loses 1 month of normal development and that some of these developmental delays (including significant IQ reductions) are irreversible**. Actually, institutions are increasing the vulnerability of these children who get to face further cognitive, social and physical delays being exposed to a variety of abuses and improper care. Further research has shown that institutionalized children who are abandoned, abused or severely neglected can face significant life risks that are costly to society, including lower earnings, poorer education achievement, and higher consumption of health services through old age and greater risk of incarceration.

Nowadays, although the institutionalisation of children has been recognised as a harmful practice in the Republic of Moldova, and despite of several deinstitutionalisation processes, a significant number of children still lives in such residential institutions - approximately 4000 children. In particular, **children with disabilities represent the most vulnerable and stigmatised cases of institutionalised children as they need special care, recuperation and therapy services. Even more, an excessive focus on medical approaches minimizes their access to mainstream education, health care and community life.**

WHAT THE MOLDAVIAN GOVERNMENT IS DOING FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

Complying to international human rights standards, the Republic of Moldova has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled persons, as well as the UN Convention on Child Rights. Thus, the Moldavian Government has taken upon itself the responsibility to protect the rights of every child.

With regard to deinstitutionalisation of children, in the last few years some **positive advancement have been done in Moldova: (1)** the creation of a legislative and legal frame for the creation of specialised alternative social services to support the closing of orphanages; **(2)** the adoption of provisions concerning social services favouring the community integration of people with disabilities (personal assistant services, mobile team services, communitarian homes services, etc.). However, **placing children with disabilities in orphanages continues to be the mainstream practice in the country, the Ministry for Labour Social Protection and Family, being one of the main actors in charge of the process.**

CURRENT PROBLEMS OF INSTITUTIONS FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

As shown by **ChildPact's Child Protection Index**¹ recently piloted in Moldova, some of the main issues regarding children with disabilities which can be immediately addressed are:

- A. Lack of monitoring mechanisms needed to control the treatment conditions and the development status of disabled children living in institutions;
- B. The lack of a complaint mechanism available for the disabled children living in institutions – they cannot raise their voice regarding the way they are treated, thus abuses go unnoticed;
- C. The lack of case management mechanisms for the disabled children in institutions – thus the care and treatment these children need to benefit from is poor and inadequate;
- D. The inadequate training and qualification of personnel hired to deal and interact with disabled children;
- E. The lack of a framework regulating the hiring and the dismissal process of the orphanages' staff.

IMMEDIATE SOLUTIONS THE MOLDAVIAN AUTHORITIES CAN ADOPT PRIOR TO DEINSTITUTIONALISATION

- 1. The adoption of a special child protection regime for disabled children placed in orphanages, with a special focus on the institutions' management guidelines and the staff's specialised background and training;
- 2. The adoption of a monitoring system for disabled children placed in institutions so that cases of abused are noticed and reduces.
- 3. The creation of adequate rehabilitation services for children with disabilities, in accessible and inclusive settings.

ChildPact, the Regional Coalition for Child Protection², is a network of 10 child-focused national networks from 10 different countries: Armenia, Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Romania and Serbia. Bringing together 600 NGOs, our members work with more than 500.000 vulnerable children from the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus areas.

APSCF is the Moldavian child-focused coalition, uniting 75 NGOs advocating for the welfare of children in the country.

For further information regarding our recommendations on child protection and child rights issues in the Republic of Moldova, please contact:

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¹ The Child Protection Index is a tool which looks into the state of play of those UNCRC articles that are the most relevant for the reality of the vulnerable children in the region. It points out how each country performs across more than 500 indicators, adapted from the official UNCRC implementation checklist. We are happy to share the results we have gathered in Moldova as we are in the process of making all our data public.

² Find more information about ChildPact at: www.childpact.org