



Written Contribution for the EU-Georgia Human Rights Dialogue 2016

ChildPact acknowledges the fact that in the last years, Georgia has been implementing reforms and developing policies aiming to transform the national child protection system in order to better respect child rights and align its legislation to international procedural requirements. Nonetheless, numerous reforms are still pending and Georgia needs to fill in several gaps to ensure decent lives for its younger generation of citizens.

Our main concerns related to the respect of child rights in Georgia are as follows:

AN ACTION PLAN FOR CHILD RIGHTS NEEDS TO BE TAILORED TO EFFICIENTLY ADDRESS CHILD ISSUES

- (1) Children rights and child protection should not be forgotten from the next action plan implementing the Human Rights National Strategy 2014-2020¹, and it should be kept separately, together with the HR Action Plan.** Such a child action plan should cover all groups of children, setting measurable targets to be monitored, specific indicators and sufficient allocated funds. The last Child Action Plan (CAP) 2012-2015 expired, so such a new action plan for children is urgently pending.
- (2) The child protection policy should include specific standards and regulations for the protection of children against any types of violence².** Child trafficking and forced labor are issues not addressed by the last Child Action Plan – even more, there is no common understanding of what constitutes child trafficking and there is no available data, no monitoring of the issue and no coordination among responsible agencies and actors. International reports suggest that child trafficking and labor exploitation and forced labor may constitute a more serious problem in Georgia than is reflected in the state reports.
- (3) The state should ensure better enforcement of legislation and employ child-sensitive approaches;**
- (4) The state should strengthen its support for victims of abuse and neglect in order to ensure their access to adequate services for recovery, counseling and other forms of rehabilitation;**
- (5) The state should establish a toll-free, 24-hour and nationally accessible child helpline service** to be able to reach out to all children in need of care or assistance throughout the country.

THE QUALITY OF SOCIAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERABLY IMPROVED THROUGH:

(1) INCREASED SOCIAL EXPENDITURE DEDICATED TO SOCIAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

The state should budget an appropriate allocation of resources and an increased support for child protection social measures of children (ex: develop national standards and mechanisms on the protection, the recovery and the reintegration programs for child victims of abuse). So far, in Georgia, there is a constant decrease of the financial resources allocated to services designed for

¹ http://gov.ge/files/429_51454_924779_STRATEGYENG.pdf

² Guth & Penner (2015), Child Protection Index <http://www.childpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Child-Protection-Index-Georgia.pdf>

children: in 2014, only 0.45% of the total social expenditure has been dedicated to child services, while in 2015 this percentage continues to decrease to 0.2 %³.

(2) EQUAL ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES FOR ALL VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Every child should have equal access to social services, regardless of their social background, or geographic location. And the local child protection services should be better developed.

- (a) Currently, there are huge discrepancies in Georgia between the capital and the municipalities in terms of access to child protection services.
- (b) There are no sufficient social workers available at local level, and most of them provide **only paid support to vulnerable children and families**. Thus, they fail to respond adequately to the needs of children as their services are limited and oftentimes chaotic.
- (c) Child protection **services are limited and not equally accessible in all regions, for all children**. For instance, the alternative care services (to deinstitutionalisation) addressed to vulnerable children are available more in the capital-city and in central cities and less in rural and remote areas. Likewise, early intervention and rehabilitation programs, day care centres, shelters for pregnant women and mothers in a difficult situation and their children are available only in the central cities.

(3) QUALITATIVE DELIVERY OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

- (a) There are long waiting lists for early intervention programs, day care centres;
- (b) There are delays in the provision of feeding and crisis intervention programs;
- (c) The majority of vulnerable children at risk are deprived of a quality, comprehensive and adequate psychological support, as the SSA has only 11 psychologists throughout the country.

(4) PROPER MONITORING OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

- (a) The government does not have a detailed situation analysis of the type of child protection services that are the most needed;
- (b) The government does not conduct an evaluation of its available child protection programs in order to assess the gaps and the impact of the provided social services.

All in all, the state fails to encourage evidence-based interventions.

(5) THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PROFESSIONAL AND QUALITY STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

- (a) In Georgia, **social work is not a regulated profession** - there is no law regulating this profession. Consequently, no professional standards or quality provisions are established for people doing this job. This affects the overall quality of delivered social services.
- (b) **Numerous people performing social work lack appropriate training**. Not only that most of them have no social work educational background, but also sometimes this role is imposed to them without clear further guidance and instructions.
- (c) Although that number of social workers has recently increased to 239, this number does not meet the international professional standards that require at least one social child protection worker serving 10,000 inhabitants. Thus, according to these international minimum standards, there need to be at least 370-400 social workers in Georgia. Even more, most of the child protection social workers cover other fields at the same time, working with disabled people or elderly, etc.
- (d) The high caseloads, the difficult working conditions (no transportation expenses, overloaded offices, low and uncompetitive salary, etc.) have determined numerous highly qualified social workers to leave the child protection system - according to the Georgian Social Work Association (GASW), 81 social workers (81% of them holding an academic degree in social work) left the child protection system during 2013-2015, having an average number of working years of 4.78.

³ <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3108373>

INTEGRATION AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED FOR YOUTH LEAVING THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

The state should have care procedure standards in place to ensure that children about to live the child protection system are prepared for independent living and for proper integration in the society. Although, the State Youth Policy and Youth Action Plan recognise this category of youth as one of the most vulnerable group requiring the special attention, there are no specific programs or policies from neither MOLHSA nor MSY (Ministry of Sports and Youths) addressing their specific needs. There are scarce initiatives aiming to address this – ex: financial assistance for aged out adolescents, available only for several months. However more needs to be done, together with a **monitoring and assessment of youth leaving care.**

THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM NEED TO BE REFORMED AND BECOME MORE CHILD-FRIENDLY

(1) The actors involved in juvenile justice should be appropriately trained to deal with children and young offenders: legal and paralegal professionals, police, prosecutors, lawyers, judges, probation officers, professionals working in penitentiary system, and psychologists and social workers. Educational modules need to be institutionalised and applied, as well as the implementation of guidelines and supervision schemes. For instance, the links between criminal and child protection services are very weak, and new protocols and services should be developed.

(2) The inter-agency cooperation among various professionals involved needs to be strengthened.

(3) There should be special services for child victims and child witnesses in order to protect them.

ChildPact's written contribution for the EU-Georgia Human Rights Dialogue is mandated by our Georgian child-focused member, the **Georgian Coalition for Children and Youth Welfare (GCCYW)**, reuniting **53 NGOs** working and advocating for better child and youth welfare in Georgia.

GCCYW contributes to the advancement of the child and youth welfare systems according to UNCRC principles through: (1) Analysis and needs assessment of the current system of child and youth welfare; (2) Preparation of the amendments to reflect the international standards into the Georgian legislation; (3) Awareness raising campaigns and ensuring society's involvement in the discussions of Child Right Issues.

ChildPact, the Regional Coalition for Child Protection, 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. Find more information about ChildPact at: www.childpact.org.

For further information regarding ChildPact's recommendations on child protection and child rights issues in Georgia, please contact:

Mirela Oprea, ChildPact Secretary General - oprea@childpact.org

Darejan Dvalishvili, GCCYW - darejan.d@gasw.org

Cristina Negoiescu, ChildPact Advocacy Officer - negoiescu@childpact.org