



Pestalozzi Children's Foundation
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RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN MOLDOVA

**Children's report for the UN Committee on the
Rights of the Child**

2016

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**Respect for children's rights in Moldova.
Children's report for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. 2016**

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The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding institutions.

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CONTENTS

5	INTRODUCTION
5	About the authors
6	About the report
6	About the working process on the report
7	Respect for the basic requirements for children participation during the working process
10	CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, OVER 25 YEARS AFTER THE ADOPTION OF THE CONVENTION
11	THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION
12	Access to education for all children
15	Educational institution resources
21	The quality of education
26	Discrimination affects pupils' attitude towards education
29	The child's opinion in the educational process
30	PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE, ABUSE AND NEGLECT
31	Prevention of violence against children
33	Emotional violence against children
35	Physical violence against children
36	Sexual violence against children
38	Child neglect
40	Violence on the Internet

41	ADOLESCENT HEALTH
42	Informing teenagers about sexual and reproductive health
45	Professionals and available services
47	CHILD LABOUR
48	Working conditions
51	Child labor in vulnerable families
54	FAMILY ENVIRONMENT
55	Parents who migrate in search of work
57	Families with multiple children and low-income families
58	Disorganized families where alcohol abuse is present

INTRODUCTION

THE REPORT REFLECTS CHILDREN'S VIEWS

on the way the Convention on
the Rights of the Child is
respected in the Republic of
Moldova.

The present report was produced by a group of children, called the Reflection Group, who carried out their activity between July 2014 and August 2016, with the support of the Non-governmental Organization Child's Rights Information Centre (CRIC). The report reflects children's views on the way the Convention on the Rights of the Child is respected in the Republic of Moldova. The development of the report builds on the experience and lessons learnt within the first report children from the Republic of Moldova submitted to the Committee in 2008.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The Reflection Group consists of 49 children from 21 regions of the country, including the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia and the districts located on the left bank of the Nistru River, aged between 12 and 18. They represent different children working groups and pupils councils at the local, regional and national levels, including children with special needs, children of Roma origin, beneficiaries of residential care services, members of National Pupils Councils from both, general and vocational schools, participants in the National Tournament on Children/Human Rights, members of the Youth Peer Education Network (Y-peer).

Most of these children groups started monitoring children's rights at the local level in 2011-2012, while other groups joined the process along the way. In 2014, members of the Reflection Group were selected on the basis of a methodology developed and implemented by CRIC, in accordance with international standards on child participation. The Group's main goal is to examine the findings of the local groups' reports, to compile them and to collect new data on insufficiently explored fields.

ABOUT THE REPORT

The report presents the points of view of more than 900 children: boys and girls, from rural and urban regions, living with their parents or with parents working abroad, facing health problems, children in conflict with the law, teenage mothers, children from different ethnic backgrounds etc., from about 20 localities of the Republic of Moldova.

The document comprises findings and conclusions, case studies and experiences children go through on a daily basis. Besides, the Reflection Group issued recommendations for duty bearers on the respect for the rights of the child.

Children included in the report information on the following rights:

- ⦿ The right to education;
- ⦿ The right to protection from abuse, violence and neglect;
- ⦿ The right to protection from economic exploitation;
- ⦿ The right to health, with a focus on adolescent sexual and reproductive health;
- ⦿ The right to a family environment.

Right to education and protection from violence are presented in this report from various aspects, because Reflection Group had access to information related to these rights from different perspectives. In case of the right to health and right to family environment, Reflection Group decided to focus only on the aspects that are most important and to which they could collect data. Synthetizing and summarizing the information proved to be one of the greatest challenges for the Group. In many cases, children chose to present the authentic opinions expressed by their peers.

ABOUT THE WORKING PROCESS ON THE REPORT

At the beginning, the Reflection Group members carried out surveys in the localities they come from, among their peers, asking them about the most significant issues children encounter. A total of 547 children of different ages (preschool children to adolescents) were interviewed. Having analysed the identified problems, the Group determined their connection with specific rights from the Convention. In the same context, the Group studied the last Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child for the Republic of Moldova (2009). This all has been taken into account by the Reflection Group when taking the decision to examine five rights reflected in the present report.

The Reflection Group met within 15 workshops over two years. During the workshops, as well as between them, the Group members:

- ⦿ observed the way in which children's rights are respected, on the basis of some indicators (developed by themselves or by other groups of children) and applying participatory research methods;
- ⦿ examined the reports made by other groups of children at the local and national levels, beginning with 2010;
- ⦿ carried out a study on adolescent sexual and reproductive health, conducting questionnaires and interviews with about 200 adolescents and 12 professionals;
- ⦿ reviewed the outcomes of focus-group discussions and interviews organized with 29 teenagers, including children of Roma origin, children with parents working abroad, children from large families and/or low-income families, children in conflict with the law, children from residential institutions, pregnant teens and young mothers, children with divorced parents, children with disabilities etc.;
- ⦿ took photographs that allowed them to illustrate the findings. So as to guarantee both their own safety, and that of children in the pictures, instead of some authentic photographs the Group members decided to stage certain situations common within schools and communities;
- ⦿ asked 144 children of different ages to write notes with messages they would like to send to their parents/caregivers;
- ⦿ organized awareness-raising activities among peers on children's rights and took part in community volunteer work.

RESPECT FOR THE BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CHILDREN PARTICIPATION DURING THE WORKING PROCESS

TRANSPARENT AND INFORMATIVE

The core group was selected through a contest announced in March 2014 for the groups of children involved in the CRC monitoring, in a transparent, informative way, offering enough time for children to apply. The new members were included in the group along the way. All the members were informed about the goal of the Reflection Group, the reporting cycle, the requirements for the children's report.

Children were trained by the CRIC team, as well as other experts on how to apply various methods of data collection and analysis: questionnaires, focus-group, photo coverage etc.

VOLUNTARY

All the children became members of the Reflection Group voluntarily. They were informed of the possibility of withdrawing from the group at any stage of the process. Some children left the group for personal reasons, most often because of the lack of time, due to continuing education in a new school.

RESPECTFUL

The working process was conceived in a way that allowed each Group member to contribute according to their abilities and the accepted role. The workshops were organized once in two-three months, as a rule during holidays or weekends, in order to respect the school schedule.

The workshop agenda provided enough room and time for activities aiming at skills development for new members and Group strengthening.

Parents were regularly informed of the process in which their children were involved, the Reflection Group's objectives and outcomes.

RELEVANT

The Reflection Group based its activities on (and improved) what had previously been developed by groups of children from Moldova (methodologies, indicators, reports).

Taking into account the subjects tackled, new tools were developed (e.g. the anonymous questionnaire on sexual education, allowing people to freely express their views, or interviews and focus-group discussions aiming at including groups of children that are usually excluded).

FRIENDLY

The Reflection Group members influenced the entire process, from setting goals, fields and research methods to determining workshop schedule and agenda. Various working and research methods were used in order to encourage different categories of children to participate, as well as to respect and develop their abilities (individual and group work; guided workshops and individual work on the field; discussions; role-play etc.). Subjects such as non-discrimination and equal rights were included in the entire work process and in the agendas of the Group's sessions, in order to promote respect for diversity.

INCLUSIVE

The Reflection Group members were selected from the total number of candidates on the bases of inclusive criteria (age and gender balance; representativeness of different regions and ethnic groups; vulnerability). In order to ensure a greater diversity CRIC contacted a Roma community, an NGO working with children with disabilities and invited the children from those groups to join the Reflection group. Sometimes the Reflection Group members suggested and invited new members, with the agreement of other participants. Some children were invited to join the Group based on the experience they had in the priority areas established by the Reflection Group (Peer Educators (Y-Peer) to work in the field of health and sexual education). This selection procedure was meant to respect and support already existing structures for children's involvement.

SUPPORTED BY TRAINED ADULTS

The Reflection Group activity was guided by CRIC team and other experts invited to cover various fields: child's rights, child participation, youth health, research, media, etc.

The invited adults were informed about the Group's goal and process of work; they were guided on how to communicate and facilitate activities with children based on these basic requirements.

SAFE

Risk assessment and development of strategies to reduce risks were carried out by CRIC team together with the Reflection Group members during the entire process.

Children conducted the research in compliance with ethical standards (informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, involvement of professional researchers).

All the adults involved in the Reflection Group activities were informed about the CRIC's Child Protection Policy and committed themselves to respect the code of conduct in accordance with the specific role they had to take up.

ACCOUNTABLE

Assessment sessions were constantly organized to support the Reflection Group members to learn from and improve the process, as well as identify the progress achieved and the challenges faced. Participation standards were presented to the Reflection Group and children's views were taken into account when the process was planned. The entire process was documented for the purpose of producing a series of short videos on its main stages of work. These films produced with the help of young people from the Youth Media Centre are used within trainings for teachers and civil society representatives who facilitate or are interested in child's rights monitoring. They will also be used to present the process of the development of the children's report to duty bearers at various levels.

In order to collect the opinions of a greater number of peers, and to disseminate accessible information on children's rights to all children, the Reflection Group members decided to build an online platform where every child would feel safe to speak about rights being respected or violated. It is through this mechanism that the Reflection Group members intend to disseminate their report, along with the Committee's Concluding Observations. Thus, another child's rights monitoring cycle will begin enabling even more children to get involved and make their voice heard within the third children's report to the Committee. The present report will be submitted to local and national authorities, The Children's Ombudsman, civil society, children and mass media over the next few months.

1 | THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN

„School doesn't meet our needs, we
have to meet the needs of the school“

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND REDUCING SCHOOL DROPOUTS

„Multidisciplinary teams working in localities are a good example: their members meet and examine issues children encounter, such as the reasons why they don't attend school, they provide the necessary support, and give them school supplies whether this is necessary“

FINDINGS:

- Although the State must ensure that every child has access to education, and children have the necessary skills and are willing to study, there are groups of children who have limited access to school: children from low-income families; children with parents working abroad, looked after by a caregiver; children of Roma origin; children with physical disabilities; children of alcohol dependent parents; children from residential institutions; teenage parents.
- Some of these children drop out of school due to discrimination on grounds of their family's financial status, its image in the community, parents' reputation, contact with law, parental abandonment.
- Children from low-income families drop out of school because their parents cannot afford to buy school uniforms, school supplies, sportswear, to rent the schoolbooks. Moreover, children and parents are forced to pay illegal fees during the school year: class and school funds, renovation and equipment, presents on various holidays and other occasions, test books, assessment copybooks, and workbooks. Children who do not pay these fees are usually punished by teachers (they get lower marks, they are neglected), mocked by students and forced to tidy up the classroom. There are schools that have a clear policy prohibiting any money collection from parents. There are also teachers who do not accept gifts, do not collect money, and do not force students to buy books or workbooks.
- As a rule, children with parents working abroad are left in the care of grandparents. Some of them do not attend school regularly, while others drop out of school because they have to take care of themselves and find a job.

- The lack of financial resources leads to leaving school and replacing it with hard and tiring physical work. Seasonal work, most frequently done by children in rural areas is one of the reasons of low school attendance and school dropouts.
- In families facing alcohol issues, children are forced to work, even when they have to go to school, and the money is used for alcohol. Besides, these children are deprived of their parents' care, they do not have appropriate learning conditions, and as a result they drop out of school.
- Children with physical disabilities do not attend school because of the lack of wheelchair ramps, resource centres, and support teachers.
- Pregnant adolescents or teenage mothers do not manage to attend school because they have to work or take care of their child.
- The lack of kindergartens forces parents to leave children in the care of their elder brothers/sisters who have to miss school.
- When parents work, they usually leave their pre-school children alone at home. Below are listed the reasons why they do not take them to the kindergarten:
 - ⦿ they cannot afford to pay the related fees (funds allocated by local public authorities to kindergartens are insufficient);
 - ⦿ the number of children whose parents are willing to take their children to kindergartens exceeds that of available places;
 - ⦿ quite often in kindergartens the physical and emotional conditions are inappropriate: the room temperature is low and parents do not bring children to kindergartens fearing they might catch a cold; hygiene requirements are not met; there is no hot water; bed linen is not regularly changed; educators let children sleep in wet clothes, and as a result they get sick; in many kindergartens renovation work does not cease, walls are painted and children have to inhale that toxic smell all day long; some children fail to adapt because educators change frequently; some educators recourse to violent methods of work with children (e.g. when children do not want to sleep educators frighten them, humiliate them, name them with bad words, use physical and emotional punishments).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is recommended that all schools should adopt anti-corruption policies and rules helping to prevent school dropouts by prohibiting collection of money, funds, and fees for various school needs, as well as accepting gifts, buying books of specific authors etc.
- Development of support strategies for vulnerable families in order to integrate all children in the education process.
- Monitoring of the way in which legislation on youth employment is applied.
- Supporting children with parents working abroad.
- Opening small kindergartens in rural areas in order to cover all the needs and reduce number of children in the groups.
- Ensuring the required number of educators in kindergartens, which would allow them to help and monitor each other.

SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

FINDINGS:

- Quite often the transportation schedule is not adapted to children's timetable: after school many children do not manage to get to the bus stop on time (e.g. the lesson ends at 2 pm and the bus leaves at 2.10 pm), the number of lessons is different for every form, but the bus runs just once in the afternoon (some children finish classes at 12.30 pm while others at 2 pm). It is rather inconvenient because sometimes children have to miss some lessons or extracurricular activities, to waste their time waiting for the bus, and to walk or find another transportation means, when they miss the school bus. Sometimes the school bus takes to school the children from one village, and then picks up those from other villages. As a result, some of them are late for school. There are situations when the bad weather is the reason why the school bus fails to arrive on time.
- Transportation conditions in school buses are not safe and even dangerous for children's lives: due to the insufficient number of school buses children of all ages (including those attending kindergartens) are transported together, busses being overcrowded, lacking enough seats. Moreover, school buses often get broken and children are late for school, because they are not announced beforehand.
- Sometimes, the school bus is the place where conflicts and fights between pupils happen.
- There are regions with no school bus, and children have to take the public transportation and pay for it. In addition to this, drivers sometimes prefer adults to pupils, and refuse to take the latter at the bus stop because adults travel longer distances. Quite often, children are intimidated by adults when they do not give up their seats or they are told they should walk to school for it is nearby.
- Some school bus drivers are very aggressive, violent people who shout at children, leave without waiting for all children. It would be a good idea to require a psychological test to all candidates for this position.
- In some localities school bus drivers accept ordinary passengers if they agree to pay or provide interurban transportation services.
- A specially designed means of transportation for children with disabilities is not available. Thus, these children have to abandon school if their parents cannot drive them to school on their own.
- By law the State does not have to ensure transportation to pupils in the ninth form and higher. Thus, high school and college students travel by public transportation and are often late due to differences between school and bus schedules.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION RESOURCES

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FINANCIAL RESOURCES

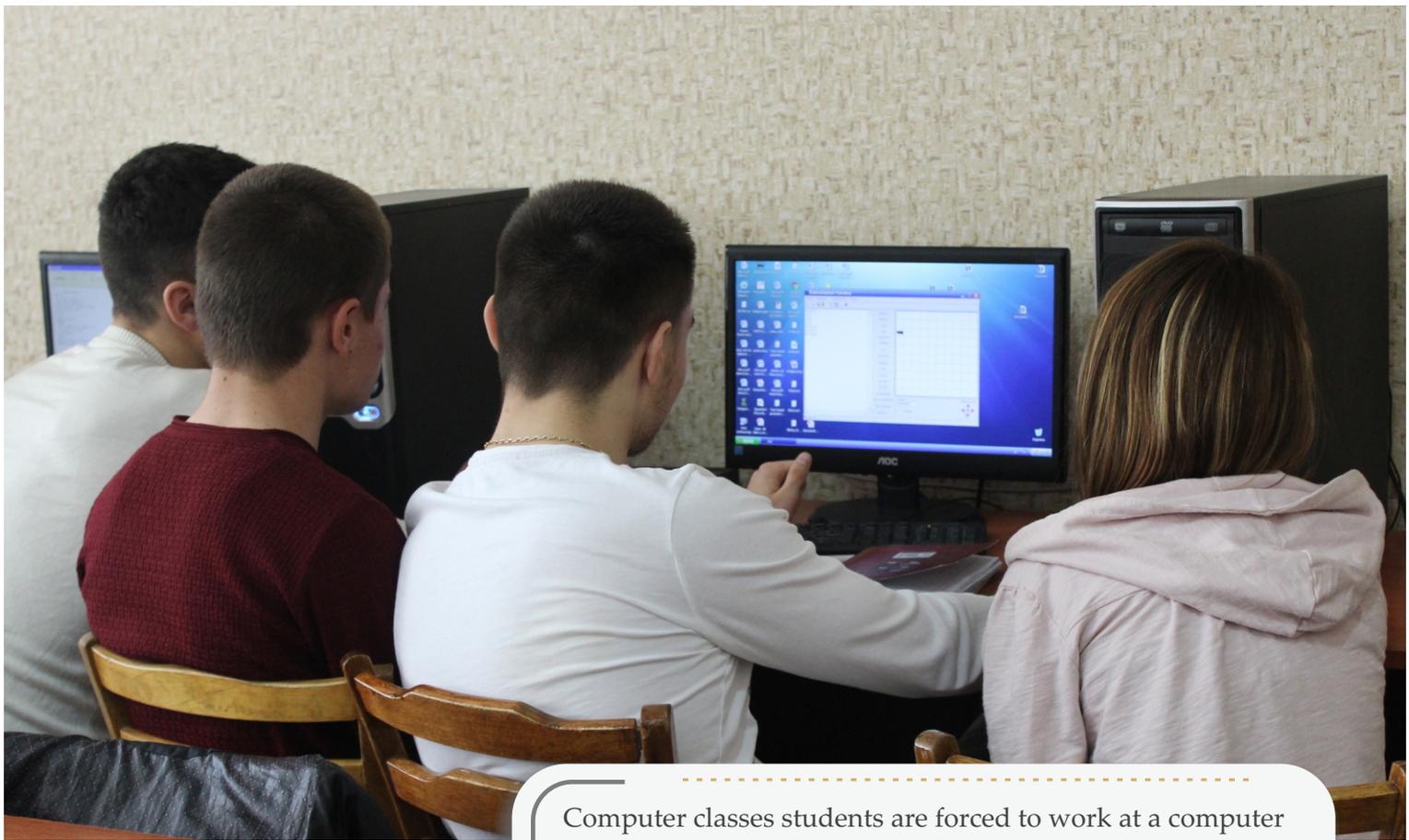
FINDINGS:

- As a result of the implementation of the new funding formula, educational institutions were given the opportunity to decide how to manage their resources. This formula is beneficial to schools from urban regions with a large number of pupils because they receive more funds and can make more investments. On the contrary, institutions from rural regions have fewer pupils, and encounter serious financial issues due to low budgets: inappropriate physical environment of educational institutions.



Schools in cities, attended by a larger number of children, have larger budget and can make more investments. Schools in villages have smaller budget. For this reason, school administration can not procure equipment and furniture, to carry out repairs and construction, which does not allow them to create better conditions in school.

Author: Cristian, 17 years



Computer classes students are forced to work at a computer 4-5; while in many rural schools, children do not have access to computers and have to learn theory.

Author: Cristian, 17 years

- Although money collection for school funds was officially banned in many schools, the administration still puts pressure on pupils and parents to pay for the school renovation, school hygiene maintenance, purchase of new furniture etc.
- During the cold season the administration of many schools saves money on electricity, heating, warm water. This has a negative impact on both children's health, and the educational process (children often miss school for reasons of sickness, lessons are shortened).
- A consequence of the implementation of the new funding formula is the lack of finances for extracurricular activities: there are few interest clubs, and sports activities.
- Information on school budget is not available to pupils and parents. They are not involved in the school budget management and are not familiar with the way in which schools are financed and how funds are spent.
- The money allocated for kindergartens is not always used in the children's interest (buying toys, school supplies, books, food etc.). It often serves for other purposes, such as staff payment.

MATERIAL RESOURCES AND EQUIPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

FINDINGS:

- Some schools were renovated and new furniture was bought but the needs of children with disabilities were not taken into account (wider desks, lower blackboards etc.). Nevertheless, in most schools furniture is out of date, damaged, and unsuitable for pupils with regard to their age.
- In many schools, gyms are in a very poor state (dust, mould, roof leaks, holes in the floor), the sports equipment is obsolete or missing, in general. Pupils are told by teachers to buy balls, nets and other things if they want to play football or other games.
- Medical rooms in schools are open only several hours a day. School nurses are often away when pupils need them. In addition, many nurses do not have skills to communicate with a child in an appropriate manner (e.g. they shout at children during the consultation). Most children find medical rooms in kindergartens frightful.



Not all schools have sport grounds in a good state. Most of them are left derelict. Students are required to carry out physical education lessons in unrepaired sport grounds or in improvised places, that do not have the needed conditions and can be dangerous for their lives. In recent years there have been cases when children were injured and even died on sport grounds because of the makeshift and broken equipment.

Author: Vlad, 17 years



Most of schools have toilets located outside the school building and does not comply with sanitary conditions.

Author: Daria, 17 years

- The administration of some schools does not allow children to eat the food they bring from home in the school canteen, it can be eaten only in the classroom.
- Some schools provide toilets inside the building, but in most schools they are located outside the building and do not meet the hygienic requirements. Sometimes toilets are too far from the main building, thus they are hard to get to, especially in wintertime, and cause health problems. Not all toilets within schools are available for children (some are used by teachers only). There are cases when there is no hot water or running water at all. Toilets are not equipped with appropriate facilities suitable for children with disabilities.

HUMAN RESOURCES OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS – TEACHING STAFF

FINDINGS:

- Most teachers have the required skills to teach their subject. However, there are situations when a teacher covers 3-4 subjects without having the necessary qualification for all of them. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is affected.
- The number of retired teachers who still work in the school is decreasing. Young teachers who take their place use modern teaching methods, although not all of them are properly prepared and trained.
- Despite the fact that training courses are organized for teachers, pupils do not see any changes in terms of the teaching process. New methods are not used. Many training courses for teachers are provided by nongovernmental organizations, not by the State.
- Children think that teachers do not assess objectively their knowledge, and when pupils do not agree with the received marks, teachers often avoid or even refuse to give feedback on pupils' activity. In addition, there are teachers who assess pupils' school performance taking into consideration their relationship with children's parents, the ethnic group they belong to, their family's social and financial status. Some teachers force children to provide certain services (to work on the field they own, to do some household chores for them, to look after domestic animals, to do shopping, to go to the post office/bank and pay their bills etc.), in exchange for some benefits at school. In similar situations children cannot report the problem to any trusted person because teachers usually support each other.
- In order to ensure that pupils are attentive and do not talk during the lesson some teachers give them bad marks. In other cases teachers justify low marks by the fact that pupils had a "wrong" behaviour, talked too much, asked too many questions etc.
- Due to low salaries, schools face staff shortages while young teachers refuse to work in schools.
- Although some teachers have the necessary qualification to work with children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) they do not always use their knowledge (they do not visit them at home, they do not help them and give them low marks, and they do not follow the individualized educational program).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Authorities have to allocate financial resources necessary to adapt and renovate schools and kindergartens: construction of ramps in every school, providing toilets with appropriate facilities, ensuring availability of hot water and suitable furniture. Installing platform lifts and stair lifts which would help disabled children to have access to classrooms on every floor of the building.
- Every school should have a clean gym, equipped with appropriate sports facilities. Physics, chemistry and biology labs should have the necessary equipment.
- All schools should have medical rooms. They should offer a pleasant atmosphere for children and be supplied with equipment and medicines; they should provide full-time daily services.
- Rigorous checks on teachers should be conducted (psychological checks) before being hired or even before entering pedagogical higher educational institutions, in order to prevent aggressive and abusive individuals from becoming teachers (who will subsequently use verbal and physical violence against children).
- Ensuring training for teachers on various topics, including prevention of violence, use of interactive teaching methods, which encourage involvement of all children, regardless of their academic achievement, financial situation, family relationships etc. Providing training courses focused on quality, which would produce visible results. Establishing a monitoring and assessment system on how teachers apply during their lessons the knowledge they get within training courses, thus changing the traditional way of teaching.
- Development of school capabilities to attract investments through projects in order to improve the physical environment of educational institutions with the parents' involvement.
- Ensuring appropriate training for all professionals, including school nurses, to work with all the children, especially in the field of children with SEN.
- Involvement of pupils and parents in the funds management process.

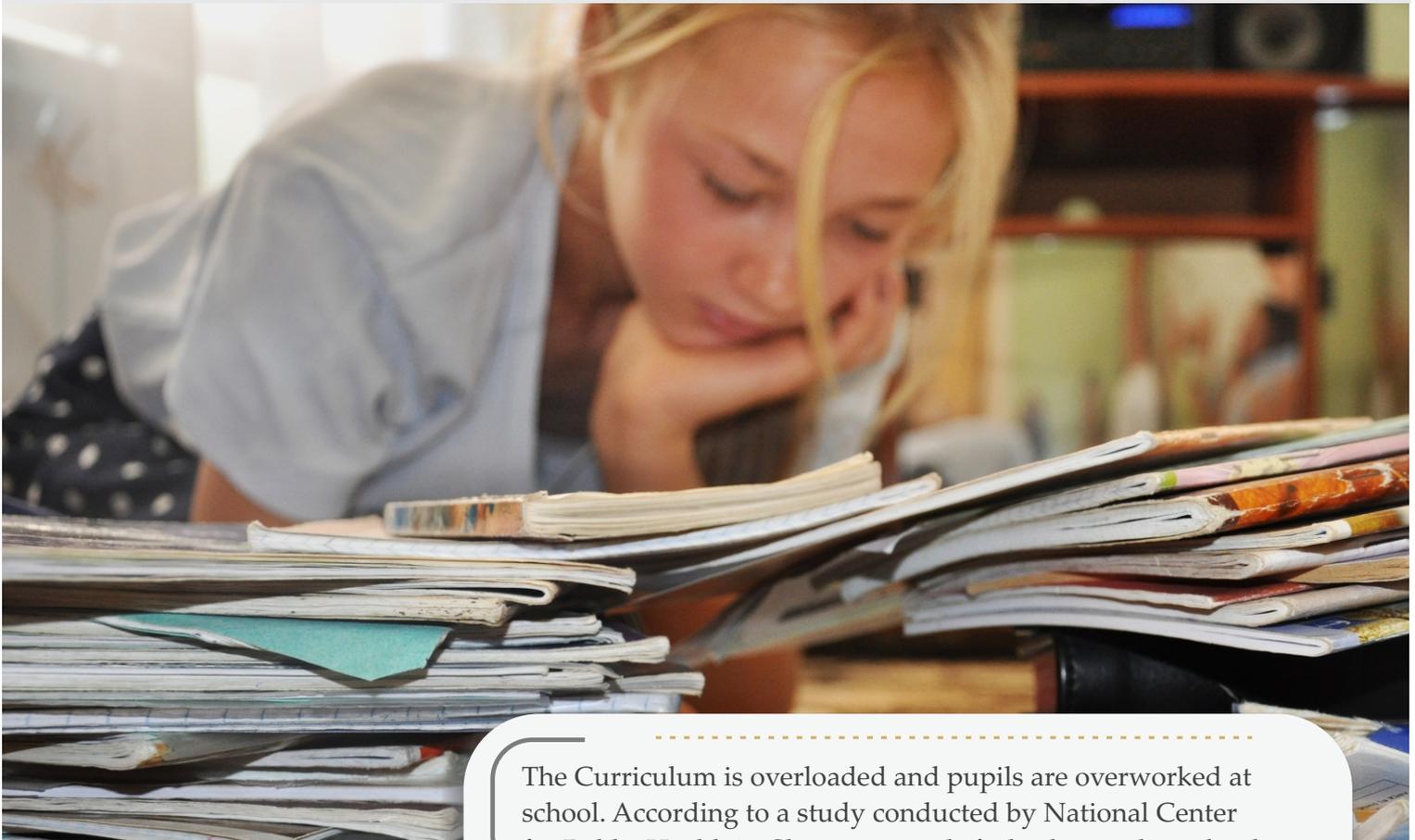
THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

AIMS OF EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM

„The things that we learn at school do not help us to make decisions, to do well in life, to choose a suitable career, to build strong relationships”

„Present-day school makes us look alike, while it should focus on identifying those traits that help us build our individuality”

„The school curriculum lacks flexibility; it does not encompass subjects related to our realities and interests”



The Curriculum is overloaded and pupils are overworked at school. According to a study conducted by National Center for Public Health in Chisinau, pupils feel exhausted at school and because of the extent of topics that must be prepared at home, children have no free time to relax or to get involved in extracurricular activities. Photo as symbol.

Author: Maria, 18 years

FINDINGS:

- The educational goals described in the UN Child Rights Convention are not respected or are partially and superficially addressed. Only some school subjects (civic education, educational class, ethics class) tackle topics such as traditions, values, culture and language; during biology lessons pupils discuss about the environment. The Convention states that they should be included in all school subjects.
- The curriculum comprises few subjects that children consider important for their holistic development. The topics listed below are either missing or insufficiently addressed, and are not focused on prevention (discussions are held in the aftermath of serious incidents):
 - ⊙ communication skills, self-expression ability, communication between adults and children.
 - ⊙ health, especially reproductive health and sexuality.
 - ⊙ professional orientation, career guidance.
 - ⊙ human/children's rights.
 - ⊙ self-knowledge, personal development.
 - ⊙ negotiation and decision-making.
- The school program is overloaded. After 6-9 classes on daily basis, children come home exhausted. That is why they do not have enough free time and concentration to do their homework properly (children receive much homework every day), they do not manage to participate in extracurricular activities, to communicate with peers, and to relax.
- Quite often the school schedule is not adapted to children's needs and rhythm: the difficult subjects (mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology) are in the afternoon while easy subjects – in the morning; the timetable is not balanced and hard lessons are sometimes on the same day, one after the other.
- Only few extracurricular activities allow children to relax and develop, most of them do not correspond to children's expectations, interest and needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- In order to ensure the link with the real life it is important to integrate in the school curriculum subjects that children find important, such as communication, health, self-knowledge, career guidance, tolerance, and gender and ethnic equality.
- To organize various activities on jobs: discussions with pupils during civic education classes, the week dedicated to jobs, psychological test on professional orientation, meetings with professionals in schools, visits to craftsmen (not after lessons, but during the lesson that is connected to the learnt topic or the pupils' interests. For example, during a Romanian lesson pupils might visit a publishing house).



Most often, primary school children need about four hours to do their homework.

Author: Mihaela, 17 years

TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODS USED IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

„In our country education is handless and heartless, it has only a head, and the other parts suffer from atrophy”

„Many teachers do not use interactive methods; they focus on theory and move to another topic even if pupils did not manage to understand the previous one”

FINDINGS:

- There is a great number of teachers, especially retired ones, who use methods based on memorizing and reproducing the information that was taught. Pupils are not helped to understand how this information can be useful in everyday life and how they can apply it.
- Another reason why children fail to understand the material is because teachers are certain that pupils do not want to study and their effort would be useless, so they engage in discussions on matters of their own personal importance, then move to another topic from the book, explaining that the syllabus is overloaded and they cannot dedicate more time to it. In addition, when children encounter difficulties while doing their homework they prefer to seek help from their peers, brothers, internet rather than from teachers and parents.

- Most teachers do not make use of modern technologies available at school (computers, smart boards etc.) because they do not know how to use them. On the other hand, pupils are not allowed to use them, as teachers have no confidence in children's abilities and fear they might break them.
- Interactive methods of teaching are scarcely used at difficult subjects (mathematics, Romanian language). They are most frequently used during civic education, history or optional subjects. Some teachers find it necessary to make use of interactive methods of teaching occasionally, for example only when public/demonstration lessons are held.
- Some teachers often apply violent methods during classes in order to educate children. For instance, if there are pupils who do not understand the material, or who give wrong answers, teachers raise their voice, label, hit, pinch, throw things at, and humiliate them.
- Nothing changed in the teaching of technology lessons, which are carried out in the same way, according to old plans and principles: boys and girls are divided in groups, although it is obvious that both boys and girls are able to do, and are interested in a variety of activities, regardless of the gender.
- Although it is forbidden by law to have several tests on the same day, this is a frequent practice. As a result, pupils do not manage to prepare properly for the tests and they get lower marks.
- Children are afraid to invite their parents to parents' assemblies because they do not know what topics will be addressed or they have already had experiences when teachers discussed pupils' situation, behaviour, and academic achievements in public. Thus, children are scolded, labelled, criticized, and compared with each other. Most often parents refuse to come to parents' assemblies for they are aware that teachers will blame them for their children's failures or will require money. In other cases, these assemblies are held during the daytime, while parents are at work thus, it is impossible for many parents to attend, since there is no law allowing working parents to leave jobs earlier. This right should be guaranteed by legislation in order to ensure that parents get involved more in their children's education.

TEACHING/ LEARNING HUMAN AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN SCHOOLS (HR/CR)

FINDINGS:

- Children's rights are taught at civic education classes, or during optional courses (such as ethics). In most cases, children are informed about their rights once or twice a year, at one lesson. Lessons are taught superficially, the provided information is usually insufficient. Teachers often address only general aspects, and focus mainly on children's obligations. Schools where teachers do their best to provide in-depth information on HR/CR are rare.

- The subject Civic Education comprises a chapter about CR, but it is based on theory: rights are listed but their meaning is not explained. The information is far from being child-friendly, and teachers do not wish to explain the essence of CR. They avoid talking about rights and highlight obligations, the main argument being "you have too many rights". Children explain such an attitude, on one hand, by teachers' fear to lose control over children who gaining more power might ask for specific decisions to be made, and on the other, by teachers' poor knowledge in this field, the misunderstanding of the concepts of HR/CR.
- Optional classes addressing HR/CR are present in few schools. Nevertheless, in schools are organized theme-based activities: HR/CR week/ten days' period, exhibition of posters, flash mobs, social theatre. These events are usually held once a year, are rather formal, insufficiently prepared, and many times organized and performed by pupils themselves.
- Teaching and informative materials are quite rare in the classrooms (conventions, booklets, documents, videos). Teachers do not bring new and updated information either. That is why rights are studied superficially, without having recourse to documents and case studies.
- Civic education is not taught in primary classes, thus pupils are not informed about their rights.

RECOMANDĂRI:

- The introduction of a compulsory course in the school curriculum, beginning with primary classes in order to ensure an in-depth study of HR/CR, including the State's obligations. An important objective of HR/CR teaching should be the development of children's capacities to recognize and not admit their rights violation, as well as to know where they could seek help etc.
- The course should be taught by experts in the field and equipped with child-friendly teaching and informative materials, adapted to children's abilities, including pre-schoolers.
- CR related topics should be integrated in all school subjects (Romanian language, biology etc.) as to ensure CR are discussed in various contexts at least once a week.
- Teachers should follow proper training, which would enable them to convey detailed information on HR/CR to children, using practical examples, and maintaining a reasonable balance between rights and responsibilities. Thus, on one hand, it should be clear what rights children have, and on the other, what are the State's obligations and those of duty bearers.
- Teachers should be tested with regard to HR/CR during the certification process.
- Ensuring training for teachers on ways to prevent, identify, intervene and report cases of children's rights violation.
- The topic of how are children's rights respected in the family and society should be discussed during parents' assemblies.

DISCRIMINATION AFFECTS PUPILS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS EDUCATION

„In Moldova school is a place for typical children, those who meet specific standards. The school in our country is far from being inclusive and sensitive to differences between children. It does not take into account the fact that they belong to various religious communities, ethnic groups, as well as the fact that there are distinctions in children's abilities and potentials”

FINDINGS:

- Children are not ready to accept differences among them, because tolerance, differences, discrimination are not sufficiently addressed in schools. As a result, some children are intimidated by their peers. They feel uncomfortable at school, have low self-esteem, isolate themselves from others, and even drop out of school.
- Teachers do not have a proper understanding of the discrimination phenomenon either. Sometimes, teachers themselves rank pupils, arrange them at desks according to their marks, form classes for pupils with "best", "average" and "low" results, thus generating tensions between pupils and creating an atmosphere of total intolerance. Teachers lack the necessary training to perform activities that would require from pupils to communicate and work together, and would help appreciate everybody's different qualities.
- Children with low academic achievements are usually discriminated and neglected. They are not encouraged by teachers to participate in discussions during the lessons or extracurricular activities. There are also teachers who do not allow certain pupils to speak because the latter need more time to express themselves, or require a specific climate to start talking.
- Extracurricular activities (holidays, school trips) are not conceived in a way that would include all children. For instance, some children cannot participate in activities such as holidays, trips, birthdays because of their religious or family's financial situation.
- There are cases when children belonging to minority religious and ethnic groups are discriminated by their classmates, peers and teachers (verbal violence).
- Schools force pupils to follow religious classes (Orthodox Christian) whereas children belonging to other religious communities have the same requirements, such as to learn prayers. At religious classes, children receive marks for their performance.
- Although by law education is meant to be inclusive and available for all children, not all pupils feel comfortable at school (especially children of Roma origin). Some pupils cannot afford to pay the required school fees. Thus, they are not involved in the educational process, they do not take part in extracurricular activities, or they do not attend school in general.

- Over the last few years the number of children with SEN integrated into ordinary schools has increased (including those from boarding schools). It should be welcomed but the path to their integration is difficult for many reasons:
- ⊙ on one hand, these children are neglected in the educational process because teachers do not take in account their specific needs. On the other, nothing is done in order to ensure that their classmates are ready to accept them.
- ⊙ children with physical disabilities cannot attend school (regularly) because roads are not adapted to wheelchairs (curbs, no asphalt on roads), parents find it hard to take them to and from school every day, schools are not equipped with ramps, and classrooms, gyms, canteens and toilets lack special furniture. As a result of these inconveniences some of them have to leave school.
- ⊙ teachers receive training on how to work with children with SEN, but they do not use the knowledge, for example, not all of them follow the individualized education plan.
- ⊙ in some schools, there are support teachers for children with SEN. As a result, there is a progress in this field for both teachers and pupils. Unfortunately, the number of these teachers is lower in comparison with that of children who need their help: either there is only one teacher per school, or only primary pupils benefit from their help. Some of them do not have proper training. For this reason, many children with SEN are helpless within classes. Even if they attend school, there is nobody to take care of them.
- ⊙ schools that do not have a resource centre for children with SEN cannot provide them the necessary help and support. There is nowhere children could relax when they get tired, and as a result, they do not attend school.
- ⊙ teaching materials, books and school textbooks are not adapted to the needs of children who have different learning abilities.
- ⊙ the topics are taught without taking into consideration children's diverse learning abilities (the material is not simplified for pupils who have a different level of understanding). As a rule, teachers choose to work at the level of some pupils who have high abilities at the subject they teach. The other pupils often do not understand the topic and teachers refuse to use various ways to explain the topic or simply express their dissatisfaction "why 2-3 pupils have understood the topic, while the others can't?!" This is a reason why some pupils drop out of school.
- ⊙ many teachers do not understand why children with special needs, especially those with mental disabilities, should attend ordinary schools and think their place is in special institutions. Teachers say that these children are dangerous and they do not have time to work with them.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The school program should be flexible, adapted to individual capacities of children, namely those who encounter understanding difficulties.
- Children should have the opportunity to choose the level of complexity of the course. For instance, they might opt for the standard history course or the advanced one, the elementary, intermediate or advanced levels of foreign languages etc.
- Religious classes should be optional, children having the right to choose this course.
- Various forms of alternative teaching (such as Montessori pedagogy, Waldorf, Step by Step Program), which are sensitive to differences in children, should be available in rural areas, offering parents a greater choice.
- Social assistants should monitor children who do not attend schools, find out the reasons why this happens, and take the necessary measures to bring them back to school.
- There should be a doctor/nurse in every school who would look after children with SEN, and make sure they take medicine on time.



Although the Student Council (SC) is an independent organ that must be present in all educational institutions, most of SC exists only formally (on paper) and are not independent. Administration of the institution's meetings and influence pupils' views.

Author: Cristian, 17 years.

THE CHILD'S OPINION IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

„Schools do not provide mechanisms allowing pupils to express their views on the quality of the lessons“

FINDINGS:

- In many educational institutions, pupils councils have a purely formal nature, only on the paper. Their members are not adequately informed about the mission and functions of a council and they are forced/manipulated by teachers to perform some form teachers' duties (keep a record of attendance, be responsible for the class register, and assess the situation of vulnerable families etc.).
- Pupils' opinion on the way in which lessons are taught is not taken into account. Teachers do not have mechanisms that would allow them to consult pupils on the performed lesson. Sometimes their views are perfunctorily sought, without paying attention to what they have to say.
- Teachers listen to the opinions of pupils they are related to. They help them, explain them the material and involve them more frequently in activities, while the other pupils are neglected and get lower marks.
- By law, optional classes should be chosen by pupils. In reality they do not have the right to choose them. In small schools, there is not a variety of optional classes, and teachers force pupils to accept a certain subject to reach the required number of pupils.
- Teachers usually force pupils to take part in school contests and Olympiads. There are situations when the same pupil is compelled to participate in several competitions and Olympiads at the same time, and the child cannot refuse because otherwise he/she risks punishment by getting low marks.
- Teachers teach in strict accordance with the school curriculum. They do not take into account pupils' needs and wishes, which depend on their realities and often differ from those included in the curriculum.

2 | PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE, ABUSE AND NEGLECT

PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

FINDINGS:

- In very few schools, children are taught how to deal with peer pressure, harassment and bullying; how to communicate, accept differences, and solve conflicts without having recourse to violent means, as well as how to cease a violent behaviour. As a rule, these topics are addressed tangentially during civic education classes, educational classes, or some optional classes.
- Thus, pupils have recourse to various ways of bullying, such as: punching, kicking, arm-twisting, tripping, throwing things, name calling; older children intimidate younger ones, by pushing them, hitting them or teasing them. Sometimes parents themselves generate or encourage violence as a way to solve conflicts ("fight back"). As a rule, bullied children do not talk to anyone about things that happen to them, because they think they are to blame, they do not have a reliable person to confess to, or they simply do not know how they can be helped.
- In other schools, children are informed about violence occasionally and superficially, either when a nongovernmental organization comes and disseminates booklets, posters, or when a week is dedicated to a specific topic at Civic Education class (once a year). As a rule, the activities organized focus on the definition of violence and its forms.
- Violence is not addressed at all in kindergartens and primary schools, although young children are also victims of abuse and they should know how to protect themselves and how to avoid risky situations.
- The only useful information in the Civic Education textbook for the 8th grade is the number of hotline for children in risk situation. There is nothing else relevant to this topic. This applies to the textbooks for other grades as well.
- Parents are not aware of services to support children in case of violence, they do not know how to communicate with children in a nonviolent manner nor what are the consequences of violence against children. Although teachers, doctors, social assistance have the responsibility to inform parents about consequences of violence, most of them do not do this because they themselves consider this a legitimate method of education.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Developing (consistently and from an early age) children's abilities to communicate in a nonviolent way, to identify the signs of abuse, to avoid or solve a situation involving violence, to ask for help.
- Developing special materials for children of all ages (tales, films etc.) in order to give children the opportunity to learn to recognize violence and have a proper response to it.
- Contact details of institutions and professionals children can address in an emergency situation should be disseminated in as many places as possible, as well as printed on the textbooks covers.
- Violence prevention campaigns should be organized in schools. Their message should be simple and concrete, and refer to one single thing: what should a child do in a situation of risk, or what teachers are supposed to do when they identify a child victim of abuse.
- All children from a class/school/community should be involved in extracurricular and out of school activities. They should be helped to spend the time together, to learn more about each other, they should be taught to negotiate, to cooperate – all activities aiming at preventing violence.



Children are not taught to communicate assertively, accept their differences and resolve conflicts without violence. Often, adults are the persons who encourage children to solve problems in a violent way.

Author: Dumitru, 18 years

EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

„Verbal and emotional violence (insults, bad words, swear words, gossips, nicknames, mocking remarks) are more frequently encountered than physical violence“

FINDINGS:

- Children are divided into groups and are attributed stereotyped-based behaviours, based on their family income, school marks, and family relationships with teachers. When something bad happens in the classroom or at school "bad/impolite/naughty" pupils are the first who are blamed for creating the problem; when activities are organized "the best/the elite" pupils are the first who are encouraged to participate.
- Children are often threatened, scolded, and insulted by teachers when they complain that their rights are not respected, or that a teacher has an inappropriate behaviour.
- Sometimes teachers label pupils, call them names (of animals), hurtful words, shout at them, make humiliating gestures. Besides the fact that it causes emotional suffering, other pupils feel encouraged to use nicknames.
- Teachers compare pupils' academic achievements and have the same expectations towards all the pupils, without taking into consideration their different abilities. Teachers use expressions like "you are not as smart as your brother", "your brother was a bad pupil and you will be just like him", "why did he/she understand and you didn't?" etc.
- Teachers often force pupils to wash the floor, do squats or stand the entire lesson as a means of punishment. This type of punishments is also used when pupils are late for classes or speak during the lessons.
- Teachers compel pupils to take part in school contests, Olympiads and other events and if they hesitate or refuse, they are usually intimidated, threatened with bad marks and even physically abused.
- Sometimes children complain to the school administration or people outside school and ask them for help. As a consequence, teachers intimidate these children telling them to share first with them their issues in order not to denigrate the school's reputation. The reason why pupils seek help outside is that previous attempts of solving problems within school failed, as teachers do not listen to them or blame them first. In addition, some pupils are afraid to share with parents their school issues because they fear their reaction.

- School non-teaching staff use humiliating words or swear words when pupils do not do something they like (such as not putting the chairs on desks when classes are over or when on rainy weather children's shoes are dirty and they leave mud on the floor etc.).
- Within the community, some children humiliate their peers belonging to a different ethnic group or speaking another language by using inappropriate words or gestures. These children are sometimes excluded from the group of friends, chased away from the playground or ignored.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Teachers should be trained on how to identify different forms of abuse, how to communicate with children without moralizing, threatening, labelling, comparing them etc.
- Teachers, social assistants and other professionals have to understand the consequences of emotional violence and react to any case of violence, not only in serious situations of physical and sexual abuse.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

„In order to punish quarrels and fighting between children adults often use physical violence“

FINDINGS:

- Many adults consider physical violence (beating) an efficient way to educate, discipline and motivate children to perform specific tasks. It is largely used in schools, families, institutions providing extracurricular activities, and on the street.
- Children suffer from different forms of violence: they are slapped, hit on the back of the head, under the chin; they are punched in the back, or hit with various objects (cane, belt, whip, broom); adults have recourse to ear pulling, nose pulling, hair pulling, cheek pulling; some grownups put out a cigarette on a child's hand or if they find out that children smoke, they force them to eat the package.
- Teachers do not have sufficient knowledge to explain parents the negative impact of physical violence on the child. Some teachers simply do not intervene in cases of child abuse, justifying their lack of response by the fact that family affairs are not their concern. Quite often teachers remain indifferent to abuse in schools. Children are often beaten by parents of children they had a quarrel with.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Teachers should be taught to inform parents about the consequences of violence on children. They should be trained how to react and where to report when they witness/have concerns that a child is abused, neglected by parents or is in any other harmful situation.
- Social assistants should receive training on assessing if violence is used in a family and how to respond to it in order to ensure the child's safety.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

„School does not teach us how to prevent, recognize, and report sexual abuse“

FINDINGS:

- Some teachers, especially men (but there are also women) touch pupils, look at them inappropriately and tell them things that make them feel uncomfortable. This is the reason why some children refuse to attend their classes.
- In most communities there are no means children could use to report sexual abuse. Within school these tools either do not exist, or they simply do not work. Children do not consider them reliable since previous experiences showed that teachers did not intervene, they refused to believe pupils or even blamed them for provoking the abuse.
- Both teachers and parents do not feel ready to tackle the subject of sexual violence. Although the school curriculum comprises this subject, it is overlooked by most teachers, who consider it shameful, do not have enough knowledge to address it, or think that parents should discuss it with their children.
- Sexual violence is a taboo topic especially in rural areas of the country, where people feel uncomfortable to speak about it. In addition, since the information spreads very fast in the country, they do not want other people to gossip about what happens in their family.
- In other cases, teachers fail to convey the information adequately, either due to the influence of existing stereotypes, or their own religious beliefs. In addition, the information in Civic Education textbooks often goes against religious education. For instance, the teacher of Civic education claims that at the age of 18 young people are fully aware of their actions. Thus, in case they are ready for this, they could have sexual intercourse. On the contrary, according to religious principles, any sexual activity has to begin after the marriage; otherwise, it is a great sin etc.
- Both teachers and parents do not consider touching in an unpleasant/unwanted way as a sexual abuse, and they react only in serious situations, although if they reacted at the first signs, they would prevent them.
- Sometimes, sexual violence is perpetrated by the parent's partner or another family member. Children might witness situations of sexual violence between adults, especially when parents abuse alcohol and other substances.
- Most victims of sexual abuse are young children, because they are not able to fight back, or they can be easily manipulated.

- Many teenage girls, under pressure from partners, accept to have sexual intercourse, even if they are not sure whether it is a good or bad thing, due to lack of knowledge in the field of sexual and reproductive health.
- In some schools, strangers (people outside school) can have access to parties organized for pupils. These adults are often drunk and they abuse children physically and verbally. Going back home late children find themselves in dangerous circumstances.
- Although nightclubs are places where abuse occurs frequently, children under 16 (sometimes children of 10-11) are admitted. At the same time, police as well as other adults do not react to photographs posted on social networks in which children drink alcohol, sit on an adult's lap, and provokingly pose etc.
- Parents cannot find out whether their children drink alcohol, smoke or hang out with dangerous people. They are not able to convince their children not to go to these places and not to befriend with these risky people, because they do not have a relationship based on trust, they do not know how to build one, or they ask an older brother/sister/cousin to look after them.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is necessary to raise awareness among teachers on how important it is to prevent sexual abuse and to inform pupils about sexual and reproductive health. They need to be taught how to address this subject with children, or in case they do not feel ready to do it by themselves, to have recourse to an expert's assistance.
- There should be a trusted person in every school. This person should be really close to children, ready to openly discuss with them, support them, and teach them what measures to take if they are intimidated/harassed/abused.
- Schools should develop functional reporting mechanisms, as well as a system aimed at monitoring its efficiency, including sexual abuse situations. Complaints should be examined by qualified psychologists/people outside schools, because teachers tend to ignore or deny these complaints in order not to affect the school's reputation. Both school administration and teachers should be informed about the advantages of these mechanisms.
- Professionals within the community have to involve parents in awareness raising activities, and work with them in order to improve the situation in terms of sexual abuse prevention.
- Both police and social workers should monitor the situation and perform properly their duties when they receive a complaint or identify an alleged case of abuse. There should be sanctions if appropriate procedures and timelines are not followed.

CHILD NEGLECT



Public authorities restrict bathing in dangerous lakes from the country, but does not monitor how these restrictions are respected. In addition, parents and are not aware that children a going to these lakes or do not see a danger in this.

Author: Alexandrina, 18 years

FINDINGS:

- There are families in which children's basic needs are neglected: food, clothes, care, private space, stable living conditions. In other cases, parents go abroad in search of better working opportunities and leave their children in the care of some people who are neither ready, nor able to meet children's needs (elder brothers/sisters, neighbours, grandparents).
- Social workers do not monitor the situation of children left behind. The mayor and the social worker fail to provide the necessary support to every child/family, especially in urban areas, where there is a large number of neglected children (a social worker covers about 45 children). In some regions, social assistants are incompetent people and refuse to do their duties.

- There are cases when the school administration does not intervene, overlooking situations of low school attendance, either because it is interested to show on paper good results, or it considers that making referrals does not fall within its competence. Sometimes, when they are requested to deal with cases of abandonment by social worker, deputy directors are sending pupils to investigate or solve issues of children who do not attend.
- Pupils are often encouraged or even forced to sing and dance on the stage in front of various delegations, officials invited to different celebrations or other events (graduation assembly, town/village day etc.), during which adults drink alcohol, eat, have fun, whereas children's needs (food, water, rest, warmth) are not a matter of concern. Moreover, children's security is not ensured: they are exposed to the risk of being verbally or sexually abused during these ceremonies (for instance, there is no adequate room for them to change costumes).
- In some schools, there are still pupils on duty. Sometimes they are forced to maintain order and discipline on the corridors, to monitor school attendance and punctuality, to prevent strangers from entering the school. These tasks are usually performed from 7.15 am to 2 pm or even 4 pm (in colleges).
- Adults believe that teenagers and children have enough energy and strength to wait longer while seeing a doctor or any other specialist, thus they are left at the back of the queue, asked to give up their seat, and if they do not do this voluntarily, they are usually harassed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The social assistance system should be developed to meet all children's needs. Within the department of social assistance, a special unit should be created which would deal with children's issues only.
- Professionals should be trained (following a program that would include specific topics and activities) to work with parents on building good relationships with their children, positive discipline, etc.
- To organize awareness raising campaigns among parents on consequences of child neglect and the measures they should take before going abroad.

VIOLENCE ON THE INTERNET

FINDINGS:

- The number of children having access to Internet is constantly increasing. They surf on dangerous sites, start discussions with strangers on forums and chat rooms, and distribute photographs and personal information on social networking sites.
- Children have access to films, games, advertising etc. with a violent content. They are lured into this unknown world, sometimes even hypnotized. Since children are easily manipulated, they adopt violent behaviours, and get a wrong perception of human relations and society as a whole.
- Parents are not taught how to supervise their children's online activities. Most parents believe their children use Internet for education purposes or simply are not aware of the risks their children are exposed to.
- Online safety is very scarcely addressed at school. Pupils are not educated to acknowledge and avoid the risks they encounter online. School does not prepare children to analyse the information they find in the virtual world. Nevertheless, in some schools awareness raising activities are held. The disadvantage is that they are quite rare and only secondary and high school pupils are involved, although it is widely known pre-schoolers surf the Internet too.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Parents have to be taught how to monitor sites their children access and how to block dangerous ones. Professionals should provide them information on useful education sites for children.
- Online safety should be discussed at Civic Education classes, educational classes, computer classes. In order to attract children's attention teachers should use case studies, short educational films.

3

ADOLESCENT
HEALTH

INFORMING TEENAGERS ABOUT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

„If children are not informed on time, they end up requiring services. Sometimes it is even too late“

„We didn't know anything about sexual life and we didn't use to protect ourselves. I was told more only after I found I was pregnant“

FINDINGS:

- The great majority of young people are not informed by their parents, teachers or community professionals about sexual and reproductive health, they are not aware of the risks they are exposed to if they start sexual life at an early age or have unprotected sexual intercourse.
- At school, prevention activities are usually conducted within biology and civic education classes. However, they are carried out only on specific occasions, and the provided information is often incomplete. While addressing this topic, teachers criticize teenagers and highlight the importance of sexual abstinence rather than discussing means of protection. Although included in the school curriculum, most teachers avoid topics related to sexual and reproductive health. Only a small number of teachers have the knowledge and are willing to tackle these topics at school.
- Over the past few years, thanks to Youth Peer Educators (YPE) there is an increased interest, on behalf of young volunteers, in getting information and promoting messages related to sexual and reproductive health. Although, there are local YPE networks providing information for young people, it is not available for everybody. YPE try to fill the gaps left by school/professionals, by presenting child friendly information, using both interactive methods of teaching and simple, practical examples.
- Questionnaires reveal that pupils feel ashamed to recognise that they need more information about sexual health. Although most teenagers interviewed by Reflection Group deny the need to take part in such information activities, at the same time they suggested topics they would like to learn more about. This could be due to the fact that pupils consider the information offered previously unclear and only partially useful. In addition, this is a taboo topic and pupils fear they will be labelled, condemned. Here are some of the topics required by pupils: physical and emotional changes during adolescence; sexually transmitted infections; healthy lifestyle; family planning; birth control methods.

- On one hand, children are not asked by the teachers what would they like to discuss and how the information should be presented, if they prefer talking to an expert or go to a youth centre. On the other hand, even if children are consulted, their suggestions are not taken into account.
- Young people who are willing to get involved do not get support from teachers and parents, being constrained by local traditions, religious beliefs or other kinds of reasons.
- Most teachers do not trust the information YPE convey and insist on attending the activities they perform. This creates a situation of tension and discomfort. At the same time, grownups themselves do not have information or a clear idea of how to conduct such lessons, discussions, trainings.
- Children prefer talking about sexual health with their sisters/brothers, relatives, and professionals from youth friendly centres. They tend to avoid similar discussions with teachers and parents. Parents themselves often are unwilling to address this topic with their children. Since they lack knowledge, the best way is to claim children must not be aware of such things. In the same context teenagers, especially girls, are often threatened by their parents with severe punishments (being beaten, being sent away from home) if they find out they have sexual intercourse or are pregnant.
- At the beginning, when parents find out about their daughters' pregnancy, they find it hard to accept the reality and moralize, beat or even send them away from home. After some time, though, parents try to restore the relationship with their children and provide them the necessary support.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Teachers should receive training on how to teach subjects related to sexual and reproductive health properly (in a clear, attractive way, systematically, professionally, using child friendly materials, leaving aside their personal or religious beliefs, and ignoring stereotypes. Other professionals (doctors, nurses, social workers) should have minimum genuine knowledge in this field.
- Topics related to sexual and reproductive health should be tackled within school subjects, such as biology and civic education. Teachers should understand that it is their responsibility to teach them and they should not avoid them or give them to students as home assignments. Education authorities should monitor the way in which teachers implement the school curriculum with respect to sexual and reproductive health.
- State institutions have to carry out studies/researches on adolescents' needs in terms of sexual and reproductive health, based on different demographic and geographical criteria. The results of the researches are to be used in the development of training programs for professionals, as well as awareness raising campaigns for adolescents and young parents, conveying clear messages, including children's rights as patients.
- Pupils' views should be sought on the contents of information materials/resources. Competences and topics chosen by pupils should be included in the curriculum. Both the educational and health systems have to fulfil their responsibility of informing children. Furthermore, parents should be ready to address these subjects with their children.
- It is the State's duty to support the organizations, child friendly health centres, as well as other institutions providing services for adolescents and promote YPE model. It is also important to involve children (who have received guidance from experts) in awareness raising activities.

PROFESSIONALS AND AVAILABLE SERVICES

„Both doctors and other professionals do not take children patients seriously“

FINDINGS:

- The study shows that of all health institutions dealing with sexual health, health centre is most frequent in communities. Nevertheless, most children consider the services obtained there as being of a low quality: the correctness of diagnosis is disputed by other medical institutions, medicine is insufficient or not available at all.
- There are not enough medical workers in communities, thus children do not receive health care services they need on time. Only those who can afford to spend more go to district health centres. There are situations when community health workers do not provide children with appropriate help, either because they do not take them seriously, or due to lack of time.
- One in three specialists interviewed by children did not participate in any training on sexual and reproductive health. Most of them do not have the required knowledge and ability to openly communicate with children on the topics related to sexual and reproductive health.
- Although providers of services for adolescents are state-run institutions, most trainings for professionals in the field of sexual and reproductive health are conducted by nongovernmental organizations (Neovita, Peace Corps, Centre Dacia, university professors supported by international organizations). This is the reason why, as a rule, professionals do not take these trainings seriously: they think of them as being short-term activities, needed by the organisers, rather than for themselves. Most of the time, while promoting messages of sexual and reproductive health, experts in the field are criticized, pressed, intimidated by both the community and the community leaders (priest, mayor).
- When children need information on health related subjects, they talk to supervisors in placement centres, parents, grandparents or other relatives. Children do not have the habit of consulting a doctor for various reasons: the medical institution is far from their homes, they think adults who raise them have enough knowledge to help them, or they know where to find the necessary information in case they need it.
- Professionals (teachers, doctors, social workers) do not inform parents on various aspects of physical, sexual, psychological development of a child.

- Doctors often require parents' presence while consulting adolescents, whereas by law people over sixteen can be consulted without their parents/caregivers being present. Sometimes, doctors do not explain to children the diagnosis, the procedures they have to undergo and are disturbed if children protest because of such treatment. At the same time, children are forced to sign, without having the opportunity to talk to their parents, agreements that they accept vaccinations and are aware of subsequent consequences. In fact, the reality is that this procedure is mandatory and doctors do not explain what the consequences might be and what they must do in this case.
- Most doctors and medical workers do not use medical gloves and other types of disposable equipment when they examine children and administer medications. Sometimes they even utilize "non-medical" objects as medical equipment.
- Most children have more confidence in Youth Friendly Health Centres (YFHC) than in those for the general public: doctors working in YFHC are more attentive to adolescents' needs, whereas those from health centres/ family doctors centres do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to meet adolescents' needs since they are focused mainly on adult patients.
- In many cases, according to YFHC professionals, centres lack the necessary equipment. Pregnancy tests, emergency contraceptives, medical equipment, disposable tools, informing materials etc. are among things centres are usually short of or lack in general.
- Not all the educational institutions provide psychological services, regardless of the number of pupils. In some schools teachers/form teachers find the solution in inviting community experts to teach pupils a lesson on a specific topic. However, the expert leaves and the problem is still there since the school lacks a professional of its own, who could serve as a permanent resource for pupils within the school.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The State should allocate funds that would allow more health centres to be opened in order to ensure basic healthcare services are provided in every locality, including funds for disposable medical equipment. Services focused on adolescents should be improved and extended to more regions. The number of medical workers should increase and their level of professionalism should get higher.
- Healthcare specialists working in various institutions (educational, medical, social) should be trained to communicate with children appropriately, which means: to pay attention to their opinions, talk directly to the children, ask them how they feel, explain the diagnosis, and use a language children can understand while doing this, apply the principles of confidentiality, respect for the patient and non-discrimination.

4 | CHILD LABOUR

WORKING CONDITIONS



Annually, a large number of children of different ages are involved in seasonal work without signing a contract with them. So they are at risk of being exploited and abused by adults or not being paid. Photo as symbol.

Author: Maria, 18 years

FINDINGS:

- Due to the lack of awareness raising activities among children on their rights at their workplace and their family's difficult financial situation, many children take up jobs that threaten their development, health and even life: they work overtime, in a harmful and stressful environment. And since they do not have an employment contract, children cannot be sure they will receive the proper payment. Cases when employers sign contracts and require parental consent are rather scarce.
- Even if children are not happy with the working conditions, they usually do not express their opinion, because they are unaware of such a right, they are afraid of being fired or abused by the employer.
- Despite the fact that the law states that children over 15 can work up to 5 hours per day, and children aged between 16 and 18 can work up to 7 hours per day, there were many cases in which working schedules were often violated, namely in:

- ⊙ Service sector – waiters, for instance, work an average of 12 hours per day; masseurs, babysitters, and shop assistants work at least 10 hours per day.
- ⊙ Agriculture, light industry, construction – at least 10 hours per day.
- Basic protection measures are not taken for children working on construction sites – helmets, protective clothing, gloves, support equipment, protective glasses, etc. In the service sector, children are obliged to buy themselves uniforms and other things required for the job.
- In all the above mentioned sectors there are situations when children are forced to work at night, interacting with adults who smoke and consume alcohol.
- Working children are often abused by their employer, colleagues or customers, especially where employment contracts are not signed. Thus, if children refuse to perform the tasks given by adults, or try to negotiate something, they are threatened to be fired, verbally humiliated, beaten or sexually harassed.
- Most of the time, employers are informed about checks performed by labour inspection ahead of time. As a rule, in order to avoid penalties, they order children employed illegally to stay at home during the inspections.
- Although places where children were illegally employed are known, cases of employers being punished for exploiting children were not made public.

Study case 1.1

Victoria is 16 years old and she works as a shop assistant in a store selling equipment for cars. Although Victoria did not qualify for the job, she was hired. She works on the basis of a verbal agreement, so she does not have an employment contract. During the school term Victoria works 5 hours a day, while on vacation and at the weekend – 12 hours a day.

Since she started working she does not have enough time for personal activities. Her academic achievement was seriously affected, too.

Study case 1.3:

Vitalie is 17. In May, he went to work in the Czech Republic along with his mother and he says that he does not intend to come back to Moldova. He found a job in a bakery and works night shifts, from 8 pm until 6 am.

Study case 1.2:

A fifteen-year-old boy works as a waiter in a restaurant. He is asked to come to work, along with his other colleagues, 10 am to get a room ready for a wedding party. It takes them about 5 hours to prepare the room and lay the tables. Afterwards they are supposed to take care of the guests until about 3 am and then to tidy up the room (about 1 hour and a half). In summertime, there might be organized three wedding parties a week. The boy is supposed to work at all of

Study case 1.4

Valeria is a fifteen-year-old girl. All summer she worked as a lifeguard at a swimming pool not far from Chisinau. Besides the fact that she does not have a special training, thus putting her own life in danger, Victoria had to cope with visitors constantly harassing her.

Study case 1.5

Ion is fifteen years old and he comes from a low-income family. There are seven children in the family and parents cannot afford taking care of them. Ion is the eldest child in the family and his parents forced him to work on the construction site, in the neighbouring village, earning 150 lei a day. Every day, the adults he works with on the construction site abuse him verbally and physically, but one day he got injured while working – his arm was broken in two places. Since Ion does not have an employment contract, the company he works for did not pay for his medical treatment, nor did he get his wage.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The state must inform parents of the existing legal provisions, risks and dangers of performing dangerous jobs with/or without an employment contract children are exposed to; it must inform children of their right to protection from economic exploitation, and employers of domestic laws and sanctions with regard to child labour.
- Parents should ensure their children have an employment contract, and competent authorities should monitor whether parents' responsibility to protect children against child labour is properly fulfilled.
- Labour inspectorates have to carry out frequent checks, including unannounced ones, to places where children are most frequently hired. It is important to create mobile groups that would inspect whether employers sign contracts when employing children, whether they take into account their age and level of development when certain duties are assigned.
- The State should also tighten the sanctions against employers who repeatedly involve children in dangerous, hazardous activities, and those who do not sign employment contracts with them.
- The State needs to have mechanisms and tools to consult children with regard to respect for children's right to protection against labour exploitation.

CHILD LABOUR IN VULNERABLE FAMILIES



Although the law stipulates that children from 15 years old may work 5-7 hours per day, there are cases where children work in agriculture more than 10 hours/day, which contributes to lower productivity at school, but also represents a risk factor for their health. Photo as symbol.

Author: Maria, 18 years

FINDINGS:

- Some parents who have low wages, or do not have a permanent job, borrow money to buy household goods, food or even alcohol. They force their children to work in order to pay back their debts, to buy basic things children need at home and school (food, clothes, medications, schoolbooks etc.).
- In other cases, parents work abroad, and their children have to do all the household chores and/or work the agricultural land. In addition, some of these children have to look after their younger sisters/brothers. There are situations in which children have to work to support themselves, since their parents are illegally abroad and cannot send money home.

- In order to make money some parents force their children to beg on the streets, from house to house, near churches. There were also cases when children were brought with the same car and then sent to several specific places on the street to beg.
- More and more frequent are the situations when children join their parents or relatives abroad in order to work during the summer holidays or even during the school year. Some of them are encouraged by adults and friends already working abroad and do not consider that school is important for children; others leave because their families cannot afford to meet their living and education expenses.
- In all the above-mentioned situations, most children have serious school attendance issues and low academic achievements. Moreover, they do not enjoy their free time, and they are discriminated and neglected by their peers and teachers.



In Moldova, 21% of children have one parent working abroad, and about 5% have both parents working. In many cases, to maintain the household or to take care of themselves and other family members, these children are forced to perform household work for adults. Photo as symbol.

Author: Maria, 16 years

Study case 2.1

Adrian, a fourteen-year-old boy is a pupil in the secondary school in his locality. Recently, he has frequently missed classes.

He has to work on the field, look after animals and do otherhousehold chores. Although his family receives financial support from the state, it is not enough to meet the family's needs. Adrian's academic achievement gets worse and worse and he looks always tired. Due to financial issues, the boy has to focus on work and he neglects his education. As a result, he does not manage to do well at school.

Since he has no friends, he is mostly isolated.

Adrian does not have time for activities that would allow him to develop both intellectually and emotionally.

Study case 2.2:

A fifteen-year-old girl, along with her two younger brothers, were left in the care of their grandparents. Due to alcohol consumption and child abuse their parents lost parental rights and custody of their children. In order to survive the girl had to work on the field. The adults she worked with were forcing her to perform their duties, even on very hot days, depriving her from lunch.

Study case 2.4

A sixteen-year-old boy, from a vulnerable family, has to work for the cognac factory «Călărași» covering the night shifts. During holidays, he works from 8 pm to 9 am, while during school time – from 8 pm to 6-7 am. As a rule, the following day he is exhausted and he misses classes.

Study case 2.3

Every day, a fifteen-year-old boy, who comes from a family of alcoholic parents, goes to the local forest to work. He does not attend school and he even forgot how to read.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- In order to reduce the risk of child involvement in hard and dangerous activities, the State has to increase the allowances for low-income families. At the same time, authorities should monitor the way in which these allowances are distributed and managed.
- The State should train professionals in the field of prevention and identification of child exploitation, and subsequently monitor their activities.

5

**FAMILY
ENVIRONMENT**

PARENTS WHO MIGRATE IN SEARCH OF WORK

FINDINGS:

- As a rule, parents who go abroad to work leave their children in the care of people who are not able to look after them, such as:
 - ⊙ grandparents who are often too old to provide appropriate care for children, or have health issues, and fail to meet children's needs;
 - ⊙ elder brothers/sisters who lack knowledge and skills in child rearing;
 - ⊙ neighbours and relatives who don't know the child very well, and cannot provide the time and attention the child needs.
- Both in school and community, some children whose parents work abroad are excluded and discriminated against by their peers and teachers. This is either because these children can't afford what their peers can, or because they do get more from their parents than other children do.
- Sometimes children cannot manage properly the money sent by their parents. In other cases, they do not benefit from that money because caregivers use it for their own purposes.
- Some children join groups of people known for their risky behaviour because they are left without adult supervision or lack affectionate communication at home. They are manipulated for many reasons, including the fact that they have more pocket money than they can manage.

Study case 1:

Ana is 16 years old. She has a younger sister, 3 older sisters and a brother who has reached the age of majority. Their parents left them eight years ago, going abroad in search of better working opportunities. When they were younger, the brother was taking care of all 5 sisters, before they were taken by a centre for abandoned children. Now, the centre is closing and the girls need a legal guardian. Their case is in court since parents have to be deprived of parental rights

Study case 2:

The boy is fifteen years old. Both parents are working abroad. He lives with two older sisters. One of them is grown up, but she does not have a job. The boy seldom speaks with his mother, via Skype, because his older sister uses the computer all the time.

- Quite often teachers, neighbours, relatives blame children for parents' decision to go abroad. Adults think that the use of expressions, such as "They left to offer you a better life, but you do not behave yourself", "Aren't you ashamed to behave like this, while your parents are gone for your future" would make children more responsible and disciplined.
- Many parents do not come back home for years and do not keep in touch with their children. Some children are simply abandoned by their migrating parents.
- Authorities are usually not aware of the situation of children in the community. If a child is looked after by a person who is a little over 18 years old, the authorities do not monitor the child, since he is in the care of an adult.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The State has to make sure that parents leave children in the care of competent people before leaving. The guardian/caregiver should be aged between 25 and 50 and monitored by social workers.
- Social assistants should assess if parents provide the resources necessary to ensure children are properly brought up.
- The State should also develop services that would provide both information and counselling to parents, children, guardians/caregivers prior to the departure and during parents' stay abroad.

FAMILIES WITH MULTIPLE CHILDREN AND LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

FINDINGS:

- The State does not allocate enough funds to cover the expenses of families with multiple children. These are often low-income families, as well. Sometimes state allowances do not reach the right families: the social worker gives the money to a family he/she favours, while on the paper another family is the beneficiary.
- The eligibility criteria for receiving social support are outdated and rigid – goods people get from neighbours, relatives or mass consumption goods are also taken into consideration during the assessment process.
- Monthly allowances and other types of support do not cover children's basic needs: food, medications, clothes, living conditions etc. Sometimes child benefits are used for other purposes: parents buy clothes for themselves or things that are not necessities, alcohol, and cigarettes.
- Children often do not attend school because they do not have money for seasonal clothing, school supplies, schoolbooks rental. Some children have to work in order to survive or support the entire family.
- Children coming from these families are often isolated at school and in the society and closed in themselves. They are rejected, abused, mocked, and reprimanded by teachers and peers. They do not participate in activities, since they do not have appropriate clothes or cannot contribute financially when these are organized. Both classmates and the whole society reject them.

DISORGANIZED FAMILIES WHERE ALCOHOL ABUSE IS PRESENT

FINDINGS:

- In some families children are not looked after, their basic needs are not met: decent living conditions, food, clothes, safe and protective environment. These families do not have a regular income and even if there is one, it is not properly managed: instead of healthy food, clothes, personal hygiene products or other things important for children and family, parents buy alcohol.
- There is not an emotional connection between parents and children. In such families children do not feel loved and protected, the reason why they develop tense relationships with their peers and other adults, they are not motivated to go to school etc. Children in these families are often victims of physical, verbal and sexual abuse, or they witness violence between adults.
- Children from these families are at big risk of alcohol abuse because they tend to imitate their parents. They do not have another example of a normal life, so they repeat their parents' style. In most rural areas, children have free access to large quantities of alcohol.
- There are no counselling programs or services for parents who abuse alcohol.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The State should ensure well-paid jobs for parents and encourage employers to hire them by offering certain privileges.
- The State should raise allowances and other types of social benefits. It should also reconsider the eligibility criteria and monitor the way in which local authorities distribute and the way in which parents use them.
- Teachers and social workers should get appropriate training on supporting children from disorganized families in the educational process.
- Regular visits to the families with many children should be organised by authorities, in order to assess their living conditions and consult with children.
- The State should develop counselling services for parents who abuse alcohol, and integrate them into the society, offering them the chance to bring up their children.
- The State must monitor and sanction individuals and shops selling alcohol to children.

