Supporting child protection and care reform in enlargement countries:

INGOs' experience, insights, and findings

Introduction: Hope and Homes for Children
The majority of these children are not ‘orphans’; approximately 80% have at least one living parent.

5.4 million children still live in institutions across the world, exposed to a system that harms their development and systematically violates their rights.
Family and community strengthening are more cost-effective in the long-run and generate sustainable growth.

Care reform enables governments to redirect funding and strengthen other public services to better meet the needs of their populations.

Care reform strengthens families and enables authorities to understand and address fundamental issues affecting wider communities at local, regional and national levels.
Our session: child care reform experts’ insights

Looking at child care reform in former and current EU candidate countries:

- Lessons learned: EU accession and implementing care reform in Bulgaria
- The way forward: What is the state of play and how can the EU accession process support care reform efforts in Moldova and Ukraine?
Lessons learnt from the care reform process in Bulgaria

Hope and Homes for Children

Lumos, Bulgaria
Child Welfare in Bulgaria Pre- and Post Eu Accession

- 1990s: estimated 30,000 children in institutions
- 2000s: Child protection system created and first alternative services and foster care piloted
- EC Monitoring reports: to reduce the number of children in institutions as a condition to accession
- 2007 – accession (availability of EU funding) and BBC4 documentary triggering meaningful reform
- 2010 National DI Strategy and Action Plan:
  - for the first time EU funding was used in a coordinated and strategic way to implement systemic child care reform (ERDF+DRR+ESF)
  - 7,716 children in 137 institutions
  - Action plan updated 2016
  - Deadline for end of reform – 2025
- 2023 - 4 institutions with a total of about 200 children remain. All children have severe to profound disabilities

*Two concrete examples of EU support to care reform =>*
Case 1: Closure Of 25 Institutions Of Children And Young People With Disabilities

LUMOS supported with own funding the national EU project which led to the closure of all 25 institutions by 2015:

- EU support was very precious, in particular: the availability of transition money while 2 systems function simultaneously
- Challenges: Spending rules and regulations could make it difficult to adhere to the child’s best interest.

In particular:

- the principle of efficiency required that all children with disabilities were moved out to small group homes all at once (SGHs received project funds on per capita basis), which led to arbitrary and hasty removal disregarding individual plans and the degree of preparedness of each child.

- Staff in the small group homes had to deal with severe affective behavior crisis that most children had during their very long adaptation, especially when children were not properly grouped but had to fill in available places to reach full capacity of each SGH.
Case 2: Closure of 32 Institutions for Babies

HHC supported with own funding the national EU funded projects which led to the closure of 16 baby institutions, partnered with the Bulgarian government to close further 10 baby institutions, and contributed to the closure of 2 other institutions with the assistance of other NGOs;

- Positives: multi-year projects bind governments in times of political changes
- Challenges with public tenders: failure of tenders for essential activities caused delays and prolonged the stay of children in the institutions; pursuit of the lowest price can jeopardize quality for the children; appeals prevent the start of the activities and can also lead to corruption and provide opponents of deinstitutionalisation with a mechanism for disruption.

In particular:

- MoH had EU funding to build 20 SGHs for permanent medical care during 2014-2020 programming period – essential infrastructure to allow the closure of the last 4 baby institutions (scheduled for 2020). Failures of public tenders, inflation indexing procedures have led to huge delays.
- Only 7 are likely to be finished. MoH have just given up the project as “unfulfillable”, which means that the children in 2 of the institutions will be stuck there for indefinite time, experiencing the significant harm of long-term institutionalisation.
What have we learnt: Our recommendations

1. EU funding dedicated to child care reform (DI) pre- and post- accession is a great incentive to governments. Key prerequisites for dedicating EU funds are:
   - National Strategy clearly outlining the direction and long-term aim of care reform
   - Clear costed action plan
   - Coordination unit at the highest political and executive level;

2. Children grow quickly and their needs change, requiring individual approach and adaptability, which can be difficult to achieve if the rules and regulations for spending EU money are not flexible enough. To ensure short stay in institutions, safe transition and quality of life in the new environment, interventions cannot be delayed, deferred or cancelled;

3. Costed action plans should include the closure of all types of institutions to prevent initiatives of management of institutions to mimic reform.
The path towards Child Protection and Care Reform in Ukraine

Hope and Homes for Children
Child protection and care system in Ukraine: State of Play

- Historically heavily reliant on institutions
- The vast majority of Ukrainian children and families have been affected by the war
- Increased risk of children being separated from their parents
- No significant progress in implementation of the National DI Strategy reform approved in 2017
- 2022 EC opinion recognises child institutionalisation in Ukraine as a ‘serious concern’ that ‘needs to be tackled as a matter of urgency’
- EU commitment to providing technical and financial support (10 million euros)
- Recently established Coordination Centre of family education and care at the government level
- Developed and presented draft of the new strategy to ensure the right of every child to grow in a family environment
The path towards child protection and care reform in Ukraine: Our recommendations

1. Support the Government of Ukraine in the development of a national care reform strategy and action plan which prioritise children with disability and children of early age who are in institutions and are at risk of family separation, displaced children with an allocated budget and clear milestones and benchmarks, as part of Ukraine’s EU accession deliverables;

2. Multi-year financing of projects to implement the care reform strategy within Ukraine Facility and other financial instruments;

3. Include the key child protection and care systems reform milestones into the annual action matrixes or equivalent mechanism used for measuring progress of Ukraine on the way to association;

4. Technical support to build the capacity of state authorities to set up a functioning independent monitoring system to measure the progress and harmonise existing policies and legislation with EU standards;

5. Meaningful involvement of civil society organisations, practitioners, and people with lived experience.
The path towards Child Protection and Care Reform in Moldova

Lumos, Moldova
Our interventions to support care reform in Moldova

Lumos Foundation Moldova and CCF/HHC Moldova:

- Supported authorities to close 17 out of 67 RIs in the country (25%)
- Helped deinstitutionalise 25% of children from RIs and supported their further community inclusion
- Supported > 7500 children to grow up in loving and nurturing family environment
- Prevented the institutionalisation of > 19500 children
- Created, piloted, developed and continuously strengthen:
  - 1) Social services (foster care, social baby nurseries, family type homes, etc.);
  - 2) Education services (resource centres for inclusive education, Inclusive education unit, a model of education inclusion for children with complex disabilities);
  - 3) Early intervention services (district ECI centres and community ECD offices);
  - 4) Cross-sector cooperation mechanisms
- Currently working on closing 3 RIs for babies and young children (CCF/HHC)

Today most children in residential care are either children with severe disabilities and complex emotional needs or children aged 0-3. The 2022-2026 National Child Protection Programme and Action Plan provides the necessary base for completing the care reform of children. The main challenge is the lack of sufficient funding and limited local expertise.
How to support child care reform in Moldova: Our recommendations

1. Strengthen the child protection and well-being systems:
   ✓ Support: the social protection sector (e.g. through EU Support Package for the Republic of Moldova), prevention services, moratorium on new entries of children in residential care, family support, parenting educational services, cross-sectorial cooperation for primary and early intervention, network of social services, early childhood interventions and inclusive early education;

2. Strengthen the capacity of and meaningfully engage the civil society sector:
   ✓ Inclusion of child and disability rights NGOs and alliances in monitoring mechanisms and structures: formal and informal consultations with the EU Delegation and other EU institutions, including via quarterly meetings with EU Delegation representatives, funding for civil society for longer term implementation system change projects as well as for social innovation projects;

3. Strengthen the capacity of the Moldovan government structures:
   ✓ High-level advisory services for Moldovan authorities, Systemic changes in the administration structures, Review of government funding requests, Efficient communication between the Government and civil society on the reform, Strengthened cooperation for better child protection and prevention of primary risks;

4. Secure the effectiveness and positive impact of RESTART reform;
   ✓ Assess and measure the impact of RESTART reform on the social protection, Secure ongoing monitoring of the reform's implementation, Transparency and meaningfully involvement of NGOs, Invest in the recruitment and development of social workforce;

5. Strengthen data collection:
   ✓ Development of precise data collection mechanisms in the area of social protection and child care reform.
Thank you for your attention

For more information, please do not hesitate to contact:

- Hope and Homes for Children: @hopeandhomes.org
- Lumos: @wearelumos.org