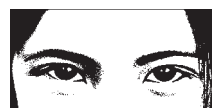




Children in Street Situations in the Republic of Moldova

Qualitative Study



Terre des hommes

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Sprijin copiilor.

Terre des hommes is the leading Swiss child relief agency. Founded in 1960, we are committed to improving the lives of millions of the world's most vulnerable children. Through our innovative protection and health projects, we provide assistance to over three million children and their families in almost forty countries each year.

What we do in Moldova

Terre des hommes (Tdh) is active in Moldova since 2004. Registered as a local Foundation, Tdh Moldova employs an expert team of 15 child protection specialists, trainers, project managers, communication and M&E specialists, legal experts, finance and administration specialists. Tdh Moldova works to reduce vulnerability and strengthen the protection of children affected by migration; to strengthen children's access to their rights in the juvenile justice system by promoting a restorative approach; and to build the protection and prevention capacity of child protection institutions and professionals, as well as of individuals with rights, such as children, families and communities. We work to ensure that all children in Moldova benefit from a system that can guarantee their survival, protection, development and participation, with a specific focus on the most vulnerable children.

Child protection

To create a safer environment for children's development, our team and partners mobilise families, communities, and public authorities to protect children who are at risk or are victims of neglect, abuse, discrimination or exploitation. We work with schools to ensure that disadvantaged children are integrated and can receive psychosocial support in toy libraries, summer camps, and through group activities. Our activities in local communities are focused on preventing violence against children, strengthening families, and increasing children's resilience. We advocate for high quality child protection services and build the capacity of professionals to effectively deliver these services to children.

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We work with justice, education, and child protection institutions and professionals in preventing juvenile delinquency and supporting children in conflict with the law. Our goal is to build effective and sustainable programmes and services that prevent juvenile delinquency, reduce recidivism, and ensure that children at risk of committing an offence are properly protected. Our specialists provide training and resources for professionals, strengthening their ability to understand and respond to children's specific needs. We advocate for policy improvements and for the development and implementation of child delinquency prevention programmes in the justice, educational, and child protection systems.

Children affected by migration

Terre des hommes works to improve protection of Moldovan children left behind due to parents' migration. We work with local communities, parents, and professionals in developing effective and sustainable community-level actions that improve the protection of children left behind and strengthen families affected by migration. At the national level, we raise awareness about migration and strategies for preventing and reducing the negative impacts of migration on children. Our local experts help children to cope with the emotional challenges related to their parents' absence, inform parents on how to maintain a sound relationship with their children, and train professionals to work with families affected by migration.



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Representatives of child safety services of the General Police Inspectorate were of an enormous support in identifying and facilitating contact with the children in this study.

Last but not least, the merit of the participants in this research – professionals, parents and children – must be acknowledged for they showed openness, honesty and courage.

What do children wish for?

„I wish my mom was here.”
(13-year old boy)

„I wish I had a football suit, for instance goalkeeper gloves, and a basketball, a telephone and a present for my mom. I want something to wear around my neck, a chain and also some notebooks for school, pens, pencils, a ruler...school supplies.”

(12-year old boy)

„I don't want to live in Moldova, because life is difficult here, and there where I will live I want to have my own house. I want to have a family.”

(16-year old boy)

„I wish there were no quarrels, beatings and this kind of things at home. I wish there were no more fights, I want them not talk to each other at all. I mean, they can talk, but not fight. I wish my father would stop humiliating my mother.”

(15-year old boy)

„A new family and to have everything I want... I want a telephone, speakers, new clothes, to change my school and character, to make new friends. I want to be a good person, to get along well with everyone, to be kind. I am nice to people who are nice to me and I am not nice to those who treat me badly.”

(13-year old boy)

„I want to have a flat and live separately. Of course, with my mother and younger sister.”

(15-year old boy)

„I want you to help me when I will need you. Help my mother if she needs it. I want to work with wood.”

(15-year old boy)

„I want Nike boots, a tracksuit, roller skates. To renovate my room. And have my hair cut.”

(14-year old boy)

„To become a baker or a cook. To have a family. To see my elder sister. To do what older people tell me to do.”

(15-year old girl)

„I want a family. My family to protect me and to not be somebody else's. I want a family that will take care of me. I want to be a good student.”

(10-year old girl)

„I want to have a family. To have a mother at home. To learn, to write, to read.”

(11-year old boy)

„I want a family. A loving family. And I want my brothers to have a family.”

(10-year old girl)

„I wish I had football boots.”
(15-year old boy)

Where do children see themselves in 10 years?

„A strong, tall, handsome, the most handsome boy in town. In 10 years.... wearing a leather jacket, glasses and driving a bike and everybody who will see me wondering "Is that him? Wow!!!"

(14-year old boy)

„I see myself a happy man, who does not run away from home, who went to school, has a job. I am no longer a headache for my mother and she is happy that I no longer do stupid things. I am a good person and do not steal or do other things, which make me deal with the police.”

(12-year old boy)

„Me...in 10 years...how old will I be?... 24. I will be married... Maybe I will grow a little taller... Yes...longer hair...I have never had long hair. Hmm... I will have a house ... a big house and three children: two boys and one girl. I will be a cook.”

(14-year old girl)

„As big as my uncle Andrei. He is dead, he killed himself.”

(15-year old boy)

„I live a normal life. This is not possible in Moldova. I need to go to another country. Life is safer in America.”

(15-year old boy)



Executive summary

This study represents a first attempt of scientific analysis of children in street situations in the Republic of Moldova.

This report is divided into six chapters. The first chapter includes a brief introduction into the literature together with a review of the main national and international documents that constitute the legal framework regarding children's rights in general and the rights of children in street situations in particular. The second chapter is dedicated to describing the research instruments, the participants and the research procedures. The following three chapters present the study results. These include: (a) professionals' perspectives on children in street situations, (b) parents' perspectives and (c) children's perspectives. The last chapter presents the conclusions of this study comprising the description of three categories of children in street situations, namely: (1) children for whom placement was established after a minimum contact experience with the street; (2) children with a street experience longer than six months and (3) children from the former National Hotel. The description of the three categories is followed by 11 recommendations that emerged from this study. These refer to preventing the phenomenon, working with the child in street situations and social policies. The report ends with some thoughts and reflections about children's participation in this study.

The main five results of the study indicate that:

1. For many children, the first experiences with the street take place at a very early age, when they are of three or four years old. These are not known by children's parents or by professionals;
2. Most of the children constantly run away from placement centres and from their families where they are taken by representatives of social services and/or police;
3. Parents' alcohol abuse is most often associated with domestic violence, child abuse and lack of child supervision. These are the main reasons children leave their homes;
4. The children have little information about how they can avoid labour exploitation and sexual abuse situations;
5. Professionals have little knowledge about the specifics of children in street situations. For some, this translates into fear or reluctance towards the children.

Top five of recommendations proposed by this study:

1. **The opinion of the child** regarding his/her placement in centres or return into the family should be taken into consideration by representatives of social services.
2. **Support measures for children who choose to live on the street.** These measures should **respect** children's choice.
3. Children who consent to be placed in a centre should be allowed **a period of adaptation** to the life and regulations of the respective centre.
4. **Campaigns** aiming to raise awareness on **parents' responsibility to supervise their children** should be developed.
5. **Professionals** working with children in street situations **should attend workshops and professional trainings** on this topic.
6. Information on the **number of children in street situations** should be collected systematically together with migration tendencies. These can help in making child protection interventions more efficient.

1. Introduction

1.1. Definitions and categories of children in street situations

The most common definition is the one given by the Inter-NGO in 1985 and adopted by UNICEF. According to this definition, cited by UNCHS (2000), the child in street situations is "...any girl or boy... for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood; and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults" (pp. 73-74).

UNICEF (2001) classifies children in street situations in: (a) children on the street, who spend their day on the street begging or working and at night they return to their homes; (b) children of the street who work and live on the street and have no contacts with their families and (c) children whose experiences fall under both categories. Another category is one of the children who live on the streets with their families (Parveen, 2014).

In order to illustrate the various perspectives and experiences of the children, Terre des Hommes (2010) replaced the term "street children" with "children in street situations" – term that is used by this study – by which children are seen as social actors constructing relationships with persons from their environment. The same term is also used by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in their General Comment no. 21 (2017) defining children in street situations as

- a. children who depend on the streets to live and/or work, whether alone, with peers or with family; and
- (b) a wider population of children who have formed strong connections with public spaces and for whom the street plays a vital role in their everyday lives and identities (p. 3).

1.2. Characteristics and experiences of the children

The literature gathered information on children in street situations starting with 1970, mostly in Latin America (Dybicz, 2005), in an attempt to draw a general picture of the "typical street child" (Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003, para. 2). This generated a series of articles that were much promoted by the media describing the image of delinquent children who also use drugs (Rizzini & Lusk, 1995), especially boys aged between 5 and 17 years (Butler & Rizzini, 2001) or the image of children victims of violence who were worthless and towards whom governments reacted by removing them from the streets using punitive measures (Scanlon, Tomkins, Lynch, & Scanlon, 1998).

Such descriptions were considered problematic because they promoted attitudes that were in disagreement with the rights of the child. Presenting the children as delinquents produced feelings of fear and, implicitly, attitudes of exclusion, whilst children's description as victims led to children being perceived by social services as objects subject to reintegration or

rehabilitation interventions (Thomas de Benitez, 2011). In the 1990s there was a perspective shift that was encouraged by exploring the phenomenon of children in street situations at global level and by understanding the fact that life experiences of the children are much too diverse and dynamic to be reduced to stereotypical characteristics.

If, initially, poverty was considered the main cause for children ending up on the streets, at present it is accepted that, although this is common among children in street situations, the causes are multiple and are largely depending on geopolitical contexts. For example, in African countries dominated by armed conflicts these constitute the reason why children are in street situations (Ennew, 2003), whilst in Latin America child abuse, parents' neglect and/or drug addictions are more frequent (Aptekar, 1991; Trussell, 1999). Other causes include economic recession, political instability or natural disasters (Tapa, Ghatane, & Rimal, 2009).

The day to day experiences of children and the process of integration of the child in different street groups was also subject of interest in the literature. In a study on boys from the Tikyan community in Yogyakarta, Beazley (2003) used the concept of career to describe the way children construct their lives. Career was presented by the author as starting with first contacts with the street where the child worked or played and where he met children without shelter. This is a period when the child "tests the waters of the street" (para. 20): he spends his time on the street and returns home at night but after a while he begins to also spend the night on the street. Initiation is a subsequent stage including practices such as anal sex and giving up all the goods the boy came with. He changes his name or he receives a new name, thus a new identity. He is then supervised by other members of the community who teach him how to behave and how to survive. With experience, the child builds a group identity by adopting the values and attitudes of the group and by raising in the hierarchy of labour where begging is the lowest level of work and busking with guitars is what all boys aspire to.

Although most of the studies showed that boys are predominant among children in street situations, girls were also subject of investigation. In Ethiopia for example, Lalor (1999) mentioned that approximately a quarter of children in street situations are girls aged 10 to 14 years. Some of them live on the streets, others are working on the streets during the day and at night they return home. Their work is mostly begging, but they also engage in prostitution. An important aspect underlined by Lalor is that, for these girls, life on the streets is working and group living by which the girls ensure their protection. In Accra (Ghana), the main source of survival for the girls is prostitution. Anarfi (1997) showed this happens mostly in train stations where girls as young as 10 offer their sexual services to men, no matter the men's age or status. Ennew (2003) explained that the small number of girls (10 percent) in street situations in Mexico was due to the cultural perception whereas women are associated with the house and men are perceived as belonging to the street.

The child's age plays an important role for the street career. Begging is no longer accessible for youth and children's roles change significantly once they have their own children (Jones & Thomas de Benitez, 2010). Also, the public perception of the children changes according to their ages. If smaller children are perceived with compassion and with a feeling of injustice that their place should not be on the streets, the older ones – mostly the boys – are seen as people who use drugs and commit crimes and thus, their presence in the pub-

lic space is less tolerated (Scherthaner, 2011). Adolescence was noticed as a period when some of the children return to their families or start conforming to the norms of the society. Other children decide to remain on the streets and take over the role of supervising and protecting the younger ones (Ennew & Swart-Kruger, 2003) while they look for alternatives to making money, mostly by committing crimes (Beazley, 2003). For other children, however, their street career ends in jail or with their death caused by street violence (Beazley, 2003), HIV or other diseases (Thomas de Benitez, 2011).

Few studies have investigated the health of children in street situations. The main focus was on drug consumption (e.g. glue) and early sexual activity (Scanlon, Tomkins, Lynch, & Scanlon, 1998). Anarfi (1997) interviewed 1147 children in street situations aged 8 to 19 years and showed that boys are at higher risks than girls to contract sexually transmitted diseases, and this risk increases as both boys and girls grow older and spend their time on the streets. Among the children who were infected, only 31 percent had been to a dispensary. In Nepal, in another study, Thapa, Ghatane and Rimal (2009) investigated the physical health of 48 children using laboratory tests and interviews. The results of this study showed that all children were suffering of at least one health problem. The most common were: lice infestations, headaches, injuries due to cuts, common cold and dental problems.

Many of the children's health problems were caused not only by their life style, but also by the work they undertook to survive. Although begging and prostitution are common among children, they were also found to earn money by doing seasonal work or local specific work. Amongst other work children take up are: washing car windshields, shoe shining, carrying luggage or being tour guides (Thomas de Benitez, 2011). Numerous studies and reports have drawn attention to the risks of labour exploitation of these children as well as sexual abuse and child trafficking (ILO, 2002; Terre des hommes, 2010; UNICEF, 2001).

The literature also noted other aspects of the day to day life of the children that include taking part in various recreational activities such as football or other sports they engage in with the support of non-governmental organizations (Oino, Sorre, & Bor, 2013) or gambling (Saldana, D'Souza, & Madangopal, 2017).

Over the years, studies on children in street situations have made recommendations that aimed at improving the lives of children. Some of these recommendations were applied to various social policies. The table below presents a summary of these policies:

Approach	Conceptualization or Social Construction of street children
Correctional, reactive or repression-oriented model	Deviants – threats or potential threats to public order whose deficient characteristics differentiate them from other children assumed to be ‘normal’, inviting a repressive response to individual children
Rehabilitative or protection-oriented model	Victims – in which the deficient conditions of street life are emphasized, those whose basic rights to food, shelter, education and health are continuously violated, inviting a more protective approach towards the children in these situations
Human-rights based model	Citizens whose rights have been violated – A group of people who are discriminated against and whose access to rights as citizens and as children are denied or unsecured by society

Reproduced from Thomas de Benitez, 2011, p. 38

1.3. Policy aspects

International organizations have long been criticized for the fact that the estimation of 100 million children in street situations that is often used has no validity and there is a need for a more rigorous method of data collection (Thomas de Benitez, 2011) and also for defining children in terms of children of and on the streets which was more appropriate for Latin America and did not include the diversity of experiences lived by the children in other parts of the world (UNCHS, 2000). Also, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was subject to criticism for not making reference explicitly to this category of children (Thomas de Benitez, 2000).

Nevertheless, significant efforts have been made in order to bring children in street situations on the agenda of international policies. In 1994, the Council of Europe proposed, for the first time, following a research that was developed during 1992-1993, three classifications of social policies addressing children in street situations, drawing attention to non-discrimination and to the need for member states to ensure the rights of these children. The most recent international document on this subject is the General comment No. 21 (2017) on children in street situations where the states that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child are recommended to develop „long-term national strategies on children in street situations using a holistic, child rights approach” in order to „prevent children experiencing rights violations and the lack of choices that results in them having to depend on the streets for their survival and development; and to promote and protect the rights of children already in street situations, ensuring a continuum of care and helping them to develop to their fullest potential”. The document offers a definition of the child as being in street situations and action guiding lines for member states

aiming to change laws (e.g. revising national laws on the rights of the child as to include children in street situations). It also draws attention on the necessity for professional training of people working in the area of child protection and reviews articles from the Convention on the Rights of the Child by including children in street situations.

At national level, Republic of Moldova has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on December, 12th, 1990. In December 1994, the Parliament adopted Law no. 338 regarding the rights of the child that went through several changes, without including children in street situations. This category of children was included, without being defined as such, in Law 140/2013 regarding the special protection of children at risk and of children without parents. Article 8 of this Law names situations in which a child is considered at risk. Amongst those situations, some can be encountered by children in street situations [e.g. c) children are practicing vagrancy, begging, prostitution; f) children are living on the street, have run away or have been sent off; g) parents of the children refuse to comply with their parental obligations regarding raising and caring for their child; or h) children have been abandoned by their parents. The two laws mentioned above, together with the Government’s Decision No. 270/2014 on the approval of “Instructions regarding the inter-sectorial cooperation mechanism for the identification, evaluation, referral, assistance and monitoring of child victims and potential victims of violence, neglect, exploitation and trafficking” constitute the legislative documents that serve as framework that can be applied to protecting children in street situations.

On the other hand, Law 140/2013 states in Article 11 that, when absence of parents is determined at the moment of identifying a child as being at risk, as is the case of most of the children in street situations, the child should be placed under emergency in an existent placement for a duration of 72 hours that can be extended to 45 days. This period is foreseen with the purpose of making a complex evaluation of the child. Thus, the first intervention for the children identified in street situations is emergency placement as a form of protection. With regards to the second intervention foreseen by the law, this includes the complex evaluation of the child. It is acknowledged¹, however, that this complex evaluation rarely reaches its aim because most of the children run away from the placement centres. Because the national documents do not foresee social services specifically for children in street situations, there is the case where the legal framework does not cover alternative interventions in order to ensure children's protection and rights. In this sense, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommends, in the General comment No. 21 (2017):

- Children in street situations who are temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment. Types of care include: practical and moral support to children on the streets, through a trustworthy adult street worker or peer support, without requiring or coercing children to renounce their street connections and/or move into alternative accommodation; drop-in and community/social centres; night shelters; day-care centres; temporary residential care in group homes; foster care; family reunification; and independent living or long-term care options including, but not exclusively, adoption. Deprivation of liberty, for example, in detention cells or closed centres, is never a form of protection (art. 44).
- States will ensure that children are not forced to depend on their street connections for their survival and/or development and that they are not forced to accept placements against their will (art. 45).

1.4. Aims and objectives

At present there is no data on the number of children in street situations in the Republic of Moldova.

The present study aims to analyse, from a qualitative point of view, the phenomenon of children in street situations in the Republic of Moldova in order to know and understand the nature and the evolution of the phenomenon and to identify mechanisms for the protection of these children and for preventing other children to be in street situations.

This study also aims to create a profile of children in street situations in the Republic of Moldova by approaching factors contributing to this phenomenon from individual, family and social perspectives.

¹ https://www.chisinau.md/public/publications/8225463_md_3.doc

2. Methodology

The present study is based on data collected from 43 participants: children in street situations, family members and professionals working in the area of child protection in the Republic of Moldova. The information was collected during October – December 2017.

Two qualitative methods were used to gather the data, namely semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

2.1. Participants

2.1.1. Participants' recruitment

For the recruitment of professionals in this study, two methods were used: a direct method that used the data base of „Terre des hommes” Foundation in Moldova and an indirect method whereas the focus groups in Balti and Cahul were facilitated by the General Police Inspectorates through the Child Safety Service in collaboration with child protection services in the respective cities. In total, 18 professionals were consulted for the purpose of this study. Seven professionals were interviewed individually and other 11 professionals attended two focus groups.

Recruitment of children in this study was made with the help of multiple institutions and professionals throughout the country including the Community Mental Health Centre in Chisinau, non-governmental organizations offering temporary placement for children following dispositions of state social services, police workers in Chisinau, Balti, Calarasi and Riscani, social workers in Nisporeni and schools in Cantemir and Straseni. In total, 21 children aged 10 to 18 years were invited to take part in this research, but only 18 accepted. The children who were included in the study came from 16 different families.

Access to families of children in street situations was provided by police workers in child safety services of the Police Inspectorates in Balti and Cahul and by social workers in Chisinau and Criuleni. 10 parents/relatives/neighbours of children living mostly on the streets of Chisinau were identified. Among the 10, one person refused to be interviewed and two parents were under the influence of alcohol when visited and the interviews could not be conducted.

The semi-structured interview was used to investigate children, parents and professionals. Due to limited time, professionals in Balti and Cahul were investigated using focus groups. In addition, the social work files of 13 children identified by the Municipal Department for the Protection of the Rights of the Child in Chisinau were analysed.

2.1.2. Characteristics of the participants

Professionals

The main categories of professionals included in this study are: social workers, police workers, representatives of non-governmental organizations, but also psychologists, psycho-pedagogues and a physician, as shown in the table below.

Profession	Chisinau	Balti	Cahul
Social workers	2	2	1
Psychologists	0	1	0
Psycho-pedagogues	0	1	1
Physician	1	0	0
Police workers	1	1	1
Pedagogues	0	1	2
NGO representatives	3	0	0
Total	7	6	5

Table 2.1. Professionals

Children

18 children in street situations (4 girls and 14 boys) were included in this research. At the time of interviewing 7 children were in a placement centre and 11 were in their families. It should be noted that some of the children living in a placement centre used to run away for several days and then return or they were brought back by the police or by the social services after being found living on the streets. Also, the children

who were in their families used to leave their homes for periods from several days to several months, especially during warm seasons. Children's ages vary between 10 and 17 years, with a predominance of 15-16 years age group. Most of the children are boys. Information regarding their gender, age, place of residence and recruitment for this study is presented in the table below:

No.	Gender	Age	Recruitment	Place of residence	Place of the child at the time of the interview
1	female	14	Community Mental Health Centre Chisinau	Cimişlia	Placement centre
2	female	15	Community Mental Health Centre Chisinau	Cimişlia	Placement centre
3	male	15	Police	Chişinău	In the family
4	male	11	NGO	Chişinău	Placement centre
5	female	10	NGO	Chişinău	Placement centre
6	female	15	NGO	Chişinău	Placement centre
7	male	15	NGO	Chişinău	Placement centre
8	male	14	Social worker	Nisporeni	In the family
9	male	14	Social worker	Nisporeni	In the family
10	male	13	School	Cantemir	Placement centre
11	male	16	Police	Bălţi	In the family
12	male	17	Police	Bălţi	In the family
13	male	16	Police	Bălţi	In the family
14	male	12	Police	Străşeni	In the family
15	male	13	Police	Străşeni	In the family
16	male	16	Police	Călăraşi	In the family
17	male	15	Police	Călăraşi	In the family
18	male	15	Police	Rişcani	In the family

Table 2.2. Characteristics of the children

Parents/relatives/neighbours

Of the seven persons identified as parents, relatives and neighbours of children in street situations, three are mothers of the children, two are the children's fathers, a person is a child's grandmother and another person is the neighbour of the family of a child living in street situations. Their characteristics are presented in the following table:

No.	Kinship	Age	Occupation	No. of children in the family	Area of residence	Child's gender	Child's age
1	mother	32	no occupation	4	Cahul/urban	male	13
2	mother	34	no occupation	4	Balti/urban	male	12
3	mother	49	no occupation	6	Criuleni/rural	male	12
4	father	n/a	no occupation	4	Balti/urban	female	13
5	father	43	no occupation	2	Criuleni/rural	male	15
6	grandmother	70	pensioner	2	Balti/urban	male	16
7	neighbour	30	no occupation	n/a	Criuleni/rural	male	12

Table 2.3. Characteristics of parents/relatives/neighbours of children in street situations

Social work files

As mentioned above, the study also included examination of the social work files of 13 children in street situations that were managed by professionals working in the Municipal Department for the Protection of the Rights of the Child in Chisinau. Of the 13 children, 8 are boys and 5 are girls. Their ages are between 8 and 17 years. The children come from 8 different families. Their gender and ages are presented in table 2.4.

No.	gender	Age
1	male	13
2	male	15
3	male	16
4	male	15
5	male	15
6	male	13
7	male	13
8	female	10
9	female	8
10	female	17
11	male	14
12	female	12
13	female	16

Table 2.4. Characteristics of children – social work files

2.2. Research instruments

2.2.1. Semi-structured interview/focus-group professionals

The purpose of the interviews and of the focus-groups with professionals was to explore their perception on children in street situations. Due to the semi-structured content of the interview guide, this was also used, with small changes, during the focus groups in Balti and Cahul. The questions included in the interview guide mainly referred to general information about children in street situations and respondents' perception on the chances of social and family reintegration of the chil-

dren, types of interventions, inter-institutional cooperation and policy aspects. A copy of the interview guide is presented in Annex 1.

2.2.2. Semi-structured interview - children

The interviews aimed at capturing children's views on street life, causes and factors leading to them living in street situations, and support. Thus, the questions in the interview guide referred to the child's family and educational history, common and less common experiences of the street, but also children's health, access

to social services and their perception of the future. The interview guide is presented in Annex 2.

2.2.3. Semi-structured interview – children’s family members

The study also aimed at obtaining the views of children’s parents, neighbours or other relatives. The interviews with this target group were structured on

two main topics: (1) child’s history including questions about the age of the child at first contact with the street and reasons for leaving home and (2) interventions for the child, a topic that included questions about people or services the respondents called in order to reduce the child’s risks. Other questions looked at respondents’ views about the future of the children and about prevention methods. Annex 3 presents the interview guide used with this group of participants.

2.3. Research procedure

The interviews that were developed in this study followed a similar procedure that included four stages: presentation of the research, asking for participants’ consent, the actual development of the interview and closing. All interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed.

2.3.1. Interviews with the professionals

The oral presentation of the research to the professionals included mentioning of the purpose of the study, the main topics covered by the interview and ethical aspects. The interviews were conducted according to the structure of the interview guide. There were situations where the participants wanted to share their experience and the history of the institutions where they worked and offered numerous examples of families and children in street situations. Due to the flexible nature of the semi-structured interview, this allowed for the main ideas to be followed while gathering valuable data about challenges and successes in working with children in street situations. The closing stage included questions about participants’ overall perception of the interview and offered the professionals the opportunity to ask questions in turn. Most of the interviews were perceived as “quite easy”, “very interesting” or “an open conversation”, while the questions asked to the researcher mainly referred to working practices in Romania. The individual interviews were conducted at the working places of the professionals and lasted between 50 minutes and one hour and 40 minutes.

The focus groups conducted with professionals in Balti and Cahul followed the same procedure as with the individual interviews. The participants were asked to write down their names, the name of the institution where they worked and contact details on a participants’ list. The focus groups were conducted at the office of child protection services in the two cities and lasted one hour and 30 minutes and one hour, respectively. The relative short duration of the focus groups was caused by the short time given to use the room

where these took place. Nevertheless, this was sufficient for all participants to be involved and to detail certain topics of interest, especially in relation to difficulties professionals met in working with children in street situations.

2.3.2. Interviews with the children

The research procedure with the children included a more detailed presentation of the research. Sometimes it was necessary to explain to the children certain terms, such as “research” or “confidential”.

All but three children included in the study were interviewed individually. Three children were interviewed together because the space available for the interview did not allow the children to be separated. Also, three children were interviewed in the presence of a lady police worker who also facilitated the translation from Russian to Romanian of some expressions used by the children. The presence of the police worker did not seem to disturb the children who knew the lady and seemed to have confidence in her. In another situation, the interview was conducted in the presence of the pedagogue in the placement centre who wanted to make sure that the child’s emotional state would not be negatively affected. In general, the interviews followed the structure of the interview guide. Because the closing stage of the interview included questions about children’s perception of their future, the children were encouraged to draw the shape of their hand and to write on each finger something they wished for. During this exercise, most of the children avoided to comment on their drawing while appearing to be focused on the colours they wanted to use and on spelling. This is contrary to the literature stating this method is usually used to facilitate conversations with the children and to gather more information (Einarsdóttir, 2007; Kellett, 2005). Of the 18 children, only 6 accepted to draw.

The place where the interviews were conducted varied according to how the children were recruited for this study. Thus, the interviews took place either in the placement centre, at the community health centre, in a school, in the office of the social worker or in children's houses. Children's interviews lasted between 25 minutes and one hour and a half; the average length was 40 minutes.

2.3.3. Interviews with parents/relatives/neighbours

Initially, these interviews were scheduled to be developed in a special room, either in the house of the respondents or at the office of a child protection institution. However, because the parents could not be previously contacted by phone, home visits were made. In five situations, the researcher was accompanied by a police worker at the child safety service

and in other two cases by a social worker. Both the police and the social workers were known to the respondents because, on many occasions, they were the ones who used to bring back home the children who had been found on the streets. The presentations, including of the researcher and of the research, obtaining participants' consent and the actual interviews took place in the yard of the houses where the respondents lived. This was preferred by the interviewees considering the very difficult conditions in which they lived. The interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. The police and social workers contributed to a great extent not just at identifying and contacting the children's parents, but also with the Russian to Romanian translation. Although the persons who were interviewed understood Romanian, they stated they speak the Russian language better.

2.4. Ethical procedure

In this study, the ethical procedure included three main stages, namely: (1) oral presentation of the research, (2) ensuring the anonymity and mentioning the situation regarding breach of confidentiality and (3) signing the consent form (Annex 4). For the professionals attending the focus groups, instead of a consent form the participants' list included two separate columns: „Participation agreement: YES/NO” and „Signature”. All participants in the two focus groups mentioned “Yes” in the column on participation agreement.

For the children included in this study who were in a placement centre, the Municipal Department for the Protection of the Rights of the Child in Chisinau agreed for the interviews to take place. In the case of the children who were in their families, parental consent was requested and obtained. Also, all children signed a participation agreement. For most of the

children however, the manner in which they were recruited did not allow for provision of information about the research before the interview. Thus, some of the children had not been prepared and needed more explanations about the purpose of the conversation with the researcher and the reasons for recording the interviews. Of the 21 children who were contacted, only two refused to participate and a third child who initially agreed to take part in the research refused to sign the participation agreement. Signing of the participation agreement was made after the researcher had read the sentences together with the child (Annex 5).

Regarding participation consent of the parents, grandmother and neighbour included in this research, this was given verbally and recorded after the consent form was read. This procedure was dictated by the conditions in which the interviews were conducted.

2.5. Data analysis

Analysis of the data was made by coding each interview. Coding is a process of organizing the data while codes are words, expressions or short sentences that are attributed to a text, a portion of a text or to several texts from interview transcripts which summarize its meanings (Saldana, 2008).

A first phase of the analysis was pre-determining series of codes for the interviews conducted with participants in each target group. These pre-determined

codes were established according to the main topics in the interview guides. Examples of pre-determined codes for the interviews with the professionals are: „perception about children in street situations”, „difficulties in working with the children”, „inter-institutional collaboration” or „prevention”; for the interviews with the parents/relatives/neighbours: „reasons for children leaving their home” or „perception about the future of the child”; and for the child interviews: „reasons for leaving home”, „school”, „life on the street”,

„National Hotel”. These codes suffered small changes following the analysis of the texts and of the observations noted by the researcher during field work. Similar experiences in each target group were thematically grouped. Also, analysis of the data focused on patterns of reactions or perceptions in each group of participants. In order to illustrate participants’ experiences, quotes from interview transcripts were used.

Analysis of the social work files for the 13 children mainly focused on children’s history, child’s age when first entered the attention of child protection services and reason for inclusion in an assistance program, and types of interventions.

3. Research results: professionals' perspective

This chapter presents the results from analysis of data from interviews and focus groups conducted with professionals. Analysis of the social work files of 13 children in street situations is also added.

3.1. Professionals - interviews

The information collected from professionals was grouped into eight main themes. These are: (1) perception on children in street situations, (2) types of interventions and results, (3) inter-institutional collaboration, (4) difficulties in working with the children, (5) need for services and/or professional training, (6) chances for social and family reintegration of children, (7) forms of prevention and (8) policy aspects. Quotes from interview transcripts are used in order to illustrate the above mentioned themes. For confidentiality reasons, the quotes are attributed to the participants by mentioning their profession instead of their names or the name of the institutions they represented.

3.1.1. Perception on children in street situations

Reasons why children leave their homes

The main reason for children leaving their homes was, in professionals' opinion, poverty that was correlated with parents' alcohol abuse and lack of child supervision. Other factors that were mentioned are: parents' divorce, mother's immoral behaviour and absence of parents who went to work abroad.

Many brothers, sisters... there are cases, even one, but the parents are divorced, the mother started using [alcohol], the father is not involved in children's education or is not in the country.

(police worker)

There are children from divorced and disorganized families; mother who had three children, each with a different man; parents who were denied their parental rights, alcoholics.

(NGO representative)

In other situations, professionals mentioned that children end up on the streets because the parents, after returning from working abroad, could not handle their children's behaviour or they just did not want to take care of them any more:

For example, a mother who left for eight years abroad came back to her teenage daughter. She went to the social services and told them "Take her away!".

(NGO representative)

The mother came back from abroad, all arranged... she did not even embrace her. (...) If she wants to, she can regain her parental rights, just to demonstrate.

(social worker)

Aside from social, economic and family factors contributing to children leaving their homes, other factors pertaining to the child were mentioned. These included the child's need to belong to a group and poor mental health:

The children, it is a known fact, at a certain age want to be part of a group and they find the group that accept them. He is accepted if he commits crimes or if he takes the same toxic substances... this way he is appreciated. And he finds the group where he is appreciated and accepted as he is.

(psychologist)

There are children who want to change their place or their life or... there are also healthy children who just escape from home because they imagine that... (...) From all the children who were in the centre, there are only three who do not have mental health issues.

(pedagogue)

In professionals' opinion, there was not a single reason why children leave their homes. Rather, a multitude of factors were invoked that belong to the family and economic environment and also endogenous factors. It is interesting that, although psychological traumas experienced by the children in their families were often mentioned by the participants, children's physical abuse by their parents was not remembered as a reason for children leaving their homes.

Characteristics of the children

The children were described by the professionals in both positive and negative terms. Most of the respondents mentioned that boys are prevalent among children in street situations and their ages vary between 10 and 16 years.

From an emotional point of view, the children were presented as lacking parental affection, being distrustful of adults and of institutions that they feel betrayed and rejected them. The children were also described as valuing their independence and freedom.

I asked them few questions... freedom and independence: „I go whenever I want, wherever I want (...) you don't tell me what to do!”

(physician)

From a behavioural point of view, the participants in the study mentioned children's vulgar language, repeated runaways from the placements centres and/or from their families and non-compliance with the rules set by the institutions that offered support. Manipulation was also mentioned by the professionals as behaviour used by the children in order to draw attention or to hide certain crimes:

More, they start using this status, that they have no family so that you would feel compassionate. (...) in a classroom there were money stolen (...) and I spoke with him “no, I did not steal, I cannot”, but he uses that you feel pity for him that he's tormented and he... this is his role, this is how he presents himself, but when you don't look, he steals ...

(police worker)

There are smart children, catchy, they can control the situation. Talking with them you feel like believing what they say, but it's not like that.

(social worker)

The professionals also referred to the children in positive terms, describing some of them as hard working, boys looking to work, talented children, sociable or children who wish to change their life style and start a family:

We have children, very good children, very talented (...) these children are not as bad as they think. They are not bad, they suffered a lot and this is why they do what they do.

(NGO representative)

It was like they reported to me...„Madam (...) today we went to school until 12.00 o'clock”, (...) „You know, we don't want to live the way we lived, we want to be drivers” (...). They are... like dough. It's really good to knead this dough. They're very receptive, they're not anti-social.

(social worker)

Although the professionals characterized the children in both positive and negative terms, most of their references were negative, emphasizing the children as being manipulative and delinquents.

Effects of street life on children

School dropout was noted by most professionals as one effect of leaving home. Some of the children are identified early by schools that monitor children's attendance and other children are identified by police workers.

There is a record of children who go to school and somehow the children who tend to wander the streets are brought back to school and reintegrated.

(psycho-pedagogue)

There are also two more [children in street situations] among them who did not come to school and were found because they committed some crime.

(social worker)

For some children, especially teenagers, school reintegration fails because the pedagogues are not well trained in managing children's difficult behaviour or some teachers tend to isolate the children in street situations from the other children at school or even make them feel uncomfortable:

The school doesn't accept them. They don't know how to work with teenagers. They swear at teachers, smoke (...) the teachers make them not want to come to school anymore: they place them in the last row in the classroom, they yell at them because they don't know how to control the children.

(NGO representative)

The same with school (...) after three years of drop out, the teacher asks him to stay in school for all the five hours. He already forgot the letters in the alphabet and everything he knew. The teacher takes the boy in front of the classroom and asks him to write the letters on the blackboard, in the eighth grade! Even if I were that boy, I wouldn't come to school the second day. It's not that this takes a great effort, but it shows these teachers don't know how to gradually integrate the child.

(social worker)

In other situations, school attendance is refused by the child who lives in a placement centre because he/she must conform to the rules set by the child protection institution:

Last year we had some girls of 13, 16 years old, about six girls who ran away. They need freedom, „we don't want to go to school we don't want to wake up in the morning, we don't want to come home in the evening, we want freedom” ...

(NGO representative)

The study participants also noticed health problems in children they work with. Neurological and psychiatric problems were mentioned as being caused by substance abuse, although the professionals stated such health problems pre-existed to children's living on the streets. The main substance children use is glue. There were also referrals to narcotics or psychoactive substances such as “weed” or salts, although:

From what two-three children told me, they also used salts and spices. This is not that credible because these are highly addictive. It usually takes one or two times to start taking this systematically. Glue, yes. But this doesn't cause such a strong addiction as the other substances. But they tell me they tried it.

(physician)

Other health problems mentioned by the professionals include: malnutrition, dental problems, head lice, kidney and respiratory problems mainly caused by sleeping on cold surfaces as it can be seen from the following quotes:

Most of the children have problems with their teeth and I think also the lungs; I think the cold takes its toll. The lungs are the most affected; the stomach also because they don't eat.

(psycho-pedagogue)

Except the head lice... respiratory, just respiratory problems. They slept on cement (...) the kidney problems, where to get it from if not from sleeping on cement? Even if they had a blanket or clothes or whatever they had, if they had.

(social worker)

Juvenile delinquency is another effect of street life mentioned by the professionals especially among the children who used to spend their time around the National Hotel, but also among other children, most of them boys older than 11 years. The most frequent behaviour that was noticed was theft but there were also mentions about beatings between children in street situations whereas intruders would step into territories they claimed:

I'm telling you „we have our area, our area is from one sector to another” and they used to tell these stories, like in the movies. You have the feeling it was an action film, I mean with different laws, different... „you're not allowed there because if I go in that sector from the circus, I will be beaten” or the reverse „if they come to us to beg, in our sector, they'll be beaten and...”. Theft, the police is looking into it at this moment.

(social worker)

Robbery, no but thefts, yes. They got it and, here it is, we have a juvenile (...), afterwards he connected with the children from the National and now we have two robberies he committed. I mean he got these crime skills.

(police worker)

The main effects brought about by the street life on children in the opinion of professionals are: school dropout caused by the unfriendly approach to the children by the school staff or by children's refusal to

attend school; health issues, especially mental and respiratory problems; and juvenile delinquency.

3.1.2. Types of interventions and results

The types of interventions mentioned by the social workers as part of their activities include talks with the parents to prevent the aggravation of children's situation, psychological and medical assistance, monitoring and mediation of relationships between the children and state institutions (e.g. school, psychological assistance services).

We invite the parents, the child. We have preventive discussions, „it is good, it is not good like this“, separately with the parents, separately with the child and after that - I mean I can't say all children need psychological assistance – so we offer a basic psychological assistance and afterwards we refer them to specialized institutions, who have psychologists. (...) If it's not a serious case we only monitor the child. (...) We go to their houses. We make home visits, we fill in a document after that stating the living conditions. (...) We also make referrals to medical institutions to see the child's health, we monitor the child's school attendance. (...) The family can have certain benefits if the National [Social Insurance] House considers this necessary.

(social worker)

In what regards the results of these interventions, most fail because parents refuse to collaborate due to their alcohol addiction or to a life style the professionals called "immoral":

So the result, you know it... we go on the field, something seems to change, but the alcohol is still there.

(social worker)

She makes babies (...) what do you do in this situation? What can we do? She had two babies, we took them, she was denied her parental rights. But then she had two more with another man and you go to her and they're on the floor... and if you take her baby away (...) she comes here to us and says „you are obliged to give me“, this is what she says.

(social worker)

But not all interventions fail. In situations where the child is removed from his/her family when the problems are only recent or where the parents collaborate

with the social service and make efforts to care for and to supervise the child, the results are positive:

In cases where the parent has a general positive attitude toward the child, wanting the child to be happy, the parent can use alternative methods, only he/she does not know about non-violent methods. And then, the parent accepts and it only takes a few discussions.

(social worker)

In placement centres, the interventions include actions aiming at family reintegration by working with the child's family and with the tutelary authorities and also actions addressing school reintegration:

We work... if the children were with us for one year, two years... we cannot give the children away, and we sometimes fight with the parents: "come (...) you need to do something for this girl!" and if they don't do positive changes, we work with them. It's not our decision, but we work towards this and we do so with the tutelary authorities and give our recommendations (...) and when we see good changes, we reintegrate the child... it's not like we just give the child if the parent came for him/her (...) there should be some positive changes that are solid.

(NGO representative)

I look for the school process, I buy the school supplies, I go to the school, like a parent does, everything to do with school reintegration.

(psycho-pedagogue)

In professionals' opinion, there are certain interventions made for the welfare of the children, such as parents' counselling, school reintegration or referral to specialized services. However, the general perception was that the family environment that is dominated by alcohol abuse or by mother's "immoral" behaviour does not lead to sustainable positive results.

3.1.3. Inter-institutional collaboration

In the context of inter-institutional collaboration, most participants mentioned a good collaboration with representatives of the police. This collaboration involved identifying or finding the children and also prevention activities police workers do in the placement centres with the children:

With the Police Inspectorate because we also do our raids together. (...) We are receptive and when they call, we react... even on our mobile phones, when we need to intervene, we contact each other and team up.

(social worker)

If the child did not arrive on time, we call the police (...) and they undertake actions ... they look in the area, if there's something they don't know, they also look in Chisinau (...) they don't leave things unsolved.

(NGO representative)

We work with the social workers, schools, kindergartens and mayor's office if it is a small village. (...) Once, after a meeting in the centre, a person from the police was invited to speak with the children about what is theft and what is rape. We went and it was good for the children.

(police worker)

Other collaborations that were mentioned as beneficial for the situation of the children included centres of family doctors, school and church:

She is main specialist at the family doctors' centre (...) she is a very receptive woman; she helps with all medical investigations, anything that is related to her profession. (...) Even with school... the school is very involved with collecting food, clothing and even furniture from pupils and teachers. (...) since last year, the church in the village got much involved also.

(social worker)

It should be noted that the good collaboration many professionals referred to was based less on the inter-institutional context and more on the personal relationships between professionals. Many respondents stated that the promptness of interventions in most cases depends on the fact they can phone colleagues from other institutions on their personal phone number.

Weaker collaborations were also mentioned. These involved the same institutions with which other professionals stated they had a good collaboration. The police however, was not mentioned as problematic:

Medical institutions are reluctant. There is this stereotype: „this child does not have to be in the family, the child needs to be removed from this family environ-

ment”, but they don't understand that children need to live in their families.

(psychologist)

It takes about six months or a year to establish the status [child without parental care] (...) we need the refusal from children's relatives ... we know where the relatives are, we can go there for a day, two, three days, but most often it takes three-four months and the children don't understand why. The child can receive benefits from the state, but if the child's status is not definitive, the child has nothing.

(NGO representative)

I go and talk with the teachers (...) there are teachers who behave badly, I'm sorry to say it (...) they don't want to understand and they keep saying „your children, your children...” and I always say „they are our children, not yours or someone else's, they are our children and we need to work together for their future”.

(psycho-pedagogue)

The fact that medical institutions, the school or community social services were mentioned by the professionals in both positive and negative terms indicates that the efficiency of inter-institutional collaboration for the benefit of the child depends to a great extent on the people working in these institutions, their training and interests and also on knowing what they have to do and what are the limits of their professions.

3.1.4. Difficulties in working with children

A major difficulty is that many children who live on the streets come from other cities. For the children living in larger cities (Chisinau, Balti or Cahul), working with them and their families was noticed by the professionals to be easier because most often the children go to sleep at home; thus, the risk factors children are exposed to appear to be more under control. For the children who come from other areas however, the problem identified by the professionals is that, although they are taken to their families, the children come back on the streets of Chisinau on the same day. Also, the Municipal Child Protection Service in Chisinau cannot intervene for these children, except for the referrals they make to community social services.

The problem is that most children who are vagrant (...) are from the Republic. Even the children who come from this sector [in Chisinau] and have a delinquent behaviour, they go back to their families. (They go back at

night?) Yes. I'm not denying it is possible that they may spend the night on the streets in the summer, when it is warmer. The problem is with the children who come from outside. (Where from?) They come from near Chisinau: Călărași, Hîncești. These children are a problem because they stay during the night. (How many are they?) Here, in this sector, approximately 12-13 (...) but the number fluctuates.

(police worker)

The children who are identified at night cannot be detained for more than three hours and after they return on the streets. However, most often, the child spends the three hours while he/she is identified in the arrest section of the police:

The police take a child off the street at one o'clock in the night. They cannot keep the child for more than three hours. What to do with the child? They have to let the child go (...) they should not keep the child with adults who are under arrest.

(NGO representative)

For the children who come from other areas on the streets of Chisinau there seems to be a vicious circle whereas interventions include transportation of the child to his/her family and failed efforts to make the parents more responsible for their child. This leads to time passing by to the detriment of the child social and family reintegration.

Lack of parental collaboration was mentioned by the professionals working in the centres where children are placed:

We also have cases where mothers come here at the gate and knock and scream and... this is it. They've done all for their child, but the child is inside, crying and being sad.

(NGO representative)

I told her „Find a job, create good living conditions, the mayor will help you and all of us working in social services will lend you a hand. You want to take them home, but you need to do something!“. She keeps on drinking alcohol, keeps on living such immoral life. Even if they stop, after a short while, they start all over again.

(social worker)

Breaking the rules of the placement centre by the children represents another difficulty for professionals who try to integrate them in the larger group of children living in the respective centres. It is about the non-smoking rule, but also about living together that implies keeping their rooms clean. This rule-breaking causes conflict not only between the children and the staff in the centre, but also with the other children who used to obey the rules but are encouraged to break it by the behaviours of the newcomers.

Most rules are imposed. (...) They are not allowed... children as young as 10 smoke more than an adult. It is not allowed to smoke inside or outside the centre; to start an argument „What to do? Why am I not allowed? Who are you to tell me not to smoke?“; or, after they wake up in the morning they have to make their bed. This too is a rule. „Why? What's my problem? Let others come make my bed“.

(social worker)

Forbidding smoking was noticed by many professionals as a rule that can be negotiated during children's adjustment to the life in the centre or while building the professional-child relationship, leaving the intervention regarding giving up smoking to a later stage:

I would tell him „Look, I let you smoke (...) but I need....“. Because we cannot change them, they smoke...

(social worker)

We first work on the relationship. If it would be the case for us to intervene, we don't want the child to run away, but to come to us. (...) someday I may teach them to give up smoking (...) but if they smoke, let them smoke under controlled conditions and with access to our smoking place, in the yard outside. (...) we don't think smoking is good for the children, but we are realistic and we think of it from a teaching point of view and I noticed they smoke less (...) may be some day we will make a significant intervention.

(physician)

Placing the children in several centres over the years was mentioned by the participants as creating difficulties because children tend to perceive this as a form of abandonment. It is possible that some of these children end up refusing other placements. One form in which to do so is by overtly breaking the rules or by destroying different goods in the respective centre so they could be transferred to another centre:

The child's distrust... because the child knows he/she will stay here for a short while and then go to some other place and will be abandoned again. (...) We have a child who, from June until yesterday was placed 12 times. If I'm not mistaken, seven times he was found and on other five occasions he came by himself.

(psychologist)

(...) it was very hard (...) they had been transferred to different centres and we believe this is not good for the children, but this was it... other children in the centre suffered a lot. The girls came around 10-11 in the evening, used to knock, break things, they broke many things here... this was very upsetting for the other children. I had to defend the interest of the other children.

(NGO representative)

The difficulties met by the professionals can be divided into two categories: difficulties related to family reintegration that are mainly caused by lack of parental cooperation and difficulties related to working with the children in placement centres that are caused by children's adjustment problems or by the strict rules of the centres.

3.1.5. Need for services and/or professional training

When asked what would they need in order to ensure the efficiency of the social and family integration interventions, most professionals said there is need for specialized services and for staff trained in working with children in street situations.

Participants' proposals regarding the specialized services were grouped into two categories: centres for children in street situations and services for the parents of these children. The suggestions about child centres include setting up centres at the level of the republic where children who do not have their domicile in Chisinau can be placed or centres that are established in larger cities where children are most often found. Transit centres that can help with children's adjustments to the institutionalized environment were also suggested.

We proposed to have republican centres. (...) Republican centres where all children can come. Not a municipal centre, but a republican one because most children are from the Republic.

(social worker)

The transit centres were described as centres functioning as a triage according to the specific intervention for each child or as a house-like institution, with a less formalized regime, where children can have food, they can wash themselves and can talk with a professional who can be a psychologist, a physician or pedagogue. The latter example can help a successful integration of the child in a placement centre or in his/her family.

There needs to be a triage centre that can hold children for up to 72 hours, may be in the hospital with a child detoxification department.

(NGO representative)

They have this fear of coming to the centres. I think this period between taking the child from the street and placing him/her in a centre needs to have something in between. I'm thinking there can be a team of professionals working by... something else, an institution that doesn't need to be so official where the child can feel free to come, without all the rules of the centres. (...) there are such mobile teams. Some place where the child could come and wash or eat. At this moment, when the child has all these things, somehow you come closer to him/her. But he comes in the centre, all of a sudden he has this procedure, all of a sudden he has the rules... and this frightens the child. (Does the child need a transit?) Yes. I think he is truly torn from there, he thinks that is his family (...) this rupture makes him [run away].

(psycho-pedagogue)

Another suggestion about specialized services includes school and community mental health services where parents can be approached in an efficient manner if these have the adequate tools and professional trainings of the staff.

The Ministry of Education made a letter that was sent to governmental institutions obliging these to develop activities... these institutions are the ones that most communicate with the parents. Parents should be offered parental education. (...) On the other hand, teachers are not trained to conduct sessions with parents on developing parental competences. They have this classic model where they invite parent and present some things about behaviour. They cannot develop interactive activities.

(psycho-pedagogue)

(...) there is a need for specialized services in the social work area and in medical institutions. At least one person. For example, if we speak of the medical staff, the medical centre should have an employee who can speak with the parents. It doesn't mean that all medics should have the ability to communicate with the parents on certain topics.

(social worker)

Suggestions regarding specialized services also included creating specific departments within the social services. During the interviews in this study there were ideas about the initiatives with regard to services for children who are in conflict with the law that need to be separated from initiatives for children in street situations, considering that not all children in the latter category commit crimes:

The department on delinquent behaviour should be on one side and the one on children in street situations on the other side. There cannot be interchangeable programs. These are different programs, are different categories of children.

(social worker)

This specialization of the social services would contribute, in professionals' opinion, to a more efficient intervention and to avoiding overwhelming the social workers, as noticed by one of the participants in this study:

Now I have to work with all the children: abused, without a family, who are on the streets or other cases of children. All sorts of child situations.

(social worker)

The professional categories that were mentioned by the participants as needing specific training are: psychologists in social services, pedagogues working in the centres and psychiatrists.

The small number of psychologists offering assistance to families and children in street situations was noticed in the context of the need for training psychologists working in psycho-pedagogical centres:

Psychologists in our city are few in schools. If these children need specialized psychological assistance, a school psychologist cannot offer this. (...) The school

psychologist from "x" school cannot assist a student who attends the "y" school. (...) Where to look for this psychologist? There are few in the centre, in the service for psycho-pedagogical assistance but they have a different area of expertise.

(school psychologist)

The professionals also noticed the need for training of teachers in working, during classes, with teenage children with difficult behaviour and also the need for working tools and techniques while approaching the children who had been recently placed in centres and refuse to obey the rules:

They understood they are very strong together and we cannot do anything. They say "If we don't come at 5 o'clock, then what?", "What should it be? I will open the door and let you in". (...) This was very difficult.

(NGO representative)

Another category of professionals for whom specialized trainings was suggested are psychiatrists. Their experience in working with children in street situations made some of the participants notice the inefficiency of the medical treatment that was prescribed to the children by mental health professionals:

I am very worried about some of the employees in the psychiatric hospital regarding their ability to correctly diagnose a patient and to offer adequate treatment. They have a standard treatment they give to all children.

(psychologist)

This helps only when they go for a day or two. The children are calmer. But afterwards they become even more aggressive. Many children come from the psychiatric hospital with new behaviours they learned in there.

(social worker)

The need for specialized social services in working with children in street situations was mentioned by all professionals in this study. They suggested creating a republican centre that can allow children who come from different areas to be placed instead of being taken back to their place of origin or setting up transit centres that would not be so formal and where children could benefit from food, hygiene and counselling. For the children who committed criminal offences and are not criminally liable, the professionals suggest-

ed setting up special and different centres. The main categories of professionals who need to be trained on working with children in street situations are: psychologists, pedagogues, staff from schools and community centres and psychiatrists.

3.1.6. Chances for social and family reintegration of children

The present study also aimed at finding professionals' perception regarding the chances of social and family reintegration of children in street situations. The question asked was: „On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you score the chances of social and family reintegration of children in street situations? Please describe“. The answers indicated that, from professionals' point of view, these chances depend on the moment the child is identified as being in street situations and on the area where the child's parents live. The less time the child spends on the street the higher, his/her reintegration chances. As well, if the child's parents live outside Chisinau, the chances of reintegration decrease significantly.

If the child is found within the first six months, the chances can be of 8, 9, even 10. If the child spends more time on the streets, the chances decrease toward zero.

(NGO representative)

I wish my score would be higher but then again, I would like to differentiate between the children in the Republic. For the children in the city [Chisinau], my score would be 5 - 6, but for the children in the Republic, this tends to be zero. Our practice shows that for several years now there are the same children who are on the streets; they come back over and over again.

(police worker)

If I should score for the children I work with, it is not so bad, so to say. Lately, their situation has improved; but if I am to score for the children who come from the Republic and beg here [in Chisinau], I think my score would be 2. (...) Most of the children here who beg are from the Republic because they come here as one would come to work.

(social worker)

A different approach on the chances of social and family reintegration of the children was brought to discussion by the physician who participated in this study when speaking of the endogenous factors:

(...) the children with organic disorders, with personality, behavioural and intellectual disorders would still probably have lower chances of reintegration, but I'm speculating.

(physician)

Another aspect about this topic was in relation to the next generation of children in street situation whereas the women who beg on the streets with their infants are teaching them about this life style:

The future children in street situations are the children you see in the arms of the women who beg. They should be removed from these families.

(NGO representative)

Thus, from professionals' points of view, the chances for social and family reintegration decrease significantly if: the child had spent more than six months in street situations, has mental disorders and comes from a family that promotes this life style.

3.1.7. Forms of prevention

One of the questions asked to professionals aimed at finding their opinions about what can help to prevent other children being in street situations. Most answers referred to media campaigns that can sensitize the general population and contribute to educating people about notifying authorities when they see children in street situations or stop paying them money.

To work with the population (...) they need to know these children are not as bad as they think. (...) the children suffered a lot and this is why they do what they do. (...) Do you know this image with the child "Can you please, help me?" and people give them money. It is not right because they go and buy cigarettes ... If the population would be educated, I hope this problem will be solved with time.

(NGO representative)

Other suggestions targeted schools that can develop more interactive activities with the participation of children and of their parents or that can promote activities and sports programs that were already started in collaboration with other institutions:

Schools should do more preventive activities with parents and children. In our community centres such activities are being developed.

(social worker)

Sports activities. A complex program engaging more institutions, police and schools. I mean the institutions concerned with this category of children.

(social worker)

Another idea was to introduce more activities in schools that would engage children and would propose constructive leisure time alternatives:

I'm thinking the children should attend more school based activities: sports, music, dances. For the children to be occupied and not have certain thoughts, so this circle to be positive and not vicious.

(social worker)

Continuing parental education programs on the consequences of alcohol abuse was also mentioned by the professionals:

There are programs (...) There is this program for those who abuse alcohol and I think it is good. (...) It used to be a fixation on alcohol, but the behavioural change occurs anyway. This program is not just about talks related to alcohol; it is also about values and changing the individual's personality.

(psychologist)

Involvement of social services and of the medical staff in identifying children at risk and in working with their families from the first moment was underlined by the participants as the most important phase in preventing the child to be in street situations:

These situations we cannot solve have reached this point because, from an early age, the child was left there. When he was going to kindergarten or in his first years at school he didn't cause problems. But when he reached adolescence, this behaviour flourished. (Who should be involved, then?) The child protection institutions.

(psychologist)

The nurse who answers a call knows if the child is fed, knows many, many things. (...) These children are not integrated in the protection system because they don't show problematic behaviours and are left there, they don't bother us, but this child grows and at 14-15 years old this child will show us what he/she has learned and it would be too late and this is hard already.

(social worker)

The professionals who took part in this study mentioned that children can be prevented to be in street situations through media campaigns targeting the general population, school involvement in educational activities for children and their parents and in activities that can constitute alternatives for the children to spend their leisure time or by continuing programs aiming to prevent domestic violence and alcohol abuse. Social and medical services were also mentioned as having a major preventive role by engaging in activities targeting the families from the moment these are identified as being at risk and before the anti-social behaviours of the children would constitute a problem.

3.1.8. Legislative aspects

There were few suggestions from professionals with regard to legislative aspects that mainly referred to parental education and empowerment.

One such suggestion involved coercing the parents whose children were included in the child protection system to do community work:

I think we need to work with the parents (...) parents who did not fulfil their parental obligations took the child to a placement centre and left the child there. (...) these parents should do community work for the respective centre or for the state. There should be a power that would make the parent do something because they live very well [while the child is in the placement centre].

(police worker)

Other suggestions included enforcement of the existent normative documents referring to mandatory education and to creating the conditions for establishing public and private parental education services.

There is a parental education strategy as part of the child protection and in this strategy it is written that the state should create the conditions for offering state services and also to create the conditions for private parental education services.

(psychologist)

I would like to state that the rights of parents and of children are considered above their obligations. The constitution and other laws state that the child should be in school until the age of 16 years. So the child should be in school.

(psycho-pedagogue)

3.2. Analysis of social work files

The social work files of 13 children in street situations who originated from seven different families were analysed in order to add to the information about children in street situation provided by the professionals during interviews and focus groups. All children included in this analysis were born in Chisinau. Three of them were part of the group of children in street situations who used to spend their time in the building of the former National Hotel.

The analysis includes information about children's history (the age when they were first identified as children at risk and reasons for inclusion in an assistance program), data about children's families, and types of interventions and the situation of the child at the moment of the analysis.

Five of the children are girls and eight are boys. Their age when they were first identified as being at risk varies from seven to 14 years. The reasons mentioned in the record sheets are mostly for begging (seven children) and for vagrancy. In the case of one boy, the reason for his identification at risk could not be found in the record sheet.

Regarding the number of children in the family, one child included in this analysis was a single child; four of the children came from families of two children; one child had two other brothers; in the case of three children, they came from families of six children; four other children came from a family of seven children.

In the case of six children who are subject of this analysis and who belong to two different families, the parents had their parental rights revoked. In the case of the family of seven children, the mother had been investigated by the police for physically and emotionally abusing her children and for trafficking them for begging purposes. In two other families, the children were in the care of both parents; the mother of another child was working abroad; one child was in the care of

From the point of view of some professionals, the legal framework can support more efficient interventions for children in street situations if parents, whose children are in placement centres, are coerced to pay with community work for this fact. Also, parental education services and enforcement of the child's obligation to go to school until he/she reaches the age of 16 were mentioned as necessary for the prevention of children being in street situations.

his mother who was divorced. In three cases, the children's mother had a job. Parental alcohol abuse was noticed in four families. Of the 13 children, four were in the attention of medical institutions with neurological and psychiatric disorders.

The types of interventions for the children included: in kind support for the families, actions regarding school reintegration, facilitation of access to medical assistance, psychological counselling and emergency, planned and/or temporary placements.

In the case of three children, identified in street situations at an earlier age (seven, and nine years), after one year and three years respectively, the children were still in placement (two sisters were in a placement centre and a girl was in foster care). This can indicate that placement interventions for smaller children can represent a stability factor. With respect to the other children, with one exception, they were still in street situations, although placed in the family (three brothers) or in centres from where they continued to run away.

Five of the children (three were part of the group of children at the former National Hotel) had several criminal files for offences including theft, robbery or accomplice to murder.

The table below shows a summary of the information collected from children's social work files.

No.	Gender	Age (years)	Age when first identified (years)	Reason for identification	Information about the family	Types of interventions	Current status
1	M	13	11	School dropout, vagrancy	Family with six children, living in two rooms, inadequate living conditions, mother without parental authority, father physically abuses the children, heavily drinking alcohol and brings home other men who are under the influence of alcohol.	In kind help: school supplies, bus pass. Collaboration with NGOs for other in kind support, referral for psychological evaluation to Psycho-pedagogical Assistance Service (PAS) and Community Mental Health Centre, school reintegration.	Continues to beg, has absence at school. In the process of being included in a boarding school.
2	M	15	12	Begging		School reintegration, benefits for school attendance.	
3	M	16	14	Begging		Temporary placement, psychological counselling, school reintegration.	
4	M	15	13	School dropout, begging, lives in a building basement	Family with two children (an adult sister), mother working abroad.	Psychological counselling of the family, medical assistance, fining of parents by the Child Protection Commission, emergency placement.	Files for criminal offences (theft and robbery). Monitoring.
5	M	15	13	School dropout, run away from home, vagrancy	Three children, alcoholic father, the child has neurological problems (diagnosis n/a).	Collaboration with the police to bring home the child, emergency placement (2016), temporary placement (2016), collaboration with day centres for completion of homework.	File for accomplice to murder. Monitoring.
6	M	13	11	Run away from home, begging, vagrancy	Two children, the mother and her concubine; adults use alcohol; the mother has a job; unsatisfactory living conditions.	Medical assistance, psychological counselling, fining of the parent, four emergency placements.	Repeated run away from placement centres, family reintegration failed attempts.
7	M	13	13	Leave of domicile, school absences	Lives with the mother in poor conditions. The mother has a job, abuses alcohol. The child has neurological problems (diagnosis n/a).	Psychological and complex evaluation, monitoring.	Monitoring.

No.	Gender	Age (years)	Age when first identified (years)	Reason for identification	Information about the family	Types of interventions	Current status
8	F	10	9	Vagrancy, victims of trafficking	Seven brothers and sisters, mother's parental rights revoked after abusing and sending her children to beg.	Mother revoked of her parental rights, psychological evaluation, planned placement.	In placement.
9	F	8	7	Vagrancy, victims of trafficking		Mother revoked of her parental rights, psychological evaluation, planned placement.	In placement.
10	F	17	14	Begging		Mother revoked of her parental rights, numerous placements, psychiatric assistance, school reintegration.	Repeated runaways from placement centres, refuses to attend school, several criminal files.
11	M	14	n/a	n/a		Mother revoked of her parental rights, numerous placements.	Repeated runaways from placement centres, minimum 20 offences (e.g. theft, robbery).
12	F	12	9	Begging	Two children, parental rights revoked.	Mother revoked of her parental rights, family placement.	In foster care.
13	F	16	13	Begging		Mother revoked of her parental rights, numerous placements.	Repeated runaways from placement centres, investigated for trafficking of children for begging purposes, 4 criminal files for robbery.

Table 3.1. *Types of interventions for the children*

4. Research results: parents' perspective

The information collected from parents, one grandmother and one neighbour were grouped under four main themes: (1) family social and economic situation, (2) perception on the reasons why children left home, (3) parents' intervention to prevent their children returning to street situations and (4) perception on the future of the children.

Quotes from interview transcripts were used to illustrate the information presented in this chapter. The names of the participants were not mentioned for confidentiality reasons.

4.1. Family social and economic situation

Except for the neighbour and the grandmother who had a pension, none of the parents who were interviewed had a stable job. Their income consists mainly of social benefits (e.g. children's allowances, invalidity pension and support from the mayor's office) and also of occasional earnings from day labour or selling walnuts.

The parents' main concern was to have enough money for heating and paying electricity and water bills, but also other debts:

Only once I received 1200-1300 lei and last summer they gave us 3000 lei (...) Here, we have debts on heating, 25000 lei... (...) so we would still have water, we were without electricity for three weeks. (mother, 34 years old)

The number of children was of two in the case of two families, of four in three families and of six in one family. The living conditions were very poor and the houses looked old and untidy.

4.2. Perception on the reasons the children left home

Most of the parents stated their children left home around the age of 10 because of a bad entourage. Some said they tried to speak with their child to find out why s/he goes back on the streets but they didn't receive an answer. Other parents emphasized that it is difficult for them to control their child and not punish by beating him/her. Some parents also knew their child steals, but said they had nothing to offer or that they try to make their child stay home by giving him/her what s/he wishes: computer or mobile phone.

From the second grade he starting going with the boys, but he shouldn't chose these boys, he should have chosen good boys. (...) We don't beat him, we say it calmly, I don't know what he wants to show. (...) What else can I give him? We're poor, what can I give to this child?

(mother, 49 years old)

He has my phone I bought from Orange. I gave him so he'd stay home, if not, he'll leave again. We do to please him, just to stay home.

(father, 43 years old)

For six years this is how I struggle with him. The neighbours (...) he learned from there, steals, smokes (...) He doesn't tell me, I asked if it's bad at home for him. He said no, he's good „But why do you keep going?“, he keeps silent, he doesn't say a word.

(mother, 34 years old)

The above quotes indicated that some parents perceive as reason for their children leaving home not just a bad entourage, but also absence of goods. The grandmother and the neighbour did not agree with this stating that children leave home because the parents are alcoholics:

The mother is weak, the father is weak. The child leaves home because he needs to. (...) Alcoholics (...) he left home, smells glue... because he is hungry, they didn't feed him, didn't wash him, he wasn't clean and this is why.

(neighbour, 30 years old)

He leaves because there's nothing for him to see here. His father drinks, calls him all sorts of things, doesn't light the fire, doesn't feed him, he has nothing to eat here. I live in one room with my granddaughter and a smaller one, I have nowhere to take him. He's not washed, he's not fed. His father drinks all day long.

(grandmother, 70 years old)

One parent also emphasized his child left home because of the friendships he had made with children from a placement centre:

They started when he knew the children from the placement centre in Criuleni. Because they come from families with many children, they were taken there...

(father, 43 years old)

It should be noted that, in the context of reasons perceived by the parents for their children being in street situations, most of them did not refer to their parental responsibility in educating and supervising their children and preferred to "blame" the children's friends or the impossibility to offer the children what they wish for.

4.3. Parents' intervention to prevent their children returning to street situations

Although parents did not take into consideration their responsibility in what concerns the children being in street situations, they reacted to the police notice of this fact by going to take them home or by trying to talk with the children about the dangers they expose themselves to. However, the children returned on the streets and the parents declared their powerlessness.

I don't beat her because psychologically... I talk with her and nothing. (...) For a few days it all seems normal and it's like she reaches something and she needs to go out with her friend. (...) She stays home for a week or two and then one-three days she's lost.

(father)

When the police called me from the centre.. he was found there the first time and I went after him. They told me he is in placement, in Botanica [sector in Chisinau]. And I went to the placement, but when I got there, he was out. (...) He came home alone, by bus. (...) I spoke with him like with humanity. Every time... even in Chisinau I went to talk with him. (...) he lived at the International, sat in those trees. I used to chase him around; among the buildings in Botanica I kept chasing him. I caught him, but he wouldn't come home, I can't beat him.

(father, 43 years old)

In the case of a mother, following numerous attempts to bring home her child, she decided it is better to let him go on the streets during the day. She told him he is loved and he can come home to eat and wash himself, but he needs to sleep at home at night:

But after this he started again. It's been more than a month in September... until September, he was in Chisinau. Left there from here, in the town. (...) we let him go to school but we're thinking he comes or not, he runs away. I give him clean and good clothing, he comes back... I told him „Tell me where you're going, but come home at night and sleep because the door is open and if it's not, knock on the window and I'll let you in!" (...) all the time when he leaves, I go wandering the streets in the evening, me or my husband and the little ones stay with me or they stay with my mother and we go and look for him in town, everywhere they may be, we find out.

(mother, 34 years old)

Parents mentioned various experiences of attempts to bring their children back home or to convince them not to leave again. In all cases however, they stated that they do not know what else they can do or whom they can ask for help.

4.4. Perception on the future of the children

When the interviews were conducted, of the seven children referred to by the participants, only two were not at home. Despite the feeling of powerlessness regarding their children, the parents showed a last hope that this time their child will no longer go on the streets, hoping he grew up:

I think he came to his senses. He goes to school, comes back, eats, he doesn't stay hungry. (...) He is capable, but he needs to have the wish to study, to finish school and may be to go to... the army...

(mother, 49 years old)

However, when the parents were asked how they see their child's future, most of them said they think their child will end up in prison. This „sentence” is based, in parents' views, on their children's previous behaviours and also on the fact that the children will soon reach the age of criminal responsibility:

He'll be locked there, in prison because he has many crimes, at the bus station, with thefts (...) in October he'll be 16 years old and he is liable.

(grandmother, 70 years old)

Jail will eat him up. If he'll keep doing bad things, steal from one, steal from another... there's no way he can be controlled.

(neighbour, 30 years old)

For two of the mothers in this study, their repeated and failed attempts to make themselves heard by their child made them lose faith and imagine the child in detention:

He'll start stealing again and he'll go to jail with his friends because he's with those friends he hangs out with and who steal. (...) he's calm now, but I don't know what he'll do. (...) if he goes with his friends who are no good, nobody can help, not the state, not... because he doesn't listen to anybody.

(mother, 32 years old)

I think he'll come to his senses. I told him „If you don't come to your senses, you'll go to jail and I won't come to you, you'll do it to yourself”. (What did he answer?) „Mum, I won't go anywhere” and I said „Please God, make it happen because I don't believe you, boy. I no longer trust you, you eat up all my nerves”.

(mother, 34 years old)

The interviews showed the parents perceive the reasons for their children leaving home not the lack of child supervision, but the inadequate friendships their children formed when they were around the age of 10 years. Even if they attempted to intervene in order to keep their child in the family, it appears that these interventions were late considering most parents resigned thinking that the future of their child is in prison.

5. Research results: children's perspective

The data collected from the 18 children in street situations who took part in this study was structured on seven themes, as follows: (1) life at home/reasons to leave, (2) school, (3) health, (4) at the placement centre, (5) on the streets, (6) at the former National Hotel and (7) children's wishes.

As with the previous chapters, in order to illustrate the experiences of children, this study used quotes from interview transcripts. The names of the children used in this report were changed for confidentiality reasons.

5.1. Life at home/reasons to leave

Contrary to the statements of some parents included in this study who said they do not beat their children, mother's and father's physical abuse was mentioned by most of the children. In addition to stories of abuse, children mentioned parents' excessive alcohol consumption and family history where mothers had several partners and where they had to change their living places numerous times.

My real father died, he was drunk, he behaved... he used to throw things at us... Every day, for months, he used to drink.

(Vasea, 11 years old)

When my father is upset, he beats my mother, the second day he beats her again. If something happens he threatens me, he tells me: "If you upset me, then mother will have her ribs broken and you'll be dead and go to the graveyard." He's been accused and locked up. And with this all things started. The first time he started, I began to run away. (...) He threatens me, tells me he'll kill me or he'll mock me again. And I started to leave home. (...) this is why I tell you, the police kept bringing me home, they didn't beat me, but I kept telling my mum and mum said not to be afraid because everything will be normal, but in a few weeks he'll be home and this is why I'm afraid he'll come... something will happen to me.

(Serioja, 15 years old)

When my mother beats me, I run away. Now I'm old enough and I can go by myself. For 1-2 months, nobody finds me, nobody finds me. (...) My mum met a man here in the village 15 years ago, he's my first father. He... used to beat my mother. Used to beat her and she lost all her children. He beat her really hard... he cared for me. Since she gave birth to me, he cared for me alone. My mum, when she saw she's beaten, she ran away. (...) When she drank, she used to beat me.

(Valeriu, 14 years old)

Elena, on the other hand, thinks her father's detention was unfair and it is her mother who should have been put in prison because she used to beat her and her sisters often:

My mother is in Bender, my father is in prison. Every night she came home, called us all kind of things and at night she'd come home even with five men. (...) They gave him 13 years... for two years they were on trial and this year they gave him 13 years in prison. (...) If I would have been allowed to go to trial, I would have told to lock up my mother, not my father. (...) she used to work at a factory that makes alcohol. When I was in Chisinau once, I spoke with her. She was drunk. (...) My godfather also went and told her: "Why do you keep beating your children?" and after that my mother hated me more because I was older. My other sister left home because of her also.

(Elena, 14 years old)

In other situations the children told about their parents who were imprisoned because of domestic violence. For Serioja, thinking of his father's release and threats after he had been sexually abused by him is a reason to keep running away from home:

For other children, life meant a long period of moves from one placement centre to another and psychiatric hospitalizations after parents' divorce or death:

After my mother died I was taken to the centre (...) For about half a year, I used to get into fights with the girls (...) From there, they took me to Codru to the hospital [psychiatric hospital] and afterwards they took me here (...) at the centre they told me I can stay if I want. I remained there three days, I liked it, it was a different director, better.

(Maria, 15 years old)

5.2. School

Most of the children went to several schools because of the frequent moves of the parents or of the numerous moves to different placement centres. In the case of Bianca and Marius, absence of clothing or of money for school supplies caused missing out from school for long periods of time:

I went only until I was older in kindergarten (...), but when I was preparing to go to school my parents didn't want to let me go, they had no clothes to give me, to pay for the books, to pay for food.

(Bianca, 10 years old)

I was for 8 years. I'm studying, but I no longer go to school. If I want to study, I study; if I don't want to, I don't study. I don't have clothes (...) I don't have shoes.

(Marius, 14 years old)

For some children, school was not a pleasant place because other children spoke badly of them or because they did not have the knowledge that was required for the specific school year and sometimes they could not understand what the teachers were teaching them. The children also stated that teachers should make more efforts to help them.

I didn't know how to read because I hadn't been to kindergarten so I was in the first grade two times. They said I should not go if I don't know how to read and write and I went to the first grade twice. (How should a teacher be?) When you don't understand something, they say you're looking over the hills... this is how my math teacher tells

About six months I stayed at the sanatorium, another half of year in another sanatorium... I would become calmer and then I'd start all over again, and then calm again and this is how it is...

(Liviu, 13 years old)

The reasons for leaving home mentioned by the children can be summarized as follows: parents' physical and alcohol abuse, mothers' multiple partners, parent's detention, death or divorce and also a history of multiple moves of the family or in various placement centres. These reasons are similar to the ones described by the professionals in this study.

me, he says „look in your notebook”. If we say we don't understand, they should tell us one more time... so we can understand...

(Alina, 14 years old)

At school it is not that good, I don't like school and the children are mean as children are, they speak what shouldn't.

(Serioja, 15 years old)

In other cases, the children chose to abandon school, as George did. Although he was excelling in the first years at school, the fact that he started not to like it was his reason to stop going and this led to being expelled:

I studied at a school in Călărași. Three years I studied. I was the class leader, I was... and my sister was too. I knew everything... that school... I no longer liked it, didn't study, didn't go to school every day, I didn't like it and... I studied until the eighth grade and stopped going for three years and they expelled me or maybe they included me, but they expelled me.

(George, 16 years old)

Unlike professionals' opinions underlining that school is not a friendly environment for the children included in the child protection system because of teachers' discriminatory behaviour, the children gave less information about this. They mainly referred to the fact that teachers should make more efforts to help them understand what was being taught. However, this state-

ment was made in the context of children not having the knowledge required for the specific school year and was not mentioned as a behaviour of teachers towards children in street situations. Not the same thing

was noticed in children's discourses in relation to their peers' reactions. They stated that other children in school treated them badly or rejected them and this led to changing schools or to school dropout.

5.3. Health

In what regards children's health, one child in this study mentioned he had epilepsy and another child had TB. Most of the children however, talked about lack of food and about smoking, drinking and using glue.

When I'm upset I smoke and I calm down. (...) Wine, cognac, champagne, beer; the wine I don't like. (...) I was in a coma, here at school I drank. I don't drink much beer, one glass every day. (Did you try smelling glue?) Once and then I was on fire, my hands were burned. (...) Not from glue, but from the acetone.

(Liviu, 13 years old)

The children included in the study who had met the group from the former National Hotel stated the latter used other substances such as cocaine or different salts:

Not just glue, everything: pink cocaine (...) marijuana, salt.

(Mihai, 15 years old)

I saw how they smell glue and how they lay ... as if they are drunk... they also take salt, they say they drink, I don't know. I don't ask for help from nobody... I don't

know... they have this character and they don't know what they want... I know what I need...

(Alina, 14 years old)

Serioja, as with other children in this study, told about many attempts to convince psychiatrists that the treatments they prescribed were not good for them:

They took me to the hospital, nothing helped. I used to go... but the treatment is no good, doesn't help. And then the lady [social worker] took me to the boarding school, she had to do the documents... but instead of taking me to one place, they took me to another, or to Codru, to the centre for children, but I told them to take me to the boarding school instead of taking me where I didn't belong. (...) everyone looked in my head and still... no treatment is good, what I need and they give me injections so I could be more... not me. And I told them I'd better do what I think, but they still gave me injections.

(Serioja, 15 years old)

Similarly to information provided by some children, professionals and parents in this study signalled that psychiatric treatment does not appear to be adequate for the children as some of them felt more agitated and had concentration and attention difficulties.

5.4. At the placement centre

As with professionals' points of view, most children who were in placement centres were not pleased with the rules and this was why they ran away:

I did not like it at all in there. It was like being in a jail. You had to be inside all the time, to sleep at noon... they (...) I really didn't like to sleep at noon and if I didn't sleep, they'd pull my ear or my hair (...) They wrote something on a paper, I don't know what and then I was sent upstairs. I opened the bars, it was thin, and I jumped and... run.

(Liviu, 13 years old)

I ran away from Orhei to Chisinau to my sister and they came (...) in Orhei I wrote a request saying I don't want to be there. (...) You're not allowed to go on a date and at night you can't go out, each girl is on duty and I cooked food, cleaned, fed 13 people... the conditions are different there... here the cook cooks the food... there's still a chart, there's the yard, the house, there's need to clean, there... the rabbits. There were nine girls there and each cleaned, there was no day off...

(Alina, 14 years old)

Another reason why some children left the placement centre was that they were beaten by other children who were older, as it was with Gabriel who was satisfied that in the centre he was when interviewed, he received presents and could celebrate his birthday with the other children:

Yes, I ran away because I was always cornered. The older ones used to beat me and since I'm here it's much better. (...) On New Year's they give us presents and when it's my birthday... the boys lift me on a chair and all start singing Happy Birthday!!

(Gabriel, 12 years old)

5.5. On the streets

The children in this study were asked to describe the first day they left home. Their stories were about wondering the streets and in the markets, about begging or looking for food in trash bins. Hunger was mentioned as the most difficult experience.

I ran away and I went somewhere else and ... I don't know... I was on the road, didn't know what to do, went to the markets (...) Since I was six years old. (...) I looked in trash bin, I had nothing to eat and stayed on the streets with my hand reaching out.

(Vasea, 11 years old)

Here it is, now I go to Nisporeni and for 2-3 days I don't eat anything, I only drink water and this is it (...) It's been such a hard experience. (What was the hardest?) Being hungry.

(Valeriu, 14 years old)

In most situations, children's first contact with the street happened when they were four or six years old. These ages are much smaller than the ones mentioned by the parents who stated their children left home around 10 years old or the age when the child entered the attention of social services. This can indicate that, when parents or social services have knowledge about children being in street situation, the children have already had few years of such experience.

For some of the children in the study, their first contacts with the street involved opportunities to work and gain money for food:

The younger children, of 10 and 11 years who were in a placement centre stated their satisfaction for the conditions they lived in and for the fact they could play and that they made friends. It can be inferred that adjustment problems can be an issue of adolescence when respecting rules can be perceived as a way of suppressing one's individuality.

The first time I left home I was about two days on the street (...) A man asked me... it was the national wine day then and I worked, sold corn and he paid me 100 lei.

(Serioja, 15 years old)

When my father died... then I started to run away... (...) Before I met that boy, I found someone who was carrying iron and I asked him: „Where do you take that iron?“, „I sell it“, „How much is a kilogram?“, „1, 50 lei“, „Can we both go and then have something to eat?“. And he said yes. We went together, we sold iron, made money, bought things to eat..

(Valeriu, 14 years old)

With time, the children had many experiences when they had been brought home by the police and ran away again or experiences when they were placed in centres after their mothers told the authorities they cannot control their children or when the situation at home was not adequate for raising a child. On the streets, the children made friends with a similar life history and, gradually, they started to come to Chisinau. In other cases, some children were taken directly to Chisinau by other children who were running away from home. Their street experiences evolved, as some children explained, from begging to stealing. The reason children stole was to make money for food, cigarettes or glue.

What experience? Ran away, stole, sell, did what I did before. (What were you doing with the money?) What? Ate, drank, smoked. (Where did you sleep?) Where? With friends, somewhere... (Did you happen to sleep on

the street?) It happened, in the market, the big market. (...) I used to go into houses, steal, sell, did...

(Livi, 13 years old)

My mother used to tie me in chains to stop running away. (...) In Straseni, here in town, we used to hide, went in the internet centre at night. (...) Around Botanica or I don't know where. Yes, probably in Botanica. We weren't many there, in Chisinau it was me and another boy. That boy went begging, asking money bread and we ate. (...) Yes, I used to steal. (What did you do with the goods?) Sold them. (How did you spend your money?) we used to buy bread, food, mostly. Bread, mayonnaise, bought it, ate and walked around.

(Ion, 12 years old)

In other situations, the children offered their sexual services in exchange for food and shelter, as it happened many times with George:

I gave myself... I didn't have money, I didn't have... I was hungry and had no place to sleep and I went to the station. (...) He saw I was cold and I asked if he had money to help me. He said he didn't have money but I can go with him and then we'll see.

(George, 16 years old)

Children's experiences are diverse; although begging and working were more frequently mentioned, sleeping in the street, prostitution and theft or using glue were also part of children's descriptions of living on the street.

5.6. At the former National Hotel

The children who lived in the building of the former National Hotel in Chisinau were noticed by all participants in this study: professionals, parents and children. Two of the children in this research were part of this group that included approximately 12 children, according to professionals. Other children in this study had different experiences with the ones at "the National". This theme presents children's perception about this group.

5.6.1. The perspective of some members of the group

The two girls who spent time at the former National Hotel described the portrait of a group of children who are united and free, insisting there are no rules among them. Analysis of their discourses revealed that they had certain roles they took on as members of the group. For example, the girls look out for the younger children and the boys take care of the girls.

The care for the younger children mainly involved searching for food and feeding the young. Also, before the winter season, the girls acted as mediators by speaking with authority representatives for the children to be taken in placement centres so they would be protected against the cold.

They... they're young... (...) we, with Mara and Alina go, look for food and feed the young, they are boys of 9, 11, 12 years old. (...) They light the fire and in the morning, when they wake up, they are black from the smoke... (...) Today I slept at the centre and when I went there in the morning... (...) they said: „You go now to the centre, we

look out for ourselves". And I went (...) at 8 o'clock I woke up and I went to see them... they were all black from the smoke. I took Alina and Mara and I told them: „Let's go to the centre". They: "No... they won't take us in". „They will", I said. I then called the mayor's office and I said we want to go to the centre, but we're afraid. „You go there and I'll talk". We went, we washed ourselves. (...) Now this is it, we all live there [at the centre].

(Maria, 15 years old)

The above quote indicates that the girls know the services available for children in street situations and, despite their history of running away from placement centres (as described by the study participants and as documented from the social work files), they created a support network that allows them to intervene for the protection of younger children.

With respect to the roles of the boys, this involved making money to buy food for the girls who spent their time listening to music:

They go, collect walnuts... the girls, we sit there, the boys go and bring walnuts, buy us food, they went out to beg for money. (...) the boys look out for us, the girls. (What do the girls do?) They sit. Hmm... one comes... we laugh, listen to music, just the three of us, the girls.

(Alina, 14 years old)

However, the girls seem to do more than stay and watch the younger children. They also beg to have money for food:

Mara begs, I stay with her. (...) Half an hour, 100 lei. We stayed at the entrance of Fidesco. Someone gave 50 lei, other 30, then 50 lei... The men give more money (...) I was there by the store with Mara... a gentleman was in the car, called us and gave me 50 and to Mara and we called all the children, bought food and ate.

(Maria, 15 years old)

The money the children earn is not used only for food, but also for glue. The reason the children smell glue is that it gives them the feeling of satiety when they are hungry and warmth when they are cold, as mentioned by Maria who insisted that the girls do not use glue:

They all smell it, except for me, Mara and Alina. For the rest of them, all smell it. (...) They get warm from this. We always ask them what it's good for?... and they say it's warmer and they don't feel hungry.

(Maria, 15 years old)

Although during the interviews the two girls stated there are no rules in the group, their stories indicated that there are certain practices that can be interpreted as norms. These are mentioned below in the words of the girls:

We protect each other. Last night, a man came, I don't know why and got close to. They all beat him up and ran away.

(Maria, 15 years old)

There, we all make up, we don't hold grudge. We don't hide food from each other there. If anything, the police comes, we all run... all... we don't leave anyone behind (...) we hold our hands.

(Alina, 14 years old)

The image of this group was described by two of its members as positive, contrasting the professionals' opinions about thefts, robbery and substance use among these children. On the other hand, this does not imply that the children who spent their time at the former National Hotel are not protecting each other and are not taking care of one another.

5.6.2. The perspective of the other children

The strongest memory of two boys who were in street situations about the children from the former National Hotel was about smelling glue.

I went to Chisinau... and you want it or not...(...) so I went, I wanted to see how it is there, at the hotel. A boy told me, a friend from here. (...) I walked, I sat there, I went to beg. (...) I smelled glue and this is it, went and walked in the city centre. (What do you think the children at the National Hotel would need in a centre for children?) to have glue.

(Marius, 14 years old)

The children told about fights with other groups of children in street situations such as the group from McDonalds and also about the fact that those who do not respect the rule of equally sharing the food are beaten and rejected. Stealing from others was also remembered as something the children at the National Hotel used to do.

There was a man who took them from the streets, he was American. He said he never saw in America children on the streets. He went to the National, bought them food, took them at his house and let them wash. Once they went to his house, ate, slept, but in the morning they left with his TV, laptop, phone and money...

(Mihai, 15 years old)

From Mihai's point of view, the children at the National Hotel have no chance for reintegration because they "learned" a life style that appears to be dependent of living on the street:

...when the police took us, either at hospital no. 3 and they were making a lot of noise, broke the bars to escape. If they're hungry, they go to the traffic lights and beg, if they're cold, they go to the internet, steal clothes put to dry out by people. They can't... they learned to be outside, to take the road. You can't do anything; they learned to be outside, like savages.

(Mihai, 15 years old)

This perception of the children from the National Hotel for whom nothing can be done was shared in this study, during the interviews and informal discussions, by some professionals and parents. However, when Alina, member of this group, was asked if there is

something that would make her and her friends not to live on the streets, she answered that she would like it if there would be a centre where the adult working there would...

(...) understand them. Listen to what the child has to say... not only the child s/he is fond of, with whom s/he gets along, but also the child who doesn't listen... s/he should listen to that child also... the child will learn to listen, too.

(Alina, 14 years old)

5.7. Children's wishes

Asked who or what can help them not to go back to the streets, most children mentioned their parents. The priest, the mayor in the village or other persons who helped the children in the past were also remembered.

The parents would also be the ones toward whom the children in the study would refer other children who would like to leave their homes for the first time. However, if a child would tell Marius (14 years old) that he or she is not well at home, Marius would reply „Leave where your feet take you!“, while Ion (12 years old) would advise that particular child to go back home and say „Mum, I'm sorry. I will not run away any more“. Children's answers varied according to the experiences they lived. Liviu, for example, did not believe that giving advice can help the child because he was not helped by anyone and he understood on his own that it is time to calm down, otherwise he risks going to prison:

To do whatever he wants. What to say? I have nothing to say: not to run away or that he'll not be beaten when he's brought back home... When I ran away, should there have been someone to tell me anything? If he wants to run away, he should do so. Nobody helped me, I calmed down on my own.

(Liviu, 13 years old)

But Liviu also said that his biggest wish was for his mother who went to work abroad to be by his side, although he was convinced that his future involved working abroad with his father.

Alina's answer can indicate that these children want to reintegrate. In her opinion, even if the children are not obedient and do not respect the rules, if the adults would be active listeners and understanding of the children, in turn, the children would learn to listen.

The children from the former National Hotel described themselves or were described by other children as a united group. The two members of the group construed the portrait of a substitutive family whereas the older take care of the younger and the boys take care of the girls. On the other hand, other participants described these children as thieves and substance users for whom nothing can be done.

Other children in the study wanted different things, such as a motorcycle, a mobile phone or clothing, and also to study for a job or to have a home and a family of their own. Most often however, children's wishes were related to the reasons that made them leave home:

I wish to have a family. I wish to be protected. I wish my family isn't alcoholic.

(Bianca, 10 years old)

I wish not to have arguments in the house, beatings, stupid things (...) not to speak... I mean they can speak, but when they start an argument, not to beat each other...

(Serioja, 15 years old)

Children's wishes can be an expression of their needs and represent part of the picture of their experiences. Either they wished for a family or for more concrete things such as mobile phones, most children in this study referred to their need to be respected and understood.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Categories of children in street situations identified in the study

One of the objectives of this study was to create a profile of children in street situations. The results showed that there is not a single pattern for all children. On a contrary, children's experiences are very diverse. The data collected through interviews, focus groups and analysis of children's social work files indicates three main categories: (1) children for whom placement was established after having had a minimum contact with the street; (2) children with more than six months experience with street situations and (3) children from the former National Hotel. However, even within one category, children's experiences and factors that contributed to children being in street situations are diverse.

6.1.1. Children for whom placement was established after having had a minimum contact with the street

This category includes children aged up to 10 years, mostly girls. Nonetheless, children aged up to 14 years were also found. In most cases, these children come from very poor families, with many children and with a parent who either left to work abroad and lost contact or was in detention or deceased. The family history includes parents' alcohol abuse and domestic violence, especially father's violence against the mother.

Children's contact with the street was for a period between one day and a month. During this time the children begged and slept in the houses of people they knew or of school colleagues, but there were also situations where the children slept on the street. Some of the children were identified by unknown people, neighbours or relatives who, in a few situations, took them to their houses where they offered accommodation and food before calling social services. Other children were handed over to community social services by their parents who stated that they cannot take care, feed or educate the child due to the family financial strain.

The health of the children was found to be generally good. During the interviews, they mentioned common colds or respiratory problems for which they had received medical assistance in the placement centre. From an emotional point of view, the children overtly expressed their wish to be loved and protected by a family. Some of them had hopes that they would be adopted by the person who found them on the street or

by another family. Other children were waiting for their mother to return from abroad or for their father to be released from prison, although they did not know when this moment will come because they did not keep contact with the parent. A strong attachment to the absent parent was noticed in these children together with feelings of confusion due to lack of information about the respective parent.

All children in this category went to school and had identification documents.

6.1.2. Children with more than six months experience with street situations

This category includes mostly boys aged 11 to 16 years who live in Chisinau or in other towns or rural areas especially from the northern part of Moldova.

The families of these children are largely single parent families. The mother was described to abuse alcohol and/or to have multiple male partners at the same time or at intervals between several months and several years. The children perceived the partners of their mother as fathers. There were also children who lived with their biological father. The family environment was characterized by parental arguments and physical abuse of the father/father figure against the mother, especially in the context of alcohol abuse. The children were also victims of physical abuse from their mother as well as their father or father figure. The number of children in one family varied between one and six. The family income included mainly social benefits and occasional income from day labour. In Chisinau there were families where the mother had a job, but her income was not sufficient to ensure children's basic needs, such as food and clothing.

The reasons children left their homes included parental neglect and abuse. First contacts with the street took place when the children were very young, some of four, five or six years. However, parents and professionals in this study mentioned that the child's age at first contacts with the street was 10 years. It is possible that in the period between four-six years and ten years children's contacts with the street were less frequent and only during the day, although the children talked about experiences where they left home for a

week and/or slept in basements or on the street. This can be interpreted as an initiation stage where the main occupation of the children included begging and socializing with other children in the same situation. With this socialization and time passing, the children started to smoke and to smell glue. These were group behaviours and took place in abandoned buildings or around areas of interest such as internet cafés, thus making themselves noticed by people passing by or by the police. Also, some children started to engage in criminal behaviours, mostly thefts. The moments when children started to smoke, smell glue and steal are the moments when they came to the attention of social services. Although parents who took part in this study stated they did not use corporal punishment, the children mentioned their parents attempted to prevent them from running away by physically abusing them. In some situations, that included starving and tying them in chains. Because of these abuses and of the unhealthy family environment (e.g. alcohol abuse, domestic violence), most children ran away but they were brought back home by authorities. The frequent runaways were accompanied by children's migration to Chisinau and by repeated emergency placements or (if parents requested or the social services decided it was for the best interest of the child) planned placements in child protection centres. Nevertheless, the children were found to refuse these placements because of its strict rules and went back on the streets.

Generally, children spent their time begging but there were also situations where they mentioned about playing together or walking. Although they usually ended their days at sun down, some children talked about sleepless summer nights when they walked in the city and told various stories. During the cold season there was a tendency for the children to return to their families or to the placement centres.

For some children, this life style appeared to slow down around the age of 16 years when they are considered criminally liable². There were situations where children returned to their families after suffering abuse from other children in street situations or situations where the child's return home was favoured by involvement in sports or by the parent's active and constructive engagement. Because children who were interviewed for the purpose of this study are aged up to 17 years and most children over 15 years old appeared to continue an unhealthy lifestyle (e.g. abuse alcohol

and/or other substances), it cannot be stated with certainty that children permanently return to their families at these ages.

With regard to children's education, most of them stopped going to school in the eighth grade. However, until the eighth grade they did not attend school regularly and reached the age of 14 years with minimum writing and reading skills. Low school attendance can have two main causes. On one hand, children had run away from their place of residence or from the placement centres where they were registered at school. On the other hand, for some of the children school was considered unfriendly because they felt discriminated against by their peers for not having the knowledge corresponding to their school grade level and the teachers did not take action for their successful reintegration. However, there were situations when pedagogues in placement centres have worked hard with the children who, eventually, succeeded to upgrade their learning.

Children's health problems were varied and included respiratory and kidney diseases and also neurological and psychiatric disorders³. Consumption and alcohol poisoning were also mentioned. In absence of data about children's medical history before and after their contact with the street it cannot be accurately stated that these health problems were caused by their street experiences, although it can be associated with the street situations since most children in this study had experienced, to various degree, such medical problems. On the other hand, glue smelling and smoking which are habits that some children claimed to have acquired while spending their time on the street, may endanger children's health.

Life on the street for this category of children also meant exposure to different risks. Children mentioned working to earn their food money: gathered and sold scrap iron, dug or cut firewood for households or did cleaning work in small shops. These experiences, although they can be said to have occurred under conditions of relative safety, do not exclude the fact that children can be exploited for work. Also, sexual exploitation is a real risk. In this study, a child told about offering his sexual services several times in exchange for food and shelter and the mother of a 12 years old

² Of the 18 children who were interviewed, 8 of them stated they used to steal while on the streets and 2 other children were reported by the social services to have been involved in committing several crimes including robbery and burglary.

³ This information was gathered from interviews with children and parents who could not state children's medical diagnosis. Also, the social work files that were analysed in this study did not include copies of children's hospital release forms, but only mentions in evaluation reports about the fact that, for example, the child „is registered with neurological problems“.

boy mentioned her child had been sexually abused by an older boy during the time he was on the street. Children who are mentally challenged are even more exposed to these risks because most of them have difficulties in understanding the seriousness of their situations (e.g. forced labour or sexual abuse) and have diminished capacity to look and ask for help.

Children who were included in this study stated they had identity papers and these are with their parents or in the placement centres. In one case, the father of a 13 years old girl mentioned she did not have a birth certificate and he will apply for it in the following days.

Regarding support, although in just a few cases, the children mentioned strangers who found them on the street and from whom they received food or housing and also relatives (especially aunts) who showed interest in their situation and helped them from time to time with food or money to return home.

6.1.3. Children from the former National Hotel

During the field study, approximately 12 children were identified by the professionals as part of this group⁴. Less than half of them came from Chisinau. For the majority of these children, planned placement had been established although they used to go to the former hotel almost daily and sometimes they used to spend their time there for periods from one to several days without returning to the centre. Children's ages were between 9 and 17 years. Eight of the children were boys and four were girls. One of the girls had been hospitalized in a psychiatric facility. Two other girls were in romantic relationships, but there is no information if they were involved with members of the group.

Children at the former National Hotel can be divided in two categories: adolescents and younger children of 9 to 12 years.

The only information about the younger children refers to their ages and to the fact that they were all boys from outside Chisinau. Some of them had been taken to their families but came back to the group. The young children are seen by the older ones as needing their protection because „they are young (...) have no place to live”. This can indicate that these children had a family history that was similar to the children

described above (alcoholic parents, mother's multiple partners, domestic violence, child physical abuse).

With regard to the adolescents in this group, the analysis of social work files showed that they come from families where parents had been revoked of their parental rights because of neglect and physical abuse or even because of using the children for begging or sexual services. There were also children who were left without parental care following mother's decease. Number of children in one family varies from two to seven.

In the case of the four children whose parents had been deprived of their parental rights, the data indicate that they were in the child protection system for at least three years. In this time, the social services made several emergency and temporary placements of these children (in the case of one child, 14 such placements were noted) in centres located in Chişinău and outside the capital. However, children ran away every time. These were the children who formed the core of the National group and also the children who committed numerous offences (in one case 20 crimes were noted) including theft, burglary and robbery, as evidenced by the studied files.

The values of this group are freedom, unity and equal rights over goods (food, money, glue or other substances). There were no mentions of conditions for joining the group; one of the children participating in the study stated that he was received “with open arms”. On the exclusion, however, it was made clear that this occurred as a result of the non-sharing of goods equally, which was also punished by beatings, some children being even hospitalized for this reason.

Although most references to the children at the former National Hotel were negative, describing children who were “fed up with what they lived at home and on the street”, „savages”, glue smelling, drug consumers or delinquents, the perception of the members is of a family where care and protection roles are divided between the older children and where the boys look out for the girls and get the money for food. This reality that was portrayed by the two girls who were part of the group does not contradict professionals' opinions or the data documented from the social work files. Even if this portrait made by the girls is not complete, it indicates that this group identifies itself as a family. Mentions of professionals about one child called at the office of the community social service who came accompanied by all the children in the group confirm the feeling of unity the girls referred to when describing this group.

⁴ The sources regarding this group were: interviews with two girls who were members of the group; interviews with the parents of two of the children; study of social work files of three other children; interviews with two children in street situations who knew the children at the National Hotel and interviews and informal discussions with professionals who had direct contacts with these children.

Regarding the children's leisure time, the information showed that they used to sing, listen to music, and talk about the dream to have a home for themselves, go to internet cafes, walk around or beg. Picking pockets or robberies was supplemented by professionals and recorded in files. Professionals also mentioned children smelling glue and using other substances or self-mutilation (e.g. cuts on the arms) when they were under the effect of psychoactive substances. However, not all children were found to steal or to use glue or drugs and this did not appear to be a conduct imposed on all members of the group.

Some of the children from the former National Hotel, as with the children with an experience of more than six months on the street, have minimum writing and reading skills even though some of them were registered in secondary education. About other children, the professionals in this study stated they were illiterate. The school was perceived by the children as a condition of the centre where they were placed. The majority of professionals who had direct contact with these children stated that most of them refuse to attend classes reasoning they do not want to wake up in the morning. The two members of the group however, mentioned they go to school and told about their need for the teachers to try harder to help them understand what is being taught at school or that they refuse to become friends with their peers because they were „pafosnii” [arrogant].

Regarding the health of these children, although medical diagnosis were not known, the professionals who were interviewed in this study mentioned malnutrition problems and that some of the children tested nega-

tive for sexually transmitted diseases and also about numerous gynaecological infections in the case of girls or unwanted pregnancies. Mental health problems appeared to predominate among the children in this group. Most of them had been admitted, at one time or another, in a psychiatric hospital for detoxification and for behavioural disorders. One of the children had been diagnosed with “psychopatiform syndrome” and received treatment. From what a girl in the group told during the interview, when the children are ill they do not access medical services; they simply react by sleeping. Personal hygiene may, as with other children, be a factor favouring illness. This is because in the periods spent on the street, the children do not wash themselves or they do so only in summer in a pond in Chisinau.

The study of the social work files showed that the older children at the former National Hotel have identification documents, but no such information was found about the younger members of this group.

The girls who took part in this study mentioned that children received help from people living nearby the former hotel who, on several occasions, brought to them blankets or warm pies. One of the girls who were interviewed also told about a particular situation when she had called “the mayor's office” in order to get shelter for the younger children who lived in cold. The fact that girl had a phone number and that she knew to call a person working in an institution can indicate that some children from the former National Hotel have created a support network, they know the procedures regarding admission in placement centres and also that they have the necessary skills to ask for help.

6.2. Recommendations regarding the prevention of the phenomenon

The results from interviews with professionals, parents and children in street situations indicate there is need for greater efforts in order to protect and promote the rights of children through actions leading to informing and educating the population in general and the parents and children in particular with regard to prevention of the phenomenon. This study identified factors that can be attributed to increasing the risks of children being in street situations. These are:

- Parents from poor and/or disorganized families have little information on the risks they expose their children to when they don't prioritize their children's supervision;
- Parents' alcohol abuse is most often associated with domestic violence, child abuse and lack of child supervision;
- Children have little information on how they can avoid labour exploitation and sexual abuse;
- Children have little information about institutions from which they can ask for help when their lives are in danger or their rights are not respected.

Thus, state institutions working in the area of child protection and civil society institutions have to act in order to diminish risk factors.

Recommendation 1. Public campaigns to educate parents on the responsibility to supervise their children

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection, as part of its responsibilities included in the 2016-2022 Inter-sectorial Strategy for the Development of Parental Skills and Competencies, should develop awareness raising and educational campaigns targeting parents on the subject of risks their children can be exposed to due to lack of parental supervision. These campaigns can include home visits to families identified as being at risk by community social services; parent meetings that can take place in mayor's offices and/or in school

from vulnerable areas; and also video and/or audio materials that can be disseminated through the media.

Recommendation 2. Continuing efforts to prevent alcohol abuse, domestic violence and child abuse

In order to achieve impact, prevention programs need to be developed constantly and to be adapted to the social and economic contexts of the target audiences. These programs should be developed at multiple levels including primary prevention (targeting the general population through the media, for example), secondary and tertiary prevention with the participation of family medical institutions, mental health community centres, schools, police and the civil society.

Recommendation 3. Child information campaign on preventing labour exploitation and sexual abuse

The family, kindergartens and schools have an important role in informing and educating children on the meanings and implications of labour exploitation and sexual abuse. Also, the media can facilitate the dissemination of preventive messages by broadcasting social audio/video materials without costs and by developing TV/radio educational shows that can be presented by or with the participation of children.

Recommendation 4. Promoting local child protection services among children

Community social services, schools, police or medical units are institutions children have little information about and most often this information is acquired from films or from the experiences of family members or of other children. In order to ask for help or to notify cases of children at risk, most children need to understand that these institutions include people who have the responsibility and training to protect them and to defend their rights. The children need to know they can come to these institutions and be heard and helped. Schools can develop partnerships with these institutions and invite its representatives to speak with the children about their work and why it is important for the children. These programs need to use a child friendly language and to actively involve the children in discussions.

6.3. Recommendations on working with children in street situations

The main issues raised by professionals in this study were about working with children in street situations. These can be summarized as follows:

- Professionals have little knowledge about children in street situations and this can induce fear of these children or reluctance in working with them;
- Reduced involvement of schools in ensuring children's school reintegration;
- Children tend to disrespect the rules of the placement centres.

Below are some recommendations that can help in solving these issues.

Recommendation 5. Information programs on the specifics of children in street situations for persons working in child protection services

Not all professionals in the social area will work with children in street situations. At one time however, any pedagogue, teacher, social worker, physician, police worker, psychologist or representative of a nongovernmental institution can meet these children or situations that involve them. Sometimes, children's vulgar language or rude behaviour can be interpreted as personal. Thus, instead of the child receiving support, the professional can react by blaming, judging, discriminating, rejecting or even being violent toward the child. In order to avoid such situations, it is recommended that the professionals are informed on the specifics of children in street situations. This can be achieved during workshops organized by representatives of civil society with experience in working with this category of children. The topics of such information can include: a description of the family and social environment of these children, reasons for leaving their homes, children's habits, the risks these children are exposed to, ways of approaching them, their needs and types of services and institutions they can be referred to.

Recommendation 6. Professional trainings for persons working with children in street situations

Professional training is necessary in working with this category of children. For example, social and police workers need to have knowledge on the street culture and habits and on who the support persons, are if any, of these children. They also need to have interviewing skills and to know how they can support the children in re-establishing contact with their families. Psychologists and psychiatrists need to know not just the child's history but also the conditions in which s/he lives and will con-

tinue to live, what are his/her personal resources, need to know how to listen to the child and to respect his/her choices and to adapt the intervention and treatment to the needs of the child and with the child's consent. Teachers also need to know the rights and the specifics of children in street situations and to attend training on participatory and inclusive methods and techniques regarding the process of teaching and learning.

Recommendation 7. Developing sports or artistic activities and/or competitions involving children in street situations. Avoiding child stigmatization.

In this study, some of the children talked about their interest in sports or music and also about being discriminated against by peers. One way to facilitate children's integration at school and also guidance of children in street situation is to involve them in various local actions or competitions that can be organized within partnerships between schools and the police or between schools and art institutions. With such activities, children can have the opportunity to share their talent or to find new areas of interest and to interact with other children on common subjects of interest. Children working together can lead to changing the perception of other children about those who are in street situations.

Recommendation 8. Giving children in placement centres an adjustment period

Children's disrespect of the rules in the placement centres can be prevented by establishing an adjustment period. This can be between one and six months, according to the duration of the placement and needs to be negotiated with each child. During the adjustment period, the child may be allowed to smoke in a special place and daily tasks may be introduced gradually with the help of another child from the centre. In order to avoid conflicts among children (e.g. children who do not smoke and respect their daily tasks), the right to an adjustment period needs to be made public as a right for all children that needs to be respected by all residents and by all staff in the centre.

6.4. Recommendations on social policies

The results of this study showed that:

- The number of children in street situation is not known;
- Most children constantly run away from placement centres or from their families;
- Most children have minimum writing and reading skills;
- Many children smell glue and some use other substances such as spices or cocaine;
- Some children, boys and girls alike, offer their sexual services in order to have money or in exchange for food and shelter and risk contracting sexually transmitted infections or, in the case of girls, have unwanted pregnancies;
- Sexual abuse occurs among children in street situations;
- For many children, their first contacts with the street are very early, around the age of four or five years. These are unknown to parents and to professionals.

Thus, this study recommends:

Recommendation 9. Systematic collection of information on the number of children in street situations and on their migration tendencies

In order to achieve an efficient intervention, community social services and the police should collect, on monthly or quarterly basis, information about all children in street situations, not just the number of children without parental care who are involved in crimes. This information can include: the number and ages of the children permanently living on the streets, the children who spend their time on the streets only during the day, and also how the numbers fluctuate according to seasons and their migration tendencies from villages to cities and to Chisinau. Such data can be centralized by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection so it can help creating intervention strategies that are focused and adapted to areas of origin of the children and/or age groups. The children themselves can be involved in collecting this information. Prevention programs and actions directed to child involvement in recreational and educational activities can be intensified according to periods in the year when the data indicates that a large number of children reaches the streets.

Recommendation 10. Taking the child's opinion under consideration when deciding placement in centres or return in the family. Preparing intervention and support measures for children who choose to live in street situations.

Some children will always run away from placements centres or from their families, most often because they developed strong connections with other children in the same situation and with the street. Although the law specifies that the child must be consulted when deciding placement, children's constant runaways indicate that they do not agree with this protection measure. Thus, the efforts made by authorities (local and central) become costly and inefficient. This study contends that the child's opinion must be respected. This does not mean that the authorities no longer have the responsibility to protect them and to ensure their rights are respected. Intervention and support measures for children who choose to live in street situation can include:

Recommendation 10.1. Constant monitoring of children by the child safety services from the General Police Inspectorate and building a trustful relationship between the children and the police workers that can allow the children to notify the police about abuse situations.

Recommendation 10.2. Establishing a republican centre for children in street situations in Chisinau where children can come when they do not feel safe or they look for a shelter, a warm meal or they want to wash themselves. This centre should be accessible to all children in Moldova, no matter where they come from in the country, their ethnicity, gender, age or disability. It is also recommended that this centre includes professionals that can make, with the child's consent, an initial medical assessment and, if necessary, the child can be referred to specialized medical services.

Recommendation 10.3. Ensuring the right to education for children who choose to live in street situations by establishing a mobile school or a "second chance" type of school. The pedagogues working in these schools must have the skills to motivate children to study, knowledge about participatory teaching methods and about the specifics of children in street situations (e.g. decreased concentration, hyperactivity, usage of vulgar language, absence of cognitive stimulation, possible mental deficiencies) so they can adapt their teaching method according to each child. It is also recommended that these schools would include vocational guidance and training programs for older

children (14-16 years old) who wish to learn about occupations.

Recommendation 10.4. Developing group programs adapted to children and youth for treating addictions. Community mental health centres are institutions that already exist and can develop such programs. It needs to be mentioned that including children in street situations in such programs takes time and the professionals (psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists) must undertake great efforts to create a trustful and accepting relationship before starting their work on increasing the motivation to change and on the actual development of the programs. Thus, these programs must include in its structures and budgets a component for preparing children's inclusion.

Recommendation 10.5. Developing programs aiming to prevent sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies. These programs must meet children's right to health. They can be run by teams of social workers and doctors or nurses and must use a language the children can understand. It is important that the persons who work in such programs are not judgemental, respect children's choices and rules related to confidentiality and have a friendly and supportive attitude toward the children. Aside from the necessary information, the programs should include preventive materials that can be handed to children, such as condoms, pregnancy tests or the possibility of testing for

sexually transmitted infections. Also, the programs should provide access to medical interventions and treatment for the children.

Recommendation 11. Early identification of children who leave home

School is most often the first institution that can notify when a child is in street situations. This study however, showed that there are preschool children who do not attend kindergarten and lack parental supervision. Most of them are invisible to social services until they reach ten years or until they are noticed because of behavioural problems (e.g. together with other children disturb public order or their glue smelling is noticed). Because the period between the first contacts with the street and the time children are identified in street situations is large, it is highly probable the children form strong connection with the street and thus, family and child interventions become difficult or inefficient. For the safety of these children and for increasing the chances of intervening to prevent children from reaching the street, it is recommended:

- Educating the general population on notifying social protection institutions about cases of children identified on the streets alone or in small groups;
- Training police workers and persons from community social services on identifying and interviewing preschool children who are alone on the streets.

6.5. Limitations of the research

This study has few limitations that need to be acknowledged.

First, parents' and children's perspectives did not include data from interviewing couples of parent-child from the same family. This could have contributed to richer information about family history and relationship dynamics. However, this was not possible due to the short time for data collection (three months) and to the difficulties in accessing the target population. Thus, participants' selection was made according to their accessibility and to their selection criterion which, in the case of the children meant to have at least ten years and to have or to have had street contact experiences and, in the case of the parents – to have children with such experiences.

Second, a more complete image of the child's transition from family to street life could have been created by interviewing the professionals who worked on a certain child-case, the child and his/her parent. This is time consuming considering some of the children were in the attention of social services for several years, thus they benefited from interventions conducted by several professionals over time. Also, some of the parents could not be approached because their parental rights had been revoked or there was no contact for them.

Third, this research did not include information on children's medical diagnosis that can offer precise data on their health. The parents and children did not know such information although they talked about some children being hospitalized or receiving medical treatment. Also, the social work files were scarce in information on this topic.

Fourth, the interviews conducted with professionals did not include the perspective of psychiatrists who were the target of criticism from all participant groups (professionals, parents and children). These interviews could have added to information about children's mental health. Unfortunately, despite the efforts, contacts of psychiatrists with experience in working with children in street situations could not be obtained.

Some of the parents and children included in this study were interviewed in the presence of a police worker from the child safety service. Except for one child who refused to be interviewed, the interviewees (parents and children alike) seemed relaxed and overt in relation to their experiences. Some of them have talked about their aversion towards authorities, including the police. However, it remains the possibility that the discourses of some participants may have been influenced by the presence of the police worker.

Another limitation of this study is that the researcher did not speak Russian. Some of the participants, especially parents, had difficulties in speaking Romanian and it was necessary to ask for translation support from Russian to Romanian. On few occasions this made interviewing more difficult and, probably, contributed to missing out some information.

Last but not least, this research might have benefited substantially from children's input as co-researchers involved in all stages, from establishing the objectives and choosing and structuring the methods of investigation to collecting and interpreting the data and writing up conclusions and recommendations.

7. Children's participation in the study. Thoughts and reflections

This study contends that children's participation in research is essential for obtaining relevant information about the needs and experiences of children in street situations. Professionals and parents are credible resources but they cannot express children's truths as the children themselves can. The children are experts on their own lives. Of course, it can happen for some children not to know what a research is about, what is involved in a research method or the meaning of "confidential" or "the right to withdraw from research". This is why it is the researcher's responsibility to explain these to the children in a child-friendly manner and using an accessible language, without inducing feelings of confusion, fear or guilt.

In this research, although the social services or the parents consented for the children to be interviewed, the children were also asked to sign a participation agreement form. This acknowledged children's ability to make decisions in what concerns them. Nevertheless, children's physical and emotional safety was a priority. Thus, the interviews were conducted in locations that could not endanger the children. Considering the sensitive nature of the questions, the children were permanently assured that they do not have to answer some questions if they do not wish. Surprisingly to a certain extent, the children who participated in this study were relaxed and open in sharing their experiences. Not all questions were welcomed, though. One of the boys in this study, for example, when he did not want to answer a question he used to mention that the researcher already knew the answer, but when replied it was not so, his non-verbal language indicated that he did not wish to return to the subject. In the case of a girl, her higher tone of voice, sudden laughter or cough were signs that she did not want to develop a certain topic. Also, for some children it was easier to speak of their present than their past or how they imagined their future. Although

the curiosity to find out more about their experiences was high, the respect for the child and for his/her decision not to provide detail was more important. The child's expertise about his/her own life also includes knowing the things s/he does not wish to share, no matter the trusting relationship between the child and the researcher and this should be respected.

Interviewing the children for the purpose of this study also involved position of power and achieving balance. Most of the times the researcher is perceived as having certain power over the child not just by being the person who asks questions and guides the subject of discussion, but also by being an adult (a capable and educated person) in front of a child (person who is developing and who is in a vulnerable situation). The conversations with the children in this study attempted to diminish these differences by recognizing, with honesty, the researcher's wish to learn about the child's experiences and by explaining to the child that s/he is the only one who holds the truth about his/her life and s/he chooses if s/he wants to share this truth or not.

Position of power can be expressed also by the child. In this study, on two occasions, adolescent boys expressed this power by asking the researcher personal questions (e.g. „what is your age?", „what exactly do you do when you're at work?") or by being sarcastic about other children in street situations or about authorities. The personal questions were answered in a simple and honest manner, without details. It would have been unfair for the child to be asked to share personal experiences and not to be given the right to ask some things about the interviewer's life. In regards to the child's sarcasm, this was accepted as such because it was part of the way the adolescent presented his own experiences.

Another aspect of doing research with children in street situation was the researcher's subjective reactions. Some of the children who were interviewed had an extremely untidy look and a stinging odour. It would be unfair not to acknowledge the discomfort. However, this contributed to being aware that accepting the children and their experiences starts with accepting and understanding one's own reactions and continues with active and respectful listening of the children.

In closing this report it should be mentioned that children's experiences are as varied as their lived street situations. The open manner in which they chose to talk about it and the fact they did not present themselves as victims of a system or of fate shows that they are capable and aware of their right to choose to live in street situations. This does not exclude states' responsibility to protect them and to ensure that their rights as children and as citizens are respected.

Annexes

Annex no. 1 – Professionals' interview guide

This interview guide is preceded by the research presentation and by signing the consent form.

Both documents are handed to the participant to keep.

A copy of the consent form remains with the researcher.

I. Personal information

1. What is your name?
2. What is your occupation?
3. For how long do you work in this position?

II. Perception on children in street situations

4. Do you have information from studies or statistics about children in street situations in general? How about the children in Moldova?
5. If you would describe them in a few words, what would those be?

III. Child interventions

6. Have you directly worked with children in street situations?

- If yes:

- 6.1. How many children have you worked with, approximately? What were their ages?
- 6.2. What were the interventions you worked on? (notification/referral, initial/complex evaluation, other types of intervention). Description.
- 6.3. What were the strengths of your interventions? Why? What were the results for the child(ren)?
- 6.4. What were the weaknesses? Why? What were the results for the child(ren)?
- 6.5. What do you think is the most difficult in working with a child in street situations? Why? What would you need to achieve positive/better results in working with these children (professional training – on what topics?, logistics, others)?

- If not:

Have you been in contact with these children in your profession? In what situations? What were the processes you took part of/assisted? What do you think about how the respective situations?

IV. Policy aspects

7. What do you think are the main institutions responsible for protecting children at risk and, implicitly, children in street situations? why
8. What do you think about inter-institutional collaboration for the children in street situations? What institutions are, in your opinion, the most important for these children's protection and reintegration?
9. What are the institutions you had your best collaboration with? What made it work?
10. How about the institutions you had a less positive collaboration with? Why was that?
11. If you would change/add something to the current law, what would that be? (Why?)
12. What do you think it should be done so other children would not reach the streets? Who should do this?

On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you score the chances of social and family reintegration for children in street situations? Please describe.

Thank you for the interview. How did you find it? Would you like to add anything?

Would you like to ask me something (else) about this research?

Thank you!

Annex no. 2 – Child interview guide

Introduction

My name is Liliana and I am a researcher, which is a person who tries to find out more about people. I'm doing a research now about children who live on the street or who spend their time there: who they are, what they think and how they think they can be helped. In order to know about all these, I will ask you about yourself: who you are, how is your family, about school, how you left home, your life now, about your health and about your friends. Thank you for accepting to speak with me.

I want to tell you that there are no good or bad answers. If you think my questions are too sensitive, please tell me and I can drop out the question. Afterwards, we can either continue or interrupt our conversation. Please remember you can choose not to answer certain questions or you can withdraw from this research at any time without anything happening. Also, when I will write about your experiences or about the experiences of other children, I will not write your name and I will not include information that may lead to others finding out who you are. Our conversation will last approximately one hour, but it can be between 30 minutes and one hour and a half. Because I want to pay attention to you and because I cannot write very fast or remember all that you can tell me, please let me record this discussion. Only I and my team will have access to this recording and it will not be passed to other persons. However, if you would tell me something about a person or about a child whose life is in danger and of whom the authorities do not know, I have the obligation to announce the authorities about this.

Are there things about this research you would like to ask me?

If you agree to continue, please read (I will read to you) this paper called "Agreement participation form"; it is a document that shows I talked with you and you accepted this. This document will be seen by you, me and my team. I have two copies: one for you and one for me.

.....
Date of the interview (the child can be asked if s/he knows the date):

Start time:

End time:

I. Identification

1. Please tell me your name and age.
2. Give me an example of something that you like the most. How about something you dislike?

II. The child's history

3. Tell me about your family:
 - Who are your parents (you don't have to give me their full names)? What do they do for a living?
 - Do you have other brothers or sisters? Who/where are they?
 - How do you get along with your parents/brothers/sisters? Who do you get along with, the best? (Why?) With whom you do not get along? (Why?)
 - Before you left home, when you were sick or had a problem, to whom did you use to go for help?
4. Where do you live now? Did you live in other places? *If yes:* Where? For how long? With whom? Why did you leave?

III. The child's educational history

5. Have you been to school? *If yes:* How many grades did you graduate? What did you like most in school? What did you not like? (*How were the teachers? How about your colleagues?*)
6. What school(s) did you go to?
If there was more than one school: Why did you change schools?
If s/he abandoned school: Why did you stop going to school?

IV. Life on the street

7. When did you start going on the street? How old were you then? How was the first day (description)?
8. How do you earn your money? How much money do you earn in a bad day? How about in a good day? How do you spend your money?
9. Who takes care of you when you're on the street? *(To see if the money is used also for protection.)*
10. Do you have friends? Who are they? What do you like most in X, Y *(names of friends)*? Is there something you don't like about X, Y?
11. Please describe one of your usual days, from when you wake up until you go to sleep.
12. Are there rules you have to respect? *If yes:* Please give me an example of such a rule. What happens if you don't respect the rules?
13. Tell me about the hardest moment you lived since you left home.
14. How about the nicest moment?
15. How do people behave with you (e.g. when you beg)? *(Please describe. How would you like for people to treat you?)*
16. How would you like to spend your time?

V. The child's health

17. When were you last sick? What happened to you? Who took care of you? How did you get well?
18. What do you do when you get sick?
19. Do you smoke? What do you usually smoke? How about glue or other things? *(To investigate how often and what substances).* How do you feel when you smoke/smell glue/take drugs?

VI. Services for the child

20. Do you have identification documents (birth certificate, identity card)?
If yes: Where is your ID?
If not: Do you think you would need this? What for? Why is it that you don't have an ID?
21. Has anyone, a person or an institution, helped you so far? How? What did you like/dislike?
22. What do you think about the centres where children live when they don't have where to sleep?
How would you like such a centre to be? Should it have rules? (What rules?) How should people working there treat you? How about the children? What kind of activities would you like to do there? What would you need to feel better there/not to run away?
23. Do you think you need help in life? What would that help be? Who could help you?
24. If you would meet a child your age who would tell you s/he wants to leave home, what would you tell him/her? *(Why?)* Would you send him/her to look for help? Where? *(Why?)*

VII. Perception about the future

25. I will start a sentence now. I will say a few words and I ask you to continue the sentence: "In order to feel protected I need...."
26. I have a blank paper and coloured crayons. Would you please draw the contour of your palms? Write in the palm you drew five wishes corresponding to the five fingers using the colour of your choice for each wish. If the child cannot write: You tell me your wishes and the colours I should use and I write it.
During writing, the child will be encouraged to verbalize about how/what s/he writes.

Closing

27. Thank you for accepting to talk with me and for your courage. How did you find this conversation?
28. Is there anything you would like to add? Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Thank you again!

Annex no. 3 – Parents' interview guide

This interview guide is preceded by the research presentation and by signing the consent form. Both documents are handed to the participant to keep. A copy of the consent form remains with the researcher.

.....

I. Personal information

1. What is your name?
2. *For the parents:* How many grades have you graduated? Do you have a job? What do you work? How many children do you have? Are you married? (history of relationships)
3. *For other persons:* How do you know X (the child)? What can you tell me about his/her family?

II. Child(ren)'s history

4. Tell me about X: what is his/her age? How was s/he when s/he was a small child? When did s/he start leaving home? How did you find out about this? Why do you think s/he left home?
5. If you would describe him/her in a few words, what would those be?

III. Intervention for the child(ren)

6. How did you react when you found out s/he spends his/her time on the street?
 7. Did you call/ask for help? From who? What happened? If you could turn back time, would you do something different? What would you do?
 8. *For the parents if the child is in a placement centre:* Do you visit him/her? How often? How did s/he react when you first went to visit? What do you talk about? Do you think s/he has changed? How do you see your child in five years from now?
 9. What do you think it should be done for the children who are on the streets? Who should do this?
 10. What can be done so other children would not reach the streets?
-

Thank you for the interview.

How did you find it?

Is there something you would like to add?

Do you wish to ask me something (else) about this research?

Thank you!

Annex no. 4 – Consent form: professionals

CONSENT FORM

Before taking part in the research, please check the information I have given you and tick the boxes by the sentences below if you agree with what it says. Please sign this form if you are willing to take part in this research.

I was clearly informed about this research and what it involves and I have had an opportunity to ask questions

I give my consent for everything that I say to be used in the study but only on the condition that my name is not mentioned and that I am not identified in any way.

I have been informed that all information I provide will be confidential. This means it will not be shared with anyone with one single exception (*see the line below*)

I understand that if I say something about a child or any other person that has been or may be abused or if I say something that may endanger the security of the person, this information will have to be passed to the appropriate authorities.

I understand that I can refuse to take part in this research, not answer any questions I don't want to or drop out of the study at any time I wish.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Annex no. 5 – Consent form parents

CONSENT FORM

Before taking part in the research, please check the information I have given you and tick the boxes by the sentences below if you agree with what it says. Please sign this form if you are willing to take part in this research.

I was clearly informed about this research and what it involves and I have had an opportunity to ask questions

I give my consent for everything that I say to be used in the study but only on the condition that my name is not mentioned and that I am not identified in any way.

I have been informed that all information I provide will be confidential. This means it will not be shared with anyone with one single exception (*see the line below*)

I understand that if I say something about a child or any other person that has been or may be abused or if I say something that may endanger the security of the person, this information will have to be passed to the appropriate authorities.

I understand that I can refuse to take part in this research, not answer any questions I don't want to or drop out of the study at any time I wish.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Annex no. 6 – Participation agreement: children

PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

Before taking part in the research, please check the information I have given you and tick the boxes by the sentences below if you agree with what it says. Please sign this form if you are willing to take part in this research.

I was clearly informed about this research and what it involves and I have had an opportunity to ask questions

I give my consent for everything that I say to be used in the study but only on the condition that my name is not mentioned and that I am not identified in any way.

I have been informed that all information I provide will be confidential. This means it will not be shared with anyone with one single exception (*see the line below*)

I understand that if I say something about a child or any other person that has been or may be abused or if I say something that may endanger the security of the prison, this information will have to be passed to the appropriate authorities.

I understand that I can refuse to take part in this research, not answer any questions I don't want to or drop out of the study at any time I wish.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

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