Children’s Report on the respect of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Chișinău, 2012
Child rights monitored by children report was published within the „Save, strong and free – a better system to protect children in Moldova” project, implemented by CRIC in partnership with NCCAP, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Internal Affairs, District Councils from Leova and Orhei, and with the financial support of UNICEF Moldova and OAK Foundation.

The whole report was produced by 74 children, members of the Child Rights Working Groups (CRWG) together with the members of the Children’s Reflection Group on the National Strategy for Child and Family Protection.

The first part of the report was developed by 51 members of CRWG who monitored the implementation of child rights to education, protection against abuse and violence and participation in their schools and communities during 14 months. Each right was monitored according to a list of indicators, developed by the group members. The rights to education and protection were monitored using the observation method. To collect data on the right to participation, children used a guide they had developed to interview the seven identified sources.

CRWG mission is to monitor the way child rights are respected in communities and to inform duty bearers, including local and central public administration, about the level of their implementation. Also, CRWG present children’s vision on measures to be taken, to help professional working with children in different fields to improve social services provided to children and family.

The second part of the report was written by 23 children, members of the Reflection Group, representatives of the Children’s Consultative Councils from Călărași, Făleşti, Ungheni districts, of the CRWG from Leova and Orhei districts, children-mediators from Călărași district, graduates from residential institution, and volunteers in organization supporting persons with disabilities from Chișinău.

The report includes children’s conclusions together with their recommendations regarding the improvement of access to education and its quality, prevention and support services for children who suffered from of abuse and violence, as well as on how children’s opinion could be taken into account in decision making processes in family, school, social services, and community. As well, the report includes children’s vision on the draft of the National Strategy for Child and Family Protection, which includes arguments for each of the five priority areas for children, where authorities’ intervention is required.

The report addresses duty bearers, responsible for child rights respect, protection and implementation at all levels: members of the Parliament, Ministries, Local Public Authorities, school administration, members of the multidisciplinary teams (teachers, doctors and medical staff, social workers, psychologists, police) and other professionals working with children.

The report was first presented within the National Children’s Forum from November 2012. During the event, the report authors passed it to the authorities responsible for respect, protection and implementation of child rights: representatives of the Parliament, members of the National Child Rights Protection Council, representatives of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, international communities, civil society, and media. Previously, parts of the report have been presented to the representatives of the district Departments for Education and schools administration from Leova and Orhei districts.
RIGHT TO EDUCATION. MAIN FINDINGS

Access to education

- There are children who do not attend the school because are afraid to be labelled or discriminated for various reasons (financial situation in the family, parent’s reputation, marks etc.) or emotionally abused by other pupils or teachers.
- Children with physical disabilities do not come to school because it is not equipped properly, but also other pupils and teachers are not prepared to accept them.
- Many roma children come to school rarely or not at all because parents force them to work or do not have enough resources to buy their children clothing, shoes, school supplies.
- Sometimes money is collected in the school for classroom/school renovation, current expenses (chalk, cattle, broom etc.), multiplication of handouts, help for classmates in need etc. There are children who are pressed, teased, humiliated and discriminated by other pupils or some teachers because their families cannot afford these expenses.

Physical conditions

- Although some schools are renovated and the furniture is new, in most of the cases, it is old, broken, insufficient or its size does not correspond to pupils age, e.g. adolescents use desks for primary school pupils.
- Most of the chemistry, physics, and biology laboratories are equipped with old kit, insufficient or expired reagents, which endanger children’s health, create difficulties in understanding the information and make lessons not attractive.
- Computers available in the school are old, damaged and not enough (one for 2-4 children).
- Gyms do not always correspond to hygienic requirements: small space, bad ventilation, high humidity, rotten floor, old, broken or not at all equipment.
- The temperature in the classrooms varies between 4-8oC and 20-25oC during the winter.
- In most cases, the toilets for children are outside the schools, sometimes quite remote. This causes pupils to be late for classes, their intimacy is not respected and they feel unsecured and in danger. Moreover, toilets are cold and are not supplied with running water and soap.
- In some schools, pupils face difficulties regarding school lunch: the canteen is not adapted to cook for a big number of pupils, thus they provide food only for the primary school. In the same time, older pupils are not allowed to leave the school in case they want to buy food from the nearby shops.
- In some schools children are not provided medical assistance – either there is no medical staff, medical facility, medication, or the nurse does not respect the working program.
Contents of the education

- Mostly teachers follow automatically the curriculum, without adapting the information to the children’s real needs, such as dealing with emotions, choosing a career, preparing for family life, interpersonal relationships, personal hygiene, nutrition etc. Some of these important subjects for children’s development are discussed too little and only within civic education, ethics, biology and educational hours.

- Very often pupils do not understand the meaning of what they learn, they are not explained how the thought information relates to their everyday life. The subjects based on practical work, such as technological education, help children better prepare for life and understand the content.

- Teachers do not coordinate with each other the tasks they give to pupils. Because each of them believes that their subject is the most important, pupils get overloaded with big amounts of homework. This takes children a lot of time and energy; they get tired of this process and do not have enough time to rest, play and communicate with their friends. As well, this is a reason why many pupils are not able to follow the rhythm and give up, losing their motivation to study.

- Activities on child rights have been organized in some schools. One can notice that pupils became more interested in this subject and try not to violate each other’s rights in those schools.

Teaching Methods

- Most teachers are well prepared to teach their subject. But there are some who teach a subject without having a specialization on it. This is why they often have difficulties to explain definitions and pupils do not understand the lesson.

- Sometimes teachers do not use the available equipment to teach classes because they do not know how to do it.

- There is a big number of retired teachers in each school. They mostly use an old language and terms that are out of use. They have a low motivation and the teaching methods they use are based on reproduction, without responding to children’s needs.

- Some interactive teaching methods are used within civic education, history and optional courses (ethics, life skills, professional orientation).

- Very often teachers hold pupils during the break. This prevents children from having a rest, relax, prepare before the next class, fulfil their needs and makes them be late for other classes. This often leads to conflicts with teachers.

- Teachers frequently use violence when children make mistakes or do not understand something, e.g. call them bad names, slap, throw their personal objects, humiliate them, use different kind of punishments.
Children’s opinion in educational process

- Some teachers ask pupils’ opinion what they liked about the lesson, while others refuse to ask children’s feedback.

- Children’s preferences are partly taken into account when it comes to choosing optional subjects. On one hand, some teachers are too busy and cannot take the courses pupils and parents ask for. On the other hand, teachers who do not reach a certain amount of hours, press pupils to apply for their optional subject, promising bigger marks at the mandatory subject.

Interpersonal relations and communication

- There are few teachers pupils trust and with whom can discuss freely on any topics.

- Usually teachers do not explain what criteria they use to mark pupils and the last feel they are not being correctly appreciated.

- The communication between pupils and teachers varies depending on the teachers’ mood or their relationship with pupil’s parents.

- Very often teachers mistreat pupils who disagree with them and have a different opinion. Pupils are teased, threatened, ignored, mocked at, asked difficult question and then given low marks.

- In some schools, the educational reform brought about an increased number of pupils because classes have merged. This created new communication difficulties among pupils and between pupils and teachers.

- Some teachers talk about child rights but in the same time, they do not admit that they also violate them, e.g. calling pupils bad names or other ways of public humiliation, applying verbal and physical violence against children.

- Although teachers claim, that their attitude is the same for all children, pupils often feel discriminated: there are teachers who pay more attention to students who are the best, who are their relatives or come from wellbeing families. Pupils coming to study from rural area to town or from one village to another are humiliated and discriminated by local children and teachers.

- Usually pupils who have lower school results have more problems in their communication with teachers.

- Open communication between children, parents and teachers does not exist. In most cases, parents are not aware about the conflicts happening between pupils and teachers because children do not tell their parents about it; they are afraid of making the situation even worse or of being blamed by their own parents for everything that happened.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Local authorities should allocate financial resources for schools’ and classrooms’ renovation, gyms’ and laboratories equipment, procurement of furniture corresponding with pupils’ physical development and number. This should include adapting school space to the needs of children with disabilities, including children’s and adults preparation to accept them. Public-private partnership should be encouraged.
2. Social workers should be more involved in supporting vulnerable families to ensure children’s schooling. Authorities should monitor how children in need benefit from social aid ensuring the confidentiality.

3. Curriculum and programs should be adapted to help teachers work with children with different capacities.

4. Children’s requests regarding school lunch should be taken into account. School administration together with local authorities should examine possibilities to provide pupils with food in school.

5. The practical character of learning should be ensured. School curriculum should be based on children’s real life.

6. Teachers should be encouraged to talk to the representatives of the Ministry of Education responsible for the development of the curriculum about the difficulties they and pupils face in the educational process.

7. Child rights should be integrated into all school subjects. This should include the revision of school regulations in order to ensure a balance between rights and obligations.

8. Teachers should be trained on different issues and on how to use interactive methods allowing to involve all pupils in the educational process.

RIGHT TO BE PROTECTED AGAINST ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

Information

- There is little information on violence. Lessons related to violence prevention are included in the program within the civic education or educational hour, but they are few, especially in the primary school. The provided information is general, not clear for all children and refers more to physical violence and verbal abuse. The sexual abuse is tackled rarely or not at all.

- Very often these lessons are formal, of poor teaching quality, not interesting, and do not bring any positive results, because children do not understand how to protect themselves.

- There are not enough informative materials on violence prevention for different categories of professionals and parents. Mostly they are produced by NGOs. Some materials are in the school, but parents do not access them because they do not know it is there or come rarely to school. Teachers do not use informative materials on child rights in the teaching process, as they believe children have first obligations and then, rights.
Teaching methods

- Overall, children do not feel protected in the school. There are teachers who use violence against children but also case of abuse between children. There are no regulations to ensure equal opportunities and protection.
- Teachers use violence as punishments because pupils are late, make mistakes, miss classes, are not prepared, or are not focused during classes. For instance, they yell, throw different staff at pupils, humiliate them, call them bad names, do not allow them to enter the room, punch them, force them sit on their knees, do physical exercises or stand all the lesson holding up their bag, force them clean the classroom or the corridor during one month etc..
- Teachers use these methods of „discipline” because they believe that in such way pupils will be better educated and will learn how to behave well.

Services

- In most villages there are no abuse prevention centres providing services for abused children. Where they exist, children do not access them for various reasons: lack of information, fear that the violence might repeat, believe that they are guilty and are parents’ or teachers’ property and, thus it is good that they had been beaten. Children do not trust in such services because there were cases when professionals did not take them seriously nor respected confidentiality.
- Children who suffered from abuse and violence would rather tell to a friend about what happened to them, than to address the social worker or other services.
- In some schools there are “teachers of trust”, who are careful and ask children what happened.
- There is no hotline where children could get consultation. Besides, there are children who do not have a phone.

Professionals and complaining procedures

- Even though professionals have been trained, they do not use the knowledge they have received. Moreover, there are cases when they are the ones who use violence against children.
- Some teachers do not want to readdress the cases of abuse because they think they will have to do additional work, which they are not paid for.
- There is no data on the number of children’s complaints because in most cases they are not registered or not given due attention because “it is not a serious case”.
- Children do not know about the complaining procedures which exist in the community. In some schools they use direct communication with “trust teachers” or school mailbox for anonymous letters.
- There are cases when the abuser and police officer threaten children who want to make a complaint.
Places where children are abused

- The most frequent and severe forms of abuse take place in school: classrooms, outdoor toilets, schools corridors, gym, locker room, school backyard, park, etc. Most often violence between pupils takes place after classes and during breaks. Sometimes children are abused in the family and even in the street (unattended places).

- Older children use violence against younger children. Ethnicity is one of the reasons (roma children). Usually teachers do not take any measures in such cases.

Education measures applied by parents

- Most parents are not prepared and do not know how to proceed when children disobey or do not do what they want. To discipline children parents use different punishments, e.g. beating, punching, hitting, yelling, bad language, isolation, not talking, exploitation by work etc. Some parents punish their children at home while others do it in public, in front of teachers and peers.

- Young children are punished more by hitting while adolescents by interdictions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Civic education and educational hour curricula should be revised in order to introduce more classes about violence prevention.

2. More accessible ways through which children could complain should be established in schools, clinics, mayor’s office, street and other public places.

3. Informative materials for children professionals about all kinds of abuse, tolerance, equality should be printed and distributed. They have to be attractive and use a simple language.

4. Trainings on prevention, identification, reporting and readdressing cases of abuse should be organized periodically and for all categories of professionals working with children: from nurses to the staff of district departments for education. Parents and future parents should be thought that there are more efficient ways of educating children than the beating. They need counselling, support, and information about child rights.

5. To reduce teachers’ violence against children, better working conditions should be created for teachers: smaller groups of children, provision of psychological help. Teachers who use violence should be sanctioned. Representatives of the district education departments, members of the CRWG, parents, civil society representatives should closely monitor teachers’ activity.

6. Children should be informed where they can get help in case of abuse. Trustworthy persons should be trained to help and assist children victims of abuse. They can be from a local NGO, the psychologist, the librarian or somebody else.

7. Special budget line should be allocated for child abuse prevention, including complaining mechanism, professionals’ training, school activities, informative materials, help services etc.
RIGHT TO BE LISTENED TO AND PARTICIPATION

Children’s opinion in different settings

- In the family parents take most decisions and children’s opinion is not taken into account. Sometimes, children are consulted in matters like choosing the place for vacation or the school.
- Very often teachers take decisions without consulting pupils in order to make their work easier and save time.
- Children don’t take any decisions in the community because adults say children do not have any relation to the community or to the decisions of the Mayor’s Office.
- Only some teachers ask pupils about the organization of the lesson and consider their views.
- Children are not prepared to take part in decision making processes in family, school, community. Except for some subjects were this topic is tackled superficially (civic education, educational hour), nobody prepares children to participate in decision-making processes. These hours are neither enough, nor efficient, because they are based on theory.
- Groups of children monitoring child rights is an efficient and practical method to prepare children to participate and help them express their opinion.

Pupils’ Councils (PC)

- In most schools, PC’s are formal, exist only on paper. Their function is not clear and neither its members nor other pupils know exactly what it has to do. Sometimes school administration or teachers name PC’s members, even if pupils have other preferences. Only in singular cases, PC’s members are trained to work but usually there is nobody to care about it. Therefore, PC’s are not involved when important decisions for school life are taken, do not have a real influence and their voice is not taken into account. They mostly organize concerts, contests and other events.
- In some schools, PC’s have a room where they meet, keep their materials, but most of them meet in a free classroom or teacher’s lounge during the break.
- Usually school administration does not allocate finances for PC’s activity, but there were cases when they offered materials or human resources for organizing some activities.
- Many ideas coming from the PC’s are rejected because schools do not have financial resources. There are cases when children buy materials on their own or organize discos to collect money.
- Usually the PC’s adult coordinator is the school’s deputy director. In some cases, PC members are satisfied by her activity, and in others they do not feel his or her presence or even do not know who their adult coordinator is.
- In most cases communication between PC’s and pupils is chaotic, indirect (through form teachers, deputy principals etc.) and does not take place permanently, on regular basis. Pupils say that PC’s activity is not transparent.
Adults’ appreciation of children’s involvement

- There are parents who think child participation is good for their development; children learn how to take decisions, become more independent. However, many parents believe that extracurricular activities are a lost of time because they do not see immediate results, school program is overloaded and these activities do not help children at school programme. Some parents do not allow their children to involve in different activities or projects because they think their child does not need it (“he won’t become a minister anyway”).
- There are supportive teachers who encourage children participating in projects or activities, but many do not like it because students miss classes. Often teachers tease them.
- Often teachers involve the same pupils in several activities and projects, which prevent other pupils to participate.
- There are no professionals trained in the field of child participation and there are no informative materials on child participation and right to opinion for different categories of professionals (teachers, doctors, police officers, social workers).

Children participating in adults’ meetings

- Usually pupils are not invited to or informed about school meetings. There are rare cases when the monitor of the class, PC members, children involved in projects or other pupils are invited to participate in parent’s or school administration meetings, where school’s problems or renovation are discussed. Children who have a difficult behaviour are invited to teachers’ meetings for reprehension.
- Other meetings where children participate happen sporadically, children are invited there formally, are not prepared on the topic and not informed about the results of the meeting.

Extracurricular activity

- Extracurricular activities are organized at teachers’ initiative.
- Only few extracurricular activities are organized to help children relax, develop their capacities, and communicate with peers. There are schools where only a single sport club functions, most of other existing clubs have old equipment, lack conditions but children go there because do not have any other choice.
- Some pupils do not attend extracurricular activities because they have many household chores, or the timetable is not convenient: most of them start after 2 pm, after lessons finish, pupils are tired and hungry and have homework to do.
- There are cases when teachers force children to attend clubs for different reasons, e.g. to have a sufficient number of children in order to avoid club’s closure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Parents, teachers and other community members should be explained the benefits of participation and trained to learn how to listen to children of different age and consider their opinion.
2. More lessons on child participation should be introduced within the civic education and other subjects to help children learn about participation in decision making processes at all levels. Participation should be learned by doing practical activities, e.g. encouraging pupils to establish working groups and express their opinion, supporting pupils’ initiatives and ideas etc.

3. Pupils’ Councils, as permanent and not formal bodies, should be established in each school in result of a real participation process, by consulting and involving all pupils. Each school should develop together with pupils’ representatives clear regulations on the establishment and functioning of the PC: number and composition, election procedure, structure, functions of the members, meetings’ timetable, communication with other pupils etc. A teacher should be appointed to coordinate CP’s training and activity. Financial resources from the school budget should be allocated for CP’s activity, including a room.

4. School administration and local authorities should regularly invite children at their meeting to consult their opinion regarding problems that affect them. Children should be informed in due time, more children have to be prepared to participate in such events (how to communicate with adults, to make their problems and suggestions heard), but also adults have to be trained in order to organise such meetings (talking an accessible language, creating a friendly environment etc.). Children should be informed about the results of the meeting and how their opinion was taken into account.

5. Informative materials on child right to be heard should be published for children of different age and for adults. They should include what is participation, how to help children participate, standards for real participation, benefits for children and for parents, professionals and community.

6. Pupils should be consulted about their needs and involved in solving school problems and managing its budget.

7. Children should be consulted before the establishment of extracurricular activities to see what their needs and interests are, what activities they prefer, convenient timetable etc.
CHILDREN’S VIEW ON THE PRIORITIES OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR CHILD AND FAMILY PROTECTION

Social and educational inclusion of all children, including those with special needs and ethnic minorities:
- Inclusion of children with special needs and minorities in the society (counseling, training, preparation)
- Correct distribution of the resources for the vulnerable families and those having children with disabilities
- Adaptation of the schools and school programs to the needs of children with special needs
- Ensuring accessibility of all public institutions
- All the institutions need to be adapted for children with special needs, public space should be supplied with equipment
- Special programs need to be developed in schools to train and evaluate children with disabilities
- Creation of job places for children with special needs
- Prevention of the drop out through training, medical support for children with special needs
- Improving the legislation for child and family protection, taking as example the developed countries
- Extracurricular activities should be organized for free and accessible

Building a protective family environment:
- Correct distribution of the budget and controlling the distribution of the budget and material support to beneficiaries
- Child adoption system should be easier and faster
- To create centers where parents and children would get psychological support
- Supporting the family to educate and raise its children, so that children stay in the family
- More social workers trained on child rights
- All the alternative care for children without parental care should provide a family type environment
- Improving the social assistance services for the families
- Growing the number of social workers and offering competitive salaries in order to motivate them
- Monitoring the social workers to see if their do their job properly
- Private sector should provide jobs
- The professionals responsible for data collection and monitoring should present the real data
- School and medical institutions should be supplied with equipment accessible for all children

Prevention and protection from social risks of children left behind by migrating parents:
- Professionals should be trained to communicate and support children left behind, they should have clear data on children left behind and report to the authorities
- Social workers should monitor the situation of children left behind, provide them with psychological support and extracurricular activities
- Public authorities need to be informed and take responsibility of children left behind
**Prevention of abuse against children and protection of victims of abuse, neglect and labor exploitation:**
- Teachers should be trained to identify and report cases of abuse
- The penalties should be increased for the abusers and monitoring of the application
- Informational activities should be carried out in schools on the prevention of abuse
- Parents should be trained to educate their children without abuse and help them solve the conflict without violence
- Children should be trained not to be scares of saying “I was abused”
- Developing social services for children victims of abuse
- Evaluate the hot line and inform the society about it

**Fighting child labor exploitation:**
- More jobs for parents in order to prevent the involvement of children in labor
- Increase salaries
- Training parents in order to prevent children from labor
- Children to be involve in appropriate labor, not to interfere with education and free time
- Serious penalties for those who involve children in labor
- Creation of schools, kindergartens, health centers, shops in the communities of ethnic minorities
- Monitoring without prior notice the private sector about involvement of children in labor