

## INTEGRATED SOCIAL SERVICES FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN IN RISKY SITUATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA THROUGH THE LENS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

**Cristina COROBAN<sup>1</sup>**

---

**Abstract:** The article presents integrated social services for children as an essential element in the protection and well-being of vulnerable children in the Republic of Moldova. Integrated social services take a coordinated approach, combining interventions from health, education, social protection and legal support. They address the complex needs of children at risk, including separated children, children affected by poverty and children with disabilities. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relevant for Moldova from the perspective of integrated social services are: eradicating poverty (SDG 1), ensuring health and well-being (SDG 3), ensuring quality education (SDG 4), reducing inequalities (SDG 10); promoting justice and inclusion (SDG 16) and strengthening partnerships (SDG 17). The SDGs form a comprehensive set that ensure sustainable development in Moldova and contribute to improving the quality of life including for people in vulnerable groups.

**Keywords:** integrated social services for children, vulnerable children, children in risky situations, sustainable development goals

**Résumé :** L'article présente les services sociaux intégrés pour les enfants comme un élément essentiel de la protection et du bien-être des enfants vulnérables en République de Moldavie. Les services sociaux intégrés adoptent une approche coordonnée, combinant des interventions dans les domaines de la santé, de l'éducation, de la protection sociale et du soutien juridique. Ils répondent aux besoins complexes des enfants à risque, y compris les enfants séparés, les enfants touchés par la pauvreté et les enfants handicapés. Les objectifs de développement durable (ODD) pertinents pour la Moldavie du point de vue des services sociaux intégrés sont les suivants : éradiquer la pauvreté (ODD 1), assurer la santé et le bien-être (ODD 3), assurer une éducation de qualité (ODD 4), réduire les inégalités (ODD 10), promouvoir la justice et l'inclusion (ODD 16) et renforcer les partenariats (ODD 17). Les ODD forment un ensemble complet qui garantit le développement durable en Moldavie et contribue à l'amélioration de la qualité de vie, y compris pour les personnes appartenant à des groupes vulnérables.

**Mots-clés :** services sociaux intégrés pour les enfants, enfants vulnérables, enfants en situation de risque, objectifs de développement durable

---

<sup>1</sup> University assistant, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Moldova State University, Republic of Moldova, Chişinău, 65 M. Kogălniceanu Street, cristina.coroban@usm.md

**Rezumat:** Articolul prezintă serviciile sociale integrate pentru copii ca un element esențial în protecția și bunăstarea copiilor vulnerabili din Republica Moldova. Serviciile sociale integrate adoptă o abordare coordonată, combinând intervenții din domenii precum sănătatea, educația, protecția socială și suportul juridic. Ele vizează nevoile complexe ale copiilor aflați în situații de risc, inclusiv cei separați de părinți, cei afectați de sărăcie și copiii cu dizabilități. Obiectivele de Dezvoltare Durabilă (ODD) relevante pentru R. Moldova din perspectiva serviciilor sociale integrate sunt: eradicarea sărăciei (ODD1), asigurarea sănătății și bunăstării (ODD 3), garantarea educației de calitate (ODD 4), reducerea inegalităților (ODD 10); promovarea justiției și incluziunii (ODD 16) și consolidarea parteneriatelor (ODD 17). ODD-urile formează un set complet ce asigură dezvoltarea durabilă în Moldova și contribuie la îmbunătățirea calității vieții inclusiv pentru persoanele din grupuri vulnerabile.

**Cuvinte cheie:** serviciile sociale integrate pentru copii, copii vulnerabili, copiilor aflați în situații de risc, obiective de dezvoltare durabilă

## 1. Introduction

Integrated social services for children represent an essential pillar in the protection and assurance of the well-being of vulnerable children, offering a holistic and coordinated approach to meet the complex needs of children. Social services for families and children at risk in the Republic of Moldova combine interventions from various fields such as health, education, social protection, and legal support, to provide solutions adapted to children in vulnerable situations, such as those separated from their parents, affected by poverty, or with disabilities. The provision of integrated social services for children aims to prevent social exclusion and marginalization, ensuring a support environment that facilitates harmonious development and active participation in community life (Goodwin, 2021). A fundamental aspect of integrated social services is the intersectoral collaboration between public institutions and non-governmental organizations, ensuring that children and their families receive multidisciplinary and personalized support.

## 2. Theoretical Perspective

The European social network conceptualizes the first definitions of integrated social services, where integrated social services are a coordinated system of interventions aimed at vulnerable groups, seeking to offer an adapted response to the needs of beneficiaries through collaboration between various sectors, such as health, education, social assistance, and legal services. The purpose of integrated social services is to prevent social exclusion and to facilitate inclusion and well-being through a holistic approach to the issues faced by beneficiaries (European Social Network, 2016). Isabelle Natalina Fabbriotti highlights the importance of coordinated actions at various levels to ensure efficient and beneficiary-centered care (Fabbriotti, 2006). Children's needs can be addressed effectively through an integrated approach, which prevents institutionalization and offers alternatives for community-based care, promoting social inclusion and

improving the quality of life for vulnerable children, through long-term development-oriented interventions and the realization of fundamental rights.

In the context of developing integrated social services for children, the Republic of Moldova has ratified a series of international normative acts concerning children's rights. These include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1993, and its optional protocols regarding children's involvement in armed conflicts, ratified in 2004, and the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography, ratified in 2007. Additionally, Moldova ratified the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding the communications procedure on May 5, 2022. This protocol allows children to file complaints with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child if they believe their rights have been violated and no solution has been found at the national level, either individually or through legal representatives. The protocol serves as a tool for investigating severe or systemic violations of children's rights (Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the procedure of communication, 2022). The 54 articles of the Convention cover essential issues, such as every child's need for a family and protection from discrimination, regardless of factors such as gender, age, or religion. The state has the responsibility to ensure the conditions and resources for the healthy growth and education of children, while the child services must comply with the norms established, particularly in the areas of safety and health. According to the Convention, both parents have shared responsibility for raising and developing the child, and the state must oversee the enforcement of this principle. The state is also obligated to protect children from violence, harm, and physical or psychological abuse, including within the family. The right to full health and access to health services are recognized as fundamental rights of the child, with an emphasis on primary and preventive care. The Ministry of Social Protection, Family, and Children plays a key role in ensuring the respect of children's rights and in implementing legislative tools for social progress and human rights within European democracies.

Through the ratification of the Association Agreement with the European Union, as provided by Law no. 112 of July 2, 2014, the legal basis for the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union was established. Upon signing this agreement, our country committed to ensuring a balanced and adjusted social policy according to the current conditions. Article 151 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) outlines the objectives of the EU's social policy: promoting employment, improving living and working conditions, equal treatment of workers, providing adequate social protection according to needs, fostering social dialogue, and developing human resources to enable high and sustainable levels of employment and combat exclusion (EUR-Lex. Social policy). Thus, public policies should aim to ensure an adequate level of welfare and social security for all members of society. Harmonizing the regulatory framework of the Republic of Moldova with the European system and raising the living standards of

citizens in difficult situations represent the primary challenge for all institutions in the Republic of Moldova.

Most of the international commitments have been transposed into the national legislative and regulatory framework for the protection of children's rights. In this regard, we note:

The legislation in the Republic of Moldova in the field of child protection and social services reflects a constant concern for the welfare of children and vulnerable families, being periodically updated to respond to the current needs of society. These are outlined in:

- The Family Code no. 1316 of October 26, 2000, which establishes the legal foundations for family relations and child protection, emphasizing the importance of ensuring a safe and adequate environment for their development.
- Law no. 370 of November 30, 2023, on children's rights, which establishes the principles and procedures for the protection of children's rights, placement in foster families, and other protective measures.
- Law no. 547 of December 25, 2003, on social assistance and Law no. 123 of June 18, 2010, on social services, which complement the general framework for social assistance and services, highlighting the state's role in supporting vulnerable categories of the population.
- Law no. 121 of May 3, 2001, regarding the supplementary social protection of certain population categories and Law no. 315 of December 23, 2016, on social benefits for children, which clarify legal aspects related to allowances and indemnities granted to families and children in difficult situations.
- Other successive government decisions, such as Decision no. 1478 of November 15, 2002, on indemnities for families with children, and Decision no. 409 of April 9, 1998, regarding the approval of the Regulations of the National Council for the Protection of Children's Rights, regulate the provision of indemnities and support for children, consolidating a legal and procedural framework to ensure equitable access to necessary resources for their protection and development.

Currently, the National Program for Child Protection for the years 2022-2026, which gives special attention to a systemic approach, is being implemented to ensure the relevance of the policy document (National Child Protection Program for 2022-2026). The programme includes the development of change theory, participatory identification and selection of priority intervention areas, estimating the necessary resources for implementation, and developing a monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanism. The action plan for its implementation is aligned with the National Development Strategy „Moldova 2030,” which is also focused on ensuring a solid and inclusive social protection system and a balance between work and family, addressing the challenges of the social assistance system and the conclusions drawn in the analysis of the „Mid-Term

Evaluation of the Implementation of the Child Protection Strategy for 2014-2020 and the Action Plan for 2016-2020.” (The government of the Republic of Moldova on the approval of the draft law on the approval of National Development Strategy „Moldova 2030”).

The three proposed general objectives provide a new approach to setting development priorities for the child protection system:

1. The child protection system responds promptly and efficiently to the needs of each child.
2. Adults and children manifest zero tolerance toward any form of violence against children.
3. Children grow up in a safe and protective family environment that ensures their well-being (National Development Strategy of Social Services for Children and Families 2022-2025, 2022).

The impact of the National Program is expected to improve all areas of children's welfare, including reference to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To effectively address the complex challenges faced by families and children in risk situations, an integrated and multisectoral approach is necessary. Therefore, cross-sector collaboration in education, health, justice, and social assistance is essential to provide coherent and coordinated support. While the Republic of Moldova has made significant progress in providing social services, major challenges still exist that hinder the full achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a strategic framework for developing sustainable and effective social policies aimed at supporting vulnerable families and children in Moldova. Key SDGs include:

- **SDG 1:** Eradicating poverty in all forms, with social services playing a key role in poverty reduction. Social services have a prioritar rol in reducing poverty by providing material, financial and psychological suport for families and children at-risk, contributing to the prevention and reduction of extreme poverty.
- **SDG 3:** Ensuring good health and well-being for all. Integrated social services promote access to medical care, psychological support, and the creation of a healthy environment for vulnerable children and families, contributing to the improvement of overall health and well-being.
- **SDG 4:** Guaranteeing quality education and lifelong learning. Social services facilitate access for vulnerable children to quality education, preventing school abandonment and supporting their academic development. Education is essential for preventing social exclusion and providing equal opportunities for all. Additionally, in the Republic of Moldova, parenting education programs have been developed and implemented in recent periods, facilitating lifelong learning.
- **SDG 10:** Reducing inequalities within and among countries. Serviciile sociale integrate sunt esențiale pentru reducerea inegalităților economice

și sociale, asigurând acces echitabil la resurse și oportunități pentru toate familiile și copiii, indiferent de mediul lor de proveniență.

- **SDG 16:** Promoting peaceful, inclusive societies and access to justice. In this context, the development of integrated social services is a major challenge for the Republic of Moldova. The fragmentation of social services and the lack of effective coordination between sectors (education, health, social protection) hinder the provision of integrated support for families and children. Another difficulty in developing integrated services is the development of professional capacity among service providers and improving collaboration between the institutions involved, as confirmed by the study „Needs of social service providers in relation to children separated from parents and children in risk situations” conducted in 2015 by Diana Cheianu-Andrei (Cheianu-Andrei, 2015).
- **SDG 17:** Partnerships for the Goals emphasize the need for international collaboration to mobilize additional resources. The approach supports the development of sustainable and equitable solutions for providing social services to vulnerable groups, contributing to broader social inclusion. Social services in Moldova face a severe lack of financial and human resources, limiting the ability to deliver uniform and quality services for all at-risk children nationwide. The study „Social services for people with intellectual and psycho-social disabilities and children from vulnerable groups” by Ludmila Ciocan highlights major challenges such as limited access to services, lack of specialized personnel, insufficient funding, and uneven territorial distribution of services (Ciocan, 2018).

A synthesis of the Sustainable Development Goals framework, which outlines strategic support for social policies for vulnerable families and children in Moldova, is represented graphically in the next figure:



**Figure 1.** Support for families and children at risk in Moldova through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Source: The author in the documentation process

These goals emphasize addressing Moldova's challenges, including service fragmentation, inadequate resources, and the need for improved inter-sectoral coordination.

Although there are numerous challenges, the 2030 Agenda also provides important opportunities for improving social services for families and children at risk in Moldova:

- The development of new intervention models, including community-based services and digital platforms for counseling and support, could contribute to expanding access and the efficiency of social services.
- Partnerships with international organizations and external donors represent an important source of funding and expertise for developing and improving social services.
- Another essential aspect is the active involvement of local communities in the decision-making process and implementation of social programs. This ensures the sustainability and relevance of the services provided, directly contributing to their success.

To create and implement an integrated service model in the Republic of Moldova that includes social assistance, education, healthcare, and psychological counseling, evaluating effectiveness is crucial. Evaluation helps understand the impact of social services on vulnerable communities to ensure that the needs of families and children at risk are met sustainably. The expertise of those involved can help identify best practices and adjust services to effectively address the SDGs, particularly SDG 1 (poverty), SDG 3 (health), and SDG 4 (education). To this end, we consulted the opinions of five experts through a focus group research. The experts' opinions suggest that: *Evaluation should be based on clearly defined and measurable indicators, such as the accessibility of services for vulnerable families, their involvement in the intervention process, and the improvement of social and educational outcomes for children (FG\_1). An essential tool would be the use of both quantitative methods, such as surveys, and qualitative methods, such as interviews and direct observations, to provide a comprehensive picture of service effectiveness (FG\_3). Evaluation must also involve the opinions of direct beneficiaries, namely children, families, and the community, to obtain relevant feedback (FG\_4). ... The impact evaluation should take into account the costs and benefits of the intervention (FG\_2); ... using available resources to maximize impact on the community (FG\_5). Continuous monitoring of progress is necessary to identify improvements or potential issues that may arise in service implementation and to ensure that they meet the specific needs of vulnerable families (FG\_3). An adaptive approach, which responds in real time to contextual changes and community needs, will contribute to the sustainability of long-term interventions (FG\_6).* The experts' opinions underline the necessity of an adaptive approach in evaluation, one that quickly responds to changes in the community and allows for adjusting interventions based on the local context's evolution.

### 3. The main conclusions reached in the analysis

Integrated social services for families and children at risk in the Republic of Moldova are essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, providing support to the most vulnerable members of society. A systemic and multisectoral approach is necessary to ensure effective interventions that address the complex needs of vulnerable individuals. Implementing these services in line with the SDGs can help reduce inequalities, promote social inclusion, and ensure sustainable development. Integrated social services are a priority for supporting the most vulnerable members of society, such as children facing poverty, discrimination, or lack of access to education and healthcare. A systemic and multisectoral approach is essential, as the needs of vulnerable people are often interconnected and require interventions from various fields. The development of integrated social services for children at risk in line with the SDGs not only contributes to reducing inequalities but also promotes social inclusion through a holistic approach, facilitating the integration of vulnerable children into society and ensuring equal chances for education and harmonious development according to the individual needs of children. The experts' opinions emphasize the need for an adaptive approach in evaluation that quickly responds to community changes and allows for adjusting interventions based on local context evolution.

#### References

1. Cheianu-Andrei, D. (2015). *The needs of social service providers about children separated from parents and children at risk*. Ministry of Labor, Social Protection, and Family, Sociopolis Research and Consulting Center. <https://sociopolis.md/uploads/0/images/large/necesitatile-prestatorilor-de-servicii-sociale.pdf>
2. Ciocan, L. (2018). *Baseline study on social services for individuals with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities and children from vulnerable groups*. Soros Foundation Moldova. <https://incluziune.md/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Studiu-de-tip-baseline-privind-serviciile-sociale-destinate-persoanelor-cu-dizabilități-intelectuale-si-psihosociale-si-copiilor-din-grupuri-vulnerabile.pdf>
3. \*\*\*, *Family Code, No. 1316* from 26-10-2000. [https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=112685&lang=ro](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=112685&lang=ro)
4. EUR-Lex. (n.d.). *Social policy*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/RO/legal-content/glossary/social-policy.html>. Accessed October 4, 2024.
5. European Social Network. (2016). *Integrated social services: European approaches to integrated services*. [https://www.esn-eu.org/sites/default/files/publications/IntegratedServicesReport\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.esn-eu.org/sites/default/files/publications/IntegratedServicesReport_FINAL.pdf)
6. Fabbriotti, I. N. (2007). *Taking care of integrated care: Integration and fragmentation in the development of integrated care arrangements* (Doctoral thesis, Erasmus University of Rotterdam). Optima Grafische Communicatie. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-8559-258-7>
7. Government of the Republic of Moldova. (2022). *National Strategy for the Development of Social Services for Children and Families 2022-2025* (pp. 21-23). Ministry of Labor and Social Protection.
8. Government of the Republic of Moldova. [https://gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/intr40\\_12\\_0.pdf](https://gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/intr40_12_0.pdf). Accessed October 7, 2024.



9. Goodwin, N., Stein, V., & Amelung, V. (2021). What is integrated care? In *Handbook of Integrated Care* (2nd ed., pp. 3–26). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-69262-9\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-69262-9_1)
10. Law No. 370 from 30-11-2023 regarding children's rights. [https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=140710&lang=ro](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=140710&lang=ro)
11. Law No. 547 from 25-12-2003 on social assistance. [https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc\\_id=107485&lang=ro](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=107485&lang=ro)
12. Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding the communication procedure. [https://gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/subiect-14\\_nu\\_189\\_maeie-mmmps\\_2022.pdf](https://gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/subiect-14_nu_189_maeie-mmmps_2022.pdf). Accessed November 16, 2024.
13. National program for child protection for the years 2022-2026 and the action plan for its implementation. [https://cancelaria.gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/325\\_0.pdf](https://cancelaria.gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/325_0.pdf)