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Juvenile Crime Prevention Research Report



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Introduction

Crime committed by juveniles is a complex phenomenon and has many causes. Behavior of juveniles can be influenced by both individual and external factors, such as family, social environment, school space, etc. Therefore, reducing the causes of crime should include working on factors such as poverty, unemployment, low levels of education, social isolation and more. Consequently, in this process, it is extremely important to have coordinated cooperation between state agencies, as well as close communication with non-governmental and business organizations. All this considered, the prevention of juvenile crime should be an important part of the state's criminal policy.

In this regard, serious steps have been taken in Georgia in recent years. In 2009, the Criminal Justice Reform Interagency Coordination Council approved the juvenile justice system reform strategy and action plan, elaborated within the frames of the Juvenile Justice Working Group; the documents are annually updated according to the situation, the results achieved, challenges and future plans. The Juvenile Justice Code was adopted by the Parliament of Georgia in 2015 and its main part came into force on January 1st, 2016.

The study was conducted by the Georgian Center for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT) and Rehabilitation Initiative for Vulnerable Groups (RIVG), within the frames of the project "Contribution to the Process of Successful Implementation of Juvenile Justice Reform", funded by the European Union.

The study focuses on one of the priorities of criminal justice reform strategy - the prevention of juvenile delinquency / crime, it also explores the situation in the country and identifies the existing challenges.

During 2019, the RIVG research team analyzed local and international legislation and standards, as well as public information provided by public agencies working on juvenile issues.

GCRT and RIVG hope that this report will be valuable to all agencies and organizations involved in and / or interested in introduction and implementation of juvenile crime prevention programs.

Research Design

Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of the research was to study the existing legal framework and practice regarding juvenile crime prevention in Georgia and to identify the challenges in this area

Research objectives

1. Review of international standards;
2. Comparative analysis of local legislation and practice with respect to international standards.

Research Methodology

The study is based on the following methodology:

A) Analysis of international standards

An analysis of the international standards referring to the issues of crime prevention was carried out, in particular:

1. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
2. General Comment of the Committee on the Rights of the Child N10 and N14
3. United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (Riyadh Guidelines);
4. Guidelines for Cooperation and Technical Assistance in Preventing Urban Crime;
5. Guidelines for Crime Prevention of the United Nations Economic and Social Council;
6. United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice ("Beijing Rules"),
7. Guidelines for Crime Prevention, UNODC.

B) Analysis of local legislation

The study reviews local normative acts that regulate the role and function of different agencies in juvenile crime prevention. A comparative analysis of the legislation with respect to international standards is also provided.

C) Analysis of public / statistical information

Public information was requested from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice (Crime Prevention Center), the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports and Ministry of IDP's from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia (including their

LEPLs), also from Prosecutor's Office of Georgia. In addition, information was gathered from various types of web resources. The information obtained from these sources was included in the study. The public information was requested for the period of 2014-2019.

D) Interviews and focus groups

In order to assess juvenile crime prevention policy and practice in Georgia, semi-structured interview and focus group methods were used. Representatives of state agencies and non-governmental / international organizations involved in the crime prevention process participated in the study.

Selection procedure: Employees from the state agencies who were presented by the above-mentioned agencies on the basis of an official application, participated in the study. In addition, respondents were selected from non-governmental organizations, as well as from the Office of the Public Defender, who are involved in juvenile crime prevention, or have regular contact with individuals working in this field.

Research participants: Ministry of Internal Affairs - 2 interviews; social workers of LEPL Educational Institution's Resource Officer's Service - 4 interviews; Crime Prevention Center of the Ministry of Justice - 4 interviews; Public Defender's Office - 2 interviews; Prosecutor's Office of Georgia - 5 interviews; Social Service Agency of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia - 8 interviews; Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia - 9 interviews; 2 focus groups with representatives of NGOs and law enforcement officers.

In total, 32 interviews and 2 focus groups were conducted. The research team developed semi-structured tools / questionnaires for interviews and focus groups for each target group. The qualitative study was carried out in 2019.

Research Limitations

During the research, the LEPL Crime Prevention Center of the Ministry of Justice and the National Probation Agency were undergoing the re-organization process , as a result, certain structural changes were being planned. Considering this, when presenting the final results of the study, certain changes may be made at the level of legislative and structural reorganization, which cannot be reflected in the study.

The role and function of local governments in crime prevention process could not be fully assessed in the research process. The governments did not provide relevant information. Additionally, no detailed qualitative research was conducted on local governments.

Main findings and recommendations of research

Ministry of Internal Affairs

The current legislative norms define the role and function of the relevant structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the direction of juvenile crime prevention. These norms apply to both the process of identifying children at risk of committing a crime and the obligation to take preventive measures, as well as referring the children to various services and programs. These provisions are mainly in line with international standards.

The study identified gaps in the legislative framework for children who have committed crimes under the age of criminal responsibility, as well as gaps in their referral process to services and programs.

- Research showed that there are gaps in the number of prevention programs. Although the Ministry of Internal Affairs usually does not play a leading role in the implementation of preventive programs, the activities it carries out (mainly in the direction of raising awareness) are very few. According to the information provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, public awareness raising programs are being implemented in about 60 schools, while there are more than 2,000 schools in Georgia (private and public);
- The study revealed gaps in the identification of children living and working on the streets and their referral to appropriate services and programs; Research showed that in the process of working with children with problem behaviors, law enforcement officers assess the underlying causes that result in working directly with the children and their family members. By cooperating with other agencies, they carry out various preventive activities, however, at this stage they are not able to work with all risk groups and in the future intend to be more active in providing information to all children about their work and role as the employees of the child support agency;
- The newly established Law Enforcement Officer Institute at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which focuses on the prevention of juvenile delinquency deserves appreciation. This institute has been functioning for about one year, so far in only two districts of Tbilisi - Vake-Saburtalo and Old Tbilisi. There are about 365 law enforcement officers in Tbilisi. According to the study, each officer covers the area of a neighborhood with about 3,000-3,500 residents, but this is also assessed individually. The law enforcement officer institute replaced the neighborhood inspector's service. The law enforcement officer no longer has operational and investigative functions and is mainly focused on implementing preventive measures. In addition, their function is to respond to domestic violence, violence perpetrated by and against juveniles. However, since this is a relatively new institution, its effectiveness has not been fully studied at this stage.

- Another shortcoming is the fact that at the level of the normative act it is not defined what is the special role of the law enforcement officer in the prevention process, what are his/her functional rights and duties. Law enforcement officers are currently part of the structure of the Criminal Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and separate functions are not defined at the legislative level at this stage¹. It is important for this new institution to have strict instructions in its activities.

Prosecutor's Office of Georgia

Prevention of juvenile crime is not a major function of the Prosecutor's Office. The Prosecutor's Office is a criminal prosecution agency. Nevertheless, there are two types of activities being carried out by this agency to prevent crime, specifically the project "Public Prosecutor's Office" and the coordination of the work of multidisciplinary working groups.

Within the frames of the project "Public Prosecutor's Office", the agency carries out various events. The target group is juveniles / school students throughout Georgia. The events are mainly held on the topics of bullying and domestic violence, as well as various competitions, exhibitions, etc. This program obviously cannot fully cover its target group or meet its needs.

The multidisciplinary working group works at the initiative and under the leadership of the Prosecutor's Office, which is carried out in all regions of Georgia. Regional representatives of various agencies (Prosecutor's Office, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Probation Bureau, Social Service Agency, etc.) participate in the working group. The function of these working groups is to assess the legislative and practical challenges in the region related to juvenile justice / crime prevention and to plan ways to address these problems. The study also found that these working groups typically discuss not only justice but also crime prevention issues. The study did not evaluate the work effectiveness of the working group, however, the initiative of the Prosecutor's office to coordinate the activities of such working groups is deserves appreciation.

Ministry of Justice (LEPL Crime Prevention Center)

The function of the Crime Prevention Center was to coordinate various agencies for the prevention of juvenile crime, as well as to provide appropriate services to risk groups. Since 2020, organizational changes have been made in the Ministry of Justice, and the Crime Prevention Center and the National Probation Agency merged, resulting in establishment of National Agency for Crime Prevention, Execution of Non-Custodial Sentences and Probation. Despite these changes, at the

¹ It may be approved by an individual internal act, but can't be found at webpage <https://matsne.gov.ge/>

legislative level, the functions of the new agency to prevent juvenile crime have not changed substantially.

- According to the information provided by the center, the number of different types of services provided to beneficiaries has been increasing over the years, which should be evaluated positively. However, the study found that the needs of beneficiaries in the risk group² were much greater than those services could provide;
- The study identified shortcomings in assessing the quality of services provided (both those implemented by the agency and those proposed by other organizations). The study showed that the quality control system did not exist in the agency. Considering such shortcoming in quality control system, it becomes unclear what kind of evidence the agency relies on when offering specific services to specific beneficiaries. Perhaps the purpose of some services is only to raise awareness and not to measure their results in the long run, but the effectiveness of other types of services should definitely be measured;
- The existence of a coordinating agency is highly important for the effective management of the inter-agency cooperation process. The Ministry of Justice has this function in accordance with legislation, and until 2020 it carried out this activity through its LEPL "Crime Prevention Center". Nevertheless, the Ministry of Justice and, consequently, the Center for Crime Prevention, have not been able to function effectively in this direction. The study revealed the passive role of local governments in the inter-agency cooperation process.
- Although the Crime Prevention Center implements certain types of programs to prevent crime, it is unable to provide sufficient number of services to meet the diverse needs of beneficiaries.
- There is good news about introduction of a referral mechanism for juveniles under the age of 14 (who commit crime) and / or children with problem behaviour. This mechanism can be evaluated after it is introduced into practice.

Recommendations (to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of Justice):

- Increase the number of evidence-based prevention programs and services through inter-agency cooperation;
- Establish a quality control system for services in agencies;
- Gradually introduce the Institute of Law Enforcement Officer under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in all districts of Tbilisi and in the regions of Georgia;
- Intensify the activities of inter-agency working groups and cover more issues related to crime prevention;

² According to juvenile crime strategy

- Actively identify the leading and coordinating role of the Ministry of Justice in the process of inter-agency cooperation, which will enable it to effectively involve various agencies in this process, especially local government bodies.

Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport

The study found that the legislation regulating the activities of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports largely complies with international standards, however a wide range of prevention programs based on holistic approach is not available in practice, the preventive role of schools is not strong and uniform in terms of access to specialists (school psychologist, social worker, special education teacher) in schools. The study found that there was a lack of early and intermediary prevention programs in the country, with most public schools not having psychological services on site, also, during the research period, no school mediation component was available. However, at the stage of qualitative research, it was revealed that the Resource Officer's office was actively working on the introduction of school mediation, which should certainly be praised.

There are a number of challenges at the practical level as well:

- During the research period, there was no internal referral procedure, which determined the direction of the child's referral in specific cases. In some cases, this led to the student being referred to the wrong direction. It should also be noted that during the research period, the Resource Officer's office was actively working to create an internal referral document to determine where the child should be referred based on the content and severity of a particular case;
- The study found that the procedures for registering out-of-school children and returning them to school were not normatively defined. There was a segment of children who were invisible to the state, which in turn threatened their right to receive education. It is noteworthy that during the research period, the Ministry of Education was working on elaboration of a unified document with the involvement of the Civil Acts Registration Authority, the Social Service Agency, the Ministry of Education and local municipalities, aimed at registering and finding children of all school ages and monitoring the obstacles they face while exercising their right to education;
- According to the analysis of the research results, it became clear that in certain cases, it was the school's management skills and positions that determined the school's preventive role. Active prevention activities become more difficult as the number of children in the school increases. It is much easier to manage schools with lower number of students where it is easier to plan preventive activities and focus on all children;
- The study revealed that the Resource officer's service is not available in all schools, and in the part of the schools where this service operates, it is not always staffed by persons of both sexes,

due to the separate functions of the resource officers, it is desirable to maintain a gender balance between them;

- The study revealed that some teachers have not undergone training in conducting the "tutor's hour" or other types of preventive activities, during which they actively talk to the students about important topics for crime prevention. Some of the interviewed teachers have undergone separate trainings, but mostly they have to find the material on how to plan and lead the lesson. Research showed that they often have difficulty correctly initiating and conducting discussions on specific topics;
- Research showed that it is sometimes difficult for teachers to identify violence and it is important to strengthen their skills in this area. Most of the time, they expect the children (when the child may be the perpetrator of the violence) or their parents/legal guardians to inform them. The inability to identify certain forms of violence also hinders the process of referring the child in the right direction;
- The research showed that in case of child's referral, there is no systematic mechanism for obtaining partnership and feedback between agencies, and this process depends only on the skills and goodwill of individual employees;
- Also, in the study, part of the respondents noted that schools consider it important to provide certain services only to children who are victims of violence, while the child who engages in violent behavior is left without attention, which does not help prevent this type of behavior;
- It was revealed that special work should be done with children and their parents to overcome the stigma of the services of a special teacher and a psychologist. This issue is highly important for further prevention, because if the child refuses to receive the necessary services due to the risk of ridicule or expulsion, it is not in his/her best interest.
- Certain teachers have stigma towards the referral procedure, sometimes they feel that in some form the referral may annoy the child, consequently they think that covering up individual cases is appropriate, which itself does not exclude the attempts to solve specific cases at the class or school level.
- The research revealed that there is a practice of special teachers to take on the role of a psychologist to some extent and actively engage in various measures of early prevention as psychologists. The question arises as to how much the special teachers should be involved in the process of easing certain school incidents as psychologists, while their function is different and they may not even have sufficient competence to carry out these activities;
- According to the legislation, the institution of social worker should be introduced in schools from 2021, therefore, the gradual training of social workers in the system was supposed to start in 2019. The study shows that the training process has not yet begun, which may pose a problem regarding the availability of social workers by 2021;
- The lack of human resources in the psycho-social service of the Resource Officer's office (lack of psychologists, social workers) is a significant challenge, and because of this, sometimes juveniles have to wait for a long time to receive the service;

- The services of the Resource Officer's Psycho-Social Center were not available in Racha and Mtskheta-Mtianeti, which was one of the most important challenges in terms of access to psychosocial services at all regional levels and improvement of geographical coverage.
- Research showed that in some cases, parents do not understand the importance of involvement of their children in Resource officer's service, they often say that the child receives psychological services from private specialists, and the Resource Officer's psycho-social center does not have any means to verify this, except for the cases when a parent directly refuses to involve the child in the service; Consequently, there may be cases where, despite the need, the parent does not take the child to a private psychologist and at the same time refuses to involve him / her in the services of the Resource Officer's psychosocial center;
- The study also revealed that the most important challenge is the absence of early and intermediary prevention services, which means that in some cases the alternative is either complete inaction or referral of a child to Samtredia Public School, which based on its format often cannot deliver high quality service tailored to the interests of the child. The structure of Samtredia boarding school is also problematic. The services available there are not tailored to the individual needs of the children and their quality is not satisfactory. Also, as it was mentioned, the challenge is that before sending the children to Samtredia school, there is no intermediary unit, where the so-called children with "problem behavior" or children under the age of criminal responsibility will be redirected. Although Resolution # 681 of the Government of Georgia stipulates that children who are not referred to a referral facility should be offered services tailored to their individual needs, these services were not available during the research period. It is also unclear how intensively is the quality of the services provided in the boarding school (now in the referral facility) controlled, and how much the need for the existing programs is evidence-based. Unfortunately, despite the request, we did not receive any information from the Ministry about the content and duration of the program modules in order to assess the quality and purpose of the programs in more detail;
- The study also showed that in terms of prevention, school autonomy puts children in different schools in unequal position, as in many cases (except for measures planned by the central office of the Ministry) implementation of prevention measures depends on the initiatives and activeness of the school principal and staff. Although the minimum requirements are defined by law, this is a very small-scale intervention and the rest of the preventive measures, and anti-violence activities are still to be organized by the principals and school staff;
- Also, the study clearly showed that there is still a significant stigma in educational institutions towards children in state care and homeless children, from teachers and school administration, as well as children and their parents. This stigma is relatively low towards children in foster care and increases towards children who are placed at day care centers or 24-hour services.
- All school representatives participating in research verbally agree to the obligation to find information when a child misses the school, however, the class tutors don't know which document obliges them to do so. Also, at this stage the exact scope of the class tutor's preventive

role is not normatively defined, and respondents have different ideas about it. The existence of such a regulation would reduce the uncertainty in some cases between the Social Service Agency and school teachers in this regard.

Recommendations:

- Define the school's obligations regarding the unjustified absence from school, separate where the school responsibility begins and ends in relation to the investigation of the reasons for absence and when the Social Service Agency is obliged to engage to clarify the issue. Create a uniform approach in the education system in case of school absence with regard to the rights and responsibilities of the tutors, and increase their role in the preventive direction (along with the increase, the relevant financial resources should be provided);
- Write the internal referral procedure at the normative level (on the level of instructions). For example, create frameworks according to which a specific case occurred at school: 1. Is discussed at the school level; 2. Will be transferred to the Resource officer's psychosocial service; 3. Will be transferred to the service of 112 4. Will be referred to the social worker of the Social Service Agency, etc.
- Provide teachers with thorough and continuous training to better understand the essence of individual preventive issues, as they need to talk to children about important topics within the frames of tutor's hour or another format (eg. non-formal education activities). Therefore, it is important that they are trained in delivering various types of information to students, the topics may be bullying, healthy lifestyle, tolerance and other issues. The issue of training is especially important because even the slightest mistake regarding these sensitive topics and wrong direction may backfire;
- The service of a Resource Officer should be available in all public schools, as well as the availability of the officers of both sexes, because certain procedures can be performed only by a representative of the same sex;
- It is important to normatively (at the level of instructions) determine the procedures for the registration of out-of-school children and their return procedures to the school process;
- It is desirable that schools move to the concept of a small institution, which will facilitate school management, strengthen the school's preventive role and create more opportunities for individual approaches. Therefore, it is important to determine the reduced index of the maximum number of students in the school, which in itself will lead to an increase in the total number of schools;

- It is important to develop the direction of school mediation, which will help schools solve a number of issues on site. This process will save the resources of the Resource Office's psychosocial service and will enable the school to refer special cases which need redirection and cannot be resolved locally;
- Measures should be taken to ensure that anti-violence strategies in schools are not a template document, but clearly define the realistic plan and specific activities for combating violence;
- It is important to train teachers to identify bullying. They need to be aware of not only all forms of bullying, but also to know about the proactive activities that may prevent violence or help them identify the hidden forms of bullying.
- It is advisable for schools to work with the child victim of violence, as well as provide certain services to the perpetrator;
- It is important to train all teachers regarding the child protection referral procedure; Practitioners of the Ministry of Education (school administration, teachers, resource officers, etc.) should be aware of their functions and responsibilities within the referral mechanism.
- Measures should be in place to raise awareness and train school staff in relation to receiving the services of a psychologist and the involvement of a special education teacher in the educational process, which will help to overcome the stigma towards this service;
- The services of a psychologist should be available in schools in order to solve minor issues on site;
- The Ministry of Education should develop a relevant module for the training of social workers to be employed in schools and should complete the training of social workers by 2021;
- Increase the resource of psychosocial services of the Resource Officer Service in order to reduce the length of service expectation;
- Expand the service area of the psychosocial center and ensure the provision of services in Racha and Mtskheta-Mtianeti, so that the psycho-social center of the Resource Office is represented in all regions where the mentioned service is not provided on site;
- Work with parents to raise awareness about age-related and developmental peculiarities of children and juveniles, so that if necessary, they can turn to specialists in a timely manner and do not avoid providing appropriate services to the child;
- Intermediary services should be set up where juveniles with problem behavior will be referred and these services should prevent their further criminal behavior; Also, the services available in Samtredia should be tailored to the needs of each child. Only the evidence-based services should be provided and the quality of their implementation should be monitored;

- Regarding prevention, cooperation between agencies should be intensified, the role of each agency should be defined, a unified circle should be established between all agencies involved in child welfare and crime prevention, and forms of information exchange and feedback should be established between agencies;
- In the transition phase, before schools better understand their role in prevention policy, the state should intervene and instruct the school autonomy more actively in this area and set more intensive measures that will be mandatory for all schools;
- Work actively to develop social skills for children in state care to ease their school adaptation process, and on the other hand, the school administration should understand that bringing these children to school should not be perceived as a threat by them, also in terms of prevention, as well as in case of separate incidents, there should be no stigmatizing attitudes towards them.

Ministry of IDP's from Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia

The study found that current family strengthening program is quite bureaucratic, and even responding to crisis intervention cases requires a significant time interval, which actually deprives the program of its core essence. The challenge is absence of systematic support programs that will be selected according to the individual needs of the families (instead of one-time services) and respond to components of family empowerment such as parental employment and vocational training, enhancing non-violent communication skills with children, and positive parenting skills, other material and non-material programs.

- The study also identified several challenges related to small family-type homes, such as lack of access to psychotherapeutic and psychiatric services, insufficient funding under the state program, which is not enough to meet all the needs of children facing social threat, also access to the part of healthcare services that are not included in the universal health insurance package. The challenge is also the scarcity of informal educational services and lack of places in small family-type homes, elimination of these problems would allow the children to be placed in the region where their residence would serve their best interests. In some cases of violence, this also complicates the issue of children's separation. There are no state services for children victims of violence, who mostly rely on caregivers, or have to stand in line to receive the services of a psychologist. It is also important to intensify the involvement of the state at both the central and municipal levels in the preparation of children in state care for independent living.

- The study revealed that in the implementation of the sub-program of foster care, we face almost the same type of challenges as we discussed above. The amount of money provided for this sub-program has increased compared to previous years, although it is still not enough to motivate and interest the foster parents. Often children taken from biological families face a number of challenges that are difficult for foster parents to deal with. Therefore, the number of applicants is small, although the state is currently unable to train this small part and the certification of foster carers has been suspended for some time. Also, since the entry of a child is possible only in a certified family, the number of available families is significantly reduced. A certified family wishing to take in the children is virtually unavailable in Tbilisi and sometimes the children have to be transferred from Tbilisi to regions. This is associated with significant stress, as in some cases, it is not desirable for a child to break up with the family, and sometimes staying in the region does not help maintain that communication. It is also important to note that due to the small amount of money provided by the sub-program, families do not want to take in small children, as well as 13-18-year-old juveniles, because there are more needs at this age and their satisfaction requires more expenses and skills. The issue of funding for expensive psychotherapy and health services, the need for access to non-formal education and crime prevention programs (especially in the regions) is also a problem for foster care. The issue of insufficient competence of social workers was also named as a challenge by a number of non-governmental organizations.
- The Homeless Children's Sub-Program also faces a number of challenges. Like other sub-programs, the amount of funding is a significant obstacle, forcing the service provider to cover a large part of the costs or to obtain them from other sources. There are certain services available, but the research respondents question their quality. The need for psychiatric and dental services is especially urgent, which in almost all cases puts a burden on the service provider. Psychotherapeutic services are also provided mainly at the expense of the service provider. Day care centers have psychologists, however, they are mainly engaged in group work and cannot provide long-term individual psychotherapeutic services. Other psychotherapists are hired for difficult cases. An important challenge related to working with homeless children is the bureaucracy and unsystematic nature of family empowerment programs, which hinders prevention of crime, going out in the street, and begging for money. Additionally, the respondents emphasized the lack of human resources, as it is advisable to work actively not only with the children, but also with their family members for prevention, which is difficult under the existing resources. There is also a problem when children are forced by adults to beg for money - neither the social workers nor the Ministry of Internal Affairs can investigate / explore these cases in detail and prevent them in future. Currently, mobile groups and day service centers are not available in the territory of Adjara. The issue is especially pressing during the summer season, when other homeless children migrate to Adjara;
- As it was mentioned in the study, the state is not involved in the prevention component at an early stage, and if the child is just on the street but has not yet started begging for money, the

state does not consider him/her a beneficiary of the program and does not implement other preventive programs. The issue of access to preventive and non-formal education programs is important for the day care center children and the children in the shelter. As for general education, the biggest problem for these children is the stigma in public schools, which is often the fault of school's lack of information and human resources. Such stigma leads to demotivation of homeless children to go to school, and this frustration exacerbates their psychological state;

- The study showed that taking homeless children into long-term care (if they are unable to return to their biological families) is challenging because both small family-type homes and foster parents (for children under the age of 6) do not want to have children with this experience. As a result, these children remain in the shelter for the homeless, and cannot enter the family environment, which in most cases doesn't serve their best interests. The research also showed that there is no institution tailored to the interests of children, where those with particularly difficult behaviors will be placed and their behavior will be further prevented. Additional challenge is that the state avoids depriving the parent of the parenting right even when the parent not only doesn't promote the development of the child, but hinders his/her reintegration and parent's interference contradicts to the best interests of the child.
- It should also be noted that there are frequent cases of addiction among state-care and homeless children, although the state cannot offer them free services tailored to their needs. The study found that even if there are separate budget programs (which is not confirmed by research), social workers and other people working with this group of children don't have the information about them.
- The respondents also identified the lack of professionalism among some of the social workers as an additional challenge.
- In terms of cooperation between agencies, the challenge is the fact that agencies do not have detailed information on each other's roles and responsibilities in the field of child welfare. There is no systematic mechanism for exchanging information on individual cases, which obviously means sharing only the amount of information that is needed to resolve the issue and is in the best interests of the child.

Recommendations - To strengthen the family

- Simplify the procedures for involving beneficiaries in the family crisis assistance sub-program;
- Establish sustainable family strengthening services that will be selected according to the individual needs of the families and will focus on issues such as parental employment and vocational training, non-violent communication skills with children, positive parenting skills, other material and non-material programs;

- Create programs for the rehabilitation and support of victims of domestic violence, which will provide timely and competent psycho-social assistance to victims of violence.

To support the small family-type homes and children in foster care:

- Increase funding for the state program to fully meet the needs of children in small family-type homes, including psychological, psycho-therapeutic and psychiatric services, dental services and other costly examinations that cannot be covered by the universal health care program;
- Increase access to non-formal education and crime prevention programs for children in small family-type homes;
- Provide appropriate number of places in small family-type homes both in the capital and in the regions, making it possible for the child to be placed in a geographical region which will serve his or her best interests (based on family location, access to reintegration programs or other purposes);
- It is important to intensify the involvement of the state at the central and municipal levels in the direction of preparing the children under state care for independent living, through various services and programs that will ease the beneficiaries' so-called "transition period" from state care to independent living;
- Provide continuous training for foster parents and support staff of small family-type homes to work with adolescents with problem behaviors and strengthen positive parenting methods;
- Define a strategy for children under state care to overcome the stigma in public schools, which should include better training of school staff and children themselves to adapt to the school environment;
- Increase the funding of the sub-program of foster care, which will help the foster parent to meet all the needs of the child;
- Restore the course of certification of foster parents; the state should ensure the training of a new stream of foster parents and continuous training of the existing foster parents (renewal of certification) which will eliminate the existing deficit of foster parents;
- Carry out an information campaign that will help attract those who want to engage in foster care and popularize the foster care service;
- It is important to provide more intensive and active support to foster parents in dealing with problem behavior, through positive parenting methods and other necessary skills;

- Local governments should take care to develop additional benefits for foster parents, such as funding for utility bills and / or free non-formal education for children, sports / recreational activities.

Within the frames of Homeless Children Sub-program:

- It is advisable to increase the funding of the state program so that the state takes full responsibility to meet the needs of homeless children, including psychological, psycho-therapeutic and psychiatric services, dental services and other expensive examinations, which cannot be covered by the universal insurance package;
- Increase access to non-formal education and crime prevention programs in day care centers and 24-hour shelters;
- It is important to create a mobile group, day care center and shelter for homeless children in Adjara;
- Increase the number of staff in day care centers and shelters, which will help these institutions to work more effectively with both children and their family members;
- The state should create an earlier mechanism to prevent street life and work. This mechanism will cover the group of children who spend much of their time on the street with homeless children, are at risk of working and living on the streets, but have not yet started asking for money and do not fall in the category of beneficiaries of homeless children sub-program;
- Measures should be taken to overcome the stigma towards homeless children in schools, specifically, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, to raise awareness of school staff, to better prepare children for adaptation to schools;
- Establish state services to support and rehabilitate juveniles with psychoactive substance addiction;

Procedural representation, specialization and inter-agency cooperation

- Register overtime work of social workers and provide them with payment according to the legislation;
- The Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, in cooperation with other state agencies, should develop a mechanism for multi-agency and multidisciplinary work, to exchange information on individual cases as well as the mechanism for receiving feedback from partner agencies.
- Introduce the practice of coordination of inter-agency working formats (which does not involve discussing matters of politics) at both central and regional levels, which will be more practical in nature, where individual cases will be discussed by professionals and specific ways and deadlines for their solution will be determined.

Local governments

At this stage, it is virtually impossible to analyze the current situation in this direction, as the role and involvement of municipalities in the implementation of state prevention policies is minimal, and if such an exception still exists, it is spontaneous and not based on analytically assessed and defined needs. There is no practice of inter-agency cooperation (Ministry of Internal Affairs; Prosecutor's Office; Local Municipalities; Resource Centers of the Ministry of Education; Social Service Agency; National Agency for Crime Prevention and Probation; NGO-s), which will make it possible to periodically assess the needs of juveniles in conflict with the law/at risk of committing crime, and redirect them to the relevant services. There are certain activities between state agencies in this direction, but the involvement of the municipality is minimal and a large part of non-governmental organizations is not represented at these meetings.

We hope that after the relevant articles of the Code on the Rights of the Child come into force (which further increases the responsibility of local governments towards prevention), the current approach will change radically and the needs and interests of children will be taken into account when determining and planning the budget and policies, also the officials whose existence becomes mandatory by the Code in each local government body, will be defined.