



## **Report of a Mapping Exercise of Pre-school Education and Support Services for Children with Special Needs in the Republic of Moldova**

**HealthProm**

Ensuring vulnerable children have the best start in life

London, United Kingdom

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# Mapping Exercise of pre-school education and support services for children with special needs in the Republic of Moldova

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### List of Acronyms

CCF	Copil, Comunitate, Familie/ Child, Community, Families
CSED	Consolidated Strategy for Education Development 2010 - 2015
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ECD	Early Childhood development
EFA-FTI	Education for All – Fast Track Initiative
EU	European Union
GoM	Government of Moldova
IEP	Individual Education Plan
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LA	Local Authority
MoE	Ministry of Education
MOT	Mobile Outreach Team
MLSPF	Ministry of Labour, Social Protection & Family
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
P4EC	Parteneriate Pentru Fiecare Copil / Partnerships for Every Child
PPAS	Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Service
SEND	Special educational needs and disabilities
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WB	World Bank

# Mapping Exercise of pre-school education and support services for children with special needs in the Republic of Moldova

## 1. INTRODUCTION

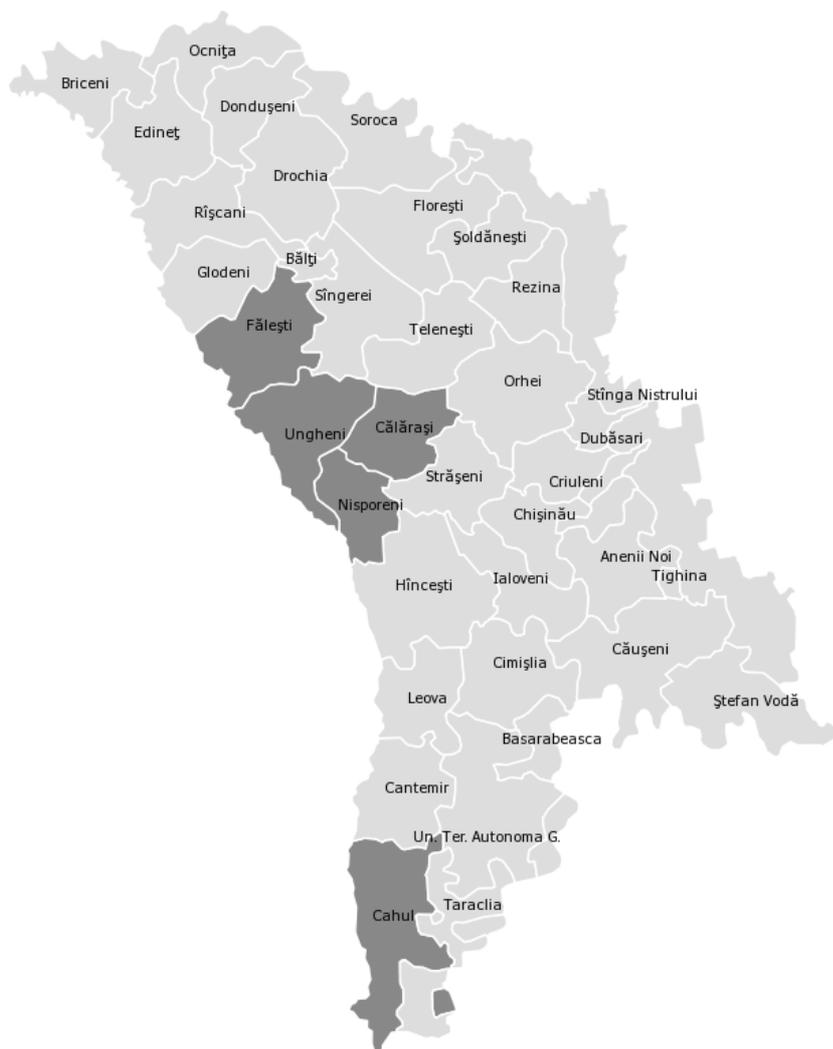
### 1.1 Rationale and Aims of the Mapping Exercise

The mapping exercise described in this report took place as part of a project funded by the European Union: *'Improving access to community-based early years and preschool support services for vulnerable children with special needs in Moldova'*. This is a three-year grant being led by Moldovan NGO Partnerships for Every Child (P4EC), in collaboration with UK organisations HealthProm and Mellow Parenting.

The aim of this exercise was to launch the project with a baseline understanding of the early years and preschool support services already in place in the five regions targeted within this grant: Cahul, Nisporeni, Ungheni, Calarasi and Falesti (Figure 1). It also set out to highlight gaps in the system and areas of unmet need as identified by both professionals working with children with special needs as well as their families.

The results of this mapping exercise will inform the design of training modules that are a feature of the larger project, which will be delivered to professionals working with children with special needs such as teachers and specialists from local authorities (LAs), as well as parents and carers.

**Figure 1: Map of Moldova highlighting the five target regions.**



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### **1.2 Methods**

A mixed-method approach was used in the design of this exercise. A variety of custom designed qualitative tools including questionnaires and interviews were used to target a diverse group of respondents across five regions of Moldova. Respondents included 1.) Staff from Moldovan NGO (and project lead) P4EC, 2.) Senior personnel from kindergartens, 3.) Staff from LAs, Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Service teams (PPAS) and Mobile Outreach Teams, and 4.) Parents and carers of children with special needs. Informal consultation was also carried out with key stakeholders such as multilateral organisations, Government bodies and local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) through meetings, telephone and e-mail contact.

All respondents were selected by Project Managers from P4EC, who have extensive knowledge of the target regions. Kindergartens that participated in the mapping exercise were required to be inclusive (i.e., they accept and enrol children with disabilities and special needs). A mix of urban, semi-urban and rural schools was aimed for in each region but not always possible to obtain. Parents and carers were identified through the selected inclusive kindergartens.

#### **Components of the mapping exercise:**

1. Regional service questionnaires completed by P4EC Project Managers for each region;
2. Questionnaires administered to kindergartens in each region;
3. Interviews (or focus groups<sup>1</sup>) with LAs, PPAS and Mobile Outreach Teams in each region;
4. Interviews (or focus groups<sup>1</sup>) with parents and carers of children with special needs in each region;
5. Consultation with relevant national stakeholders, NGOs and international NGOs (INGOs);
6. Desk-based background research on pre-school educational service provision in Moldova.

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<sup>1</sup> Final method left to the discretion of P4EC Project Managers implementing the exercise depending on logistical considerations and number of participants.

## **2. OVERVIEW OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN MOLDOVA**

The Republic of Moldova is one of the poorest countries in Europe, ranking 114 out of 187 countries in the Human Development Index (UNDP 2014). Equal access to health and social services remains a challenge throughout the country, with rural populations and vulnerable groups facing the most significant barriers to services. This is particularly evident within the education system, where, despite notable improvements in recent years, many children do not yet fully benefit from their right to attend school<sup>2</sup>. Significant disparities in access to and enrolment in school still exist between urban and rural populations and different income groups, and marginalisation of vulnerable groups of children such as migrants and those with disabilities persists.

Despite such challenges, the Government of Moldova (GoM) has prioritised the development of its education system over the past fifteen years focusing on improving quality and access at all levels of education. More recently, a growing emphasis on the early years period and pre-school education has emerged. Most of the key developments in education policy and legislation have been supported by multilateral and international organisations including the World Bank, UNICEF and the Global Partnership for Education.

### **Key legislation timeline:**

*Education for All* National Strategy approved (2003)

Modernisation programme of the educational system approved (2005)

Strategy for social inclusion of persons with disabilities (2010-2013)

National Strategy and Plan of Action regarding the reform of the residential system of child care (2010)

Consolidated Strategy for Education Development (2011-2015)

The Development Programme for inclusive education in Moldova (2011-2020)

*Education 2020*, Education Development Strategy (2014-2020)

The Consolidated Strategy for Education Development (CSED) 2011-2015<sup>3</sup> has been particularly important for the development of early years education. It makes explicit provision for pre-school education and highlights the need to increase the rate of enrolment in pre-school programs for children aged 3 to 6 years old, as well as reducing the gap between urban and rural regions and between income groups. The key aims of the strategy as it relates to pre-school education were: a) to improve both the quality of early years care and access to it, particularly in areas which were poorly served; b) to provide better facilities, c) to support and assist disadvantaged children and d) to improve the continuing professional development of educators and other professionals. Improved parent education is also seen as a key priority.

Another key milestone in the development of the Moldovan education system was the implementation of the World Bank funded Education for All, Fast Track Initiative (FTI) (2006-2010) (See Section 3). The initiative invested USD 4.4 million in a Catalytic Fund for Moldova. This fund was almost entirely dedicated to early childhood development in Moldova, which has resulted in significant progress in access to pre-school education. In addition to an increase in the number of pre-school institutions in both urban and rural areas, net pre-school enrolment figures have improved considerably, from 70.7% of children 3–6 years old in 2005 to 82.3% by 2015<sup>2</sup>.

### **Education spending**

In 2015, the Republic of Moldova spent 6.9% of its GNP on education as a whole. This was down from previous years following a peak in 2010 of 9.1%. Within the education budget in 2014, approximately 58% was spent on primary and secondary education, 18% on pre-primary education and 18% per cent on university

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<sup>2</sup> UNICEF. 2010. Education in Moldova: Country profile. <http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Moldova.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Government of the Republic of Moldova Ministry of Education – 2011 – 2015 Consolidated Strategy for Education Development Chisinau 2010 (approved by ordinance of the Minister of Education no. 849, 2010)

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education<sup>4</sup>.

Pre-school education for 3-6 year olds is provided for free by the State, with families expected to contribute small additional fees to cover the cost of meals. It is available from the age of three and obligatory from the age of five. There are three main types of pre-school institutions in Moldova, namely kindergartens, nurseries and community centres with various combinations between them (e.g., combined nursery/kindergartens, kindergartens embedded within schools) (Table 1). The FTI identified a strong demand for pre-school services for children younger than three, yet only a few kindergartens currently provide this service and there is no financing to make this possible as a universal State provision.

**Table 1: Preschool institutions by type**

Preschool institutions	2010	2012	2015
Total	1381	1418	1461
Kindergartens	476	501	520
Nurseries- Kindergartens	845	853	840
Nurseries	3	3	2
Schools Kindergartens	57	61	73
Community Centres	0	0	26
<b>Number of children enrolled</b>	<b>130,041</b>	<b>141,083</b>	<b>149,936</b>
Kindergartens	27,498	30,038	33,940
Nurseries- Kindergartens	99,613	107,923	111,461
Nurseries	151	156	157
Schools Kindergartens	2779	2966	3446
Community Centres	0	0	932

Source: Education in the Republic of Moldova 2015/2016, Statistical Publication. Moldovan National Bureau of Statistics: [http://www.statistica.md/public/files/publicatii\\_electronice/Educatia/Educatia\\_RM\\_2016.pdf](http://www.statistica.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/Educatia/Educatia_RM_2016.pdf)

In 2014, an allocation of 26,681.1 thousand Moldovan Lei (MDL)<sup>5</sup> was made for inclusive education at the pre-school level. Expenditure on inclusive education continues to rise as increasing numbers of children with special needs enrol at all levels of mainstream schools. Funding to support these children is allocated on a percentage basis per child. Any additional services required— such as support teachers, therapists or school transport drivers— that are not already included in a pre-school’s core staffing budget are not funded centrally. Pre-schools must apply to their local city council for additional funds to cover these costs.

### Teachers

School teacher salaries are low when compared to the average national wage. In 2010, a teacher’s average monthly salary was 2361,0 MDL (79.4% of the national average salary). This is a notable increase from 2005, when school teacher salaries were only 66.9% of the national average salary. By 2015, the average salary had risen to 3813,6 MDL (82.7% of the national average salary). UNICEF and the World Bank both identify low pay as a significant factor contributing to dissatisfaction with the job and high rates of attrition. Yet maintaining salaries even at this low level places a strain on the overall budget for education. The World Bank review of the CSED notes that *‘the widening fiscal deficit and the kept promise for teachers’ salaries to increase, means that the Government of Moldova is unlikely to raise the revenues required to fully fund the CSED objectives for*

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Finance 2015. Education Financing in Moldova. Power Point presentation by Svetlana Bortoi, Head of education, culture and science financial division.

<sup>5</sup> The current rate of exchange Moldovan Lei : Euros is 1 MDL= 0.045 Euros

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*preschool education or to allocate the funds required for investment in physical infrastructure. World Bank project funds will therefore continue to play a crucial role in bridging this gap'.<sup>6</sup>*

Another key challenge is teacher training. Several of the NGOs consulted for this exercise reported that the prevailing educational approach used at the pre-school level is out dated, rooted in rigid, highly didactic teaching methods. As reported, a significant challenge remains improving training for pre-school teachers and encouraging them to adapt and evolve their approaches. Further unmet need for training has also become evident with the rising number of children with special needs entering mainstream schools and pre-schools. Many teachers report feeling overwhelmed and underprepared to meet their needs.<sup>7</sup> Additional teacher training is required to effectively manage the needs of vulnerable children in schools and to increase the likelihood of their regular attendance and integration once there.

### **Children with special needs and disabilities**

In recent years, the number of children with special needs has tripled in mainstream schools in Moldova<sup>8</sup>, which reflects both a shift towards more robust policy regarding inclusive education, as well as improved screening and assessment practices. However, inclusion is not necessarily synonymous with integration. Whilst they may be enrolled in a school, children with special needs may not be fully integrated due to a lack of necessary support facilities, poorly trained staff or discrimination from staff, students and parents.

As of 2013, there were 13,349 children under the age of 18 registered with disabilities in Moldova<sup>9</sup>. Although legislation now states that these children must be included in mainstream schools, in practice, social stereotypes and stigma restrict their integration and participation. Many parents and caregivers still believe that children with disabilities should either stay at home without receiving an education or be sent to a residential institution or special school. Similar beliefs are also still found amongst some teachers, who believe that children with disabilities should not study in mainstream schools. Many children with disabilities and special needs continue to be placed in institutions. In 2012, 59% of the children living in residential institutions were those with disabilities<sup>9</sup>. Those who live with their families are often kept isolated at home or denied access to mainstream schools. Only a small proportion of families with disabled children are able to send them to specialised pre-school kindergarten programmes.

The initial steps towards inclusive education in Moldova were taken with disabled children of primary and secondary school age that had transitioned out of residential institutions. From 2016, the MoE placed an emphasis on supporting the inclusion of children at the pre-school stage. Currently, the majority of children with special needs who attend mainstream pre-schools have disabilities related to communication difficulties (Table 2). Children with severe disabilities and complex needs are not readily included into pre-schools and most still remain either at home or in residential institutions.

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<sup>6</sup> World Bank. 2011. Moldova - Third Education For All Fast Track Initiative (EFA FTI) Grant Project: additional financing grant. Report No. 79817. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. Page 24.

<sup>7</sup> Discussions with Step by Step Moldova, Lumos and CCF

<sup>8</sup> Moldovan National Bureau of Statistics: Education in the Republic of Moldova 2015/2016, Statistical Publication. [http://www.statistica.md/public/files/publicatii\\_electronice/Educatia/Educatia\\_RM\\_2016.pdf](http://www.statistica.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/Educatia/Educatia_RM_2016.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF. Children in Moldova. <http://www.unicef.org/moldova/children.html> [accessed 6 September 2016]

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**Table 2: Children with special needs in pre-school education, by disability**

<b>Year</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2015</b>
Hearing impairments	47	54	56
Speech impairments	1322	1468	1122
Visual impairments	258	266	251
Mental disability	196	198	135
Muscle and motion difficulties	36	34	49
Other	104	114	251
<b>Total number of children</b>	<b>1,963</b>	<b>2,134</b>	<b>1,864</b>

Source: Education in the Republic of Moldova 2015/2016, Statistical Publication. Moldovan National Bureau of Statistics: [http://www.statistica.md/public/files/publicatii\\_electronice/Educatia/Educatia\\_RM\\_2016.pdf](http://www.statistica.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/Educatia/Educatia_RM_2016.pdf)

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### 2.1 Summary of relevant Government departments

#### Ministry of Education

Minister of Education (From January 2016): Mrs Corina Fusu

Deputy Minister: Mrs Elena Cernei

Lead for inclusive education: Mr Valentin Cudru

Lead for pre-school inclusive education: Mrs Viorica Marti

The Ministry of Education (MoE) is planning to launch a web based Early Years Inclusive Education portal from September 2016, which will encourage collaboration and information sharing between organisations and enable resources and training materials to be published and shared in one location.

#### Republican Centre for Psychological Assistance

(MoE department responsible for implementing inclusive education)

Director: Mrs Virginia Rusnac

Deputy Director: Mrs Svetlana Curilov

This Centre manages and oversees the thirty-five Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Services. These multi-disciplinary teams are located in every region of the country and provide assessment and support to families with children identified as vulnerable or as having special needs. The teams comprise some or all of the following specialists: psychologists, educators, social assistants, therapists and nurses. The PPAS have a broad remit and are expected to assess an increasingly large number of children, develop individual programmes for every child and liaise with educators to ensure that the programmes are implemented at school as well as at home.

#### Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family

Minister of Labour, Social Protection and Family (from January 2016): Dr Stela Grigoras

Deputy Minister: Mrs Viorica Dumbraveanu

#### Mobile Outreach Teams

In many regions Mobile Outreach Teams (MOTs) have been established, which are able to provide support to isolated or remote families. These are funded by the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family. Not all of the five target regions of this project have MOTs, meaning that the ability to identify and visit hard-to-reach families varies from region to region. Amongst the five regions that were targeted in this exercise, three currently provide mobile outreach services: Ungheni, Falesti and Nisporeni.

### **3. Previous major initiatives in pre-school education**

#### **Education for All - Fast Track Initiative**

Budget: USD 4.4 million

Timescale: 2006 - 2010

Main objectives:

- Increased rate of children enrolled in preschool programmes;
- Improved access to quality preschool education for children at risk;
- Improved quality of early child education;
- Training of preschool teaching and managerial staff in early child development;
- Improved social partnership and community involvement in early child development programmes.

Main results:

- 50 kindergartens and 16 community centres renovated;
- 21 community centres created and endowed under the project;
- Establishment of 2 rehabilitation centres for children with special needs;
- Establishment of 3 inclusive kindergartens;
- 9454 children and 194 children with special needs now benefit from access to early education;
- 983 new working places created for the teaching staff due to the project;
- Over 31,000 books and learning materials provided to kindergartens and specialists;
- Training courses attended by over 1,700 educators;

The Initiative produced a large number of influential documents ranging from professional teaching standards, to methodological guides for teacher training, to research surveys, to high-level policy documents that have influenced the development of national legislation.

All of the five regions targeted in this mapping exercise had institutions that were involved in the FTI:

- Nisporeni: Kindergarten Povestea received training and equipment
- Cahul: Kindergarten No 8 was renovated
- Calarasi: Kindergarten Guguta was renovated
- Falesti: Kindergarten Soarele was renovated
- Ungheni: An early years community centre received support
- A number of village kindergartens across all five regions were also supported

#### **Global Partnership for Education (funder)**

Budget: USD 4.35 million

Timescale: January 2012 – August 2013

Partners: UNICEF, World Bank, Moldova Social Investment Fund

Main activities:

- Improving equitable access to preschool programmes in rural localities;
- Ensuring increased access to preschool education of children with special needs and those from disadvantaged and vulnerable social groups;
- Improving the quality of preschool education by raising the capacity of educators to routinely apply new child-centred curricula and newly developed teaching standards.

A second component of the project focused specifically on increasing access to preschool programmes for children with special needs. It included:

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- Proposals to refine the legal framework on inclusive education;
- Development of methodologies and training programmes;
- Development of premises allowing for an integrated and deinstitutionalised model for preschool education.

Since the completion of the Global Partnership for Education project, the World Bank has been phasing out its involvement in the area of preschool education. It is currently implementing a remaining grant of about USD 2.5 million towards supporting the rehabilitation of 20 schools so they can better receive students with disabilities. This grant is also supporting some teacher training and community awareness programs.

### Selected smaller projects<sup>10</sup>

#### Good Start in Life

Budget: EUR 316,840 funded by Lichtenstein Development Service

Timescale: August 2012 – July 2015

Partners: Step by Step, MoE, educational departments of Universities.

Training and mentoring of educators working in the early years foundation stage

#### Promoting the successful model of inclusive education in the Republic of Moldova

Budget: USD 524,090 funded by the Czech Development Agency

Timescale: August 2013 – December 2014

Partners: Ministry of Education and local authorities in 2 towns: Edinet and Leova.

#### Improving the access to quality services for the most vulnerable preschool children

Budget: USD 524,506 funded by UNICEF

Timescale: November 2011 – November 2013

Partners: UNICEF, Moldova Social Investment Fund and the National Centre for Early Years Education

Training and mentoring of educators and parents; working with 2200 vulnerable children; developing 44 community centres

#### Refurbishing the preschool in Orhei

Budget: EUR 67,046 funded by the Japanese Programme Kusanone

Timescale: August 2012 – August 2013

Partners: Japanese Embassy and the local department of investment, youth and sport

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<sup>10</sup> Courtesy of Ministry of Education website

#### **4. NGOs & INGOs working in inclusive education**

##### **Keystone**

Keystone Moldova is an American NGO. It supports the implementation of inclusive education in 22 pre-schools from 15 districts. In partnership with the local public administrations and school administrations, it has developed a network of fifteen Resource Centres to support the development of inclusive education. It is also actively involved in developing the capacity of teachers to promote inclusive environments and employ a child-centred approach to teaching. In addition, it collaborates with the MoE in piloting inclusive education methodology at the pre-school level.

##### **Step by Step Moldova**

Step by Step Moldova is an independent Moldovan NGO which collaborates regularly with Keystone. It has been working in early years inclusive education since 1994, at which time it was the first Moldovan NGO to work in this area. Step by Step Moldova provides methodological support for the education sector, including a range of training materials and guidance on establishing optimal classrooms and activity centres. It was actively involved in the FTI, supporting educators to learn and adopt a child-centred approach to teaching. It currently works actively with Keystone to support communication and linkages between regional PPAS teams, teachers and other professionals so that inclusive education is implemented successfully and there is strong collaboration between the various actors involved.

##### **Lumos**

Lumos is a British NGO, most known for its extensive work towards reducing the institutionalisation of young children in Moldova and other countries of Eastern Europe. However, it has also been involved in inclusive education in Moldova since 2010. Lumos implemented inclusive education programmes in two pilot regions (Ialoveni and Floresti) working in collaboration with local PPAS teams, and have created entirely new inclusive schools (one pre-school and one primary school) in Ialoveni and Licoreul. These initiatives aimed to support children with a wide range of disabilities, including those with severe and complex needs.

##### **CCF—Copil, Comunitate, Familie**

CCF is the Moldovan partner organisation of Hope and Homes for Children (HHC), a British NGO. CCF/HHC works to develop support services within Moldovan Baby Homes, or orphanages, to assist the transition of children with special needs when they are removed from institutional care and restored to their families and communities. Mobile teams of psychologists and social workers from CCF monitor the reintegration process through regular home visits, and provide support where needed.

##### **Partnerships for Every Child (P4EC)**

P4EC is a legal successor of EveryChild and has a record of over 20 years in reforming the child protection system in Moldova, including Transnistria. P4EC has a strong presence in Moldova as an important partner of the Government, a strong advocate for systems reform, and a child protection capacity building entity. It has a strong portfolio of past funded projects, and currently implements a \$4.4m USAID funded project “Children in Moldova live in safe and secure families” (2014 -2017), a World Bank funded project “Support in implementing the service delivery standards and the new business model administration by social assistance territorial structures” (2014-2015), and various other projects. It has more recently become involved in the area of inclusive education through a new EC funded project addressing access to community-based services for children with special needs in Moldova, including pre-school education.

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### 5. Results of the Mapping Exercise

#### 5.1 Overview of kindergartens across five target regions

A selection of 63 kindergartens participated in the mapping exercise of kindergartens in the five target regions of this project. A total of 8519 children are currently enrolled in these kindergartens across the five regions, with 3162 in Ungheni (15 schools), 1513 in Falesti (14 schools), 1610 in Calarasi (15 schools) 1506 in Nisporeni (15 schools) and 728 in Cahul (4 schools). The number of children in each kindergarten ranges from 59-383 in Ungheni, 41-180 in Falesti, 18-310 in Calarasi, 34-260 in Nisporeni and 87-338 in Cahul. Whilst the average number of children per class varies greatly from the smallest class of 6 children up to classes of 39, the average across the five regions is 24.9 children per class, with an average child to teacher ratio of 25:1 (Table 1). A school in Ungheni (School U5) reports the smallest class size of any school with just 6 students per class, and schools F18 in Falesti and C43 in Calarasi both report a child to teacher ratio of 3:1 or less. These are likely to be reporting errors.

#### Educational staff

The total number of teachers across the participating schools is 498, broken down by region as follows: Ungheni (174), Falesti (97) Nisporeni (86) Calarasi (85) and Cahul (56). Despite the differences across the schools, child to teacher ratios remain similar (Table 3). Variations were identified in the number of teachers reported by individual schools, with as few as 1 teacher in one school in Calarasi and up to 31 in a school in Cahul.

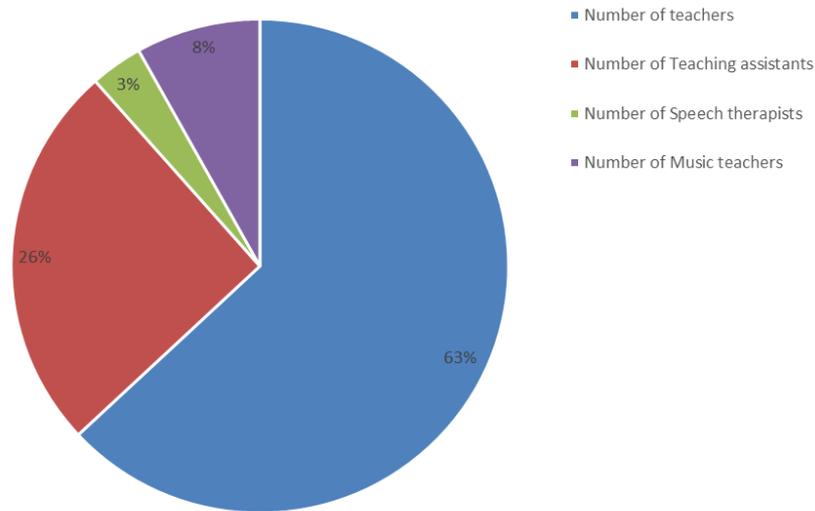
**Table 3:** Analysis of workforce availability in schools by region

	Ungheni	Falesti	Calarasi	Nisporeni	Cahul
Number of teachers	174	97	85	86	56
Average per School	11.6	6.9	5.7	5.7	14.0
Average child: teacher ratio	25.1	24.9	25.4	24.3	25.3
Max	22	12	12	14	31
Min	4	3	1	2	7
Number of Teaching assistants	46	30	35	72	18
Average per School	5.1	2.1	2.7	4.8	4.5
Max	16	6	9	12	8
Min	0	0	0	1	0
Number of Speech therapists	4	17	3	1	2
Average per School	0.4	1.7	0.2	0.1	0.7
Max	2	17	1	1	1
Min	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Music teachers	19	14	16	10	5
Average per School	1.3	1.0	1.1	0.7	1.3
Max	2	1	3	1	2
Min	0	10	0	0	1
Number of schools with psychologists (%)	1 (7.1)	1 (7.1)	1 (6.7)	0 (0)	0 (0)

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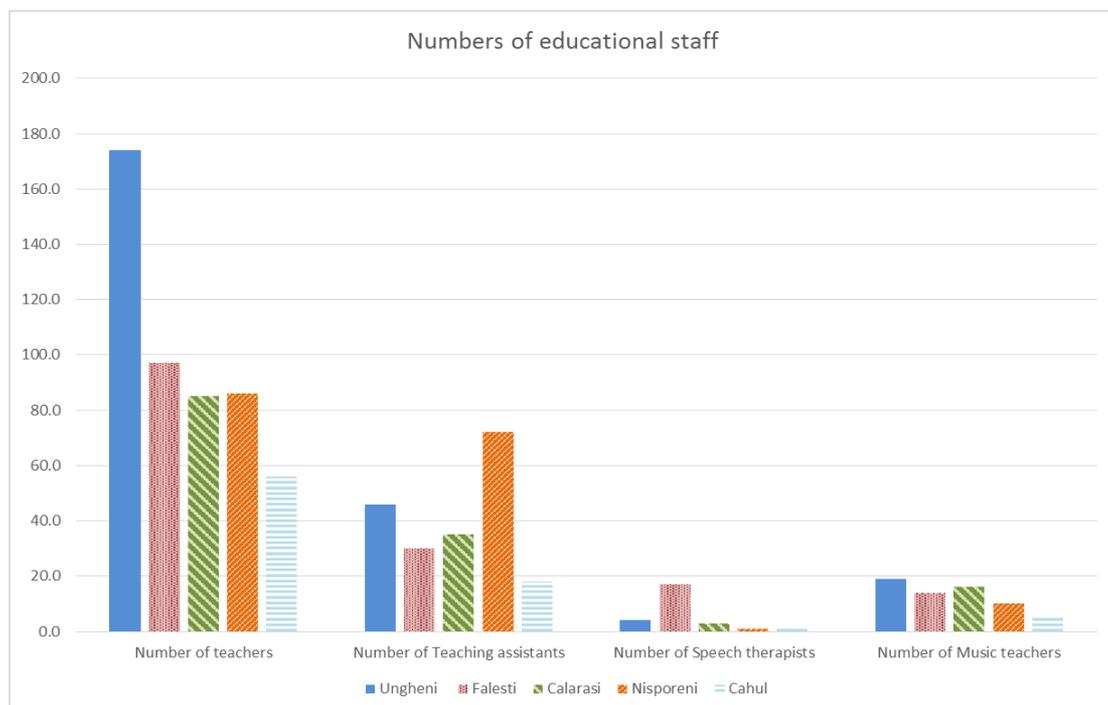
The composition of educational staff across the five regions includes teaching assistants, speech therapists and music teachers. Across the 63 kindergartens surveyed, teachers account for 63% of the workforce in the kindergartens surveyed, teaching assistants 26%, music teachers 8% and speech therapists 3% (Figure 2).

**Figure 2:** Composition of the educational workforce across the five regions



Total numbers of educational staff reflect differences between individual schools across the regions (Figure 3). Most schools that responded reported having on average between 2.1 and 5.1 full-time teaching assistants where one would be allocated to a whole class. One school reported having 16 teaching assistants. 16 (25%) schools reported having no teaching assistants and 40 (64%) schools reported having no speech therapist. In schools where a speech therapist was available, they were usually full-time. 55 (87%) schools reported having at least one music teacher, although they were mostly part-time. Only 3 schools (5%) reported having access to a psychologist on site in the school.

**Figure 3:** Total numbers of educational staff across the five regions



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### Engaging parents and families

Thirty-eight (60%) schools reported some level of engagement with parents and families in the form of parents volunteering to help at the school. Activities that parents were involved in ranged from manual labour such as repairs and cleaning to involvement in the strategic running of the school and decision-making processes. Parents were also reported as often being involved in the design and delivery of educational sessions and extra-curricular activities.

### 5.2 Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

44% (n=28) of kindergartens surveyed reported that they have children enrolled at their school with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), with an average of 3 children with SEND per class (Table 4). The most frequently reported special needs of those children enrolled in schools are communication difficulties (approximately 40% of children). Learning disabilities and social-emotional difficulties represented another 40%, whilst children with physical disabilities made up just over 10%.

**Table 4:** Overview of availability of services for children with special educational needs (SEND) by region

	Ungheni	Falesti	Calarasi	Nisporeni	Cahul
Kindergartens with children with SEND (%)	10 (66.7)	8 (61.5)	6 (40)	2 (13.3)	2 (50)
Average children with SEND per class	3.6	1.8	3.4	1.0	1.0
Max children with SEND per class	8	2	9	1	1
Min children with SEND per class	1	1	1	1	1
Kindergartens with physical facilities for children with SEND (%)	1 (11.1)	1 (14.3)	1 (16.7)	1 (50)	0 (0)
Kindergartens with additional teaching support for children with SEND (%)	8 (80)	2 (28.6)	2 (33.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Kindergartens using alternative communication methods with children with SEND (%)	4 (44.4)	2 (33.3)	3 (50)	2 (100)	0 (0)
Kindergartens with parental support for children with SEND (%)	4 (40)	1 (12.5)	3 (50)	1 (50)	1 (50)
Kindergartens with dedicated therapy space for children with SEND (%)	6 (60)	1 (12.5)	5 (83.3)	0 (0)	1 (50)
Kindergartens with sensory room for children with SEND (%)	1 (10)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Kindergartens with reporting access to community-based services for children with SEND (%)	6 (60)	4 (50)	3 (60)	1 (50)	1 (50)

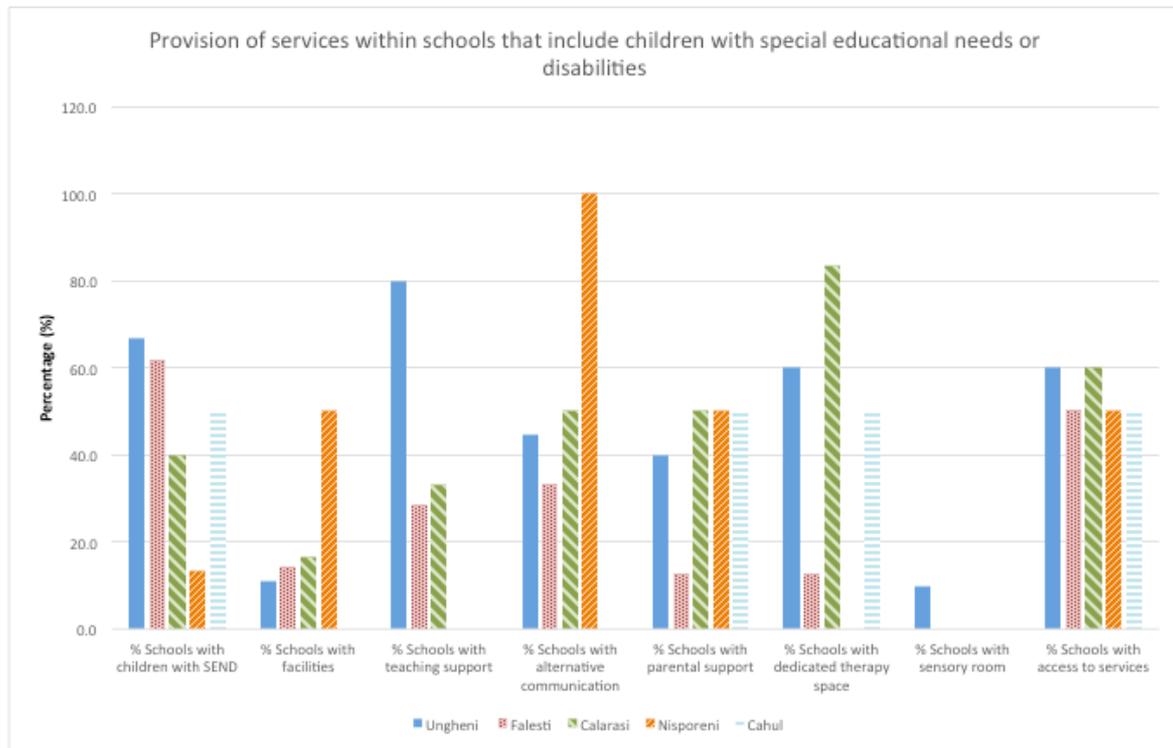
The questionnaire administered to kindergartens also ascertained the availability of facilities and services within the school to support children with SEND. Response rates varied but only 4 schools identified specific facilities that were available to support children with physical disabilities, such as wheelchair ramps. Some respondents reported that such facilities were not necessary as they don't have children with physical disabilities enrolled in their schools, however others identified a need for such facilities but no provision. 19% of kindergartens (n=12) reported having additional teaching support available for children with SEND, usually provided by the teacher or teaching assistant.

11 kindergartens reported the use of alternative methods of communication with children with SEND such as signs or pictures. Whilst only one school had a purpose-specific sensory room, 13 schools reported access to dedicated space for the delivery of specialist therapies such as speech or

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music therapy. 10 schools reported active engagement with parents who come into classrooms to support their own children with SEND. In addition, more than half of the schools reported that children with SEND have access to additional support services outside of school—based in the community— such as physiotherapy, speech therapy or formal assessment.

**Figure 4:** Overview of availability of services for children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) by region



### 5.3 Overview of regional Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Services

The five regional Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Services (PPAS) cover a total population of over 350,000 people and more than 600 children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), although this is generally regarded by PPAS staff as an underestimate of the actual number of children with SEND likely to be living in these regions. In addition to working with children with special needs and disabilities, these teams also work with other children identified as vulnerable. Table 5 profiles the five regional PPAS with a focus on the services they provide and availability of additional social and medical services for children with SEND in the regions they cover. The services provided usually include assessments of child development and related needs assessments, the provision of support for children and their families as well as direct assistance to the schools the children attend. Some also provide services on a mobile outreach basis (described below). Some regional PPAS, such as in Ungheni, provide additional services such as contracting experts to participate in court hearings for criminal cases involving vulnerable children. Teams across the five regions are relatively small, with only seven or eight staff members. There was some variation in the age ranges of children served by the PPAS across the regions, as shown in Table 3. All regions cover children under the age of five, with the exception of Cahul which provides services to children aged 5 and above. All teams report actively involving the families and carers in the work they undertake.

All regional teams were aware of additional State provided social services available to children with SEND and their families in their regions, including foster care and respite (short-term) care, as well as psychological and personal assistance services. Three regions (Ungheni, Falesti and Calarasi) also identified the provision of additional support services offered through local civil society organisations for young children (0-7 years).

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**Table 5:** Profile of Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Service (PPAS) teams and availability of services for preschool children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)

Characteristic	Ungheni	Falesti	Calarasi	Nisporeni	Cahul
Size of Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Service (PPAS) team	8	7	7	7	8
Age of children eligible to access Psycho-Pedagogical Assistance Services	0-8	3-18	3-18	2-16	5-16
Availability of additional regional public social services for children with SEND	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Availability of additional regional services supported by civil society organisation (CSOs)	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Availability of additional regional medical services for children with SEND	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Preschools in region that accept children with SEND (%)	55 (100)	15 (31.3)	7 (21.2)	2 (7.7)	1*
Provision of transport for children with SEND	N	N	N	Y	Y
Preschools with parent group or CSO attached	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
PPAS involvement of parents/carers of children with SEND	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

\*Denotes a specialist school only for children with SEND

### 5.4 Overview of Mobile Outreach Services

Three of the five regions surveyed currently provide mobile outreach services: Ungheni, Falesti and Nisporeni. The Mobile Outreach Teams (MOTs) are composed of between 4-6 staff and provide services for children and young people with disabilities that are homebound or living in hard-to-reach areas. Services provided by the MOTs include psychological assessment, physiotherapy and rehabilitation as well as general advice and support. Respondents reported a desire to add additional services to more effectively meet needs, particularly speech and language therapy, psycho-pedagogic services and psychiatric services. MOTs involve parents and carers directly in the delivery of services to their children through training in areas such as therapeutic massage and rehabilitative activities. They also provide information to parents to help them understand their child's condition.

### 5.4 Parents and carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities

28 parents and carers of children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) from across the five regions participated in this exercise. Distribution across the regions was as follows: Ungheni (n=5), Falesti (n=6), Calarasi (n=6), Nisporeni (n=6) and Cahul (n=5). Respondents had children in their care between the ages of 1.5 and 7 years, with a median age of 5.

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**Table 6: Summary of responses from survey of 28 parents/carers of children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) across the five regions**

	Yes	No	No Response
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Do you currently care for a child or children with a disability?	28 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Does your child wear glasses?	3 (10.7)	25 (89.3)	0 (0)
Does your child wear a hearing aid?	0 (0)	28 (100)	0 (0)
Do you use any alternative methods of communication with your child, such as signs or pictures?	9 (32.1)	19 (67.9)	0 (0)
Does your child attend any type of school?	19 (67.9)	9 (32.1)	0 (0)
Has your child ever received any <b>public</b> support services in your community? For example, physiotherapy, speech therapy, or formal assessment.	25 (89.3)	3 (10.7)	0 (0)
Did you have to pay a fee for any of these public services?	3 (12)	21 (84)	1 (3.6)
Have you ever sought <b>private</b> support services for your child?	15 (53.6)	12 (42.9)	1 (3.6)
Do you participate in any support groups or meetings with other parents/carers of children with disabilities?	9 (32.1)	19 (67.9)	0 (0)

**Range of special needs and disabilities as reported by parents and carers**

As reported by respondents, only 3 (11%) of the children wore glasses, although a further two children were identified that either needed them but didn't have them, or would need them in the near future. No children were identified that wore a hearing aid (Table 6). The most common areas of disability reported were communication difficulties (43%), followed by socio-emotional difficulties (21%), although many parents reported multiple disabilities (Table 7).

**Table 7: Frequency of disabilities as reported by parents and carers**

Disability	Frequency
Communication	12 (43%)
Socio-emotional	6 (21%)
Learning	4 (14%)
'Infantile brain paralysis'	4 (14%)
Eye-sight	4 (14%)
Epilepsy	3 (11%)
Down's syndrome	2 (7%)
Physical mobility	2 (7%)
Other	10 (36%)

**Educational and support services as reported by parents and carers**

Almost 68% (19) of parents reported that their child attends school, with 18 attending a mainstream inclusive kindergarten and 1 child attending a specialist kindergarten. Of the 9 children that do not attend school, 5 were from Ungheni and 4 from Nisporeni, representing 100% and 66% of the respondents for those regions, respectively. The most common reason provided by parents and carers for their child not attending school was that the children had high-levels of needs, which in many cases could not be met by the schools. A few respondents reported some schools taking little interest in

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providing for the needs of the child. Only one respondent identified that the child's non-attendance was due to the unwillingness of the parents to send the child to school.

Almost 90% (n=25) of respondents identified that their child had received some level of public support services available to them. The most common services accessed were speech therapy (56%) and consultations with a neurologist (32%), with a number of families (11) accessing multiple services (Table 8). Most respondents were made aware of these public services from professionals including healthcare providers and teachers, with a small number finding out from friends and family (n=4).

**Table 8: Frequency of reported utilisation of public support services**

<b>Public support service</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Speech therapist	14 (56%)
Neurologist	8 (32%)
Family doctor	6 (24%)
Psychiatrist/psychologist	4 (16%)
Massage/paraffin therapy	4 (16%)
Physiotherapy	2 (8%)
Mobile Outreach Team	1 (4%)
ABA therapy	1 (4%)
Paediatric specialist	1 (4%)

In addition to accessing publicly provided support services, many families (n=15) also sought access to private services. This mostly includes private medical consultations and care (67%) and private prescriptions for medicines (40%) but also includes access to private therapies and medical tests.

#### **Access to support for parents and carers**

Only a small number of respondents identified that they accessed support groups (n=9), with no respondents from Nisporeni included in this group. Those that did participate in such groups reported that they were useful for building a support network for advice, especially around treatments and therapies. Despite the relatively low reported utilisation of such support, all regions surveyed reported having at least some pre-schools with parent groups or relevant civil society organisations attached.

## **6. Key findings**

- A high proportion of the children with special needs and disabilities enrolled in inclusive pre-schools have communication difficulties. This finding is consistent with recent figures from the Moldovan National Bureau of Statistics (Table 2). Simultaneously, speech therapists comprise only a small proportion of educational staff available in schools across the five regions surveyed.
- PPAS and Mobile Outreach Teams highlighted a need for additional expertise in communication difficulties. Both expressed the desire to add speech therapy services to their remit in order to meet demand.
- Only a small proportion (6%) of schools surveyed have adequate physical facilities to support children with special needs and disabilities, such as wheelchair ramps.
- Only a small proportion of parents and carers of children with SEND reported attending support groups, although those that did access such groups found them positive and useful.
- Findings suggest that children with severe disabilities and complex needs remain excluded from pre-school education, due to a range of factors including limited physical facilities to meet their needs, and unwillingness to do so perpetuated by stigma and discrimination. This remains a highly vulnerable group of children in the Republic of Moldova.

## **Mapping Exercise of pre-school education and support services for children with special needs in the Republic of Moldova**

The overall objective of the larger European Commission funded project for which this exercise was carried out is to improve access to community-based early years and pre-school support services for vulnerable children with special needs in Moldova. This mapping exercise provides an essential baseline understanding of services already in place in the five regions targeted in the project, and highlights areas of unmet need amongst relevant professionals. The findings will inform the design of a professional training programme that is also a feature of the larger project.

### **7. Limitations of this exercise**

This exercise was devised as a rapid baseline assessment of schools, key professionals and parents and carers in the five regions of Moldova targeted in the European Commission funded project for which it forms a part. It aimed to elucidate areas of specific relevance to this project, therefore it is not an exhaustive formal research analysis of pre-school education and support services for children with special needs in the Republic of Moldova. The results cannot be generalised to other regions of Moldova, nor can they identify trends due to their cross-sectional nature.

Elements of measurement error and reporting error may have been introduced through translation of original questionnaires from English into Romanian, and administration of interviews by professionals not specifically trained in qualitative research methods.

## Mapping Exercise of pre-school education and support services for children with special needs in the Republic of Moldova

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## Mapping Exercise of pre-school education and support services for children with special needs in the Republic of Moldova

### 9. Annexes

#### Annex A: Stakeholders consulted for this exercise

##### **Copil, Comunitate, Familie (CCF) and Hope and Homes for Children**

(Moldovan / UK NGOs)

Director: Liliana Rotaru

Specialist in inclusive education: Viorica Cojocaru

##### **Keystone**

(US NGO)

Director: Ludmilla Malcoci

##### **Lumos**

(UK / Moldovan NGO)

Director: Irina Malanciuc

Specialist in inclusive education: Galina Bulat

##### **Ministry of Education Moldova**

Responsible for early years inclusion: Veronica Mart

##### **Ministry of Labour and Social Protection**

Minister: Dr Stela Grigoras

Deputy Minister responsible for Early Years: Veronica Marti

##### **Partnerships for Every Child**

(Moldovan NGO, formerly EveryChild)

Director: Daniela Mamaliga

EU Project Manager: Daniela Leahu

##### **Republican Centre for Psychological Assistance**

(MoE department responsible for implementing inclusive education)

Director: Virginia Rusnac

Deputy Director: Svetlana Curilov

##### **Step by Step**

(Moldovan NGO)

Director: Cornelia Cincilei

##### **UNICEF Moldova**

Early Years lead: Larisa Virtosu

##### **World Bank**

Education lead: Lucia Casap

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### Annex B: Key resources

Action Plan for the years 2015-2017 for implementation of inclusive education development program for 2011-2020.In Romanian.

<http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=362471>

Action Plan for 2016 to resolve identified issues in education provision approved by the Government no.56-d 04.26.2016. In Romanian.

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