



THE CHILD RIGHTS PROTECTION AND SUPPORT DEPARTMENT'S EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT AND EXISTING CHALLENGES

Brot
für die Welt

MONITORING REPORT

Needs

"Rising awareness of the Child Rights Protection Department is essential."

Prospects

"The role of non-governmental organizations is huge in promoting coordination and cooperation."

"There are a lot of needs regarding vulnerable families, and we cannot meet half of them since there is no budget."



"They left none of my questions unanswered, and they help me whenever possible."

"Children need protection and support."

No to violence

Opportunities



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2022

**THE PUBLICATION WAS PREPARED BY AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION
BROT FÜR DIE WELT (BREAD FOR THE WORLD)
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	5
1. INTRODUCTION	7
STUDY METHODOLOGY.....	10
2. LEGAL OBLIGATIONS AND STANDARDS OF THE STATE.....	10
3. BEST PRACTICES	14
4. MAIN FINDINGS	16
4.1. The process of establishing the Child Rights Protection and Support Departments and their importance	16
Child Protection Department establishment and affiliation to the municipality structural unit.....	16
The need to create Child Protection Departments in municipalities.....	18
Involvement in the Child Protection Department planning and implementation process and cooperation with state agencies	19
4.2 Child Protection Department staff and qualifications	20
Enforcement of legal standards - Child Protection Department real opportunities	20
Professional training of child support persons	24
Source of informing beneficiaries about the Child Protection Department	25
Special space for beneficiaries	25
Communication between beneficiaries and department representatives	25
What type of assistance do beneficiaries need? What programs are necessary for vulnerable families in the municipality?	27

4.3 Scope of activities of Child Protection Departments - opportunities and challenges	28
Assessment of child rights protection and support programs. Problems/challenges. Prospect of identifying vulnerable families, preventing and responding to violence against womens	28
Prospect of introducing a unified approach - the need to include child rights protection program in the unified space of support for victims of domestic violence and perpetrator`s behavior change programs	28
Municipal programs aimed at the Child Rights Protection and Support Department beneficiaries	37
Mechanisms for identification of the beneficiaries and involving them in the program	39
Ways of identifying and referring children victims of violence. Relevant guidelines.....	41
Monitoring and evaluation of child protection and support programs	42
Quality of cooperation, information exchange, and coordination between the Child Protection Department and various agencies	43
Ways of institutional strengthening of the departments and improving the work quality of their staff	44
CONCLUSION:	46
RECOMMENDATIONS:	46
BIBLIOGRAPHY:.....	49

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The monitoring report aims to study the effectiveness and existing challenges of the Child Rights Protection and Support Departments (**hereinafter, Child Protection Departments/Departments**) **operating** in municipalities. In addition, attention is paid to strengthening the department staff and implementing appropriate preventive measures and the necessary response, which significantly increases the role of the Child Protection Department representatives, especially the social worker and the psychologist.

Within the study frame, 50 in-depth interviews were conducted in 10 target municipalities in June-July 2022.

The existing legal regulations and mechanisms on violence against women and domestic violence in Georgia require complex and coordinated policies for protecting and supporting gender-based and domestic violence victims at the central and local levels. At the same time, the Code on the Rights of the Child identifies local self-government powers in the field of child rights protection and support. In addition, the proper implementation of the social service decentralization policy requires a substantial increase in the municipality's role. Accordingly, since 2019, municipalities have been obliged to create structural units to implement child rights protection and support programs.

The current international best practices also offer several European, Australian, and American models, where child support services organized by municipalities play a leading role. These models include a multisectoral approach, delegation of services / the use of outsourcing for their [service] effective delivery, etc.

The study has revealed stakeholders' insufficient involvement in discussing proposals on Child Protection Departments and their creation (their intervention was primarily limited to comments on the shared document and written recommendations). It led to the lack of information about this institution in society. Also, it laid the foundation for some shortcomings, which were revealed from the initial stage of the Child Protection Department's creation and functioning. The monitoring results have also shown that there was no "open" selection of the Child Protection Department personnel. The new structure was composed of the existing staff through one-time retraining, which, according to the study respondents, was insufficient. During the monitoring process, the creation of continuous education opportunities for raising the departments' staff

qualifications was repeatedly noted. Consequently, the lack of qualified staff and incomplete awareness of their authorities by Child Protection Department representatives' is a challenge.

Besides, the **lack of personnel** is also a challenge. **The lack of social workers and psychologists** is especially evident.

The study has also revealed **the need of raising awareness** of Child Protection Departments since many respondents did not have information about the Department. However, it should be noted that after communication with the department representatives, the direct beneficiaries expressed great satisfaction and assessed their work positively. It should also be noted that in many cases, **the attitude towards beneficiaries and timely receipt of services /proper referral depends on the Child Protection Department representative/ individual decisions**, and a gap in the systemic approach is identified. According to the current practice, if the beneficiary moves to another municipality, s/he may not be able to communicate with the local structures promptly and face problems with receiving the service. However, the study revealed a specific example, when a beneficiary (teenager) moved to another municipality but was monitored and provided with appropriate services upon the social worker's personal decision and contacts.

The Child Protection Department members, field experts, and often the beneficiaries also realize **the importance of cooperation and coordinated work** of relevant agencies.

Identifying vulnerable families by the Child Protection Department is a **relatively strong point**. However, **limited human and material resources are also a barrier** (for example, lack of transport to reach mountainous and/or relatively remote villages). Also, an insufficient number of specialists hinder the identification of potential beneficiaries. The problem is the **lack of municipal services**, which significantly **weakens the Child Protection Department representatives' motivation** since they cannot provide the necessary assistance when identifying vulnerable families. It diminishes the institution's role but also causes **distrust among the beneficiaries**.

Furthermore, since the creation of the Child Protection Departments, **their activities have not been monitored and evaluated**, and it is a challenge as well. It would have contributed to a more precise identification of problems and improved the efficiency of the department's work.

Despite the abovementioned, the persons involved in the study **were aware of the Child**

Protection Department's importance in identifying vulnerable families and preventing violence. The monitoring process has identified specific ways of filling the existing gaps and prospects for the institution's development. According to most respondents, **it should be based on the coordinated work of various relevant agencies and the multisectoral cooperation approach.**

Recommendations for municipalities include the provision of continuous qualification-raising programs to the Child Rights Protection Department representatives; the creation and improvement of relevant tools/guidelines; introduction and diversification of municipal services tailored to the beneficiaries' needs; an expansion of service area; improvement of the beneficiary identification system and better protection of confidentiality principles; provision of appropriate human, technical and material resources for the proper functioning of the Departments, etc. In addition, recommendations for various agencies include creating appropriate conditions for enforcing legislative standards, continuous education, awareness raising campaign, etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

The complexity of the phenomenon of violence against children is manifested in its "invisibility" and originates from society's mentality and prevailing cultural stereotypes. Children's safety and well-being are endangered by maltreatment and neglect related to domestic violence.

Living in an abusive environment for children, manifests itself in various complicated ways, namely: **behavioral, social, and emotional** (aggression, anger, fear, anxiety, depression, etc.), **cognitive, and attitudinal** (low academic performance, unconditional acceptance of gender stereotypes and violent behaviour, conflict, and impaired problem-solving skills/inability, etc.), **chronic problems** (high rates of depression and trauma symptoms, and violent behaviour acceptance in adulthood). Therefore, ensuring the children's welfare and safety should not be regarded as an obligation of only one structural unit or professional group.¹

¹ Child Protection in Families Experiencing Domestic Violence. H. Lien Bragg, 2003. **Child Abuse and Neglect user Manual** Series U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families Children's Bureau Office on Child Abuse and Neglect. p. 1. Available at – https://books.google.ge/books?hl=en&lr=&id=iGpHAAAAMAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP8&dq=Child+Protection+in+Families+Experiencing+Domestic+Violence.+H.+Lien+Bragg,+2003.&ots=JgBERmjFa1-&sig=UHSv-byBOLhcxj3Z0OvrYeVILcs&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Child%20Protection%20in%20Families%20Experiencing%20Domestic%20Violence.%20H.%20Lien%20Bragg%2C%202003.&f=false

A holistic approach to the issue is crucial.²³ Their local authorities' role and enhanced involvement in child protection and support issues are essential⁴.

At the meeting held in 2018, municipality and UN representatives discussed the state policy necessary for the children and family welfare. The UNICEF representative **stated**, **“Municipalities have a crucial role in protecting children from violence... and in providing assistance”** and stressed the municipality's obligation to provide essential services for protecting the child and the family's rights.

A manual published by **Save the Children** in 2019 emphasizes **the local government's role and importance in developing child-friendly, preventive, and early response-aimed services**, which implies developing and implementing referral, response, rehabilitation, and “case management” programs. It primarily requires **the institutional strengthening of the social workers' roles**. For instance, training for staff working with children/families should **focus on identifying, referring to the relevant agency, and protecting confidentiality**.

Besides, to ensure the sustainability and viability of the child protection and support system, it is necessary to coordinate the work of response and referral mechanisms and strengthen preventive ones, which requires the investment of relevant financial resources.⁵

According to the Pan American Health Organization, there are three levels of prevention within the municipal policy strategy of child rights protection and support (in the direction of domestic violence): **the first level** - includes the coordinated work of the health, educational, and public sectors to develop strategies for preventing domestic violence and recognizing it as a social problem; **the second level** - refers to stopping domestic violence,

2 **Children as Victims of Violence in the Municipalities of Bujanovc and Presevo:** The Forms of Manifestation. Journal of Modern Education Review, ISSN 2155-7993, USA. September 2014, Volume 4, No. 9, pp. 699–708 Doi: 10.15341/jmer (2155-7993)/09.04.2014/006 Ó Academic Star Publishing Company, 2014.. 1. Available at - https://www.researchgate.net/publication/288124376_Children_as_Victims_of_Violence_in_the_Municipalities_of_Bujanovc_and_Presevo_The_Forms_of_Manifestation

3 **Violence against women. Public policies on domestic violence.** Gender, Ethnicity, and Health Unit. Pan American Health Organization (regional office of World Health Organization). p.14. Available at - https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306012171_Violence_against_Women_The_Health_Sector_Responds_V_Pan_American_Health_Organization_Pan_American_Health_Organization

4 **The Role of Local Governments in the protection of Children's Rights Based on the Law of Child Protection.** By: Laurensius Arliman S. Graduate Student of Andalas University Limau Manis, Padang, West. August 2017. p. 6-9.

5 **Strengthening Child Protection Systems.** Save the Children. Published by Save the Children UK 1 St John's Lane, London, EC1M 4AR, UK. © Save the Children 2019. pp. 13-44. Available at - https://resource-centre.savethechildren.net/pdf/strengthening_child_protection_systems.pdf/

as soon as it is identified, by involving in health services and/or other structural units. It requires multisectoral, coordinated work to protect victims of violence and children; **the third level** - is working on eliminating the domestic violence consequences (physical and psychological). It includes consultation, medical care, and support groups.⁶

In 2019, Child Rights Protection and Support Departments were established in municipalities throughout the country to develop and implement municipal programs for protecting and supporting child rights and coordinating work at the local level between stakeholders (including relevant state institutions, legal entities of private law, and non-governmental and international organizations).

This paper aims to study the challenges and the effectiveness of the Child Rights Protection structural unit activities existing in municipalities and develop relevant recommendations based on the obtained data and findings to promote institutional strengthening and improvement of their activities.

⁶ **Violence against women. Public policies on domestic violence.** Gender, Ethnicity, and Health Unit. Pan American Health Organization (regional office of World Health Organization). p.14. Available at - https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306012171_Violence_Against_Women_The_Health_Sector_Responds_Pan_American_Health_Organization_Pan_American_Health_Organization

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methods, such as desk research and in-depth interview, were used in the monitoring process.

Target municipalities: 10 (Chokhatauri, Tkibuli, Kobuleti, Baghdati, Vani, Terjola, Samtredia, Senaki, Zugdidi, and Tsalenjikha).

Target groups: representatives of municipalities, social workers/psychologists, representatives of international/non-governmental organizations (including World Vision, UNICEF, SOS Children's Village, Child Welfare League, etc.), representatives of Agency for State Care and Assistance For the (Statutory) Victims of Human trafficking, and representatives of the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs.

Number of in-depth interviews: 50

Fieldwork was conducted in June and July 2022.

2. LEGAL OBLIGATIONS AND STANDARDS OF THE STATE

Under the Constitution of Georgia, **the rights of mothers and children in Georgia are protected by law.**⁷ This right has a positive attitude toward the state and demands fulfillment of its obligations. In particular, the state takes care not only of the social rights of mothers and children, which first of all implies providing them with minimal means of existence, health insurance, and other components of social assistance, but also protects the family from various forms of violence by legislation. The rights of mothers and children are protected both by national legislation and international law norms.⁸

In 2017, when Georgia ratified **the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (known as the Istanbul Convention)**, a new phase of combating violence against women and domestic violence began. The state has undertaken to implement a more effec-

⁷ Constitution of Georgia, l 30.23. available at - <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/30346?-publication=36>

⁸ Comments on the Constitution of Georgia, Georgian citizenship. Basic human rights and freedoms, p. 449, 2013. Available at - http://www.library.court.ge/upload/Constitution_Commentary_Human_Rights.pdf

tive, **complex, and coordinated policy** for the protection and support of victims of violence against women and domestic violence. The third chapter of the Convention is devoted to preventing violence against women and domestic violence. Article 17 obliges the state to **conduct an information and awareness-raising campaign about the negative consequences of child abuse**. And the list of paragraph 3 of Article 18, represented in the protection and support chapter, explicitly specifies that the state should consider the needs of children victims of violence and make protection and support services available to them. In addition, Article 26 of the Convention obliges the parties to provide all necessary legislative or appropriate age group-oriented **psychosocial consultations** to protect and assist child witnesses.

In addition to Istanbul Convention, Georgia joined the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** in 1994 (adopted on November 20, 1989). It assumed obligations under the convention to take all appropriate legislative measures to protect a child from all forms of physical or psychological violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.⁹

In 2019, on the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Georgia adopted the **Code on the Rights of the Child**, taking the protection of children's rights to a substantially new level. It is the first unified state policy document that includes specific, effective mechanisms to ensure children's well-being.¹⁰ The third book of the Code is entirely devoted to institutional guarantees of protection and support of the rights and freedom of the child. Article 85 of the Code provides for **the obligation of authorized state and municipal bodies to implement child rights protection and support programs to ensure effective protection and support of the child's rights**. Its objectives are:

9 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, I 19. Available at - <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1399901?publication=0>

10 Statement of Sophio Kiladze, chairperson of the Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee of the parliament, who led the three-year process of drafting the code. Available at - shorturl.at/muvKP

- The promotion of the social development of the child;
- The promotion of the education of the child;
- The promotion of the health of the child;
- The promotion of child care;
- The promotion of meeting the individual needs of a child with disabilities;
- The provision of the functioning of a childcare institution.¹¹

Chapter 12 of the code determines the legal powers in protecting and supporting the child's rights, where Article 96 identifies those of the **municipal bodies**. In particular, the third part of this article obliges the municipality, within its competence, to designate a relevant office (structural unit) for developing programs for the protection and support of the rights of the child. This structural unit will ensure child rights protection management and implementation control within the scope of the legal or delegated powers of the municipality.¹² Since September, after entering the Code on the Rights of the Child into force, under the requirements of other national legislative acts in Georgia and the regulations of the municipality City Hall, instruction(s) approved by the mayor's order(s) on implementing the child and family support action, **Child Rights Protection and Support Departments** have been established at the municipal level.¹³

According to the Municipal City Council resolution, the departments have the following composition:

- **Child social worker** of the Child Rights Protection and Support Department;
- **Child psychologist** of the Child Rights Protection and Support Department;
- **Child health management specialist** of the Child Rights Protection and Support Department;

¹¹ The Code on the Rights of the Child, L 85 (1-2) available at - <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4613854?publication=2>

¹² Ibid, L 96,3.

¹³ Tsalenjikha Municipality City Council resolution on "Approving the Regulations of Tsalenjikha Municipality City Hall Social Service, Health Care and Children Rights Support Service" (September 23, 2019, №24). Available at - https://tsalenjikha.gov.ge/sites/default/files/danarti_1jandacva.pdf
Note: in each municipality, these departments are integrated differently with different pre-existing departments.

- **Lawyer (Legal aid professional)** of the Child Rights Protection and Support Department;
- **Child protection inspector** of the Child Rights Protection and Support Department whose functions and authorities are outlined in the above-mentioned local normative act.¹⁴

Timely implementation of these international and national legal norms determines effective prevention of violence against women and/or domestic violence, support, and protection of victims. However, adopting a new Action Plan for the fight against gender-based and domestic violence and the protection of victims has been alarmingly delayed for two years. Accordingly, it is impossible to inform the public about the specific obligations and actions of all the responsible agencies, hold them accountable, and assess the quality of the implemented activities. Besides, there is no new state audit report which would assess the quality of the implementation of the 2018-20 Action Plan. According to the public defender 2021 annual report, **the lack of services, relevant specialists, and geographical access to services focused on child rehabilitation and support remains a challenge in the country.**¹⁵ Comprehensive drafting of legislative acts at the municipal level is still problematic. It is evidenced by the analysis of child's rights protection departments' regulations (provided by the Fund "Sukhumi"), which mostly are copies of each other and do not always meet the specific challenges and needs of the municipalities.

14 Tsalenjikha Municipality City Council Resolution on "Approving the Tsalenjikha Municipality City Hall the Health Protection and Social Service Regulation" on amending Resolution N24 of September 23, 2019 of Tsalenjikha Municipality. L.5(8,9,10,11,12). Available at - <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4960518?publication=0>

15 Public Defender's Report on the Situation in Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia, p. 269, 2021. Available at - <https://www.ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2022040413242699860.pdf>

3. BEST PRACTICES

Germany - Due to Germany's federal arrangement, laws on children's protection differ at the federal and district (Bundesländer) levels. In each federal state, the municipalities organize child welfare services, which identify the support programs and structures offered by the **local Jugendämter - youth welfare offices**. **Jugendämter's** functions include providing services for children and their families, including social work, educational services, consultation for parents, etc. They are also obliged to investigate whether the child is in danger. **The services may be provided by state structures but carried out by non-governmental organizations**. When a risk assessment is carried out in a vulnerable family, if a social worker cannot cope with the problem, his/her colleagues get involved. **The Jugendämter** offers different services to the family if necessary (parents have the right to choose the offered services). Even if the child is not at serious risk of violence, **the family is offered such support services as consultation, social worker support, early intervention programs, etc.**¹⁶

USA - Professionals working on child support and welfare issues often operate with other "actors" rather than individually, e.g., law enforcement bodies, courts, various service providers, etc. The monitoring report represents examples of 5 states and their different approaches to children's protection and support, from which we highlight two interesting approaches. For example, in Massachusetts and Oregon, Child Protection Services (CPS - an administrative unit responsible for social work related to the welfare of children) **operates based on an intersectoral approach (different relevant agencies are involved in the implementation of services from the beginning)**. In contrast, the Children's Bureau in San Diego has established a new structural unit specifically for CPS-Child Protection Services cases that focuses on changing existing practices. Besides, it conducts training for Child Protection Service workers [social workers] on coping strategies in the face of domestic violence.¹⁷

Australia - A comprehensive, "integrated response" to vulnerable families and domestic violence, is recognized as best practice at international and national levels. The term "integrated response" refers to the state and public sectors' coordinated work, prioritizing the family, women, and children and coping with the abusive environment based on a

16 Hestia. **Briefing on the German Child Protection System**. Susanne Witte, Laura Miehlsbradt, Eric van Santen & Heinz Kindler. September 2016. p. 1-5. Available at - <https://welfarestatefutures.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/hestia-whitepaper-german-child-protection-system-aug2016.pdf>

17 **Efforts by Child Welfare Agencies to Address Domestic Violence: The Experiences of Five Communities**. Laudan Y. Aron and Krista K. Olson the Urban Institute. March 1997. Available at - <https://www.aspe.hhs.gov/reports/efforts-child-welfare-agencies-address-domestic-violence-experiences-five-communities-0>

holistic approach. Program providers work in coordination with relevant local agencies to assess and manage risks. It includes assessment, management, monitoring, coordination of response services, referral procedures, consultation, recording child protection issues, etc.¹⁸

Lithuania - Municipal bodies and institutions organize and provide financing for social, healthcare, educational, and other services necessary for the family. Besides, they analyze the status of the child's well-being in the municipality, plan and ensure measures for protecting child rights; provide the family and the child with **initial consultations, and deliver social services** (by a social worker). If necessary, other specialists and municipal bodies are involved as well. Furthermore, they coordinate various agencies and organizations to work on the issue of child and family welfare, register children living in the municipality, and provide assistance in case of educational needs.¹⁹

Finland - The protection of child rights is supported by the Constitution (also set by the European human rights and UN conventions on child rights). **Local authorities in each municipality are responsible for organizing child welfare services.** The self-government can either provide these services to the beneficiaries or purchase **them from other organizations (in this case, they are responsible for monitoring)**. In addition, various organizations are involved in providing and developing the services. The local authorities are also responsible for providing social services to the child and his/her family, obtained **through the social worker assessment.**²⁰

Norway - Each municipality is responsible for establishing a Child Welfare Service, which will work under the law concerning child protection and family assistance. In addition, it provides referral (in relatively severe cases of violence, e.g., foster care needs). The governor monitors the municipality activities to see whether the child protection service has fulfilled its obligations and whether the measures taken comply with the law on protecting children. In addition, the governor is an administrative appellate unit/body that can respond to the municipality's decisions individually. For instance, if the beneficiary expresses dissatisfaction about receiving improper service or not receiving it, the munic-

18 **Practice Standards for Perpetrator Intervention: Engaging and Responding to Men who are Perpetrators of Family and Domestic Violence.** Department of Attorney General and Justice (2012). Published by the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, Family and Domestic Violence Unit 2015. p. 2-15. Available at - <https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2021-10/Practice-Standards-for-Perpetrator-Intervention.pdf>

19 **The Lithuanian child rights protection system. State Child's Rights Protection and Adoption Service** (under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour). Available at - <https://vaikoteises.lt/protection-of-children/the-lithuanian-child-rights-protection-system/>

20 Ministry of Social Affairs and Health – Finland. Available at - <https://stm.fi/en/social-services/child-welfare>

pality is obliged to respond on the governor's decision basis. Subsequently, the governor monitors the provision of appropriate services to children.²¹

Netherlands - Municipalities and the central government work together on measures for coping with domestic violence. Since January 2015, municipalities have been responsible for combating domestic violence and violence against children. As a result, a structure called Veilig Thuis ("Safe at Home"- "stay safe") has been established. Municipalities are directly responsible for women's shelters and consultation centres. In addition, municipalities cooperate with various agencies in this direction, e.g., the health-care sector, probation agency, police, etc. The Association of Netherlands Municipalities has developed **a manual on the fight against violence against children and domestic violence, which outlines relevant strategies, approaches, and information on necessary skills.**

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1. THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING THE CHILD RIGHTS PROTECTION AND SUPPORT DEPARTMENTS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

CHILD PROTECTION DEPARTMENT ESTABLISHMENT AND AFFILIATION TO THE MUNICIPALITY STRUCTURAL UNIT

Within the framework of the study carried out by the Fund "Sukhumi", Child Rights Protection and Support Departments (Chokhatauri, Tkibuli, Kobuleti, Baghdati, Vani, Terjola, Samtredia, Senaki, Zugdidi and Tsalenjikha), included in the monitoring report, were established almost simultaneously from September 1 to October 1, 2020. These departments are integrated into the following structural units according to the municipalities: Health and Social Protection Service (Zugdidi, Kobuleti, Senaki, Terjola, and Chokhatauri); Administrative and Procurement Service²² (Vani, Terjola); Social and Child Protection Service (Tsalendzhikha). In Tkibuli, the department is represented as a separate structural unit. As for the municipality of Samtredia, at this stage, the Child's Rights Protection Department has not yet been formed (the study respondent cites the lack of human resources/qualified personnel as one of the reasons). (See Table #1)

²¹ **County Governor - Statsforvalteren.no. Child protection** Available at - <https://www.statsforvalteren.no/en/portal/Children-and-parents/Child-protection/>

²² However, the research revealed some respondents' opinions, that it would be better to unite the child protection department with the health care and social services department. The reason is that the administrative service consists of many secondary structural units, and the function of the child protection department has somehow been "lost".

Table #1

Municipality	Current employees
Chokhatauri	Department Head and Inspector. The community social worker has to combine the social worker function as well. (The department social worker underwent retraining, but in the end, she no longer wanted to work in this field).
Tkibuli	The fully completed staff includes two social workers, a lawyer, an inspector, a psychologist, a healthcare specialist, and a head of the department.
Kobuleti	There are 2 social workers, a healthcare specialist, a department coordinator, and a lawyer.
Vani	A department head, an inspector, and a social worker.
Terjola	The head of municipality administration combines the coordinator function as well. In addition, the department has a social worker, a psychologist, and a healthcare specialist. The function of a lawyer is performed by the lawyer of the City Hall.
Zugdidi	The fully completed staff includes a social worker, a lawyer, a psychologist, a healthcare specialist, an inspector, and a coordinator.
Senaki	A manager, a social worker, a psychologist, and an inspector.
Tsalenjikha	A social worker, a lawyer, and an inspector.
Baghdati	A social worker, a lawyer, a psychologist, a health specialist, and a coordinator

THE NEED TO CREATE CHILD PROTECTION DEPARTMENTS IN MUNICIPALITIES

Several factors resulted in the need to establish Child Protection Departments. This process was preceded by the creation and implementation of the Code of Children's Rights. Also, the policy of decentralization of the social direction existing in the country **implies the direct involvement of municipalities in implementing various programs**. Therefore, it was necessary to make the provision of social services more mobile. At the same time, the facts of child abuse and the weak policy of violence prevention were observed. Therefore, it was necessary to strengthen and support families with multiple needs. ***"All programs are designed to respond to an incident after it happens. That's why it is essential to take preventive measures in advance."*** - Tinatin Chelishvili, Imereti Development Center Coordinator, Community Development Facilitator. **The study (the majority of respondents indicate it) showed the need for Child Protection Departments as a mechanism for preventing problems/violence/crises.**

The municipality is the item closest to the local population/vulnerable groups, and they should be the best able to identify and further respond to their specific needs: ***"It was also crucial that the social worker's resources were limited. After entering the family, you identify many problems and can't do anything with your bare hands. Therefore, the role of the municipality was essential in this regard. The municipality has real leverage, programs, and budget, and can do more in this regard"*** - a social worker of the target municipality.

As a specific example, we can give the opinion expressed by Marekhi Mshvenieradze, Head of **Baghdati** Municipality Healthcare and Social Services. When World Vision created a Child's Rights Protection group in the municipality, the mayor's representative referred several cases to them, which were managed effectively. As the respondent pointed out, with the help of the mentioned group, the program for strengthening families with children was included in the municipal budget. So, **the group work process identified the need for strengthening the family, which included the parents' employment**. The program was launched with World Vision financial assistance, and after it proved to be effective, the program was integrated into the municipal budget.

A social worker from Samtredia municipality, a representative of the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking, indicates the necessity and importance of creating Child Protection Departments. Besides, she emphasizes

the positive role that the Child Protection Department would play regarding the municipalities' beneficiaries and representatives in case of existence: ***"It would be a great relief if this department existed and was staffed by personnel with relevant qualifications. The child's department would work in a program part. Despite the presence of 3 social workers, we work on many cases simultaneously and not only with children. It should be noted that the municipality has more resources in terms of programming. Besides, it is also essential that they have huge resources regarding the identification through the mayor's representatives, which would significantly change and improve the work of not only other service providers but also the condition of the beneficiaries"***.

INVOLVEMENT IN THE CHILD PROTECTION DEPARTMENT PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND COOPERATION WITH STATE AGENCIES

Most of the respondents participating in the study were not directly involved in planning and establishing Child Protection Departments. For example, the involvement of most of the experts was limited to written recommendations and comments. And according to them, they did not even receive any feedback. Accordingly, the department representatives realized the Child Protection Department's specificity, importance, and function during the structure setup process or at a later stage.

The qualitative research respondents name specific persons/organizations/representatives of structural units having provided **methodological and financial support during the establishment of Child Protection Departments.** Several important "actors" were identified within the framework of the study:

- ✓ **Human Rights Protection Committee of the Parliament of Georgia;**
- ✓ **Child Welfare League** - (methodological assistance - developed screening forms that allow identifying the risk of harm, and also describe how to conduct screening, how to assess the family; identify which level the family belongs according to the risk of harm);
- ✓ **Experts on the issue: Paata Turava (co-author of the Child Protection Code), Zviad Kordzadze, Manana Fitskheleishvili;**
- ✓ **Teachers' professional training center** (professional training course);
- ✓ **World Vision Georgia** (methodological and financial support).

4.2 CHILD PROTECTION DEPARTMENT STAFF AND QUALIFICATIONS

ENFORCEMENT OF LEGAL STANDARDS – CHILD PROTECTION DEPARTMENT REAL OPPORTUNITIES

According to some respondents, the legal standards, in the presence of relevant resources (human, financial, etc.), allow effective management of cases. However, **the problem is the lack of qualified staff, timely referral, and inappropriate level of coordination, which hinders the timely enforcement of the law.** On the other hand, the field experts point to the Child Protection Department representatives' **willingness to cooperate with various sectors** in terms of professional development and involvement in activities. This fact creates a prerequisite for enforcing standards defined by law.

*“Legislation has provided us with good standards, but children cannot benefit from them. There are following two reasons affecting it. First, it is good to set the „correct standards”, such as work focused on children’s rights in self-governing units and the emergence of institutional mechanisms. Still, the **legislator should look at this as a consistent system.** The legislator has the right to say that s/he has written something good if s/he is sure that a child gets some benefit from it and **it served the one for whom this standard had been written.** However, we have a problem at the local and central levels in the second part. Self-government representatives talking about the children’s part say that it is impossible to enforce it. They said that they had not been involved in the processes.” - Ana Abashidze, founder of Partnership for Human Rights.*

The staff was mainly selected and retrained from the already existing base. According to the respondents, **the staff was not selected through an open contest.** However, their service co-workers were trained, including those who did not want to work in a specific position (e.g., social worker) but had to. Finally, the mentioned person left the job after some time because she could not cope with the assigned responsibilities and obligations. The Head of Baghdati City Hall social and healthcare service indicates that the existing social worker has been trained,²³ the psychologist who worked in another position has been transferred to the relevant position, and the contract has been signed with the healthcare specialist. In addition, the lawyer has joined the department from the legal department. A coordinator position has also been created.

Vacancies in individual municipalities were announced on the municipality’s official website and hr.gov.ge, and the staff was selected based on interviews.

²³ In Baghdati municipality, the social worker position was vacant during the interview, and an open contest was in progress. However, none of the submitted applications was satisfactory, which indicates a shortage of qualified personnel.

As a result of the monitoring, the following specific challenges related to the personnel policy of Child Protection Departments were identified:

- ✓ **The lack of / deficiency of psychologists. For instance.: In Adjara, most municipalities do not have psychologists' staff at all.** In Chokhatauri and Tkibuli municipalities, it was noted that **the problem lies not only in the absence of a psychologist but in the public's unawareness of the importance of this specialist. Therefore, the population considers material needs satisfaction to be the priority.**
- ✓ **The lack of a sufficient number of specialists** (social worker, psychologist, legal specialist, health specialist) **and burdening the on-site staff without appropriate qualifications with adjacent obligations, which ultimately affects their work quality, efficiency, and results;**
- ✓ **In general, the lack of professionalism of the department staff.**

“An accountant was appointed as a psychologist. 250 people, who were not close to the profession, were employed as social workers. As soon as the certification process started, we were suspended because it is inconceivable that a person who has not chosen social work as a profession, nor has the appropriate values and motivation, can develop the skills and protect the beneficiary interests as needed. Then a 3-month professional online course was conducted for these people, with twice a week session...” - Ketevan Gigineishvili, Head of the Association of Social Workers.

*“For example, when a child victim of violence comes, our staff cannot work with such beneficiaries since it is very risky for them to carry out any work in this regard. Therefore, children are referred to the relevant agencies, because our staff do not have high competence in psychology and cannot provide this service. If the case is complicated, a beneficiary [child victim] remains in child care. Does the municipality fulfill the function of social departments? It's all mixed up. **A person who received several months of training will not be a reliable partner for me and will not be perceived as a specialist who will work in such a way as not to cause trauma to anyone**” - inspector of the target municipality Department of Child Rights Protection and Support.*

“When we provide legal representation to the police, and the investigator considers it necessary to involve a psychologist, we invite a psychologist from Ozurgeti, or a psychologist from the crisis centre is also involved. Since we do not have a social worker in the department... If at least one psychologist were specialized in working with children, it

would make things much easier for us.” - Madonna Lagvilava, Agency for State Care and Assistance for Victims of Human Trafficking, Social worker, Chokhatauri.

The social worker has an essential function - screening - which aims to identify the child’s well-being needs and to determine the initial level of risk of harm, based on which the appropriate response form is identified. The above is a necessary prerequisite for planning the correct preventive measures. Therefore, **the social worker’s qualifications and motivation to work are crucial for preventing violence.**

“A bio-psycho-social assessment should be done by a social worker and a person who has worked as a specialist or worked in a PR service all his life and had no connection with this field was retrained as a social worker in three months. S/He will not be able to be efficient... In several municipalities, the number of department staff has been cut down, and specialists had to become social workers not to be left unemployed” - Tinatin Chelishvili, Imereti Development Center, coordinator, Community Development Facilitator.

The lack of social workers on the ground often leads to an inability to take necessary actions at the right time. In relatively small municipalities, the staff of one social worker may be sufficient. However, in case of critical necessity, further cooperation with social workers from the Agency for State Care and Assistance for Victims of Human Trafficking may be necessary.

Despite the challenges, some field specialists emphasized **the motivation of the staff working in the Child Protection Departments and their desire to raise their qualifications**. Beneficiaries also expressed satisfaction with the work of specialists in the Child Protection Departments, even though they sometimes do not know which specialist they work with.

An interesting practice was observed in Tkibuli municipality. **There are social workers of both genders (men and women) on the staff, which makes their work and response to cases much more effective.** For example, sometimes, a teenager or a beneficiary explicitly needs and requests the involvement of a social worker of his/her gender.

When asked whether the actors of the Child Rights Protection “system” (e.g., representatives of Child Protection Departments in municipalities) are aware of their rights and duties, it was revealed that the functions, rights, and duties of specific staff units are insufficiently outlined. Therefore, it hinders the department representatives from properly realizing their role.

The target municipality representative emphasizes the department specialists' limited resources and not the problem of realizing their functions. *"The department has been created to carry out preventive activities by promoting social work. However, **the resources are so scarce that they cannot improve the beneficiary's condition, so prevention will not be possible.** Until we reach the point where this department will have its resources, the work effectiveness is difficult to assess."*

According to the expressed opinion, both problems mentioned above - unawareness towards their [department staff representatives'] functions, and scarcity of resources - are equally acute. *"**Implementation is difficult. There are loads of work... Although there are some steps forward, there is also a casual attitude toward functions and duties... In some spots, they do not have a social worker - the main axis of this team. Although they have other specialists, it is impossible to respond to referrals since the appropriate forms cannot be filled out. Therefore, the work a social worker must do, cannot be performed**"* - Eter Tshkaia, Child Welfare League.

The Child Protection Department representatives emphasized the need **to provide continuous education to specialists and share their experiences.** *"At the training, we discussed our cases and how we managed a particular case. It is good to compare what we do correctly and what we could have done differently"* - Khatuna Ochchikidze, Vani Municipality Child Rights Protection and Support Department social worker.

Intersectoral cooperation. The study respondents indicate specific examples of cooperation with various "sectors", for example, with non-governmental organizations such as Women Fund "Sukhumi" and Child Welfare League, with international organizations like World Vision, educational institutions and state agencies, Atipfund Georgia and Kutaisi Psycho-Social Rehabilitation Center. *"I think the cooperation of different sectors, governmental, and non-governmental, experts are essential. **The role of non-governmental organizations is huge in creating these platforms for promoting the coordination system... A good example is a project implemented in Ozurgeti and Telavi. It includes an educational component, increasing awareness of municipal social work, involvement, development of appropriate programs to strengthen vulnerable families**"* - Maya Gogichaishvili, Head of the Child's Rights Protection Department, a former social worker in an Atipfund.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF CHILD SUPPORT PERSONS

According to the qualitative data, in the target municipalities involved in the research, a significant part of the Child Protection and Support Department representatives have undergone qualification and certification training²⁴, which they give a positive assessment and say that the knowledge gained during the training helped them a lot while performing their work. However, several needs have been identified:

- The Child Protection Department representatives consider it necessary to conduct other skill development training. For example, in **research methodology**, so that the department specialist can develop a research tool and conduct a group discussion to identify the beneficiaries' needs and initiate them during the budgeting process. In addition, they wish to invite a **qualified specialist to the department, who will help to develop the policy document**;
- The participants in the study request **intensive training for other department specialists (psychologists, lawyers, healthcare specialists)** since social workers are more or less intensively trained. The need for professional training of psychologists and healthcare specialists has been especially highlighted;
- Some respondents indicate, that short-term training courses help with the identification of basic issues and the limits of their competence. However, according to the same respondents, short-term courses are not enough for a specialist to become a professional;
- All specialists and field experts generally demand the **formation and development of a continuous professional educational system**, including through outsourcing. **The service can be provided by civil society**;
- It is necessary to develop a unified approach and a unified standard for **working with beneficiaries/specific cases**;
- **The experience-sharing practice** between municipalities should be more intensive, especially between Child Protection Departments.

The specialists participating in the study noted that there is no legal standard related to the professional education development of persons providing child support²⁵.

²⁴ For example, training organized by the Association of Social Workers and Teacher's House (e.g. teaching 14 subjects online for 4 months), certifier program for social workers employed in self-governments, gender budgeting, three-month basic training conducted by UNICEF, training organized by World Vision (three-day-for psychologists, social workers, etc.), series of trainings conducted by the Child Welfare League on various topics, including early childhood development, psychological issues, etc.

²⁵ The Code on the Rights of the Child: Article 88, p. 1; *ibid* - Article 99

However, they also pointed out that it is necessary to outline personnel functions in some departments more thoroughly.

Source of informing beneficiaries about the Child Protection Department

The beneficiaries mainly received information about the programs from **the Child Protection Department specialists (mainly social workers)**. However, during the interview, it turned out that some beneficiaries find it challenging to identify the department and its specialists and do not have information about the department's programs and services. This fact indicates **the need of increasing awareness**. Some received information from **the village governor/trustee and/or a school representative**.

According to the beneficiaries participating in the study, the Child Protection Department representatives communicate **productively** with the family. In addition, beneficiaries emphasize the department specialists' attention to solving their problems.

Special space for beneficiaries

- **There is** one in Tkibuli, Senaki, and Zugdidi (there is no special space, but there is a separate room for the beneficiary to use upon necessity);
- **There is no** special space in Terjola and Tsalenjikha (there is a workspace for 3 employees, at the same time, where the beneficiary is received);
- **Did not have to visit/Had no information:** Baghdati, Vani, Chokhatauri, and Kobuleti.

Communication between beneficiaries and department representatives

- Social worker (reported by the majority);
- Psychologist;
- Coordinator;
- The Child Protection Department all active specialists;
- Head of the Department.

Beneficiaries are generally satisfied by the communication with the Child Protection Department specialists. Moreover, they indicate that in the future, if necessary, they will also inform other persons about the department's activities. There is a partial list of beneficiaries' assessments below: (See Table #2)

Table #2

<i>"She made an important assessment for me that I needed help. They can't do anything more for my girls." (Mother of disabled children, beneficiary, Vani).</i>
<i>"They took my problem close to heart. They call me every day" (victim of violence, beneficiary, Vani).</i>
<i>"I know I am not alone and I will not return to the perpetrator... In the last case of / violence/, my eldest son called the Child's Department representatives" (victim of violence, Terjola, beneficiary).</i>
<i>"If it were not for the department employees, my child and I would not be together. They are trying their best for me and my child" (victim of violence, beneficiary, Senaki).</i>
<i>"Any help at this stage was vital for me. If I didn't feel supported, I don't think I would have taken any risk and left my family. I had done it many times before and went to my parent's family, but I returned back" (Victim of violence, beneficiary, Vani).</i>
<i>"The work and intervention of the department saved the child's life. His mother could not take him/her to the doctor. My beneficiary did not know they employ socially vulnerable people, and I am also happy that we employed her" (Mzekala Kurtanidze, Tkibuli Child Rights Protection Department social worker).</i>
<i>"In my case, the social worker was my savior. I will refer my relative or anybody in need to this department" - (victim of violence, beneficiary, Senaki).</i>
<i>"They left none of my questions unanswered, and they help me whenever possible." (Mother of a disabled child, beneficiary, Tkibuli).</i>
<i>"The social worker calls me at least every other day. When there is an opportunity to help with clothes, shoes, and other things - they call me. She works with me psychologically; she helps me so much that she is my lifeline in everything" (mother of three children, socially vulnerable, beneficiary, Zugdidi).</i>

What type of assistance do beneficiaries need? What programs are necessary for vulnerable families in the municipality?

According to the study results, different types of **basic needs** have been identified:

- Household items and appliances: (e.g., closet, beds, refrigerator, washing machine, etc.);
- School supplies and computer equipment;
- Household appliances;
- Hygiene items - especially Pampers for children with disabilities;
- Food;
- Apartment rent.

*“Unfortunately, in the 21st century, we still have to discuss violence prevention and protection of the children victims. There are still families around us with no basic conditions for children - clothes, food, and other necessities that are vital.”-
la Ekhvaia, Coordinator of Zugdidi Child Protection and Support Department.*

Among the necessary programs, respondents mainly **highlighted** the following:

- Sports and art clubs;
- Medical program for small children;
- Programs promoting the integration of children with disabilities;
- Psychological support programs for parents and family members of disabled children;
- Programs to improve household conditions (e.g., roof repair, etc.).

4.3 SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES OF CHILD PROTECTION DEPARTMENTS – OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

ASSESSMENT OF CHILD RIGHTS PROTECTION AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS. PROBLEMS/CHALLENGES. PROSPECT OF IDENTIFYING VULNERABLE FAMILIES, PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Field experts, specialists, and beneficiaries have identified different types of **challenges**:

- ✓ A target municipality representative notes that **there has been no diversification of the local municipality programs according to the needs**. At the given moment, it is possible to benefit only from those programs that are included in the **social budget**;
- ✓ **The beneficiary must be registered in the municipality**. The family was not registered in Lanchkhuti municipality. However, with the involvement of non-governmental organizations, essentials have been provided to them;
- ✓ **We should consider transportation problems in 2 directions**:
 - **Transportation of the Child Protection Department employees**, for instance, to populated areas remote from the centre (due to lack of fuel or lack of transport in the Department): *“Petrol coupons are not enough. I had three cases. I was late in responding. However, according to the protocol, in three days, I have to visit the family”*- Child’s Rights Protection Department of the target municipality, Social worker;
 - **Beneficiaries face transportation problems, restricting/ depriving them of the opportunity to receive necessary medical services (especially for children with disabilities)**. *“My child is involved in a rehabilitation program, and I have to go to the city several times a week. It requires a lot of finances, although the social worker promised me that she would find some resources and co-finance my transportation.”* - the target municipality beneficiary, mother of a disabled child, socially vulnerable;²⁶
- ✓ **The inspector’s function** is not outlined in detail. Therefore his/her obligations are unclear;

²⁶ According to some beneficiaries, the department representatives have provided funding for their children’s transportation. Some were promised that the problem would be solved through coordination with the City Hall.

- ✓ **The psychologist does not have a working tool/her(his) role is minimal, limited only to problem identification;** At this stage, the municipality cannot purchase the working tool. Therefore, for example, the **Baghdati Municipality** psychologist introduced the assessment form/guideline developed by a qualified specialist in another municipality and is currently using it. The **Terjola municipality** Child Rights Protection Department psychologist talks about the need to increase their role and effectively involve them in case management. She gave a specific example when the psychologist's intervention (which was her goodwill and not an outlined obligation) and approach to the problem had a positive result - a teenager with a severe psychological condition could resume his normal life;²⁷
- ✓ **Low salaries of municipal employees often contribute to the certified personnel manpower drain;** *“I would like to point out a problem that hinders our effective work. We have a very low salary (600 GEL), which is inappropriate for working on such a scale. I intend to apply to a local social service agency as soon as a job opportunity exists.” Municipality representative;*
- ✓ **Lack of staff/specialists²⁸ and qualifications.** They primarily emphasize the low availability of a psychologist (absent in most municipalities). *“When the state announced a vacancy, we could not hire staff because most of them had left for big cities. People of these professions (psychologist, lawyer, social worker) should have continuous education.” - Mari Tsereteli, Child Welfare League;*

“Resources of psychologists are scarce. They don't have the proper qualifications either. There is not a good staff. They cannot conduct therapy. According to the law, social workers must be retrained everywhere, not only in municipalities... Our universities cannot provide such staff... If they come from regions and get their bachelor's degree here, they never come back... In this situation, it is justified to retrain the staff who will fill the existing gap...” - Eter Tskhakaia. Child Welfare League;

²⁷ “There was a case of violence including all forms except sexual one. Based on my conclusion, the child was referred to the Atipfund. But apparently, the child could not communicate with them and still communicate with me. I could not leave her unanswered. She even wrote to me late at night that her father was chasing them with a knife. At that time, the Atipfund was involved in case management.... I called the police, and we responded to the fact. This girl did not even go to school and was ashamed of her family situation. However, with the help of personal conversations, she continued attending school...”

²⁸ Tsalenjikha municipality does not have children's protection and support programs; therefore, it does not have a budget, no psychologist or a healthcare specialist, which hinders work efficiency.

- ✓ **Lack of relevant department specialists:** *“When I write in the conclusion that s/he needs to consult a psychologist, I know it for sure. I am not a psychologist. I learned it this last summer when I attended training on 14 subjects. One of them was about child psychology. When I do a screening, it should be comprehended by a healthcare professional, a psychologist, a lawyer, but unfortunately, we don’t have such staff”*- target municipality Child’s Rights Protection and Support Department Inspector;
- ✓ **Low level of awareness in general - this challenge affects the identification of potential beneficiaries and preventive measures. Specific positive facts of cooperation with educational institutions (e.g., in Zugdidi municipality) are insufficient at this stage:** *“The municipality has great resources to work with the community. It is essential to work with schools and kindergartens. Unfortunately, violence is perceived as only a physical fact. However, the result of psychological violence can be very profound for a child’s physical and psychological condition. Consequently, working on raising awareness is vital.”* - Tamar Meskhia, social worker of SOS Children’s Village;
- ✓ **Lack of public awareness about the departments** - e.g., parents of children with disabilities who were unfamiliar with the child rights department, have received information from other parents. The Ministry of Health imposed the obligation on the municipality to respond to the beneficiaries and provide services;
- ✓ **Sometimes, it depends on the professionalism and attentiveness of a particular representative of the department how to reach out to the population and respond to the crisis;**
- ✓ **Confidentiality protection** - personal data of the beneficiary recorded in the documentation, may become public. The above-mentioned hinders **the identification of vulnerable families and communication of potential beneficiaries with the department.** *“All data should be hidden. However, we deal with an administrative case and upload all the documents, name, surname, place of residence, etc. Although the system of public cases is closed, many people still have access to it. We could not have agreed on this issue. What can we do not to let information outside our multifunctional group?”*- target municipality Child Rights Protection and Support Department psychologist;
- ✓ **Lack of social programs and budgets in municipalities to respond to the vulnerable families` needs.** *“There are a lot of needs regarding vulnerable families,*

and we cannot meet half of them since there is no budget.”- the Department representative; “As we see, this department has neither resources nor programs. Consequently, it cannot carry out preventive measures on the ground. 99% of the cases are still referred to the agencies already working on them“- Teona Abashidze, head of charity organization “Ialkani”; “Vulnerable families are better and faster identified, and their needs are responded to. However, we are limited in terms of resources“- target municipality children’s department social worker; “The department should have its budget to create programs to help families. One thing is identification, but the fact that you cannot help and change its situation is another. Atipfund has programs, why shouldn’t we have them?”- target municipality child department social worker; “In fact, I have outlined a lot of needs according to the existing cases, but I cannot respond to them. When I enter the family and see the need, I write it down. Still, I cannot promise anything to the beneficiary except to provide the services involved in this year’s budget“- target municipality child department social worker; “It’s impossible to work like that... Moreover, transportation costs are covered from our pocket.”- target municipality children’s department social worker;

- ✓ **Improper separation of authority and accountability of the Department** - *“Departments should see how rights and duties are separated, as well as who they are accountable to. Because there is still a misunderstanding. We still do not know our responsibilities. **For example, I receive a referral from a particular case and the children’s Department...The reality is that setting up this Department did not ease the work of anyone“- Tinatin Chelishvili, Community Development Facilitator, Imereti Development Center;***
- ✓ **Lack of opportunity to implement preventive measures** - *“Perhaps we should work more on prevention... the beneficiary comes when the case of violence has happened/occurred, and the police know about it. The municipality cannot help, except for one-time assistance, and the victim of violence remains in the same reality” - head of the target municipality’s Child Rights Protection and Support Departments. “If we start working on identifying, the statistics of our beneficiaries will be much larger, and there will be much more needs, which we cannot physically meet with empty hands” - a department representative. “Certain measures need to be taken to strengthen the “preventive function”, for example, **intensive work with kindergartens and schools to raise awareness.** It requires strengthening financial and human resources and diversifying municipal programs;*

- ✓ **Cooperation with relevant agencies and referral entities and the need to strengthen coordinated work** - *“We cannot talk about the work effectiveness of separate child rights protection departments. The social system should work. The closest link to the population is the deputy mayors, who have their staff with 2-3 employees... I was admired by programs, awareness, and response to the population’s needs of Zugdidi municipality... **The system should be united, and everyone should work together since only the Child Rights Protection Department will not do anything**”* - Nino Davitashvili, UNICEF, social policy officer;
- ✓ **Two factors have been identified among the challenges related to children with special needs (mainly those with ADHD²⁹ and autism spectrum disorders), which lead to the restriction or non-acceptance of services, identification, and referral.** On the one hand, parents ‘ ignorance of the existing problem, non-recognition, and, accordingly, unwillingness to request the service. On the other hand, low awareness and unqualified approach of the educational institution teachers, which is manifested in weak communication with the Department;
- ✓ The study has also revealed that **often one-time monetary assistance given to beneficiaries is spent improperly due to weak monitoring by the departments.** Therefore, either municipality should purchase the necessary goods or check the purposefulness of the allocated funds.

29 ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Table #3

Municipalities	Challenges	Ways to overcome challenges
Chokhatauri	Low awareness of domestic violence issues in general and lack of information about the departments and their programs.	Information meetings to raise awareness, not only with community members but also with stakeholders.
	Conducting a needs assessment study to identify community issues/problems.	Help in methodology development.
	Inspector's vague function	Rights and obligations should be outlined in detail.
	A new annual financial challenge to maintain the sustainability of existing social programs.	Mobilization of additional financial resources.
	The problem of transporting the Child Protection Department members for face-to-face communication with the population. Despite identifying the needs, face-to-face communication is impossible everywhere since the villages are far from the district centre.	Provision of the department with vehicles.
Tkibuli	The issue of transportation of the Child Protection Department members for face-to-face communication with the population in mountainous locations.	Provision of the department with vehicles (they are provided with fuel).
	Inspector's vague function	Rights and obligations should be outlined in detail.
	Lack of resources affecting the effectiveness of staff work. Also, cooperation in terms of child and family-oriented services.	Intersectoral cooperation - governmental, non-governmental, expert groups. Creating appropriate platforms for information exchange.

Kobuleti	Low awareness	Conducting training, including for parents
	The problem of transporting the Child Protection Department members for face-to-face communication with the population. Sometimes in a vulnerable family, they need to develop specific skills, so intensive visits are necessary.	Provision of the department with vehicles (they are provided with fuel).
Baghdati	Beneficiary privacy-protection gap.	Strict adherence to privacy standards.
	Low availability of a psychologist, only an“evaluator” function.	Increasing access to psychologists - psycho-consulting of beneficiaries.
Vani	The department staff qualification problem (they don't have a psychologist and health specialist).	Training, and communication with field experts and specialists. Seeking specialists.
	Lack/absence of guidelines/tools for department specialists.	Allocation of money for a psychologist's work tool; Hiring a specialist to help in developing guidelines.
	Absence of a special space in the department for interviews with beneficiaries.	Allocation of some space/room in the municipality building where the beneficiary will communicate individually with the department representative.
	The problem of transporting the Child Protection Department members for face-to-face communication with the population.	Provision of the department with vehicles.

Terjola	Lack of /inflexibility of the Child Protection Department budget:	Increasing financial resources for strengthening vulnerable families. Acting according to the "one window principle", i.e. whoever identifies the needs should be fully able to provide services. It is desirable if a "Positive Parenting Course" is introduced.
	Absence of a special space in the department for interviews with beneficiaries.	Allocation of some space/room in the municipality building, where the beneficiary will talk individually with the department representative (psychologist, social worker. Worker, etc.).
	"Duplicated" services: "When a care agency helps with medication, I should be aware of it. So, I can help another family in this regard. It should also be well arranged. The same beneficiary should not only receive help, and someone should be left without aid at all" - Child Rights Protection and Support Department.	Unified (identical) program for the Child Protection Departments of all municipalities, where services will be separated from similar services in other agencies.
Senaki	Lack of department budget.	The allocation of more financial resources will enable more programs to meet the beneficiaries' needs.
	The psychologist's minimum role in the department – s/he is only involved in identifying the beneficiary. They don't have a social worker.	Seeking a social worker; increasing the psychologist's functions, and involvement in case management.
	The need for retraining of department representatives.	Continuous education – training.

Tsalenjikha	Incompletely staffed department; Improperly distributed rights and duties.	The department staffing with all the specialists stipulated by the law; Detailed outline of rights and obligations.
	Irregularity of retraining of specialists.	Continuous education provision – training.
	Lack of programs.	Increasing the number of programs that require additional financial resources.
Zugdidi	Lack of personnel.	The social worker's staff should be added (regardless of existing).
	Existing gaps in rights and duties of department representatives.	Rights and obligations should be outlined in detail for all specialists in the Department.

PROSPECT OF INTRODUCING A UNIFIED APPROACH – THE NEED TO INCLUDE CHILD RIGHTS PROTECTION PROGRAM IN THE UNIFIED SPACE OF SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND PERPETRATOR'S BEHAVIOR CHANGE PROGRAMS

Experts/ field specialists note the **need for a holistic approach** to strengthen vulnerable families, to ensure effective prevention and response to domestic violence.

“Overall, the social system should work. The mayor’s representatives should be able to provide information. The system should be unified, and everyone should work together since the Child Rights Protection Department cannot do anything separately. On the one hand, it needs programs and services to be included in these programs and services locally and on the other hand to refer them to the state services and help”- Nino Davitashvili, UNICEF, social policy officer.

“Prevention always brings outcomes. Therefore, I think that preventive work should be carried out with all groups, including victims and perpetrators.” - Nana Nachkepia, Zugdidi Child Protection, and Support Department Psychologist.

According to the experts/specialists, it is necessary to raise the Child Protection Department specialists` qualification, increase the awareness of the referral system actors` towards the child rights department, and strengthen cooperation and coordination. Furthermore, creating effective means of violence prevention and favorable conditions for preventive actions for the department is essential.

MUNICIPAL PROGRAMS AIMED AT THE CHILD RIGHTS PROTECTION AND SUPPORT DEPARTMENT BENEFICIARIES

The Child Protection Department program beneficiaries (socially vulnerable) who had been beneficiaries of social programs before the Child Protection Department’s establishment. The research showed that some of the beneficiaries are unaware of the department’s programs. Moreover, they find it difficult to distinguish between the department and other (e.g., social) programs (see Table #4).

Table #4

Municipality	Programs
Chokhatauri	Since 2022, 800 GEL one-time monetary assistance has been provided to families with rating points up to 65 000.
Baghdati	Family strengthening program, assistance in terms of healthcare and psycho-rehabilitation, one-time assistance.
Zugdidi	Material support program for a child facing social danger - aimed at victims of violence and/or juveniles in conflict with the law; socially vulnerable children or children with health problems - includes monthly continuous support - 30 GEL per child; employment program for juveniles in conflict with the law - 4-month employment for juveniles in the LEPL under the City Hall (although they have not yet had a beneficiary); aqua-therapy program for children with certain pathologies, including - socially vulnerable ones (10 children benefit); children's party support program - preparation of gift parcels for beneficiaries of day centers on children's day and other holidays.
Tkibuli	One-time allowances and relatively long-term service. For some beneficiaries with small children, a living space will be purchased. The department does not have a separate budget but is broken down into different programs and sub-programs. 300 GEL monetary assistance for children with disabilities, speech therapist service, and Epilepsy Assistance Program – 300 GEL.
Kobuleti	There is a lack of programs, but they work with kindergartens, schools, and family doctors - to identify violent facts.
Vani	Financing transportation to receive medical care (for a child), one-time assistance
Senaki	Assistance for large families, children's nutrition programs
Tsalenjikha	Rehabilitation-habilitation program (for children with disabilities). In addition, they received one-time monetary assistance and assistance in transportation to receive medical services.

However, sometimes the provision of certain **services to the beneficiary depends on the social worker's** attentiveness. For example, within the monitoring framework, a case is described when a teenager's parent did not buy some medicine for her child. However, the social worker purchased them with personal funds. It **indicates the necessity of the Medicine Provision Program.**

MECHANISMS FOR IDENTIFICATION OF THE BENEFICIARIES AND INVOLVING THEM IN THE PROGRAM

Table #5

Municipality	Beneficiary identification mechanisms
Chokhatauri	Beneficiaries are identified in several ways. Mostly, contact persons are deputies, representatives, specialists in the administrative unit, and social agents (in Chokhatauri). The door-to-door method is used in villages where there are doubts about the crisis in the family. They cooperate with schools and kindergartens. The department head plans to create a database of beneficiaries and programs necessary for their assistance.
Baghdati	
Zugdidi	
Tkibuli	The Child Protection Department sent written messages to all the relevant agencies as soon as it was established. Door-to-door methods, personal visits, and communication via phone calls or social networks are used. They communicate with kindergartens, schools, sports and art clubs; cooperate with Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking. The department's Facebook page has been created, making communicating with different categories of beneficiaries easier.

Kobuleti	Communication with the Mayor's representatives, neighbors, and relatives to identify vulnerable families. In addition, cooperation with schools and kindergartens, door-to-door method, and communication with social services provide information about vulnerable families.
Vani	Communication with the Mayor's representatives Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking. Child Welfare League offered Terjola municipality to organize meetings with schools and kindergarten representatives.
Terjola	
Senaki	Individual communication to the department, also by a family member, neighbor, or relative. Communication with Mayor's representatives, schools and kindergartens, and Educational Resource Centres. They also use a database of socially vulnerable persons.
Tsalenjikha	Identification is mainly based on referral.

It should be noted that the Women's Fund "Sukhumi", with the involvement of women's support centres, organizes meetings of society representatives (schools, communities). These meetings serve to increase awareness of the Child Protection Departments and strengthen the identification of potential beneficiaries and better study of needs. Meetings have been held in all ten target municipalities. The meetings highlighted the importance of the social agents' resources as a source of information about beneficiaries. It is because social agents have the most comprehensive information on the social situation of families.

WAYS OF IDENTIFYING AND REFERRING CHILDREN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE. RELEVANT GUIDELINES

If a child is in a vulnerable family (2nd and 3rd levels of risk according to screening), **the municipality social worker is responsible for identifying such family and referring it to the care agency, where the family members will be provided with services (services of a psychologist, lawyer, alternative care, etc.).**

Children victims of violence are identified via the information provided by village attorneys, parents/family members, teachers, doctors, etc. - *“A social worker talks with a parent, and a psychologist with a child. In addition, we work with people, who have close connections with the child, School, kindergarten, and neighbors; therefore, on the first and second visits, the child may not appear to be the victim of violence. Then, the psychologist gives us a conclusion and direction on how to work with him/her”* - Mzia Bigvava, Senaki municipality Child Rights Department coordinator.

Each municipality produces statistics on vulnerable families and children - victims of violence. For example, in Zugdidi municipality, there is a database of victims of violence. Only 12 children are from vulnerable families, and 5 of them are victims of violence.

If necessary, the Child Protection Department representatives conduct telephone consultations with the referral subjects. After identifying the fact of violence, **the family needs are studied, and the psychologist/social worker is involved.**

At the fourth level of the violence risk assessment, a referral is made to the Atipfund - **based on the narrative conclusion only**- *“The social worker has guidelines for all levels, from the first level to the fourth one. The fourth level refers to the facts of violence. We manage the first, second, and third levels and involve the Atipfund on the fourth level. It is good leverage for us... In addition, our service cooperates and coordinates with educational institutions and psycho-social rehabilitation centre in Kutaisi”*- Lela Purtseladze, Baghdati municipality Child Rights Department Coordinator.

As the study showed, one of the hindering factors affecting identification is **the influence of stereotypes.** *“It is a small municipality, everyone knows each other, and they avoid identification... In addition, women do not want to bring the problem outside the family. So, no one can interfere. As for the address to the department, they cannot apply to us because we do not have the budget. Accordingly, when you cannot assist, no one will address you”*- Target municipality Child Rights Protection and Support Department social worker.

The lack of specific skills of the persons performing the screening is also a challenge, as a result of which the screening is not thoroughly carried out. Consequently, it affects the response quality and effectiveness.

Teona Abashidze, the head of the charity organization “Ialkani”, points out that any agency working on children should carry out **a timely and correct risk assessment** for referral to the targeted agency. Representatives of the municipalities state that if the **victim of violence moves to another municipality, with the involvement of trustees and district doctors, they should also communicate with the mentioned municipality.** A target municipality Child Rights Protection Department social worker talks about a specific case - economic violence and neglect. It was identified during a visit to a healthcare specialist. As a result, the teenager received health care services in another municipality, where the family moved. In addition, they addressed the Atipfund in written form about economic violence (a 15-year-old teenager was working in an open pit). **The described case is noteworthy because the need for strengthening inter-municipal cooperation is obvious. In particular - the target municipality conducted telephone monitoring on its initiative since the City Hall, where the beneficiary moved, did not provide any feedback (although it turned out that the referral process was underway), which indicates the gap in coordinated work and communication.**

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF CHILD PROTECTION AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS

The study results show **that monitoring and evaluation** of Child Protection Departments **have not been conducted yet**, but experts and field specialists speak about its **necessity**. *“I consider it vital to implement the monitoring system. It will allow us to identify good practices and challenges”*- head of the Child Rights Protection Department of the target municipality, a former social worker at a care agency.

“The Ministry of health is only the monitoring provider, but I have not heard of any type of monitoring at this stage” - Nino Davitashvili, UNICEF social policy officer.

As for the monitoring frequency, according to experts, **it is desirable to hold at least twice a year**, but it depends on financial and human resources.

The Child Welfare League is studying Child Rights Protection departments` activities. The League **supervises these departments** and provides the municipality with specific recommendations.

An opinion was expressed about **conducting a study of beneficiaries' satisfaction** within the assessment framework.

In addition, the individuals involved in the study, talk about the monitoring of the families/cases. For example, the Senaki municipality social worker indicates that the monitoring of families should be carried out upon necessity, as the specific case requires.

QUALITY OF COOPERATION, INFORMATION EXCHANGE, AND COORDINATION BETWEEN THE CHILD PROTECTION DEPARTMENT AND VARIOUS AGENCIES

The study within the monitoring framework showed that **communication with various agencies is carried out via telephone calls and personal contacts. However, the respondents indicate that relations should be based not on personal but on an institutional basis.** The municipalities closely cooperate with the City Hall, the police, and the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking in terms of the beneficiaries' needs (NGOs have also been mentioned). Communication with kindergartens and schools aims to raise awareness and manage specific cases. **Timely and correct exchange of information between different agencies and correct referral is essential.**

"The more agencies working on children's issues and having the competence and powers will be involved, the more productive our activity will be in the future... It would be good to have some platform for them to exchange information"- head of the target municipality's Child Rights Protection and Support Departments.

"Sometimes we encounter cases when the expectations of various agencies are very different from the department and its employees' authorities and obligations. For example, when there is a case of violence, the police ask attendance of our psychologist or social worker. But it is not correct and goes beyond our outlined authorities... It would be good to raise the issue that the neighboring agencies, involved in the referral process and having crossed activities with the child departments, had information about their authorities, competence, and obligations"- representative of the Child Rights Protection Department of the target municipality.

WAYS OF INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING OF THE DEPARTMENTS AND IMPROVING THE WORK QUALITY OF THEIR STAFF

According to the survey respondents, the following factors will contribute to the development of high standards and increase of the departments' efficiency:

- Staff training/qualification raising;
- Outlining the department specialists' functions and duties in detail;
- Representing a specific work plan to the population;
- Strengthening the budget;
- Maintaining statistics of beneficiaries receiving municipal services (all persons who have been consulted, advocated, and referred should be recorded. According to the target municipality representative, such cases are not recorded);
- Coordinated work with neighboring agencies. Exchange of information between municipalities, consultations, meetings with colleagues (experience sharing), methodological assistance, including expert inclusiveness in assisting departments;
- Delivery of municipal services through outsourcing. **One of the examples is the psychological services provided by the Women's Fund "Sukhumi" to the beneficiaries identified by the Child Protection Department;**
- Introduction of new programs tailored to beneficiaries' individual needs;
- Exclusion of related obligations (which, according to the target municipality social worker, leads to professional burnout);
- Awareness-raising campaigns (e.g., meetings in schools, kindergartens, parents, etc.) - *"Before the pandemic, we held several meetings in schools. We started to survey the relevant topics for the children. The social worker, inspector, and I held several meetings in schools. We provided each topic in a simple, child-friendly language. They had a lot of questions."* Nana Nachkebia, Psychologist of Zugdidi Child Protection and Support Department;
- Implementing long-term programs for strengthening beneficiaries - *"The funds that some municipalities have for this department can be provided much more purposefully, not for one-time disbursement. For example, they should outline the criteria, select 15 beneficiaries and strengthen them in the long run. Social and Child Departments have identical beneficiaries. So, they can select and strengthen more vulnerable people."* Tinatin Chelishvili, Imereti Development Center, coordinator, Community Development Facilitator;

- Monitoring the quality and effectiveness of municipal programs;
- Care for strengthening the family/introduction/development of employment programs;
- Increasing the psychologist's "role" and accessibility for vulnerable families (the possibility of providing psychological consultation to the beneficiary and his family members with the rights and duties stipulated by the law);
- Providing medical financing and transportation to beneficiaries with special needs;
- Providing financial assistance to beneficiaries tailored to their individual needs (not only one-time assistance);
- The ability to provide the beneficiary with the necessary service without obstacles in case of moving to another municipality;
- Fully staffed Child Protection Departments;
- Allocating special space in the building for beneficiaries, where they will be able to communicate individually with the Department specialist;
- Strengthening the mechanisms of identification of children with special needs, their referral, and, accordingly, the opportunity of receiving services tailored to the needs, in full (for example, Social Service Agency Terjola Regional Department plans to add 4 social workers to the staff, who will work with schools throughout the municipality, to implement the goal mentioned above. It is desirable to outspread the following practice in other municipalities).

CONCLUSION:

To overcome challenges related to the Child Protection Departments, and to ensure diversity of municipal services, early identification of vulnerable families, and timely and correct referral, it is necessary to take specific measures, such as the provision of continuous education/qualification raising, awareness raising, maintaining statistics of beneficiaries, supporting of family strengthening /introducing employment programs, excluding the adjacent obligations of the department specialists, developing the programs tailored to beneficiaries individual needs, monitoring the quality of municipal programs, etc., which will be mainly narrowed down to financial issues and coordinated work of relevant agencies. In addition, it is necessary to raise the population`s awareness (including those involved in child welfare and educational systems), ensure continuous education of the department specialists, and, most importantly, have a holistic perception of the issue of violence and a systemic approach to its solution.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To municipalities

- Carry out a needs assessment study and set the criteria for conducting it to identify the beneficiaries` needs better; introduce/develop relevant municipal programs based on the needs assessment study;
- Coordination with relevant agencies should be enhanced to fully identify vulnerable families and avoid duplication of services, as well as to exchange information, share experience, and hold consultations;
- To sign a memorandum of cooperation, e.g. providing municipal services through the means of outsourcing to non-governmental organizations, if necessary;
- The Child Protection and Support Department representatives should be provided with means of transport to better communicate with vulnerable families (especially in mountainous and inaccessible villages);
- Introduce municipal programs that will provide medical services and transportation for beneficiaries with special needs (transportation money should be allocated for vulnerable family children with disabilities living away from the district centre);
- Rise the qualification of the Child Protection and Support Department representatives; ensure continuous education;

- Allocate a special space for beneficiaries, where s/he will be able to communicate face to face, individually, with the necessary specialist;
- The municipality should ensure the confidentiality of the Child Protection and Support Department beneficiaries. The documentation should be adequately protected, and the “outsiders” should not have access to them (i.e., a person who does not work directly on the case of a particular beneficiary). However, it should not serve as a basis for limiting the sharing of information about the beneficiary with relevant agencies (agencies that are directly involved in the “case” of the beneficiary by a multiteam principle);
- Additional specialists/staff units should be allocated for the full staffing of the Child Protection and Support Departments and it is desirable to add in-demand specialists, and/or staff units (e.g. psychologist and/or social worker);
- Intensify relations of social workers with educational institutions (school/kindergarten) to raise awareness, identify and refer vulnerable families;
- The functions and responsibilities of the Child Protection and Support Department representatives (especially the inspector) should be outlined in detail; it is necessary to avoid overloading the department specialists with adjacent obligations;
- Provide the Child Protection and Support Department representatives with appropriate resources and tools;
- Strengthen the role of the Child Protection and Support Department’s central figures (social workers and psychologists), not limited to screening and narrative assessment. If necessary, the psychologist should be able to be involved in work with the beneficiary (psycho-consultation);
- Maintain statistics of beneficiaries receiving municipal services (for example, persons who have been consulted, advocated, or referred);
- Diversify new programs according to the individual needs of beneficiaries (with appropriate funding);
- Introduce long-term beneficiary empowerment programs, focusing on their (and their families’) economic development. It is desirable to promote the development of employment programs;
- In case a beneficiary moves to another municipality, s/he should be able to receive the service according to the actual location without any barriers. It requires strengthening cooperation between municipalities on this issue.

To Government of Georgia – the Inter-agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence Against Women, and Domestic Violence

- It is desirable to identify the rule of Child Protection and Support Departments financing;
- It is desirable to identify: agencies responsible for ensuring enforcement of legislative standards; rules for Child Protection and Support Departments staffing; referral mechanisms;
- It is desirable to define clearly the functions of the Child Protection Department specialists and avoid related obligations;
- It is desirable to identify the Child Protection Department beneficiaries and the rule of inclusion in the Department programs/services;
- Develop a common rule for working with the Child Protection and Support Department beneficiaries.

To Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Affairs

- Organize professional/qualification/certification training for the Child Protection and Support Department specialists (social worker, psychologist, healthcare specialist, lawyer, inspector) to ensure continuous education. Identify the training cycle frequency and duration;
- Monitor and evaluate the implementation quality and effectiveness of the Child Protection and Support Department programs. Identify the monitoring and evaluation frequency;
- Outline professional standards for persons providing child protection and support, in detail;
- The referral procedures of the Child Protection and Support Department beneficiaries should be outlined in detail;
- Raise the awareness of educational institution teachers towards the children with special needs (mainly ADHD and autistic spectrum).

To Ministry of Education and Science/Union of Kindergartens

- Conduct an awareness-raising campaign;
- Organize events against domestic violence in schools;
- Organize events against domestic violence in kindergartens;
- Strengthen cooperation with the Mandatory Service, and Educational Resource Centers to raise awareness;
- Ensure qualification raising/retraining of persons involved in social work.

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