

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Governments pledge to tackle increasing child separation from families**

*Five eastern European countries agree to develop social services that reduce reliance on state-run children's institutions*

CHISINAU, MOLDOVA, November 26, 2009 – Governments of five eastern European countries have agreed to start the long-term work of developing community-based services and phasing out state-run children's institutions.

The Moldovan Minister of Labour, Social Protection and Family, Valentina Buliga, said: "A priority must be for all of our countries to prevent children being separated from their families. This means developing a range of family social support services that enable early identification of problems in the home, so we can devise solutions to keep families together."

UNICEF Central and Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) Child Protection Regional Adviser, Jean-Claude Legrand, said: "Too many children are being placed in residential homes. This agreement is a promising start. Now we need governments to act upon their word. They must start to co-ordinate across government ministries and invest in new social and family support services by re-allocating resources already available within their child care budgets."

Delegates drawn from the governments of Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have all agreed to take 12 important steps within the next two years which will help them develop national plans for reforming child care. These steps include setting timelines, targets and indicators for measuring progress of reforms.

The participants emphasised the need to change their child care systems to more effectively prevent the separation of children from their families. This means developing mechanisms for re-allocating resources to new services and this will enable the more effective use of existing state budgets. Services are intended to be available for all communities, irrespective of whether they live in urban or remote locations. This will only be achieved by better co-ordination of government ministries and other stakeholders at the highest level.

Their pledges were made at the end of a high-level conference on Child Care System Reform, in Chisinau, hosted by the Moldovan government, with UNICEF support, from November 24-26.

Out of an estimated two million children who are in institutionalised care around the world, more than 800,000 come from CEE/CIS.

In 2008, there were approximately 210,000 children living in various types of alternative care arrangements in all the five countries. More than 110,000 of them were growing up in institutions.

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Poverty, migration and disability are important factors which push families to abandon their children. Experience in these countries suggests in economic hard times even more families use residential care for their children as a coping mechanism and there are disproportionately high numbers of young and disabled children abandoned in institutions or living at home without specialised support services.

The countries participating in this conference are among the most severely hit, globally, by the economic crisis.

\*\*\*ENDS\*\*\*

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*Watch a 'OneMinuteJnr' film produced by Tudor Culeanu, a Moldovan teenager living in an institution: [http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/reallives\\_12851.html](http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/reallives_12851.html)*