

Implementation of innovations in the public administration system for the social sphere: reform of the deinstitutionalization process in Ukraine

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Abstract

The main purpose of the research is to identify problems of public administration in the context of achieving strategic goals of the deinstitutionalization process for children's social care in Ukraine to ultimately implement innovative changes in the children's social care. In terms of the theory and practice of public administration in Ukraine these issues remain unresolved and require further development and research. The article examines the reform of the national system of institutional child care in the following logical sequence: analysis of the main stages of the reform of the deinstitutionalization process for the children's social care starting from the Ukraine's independence; assessment of the results of the reform and the level of its efficiency; identification of problems of public administration in the context of achieving the strategic goals of the reform of the deinstitutionalization process for children's social care in Ukraine; development of proposals for the adaptation of public administration system for the children's social protection to comply with the European standards. The article provides an analytical review of the implementation of the reform of deinstitutionalization process of child care and showed the gap between the current model of child care deinstitutionalization in Ukraine with today's needs that requires a radical change in the priorities of public policy for the social care sphere. As the results of the research process the authors have proposed the main directions for the implementation of innovations in the public administration system for the children's social care, namely: introduction of multilevel governance; creation of a new network of social care institutions both in the territorial dimension and in the functional direction; introduction of new tools for social investment. The achieved results may serve as a basis for further research on modernization of public administration for the children's social care.

Keywords: public administration, social sphere, social policy, social protection, deinstitutionalization, decentralization.

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doi: [https://doi.org/10.26642/ppa-2021-2\(4\)-9-16](https://doi.org/10.26642/ppa-2021-2(4)-9-16)

1. Introduction

The problem of maintaining and raising children without parental care or in need of special care has existed at all times and continues to exist in any country in the world. It is being solved based on the value system and worldviews prevailing in each given society. However, common principles of national children's care policies are protected by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It ensures that every child has a standard of living appropriate to his or her physical, mental and social development, as well as opportunities for growth in the family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. The process of the deinstitutionalization of the children's care has become a modern global trend in the system of the children's social care. It has become an effective means to ensure the rights of the child in the family environment or close to the family environment.

The issues related to the deinstitutionalization process of children's social care remain at the top of the European Union's and the Member States' political agenda. Europe's efforts are focused on the transition from institutional services to community-based services, the integration of children into the community and society as a whole, in order to avoid segregation and social exclusion. At the same time, European governments are developing and implementing large-scale strategies to deinstitutionalize children's care systems.

By ratifying the UNCRC, Ukraine has also committed itself to the creation of the conditions for the realization of the right of every child to be raised in the family environment, ensuring the priority for the children deprived of parental care to be provided with the family forms of placement. Currently, Ukraine is implementing the National Strategy for the Reform in the Institutional Child Care System (National Strategy) for the 2017-2026, introduced by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in 2017. Despite the presence of some positive results of its implementation, in general, the problem of institutional children's care is not solved. According to the results of the reform monitoring, almost 100,000 children or 1.23% of their total number are in the state residential institutions. This share is quite high compared to the European Union or post-Soviet countries. For instance, the rate of children kept in orphanages in Austria and Norway is 0.1%, and in Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova the rate is 0.5% [1].

In order to increase the effectiveness of the ongoing reform of deinstitutionalization process, adjustment of actions of the state and society, there is a need to develop and implement social innovations in the field of public administration of the social protection system for children. Thus, there is a need for in-depth study of the theory and practice of public administration in Ukraine on social placement and care of vulnerable children, i.e. the research focused on developing an adequate scientific basis for the formation of innovative policy to ensure children's rights.

2. Literature review

According to the results of bibliometric analysis, the number of articles on "deinstitutionalization of child care" has increased in recent years, but remains insignificant. The total number of Scopus publications is 153 and there are 129 of Web of Science (WoS) publications. For the period of 2018-2021 the number of publications is 22 in Scopus and 49 articles in WoS. Remarkably, the most research has been conducted in the field of psychology, medicine, social sciences (especially social care). There are only two publications in the field of political science, including public administration [2; 3].

The publications are mainly addressing certain issues concerning the placement of children without parental care [4; 5] or the status of a public policy aimed at transforming institutions in former USSR [6; 7] and in the other countries [8; 9; 10]. Only one document concerns the problems of deinstitutionalization of children's care in Ukraine, relating to the conditions for improving the success of the reform [11].

The analysis of scientific sources from the database of Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine (VNLU) i.e. the main all-Ukrainian book collection, proves a similar situation. There are only 8 publications directly on the problems of the deinstitutionalization process of children's care in Ukraine. Most of them have been published in the last 5 years (Table 1).

Table 1
Publication activity in VNLU on the deinstitutionalization process of the children's care

	1996- 2000	2001- 2005	2006- 2010	2011- 2015	2016- 2021	1996- 2021
Social protection of children	2	8	9	116	55	190
Social care for children	1	2	4	10	12	29
Family forms of care, including:	8	11	38	93	43	193
<i>adoption</i>	2	4	23	50	24	103
<i>guardianship</i>	0	1	1	5	5	12
<i>family child care homes and foster families</i>	5	5	15	27	12	64
Institutional care	1	15	20	89	37	162
Deinstitutionalization	0	0	3	0	5	8
All publications	12	36	74	308	152	582

Sources: developed by authors

It should be noted that the greatest attention of national experts is paid to the legal and pedagogical aspects of placement and care of children. The scientific interest of lawyers is focused more on the problems of adoption, guardianship and custody of children. In the field of pedagogy and psychology, the problems of child care are studied as a socio-pedagogical environment for the development of the child's personality and its psychological protection.

Nonetheless, the research in the public administration sphere is devoted to only some aspects of social placement of children: as an integral part of child care [12; 13; 14] or institutional care and raising of children [15]. The role of family forms of children residence as an alternative to institutional children's care is especially stressed. There is also a big role devoted to the executive bodies in the introduction of alternative forms of children's placement.

3. The identification of previously unresolved issues and the formulation of research hypotheses

The generalization of the scientific achievements of these experts shows that the study of reform of the deinstitutionalization process is incomplete and fragmentary. Accordingly, for the theory and practice of public administration in Ukraine, the issues raised remain unresolved and require further research.

Therefore, the aim of the article is to identify problems and limitations of public administration in the context of achieving the strategic goals of the reform of deinstitutionalization process of children's care in Ukraine and to propose innovative ways to optimize public administration and implementation of innovative changes in the social care system.

4. Research methodology and methods

To achieve the set goals, the issue is considered in the following logical sequence:

- 1) analysis of the main stages of the reform of the deinstitutionalization process for the children's social care starting from the Ukraine's independence;
- 2) assessment of the results of the reform and the level of its efficiency;
- 3) identification of problems of public administration in the context of achieving the strategic goals of the reform of the deinstitutionalization process for children's social care in Ukraine;
- 4) development of proposals for the adaptation of public administration system for the children's social care to comply with the European standards.

Thus, the methodological basis of the presented article is a combination of classical and special methods of scientific research, namely: information synthesis and analysis, comparison, systematization, generalization.

Identification of the main stages of the reform of deinstitutionalization process for children's care was based on analysis of the scientific literature in the related field and Ukrainian legal and political framework. Systematization method allowed us to theoretically outline the national model of deinstitutionalization process of children's care and to identify its essence. Synthesis has shaped an idea of the structure and properties of this system.

Statistical analysis of monitoring indicators of the National Strategy was also used to assess the results of the reform and the level of its efficiency. For this purpose, statistical data from the State Statistics Service [16] and the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine [17] for the period of 2010-2020 were used. This allowed us to trace the dynamics of changes in the main social indicators of children's care and compare the results of the implementation of the National Strategy with the previous data.

The logical analysis of factual material, results of previous research, legislation bases of children's social care, the practice of investment instruments has led to the identification of problems and threats to the efficient reform of the children's care system. In particular, for this purpose we made the calculations on providing of social projects by the State Fund for Regional Development, using the decisions of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine for the entire period of the fund's existence (2012-2020) [18]. According to the Register of Social Service Providers [19] our calculations were also performed to determine the level of development of social support infrastructure for families with children (especially in rural areas).

The main directions for change and innovation in the system of public administration of children's social care have been developed by taking into account previous scientific developments [20; 21] regarding general approaches to regional social development on the basis of multilevel governance and the principle of subsidiarity.

5. Main results

Since the first years of Ukraine's independence, a number of important steps have been taken to ensure the rights of children to be raised in family environments.

The first step in minimizing their institutional care was the introduction of alternative forms of care for children deprived of parental care: the creation of family child care homes and foster families. However, there were just a few implemented cases. The number of such families was insignificant, which objectively could not solve the problem. Additionally, in the first decade of Ukrainian statehood, the activities of the authorities in the field of social placement of children were mainly limited to the legislative regulation of adoption, guardianship of children, ensuring the functioning of the residential institutions, which Ukraine inherited from the Ukrainian Soviet Republic.

The next step was to legislate the priority of raising children in a family environment (Family Code of Ukraine, 2002). This step is considered by some experts to be the beginning of the reform of deinstitutionalization process of raising children and children's care in the country. Subsequently, the priority of family forms of placement of orphans and children deprived of parental care was included into Ukrainian legislation [22]. At this time, financial support for alternative forms of child care had

also been strengthened, which had contributed to a significant increase in the number of children placed in family child care homes and foster families.

The third step is the approval and implementation of the State Targeted Social Program for Reforming the System of Institutions for Orphans and Children Deprived of Parental Care (2007). The program had a set of actions for the removal of children from public institutions in order to create conditions for raising children and providing children's care outside residential institutions. As a result, the number of boarding schools for orphans and children deprived of parental care had significantly decreased, but in general the problem of children's stay in institutions had not been solved.

The fourth step was the adoption of the National Strategy for the Prevention of Social Orphanhood (2012), that introduced preventive measures for children to enter residential institutions by improving the system of social care with families, children and youth using the newest social approaches. At that point of time, the institute of social care specialists was introduced to perform the functions of social support for families with children in difficult life circumstances. Such measures have yielded some results, as they have helped reduce the number of children in residential institutions, but in general have not solved the problem.

The fifth step was the approval of the National Strategy in the field of human rights (2015), with the aim to create conditions for the development and raising children in families or in conditions as close as possible to family ones i.e. reforming residential institutions by gradually shutting them up. In particular, some laws of Ukraine were amended to strengthen the children's social care and to support families with children (2016). These measures introduced an experiment to provide patronage services for children in difficult life circumstances and temporarily unable to live with their families. Such actions were aimed at replacing the system of institutions for temporary stay of children (orphanages) with patronage care services. Despite the importance of such measures, due to their underdevelopment, it was not feasible to achieve significant changes.

Finally, the most important step was the adoption of the National Strategy for Reforming the System of Institutional Care and Upbringing of Children for 2017-2026 [1]. As a result of its implementation, it is planned to create a system of children's social care, that should consist from three key components:

- support of raising children in the family environment as a prevention of children entering residential institutions;
- development of alternative care for children deprived of parental care;
- restructuring of the residential institutions for raising children and providing children's care.

Following the European experience, the proper combination of such components can ensure the integrity and efficiency of children's social care [23; 24].

The second stage of the Strategy implementation is currently being implemented. Preliminary evaluation of its results shows a decrease in the number of children in residential institutions (Table 2).

Table 2
Some indicators of children's social care

	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total number of children	8003281	7614006	7615606	7609297	7579703	7533930	7459677
Number of orphans	98119	73183	71178	70240	69352	68877	68533
Number of residential institutions*	749	536	515	510	482	476	450
with children	78396	50740	50268	49463	46211	44531	41354
of them orphans or children deprived of the parental care	20005	11372	10603	10274	8518	8456	7990
Number of family child care homes	535	939	973	1019	1103	1153	1235
with children	3573	6169	6415	6809	7372	7874	8534
Number of foster families	3195	3901	3797	3677	3512	3346	3172
with children	5451	7187	6993	6880	6571	6184	5982
Number of children in family forms of care	72081	66294	64981	64790	64159	63682	63532
Number of children under guardianship	63057	52938	51573	51101	50216	49624	49016
Patronage services for children:							
Number of families	x**	x	x	24	71	121	168
with children	x	x	x	56	204	510	936
Inclusive education services, persons	x	x	9211	12795	14056	25081	36575

Sources: created by authors using [16; 17]

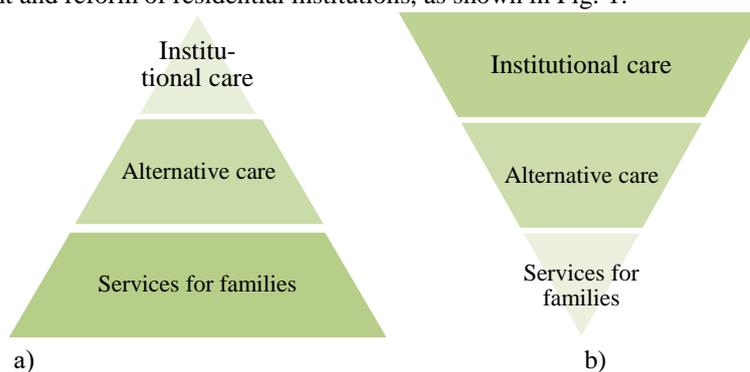
Note: *sanatorium schools had not been taken into account

** no data available

Nevertheless, in general, a substantial reduction in the level of institutional care for children has not been achieved. In our opinion, this is due to the fact that the positive changes occurred mainly due to an increase in the number of orphans and children deprived of parental care, covered by family forms of care, in particular arranged in family child care homes (Table 2). Meanwhile, children in residential institutions are children who have parents, namely children with disabilities and children in difficult life circumstances. It is important to note, that over the years of Strategy implementation, the share of such children has even increased slightly, despite the almost threefold increase in the number of children covered by inclusive education services, as well as the development of patronage services for children (Table 2). This situation convincingly proves the lack of an effective and capable system of supporting the growth of children in the family environments.

During the implementation of the Strategy, no significant changes took place in the structure of residential institutions, except for the expansion of the network of centers for social and psychological rehabilitation, while there was the reduction in the number of orphanages. According to the social reports of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, there are only a few cases of shutting up or reorganization of residential institutions [17].

Thus, despite the official declaration of the need to create a system of children's social care that is based on ensuring that children are raised in the family environment, in practice the priorities of the authorities are shifted towards the development of alternative forms of placement and reform of residential institutions, as shown in Fig. 1.



Sources: created by authors

Fig. 1. The model of deinstitutionalization of process of child care in Ukraine: a) officially declared; b) provided in practice.

It is obvious that improving the situation would be possible only with some adjustments to the actions of the authorities. It is necessary to radically change the priorities of public policy in the field of children's social care, to apply innovative approaches to solving problems of providing community-based services to families with children in accordance with their needs, ensuring accessibility and improving the quality of these services.

Following the experience of developed countries, the key to solving such problems is the presence of strong local authorities, able to cope with current social issues, to create a favorable environment for the realization of social rights of its people, especially children and to defend their interests via national programs and activities.

Instead, Ukraine continues to maintain a situation where getting local authorities closer to the child in terms of spatial proximity is followed by a narrowing of its powers on social care and reducing the organizational and financial capacity of its implementation. Although all local communities are legally empowered to provide children's social care, not all local executive bodies have children's care services responsible for direct implementation and coordination of actions to ensure children's rights. At the beginning of this year, such services were established in only 821 communities, which is only 57.1% of their total number [17]. As a result, the main decisions on children's social care are adopted at the district (rayon) level and only in case that there are appropriate organizational conditions at the level of the city itself or its districts.

Moreover, the amount of financial resources of territorial communities does not correspond to the powers delegated to them, the achievement of planned priorities and the implementation of social development programs on their territories. Despite the significant increase in communities' own incomes due to the budget decentralization, the level of their subsidies remains high. The share of the budget transfers is more than a half of the total revenues of local budgets [20; 25; 26].

In such conditions local authorities appeared to be unable to form an appropriate infrastructure for the provision of services such as social care for families with children. Consequently, according to the Register of Social Service Providers [19], there are only 376 of such centers at the level of territorial communities. Given that there are 1 438 created communities in Ukraine, the need for such institutions has been met by only 25%. Such a gap between the demand and supply of services cannot be closed by social demand and/or services from natural persons and NGOs, especially having a limited amount of financial resources in place.

The situation with regard to the development of infrastructure for social care is even worse. The existing network of social service centers for families, children and youth is a centralized and vertical one and is represented mainly at the regional and district (rayon) levels. At the community level there are only 176 social service centers: 12 rural and 164 urban [19]. Such a network covers only 12% of the total number of territorial communities. Accordingly, in more than 1 200 communities families with children are deprived of adequate social care from their local governments. Moreover, the demand for social work institutions could not be solved by the development of the institute of social work specialists. Only 272 units have been added to the staff of executive committees of local councils [17]. As a result communities that are supposed to be at the forefront of

ensuring children's rights, well-being, security and stability, social work with families, the possibility to ensure all of these is almost non-existent.

The situation is more complicated by the lack of efficient foreign investment instruments. To promote the development of social services at the local level, the state pilot project «Development of social services» was introduced [27]. Under this project, budget funds should be used to pay for social services represented by the providers of various forms of ownership. However, the amount of project funding from the state budget (the Law of Ukraine “On the State Budget of Ukraine for 2022”) allows the government to support 50 communities annually, which is only 3.5% of their total number.

Another state investment instrument is the State fund for regional development [29]. Every year from 50–75 % of its funds are directed to the implementation of social projects and programs of territorial communities (Table 3).

Table 3

Dynamics of financing of investment projects at the expense of the state fund of regional development

Years	All projects		of them - projects for the development of social services		
	Number, units	Volume, UAH million	Number, units	Volume, UAH million	% of Volume
2012	349	1090,0	265	863,4	79,2
2013	143	571,9	110	467,0	81,7
2015	877	2889,7	516	163,5	51,4
2016	809	3000,0	476	1568,6	52,3
2017	840	3500,0	579	2250,8	64,3
2018	843	5987,8	369	3155,9	52,7
2019	723	6896,3	426	4094,4	59,4
2020	478	4102,3	316	3112,9	75,9

Sources: the authors calculations based on [21]

However, the practice of its implementation shows that public funds are used mainly for the construction, reconstruction or modernization of technical equipment of social infrastructure, namely to improve the conditions for the provision of services. Without diminishing the importance of such measures, only a small number of them provide for the expansion of spatial and physical access of the population to public services. The analysis of the project structure also shows that local authorities overlooked social institutions, whose activities play an important role in providing support to families with children (Table 4).

Table 4

Investment projects of the development of certain types of services (% of total funding volume)

Years	Schools		Hospitals		Social services		Housing projects	
	Number	%	Number,	%	Number	%	Number	%
2012	142	40,7	59	16,9	4	1,1	3	0,9
2013	65	45,5	28	19,6	4	2,8	1	0,7
2015	312	35,6	119	12,6	14	1,6	13	1,5
2016	294	36,3	118	14,6	12	1,5	9	1,1
2017	295	29,8	151	18,0	26	2,2	2	0,5
2018	342	32,6	137	17,3	25	2,7	2	0,09
2019	300	40,3	107	16,3	18	2,7	1	0,06
2020	248	52,7	61	14,0	6	1,7	1	0,08

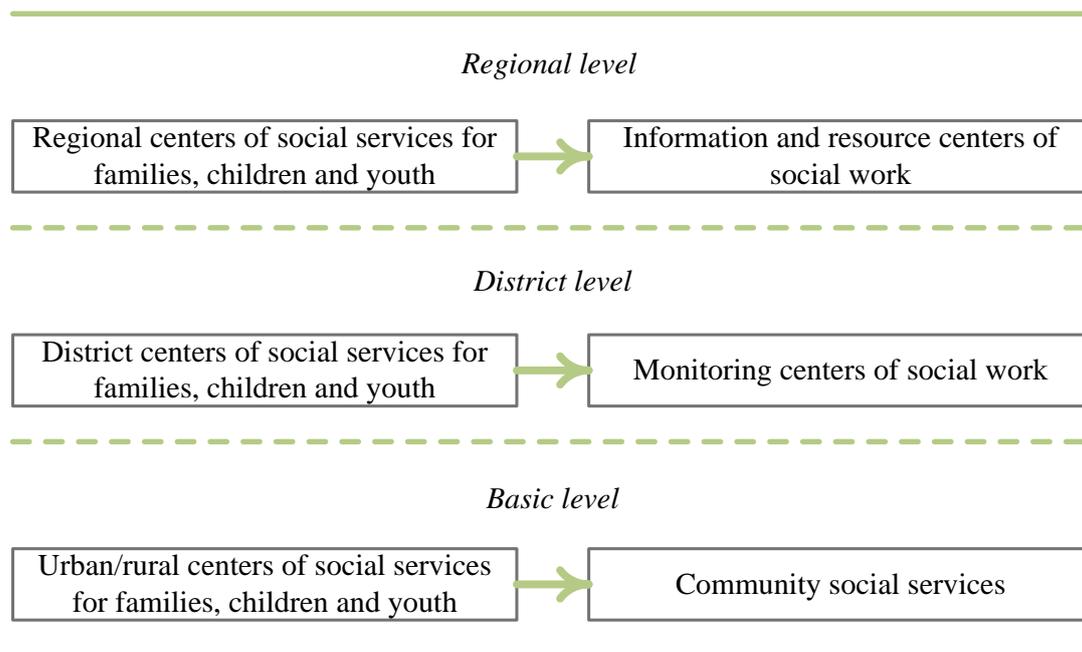
Sources: the authors calculations based on [21]

Therefore, the State fund for regional development has not become the financial instrument that would contribute to the development of the social sphere at the community level. In addition, the results of the analysis of the functioning of the Fund also showed that the formation of an effective system of social support for families with children did not take its rightful place among the social priorities of local governments.

Consequently, it should be noted that the outlined problems and limitations of local authorities determine the main directions of change and implementation of innovations in the system of public administration for the children’s social care:

1. The introduction of multilevel governance to strengthen the institutional capacity of territorial communities. To accomplish this task, it is necessary, first of all, to establish legislative requirements to include the service (authorized person) for children care into the structure of executive bodies of local self-governments. Secondly, it is necessary to ensure the creation of multilevel governance and coordination of government structures in the researched area. This will on the one hand, expand the range of children’s social care, promote greater public involvement in the development and implementation of management decisions on these issues of support for families with children, and on the other hand, ensure the efficient cooperation between public authorities, local governments and various stakeholders with socially-aimed activities.

2. Formation of a new network of social work institutions both in the territorial dimension and in the functional direction (Fig. 2).



Sources: created by authors

Fig. 2. Formation of a new network of social work institutions

It should start from the creation of the communal social services. Their mission is to organize social work in the community, provide and order services for families in difficult situations, coordinate and interact with their service providers, monitor the provision of services in the community. At the district level, it is necessary to reorganize district centers of social services for families, children and youth into monitoring centers of social work. Their main activity should be to determine the needs of relevant administrative-territorial units in social services, monitoring social work in the community, evaluation availability and quality of social services provided at the basic and district levels in accordance with established standards. To replace the regional centers of social services for families, children and youth, it is advisable to create social care information and resource centers. Their functions should include: determining the needs of the region in social services, methodological support of social work and development of social services in the region, raising professional competence of social services workers and service providers, training and retraining of highly specialized service providers (foster parents, parents of family child care homes, parents of patronage services etc.), assessment of availability and quality of social services provided at the regional level.

3. Introduction of new investment instruments. In our opinion, it could be the State social fund. Its purpose is to finance local projects and programs aimed at social investment. There should be the following characteristic features of the Fund:

- competitive principles;
- spatial differentiation taking into account the level of community development and the number of families with children;
- additional funding (subject to co-financing from local budgets);
- kick-off stage (with further financing of social projects and programs at the expense of local budgets);
- partnership (with broad participation of social partners, civil society);
- shared management (shared responsibility for the implementation of measures of public authorities and local governments).

Such approaches underlie the functioning of the European Social Fund, the effectiveness and efficiency of which is proved by the 60 years of experience in its operation as a financial tool in the European Union.

6. Concluding remarks

1. The analytical review of the main stages of the implementation of the reform of deinstitutionalization process of the children's care showed a number of positive achievements in ensuring the rights of children to be raised in a family environment. However, the planned model of deinstitutionalization of child care in Ukraine does not correspond to the actual model implemented in practice. Accordingly, it does not allow to achieve the desired results and the efficient fulfillment of key objectives of the National Strategy.

2. There is a clear need to radically change the priorities of public policy in the field of children's social care, to implement innovative approaches addressing community-based services for families with children that would follow their actual needs, ensuring accessibility and improving the service quality.

3. The identified problems and limitations of local authorities in this area will allow to determine the main directions of change and implementation of innovations in the system of public administration of children's social care to strengthen the

institutional capacity of local communities; to form a new network of social care institutions both in the territorial dimension and in the functional direction; to introduce new tools for social investment.

4. The obtained results will serve as a basis for further research on the modernization of public administration in the field of children's social care and practical development of specific tools to reform the institutional children's care and to form an effective system to support children to be raised in a family environment with safe and prosperous conditions.

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