



Research on the
situation of families
with children at risk
in the context of the
pandemic caused
by coronavirus

Summary

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INTRODUCTION

This research has been developed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the new coronavirus and was conducted by CCF/HHC Moldova from 14-28 April 2020 on a sample of 140 families who are registered with the Territorial Social Assistance Structures. The research comprised of a standardized questionnaire carried out over the telephone between an adult family member and the CCF/HHC Moldova Case Manager.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- **Identify the problems faced by families with children at risk and their major needs during the pandemic;**
- **Identify the response of the authorities and of civil society in order to support the most affected families with children in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic;**
- **Formulate recommendations for authorities at a central, district and local level based on the needs identified;**
- **Recommend intervention measures to civil society and donors.**

The questionnaire consisted of 17 closed, open-ended, single choice and multiple-choice questions to gather both qualitative and statistical data to represent the opinions and knowledge level of respondents.

The evaluation focussed on several areas in order to accumulate information about family members, their sources of monthly income, access to services during the pandemic and the type of services they feel are most needed during the pandemic. Data was collated to illustrate the level of families' understanding of protection measures in place due to COVID-19, the emotional state of family members during such time of crisis, any problems or difficulties families are experiencing during the pandemic, and the nature of support provided by the authorities, community members, NGOs and other parties.

SAMPLE: The target group for this research consisted of 140 families (with 411 children) from 31 municipalities and districts of the Republic of Moldova (figure 1) who have benefited from and/or are currently benefiting from social services. These families are monitored by the Territorial Structures of Social Assistance and CCF Moldova programs and represent a proportion of families and children with increased vulnerability due to their location of residence (76% live in rural areas) (figure 2), having family members with disabilities, a low income, a large number of children, or the type of family (single parent, nuclear family or cohabiting with a partner) etc.

Figure 1. **Distribution of families by region**
(according to the development regions)

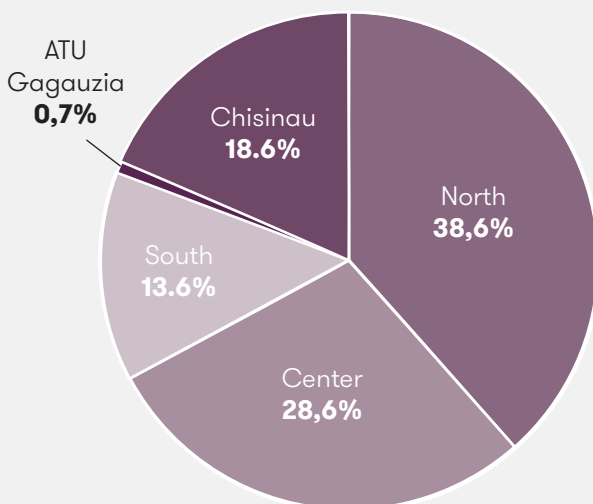
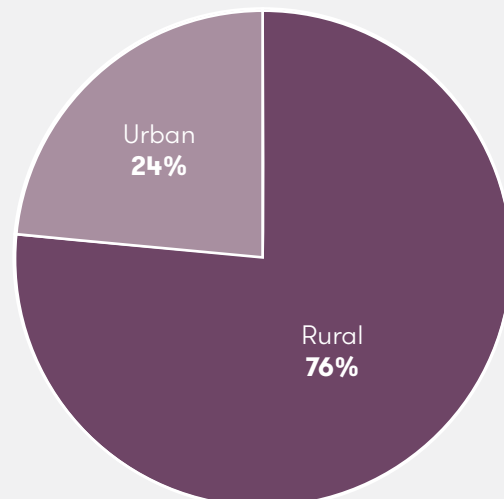


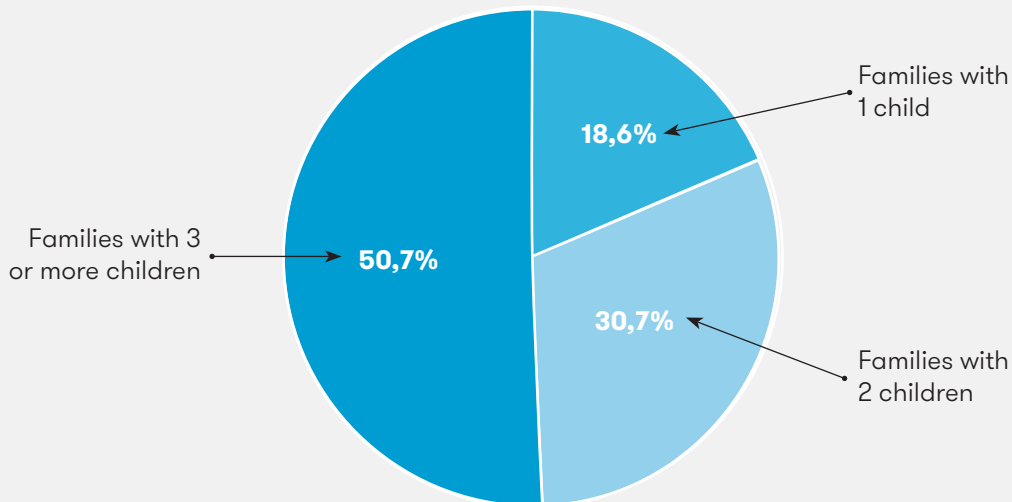
Figure 2. **Families' location of residence**
famiilor



Most of the interviewed families (88%) are biological families. Based on the collected data, in terms of typology, we obtained the following picture that captures the diversity of families: 38% are complete (nuclear), 34% are single-parents and 28% are cohabiting with a partner.

Over 50% of the interviewed families are families with three or more children (Figure 3). These families raise 73% of the children sampled.

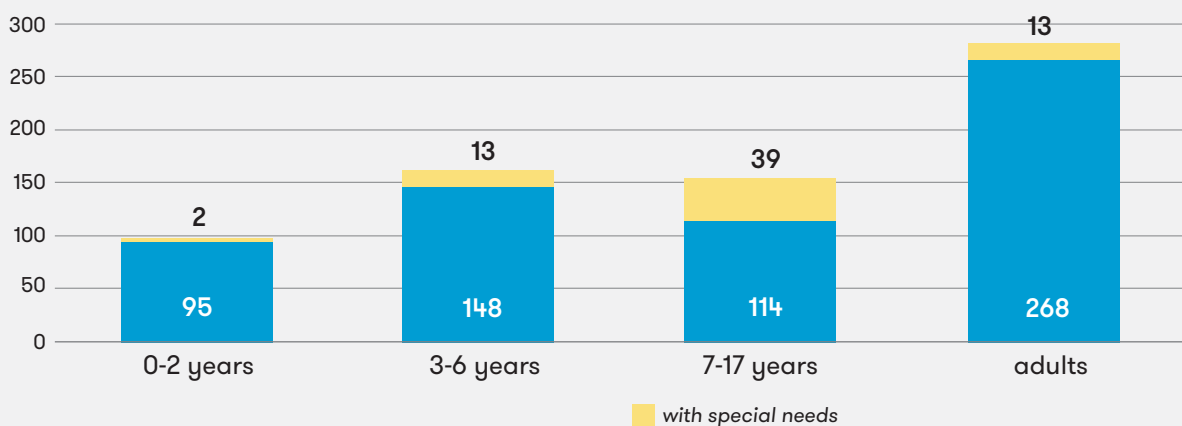
Figure 3. **Families (%) according to the number of children**



From the sample of interviewed families, 54 children have special needs (13%), and are mainly of school age. Also, 4.6% (13 people) of adult family members have special needs. (Figure 4)

The research has its limitations; the sample is not representative at a national scale, and the time period in which data was collected was limited to 1 January – 15 April 2020.

Figure 4. **Family members, by age groups and special needs**





CCF Moldova is extremely grateful to the **140 interviewed families** for the time they gave to the interviewer and the honesty shown whilst answering the questions.

FINDINGS



A. Understanding of COVID-19 and the attitude of families towards it

The research results show most families are aware of COVID-19 and have a basic understanding of protective measures.

78% of the interviewed families believe the situation created by COVID-19 is either serious or very serious. Although only 16% thought the situation was not serious, 32% expressed concern for tomorrow; stress and exhaustion; fear of infection etc.

Only 5% of respondents knew nothing about COVID-19 and did not consider themselves to be affected.

Respondent parent, Riscani district:

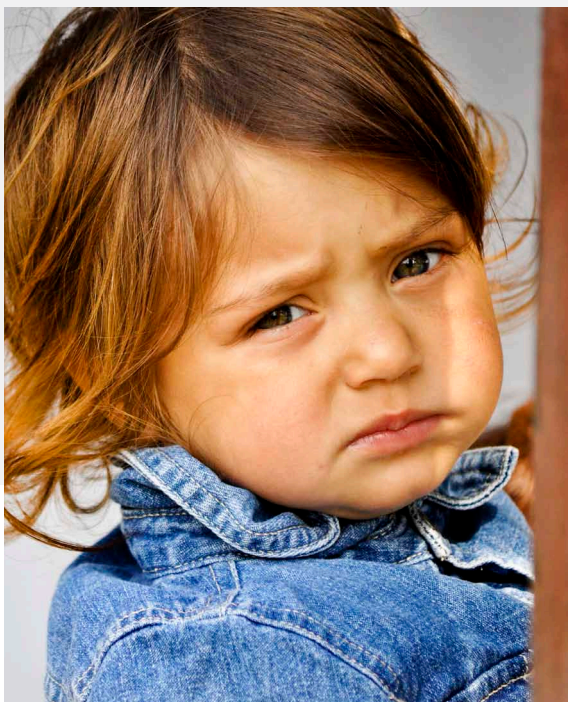
”

It's very difficult for us emotionally, and also for the children, especially because there is a lot of information that overwhelms and worries us.

”



When asked about how the children are feeling, 79% of respondents declared they are calm and peaceful. However, about 14% of families noticed that their children feel isolated from friends and are bored („... Kids want to go to school, kindergarten, they are upset by the isolation ...”) and another 7% of families noted that their children are sad and scared.



Respondent parent, Orhei district:

”

They are not the kids who they were before. They are full of fear, sadness. It seems that my children have changed, somehow ...

”

The interviews illustrated that most families know of, and apply, protection measures.

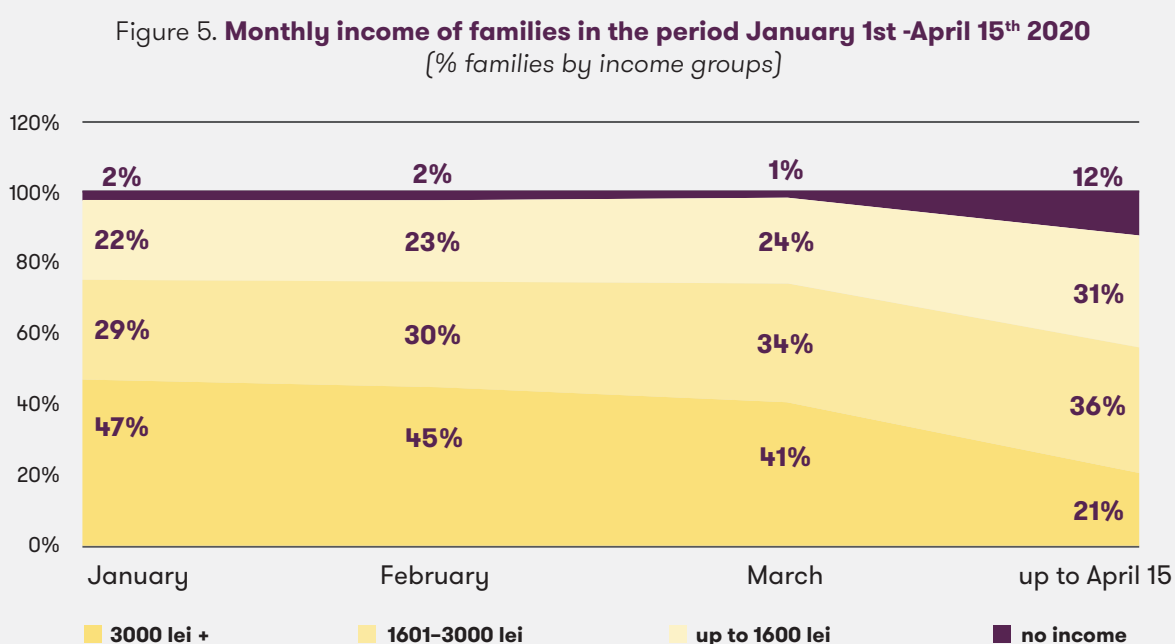
B. Family income

The COVID-19 pandemic reduced income for the majority of the interviewed families.

54% of families interviewed stated that their income decreased between March and April compared to January and February. The monthly income of families fluctuates between 540 and 9500 lei, and some families even indicated a total lack of income.

When analysing the situation of the families' monthly income across the period (Figure 5), it became apparent that families obtained the highest level of income during January 2020, especially as a result of the implementation of the decisions of the District Commissions for Child Protection related to the allocation of family support for 2019.

Starting in February, however, income constantly decreased, and by April many families with incomes over 3000 lei had their income halved. There was also a six-fold increase in the number of families without any income (from 1-2% in January- February rising to 12% in April), and a significant increase in the number of very low-income families.



Respondent parent, Edinet district:

”

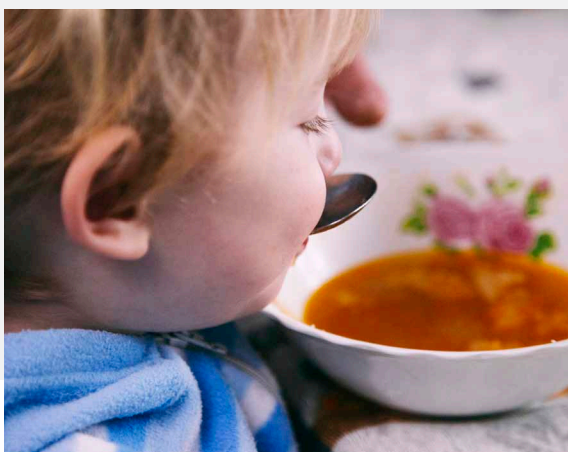
Now only one of us is working and that's why our income has lowered. Before, both of us were working, but now one of us has to stay with the kids.

”



Income generated from casual work largely decreased due to difficulties of commuting to other localities and a reduction of opportunities for short contract work (i.e. daily labour). There were also delays in the payment of social benefits, and the provision of financial assistance for family support was stopped due to the impossibility of assessing/confirming their needs and the impossibility of the multidisciplinary teams to meet and complete the necessary documentation.

The issue of food insecurity was reported by the interviewed families; the main cause being the sudden reduction of income experienced as soon as the state of emergency was established across the country.



Respondent parent, Balti district:

”

I am worried that the food is going to disappear from the grocery stores.

”

C. Access to services

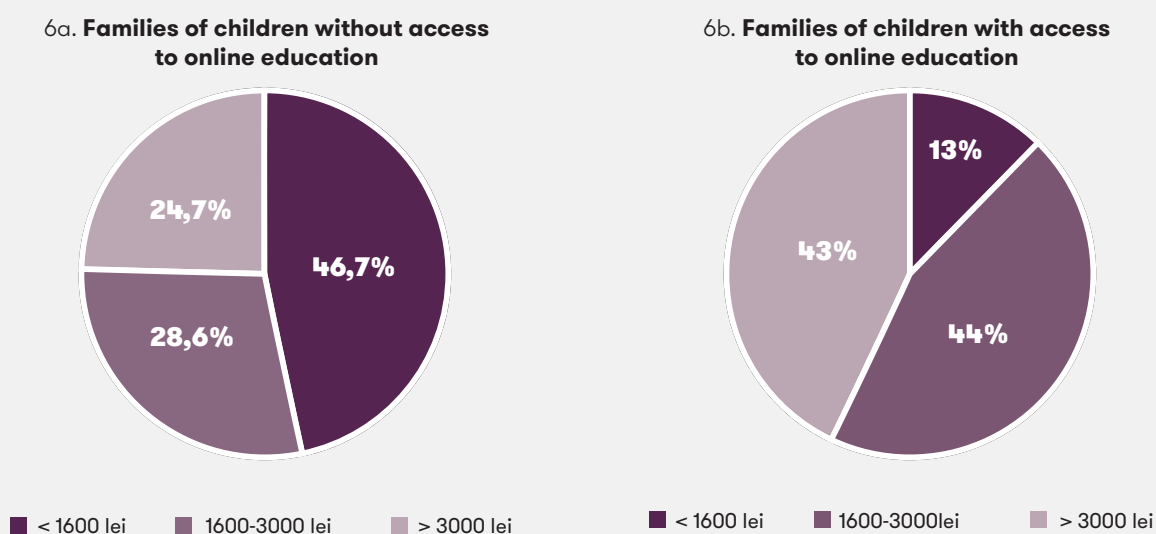
Due to the state of emergency, several educational and social services ceased to operate or alternatively transitioned to deliver activities online. The interviewed families remarked that the closing of several types of services had greatly affected their lives.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION – 88 of the 140 interviewed families raise school-age children and had access to education during the pre-emergency period. However, as education activities shifted from being delivered in schools to an online format, only 52% of families interviewed with school-age children were able to provide their children with access to online education, many restricted by a lack of internet connection and necessary equipment.

Families which can't ensure their children access to online education

42 families, home to 77 school-age children, were unable to provide their children with access to online education. These families mainly live in rural areas, have three or more children and a low income. Income seems to be a determining factor as to whether children have access to online education; 47% of families who could not provide access to online education have an income lower than 1600 lei, whereas only 13% of families who could provide online education fell within this income bracket (Figure 6).

Figure 6. **Access to online education for school-age children by the type of family and income, April 2020** (% of total families)



Respondent parent, Orhei district:

”

The child does not understand what the teacher says (in virtual classroom) and receives tasks individually from the support teacher and from the speech therapist.

”



Families also stated that the educational process is of a poorer quality, particularly in relation to children with special educational needs. It is worth mentioning that many families face related risk factors, namely low income, status of a single parent family or residence in a rural area. Another challenge is the feeling of isolation and depression, stated by both families and Social Work Departments employees. Thereby, 78% of respondent families perceive their situation as severe or very severe, while 32% feel ‘concerned about the future’, ‘stressed and exhausted’, ‘fear of infection’, ‘that they cannot cope with the huge amount of information’, ‘lack of communication’.

Access to socio-medical services (especially medical ones) was less affected, considering that they were not closed during the emergency situation, therefore



Respondent parent, Ungheni district:

”

The speech therapist cannot work on Viber as efficiently as before.

”

polyclinics, pharmacies, and specialized treatment facilities provided services when needed. For some respondents, access to socio-medical services was limited (e.g. “frozen” medical insurance), while access to social services such as day centres, mobile teams, social canteens, and early intervention services were stopped whilst these services were quarantined due to the pandemic.

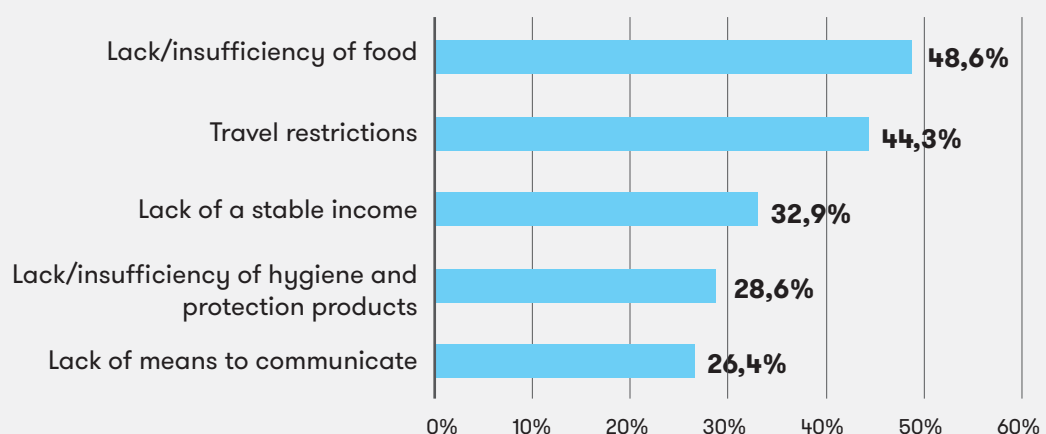
71% of interviewed families mentioned that they were affected by the lack of access to services.

Financial problems were referenced most frequently: lack of opportunity to work as a day labourer (26%), insufficient financial resources led to the need to get loans (24%), and an inability to cope with family responsibilities (14%). 17% highlighted other reasons, emphasizing negative effects on parents’ emotional state, the wellbeing of the child, the quality of education, and the time available for work and household chores, etc.

Problems caused by COVID-19

The biggest challenges that families are having to deal with in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic include the lack of / insufficient food, travel restrictions, lack of a stable income, lack of/ insufficiency of hygiene and protection products, and a lack of means to communicate (ICT), especially for families with school-age children. (Figure 7).

Figure 7. **Families’ perception of the most severe issues (multiple answers)**



D. Support network

During the crisis, families received assistance from NGOs (66%), friends and relatives (56%), state structures (25%), neighbours (20%) and the church (11%), but there were still families (11%) that mentioned that they did not receive help from anyone during this period. It must be highlighted that all these families are in the CCF Moldova programme, for this reason most of the answers refer to the support provided by NGOs.

Of the 140 families interviewed, in January-March, 56 families needed and received help (donations), and 84 did not receive donations. Most families received donations more than once. (table 1)

The increased need for support is obvious, especially during April when the number of families supported in a 2-week period was equal to, or greater than, those supported for a whole month, during the previous 3 months.

Table 1. **Number of families in receipt of assistance (donations) from the support network** (between 1 January - 15 April 2020)

	January	February	March	1 st - 15 th April
Nr. of families that received donations	24	20	27	27
Nr. of families that didn't receive donations	116	120	113	113

This situation confirms the hypothesis that, during the emergency period, the need for support increased and the assistance available from the authorities decreased due to the impossibility of evaluating families remotely and deciding on necessary services and benefits.



What do families expect from the authorities?

The interviewed families mentioned that they want the authorities to implement economic recovery actions and ensure a stable income in the context of the pandemic. Another expectation is related to the direct assistance offered to families with children, namely: quality educational services online, social services provided through counselling, visits and material help, but also control of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to return to a life without restrictions.

CONCLUSIONS



1. During the state of emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the main problems faced by the interviewed families were the following:

- Reduced income in the case of 54% of families, who already had an insufficient level of income;
- Reduced access to educational services for children in 48% of families with school-age children, primarily due to lack of equipment or internet connection. In cases where children had access to online school, parents reported a reduction in the quality of education, especially for children with special educational needs;

- Limited food and hygiene resources due to declining incomes, during a time when food consumption increased as children were staying at home as unable to attend kindergarten or school. At the same time, in order to avoid the risk of infection, families frequently washed their hands, sanitised their homes and used masks and gloves, often bought at higher prices, placing increased pressure on their budget;
- A negatively affected emotional state of adults and children. Over 32% of families confessed that they are worried about the future, feel isolated, helpless and fear the infection. Likewise, families mentioned that about 21% of children are bored, apathetic or sad. The number of such cases may increase with the extension of the pandemic and isolation.

2. The most affected families were those with many children, those resident in rural areas, single-parent households and/or those with a low income.

3. The authorities' response to problems families were facing was timely but, in a way, reactive. Approximately 25% of families mentioned that they received support from local authorities and social workers, 10% from school, and 8% from the medical system. Several respondents mentioned they received help from the community social worker in completing the social assistance application (during the emergency period, families could receive a social allowance without much bureaucracy, rather it was based on trust). Other community actors (school, kindergarten and faith-based structures) also mobilized to help families with food packages and hygiene products from the reserves held at schools, nurseries and churches.

RECOMMENDATIONS



1. Recommendations addressed to the local and district authorities

IMMEDIATE: *June-August 2020*

- Provide low-income families with food, based on an assessment of the consequences of COVID-19 on the family situation (disposable income, support network, etc.);
- Provide personal protective equipment to prevent the spread of COVID-19;
- Organize tutoring, delivered by teachers from educational institutions, for children from families who did not have access to online education;
- Prioritize the enrolment of children from single parent families and those with many children into kindergarten when opened;

- Provide children with equipment (laptop, computer, tablet) so they can access an online education;
- Implement case management, with adjustments during the COVID period, in compliance with all protection measures.

MEDIUM-TERM: September 2020-August 2021

- Create an emergency fund for crisis/emergency situations at LPA I and II levels for emergency management and assistance to the most vulnerable families facing exceptional situations;
- Map and evaluate the most vulnerable families (determined by the number of children, type of family, income level, health status, etc.) in order to distribute material assistance;
- Reopen social and educational services which were closed due to the pandemic e.g. rehabilitation services, day services, educational services.

2. Recommendations addressed to the central authorities

IMMEDIATE: June-August 2020

- Identify financial resources for emergency interventions within the Population Support Fund
- Elaborate methodological notes for the employees of the social, medical and educational assistance system in crisis/emergency assistance in order to ensure a coherent and efficient approach during the pandemic and to avoid fragmentation of approaches and loss of time;
- Develop an action plan in order to reduce the negative impact of COVID-19;
- Provide teachers with the necessary equipment and internet access in the online training process.

MEDIUM-TERM: September 2020-August 2021

- Regulate the psychological assistance and counselling service for children and adults affected by the trauma caused by isolation, loss of income and danger to health;

- Provide trainings for teachers in order to improve the quality of online educational services;
- Provide children from vulnerable families with the necessary equipment for online education and internet access.

3. Recommendations addressed to civil society

IMMEDIATE: June-August 2020

- Coordinate efforts (e.g. planning, material development, consultation), to ensure a coherent approach and avoid efforts being duplicated;
- Identify financial resources available to assist families affected by COVID-19 in order to overcome the negative consequences;
- Assist families in crisis, which were referred by Social Work Department and community Social Worker, based on their needs assessment and in accordance with available financial resources.

MEDIUM-TERM: September 2020-August 2021

- Adjust intervention plans to integrate COVID-19 prevention actions and reduce the consequences of the pandemic on the most vulnerable children and their families;
- Develop new programs (e.g. psychological assistance for families and children affected by trauma);
- Initiate the process of collecting financial resources to support families affected by COVID-19.

4. Recommendations addressed to donors

IMMEDIATE: June-August 2020

- Adjust short-term funding schemes for authorities and civil society to provide financial resources for COVID-19 prevention and control actions.

MEDIUM-TERM: September 2020-August 2021

- Adjust country strategies in order to include emergency response as a priority;
- Allocate additional financial resources for emergency interventions.



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