

Case Study

Vulnerability of women caring for children with disabilities in single-parent families in Falesti region

Goal of the study:

to demonstrate that it is necessary to take into account the caring for children with disabilities by single mothers in implementing the social reform of deinstitutionalization of children with disabilities, particularly in light of the government's commitment to providing employment to women and increase *de facto* the economic and social equality of women and men, as clearly stated in the national and international regulatory framework and in light of the Government initiative of developing the Strategy to reform the social protection system for persons with disabilities.

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1. Introduction

This study is one of the first research works addressing the correlation between the gender related economic situation and situation of single-parent families caring for disabled children. There are numerous proofs of close connection between care provided to a child with disabilities and the level of poverty in the family. In case of single mothers caring for children, there is a direct correlation between economic vulnerability and existence of a child with disabilities.

The ultimate *goal* of the study is to demonstrate that it is necessary to take into account the caring for children with disabilities by single mothers in implementing the social reform of deinstitutionalization of children with disabilities in parallel with the government's commitment to providing employment to women and increase *de facto* economic and social equality of women and men.

The *object* of the study is the situation of single-parent families caring for children with disabilities in Falesti region.

2. Methodology

Review of regulatory legislation (Annex 1); official statistics, data provided by the Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Child; data provided by the National Social Insurance House; data and financial reports submitted by the institutions under review were used in the elaboration of this case study. Analytical, comparative and statistical methods of analysis were used.

3. Situation analysis of single mothers raising children / Case Study

General Data. Currently, in Falesti region, there are 1032 single-parent families caring for 1550 children. The Working Group used a gender based approach while identifying the categories of single-parent families with children, the reasons for becoming a single-parent family, number of children reared in such families and number of institutionalized children (*see Annex 2*), as well as various economic aspects such as: employment, remuneration level, amount of government allowances. The situation of 74 single-parent families rearing children with disabilities was also examined.

a) *Share of women in single-parent families*

Quantitative analysis. Data analysis reveals that 90% of single-parent families are headed by mothers and in the remaining 10% of single-parent families, the head is father.

Single-parent families can be grouped by nature of such families' emergence:

- single mothers – 420 cases;
- resulted from death of one parent – 265 cases;
- resulted from divorce – 247 cases and 100 cases of abandonment;

There are 926 single-parent families where children are reared by mothers and only 106 families where children are reared by fathers. In cases of abandonment of children – 36 cases when children were abandoned by mothers and 731 cases – by fathers.

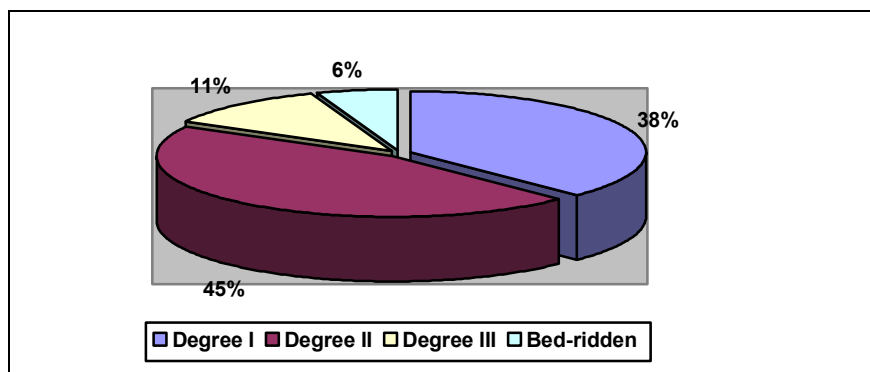
It should be noted that of all children from single-parent families 88.45% are reared in families headed by mothers and only 11.5% live with fathers.

Qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis of the problem is not enough to determine the degree of social and economic vulnerability of single mothers. A qualitative component of this issue are the children with disabilities and the severity degree of the disability. This is complicated for complete families, but in particular burdensome for single-parent families.

In Falesti region there are 333 families with 335 children with disability degree, of which 140 children with the first degree of severity (of which 19 are bed-ridden and need permanent care), 156 children

have second degree of severity and 39 – third degree (*see* Annex 3). The Figure below illustrates the distribution of these children by degrees of severity of disability.

Figure 1. Distribution of children with disabilities by degrees of severity in Falesti region



Giving birth and rearing for a child with disabilities is a tough challenge for any family and not every couple can stand to it. Hence, as a result of the birth of a child with severe disabilities, the breakup of 43 families has been officially registered in the region. Families with children with disabilities were abandoned by 30 fathers and 6 mothers.

Of 74 single-parent families with disabled children (*see* Annex 4), only 9 are supported by single fathers, while there are 65 single-parent families supported by mothers.

Children with disabilities are usually reared by single mothers. In case of severe disabilities children need special, long-term care. In such circumstances parents' employment becomes a problem. The analysis shows that about 72% of the total number of single mothers rearing for disabled children are unemployed whilst the share of unemployed single fathers represents 40%.

The significant disparities between female and male employment reveal a high degree of economic vulnerability of such families: they have to subsist with the 503 lei state allowance, which is approximately 50% of the minimal consumption basket.

Women in single-parent families, in particular with children with severe disabilities are exposed to more social-economic risks compared to men. Single mothers face the following problems:

- Lack of adequate financial resources needed to rear a child with disabilities;
- Psychological and emotional pressure caused by the inability to deal with difficulties;
- Social isolation (serious barriers to employment) and high economic vulnerability (such women support the family only from the social assistance payments);
- Missed opportunity to get a job entailing the risk of uncertain future and insecure old age.
- Lack of access of mothers who are caretakers of children in difficulty to insured health services (such mothers can apply for insured health services as only unemployed, but the validity for such access is only 9 months)

It has to be noted that the effective social security system does not keep account of these problems. It is worthwhile that the Strategy to reform the social protection system for persons with disabilities keeps account of these peculiarities.

In this context, it is very important that the Government recognizes the value of care work performed by mothers rearing children with disabilities, especially with first degree of severity, by considering the care period in the seniority period, which would further entitle such person to a work book, paid leaves and pension etc. should the

Ana L. from Glingeni village is rearing two disabled daughters (15 and 10 years old) with severe locomotor and mental disability. Her husband left abroad 5 years ago to earn money for treatment. The only financial support now is the social benefit and payments amounting to 1250 lei and support from relatives and friends. Under these circumstances, for 15 years Ana can not get a job and has no financial possibilities to

disabled child not be institutionalized.

b) Socio-economic analysis of single mothers who take care of children with disabilities

Pursuant to effective normative acts provisions (see Annex 1), children with disabilities benefit from:

- Pensions: for invalidity (I, II, III degree), *survivor pension* (in case of supporter's death), *old age pension* paid from the State Social Insurance Budget;
- State social allocations: - for children with I, II, III disability degree; - for children in case of loss of supporter; - for taking care of a child with the disability of I degree – paid from State Budget through the State Social Insurance Budget;
- Allocations for families with children: monthly for raising / taking care / supporting the child up to 18 months, and from 18 months up to 16 years – paid from State Budget and State Social Insurance Budget;
- ✓ Nominative compensations: - for disabled children under 16/18 years, disabled from childhood; - to families of those who died on duty; - to families with 4 and more children – paid from State Budget funds.

However, the amounts of all these forms of social support to children and carers directly depend on the income obtained as a salary (for insured persons) while persons who do not have income from salary and are thus regarded as uninsured are in a difficult financial situation (because all these forms of financial support are below the national *average salary* (2065 lei) and the *minimum consumption basket* (1025 lei).

The analysis of financial situation of single mothers who take care of children with certain degrees of disability (first degree) and are unemployed, shows that they can benefit of pensions and allocations maximally amounting to 503 lei, which is twice smaller than the *minimum consumption basket* and 4 times smaller than *average salary*.

The analysis of data on single mothers' employment shows the correlation between the severity degree of the child and mother's opportunity to get a job. The milder is the degree of disability, the higher is the employment opportunity (3 persons compared to the 14 taking care of children with I and II degrees of disability) and the larger is the salary (on average: I degree- 785 lei, II degree – 867 lei, III degree -1007 lei).

c) Social-economic costs estimates of caring for a child with disabilities in single-parent families supported by mothers

The comparative analysis of costs of keeping a child in a residential institution, costs of keeping a child with disabilities in a single-parent family supported by mother, and the amount of social support provided to such mother shows an increased economic vulnerability of single mothers rearing children with disabilities. The case study was conducted on the basis of the auxiliary boarding schools of Socii Noi and Albinetul Vechi villages (see Annex 6).

The cost analysis shows that monthly maintenance costs per child in a boarding school amount to 2,154 lei, the same costs for a child in a family amounts to 1,625.70 lei, while the single mother, if unemployed, can benefit from government support of 503 lei.

The analysis shows uneven and inefficient distribution of financial resources: residential care being costly and inefficient in terms of adequate development of the child with special educational needs.

On the other hand, single mothers, carers of children with disabilities who can not get a job because they have to permanently attend the child, are financially constrained, they are not entitled to health and minimal social insurance, unlike the teaching staff employed in residential institutions, do not benefit from salaries and supplements for working in specific conditions.

This is a vicious pattern stimulating single mothers to abandon children with disabilities.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Having examined the situation of women in single-parent families who are carers of children with disabilities, *we conclude*, that unlike men in similar situations, women are more prone to social and economic risks. Single mothers have much less opportunities than men to participate in labour market and as a result they do not have enough funds to support their living, have no work record that would ensure their access to medical services and social protection in the future. Unemployed single mothers can no longer participate in labor market and rely on social care payments which are not sufficient to maintain a child with disabilities.

Economic possibilities to provide adequate care to a child with disabilities in a single-parent family are reduced, while community based services to support such children are poorly developed, thus entailing abandonment or institutionalization of children. These problems generate an increased risk of poverty at present and in future, both for carers (single mothers), and children in such families, in particular, children with disabilities.

Aiming at reducing the social and economic risks for single mothers raising children with disabilities, prevent institutionalization and promoting social inclusion, the working group **suggests** to consider and include the following measures into the draft Strategy to reform the social protection system for persons with disabilities:

- Develop multi-functional social care community centers supported by government allowing single mothers to seek employment.
- Adapt pre-school educational institutions to the needs of persons with disabilities to avoid social exclusion. Financial support and training to the staff from general schools to work with such children.
- Increase allocations, pensions and social benefits for persons with disabilities and their adjustment to the *minimum consumption basket* and *minimum salary* average to ensure adequate existence and prevent institutionalization of children with disabilities. Development of a flexible mechanism of re-directing financial resources from residential institutions to families, as long maintenance in these institutions is not socially justified.
- Amend labour legislation to allow including in the seniority period the time spent on rearing a child with severe disabilities, thus ensuring the access to state health and social insurance.
- Develop home-based care services to include recovery services, counselling, assistance services both for the child and caregivers, encouragement of voluntary support teams.
- Promote family support services to vulnerable families with children at risk at local, regional and central level, temporary shelter alternative to institutionalization;
- Regulate the process of parents' migration by making it mandatory to determine the legal form of placement for children for the time of their absence, to avoid leaving children unsupervised and prevent risks;
- Expand the list of medications provided free of charge by the National Health Insurance Company to persons with disabilities;
- Include the mandatory genetic tests for those who intend to get married in the Single Package of mandatory health services, in order to diminish the number of children born with disabilities caused by defective genetic background.

5. Annexes

Annex 1

List of normative acts

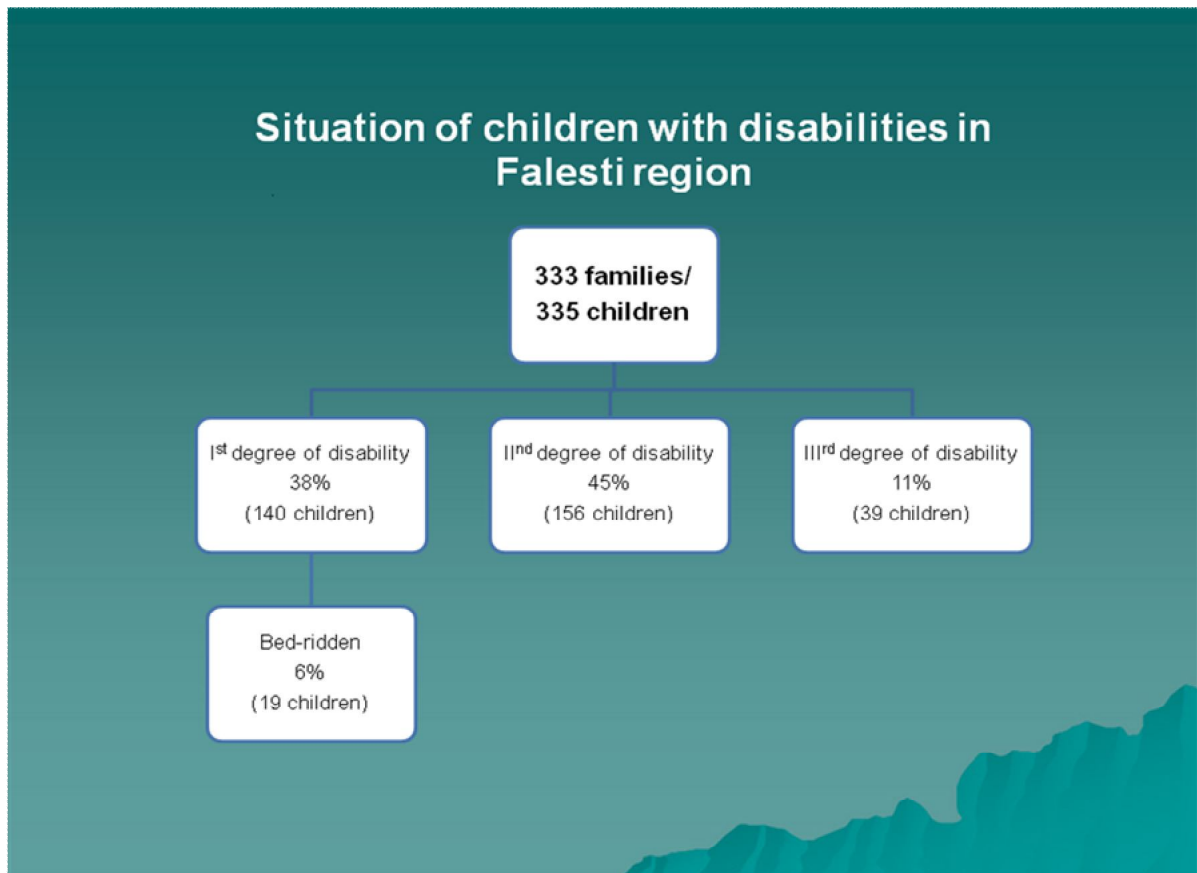
1. Law of the RM on state social insurance pensions no. 156-XIV of 14.10.1998 with further amendments;
2. Law of the RM on the compulsory medical insurance no.1585-XIII of 27.02.1998 with further amendments
3. Law of the RM on state social benefits for certain categories of persons no.499 of 14.07.1999 with further amendments;
4. Law of the RM on the amount, fashion and terms of payment of premiums for medical compulsory insurance no.1593-XV of 26.12.2002;
5. Law of the RM on special social protection of certain categories of the population no.933 of 14.04.2000 with further amendments;
6. Decree of the Government of the RM on allowances for families with children no.1478 of 15.11.2002 with further amendments;
7. Decree of the Government of the RM on nominative compensations for some categories of the population no.761 of 31.07.2000 with amendments.

Annex 2

Table with data on single-parent families in Falesti region

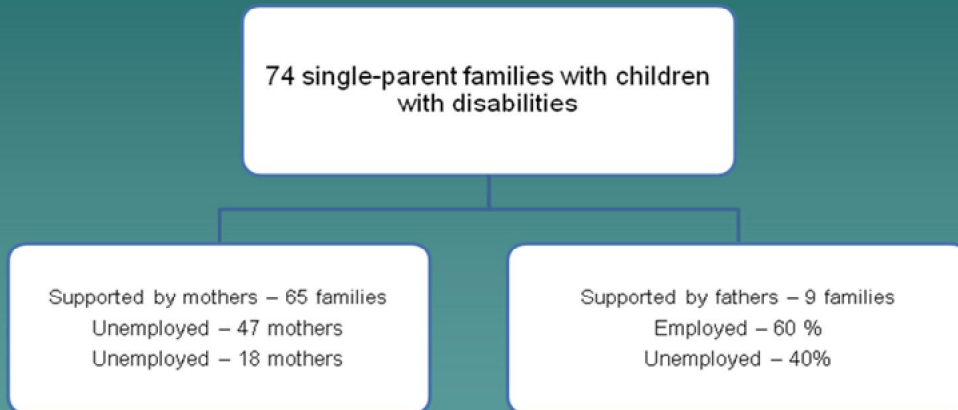
As a result of divorce/abandonment /death the child is supported by	Nr. of families	Nr. of children	Raised in the family	Cases where the child was later institutionalized
<i>Single-parent families as a result of divorce</i>				
Total	247	409	391	18
Supported by mothers	229	385	369	16 children 4,2%
Supported by fathers	18	24	22	2 8,3%
<i>Single-parent families as a result of abandonment</i>				
Total	100	201	183	18
Supported by mothers	82	166	149	17 children 11,4%
Supported by fathers	18	35	34	1 child 2,9%
<i>Single-parent families as a result of death of one parent</i>				
Total	265	468	459	9
Supported by mothers	195	348	343	5 children 1,4%
Supported by fathers	70	120	116	4 children 3,4%
<i>Families supported by single mothers</i>				
Supported by mother	420	472	465	7-
Total single-parent families	No. of families	No. of children	Raised in the family	Cases where the child was later institutionalized
	1032	1550	1498	52

Source: Social Charts of localities in Falesti region



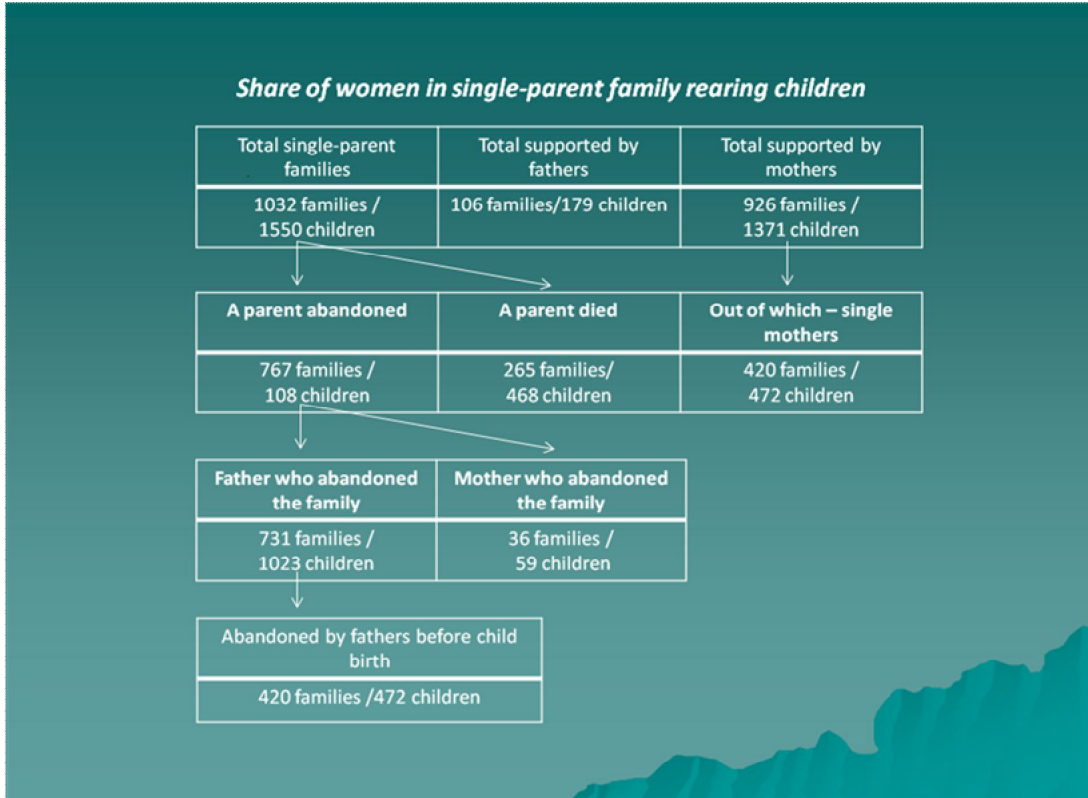
Annex 4.

Data on single-parent family rearing children with disabilities



Annex 5.

Data on the share of women in single-parent family rearing children



Case study on the estimation of maintenance expenditures per child in residential institutions

Nr.	Expenditures	Maintenance expenditures 1 bed/day in residential institutions (lei)	Maintenance expenditures per 1 child/day by a single mother (lei)
1.	Electricity ¹	3.64	2.50
2.	Gas	4.53	3.00
3.	Stationery, household goods	2.17	1.50
4.	Food	17.62	22.89
5.	Pharmaceuticals	3.77	20.00
6.	Telecommunication services	0.25	0.20
7.	Rental of transport means	1.13	-
8.	Soft accessories	2.13	2.00
9.	Recurrent repairs of buildings	2.37	-
10.	Recurrent repairs of equipment	0.51	-
11.	Fuel	0.28	-
12.	Guard	0.85	-
13.	IT	0.15	-
14.	Water and sewerage	0.98	2.00
15.	Sanitation	0.10	0.10
16.	Feed for animals	0.58	-
17.	Other goods and services	0.16	-
18.	Business trips	0.05	-
19.	Procurement of equipment	1.44	-
20.	Wages	23.04	-
21.	Contributions to SSI Fund	5.50	8.00
22.	Contribution to the MHIF	0.55	5.20
	TOTAL/day	71.80	54.19/67.39
	TOTAL/month	2154.00	1625.70/2021.70

Source: elaborated by authors based on effective norms of the Ministry of Finance

Remark. The auxiliary boarding school in Socii Noi village accommodates 63 children, including 40 girls and 23 boys. The staff of this institution is 39 persons of which 11 men and 28 women. The total staff has a distribution of 28.2% men and 71.8% - women. Thus, the wage fund is distributed accordingly - 27.2% to men and 72.8% - to women, while the average wage for women is 1223,50 lei and for men 1163,18 lei, compared to the overall average of 1206,49 lei.

The auxiliary boarding school in Albinețul Vechi village accommodates 54 children, including 27 girls and 27 boys. The staff of this institution is 39 persons of which 11 are men and 28 women. The total staff has a distribution of 34.2% men and 65.8% women. Thus, the wage fund is distributed accordingly, 35.7% to men and 64.3% to women, while the average wage for women is 1079,42 lei and 1150,35 lei for men, compared to the overall average of 1103,69 lei.

Both institutions work at half capacity and distribution of resources is inefficient because the calculation of resources needed to maintain such institutions is based on normative estimations.

¹ The expenditures for electricity, gas, water, sewerage and sanitation supported by a single mother who is a carer of her disabled child are calculated in conformity with the maintenance norms approved through Government and Regional Council Decisions.