



EUROPEAN RECOMMENDATIONS

ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A
CHILD RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH
FOR CARE PROFESSIONALS
WORKING WITH AND FOR CHILDREN



SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES



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INTRODUCTION

A quality child care system should be developed holistically. Therefore, quality care can only be achieved by ensuring that care placements are appropriate to the individual needs of the child, and that care professionals in those placements apply a child rights-based approach¹ to their daily practice. The European Recommendations on the implementation of a child rights-based approach for care professionals working with and for children highlights the steps to be undertaken to develop a child care service workforce capable of applying a child rights-based approach to their work.

Who are these Recommendations for?

Creating a child care system that upholds and respects the rights of children requires ongoing investment in both its structures and professionals. The European Recommendations have been developed to support the training of care professionals in European countries interested in improving the quality of their child care and child protection systems. They detail the actions to be undertaken to ensure that the quality of care provided is enhanced through the capacity building of professionals in their alternative care and protection systems. The *“Training Professionals Working with Children in Care”* project funded by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Justice and led by SOS Children’s Villages sought to address the need to invest in the capacity and competencies of professionals working in the alternative care system through building their capacity to apply a child rights-based approach to their daily work. Over a period of two years, in eight EU countries, SOS Children’s Villages together with 54 international and national partners developed and delivered child rights-focused training for care professionals anchored in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. These Recommendations draw on the experiences of the eight project partner coun-

¹ UNICEF defines this approach as human rights and child rights principles focused on developing the capacities of duty-bearers, at all levels, to meet their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil rights, as well as on developing the capacities of rights-holders to claim their rights - http://www.unicef.org/tdad/index_55678.html

tries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Hungary, Italy, Latvia and Romania) in their implementation of the training as well as on their awareness-raising and advocacy work with national stakeholders and decision makers. In total, 842 care professionals in those eight countries have been trained to adopt a child rights-based approach in their daily practice.

Supporting the development of care professionals – an international and European priority

Supporting the rights of children in alternative care is a priority issue for the UN, EU and Council of Europe. The project and the recommendations set out in this document reflect the priority assigned by these international stakeholders to the capacity building of care professionals. The **UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children** provide a valuable framework for the development of quality child care services. On capacity building of care professionals, they state that all carers in agencies and care settings should be provided with training on the rights of children without parental care and on the specific vulnerability of children (paragraph 115)².

The Council of Europe Children's Rights Division has demonstrated ongoing commitment to this topic, firstly through its 2005 **Recommendation on the rights of children living in residential institutions**³, and then its 2011 **Recommendation on children's rights and social services friendly to children and families**⁴. Specifically, the training of care professionals working with children in alternative care is underlined as a key priority in its current **Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021)**. The Council of Europe has also been instrumental in the development of valuable materials for children and young people in alternative care with **Discover Your Rights**⁵, a 2009 child rights booklet for children and young people in alternative care settings, and **Securing Children's Rights**⁶, 2014, a guide for care professionals implementing a child rights-based approach in their work.

2 UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (2010)

3 Council of Europe Recommendation Rec(2005)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the rights of children living in residential institutions

4 Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on children's rights and social services friendly to children and families

5 <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168046ce9a>

6 <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168046ceaf>

The **European Commission** is a supporter of children's rights and quality care for children, with the topic of training for care professionals forming an important pillar of that work. **The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union** highlights the importance of children's rights. Article 24 of the Charter states that all children have the right to protection and care as is necessary for their wellbeing and the right to openly voice their opinions and to have those opinions taken into account in matters that concern them. Furthermore, the Charter states that the **best interests of the child** shall be a primary consideration by public authorities and private institutions in all decision and actions which impact upon children.

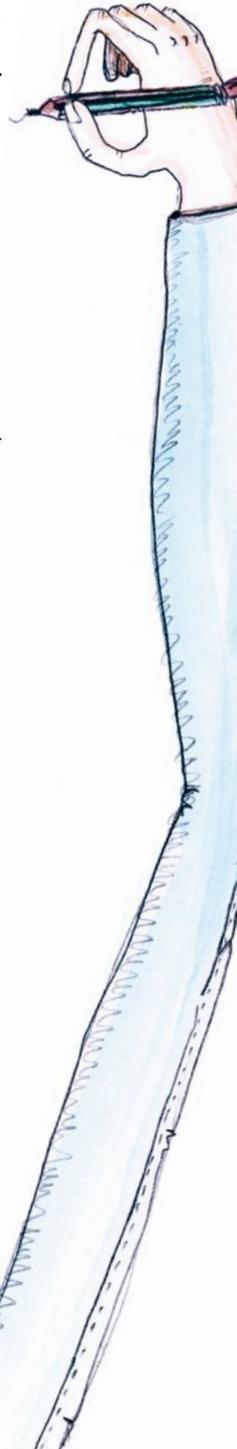
The Directorate-General for Justice's **ten guiding principles for an integrated child protection system**⁷ state the importance of recruiting *Professionals [who] are committed and competent*. Furthermore, they state that *Professionals and practitioners working for and with children [require] training and guidance on the rights of the child, on child protection law and procedures and more generally on child development*. Moreover, the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, through its 2013 **Investing in Children Recommendation**, identifies the need to enhance the quality of alternative care settings and to give due consideration to the voices of children in decisions that impact upon their lives⁸.

The **deinstitutionalization process** has rightly been central to the debate on the need to provide quality services for children in alternative care. For a successful transition from institutional to community-based care, the capacity of care professionals to embed child rights in their work is essential. This belief is captured in the **Common European Guidelines on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care**⁹. The Guidelines state that a **cultural shift** in the attitude of care professionals is required in order to change institutional mind-sets and practices. This can be achieved through skills development and training on the rights of the child.

7 European Commission (2015) 10 Guiding Principles on an Integrated Child Protection System – principle 6.1

8 European Commission (2015) Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage

9 Common European Guidelines on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care (2013)



Conclusions – project impact

The litmus test to determine the effectiveness and impact of the training rests on the success of its implementation by the trained care professionals working for and with children in alternative care settings. To ascertain this effectiveness and give an insight into the impact of the training on the practice of care professionals, a comprehensive evaluation was undertaken including a before-and-after assessment of knowledge of children's rights, and implementation of children's rights principles in practice. A total of 842 care professionals from the eight project partner countries participated in the evaluation process.

The results of the pre-training evaluations highlight two core outcomes. The first of these clearly demonstrates that **current training of care professionals at the national level is inadequate to promote children's rights in alternative care**, reaffirming that care professionals often lack basic knowledge of children's rights. The second outcome reveals that the **alternative care and child protection systems are still a long way from being child rights-based or focused**. Prior to this project, in none of the eight project partner countries had **the training participants received training on child rights!**

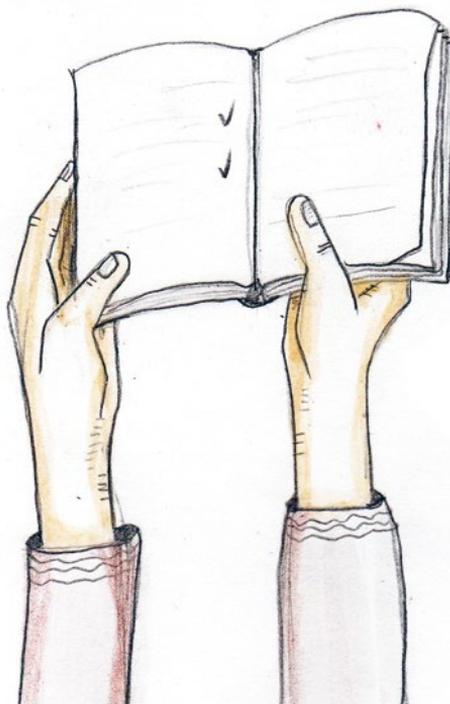
The post-training evaluation was designed to determine the impact of the training on:

- 1. Raising the awareness of care professionals to the importance of children's rights in alternative care**
- 2. Implementation of a child rights-based approach in the daily practice of care professionals**

In all countries, the training evaluation results showed a **significant rise in the awareness of the training participants regarding the importance of children's rights in alternative care**. Furthermore, the training participants noted that they had gained the **ability to identify restrictions and violations of children's rights** and an appreciation of the need for the rights of children in alternative care to be respected. The results in relation to implementation of the training in practice highlighted some interesting findings. Training participants found that the interactive, participatory and practical nature of the training facilitated implementation of the learnings in their daily practice with children and young people. They reported that

the training had equipped them with a child-centred perspective and a view of the child as a whole person with rights. Training participants also stated that they were more **“open-minded” and “motivated” to adopt and embed a child rights-based approach in their daily practice.** In particular, training participants noted a number of **common changes in their work,** particularly, ensuring child and youth participation in all processes, procedures and planning, not only as a means to improve the relationship between the professional and the child, but also to **undertake a holistic evaluation to determine the child’s best interests.** In addition, the trainings facilitated the development of more effective strategies to embed children’s rights into their work.

The overriding conclusions from the evaluation are that the care professionals in the eight partner countries highly appreciated the practical training on children’s rights and found it very valuable for their daily practice. From the participants’ responses, it is clear that **the training fills a gap in the professional toolkit of those working in the alternative care system for applying a child rights-based approach.** Based on the findings of this project, it is safe to assume that similar gaps exist in many other European countries, which could be addressed through similar training activities.





European Recommendations

1



EUROPEAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The following European Recommendations have been developed under two core implementation pillars. The first pillar **“Implement children’s rights”** focuses on the policy requirements needed to ensure that the rights of children are mainstreamed and applied to the daily practice of professionals working with and for children. The second pillar **“Implement quality child rights training”** highlights the practical steps to be undertaken to ensure that quality training is made available to all care professionals working with children in the alternative care system. These two pillars are interrelated and interdependent and should in all cases be implemented jointly.



A. Implement children's rights

The following **policy recommendations** should be adopted by governments, national ministries, national public authorities and service providers to implement existing child rights principles in practice, promote child rights among children and young people and develop national strategies to implement child rights training for professionals. Furthermore, national governments should ensure that the existing systems and frameworks are implemented correctly and fully, placing the best interests of the child at their centre.

1. Proactively implement and disseminate, at the national level, awareness and knowledge of children's rights among all those working for and with children.

Proactive implementation would include efforts to disseminate country-specific Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to all actors at the national, regional and local levels. Moreover, the implementation of General Comments from the UN Committee should be supported through the development and dissemination of measures such as information packs on General Comments. Information packs should include the details of national contact bodies for child rights, identification of which body is the lead for child rights and an explanation of reporting and complaint mechanisms.



Children's rights must go beyond agreement in principle, and be comprehensively applied and implemented.

2. Promote and disseminate information in a child- and youth-friendly manner, and raise awareness among children and young people about their rights.

Creating a society based on human dignity and respect requires an acute awareness of one's own rights and the rights of others. As equal members of society, it is imperative that children and young people are aware of their

rights and know how to report rights violations. Child rights education should be mainstreamed through schools, youth clubs and alternative care settings, to name but a few, to ensure that children learn about their rights and the rights of others.

3. Develop a national child rights training strategy to ensure that all professionals working for and with children undertake compulsory and ongoing training on the rights of the child.



Children's rights are everyone's concern, but are especially relevant for professionals working for and with children on a daily basis.

Children's rights are everyone's concern, but are especially relevant for professionals working for and with children on a daily basis. To ensure that the rights of children are upheld, it is imperative that governments develop strong national child rights training strategies, which are monitored and reviewed by an independent Ombudsperson for Children. These strategies should include:

- >>> Developing minimum standards for the education and child rights training of care professionals as a precondition to working in the alternative care system
- >>> Mandatory and ongoing training on child rights for all professionals working for and with children, in all occupations, and at all levels of their development including university. Specific focus should be placed on professionals working with children most at risk of rights violations, such as children and young people in alternative care
- >>> Training modules that are practical, and are based on and aligned with the UNCRC and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children
- >>> Strong youth participation components in the delivery and development of training programmes
- >>> Open resource spaces for professionals to learn and exchange best practices
- >>> Monitoring, evaluation and data collection procedures to oversee implementation of the strategy and evaluate its impact

B. Implement quality child rights training

The following recommendations focus on the **implementation of training** as part of a national child rights strategy, with a specific focus on training care professionals working in alternative care systems. **Improving the quality of care involves investing in capacity building of care professionals, supporting their involvement, and ensuring the participation of children and young people.** In order to ensure alignment with the UNCRC and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, practical training and the corresponding materials should be anchored in these two international instruments.

1. Invest in quality practical training of all care professionals working in alternative care settings.

Investing in, and adequately resourcing, practical continuous training on the rights of children in alternative care not only improves child protection systems and the quality of the care received by children and young people, but also benefits children and care professionals and improves service delivery. All training should, as a minimum, inform care professionals how to practically apply a child rights-based approach and child safeguarding standards to their daily practice.

2. Ensure that all care professionals working for and with children in alternative care settings are able to access, and are supported to avail themselves of, quality training on the rights of children in alternative care.

It is imperative that care professionals are trained and ready to implement a child rights-based approach in their work. To facilitate this undertaking, social service managers and directors should promote take-up of this training by making it mandatory, accessible and of the highest quality. Social service managers and directors should monitor the undertaking of training by care professionals through ongoing supervision and support for care professionals.

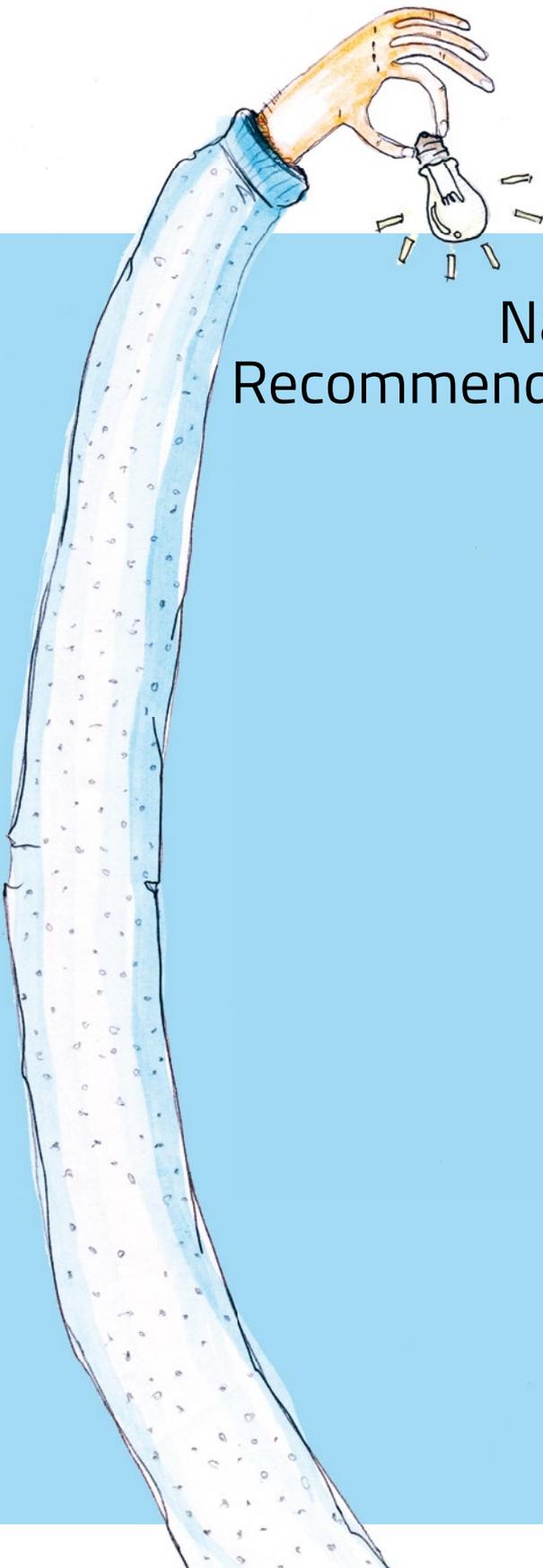
3. Every opportunity should be taken to ensure that children and young people are enabled to participate in the capacity building of care professionals through their inclusion as trainers and experts in their own rights.

As the direct recipients of care, children and young people in care or with care experience can play an important role in the training of care professionals, in reviewing the services delivered to them and in underlining the importance of applying a child rights-based approach to their practice. Involvement of children and young people should be on their terms and be shaped by current best practices and models, such as The Lundy model of child participation.¹⁰

4. To facilitate dialogue and a multi-disciplinary approach, ensure that training participants are a mix of child care professionals representing different disciplines and perspectives.

Quality care provision depends on different professionals working together to guarantee the protection and achieve the best interests of the child. Therefore, it is imperative that training participants represent different professional groups working in the child care system (e.g. social workers, youth workers, foster carers, child psychologists, social pedagogues, etc.). This approach allows for an enriching training experience with the representation of many different perspectives and enables all professionals involved in the continuum of care to adopt and implement the same approach to their work.

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/lundy_model_child_participation.pdf



National
Recommendations

2

NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Developed by the National Steering Groups in:

- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Estonia
- France
- Hungary
- Italy
- Latvia
- Romania

During the two year project “*Training Professionals Working with Children in Care*” project countries developed national recommendations based on their learnings. These aim to embed child right’s training for professionals working with and for children in alternative care into the national child protection system. This document gives an overview of the headlines of each country’s national recommendations. **Please see the conference webpage for the full texts.**



Bulgaria

- >>> All professionals who work with children in alternative care to be trained on children's rights
- >>> Training courses on realisation of children's rights to be included in the university and post-graduate curricula for professionals who work with children in alternative care
- >>> Children and young people in alternative care learn about children's rights
- >>> Conduct research and data collection regarding existing educational and training programmes and practices

Croatia

- >>> Develop a set of minimum standards for care professionals to implement a child rights-based approach in their work
- >>> Make the training on child rights-based approach a part of the standard curriculum for professions working with children and young people in alternative care
- >>> Improve the competences of all professionals working with children in alternative care for the implementation of children's rights in their work
- >>> Develop and implement a child protection policy in every alternative care setting

Estonia

- >>> Child rights should be introduced as part of an obligatory training for care workers. A minimum number of hours and topics have to be identified. Participatory approach should be recommended for such trainings
- >>> Child rights should be introduced as part of an obligatory training for foster carers, kinship carers and legal guardianship foster careers. A minimum number of hours and topics have to be identified. Participatory approach should be recommended for such trainings
- >>> Follow up trainings on child rights and child rights approach should be regularly offered to all care workers, foster families, kinship carers and others, at the minimum at least once every three years. The method used should be participatory, with a special section dedicated to case studies and case discussions
- >>> Positive parenting trainings for care workers, foster families, kinship families and others should be made available and part of professional training
- >>> Regular roundtables for care professionals (substitute home care takers, social workers) and care volunteers (kinship families, foster families) should be organised at least once per year
- >>> Professional education of social workers and child protection specialists should contain an obligatory block on child rights, with special attention paid to the requirements of the international documents such as UN CRC, UN Guidelines, CoE instruments, including those on participation, and questions on child rights should be part of the final exam



France

- >>> Require mandatory training on Children's Rights in professionals' initial training and continuing education programs for professionals and supervisors working with children and young people. Children's Rights should be a subject matter as a whole, and integrated as such in the trainings offered to professionals. These trainings should focus on the soft and « know-how » skills to move beyond academic knowledge. They should be multi-institutional and inter-disciplinary and should allow children and young people to speak up, as they are the first to be concerned
- >>> To tackle the challenges and obstacles to child/youth participation, and reinforce participation mechanisms. A change of vision and even work culture is essential to open working groups to a co-reflective and co-constructive approach. Child and youth participation ought to become mandatory within the realm of Child Welfare, and should be carried out through monitoring and accountability mechanisms
- >>> Organize a national and local monitoring and observation system on the implementation of Children's Rights within the realm of Child Welfare. This national monitoring system on the implementation of Children's Rights can be placed under the responsibility of the National Council for Childhood Protection. The monitoring of the implementation of Children's Rights within the realm of Child Welfare should be occurring both at national and local levels
- >>> Develop resource spaces and professionals on Children's Rights for professionals, children, young people and their families. The training of professionals is by all means required but it needs to be thought out together with the development of working spaces where dialogue and reflection are encouraged as well as the designation or the dissemination of information regarding resource professionals on Children's Rights

Hungary

- >>> Promote the adoption of a comprehensive policy covering all areas of children's rights to ensure that child rights education in general becomes a priority
- >>> Promote the establishment of a single body that is responsible for the overall coordination of the activities in the area of children's rights
- >>> Promote the establishment of an independent ombudsperson for children's rights
- >>> Include compulsory child rights training in the curricula and the ongoing development of all care professionals
- >>> Make accessible child rights training for care professionals
- >>> Ensure that child rights education is not only theoretical but care professionals are able to implement children's rights into their everyday practice at all levels

Italy

- >>> Make the training on child rights-based approach a part of the standard curriculum for professions working with children and young people in alternative care, also developing postgraduate training courses
- >>> Improve the competences of all professionals working with children in alternative care for the implementation of children's rights in their work
- >>> Develop and implement a child protection policy in every alternative care setting
- >>> Develop a set of minimum national and European standards in alternative care so as to enable children to be listened to and to participate in their care process



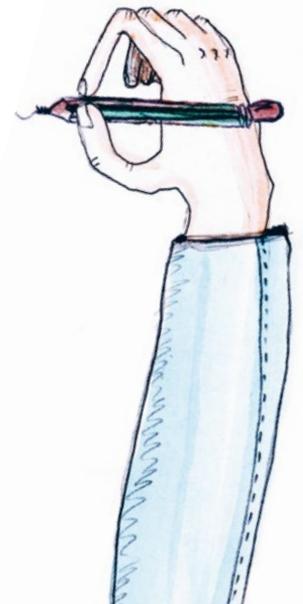
Latvia

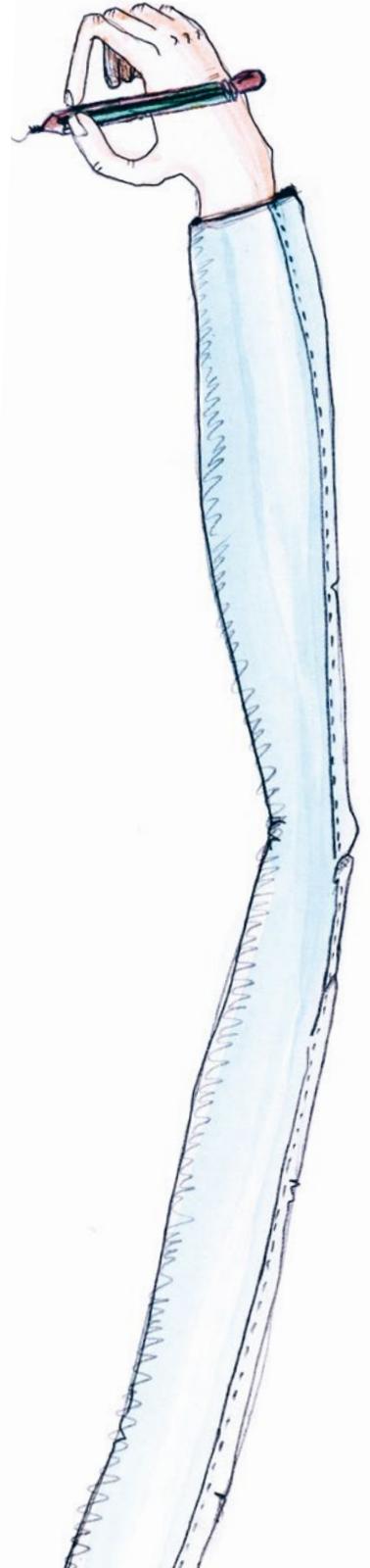
- >>> Expand target group of training participants – Child rights should be introduced as part of an obligatory training for a wider target group – social workers, police, public prosecutors, etc., with particular emphasis on orphan’s court personnel
- >>> Guide strengthening, implementation and wider application of the method developed within the project (particularly distinguishing training target group – specialists working in out-of- family care)
- >>> Strengthen the principle of participation of children and young people in the training of care professionals
- >>> Establish more frequent trainings on the rights of children

Romania

- >>> Develop and approve a national strategy on training provided to professionals working with children (including children in alternative care)
- >>> Establish a platform on training professionals working with children in alternative care
- >>> Develop a 3-year training programme by the child protection departments which have been involved in this project
- >>> Raise awareness on training care professionals working with children in alternative care
- >>> Coordination regarding the legal frame when it comes to occupational and quality standards for social services for children
- >>> Create a pool of trainers on national level to provide trainings for children in alternative care

What I can do to support the implementation of the recommendations:







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