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Child's training for changing the form protection

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Training needed by the child in foster care / **maternal assistance** in order to change the form of child protection:
reinsertion in the natural family or in an adoptive family



The evolution of the maternal assistance system in Romania

- *The professional maternal assistant* – within the Romanian system of child protection – is a person certified by the Commission for Child Protection, whose job description includes raising, educating and taking care of the assigned child / children for a harmonious development, at the assistant's domicile, employed by public institutions or/and by nongovernmental organizations
 - The professional maternal assistant is the newest occupation within the Romanian child protection system
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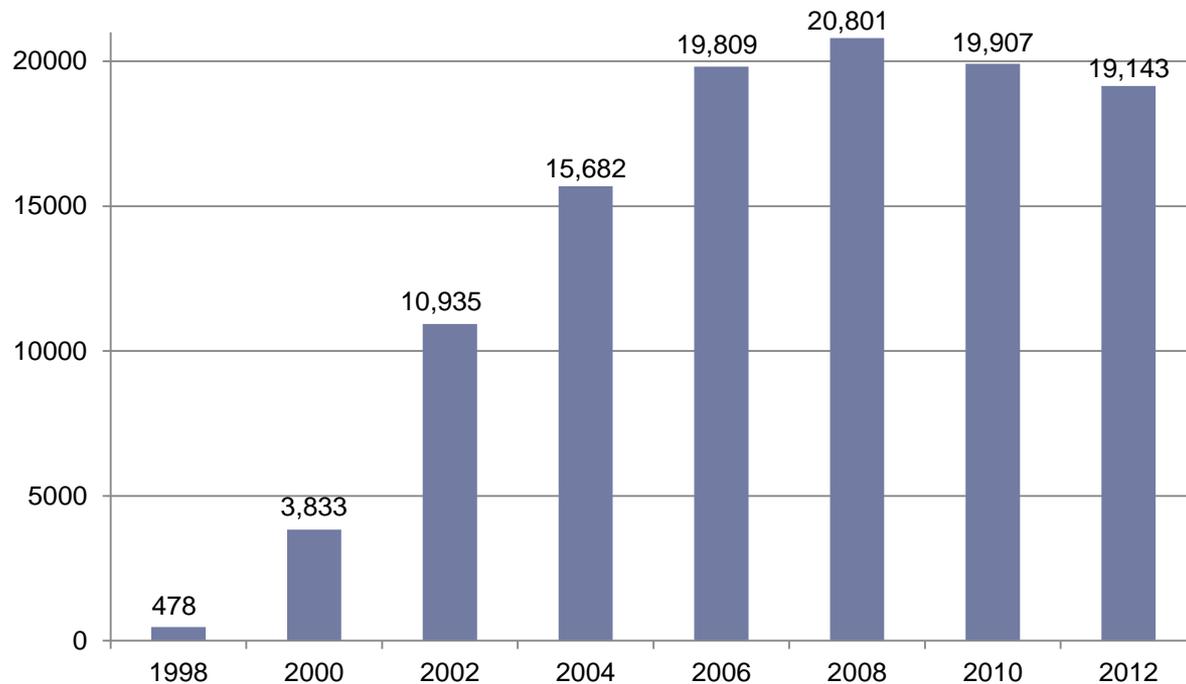
- The “*de-institutionalization*” has been the main priority of action in this field since 1998, the need to develop alternative services to residential services became of high importance
 - The development of the maternal assistants’ network became the main focus and it is part of the actual trend in developing the social services in Romania
 - The legal perspective of the protection dedicated to children in difficulty – through professional maternal assistance – went through a series of phases trying to adjust to the needs of the social environment and also to implement the European legislation, in the context of the efforts made by Romania in order to become member state of European Union
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- **The Order 35/2003** issued by the State Secretary of the National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption **approving the minimum compulsory standards** for child protection through maternal assistance, as well as **The methodological guidelines for implementation of these standards**, is the first legal text introducing the idea of the *minimum compulsory standards, conditions for a good development of the maternal assistance activities and for achieving a certain standards of quality*
 - The **Government Decision no 679/2003** on the conditions to obtain the professional certification, procedures for obtaining this certificate and the statute of the professional maternal assistant
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- **The Law 272/2004 regarding the protection and promotion of children's rights** is the legal text that stated for the first time in Romania that a child under 2 years of age can only be placed within the extended or substitutive family (maternal assistant). This law forbids the placement of the child under 2 years of age in a residential center

The evolution of the number of children benefitting from maternal assistance in Romania (1998-2012)



Source: www.copii.ro

The child's placement

- It is a special protection measure, has a temporary nature and can be ordered at:
 - a person or family
 - a maternal assistant
 - a residential type service.
- The placement of the child under two years old may be ordered only to extended family or foster family



The most important elements that must be considered during the transfer process

- Familiar faces, familiar places
 - The transition objects
 - Positive moves
 - Support after being transferred
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The following recommendations can be proposed:

- The social worker and the psychologist facilitate the matching process based on the most recent child's needs assessment and on the maternal assistant's abilities and competencies
 - The child and his/her family, the maternal assistant and his/her family, other children in placement and other specialists should be involved during the matching process
 - The placement decision to be based on the child's development needs
 - The process of finding a new maternal assistant to be based on the abilities, knowledge and capacities required to fulfill the child's needs
 - The child should be placed together with his/her brothers and sisters
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Favorable and unfavorable factors influencing a child's insertion in a family:

Maternal assistants must understand:

- The importance of the connection between the child's behavior, emotions, development and fondness relationships of the child
- The impact of the fondness on the child's development from birth to teenage
- The intensity and the power of a small child in usual situations in which the child "loves" the people of whom he/she is fond
- That if a child has no special behaviors and feelings when is separated from the previous maternal assistant, that does not mean the child is not living the separation in a very acute way



- That some children, based on previous early experiences, use unforeseeable self protection strategies to get help and support
 - That the things a child learns in his/her early experiences can be extremely resistive to changes, no matter the assistant's efforts, abilities and devotion
 - To use pictures, objects, games, discussions to help the child remember those people who are or were important for him / her
 - To secure a daily routine for the child
 - That it is possible that a child has many needs that must be carefully assessed and the results must be told to those involved in the development and safety of the child.
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What should be known before the beginning of a preparatory process?

- Each child is an individual and therefore, the best way to prepare him / her is designing a program in concordance with his/ her individual needs and situation
- Detailed pieces of information on the family context and on the child's relatives' wishes.
- Pieces of information about child's wishes (the wishes vary depending on the child's age and level of understanding).
- The clear recommendation for placement



The discussion about a transfer must take into consideration the following aspects:

- Choosing the moment to speak with the child
- The way the discussion with the child is conducted
- What should be discussed
- What should be omitted



- The maternal assistants have a valuable contribution in helping the child cope with the transfer from a family to another. Together with the social worker, he/she must help the child cope with the feelings related to changes.

The disadvantages of the maternal assistance system

- *Fragmenting the care of the child* by placing the child successively at many maternal assistants may jeopardize the initial positive effects
- *Excessive extension of the placement period* - the care provided within the family of the maternal assistant loses its short term characteristics and becomes a medium and even long term intervention



- *The lack of economic resources – in most of the cases – of the natural family of the child, makes reinsertion into the natural family impossible on the short term, which generates a dilution of child's affective relationships with the natural family, a cultural and lifestyle gap which, in many situations, generated tragic consequences on the child when he / she was reinserted into the natural family.*
 - *The impossibility for the maternal assistant to take his/her annual leave while they have children in placement which is an obvious violation of the Employment Law. Maternal assistants cannot take their annual leave in concordance with their employment contract, because there is no solution for hosting and taking care of the children placed within their family. Moreover, there are no legal texts to clearly regulate this aspect.*
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- The specialized literature describes as solutions for such situations the so-called “*respiro centers*” where children in placement may be left by the maternal assistants in order to be able to take his/her annual leave. Unfortunately, the existing legislation does not include any regulations to allow the certification of such social services.
 - *In conclusion, the maternal assistant is an employee forced to work 24 hours/day, 7 days/week, 365 days/year* which raises a question on the quality of the activity implemented in situations of obvious overload and, especially in the context of taking care of two children simultaneously.
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- The children included in the system of maternal assistance face very often *discrimination in educational services*. Many maternal assistants claim to face difficulties in registering the children at kindergarten or school and, in some situations, they signaled the fact that children are treated differently just because they come from “the system”.
 - The funds for the maternal assistance network are not clearly, unequal and not sufficient budgeted. The budgetary allocations do not allow the employment of a sufficient number of social workers to support the network of professional maternal assistants, while the number of cases of children in placement instrumented by a social worker varies from one county to another from 40 cases / social worker to 200 cases/ social worker.
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- *The support of the psychologists is very low and difficult to be offered under the circumstances that the number of specialists in the field employed by the Directions of Child Protection and Social Assistance is not sufficient. The employed psychologists are in charge especially with the individual evaluation and counseling for children.*
 - *The lacks on a unitary monitoring system correlated to the insufficient funds allocated to professional supervision of the maternal assistants are intensely perceived by the professionals in the field. The social workers see themselves in the situation to decide which is the most urgent situation to be solved immediately or to decide which are the most important cases to focus.*
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- In 2006 The National Authorities for Protection of Child's Rights initiated a consultative process to develop a new law to regulate more clearly the statute of the families / people who receive children in placement, as well as the statutes of the maternal assistants.
 - The legal project was not finalized yet, due to the low level of consensus of all actors interested in the proposed regulations.
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