Palacký University in Olomouc
Cyril and Methodeus Faculty of Theology

Department of Christian Social Work

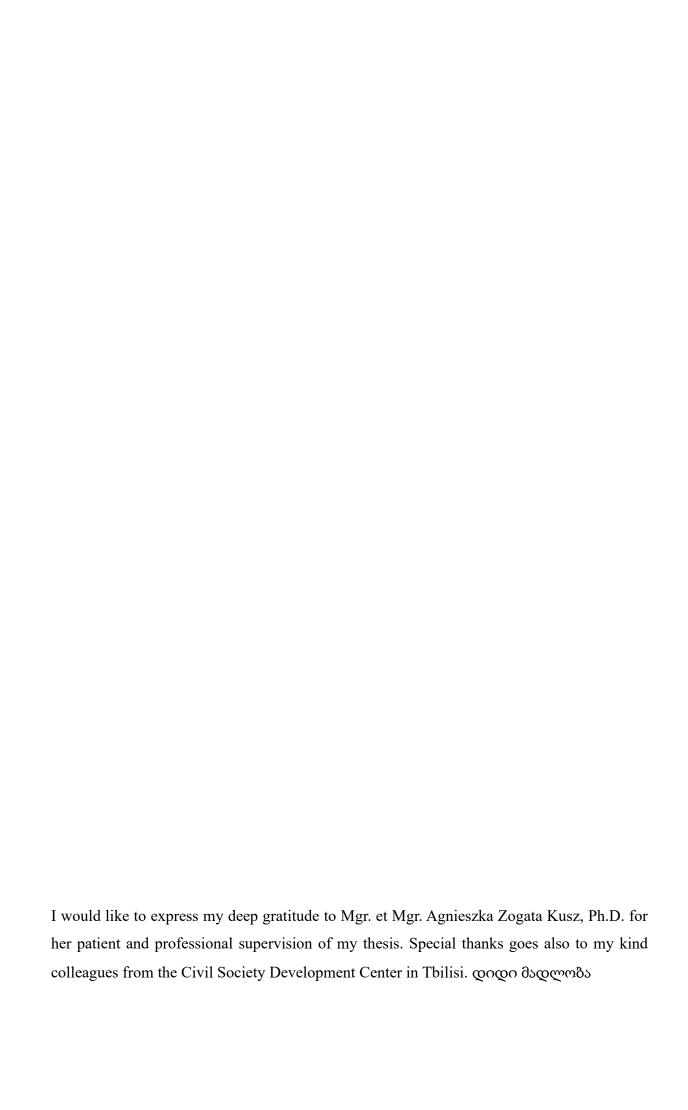*Charitable and Social Work – International*

Marie-Anna Matyásková

Identification of Problems in Social Work Services for Street-connected Children in Georgia

Diploma Thesis

supervisor: Mgr. et Mgr. Agnieszka Zogata Kusz, Ph.D.

2023

I declare that I have prepared this thesis independently and I have listed all the sources used to write the thesis in the reference list.

_____

Acronyms

AIDS - acquired immune deficiency syndrome

ANPPCAN – African Network for the Prevention and Protection agains Child Abuse and Neglect

CSDC – Civil Society Development Center

CBP - Child Benefit Programme

GASW – Georgian Association of Social Workers

HIV - human immunodeficiency virus

ILO – International Labour Organisation

MOH - Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from Occupied Territories, Labour, Healthand Social Affairs

MES – Ministry of Education and Science of Georfia

NATO - North Atlantic Alliance

NFE – non-Formal Education

NGO – non-Gvernmental Organisation

STD - Sexually transmitted diseases

TSA - Targeted Social Assistance Programme

UN – United Nations

UN-HABITAT - United Nations Human Settlements Programme

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHCHR - Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

UNHRC - United Nations Human Rights Council

UNICEF - United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

WHO – World Health Organisation

Content

Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the identification of problems in social work services aimed at the target group of street-connected children in Georgia. The research was conducted during an internship in the territory of Georgia in the autumn of 2021, when the researcher had already spent several months in the environment of the NGO Civil Society Development Center in Tbilisi, which, among its activities, deals with social work with the group of street-connected children.

Since the 1980s, street-connected children, along with other groups of vulnerable children, have become an integral part of the global agenda of academic research, policy debates and intervention programmes (Dabir, 2014). Subsequently, street-connected children have been recognized as a separate group of vulnerable children in most countries. In April 2011, the UNHRC adopted resolution 16/12 on the rights of the child to strengthen a holistic approach to protecting and promoting the rights of children working and/or living on the streets.

The specific socio-economic and political context of each geographic area and the uniqueness of each individual child's life story leads to a very complicated situation in terms of how exactly to define street-connected children. Despite their many strengths, and regardless of what kind of contact they may have with their families, street-connected children are a highly vulnerable group in the human community. Their exclusion from social structures severely limits their opportunities and chances to find and fulfil their potential in life. This makes these vurnelable kids a clear target group for social work.

In 2009, Save the Children, in collaboration with many governmental, and non-governmental academic actors, published the case study 'Don't call me a street child' about street-connected children in Georgia's cities. The aim of the study was to better understand the situation of street-connected children in order to base any future policies regarding this

marginalized group of children. The study worked with a research sample of 1049 children in the streets and showed that the situation of these children in Georgia is a manifestation of the many socio-economic problems faced by children and their families (Sve the children, 2009).

In 2009, the deinstitutionalization of childcare services began in Georgia. Institutional care was gradually replaced by community-based care alternatives. However, in a situational analysis (SOS Children's Villages of Georgia and GASW, 2012), the authors came up with the discovery that the deinstitutionalisation of the system did not sufficiently protect certain groups of children, including street-connected children (ILO, 2020).

In 2011, a number of services for street-connected children were established in Georgia with the support of various aid actors. However, service providers were still confronted with gaps in the services offered and the specific needs of street-connected children. In response to this situation, UNICEF and its partners conducted a study in 2018 entitled 'Children Living and/or Working in the Streets of Georgia', which again provided a new in-depth analysis of the situation of children in the streets of Georgia (UNICEF, 2018).

The aim of this thesis is to find out how social workers and other specialists who are directly or indirectly involved in the provision of social services for street-connected children in Georgia perceive the current situation and to use their stories to identify the problems they face in their work.

Our thesis consists of two parts, a conceptual and research part. The conceptual part consists of three chapters, which represent a summary of the basic relevant concepts for orientation in the field of social work with street-connected children. The research part of the thesis presents the research strategy and methodology. We present the selection and description of the sample population and attention is also paid to ethical aspects and possible limitations of the research. In the analytical chapter we present the results of our research and answer the research question. The last chapter of the thesis is the conclusion where we summarize the final findings of our research.

. Within the conceptual part in the first chapter of our thesis, we describe the global evolution of the definition of street-connected children, introduce important documents and reveal the street environment in which children move.

In Chapter 2, we will review the paradigm shift and right-based approach in social work with street-connected children, and describe the services and trends that are being applied in social work interventions in different parts of the world.

Chapter 3 introduces childcare policy in Georgia, describes the background and context of the street environment in which children live in Georgia, and also pays attention to Georgian actors who specialise in helping the marginalised group of street-connected children.

For the research part of our thesis we chose a qualitative research method. The data for the research was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group interview. For these interviews we select a target group of professionals who are directly or indirectly involved in the provision of social services for street-connected children in Georgia.

I. CONCEPTUAL PART

1 Street-connected children

In the first chapter of our thesis, we would like to present the development of the definition of vulnerable children in the street environment in the international arena and describe the background and context that street-connected children face in the street environment. We will expose the theme of push and pull factors that bring the child to this life path and describe the street environment in which the child grows up.

1.1 Term definition

Since the 1980's, street-connected children, along with other groups of vulnerable children, have become an integral part of the global agenda for academic research, policy debates, and intervention programs (Dabir, 2014). In April 2011, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) adopted Resolution 16/12 on the Rights of the Child with a view to strengthen a holistic approach to the protection and promotion of the rights of **children working and/or living on the street**. This resolution confirmed that:

"it is essential for States to take all appropriate measures to ensure the meaningful participation of children, including children working and/or living on the street, in all matters and decisions affecting their lives through the expression of their views, and that those views be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity" (UNHRC, 2011).

According to Dabir (2014), this resolution can be considered the most significant global initiative for this target group of children since the late 80s of the 20th century, when in 1988 UNICEF formulated a definition of street children which concerns children "for whom the street...has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood" (UN-HABITAT, 2000). Then subsequently in most countries street children were recognized as a separate group of vulnerable children. Definition of street children formulated by United Nations International Children's Emergency (UNICEF) in 1988 categorised children as those:

- **on the street** who spend nights in the streets or in places not meant for human habitation for a period of one month or more. They either do not have a family/caregiver, or have not had any contact with their family/caregiver for a period

of one month or longer. They provide for themselves, and spend the money to secure their own needs in their street surroundings

- **of the street** who always sleep at home but spend most of the daytime on the streets. They may have regular or irregular contact with their family/caregiver. They provide for themselves and usually bring at least a portion of their income back home to support their family/caregiver (Landers, 1988, Warnag, Dershem, 2014, pg. 11).

The specific socio-economic and political context of each geographical area and the uniqueness of each individual child's life story leads to a very complicated situation within the framework of how to accurately define children connected to the street The debate about the meaning and definition of street children is taking place across academia and politics, as well as among practitioners and the general public (West, 2003, Dabir, 2014). Among other reasons, such as the lack of birth records in developing countries, political instability in times of crisis or child trafficking (Dabir & Athale, 2011; West, 2003), definition difficulties are another significant obstacle for more effective research in this area (Thomas de Benitez, 2007).

Following the call by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Resolution 16/12 (2011) to conduct a study on the challenges, lessons learned and best practices in a holistic, child rights-based and gender-based approach to protect and promote the rights of children working and/or living on the streets, author Anne Louise Meincke used in her study Children's voices: "Nothing about us, without us" (2011) a term for **children connected by streets**, which can be understood as "children for whom the street has become a central reference point, playing a significant role in their everyday lives and identities."

Hiddleston and Thomas de Benitez (2011) see this definition as more inclusive for several reasons (1) Recognizes every child as a social actor capable of developing relationships with people and places, and whose activities contribute to building their identity (2) encourages a focus on children's emotional connection to public space, rather than their current physical presence on the street (3) Recognized that children who have spent time working, hanging out or living on the street make bonds there – as well as have different ties to family, community and wider society (4) Recognizes that street experiences contribute to identity development in particular, which may be different from those experienced by other urban and even other mobile or socially excluded children (Dabir, 2014).

Since 2012, the term street-connected children can be seen in UN brochures and publications. The term first appears in the 2012 brochure of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, a clear step away from the issuance of Resolution 16/12 (2011), which used the definition of children working and/or living on the street, which has been criticised for excluding some children who may not be physically present on the street because of their work or because of moving between home and street (Hiddleston, Thomas de Benitez, 2011). According to Dabir (2014), the formulation also draws attention to the physical presence of children in the street environment and ignores their emotional ties to the street.

Based on the above, we also decided to use the term street-connected children for our thesis, which is considered the most inclusive and dignified among experts in the field of research in social work.

1.2 Street and child

The above terminology implies that on the street we can meet children whose life situation differs depending on their relationship to their family, the intensity of their time spent in the street environment and the activities they perform on the street. With regard to the popular names given to this marginalised group of children across the world, it is notable that these labels carry predominantly negative connotations These names usually describe the main occupation of street children in a given area, for example in the Democratic Republic of Congo these children are called *balados* - "those who walk around", in Vietnam these children are known as *buido* - "children of the peach", or in Guatemala they are *huelepegas*, literally "glue sniffers" (Dabir, 2014).

Any one trait or background cannot define street children. There are a variety of conditions and circumstances that define them. The life experiences and reasons that lead a child to connect his or her life to the street are unique for each child. However, across the literature we can find a categorisation of the reasons and ways in which children find themselves on the streets. For example, Peggy Shifflett (2004) names two groups of street children - runaway children and homeless children. The hallmark of the first group of children

is that they choose to go on the streets themselves; homeless children find themselves on the streets for socioeconomic reasons that leave them homeless for varying periods of time. Furthermore, the factors that influence children's acceptance of street life can be divided into push and pull factors. Push factors include poverty, abuse or abandonment. Pull factors are various types of addictions, the desire for apparent freedom, or to earn their own money. These factors intersect to varying degrees and can change over the time (Dabir, 2014). The UNICEF commissioned annual report for 2020 (UNICEF, 2021, WHO, https://www.unodc.org/pdf/youthnet/who_street_children_module1.PDF) provides many disturbing data on the world's child population. For example, that some 150 million children are involved in the worst forms of child labour, 1.2 million children are trafficked each year, 230 million children are not registered at birth at all, up to one million children are held in detention without trial, three million girls a year have to undergo infant circumcision, 7.3 million girls give birth to an offspring each year before their own majority or are married off by their families before the age of fifteen. Of the world's approximately eight billion people, children make up about a third, but some of these children are forced to face threats and problems from a very early age that have a very negative impact on their lives.

Being on the streets makes children more vulnerable. The challenges facing street-connected children are cross-regional and well known and documented. Risks faced by street-connected children and young people are physical, psychological and sexual exploitation, violence, economic exploitation, social exclusion, no skills-based employment, substance misuse, widespread addiction and HIV (Coren et al., 2013). In general, all forms of money making, either for themselves or for their families, can be found in UN Convention 182 under the title Worst Forms of Child Labour, (2011). The types of work in which street children engage are region specific, but the character of this work is similar across the world. Examples of such work include recycling waste, performing art, selling various small items such as disposable toiletries, fruit, or fish, washing cars, or begging. Other forms of money-raising in the street environment include illegal activities such as drug dealing, prostitution, stealing and illegal money exchange. These illegal activities often take place in organised street gangs. Another specific area of earning for children in areas affected by local war conflicts such as Somalia, Afghanistan, or Sri Lanka is recruitment into the ranks of child soldiers (Dabir, 2013, West 2003).

According to Sharon Pretto (2006, pg. 119), children who live on and off the streets rarely look their chronological age. Lack of proper nutrition and other facilities from an early age while surviving on the streets hinders a child's normal physical growth and development. As a result, the child may look younger than he or she actually is. At the same time, the harsh realities of life on the streets can force a child to grow and mature at an early age (2006, pg. 119). Despite the absence of proper nutrition and a healthy lifestyle, which is reflected in the physical appearance of children, this problem is not indicated by children as a majority in the studies conducted. Aptekar and Abebe (1997) mention in their publication that almost every study of street children in different cultures concludes that the worst fear of children is not starvation or loss of security of their families but hostility from the public and the police. As an example, the number of children killed on the streets in Brazil actually makes up for the total loss of life in the civil war in Lebanon.

The typical age of a street child varies from place to place. The difference can be observed between developed and third world countries, in the World Health Organisation (WHO) education module, in developing countries there are on average 30% fewer girls on the streets and the age of children moving on the streets is already 8 years. In developing countries, this age is 12 years and the girl population is as much as fifty percent smaller. The WHO cites as reasons for this phenomenon (1) that girls are often raised by family and culture to be more submissive and nurturing, therefore girls have less conflict in their families (2) Girls find it easier to find work on the streets, such as housewives or in the sex business, therefore they are not as visible on the streets (3) Street girls may be less visible to researchers because they mask their identities in order to gain more safety.

1.3 Counting of street-connected children

Due to a large definitional gap in the research area, and despite global attention to collect more inclusive population data, national and international data collection mechanisms do not capture the most marginalised and vulnerable populations which include this marginalised population of children. Another complication is the life in motion of these children and also their own efforts to be invisible.

While street children may not be intentionally omitted from data collection, the methods most often used during sampling render street children and other vulnerable populations invisible. Household surveys, considered to be one of the most important data sources, exclude populations outside traditional households, such as displaced-, refugee- and homeless populations including street children. Moreover, censuses, which are considered more inclusive, are often not carried out on a regular basis by many countries, partly due to the cost in financial and human resources. When they are, street children remain largely hidden and uncounted (Consorcium for street children, 2018).

According to the Consortium for Street Children (Consorcium for street children, 2018), there are currently no solid population estimates of street children and current national data is still limited. However, in our study of the literature we came across several resources that provide estimates of the number of street-connected children in the World. In State of the World's Street Children: (Benítez, p. VI, 2007) Alex Dressler, Executive Director of the Consortium for Street Children, estimates that in 2007 the world's street child population was approaching one million. He also addresses the question of whether exact numbers are important, and presents his strong belief that every one child who ends up on the streets is one too many.

2 Social work in the field of street-connected children

Despite their many strengths, and regardless of what kind of contact they may have with their families, street children are a highly vulnerable group in the human community. Their exclusion from social structures severely limits their opportunities and chances to find and fulfil their potential in life. This makes this group a clear area of interest for social work. Despite the alarming numbers of unaccompanied children on the streets of the world's capitals, in border areas and along migration routes, there is still a clear absence of a direct specialism in social work education that focuses directly on this marginalised group of children in the world. In this chapter, we will review the paradigm shift and right-based approach in the field of social work with street-connected children, and describe the services and trends that are being applied in social work interventions in different parts of the world.

2.1 Normative paradigm and right-based approach

The change of the normative paradigm in the approach to street-connected children can be observed in all areas of social work – in theory, research and practice. It is a process of transformation of thinking that stereotypically viewed street-connected children as abandoned homeless children living chaotic lives with great potential for future delinquency. From this point of view, adults are perceived as the only ones who are able to ensure the well-being of these children through control and supervision. In his contribution to the Encyclopedia of Social Work (Matoušek and col., 2013), Michal Kaplánek, in the chapter Street Children, describes the development of society's approach to the marginalized group of street children during the second half of the twentieth century in South America. Specifically, in Brazil, there was an evolution of approach from correctional pedagogy, to social pedagogy, to the children's rights movement itself. Within this process, there has been a move away from viewing the street child as an object, with the goal of social worker intervention being the elimination of deficits. This was followed by a new, more dignified and functional approach to the child as a subject. The subjective conception of social intervention takes into account the child as a full human being, with his/her own needs, who needs first of all to be supported and then to be part of the emancipatory process in his/her natural environment.

In the area of (1) theory of social work with street-connected children the change lies in the perception of the street as a place of great value and importance for the formation of various supportive networks. The age of these children is a significant factor in their street life. With age there are milestone changes in the roles they accept and in the way of life they live in the street environment. In the field of (2) research, long-term studies need to be conducted using various triangulation methods, which will give researchers a richer opportunity to see and understand the intricate relationship links and their consequences in the lives of these children. Children-centred participatory research should not only be a priority for researchers, but also accepted without exception as a right of the child. The change in social work (3) practice consists in using the street environment as a space for social intervention, which is built on already existing ties and networks. Leading the practice with street-connected children is long-term, age-sensitive and right-based. Thanks to these principles, social programs try to ensure the best possible conditions for the development of the life potential of each child (Ennew, 2003, Meincke, 2011, Thomas de Benitez, 2011).

The main idea behind the rights-based approach is that people are recognized as key actors in their own development, rather than passive recipients of commodities and services. Under international human rights law, states, as the principal duty bearers, are accountable for respecting, protecting and fulfilling children's rights within their territories (UNHRC, 2012).

Non-governmental organizations in the fields of international development and public health are increasingly modifying their work based on the principles of human rights. Also the United Nations has begun to mainstream human rights into all of its work, while United Nationas agencies such as the UNDP and UNICEF have already implemented rights-based approaches. However, social work and the related helping professions have yet to identify rights-based approaches to practice (Androff, 2015, pg. 9).

The rights-based approach has replaced the "welfare and rescue" approach in the area of social work with street-connected children, which brought several problems and stereotypes such as 1) children who work or live on the streets, have no families or have bad families who forced their children out. (2) Welfare and rescue approach focuses on satisfying children's needs, as perceived by adults, rather than on fulfilling children's rights, or (3) reinforcing an understanding of the street environment as the worst option - rather than the logical response

of children to other possibly worse options - and therefore the area from which children must be rescued (Dabir, 2014, Cornwall, Nyamu-Musembi, 2004, Hiddleston, **Thomas de Benitez**, 2011).

Among other things, several criteria were formulated in the report of UNHCHR (2012), which form the basis for building good practice with the target group of street-connected children. Below is an original transcript of the criteria, which are based directly on the conventions on the rights of the child:

- **Best interests of children** in street situations must be a primary concern in all actions that concern them – by parents, carers, lawmakers, policymakers, welfare institutions and those who influence or control resource allocation, including decisions throughout government, parliament and the judiciary, as stated in the Committee‟s general comment No. 5 (2003) on general measures of implementation of the Convention.
- **Non-discrimination:** children in street situations have the right to be treated as all other children. Equality does not mean that rights have to be delivered in the same way; the best interests of each child determine how that child‟s rights can best be achieved. Explicit discrimination includes vagrancy laws and policies allowing street children to be detained for survival behaviours; implicit discrimination includes requiring birth certificates to access health care or education.
- **Participation** is a right and a practical imperative. The opinion of street- connected children should inform policies, plans and interventions designed to address them. Street-connected children may have difficulty forming positive relationships with adults, therefore care, consistency and respect, built over time, are important to ensure their meaningful participation.
- **Accountability** on the part of courts and tribunals, which should respect street-connected children by listening to them and taking due account of their views and experiences; offering child-friendly justice; having staff trained in child-friendly procedures and child rights; using language that can be understood by street-connected children; and enforcing judgments. Children who are victims of violations are entitled to reparation, restitution, compensation and guarantees of non-repetition. Mechanisms for accountability should ensure States and other actors comply with their obligations

to children, for example through monitoring and evaluating practices; receiving and responding to complaints; providing remedies or redress for human rights violations.

- **Sustainability** means ensuring continuity of support to defend children‟s enjoyment of their rights. Sustainability of individual improvements means providing children with appropriate support so they can enjoy their rights into youth and adulthood. This requires appropriate legal, financial and policy support. Sustainability implies finding cost-effective investments rather than limiting action to assumptions of "means available."

2.2 Social work services for street-connected children

Social work practice related to street-connected children is diverse. This is primarily due to the diversity of the population of children, which also requires an understanding of complex macro issues such as poverty, migration and gender in order to address the problem holistically. The social worker who intervenes in this issue is faced with both the immediate needs and problems of children living on the streets, as well as long-term interventions to prevent the growth of street children. Social workers are therefore required to integrate a preventive and targeted approach involving interventions at the micro, intermediate and macro levels. Examples of macroscopic problems include corruption and the lack of political will to address the situation of children on the streets - the child population is not a voting group, social inequalities and urbanisation and mass migration to cities. Mesoscopic problems include natural disasters, wars and poverty. Microscopic problems concerning the children themselves are, for example, the dysfunction of families and the search for their own identity (Desai, 2014, D'Souza, 2005).

Dabitcz, in his 2005 article, gives attention to an analysis of the literature and best practices in the field of street-experienced children. He divides social services into three areas. These are primary and secondary prevention and tertiary intervention. Primary prevention focuses on community development and support for families living in poverty. Primary prevention services, provided by non-profit organisations, aim to avoid the child leaving the street environment alone. The services work to prevent push and pull factors and empower families to earn their own household income. Secondary prevention deals with children who have already experienced some form of street life. The aim of secondary prevention is to

ensure that the experience of street life becomes a transitional phase in the child's life and that the child is able to live his or her adult life without having to continue the experience. In secondary prevention, children are made aware of the risks and pitfalls that they may encounter in the street environment so that they can better avoid them and emerge from this life situation with the least possible injury. Tertiary intervention focuses on children who have been orphaned or for any other reason have permanently left their family or other community background (Dabitcz, 2005).

Among the UNHRC key recommendations for governments and actors working with street-connected children is warning that those children carry through life the experience of great hardship and violations of their rights, and therefore calls fo interventions built on supportive community enviroments. At the state level, there is a call for investment in comprehensive child protection systems that will automatically include a holistic, rights-based aproachto the child. It also calls for the design and implementation of policies at municipal level to support children through specialised social work interventions. Also to provide operating budgets and funding for research in this area. Member States are also called upon by the High Commisioner for Human Rights to address stigma nad discrimmination, and to spread awareness of street-connected children to the wider public. Equal emphasis is placed in the report on putting in place enforcement systems to better control perpetrators of violence against children and to enable these children to access affordable counseling and support (UNHRC, 2012).

In the following paragraphs we will look at the direct services that are provided to street-connected children across the world. Examples of these services and programmes include educational programmes, harm-reduction, HIV prevention or implementation of dynamic approach.

The education of street-connected children can be broadly divided into two groups. These are formal education and non-formal education. The main objective of formal education programmes is to ensure that children are empowered to receive an education and attain a state of life that will enable them to better break the cycle of poverty in the street environment and earn a decent living on their own in the future (Shorter and Onyancha, 1999, Ouma, 2004). Using the example of the practice with education programmes in Kenya, we can present the

recommendations made as early as 1994 by the African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN). Educational programs for children must be flexible enough to cover the provision of the physical, psychological and sociological needs of the child with street experience in the premises for individualized programs. Educational programs should be accessible and designed specifically for street children. Basic elements of educational programmes should include literacy and strong life skills training to help the child find suitable employment in the future (Ouma, 2004, The Children's Charter of South Africa, 1992). Non-formal education (NFE) is any organised systematic activity that is carried out both within and outside educational institutions. Non-formal education programmes address the direct needs of marginalised populations and are characterised by their open approach, community environment, voluntary participation and their time-saving character (Thompson, 2000).

Next, we will present harm-reduction programs through which social workers and other professionals, for example from the fields of addiction medicine and pediatrics, try to minimize the harm related to children's substance use, sex work, or experiences of domestic violence. In the context of drug use, harm reduction separates itself from the notion that drug use equals harm and instead identifies the negative consequences of drug use as the target of intervention more than drug use itself (Des, 1995). In general, harm reduction interventions aim to reduce the risk of transmission of infectious diseases such as HIV or hepatitis through the distribution and disposal of disposable syringes, condoms and other barrier devices. In addition, in these service settings, children are given the space to have open conversations about topics such as drugs and sex work. Social workers use their approach to highlight the risks of this risky behaviour and offer information on how to prevent it. The ideal state of the client is to break free from the cycle of addiction, but the core of harm-reduction services is primarily about providing the conditions for the client to become safe and genuinely interested in the first place, and to see the motivation to leave the vicious cycle of risky behaviour patterns (Kalina, 2003, Harm reduction, 2005).

In 2006, UNESCO's Division of Basic Education published a handbook for facilitators working with street-connected children on STD and drug prevention. The publication is entitled Street children HIV and AIDS methodological guide for facilitators and aims to create a training tool that is flexible and adaptable enough to guide the primary prevention process

on this issue, reducing the vulnerability of street-connected children and helping them to avoid risky behaviours. The publication describes intervention techniques and activities that will provide a better and more open environment for trainers to meet their HIV/AIDS prevention goals. These include listening, observing and asking questions. An example of an activity is "mutual aid solidarity" which reinforces the belief among children that help is needed and necessary if one is infected. Through the activity "health actors", children come to realise the risks they may face in their lives on the street and thus accept the need to implement prevention (UNESCO, 2006).

Dynamic programs use life cycle frameworks to understand, explain, and intervene in problem behaviors in children and adolescents. The programme takes into account both the child's stage of development and the shape of the child's relationships with the caregiver or family or caring community. Through a systematic process, interaction patterns in the child's behaviour can be identified and appropriate goals can be formulated to alleviate problem behaviour. One of these dynamic programs is run by St. John of God Community Services, which provides mental health services in the city of Mzuzu in the African nation of Malawi. This particular program, Umoza Street Children, which has been in operation since 1998, seeks to address deprivation and psychosocial problems that stem from complex parent-child, parent-parent, and child-parent-environment dynamics.. St. John of God Community Services is an Irish NGO – established the Umoza Street Children's Programme with major areas of concentration: (1) re-socialization/re-enculturation (2) repatriation and social re-integration (3) rehabilitation (4) remedial teaching and education (5) prevocational skills (6) school placement as seen fit (7) individual and group counselling and psychotherapy and (8) Child-parent and parent-parent interventions and (9)social/recreational interventions (Silungwe, Bandawe, 2011).

3 Georgian context

In the third chapter of our thesis, which focuses directly on the field of social work with street-connected children in Georgia, we present the development of Childcare policy in Georgia. Then, as in the first chapter, we will describe the background and context of the street environment in which children live directly in Georgia, and at the end of the chapter we will pay attention to the Georgian actors who specialize in helping our marginalized group of children.

3.1 Childcare policy in Georgia

In 2009, the deinstitutionalisation of childcare services in Georgia began. Institutional care was gradually replaced by foster care, and small community homes for children and youth became an alternative to large institutions. In the Situation Analysis (SOS Children's Village Georgia and GASW, 2012), the authors identified the main shortcoming of the reform as its over-focus on deinstitutionalising the system and failing to reach certain groups of children such as street-connected children, children with mental health problems and members of ethnic minorities (ILO, 2020).

In 2014, Georgia began major legislative changes aimed at protecting children's rights. Under the Civil Code of Georgia, a ban was issued on educational methods that could cause physical or psychological suffering to a child. Then, under the Criminal Code, a prison sentence of 2-4 years was established for caregivers who are responsible for forced marriage committed against a child. There has also been a new law – the Law on "Combating Domestic Violence, Assistance and Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence" which precisely defines neglect of a child by a caregiver and imposes the right to temporary residence in the country for nationals who are victims of domestic violence. Next wave of legislative change came in 2016, when a working group within the Georgian Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with UNICEF and other stakeholders, examined the challenges and gaps in legislative protection for children. In the second wave of legislative action, three laws were adopted. These are (1)

the Law on "Social Assistance" under which the term "deprived child" is included in the categories of persons requiring special care. The Social Assistance Law also established the term "disadvantaged child" which defines children identified by a social worker who live and/or work on the streets. Another law of 2016 is (2) the law on "Registration of Georgian and foreign nationals, rules for the issuance of ID cards and passports" this law allows social workers to act on behalf of a child in obtaining an ID card in order to facilitate access to education, health care and social services.The Law (3) on "Combating Domestic Violence, Assistance and Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence" expands the powers of the state social worker in the matter of separating a child from his/her family or caregiver in the case of violence against a child. However, the law also stresses that the removal of the child from the caregiver is a measure of last resort if all other attempts to protect the child have been exhausted. In addition to the three laws mentioned above, the second wave of legislative measures is complemented by a government regulation on child protection reporting procedures, which mandates that all professionals, institutions and organisations involved in working with children are obliged to identify and properly report violence against children (UNICEF, pg. 61-63, 2018).

Despite the adoption by the Georgian Parliament of the Children's Rights Code in 2019, which includes a specific focus on social protection in addition to all the rights and freedoms outlined in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children in Georgia face poverty at a significantly higher rate than other age groups. Data from 2020 shows that 12% of the child population lives below the poverty line and 30% of children are at risk of poverty. Georgia's social protection system invests heavily in a programme aimed at combating extreme poverty (TSA), which is paid to the family as a whole. Other areas in the welfare system that affect children are child benefits, which are means-tested and paid through CBP under TSA. The CBP refers to a program for children living in households that are considered poor and is considered the most extensive for the benefit of children in Georgia. In addition, it is a benefit for children with disabilities paid as part of the welfare package and orphan or survivor benefits for orphaned children (ILO, 2020; UNICEF 2019).

While Georgia has achieved near-universal coverage for the elderly, children are significantly less likely to receive any benefit commensurate with their life situation. This

points to significant gaps in the provision of risks such as child labour, malnutrition, living conditions that negatively affect learning, etc. for the child population (ILO, 2020).

3.2 Street and Child in Georgia

The population of Street-connected children in Georgia is very diverse, as everywhere in the world. However, from the available sources, children can be described by subcategories according to the type of contact and accompaniment by family and adults, as well as by language and ethnicity, gender and age. The division and identification of street children is important in social practice. A proper understanding and insight into the complex social connections and life situation of children gives social workers and other professionals a guide to how to set up interventions and services for this target group correctly and most effectively.

According to UNICEF, there are four subgroups in Georgi according to the type of accompaniment and contact with the family. These are (1) Homeless children and youth who live and work on the streets without adult accompaniment and without any parental care. Although these children maintain a relatively independent life from their families, in some cases, occasional contact with family members is noted. This group of children includes both boys and girls who engage in various legal and illegal income-generating activities in the street environment. Seasonal migration is frequent among these children, who migrate to seaside resorts on the Black Sea beaches during the summer months due to the higher concentration of foreign tourists and better opportunities to earn money. The other group are children (2) who are unaccompanied on the street, doing various income generating activities and spending their free time in the street environment. At night, however, they return to the place they call home to the family, which provides them with food or resources that the children themselves bring to the family through their activities on the street. Children from mobile families (3) are defined as those who accompany or are accompanied by adults who are themselves street workers, but these families go home together at night. These families are very actively mobile and there is also significant seasonal migration. Children from homeless families (4) are, like the previous third category, children of homeless families. However, these families are completely homeless in cities and spend both days and nights in the street environment.

Neglected hygiene and lack of food are common problems for these children (UNICEF, pg. 23-25, 2018).

The child street population in Georgia is predominantly ethnically Georgian. Furthermore, on the street one can meet children from two different Roma groups and Azerbaijani Kurdish children. The Roma children are divided into two linguistically mutually unintelligible groups and identify themselves as either Moldovan Roma or Roma belonging to the Lom, Dom or also Bosha groups. Moldovan Roma are considered in Georgia as people who constantly migrate from place to place and earn money for their livelihood. Roma who self-identify as Lom, Dom, or Bosha have a long-term and multi-generational relationship with specific places in Georgia. In addition to the stigma that comes from their street lifestyle, Azerbaijani Kurdish people in the Caucasus region also have to deal with the majority view that their Kurdish identity is false. There is a general lack of awareness that, like the Romani language, Kurdish has several mutually unintelligible dialects The pervasive ignorance of cultural differences is markedly noticeable (UNICEF, 2018).

Among street-connected children in Georgia we can meet twice as many boys as girls. The proportion of boys in the street-connected child population increases proportionally with age, with the highest proportion of boys among children aged 15-18. The reason for this phenomenon may be the disproportion in educational practices and cultural differentiation of male and female roles in Georgia. Usually, a child is exposed to the street environment at an early school age, but there are also a large number of infants and toddlers (15%) on the street who usually accompany their begging mothers. Although the majority of the street population is under 14 years of age, street children groups are composed of adolescents at about 20 percent (Save the Children, pg. 21, 2009).

There are several factors that bring children in Georgia to the streets. These include forced migration, poverty and children's involvement in activities to help their parents run the household. These activities lead to child labour, which brings the child into the street environment. Another group of factors is related to the absence of parental care. These include parental illness or death and subsequent orphaning of the child, parental incarceration or parental substance abuse leading to abandonment of the child, or neglect of parental

responsibilities and domestic violence, which then pushes the child into a situation where he or she must fend for him or herself and prefers to live outside the home. In foster care, juvenile residential schools and rehabilitation facilities, strict discipline, particularly limiting children's social networks, is cited as a major factor, leading children and youth to prefer life on the streets to repeatedly running away and getting into trouble with caregivers (UNICEF, 2018).

3.3 Social Services for street connected children in Georgia

Social services for street-connected children in Georgia focus on the social reintegration and rehabilitation of children at risk. Social service actors can be divided into (1) governmental, which fall under the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs (MOH) and the Ministry of Education and Science. Then there are the services of (2) NGOs such as Caritas Georgia, World Vision or Child Environment. As a third group we will mention (3) UN programs and services, specifically UNICEF, which although no longer active in Georgia, have greatly helped in the start-up of social services for children in Georgia in the past years.

Within the framework of the programme of reintegration and rehabilitation of children at risk, the MOH, in cooperation with the non-profit sector, operates a mobile team service in Georgia. Specifically, this is a collaboration between MOH and two large non-profit organisations, Caritas Georgia and World Vision. The first mobile team was put into operation in the summer of 2013 in the territory of the capital city of Tbilisi. The mobile team consists of a psychologist, a social worker. a peer worker and a driver, who is usually a person who has his/her own life experience of street life and is well versed in the intricate connections and background of the street. The whole team works under the coordination of a social worker from the state social services agency. The team's task is to establish contact with the children non-violently and to gain their trust in their natural street environment, which takes the form of games and informal leisure activities. Furthermore, a professional assessment of the child's condition and the development of an appropriate proposal to address the life situation. The mobile team also distributes hygiene supplies and spreads information on self-care in hygiene

and prevention of infectious diseases associated with risky behaviour in the streets (UNICEF, 2015, UNICEF, 2018, Caritas Georgia, web).

Another activity of the programme is the operation of day centres and 24-hour shelters. Within the day centres, children from street backgrounds, who have been largely contacted through the activities of the mobile team, receive a safe base during the day. The day centres offer children food, space for hygiene and directly provide or mediate the possibility of medical and psychological care for the child. Other opportunities and activities of the day centres include teaching formal and informal social skills and facilitating various cultural and sporting activities. In addition, shelters also allow children who have no shelter to sleep overnight in the safety of the facility (UNICEF, 2015, UNICEF, 2018).

Under the auspices of MES, a pilot project called "Transition Education Programme for Vulnerable Children" has been running since 2015. This programme specialises in educational activities for children from day centres and 24 hour shelters. Apart from educational activities for children, it also involves education and training of teachers in schools to reduce the stigma that goes hand in hand with the inclusion of children from street backgrounds in the education system. Through the Transition Education Program, MES also facilitates funding for the NGOs that participate in the program. As an example, the Civil Society Development Center (CSDC), through its own program "The Second Opportunity for Education for Children Beyond Education Process in Georgia", facilitates life skills classes for children and provides age-appropriate schooling. CSDC has also been working since 2015 to strengthen schools through professional training for teachers and disseminating awareness-raising materials to parents of students (UNICEF, pg. 63, 2018, CSDC.ge).

Among the largest non-profit sector service providers for the target group of street-connected children in Georgia are Caritas Georgia and World Vision, which, in cooperation with the State Social Service Agency, as mentioned above, are heavily involved in the running of government services. Below we present their other activities and services in the field of social work with street-connected children in Georgia.

Caritas Georgia was established in Georgia in 1994 and has been active in the field of crisis response, humanitarian and social assistance since then. One of the mainstay programs of the organization's work in Georgia is "Children and Youth Protection and Development" in which they participate in the aforementioned government services of mobile teams, day centers and 24 hour shelters. Other services that Caritas Georgia provides for children are "Family Type Small-Group Homes" and "Independent Life Program". Services that do not directly affect the children themselves but have a significant impact on preventing street life include a service called "Parents Support Program". Family Type Small-Group Homes operates three facilities of this type in Georgia. The aim is to provide children without parental care with the opportunity to grow up in a close family-type community environment. Participants in this programme are children aged 6 to 18 years who are also fully enrolled in the compulsory school system. The Independent Life Program then provides residential children with services to facilitate their transition from care to their own adult lives. Specifically, this includes the provision of temporary accommodation, reimbursement of living costs for a certain start-up period, assistance in obtaining employment and other types of social assistance. Within the Parents Support Programme, parents are provided with professional psychological counselling to address their psycho-emotional problems, and various leisure activities are organised to facilitate and improve the relationship between parents and the child in the home in order to prevent the child from leaving the street due to unhealthy family relationships. To ensure the economic sustainability of the family and to increase the chances of employment, parents have the opportunity to acquire vocational skills through five-month retraining courses (https://caritas.ge).

In 1996, World Vision Georgia (WVG) opened an office in the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, in response to the urgent need for economic assistance and intervention in the lives of Georgia's poor and vulnerable. Today, all World Vision Georgia projects are built around three strategic objectives that build local capacity, contribute to local and national policy development, and are community-based and sustainable. WVG's three strategic goals are (1) Strengthening child care, (2) Increasing youth participation, and (3) Community development. In partnership with the Government of Georgia, WVG operates three mobile teams and three day and 24-hour centres. Child protection initiatives at the community and national levels are implemented through the World Vision Child Protection and Advocacy (CP&A) model. This model works on the basis of 4 components of child protection, which are (1) building

community awareness and sensitization, (2) strengthening the referral system, (3) empowering vulnerable families with children, and (4) increasing children's resilience. WVG operates a day care center in Tbilisi for 25 infants and toddlers from vulnerable families. This service is unique in that it offers extended hours and enables single parents to maintain employment. In 2015, WVG was elected as the Chair of the Board of Directors of the National Child and Youth Protection Coalition, a network of 54 organizations focused on collective advocacy initiatives and providing technical expertise in child protection. In addition to major cities such as Tbilisi and Kutaisi, the organization also carries out all its activities in the regions of Kakheti, Imereti, Samtskhe-Javakheti (https://www.wvi.org/georgia#).

UNICEF does not currently directly run any specific services for the street-connected children target group in Georgia, but it is clearly worth noting the UN agency's activities in previous years, which significantly helped to start the Government and NGO services as the mobile teams and day and 24 Hour Centres services in 2011-2014 (UNICEF, pg. 68, 2018).

II. RESEARCH PART

4 Research Methodology

4.1 Research aim

In July 2014, the Stronger Coalition for Childcare conducted research in Georgia to assess the child welfare system's guidelines, identify key needs and provide recommendations for improving existing child welfare policies and practices. The research identified key issues in the child care system in Georgia. These problems were in the areas of (1) lack of resources, (2) lack of qualification caregivers, social workers, and other specialists, (3) absence of specialised institution of juvenile justice and inefficient communication between subjects works with children in the field of justice, (4) weakness of institutions of education and police, (5) Centralization of social work services, (6) discrimination against ethnic minorities in access to state services, (7) Absence of services to help children who leave state care service after 18, (8) problem coordination between schools and Social Service Agency and (9) lack and poor access for families of at-risk groups to Government services (A Stronger Coalition for Child Welfare, 2014).

Children who find themselves in a street environment and are subsequently placed in care after the intervention of social workers are most vulnerable to the above-mentioned problems and threats. Therefore, social work with this marginalized group of children in Georgia became the focus of our research. At the same time, like the whole world, the Caucasus region was affected by the C-19 pandemic in 2020, which significantly affected the operation and quality of services for street-connected children.

The **aim of the research** is to find out how professionals who work in the field of social services for street-connected children in Georgia perceive the current situation and to identify existing problems in the field of service provision.

The main research question is: What are the main problems in social welfare services for street children in Georgia in the current situation?

4.2 Qualitative reserch approach

The thesis research was conducted using a qualitative approach, which is known for its wide use in social sciences (Perumal, 2014). The outcome of qualitative research findings is derived from data collected in many different ways. For example, through observation and interviews, but also through analysis of documents, books, and videos (Strauss, Corbin, 1999)." The aim of qualitative research is to obtain descriptions of the particularities of cases, to form hypotheses and to develop theories about phenomena in the world. Quantitative research is more structured and uses more deductive scientific methods. It focuses on describing the variability of predefined variables that define what we will observe and capture. " (Hendl, 2005, p. 63)

The theoretical basis of qualitative research consists mainly of phenomenology and social constructivism, which in other words means that reality does not exist by itself on its actors or observers, but is constantly constructed in the process of social interaction (Patton, 2002). Hendl (2005) considers the advantage of qualitative research to be results that provide a detailed description and insight into the studied phenomenon through its study in the natural environment, thus taking into account local conditions and allowing the study of processes and the search for causation. (Miovský, 2006) emphasises its uniqueness and contextuality in qualitative research.

The disadvantage of qualitative research is the possible distortion of data both by the researcher who indirectly participates in the processes he / she is researching and by respondents who may not react naturally due to the fact that they are being investigated. The reason for the distortion of data by respondents may be the effort to appear in the best possible light or the fear of opening up to sensitive issues related to the performance of their job (Disman, 2000).

4.3 Data collection and research sample

The following two data collection methods were selected within the qualitative research approach. The Focus Group and Semistructured Interview.

Focus group discussion is frequently used as a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of social issues. The method aims to obtain data from a purposely selected group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of a broader population (Casey, Kueger, 2000). Focus group was conducted with participation of CSDC staff and invited 8 specialists who are working with street-connected children. Specifically, there were two social workers, two special teachers, one life skills worker and three other specialists in the field of social work with street-connected children who are both special teachers and life skills teachers in the organisation. Our focus group was held in November 2021.

Semi-structured interview is one of the most used techniques for obtaining qualitative data. This kind of interview is authentic and flexible. A semi-structured interview requires the preparation of questions and schemes that need to be held during the interview. The advantage of this type of horn is a space for additional questions (Miovský, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were held with specialists from the Government, NGO sector, shelters and mobile groups.

Data collection for our research took place during 8 weeks (29.10.2021 - 22.12. 2021) in Tbilisi, Georgia. The most important consideration for the **focus group interview** was that the people selected for the interview had been working directly with street-connected children in Georgia. CSDC staff - social workers, life skills teachers and special teachers who work directly with children in the transit programme for street-connected children in the cities of Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Rustavi - were approached as part of our focus group interview. Number of participants was 8.

The CSDC transit programme forms a notional inclusive bridge between schools, shelters, parents of street-connected children, children themselves and the school community. As part of the transit program, CSDC personnel are working to improve the integration of street children into Georgia's education system and wider society.

To overcome the language barrier between the CSDC staff and the researcher, a Georgian native speaker was selected and approached to moderate the interview. The moderator was also a CSDC employee with a sufficient level of English. The moderator was acquainted in detail with the aims of the research. Based on a previous agreement with the researcher, she led a focus group in Georgian language.

To overcome the distance between the participants of our focus group interview, who live and work in different cities on the territory of Georgia, the online zoom platform was chosen to hold an interview. The researcher was present for possible questions from the facilitator throughout the focus group interview. With the consent of the focus group participants, an audio-visual recording was carried out, which was then translated into written form in the Georgian language by the Facilitator and translated into the English language.

In case of **semi-structured interview**, participants of this part of research were not selected with the condition of direct work with street-connected children as was it for members of our focus group interview. In addition to social workers, psychologists, and other professionals who provide direct work with street-connected children, people working in managerial positions in the nonprofit sector, or such as those in the Ministry of Education and Science, have also been approached. Contacts and a list of potential interviewees were gradually compiled during the researcher's internship. 23 potential respondents were approached using email correspondence. Eight interviews were conducted. In three cases, an English-speaking translator was invited to the interview. In each case, it was a person selected by the respondent. This requirement from the researcher was set to make the respondent feel comfortable during the interview. Translators were always colleagues from the organisation who spoke English.

Due to the worldwide pandemic situation, respondents were offered the opportunity to conduct an interview either online using Zoom or in person. We fully respected each respondent's decision and prepared the conditions for the interview to make him feel comfortable. In both cases, the conversation was recorded after the respondent's consent and then translated into written form using transcription.

4.4 Ethical aspects of research

The research took place in 2021 within the frame of the internship of the author, who is a student of the Master's programme in Charity and Social Work at the Department of Christian Social Work of the Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Palacký University in Olomouc, in the CSDC organization in the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi. The organization was fully informed about the research and after initial consultations, the author was provided with all the required space and offered assistance to conduct the research. Specifically, email contacts were provided to potential respondents, i.e. professionals in the field of social work with street-connected children in Georgia.

Each participant in both the semi-structured interview and the focus group interview was informed in advance of the research topic and the fact that the research would be published as part of the researcher's final thesis. Before the beginning of each individual interview in the case of individual interviews and before the beginning of the focus group interview, respondents were explicitly asked for verbal consent to conduct the research and were also presented with the option to leave the interview at any time; however, none of the respondents took this option.

Due to a complicated Covid situation that was not fully favorable at the time of data collection and research implementation, each respondent was offered a choice between an online meeting and a personal meeting. In the case of the personal interview, hygiene precautions were always followed. This meant open, ventilated areas and the use of mouth and nose protection in the form of protective face masks.

4.5 Data Processing method

The first step for the data processing which were collected from the semi-structured interviews and focus group interview was to transcribe the data from the audio recordings into written form. In order to obtain the most accurate and unbiased statements from the respondents, the interviews were transcribed verbatim without any intervention from the researcher. In the case of the focus group interview, the Georgian interview was first transcribed into written form in Georgian and then the Georgian original was translated by the focus group moderator into English, after which the researcher worked with it.Subsequently, the interviews were properly read and any transcripts that did not convey relevant information to the research questions were deleted. In addition, information that appeared multiple times within the same interview was discarded. According to Miovský, this technique is called first-order reduction (Miovský, 2006). Each respondent was given a mark. In the case of focus group participants, this was marked FG1 - FG8 and respondents with whom semi-structured interviews were conducted were tagged IR1 - IR8. This was followed by coding the data into segments according to the respondents' statements.

As a technique for preparing the data for interpretation in the thesis, the text colouring technique was chosen and applied to printed interview sheets that had already undergone first-order data reduction.

4.6 Possible research limitation

Despite all possible efforts and preparations to make communication as easy as possible through the interpreters and assistants who participated in the research, the language barrier between the researcher and the sample population is a potential limitation of the research. In particular, conducting a focus group where there was no opportunity to conduct the participant group in English. Therefore, a Georgian speaker with sufficient knowledge of English was brought in to transcribe the recording first into Georgian and then translate the collected data into English which the researcher subsequently worked with. In the case of semi-structured interviews, it was necessary to invite an interpreter in two cases for the same

reason. This fact can also be taken as a possible limitation of the research due to the presence of a third person between the researcher and the respondent.

5 Data Analysis

In this chapter we answer our research question - *What are the main problems in social welfare services for street-connected children in Georgia in the current situation?* From the statements of our respondents in the focus group and semi-structured interviews, we identified eight categories of problems in the field of welfare services for street-connected children in Georgia from the perspective of professionals who are directly or indirectly involved in the operation of these services. These areas are (1) insufficiently educated staff and lack of human resources in services for street-connected children; (2) lack of prevention programmes and support for families; (3) stigma and lack of awareness of the phenomenon of street-connected children in society; (4) problematic cross-sectoral cooperation; (5) barrier between ethnic minorities and social work services; (6) No life perspective for children over 18; (7) lack of financial resources and (8) complications related to C-19 pandemic. All of these categories of problems are in some way intertwined and interact with each other in their intensity throughout the process of providing social services to our target group of vulnerable children.

The **insufficiently educated staff and lack of human resources in services for street-connected children** is one of the most frequently cited problems perceived by our respondents. For instance FG8 points out: *„In general I think the biggest problem is the lack of human resources. Even in the centres there is a need for training of staff. I see this as a big problem. Because just feeding and dressing these children is not enough... You need other involvement, which is a big problem in shelters."*

The lack of human resources and low level of education is perceived by our respondents especially in the field of education and integration of street-connected children into the education system. For example IR7 points: *„In many cases public school teachers know about street children but they don't know how to work with them, what techniques to use. (...) Public school teachers ask too much from children in the process of teaching. They do not use individual approaches. Teachers don't know how to manage street children's behaviour. Very often teachers do not take in mind that street children have violent families that was the*

reason why they started living in the street. Teacher had various lectures and trainings about this topic but still, they do not know how to behave correctly." This fact only reinforces the problem of Stigma that street-connected children have to face. IR7 adds: *„If the teacher does not have the right information about the child from the street environment and if the teacher does not have a professional attitude towards the child, the teacher influences the class and in parallel the parents and their attitudes."*

However, social workers and other specialists are fully aware that this unprofessional approach goes hand in hand with lack of funding and a general lack of interest in this group of children. FG2 describes the situation at school: *„When a child has a behavioural disorder, it is challenging for the school and the classroom. Schools don't have enough resources to handle more than four children with special needs (...) there are other children with special needs in those schools besides our children and they can't manage the whole day when they are short staffed."*

Schools and the education system in Georgia are not the only part that suffers from a lack of human resources and their low level of education in the care process of street-connected children. This problem is also evident in the mobile teams that work with children directly on the streets, FG5 describes human resource gaps in field programmes: *"one psychologist in one mobile group cannot take care of all children. It cannot work with all of them individually and with good quality"* or, for example, in the offices that suffer from a shortage of social workers to carry out social and legal protection of children. IR4 points out: *„There are very few social workers working in government offices, which is a big problem because there are too many beneficiaries and poor families and social workers are not able to work always good in all cases".*

The **lack of prevention programmes and support for families** is a clear deficit in the whole care chain in the field of work with street-connected children in Georgia. FG5 highlights: *"There is definitely a need to strengthen families, there is a big problem in this area."* When we take into account that street-connected children mainly come from dysfunctional families, IR2: *„social workers, psychologists and case managers who work with street children no longer work with their families. This is why street children become street*

children. We then work with the consequences and not with the cause of the problem. (...) We don't have prevention and we only work with bad results. " the only way to prevent a child from becoming a street-connected child is to target their families and support them effectively in the first place. FG1: *„We still find kids on the street. What needs to be done? Probably not to put any child in a situation where they find themselves homeless."*

It does not mean that there are no prevention programs in Georgia at all, but their capacity is overcrowded, and our child welfare respondents noted the excessively long waiting times that families in need must experience in order to have a chance at placement. For example IR2 describes a situation with long waiting periods: *„There are very few prevention programmes and if you want to join one you have to wait at least five months when your family needs help. The process is too long. (...) What social workers do is that they tell children's families that such programmes exist and that they can join. But at the same time we see that there are no places in these programs. So we should have more programs and those programs should be better funded."*

Despite the fact that social services for street-connected children in Georgia have been in place for almost fifteen years and developed in various ways, the **stigma and lack of awareness of the phenomenon of street-connected children in society** is considerable. FG4 point out: *„Society does not sufficiently address the group of street children. Many people are blind to this problem."* Each of our interviewees who work directly with children brings testimony of this persistent problem in Georgian society. In particular, it is a persistent phenomenon that adults treat street-connect children differently in a negative sense than they treat children who do not have any street experience. FG4 describes own experience: *„I have experience that we took our children to museum in Tbilisi. When guide learned about the children being from the shelter, she skipped a lot and didn't show the children many things. (...) In the past, when I accompanied school children and their parents , the same guide did everything to keep the children interested."* another respondent says *„One teacher at school told me that she could write good grades for our beneficiary without the child attending school, that he could stay on the street. It was her compromise because she wanted to protect the other kids in the class."*

Another area of the problem of stigma and lack of awareness in society is the response of people to child begging in the streets. FG7: *„A part of society is unaware that the little financial assistance they provide to children does not help, but reinforces their motivation to stay on the streets."* The public is not well informed about the fact that money only provides a child with a momentary satisfaction of his or her needs, but does not provide a long-term solution to his or her situation. On the contrary, it only serves to anchor them in a vicious circle of risky behaviour and illegal economic activity. IR6 mentions: *„People don't understand that giving money to childre is not the solution. It's very hard for people that these kids kids need support and care they don't need money. It's not good for their development. This money is only a short-term solution. This really damages social work services because social workers try to explain everything to the children but the children see money on the street."*

We named the category of problems faced by our respondents at the level of cooperation between different sectors such as health, education as **Problematic cross-sectoral cooperation.** IR4 describes the cooperation problem: *„Lack of coordination between schools, preschools, hospitals and NGOs. The point is that everything works great on paper, but in practice it is different."*

As we mentioned in the first category which referred to the problems of lack of education of staff working with street-connected children in schools, communication between schools as institutions and care providers is also described by our respondents as problematic. The above is confirmed by our other respondents, for example FG1 points: *„On paper everything works, but in reality it doesn't work well. Public schools in Georgia are officially free for every child (...) This means that every child can go to public school and get education. But when children have problems at home and parents don't send them to schools, we don't have any tools to manage it. (...) It need more cooperation, sharing of information and experience."* There are situations where communication with schools is very complicated because the school simply doesn't want to include a child with street experience in the learning process. *„Sometimes they* (children) *are academically challenged and therefore have some special educational need, this is accompanied by difficult behavior and school administrators try to avoid enrolling a street child in school"*

There is also perceived major deficit in a psychiatric and psychological care for children in the health care system. FG3: *„There is no individual approach and everyone is diagnosed with a behavioural disorder and prescribed the same medication."* Specialists see a lack of and rigidity in practices that could help children overcome their traumas associated with living in dysfunctional families and with their street experiences. Health care for these children does not facilitate their integration, which would lead to a better quality of their life. FG1: *„Especially children with psychological problems have a problem getting help because there are no such services in Kutaisi. There is only one mental health centre where every child is diagnosed without the same problems and there is no individual approach at all, everyone is given one diagnosis of behavioural disorder and the treatment is standard for everyone."*

In the context of cross-sector collaboration, the mismatch between donors and service providers also resonates strongly in some cases. IR4 describes:*„For example, managers and monitoring staff do not have an overview of what is happening in the feeldo and shelters. They only have a theoretical point of view."* Respondents who work directly in the field see the problem that some of their colleagues are not familiar with the environment they control and have unrealistic ideas about service management. IR7: *„We have a communication problem. For example, donors tell us not to let children smoke near the centres. And we have to let children go to the street environment and smoke there. For example, in and around our centre, children are not allowed to smoke. If monitoring comes, it may be noticed and it will be very bad for our project and for our organization. Practice is much more problematic than theory."*

The **barrier between ethnic minorities and social work services** is a significant complication both for the children themselves and for service workers for street-connected children in Georgia. FG1 describe the situation: *„The problem is the children who are in the Georgian street environment but are not Georgian citizens, such as Azerbaijani children. (...) There is nothing that can be done with these children because they don't have documents. These children are completely disconnected from the services of the health and education system and are completely vulnerable."* As we already described in the conceptual section of our thesis, the population of street-connected children in Georgia is very diverse. Social workers and other professionals encounter children from different ethnic minorities such as Moldovan Roma or Azerbaijani Kurds on the streets. IR3 points out: *„... Most of the street*

children living in Georgia are citizens of Azerbaijan or other countries. Health programs in Georgia are for Georgian citizens, so they do not have access to medical services." The first complication in working with these children is the language barrier, which greatly complicates the social interventions of specialists in the field. Secondly, it is the absence of all documents, which makes it impossible for the child to access the services of the school or health system in any way.

An issue that resonates across our research sample is also the situation when children from shelters turn eighteen and become young adults. We named this category of problems in social work services in Georgia **No life perspective for children over 18.** FG4 point out: *(...) There is also no official budget to support children who turn 18 and are forced to leave asylum without an initial budget.*" Although there are already some efforts in Georgia to provide this specific type of service for young adults who have street experience and spend their childhood and adolescence in institutional care *„Rustavi City Hall has a program for children from shelters 18+, but I can't say that shelter is provided for everyone (...) I know of successful cases where school has been funded for children, but it's not for everyone"* is still the lack of these kind of services a very demotivating element for people who work with children in the field. FG6 add: *„What I see and I think can be fixed is that these children come into the care of our shelters, they have everything - food, drink, clothes, the staff of the centre plan things and prepare programmes (...) But once they turn 18, everything stops. As far as I know, our children who left the centre did not follow a good path. (...) It would be good if there was a programme for the children to help them not to end up on the wrong path after they leave the centre.*"

The lack of funding is perceived by our respondents at the level of funding of services for street-conneted children – due to FG7: *„funding is insufficient. State money. Because it's not a priority to protect street children and socialise them. (...) There's not enough funding in the programmes, that's why there's a shortage of social workers, psychologists and special teachers and that's the main problem because street children are not a priority for the government (...) because they don't vote in elections and I think that's the reason.*" and at the level of salaries for the workers themselves. IR1: *„We have very good social workers who work with street children both at the state level and in NGOs. However, they do not have good*

conditions for their work. They have little money and they don't have cars to do their work." As funding for services is unstable, workers perceive that in the field of social services for street-connected children, the lack of funding often means that services do not have the conditions for their continual functioning. *„There is little funding for programs that are needed. Often there are times when the money expire and we can't offer any more services."* We have identified this category of problems based on our interviews as **Lack of financial resources.**

Similarly to the whole world, Georgia has not avoided a battle with the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The research was conducted in the second year after the first cases of the disease and we were interested in our interviews to know what problems and complications this extremely challenging situation brought to the functioning of social services for street-connected children in Georgia. We called this category of problems **Problems related to Covid-19 pandemic.**

According to our findings, all of the above problems multiplied and intensified significantly during the pandemic. Low staff capacity in services for street-connected children was exacerbated by the impact of the infection on some workers, and those who stayed in shelters and day centers worked in risk and often had to adopt the crisis position of 'social worker for everything'. IR5 point out: *„There are not enough workers. Social workers were all in one person, they were also teachers. And also these social workers were very vulnerable. Just like the children. You know this category of children cannot stay in one place, they need to be out. (...) It was a very critical period for our workers. I mean, they were in the same space with these street youth and they were the only ones who worked with them. For example, one social worker with ten children. It was like that. Human resources were really low. And that's still an ongoing problem."* In the case of the work with the group of street-connected children was almost impossible to switch to the online form of learning as it used to be for others. This was not only due to the lack of technology such as laptops, tablets and internet connection, another problem was that children from the street are usually not familiary with computers, they simply do not know how to use it besause they have no experince. IR8: *„The children especially from vulnerable families and children of the street that are coming from this kind of families really had problems to have access to the online learning. Also they do*

not have computer skills and they do not have anybody to support them in this very new form of learning and teaching."

The pandemic has also increased the number of children on the streets. Vulnerable families who lost incomes from activities they could not perform due to the lockdown took to the streets to begging. IR6 describes the pandemic situation: *"Too many families was affected by the pandemic and there was more children on the streets. Maybe even children who was not in the street before the pandemic."* The period of the beginning of the lockdown was very stressful for the staff of the centres and mobile teams. If the children left the centre, they could not return because the centres were closed. A temporary solution came in the form of building covid hotels that offered space for these children. IR1: *„The day care centres were closed and many children stayed outside. And they had really, really a lot of problems. After some time, the Covid Hotel was opened for these children. Some of the children got Covid and and the social workers really tried to help them. It was a really critical year."*

Conclusion

As findings of our research, we have identified eight categories of problems perceived by specialists in the field of providing social services for street-connected children in Georgia.

1. Insufficiently educated staff and lack of human resources in services for street-connected children

2. Lack of prevention programmes and support for families

3. Stigma and lack of awareness of the phenomenon of street-connected children in society

4. Problematic cross-sectoral cooperation

5. Barrier between ethnic minorities and social work services

6. No life perspective for children over 18

7. Lack of financial resources

8. Complications related to C-19 pandemic

One of the most frequent problem identified in the research is the lack of human resources and the low quality of education of staff providing care for street-connected children in different areas of childcare. This problem is most pronounced in the area of education and integration of the street-connected child into the education system.

The lack of prevention programs was cited by research participants as inadequate. The lack of these services often results in a vicious cycle in their work with their clients, where, for example, families of children who are already involved in day centre and 24-hour shelter services see repeat cases of other siblings being removed from their parents and placed in care services.

Despite the efforts of non-profit organizations in the field of education and breaking down stereotypes that still very strongly accompany the lives of children with street experience, specialists in the field of social work with this marginalized group of children still mention the significant presence of stigma and little awareness of the issue of street-connected children in society. This lack is evident among both the general public and school staff.

The government's child protection and care system only provides services for children under the age of 18. However, there are no programs to help young people with street experience and subsequent institutional care overcome the difficult period of transition from care to adult life. This often returns adolescents to the vicious cycle of life on the streets, and social work professionals working with street-connected children see this as a very demotivating aspect of their work.

The lack of funding is perceived by specialists in the field of social work with street-connected children in all directions. They see this shortage in areas such as funds to cover the running of the day centres themselves or the 24-hour shelters, in the salary levels of the specialists in the centres, in the schools and in the field, and in the funds spent on various services outside the schools and centres

Children who come from ethnic minorities, such as Moldovan Roma or Azerbaijani Kurds, often do not have the documents necessary to integrate and enrol the child in social care services. These children are completely disconnected from the health care and education system. Another aspect that makes it difficult for care providers to work on the street with these children is the language barrier.

All of the above problems are reflected in the operation of cross-sectoral cooperation. The biggest problem is seen by specialists who provide direct care to children in the communication between the different sectors. Most of them perceive shortcomings especially in the field of education and health care. The lack of individual approach and orientation to the problems of street-connected children is visible, as is the lack of psychological and therapeutic programs for these children, who are marked by unhealthy and violent relationships both in their original families and in the street environment.

The complications associated with the pandemic situation as a result of the spread of Covid-19 are a new problem of this time. Respondents report difficulties and complications that make it very difficult for them to work with street-connected children. These include disruptions in the quality of services supporting children's education. Street-connected children often do not have access and sufficient knowledge of the use of technology for distance learning. Another aspect of this problem is the closure of centres, whereby the opportunity for children to use this refuge is closed with the closure of centres and they are forced to remain in the street environment.

Reference List

A Stronger Coalition for Child Welfare. (2014), *Assessment of Child Welfare Reform and Child Care System.* Georgia. Retrieved from: https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Annex%204_Report_Child_Welfare_Reform.pdf

Androff, D. (2015). *Practicing Rights: Human rights-based approaches to social work practice (1st ed.)*. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315885483

Aptekar, L., Abebe, B. (1997). *Conflict in the Neighbourhood: Street and Working Children in the Public Space.* Pg: 477–90.

Caritas Georgia https://caritas.ge/

Consortium for Street Children. (2018). *Making Invisible Populations Count – The development agenda of the 21st Century.* Retrieved from: https://www.streetchildren.org/news-and-updates/making-invisible-populations-count-the-development-agenda-of-the-21st-century/

Coren et al. (2013). *Interventions for Promoting Reintegration and Reducing Harmful Behaviour and Lifestyles in Street-connected Children and Young People: A Systematic Review.* Campbell Systematic Reviews. Retrieved from: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdfdirect/10.4073/csr.2013.6

Cronwall, A., Nyamu-Musembi, C. (2004). *What is the "rights-based approach" all about? : perspectives from international development agencies.* Working paper series, 234. Brighton: IDS.

CSDC – Civil Society Development Center https://csdc.ge/en/

Dabir, N. (2014). *Street-connected Children.* Encyklopedia of social work. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.013.1044

Des, J. (1995). *Harm reduction—a framework for incorporating science into drug policy*. Am J Public Health.

Dybicz, P. (2005). *Interventions for street children: An analysis of current best practices.* International Social Work. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872805057083

 Harm reduction. (2005).*A British Columbia community guide.*Victoria ISBN 07-726-5440-9

Hiddleston, T., Thomas de Benitez, S. (2011). *Research paper on the promotion and protection of the rights of children working and/or living on the street: OHCHR 2011 Global Study*. Geneva: OHCHR.

ILO. (2020). *Assessment of the Social protection System in Georgia.* Final Report, ISBN 9789220330364.   Retrieved   from: https://www.ilo.org/moscow/information-resources/publications/WCMS_767261/lang--en/index.htm

Kalina, K. (2003) *Drogy a drogové závislosti: mezioborový přístup*. 1. vyd. Praha: Úřad vlády České republiky, c2003. ISBN 80-86734-05-61.

Lusk, M. W. (1992) *Street children of Rio de Janeiro.* International social work 35, no. 3 (1992): 293-305.

Matoušek, O., Křištan, A. (2013). *Encyklopedie sociální práce*. Praha: Portál.

Meincke, A. L. (2011). *Children's voices paper: "Nothing about us, without us."* London: Consortium for Street Children.

Ouma, W.G., (2014). *Education for street children in Kenya: the role of the Undugu society.* Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.

Panter-Brick, C. (2003). *Street Children, Human Rights and Public Health* in Children,Youth and Environments Volume 13 No. 1

Pretto, S. (2006). *Walking with Vulnerable Children.* Mumbai: Shelter Don Bosco Research, Documentation and Training Center, pp. 118–31.

Save the Children. (2009). *Do not call me a street child*. Retrieved from: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADO657.pdf

Shifflett, P. A. (2004). *Homeless children and runaways in the United States.* Retrieved from http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Homeless_children.aspx

Shorter, A., Onyancha, E. (1999). Street children in Africa: a Nairobi casestudy, Nairobi: Paulines Publications.

Silungwe, N., Bandawe, Ch. (2011). *Implementing a Dynamic Street-Children's Program: Successes and Challenges. Malawi medical journal : the journal of Medical Association of* Malawi. 23. 78-84.

SOS Children's Village Georgia and GASW. (2012). *Child rights situation analysis of children at risk of losing parental care & children who have lost parental care.* Retrieved from: https://www.sos-childrensvillages.ge/assets/img/uploads/publications/child-rights-situation-analysis_eng.pdf

The Children's Charter of South Africa. (1992). Resolutions of the International Children's Summit held from 27 May to 1 June 1992, Cape Town. Retrieved from: https://www.naturalchild.org/articles/advocacy/childrens_charter.html

Thomas de Benitez, S. (2007). *State of the world's street children: Violence.* London: Consortium for Street Children.

Thompson. (2000). *"Formal-Nonformal-Informal Interfaces and Implications for Access, Retention and Learning Achievement".* Non-formal education: alternative approaches to basic education. Nairobi: NFE-AABE partners.

UN-HABITAT. (2000). *Strategies to combat homelessness.* United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. Nairobi. Retrieved from: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/623546?ln=en

UNHRC. (2011). *Resolution 16/12, Rights of the child: a holistic approach to the protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street.* Retrieved from: A/HRC/RES/16/12 General Assembly

UNHRC. (2012). *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street,* Pg 5, point 11. Retrieved from http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session19/A-HRC-19-35_en.pdf

UNESCO. (2006). *Street Children HIV & AIDS and Methodological Guide for Facilitators.* Retrieved from: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000147354

UNICEF. (2015). *Reaching vulnerable children in Georgia.* Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/georgia/media/1501/file/Children%20Living%20or%20Woking%20on%20the%20streets.pdf

UNICEF. (2018). *Children living and working in the streets of Georgia.* Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/georgia/press-releases/children-streets-georgia-lack-access-education-health-and-protection-services-unicef

UNICEF. (2019). *Press Release: UNICEF welcomes the adoption of the historic Code on the Rights of the Child in Georgia.* Tbilisi. Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/georgia/press-releases/unicef-welcomes-adoption-historic-code-rights-child-georgia

UNICEF. (2021). *Responding to COVID-19: UNICEF Annual Report 2020.* New York: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/media/100946/file/UNICEF%20Annual%20Report%202020.pdf

West, A. (2003). *At the margins: Street children in Asia and the Pacific: Poverty and social development papers*. Manila: Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank

WHO. *A Training Package on Substance Use, Sexual and Reproductive Health including HIV/AIDS and STDs.* Retrieved from: https://www.unodc.org/pdf/youthnet/who_street_children_module1.PDF

World Vision Georgia https://www.wvi.org/georgia#