



Special Report

Results of the Monitoring of Preschool Institutions

Tbilisi

2020

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Introduction

The present document is a special report on the results of the monitoring of the rights situation of children in preschool institutions, which was carried out within the framework of the "Strengthening the Capacities of the Center for the Rights of the Child" project being implemented by the Public Defender of Georgia with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The task of the monitoring was to assess the situation in public preschool institutions across the country, to what extent they meet national and international standards.

In 2019, 150 930 children were registered with 1 481 public kindergartens in Georgia. The monitoring conducted by the Public Defender's Office covered 143 preschool institutions in Tbilisi, also the cities, towns and villages of 51 municipalities of 10 regions of Georgia, including those located in the highlands.

The monitoring results showed that compared to the results of the monitoring conducted by the Public Defender's Office in 2014,¹ situation in the above institutions has been improved, mainly in terms of healthy and balanced nutrition of children, as well as consideration of special nutritional needs, which should be considered a successful step. However, despite the efforts of the state and the municipalities, a number of issues remain problematic, which requires more efforts from the relevant agencies. The problems are mainly related to the infrastructure of preschool institutions, upbringing-educational equipment and yards, as well as the overcrowding of kindergartens and the insufficient number of staff. Despite the steps taken, the remuneration of the kindergarten staff and their professional retraining also remain problematic.

Monitoring methodology

The monitoring of preschool institutions was carried out under the authority established by the Organic Law of Georgia on the Public Defender and relied on the law of Georgia on preschool education, international treaties and established standards.²

¹ From May 1, 2014 to January 31, 2015, preschool institutions were monitored across the country within the framework of the Strengthening the Capacities of the Center for the Rights of the Child project being implemented by the Public Defender of Georgia with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Available: <http://www.ombudsman.ge/geo/190307051819angarishebi/specialuri-angarishi-skolamdeli-saagmzrdelo-dawesebulebebis-monitoringis-shesaxeb>

² Constitution of Georgia; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; Law of Georgia on Early and Preschool Education, 2016; Resolution №485 of the Government of Georgia of 2017 on the approval of sanitary and hygienic norms of early and preschool education institutions; Resolution №487 of the Government of Georgia of 2017 on the approval of organization of food and nutritional values of rations for early and preschool education institutions; Instrument for monitoring the protection of water, sanitation and hygiene in preschool institutions approved by Order 101-21/O of the Minister of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia in 2018.

At the initial stage, monitoring methodology and questionnaires were developed for the kindergarten administration and teachers. With the assistance of a statistician, the number of institutions to be monitored was determined according to regions and municipalities. The second stage of monitoring included fieldwork. Meetings were held with kindergarten associations and kindergarten staff; the physical environment of kindergartens was inspected as well.

As part of the fieldwork, interviews were conducted with 216 kindergarten teachers, 136 principals and 45 heads of kindergarten associations. At the same time, the Department of the Rights of the Child of the Public Defender's Office launched individual proceedings into 45 alleged violations of the rights of the child identified as a result of the monitoring; recommendations were issued by the Public Defender of Georgia in 6 cases.

The data obtained as a result of the fieldwork were processed by a statistician and a statistical analyst, which served as the basis for the present special report and the recommendations of the Public Defender.

Key findings

- Despite the measures taken by the municipalities, the issue of insufficient space in kindergartens remains a challenge, which makes it impossible to arrange all the necessary rooms in the building or to allocate adequate space for children. This problem is even more acute in kindergartens located in non-standard buildings;
- Apart from only few exceptions, kindergartens are not tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities and therefore fail to ensure their full involvement;
- The monitoring showed that in the vast majority of kindergartens, yards are not arranged for children's development, entertainment or relaxation, and they have no appropriate space or equipment, which would make it possible for children to be engaged in various activities. In addition, some of the yards are fenced in such a way that it is impossible to control the entry of strangers and protect safety in the facility;
- The lack of adequate furniture should also be emphasized, which is especially evident in bedrooms, classrooms and dining rooms;
- Visual inspection of institutions and interviews with teachers made it clear that kindergartens are rarely supplied with toys suitable for the age or number of children, which hinders the implementation of a variety of activities;
- Despite the steps taken by the municipalities, kindergartens still fail to arrange toilets according to the number or age of children; no adequate space or equipment is provided for toilets. At the same time, hot water supply remains a challenge in some of the kindergartens;

- Interviews with kindergarten teachers and administration made it clear that most of them had not been trained on child abuse issues; they are not properly informed of child abuse referral procedures, which hinders the detection and timely response to the cases of violence;
- 34% of kindergartens have children with disabilities, although only 14.2% of them have special teachers. According to the kindergarten staff, the need for special teachers is in fact much higher, although in many cases, the parents of children with disabilities are against granting the status of special educational needs to their children. Despite the fact that the above represents the neglect of the child's needs, neither the kindergarten staff use the service of the social worker in order to avoid confrontation with parents, except in extreme cases, when they can no longer manage the behavior of the child;
- It turned out that the geographical accessibility of kindergartens is also problematic; only few villages (13.75%) provide transportation of children to a nearby kindergarten; in addition to the fact that transportation is hampered by the landscape, climate and big distance between the villages, the approach of the municipalities is also problematic, as they consider that one kindergarten in each administrative unit guarantees access to preschool education and that transportation is not necessary even if the administrative unit includes a number of villages.

1. Infrastructure

1.1 Physical environment

According to the State Standard for Early and Preschool Education, the physical environment in kindergartens shall ensure the protection of physical health and safety of each child and employee. The physical environment of the building shall be safe, comfortable and easy for everyone to use. Both the interior space and the yard of the institution shall be arranged in accordance with the methodology and goals of educational process, and the arrangement of space shall contribute to the full development of each child. Protection of the norms of personal hygiene, sleep and rest shall be ensured. In addition, children shall have the opportunity to play both in the yard of the kindergarten and inside the building.³

The monitoring assessed the physical environment and infrastructure of preschool institutions. Monitors viewed the kindergarten yards, buildings, food facilities, storage places, toilets, classrooms and bedrooms, and found that the vast majority of kindergartens were located away from mains or other sources of contamination. The physical environment of 53.8% of kindergartens required infrastructural works. In particular, walls and floors were damaged in 19.2% of buildings, and electrical wiring needed to be repaired in 3.8% of buildings. The monitoring showed that the walls, ceiling and floor of several buildings were so damaged by moisture that it was unbearable to breathe in the room. The monitoring also revealed cases of damaged floor, nails sticking out of floorboards, holes in the floor, which poses a danger to children. In some of the kindergartens

³ State Standard for Early and Preschool Education, 2017, Article 13.

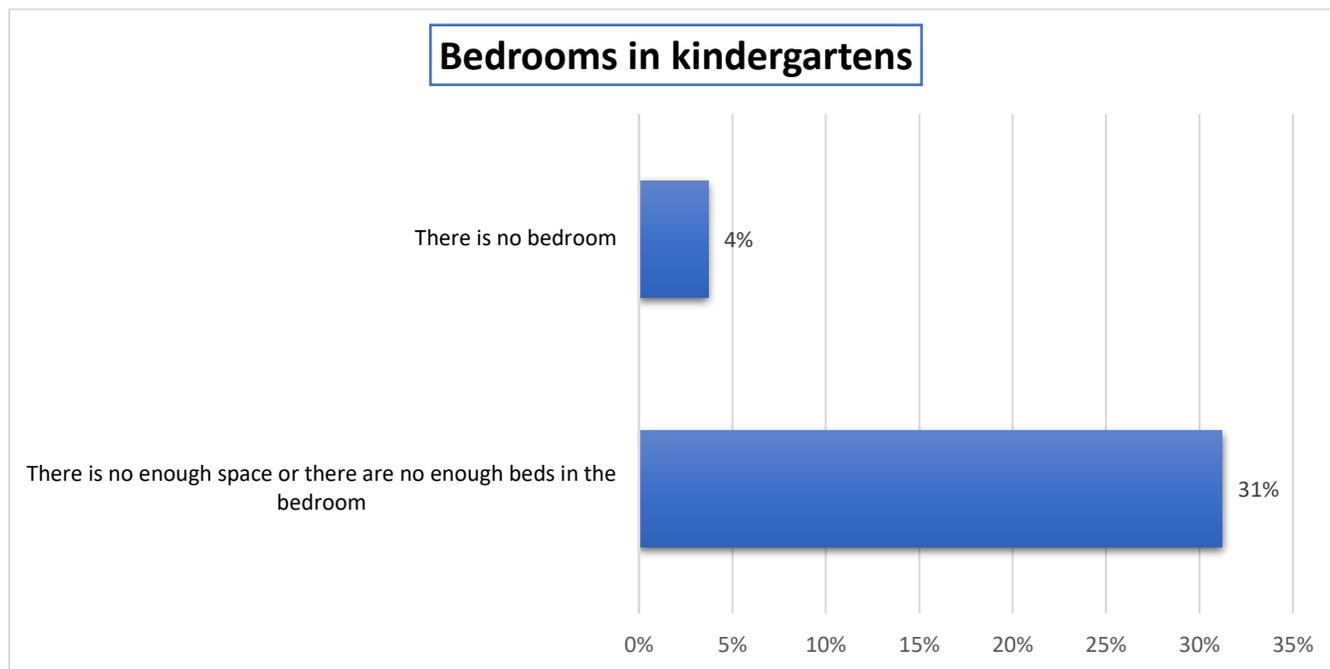
(4.5%), especially in rural areas, firewood stoves are used due to the lack of central heating system, although no safety measures are observed.

It is still a challenge that some of the preschool institutions are located in non-standard buildings, the environment of which is not adapted for preschool children. 15.4% of the kindergartens monitored by us operate in a non-standard building, private house or only in a few of its rooms, block of flats, old outpatient clinic or city council building.⁴ At the same time, many kindergarten associations (62.1%) refer to the problem of overcrowding caused by insufficient space in kindergarten buildings. The use of classrooms as dining rooms, bedrooms or dressing rooms due to insufficient space is particularly problematic, as it makes it very difficult to carry out a variety of educational activities. In addition, in a high percentage of kindergartens (54%), no physical accessibility is provided for persons with disabilities, while in 27% of kindergartens, the above is only partially provided. Even when the entrance to the kindergarten is equipped with a ramp, the internal infrastructure of the building does not satisfy the needs of persons with disabilities. For example, in some of the kindergartens, the hall intended for concerts and various events, or the room intended for music lessons, are located on the second floor, but the internal stairs of the buildings are not adapted for children with disabilities. Only one newly built building had an elevator. The above prevents children from participating in various activities.

The issue of allocating adequate space for bedrooms is especially problematic. Due to the lack of sufficient space, in 10.7% of kindergartens, only 2-3-year-old children are able to sleep during the day, while 3.7% of kindergartens do not have a bedroom at all. In one of the kindergartens, the bedroom was arranged in the principal's room. Beds were located too close to each other and to the window or there were insufficient number of beds due to the lack of adequate space in 13.3% of kindergartens.

⁴ Kindergarten of the village of Khaishi, Tetrtskaro municipality.

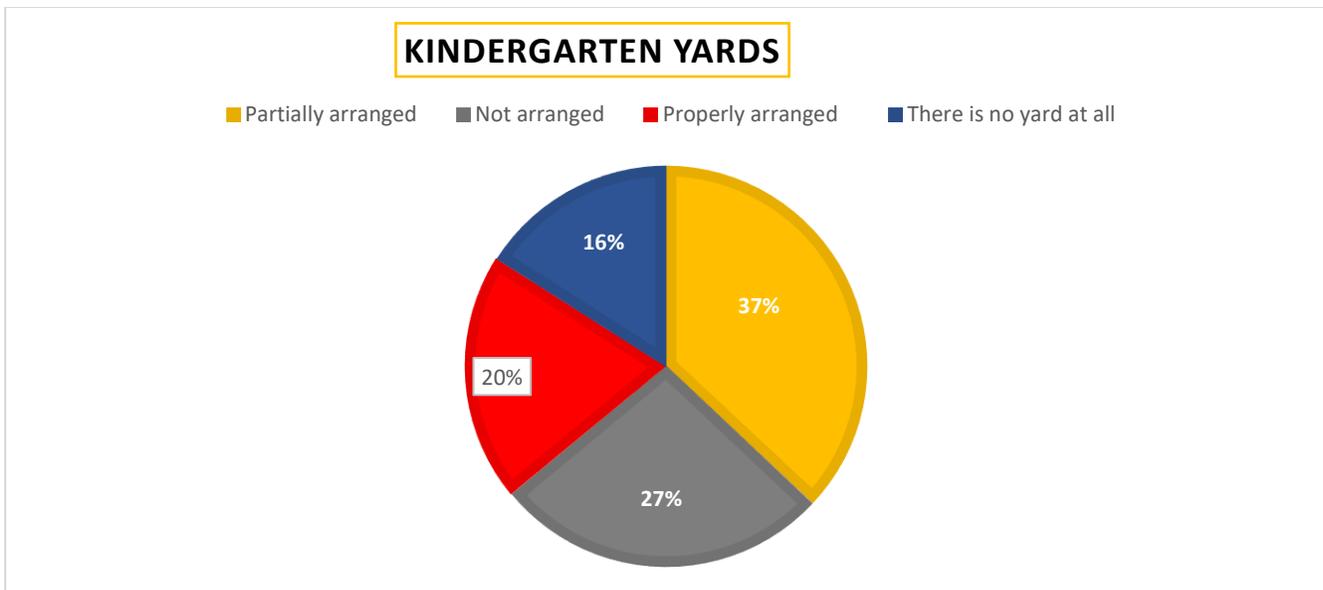
Table №1



Proper arrangement of the yard is a special problem in kindergartens. The representatives of the Public Defender found during visual inspection that a high percentage of institutions (45.5%) had no yard at all or had only partially arranged yard for the entertainment and relaxation of children, where the safety of equipment, or their suitability for children's age, height and other parameters and needs were taken into account. The involvement of children with disabilities and consideration of their needs when arranging the equipment, swings and playgrounds turned out to be the biggest problem. In some cases, children with disabilities face obstacles even when moving around the yard, not to mention entertainment and relaxation.

Some of the kindergartens share a yard with another facility, such as an outpatient clinic, local administration, school, or church, due to which, it is impossible to arrange a playground and engage children in all the activities that are necessary for their development. In some cases, the kindergarten yard has no fence and the area is not protected from strangers. It should also be noted that some of the kindergartens either do not have a yard at all (4 kindergartens) or do not have a play space (33.3%). Under similar conditions, children are only taken to the balcony. According to the teachers, to compensate for the fact that children cannot spend time in the open air, they try to ventilate the rooms frequently. The problem is especially acute in kindergartens located in the block of flats. In this case, teachers take children to a nearby park.

Table №2



According to the information obtained, the kindergarten associations draw up a plan of measures aimed at improving the kindergarten infrastructure and environment, which are mainly related to repairs, improvements in sanitary-hygienic conditions, proper arrangement of food facilities and yards. It should be noted that according to the majority of associations (58.1%), the planned measures are successfully implemented. However, there have been cases when the measures could not be implemented in a timely manner, according to the plan. Respondents mostly refrained from naming the hindering factors, although some of them pointed to insufficient funding, meaning that the funds allocated by the municipalities fail to meet the needs and that the priorities are adjusted to the funds allocated.

1.2 Toilets

According to the State Standards for Early and Preschool Education, the physical environment of the kindergarten shall allow the protection of personal hygiene of each child. In particular, the toilet shall be properly equipped, clean and accessible to every child, including those with special needs.⁵

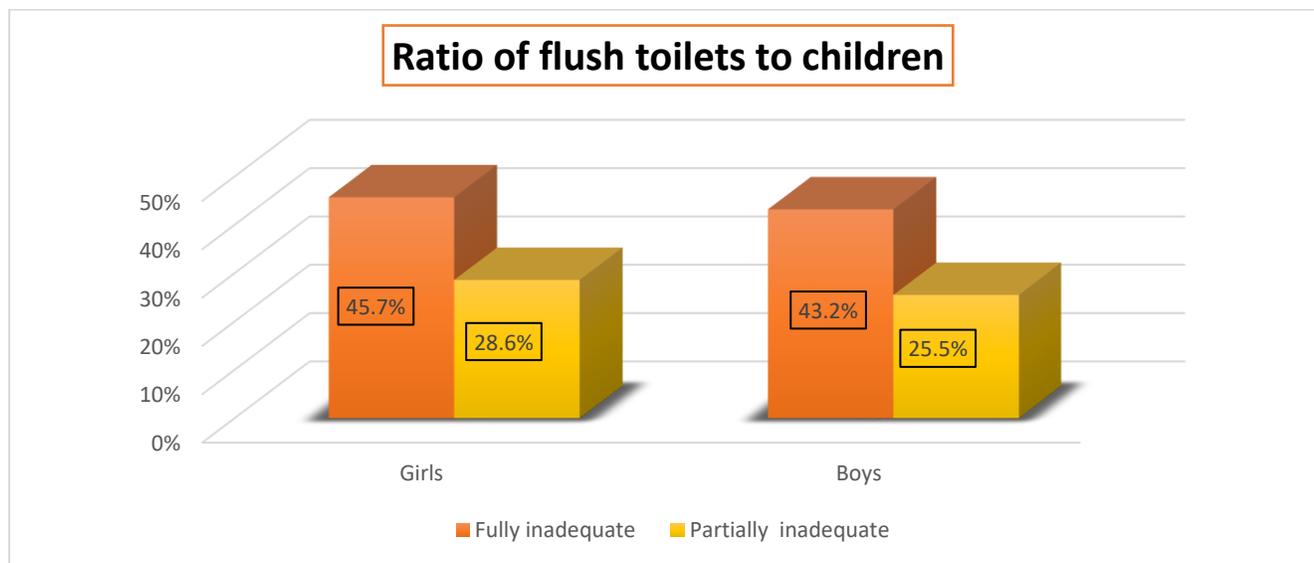
Interviews with representatives of the kindergarten associations made it clear that the municipalities pay attention to the kindergarten toilets when carrying out infrastructural works in kindergartens and the largest changes (29.5%) are made to the associations' budget exactly for the purpose of repairing/arranging toilets. However, the visual inspection of the toilets and interviews with the staff revealed that despite the efforts of the municipalities, the toilets fail to meet the established standard.⁶

⁵ State Standards for Early and Preschool Education, 2017, Article 13, Article 15.

⁶ Technical regulations - Resolution №485 of the Government of Georgia of 2017 on the approval of sanitary and hygienic norms of early and preschool education institutions, Article 9 - One flush toilet per 10-12 girls; one flush toilet per 10-20

It was found out that in the vast majority of cases (88.7%), the toilets intended for children are located inside the building, while in some cases - near the building; rural kindergartens have one toilet in the yard, with one or two Turkish-type bowls. Most kindergartens do not have a flush toilet at all, or only some of its groups have enough flush toilets. In some kindergartens, some of the groups did not have their own toilet and had to use the toilet intended for the staff of the kindergarten.

Table №3



The monitoring also revealed a case, when the toilet of the group of 2-3-year-old children had no sewerage system and children had to use the night pots brought by their parents. In several kindergartens, the toilet seats were damaged and the flushing systems were out of order. In addition, 5% of kindergartens are not supplied with hot water at all; this issue is only partially regulated in 25.5%. In some cases, only the food facility of the kindergarten enjoys hot water supply, while children have to use cold water. In one of the kindergartens, due to the lack of the hot water system in the building, water was heated in a shovel on the firewood stove, during which, children in the room were involved in various activities.

The allocation of independent space for separate toilets for girls and boys is also a problem. In particular, 67.9% of kindergartens do not have separate spaces for girls and boys in any of its toilets, while in some of the kindergartens (25%), this issue is solved only for some of its groups.

The issue of matching the size of the flushing toilet to the age of children is another problem. In particular, in a large percentage of kindergartens (37.1%), the height of flush toilets does not match the age groups of children at all, while in 27.9%, this requirement is only partially met. For example, the monitoring revealed a case when a wooden stand was fixed to a toilet, the size of which was inappropriate for the age of kindergarten children.

boys; one urinal per 20 boys; one washbasin per 20 children. The size of the toilet cabin should be 80×110 cm, the size of the washbasin should be 55.5 cm.

It should be noted that 78% of kindergartens do not have a bath at all, and in 5.7% - this service is provided for only some of the groups. The lack of washbasins is also problematic. In particular, in 31.4% of kindergartens, the number of washbasins was not adequate for the number of children.

The monitoring also revealed several cases when a large-sized flush toilet or a Turkish toilet intended for kindergarten teachers was placed in a toilet intended for children, without separation or independent entrance.

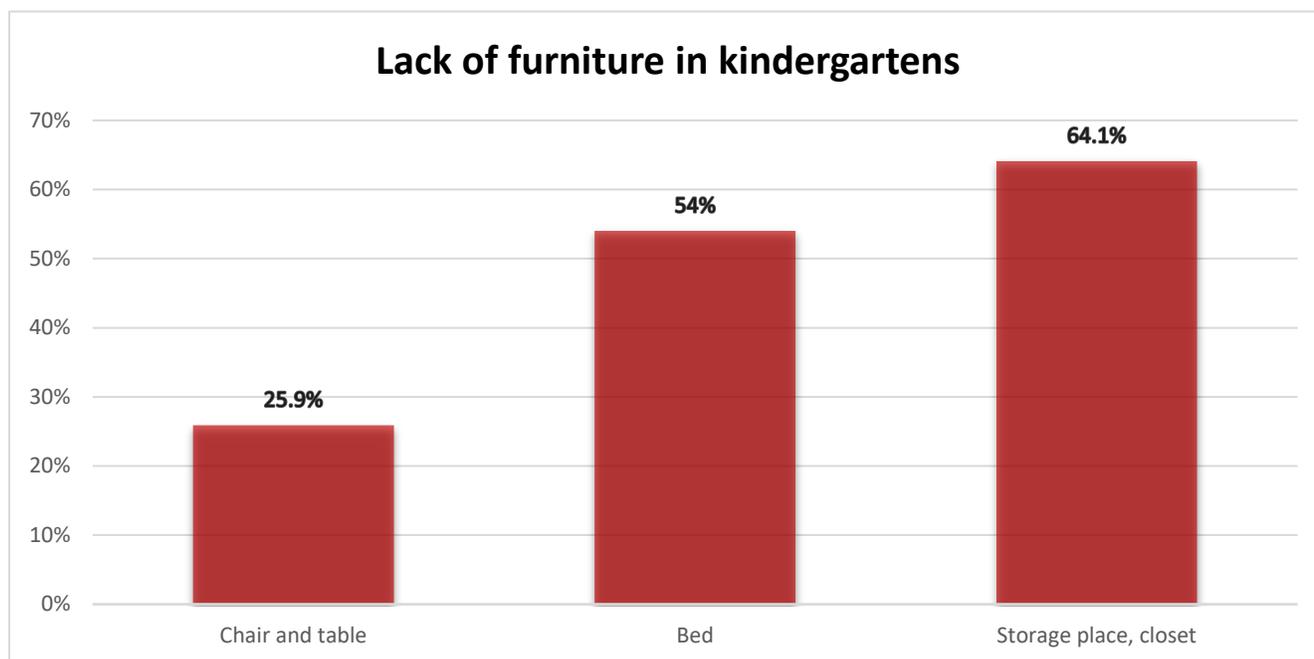
According to the State Standards for Early and Preschool Education, the physical environment of the kindergarten shall be adapted in such a way as to ensure the full involvement of persons with disabilities. Inter alia, toilets shall be arranged in accordance with the requirements of the technical regulations.⁷ However, the monitoring showed that the issue of neglecting the needs of persons with disabilities is especially acute when arranging toilets in kindergartens. In particular, in most kindergartens (86%,) toilets are not accessible to children with disabilities. Even when a separate cabin was provided for a child with disabilities, the flush toilet placed there was not adapted, for example, no appropriate railings were fixed to it. At the same time, as a rule, the kindergartens monitored by us had only one adapted toilet, in one of its groups. Consequently, the kindergartens will find it difficult to admit children with disabilities of different ages to appropriate age groups, if there is such a need.

1.3 Furniture and toys

The kindergarten associations draw up an action plan based on the annual budget and the needs of the kindergartens, which also addresses the issue of providing the kindergartens with all necessary furniture and toys. Nevertheless, the monitoring results showed that a large percentage of kindergartens has no sufficient furniture - tables, chairs, beds or closets.

⁷ Technical regulations - Resolution №485 of the Government of Georgia of 2017 on the approval of sanitary and hygienic norms of early and preschool education institutions, Article 9 – “There shall be at least one toilet for persons with disabilities in early and preschool education institutions, the minimum size of which shall be 122 × 142 cm (when it is accessed from the latitude side); 122 × 167 cm (when it is accessed from the longitudinal side); the height of the flush toilet shall be - 45-48 cm; the height of the railing intended for a person with disabilities to move from a wheelchair to the toilet shall not exceed 90 cm.

Table №4

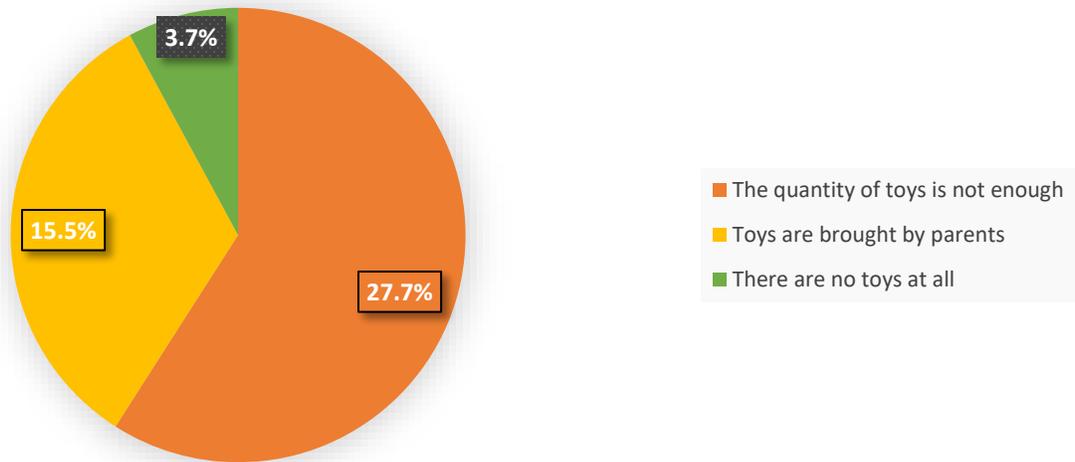


It should also be noted that in a significant percentage of cases (12.6%), the furniture was damaged and needed to be renewed. The suitability of furniture for the age and needs of children was also an issue. In particular, in several cases, little children were sitting on two chairs placed on each other in order to reach high tables. In addition, some of the chairs and tables in the classroom and dining rooms were heavy and had sharp edges.

The above indicator is even higher relating to children's toys (73%). Most of the kindergartens do not have enough toys. The circumstance that toys are often brought to the kindergarten by parents, which is associated with certain costs, contradicts the guaranteed access to free preschool education for everyone under Georgian law. This circumstance, in most cases, does not allow the consideration of the quality and safety requirements of toys. Another problem is that toys are not replaced with new ones on time or periodically. In particular, in 62.9% of kindergartens, toys are replaced and replenished only once or twice a year. However, according to a significant percentage of teachers (18.5%), new toys are, for the most part, of poor quality and children damage them soon.

Table №5

Quantity of toys in kindergartens



2. Food

The monitoring showed that due attention is paid to the issue of nutrition in preschool institutions. All kindergartens draw up a 10-day/two-week menu in advance, indicating a special catalogue of dishes in accordance with the technical regulations. In the majority of kindergartens (92.1%), the daily menu is pre-written and posted up on the wall so that it is accessible to parents.

It should also be noted that in order to avoid eating-related hazards, the eating process is always attended by the teacher together with his/her assistant, nurse or other staff. According to the monitoring results, it can be said that the kindergarten menu includes the products necessary for the optimal growth and development of children; in addition, the issues of prevention of nutritional deficiencies, obesity and nutrition-related chronic diseases are taken into account.

Interviews with the heads of the kindergartens associations made it clear that the majority of them (79.5%) funded and organized trainings for kindergarten staff on nutrition issues. The vast majority of kindergarten principals (91.1%) said that their cooks and assistants cooks, as well as nurses, principals and heads of economic departments, had been trained on nutrition issues.

The needs of children, including their health condition and history of allergies, are taken into account. According to teachers, they help children with disabilities in the process of eating, if necessary. The eating process, which is attended by the teacher and his/her assistant, is based on the encouragement and not on

coercion of children to eat. Interviews with teachers made it clear that they possessed information about difficulties related to the eating process and symptoms of allergies.

Notwithstanding the above, the monitoring also showed that some of the kindergartens (5.2%) do not take into account the needs of children with disabilities in the eating process at all, while some of them (16.9%) only partially take the above into account. The monitoring showed that food is taken to some kindergartens by parents. In addition, due to the lack of an individual assistant, some parents have to help their children to eat certain types of food, such as soup. In most kindergartens, meals are always served at one and the same time. However, in certain cases, the process of food preparation is delayed due to the lack of the required number of staff.

It is noteworthy that only two of the inspected institutions had a special list of food additives that are not recommended by specialists. 37.6% of the interviewed principals said that they had no information on the above topic at all, while 53.3% of them said that no one had provided them with the special list of additives and they only knew what kind of product they should not use from their own experience.

It should be praised that the municipalities pay due attention to the arrangement of the kitchen. Most of the kindergartens, with some exceptions (9.3%), have a kitchen area with separated cooking and washing zones. In addition, except for 11 cases,⁸ all kitchens are supplied with hot water. However, the lack of dining rooms is a problem, due to which, some kindergartens have to use classrooms, dressing area between closets or corridors for eating. Even if there is a dining room, its arrangement according to the number and age of children is problematic. In particular, the furniture placed there corresponds to children's physical development and independent eating skills only in 75.9% of cases. As for the storage places in the food facilities, 39 cases have been identified, when there was not enough space or shelves in the storage room, the room was not properly ventilated or was not ventilated at all, products were placed on the floor or their storage rules were not observed.

3. Water, sanitation and hygiene

3.1 Water

According to legislation, preschool institutions shall be provided with water, including hot water, and sewerage system. In addition, kindergartens shall be supplied with both non-potable and potable water, the quality of which shall be assessed by the relevant competent service.⁹ It should also be noted that drinking water available

⁸ In one of the villages, due to the lack of warm water, the kindergarten staff have to heat water in the firewood stove in the classroom. In one of the cases, water could not be heated properly in the kitchen due to the malfunction of the heater.

⁹ Technical regulations - Resolution №485 of the Government of Georgia of 2017 on the approval of sanitary and hygienic norms of early and preschool education institutions, Article 8.

in preschool institutions shall meet the requirements of the Resolution of the Government of Georgia on the Approval of Technical Regulations on Drinking Water.¹⁰

The monitoring focused on the supply of both potable and non-potable water and the laboratory assessment of water quality. According to the monitoring results, most of the kindergartens (89.5%) have a central potable and non-potable water supply system, while some of the kindergartens (5.1%) are supplied with properly protected and tested well water.¹¹ In addition, the majority of kitchens (93.2%) are provided with hot water. However, the supply of hot water to toilets is a problem in some kindergartens. For example, the issue of hot water supply is not fully resolved in 25% of kindergartens, while in 5% of kindergartens, hot water is not supplied at all.

Several kindergartens that do not have drinking water (4.4%) are supplied by the kindergarten associations. However, in one of the cases, employees had to use boiled water, as, according to them, the water available in the building was unsuitable for drinking and neither the kindergarten association supplied them with water.¹²

The monitoring showed that the kindergarten associations provide water testing once or twice a year, before the start of the educational process. The vast majority of principals indicated that the safety of drinking water had been assessed (97%) and the document was kept in the kindergarten association or preschool institution.

According to the documents on laboratory assessment of the safety of drinking water, the suitability of drinking water is tested in kindergartens differently. In some cases, according to the laboratory analysis documents, water had not been tested for several important indicators, such as, for example, the E.coli bacterium. The associations of preschool institutions do not have a uniform approach in this regard and are not informed of how exactly the drinking water should be tested. The difference is especially big between urban and rural kindergartens.¹³ At the same time, some of the kindergartens (35.1%) consider that adequate resources should be allocated by the municipalities to improve the water supply system and equipment.

¹⁰ Resolution №58 of the Government of Georgia on the approval of technical regulations on drinking water, Article 2, paragraph 1 - Drinking water must be safe in terms of the epidemic and radiation, its chemical composition must be harmless and it must have favorable organoleptic properties.

¹¹ Technical regulations - Resolution №485 of the Government of Georgia of 2017 on the approval of sanitary and hygienic norms of early and preschool education institutions, Article 8, paragraph 11 - The well must be located not less than 30 meters away from any polluting source; the use of pesticides is not allowed within the radius of 100 meters from the well; the structural integrity of the well shall be constantly checked; it shall be protected from animals; it must have a drainage system; the water bucket must be clean and the well shall be covered.

¹² Kindergarten in the village of Alpana, Tsageri municipality.

¹³ Resolution №58 of the Government of Georgia on the approval of technical regulations on drinking water, 2014, Article 3, paragraph 9 - For routine monitoring, laboratory tests should be performed for organoleptic (odour, taste, colour, turbidity), microbiological (mesophilic aerobes, facultative anaerobic bacteria, coliform bacteria, E.coli) and chemical (PH, nitrogen forms (ammonia, nitrate, nitrite), chlorides, oxidation, residual chlorine) indicators.

3.2 Sanitation-hygiene

Preschool institutions shall ensure the protection of sanitation and hygiene. In particular, the perimeter of the building should be cleaned daily. The internal regulations of the kindergarten shall specify the frequency and form of cleaning of each unit. Interviews with the kindergarten staff revealed that the institutions pay special attention to the cleaning of classrooms, food facilities and yards. According to 32.8% of respondents, the kindergarten building is deeply cleaned on a weekly basis. According to the vast majority of respondents (95.1%), classrooms are cleaned daily, which could be noticed by visual inspection as well. The kitchen is cleaned daily or several times a day. According to the majority of respondents (66.2%), yards are also cleaned daily.

In some kindergartens, however, the frequency and timing of cleaning is problematic. For example, 24 kindergartens clean the building deeply only twice a year, while 4.4% clean classrooms only once a week. In addition, some kitchens were not clean during monitoring and neither the walls of the rooms were covered with materials intended for wet cleaning.¹⁴ The rules of storing dishes were observed only in 59.6%. In particular, they were placed on special shelves, while small equipment were stored in the closet.

In addition, in most of the kindergartens, bed sheets are washed once a week (84.8%) or once every two weeks (15.2%). Mattresses are mostly cleaned once a month or several times a month, but in 5.7% of kindergartens, they are cleaned only once a year.¹⁵

The kindergartens monitored by us do not have a uniform approach based on regulations relating to the form and frequency of cleaning toys. Typically, they are cleaned once a week (61.2%) or once every two weeks, (7%) with special liquid, chlorine or detergent. However, some kindergartens clean toys only once a month (4.7%) or once a year (1.2%). It is also noteworthy that some teachers, assistants and cleaners take toys home for cleaning (in 4.7% of kindergartens) due to the unfavorable conditions in the kindergarten. Regulating the frequency and rule of cleaning is especially problematic when it comes to the toys that children bring from home. They are cleaned by their parents.¹⁶

¹⁴ Technical regulations - Resolution №485 of the Government of Georgia of 2017 on the approval of sanitary and hygienic norms of early and preschool education institutions, Article 6 - The entire building shall be deeply cleaned monthly; wet cleaning shall be carried out daily, with windows and transoms being open; the floor shall be washed twice a day.

¹⁵ Technical regulations - Resolution №485 of the Government of Georgia of 2017 on the approval of sanitary and hygienic norms of early and preschool education institutions, Article 6, paragraph 6 – All the bed sheets shall be marked. The early and preschool education institution shall have sufficient bed sheets, which shall be changed when dirty, but not less than once a week. Clean and dirty sheets should be stored separately from each other. Dry cleaning should be provided for pillows and mattresses once a year.

¹⁶ Technical regulations - Resolution №485 of the Government of Georgia of 2017 on the approval of sanitary and hygienic norms of early and preschool education institutions, Article 6 – The newly purchased toys (other than soft toys) shall be washed with soap and water at 370 °C for 15 minutes and air-dried before giving them to children. Toys for

According to the staff, the rooms are cleaned with disinfectants only when children are not in the building. However, the monitoring revealed several cases when there was a strong smell of chlorine in the toilet. It should also be noted that the rules for storing the toilet cleaning items are not observed in the vast majority of toilets. In particular, the cleaning products are usually placed next to the flush toilets intended for children, while in 37% of the institutions, neither disinfectants nor detergents were stored in specially designed dark-coloured containers out of reach of children.¹⁷

Most of the kindergartens dispose of waste daily, in a nearby bin. In addition, with only few exceptions, solid food waste is collected in all rooms of the kindergarten and removed from the building at the end of the day. The garbage bins of the institutions are washed and disinfected at least once a month. The monitoring revealed one case when no garbage bin was placed near the kindergarten. The staff of that kindergarten kept waste in a storage room located in the yard, which was later removed by a cleaning service vehicle, at the end of the week. In several institutions, the garbage is thrown or burnt in a nearby ravine due to the lack of a garbage bin.¹⁸

When selecting the themes of training for the kindergarten staff, due attention is given to the sanitation-hygiene issues. In particular, 85.7% of kindergarten associations funded and provided training for the kindergarten staff on issues of sanitation-hygiene. According to 91.9% of kindergarten principals, their staff, mostly nurses, were trained on sanitation-hygiene issues. It is noteworthy that assistant teachers, cleaners and even representatives of the economic department or administration of kindergartens are also often trained in this direction.

4. Healthcare

The preschool institution shall protect the health of children, including by providing clearly defined child healthcare procedures. In addition, the staff working directly with children should have first aid certificates, while the kindergarten should have a disease prevention mechanism.¹⁹ These very indicators were the focus of the monitoring. In particular, we studied issues relating to the availability of staff working on health issues,

children under the age of 2 should be washed daily with water, brush, soap or 2% sodium, while toys for preschool children (over the age of 2 years) should be washed every other day. Doll clothes should be washed when dirty.

¹⁷ Technical regulations - Resolution №485 of the Government of Georgia of 2017 on the approval of sanitary and hygienic norms of early and preschool education institutions, Article 6 - Toilet cleaning items shall be marked and stored in a special closet near the toilet. Disinfectants and detergents should be stored in dark containers out of reach of children. Cleaning chemicals and disinfectants should be stored in a locked closet specially designed for this purpose.

¹⁸ Technical regulations - Resolution №485 of the Government of Georgia of 2017 on the approval of sanitary and hygienic norms of early and preschool education institutions, Article 6, paragraph 12 - Garbage should be thrown in garbage containers. In case of absence of a sewerage system, pits and rubbish bins must be cleaned until they are 2/3 full. They shall be cleansed with 10% chlorine daily and with dry chlorine (1 kg per m²) once a week.

¹⁹ State Standards for Early and Preschool Education, 2017, Article 13.

their retraining, child health certificate and health box, as well as how medicines are given to children in kindergartens.

The monitoring revealed that the majority of kindergartens (86.5%) have medical personnel – a doctor or a nurse. Kindergartens with no medical personnel are served by the staff of the kindergarten associations, including in drawing up health documents, protecting hygiene and any other issue, if kindergarten principals apply to them. Most of the kindergarten teachers said that they knew how to provide first aid to children. However, majority of them (54%) report the health-related problem to the parent first, while a considerable percentage of teachers (48.4%) call the 112 service. 32.6% of the institutions have called 112 at least once. A significant percentage of principals (27.6%) pointed to problems relating to the availability of 112 service, in particular, the late arrival of the ambulance.

When admitting a child to the kindergarten, it is necessary to submit a health certificate. The certificates are kept in the kindergarten or kindergarten association. Nevertheless, the monitoring revealed a case when the director of the kindergarten had not obliged one of the parents to submit a health certificate, which she explained by the fact that the families with financial difficulties, who did not have the status of the socially vulnerable, found it difficult to obtain a health certificate, as the above was associated with certain expenses. In addition, interviews with the kindergarten staff revealed that in many cases health certificates do not provide the necessary information about the child's health, such as his/her food allergies or special needs. In 22.4% of kindergartens, the condition of children deteriorated so that no information about their health problems had been indicated in their health certificates or had been reported by their parents.

It should be noted positively that in most kindergartens, nurses examine children daily or every other day to prevent the spread of louses and viral diseases. However, according to the principals, there have been cases when children were given a fever-reducing drug in the morning, before going to kindergarten, so that the nurse could not notice any symptoms. In similar cases, the parents' argument is that they have to go to work and cannot leave their children alone at home.

Only some of the kindergartens (37.6%) have a psychologist and 31.2% have a speech therapist. In most cases, the mentioned specialists are employed by the kindergarten associations and are sent to kindergartens if necessary, which hinders the process of individual and regular work with children. As mentioned above, some kindergartens (34%) have children with disabilities, although only 14.2% of the institutions have the position of a special teacher. Consequently, in some kindergartens, in addition to the physical environment, it is also problematic that children cannot enjoy appropriate individual approach to their needs, which has a negative impact on access of preschool education for children with disabilities. The above is proved by the low number of kindergartens with children with disabilities as well.

It is also noteworthy that several kindergartens of Tbilisi and one kindergarten of the Lanchkhuti municipality have rooms for children with disabilities and special educational needs, which are equipped with appropriate toys and furniture, and where special teachers can work with children individually.

It should be noted that the majority of kindergartens (83.2%) are provided with primary healthcare boxes and items. However, the monitoring revealed several cases when teachers or nurses had to purchase primary healthcare items at their own expense.

The rules for giving medicines to children²⁰ (including to children with specific health condition) is protected in the vast majority of preschools (indicated by 90.5% of observers). The teachers noted that in the event of a child's illness, such as a high fever, the child is not given medication without consulting his/her parent. The kindergarten staff are also particularly careful about giving the medication prescribed by a doctor to a child with specific health condition. Such medications are stored separately and the name of the child is indicated on them. The process of giving medications to children is regulated by nurses. There were cases during monitoring, when chronically ill children were accompanied by a nurse or a dietitian in the preschool institution. They regulated the issues relating to the provision of medications and proper nutrition of the child.

5. Child abuse

Preschool institutions shall provide a non-violent and non-discriminatory environment for each child. The staff shall be able to identify signs of various forms of violence, including physical, emotional, sexual violence, or neglect. In addition, the institution shall have a pre-written list of actions to be taken in case of suspicions of child abuse, while in case of child abuse, the kindergarten staff shall act in accordance with the child protection referral procedures.²¹

We monitored the regulations applied by the kindergartens for the management and prevention of cases of violence. In particular, we monitored what methods are used by teachers to prevent and respond to violence between children.

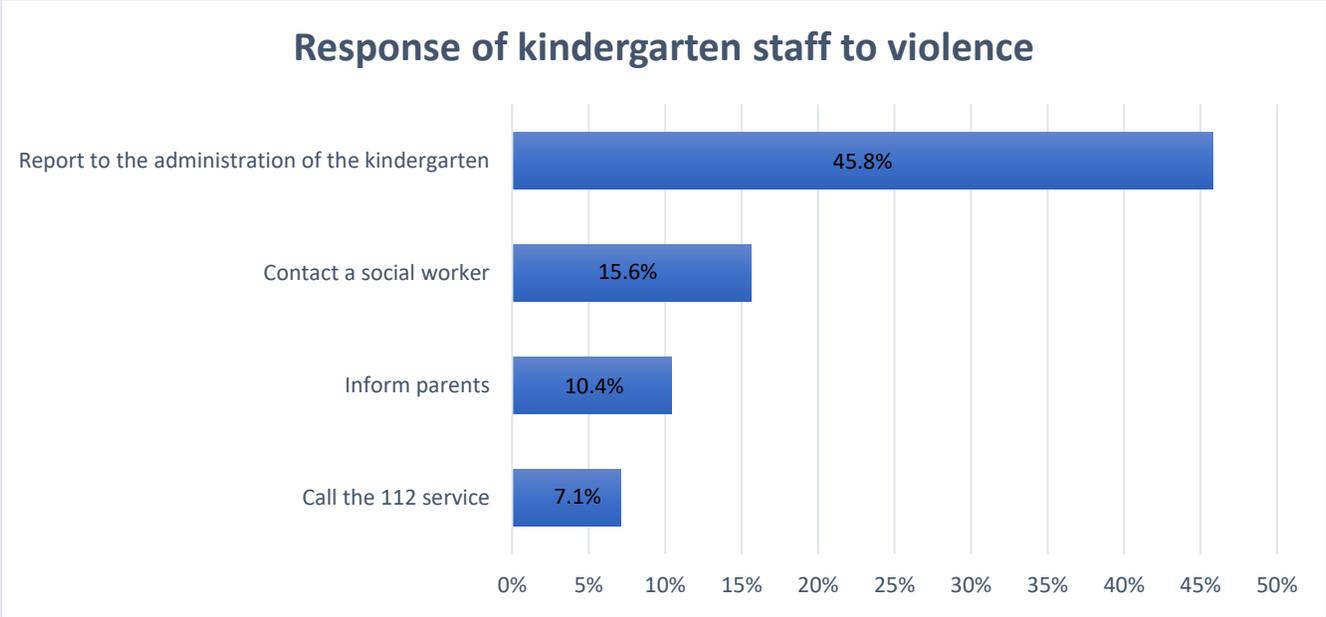
A considerable percentage of respondents (68.1%) say that talking to children is a positive upbringing method and the most effective way to prevent violence between children, while 21.4% prefer to read thematic stories to children, or to watch movies, play games and discuss fables. Several kindergartens also consider working with parents as a preventative measure against violence. Although most of the kindergartens have a pre-defined approach, in particular, what measures should be taken and who they should apply to in case of violence, and some kindergartens even have a person responsible for these issues, the monitoring revealed several kindergartens with no specific internal instructions in this direction.

²⁰ State Standards for Early and Preschool Education, 2017, Article 2 - The institutions shall have procedures for giving medications to children if necessary. The health certificate of each child is kept in the institution.

²¹ State Standards for Early and Preschool Education, 2017, Article 13.

If there is a suspicion of any kind of violence against children, most of the teachers apply to the administration of the kindergarten in order to respond appropriately to the case. Fewer teachers said they would contact a social worker, inform a parent, or call the 112 hotline.²²

Table №6



The vast majority of teachers (94.9%) say that they have never noticed any form of violence against children, which, as a rule, should be a positive indicator. However, it is likely that such a high rate, inter alia, is conditioned by the lack of skills of assessing and detecting various forms of violence. The above also creates a risk that children may become victims of any form of violence by the kindergarten staff themselves. As for the identified cases of violence, the number of which is very low (5.1%), all of them involve physical violence, which can be easily detected as a result of physical examination of the child. It is also noteworthy that in all the cases named by the kindergarten staff, the child was abused by his/her family member. As for the abuse by the kindergarten staff, only one such case has been reported, as a result of which, the employee was fired. The doubts are further strengthened by the fact that only a very low number of the interviewed teachers said that they had been retrained on issues of violence. In addition, only a low number of the interviewed directors (12.9%) were informed of child protection referral procedures.

Despite the requirements of the law, only several kindergartens (9) have a person working on violence issues, who is also in charge of staff training and provision of information on the above topics. In most cases, responsibility for this issue is undertaken by the principal of the kindergarten. Trainings on child abuse are

²² State Standards for Early and Preschool Education, 2017, Article 20, paragraph 2; Law of Georgia on Early and Preschool Education, Article 6, paragraph 4 - The institution is obliged to ensure the prevention, identification and appropriate response to violence in accordance with child protection referral procedures; paragraph 6 - The institution is obliged to appoint a person responsible for the protection of children from violence.

even more important for teachers, so that to inform them of positive discipline methods, as well as to enable them to detect violence by observing children and to take action under law.

The absolute majority of representatives of kindergarten associations (97.7%) also indicate the need to train all kindergarten staff, especially teachers and their assistants, on issues of violence against children. However, only half of the associations (52.3%) have funded and organized similar trainings, and they were intended not for teachers or their assistants, but mainly for methodists and members of the kindergarten administration, who, according to the principals, subsequently impart the information received during trainings to other kindergarten staff, including teachers and their assistants, which is a less effective way of developing positive upbringing skills or skills needed to identify the cases of violence. Organization of trainings is related to the budget allocated for the kindergarten associations, which shows that providing such trainings does not represent a priority for the municipalities at this stage.

6. Human resources

The preschool institution shall ensure the physical and emotional protection of the staff of the institution, as well as the protection of their health and safety.²³ To ensure quality upbringing process, protection of the best interests of the child, prevention of violence and provision of safe environment in the kindergarten, it is necessary to train the kindergarten staff, promote their professional growth and development.²⁴

We studied the working conditions and professional training of the kindergarten staff during monitoring, which revealed that despite their great desire to improve their qualifications on the topics of violence against children, the management of difficult behavior and the needs of children with disabilities, most of them (50.2 %) had been trained only in upbringing methods, and even fewer of them (29.1%) had been trained in inclusive education, protection of environment and safety, violence and complex behavior management. Some of the teachers (8.7%) have not been trained at all while working in the kindergarten.

As the kindergarten associations only seldom organize trainings for teachers, the latter have to search and pay for the trainings themselves. This is very difficult given their low salaries. It should also be noted that the salaries of kindergarten staff vary considerably from municipality to municipality and often do not correspond to the work performed by them.

The physical environment of the kindergarten staff is also problematic, which hinders the upbringing-educational process. For example, only 77.3% of kindergartens have a separate toilet for the staff, 9.9% of which are located outside the building, often far away, and do not have a washbasin or water. In some kindergartens, the staff do not have a toilet at all, due to which, they have to go to a nearby school, other institution or home,

²³ State Standards for Early and Preschool Education, 2017, Article 6, Article 13.

²⁴ State Standards for Early and Preschool Education, 2017, Article 6, Article 6 (3), Article 10 (3) (b).

which makes it virtually impossible for them to use the toilet, as they cannot leave children alone for a long time.

The issue of allocating storage and dining spaces for the employees of the kindergarten is also problematic. For example, most of the kindergartens (64.1%) do not have a storage space for the staff. Apart from only few exceptions, neither the dining space is provided for the staff, which makes it difficult for them, especially for teachers, to eat food during working hours.

Interviews with the kindergarten staff, especially teachers, their assistants and nannies, revealed that in many cases, their functions did not fit their positions. Assistant teachers and nannies have to perform the functions of cleaners as well. They clean classrooms, bedrooms and toys, wash dishes and often bed sheets as well. For this reason, they are not involved in the educational process, and teachers are, in fact, left alone, which ultimately has a negative impact on the quality of upbringing and education of children.

Conclusion

The monitoring showed that despite the steps taken by the municipalities, it remains problematic in kindergartens not only to meet the standards applied in the state, but also to create a physical environment, where it would be possible to conduct a smooth and proper upbringing-educational process.

Inspection of the physical environment of kindergartens and interviews with the staff made it clear that at this stage, municipalities give priority to the proper arrangement of food facilities and storage places of kindergartens, as well as supply of food in accordance with demand. However, the issue of insufficient space in other rooms and the provision of furniture suitable for the number and age of children remain problematic. Supply of toys is also a challenge.

Interviews with the kindergarten principals, teachers and heads of the kindergarten associations revealed that the kindergarten staff are mainly trained on food and sanitation-hygiene issues. As for the topics such as working with children with special needs, managing complex behaviors, violence against children, child's development and general thematic directions, retraining of teachers in these directions remains a challenge, despite their strong desire.

The above-mentioned challenges negatively affect the upbringing-educational process, hinder the full development of children and complicate the protection of their best interests, which in turn hinders the realization of the right of the child to receive proper preschool education.

Recommendations

To the local self-governments:

- Arrange preschool institutions, both infrastructurally and functionally, in accordance with the standards established by legislation of Georgia; arrange kindergarten yards in compliance with the safety standards for the development and relaxation of children.
- Regularly supply preschool institutions with furniture, books and toys.
- Periodically monitor the geographical accessibility of preschool institutions, assess access to preschool education. If necessary, transportation costs should be included in the annual budget.
- Assess the ratio of human resources of preschool institutions to the contingent and, if necessary, increase the number of staff. Provide all kindergartens with the services of a nurse, speech therapist and psychologist as much as possible.
- Increase the remuneration of kindergarten staff and balance it between the municipalities.
- Ensure continuous professional development of all the employees of kindergartens. Inter alia, inform the kindergarten staff about the referral procedures, normative acts relating to preschool education and the rights of the child.
- Develop an effective mechanism for monitoring the physical environment and upbringing process in kindergartens, oriented not to punishment, but to support and development of kindergartens. In particular, a regular monitoring schedule should be drawn up and the information obtained should be entered into the relevant electronic database, while the violations identified should be re-checked.

To the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia:

- Develop a document on the procedure and periodicity of assessing the quality of water in preschool institutions, in order to introduce a uniform standard in this direction.