

BACKBONE STRUCTURES IN COLLECTIVE IMPACT INITIATIVES: THEORY AND PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION IN MOLDOVA

Alexandra SAFRONOVA

Master in Sociology, PhD Student
Moldova State University, MOLDOVA
E-mail: safronova.alex.87@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0004-6532-2497

Anastasia OCERETNÎI

PhD, Associate Professor
Moldova State University, MOLDOVA
E-mail: a_oceretnii@yahoo.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-4648-7921

Abstract: *This article examines application of Collective Impact (CI) framework to advance childcare reform in Moldova, focusing on the pivotal role of "backbone" structures in coordinating multi-stakeholder initiatives. Using a mixed-methods approach, including analysis of reports, participant databases, etc., and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, research identifies the National Programme for Child Protection (NPCP) 2022–2026 as a potential common agenda for CI initiative. The article highlights the essential functions of backbone structures, such as strategic direction, stakeholder facilitation, data management, and resource mobilisation, while emphasising the need for strong leadership, clear governance, and dedicated resources to ensure effective coordination. Findings reveal that while Moldova's National Council for Child Rights Protection (NCCRP) has historically played a central role in child protection, its decline in activity underscored the need for revitalisation. Alternative backbone models, including civil society alliances or dedicated coordinators, are proposed, describing unique strengths and challenges. The research underscores the importance of inclusive stakeholder engagement, adaptive leadership, and robust monitoring mechanisms to sustain long-term impact. The article contributes to the broader discourse on CI by offering practical insights into the design and implementation of backbone structures in complex, multi-sectoral reforms. It provides actionable recommendations for policymakers, including the formalisation of a backbone structure, capacity-building for leaders, and enhanced stakeholder collaboration. By aligning the NPCP with CI principles, this research offers a roadmap for achieving systemic change in Moldova's childcare system.*

Keywords: *Collective Impact, Backbone structure, childcare system, childcare reform, Moldova.*

UDC: 316.42:364.4-053.2(478)

Classification JEL: Z13

1. Introduction

Collective Impact (CI) is a structured approach to solving complex social problems through the coordinated efforts of multiple stakeholders from different sectors. First articulated by Kania and Kramer (2011), CI has gained traction globally as a framework for achieving large-scale social change. The approach suggests there are five key conditions, including common agenda, continuous communication, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities and backbone support. At the heart of CI initiatives is the backbone structure, an organisation or entity responsible for guiding the initiative, facilitating collaboration, and ensuring that all participants work towards a shared goal. Starting with 2021 for the first time in Moldova, CI was applied to continue reforming childcare sector at the

national level. [1] By this time, the childcare system in Moldova has already undergone significant reform over the past decades, yet persistent challenges necessitate more integrated approaches. This paper explores the forms backbone structure can take to support CI initiative as well as peculiarities of mobilizing and coordinating key actors in child protection in Moldova. Basing on the results of mixed method analysis including document review and key informant interviews authors try to come with potential scenarios and recommendations for setting up backbone support structure within a CI initiative.

2. Literature Review

2.2. Types of Governance Structures for Collective Impact

In 2021 Collective Impact Forum and FSG Reimagining Social Change defined backbone support as follows: “An independent, dedicated staff provides support and key functions for the sustained operation of the collective impact initiative.”[2] The structure or organization that serves as a "backbone" ensures that the initiative progresses toward achieving the common agenda by facilitating the other three conditions of CI, including continuous communication, shared measurement systems, and mutually reinforcing activities. It is tempting to say that there are as many "backbone" models as there are CI initiatives. However, we have found that, at a certain level, there is a common theory of change for "backbone" organizations that ultimately seeks to improve social outcomes by organizing cross-sector groups of partners to transform an often inefficient and fragmented system. "Backbone" organizations play six key roles in driving this vision forward, regardless of their sector. They set strategic direction, foster collaboration between partners, and manage data collection and analysis. Additionally, they oversee communications, coordinate community outreach, and secure funding. By handling these essential functions, they ensure the initiative's success. The "backbone" structure builds trust among partners by remaining neutral and providing ongoing support. [3]

To create consensus, the following aspects are important for the "backbone" organization or structure:

- Competence: Knowledge, strategic vision, problem-solving skills, and interpersonal abilities.
- Commitment: Solid experience and demonstrated commitment to the issue.
- Objectivity: Focus on the common good, creating a safe space for all opinions, not driven by individual organizational interests.
- Data and Information: Using tools such as research, data, and media to inform and/or drive the initiative.
- Network: Strong connections with cross-sector actors and community members.
- Visibility: Creating sufficient recognition of contributions within the initiative to achieve successful influence. [4]
- Additionally, a 2018 study found that the most effective "backbone" organizations focused on building the network rather than leading change. The "backbone" structure should be composed of well-trained leaders with a specific focus on equity within the initiative.[5] Funders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government agencies, or a combination of these actors can fulfil the role of the "backbone" structure.[3] Depending on the flexibility of funders, the way the initiative was created, and which organizations within

the existing community of practitioners are best positioned to fulfil this function, the "backbone" organization will be determined.

- When a donor initiates the use of the CI methodology, there are advantages and disadvantages for the donor, both in the role of funder and as the "backbone." Donors offer a broad perspective, as they often work across multiple sectors. They have the ability to connect partners who might not traditionally work together and can be considered the natural choice for a "backbone" structure, as they have the authority and responsibility to disburse funds. However, while donors have a "big picture" view as funders, they may lack local knowledge and technical expertise. Funders can become a barrier to collaboration and progress if they are not perceived as neutral or open to learning from failures. Non-profit organizations may become closed to collaboration or inactive due to the perception that the funder has a pre-determined vision, strategy, or expected outcomes. The power dynamics between funders and beneficiaries can interfere with the ability to act as a neutral facilitator.
- In some cases, donors select and fund intermediaries to serve as a neutral organization to convene multiple stakeholders, build capacity, distribute funds, and conduct evaluations. Intermediaries are selected to act as funders when the donor lacks sufficient capacity and expertise to fulfil this role. While this adds a layer of subordination between the donor and the funded stakeholders, perceptions of inequality can cause tension. When the roles of intermediary and "backbone" are combined, the tasks of the "backbone" structure can be perceived as controls over fund accountability. [5] When the roles of intermediary and "backbone" are not combined, confusion about roles and responsibilities can cause disruptions within the initiative and tensions between these two organizations or structures.
- To address these challenges, intermediary organizations have established processes to ensure a prominent level of transparency in decision-making, detailed reporting between partners, and open discussions about equity. Roles and responsibilities among initiative leaders must be clearly defined from the outset, [6] with periodic evaluations and updates as the initiative evolves. The "backbone" organization must be credible among stakeholders and have facilitation and capacity-building skills to create strong leaders or champions with a long-term vision for change and the ability to achieve it. Given the need for credibility, whenever possible, the community of leaders and practitioners in the sector should be consulted regarding the selection and creation of the "backbone".[5]

2.2. Leadership Skills Required for a "Backbone" Structure

Leadership skills demonstrated by the staff of a "backbone" structure are essential for the success of any collective impact initiative. As Hanleybrown and colleagues noted in their 2012 article, *"Backbone organizations must strike a delicate balance between the strong leadership needed to hold all parties together and the invisible 'behind-the-scenes' role that allows other stakeholders to take ownership of the initiative's success."*[3] Backbone structures work best when they use an adaptive, systems-oriented leadership style. According to Senge, Hamilton, and Kania (2015), system leaders need to have a specific set of skills to be successful. They need to have an ability to see bigger picture and recognize there exist hidden dynamics and interconnections within a system. Leaders need

to help others grasp this complexity even beyond immediate view. Plus, they need to be able to facilitate deep reflective conversations that would help participants unlocking new insights, bridge perspectives and spark innovation. Finally, they need to support groups on shaping the future rather than fixing immediate problems.[8]

Kania and Kramer described this leadership orientation in different terms: *"In the best circumstances, backbone organizations embody the principles of adaptive leadership: the ability to focus people's attention and create a sense of urgency, the ability to apply pressure to stakeholders without overwhelming them, the competence to frame problems in a way that presents both opportunities and challenges, and the power to mediate conflicts between stakeholders."*[3] Ross Meyer, former leader of the "backbone" organization for the initiative *Partners for a Competitive Workforce*, noted: *"I think backbone leaders require a diverse skill set. The most important skills are listening, facilitating, developing relationships and trust with individuals and partners, being able to communicate a compelling vision... and the ability to execute toward that vision."*[9]

Leadership must be collaborative and relationship-oriented within a collective impact initiative, often requiring being both diplomatic and humble. Successful leaders have also been described as visionary, charismatic, and influential communicators, results-oriented and focused, yet adaptable. Liz Weaver, Vice President of the Tamarack Institute, has worked closely with many backbone leaders and was herself a leader of a "backbone" structure for the collective impact initiative - the Hamilton Roundtable in Ontario, Canada. She believes that leaders must focus not only on building relationships but also on inclusive conversations. *"You have to go slow to go fast. Too often, we only talk to the people we know. Until you bring in those people you don't know, you'll have the same conversation you've always had."*

As the work evolves, successful leaders in the "backbone" organization or structure continue to prioritize coordination by considering the interpersonal dynamics of partnership and collaboration. For example, Chekemma Fulmore-Townsend of Project U-Turn consults key stakeholders before publishing reports: *"We vet the data with leaders in the system [before releasing important reports]. Of all the things we do to advance partnerships and align to the common goal, vetting reports with system leaders prior to publication is the most powerful approach we have."* [10] To generate deep dialogue and co-create sustainable solutions, the leader must be able to speak freely and fluently with all partners in the system. This may require communication that can reach different sectors or partners. It is important to note that different organizations within a certain category need to be approached differently depending on their preferences. Gabriel Guillaume of LiveWell Colorado explains the approaches to structuring his conversations with them as follows: *"Some funders want to hear the 'collective' part of collective impact, such as how partnerships are formed. But others want to hear the 'impact' part, such as what you are achieving and what the return on investment is."* [10]

The process of selecting the type of "backbone" structure requires careful analysis and design for the local context. "Backbone" structures are neither self-appointed nor predetermined, as this could diminish trust, transparency, and credibility as a fair and honest intermediary between the partners of the effort. Rather, the coordinating committee develops a process through which its members and key stakeholders provide input and select the structure, staff, and partner to provide support for the collaborative. Depending on the local context, initiatives may choose an open, semi-open, or closed selection process. Among the advantages of an open selection process are its transparency, the

ability to build the initiative's credibility among stakeholders, and openness to a wide range of organizations with different skill sets, including those that are not part of the most prominent organizations or have the most resources, which may not always be the best choice for promoting inclusion and equity within the initiative. The disadvantages of an open initiative include the fact that the open approach usually requires a longer period of time to establish the coordinating structure, and the potential for controversial discussions within the coordinating committee.

Communities that emphasize inclusion often choose to design an open and transparent selection process to further build trust. An open process can be particularly useful for building trust in communities where a certain population or group may feel historically marginalized. However, a more closed selection process may make sense in certain cases. For example, in communities with more limited resources, there may be only one organization with the size and capacity to host the "backbone" structure. In such a context, that organization is the obvious choice, and therefore an open selection process is not necessary.[10]

3. Methodology

As part of the research, the following methods were applied:

- Key informant interviews with experts, equalling six detailed one-on-one discussions.
- Document analysis, which involved reviewing secondary data, including meeting notes, reports, and quantitative data related to meetings, events, and participants.

The number of in-depth interviews was limited due to the relatively small pool of individuals with the necessary knowledge and experience relevant to the study. While there is an understanding that the socio-ecological model can be applied to study CI, it is challenging to identify behavioural changes across different levels. That said, the methodology provides a structured framework, including critical components and phases, which served as the foundation for exploring and documenting the experience of applying CI to advance childcare system reform in the Republic of Moldova.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Coordination Structures within the Child Care and Protection System in the Republic of Moldova

In the Republic of Moldova, there is an urgent need to finalize childcare reform to ensure that all children grow up in families or family-like environments and have access to quality community services at the rayon level. The global initiative Changing the Way We Care has brought a bold solution to these challenges by introducing the CI approach to unite all key stakeholders in the field. The success of previous reforms in childcare - such as reducing the number of children in residential institutions from 17,000 [12] in 1995 to 600 by the end of 2023 [13] was driven by effective collaboration between central and local public authorities, development partners, donors, and civil society organizations. The key coordination structure is the National Council for Child Rights Protection, established in 1998 and chaired by the Prime Minister, with the Deputy Head represented by the Minister of Labour, and Social Protection [14].

The implementation of policies in the field of child protection requires active involvement of the National Council for Child Rights Protection (NCCRP). This body

plays a pivotal role in fostering intersectoral collaboration among government structures and facilitating interaction with the associative sector, which is equally vital for the development of the child protection system. Over the years, the NCCRP has demonstrated its viability by coordinating the development of policy documents in this domain, serving as a platform for dialogue on child-related issues between governmental and non-governmental entities, and strengthening professional partnerships.

Due to multiple contextual challenges as well as government structural changes, the Council's activities were deprioritized and according to its official website, there have even been no publicly available action plans between 2020 and 2022. Consequently, new initiatives and entities have emerged to support the promotion of reforms within the care system. In the autumn of 2020, key governmental and non-governmental stakeholders initiated the development of a National Programme for Child Protection for the years 2022-2026. The programme includes provisions and recommendations for a coordination mechanism to support the implementation of its objectives: *The coordination of child protection policy in the Republic of Moldova is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, facilitated through the National Council for Child Rights Protection (NCCRP). Established in 1998 and reactivated in 2010, the Council plays a central role in ensuring intersectoral collaboration among government structures and fostering interaction with civil society organisations and development partners in the field. These stakeholders represent a critical resource for the advancement of the child protection system. In accordance with its mandate, the NCCRP is tasked with promoting dialogue and cooperation between governmental and non-governmental entities, thereby strengthening the framework for child rights protection. Its efforts are instrumental in aligning policies, strategies, and actions to address the needs of children effectively and to uphold their rights as a national priority.* [15] The transition towards a more robust and inclusive child protection framework underscores the importance of revitalizing the NCCRP's role. By doing so, it can continue to serve as a cornerstone for policy development and intersectoral collaboration, ensuring that the rights and welfare of children remain at the forefront of national priorities.

Another significant role is played by sectoral alliances and platforms, often led by civil society organisations (CSOs), which facilitate collaboration among multiple stakeholders. Among these are the Alliance of NGOs Active in the Field of Child and Family Social Protection (APSCF), the Alliance of Organisations for People with Disabilities in the Republic of Moldova, the Joint Platform of Civil Society Organisations Promoting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Aid Management Platform (an automated information system where data on external assistance is stored), coordinated by the State Chancellery. Interestingly, these entities are largely regarded as platforms for information exchange and advocacy rather than as coordination mechanisms. On occasion, they undertake joint initiatives that require coordination - such as the APSCF's efforts in developing the National Child Protection Programme - but their primary function is not coordination. Instead, they serve as vital spaces for dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and collective action, contributing to the broader goals of child protection and social inclusion. Their work underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement in addressing complex social challenges, even if their core mandate lies in fostering collaboration rather than direct coordination.

To confirm the list of coordination mechanisms in the field of child protection, as well as to identify their strengths, weaknesses, lessons learned, and suggestions for improvement, we conducted in-depth individual interviews with leaders in the field. As a

result, we identified that certain elements of the methodology were present in successful mechanisms. Interviewees mentioned two mechanisms that coordinated activities within the care system, though neither is currently active, as they have fulfilled their respective functions. These are: the National Council for Coordinating the Reform of the Residential Childcare System and the Development of Inclusive Education, and the Country Core Team, which conducted an evaluation of alternative care in Moldova. According to experts, these mechanisms had common agendas, coordination structures, and elements of shared measurement systems.

Successful mechanisms played a significant role in reforming the care system, improved collaboration among stakeholders, and benefited from more efficient relationships between partners. Among the factors that influenced the effectiveness of these coordination mechanisms were the presence of a clear strategy and action plan, the fact that most residential institutions undergoing deinstitutionalisation were subordinated to the Ministry of Education (where the coordination mechanism was also located), and the sense of ownership among stakeholders. Additionally, influential leaders with strong advocacy skills were considered crucial.

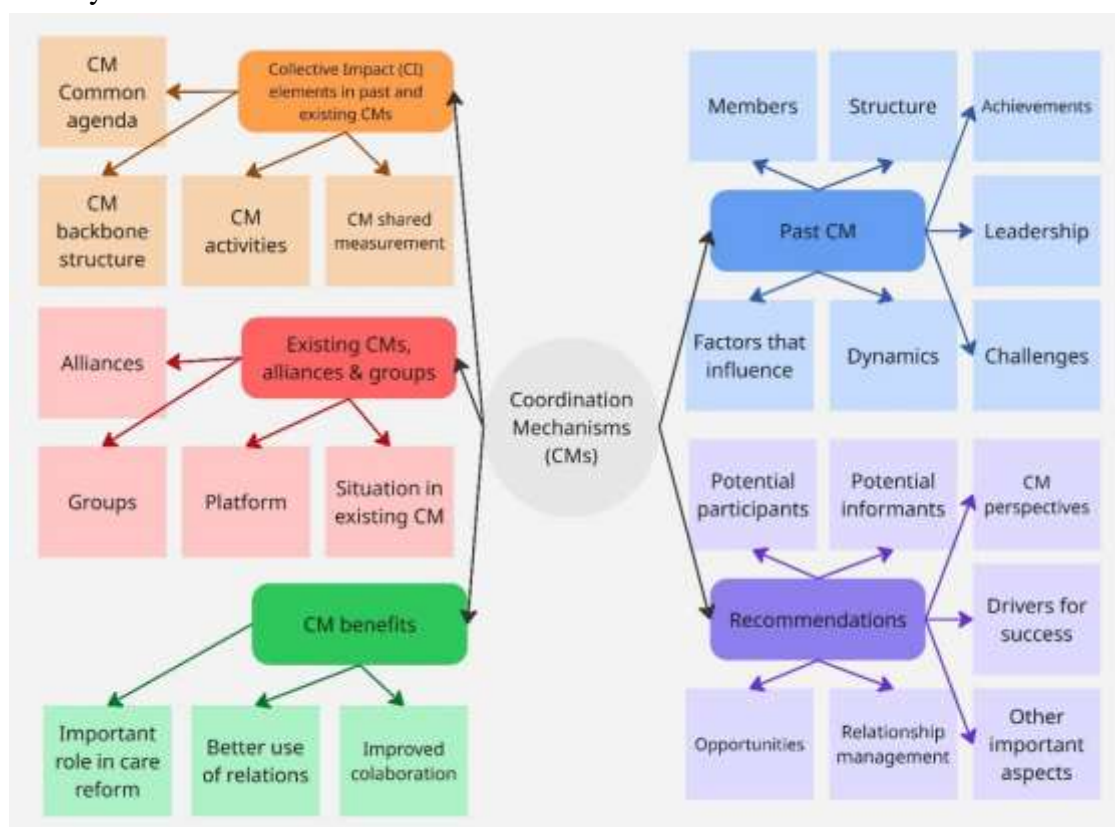


Figure 1. Results of analysis of key informant interviews on the topic of coordination in the field of childcare in Moldova.

Source: Analysis matrix of key informant interviews, 2021

Champions in the field provided recommendations for establishing backbone structures. One of the most interesting suggestions was to link the collective impact initiative with the implementation of the care system reform, particularly through the development of the National Programme for Child Protection for 2022-2026. It was also noted that a clear list of tasks is essential, as well as involving different collaborators in separate working groups to avoid partner fatigue and demotivation. These insights

highlight the importance of strategic planning, inclusive leadership, and structured collaboration in achieving sustainable reforms in child protection.

In May 2023, the Government of Moldova approved updated Council Regulations and renewed the list of organizations-members. The composition and structure of the National Council for Child Rights Protection (CNPDC) are formally established under Annex No. 1 to Government Decision No. 338/2023 [16] Previously the regulations were approved in 2003, in other words 20 year ago and required updates considering the changing landscape. Due to advocacy efforts in the frame of CI collaborative, the council remains chaired by the Prime Minister.

A brief analysis of secondary sources indicates that a significant amount of financial, human, institutional, and other resources is concentrated in the areas of family support, childcare and protection, as well as support for children and persons with disabilities. Evaluations and assessments conducted by development partners and international organisations highlight the need for improved coordination, strengthened monitoring practices, and greater mutual accountability. Furthermore, the inclusion of the voices of target groups in coordination efforts remains challenging but presents opportunities for achieving greater impact.

4.2. Common Agenda and Identification of a "Backbone" Structure for the Initiative

Between 2020 and 2021, the Government of the Republic of Moldova, in collaboration with development partners, civil society organizations, and domain experts, engaged in the development of the National Programme for Child Protection (NPCP) for the period 2022–2026. This programme, along with its action plan, plays a pivotal role in advancing the childcare system in Moldova and promoting the reform of the childcare system. Two out of three strategic objectives of Changing The Way We Care (CTWWC) initiative are closely aligned with the objectives of the NPCP. For instance: Strategic Objective 1 of CTWWC: *1: Governments advocate for family based care and the transition/ closure residential care facilities , and lead, organize, manage and fund related policies and programs in alignment with United Nations endorsed Guidelines on the Alternative Care for Children*, is similar to General Objective 1 of the NPCP: *The child protection system responds promptly and effectively to the needs of every child*. Strategic Objective 2 of CTWWC: *Children/youth remain or are reintegrated into a safe and nurturing family care*, aligns with General Objective 3 of the NPCP: *Children grow up in a safe and protective family environment that ensures their well-being*. Drawing from the methodology, which emphasizes a common agenda that is consulted upon and agreed to by key stakeholders, it was considered a logical option to adopt the National Programme for Child Protection and its action plan as the common agenda for the CI collaborative. To coordinate activities within the programme and ensure the implementation of actions and achievement of objectives, it is deemed necessary to establish a coordination mechanism. From the perspective of applying CI methodology, this mechanism would serve as the backbone structure.

In line with CI methodology, the second phase of the initiative requires the establishment of a 'backbone' structure to effectively coordinate activities and drive collaborative actions. [3] During in-depth individual interviews, we discussed potential perspectives for identifying this structure with CTWWC Moldova. In 2021, there was some uncertainty regarding the decision-making factors that could influence the final decision. Additionally, the physical location, subordination, and level of influence of the coordination structure remained unclear.

Potential options include establishing a "backbone" structure to coordinate the initiative or to oversee the implementation of the entire action plan for the National Programme for Child Protection. There are certain expectations from key stakeholders in the field, such as the need for the decision to be made at a high level by government representatives. Some opinions suggest that the decision regarding the establishment of the "backbone" structure should be made by CTWWC managers. Several stakeholders believe there is an urgent need for a decision in this regard. The CTWWC Director mentioned various possibilities, emphasizing that none of them are ideal. Among the potential scenarios discussed were:

- National Council for Child Rights Protection (NCCRP) oversees continuation of care reform as a government entity with experience and credibility.
- The Alliance of NGOs Active in the Field of Child and Family Social Protection (APSCF) - a coalition of non-governmental organizations with expertise in the field.
- CTWWC appoints a dedicated coordinator, who either works as a part of the Ministry or operates independently.

Each model has its strengths and weaknesses, such as sustainability in the face of changes within the government and ministries. For example, while the NCCRP offers institutional legitimacy, it may face challenges related to bureaucratic inefficiencies. On the other hand, a dedicated coordinator hired by CTWWC could provide flexibility and focus but might lack the broader institutional support needed for long-term sustainability.

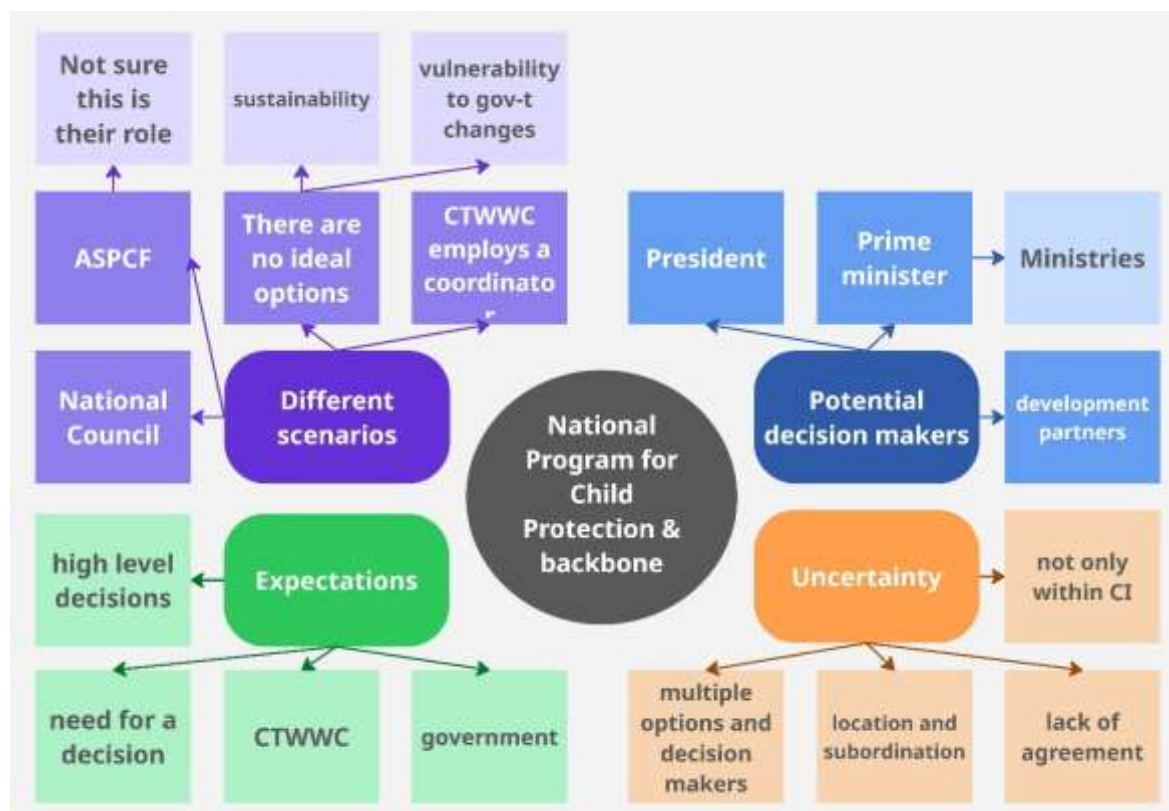


Figure 2. Results of analysis of key informant interviews on the topic of establishing backbone structure for collective impact.

Source: Analysis matrix of key informant interviews, 2021

The establishment of a "backbone" structure is critical to ensure the effective coordination and implementation of the CI initiative. While several options are under consideration, the decision must balance stakeholder expectations, institutional capacity, and long-term sustainability. The final choice will significantly influence the success of the initiative in achieving its goals and advancing the reform of Moldova's childcare system.

5. Conclusions

The concept of backbone structures or organisations plays a pivotal role in the successful implementation of CI initiatives. These structures handle essential functions such as promoting strategic direction, facilitating communication among partners, managing data collection and analysis processes, coordinating community engagement activities, and mobilising funding. Backbone structures can take various forms, including existing or newly created non-profit organisations, shared responsibilities among multiple entities, or entities supported by funders, government bodies, donors, or coordination committees. Effective leadership within these structures requires a diverse skill set, including strategic vision, communication and facilitation abilities, and the ability to coordinate actors across different sectors.

A well-coordinated CI collaborative requires strong leadership, a clear structure, a shared identity, and dedicated resources specifically allocated to the coordination function. In the context of child protection in Moldova, the National Programme for Child Protection (NPCP) and its action plan can serve as a common agenda for CI initiative. Furthermore, the coordination mechanism within the NPCP could function as the backbone structure. However, there still remained a pressing need to identify and establish a suitable backbone structure to effectively promote activities under the common agenda.

5.1. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings underscore the importance of backbone structures in fostering collaboration and ensuring the success of CI initiatives. From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with the principles of collective impact, which emphasise the necessity of a centralised entity to guide and sustain multi-stakeholder efforts. The study highlights the critical role of leadership and organisational design in achieving systemic change, contributing to the broader discourse on governance and coordination in public policy implementation.

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners involved in child protection reforms. The identification of the NPCP as a potential common agenda and its coordination mechanism as a backbone structure provides a concrete framework for enhancing collaboration among stakeholders. This approach could streamline efforts, reduce duplication, and ensure that resources are utilised more effectively. Additionally, the emphasis on leadership competencies and resource allocation underscores the need for capacity-building initiatives to equip backbone organisations with the skills and tools required to fulfil their roles effectively.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research and Policymaking

- **Establish a Clear Backbone Structure:** Policymakers should prioritise the identification and formalisation of a backbone structure to coordinate the NPCP. This structure should be designed to reflect the unique context of Moldova's child protection system, ensuring it has the authority, resources, and legitimacy to drive collective action.

- Invest in Leadership Development: Future initiatives should focus on developing the transversal competencies of backbone leaders, particularly in strategic vision, cross-sector collaboration, and stakeholder engagement. Training programmes and mentorship opportunities could be instrumental in building this capacity.
- Enhance Stakeholder Engagement: Efforts should be made to ensure that the backbone structure actively involves all relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organisations, and community representatives. This inclusive approach will foster a sense of ownership and commitment to the common agenda.
- Conduct Further Research: Future research could explore the long-term sustainability of backbone structures, particularly in contexts with frequent political or institutional changes. Comparative studies across different countries or sectors could also provide valuable insights into best practices and potential pitfalls.
- Monitor and Evaluate Impact: Robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be integrated into the backbone structure to track progress, measure impact, and adapt strategies as needed. This will ensure accountability and continuous improvement.

5.3. Contributions and Applications of the Findings

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on collective impact by providing a practical framework for implementing backbone structures in the context of child protection reforms. The findings offer a roadmap for policymakers and practitioners seeking to enhance coordination and collaboration in complex, multi-stakeholder initiatives. By identifying the NPCP as a common agenda and proposing its coordination mechanism as a backbone structure, the study provides a tangible application of CI principles in a real-world setting. This approach has the potential to not only improve outcomes for children in Moldova but also serve as a model for other countries facing similar challenges.

In conclusion, the findings highlight the transformative potential of well-designed backbone structures in driving systemic change. By addressing the theoretical and practical implications of these findings, this study lays the groundwork for more effective and sustainable child protection systems, ultimately contributing to the well-being and rights of children in Moldova and beyond.

6. References

1. SAFRONOVA A. *Systems for child care reform in Moldova and opportunities to do business differently through collective impact*, in Sesiunea națională cu participare internațională de comunicări științifice studențești dedicată aniversării a 75-a a USM Ediția a XXV-a, Rezumatele comunicărilor, Volumul II, April 2021 pp. 228-230.
2. COLLECTIVE IMPACT FORUM. *Backbone Starter Guide* [online], 2021. [viewed 20.03.2024]. Available from: <https://collectiveimpactforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Backbone-Starter-Guide.pdf>
3. KANIA, J., KRAMER M. and HANLEYBROWN F., *Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work*. A Stanford Social Innovation Review, [online], 2012, DOI 10.48558/2T4M-ZR69. [viewed 05.02.2025]. Available from: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/channeling_change_making_collective_impact_work

4. TURNER, S., ERRECART, K., & BHATT, *Exerting Influence Without Formal Authority*, A Stanford Social Innovation Review, [online], 2013, DOI 10.48558/41w0-v479 [viewed 20.03.2024]. Available from: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/exerting_influence_without_formal_authority
5. LYNN, J. *When Collective Impact has an Impact*, CO between Spark Policy Institute of Denver, [online], 2018, DOI 10.13140/RG.2.2.23085.13284. [viewed 06.02.2025] Available from: <http://rgdoi.net/10.13140/RG.2.2.23085.13284>
6. BETTERCARENETWORK. *Global Alliance for Children Review for GHR Foundation* [online], 2019. [viewed on 21.03.25]. Available from: <https://bettercarenetwork.org/library/principles-of-good-care-practices/child-development/global-alliance-for-children-review-for-ghr-foundation> p.7
7. SENGE, P, HAMILTON, H and KANIA, J, *The Dawn of System Leadership* in Stanford Social Innovation Review, [online], Winter 2015, DOI 10.48558/YTE7-XT62, [viewed 21.03.2025]. Available from: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_dawn_of_system_leadership
8. KANIA, J., & KRAMER, M. *Collective Impact* in *Stanford Social Innovation Review* [online] 2011, DOI 10.48558/5900-KN19 [viewed 27.11.2024] Available from: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact
9. COLLECTIVE IMPACT FORUM. *Backbone Starter Guide* [online], 2021. [viewed 20.03.2024]. Available from: <https://collectiveimpactforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Backbone-Starter-Guide.pdf>
10. PHILLIPS D., *Lessons Learned from our Conversations with Experienced Backbone Leaders*, on Collective Impact Forum, [online], 2016, [viewed 21.03.2025]. Available from: <https://collectiveimpactforum.org/blog/lessons-learned-from-our-conversations-with-experienced-backbone-leaders/>
11. NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR PARTNERSHIPS IN EQUITY. *Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact* [online], 2017 [viewed 20.03.2024]. Available from: www.napequity.org/nape-content/uploads/NSF_backbone-memo_FINAL_03-02-17_kjf.pdf
12. *Better Care Network, Care Reform in Moldova: Timeline of System Achievements*, 2017
13. MINISTERUL MUNCII ŞI PROTECŢIEI SOCIALE. *Raport cu privire la copiii aflaţi în situaţie de risc şi copiii separaţi în anul 2023* [online]. Chişinău: Ministerul Muncii şi Protecţiei Sociale, 2024. [viewed 10 January 2025]. Available from: <https://social.gov.md/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Raport-statistic-anual-nr.-103---Copii-aflati-in-situatie-de-risc-si-copii-separati-de-parinti-in-anul-2023.pdf>
14. CONSILIUL NAŢIONAL PENTRU PROTECŢIA DREPTURILOR COPILULUI (CNPDC). *Componenţa Consiliului Naţional pentru Protecţia Drepturilor Copilului* [online]. Chişinău: Consiliul Naţional pentru Protecţia Drepturilor Copilului, [viewed 10 January 2025]. Available from: <https://cnpdc.gov.md/ro/content/membrii-consiliului>
15. REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA/GOVERNMENT. *Decision No. 347 of 01-06-2022 on the Approval of the National Programme for Child Protection for 2022-2026 and the Action Plan for its Implementation*. Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova, No. 194-200, Art. 492, 01 July 2022. Annex 1 [viewed 10 January 2025]. Available from: https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=131899&lang=ro
16. REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA/GOVERNMENT. *Decision No. 338 of 31-05-2023 on the National Council for the Protection of Child Rights*. Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova, No. 208-209, Art. 494, 22 June 2023. [viewed 20.03.2025]. Available from: https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=137530&lang=ro