

THE FINE MEMO (14/15)

The Professionals Who Form the Invisible Backbone of the System

Serie : Child Protection

5mn

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La Ligne Fine Institut

Introduction

For children entrusted to ASE, protection is largely built in daily relationships. Family assistants organize life at home, educators accompany children in institutions, and social workers monitor situations, prepare decisions, and act as a link with families. Responsibilities differ, but they come together around the same child.

However, the child protection sector is going through a period of intense tension. In its April 2026 report, the Senate notes that more than 71% of child protection institutions face difficulties recruiting and mentions nearly 30,000 vacancies.[1] These figures concern institutions in the sector; they do not alone describe the particular difficulties of foster care. They nevertheless invite examining the consequences of staff shortages on support conditions.

This memo focuses on professions that ensure continuity of pathways. It examines the role of foster families and educational teams, the difficulties encountered in performing the work, and how institutions take their experience into account. Recognition of professions has little impact if it is not accompanied by conditions allowing them to work together and stay with children over time.

I. Different professions close to children

Family assistants welcome children to their homes under an employment contract with a department or association managing a family placement service. The law of June 27, 2005, helped clarify the professional framework of this foster care.[2] The days are built around family life, schooling, care, and relationships with parents. Appointments and institutional decisions are part of a daily routine that the caregivers must make as stable as possible.

This organization places professional activity at the heart of family life. The survey published by DREES in January 2026 describes the participation of other family members, without them themselves holding salaried positions. It also highlights possible tensions between expected availability, attachment to the child, and personal time. [3] Daily proximity to children is an asset for their support, but it can become difficult to maintain when the foster family cannot find a supporter.

Specialized educators, educator monitors, as well as other professionals in the institutions, work in a different organization. They provide collective and individual support, participate in exchanges with the school and health services, and work with parents when the situation allows. In departmental or open service settings, social service assistants as well as educators monitor the measures and

[1] Senate. (2026, April 28). Childhood at risk: solutions exist, it is time to seize them (information report no. 574), summary. https://www.senat.fr/notice-rapport/2025/r25-574-notice.html

[2] Law No. 2005-706 of June 27, 2005 relating to childminders and family assistants; Le Rhun, B. (2026), The profession of family assistant, DREES, Studies and Results, no. 1360. https://drees.solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/publications-communique-de-presse/etudes-et-resultats/260109-assistante-familiale

[3] Le Rhun, B. (2026, January 9). The profession of family assistant, involvement of all family members. DREES, Studies and Results, no. 1360; Barbry, C., et al. (2026), Qualitative study on the conditions for practicing the profession of family assistant, DREES, no. 134. https://drees.solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/2026-01/DD134_Assitant_familial.pdf

participate in evaluations. These tasks are not interchangeable; the quality of the child's support largely depends on their coordination.[4]

A difficulty arises when the observations collected daily are not sufficiently taken into account in institutional decisions. The DREES and the Senate report sometimes complicated relationships between foster families, reference services, and monitoring teams.[5] The person accompanying homework, observing behavioral changes, or preparing a return from a family visit nevertheless has useful information. It is necessary to be able to share them confidentially, while maintaining room for the child's voice.

II. Conditions of practice that weaken work continuity

Family care is experiencing a difficult renewal. At the end of 2024, about 34,200 family assistants were employed by departmental councils or other local authorities responsible for ASE, compared to 37,603 in 2017. This represents a decrease of about 9% over this period. The average age of people employed by departments reached 54 years in 2023.[6] These figures do not cover associative jobs and granted approvals in the same way; They nevertheless highlight the challenge of replacing professionals leaving the sector.

Tensions also affect institutions, but they do not take the same form everywhere. The DREES survey on ASE establishments recorded, for 2021, 79 full-time equivalent jobs per 100 places, with very different rates depending on the categories of structures.[7] This old result does not describe the 2026 workforce . It reminds us that professional constraints differ depending on the structure: children's homes, nurseries, or living spaces. When positions remain vacant, teams must adjust schedules, manage absences, and sometimes postpone scheduled times for educational projects.

For foster families, rest time and the possibility of requesting a respite are very concrete issues. The law of February 7, 2022, provided guarantees on employment conditions and provided for the possibility of monthly rest as part of the contract.[8] Pay remains a subject of professional recognition, but surveys also emphasize the need to be supported in complex situations, to be able to take leave, and not to be isolated when facing a child's difficulties.[9]

Social workers face other constraints. It is necessary to write reports, prepare hearings, meet families, conduct visits, and find solutions when reception or follow-up conditions no longer allow continuity of support. Emergencies sometimes take the place of team exchanges. The 2025

[4]Senate. (2026), report no. 574, parts on the organization and coordination of child protection. https://www.senat.fr/rap/r25-574/r25-574_mono.html; Defender of Rights. (2025), framework decision no. 2025-005. https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/protection-de-lenfance-808

[5]Barbry, C., et al. (2026), DREES, No. 134, passages relating to team placement and relations with services; Senate. (2026), opinion No. 79, chapter II, article 4. https://www.senat.fr/rap/a26-079/a26-07910.html

[6]Senate. (2026, October 20). Opinion No. 79 (2026–2027) on the bill relating to child protection, chapter II, article 4; Le Rhun, B. (2026), DREES, no. 1360. https://www.senat.fr/rap/a26-079/a26-07910.html

[7]DREES. (2025, June). Child Social Assistance, 2025 edition (DREES Files, no. 131), chapter on institutions, table 2 (2021 data). https://drees.solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/2025-06/DD%20ASE%202025_VF.pdf

[8]Law No. 2022-140 of February 7, 2022, relating to the protection of children, arts. 28 and 29; Social Action and Family Code, art. L. 423-33-1 (rest provided for by the contract). https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/article_jo/JORFARTI000045133808

[9]Barbry, C., et al. (2026). Qualitative study on the conditions for practicing the profession of family assistant. DREES, no. 134, on leave, support, and working conditions. https://drees.solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/2026-01/DD134_Assitant_familial.pdf

Defender of Rights framework decision emphasizes the difficulty of services in carrying out their missions within timeframes compatible with children's needs.[10] Working conditions therefore constitute a matter of quality of protection, and not only of human resource management.

These data cover periods, categories of professionals, and distinct institutional boundaries. They allow identification of several structural tensions, without constituting a homogeneous measure of all child protection professions.

III. What these difficulties change for children

The stability of a pathway does not depend solely on a place of reception. Children also need to know who supports them, whom to turn to, and how important elements of their story will be passed on. A change of educator, coordinator, or foster family does not always have the same reasons or consequences. Some transitions are necessary. Others occur because teams no longer have the means to provide the planned support.

The national DREES survey of foster families shows that in 2021, 41% of foster care took place in an emergency, without preparation with the family.[11] Emergency care can be essential to keep a child safe. However, it allows less time to present their situation, prepare for their arrival, and anticipate care or schooling needs. The DREES specifies that, in the vast majority of cases, information about the child had nevertheless been provided. [12] It would therefore be inaccurate to equate all these receptions with care without any reliance.

Difficulties also arise when court decisions are not executed on time. Contacted notably by juvenile judges, the Defender of Rights reported in January 2025 about unfulfilled placements and delays in educational support.[13] This situation cannot be attributed to individual field professionals. It is due to the availability of care centers, the organization of services, and coordination possibilities. Yet it is the children and teams who experience the consequences of the delays.

Psychological health needs make these breaks particularly sensitive. The Haute Autorité de santé emphasized in 2025 that access to child psychiatry still too often occurs at the time of emergencies and that follow-up suffers from insufficient coordination.[14] Educational teams and foster families may detect a deterioration of the situation without having the necessary means to respond on their own. Continuity then depends on their ability to work with caregivers and on the existence of truly accessible relays.

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[10]Defender of Rights. (2025, January 28). Framework Decision No. 2025-005 on child protection, and press release of January 29. https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/protection-de-lenfance-808

[11]Le Rhun, B. (2026, January 9). The profession of family assistant, involvement of all family members. DREES, Studies and Results, no. 1360, survey conducted in 2021. https://drees.solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/publications-communique-de-presse/etudes-et-resultats/260109-assistante-familiale

[12] Le Rhun, B. (2026), DREES, no. 1360, section "Four out of ten children are admitted urgently, without preparation." https://drees.solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/publications-communique-de-presse/etudes-et-resultats/260109-assistante-familiale

[13]Defender of Rights. (2025, January 29). Child protection: the Defender of Rights denounces violations of children's rights, statement relating to framework decision no. 2025-005. https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/protection-de-lenfance-808

[14]High Authority for Health. (2025, May 26). Coordination between child protection and child and adolescent psychiatry, recommendation for good practice. https://www.has-sante.fr/jcms/p_3261731/

IV. Recognize professions and provide them with concrete support

Recent reports emphasize the need to develop respite solutions for family assistants, notably through respite care services allowing professionals to take rest periods without interrupting the care of children. The bill on child protection, discussed in Parliament in autumn 2026, thus provides a framework for respite family care, complementary to primary care. It is still a legislative proposal under discussion, not a system whose effects are already established. [15] For the child, a relay is only useful if they are prepared and the transmission between the caregivers helps preserve their bearings.

Training has also evolved. The training framework reformed in 2025 provides for a 100-hour preparatory internship, then a 420-hour training for candidates preparing for the entire State diploma of family assistant, subject to adaptations planned according to the pathways. [16] This evolution aims to better prepare professionals for the complexity of the situations encountered. However, it does not resolve the issue of continuing education, whose access remains highly dependent on departments and employers, as noted by the Senate in October 2026.[17] Time spent analyzing practices and supporting multidisciplinary teams is just as important when professionals have to face situations of violence or severe psychological suffering.

Better involvement in decision-making would also be necessary. Observations from professionals, as well as the child's voice, should contribute to the development and updating of their child project (PPE). The Senate highlights the difficulties in information flow and the need to strengthen coordination around the child.[18] This requires explicit responsibilities and time for exchanges. Punctual and late transmission cannot replace regular coordination between professionals.

The implementation of these improvements requires a clear division of responsibilities. Departments, as leaders in child protection, play a central role in organizing reception, coordinating pathways, and supporting professionals. Associative and public employers must also guarantee working conditions that promote collective work, access to training, and opportunities for respite. The State, for its part, retains responsibility in defining the national framework, training, and monitoring territorial disparities. Finally, multidisciplinary teams must have appropriate time and procedures to ensure the flow of information and continuity of support.

Finally, it remains to be seen how to assess the effects of the proposed responses. The number of people trained, positions opened, or relays organized provides information about the resources employed. To understand what changes for children, it is also necessary to examine changes in living environment, continuation of care, stability of adult references, and how children experience

[15] Senate. (2026, October 20). Opinion No. 79 on the bill relating to child protection, Article 4 relating to foster care. https://www.senat.fr/rap/a26-079/a26-07910.html; Council of State. (2026). Opinion on a bill relating to child protection. https://www.conseil-etat.fr/avis-consultatifs/derniers-avis-rendus/au-gouvernement/avis-sur-un-projet-de-loi-relatif-a-la-protection-des-enfants2

[16] Senate. (2026, October 20). Opinion No. 79, provisions relating to training, decree No. 2025-305 and order of April 1, 2025. https://www.senat.fr/rap/a26-079/a26-07910.html

[17] Senate. (2026, October 20). Opinion No. 79, Article 4 bis A, development on the limits of continuing education. https://www.senat.fr/rap/a26-079/a26-079_mono.html

[18] Senate. (2026, April 28). Information Report No. 574, recommendations on coordination and children's rights; Barbry, C., et al. (2026), DREES, No. 134. https://www.senat.fr/rap/r25-574/r25-574_mono.html

their support. The recommendations of the Haute Autorité de santé encourage structuring exchanges and pathways rather than favoring a single intervention model.[19]

Conclusion

Family assistants, educators, and social workers hold different roles, but their work depends on the same requirement for continuity. Children need support, follow-up, and people who know their history. These daily relationships are weakened when numbers decrease, teams change, or there is a lack of relays.

Statutory advances and new training are important. Their impact remains limited if professionals are kept out of decisions or if services do not have time to work together. Recruitment difficulties therefore deserve to be addressed with working conditions and coordination means. For protected children, stability does not depend solely on decisions made on their behalf; it also depends on those who can support them after these decisions.

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[19]High Authority for Health. (2025). Coordination between child protection and child and adolescent psychiatry, recommendations and limits of available data on the systems. https://www.has-sante.fr/jcms/p_3261731/

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