

REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL POLICY

**Facing the challenges of social inclusion of children
in Europe and Bulgaria's experience**

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Social inclusion of children in Bulgaria

The social inclusion of children in Bulgaria has been implemented in compliance with and in adherence to the international and national regulatory acts in the field of children care and protection and mainly of the UN Convention on the Rights of Children and the Child Protection Act.

With respect of main fields:

- all rights are guaranteed for all children based on non-discrimination and equal treatment;
- the interests of children are leading in all areas of activities pertaining thereto;
- children's opinion shall be taken heed of on all issues pertaining thereto;
- participation of children in public life, determination of child's civil and political rights;
- implementation of the fundamental rights and requirements aiming to achieve fully-fledged development of children;
- healthy status;
- education and environment appropriate for their development;
- protection of children against exploitation, abuse /physical, sexual and psychological/;

- development of children in their natural environment – the family.

Historical overview before 2003

Until 2003 the main care for the Children was - Care of an institutional type.

The social services were centralized. There was lack of social services for within the community. Generally speaking there were limited opportunities.

Legislative initiatives

- **Child Protection Act** - adopted in 2000. In result of it there were established:
 - State Agency for Child Protection
 - Child protection departments with the Social Assistance Directorates
 - National Council for Child Protection

- In 2003 was adopted **The Social Assistance Act** , which specifies:
 - Deinstitutionalization
 - Decentralization – with starting social services like:
 - Professional foster families (2006)
 - Period for payment of compensations for pregnancy and birth for duration of 315 days (2007),
 - and with Decentralization of the management of social welfare homes for children without parental care (2007).

Another very important document regarding the implementing of Child's rights is **The NATIONAL CHILDREN'S STRATEGY 2008-2018**

The grounds for adoption it are stipulated in Art.1, para. 3 of the Child Protection Act.

Duration – 10 years

Goal – Policy targeted at all children – provision of conditions for the efficient exercise of rights and improvement of quality of life for children

Operational goals:

- Reduction of children's poverty and establishment of conditions for the social inclusion of children
- Provision of equal access to high-quality pre-school preparation and school education for all children
- Improvement of children's health
- Promotion of children's participation in the development and implementation of policies related to their rights and obligations

The strategy is structured in three parts

- Part one – situation of children in Bulgaria
- Part two – activities and measures for the implementation of the operational goals in the priority areas
- Part three – Strategy implementation and reporting

Let's focus our attention on phenomenon of Street Children! They are part of the Governmental Policy with respect of whole children at risk.

Features of the street children target group

- The group of street children encompasses children for whom the street (including sheds, buildings, shafts, subways) provides temporary or permanent home and who make their living in the street.

Depending on the type of contacts which the children maintain with their family (biological or extended), there are 2 types of groups:

- Children who spend their day in the street, make their living there (often for their families too), but return to their homes in the evening;
- Children who have completely severed their connection with their family environment and have developed lasting habits of living in the street and living a "street life."

Data about the number of children in the street from the moment they have first come up there up till the present moment are average, hence it is difficult to assess that number mainly due to two factors: the variations in the members of the group and the insufficient reliability of the sources (which include either children from some regions in the country or part of the entire group).

The actual number of street children is 733 for the 1 quarter of 2009.

Republic of Bulgaria undertakes a number of reforms in the field of policies for the children and families.

- Social services have been decentralized and have passed on to the management of municipal mayors
- An individual approach has been applied in the social work
- Private entrepreneurship has been promoted
- Social services funding has been regulated anew
- Social services have been divided into delegated state and local activities.

Outcomes

- Criteria and standards have been introduced for the performance of social services at specialized institutions and services provided within the community
- The criteria and standards to provide social services to children are stipulated in the Regulation on Criteria and Standards of Social Services for Children
- Measures have been applied to a significant number of the children for their protection in their family environment:
 - Consultation and support for their families;
 - Organization of a school for parents;
 - Inclusion of children in preliminary groups for pre-school preparation, etc.

- The control over compliance with the criteria and standards for social services for children is exercised by the Chairperson of the State Agency for Child Protection
- Civil control over the quality of provided social services has been introduced – Public councils at municipalities and councils of service users
- Large-scale advance of NGOs and commercial companies
- Efficient spending of funds for the development of social services
- Modern and complex approach to management
- Conditions for increased flexibility and adaptability
- Improved quality of provided services
- Increased remuneration of the employees working in the field
- Provision of environment close to the family
- Prevention of accommodation at specialized institutions
- Provision of care targeted at the individual needs of children
- Opportunities to participate in individual programmes for social inclusion, education and vocational training, free time organization, establishment of social and personal contacts combined with the support of professionals in various fields

Social services within the community –2009

- 68 Children Day Care Centers
- 12 Centers for temporarily placement
- 11 Centers for Street children
- 54 Centers for Social Rehabilitation and Integration
- 41 Public Support Centers

- 10 Mother and Baby Units
- 9 crisis centers
- 28 Family accommodation centers

The variety of the social services for the children in Bulgaria for the period 2006 – 2009 is:

- Transition homes
- Social vocational training centers
- Family accommodation centers
- Crisis center
- Center for work with street children
- Social assistance center
- Mother and Baby Unit
- Social welfare centers for children without parental care
- Centers for social Rehabilitation and integration
- Day Care Centers for children with disabilities

You can see on the diagram that it was very intensive period of development and starting new adequate services for different children's needs.

Of course this is process and this tendency of development the specific and variable services will continue.

I have to mention the Good practices to support parents:

- National Programme **“Support to motherhood”** – upbringing children to the age of 3 by unemployed people
- Incentive measures under the **Employment Promotion Act** aiming to hire unemployed single parents and mothers of children by the age of 5
- **“Family Centers for Kids”** Project:
 - Children from 1 to 3 years of age
 - Children from 3 to 5 years of age

The urgent measures for 2009 are:

- Changes in the **Family Code** for faster adoption of children accommodated at specialized institutions

- Changes in the **Child Protection Act** aiming at more well-defined responsibilities, control and sanctions for the violators of children's rights
- Introduction of **187** new social services
- Training of **800** employees in the system – social workers, employees in the field of social services, representatives of the municipal administration

THE SOURCES OF FUNDS FOR THE SOCIAL SERVICES ARE:

- State budget;
- Municipal budget;
- Social Assistance Fund;
- National programs and international projects;
- Operational Programme Human Resources Development

In Bulgaria we have Delegated state activities. This is purposefully funding for social services for children.

BGN 143 million were allocated in 2008 for this service, i.e. up by 72% as compared to 2007.

The Operational Program Human Resources Development is financial soars for implementation of different social services. In 2008

- Operation **“Better future for the children”** gives opportunity for:
 - Introduction of new standards of care in the specialized institutions working with children
 - opportunity for establishment of conditions close to the family environment and
 - Improvement in the quality of care
- Financial resources – **BGN 19.6 million - budget for 2008**

Challenges toward Child protection Policy

- Multiplication of good practices
- Sustainability
- Promotion of social entrepreneurship in the field of social services
- Adoption of an integrated approach to defining and providing services

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!