



NATIONAL NETWORK FOR CHILDREN

REPORT CARD 2015

WHAT IS
THE AVERAGE
GOVERNMENT
SCORE
FOR CHILDCARE?



Report Card 2015: What is the average Government score for childcare?

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'Vitosha' blvd, 58, floor 4
1463 Sofia
t/f.: 02 988 82 07, 02 4444 380
office@nmd.bg
www.nmd.bg
facebook.com/nmdbg

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FOR FRIENDS**

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FOREWORD



George Bogdanov
Secretary General

Dear colleagues, supporters and friends,

The 2015 annual report of the National Network for Children “Report Card: What is the average Government score on childcare?” comes out for the fourth successive year. Again, the review of the progress of the state institutions in the implementation of their own stated commitments regarding children focused the efforts of many people from civil organisations, practitioners working with children and families on an everyday basis, colleagues from the academic field and independent experts. The aim of this large-scale product is for our wide unification of non-governmental organisations across the country to provide an external perspective to the politicians and experts working in the state institutions with regard to the direction we have taken in the development of children public policies. Apart from pointing out the challenges, we try all through to provide solutions and to share existing good practices.

For the second year in succession the Report Card takes into account the view point of the children and young people. Consultations with a variety of children and youth groups from Sofia and the country have taken place, so that they had the opportunity to express their opinion on the problems regarding them and recognized by the National Network for Children experts in the Report Card 2015.

Last year was another year of turbulences and difficulties for the Bulgarian children and families. Again, we had three governments, protests and unstable political environment; however, in spite of all this we can see progress in some of the key policies the National Network for Children advocates for, such as education and justice. In other areas, however, in spite of the demonstrated recognition of the problems, no steps have been taken towards their solution. These are some of the areas:

- The process of developing a comprehensive policy for family support hasn't been started yet;
- The inclusive education topic continues to be of a challenge and we are still left with the wrong impression that inclusion is not for all the children but only for children with disabilities
- The Deinstitutionalisation policy and child protection system are still struggling with the large number of children at risk, the insufficient number of social workers and the uneven distribution of the existing community-based services.
- In spite of the existence of a Programme for Mather and Child Healthcare, these most vulnerable groups of society still have no access to quality healthcare in some locations, and children mortality rate in some rural areas continues to be alarmingly high.

I would like to extend my gratitude on behalf of the National Network for Children to all those who took part in the preparation of the Report Card and to those who will read it and take steps towards a better life of the children in Bulgaria. We wish the recommendations and conclusions of the report to reach the decision-makers. And most of all, let's hope that their decisions will be wise and with the vision for the best of our children!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'George Bogdanov'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The National Network for Children would like to thank all the people who contributed to the preparation of the "Report Card 2015: What is the average Government score for childcare". We are grateful to the authors who wrote the chapters of the report. We are thankful for the support of the NNC's member organizations, for the efforts and diligence of the colleagues who commented and edited separate parts of the report. Special thanks goes to the Irish organization Children's Rights Alliance, whose "Report Card" has inspired us for the current initiative.

We couldn't go without saying THANK YOU to the young people from Turgovishte, Lovech, Gorna Oryahovitsa and Sofia; to our colleagues from the NGO Club – Turgovishte, "Ecomission 21 century" Association – Lovech, "Youth tolerance" Association – Gorna Oryahovitsa, the director of 26 High School in Sofia and to all the young people across the country who spent time and efforts to fill in our special questionnaire and share their opinions and view points on the challenging areas for the children in Bulgaria and how to overcome them.

We also extend particular gratitude for the efforts to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, the Ministry of Finance, the Agency for Social Assistance, the State Agency for Child Protection and the National Health Insurance Fund experts who provided us with detailed information on the progress of the commitments taken and prepared answers to the numerous requests for access to public information for the aims of the Report Card.

We wish to express our special gratitude to the members of the external evaluation panel who gave time, efforts and expertise to comment on the report, added to the analyses and recommendations and finalised the grades.

AUTHORS:

Alexandra Angelova, Centre for Inclusive Education
Annette Marinova, 'Child and Space' Association
Antonia Smokova, 'Paideia' Foundation
Bistra Boncheva, 'Karin dom' Foundation
Vesselina Tincheva, 'Karin dom' Foundation
Victoria Buchvarova, Centre for Inclusive Education
Galina Bisset, Hope and Homes for Children - Bulgaria
Gergana Bogdanova, Bulgarian Association Adopters and Adopted
Georgi Apostolov, 'Applied Research and Communications' Fund
Dani Koleva, National Network for Children
Daniela Todorova, 'Teach for Bulgaria' Foundation
Deyan Kolev, Centre for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance 'Amalipe'
Donika Koleva, 'SOS Children's Villages Bulgaria' Association
Elena Zlatanova, consultant
Elka Nalbantova, 'For Our Children' Foundation
Zvezditsa Peneva-Kovacheva, 'FICE - Bulgaria' Association
Yoana Terzieva, 'Centre Nadya' Foundation
Madlen Tanielyan, National Network for Children
Dr Masha Gavrailova, independent expert
Milena Nikolova, National Network for Children
Nadya Stoykova, PhD, Social Activities and Practices Institute
Plamena Foteva, National Network for Children
Rossitsa Milkova, Open Society Institute
Stanislav Dodov, National Network for Children
Tanya Kmetova, Centre for Women's Studies and Policies

EXTERNAL EXPERTS:

Attorney Hristina Nikolova, Centre for Protection of the Rights in Healthcare
Boyan Zahariev, Open Society Institute
Associate professor Velina Todorova, PhD, Institute for the State and Law, BSA
Kapka Panayotova, Centre for Independent Living
Prof. Krustyo Petkov, university lecturer on Economic Sociology and Social Policy
Slavka Kukova, researcher
Zhivka Marinova, 'Gender Education, Research and Technologies' Foundation

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Report Card 2014: What is the average Government score for childcare? is the National Network for Children's fourth annual report in this series. It evaluates the implementation of selected Government commitments in the area of child and family policies in Bulgaria during 2014.

The main goal we set with the development of the Report Card is to carry out annual, independent monitoring of children's rights based on the commitments of the Governments and supported by facts and data. The Report Card also gives recommendations, which hopefully will support the improvement of the policies and practices for children and families in the country.

The selection of topics and commitments is based on a thorough review of all national strategies, plans and programmes concerning child related policies or measures. Main factor in the selection of the commitments in 'Report Card 2015' is the familiarity and the significance of the topic for the Network member organisations, its public importance and opportunity to tackle the issue addressed by the Government commitment.

The selection of the commitments examined in the Report Card follows the principle of consistency. We have retained those whose length of implementation continues through 2014 and have replaced the expired ones with new commitments concerning the same or similar issues. This approach has allowed us to track dynamically how the Government is addressing certain challenges and whether action has been taken to tackle the issues identified in the previous year, in line with the given recommendations.

At the same time, the limitations to this approach, resulting from its methodology, concern the evaluation of the implementation of the commitments and not the commitments themselves in terms of effectiveness and efficiency and whether what the Government has promised is appropriate and compliant with the best international practices.

To answer this challenge, the 2015 Report added a new element – a list of 10 items not having been recognized as commitments so far, which we believe will lead to a system change and better results for the children and their parents.

"Report Card 2015" incorporates 5 areas, 16 sub-areas and 29 commitments. The analyses consist of: brief description of the commitment, the source and the institution in charge of its implementation; assessment of the implementation and brief justification of the assessment; description of the facts and data from the expert research and the answers of the state institutions on the respective commitment; recommendations for action (concrete steps and possible directions of work); and highlights – important facts and data directly relating to the commitment and emerging from the analysis.

The analyses on each commitment were prepared by 23 authors, edited and amplified with information provided by the relevant state institutions, by NNC team members, agreed with the Network member-organizations and added to by external evaluation experts.

The assigned grades are identical with those used in the educational system. The initial grades were proposed by the experts who had compiled the separate analytical units. These were subsequently confirmed by civil society organizations who are members of the NNC. The final grades were coordinated with and validated by a group of external evaluation experts. All of these experts are public figures and professionals with a wealth of experience in the problem areas concerned.

WHAT ARE THE EXPERTS' GRADES?

| AREAS | SUBAREAS | GRADE | | | | AVERAGE GRADE | | | |
|---|---|-------|------|------|------|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
| 1. UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD | NON-DISCRIMINATION | 2.00 | 2.00 | 2.50 | 2.50 | 2.88 | 2.71 | 2.97 | 3.06 |
| | OPINION OF THE CHILDREN | 3.00 | 3.25 | 3.18 | 3.00 | | | | |
| | CHILD POVERTY AND WELFARE | 3.17 | 2.50 | 2.29 | 2.86 | | | | |
| | SAFE AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT | 3.50 | 3.50 | 3.93 | 3.75 | | | | |
| 2. FAMILY ENVI- RONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE | FAMILY ENVIRONMENT | 2.33 | 2.67 | 3.02 | 2.39 | 3.14 | 2.93 | 2.98 | 2.61 |
| | CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONS AND DEINSTITUTIONALISATION | 4.00 | 3.00 | 3.09 | 3.32 | | | | |
| | ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE | 3.00 | 3.50 | 2.43 | 2.11 | | | | |
| 3. HEALTHCARE | IN-PATIENT AND OUT-PATIENT CARE | 3.50 | 2.50 | 3.55 | 3.21 | 2.79 | 2.38 | 3.21 | 3.31 |
| | MENTAL HEALTH | 2.00 | 2.00 | 2.62 | 2.86 | | | | |
| | INFANT AND CHILD MORTALITY | 3.00 | 3.00 | 3.57 | 3.93 | | | | |
| 4. EDUCATION | EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE | 2.00 | 3.00 | 2.86 | 4.29 | 2.68 | 3.00 | 3.11 | 3.62 |
| | SCHOOL EDUCATION | 2.80 | 3.67 | 3.19 | 3.07 | | | | |
| | INCLUSIVE EDUCATION | 2.50 | 2.00 | 2.62 | 3.61 | | | | |
| | HEALTH AND CIVIL EDUCATION | 3.00 | 3.33 | 3.50 | 3.50 | | | | |
| 5. JUSTICE | CHILD-FRIENDLY JUSTICE | 3.75 | 3.50 | 2.81 | 3.93 | 3.56 | 3.44 | 2.90 | 3.30 |
| | CHILD NEGLECT AND ABUSE | 3.25 | 3.33 | 3.02 | 2.68 | | | | |
| ANNUAL GRADE | | | | | | 3.00 | 2.90 | 3.00 | 3.20 |

EXPLANATION OF GRADES

EXCELLENT 6

there is a significant, positive change in children's lives

VERY GOOD 5

there are positive differences to children

GOOD 4

satisfactory attempt, but children still left wanting

AVERAGE 3

barely acceptable performance, limited positive impact on children

POOR 2

unacceptable result, no steps taken or taking steps in the wrong direction

WHAT ARE THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S GRADES?

According to the grades of the children and young people who participated in the consultations, the average grade on the Government's sixteen commitments subject to this report is **average 3,39**.

The area ranked highest of the five areas is the 'Healthcare' area - good 3,63.

The area ranked lowest of the five areas is the 'General Principles under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child' - average 3,28.

The three Government commitments ranked highest with regard to their implementation are:

- „Promoting safe Internet rules for children to children, parents and school authorities and on sites where inappropriate Internet information could be reported“ good 3,98;
- „Providing early diagnostics and rehabilitation to children with neurological diseases by setting up specialized centers“ good 3,89;
- „Development of children's structures – introducing the four-level model“ good 3,86.

The three Government commitments ranked lowest with regard to their implementation are:

- „Reducing the number of children aged 0-18 living in poverty, with 78 000 (30% of the general national goal and 25% of the the number of poor children in 2008)“ average 2,78;
- „Regular updating of the school content with the aim to form basic skills and key competencies meeting the requirements of the labor market and the new public expectations“ average 3,23;
- „Taking in 100% of the children from the primary school stage, 95% of the children from the junior high school stage, 90% of the children finishing high school“ average 3,28.

WHAT HAS IMPRESSED US?

1. Not being surprised by the fact, we noticed that the children and young people participating in the consultation process, seemed to 'translate' each commitment and recommendation on everyday 'language' – no mention of agencies, mechanisms and indicators, but rather talking about interactions between people and groups, about roles, emotions, cause-and-effect relationships, they way they see them. This comes to remind the experts and agencies that from a certain moment on, the success of their actions depends to a great extent on the accessibility and readability of these actions and messages to the targeted people. And this leads us to the next conclusion...

2. An indication about scarce information came from the involved children and young people at the different locations and in a variety of ways – sometimes information about their rights, sometimes with regard to 'transparency', sometimes as a condition for the accessibility of an activity or service, and sometimes as a precondition to lead one way of life instead of another. So we come to the next conclusion...

3. How much or how little do the children and young people know about the progress of the commitments concerning them, is often indicative of the very implementation of the commitments. This is obvious from the number of the 'I don't know' answers to the questions regarding the extent to which a certain commitment or recommendation has been implemented.

- One in seven young people who filled in the questionnaire (15% in total for all commitments) doesn't know what the Government commitments towards him/her or their peers are.
- The two least familiar to the interviewed children areas are 'Justice' (20%) and 'Family and alternative care' (18%).

WHAT ARE THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S GRADES?

- Not surprisingly, fewer 'I don't know' answers are given to the commitments concerning bigger groups of children – e.g. have more modern learning and teaching methods been introduced in school (one in ten children doesn't know), has the number of children living in poverty been reduced (one in thirteen children doesn't know), have (are there) children's councils been set up at school or in the respective living area (again one in thirteen children doesn't know), etc. And vice versa – commitments concerning more specific problems or smaller groups of children and young people get more 'I don't know' answers – e.g. has the placement of children and young people at Socio-pedagogical Boarding Schools and Correctional Boarding Schools stopped (one in four children doesn't know), have more children victims of abuse had their hearing in specially-equipped rooms and in front of professionals (one in five children doesn't know), have foster careers been supported in caring for children (one in five doesn't know).

- The lack of knowledge of the interviewed children about some commitments is confusing, however and raises questions about their implementation. For example, one in six children doesn't know whether schools have the autonomy to lay down some parts of the syllabuses. One in eight children doesn't know whether curricula are regularly updated. One in eight children doesn't know whether there is a designated and independent agency in Bulgaria responsible for children's rights.

4. Often, the children and young people, who have taken part in the consultations, emphasize their willingness and the meaningfulness of their opinion to be heard and taken into consideration. Sometimes their opinion is expressed by use of stereotypical phrases, but rather it refers to very specific issues – e.g. abuse thrives when children's experiences and emotions are not acknowledged by anybody, or that even structures that are established to 'collect' the opinion of children sometimes are unable to do so.

5. The Adult reading the outcomes of the consultations will not be spared the reflexions of some of his attitudes and burdens on the children and young people, as they say. There are occasional bad words, preference to punishment and sanctions instead of support, some xenophobic statements...

6. Very often the consulted children and young people 'interpret' the presented commitments and recommendations in the light of social relationships (exclusion, bullying), and personal conditions and moral judgements (how does someone feel, what does the attitude towards someone look like) rather than in the light of the technical causes and effects adults are used to due to the 'burden' of their experience. This, of course, hinders the relation between the answers and questions but reveals the mental, social and cultural effects of the implementation, or rather the lack of implementation, of the commitments.

TEN POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO TEN UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

GENERAL PRINCIPLES IN APPLYING THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

- 1. Setting up Children's Ombudsman** by differentiating a special position within the national Ombudsman's team called 'Children's Rights Ombudsman' whose main function is to serve as independent monitoring of children's policies.
- 2. Updating the National housing strategy from 2004 and approving a package of programmes and legislative changes for its implementation**, with a focus on increasing the social housings (both municipal and state) to meet specific needs and encourage the social inclusion not only of the socially disadvantaged people, but also large families, young adults with disabilities and other target groups.

СЕМЕЙСТВО

- 1. Developing and approving a comprehensive family policy** with clear goals, measures and activities and adopting a family-oriented approach in all areas concerning child welfare – social and economic measures, education, healthcare, housing, child protection, social assistance, etc.
- 2. Strengthening the capacity of the child protection system** by means of increasing the number of the Child Protection Department (CPD) social workers, developing standards for their workload and providing needs-based training, supervision and support.

EDUCATION

- 1. Abolishing the two-shift educational model.** The current organization of the educational process makes impossible the efforts for establishing a modern environment for education and development of the whole school community. The two-shift educational model devoid of meaning the all-day organization of the educational process and puts limitations to the schools in developing leisure-time activities for the students.
- 2. Providing for free access to pre-school education of all children regardless of their place of living and social status.** We put forward the idea for the nurseries as public institutions for raising, upbringing and educating children under 3 to be lawfully and structurally integrated in a single public system for early childhood development together with the kindergartens.

HEALTHCARE

- 1. Providing for mother and baby – friendly health system** by changing the existing pre- and post-child birth models of care and practices, which are not in compliance with the modern trends, such as separating the mother from the baby, lack of breast-feeding support, non-admission of a companion during child birth, etc.
- 2. Developing an ear-marked state policy for investing in and retaining in Bulgaria** the professionals with key for the child health and welfare occupations such as 'pediatry', 'child psychiatry', etc.

JUSTICE

- 1. Adopting a policy and encouraging a culture of zero tolerance to child abuse** in society. We can't help a child 'grow and mature' by approaching them in a humiliating and dominant way. A number of studies prove that abuse has a negative effect upon children. Abuse breeds abuse and must not be tolerated in any shape or form!
- 2. Developing and applying uniform standards for child-friendly hearing of children.** The practice of using specially-equipped rooms for hearing and interrogation, especially for children witnesses and victims of abuse strengthens its position during the last decade in Bulgaria in line with the existing best practices in a number of European countries. At the same time there is no uniform philosophy and approach in this area so that secondary traumatising of the child during the investigation and administration of justice process is avoided, protection of their rights and best interest is guaranteed, and the collection of full and precise information on the case is ensured.

I.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES
UNDER THE TERMS OF
THE UN CONVENTION OF
THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



COMMITMENT 1

Setting up a special unit for combatting discrimination of children at the Commission for Protection against Discrimination

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

For the fourth year in succession no progress on this commitment has been reported. There is no special unit at the Commission for Protection against Discrimination to deal with cases of discrimination against children and there are no indications that activities in this direction have been planned.

In 2011 the Commission against Discrimination and the Ombudsman were given mandate B as independent human-right organisations in compliance with the Paris principles¹ setting up minimal standards with regard to the status, powers and functioning of the national human-right institutions. Bulgaria is one of the eight countries in the EU being given status B for the lack of full compliance with the Paris principles.

There is still no children's rights ombudsman in Bulgaria to guarantee independent monitoring and control in observing children's rights. Bulgaria is one of the three EU member-states not having such a specialized child protection figure.

Unfortunately, in spite of the efforts of the Bulgarian Government to include vulnerable groups and accelerate their social inclusion according to the provisions in a number of strategies, there are still practices of discrimination and unequal treatment of refugee children, children with disabilities and Roma children in terms of their access to education, healthcare and adequate housing and social environment.

HIGHLIGHT:

Bulgaria still doesn't have children's rights ombudsman to guarantee independent monitoring and control in observing children's rights. Bulgaria is one of the three EU member-states not having such a specialized child protection figure.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To take actions for tackling the issue with the need for specialized and independent children's rights advocate in accordance with the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.
- To introduce a special, simplified procedure applicable in the cases of infringement of the rights of children, in view of the specific and fast developing process with children, and training the members of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination responsible for its implementation.

1. Passed with Resolution 1992/54 of the Commission and confirmed with Resolution A/RES/48/134 of the UN General Assembly in December 1993.

COMMITMENT 2

Change in the attitudes towards the role of girls and women in the family and society and guaranteeing the right of development and equality

HIGHLIGHT:

Early marriages, cohabitation with minor and under-age girls and the resulting early childbirths are looked at mainly in the light of ethnicity, while the attitude to gender perspective is totally missing. This puts the suggested and subsequently adopted measures at the risk of being discriminative in terms of gender, age or ethnic origin, as well as the risk of girls, victims of crime or parental neglect, to be the affected ones by the measures.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

Sexual abuse of children and especially minor and under-age girls, in the form of indecent assaults, rapes, cohabitations and the resulting 'early marriages', childbirths and abortions, continues to be a significant issue recognized by the society, media and state institutions.

The National Plan for Prevention of Child Abuse 2012-2014 makes provisions for only one measure in the area of sexual abuse of children, implemented in 2012 within an NGO project funded from outside². Not all agencies and organisations working with children have child protection policies and procedures, providing for the application of appropriate mechanisms for staff and volunteers recruitment and selection, training, support and supervision, as well as clear procedures for response in the cases of child abuse.³

Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography whose transposition deadline has expired at the end of 2013, hadn't been implemented in the national legal system. The Amendment and Supplement draft law of the Penal Code, drafted by the institutions at the end of 2013 with the aim to implement the provisions in the Directive, even though brought to a plenary session on a second reading in June, 2014 hasn't been passed by the Parliament.

Another form of sexual abuse not tending to decrease in time⁴ is the cohabitation with minor and under-age girls. The usual results from these so called „early marriages“ are abortions, pregnancy and child delivery by children. The measures taken in this area resolve into „Making Verification by Referral in the Healthcare System in Cases of Minor or Under-age Pregnant Girls“⁵. In October 2013 the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP) undertook a special-purpose planned check on „Early Childbirths and Prevention of Abandonment of New-born Babies at the Maternity Hospitals“. The check proved the lack of a working mechanism for inter-agency coordination in these cases and resulted in issuing instructions for institutional cooperation⁶. The majority of early-marriage cases have been reported to the appropriate prosecution offices; however in most of the cases criminal proceedings haven't been undertaken.

It is a fact that measures are taken post-factum, however neither prevention of the phenomenon, nor active field work with the Roma community and formal health and sexual school education have been initiated.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Change in the legal framework treating child sexual abuse;
- Carrying out awareness-raising campaigns, developing and applying programmes on prevention of early marriages, for parents and state officials involved in protecting girls at risk of entering early marriages and the respective consequences;
- Urgent actions on introducing formal health and sexual school education.

2. See also <http://www.sapibg.org/prestupni-laski/seksualna-zlou-potreba>

3. See NNC position on <http://nmd.bg/stanovishte-na-natsionalna-mrezha-za-detsata-po-povod-slutchayana-nasilie-nad-dete-s-autizam-ot-sofiya/>

4. For instance there is an average of more than 50 cases in the last 4 years at the Pleven district court.

5. Point 12.1, Activity 4 of the Action plan for implementation of the final recommendations to the Republic of Bulgaria made by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), passed in 2013.

6. SACP, Analysis of the results of the undertaken planned check at the maternity hospitals and Social Assistance Directorates, as well as SACP report on „Monitoring on the implementation of the Coordination mechanism for cooperation in the cases of children, victims of abuse or at risk of abuse and for cooperation in crisis intervention“, 2013.

COMMITMENT

„Development of children's structures – introducing a four-level model“

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The analysis of the national child protection programs up to 2014 including and the 2011-2013 and 2014–2016 SACP strategic plans shows that child participation is recognized as a significant area and is a stated priority in the activities of the SACP. At the same time, it shows that in spite of the development of the local councils and the invested amount of efforts in this, the strategic focus is mainly on the Council of Children where 75% of the 2011-2013 activities have been concentrated, the trend continuing with the ones in the current 2014-2016 plan.

The Council of Children still faces the general difficulty of not being part of the Structural Regulations of the SACP, but only serving as a consultative body under the SACP Chairperson which is regulated in the Council of Children's Regulations alone. This results in a significant functional and resource dependency and prevents the Council from exercising its functions adequately with regard to the local councils including.

In 2014 the operational implementation of the provisions in the SACP Strategic Plan with regard to its own specific work on child participation continued to be carried out by means of the “Encouraging Child Participation by Strengthening the Role of the School Councils at School, Municipal and National Level” project implemented by “Partners - Bulgaria” in partnership with UNICEF – Bulgaria and the SACP. The project will continue through the 2014-2015 school year, the key challenge being how to turn the work of and with the councils into a starting point for the whole development of an institutionally supported child participation across the country without consisting in it alone.

HIGHLIGHT:

In 2014 the purposeful work on the children's right to opinion and participation was limited to one project and one specific way of child participation while the scope and number of needs related to this right remain unclear.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS:

- With regard to the recommendations of Gerison Lansdown, the SACP to begin a purposeful consultation process with the stakeholders from agencies and civil organisations aiming at developing a comprehensive Child Participation Plan in line with the 2008-2018 National Child Protection Strategy.
- To develop a monitoring and evaluation framework and start a process of regular assessment of child participation across the country to inform the development of the policies and practices in the area. This being based on the Child Participation Plan operationalizing the goals of the National Child Strategy.

COMMITMENT 1

Reducing the number of children aged 0-18 living in poverty with 78 000 persons (30% of the general national goal and 25% of the number of poor children in 2008)

HIGHLIGHT:

Children remain the poorest part of the population of the country (28,4 % compared to 28,2 % in the previous year) and in significant risk of becoming poor or socially excluded (51.5 % or 609 000 children).

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

Children are still a particularly vulnerable group in terms of the poverty indicators. Even though the general poverty indicator has decreased a little, the rate of poor children has grown and reached the level of 2010 - 28.4% (28.2% in 2011). It turns out that children are the poorest part of the population. With regard to their vulnerability of becoming poor or socially excluded, they rank second after the people aged 65+ (57,6%) with 51.5% or nearly 609 000 children. This is almost twice the EU average of children according to this indicator, which stands at 27,1%.⁷

Those at greatest risk of poverty remain the children raised by single parents and children raised in large families. The poverty level of the large families has decreased at the expense of an increase of the single parents' poverty level in the past period, while the current trend is the opposite and the rate of large families living in poverty is 68.1% compared to 31.6% single-parent families. The data on material deprivation of the children in the household show that almost half of them can't afford at least one daily meal consisting of meat, fish, fruit and vegetables, and 2/5 of the children can't be provided with new clothes.⁸

As a result of the amendments in the Rules on the Implementation of the Family Allowances Act in the autumn of 2013, the monthly allowances for children have been bound to the compulsory attendance of kindergarten (pre-school group) and school since the beginning of 2014 r. In the opinion of the National Network for Children this measure is ineffective since the compulsory character of the attendance itself doesn't result in the wider inclusion of the vulnerable group children. Outreaching these children demands comprehensive approaches and comprehensive family support services instead of punitive approach based on poverty.

In spite of the undertaken measures and increase in some of the allowances, in 2014 there is still no comprehensive approach to child and family support binding the social benefits with social work. According to the last National Social Report of the Republic of Bulgaria for 2013 – 2014, the influence of social transfers (pensions not included) on the decrease of the poverty risk is 4.7 %, which is twice lower than the EU average – 9 % and highlights the need to improve the effectiveness of social transfers which is part of the EC Specific recommendations to our country.⁹

Another challenge related to policy effectiveness is the need of development and practical implementation of the 'money follows the child' mechanism.¹⁰ Under the current legislation the increased allowances in 2014 don't result in quality improvement of the outcomes but only increase the expenditure on ineffective policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Developing and approving National Plan for the implementation of the „National Strategy for Decreasing Poverty and Social Exclusion 2020“.
- Developing a separate family policy with clear goals, measures and activities and adopting a family-oriented approach in all areas related to child welfare.
- Improving the effectiveness of social allowances by binding social benefits with social work based on individual approach and family assessment, too. Family support needs to be provided not only on the basis of the parents' income assessment but also of the other factors specifying the resources of the parents to look after their children.

7. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe_2020_indicators_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion#cite_note-8

8. NIS, Indicators for poverty and social inclusion in 2013, press release, Dec 15, 2014

9. http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_bg.htm

10. For further information, see the analysis and recommendations on the specific commitment.

COMMITMENT 1

Prevention of risky behavior and health promotion among children

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The National Child Protection Programme for 2014 provides for four operational objectives one of them being 'Prevention of Risky Behavior and Health Promotion among Children' in the implementation of the strategic aim 'Development and Promotion of Appropriate Services for Children and Families in the Healthcare System'. A number of campaigns and activities such as awareness-raising on the ill-effects of active and passive smoking, healthy diet, prevention of unwanted pregnancy, etc. have been planned and implemented to achieve this objective.¹¹

The analysis shows that efforts have been made in preventing child diseases; however there is no evaluation of the effectiveness of the activities. The number of activities is also insufficient to take in all the children.

HIGHLIGHT:

Efforts have been made in the prevention of child diseases; however there is no evaluation of the effectiveness of the activities. The number of activities is also insufficient to include all the children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Providing for the necessary funds from the state budget to finance the activities planned for the implementation of the programs on prevention of risky behavior and child health promotion.
- Developing a mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of the campaigns, making an annual analysis of the outcomes.
- Specifying the indicators to be achieved with the campaigns provided in the 2015 National Child Protection Programme and the other national prevention programs.
- Developing National Programme for improving sexual and reproductive health which has been delayed with more than 10 years.

11. Information from letter № 91-00-140 dated 3.11.2014 of the Ministry of Health regarding the progress in the implementation of the state commitments in the MoH competency reviewed in the NNC "Report Card 2015".

COMMITMENT 2

Introducing state policies for taking up part of the bank credits for housing of young and large families

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The National Child Programme for 2014 doesn't specify measures and activities or agencies involved in providing real access to quality housing (own or rented) with view to child welfare in the family context. Besides, the Programme is not linked with key strategic documents in the housing field, the main one being the National Housing Strategy. This results in lack of consistency and sporadic inter-sectorial approach of work distanced from the needs of the target group and strengthening the feeling of the families, especially the vulnerable ones, that there is no adequate state housing policy.

The available municipal housing is totally insufficient to meet the housing needs even of the persons filed for housing in line with the Regulation on the Terms and Conditions for Identifying Housing Needs, Accommodation and Selling Municipal Housing. The natural disasters in 2014 and the forced demolition of illegal Roma houses on the territory of Stara Zagora municipality and of Block 20 in Yambol some years earlier highlight the need to increase the number of available social housing to meet the housing needs of the identified families.

HIGHLIGHT:

The trend of decreasing the rate of occupied public (municipal or state) housing continues. They amounted to 2,6% at the last census in 2011 or nearly seven times less compared to the 1985 data when their rate was 16,2%.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Integrating specific measures and activities part of the housing component in the strategic documents conducting children's policies with the aim to provide housing conditions appropriate for quality early childhood development. Introducing quantity and quality indicators to monitor the implementation progress.
- Developing social housing policy focused on the child in a family context and the child's right to access to quality housing (own or rented) as a form of prevention of poverty and social exclusion. Municipalities to take the leading role.
- Making an assessment of the condition and needs for municipal housing aiming at updating the municipal housing strategies and programs by putting specific indicators and the budget needed for their accomplishment. Introducing provisions for annual increase in the number of municipal housing by building new one or utilizing the available unoccupied housing.

II.

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE



COMMITMENT 1

Increasing the knowledge and skills of the health professionals to provide appropriate and timely support to children at risk.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

Increasing the knowledge and skills of the health professionals, who are on the front-line in interacting with children and families, to provide appropriate and timely support to children at risk, remains unaccomplished in 2014. There is progress from practical point of view since hospitals recognize children at risk and refer them to the CPD. In most of the cases, however, their role is limited to making the referral and transferring the whole responsibility of the case on the CPD social workers. The cases of children with severe diseases or disabilities living in very poor and risky families are of special concern. After the expiry of the hospitalization, covered by the National Health Insurance Fund, the child is sent home and the GP observation and follow-up care alone is insufficient to guarantee safe and appropriate care of their special needs and timely professional response in case of complications. This often results in CPD making the decision to place the child in residential care which is painful both for the child and the family. The multidisciplinary teams consisting of health professionals, psychologists and CPD social workers, provided for in activity 2.1.1, need to continue to support the family and the child at home where is most favorable to the child's recuperation.

Hospital staff are still mostly negative and prejudiced against families at risk and ethnic minority families. No attempts have been made to empathies with the concerns and difficulties of the mothers with new-born babies or those attending their young child at the children's ward. They often have other children at home and the care routine in the mother's absence doesn't seem very reliable to the staff. The need of these mothers to provide safe and needs-based environment to the other children or dependent adults has been interpreted as an 'escape'. A well-trained, with the right attitude multidisciplinary team consisting of health professionals, CPD social worker and service provider would provide individual support recognizing the needs of the all the children in the family.

The fee for in-patient stay including basic hygiene materials and food for the person attending the child, the payment for some medical checks and basic necessities for the baby still presents difficulty to families at risk. The hospital requirement for foster children or children living in Family-type Placement Centers/ Emergency Centers to be attended can be very difficult to meet sometimes. In some cases the foster mother has more foster or birth children at home and finds it impossible to provide informal respite care for them. The Centers need to organize second shift which is not always possible and premises for accidents and worse quality of care for the rest of the children in the Centre. Most hospitals do not allow male family member attendants especially in the children's wards.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Trainings to be provided to the professionals working directly with children and families. The MoH to monitor the work of the trained professionals.
- To set up multidisciplinary teams at the hospitals consisting of health professionals, psychologists, CPD social workers and service providers. The teams must follow the same values and work standards in prevention of child abandonments/ institutionalization by providing multidisciplinary support to the child in the family environment in the light of the community pediatrics supporting child protection.

2.1.

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

COMMITMENT 2

Setting up a minimal package of activities in taking protection measures – prevention of abandonment, reintegration, kinship care, foster care and adoption

HIGHLIGHT:

The principle behind the identification and planning of the operational objectives of the priority areas, and the relative activities is not clear – there is no general methodology for planning and monitoring of the National Child Protection Strategy and the respective National Child Protection Programme.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The response of the SACP and the ASA when asked about the progress on this commitment makes referral to other commitments related not to child protection measures but rather to the development of social services.

Among the commitments included in the 2014 National Child Protection Programme are not only the ones related to the service provision network but also to the child protection measures: setting up a minimal package of activities in taking protection measures – prevention of abandonment, reintegration, kinship care, foster care and adoption.

The rationale behind the commitment formulated in this way leads to the conclusion that the state institutions' expectation has been to involve not only the social services but other child protection authorities as well in a consistent and filled with minimal activities work process in applying the protection measures. According to the Child Protection Act these authorities are the Minister of Labor and Social Policy, the Minister of Education, Youth and Science, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Culture, the Minister of Health and the municipal mayors. If this was the commitment's idea and the commitment was included in order to outline the work process of the state institutions when applying protection measures then certain steps needed to have been taken in this direction. This is especially valid in a situation where systems don't operate in a synchronized way even in applying protection measures. *(For example, a Dawn syndrome child (a twin in a family with 3 children) reintegrated in the family from an institution has been refused access to kindergarten due to the insufficient capacity of the kindergarten.)*

In view of the above, comes the logical question how effective is the development of the National Child Protection Programme. If the state institutions responsible for the implementation of the commitment have different interpretations, and no steps have been taken in this direction, we recommend a review of the process of developing and agreeing the Programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To make the development of the National Child Protection programmed more effective so that the commitments of the state institutions involved are incorporated in their plans in due course.
- The commitments of the state institutions involved in the National Child Protection Programme implementation to be planned on a longer-term basis (at least 2-yearly).

COMMITMENT 1

To introduce a funding mechanism encouraging the municipalities to develop community-based services and based on the 'money follows the child' principle.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

To a certain extent the mechanism of compensated change reviewed in detail in the 2014¹² Report Card gives opportunities to the municipalities to re-direct resources from decreased capacities or closed down institutions (mainly Homes for Children Deprived of Parental Care) to setting up new social services, increasing the capacity of functioning ones and providing sustainability of the services set up under the 'Human Resource Development' Operational Programme. This mechanism however is far from the 'money follows that child' model, which provides for individual financial standard for each child to best meet the needs of the child in the new family or family-type placement. These include reintegration (currently families are given small fixed allowances), foster care and residential care. The practice in many institutions is to discharge the children even without clothes which puts burden on the receiving family/ service. One of the legal amendments, developed in 2014 and coming into force from January 2015, is the introduction of a differentiated approach to outlining the standards for funding delegated by the state social services - Family-Type Placement Centre (FTPC), Protected Housing and Daycare Centre, by means of the municipal budgets. This approach in a way compensates for the low costs for these services but demands differentiation of the services – the more difficult the target group, the harder to find staff to work with it. The cost increase for the difficult service-users is insufficient to offer attractive remuneration or to hire extra staff.

As far as re-directing funds from the closed down Homes for Medical and Social Care for Children (HMSSC) is concerned, the existing practices are partial and inconsistent. The model of closing down the HMSSC in Teteven¹³ hasn't been replicated in the closure of the HMSSC in Shiroka Laka and Kyustendil, in spite of the need and willingness of the municipalities to set up new/ increase the capacity of the existing children and family services.

The 2014 National Child Protection Programme provides for developing a funding mechanism for re-directing funds from institutional care to the new alternative services and measures – and/ or family support by taking part in a working group at the Ministry of Finance. An inter-agency working group (MoF, MLSP, MoH, National Association of the Municipalities of the Republic of Bulgaria) has been set up all the way back in 2013 with the task to develop a mechanism for re-directing the released funds from institutional care to community-based care for children and their families however there is still no mechanism guaranteeing re-direction of funds from the closed down specialized institutions to the new services. There is no information about the work pattern, models used and the progress of the group.

The current practice with regard to the 'money follows the child' principle is a practice of transferring funds from one service to another without actually following the child.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To finalize the development and introduction of a mechanism for re-directing resources in order to provide not only sustainability to the EU funded social services but also individualized financial support to the families raising children as part of the work on prevention of abandonment, reintegration, kinship care and foster care.
- To put in the agenda of the MoF working group the development of 'money follows the child' approach with the participation of NGO, external experts and study of the international practices.
- To provide for more transparency in the calculation and decision-making process on the use of the saved from the institutional system funds.
- To reinstate the work on the new Social Services Act. .

12. Report Card 2014, pg.46-47

13. 2/3 of the budget is re-directed to the newly-opened social service Community Support Centre regulated in an agreement protocol between the MH and the Teteven Municipality (with the support of the MLSP) offering to the Minister of Finance to make compensated changes in the 2011 MH and Teteven Municipality budgets according to Art. 34, Par. 2 from the State Budget Act.

COMMITMENT 2

Continuing the process of reforming institutional care and observing the rights of the children raised in specialized institutions by implementing the projects in the Action Plan

HIGHLIGHT:

There are serious concerns that the implementation of the projects is focused on their technical and administrative provision rather than on the best interest of the children and the protection of their rights.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The projects from the Action Plan were supposed to enter their final stage in 2014. In fact, the six projects¹⁴ were extended to implement their activities and spend the financial resources to the highest degree.

In general, the state institutions report progress in the implementation of the pilot projects, however the information from working meetings and informal contacts with municipal and NGO representatives about the way the activities take place locally, is contradictory. Several organizations responded by sending official letters to the state institutions raising serious concerns with regard to the assessments, the preparation of children and young people for moving and the moving to the new services itself. The main concerns are related to the fact that project indicators and administrative requirements are given priority at the expense of the best interest of the children and young people.

A turning point in reconsidering the experience was the review of the external expert Joanna Rogers written in June, 2014 "Review and Evaluation of the Implementation of the National Strategy 'Vision for the Deinstitutionalisation of the Children in Bulgaria'"¹⁵. It gave an impartial view on the achievements and challenges to the process which need to be addressed adequately in the next stage. Key moments in the review are the finalization of the process of deinstitutionalisation of all HMSCC, HCDPC and HCLD with a focus on preventing the separation of children from their families, updating the Action Plan, introducing a general monitoring system of the process.

Although a number of non-governmental organisations have openly stated their willingness to cooperate and provide support on local level, in 2014 the NGO sector remained excluded from the management and coordination of the deinstitutionalization process. The inter-agency group on deputy-ministerial level met only once during the year and by the time of outlining the commitment there had been no clarity about its members, chairperson and willingness to communicate with NGO representatives.

There has been no information by the end of the year either on how and whether the Action Plan of the DI Vision would be updated or how the NGOs concerns with regard to the lack of proper coordination and communication among the stakeholders would be addressed.

Reconsideration of the future development of the DI process needs to include the methodologies for managing the various 'community'-based services of residential type with regard to separating the accommodation of the children from the service provision. This goes with a change in the staff structure – care staff in the services and social workers in the social services.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Emphasizing on increasing the effectiveness of the child protection system by providing systematic, purposeful and regular support and training to its employees.
- Publicity and transparency of the whole process of leadership, coordination and decision-making by making it clear who manages the whole DI process and coordinates the actions of the stakeholders; setting up the inter-agency working group and inviting NGOs to take part in it.
- Updating the Action Plan for 2015-2020 so that the commenced reforms don't end up as sporadic intervention without sustainable and complete outcomes.
- Carrying out an impartial analysis of the model of closing down the pilot HMSCC and planning the closure of the rest of the baby homes.

14. Project „Childhood for All“, „DIRECTION: Family“, „I Have a Family, too“, „Developing the System of Planning and Provision of Social Services on Regional Level“, „Developing the Capacity of the ASA System to Increase the Quality and Effectiveness of Social Work“ and „Support“.

15. DEINSTITUTIONALISATION OF CHILDREN IN BULGARIA - HOW FAR AND WHERE TO? Independent review of progress and challenges, UNICEF, Sofia, 2014

COMMITMENT 1

To develop social services for mandatory preparation of prospective adopters and children who are to be adopted; and for support of adopters and adopted

HIGHLIGHT:

There is no practice of collecting, processing and analyzing statistical data and information about the problems in the adoptive families, abuse, bad school results, deviant behavior, etc.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The process of adoption in Bulgaria is not a state priority; it is complicated, confusing and not coordinated among the numerous agencies. The bad practice of disclosing the adoption to the children inappropriately and by the wrong people deeply hurts them and has long-term effects on their mental and emotional development. The research of the Bulgarian Association of Adopted and Adopters carried out among adoptive parents, shows that Bulgarian society is still neglecting and discriminative against adoption. This has a negative effect on the overall situation of the adopting families by putting them in isolation. There is no standard for prospective adopters' trainings, no support services for the child and the adopters during the post-adoption period; the work with families is not of mandatory or preventive nature. Key factor for successful adoption is building the sensitivity of the adopters towards the past of the child, the traumas and the effects of institutionalization. This is possible to achieve only through intensive work with the family. The monitoring done by the CPD is often formal and doesn't provide support; the social workers haven't been trained to work with adopters and adopted children.

There is no practice of collecting, processing and analyzing statistical data and information about the problems in the adoptive families, abuse, bad school results, deviant behavior, etc. There are no measures to prevent adoption breakdown.

In spite of the recommendation of the UN Human Rights Council to Bulgaria in the UPR report from 2010: 'To introduce legislation prohibiting the secrecy of adoption and guarantee the right of the child to know their origin' the secrecy of adoption is legally regulated and practiced. The origin and family relations of the child are kept in secrecy or thoroughly deleted thus infringing their rights enshrined in art. 8 of the UN CRC i.e. the right to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations. Birth origin of the children adopted under the conditions of full adoption has its legal meaning in a number of occasions including the assessment and recognition of obstacles to concluding matrimony between relatives next to kin, brothers and sisters, as well as other relatives who are collateral kinsmen up to 4th level (Art.7, Par.2, l.1 and 2 from the Family Code).

In practice there are no provisions on the responsible authority, type of procedure and stage at which an assessment of the obstacles to concluding matrimony is made. This raises the question whether such an assessment is made at all. The procedure of the only legally settled provision for disclosure of birth origin (Art. 105 from the FC) is slow and requires court proceedings.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- There is a need for a state policy on supporting the adoption process, raising the awareness of the society and forming a tolerant, humane and civilized public attitude towards adoption.
- To provide specialization and qualification in adoption of the professionals working in the child protection system, service provision and education.
- Collection, summary and analysis of detailed statistical data on the adoption process, the adaptation of the adopted children in the family and society as well as information on the effect of adoption on children.
- To regulate a mandatory package of support services for adopters including design of financial regulation and standard for support services and support for children and adoptive parents during the matching and the post-adoption period.
- To support the parents in disclosing adoption to the child in the right moment and in an appropriate way, so that the child feels part of the family and not excluded or betrayed.
- To collect and keep both essential information about the origin of the child and information regarding health circumstances and genetic predisposition.
- To simplify the procedure of exercising the right to information about birth origin, observing the rights and interests of all parties.

COMMITMENT 2

To improve the quality of the kinship care services and the voluntary and professional foster care

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

A total of 2178 children¹⁶ have been placed in foster care by June 30, 2014. Foster care has already been developed on a national scale during the year and people living in smaller towns as well as in the cities have been involved with it for the first time. Between January – September 2014 a total of 599 children were placed in foster care – 173 of them are children from specialized institutions and 315 are children from the community. Young children aged 0-3 are the ones most often placed in foster care – a total of 315.¹⁷

The so-called unified financial standard (UFS) for foster care was expected to be finalized in 2014 as part of the 'I Have a Family, Too' project. It was supposed to make possible the provision of foster care by the municipalities with clear subsidy from the state budget. This hasn't been achieved by the end of the year and there is no information about the progress of the process.

A special questionnaire has been worked out for the purposes of this analysis to ask foster caregivers about their definition of the service quality. Part of them have very good understanding of what makes foster care – from the proper selection of applicants and the fact that foster care shouldn't be taken for granted to how foster caregivers and service providers can meet the needs of the child. Good attitude towards the family and support from service providers have been ranked high. Another category of foster care responses, however indicate either about lack of support or ineffective support. These responses recommend foster caregivers 'to be left alone and to be visited only quarterly', they deny the role of the trainings provided by the foster care provider and set requirements such as 'not to adopt children placed in foster care'¹⁸. Comprehensions like these about foster care shared by foster caregivers raise concerns whether these are the right people for the job and what happens to the children placed with them.

Foster care is both a service and a child protection measure according to Bulgarian legislation. At the same time, the main foster care providers until recently have been the CPDs and they are still a key factor in the quality of the service in spite of their dual role as placement body and service provider. CPD decisions about children are key to the quality of foster care in the light of the needs and rights of children, especially in the process of deinstitutionalization.

Case study:

A five-year old child placed at the HMSCC in Varna since birth. The child has already experienced 2 broken adoptions and 1 broken foster care placement by the age of 5. In 2014 the child was moved from the institution to foster caregivers in Sofia. At some point, the child was identified for adopting again by the CPD and only the insistence of the foster care provider and the restoration of the child's life story had stopped the adoption process for the time being.

The review of such cases proves the failure of the CPDs' role in the foster care process. They don't have the capacity to respond to children's cases timely and appropriately, don't have the time and capacity to restore children's life stories and make informed decisions. The placement of children from big cities to small towns and villages only because there are foster caregivers (but no children) questions even further the centralized model of management of the child protection system and its key role in the care and service quality on local level.

Children in kinship care

More than 6700¹⁹ children have been raised formally in kinship care by December 31, 2013 in Bulgaria and another 925 children²⁰ have been placed in kinship care only between January and September, 2014. No significant changes have been observed with regard to this measure in 2014. It is not clear how many caregivers get support and how many don't get since there is no information on this²¹.

17. Letter from SACP, outgoing № 14-00-12 dated 30.10.2014. Information on the progress of the implementation of the state commitments in the area of expertise of the SACP for Report Card 2015. – outgoing № 14-00-12 dated 30.10.2014.
18. Quotes from foster care questionnaires
19. Activity report of the Agency for Social Assistance in 2013.
20. Letter from ASA, outgoing N 63 – 146 dated 24.10.2014, about Providing information on the implementation of the activities and policies for children and families in Bulgaria in relation to the preparation of the 'Report Card 2015: What is the Average Government Score for Childcare?'
21. Same source
22. http://dariknews.bg/view_article.php?article_id=1262664
<http://bnt.bg/part-of-show/detsatana-gurbetchiite>
<http://nasoki.bg/bg/15-interview/280-zhecheva-gurbet-deca>
<http://bnt.bg/part-of-show/emigrantski-dnevni-tsi-ili-kak-prehodat-pra-sna-po-sveta-900-hil-ba-lgari>

COMMITMENT 2

HIGHLIGHT:

The issue of children whose parents work abroad remains acute in 2014. An eleven-year child died and his sister was severely injured in an explosion at home in March 2014. The two children, whose parents worked abroad, lived on their own with occasional overseeing by relatives. The accident gave rise to a number of TV reportages and press publications about 'the children of working abroad parents', who are left in Bulgaria. According to the SACP the number of children, whose parents work abroad, is not clear. According to a study carried out by 'Partners - Bulgaria' their number is nearly 270 000. The effects of the so called 'Skype parents' have been discussed recently.²²

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To make a long-term plan for the development of foster care across the country based on the target groups on municipal and regional level so that municipalities can apply for state funding.
- To finalize the process of foster care decentralization by introducing the unified financial standard for the 'foster care' service to guarantee the sustainability of the service as delegated by the state. To give municipalities clear instructions on applying the UFS and managing foster care.
- To review the UFS after one year of operation and to update its structure, amount and way of provision as subsidy.
- To plan for a project on strengthening the capacity of the municipalities in foster care provision and management.
- To involve NGOs in the process of piloting new types of placements across the country and to inform the UFS.
- To clarify the quality indicators applicable on local and national level. They will be used in the monitoring of foster care and kinship care. To involve children and young people in the process. To introduce indicators reflecting the trends in foster care on national level.
- To work towards broadening the scope and variety of services for children in kinship care and children whose parents are abroad.

III.

HEALTHCARE



COMMITMENT 1

Situational analysis and evaluation of the provision of preventive medical checks to pregnant women and children and the effectiveness of these checks

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The Ministry of Health has provided for legal and financial mechanisms for access to healthcare of all pregnant women regardless of their health-insurance status. Unfortunately, not all pregnant women (due to poverty, illiteracy or health ignorance reasons) make use of the services of the system. The state provides the pregnant women, who are not insured against health risks, with the following: one free obstetrician medical check consisting of ultra-sound and clinical examinations; midwife's assistance during childbirth in a hospital chosen by the pregnant woman.

The work of the health mediators also contributes to improving the access of marginalized communities to healthcare. Health mediators organize and support the doctor's visits for observation of ethnic minority pregnant women without health insurance.

With regard to the implementation of the Health Strategy for Disadvantaged Persons from ethnic minorities, the health inspectors from the Regional Health Inspectorates and the health mediators have organized a number of discussions, trainings and campaigns on prevention of unwanted pregnancy, the significance of vaccinations, and seminars with medical professionals from kindergartens and schools, teachers, educators, etc. during the first half of 2014.

HIGHLIGHT:

A total of 1 756 321 preventive medical checks have been made under the 'Children Healthcare' programmed and 349 996 under the 'Maternity Healthcare' programmed between January 1 and September 30, 2014 according to information from the National Health Insurance Fund.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To plan targeted activities in the 2015 National Programme for Child Protection for reducing children diseases of social importance. These need to have measurable outcomes and indicators otherwise separate programmed reporting makes the responsibilities of the stakeholders and the activities themselves unclear.
- To develop a system for monitoring and control of the provision of preventive medical checks to pregnant women and children. To set measurable indicators serving as a basis of the evaluation.
- To set real indicators for reporting the effectiveness of the preventive medical checks of pregnant women and children.

1. По информация от писмо № 91-00-140 от 3.11.2014 г. на МЗ относно напредъка по изпълнение на държавните ангажименти от компетентността на МЗ, разглеждан в доклад на Националната мрежа за децата „Бележник 2015“
2. Отговор на НЗОК по Заявление за достъп до обществена информация с вх. № 24-00-54 от 18.11.2014 г.
3. Справка по заявление за достъп до обществена информация с вх. № 93-00-4 от 20.01.2015 г., получено с писмо от Министерство на здравеопазването с вх. № 93-00-4 от 04.02.2015 г.

3.1.

IN-PATIENT AND OUT-PATIENT CARE

COMMITMENT 2

Providing early diagnostics and rehabilitation to children with neurological diseases by setting up specialized centers

HIGHLIGHT:

Currently, the Ministry of Health has no single register of children with chronic and neurological diseases.

The planned set-up of specialized centers for treatment of children with neurological diseases hasn't happened yet. No such center were opened in 2014.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

According to the National Health Insurance Fund regulations in Bulgaria, rehabilitation of children with disabilities can be covered financially by seven different clinical paths in hospitals depending on the main disease resulting in the need of rehabilitation. One can also be provided by out-patient care and health insurance.²³ Early diagnostics of neurological diseases during the pre-, perinatal- and post-natal period of the child's development is essential in view of the potential of timely treatment. The total number of children diagnosed with neurological diseases in 2014 is 23 828 compared to 24 578 in 2013 and 24 387 in 2012.²⁴

Children born with neurological diseases need to be referred to specialized hospitals where a team of professionals develops and carries out a programmed for thorough diagnostics, treatment and complete medical and pedagogical rehabilitation, controls its implementation, trains parents and makes them part of the rehabilitation team. There is an urgent need for a single register of children with chronic and neurological diseases. It would make it possible for proper, long-term planning of the funds needed for medical and social activities with these children. Currently, the Ministry of Health has no such information and register.²⁵

According to the regulations on using the service pack covered by the Health Insurance Fund, children with cerebral palsy are entitled to 120 days of rehabilitation on an annual basis scheduled by the doctor. Rehabilitation is available in 57 hospitals and 17 Homes for Medical and Social care for Children and is funded by the Health Insurance Fund. Specialized rehabilitation centers are insufficient to meet the needs of the large number of children with disabilities.

More specialized centers need to be equipped and furnished to provide access to quality medical and psychological rehabilitation of children with cerebral palsy, and training of specialists in applying contemporary methods of treatment. Only a few specialized hospital wards are equipped with modern appliances and have specialists trained to apply contemporary work methods and approaches. Several Homes for Medical and Social care for Children already have traditions in multi-disciplinary approach to treatment and rehabilitation of such disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To introduce mandatory pre-natal screening. Although there is a trend in increasing the number of screenings of women with risk pregnancy in the last 3 years, it is recommendable some of them to become mandatory for all pregnant women in order to give them the opportunity to make an informed decision.
- To train birth parents, foster careers and adopters in providing care and rehabilitation to children with neurological diseases.
- To provide quality training and specialization to Bulgarian professionals in centers for treatment and rehabilitation abroad.
- To provide access to children living in remote areas by setting up specialized hospitals and centers for treatment and rehabilitation.
- To make a single register of children with chronic and neurological diseases. It would make it possible for proper, long-term planning of the funds needed for medical and social activities with these children. According to information from the MoH, there are provisions for the implementation of 'Improving the Control and Information Systems for Prevention of the Risk in Healthcare' project, with beneficiary the National Centre for Public Health and Analyses (NCPHA).
- To research and compare the provided healthcare with regard to rehabilitation and treatment of children with neurological diseases in the small towns and big cities in Bulgaria.
- To provide opportunities for running self-support groups and psycho-therapeutic support to parents in any hospital for treatment and rehabilitation so that parents can share information on their experience and ways of coping with everyday issues.

23. According to the information from MoH letter № 91-00-140 dated 3.11.2014 on the progress of the implementation of the state commitments in the area of expertise of the MoH for NNC Report Card 2015.

24. Response from the NHIF to application for access to public information, № РД-19-8 dated 27.01.2015.

25. Same source.

COMMITMENT 1

Introduced programs for mental health wellbeing of children, including preventive care programs for children with mental health issues and their families.

HIGHLIGHT:

The work of the National Mobile Group for Psychological Support was stopped in 2014.

Mental health issues of children continue to be outside the scope of the definition for Special Educational Needs. This deprives a number of children from the opportunity to get support, and makes them subjects of treatment of the methods and measures of the Juvenile Delinquency Act which often doesn't correspond to their needs of mental-health care and treatment.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The reform in psychiatry adopted by the State in 2007 hasn't been implemented following Bulgaria's EU accession in spite of the commitments and the existence of strategic documents for healthcare reform. As a result, Bulgaria comes last in Europe on mental health care as indicated in the report of The Economist Intelligence Unit²⁶.

The development of 'Child Psychiatry' medical standard in 2014 marks the main progress in the area of children's mental health. The standard is to be discussed and accepted by leading medical professionals in the area and approved with an ordinance issued by the Minister of Health. The approval of the standard is expected to achieve the following objectives: early diagnostics and effective treatment, consultation and methodological support for the medical and non-medical specialists working with children; increasing the expert work of the Labor Expert Doctors' Panel system, social care and education on children's mental health issues.²⁷ The Ministry of Health approved a paper called 'Measures for Improving Care in Support of Autistic People and Their Families' in June 2013. The paper is accompanied by an Action Plan consisting of the following directions: "screening of autism", "early diagnostics", "early intervention", "provision of integrated services", "raising the awareness of the society and health professionals on the issues and potential of people with autism", "staff training and qualification", "partnership with other countries/ international cooperation". NCPHA took part and organized five events on the topic of autism in 2014. Hundreds of participants and service users, parents of children with autism, NGO members, etc. were involved in the events. The aim of the events was raising public awareness on the issues of autism and improving the quality of care and life of children with autism. NCPHA supported training for sensor integration specialists delivered by an NGO between June – September 2014.²⁸

The need for providing psychological support to children victims of abuse is urgent. Kindergarten and school professionals are possible resource in meeting it. Psychological counselling and support come up as a leading topic in the discussions regarding care provision in the cases of child abuse and emerges as an urgent task of the state. Unfortunately, there is still no clearly outlined national policy on psychological provision in education. The work of the National Mobile Group for Psychological Support was stopped with a decision of the Minister of Education and Science in 2014. It used to meet the need of interaction in crisis or child abuse cases and to provide support to schools in response to the growing needs of the students. This had a negative effect on the education system and made it uncertain in case management, especially in the areas where there are no school psychologists and pedagogical advisors or there is shortage of psychologists from the resource centers for children with special educational needs.

The lagging behind of the health sector in child care is a major obstacle for the further implementation of programs, projects and planned activities which have turned successful and paved the way for programs for mental-health wellbeing of children.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To prioritise the development of national programmed targeted at investing in children with a focus on early childhood development. To apply in practice the standards for early childhood development.
- To apply in practice the childhood development screening test for children aged 3-3.5 from the pilot kindergartens of the MoE 'Inclusive Education' project.
- To start the provision of mental health services for autistic children according to a document adopted by the MoH.
- To carry out a national research on children's mental health and the need for services and care programs.
- To turn into action the initiative for setting up a care network for children's mental health by integrating the services in the healthcare, social and educational systems jointly with the NGOs.

26. http://www.mentalhealthintegration.co.uk/media/whitepaper/Executive_Summary_EIU-Janssen_Mental_Health.pdf

27. Information from the MoH, letter with outgoing № 91-00-140 dated 03.11.2014.

28. Same source.

COMMITMENT 1

Reducing the infant mortality indicators and making them close to the good EU member states practices to achieve the Millennium goals for Bulgaria: reducing infant mortality rate of children aged up to 5 to 9,5 out of 1000 live births; of children aged up to 1 - to 7,0 children out of 1000 live births, perinatal mortality rate to aim at 8,0 out of 1000 children, the percentage of low-weight born alive children to aim at 6 out of 1000 born alive children.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

Infant mortality rate²⁹ is an indicator reflecting in part the quality of medical care, but is most of all linked with the standard of living and health awareness of the population.

According to the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) information, a total of 489 children aged up to 1 (7.3%) and 115 children aged between 1-4 (4 years, 11 months and 29 days) have died in 2013 i.e. a total of 604 children aged up to 5.³⁰ The 'Mortality rate of children aged up to 5 in 1000 live births' indicator is 9.07‰ according to this information which means that one of the Millennium goals - 9.5‰, has been achieved. The number of deaths of children aged up to 1 has reduced progressively amounting to 536 children in 2012 and 601 children in 2011.

On a regional scale, in 2013 the infant mortality rate is lower than the average one for the country in 12 regions: in Turgovishte region being the lowest one of 2.7‰, Varna - 4.2‰, and Sofia (the capital) - 4.7‰. The highest infant mortality rate has been registered in the Lovech region (16.5‰). Higher than the average infant mortality rate are the ones in the regions of Shumen (12.9‰), Sliven (12.8‰) and Pazardjik (11.1‰). In spite of the positive trend in reducing the levels of infant mortality, it is still among the highest in the EU. It is only Romania who has higher level of this indicator than Bulgaria. In most of the EU countries the infant mortality rate is below 5.0‰, the lowest ones being in Slovenia - 1.6‰, Finland - 2.4‰, and Luxembourg - 2.5‰. The infant mortality rate was 3.8‰³¹ in 2012 for EU-28 in general.

Perinatal infant mortality³² keeps high level in 2013, too (10,3‰), however there is a reduction in comparison to 2012 (11.0‰) and 2011 (11.7‰).

The analysis of the deaths of children aged up to 1, based on death causes doesn't differ significantly in the last years. The birthrate indicator for still-births has reduced compared to last year. It was 7,25‰ in 2013 and 8.06‰ in 2012; the death cause in 451 out of 483 cases of still-born children in total was related to some perinatal conditions and in 32 cases – to innate abnormalities, deformations and chromosome malformations.

The National Programme for Improving Mother and Child Healthcare 2014-2020 and the Action Plan were passed in 2014.

29. Infant mortality rate shows the number of deaths of children under one year of age out of 1 000 born alive children. It is calculated in thousandths as a ratio between the number of deaths of children below the age of one and the number of live births in the reference year. (according to Population and demographic processes 2013, published by the National Institute of Statistics)

30. Letter № 91-00-140 dated 3.11.2014 from the MoH on the progress of the implementation of the state commitments in the area of expertise of the MoH for NNC Report Card 2015.

31. Population and demographic processes 2013, published by the National Institute of Statistics, pgs. 28-29

32. Perinatal mortality indicates the number of still-born children and those born alive who have died in the first 6 days from birth out of 1 000 born children (alive and still-born), i.e. the mortality between the 28th week of pregnancy till the 6th day after birth.

COMMITMENT 1

HIGHLIGHTS:

1. The 'Mortality rate of children aged up to 5 in 1000 live births' indicator is 9.07‰ according to this information which means that one of the Millennium goals - 9.5‰, has been achieved.

2. The highest infant mortality rate has been registered in the Lovech region (16.5‰). Higher than the average infant mortality rate are the ones in the regions of Shumen (12.9‰), Sliven (12.8‰) and Pazardjik (11.1‰) compared to 3.8‰ for EU-28 in general in 2012. There are serious issues influencing the healthcare of pregnant women and children the main ones being the uneven distribution of GP practices, gaps in the implementation of the packages of preventive and dispensary check-ups for pregnant women and children, lack of organized ultra sound screening of pregnant women, insufficient capacity of the system for diagnostics of pathological pregnancies, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To make every endeavour for the implementation of the planned activities in the National Programme for improving mother and child healthcare in line with the accepted deadlines and provided funding.
- To take concrete measures for reducing infant mortality rate in the regions of Lovech, Shumen, Sliven and Pazardjik.
- To prioritise measures for reducing the impact of the risk factors on the health condition of pregnant women and new-born babies.
- To point out concrete activities in the National Child Protection Programme for 2015 for reducing infant mortality. The activities have to be implemented on the basis of documents passed by the respective agencies.

IV.

EDUCATION



COMMITMENT 1

Introduced standards for early childhood development

HIGHLIGHT:

The various ministries and state institutions provide a number of services focused on the development of young children, however their approach is fragmented. There is no integrated framework for early childhood which incorporates all sectorial policies and efforts and unifies them in a comprehensive inter-sectorial strategy ensuring shared philosophy and uniform approach to early childhood development.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

There are a number of negative trends with regard to key indicators for children welfare³³ showing that national policies and institutional framework are unable to respond to the growing inequalities in society and meet the needs of children and families, especially the most vulnerable ones.

Early childhood development incorporates the whole range of support to the child starting from the prenatal phase till the age of 8 in order to implement the child's right to survival, protection and care guaranteeing their best development. In November 2014, a team from the Institute for Population and Human Studies, part of the Bulgarian Academy of Science, introduced development standards and indicators, as well as strategies for care, upbringing and education of children aged 0-36 months. The project was initiated and supported by UNICEF – Bulgaria and appeared as a response to the need of applying a systematic, interdisciplinary approach to early childhood development in order to improve the quality of childcare.

A parent-oriented toolkit on the implementation of the standards is to be developed.³⁴ Screening tests for early childhood development of children aged 3 - 3,5 are being used in kindergartens at the moment. There are programs for psychological and speech-therapy support for children at risk, too. At the same time, there is no information about the MoE plans with regard to the future use of the collected data and the provision of support to professionals to ensure quality direct work with children.

The SABER 2014 report of the World Bank³⁵ analyzing the early childhood development programs and policies in Bulgaria, reports that the various ministries and state institutions provide a number of services focused on the development of young children, however their approach is fragmentary. The evaluation points out the need for coordination of the national efforts in encouraging the overall early childhood development by adopting an integrated framework for early childhood which incorporates all sectorial policies and efforts and unifies them in a comprehensive inter-sectorial strategy ensuring shared philosophy and uniform approach to early childhood development.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To define the concrete application of the developed standards for early (0-36 month) childhood development and their potential users.
- To undertake activities for developing standards for the development of children aged 3-7.
- To develop a uniform, multi-sectorial strategy for early childhood development and a plan for its implementation.
- To develop programs for early childhood development which are flexible, oriented to the early prevention of risks, and meet the emerging children and families needs.
- To make use of the existing and NGO-applied good practices on early childhood education and care and to replicate them across the country.
- To regulate and make possible the development of a variety of alternative care for early childhood education and care to meet the individual needs of the children

33. See key facts and data on the situation of children in Bulgaria at <http://nmd.bg/konferentsiya-na-visoko-nivo-vrannoto-detsko-razvitiie-v-pravo-i-investitsiya-s-dalgotraen-efektiv/>

34. For further information about the standards see „Early childhood development and learning standards: from birth to 3 years“, publ. Bulvest 2000, Sofia 2014

35. <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/eca/Bulgaria/unicef/SABER%20ECD%20-%20WORLD%20BANK%20%2005%20June%20%20final.pdf>

COMMITMENT 2

Developing syllabuses for pre-school education and preparation

HIGHLIGHT:

The National Network for Children proposes to change the name 'syllabuses' of the programs since this has connotation of early schooling while the process of piling knowledge in early childhood should not be limited only to cognitive development. The term 'early childhood education and care programs' has been put forward instead.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The term 'early childhood education and care' (ECEC) refers to publicly funded and provided services for children who haven't reached the compulsory school age. 'Education' and 'care' are united in a phrase to emphasize that services for children under 7 can incorporate physical care but need to provide opportunities for learning and development, as well³⁶. The list of key principles for quality framework in the area of ECEC suggested and prepared by an EC working group, and published in October 2014, points out the definition that ECEC services cover the age range from birth to the compulsory school age irrespective of the environment of provision, funding, working time or content of the programmed.

The national rate of admission of children between 3 and 6 years of age to kindergartens in Bulgaria was 83.6% in 2013/14 and has indicated stable increase since 2010.

In its position paper on the draft programs³⁷ submitted for public discussion in the autumn of 2014, the National Network for Children insists that the quality improvement of the programs follows a systematic approach. This approach provides for a consistency and sustainability cycle of the acquired knowledge and skills, interconnection between the separate programs, and opportunity for adding further modules to the programmed responding to the interests and needs of the children.

The Network member organisations insist on abolishing the 'subject' model of education in the kindergartens and focusing on areas of child development and knowledge, e.g. 'man and society' (incorporating the 'I' and 'the others' concepts, relationships with the others, building tolerance and skills for accepting the different, everyday activities, interaction and acquaintance with the environment and artefacts, etc.), 'language and communication', 'science', 'art and aesthetics', 'physical culture', etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To prioritise the development of state educational standards for pre-school education and learning Bulgarian and to go in parallel with the process of discussion and adoption of the Pre-school and School Education draft law.
- To develop multi-sectorial strategy for early childhood development in Bulgaria.
- To develop standards for development of children aged 3-7, and early child education and care programs for children aged 0-3 as well as 4-7.
- To pay special attention to the adults-children ratio in the nurseries and kindergartens since the quality of interaction depends to a large extent on the potential of the teachers and specialists to pay individual attention to every child.
- To pay special attention to the environment as a factor for the education at the nurseries, kindergartens and pre-school groups at school.
- To pay special attention to children with special educational needs and bilingual children at the early childhood education and care stage.

36. „Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities“, European Commission, 2009

For further information see the publication „Faces of Child Poverty“, UNICEF and Open Society, Sofia 2010 at <https://www.unicef.bg/assets/PDFs/new/41.pdf>

37. Please see Note 27

COMMITMENT 2.1

Taking in 100% of the children from the primary school stage, 95% of the children from the junior high school stage, 90% of the children finishing high school.

HIGHLIGHTS:

1. Junior high school stage is the stage at which a large number of students drop out from school.
2. The lack of effective mechanisms for coordination between the school, social services and parents makes very difficult the work of the school teams, who are limited in responding to cases of children at risk of dropping out.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The Government passed a Plan for the Implementation of the 2013-2020 Strategy for Decreasing the Number of Early Drop-outs for the 2014-2015 period. The Plan aims at achieving better inter-agency cooperation by uniting the efforts of the ministries, state institutions, citizens and local governments. It has to pave the way for the operation of a Coordination Mechanism on municipal, regional and national level.

As a result of the delay in passing the Implementation Plan (at the end of October 2014), the practical implementation of the measures will start in the beginning of 2015. This will further delay the processes and due to the peculiarities of school year scheduling many of them will start at the beginning of the next school year.

The rate of students leaving school to go abroad should not be underestimated since according to the NIS³⁸ data this is the second major reason for school drop-out straight after the family reasons at the primary and junior high school.

The lack of effective mechanisms for coordination between the school, social services and parents makes very difficult the work of the school teams, who are limited in responding to cases of children at risk of dropping out.

A comprehensive change of the educational environment and the perspectives for the students, especially the ones at the final stage of education, is needed to provide sustainability of school attendance

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To improve and enlarge the scope of the data analysis and the application of the Register for movement of children and students by increasing the commitment of the local authorities in monitoring the enrolment and drop-out of students; all agencies involved to provide full support to schools in doing this.
- To set up proper mechanisms for tracking down the children leaving the country with their emigrating parents; to make amendments in legislation regulating guardianship and warship in the cases of children staying in Bulgaria; to develop school mechanisms for equating knowledge, different from the individual form of training, giving opportunity to children who have returned from abroad to continue their education.
- To provide more intensive support and social work to children at risk of dropping out from school due to social and economic reasons and marginalization, and their families. To work with parents, teachers and students on prevention of early pregnancy and school drop-out due to employment. To encourage parents involvement and the support of the whole school community to all students.
- To continue the good practices for career guidance including all secondary schools; to encourage the business to take part in the educational process and to develop its corporate responsibility towards young people and their professional realization – skill development training, financial education, entrepreneurship training, etc.
- To continue the comprehensive efforts for modernization of education by updating the curricula, introducing innovative teaching methods and mostly focusing on retaining young professionals – teachers in smaller locations and vocational schools.

38. <http://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/3435/%D1%83%D1%87%D0%B0%D1%89%D0%B8-%D0%B8-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BF%D1%83%D1%81%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB-%D0%B8-%D0%BF%D0%BE-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%B8-%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BF%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5>

COMMITMENT 2.2

Increasing the quality of education as a precondition for personal development of each child and student and prevention of early school drop-out

HIGHLIGHTS:

1. The rate of early school leavers aged 18-24 in Bulgaria is 12.5% compared to 12.0% in EU-27.
2. The lack of mechanism for quality assessment of education, the quality of teaching and management included, questions the effectiveness of the operational programs funds used for training teachers.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The results from the 'Workforce Monitoring' made by Eurostat³⁹ in 2013 show that the rate of early school leavers aged 18-24 in Bulgaria is 12.5% compared to 12.0% in EU-27. The national goal for Bulgaria is for this rate to drop below 11 %.

The strategy sets three key groups of measures for the implementation of this goal – measures on preventing the reasons for Early School Leaving (prevention), on creating conditions for limiting Early School Leaving (intervention) and on supporting early school leavers in their secondary school attendance (compensation). Expanding the focus beyond prevention is one of the positive features of the Strategy.

A key measure for effective prevention of school drop-out is improving the quality of education – school environment, facilities, organization of the education process, complexity of the school content, updating the teaching methods in accordance with the individual child and student, effective monitoring and control in the education system, school capacity to involve parents, development and implementation of innovative forms of education, etc. The prioritization of the activities and tasks leading to the implementation of this measure need preconditions, which are still unavailable in the Bulgarian educational system.

No new measures have been undertaken to prevent school drop-out. Changes are a result of cohort effect, the expectations being that the number of early school leavers will grow and more young people will not have finished secondary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To pass urgently a new Pre-school and School Education Act, providing for extra measures for increasing the financial independence of education and ensuring reduction of the rate of early school drop-outs.
- The draft proposals on school autonomy to give schools the opportunity to set syllabuses for extended and additional preparation based on the needs and interests of the students.
- The consistency of the subjects for additional preparation with the interests of the students would create favorable conditions for improving the quality of school education and training, hence reducing early school leaving.
- To make regular appraisal of the teaching staff and directors which would lead to a comprehensive analysis of the work, competency and achievements of the teaching staff – teachers and director – hence more effective and focused selection of qualifications and training.

39. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tsdsc410&plugin=1-tsdsc410>

COMMITMENT 1

Setting up a model of successful inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) in the mainstream educational system

HIGHLIGHTS:

1. A total of 14 967 children and students with special educational needs have been receiving inclusive education during the school 2013/14 year
2. The children from the 8 pilot schools of the 'Inclusive Education' project have various complex needs, most of which being of psychological and social nature without medical reasons.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The 'Inclusive Education' project, commenced in 2012, is supposed to run in parallel with the discussion on the new draft law for pre-school and school education and the 18 state educational standards. The contribution of the 'Inclusive Education' project been limited to the appointment of specialists in the mainstream and primary schools so far has who face a situation of not being provided with work methodologies in the new circumstances. The project targets 84 pilot schools with more than 1600 children who have various complex needs, most of which being of psychological and social nature without medical reasons. In fact, the support is often limited to diagnostics and assessment without focusing on the process, i.e. on including the child and meeting their various needs.

According to information provided by the MoE, an intense process of inclusive education of children with SEN has been implemented in 2014. Just for the record, only 717 children and students with SEN have been educated at the dawn of inclusive education in 2004, while in 2014 their number has grown to 13 313 children and students. The total number of children with SEN receiving inclusive education during the school 2013/14 year (the children from the pilot project including) is 14 967. They are supported by 1 364 specialists from the Resource Centers.⁴⁰

A comprehensive evaluation of the 'Inclusive Education' project is yet to be made with regard to its effectiveness and efficiency. The project is, however a step forward in setting up a model for inclusion of children and students with SEN in the system of education. It becomes clear for the first time in Bulgaria that inclusion is possible when children are provided with timely professional support where they are – at school or kindergarten.

At the same time, education is not only about specialists at school – it is a concept comprising all the factors making the child an equal participant in the educational process, allowing them to reach their full potential and demonstrate their strengths. The components of supportive environment are the well-trained professionals, physical access, adapted classrooms, individual curricula, appropriate school aids, teaching technologies, facilities, appliances, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To analyse the process of educational integration since its beginning in 2001 when the first amendments in legislation have been made, going through the eight-year experience of the Resource Centers in Bulgaria and relating it to the deinstitutionalization process running in parallel with the 'Inclusive Education' project.
- To put the child/ student with SEN in the center of care – to measure the intensity and progress to their own abilities and personal achievements.
- To develop a clear-cut model (all-dimensional) for successful inclusion of students with SEN to apply in all mainstream schools and kindergartens.
- To focus on teamwork when integrating children with SEN – in close cooperation between the mainstream teacher and the specialists working with the child.
- To identify and apply good practices for achieving the objectives with regard to child education and change of the whole educational environment.
- To deliver trainings not only for the specialists working with children with SEN but for mainstream teachers and all the actors involved in the inclusion process as well. Many mainstream teachers find communication with students with SEN challenging and the lack of sufficient teaching aids makes the effective inclusion of children even more difficult.

40. Information from the MoE provided in a letter dated 17.10.2014, outgoing № 18-617.

COMMITMENT 2

Providing extra support to children who don't speak Bulgarian as a first language

HIGHLIGHTS:

The MoE activities focusing on providing extra support to children who don't speak Bulgarian as a first language fail to address in a sufficient way the specific difficulties of these children: bad command of the official language, negative stereotypes and discrimination (against Roma children, in particular), segregation in some schools and classes, insufficient inter-cultural

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The MoE reports on the introduction of the compulsory two-year preparation prior to school entry, provision of all-day education for pupils between I and V grade, the National Programme 'With Care for Each Student', 'Supporting the All-day Education of Primary School Pupils' module, the National Programme 'No Absences from School', and the development of Action Plan on the implementation of the National Programme on Roma Integration.

Essentially, the majority of the above-mentioned activities focus on providing extra support to all children irrespective of their mother tongue. They definitely contribute to the fuller intake of children and their more successful realization. At the same time, they fail to address in a sufficient way the specific difficulties of the children who don't speak Bulgarian as a first language: bad command of the official language⁴¹, negative stereotypes and discrimination (against Roma children, in particular), segregation in some schools and classes, insufficient inter-cultural education forms, etc. For instance, the educational forms provided within the all-day education process are a standard continuation of the school day: semi-boarding groups and activities in multiple groups. They are not oriented towards the specific needs of the ethnic minority children (e.g. inter-cultural education activity classes) and thus their effect on the children and students is reduced. Neither have the enlisted activities been changed, nor has their effect increased in 2014.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Applying for funding under the 'Science and Education for Intelligent Growth' Operational Programme for the activities providing extra support to children who don't speak Bulgarian as a first language: both within the 'Socio-economic integration of marginalized communities such as the Roma community' investment priority and the other priorities for investment.
- Setting up a mechanism for coordination of the activities on educational integration done by the MoE, NGOs, municipalities, schools and other stakeholders.
- Incorporating texts in the new Pre-school and School Education Act prohibiting the establishment of segregated schools for same-ethnicity children living in multi-ethnic environment, and supporting the development of school networks in the rural areas and the quality of education in places where there is only one school.
- Keeping the 8th grade within the junior high school stage of education and introducing the requirement for compulsiveness of the education until 10th grade (or first high-school level).

41. The issue refers not to all minority group children

COMMITMENT 1

Developing draft National Programme for Improving Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare 2015-2019

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The lack of comprehensive national programmed with ear-marked funding to provide a systematic and integrated approach to prevention of early childbirths and abortions, to encouragement of family planning development and access to quality survives and modern contraception, to awareness-raising and provision of health education, results in inconsistency of the implemented activities, unclear distribution of responsibilities and lack of sustainability of the achievements. There are good practices in Bulgaria on prevention of unwanted pregnancy and child delivery by minor mothers, and provision of family planning and health-education services to vulnerable groups. Most of these programs however are project-based and have no capacity for long-term provision of the activities and sustainability of the achievements. There is still no official sexual and reproductive healthcare programmed, in spite of the high levels of child delivery by mothers aged 15-19 years, the high rate of abortions and increased maternity mortality rate, as well as the efforts made since 2008.

HIGHLIGHTS:

1 There is an increase in maternity mortality rate: from 2.8 in 2011, to 4.3 in 2012 and 12.0 in 2013.
2. According to information provided by MoE, a total of 202 schools have provided non-compulsory sexual and/ or health education to 7 243 students during 2014-2015 school year.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The MoH to adopt urgently a sexual and reproductive healthcare programmed and a monitoring and financial plan. It is essential that the programmed provides for free contraception to the most risky and vulnerable groups.
- To develop and apply comprehensive and integrated socio-health educational programs for young girls within the national programmed. The programs can include health and sexual education; developing health and social skills; health promotion; family planning; awareness-raising activities on the risks of early marriages and early child delivery; early intake and monitoring of young pregnant girls; prevention early school leaving and measures for retaining young girls at school.
- The MoE and MoH to provide access of children and young people to systematic and skill-strengthening health education as part of the compulsory preparation of the students. To incorporate health education in the school content in line with the state educational requirements.
- The MLSP and MoH to regulate the provision of health services by NGOs.

COMMITMENT 2

Regular updating of the school content with the aim to form basic skills and key competencies meeting the requirements of the labor market and the new public expectations

HIGHLIGHTS:

1. In spite of the MoE obligation to update the syllabuses once in every four years in accordance to the active Public Education Act (PED), this doesn't take place.

2. The gap between the 'good' and 'bad' schools in terms of school results is growing.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

According to the active Public Education Act (PED), the MoE must update the syllabuses once in every four years. This however doesn't take place. There have been completed projects for updating the State Educational Requirements (SER) since 2010 but until now neither they nor a new education act have been passed. The current SER don't fully follow the principle of developing key competencies because they are focused mainly on the cognitive segments of development and on fact sheets in studying a subject. Although they are divided according to cultural-educational areas, the SER reproduce the subject-based model and the progress in civil education remains within the individual efforts of the separate teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The developed and improved versions of the SER and the syllabuses to be published and opened for public discussion.
- To develop measures for improving the educational system in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy, MLSP and the civil sector. The measures should be targeted not only at responding to the future needs of the labor market also at changing the labor market/ economy. It is important to know what national economy we want to have in 2020 and how education will prepare young people for this.
- To strengthen school autonomy and the effectiveness of external assessment in order to break the trend of having 'good' and 'bad' schools and respectively well-prepared and badly prepared students. The state educational standard for mainstream preparation should set the minimum level achievable by all children – 100% of the students irrespective of type of school should be able to achieve it.
- Mainstream preparation to represent 70% of the general school time sufficient to achieve the mainstream minimum. Additional preparation within 30% of the school time should be used for additional preparation of the children according to their interests and the priorities of the attended school. The general and additional preparation to keep the ratio of 70% to 30% till the end of compulsory education, when only profiled preparation for career orientation will be provided both in mainstream and specialized schools.

V.

JUSTICE



5.1.

CHILD-FRIENDLY JUSTICE

COMMITMENT 1

Hearings of children victims of abuse to take place only in the presence of well-trained professionals and in specially equipped room to avoid secondary victimization of the child

HIGHLIGHT:

In spite of the achieved progress, the sporadic initiatives need to be integrated in a comprehensive policy putting the child witness or victim of crime and his/ her rights in the center.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

In 2014 we have witnessed the absence of any activity with regard to the implementation of the commitments in the Road Map for the implementation of the Concept of State Policy on Juvenile Justice adopted by the Council of Ministers.

An inter-agency working group has been set up in May 2014 at the Ministry of Justice with the task to draft amendments to the Criminal Proceeding Code by November 30th, 2014. The amendments should introduce rules in compliance with the international standards relating to the interrogation procedure for minor and juvenile witness and victim of crime (Order ЛС-04-883 dated 27.05.2014 by the Minister of Justice). A number of amendment contributing to child-friendly procedures and motivated by particular articles from Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe have been discussed by the working group.

An increase in establishing specially-equipped rooms for hearing and interrogation of children has been observed however the low number of interrogations conducted in these rooms⁴² and the lack of single rules and standards of the process are alarming.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Transposing two Directives of the European Parliament and the Council – Directive 2012/29/EU and Directive 2012/92/EU.
- Developing a methodology on the use of ‘Blue Rooms’ setting criteria for location, facilities and organizational rules.
- Introducing obligatory procedural rules for hearing of children victims or witnesses of crimes.
- Introducing the figure of public defender – an external to the social care system professional – to serve as indispensable supporter of children victims or witnesses of crimes.
- Identifying a single institution responsible for the management and financial provision of the established ‘Blue Rooms’.

42. According to information provided by the Social Activities and Practices Institute, a total of 54 hearings of children have been conducted in the ‘Blue rooms’ since their establishment in 2009, 14 of which – in 2014.

COMMITMENT 2

Developing a specialized programmed for working with children victims of abuse or exploitation incorporating a mechanism for coordinated activities for prevention and establishment of abuse, case assessment, referring the child for rehabilitation and case follow up, in order to increase the capacity of the child protection system and provide special protection to children victims of abuse or exploitation

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The trend in the number of abuse cases is stable with 2 000 to 3 000 thousand a year. The information provided by the police differs from the one provided by the SACP due to a variety of factors. A positive trend in using the potential of the Coordination Mechanism in working on cases of abuse has been observed.

The number of cases of child exploitation and ill-treatment hasn't decreased, too but the information provided by the agencies differs due to the lack of single criteria. The 'child exploitation and ill-treatment' category includes a variety of cases such as cases of trafficking, labor exploitation, child prostitution, child pornography, child 'selling', etc. The cases of pick-pocketing and street-begging can be found both in the trafficking category when the child is abroad and in the anti-social behavior category.

According to the Ministry of Interior (MI) information for 2014 (until September 30th, 2014) there are 105 cases of children and juvenile pick-pocketing (41 of which are committed by minors) and 119 pre-trial investigations have been initiated. The questions of how to treat child pick-pocketing and street-begging – as anti-social behaviors or possible child abuse, and who and when will start proceedings against adults in charge of these children, are still open. It needs to make a specialized assessment in child abuse cases like these so that decisions about child protection measures are based on them. This is still an issue to be tackled by the system causing damage to the children.

The data from the SACP and ASA analyses⁴³ regarding the application of the Coordination Mechanism instrument indicate that only in approximately 1/3 of the child abuse cases the team of the CM has been summoned. The different interpretation of the reasons for such child behavior by the system results in insufficient support and protection of children from exploitation appearing in the form of pick-pocketing and street-begging, early marriages and cohabitations, etc.

According to the SACP monitoring report data, 97% of the respondents state that there are established teams working as part of the Coordination Mechanism. This means that 4 years after the introduction of the Coordination Mechanism, possibly there are places where such teams haven't been set up. The positive side to it is that most of the respondents indicate about good cooperation within the teams.

According to that data, the rehabilitation centers for children victims of abuse and exploitation are scarce and unevenly distributed. The rehabilitation services providing placement and removal from family environment such as Emergency Centers, emergency admission within the Community Support Centers and specialized foster care, are scarce. Their capacity is for approximately 160 users in total. There are still not enough developed services providing specialized foster care as part of the measures for rehabilitation and support of the children victims of abuse and exploitation. This is especially valid in the cases of children victims of abuse aged 12-13. The challenges to the process of applying the Coordination Mechanism, pointed out in the SACP analysis, are 'related mostly to the underdevelopment of the social services and the lack of specialists' in 20 of the regions. Even the existing services face untacked issues such as unclear roles with regard to providing the child access to services, responsibility for the transportation of the child, difficulties in the collaboration with hospitals, etc.

The analysis of the SACP and ASA reports leads to the conclusion that the Coordination Mechanism is being applied mostly as a child protection measure instrument. Its function to guarantee the best interests of the children victims of abuse and crime including their right to protection from secondary victimization as participants in legal proceedings, has been underused.

43. According to information provided by RDSA (for 2013) a total of 697 Coordination team meetings have taken place at the point of initial referral. The information for 2014 is expected.

COMMITMENT 2

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The existing practice doesn't meet the international requirements and needs to change. Changes should be made towards introducing a new model of specialized individual assessment. The assessment needs to be integrating, multidisciplinary, inter-agency and to serve as an instrument in making decisions about protection and support measures, as well as protection of the child in legal proceedings to prevent secondary victimization.
- The Coordination Mechanism is a good strategic document laying the foundations of an indispensable and effective inter-agency cooperation in child abuse cases. It is however being developed and applied mostly as a child protection measure instrument and not so much for coordinating the collaboration in child abuse cases involving the system of justice.
- Possible direction for development of the system is to elaborate and apply the Coordination Mechanism in the cases of child abuse in which the child participates in legal proceedings. This would result in a more explicit and unconditional protection of the rights and interests of the children and decrease of the risk of secondary victimization, intimidation, revenge or pressure upon children victims of abuse or exploitation. It would also lead to the implementation of the requirements of the 2012/29/EU European Directive establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime.
- The CM case analysis needs to introduce criteria for case follow-up beyond the legal definition for abuse, e.g. physical, sexual, etc. such as type of crimes on which the Mechanism is not being applied sufficiently. It needs to research the causes for underuse of the Coordination Mechanism in child abuse cases since this is a precondition for infringement of children's rights and delayed application of child protection measures especially in the cases of children victims of crime.
- The National Plan for Prevention of Child Abuse, as an operational strategic document, needs to be harmonized with the National Strategy and provide for measures on the commitment for the next reporting period starting from 2015.

8. По данни от РДСП (за периода 2013) са проведени общо 697 срещи при първоначално постъпване на сигнал, по които се е събирал мултидисциплинарният екип от задължително представените участници, определени в Координационния механизъм. Очакват се данните за 2014 г.

9. В доклад на ДАЗД за 2012 г. е направена подобна констатация и се дава препоръка за изработване на чек-лист към методиката, за да може тя да се приложи от екипите, работещи по Координационния механизъм

10. ДАЗД, 2013 г., с.4

COMMITMENT 1

Developing a plan for closing down the Socio-pedagogical Boarding Schools and reforming the Correctional Boarding School and the Homes for Temporary Placement of Minors and Juveniles

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

Socio-pedagogical Boarding Schools (SPBS) and Correctional Boarding School (CBS) are boarding-type institutions established according to the Juvenile Delinquency Act. They have a status of special schools for placement of minors with anti-social behaviors above 8 years of age. Both types of boarding-schools lack regulation and application of clear child's-right oriented methodology for working with children in conflict with law.

The SPBS in Straldja, in the region of Yambol, was closed down as a result of found child abuse cases, staff misconduct and lack of resources, in September, 2014 with an Order by the Minister of Education and science.

The lack of integrated services on prevention of children and juvenile delinquent behavior and the lack of specialized residential services for children in conflict with law results in the same rate of placements in SPBS and CBS as in 2013. According to the information provided by the MoE: 69 students were placed in CBS in 2013 and 63 between Jan-Sept 2014; 54 students were placed in SPBS in 2013 and 41 between Jan-Sept 2014. A total of 144 students were placed in the four CBS between Jan-Sept 2014 and a total of 78 in the two SPBS. The staff distribution is as follows: 51 pedagogical and 38 other staff in CBS; 28 pedagogical and 17 other staff in SPBS.

There are 5 Homes for Temporary Placement of Minors and Juveniles (HTPMJ) in Bulgaria – in Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas and Gorna Oryahovits. They are managed by the Ministry of Interior. They are the designated placements for children with anti-social behaviors, children without permanent address, street and street-begging children as well as runaways from reformatory confinements or compulsory treatment. The length of stay is ordered by prosecutor and cannot exceed 15 days, only in exceptional circumstance – up to 2 months. The legal provisions for placement of children in HTPMJ are in conflict with the regulation of the Child Protection Act stating that placement of children in specialized institutions, such as HTPMJ, follows a court decision. Placement cannot be appealed in court. It often has penal functions and collides with international standards.

The general conclusion is that regardless of the fact that there is a Concept of State Policy on Juvenile Justice and Road Map for its implementation they have not been operating for two years already. It also needs political will to pass a special law on juvenile justice incorporating all issues related to children in conflict with the law and recognizing their rights, as well as the rights and interests of the victims and the public interest.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To review the commitment of the state institutions to achieve common understanding and action plan for its implementation.
- To cease the placement of children in socio-pedagogical boarding schools.
- To pass a new Juvenile Justice Act, establishing a set of principles recognized in international and European standards; a system of state authorities stakeholders in the proceeding; stages, deadlines and procedures from the moment of referral for a crime committed by child, prevention from criminal justice, potential alternative measures until the case is solved with verdict or another decree and measures for on-going care after the execution of the punishment.

COMMITMENT 2

Promoting safe Internet rules for children to children, parents and school authorities and on sites where inappropriate Internet information could be reported

HIGHLIGHT:

The responsible ministries continue to disregard the significance of child protection from cyber sexual abuse and the prevention of cyber bullying.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT SITUATION?

The Amendment and Supplement draft law of the Penal Code for transposing the Directive of the European Parliament and of the EU Council on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography has been introduced to the National Assembly at the end of 2014 with an year's delay. The draft amendments provided for in the active Penal Code will facilitate the identification of the cyber child abusers and the distribution of justice.

The good collaboration between the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre and the State Agency for National Security (SANS) 'Cybercrime' department has been reinstated after a period of transferring the department from the Ministry of Interior to the SANS.

More than 200 schools across the country have been involved in a variety of raising-awareness activities for children, parents and teachers and strengthening the capacity of the teachers, thanks to the efforts of the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre. The Centre and the State Agency for Child Protection delivered joint training sessions in 6 schools in Sofia.

The Ministry of Education made no steps in introducing personal cyber safety training, unlike the schools and municipalities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To pass urgently the Amendment and Supplement Act of the Penal Code for transposing the European Parliament Directive on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography.
- To take into consideration all the amendments and supplements reflected in the Amendment and Supplement Act of the Penal Code in the process preparing a new Penal Code.
- To make amendments in Art. 250a from the Electronic Communications Act so that all kinds of child abuse are considered as a ground for requiring traffic data alongside grave crimes and general cyber crime.
- To pass the Children's Act (Child and Family Act) making provisions for keeping a register on perpetrators of sexual abuse against minors and juveniles, and obligatory referral to the register when appointing staff working with or in contact with children.
- The state institutions to commit to the financial contribution of the National Safer Internet Centre work and to support the activities on training children and young people in responsible and safe use of IT.
- To plan and introduce in an appropriate way a systematic approach to introducing the topic of Internet as a main means of communication and socialization in the school content of the public science and sigil education subjects

REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD RECOMMENDATIONS

(CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM JUNE 6, 2008 OF THE UN CRC)

| THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS TO THE STATE | REVIEW ON THE IMPLEMENTATION |
|--|---|
| <p>To conduct a thorough analysis of the root causes of low achievement levels and drop-out of schools in order to develop measures which ensure that all children, in urban and in rural areas, complete the full course of compulsory education until the age of 16.</p> | <p>Note! The 2013-2020 Strategy for Decreasing the Number of Early Drop-outs was adopted in 2013, however the Plan for its implementation hasn't been passed before the end of 2014. The Pre-school and School Education draft law (PSEDL), which was publicly discusses and passed on a first readings by the Parliament, provides for students to finish compulsory education at the end of 7th grade (or at the age of 14-15). This puts many of the students at the risk of not being able to continue their education in high or vocational schools. New measures on school drop-out haven't been passed in 2014. Changes are a result of cohort effects, the expectations being that the number of early school leavers will grow and more young people will not have finished secondary education.</p> |
| <p>To expand the integration of human rights and child rights education in the curriculum of all schools and shape learning and social life of schools accordingly taking into account the Committee's general comment No. 1 on the aims of education (CRC/GC/2001/1)</p> | <p>Note! Not implemented.</p> |
| <p>To establish a vocational education and training system for children, who wish to enter practical occupations, including for children who dropped out before graduating from primary or secondary education.</p> | <p>Partial progress. There are amendments to the Vocational Education and Training Act, increasing the opportunities for acquiring one, focusing on the quality and introducing dual training. Dual training is provided for in the Pre-school and School Education draft law.</p> |
| <p>To develop efficient and effective mechanisms to adequately implement and review all plans of action that are relevant for children and enjoyment of their rights.</p> | <p>Note! Not implemented.</p> |
| <p>The Committee recommends to the State party that an independent monitoring agency be given the responsibility to monitor and promote children's rights and provide an accessible complaint mechanism for children and their representatives.</p> | <p>Note! Not implemented.</p> |
| <p>To further increase budget allocations for the implementation of the rights recognized in the Convention and especially for health, education and family support.</p> | <p>Partial progress. Standards for social services, universal allowances for children, pocket money for students with disabilities, and professional foster care salaries have been increased and an attempt to differentiate the funding for residential services has been made in 2014. The current practice with regard to the 'money follows the child' principle is a practice of transferring funds from one service to another without actually following the child. There is no information about increase in the budget for health and education.</p> |

| THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS TO THE STATE | REVIEW ON THE IMPLEMENTATION |
|---|--|
| <p>To pay particular attention to economically disadvantaged, marginalized and neglected children, including Roma children, with a view to alleviating disparities, deficits and inequalities.</p> | <p>Partial progress. Some of the social allowances/ benefits have been increased in 2014 (see above), however there is no purposeful policy on adequate integration; campaigns for changing public attitudes and making efforts to include the children who are tolerant to their socially-disadvantaged classmates included.</p> |
| <p>To strengthen the skills of the personnel of the administration of child protection system as well as local Governments in planning and management of budgets that address the needs of children and families.</p> | <p>Note! The implementation of the activities of the „Strengthening the Capacity of the Agency for Social Assistance in Increasing the Quality and Effectiveness of Social Work” project is for form’s sake. There is no purposeful work on strengthening the capacity of the local authorities with regard to budget and service planning and management for the needs of the children and families.</p> |
| <p>To strengthen its collaboration with civil society and widen the scope of cooperation so as to ensure cooperation on a broad level in all areas related to the promotion and protection of the rights of the child and throughout all stages of the implementation and monitoring of the Convention.</p> | <p>Note! Not implemented.</p> |
| <p>To promote non-violent, positive, participatory methods of childrearing and education and reinforcing knowledge among children of their right to protection from all forms of corporal punishment. Bringing offenders before the competent administrative and judicial authorities.</p> | <p>Note! No progress on the side of the state. A number of NGOs recognize the issue and make efforts in raising it and making it recognizable by the society.</p> |
| <p>To increase support to families with children, in particular for those living in poverty, families caring for children with disabilities and to single-parent households</p> | <p>Partial progress. Standards for social services, universal allowances for children, pocket money for students with disabilities, and professional foster care salaries have been increased. However, there is no understanding of the need to apply family-oriented approach and develop stimulating as opposed to repressive policy; and the need of separate family-support policy.</p> |
| <p>To and financially support community-based and family-focused services for families at risk of social problems and families who care for children with developmental challenges, disabilities or health problems</p> | <p>Partial progress. Standards for social services, universal allowances for children, pocket money for students with disabilities, and professional foster care salaries have been increased and an attempt to differentiate the funding for residential services has been made in 2014. However, no standards for services on prevention of abandonment, early intervention and support to families at risk have been adopted.</p> |
| <p>To continue its efforts for deinstitutionalization while taking steps to ensure that appropriate alternative accommodations are provided for each child.</p> | <p>Partial progress. Deinstitutionalisation of children is looked at only in the light of the pilot projects in the Action Plan for the implementation of the Vision of Deinstitutionalisation. There are serious concerns that the implementation of the projects is focused on their technical and administrative provision rather than on the best interest of the children and the protection of their rights.</p> |

| THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS TO THE STATE | REVIEW ON THE IMPLEMENTATION |
|--|--|
| To develop a comprehensive programme to improve mother and child health, including through basic health care services for the most vulnerable children, in particular for Roma children and children living in rural areas; | There is progress. A Programme for Mother and Child Health-care and the Action Plan for its implementation have been adopted in 2014. |
| Closely collaborate with the minority communities and their respective leaders to elaborate effective measures to abolish traditional practices prejudicial to the health and well being of children, such as early marriage. | Partial progress. Efforts have been made in organizing discussions, delivering lectures and trainings on prevention of unwanted, sexually-transmitted diseases and the significance of vaccinations. |
| To develop a comprehensive mental health policy, including, mental health promotion, prevention of suicidal and violent behavior, outpatient day care and inpatient services for adolescents with mental health problems, as well as programs to support families with children at risk. | Note! No progress. Children's mental health is one the most under-developed areas in healthcare. |
| To take all necessary measures to make adequate housing, sanitation and infrastructure available for all families including for low-income and large families and Roma communities. | Note! There is an urgent need to update the National Housing Strategy from 2004 and accept an Action Plan for its implementation. The Plan needs to focus on increasing the social housing (both municipal and state) to meet specific needs and encourage the social inclusion not only of the socially disadvantaged people, but also large families, young adults with disabilities and other target groups. |
| To take prompt measures to fully bring the system of juvenile justice in line with the Convention. | Note! Regardless of the fact that there is a Concept of State Policy on Juvenile Justice and Road Map for its implementation they have not been operating for two years already. It also needs political will to pass a special law on juvenile justice incorporating all issues related to children in conflict with the law and recognizing their rights, as well as the rights and interests of the victims and the public interest. |
| To set up an adequate system of juvenile justice, including juvenile courts with specialized judges for children, throughout the country; | Partial progress. A preparation process for piloting three specialized juvenile chambers at three regional and two district courts has started at the end of 2014. The practice of using specially-equipped rooms for hearing and interrogation of children witnesses and victims of abuse has strengthened its position. At the same time there is no uniform philosophy and approach in this area so that secondary traumatising of the child during the investigation and administration of justice process is avoided, protection of their rights and best interest is guaranteed, and the collection of full and precise information on the case is ensured. |
| To focus on strategies to prevent crimes in order to support children at risk at an early stage | Note! There are no delinquency prevention strategies and practices developed and applied to support children at risk at an early stage. The question of how to treat child pick-pocketing and street-begging – as anti-social behaviors or possible child abuse – is still open. It needs in child abuse cases like these to make a specialized assessment so that decisions about child protection measures are based on them. |

NETWORK MEMBERS

Blagoevgrad Region

Association 'Community Council on Education' – Gotse Delchev

Burgas Region

'The Faithful Steward' Association – Burgas
'Demetra' Association – Burgas
Integra Bulgaria
'Regional Roma Alliance' Association – Burgas
'Smile' Association – Burgas

Varna Region

Association of Parents of Children with Dyslexia – Varna
'Gavroche' Association – Varna
'Eurointegration' Association – Varna
'Karin Dom' Foundation – Varna
'MIG – Kraimorie' Association – Beloslav
Agency for Social Development 'Vision' – Varna
'Joy for Our Children' Foundation – Varna
Social Association 'St. Andrei' – Varna
'Sauchastie' Association – Varna
'Colourful Future' Association – Varna

Veliko Tarnovo Region

Centre for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance AMALIPE – Veliko Tarnovo

Vratsa Region

'First of June' Association – Byala Slatina
'Science and Technology Centre' Association – Vratsa
'New Way' Association – Hayredin
School Board of Trustees of 'Hristo Botev' School – Tarnava

Gabrovo Region

'Social Dialogue 2001' Association – Gabrovo

Dobrich Region

YMCA Association – Dobrich
'Helping Hand' Foundation – Dobrich

Kardjali Region

Association 'Initiative for Development – Kardzhali Decides' – Kardzhali

Kyustendil Region

Parental Boards of Trustees of Kindergarten 'Kalina' – Doupnitsa

Lovech Region

'Ecomission 21st Century' Association – Lovech

Montana Region

Community Council on Education – Berkovica
Sham Foundation – Montana

Pazardjik Region

'Future' Foundation – Rakitovo
'Zhuleviat Dom' Foundation – Lesichevo
Crime Prevention Fund IGA – Pazardzhik
'Social Practices in the Community' Foundation – Pazardzhik
'Development' Association – Rakitovo

Pernik Region

'PULSE' Foundation – Pernik
'White Swallow' Association – Tran

Pleven Region

Pleven Public Fund
'Chitalishta' – Pleven

Plovdiv Region

'Big Brother, Big Sister' Association – Plovdiv
National Alliance for Volunteer Action – Plovdiv

Razgrad Region

'Janeta' Association – Razgrad
'Integro' Association – Razgrad
Youth Forum 2001 – Razgrad

Ruse Region

BRTMI Association – Ruse
'Equilibrium' Association – Ruse
Association 'European centre for mediation and arbitration' – Ruse
'Caritas-Ruse' Foundation – Ruse
Open Society Club – Ruse
Centre Dynamica Association – Ruse

Silistra Region

'Ekaterina Karavelova' Women's Association – Silistra – Silistra
'Hope for a Good Future' Association – Silistra

Sliven Region

Society for the support of children and adults with mental, physical and sensory disabilities 'St. Stiliyan Child Protector' – Sliven
'The Health of Romany People' Foundation – Sliven
IRA Foundation – Sliven
'Doctors of the World' Association – Bulgaria branch – Sliven

'Roma Academy for Culture and Education' Association – Sliven

Sofia City Region

'Agapedia – Bulgaria' Foundation
Alliance of Bulgarian Midwives
'Alpha Club – to Survive' Association
Association for Early Childhood Development
Association of Mental Health Professionals in Kindergartens and Schools in the Republic of Bulgaria
'Parents' Association
Bulgarian Association of Adopted Children and Adoptive Parents
Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association
Bulgarian Pediatric Association
Bulgarian Helsinki Committee
Association for Bulgarian Family Values, Traditions and Culture
'Bulgarche'
'Bulgarian Child' Foundation
BNC 'Together for the Children'
Bulgarian Training Centre
'Child and Space' Association
'Children and Adolescents' Association
'EVRIKA' Foundation
ECIP Foundation
"Teach for Bulgaria" Foundation
'For our Children' Foundation
'Health and Social Development' Foundation
Ethnic Minorities Health Problems Foundation
Parents' Initiative Committee
Social Activities and Practices Institute
'Concordia Bulgaria' Foundation
International Legal Advice Centre
'International Award of the Duke of Edinburgh' Foundation
Arete Youth Foundation
National Foster Care Association
National Network of Health Mediators
Foundation 'Hope for the Little Ones'
'Hope for Us' Association
National scout organisation of Bulgaria
National School Eco-Parliament
'Society for All' Association
'Paidea' Foundation
'Partners – Bulgaria' Foundation
'Human Rights' Project
'Applied Research and Communications' Found
'Friends 2006' Foundation
Reachout.BG Association

Association for Progressive and Open Communication – Sofia
'Cedar' Foundation
'Step for Bulgaria' Foundation
'Step by Step' Foundation
Theatre "Tsvete"
'Freerun Bulgaria' Association
FICE Bulgaria
Worldwide Foundation for Vulnerable Children
'Tsvetan Tsanov' Foundation
'Centre Nadya' Foundation
Centre for Inclusive Education
Centre for Psychosocial Support
Amici dei Bambini Foundation – Sofia
Habitat for Humanity
Outward Bound Bulgaria
SOS Kinderdorf – Bulgaria

Sofia Region

'Towards a Better Life' Association – Chelopech
'Choice for Tomorrow' Association, Botevgrad

Stara Zagora Region

'Future for Children with Disabilities' Association – Kazanlak
Chitalishte 'Vazrodena Iskra' – Kazanlak
'Clovers' Association – Chirpan
National Association of Resource Teachers – Stara Zagora
Friends 2011' Association – Chirpan
'Samaritans' Association – Stara Zagora
'World without Boundaries' Association – Stara Zagora

Targovishte Region

'Naya' Association – Targovishte
Club of NGOs – Targovishte

Haskovo Region

Association of Community Centres – Dimitrovgrad
'Children and Families' Association – Haskovo
'Give a Smile' Foundation – Dimitrovgrad

Shumen Region

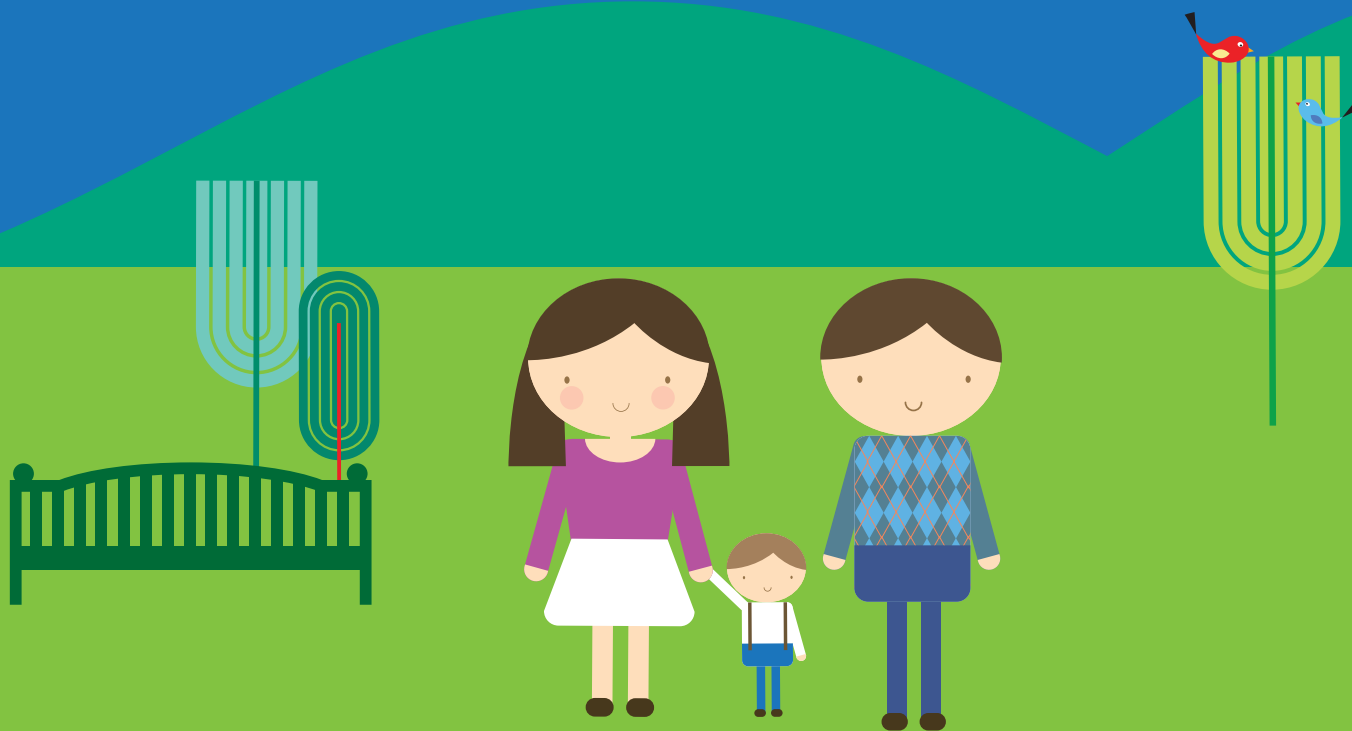
'SOS Women and Children survived violence' Association – Novi Pazar
Association of Roma Women
'Hayatchi' – Novi Pazar

Yambol Region

'People with Athma' Foundation – Yambol
Municipal School Board of Trustees – Boliarovo



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