



NATIONAL NETWORK FOR CHILDREN

REPORT CARD 2018

WHAT IS
THE AVERAGE
GOVERNMENT
SCORE FOR
CHILDCARE?



REPORT CARD 2018:
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SCORE FOR CHILDCARE?

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FOREWORD



George Bogdanov

Executive Director
National Network
for Children

Dear Reader,

In your hands you are holding the seventh edition of Report Card: *What Is the Average Government Score for Childcare?* The title itself is indicative of the main task of the report, which is to analyse and measure the efforts made by the government to support Bulgarian children. The inputs were contributed by experts from NGOs working for or with families and children on a daily basis. We at the National Network for Children base a substantial part of our advocacy efforts on this document, as it presents an informed, objective and institutionally approved picture of the current state of affairs of children's rights in the country.

We are proud that for the second consecutive year the experts' conclusions are accompanied by a separate report called Report Card 2018: *How Do Children, Parents and Professionals Evaluate the Government?*, which studies the attitudes and impressions of all those affected by government policies. Consulting 597 people through a total of 40 focus groups involving 189 children and 156 adults and an online survey with 252 participants, we tried to compare our analysis with people's day-to-day perceptions of government policies focused on them. Brief summaries of the results of the consultations in each area can be found in the section below.

What everyone will most probably notice in this year's report is the all-time low average grade of Poor 2.88 for all five covered areas: General Principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; Family Environment and Alternative Care; Healthcare; Education; and Justice. While the progress made in the different areas has been noted in detail and ministries' efforts have been praised, this year's Report Card makes it clear that we, civil society organisations, find that formally approved strategies need to be replaced by more efficiency as a matter of urgency, and that there is an obvious need for fewer declarations of political will and more real action and coordination between separate ministries to take over current piecemeal efforts. Not only would this overturn the report card grades, but it would also offer more chances to children in Bulgaria to develop their full potential.

In addition, 2017 was marked by a tendency to consider the civil sector not as an equal partner, but rather as a threat to institutional and even to the general public stability. Such perceptions do not foster a partnership culture, and, even more importantly, do not contribute to a unification of all stakeholders' efforts towards achieving our common goal to improve the welfare of children, parents and families in the country. In this regard, we at the National Network for Children hope that both this report and our constructive day-to-day communication with decision makers will enable us to reach the much-needed milestone of child-centred policy making.

Finally, I would like to thank all contributors to the Report Card – authors, member organisations of the National Network for Children, external evaluators and to all the experts from the different institutions, who provided us with information on the progress in the different areas. We believe that you, the Reader, will discover a fresh perspective in the report, and that beyond the grades you will recognise our intention to offer a constructive critique of current policies, one that would pave the way to finding the long-awaited sustainable decisions to guaranteeing children's rights.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'George Bogdanov', with a stylized flourish at the end.

GRADES

AREA	SUB-AREA	GRADE 2018	AVERAGE GRADE						
			2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
1. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	Non-discrimination	2.33	2.60	2.86	2.91	3.06	2.97	2.71	2.88
	Child Opinion and Participation	2.83							
	Child Poverty and Welfare	2.17							
	Child abuse and neglect	2.83							
	Safe and Healthy Environment	2.83							
2. Family Environment and Alternative Care	Family Environment	2.38	2.53	3.01	3.02	2.61	2.98	2.93	3.14
	Children in institutions and Deinstitutionalisation	2.63							
	Adoption and foster care	2.58							
3. Healthcare	Inpatient and outpatient care	3.08	3.19	3.64	3.58	3.31	3.21	2.38	2.79
	Mental health	2.88							
	Infant mortality	3.63							
4. Education	Early childhood education and care	2.33	3.02	3.44	3.45	3.62	3.11	3.00	2.68
	School education	3.42							
	Inclusive education	3.30							
5. Justice		2.75	2.79	3.05	3.45	3.30	2.90	3.44	3.56
	Child abuse and neglect in the cyberspace	2.83							
ANNUAL GRADE			2.88	3.20	3.28	3.20	3.00	2.90	3.00

WHAT DO GRADES TELL US?

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

The total grade for this area is Average 2.70. In 2017 a number of legislative amendments were made in areas relevant to children and families. However, for the most part, these were piecemeal changes (sealed within the system) rather than a conscious and integrated approach to children's rights and parent support.

A grade of Average 3.00 was given to: efforts to set up mechanisms for respecting children's opinion in the development and implementation of policies for children; child abuse, early cohabitation and early marriages case management within a school-leaving context; promotion of healthy nutrition among schoolchildren and breastfeeding of infants up to one year old; and development of a Draft National Housing Strategy. The legislative progress under these commitments, however, did not lead to either unification of institutional efforts or to any concrete effect on the lives of children and their families.

The lowest grade was given to combatting child poverty. A similar lack of progress can also be seen in the integration and education of asylum seeking children in Bulgaria despite the numerous reductions in their numbers.

What do children, parents and professionals think?

The total grade given by children, parents and professionals for this area is 3.14.

Most children have heard that they have rights, which it is important to be respected. At the same time, they find it difficult to specify the nature of those rights. Many of them associate opinion sharing with struggle and confrontation, or with a lack of hope that it would make any difference.

Many children are well aware of the nature of poverty, and what it means to live in poverty. They think that responsibility for the non-existence of poor children lies with the 'government' and with their parents, as well as that government institutions can help parents 'get back on their feet'.

The most common victims of violence are children who do not fit although, in fact, 'no one is safe'. Protecting children from violence requires considerable discussion of the subject, as well as ensuring that everyone can recognise violence and know how to stay away from it.

Many children and adults are aware of the issue of healthy nutrition and it is becoming increasingly spoken about. Nevertheless, the access to healthy food is not universally guaranteed, which, together with attractive commercials, makes many of them opt for an unhealthy diet instead.

Much like children, adults also know little about the lives of refugee children in the country and about whether they are protected from violence and if they have access to education.

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE

The total grade given for Family Environment and Alternative Care is 2.53, making it the area with least progress in terms of meeting the government's commitments in Report Card 2018.

Despite the reduction in the number of specialised institutions and the children placed there, the number of those living away from their biological families has remained high and relatively unchanged over the years. Financial sustainability, the ability to ensure good-quality alternative care forms and the capacity of the child protection system very often remain doubtful.

The existing protection system continues to focus on children at risk, lacking a concept on the welfare of all children and families. Active action is needed to guarantee the right of the child to a family, including through creation of community-accessible prevention services and ensuring the all-important connectivity to the healthcare and education systems.

What do children, parents and professionals think?

The average grade given by children, parents and professionals for this area is 3.69.

Most children find the new smaller homes better than the big ones, as they do not get beaten here and have more chances to learn about the real life. At the same time, they think that it would be best if children could live with their families, and where a family has problems and does not know how to take care of the child, it should be offered assistance to learn. If, however, a child cannot live with the family, whatever the reason, a proper explanation as to where the child is going and what will happen next needs to be provided to him/her.

Some progress can be seen in the adoption process; however, prospective adoptive parents and adopters still find it difficult to find sufficient information and support during and after the procedure.

Foster care was ranked the lowest in the whole area. Foster parents believe that foster care is getting worse and feel alone and unsupported. They identify numerous gaps in the communication between the different systems, putting foster children in a difficult situation.

HEALTHCARE

The average grade for the implementation of the government's commitments in Healthcare is 3.19. This is the highest-ranking area in Report Card 2018, largely due to the achieved reduction in infant mortality. In recent years there has been a pronounced drop in the infant mortality rate, where 2016's value of 6.5‰ was an all-time low in the history of demographic statistics in Bulgaria. At the same time, it remains worrying that while in some parts of the country the average rate exceeds 10‰, no extra action or measures have been planned to tackle this negative situation.

The National Programme for Improving Maternal and Child Health introduces a new approach to caring for pregnant women and children, but at the same time there is no uniform methodology for the operation of health and counselling centres for maternal and child health, no publicly available information about their existence, and no training provision for professionals. As in previous years, 2017 saw no change in the status of uninsured pregnant women, nor any normative amendment to underpin this change.

Despite the steps taken, Bulgaria still lacks an overarching and integrated approach to children with special needs and their parents. Careful attention should also be paid to the training of professionals working with children on the communication of information about the child in cases of disability or unfavourable prognosis. Local practices continue to differ from current tendencies for encouraging contact between newborns with or without disabilities and their parents, and there are no conditions for introducing kangaroo care and breastfeeding of infants.

Another necessity is the development of an integrated services concept to bring together all different systems, such as healthcare, social, education etc., under a common philosophy, approach and coordination for development, implementation and delivery of integrated services. This is the only way to meet the complex needs of children, parents and families, including as regards children's mental health, addiction prevention etc.

What do children, parents and professionals think?

The average grade given by children, parents and professionals for Healthcare is 3.12. Parents believe that, depending on whether one has or does not have health insurance, healthcare can vary, not just in terms of access but also quality. Free healthcare involves many hidden costs. For the most part, when required, emergency aid is provided to everyone; however, the problem is buying supplies and medications for children, as they can be expensive and not all parents can afford them. Many parents find it difficult to decide what to do if there is a problem with their child.

EDUCATION

The average grade for Education is 3.02, marking a significant drop over the three previous years and approximating the value for 2013.

This is mostly due to the lack of progress in early childhood development policies, which, as yet, are deficient in overall vision and reform strategy. Similarly, integrated services are only partially developed locally while cross-sectoral coordination and family support is altogether absent from all systems.

Despite the progressing school education reform, as evidenced by the interinstitutional mechanism for coverage of permanent school leavers and children who have never attended school, the real effect of the initiated changes remains unclear. The proposed measures are mostly campaign- or project-oriented, and sanction-based principle continues to be favoured over student and family support. No mechanisms have been developed for long-term impact, reintegration of children who have dropped out of school, support for drop-out prevention, targeted state policies for attracting young and qualified teachers, as well as a systematic approach to quality and educational access equalising in spite of regional differences.

Also, an underlying factor for the poor grade we can mention that despite the initiated reform of inclusive education, no significant development over the previous edition of the Report Card can be seen. The inclusive approach has, as yet, not been fully embraced by all teachers, directors and parents, and neither has the need for its implementation. No provisions have been fully ensured in terms of funding, the required facilities, methodological resources and specialised human resources for working with children.

What do children, parents and professionals think?

The grade given for Education by children, parents and professionals is 3.14. As a main support option for early childhood development parents continue to turn to kindergartens. However, most of them fail to consider children's individual needs due to overcrowding of groups and there is no involvement of parents.

The main reasons for children not to attend school are related with them not finding much sense in doing so; because 'school is scary'; or with their families not having enough money for clothes and schoolbooks. Together with family issues, this is actually stopping the children to go to school.

The perception shared by adults – parents and professionals – is that each new government restarts the efforts towards the education reform from scratch, and there is no consistency and common vision. Bureaucracy, work overload and a lack of appreciation put off young teachers on the one hand, while on the other many others lack the necessary knowledge and skills. Another big problem is the lack of connection between the school and the social support, which is much needed by the majority of children.

Children who do not fit find it difficult to cope at school, as, more often than not, the school itself is not prepared to accommodate their needs whatever the issue – accessible environment for children with motor disabilities, schoolbooks for visually impaired children or teachers' attitudes towards those who are different.

JUSTICE

The average grade for Justice is 2.79, which is the lowest grade ever awarded for this area since the first edition of the report. In 2017 no progress was made towards the implementation of the child justice reform despite the numerous declarations of political will to that effect on behalf of the Ministry of Justice. Regardless of the annual growth in the number of specialised facilities for hearing children in the country, there has been no real positive change in the situation of child victims of violence or crime. Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, has been transposed in Bulgarian legislation only partially. Except at specific events and forums, the issue of development of digital and media literacy in children is not on the agenda of the responsible institutions, in particular the Ministry of Education and Science. According to school curricula, the discussion of such topics is limited only to computer modelling and information technology classes.

What do children, parents and professionals think?

The grade given by children, parents and professionals for Justice is 3.21. Most children who have been involved with the justice system are aware that children's hearings should take a different form from adults', but they find it difficult to specify why and how exactly this should happen. Adults, on the other hand, consider that it is important not only to ensure dedicated facilities for hearing of children, but also professionally qualified staff to handle those hearings.

Most children and young people in conflict with the law have a long history with institutions. The reason for this they find within themselves, but they also think that had they been backed up by a stable family, they would have done fewer offenses. For them, the most difficult thing in their dealings with the justice system is not knowing what would happen next and how long it would take, as well as not having an adult to rely on.

Many children are aware of the different Internet hazards related to personal information, bullying or even inability to recognise fake news. Internet safety is not a subject which is talked about in school; however, it is precisely there, as well as at home, that a child can learn self-protection.

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METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

'Report Card 2018: What is the Average Government Score for Childcare?' is the seventh consecutive annual report of the National Network for Children. The report evaluates the implementation over calendar year 2017 of selected government commitments in the field of child and family policies in Bulgaria. The selection of topics and commitments is based on a detailed review of all national strategies, plans and programmes affecting child-related policies or measures. We have mainly followed three priority criteria for the problems - importance, relevance to the theme, priority for the NNC member organisations, and the opportunities to solve them. 'Report Card 2018' contains 5 areas, 15 sub-areas and 25 commitments.

In the search for maximum fairness in the development of the Report Card we traditionally use facts and data provided by the institutions in accordance with the Access to Public Information Act. We seek to develop the report in consultation with the competent institutions which we inform about the commitments we will analyse and evaluate as early as the initial stage of our work. Since the report was developed over 2017 calendar year and in the first months of 2018, the data reported refer mainly to 2017. When such data was not available, we used the most up-to-date available data that outlines the overall picture and the state of the policy.

The selected 'promises' to be analysed are of a different order. Some are very specific measures, others are a set of measures and still others are comprehensive policies. For some of them, it can be clearly stated whether they have been implemented. Evaluating the performance across others requires expert review of the entire context within which they are being developed.

Our task was to take account of the changes with respect to the implementation of the commitments, to report what has been done. Where progress is lacking and there are no policy actions, the grade is poor, even though in some cases there is a longer deadline for fulfilling the commitment. We have not missed to also encourage the efforts made and the positive developments even in the absence of concrete results or when the implementation of the reviewed commitments is uncomplete.

The evaluation is done by analogy with that in the Bulgarian educational system, where grades range from poor 2 to excellent 6. The initial grades were proposed by the experts who developed the respective analytical units and were subsequently confirmed by the civic organisations, members of the National Network for Children. The final grades were obtained after coordination and validation with a group of external evaluation experts - public figures and professionals with experience and a stand on the issues reviewed.

The content of the sections before each area titled 'What do children, parents and professionals think' is a summary of the main topics of the supplementary edition to this report - 'Report Card 2018: How do children, parents and professionals evaluate the government?'. In an effort to give the views of children, parents and professionals, it reflects the results of a survey conducted in the period December 2017 - February 2018. The survey was conducted through a total of 52 focus groups, involving 518 people and an online survey with 352 respondents. Focus groups and survey respondents followed the structure of the current report by reviewing the government commitments in terms of their implementation, scoring it and giving recommendations for improvements.

1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



COMMITMENT 1

Developing legislative amendments
in the field of the rights of the child

GRADE:**Poor 2.50**

due to the continuing tendency for compartmentalisation by individual sectors and the lack of specific steps to develop and agree on a common and shared concept for legislative amendments in the field of children's rights.

PROGRESS:

Legislative amendments in the field of the rights of the child in 2017 were mainly adopted in individual sector policies – social area, education, healthcare and justice, while actually all proposals related to the development of cross-sectoral cooperation and achieving one common vision for regulating an integrated approach are at a standstill.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING LEGISLATIVE AMENDMENTS:

- **Develop and implement a common and shared concept of legislative amendments in the area of children's rights**, including regulating integrated approach and integrated services. The concept should also be based on **a common vision and philosophy of working with children and promoting a family-focused approach to the development of policies, practices and services for children and parents in the country**

RECOMMENDATIONS AIMED AT EFFECTIVE ENFORCEMENT OF THE LEGISLATION AND ITS AMENDMENTS:

- Review, update and **amend the Code of Ethics for Working with Children into a Code of Ethics for Working with Children and Parents** to effectively implement a family-focused approach as part of the job descriptions of all professionals working with children.
- **Specialisation of professionals working with children based on established standards for their competence** and building their capacity. In practice this means development and introduction of state professional standards for recruitment, qualification maintenance, competitive career development and performance appraisal of all groups of public employees working with children: health professionals; teachers; social workers; psychologists; police officers and Mol staff, magistrates, investigators, lawyers; probation officers; staff members of penitentiary institutions and others.
- **Plans and programmes to develop an effective system for provision of induction and in-service training, support, and supervision** for professionals working with children.
- **Common methodologies and assessment tools**, with exploring the current European experiences, different practices, and building on the lessons learned from other Member States.
- **Effective mechanisms to ensure the rights of the child through interaction between different systems and professionals while working on specific child cases** – provision and implementation of **common risk assessment methodologies and tools and other mechanisms** for interinstitutional cooperation, professional coordination and promotion of multidisciplinary approach with clear roles and responsibilities, and authorities responsible for the coordination and case management.

COMMITMENT 2**Protection and integration
of unaccompanied minors and juveniles****GRADE:****Poor 2.50**Lack of viable
solutions and
effective measures.**PROGRESS:**

No progress. None of the measures taken has led to an improvement in the situation of unaccompanied children.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

None of the recommendations made by the NNC in Report Card 2017 has been implemented, so they remain unchanged this year as well.

- Draft and adopt Action Plans to the National Strategy for integration of persons granted international protection in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014-2020 and the National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration 2015-2020, with specific measures, indicators for their implementation, deadlines and responsible institutions;
- Finalise and adopt the Coordination Mechanism for interaction between the national and local child protection authorities on cases of minor or juvenile aliens seeking or having been granted international protection;
- Draft guidelines and procedures for applying the new legislative decision on the representation of unaccompanied

minor and juvenile refugees related to specifying at which moment to appoint the representative, a clear procedure for changing representation when moving the child to the territory of a different municipality; interaction with other institutions; accountability and control of the nominated child's representative, etc.;

- Guarantee effective access to health, education and social services for unaccompanied children;

- Taking into account the significant number of cases of unaccompanied children, seeking and having been granted protection, that certain CPDs in the country work with, and the amendments to the Act on Foreign Nationals in the Republic of Bulgaria that imposed new commitments, it is necessary to appoint additional social workers. They should be specially trained to work only on cases of unaccompanied children.

COMMITMENT 1

Creating mechanisms for taking into consideration the opinion of children in drafting and implementing policies that affect them

GRADE:

Average 3.00,

since there are some attempts to make the child's opinion heard at the policy and practice level among professionals, but no real results are yet to be seen. All new steps are still very formal and have no real impact on policies.

PROGRESS:

There has been some progress in the implementation of child participation mainly through its extensive promotion by the Chairperson of the SACP as well as in some specific steps and measures. However, the fact that there is no single concept in Bulgaria about the meaning of 'child participation' and that respect for the child's opinion is at a very early stage, has simply been ignored, in the same way as was ignored the need for training the adults.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

→ Raise the capacity of SACP professionals to plan and implement appropriate forms of child participation in different spheres of life and at different levels of decision-making.

→ SACP to promote and develop other forms of child participation besides children's councils, such as articles and newspapers, storytelling (for children interested in journalism), child participation expressed through the creative talents of children (songs, theatre, arts, cinema, etc.), using research methods (interviews, focus groups, etc.), while respecting the principles of child participation and ethical conduct of research reaching out to children. These forms should also be applied when formulating policies for children, developing programmes and plans, designing services, etc.

→ SACP to organise the participation of children in preliminary impact assessment prior to an amendment/adoption of a legislative act for consulting the

children's opinion. The impact assessment is carried out according to an established methodology; it provides for improving the quality of the legislative acts by examining the social, economic, environmental and other effects of their implementation, including on small and medium-sized enterprises, non-governmental organisations and citizens. The methodology also provides for consultations in which children could be included as well.

→ MES to support schools in the work of student councils. There are many positive and interesting forms of selecting representatives and of the work of student councils on the ground, and it would be helpful these approaches to be shared when they have a positive effect on child participation. The pedagogical specialists, who support the work of children's councils, should also be supported through training.

COMMITMENT 1

Reducing the number of children aged 0-18 living in poverty by 78,000 (30% of the overall national target and 25% of the number of poor children in 2008.)

GRADE:**Poor 2.00,**

since, although there was some rise in the amount of social transfers, the share of poor children and those at risk of poverty and social exclusion keeps increasing. There is no integrated approach and integrated services of the social, health and education systems, which by active measures to deal with overcoming child poverty in the long term.

PROGRESS:

The share of children living in poverty and at risk of poverty has increased compared to the previous year. In 2017 certain types of childcare benefits and allowances were changed and increased. An Action Plan for the implementation of the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Promotion of Social Inclusion for the period 2017-2018 was adopted and the work on a new Social Services Act was launched.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Integrated approach to child poverty issues and implementation of measures under the Strategy (and the Plan) for combating poverty and social exclusion.
- Develop and adopt a Child and Family Strategy that will serve as a basis for a comprehensive family policy with clear objectives, measures and activities, and adoption of a family-focused approach in all areas that affect child welfare.
- Redirect policies and programmes to improve the welfare of all children and parents in the country, not just focusing on children at risk.
- Evaluate the impact of the policy aimed at ensuring adequate and sustainable social transfers, including assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the child and family support provided under the Social Assistance Act (SAA), the Law on Family Benefits for Children (LFBC), the Child Protection Act (CPA) and the Law on Integration of People with Disabilities (LIPD).

COMMITMENT 1

Development of criteria and indicators for evaluating the work on cases of violence against children.

GRADE:

Average 3.00, due to placing the topic on the agenda of the responsible institutions as well as due to some legislative amendments concerning the protection of child victims of violence.

PROGRESS:

During the period examined, some regulatory progress has been seen in terms of coordinating the activities of the responsible institutions and authorities in dealing with cases of child victims and/or witnesses of violence, but the practice shows that it is minimal.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Coordinate the work of police, social services, prosecutor's office, courts and healthcare so as to ensure more effective interaction in cases of abuse. This can be done by:
 - updating the Coordination Mechanism by including changes for mandatory involvement of providers of social services for children through the participation of municipalities or victim support organisations (in line with the Crime Victim Assistance and Financial Compensation Act (CVAFCA)); i.e. it is necessary for the Mechanism to comply with the Directive and the CVAFCA, the Law on the Mol, the SAA and the CPA;
 - updating the Implementing Regulations of the CPA, followed by amending the Mechanism by introducing a requirement when making the assessment of the reported case, an initial individual assessment of the needs and the risk of re-victimisation and secondary victimisation to be conducted by the Child Protection Department/Directorate 'Social Assistance' (CPD/DSA) and the police in partnership with the municipality/service provider or victim support organisation;
 - coordinating the secondary legislative acts concerning the work of police, social services, prosecutor's office, courts and healthcare so as to ensure better and more effective cooperation on cases of child abuse and mutual understanding of the regulatory framework. To
- clearly specify how to exchange information between institutions.
- Introduce specific indicators to monitor the territorial cooperation under the Coordination Mechanism, including information on the quality of cooperation, such as cooperation efficiency (response speed, involvement of alternative actors, follow-up of cases and regularity of meetings, etc.); individual assessments made or updated at each stage of proceedings; special measures taken to protect and safeguard the rights of child victims by the child protection or justice authorities; follow-up of the psychosocial, health, legal and therapeutic support provided to the child victims, etc.;
- Draft rules for convening the Mechanism at local level, with mandatory requirement to monitor and close the case;
- Involve in the meetings under the Mechanism not only the mandatory participants but all those who work on the case and/or have information and expertise, incl. also social service providers;
- Develop rules for 'case management', when working in a multidisciplinary team, as well as in case of change in the child's location, the child file to follow the child with provided continuity and transfer of the case to the Child Protection Department at the new location.

COMMITMENT 2

Secondary and tertiary prevention by encouraging early warning of cases of early cohabitation or parents stopping their children from going to school, and multidisciplinary work on such cases

GRADE:

Average 3.00

Although there is an expressed willingness by officials from the responsible institutions to act, some of them work on the problem just from time to time. There is no coordination, no targeted steps or integrated approach between the different sectoral policies for sustainable problem resolution.

PROGRESS:

Increase in the number of persons who were held criminally liable for early cohabitation with children, compared to previous years.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Health and sexual education should become a basic school subject in all schools, even in pre-secondary schools, and should cover topics such as family health protection, child care, and include opportunities for parents' involvement and participation.
- Art. 28 of the Health Act should be completed by the following: 'There is evidence that the person is a victim of physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or economic violence, as well as of an attempt of such violence' so that physicians could respond in case of identifying early cohabitation.
- Institutions should make more efforts to inform parents of the risks and consequences of early pregnancy on their children. The imposed measures and penalties for violation of all types of children's rights, including violence against children and coercion of a child to early cohabitation, should be promoted through open meetings in risky neighbourhoods, specialised sections on the websites of the prosecutors' office, the courts, the Directorates 'Social assistance' and child protection departments, in the media and by other methods to raise the awareness about the activities of government authorities with regard to prevention of giving birth in early age and early marriages.
- Integrate the NSI databases with those of the other government institutions with respect to gender and age of early school leavers, the age of young mothers, the age of persons involved in actual cohabitation, the reasons for school leaving, etc. in order to make an effective analysis of the situation and carry out actual simultaneous prevention of early cohabitation and early school leaving.

SAFE AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

COMMITMENT 1

Promoting healthy nutrition among children and students as well as encouraging breastfeeding of infants up to one year old.

GRADE:

Average 3.00

The awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding among pregnant women has been improved. Support by breastfeeding consultants is available in the entire country, but there is no uniform practice to support long-term breastfeeding and proper healthy introduction of solid foods. Although healthy children's nutrition is regulated, in practice the principles laid down are not being followed due to the lack of clear mechanism and willingness on the part of control institutions. Also, there is no efficient system for educating in and promoting healthy nutrition among children and their parents.

PROGRESS:

There is some relative progress in supporting the mother and the newborn for encouraging breastfeeding. The National Centre of Public Health and Analyses (NCPHA) prepared and disseminated through the Regional Health Inspectorates (RHI) 'Recommendations for healthy nutrition prior and during pregnancy and breastfeeding'. The necessary statutory framework related to the regulation of child nutrition in Bulgaria is in place through: Ordinance 2/2013 on healthy nutrition of children aged 0 to 3 in child care facilities and facilities for preparing infant food; Ordinance 6/2011 on healthy nutrition of children aged 3 to 7 in kindergartens and Ordinance 37/2009 on healthy nutrition of students.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Introduce training sessions and practice in support of breastfeeding for students in medical universities and colleges;
- Introduce training sessions and practice in support of breastfeeding for students in medical universities and colleges; expertise in developing state-of-the-art programmes and projects to educate pre-school and school-age children on healthy eating habits;
- Promote good practices among the medical community in maternity wards and family doctors in support of healthy infant feeding, proper and long-term breastfeeding;
- Introduce a clear mechanism for control and responsibilities concerning the feeding of children in kindergartens and schools – direct involvement of the Ministry of Health (MoH) and RHI in the control of the quality and type of food is required;
- Provide opportunities for breastfeeding in the early hours after birth and restructure maternity and neonatal wards to maintain 24-hour mother-infant contact;
- Update healthy nutrition regulations and recipe books, introducing stricter requirements concerning the quality of food offered at educational establishments. It is also necessary to develop and include exemplary recommended types of snacks (for pupils from first to fourth grade), which will follow the principles of healthy nutrition laid down in the ordinances as well as ensure the required diversity;
- Apply in kindergartens and schools various educational programmes and initiatives targeting both children and their parents on the need for proper and balanced diet, as well as educate for building eating habits to promote healthy nutrition;
- Joint work with non-governmental organisations who would provide independent data on children's nutrition and assist government authorities with
- Promotion of approved recipe books related to child nutrition on the NCPHA website.

COMMITMENT 2

Improvement of housing conditions,
including the related technical infrastructure

GRADE:

Average 3.00

A large part of the activities for implementing the commitment have been implemented but there are still no concrete and visible effects.

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR:

2. Development of a concept for a housing system and a new National Housing Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria.

PROGRESS:

Significant. The process has started in early 2017, a Draft National Housing Strategy was developed by a consultant, but by 31.12.2017 the document hasn't been approved by the Contracting Authority – the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

→ A significant part of the findings in the above assessment of the housing sector in Bulgaria are also included in the working version of the National Housing Strategy, but it needs to focus on supporting those really in need for housing improvements, based on the family income and vulnerability.

→ The National Housing Strategy should provide a balance of the public investment in housing policy, on the one hand, by encouraging private investment in improving the energy efficiency of housing and, on the other hand, by directing public funds to address the housing problems of the most vulnerable groups.

2. FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE



COMMITMENT 1

Expanding the network of services to prevent child abandonment and separation of children from their biological parents and families

GRADE:**Poor 2.50,**

because the procedures for building the infrastructure and changing the legislative basis are timely launched.

Despite the formally followed procedure for coordinating the Maps of new services (community-based and residential) with the municipalities, the process was not of good quality and deep enough, and many municipalities responded negatively to the approved maps, and some refuse to develop the services envisaged.

PROGRESS:

At the end of the year, the ASA launched actions aimed at reviewing and updating the methodological guide for the provision of the service, as well as the Ordinance on the conditions and procedure for implementing measures to prevent the abandonment of children and their placement in institutions and for their reintegration, where NGOs were included in the process. There has been progress in the preparation for building the necessary infrastructure to reform the Community Support Centres, but it is alarming that there is a lack of qualitative coordination of the Map of new services with the municipalities, causing tension and delays in the submission of infrastructure projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Taking into account the requests of the municipalities for the services needed at local level to date and their arguments for changing the type and number of services envisaged in the maps, as well as for not developing any new services at all.
- Prevention of abandonment programmes at the Community Support Centre should have a wide-open entry.
- Good resource provision for crisis material support and mobile work in the communities.

DEINSTITUTIONALISATION

COMMITMENT 1

Deinstitutionalisation (DI) of child care (a network of community-based social services, programmes for children leaving the specialised institutions, foster care, et.)

GRADE:

Average 3.00,

because the indicators are being met insofar as specialised institutions are gradually closing down and the number of children in them decreasing, but there is no investment in the capacity of the child protection system, including in the residential services that have taken over the care of a large proportion of children and young people from the closed institutions.

PROGRESS:

The process of closing down specialised institutions and opening new community-based services continues, but no investment is being made in the teams of these services, which puts the quality of care provided in them at risk.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Resuming the work of the Standing experts working group on DI (SEWGDI) and the Inter-institutional working group on DI and establishing a working mechanism for liaison between the two;
- Improving the coordination between social, health and education systems at every level so that each system would assume responsibility for children and young people - the target group of the DI process.
- Discussion of the implementation of the measures and activities of the updated Action Plan in the SEWGDI and deciding on further activities;
- Raising the financial standard of the Family-Type Placement Centre (FTPC) service to provide a higher number of staff with decent remuneration and opportunities for training and supervision;
- Investing in expanding the capacity of social workers in the system.

COMMITMENT 1

Develop social services for mandatory preparation of prospective adoptive parents and children who are to be adopted; and for support of adoptive parents and adopted children.

GRADE:

Average 3.00,

since at the end of the year there was an active move in a positive direction on the topic. In early October 2017, the MLSP made a commitment to set up follow-up thematic working meetings in 2018. There is an intention stated for legislative amendments concerning adoptive motherhood to be finalised and proposed to be put to the vote in the National Assembly.

PROGRESS:

On 12 December 2017, the MLSP proposed changes and opened a one-month public consultation concerning the topic of parental leave and compensation in case of adoption of children aged between 0 and 5. In November 2017, a working group was set up to update the Training programme for prospective adoptive parents with an option for the involvement of stakeholders - NGOs. In the middle of the year, an entitlement to a 15-day adoption leave for adoptive fathers was introduced, however this refers only to cases where the child is under 5 years of age. The work on the bill amending and supplementing the Family Code of the end of 2016, which triggered a tremendous public interest in its adoption section, remained without further development.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Develop a uniform methodology and standard for preparing prospective adoptive parents. The programme should provide an in-depth examination of a wide range of aspects.
- Prepare specialised training for parents in case of a second and/or consecutive adoption or adoption in a family with biological child/children.
- Develop a programme of mandatory support services for the child and the adoptive parent in the post-adoption period, which should involve the family, social workers, social service providers and education system staff.
- Regulation of an earmarked adoption leave, regardless of the age of the child, as well as regulation of the entitlement of the adoptive father to a 15-day leave also in cases where the adoption occurs after the fifth birthday of the child.
- Regulation of the entitlement to one-off benefit in the event of adoption at the amount corresponding to the order of the child in the family, and not to the mechanism by which the child has become part of that family.
- Take action to implement the UN Human Rights Council's recommendation for introduction of a legislation, banning the secret of adoption and guaranteeing the right of the child to know their origin. It is necessary to collect and store quality information about the biological family, as well as to develop a detailed administrative procedure regulating the access to this information, while protecting the interests of the three parties.
- Ensure the transparency of procedures and processes by the institutions - publicly available sources of information and publication of regular statistics about the profiles of children and prospective adopters entered in the registers. Ensuring access to information on the movement of the personal file of the prospective adopters.
- Provide information on adoption policy - analysis of the reasons for the relatively low number of adoptions, comparison between the domestic and international adoptions in terms of numbers and characteristics of children, analysis of tendencies in adoption.

COMMITMENT 2

To improve the quality of foster care social service

GRADE:

Poor 2.50,

because in the quest for quality foster care, specific measures have been taken but these are piecemeal and there is no comprehensive vision for the service development in the country in the long run, while key issues remain unaddressed.

PROGRESS:

The info cards developed under the 'Accept me 2015' project contain data and information on the development of foster children and take account of the progress in their development, changes, new diseases or difficulties in their overall development. The number of foster families in the country remains relatively small. Absence of ability to meet the specific needs of particular groups of children for whom placements are more complex.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is necessary to develop a vision and a comprehensive plan for the development of foster care service in the country with a view of refining the provision model upon the end of the 'Accept me 2015' project. It is important for the vision and the plan to step on a comprehensive current analysis of the service with assessment of the impact on children, biological and foster parents and professionals.
- The planning, coordination, monitoring, management and service provision roles need to be specified. The option for the DSA to be the service provider should be restricted, as this entails a conflict of interests with their role as a child protection authority.
- The arrangements on the participation of NGOs as partners to municipalities or as a provider of the overall service should be specified in terms of how to be implemented in practice.
- Placement in kinship care should be placement with provision of care meeting certain standards, providing resources and monitoring by the services. It is necessary to tackle the problem of children whose parents leave for a job in a different country while children remain in the informal care of other people.
- Provide a constant package of in-service training modules, individual and group supervisions, counselling, and support groups for foster families and Regional Foster Care Teams (RFCT) staff to improve and upgrade their skills. Continue with forms of ongoing monitoring and looking for feedback from foster families and RFCT social workers for overcoming specific difficulties.
- Development of foster care for children with special needs - behavioural difficulties, children with disabilities, victims of violence, etc. Increasing the number of placed children with special needs should go along with a package of additional social support and services directly targeting the child and the family, incl. adequate involvement of health and education systems.
- Need for positive national campaigns to recruit new foster families. It is important to plan the number of foster families needed in view of the plans for closing down specialised institutions.

3.

HEALTHCARE



INPATIENT AND OUTPATIENT CARE

COMMITMENT 1

Expanding the scope of medical services provided to pregnant women and children at risk

GRADE:

Average 3.00

due to the non-compliance with the commitments made by the State for active implementation of the integrated medical-social approach to pregnant women, newborn children and children at risk, introduced via the National Programme for Improving Maternal and Child Health.

PROGRESS:

The National Programme for Improving Maternal and Child Health adopted in 2015 introduced a *new philosophy* of prevention, health education, early screening and synchronised institutional activities to improve the health of children, young people and families.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Setting up a Public Council to the National Programme for Improving Maternal and Child Health involving the stakeholders to monitor the Programme management and the implementation of the envisaged activities.
- Develop and implement a methodology for the operation of the Health and counselling centres for maternal and child health.
- Deliver the trainings for professionals planned in the National Programme for Improving Maternal and Child Health.
- Build a single information portal/website where to publish updated information on the activities and services provided by the Health Counselling Centres.
- Carry out the national preventive healthcare information campaigns envisaged under the Programme.
- Expand the scope of Ordinance 26 on Healthcare to Uninsured Pregnant Women with a second preventive healthcare examination and a blood group test.

COMMITMENT 2

Apply a complex medical and social approach to the child care, incl. for children with disabilities and chronic diseases, and provide support to their families.

GRADE:**Poor 2.50**

given the lack of an integrated approach and support for children with special needs in early childhood and development of early intervention services, no activities for opening Centres for Complex Services for Children with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases.

PROGRESS:

Partial implementation of the activities envisaged/required to meet the commitment and positive results are seen, but only where there are pilot interventions and support from external partners and donors.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Applying an integrated approach to support the child and his/her family - synchronising health services and treatment with early intervention and social services;
- Strengthen the capacity of the legally established Centres for Complex Services;
- Carry out compulsory screening of early childhood development at age of 0-3 by a paediatrician and/or at entering a child care facility, with a view to early detection of problems/specific developmental needs;
- Communicate information about the child in cases of disability or unfavourable prognosis to the parents in a humane, friendly and respecting human rights manner;
- Encourage the contact between the newborn with or without disabilities and the parents through: daily visits, involving mothers in the daily care of the baby, introducing conditions for kangaroo care and breastfeeding of the baby;
- Organisation of family rooms at each hospital;
- Creation and maintenance of single registers of children with disabilities, with chronic diseases, of premature babies and of children with special needs.

COMMITMENT 3

Strengthening the model of health mediators as a prerequisite for improving access to healthcare for vulnerable groups

GRADE:

Good 3.50

This policy is being implemented, but at legislative level no concrete results have yet been achieved, although steps have been taken in this direction. The health mediator model is well established and has proven its effectiveness both locally and nationally.

PROGRESS:

In 2017, the network of health mediators was expanded by 20 new positions. The health mediators in place in the country in 2016 were 195 in 110 municipalities, in 26 regions, while in 2017 some 215 health mediator positions in 116 municipalities were approved. The Health mediation programme in 2017 covered 27 out of 28 regions of the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Development of detailed guidelines for the work of the health mediators (HM) with clear procedures for the inclusion of new municipalities and new health mediators in the programme; competitive recruitment of new health mediators; providing a workplace and good working conditions;
- Delegation of activities to non-governmental organisations related to the expansion of the HM network, incl. to monitor and analyse the results achieved by the HM and the impact of their services on the most vulnerable communities;
- Improving the knowledge and information of municipal administrations about the national healthcare policies in order to implement them more effectively at local level;
- Promoting the role of HM and the effect of their work among municipal administrations and all stakeholders at local level.

COMMITMENT 1

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

GRADE:

Average 3.00

In healthcare and education, there are some individual elements of the policy for good child mental health, but there are still not enough points of contact between the three systems - healthcare, social protection and education. Separate measures for improving the performance of the systems exist, but rather 'two by two'.

PROGRESS:

Actions are being taken to fulfil the commitment and regulate different services, but there is no complex and integrated approach to the needs of children and parents. Progress shows a clearer outline of the area of childhood development in individual sectoral policies and services as complementary to the rights of the child. Through this prism the focus of attention is transferred to the conditions of the environment in which child lives - family, school, friends. Where professional interventions have an individualised approach and support the prevention of mental health problems, opportunities for positive outcomes are opened for the future of the children covered.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Establish child mental health as a separate policy, and not as a part of the general mental health of adults. The recommendation from last year's Report Card 2017 to include in the new Child and Family Strategy the need for data on the mental health of Bulgarian children to be entered in the government agenda remains valid;
- Develop of an integrated services concept to bring together all different systems, such as healthcare, social, education, justice, developmental under a common philosophy, approach and coordination for development, implementation and delivery of integrated services;
- The early development of the child should be a priority in mental health policy;
- The education system should outline and clarify the exact functions, place and role of both types of specialists - psychologists, pedagogical counsellors and social workers in education for the purposes of mental health of children in kindergartens and schools. Alternative ways of support should be applied to children, informed by their mental health problems and the specifics of their development, rather than treating the difficulties in their behaviour with sanctions and penalties;
- Improvement of prevention and proactive approaches to work in the educational sphere in terms of recognising children with traumatic experiences, with emotional and behavioural problems, victims of violence or living in an environment with multiple complex risk factors.

COMMITMENT 1

Ending by 2030 preventable newborn and under-five deaths, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to a maximum of 12 per 1,000 live births and the under-five mortality rate to a maximum of 25 per 1,000 live births

GRADE:

Good 4.00,

because the target was met with regard to infant mortality overall for the country, but the indicator is still much higher for some towns, in rural areas and regions and higher than the EU average.

PROGRESS:

The target for the overall infant mortality rate for the country has been achieved. Some work on the Action Plan for the National Health Strategy 2020 and on the National Programme for Improving Maternal and Child Health 2014-2020 is underway, but there is no progress in reducing the rate in certain regions of the country. Mortality in children aged 1-9 decreased to 0.20 ‰, therefore this target was reached as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Prioritize under different programmes and projects implementation of targeted actions to reduce infant mortality in regions and settlements where it is highest;
- Implement the planned activities under the different plans and programmes related to maternal and child health and their annual public reporting.

4. EDUCATION



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

COMMITMENT 1

Implementation of activities related to the development and provision of integrated services for early childhood development

GRADE:

Poor 2.50,

because despite the continuing provision of integrated early childhood development services in some municipalities, there has been little progress and political will for reforms in the health, education and social areas to bring real progress and measurable results to all early-age children and their families.

PROGRESS:

There is minimal progress, but the services provided are narrow in scope and limited in territory; there is no comprehensive and full access to them for all children and families.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Adoption of an integrated cross-sectoral strategy for early childhood development which will make it a national priority;
- Development of a shared vision and adoption of a regulatory framework for the integrated services that is consistent with the rights of children in early childhood and their needs;
- Ensure sustainable funding for the integrated early childhood development services;
- Ensure quality and access to the existing early childhood development services, both sectoral and integrated;
- Legal regulation and introducing programmes such as early intervention and home visiting, which are key to the development of children at the earliest possible stage;
- Measures for training and upgrading the qualification and for improving the working conditions of professionals working with children at an early age;
- Introduce mechanisms for collecting data on early childhood development and the provided services, and measures aimed at evaluating their impact;
- Adoption of standards for early childhood development under the Ordinance provided for in Art. 24 of the Pre-school and School Education Act (PSEA);
- Raise the public awareness of the importance of early childhood development and the sensitivity to the need for investing in children.

COMMITMENT 1

Support for access to preschool and school education

GRADE:

Good 3.50,

because of the consistency of the measures taken to improve access but in the absence of overall vision and measurability of their quality results.

PROGRESS:

The implementation of policies envisaged and planned in the previous programming period continues. There are no particular innovations, more serious ones are expected in several areas in 2018. The main efforts are focused on some amendments in the legal framework and its implementation. The effects of lowering the level for getting primary education by one grade from 8th to 7th and the creation of combined schools teaching children in compulsory school age up to 10th grade need detailed analysis

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Analysis of the effects of early inclusion of children in pre-school education and developing a strategy to extend its coverage to 4-year-olds in the conditions of a broad public consultation and a clear concept for its funding, infrastructure and provision of teaching staff.
- Analysis and assessment of the effect of lowering the grade for getting primary education and the tendencies for dropping-out of/continuing education related to it. Strategy for development of combined schools as a possible solution to the problem.
- A comprehensive strategy for the development of schools by regions aimed at equalising the education quality and preventing the negative tendencies caused by students' moving and traveling to neighbouring schools and schools in other municipalities.
- A commitment by the government to build an accessible architectural environment for children with physical disabilities in all schools in the country.

COMMITMENT 2

Prevention of dropping out at compulsory school age, compensatory measures for those at risk of dropping out and reintegration of early school leavers.

GRADE:

Good 4.00

due to the introduction of the Mechanism and the guarantee for sustainability of the procedure by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), but the still unclear effect of its implementation as well as due to the short deadlines and the lack of good organisation of the interinstitutional teams by coverage, the unequal involvement of different professionals and the incomplete source database of children subject to compulsory education. Although it is still early to analyse the results of getting children back to school, a key question remains of what coordinated measures will be taken to ensure the long-term and beneficial stay of children at school, what prevention of repeated dropping out is foreseen by the Ministry and what is going on with all the children who were not found at their addresses.

PROGRESS:

The introduced in July 2017¹ *Mechanism for joint work by institutions for enrolment and retaining in the education system of children and schoolchildren at compulsory pre-school and school age* is the first serious claim for coordinated interinstitutional action at national level over the last decade, although to a great extent repeating the already existing practices for finding and enrolment of students that exist unofficially in many municipalities and schools across the country. In this sense, such a commitment by the State should be welcomed as a step in the right direction and an attempt for the recognition of the enormous problem of dropping out of school as a responsibility not only of the education system and the family. However, all issues that accompany its implementation in practice must be taken into account.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Analysis of the results, short and long-term effects of the implementation of the Mechanism and respectively improving its principles of work.
- Requirement for a strong commitment and active involvement of all related institutions, both in the teams for the coverage and in the follow-up measures for integration and against repeated dropping out of students.
- Development of a comprehensive policy to support families and children at risk of dropping out to ensure that sufficient conditions for integration at school are genuinely created for children, and that the social barriers related to poverty and social exclusion, cultural characteristics and other difficulties beyond educational ones are removed. Moving away from a policy of sanctions to a policy of supporting the families.

1. Council of Ministers Decision
No 373/05.07.2017

COMMITMENT 3

Developing a system of special measures to attract, retain and develop pedagogical staff aged up to 35 and specialists with high level of professional training and qualification in the system of secondary education.

GRADE:

Good 3.50,

because some steps under this commitment have been taken - such as changes in the requirements for acquiring a professional qualification as a teacher, a new master's programme, and an increase in the starting salary, but they still haven't produced a satisfactory and lasting result. Part of the activities planned in the strategy have not been implemented, including the development of a pilot model for state pedagogical practice.

PROGRESS:

One operational plan with an implementation period 2015-2016 was published so far under the Strategy. As of this moment (February 2018) a new plan is not available. Since the National Network for Children finds the commitment to attract young pedagogical staff a key to the development of Bulgarian education, it monitors the implementation of the indicators laid down under the Strategy until 2020, with most of the changes reviewed in this analysis being introduced after 2016, and covering the evaluation period of this Report Card. Some legislative amendments have been adopted, focusing on pedagogical staff in general, and an innovative master's programme has been developed. As regards young teachers, measures for attraction, retention and development have been introduced however not all indicators in the strategy implementation plan have been achieved.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Facilitating the access for acquiring a legal capacity as a teacher by involving more organisations accredited under high and transparent criteria by the Ministry of Education and Science to offer basic teacher training.
- Introduce measures to motivate and involve current students interested in working as teachers. This may include expanding access to pedagogical training courses for students of different specialties.
- Competitive salaries paid to teachers according to their performance and working conditions.
- In order to motivate directors to attract and retain young teachers, their activities in this regard may be taken into account in their performance appraisal.
- Ensuring quality additional in-service trainings according to the individual needs of the teacher and monitoring the effects of the funds invested in these trainings on the results and motivation of teachers.

COMMITMENT 1

Providing conditions for inclusive education

GRADE:**Good 3.50,**

due to the partially secured conditions for the implementation of the legislative initiatives launched in 2016. Sustainable and timely funding and provision with specialists, methodologies, tools and practices has not been yet secured despite the presence of legal requirements.

PROGRESS:

A new Ordinance on inclusive education has been adopted to help the processes of full coverage of inclusion policies and improvement of the educational environment, but there is still not good understanding of the inclusive education philosophy, its implementation in practice in all schools, as well as sustainable financing.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- After evaluating the effect of their implementation on children and students, disseminate the methodologies and tools developed under the SESEG OP within the project BG05M20P001-3.003-0001 – ‘Support for equal access and personal development’, incl. tools that are of a purely operational nature in the context of the requirements of the new Ordinance – e.g. individual programme, support plan, etc. As soon as possible, the MES to equip the schools with a set of tools, methodologies and aids to provide general support in the part for prevention of learning difficulties.
- The 3-year Action Plan for the implementation of the National Development Programme: BULGARIA 2020 to broaden the scope of the measures with respect to inclusive education and to pay attention to how and at what quality it is ensured to children in all institutions in the country, as provided for by the PSEA.
- To create a common shared national vision for the purposes of inclusive education, that leads to a uniform understanding of its philosophy and implementation. Such a vision must be accompanied by a ‘Roadmap’ of deadlines, resources and responsible institutions.
- The funding for the general and the additional support should be as clear and transparent as possible. To secure support not only for children with SEN, but also for children at risk, with chronic diseases and gifted children. Funding should not depend only on the individual will of individual managers of educational establishments. The general support activities should provide for specialists, incl. a speech therapist and a psychologist.

5.

JUSTICE



JUSTICE IN LINE WITH THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD

COMMITMENT 1

To equip/adapt special rooms for stay, hearing, interviewing children, including children with disabilities in proceedings that affect them

GRADE:

Average 3.00

due to the efforts to equip/adapt special rooms for stay, hearing, interviewing children, including children with disabilities, in the proceedings that affect them.

PROGRESS:

Unfortunately, efforts to create special rooms have not led to real positive changes in the situation of children who are victims of violence or crimes. There is no change at all for child victims of violence or crimes with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Analysis of the problems and good practices in the country and in the EU of using specialised rooms, to support the identification of national priorities in this field;
- Introduce a clear system for collecting and periodic analysis of data from the existing specialised rooms and developing uniform standards for their work. It is necessary to introduce common indicators for the 'blue rooms' in the country at national level, to track the hearings and interviews of children in the specialised interview rooms. Data to be used for monitoring and introducing new policies and practices as well as for research.
- Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) to be underpinned by the analysis and to guarantee full introduction of the requirements of Directive 2012/29/EU to ensure access to protection measures for child victims of violence and crimes, including hearing/interviewing in a specialised room, for which victims to be adequately informed at very first contact, and at any subsequent contact with the protection system, the police or the justice system;
- Introduction of individual assessment not as a possible expertise but as a psychosocial assessment of the readiness of children, including children with disabilities to participate in legal proceedings, and for identifying their protection and support needs;
- Introduction of amendments to the Coordination Mechanism for cooperation in the work on cases of children victims or at risk of violence, and for cooperation in crisis intervention to ensure an interinstitutional and multidisciplinary approach throughout the entire period of working on a case of a child victim of violence and/or crime, including children with disabilities, from reporting the case to the full recovery from the traumatic experiences, including after the eventual sentence has been served by the offender;
- Introduction of standards for interviewing children, including children with disabilities, such as methodology and procedures regardless of who shall conduct them;
- Introduction of requirements for the competency profile of the investigating authorities who conduct the hearings and interviews and of the psychologists or pedagogues who assist in the hearings and interviews.

COMMITMENT 2

Preparing a package of legislative amendments to provide for amendments to the Criminal Code and related legislation, as well as adoption of special laws for child justice - governing the possibilities for diversion of juveniles from criminal proceedings and governing the disciplinary measures in case of release.

GRADE:**Weak 2.00,**

due to the declared political will to implement the reform, and placing the topic on the agenda of the Council on implementation of the Updated Strategy to Continue the Reform of the Judicial System.

PROGRESS:

At the end of the year, the Ministry of Justice declared that they would work to finalise the draft Diversion of Criminal Proceedings and Imposition of Disciplinary Measures for Juveniles Act as a matter of urgency, taking into account the international standards. The Social-Pedagogical Boarding School (SPBS) in the village of Dragodanovo was closed by the Ministry of Education and Science.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The draft of the Diversion of Criminal Proceedings and Imposition of Disciplinary Measures for Juveniles Act and the amendments to the Criminal Code and the CPC that go with it to be submitted to the National Assembly, while clarifying the role of the social services and provision of resources for their responsibilities in supporting the children in conflict with the law and the children under the minimum age for criminal liability.
- Draft an Action Plan for enforcing the new legislation that would provide a framework and clarity on how all planned

changes will be managed and how they will be organised over time; which activities will be prioritized; what measures and guarantees should be put in place to provide the necessary human and financial resources for its implementation;

- Establish interinstitutional and multidisciplinary teams with the participation of external experts and representatives of NGOs to draw up individual plans for the closure of the Correctional Boarding Schools and SPBS and to redirect the children and young people placed there to new forms of support and correctional measures.

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN THE CYBERSPACE

COMMITMENT 1

Promoting safe internet rules for children to children, parents and school authorities and the contact details where inappropriate internet information could be reported

GRADE:

Average 3.00

There were several SACP initiatives in this direction as well as improvement in the MES curricula, but much more efforts are needed.

PROGRESS:

SACP initiated several important events and declared intention within the National Child Protection Programme for 2018 one of the Agency's important priorities to be 'Children in the Digital Era'.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

→ SACP to update the content of their website by clearly displaying the web addresses and phones where reports could be made or advice or help could be sought in case of problem with a child in the internet.

→ The Ministry of Education and Science to undertake a comprehensive review of the curricula in order for the development of digital literacy of children from initial schooling to completion of secondary education to be integrated in the requirements for other relevant subjects.

NETWORK MEMBERS

Blagoevgrad Region

Association 'Community Council on Education' – Gotse Delchev

Burgas Region

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

Varna Region

Association of Parents of Children with Dyslexia – Varna
'Gavroche' Association – Varna
'Eurointegration'
Association – Varna
'Karin Dom' Foundation – Varna
'Vassilitsa' Association
Agency for Social Development
'Vision' – Varna
'Joy for Our Children'
Foundation – Varna
Social Association 'St. Andrei' – Varna
Family Centre Maria – Varna
Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Association – Varna
'Sauchastie' Association – Varna
'Colourful Future' Association – Varna

Veliko Tarnovo Region

'International Social Service'
Foundation – Veliko Tarnovo
'Youth Tolerance' Association – Gorna Oriahovitsa
Centre for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance AMALIPE – Veliko Tarnovo

Vidin Region

Association 'Organization Drom' – Vidin

Vratsa Region

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

Gabrovo Region

YMCA Gabrovo Association
'Social Dialogue 2001'
Association – Gabrovo

Dobrich Region

'Helping Hand' Foundation – Dobrich

Kardjali Region

Association 'Initiative for Development' – Kardzhali
Decides' – Kardzhali

Kyustendil Region

Association "Knowledge, Success, Change" – Dupnitsa
Association Largo – Kyustendil
Parental Boards of Trustees of Kindergarten 'Kalina' – Doupnitsa

Lovech Region

'Ecomission 21st Century'
Association – Lovech
'Knowledge' Association – Lovech

Pazardjik Region

'Future' Foundation – Rakitovo
'Juleviya Dom' Foundation
KUZMANOV Foundation – Zvanitchevo
Crime Prevention Fund IGA – Pazardzhik
'Social Practices in the Community'
Foundation – Pazardzhik

Pernik Region

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

Pleven Region

Pleven Public Fund 'Chitalishta' – Pleven

Plovdiv Region

'Big Brother, Big Sister' Association – Plovdiv
'Gender Alternatives' Foundation- Plovdiv
National Alliance for Volunteer Action – Plovdiv

Razgrad Region

'Janeta' Association – Razgrad
'Phoenix' Association – Razgrad

Ruse Region

BRTMI Association – Ruse
'Equilibrium' Association – Ruse
European Centre for Mediation and Arbitrage (ECMA)
'Caritas-Ruse' Foundation – Ruse
Open Society Club – Ruse
Centre Dynamica Association – Ruse

Silistra Region

'Ekaterina Karavelova' Women's Association – 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' Foundation – Bulgarian Branch – Sliven
'Roma Academy for Culture and Education' Association – Sliven

Sofia City Region

'Agapedia – Bulgaria' Foundation
Alliance of Bulgarian Midwives Association 'Bulgarian Psychoanalytic Space'
Association for Bulgarian family values, traditions and culture
'Bulgarche'
'Alpha Club – to Survive'
Association
Association for Early Childhood Development
'Parents' Association
Charity Foundation
Bulgarian Association of Adopted Children and Adoptive Parents
Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association
Bulgarian Paediatric Association
Bulgarian Helsinki Committee
'Bulgarian Child' Foundation
BNC 'Together for the Children'
Bulgarian Training Centre
'Child and Space' Association
'Children's Books' Association
'Children and Adolescents'
Association
Association 'Children of Bulgaria'
'Dechitsa' Foundation
'Evrika' Foundation
ECIP Foundation
'Teach for Bulgaria' Foundation
'Maternal and Child Health' Foundation
'For our Children' Foundation
'Health and Social Development' Foundation
Ethnic Minorities Health Problems Foundation
Institute for Promotion of Vocational Education and Training
Institute for Progressive Education
Social Activities and Practices Institute
'Concordia Bulgaria' Foundation
'The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award – Bulgaria' Foundation
International Legal Centre
'Arete' Youth Foundation '
M&M Physio Foundation
National Foster Care Association
National Association of Resource Teachers.
National Network of Health Mediators
National Movement 'FUUTURA' Foundation
'Hope for the Little Ones'
'Hope for Us' Association
National School Eco-Parliament
National Centre for Social and Emotional Development
'Paideia' Foundation
'Partners – Bulgaria' Foundation
'Human Rights' Project
'Applied Research and Communications' Foundation

'Friends 2006' Foundation
Association Re-Act
Reachout.BG Association
Association for Progressive and Open Communication – Sofia
'Cedar' Foundation
'Single Step' Foundation
'Step for Bulgaria' Foundation
'Step by Step' Foundation – Sofia
Social Theatre Formation 'Flower'
School Board of Trustees
'Nadezhda' at 'Benito Juárez' School
Association for Pedagogical and social help for children – FICE Bulgaria
Worldwide Foundation for Vulnerable Children
Foundation for Access to Rights (FAR)
'Zographche' Centre
'Tsvetan Tsanov' Foundation
'Centre Nadya' Foundation
'Centre for Inclusive Education' Association
Centre for Psychosocial Support
Habitat for Humanity
SOS Children's Villages – Bulgaria

Sofia Region

'Towards a Better Life'
Association – Chelopech

Stara Zagora Region

'Future for Children' Association- Kazanlak
Chitalishte 'Vazrodena Iskra' – Kazanlak
'Samaritans' Association – Stara Zagora
'World without Boundaries' Association – Stara Zagora

Targovishte Region

'Academica 245' Association – Antonovo
'Naya' Association – Targovishte
Club of NGOs – Targovishte

Haskovo Region

'Children and Families' Association – Haskovo
'Give a Smile' Foundation – Dimitrovgrad
'Hope for Protection' Association – Haskovo

Shumen Region

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

Yambol Region

Municipal School Board of Trustees – Boliarovo
Chitalishte 'Umenie 2003' – Yambol



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