



BULGARIA: COUNTRY FACT SHEET

Bulgaria is entering the final phase of the deinstitutionalisation of childcare, launched in 2010 with a clear commitment from the government. Political documents were adopted, which provided the conceptual framework of the reform: the National Strategy "Vision for Deinstitutionalization of Children in the Republic of Bulgaria" and the Plan for its Implementation, which was updated for the period 2016-2020. The structures responsible for implementing the reform have also been set up - an Interministerial Working Group, which manages and coordinates the deinstitutionalization policy in Bulgaria and a Permanent Expert Working Group, which monitors the implementation of specific actions and measures. It is intended to eradicate the institutional model of care by 2025 and to prioritize care in a family or close to the family environment.

In support of this process is the establishment of 149 new social services - 66 community and family based support services and 83 resident-type services. Targeted efforts are directed on the establishment of new integrated health and social services supporting the finalization of the deinstitutionalization process of childcare up to 3 years - closure of all Homes for medical and social care for children (HMSCC) and gradual closure of the remaining Homes for children deprived from parental care (HCDPC). An individual assessment of the needs of each child accommodated in the HMSCC and the HCDPC is planned as well as an update of the assessment of the needs of disabled children accommodated in family-type accommodation centers and their parents.

In the recent years there has been a steady tendency to reduce the number of children placed in specialized institutions, this process being parallel to the expansion of the residential services network. At the start of the reform in **2010, there were 137 specialized institutions** for children in **which 7600 children** were raised and by the end of 2018 the number of children placed in specialized institutions on the territory of the country has decreased **by over 90%**. The analysis of the data towards the end of 2018 shows the positive tendency towards guaranteeing the rights and interests of the children by providing alternative care, prevention of abandonment and reintegration into biological families - by the end of **2018 in specialized institutions remain 653 children**.

At the end of 2015 all **24 Homes for children and youngsters with mental disabilities (HCYMD) were closed**, in which approximately 1400 disabled children and young people were accommodated. The Homes for children deprived of parental care from 3 to 18 years old on the territory of the country were 80 with 3,770 children and young people accommodated there. For a period of eight years, the relative share of children in the HCDPC in the country has decreased by 95%. All homes for children deprived of parental care for children between the ages of 3 and 6 are closed, which guarantees a targeted and successful approach to the ongoing reform. In 2018, another 7 HCDPCs were closed, and the children and youngsters were taken out after an individual assessment of the needs and were accommodated in appropriate settings. At the end of 2018 there were **13 remaining HCDPCs from 7 to 18 years old with 213 accommodated children**. The Homes for medical and social care for children in 2010 were 32, with 2,455 accommodated children aged 0 to 3 years old. After bringing the children out and finding solutions that respond to their best interest, by the end of 2018 the number of HMSCCs in the country was **13 with 440 accommodated children**.

An important step towards the closure of the entrance to the institutions was the **Ordinance issued by the Executive Director of the Agency for Social Assistance in the first half of 2018, for the**



termination of the placement of children in the HCDPCs and of healthy children under 3 years in the HMSCCs. An additional impetus for the transition to a childcare system, based on the rights of the child, is implied into the philosophy of the new Social Services Act, which was developed in 2018, as well as in the amendments to the Regulation on the conditions and procedures for the implementation of measures for the prevention of the abandonment of children and their placement in institutions, as well as their reintegration.

The social services system has expanded considerably in recent years due to reforms aimed at improving planning, deinstitutionalization and providing more community-based and family-based services. From 01.01.2018 to 31.12.2018 the Chairperson of the State Agency for Child of which Protection issued **136 licenses for providing 136 social services for children, 25 for innovative services.** The total number of social services for children provided in the community, including the resident services, as of 01.12.2018 is 619, with a capacity of 14 046 children and 15 048 occupied places, as follows:

- 84 Day Care centers for children and / or young people with disabilities; children and young people with severe multiple disabilities, with a capacity of 2,403 children;
- 3 Day Care centers for children with disabilities / children with severe multiple disabilities, with a capacity of 92 children;
- 6 Day Care Centers for children and young people with disabilities with weekly care, with a capacity of 133 children;
- 1 Day Care centre for children and adults with disabilities, with a capacity of 50 children;
- 51 Centers for Social Rehabilitation and Integration for Children, with a capacity of 1 772 children;
- 1 Center for Social Rehabilitation and Integration for Children and Youth, with a capacity of 25 children;
- 13 Mother and Baby Units, with a capacity of 85 children;
- 135 Community Support Centers, with a capacity of 5,378 children;
- 20 Children's Street Work Centers, with a capacity of 389 children;
- 18 Transitional Children's Homes with a capacity of 140 children ;
- 4 Family-type placement centers for children / young people without disabilities, with a capacity of 46 children;
- 140 Family-type placement centers for children without disabilities, with a capacity of 1 701 children;
- 110 Family-type placement centers for children / young people with disabilities, with a capacity of 1 472 children;
- 7 Family-type placement centers for children with disabilities with a capacity of 93 children;
- 8 family-type placement centers for children / young people with disabilities needing permanent medical care, with a capacity of 64 children;
- 18 Crisis Centers for Children, with a capacity of 196 children.

There is a tendency over the recent years **of increasing of the funding for social services.** The funding standards for the Family-type placement centers, defined by the Council of Ministers in the last three years and 2019, are as follows:



Type of social service	2016 financial standard in bg leva	2017 financial standard in bg leva	2018 financial standard in bg leva	2019 financial standard in bg leva
Family-type placement center for children / young people without disabilities	8 806	9 070	9 700	10 913
Family-type placement center for children / young people with disabilities	9 320	10 718	11 580	13 317
Family-type placement center for children / young people with disabilities and need of permanent medical care	14 000	14 420	15 580	17 917

As of 1.01.2019, the number of approved foster families in **146 municipalities in Bulgaria was 2 154**, 2 147 of which were professional and 7 were voluntary. By the end of January 2019, in 1,640 foster families were children placed, 514 foster families were free. As of 31.01.2019, a total of 2,048 children resided in the foster families, of which 1869 healthy children and 179 children with disabilities. The children remaining in foster families as of 31.01.2019 are 1,979, broken down by age, as follows: 0-3 (31%); 3-6 (18%); 6-14 (38%); 14-18 (13%). For the period 01.11.2016 - 31.01.2019, the average number of **children with disability in foster care in 146 municipalities is 177**. The children accommodated in foster care in 2018 come mainly from: the community (biological family, family of relatives or relatives, same or another foster family) - the average monthly value for the year 2018 is 84.53%; a specialized institution - the average monthly value for the year 2018 is 9,27%; of the resident type social service - the average monthly value for 2018 is 6.1%.

HHC – Bulgaria's contribution

How it all began

The Bulgarian branch of **Hope and Homes for Children** was established in November 2011.

Our team has focused its efforts in **supporting children between the ages of 0 and 3 and their families** because abandonment at such a fragile age leads to serious trauma that leaves the child scarred for life and hinders the development of the children as adults.

We are aimed at leading a more active policy in regards to the prevention of abandonment and not allowing the placement of children in specialized institutions in Bulgaria. According to us, we need a systematic approach in order to maintain the sustainability of family policies in the country. The idea that every child needs a home and a family, in which they can feel loved and protected, lies at the basis of our work.

We believe that honour in our intentions and transparency in our every move are the factors responsible for the success of our organization. That is why we are incredibly honest in our work with children and their families, as well as with various governmental and state structures.

The work of Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria is related to the change of attitudes and policies, and where there is change there is resistance. Multiple obstacles come in the way of success.



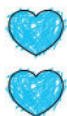
However, the same way an army heads into battle, believing in victory, we also head into each day with the courage that we will manage to give each child in Bulgaria the opportunity to live and grow up in a loving family environment. **We are creative and we are not afraid to try** over and over and over again.

We change the lives of tens of children every day, that is why **we work with extreme precision** and we treat the children, their families and all other parties involved with the utmost respect. For the time our organization has been actively working with children and their families in Bulgaria **/January 2012 – December 2018/** we have accomplished success in the fields of deinstitutionalization, prevention of abandonment and reintegration of children from institutional to family based care.

Project work

In January 2012 we started the project **“Strategic deinstitutionalization and reform of the child care for children between the ages of 0 and 3”** in support of the project “Direction: Family”, implemented by the Ministry of Health (MH) in partnership with the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP) and the Agency for Social Assistance (ASA) and financed by the Operational program “Development of human resources”, through the use of constructive and supplementary activities. Within this project, we managed to close 8 Homes for Medical and Social Care for Children (HMSCC) in the pilot regions of Sofia, Pernik, Montana, Pazardjik, Plovdiv, Gabrovo, Targovishte and Ruse. The project’s basis was the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria and the Ministry of Health (MH), Agency for social assistance (ASA) and SACP. The goals and activities of the project were related to the practical implementation of the model, developed by our organization for ACTIVE support of families.

In 2014 our organization began the implementation of the project **“Strategic deinstitutionalization for the eradication of institutional care for children between the ages of 0 and 3 in Bulgaria”** with the tendency to expand the existing activities throughout all other regions of the country. The model of “District DI Coordination Mechanism” (DDICM) had been multiplied in 13 other regions (Pleven, Razgrad, Silistra, Burgas, Vidin, Vraca, Veliko Tarnovo, Kardjali, Stara Zagora, Sliven, Haskovo, Yambol and Sofia -region).



23 coordinators around Bulgaria

21 regions of operation within the country

Direct work with children and families

Our organization has extensive experience in the work with children, their families and communities, central and local authorities, for the creation, improvement and dissemination of sustainable models for family or family based care for children. Our working models of Active Family Support (AFS) and DDICM have **been acknowledged by UNICEF and the World Health Organization** as good practices in this field.



21 DDICM formed in the country

Through the DDICMs in the country and the **150 sessions** conducted with them, we constantly provide support for the creation of solutions on specific cases thus **influencing the quality of life of children directly and positively**

2472 trained members of DDICMs, CPDs, social service providers in the country



861 participants in DDICM sessions



Establishment of long lasting partnerships with interested parties in all locations
Our organization also has the practical experience in direct support of families on location for the creation of conditions for **the upbringing of children in their biological environment**



Around **1606** successful and traced preventions



187 successful and traced reintegrations

Work on closure

In 2009, together with the Equilibrium Association, Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria was actively involved in the closure of the first HMSCC in Teteven. This participation included the elaboration of an action plan in partnership with the Municipality of Teteven, for the future steps and responsibilities of each party. The active work of all interested parties, as well as the work with families showed highly positive results. As suggested by the MH, our organization, together with the International Social Service, supported the closure of HMSCC in the village of Shiroka Luka. Our organization also supported the closure of the HMSCC – Kustendil. In partnership with the Ministry of Health, all 8 pilot HMSCCs in Sofia (St. Paraskeva), Plovdiv, Pernik, Pazardjik, Targovishte, Gabrovo, Ruse and Montana were closed. After our intensive work on the spot, we managed to further support the closure of HMSCC – Vetren, HMSCC – Razgrad and HMSCC – Zlatica.



17 closed institutions for babies with the help and effort of our organization

Work in partnership

At the very beginning of our work in 2012, we managed to establish contacts and interactions with all interested parties in the deinstitutionalization process. Hope and homes for children – Bulgaria continues to develop and support regional and local authorities in their direct work with children and families. HHC - Bulgaria has recognized the importance of partnerships and taking the initiative regarding the execution of the National strategy “Vision for deinstitutionalization of children in the Republic of Bulgaria” in cooperation with others. These two factors are also engrained in the success and effectiveness of the organization.



Signed **agreement for collaboration with MH, ASA and SACP** for mutual initiatives within the project “Direction: Family”



Signed **Memorandum of Understanding with SACP** for collaboration



18 signed MoUs with Regional and Municipal Administrations



130 CPDs we are working with

Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria is a **member of the Coalition “Childhood 2025”** - an association of civil organizations and networks, representing nongovernmental organizations and individuals, working on the deinstitutionalization process and the support for children and families in Bulgaria. HHC – Bulgaria is not simply a member of the Coalition – the organization was also a



coordinator of this association for the time frame of August 2015 – January 2016. In 2015 the Coalition was very active in the implementation of different initiatives and meetings, development of statements, letters and other texts for the updated Action Plan for the implementation of the National Strategy “Vision for the deinstitutionalization of children in the Republic of Bulgaria”. The Coalition prepared an appeal to the Bulgarian government, which was supported by the campaign “Let’s open the doors for the children of Europe” and represented the goals and positions of all member organizations at different forums seminars, conferences and meetings. Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria has been an active participant in all of the abovementioned events and continues to work actively in partnership with all other organizations in the Coalition.

Through the work with families, the execution of different programs for social protection, by changing attitudes, related to the deinstitutionalization process and placing the interest of the children at the basis of all work processes, Coalition “Childhood 2025” follows the goals, accepted and engrained in the long-term strategy “Vision for the deinstitutionalization of children in the Republic of Bulgaria”: to guarantee the right of every child to live in a family environment and to have access to quality services based on their individual needs.

Expert work

A significant part of Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria’s work is related to offering **expert and specialized help and trainings** to all interested institutions on regional level, related to topics such as deinstitutionalization, child care, support for families, multidisciplinary approaches, normative and legal frameworks.

The trainings we carry out are aimed at specialists from Child Protection Departments (CPDs), Directorate for Social Assistance (DSA), Regional Directorate for Social Assistance (RDSA), social service providers, as well as all members of the DDICMs. The trainings’ topics are related to our direct work Active Family Support and the deinstitutionalization process, based on practical examples and our experience. Moreover, the trainings are highly focused on the effectiveness of inter-institutional interactions.



340 consulted specialists



176 supervised representative of local structures



87 trained specialists from the teams of the new small group homes in Pleven, Vidin, Asenovgrad, Gabrovo, Velingrad and the Center for Social Rehabilitation and Integration (CSRI) – Vidin



54 CPDs trained and supervised throughout the country that we work directly with. These CPDs were trained on topics such as deinstitutionalization, alternative care and active family support



101 trained specialists working in the Family type placement centers for children and young people with disabilities under the IMPACT programme for overcoming challenging behaviour

Since April 2016 Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria is a member of the Permanent Expert Work Group on deinstitutionalization (PEWG). This allows the organization to play the role of a valuable voice, to help construct a more effective and focused policy in support of children and families in Bulgaria and to contribute with expertise and the already established cooperative

relations in different places, based on HHC – Bulgaria's gathered experience throughout the years the organization has been active. Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria has also been part of the work group responsible for the development of the updated Plan of Action in regards to executing the National strategy. The Updated Action Plan was officially approved in October 2016 by Council of Ministers.

The organization has participated in the work groups at the Ministry of Health and has been actively involved in the development of the Concept for closure of all HMSCC and development of a network of health and integrated socio-health services for children and families in the community "Health for all children" – 2016 – 2025.

Hope and Homes for Children - Bulgaria accepts its commitment in the process of deinstitutionalization in Bulgaria and will focus its efforts on the following aspects:

- Active advocacy and pressure for qualitative implementation of the measures adopted under the updated plan, development of supportive legislation and regulatory environment
- Active support of the system in terms of prevention of child abandonment, as well as support for providing an alternative family environment for institutionalized children
- Support for building high professional standards in the work of child protection specialists

HHC – Bulgaria contributes with all its inherent courage, excellence and integrity, applying good models and practices, providing expertise and supporting the coordination at regional level for the implementation of the DI process in Bulgaria. The cooperative efforts and hard work together with all stakeholders, including NGOs among them active role of HHC - Bulgaria create conditions for the approval of the National strategy "Vision for the deinstitutionalisation of the children in the Republic of Bulgaria" accompanied with two Action Plans (2011-2015; 2016 – 2020) and securing the funds from the EU and National budget for the set measures and activities under the Plans. HHC – Bulgaria is involved as an expert and capacity organization in different working groups and formats for elaboration of various documents, statements and legislative framework and set pressure to the Government to follow its commitment. As a result of this cooperation the DI process in Bulgaria is irreversible and sustainable process.

Hope and Homes for Children - Bulgaria will continue actively participate in the process of deinstitutionalization at the expert level, being part of the structures that influence this process - working groups, councils and others, as well as informal and formal advocacy level with the partners of Coalition Childhood 2025 and other groups of adherents.

In the period 2019 -2021 Hope and Homes for Children - Bulgaria will continue to actively work to close down all institutions in Bulgaria by closing the entrance to them in the form of active prevention of abandonment on the basis of a well-trained and motivated team and effective working models. We will continue to develop active partnerships with all stakeholders and with them we will seek the best solution for every child in residential care.