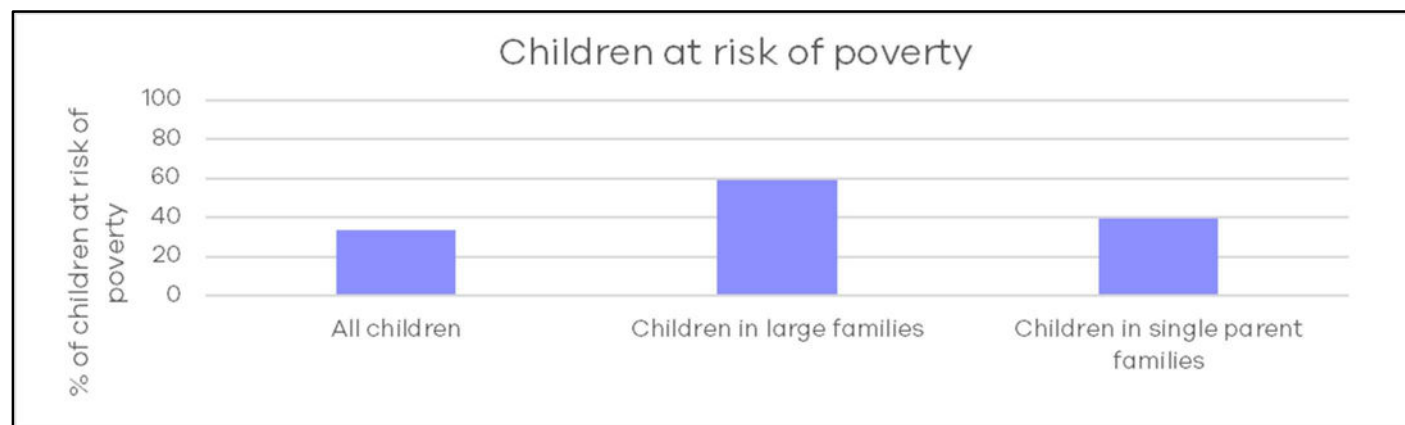
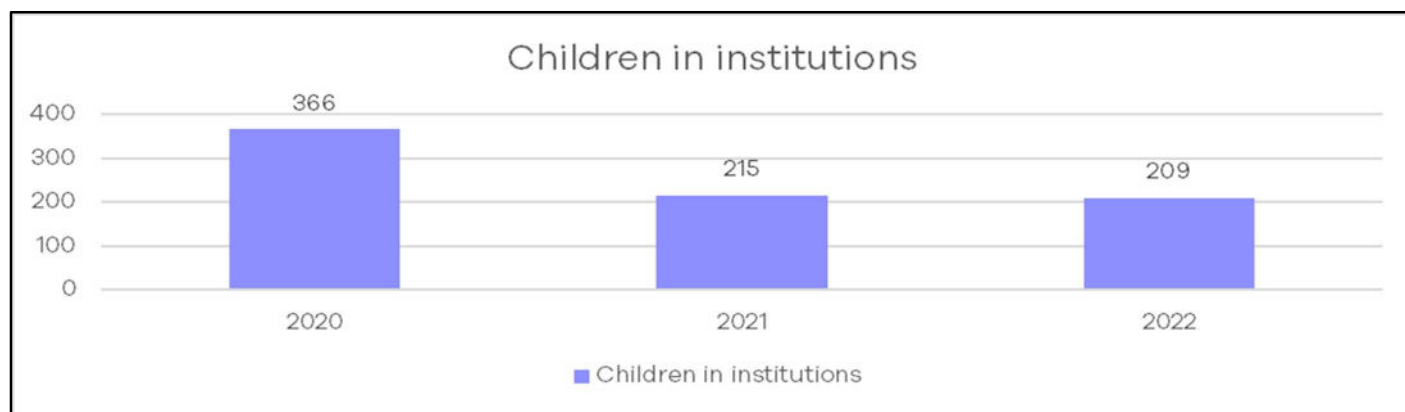




What are the key priorities facing child protection system reform in 2023 in your country?

- **Closure of the final four institutions for children.**
- **Services finalised, including specialised foster care for disabled children and family-type placement centres for children with need of permanent medical care, to ensure that the children in these remaining institutions, all of whom have disabilities, can be safely transitioned.**
- **Implementation of the National Action Plan of the EU Child Guarantee, with targeted measures to tackle child poverty.**





The biggest positive change in the country over the last 12 months

Structures within the responsible Ministries – of Health and of Social Policy have been established to coordinate the closure process. The plans that mandate the closure of the final four institutions have been elaborated; The National strategy “Vision for the deinstitutionalisation of children in Bulgaria” is a long-term strategy that each government has to follow. It has been agreed that two institutions should be closed by the end of 2024, and the final two by the end of 2025.

The biggest negative change in the country over the last 12 months.

There has been a reduction in the number of planned family-type placement centres with permanent medical care, from 28 to 14 (8 existing and 6 under construction instead of 20). The political situation has been quite unstable but, in the middle of 2023, a regular government was voted by the Parliament.

What are the other headlines or issues that you are working on in terms of child protection system reform?

- 1. Development of specialised foster care for disabled children and relevant legal amendments**
- 2. Active work on taking children and youngsters from the family-type placement centres (SGHs).**
- 3. Elaboration of a national map of social services as part of the new legislation in the field of social services**
- 4. Monitoring the implementation of the last phase of the DI process and European Child Guarantee.**



What is the main thing Hope and Homes for Children wants the government or international donors to know about in 2023?

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 was the establishment of 149 new social services - 66 community and family-based support services and 83 resident-type services. Targeted efforts are directed towards the establishment of new integrated health and social services supporting the finalization of the deinstitutionalisation process of childcare up to 3 years - closure of the last 4 Homes for Medical and Social Care for Children (HMSCC) and reducing the number of children in residential care (Small Group Homes, SGHs). 2021 was a turning point in the fight against child poverty, with the launch of two landmark initiatives, the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee.

The National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation in Bulgaria of the EU Child Guarantee¹ was published in December 2022. The plan identifies the children most in need in the country, namely children with disabilities, children in migration and refugees, children from minority backgrounds, children in alternative care and those leaving care, especially children in residential care and children from households with more than three children, single-parent families. The focus on children with disabilities is very welcome. It is important to provide children with disabilities with a family environment or close to it, to support the biological families who take care of them, and to assist foster families who would be committed to raising children with disabilities.

Specialised foster care must be supported and expanded and the NAP for the implementation of the Child Guarantee should provide all the necessary EU measures, actions and funding for children with disabilities (primarily prevention and specialised foster care) so that disabled children fully realise their right to family life and grow up in a more inclusive society. Young people with disabilities from Family-type Placement Centres need to be supported to live independently, which means resources must be provided to support them with counselling, housing, and entering the workforce.

¹ <https://www.strategy.bg/FileHandler.ashx?fileId=30810>



Latest developments, e.g., Laws, policy, and moratoria

Positive

1. The National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation in Bulgaria of the EU Child Guarantee, creates a sustainable path towards appropriate child protection system reform.
2. The documents that mandate the closure of the final four institutions have been signed; The National Strategy on DI is a long-term strategy that each government has to follow. It has been agreed that two institutions should be closed by the end of 2024, and the final two by the end of 2025.
3. New structures have been established – in the Ministry of Health and in the Ministry of Labour and Social policy responsible for the coordination of the closure process and for the elaboration of the closure plans.

Negative

1. The National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation in Bulgaria of the EU Child Guarantee doesn't not go far enough to protect and support children with disabilities.
2. HHC are concerned that the deinstitutionalisation efforts and replacement of an updated action plan for deinstitutionalisation until 2025 by the NAP is insufficiently robust. A considerable challenge remains, and there are concerns about how the deinstitutionalisation process will be managed and monitored.
3. Despite the fact that many of the foster families are willing to take a child with a disability, and the availability of more suitable placements, there remains several bureaucratic roadblocks.



"We need to be encouraged that everything will be well in the end."

Girl, 11-14, Bulgaria²



Hope and Homes for Children calls on the government to:

1. Include NGOs more actively in all types of consultations, discussions and to take into consideration the recommendations given by them.
2. Ensure the effective implementation of the National Action Plan of the Child Guarantee, through instilling accountability and commitment from across relevant national institutions and government agencies.
3. Place special attention on children's policies, with a targeted approach that outlines problems and places a real focus on child poverty and possible solutions in the short and long term.
4. Improve the mechanisms and protocols for gathering data on vulnerable children and provide access to data for stakeholders.

Hope and Homes for Children calls on the European Union/ international donor community to

1. Establish monitoring mechanisms on the implementation of policies in the field of DI, child poverty and establishment of social services.
2. Invest in transferring good practices and know-how in the field of provision of specialised foster care for disabled children.
3. Support for the improvement of the prevention work for families at risk
4. Support various programmes and projects regarding advocacy for vulnerable groups and elaboration of targeted policies for them.

² https://familyforeverychild.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/dgd_survey_report_web_en-2.pdf

HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN



Country Factsheet 2023

Bulgaria

Hope and Homes for Children Bulgaria

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About our country factsheet

This country factsheet provides an overview of the work of Hope and Homes for Children in Ukraine. It is intended to inform policymakers, donors, and the wider public about the scope of child protection system reform in each country, highlighting efforts to transition from institutions (orphanages) to family- and community-based alternatives.

Each country snapshot outlines both the strengths and weaknesses of current policies and actions within the child protection system. It provides a summary of publicly available data that we have been able to source, alongside our expert analysis of this information as it pertains to overall child protection reform. We also offer key recommendations for future interventions to drive continued improvement. These insights are based on over 30 years of experience from Hope and Homes for Children. While significant progress in child protection reform is possible, challenges remain, especially in gathering comprehensive data and aligning definitions. Where applicable, definitions and programmes discussed are based on local legal and policy frameworks. For this reason, they are not readily comparable to country factsheets, produced by us for another country or jurisdiction.

Data disclaimer

The data is primarily sourced from official state sources. The situation with children in alternative care is dynamic, and changes may not necessarily be captured in present data set. All reasonable efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the data presented herein compiled. However, Hope and Homes for Children provides this data as the guidance only and cannot guarantee its accuracy, timeliness, or completeness. Nor can we be held responsible for its use.

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Hope and Homes for Children is on the Transparency Register of the European Union,
Identification number in the register: 035163533684-92

Organisation in special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 2019.

An NGO in participatory status with the Council of Europe as of 2021.

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