

Bulgaria

Country Situation

Demographic situation

The population of Bulgaria decreased from 8.6 Million in 1990 to 7.8 Millions in 2003 (including 52% of women).¹ In 2002, 69.7% of the total population was urban. Birth rates fell from 12.7 per thousand in 1989 to 8.6 per thousand in 2003 while death rates rose from 12.0 per thousand to 14.3 per thousand during the same period, resulting in a significantly older population. Indeed, the average age in 2003 was 40.8 years² and the average life expectancy of the population rose from 70.91 years for the period 1992-1994 to 72.1 years for 1998-2003. This ageing population will burden increasingly the state budget and divert already scarce resources away from social support for groups that are economically and socially excluded from the mainstream society (like the Roma who represent 6.9% of the population).³

Socio-economic and political context

Bulgaria finalised the negotiations for accession with the EU, closing all the 31 accession negotiation chapters in 2004. The Accession Agreement between Bulgaria and the European Union was signed in April 2005 and the target date for EU membership has been set at 1 January 2007.

The 1996/1997 economic and social crisis was a turning point in Bulgaria's transition. After years of instability, Bulgaria chose in 1997 to move towards membership of the EU. Since then, this new national consensus has led successive Governments to follow a consistent reform policy, including a socially painful privatization process. Fiscal discipline, low inflation and banking sector reform have contributed to a general improvement in the country's business climate, leading to increased private investment and positive economic growth from 1998 onwards (above 4 per cent since 2000)⁴. Unemployment reached its lowest levels at 12.67% in 2004 against 13.5% in 2003. The target rate for 2005 is expected at about 12.5%⁵.

Despite the economic recovery of the last few years and sustained efforts to raise living standards reflected in an improved Human Development Index ranking (56 in 2004), poverty continues to be a problem, particularly by EU standards. In 2003,

1 National Institute for Statistics – Data from the last Census of the Population – 2003. At www.nsi.bg

2 The process of ageing is visible in the rural areas and in the cities; in rural areas the average age is higher than in the cities. In the cities this indicator shows 39,1 years, in rural areas – 44,9 years.

3 *There are also a small number of Armenians, Jews, Macedonians, Tatars, Circassians and other ethnic groups. The official data on minorities must be treated with reservation as information on personal ethnicity is provided on a voluntary basis.*

4 UNDP Draft country programme document for Bulgaria (2006- 2009), page 2.

5 Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 26 January 2005 at www.mlsp.government.bg. However, Bulgaria's growing success in generating employment opportunities is uneven, with unemployment levels ranging from less than 5 per cent in some urban centres to well over 30 per cent in many rural areas. The latter constitute 80 per cent of the country's territory with 44 per cent of the population and have development levels below the national average. UNDP Draft country ..., page 2.

Bulgaria's gross domestic product per capita constituted only 29.6 per cent of the EU average and the monthly average wage was almost 10 times lower than the EU average. Although the benefits of reform have reached growing numbers of people, an important part of the population still remains poor, particularly the 13.4 per cent living below the *relative poverty threshold*⁶. The latest World Bank Poverty Assessment (2001) also found that 7.9% of the Bulgarians were living below the *absolute poverty line* of \$2.15 per day, and 31.9% below US\$3.40 a day⁷. The WB Report shows further that poverty affects mostly:

- **Rural residents.** In 2001 nearly 33% of population lived in rural areas whereas their households comprised 66% of the poor. According to the UNDP Municipal Human Development Index, per capita incomes are lowest in the North-western (Vidin, Montana), North-eastern (Razgrad, Targovishte, Silistra) and South-eastern (Kurdjali, Smolian) regions of the country with particularly critical levels in municipalities with a high concentration of Roma and Turks⁸.
- **Distinct demographic groups:** Children and particularly those in rural households and/or from large families are over-represented among poor (60%). Children aged 10 and less represent only 10% of the population but comprise 20% of the poor. Half of all children under 5 in rural areas live below the poverty line.
- **Poorly educated individuals.** Citizens who did not complete secondary education represent 36% of the population and 80% of the poor.
- **Ethnic minorities** – especially Roma (arguably 8.8% of the population and 60% of the poor).
- **Unemployed** (15% of the population and 40% of the poor). Important factors contributing to high unemployment is the gap between skills available on the market and the jobs requirements⁹.

Education

Public expenditure for education –as % of GDP- remains low compared both to the pre-transition figures (see table below)¹⁰ and to EU level (5%)¹¹:

6 UNDP Draft country programme document for Bulgaria (2006- 2009), page 2.

7 The latest Poverty Assessment of the World Bank and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy presented on 26 January 2005 by the Social Minister suggests that 34% of the population in thirteen municipalities lives below the poverty threshold set by the Social Ministry at BGN 102 (approximately EUR 51). Rural and mountainous areas are usually the most heavily hit by poverty, including the regions of Silistra, Targovishte, Kurdjali, Blagoevgrad and Smolyan. The main reasons are local unemployment, feeble industry and services as well as slack education system in those regions. To combat the poverty in those lowest-standard municipalities, the Ministry announced the launch of a new social program based on a special "poverty map". It will develop new methods to offer people decent workplaces and decrease unemployment.

8 Bulgaria Human Development Index 2002: Municipalities in the context of Districts. UNDP. <http://www.undp.bg/bg/publications>

9 Bulgaria: A Changing Poverty Profile. Poverty Assessment. WB, p. xvi.

10 Education for all. Regional Monitoring Report, N 5/1998. UNICEF – MONEE Project.

11 Review of the Public Expenditures: Education – status, problems and opportunities. Ministry of Finance, August, 2004 and EU Press release on benchmark for education <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/02/1710&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Bulgarian Budget affected to Education as % of GDP						
Year	1990	1991	2001	2002	2003	2004
% from the GDP	5.0	5.1	4.0	4.2	4.4	4.1

Consequently, families have to pay comparatively important sums for the education of children. These include both **direct** costs (payment for textbooks and school materials, fees for pre-school education, extra curricular activities)¹² and **indirect** (opportunity costs)¹³.

Also, the lack of supportive environment in the family, especially among ethnic minorities, contributes to low enrolment in preschool and secondary education¹⁴. Parents sometimes actively discourage their children from attending school because a/of a lack of vision of the child's professional future, b/a lack of trust in the education system to provide skills on demand on the market c/out of concerns for the safety of children at school, d/because they feel the child will be discriminated against (if s/he belongs to an ethnic minority). Domestic violence, alcoholism and the presence of a parent in jail are also correlated with low attendance in school.

Children from minority communities face additional barriers including language proficiency and geographic isolation. Cultural traditions also influence participation in education. Girls from some Roma and Turkish communities often marry early and do not continue their education. Roma children, in particular, face discrimination and are more likely to end up in segregated schools or in special schools with mentally and physically impaired children, with little education and career prospects.

Contrasting with the communist period, the girl child level of education is lower than for their male counterparts. Girls also have limited opportunities for further vocational training. They are more likely to get involved in housework and to take care for siblings, due to the family's perception of women's traditional role at home (especially in Roma and Turkish communities).

Trends in Attendance Rates (% of age group)									
	Preschool education			Primary education			Secondary education		
	1995	1997	2001	1995	1997	2001	1995	1997	2001
Total population	44	14	22	87	88	90	47	55	46
Males	42	12	21	88	88	90	49	54	46
Females	46	15	24	85	88	89	45	56	46
Urban	46	13	24	88	90	92	52	63	53
Rural	40	14	20	83	84	84	31	32	22
Ethnic Bulgarians	44	15	26	90	93	94	55	66	56
Turks	53	10	19	88	93	90	10	30	34
Roma	25	5	16	55	58	71	3	5	6

Source: Bulgarian Integrated Household Survey 1995, 1997, 2001 (cited in WB Poverty Assessment, p. 116)

¹² With the exception for the first grade where the textbooks are free.

¹³ WB Assessment, p. 119-120. See also Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion, page 14.

¹⁴ WB Poverty Assessment, pages 113 et seq.

Apart from the inadequate public funding, the education system, faces other problems¹⁵. It does not reflect in a systematic way the needs of children in WFCL. Not only the enrolment is problematic but also the system is not flexible enough and does not provide informal and/or alternative schooling. In addition, the low quality of vocational training does not compare to the demand for qualified workers of the labour market. Children vulnerable to WFCL have a difficult access to vocational training because of distance from homes, lack of formal education grade, lack of capacity of children and parents to make a decision for the future of the child (beyond traditional family occupation)¹⁶.

1.1.2 The Problem of child labour and trafficking in children in Bulgaria

With the above mentioned levels of household poverty, the difficult situation of the education system and the general positive attitude to child labour the number of working children (including children used for illicit activities) has increased. There is no recent statistical data on child labour but different sources that are quoted below suggest an increase of children working in the streets and in agriculture. There has also been an increase of children involved in family owned businesses and of children sexually exploited for commercial purposes.

A national survey¹⁷ in 2000 revealed that:

- Out of a total 1,294,000 children between 5-17 years of age, in 2000, 83,000 were economically active (6.4% of that age group), another 41,800 (3.22%) declared to be engaged in family business, and another 611,000 (or 41.8%) were involved in domestic work.
- Economically active children mostly work in the informal sector mainly in the sectors of agriculture (especially Turkish children¹⁸), tourism, trade and services. Some of them work in hazardous conditions.
- Roma children are too often involved from an early age in activities threatening their morality and physical integrity such as begging, child prostitution and theft.

Working Street Children are very vulnerable to various forms of abuse. In December 2004 the State Agency for Child Protection reported 625 children being identified as involved in WFCL in the streets of five big cities (Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv, Burgas and Stara Zagora). The types of work the children were performing included begging, car washing, scavenging and prostitution. The life of working street children is marked by many problems related to their health, moral, socialization and overall development. Working street children are most vulnerable to recruitment for other

15 In: 2004: Regular Report of the EC on Bulgaria's Progress towards Accession to the EU, page 37. The inability of the education system to provide education and vocational training to fit the labour market demand has become a highly debatable issue in Bulgaria currently. See a Survey on the needs of employers for highly qualified workers, done by Alpha Research in June 2004, at <http://www.aresearch.org/> and Kapital, weekly, 14-20 May, 2005, page 12.

16 See a good analyses of these problems in the World Bank survey (2002) at: <http://www.mlsp.government.bg/bg/projects/children/beneficiaries/bulfindok11.doc>

17 The National survey "The Problems of Child Labour under the Conditions of Transformation in Bulgaria" that has been carried out with the financial support of IPEC and the ILO assistance in 2000 by members of the Sociological Institute at BAS (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences).

18 The WB Assessment reveals that in Pomak (Bulgarian Muslim) and Turkish villages, nearly all children are employed in tobacco farming. P. 119.

forms of hazardous work and are easy prey to child trafficking and prostitution. Street life is often the entry point for criminal activities.

Trafficking in children: The most recent report on trafficking in children in South-Eastern Europe¹⁹ states that Bulgaria is a country of origin and a transit country for trafficking in persons and to a lesser degree a country of destination. Among the factors increasing the vulnerability of victims to trafficking there are to be mentioned: economic background, family relations, education and employment.

The total number of Bulgarian victims identified and assisted between January 2000 and 31 December 2004 was 621. Bulgarian victims have been trafficked for sexual exploitation, labour, begging, delinquency and adoption. Some victims have also been exposed to dual forms of exploitation while trafficked. Bulgarian victims of sexual exploitation were trafficked to 20 destination countries in 2003 and 2004, most of them outside the SEE region. Victims of labour, begging and delinquency were primarily sent to EU countries. Some of the victims were trafficked internally. The majority of victims were female. Child victims accounted for 69.2 per cent of the victims of trafficking for labour begging and delinquency in 2003 and 45.5 per cent in 2004. The information from the State Agency for Child Protection supports the above.

Members of ethnic minorities were particularly vulnerable to trafficking for sexual, labour, begging, delinquency and adoption. In 2003 and 2004, 76.9 per cent and 81.8 per cent of victims for labour, begging and delinquency were from ethnic minorities. Similarly, 35.4 per cent of victims of sexual exploitation in 2003 were ethnic minorities and 42.6 per cent in 2004. The report recommends that further prevention and protection efforts to be tailored to these target groups and states that more cooperation is needed among counter-trafficking actors and organizations already working with ethnic minorities. In order to be effective interventions should carefully consider the differences between the ethnic groups and within the ethnic minority groups.

The interest of authorities in trafficking is motivated by the problem of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and the problem of unaccompanied children abroad²⁰. Bulgarian Police data²¹ suggest that more than 60% of the identified victims of trafficking are girls under 18 (72 girls out of 117) over the period 2000 – 2003. It has been dealing annually (2002 –2003) with 40 – 50 cases of unaccompanied children returning back from countries such as Austria, Italy, Germany, and Belgium where the children were trafficked for forced labour. The South Europe Coordinated Initiative²² Mirage operation in Bulgaria in July 2004 raided places of commercial sex work, and withdrew 63 girls between 14 and 18 years of age and 2 girls below 14 years of age from sexual exploitation²³.

19 Surtees, Rebecca. (2005). Second Annual report on Victims of Trafficking in South Eastern Europe. IOM, Regional Clearing Point, pages 163 -165.

20 In: Trafficking in Human Beings in South Eastern Europe. 2003 Update on Situation and Responses. UNICEF, UNOHCHR, OSCE/ODIHR, page 68.

21 Trafficking in Human Beings in South Eastern Europe. 2003 Update on Situation and Responses on Trafficking in Human Beings. UNICEF, UNOHCHR, OSCE/ODIHR. P.64.

22 A regional body for police and border forces combating organized crime.

23 From the Reply of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy on a Parliamentary enquiry, October 2004: <http://www.mlsp.government.bg/bg/news/listing.asp>

According to the 2004 client database of Animus Association Foundation²⁴, the reasons for children to enter trafficking can be summarized as follows: a/ single parenthood and problematic family background (domestic violence and sexual abuse, poverty, alcoholism, and absent parent - 93 children out of 104 children); b/ limited opportunities for young people (recently graduated) to find satisfactory jobs matching their educational background and skills, despite the general trend of decreasing unemployment; c/ still high level of institutionalization of children, with a negative impact on their vocational training and life skills education – 10% of children who benefited from Animus services were from institutions.

Children involved in illicit activities: **According to the Annual Report of the Central Commission against Juvenile Delinquency for the year 2003, 13 per cent of crimes discovered in Bulgaria in 2002 were committed by children. The National Statistics show an increase of the number of anti-social acts and crimes committed by children and registered in the Child Pedagogic Rooms under the Juvenile Delinquency Act²⁵ - 13,196 in 2003 against 11,070 in 2002. It has to be noted that “anti-social acts” cover a wide variety of activities - running away from home, wandering, prostitution, alcohol and drug addiction (not all would be criminalised in other countries).**

Vulnerability of children in institutions

In Bulgaria, children accommodated in state residential institutions are particularly vulnerable to child labour. The so-called ‘care leavers’²⁶ often have difficulties in their social integration and limited professional opportunities due to the following reasons: 1/ missing network of social contacts, permanent address and financial resources²⁷, 2/ insufficient knowledge of their ‘labour rights’ and social entitlements, that results in missed education and job opportunities, 3/ low trust of employers in their professional capacity²⁸. Care leavers are therefore at heightened risk to be exploited in the informal and even criminal sectors.

The perspective of finishing school and leaving the residential institution is a scary one for children as they are left in the street with no job skills, and no support systems. This situation is sometimes used by the pimps to approach children a year or two before they leave the Home. The children usually have no clear ideas about their professional future, so they accept those offers. Some of them get involved into prostitution while they are still in the Home. For these children it is difficult to imagine a different future and they inevitably get involved into trafficking after leaving the Home.

According to the latest Report of the State Agency for Child Protection on the Assessment of Social Institutions²⁹ (2004), 5,567 children aged 7-18 years are living in 101 residential

²⁴ One of the most experienced NGOs in Bulgaria providing services to women victims of domestic violence and trafficking. See more at: www.animusassociation.org

²⁵ Criminal statistics in: www.nsi.bg

²⁶ Youth who live the state residential institutions at 18 years of age – 300 young persons per year at average.

²⁷ Usually after reaching the age of majority the young people go to their birth place which is different than the location of the Care institution where they have spend their childhood.

²⁸ Project Document ‘Social Integration of Youth Leaving the State Residential Institutions’. Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Education, Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development, 14.11-2003–31.12.2005, page 5, at <http://www.mlsp.government.bg/bg/projects/annex1%20-%20bg.doc>

²⁹ The meaning of the term Social Institutions for this APSO is – residential homes created and supported by the State under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, where children from 4 (7) till 18 years of age could be accommodated based on a court decision either: 1/ as a measure for protection on the grounds provided by article 25 of the Child Protection Act – in general due to missing

institutions (Homes for Care and Education of Children Deprived of Parental Care - HCECDPC)³⁰. They have either no parents or their parents abandoned them. 40% of them are girls and 43% of them are Roma.

Another 2,008 children are accommodated as a measure for correction and education under the Juvenile Delinquency Act in: 23 Socio-Pedagogical Boarding Schools³¹ (SPBS) (1,678 children) and in seven Correctional Boarding Schools (CBS) – 330 children. These are public schools, for children above 8 years of age who either a/don't have suitable living conditions in their families and are placed as a preventive measure, or b/are deprived of parental care and control, or c/have demonstrated "antisocial behaviour" (CBS)³².

The institutions described above share a number of features and most prominently the fact that they provide accommodation to a large group of children. However, a/ HCECDPC provide only care and extra curricular activities while the education is provided through the local school, b/ SPBS and CBS are boarding schools.

Legislation and policies

International Standards

Bulgaria has demonstrated its commitment to international standards in the field of human rights and children's rights by ratifying key related treaties. These include the ILO Convention #138 on the minimum age for admission to employment and Convention #182 on the Prohibition and Immediate Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (in force since 28.07.2001), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (in force since 1991), the two Optional Protocols on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts and on Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (in force since 2002) as well as the UN Convention against Cross-Border Organized Crime and the two Protocols thereto – the Protocol on Illegal Trafficking of Migrants by Land, Air and Sea and the Protocol on Prevention, Prohibition and Punishment of Illegal Trafficking of People, Women and Children in Particular (in force since 2001).

Child Labour

The National Action Plan against the Worst Forms of Child Labour 2002-2005 was adopted in line with the international obligations of Bulgaria under C182.

According to the Labour Code of 1996, the list of hazardous works, in which only adult persons may be employed, is established by Decree Nr. 4 dated 1987 (last amended in 1999). Under the same Decree, the labour inspectorate shall prevent the employment of young persons (below the age of 16) if the work implies a dangerous exposure to physical, biological or chemical agents, as determined in the list attached to the Decree. It shall further prevent employment in cases where a young person cannot identify or prevent the risk of accident because of lack of training, and/or of experience.

parental care, or 2/ as a correctional measure under the Juvenile Delinquency Act. The report is at: http://www.sacp.government.bg/index_bg.htm

30 The Report informs that 50% of these institutions (Homes for Children Deprived of Parental Care) are placed in remote villages, where community based social services are not available.

31 Regulations of the Socio-Pedagogical Boarding Schools of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) of 1999 and Juvenile Delinquency Act (Art. 28) changed in 2004.

32 See Annex I for description of these institutions.

Several policy documents were also adopted that are directly relevant to the elimination of the WFCL:

- National Plan for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2004);
- National Strategy for the Protection of the Rights of Children in the Street (2003– 2005);
- National Action Plan against the commercial sexual exploitation of children (2003 – 2005);
- Action Plan for Begging Children (2003-2005);
- National Programme for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2005);
- Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Strategy for Prevention and Combating Antisocial and Criminal Behaviour of Underage Persons (2003-2006).

The worst forms of child labour were also mainstreamed in the Draft Joint Social Inclusion Memorandum (JIM) between the Government and EU33 and consequently in the future joint policy reviews, and within future activities funded by the European Social Funds.

Child Protection

In addition, between 2000 and 2004, the Child Protection Act was passed, a bulk of related secondary legislation and the National Strategy for Child Protection – 2004-2006 were adopted, and the consequent institutional framework was created. This framework comprises a/ the State Agency for Child Protection, at central level, in charge of law and policy drafting, monitoring and coordination, and b/Child Protection Departments in all 272 municipalities, under the Social Assistance Directorates of the Agency for Social Assistance to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Child Trafficking

A Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Act was adopted in 2000 and a National Commission to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings was established in late December 2004. The Act provides for development of “*services to protect the victims of trafficking including children*”, including a/Shelters for temporary accommodation of victims of trafficking, and b/Crisis Centres for Protection and Assistance of victims³⁴ to provide shelter, social, medical services and psychological assistance, information on administrative and judicial procedures.

A Mechanism for the Referral and Care for children victims of trafficking³⁵ was signed in November 2005 by the State Agency for Child Protection, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and Agency for Social Assistance. Its aim is to ensure the coordinated actions of the stakeholders for identification (MFA,

33 It states that “The Bulgarian Government has developed special procedures to overcome the social exclusion of other particularly vulnerable groups of children, such as street children and dropouts who become involved in the worst forms of child labour, as defined by Convention No.182 of the International Labour Organization, ratified by Bulgaria. Ensuring access to education, providing support to families and developing specialised services are goals that are part of the National Plan on Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion” (pages 34-35).

34 Source: Implementing Legislation for the Temporary Placement Shelters and the Centres for Protection and Assistance of the Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (SG no. 19 of 9 March 2004).

35 At: http://www.stopech.sacp.government.bg/?sid=professional_eng&pid=0000000046

SACP, MI, ASA), withdrawal (ASA, SACP, CPDs³⁶), rehabilitation and reintegration (CPDs and service providers) and tracking the cases of trafficked children (CPDs, ASA, SACP), both internally and internationally. The Mechanism will be integrated with the Child Labour Monitoring System currently being piloted in Bulgaria.

Education and vocational training

The Bulgarian Constitution (1991) and the Act on Public Education (1992) stipulate that education in state and municipal schools shall be mandatory for children under 16 years of age, and free of charge.

The Vocational Education and Training Act (1999) provides for the access of students and adults to vocational education.

Some important reforms were made recently, in order to improve the situation in rural areas and among ethnic communities:

- With the latest amendments to the Act on Public Education, pre-school education was made compulsory and free of charge for all children (in order to lower the language proficiency barrier for minorities),
- The Strategy for the Education Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities was approved by the Minister of Education and Science on 11 June, 2004. The Strategy is part of the reform of the education system for providing quality education to all children. It aims at improving the quality of education package and the schooling environment.
- The Family Benefits for Children Act of 2002 (last amended in 2004) introduced two types of benefits for families raising their children, both conditional on the school attendance of the child. The first one is the monthly benefit and the second one is the targeted single benefit for children of families to cover their basic needs at the start of the school year (the amount shall be returned back if the child is not at school).
- A National Back to School Programme was adopted by the Government in April 2005 aiming at improving the access to primary education through the following measures: 1/ free text books for children from first to fourth grade (primary education), 2/ free transportation for students from remote places and 3/ free breakfast for students attending primary grades³⁷.

Some key strategic documents, however, for instance the National Plan for Combating Poverty and Social Isolation, do not integrate the WFCL³⁸. Also, although experience shows that children in institutions are at risk of falling into WFCL (especially prostitution and trafficking), the political priority of de-institutionalisation of these 10,777 children has not been linked strategically to the combat against the WFCL.

³⁶ CPDs have the responsibilities to provide the multi-disciplinary case management.

³⁷ The Programme started in March 2005 and is funded by the state budget with the amount of 50 MLN BGN (appr. 25 MLN Euros).

³⁸ A review of policy documents suggests that the WFCL are well integrated mainly in the policies for child protection, but not in education and employment policies.

De-Institutionalisation of Children³⁹

Despite political and institutional efforts, the process of deinstitutionalization is slow and cumbersome mainly due to the: 1/. Absence of preventive work with families (hence children are still being institutionalised) and 2/ low capacity of stakeholders to mobilize the national and local resources for alternatives to institutionalisation.

De-institutionalisation is a priority for SACP. It is conducting an assessment of the institutions to either close them or transform them in day care providers. It is also building up the capacity of social workers in the CPDs to identify and support alternatives to institutional care (foster care, day care, family group homes etc.).

The MLSP is currently (May 2001 - June 2006) implementing a Project “Reform in the Child Welfare System in Bulgaria”⁴⁰. The Project supports the creation of Centres for social services for children and families⁴¹ in 10 pilot municipalities in Bulgaria⁴², aiming at a/20% reduction of children placed in state residential institutions, b/ 20% increase in children leaving the institutions and re-integrated in family environment, c/ 30% increase in the pre-school enrolment of children from risk groups, d/ 20% reduction in school drop outs, e/ increased capacity⁴³ of Police, Child Protection Departments, School inspectorates, health and social protection, f/ improved access of street children to education and health care.

No	Pilot municipality	Type of services in the Centre
1.	Sofia	Centre for street children, Centre for social support and Mother and baby Unit.
2.	Plovdiv	Centre for street children, Centre for social support and Mother and baby Unit.
3.	Russe	Centre for street children, Centre for social support and Mother and baby Unit.
4.	Stara Zagora	Centre for social support and, Mother and baby Unit.
5.	Sliven	Centre for street children and Centre for social support.
6.	Burgas	Centre for street children.
7.	Varna	Centre for social support and Mother and baby Unit.
8.	Shumen	Centre for social support.
9.	Targovishte	Centre for social support and Mother and baby Unit.

Other programmes of the Government and NGOs targeted the issue of “care leavers” but not in a systematic way. In 2000, for instance, the MLSP and the ME adopted a Programme for Social and Occupational Integration of Adolescents Leaving the State

³⁹ The deinstitutionalization of children has become a political priority since 2000 when a Governmental Strategy and Plan of Action for the Protection of the rights of children in Bulgaria (2000-2003) were passed. In 2003 a more detailed Plan for Decreasing the Number of Children Placed in the Institutions was passed by the Government and included in the Road Map for Bulgaria's Accession to the EU. At: <http://www.sacp.government.bg/downloads/bg/6/3/DOVDLRG.doc>

⁴⁰ The Project is funded by a Loan 4596/Bul from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and other donors such as: EU, the Governments of Japan, UK and Switzerland. At: <http://www.mlsp.government.bg/bg/projects/children/index.htm>

⁴¹ The service provider will be required to develop, manage and deliver (at least) the following range of services: 1/Prevention of child abandonment and child abuse; 2/.reintegration and work with children from the specialised residential care institutions; 3/foster care and adoption; 4/deviant behaviour – prevention and support to children; 5/. school dropout prevention and street child support.

⁴² Sofia, Pazardjik, Plovdiv, Russe, Stara Zagora, Sliven, Burgas, Varna, Shumen and Targovishte

⁴³ To provide police protection of children in emergency situations as per the CPA.

Residential Institutions⁴⁴. The Programme was passed in 2000 and its piloting started in 2003 in three municipalities – Veliko Tarnovo, Sevlievo and Lovech with the financial support (of 1,525,800 Swiss Franks) and technical assistance from the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development through the International Social Services⁴⁵. The Pilot Project focuses on a/life skills and vocational training initial support for accommodation and employment for care leavers, b/networking between residential institutions, municipal authorities, social and educational services providers, employer's organizations and NGOs, c/production of methodological tools. The evaluation of the Project reveals that the lack of coordination between relevant institutions was the main hurdle to create sustainable solutions for care givers.

The Ministry of Education and UNICEF started recently a preparatory phase of a Programme to integrate life skills education in the Homes for Care and Education for Children Deprived of Parental Care. A comprehensive Manual for Trainers on Life Skills Training will be adapted, translated, published and integrated in the ME policies.

Institutions and mandates

The **Agency for Social Assistance (ASA)** under the MLSP is responsible for implementing the social policy towards vulnerable groups including children at risk and their families. The ASA and its municipal branches - **Child Protection Departments** in the **Directorates for Social Assistance** have wide ranging statutory powers to enable them to carry out their role in protecting children from social risks. They a/carry checks relating to complaints on violations of children's rights, b/give orders for improvement of the situation, c/ signal cases to the police and the courts, which are bound to undertake immediate measures for the protection of children (as per Article 21 of the Child Protection Act).

The **National Employment Agency⁴⁶** of the MLSP is responsible for the monitoring of the trends in the labour market and for the registration and the vocational training programmes for unemployed persons. Through its regional and municipal Employment Offices it provides mediation services for job seekers and employers, professional guidance and training, and it implements labour market surveys.

The **State Agency for Child Protection** to the Council of Ministers coordinates the policy towards children including: monitoring of children's rights, identification and rehabilitation of children at risk, drafting of criteria and standards for social services for children, licensing of service providers for children, monitoring visits to ensure the quality of social services for children is up to standards.

A **National Council for Child Protection⁴⁷** functions as a consultative and coordinative body to the Chairperson of the Agency involving representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Youth and Sport, the National Insurance Institute, the Central Commission on Antisocial Behaviour of Children under the Council of Ministers and the National Association of

⁴⁴ See at: http://www.mlsp.government.bg/bg/projects/Programme_ddu.doc

⁴⁵ The Project management is assigned now to the newly registered NGO International Social Services – Bulgaria.

⁴⁶ At <http://www.az.government.bg/>

⁴⁷ Article 18 of the Child Protection Act.

the Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria as well as child protection non-for-profit entities.

The **Ministry of Education and Science** through its Regional Inspectorates of Education implements the government's educational policy at local level. In 2004, within the structure of the MES, a National Centre for Assistance and Consultation was established with the specific purpose to: 1/ work with school dropouts and provide them with educational and professional support and 2/ to provide job counselling to students. The Centre has regional structures - called Centres for Educational Services and Qualification - in all 28 district administrative centres of Bulgaria. The **Homes for Care and Education of Children Deprived of Parental Care, Socio-Pedagogical Boarding Schools** and the **Correctional Boarding Schools** are also subordinated to this Ministry.

The **Ministry of Interior** through the National Police Office and the Regional Directorates of Interior organizes and implements actions to safeguard public order and investigate / expose crimes and offences. According to the CPA the Minister of Interior is responsible for the protection of children in public places⁴⁸ and in cases of immediate risks for their life and security⁴⁹. The National Police works in cooperation with other government institutions, NGOs and citizens.

The **Central Commission to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings** was established in December 2004 with the aim a/of coordinating actions between the relevant agencies and organisations for the implementation of the Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Act, and b/to define and supervise the implementation of the National Policy and Strategy in the Area of Combating Trafficking in Human Beings⁵⁰.

The **Child Protection Commissions** are consultative bodies to the DSA⁵¹. Members of the CPC are representatives of the municipal administration, DSA, regional departments of the National Police, Regional Inspectorates for Education, Regional Healthcare Centres, Local Commissions against Juvenile Delinquency, as well as NGOs. The CPC serves as a mechanism for coordination and multidisciplinary teamwork at local level.

The Local Commissions against Juvenile Delinquency are municipal structures functioning under the Juvenile Delinquency Act of 1958. Their mandate comprises identification of children with antisocial behaviour⁵², imposing of educational measures as an alternative of penal sanctions and enforcement of these measures. If the Local Commission considers that the adequate measure imposed to the juvenile offender should be placement in a Boarding School it must send the case to the Court to take the decision for that placement⁵³. The Juvenile Delinquency Act establishes the: a/ Socio-Pedagogical Boarding Schools and the Correctional Boarding Schools

48 According to the Regulation of the Council of Ministers on the Specialised Protection of Children at Public Places, № 165 of 25.07.2003, State Gazette 68/1.08.2003

49 Articles 6/3, 7 and 37.

50 Article 4 of the Combating Trafficking of Human Beings Act.

51 Article 20a of the Child Protection Act.

52 The Juvenile Delinquency Act as revised in 2004 defines the antisocial behaviour as "act, which is socially dangerous and violates the law or the moral or the good mores" – Article 49a/1.

53 Article 21, para 1, 1, of the Juvenile Delinquency Act.

for children who committed anti social acts, and b/ Home for Temporary Placement of Minors and Adolescents⁵⁴.

IPEC activities in Bulgaria

Bulgaria is participating in PROTECT CEE since March 2004. The primary focus of ILO IPEC in Bulgaria is to provide support for the design of policy and technical tools against child labour adapted to the national context. IPEC also documents national good practices for the elimination of CL that can be of use to other countries of the region.

Policy level work

A **Memorandum of Understanding** between ILO and Bulgarian Government was signed by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy on March 22nd, 2005. In April 2005 a **Child Labour Unit** was established under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) within the Directorate “Labour Conditions, Crisis Management and Alternative Service” based on a recent change of the Internal Regulations of the Ministry. The Chief of Child Labour Unit is a State Official with a rank of Chief Expert. A National Steering Committee against Child Labour was established chaired by a Deputy minister of labour and social policy and held its first meeting on 3 November 2005.

A national “Strategic Planning Impact Framework Workshop in Bulgaria” was organized on 22-23 June 2004. The purpose of the workshop was to provide inputs for the preparation of a country-specific strategy, including proposals for further direction for action for combating the Worst Forms of Child Labour and trafficking in children in Bulgaria, to gain common understanding among the main stakeholders of the project on the problems causing worst forms of child labour and sexual exploitation, including trafficking and to identify possible solutions and strategies leading to the progressive elimination of these problems.

An Occupational Safety and Health Study of children working in the informal sector (street work, scavenging, construction, family owned farms) is implemented to serve as a reference to labour inspection and child protection agencies to withdraw children involved in hazardous work in the formal and informal sector.

IPEC contributed to the integration of the WFCL into the Joint Social Inclusion Memorandum signed in January 2005 between the Bulgarian Government and the EU.

IPEC is a member of the Working group for Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the UN CRC in Bulgaria. The process started in October 2004 and comprises Governmental agencies and NGOs supported by UNICEF.

IPEC takes part in the meetings of the National Council for Child Protection to the Chairperson of the State Agency for Child Protection.

54 The Juvenile Delinquency Act (Art. 35) Law of the Ministry of the Interior (Art. 34), and the Regulations issued by the minister of interior (1998, amended in 2003).

Direct actions

Five Action Programmes started focusing on a/awareness raising of the society at large and some key groups such as journalists, community leaders, employers, teachers, parents, youth clubs on the dramatic consequences of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (WFCL), b/ establishing a model of Child Labour Monitoring System (CLMS) in Bulgaria together with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the State Agency for Child protection, the General Labour Inspectorate and the Agency for Social Assistance, c/ preventing child labour for children in institutions and providing counselling to children victims of trafficking.

ILEC/PROTECT CEE implementing partners in Bulgaria:

1. Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
2. Confederation of Independent Trade Unions
3. Foundation "Human Relations Institute" Sofia
4. Open Society Institute, Sofia
5. United Nations Association of Bulgaria
6. Bulgarian Red Cross
7. Broadcast Training Centre ProMedia Foundation
8. CARE Bulgaria
9. Animus Association Foundation
10. Foundation "Programme Step by Step"
11. "Institute for Labour and Industrial Relations, Employment and Social Activities"