

# Development of alternative services including foster care in context of child protection system reform – experience of Bulgaria

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# Priorities of reform in Bulgaria

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## **Tools for deinstitutionalization for vulnerable children :**

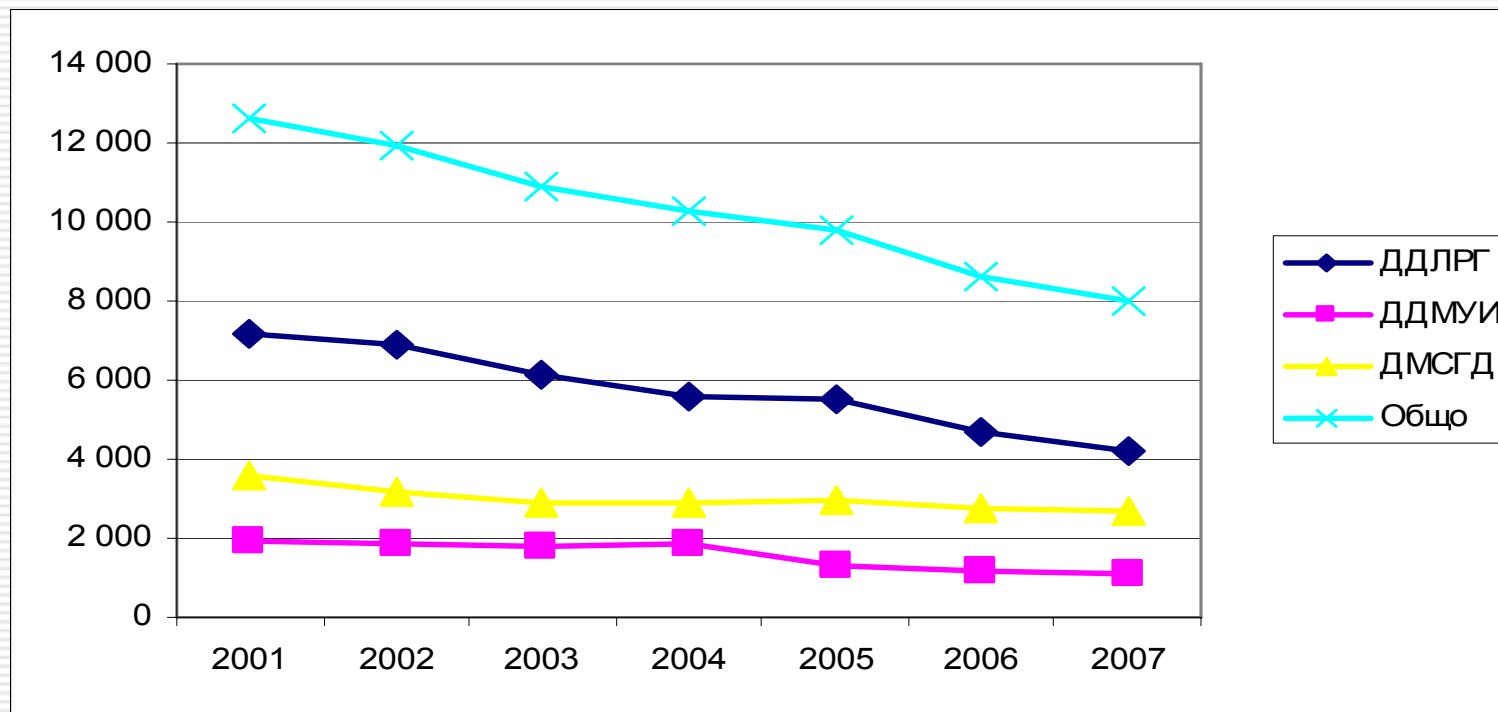
- *Gate keeping*
- Implementation of new methodology focused on individual children's needs
- Development of norms and standards for creation of new alternative services

## *Decentralization of social services:*

- State regulates services through the law and provide financing
  - State delegates competency and supervises through financing, standards and licensing
  - Attraction of new service providers to Bulgarian municipalities and NGOs
  - For today one NGO chosen through a competition process is able to provide service paid by Government
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# Priorities of reform in Bulgaria

Diagram 1: Number of children in special residential institutions in 2001 – 2007



# Development of alternative services

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- **Community - based social services: support to children and family**
    - Center of public support
    - Day Care Centre
    - Centre 'Mother and baby
    - Continuum of social services for children and families
  - **Community - based social services for children: substitute families**
    - Adoption
    - Extended family
    - Foster family
    - Family type Center (8-12 children)
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# Community - based social services for children: substitute families

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- ***Placement of child to extended family – approx. 6 000 children in 2008***
  - Carry out due to court decision made on submission of Child Protection Department
  - Biological or extended family carrying out care for a child and paid by Government
  - The family also have access to community-based social services and support
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# Community based social services for children - foster family

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- **Placement of child to foster family**
  - In the beginning of 2009 total number of children in foster families was only 220. Number of foster families was 250. Taking into consideration that 9 000 children are in the residential institutions the figures mentioned above evidence that foster care is not develop properly.
  - What reasons for that?
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# National study 'Attitude of Bulgarian population toward to foster care '

- **A. For today one of the main reasons of undeveloped foster care is weak awareness of population.** More than half respondents (54%) are not able to give a definition of existing foster care and 18% out of them understand foster care as an adoption or preparation to adoption
  - **B. Preparedness of citizens to create foster families on the assumptions connected with child and financing.** 40% of population express potential readiness. Aside from conditions from 8 to 12,5% of respondents are ready to be foster parents, 42% of population are ready to receive a child for the weekend, holidays and vacation, 25% from them would receive a child for one month. People at the age from 38 to 50 years old express wishes to receive foster children for the period from one year and more. They take the possibility of long-term foster care as a chance for adoption of child.
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# National study 'Attitude of Bulgarian population toward to foster care '

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- **C. Positive attitude to care of children in family environment and negative attitude to institutional care prevail among civilians**
  - Approx. 30% would trust foster family to bring up their child aside from conditions of payment and length of stay
  - Approx. 25% of respondents would trust professional staff from small family type home to bring up their child
  - Only 4% of civilians prefer to place their children to state residential institutions.
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# National study 'Attitude of Bulgarian population toward to foster care '

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- **D. Key positive motivation of civilians is not financial** what is the more often fear among specialists. More then tierce (39,6%) of respondents express their preparedness to create a foster family for the children in need of foster care as only chance to familiarize with family relationships
  - **E. Fear to receive unknown child** is a key restrictive factor according to study of motivation of creation of foster family
  - **F. According to finding of the study finance motivation is key factor for creation of foster family for 48% of population**
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# National study 'Attitude of Bulgarian population toward to foster care '

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- ***G. Capacity of Social Protection System have been evaluated as insufficient for implementation of foster care***

This finding of the study was fully confirmed during last years when all other obstacles were overcome including provision with finance following which raising of activity on creation of foster care was expected. In reality, the main problem is existing child care system and its' preparedness for realization of foster care.

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# Foster care in Bulgaria – actual situation

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- The study helped to bring amendments to norms on foster care in Bulgaria in 2007 and to adopt in 2008 standards for assignment of foster care service
  - Capacity of NGO to carry out selection, evaluation, training and support to foster families
  - Placement children to extended families taking as foster care
  - Two type of fostering are existing in Bulgaria for today – voluntary foster care and professional foster care
  - Voluntary foster family receive finance support for a child depending on his/her age
  - Professional foster family is paid based on agreement between one of foster parent and Child Protection Department. In the same time the foster family receives finance support for a child depending on his/her age
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# Foster care in Bulgaria – actual situation

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- Types of foster care:
    - Short-term foster care (less than 1 year)
    - Long-term foster care (more than 1 year)
    - Substitute (for short-term as alternative measure or care)
    - Emergency foster care – when period of meeting and adaptation of foster family and child is absent or very short
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# Standards of foster care

## Selection, evaluation and training of foster families

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- Process is lasting not more than 4 weeks
- The process of selection implements through:
- Informational campaign – national and local
- Informational meetings – individual and group.  
Information about submitted applications from potential foster family is provided
- Interested families submit documents and make a contract with service provider including evaluation and training

### *Информационная встреча с кандидатами*



# Standards of foster care

## Selection, evaluation and training of foster families

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- Training is a part of process of evaluation. Training is conducted on approved program in participatory way by using interactive methods
- Selection is ended by provider's report offering to approve or not approve candidate and review of child's "profile" (sex, age, number, ethic, religion etc.)



*Trainings of candidates for foster family care*



# Standards of foster care

## Selection of foster family

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- During the selection of proper foster family evaluation of needs of the child, action plan and profile of the foster family are taking into consideration
  - Case manager organizes meeting with social worker responsible for registration of foster families. During the meeting preliminary selection of foster family corresponded to the child is conducted.
  - If there is appropriate foster families case manager organizes meetings with social workers and foster families and provides information about children.
  - Social workers of foster families provide all needed information about knowledge, skills and mood of selected foster families.
  - Case manager with support of relevant social workers selects foster family mostly fitting to child's needs
  - Case manager and social worker of foster family arrange meeting with potential foster family to discuss conditions of agreement
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# Standards of foster care

## Preparation of a child and meeting with foster family

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- This process is lasting for from 4 to 6 weeks
  - The process implements through interaction of social worker of a child, foster family and child himself
  - The process includes as individual preparation of a child and family as line of meetings
  - Case manager from Child Protection Department, social worker of foster family and foster family define intensity of introductory meetings taking into account:
    - Specifics of child's age, process of adaptation of a child and foster family, risk factors such as: child never left residential institution, don't have other contacts except of contacts with children in the institution, loss of parents, recent experience of violence or trauma, etc.
    - Opinion of elder children is taking into consideration regarding to intensity of the meetings and process of transfer
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# Standards of foster care

## Preparation of a child and meeting with foster family

- ***Social services 'adaptation of a child to the family – These services aimed at improving of connection between child and family and facilitating mutual adaptation***

Usually services are provided in the Public Support Centers (26 in the country)

***Child and foster mother meet each other***



***Meeting of team with candidates***



14-15-000  
SEP 12, 2004

# Standards of foster care

## Support to placement of child to the family

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- Placement of children takes place after successful finalization of procedure connecting with introduction and preparation of the child and foster family
  - After placement of child to the family social workers from Child Protection Department and service provider continue to support them but intensity of support is different in stage of placement and after adaptation.
  - Foster family cares about foster child in compliance with developed by family and child protection department individual plan of care
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# Standards of foster care

## Support to placement of child to the foster family

- Service provider provides such services for foster family as Consulting, Social support, mediation, supervision and organization of holidays
- Service provider provides subsidiary education (not less than 24 hours per year) and supervision over foster family

Group supervision



Celebration of Easter with foster families and children



# Standards of foster care

## Support to placement of child to the foster family

- Service provider can offer service for the child which is included to plan for child
- **informing, consulting**
- Support of children with learning difficulties and children at risk of exclusion from school mainstream,
- social support to child to overcome difficulties,
- Development of child's interests



Groups for development of social skills



School support



# Standards of foster care

## Support to placement of child to the foster family

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- **Continuum of social services for children and families (12)** usually include : center of public support, “Mother and baby” center, day care center



# Foster care standards

## Emergency intervention for prevention of removing child from foster family

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- Appears when child has adaptation problems, unexpected events in family and child's life
- An intervention plan to be developed based on evaluation of risk for child and family
- Intervention might be ended with a new plan of services for family aimed at support of child's placing or removing. The key principle is the best interests of child.

Separate room for interviewing children



**Emergency service for children  
- victims of violence**

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# Foster care standards

## Emergency intervention for prevention of removing child from foster family

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- Compulsory requirement for removing child from foster family:
    - Identification of child abuse case in foster family;
    - Big changes in family which lead to inability to provide child with quality care (illness or death of care giver, financial problems etc.
  - The practice in Bulgaria shows that frequent change of foster parents is needed if there are difficulties in selection and training of foster families. Change of foster parents might be harmful for child.
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# «Lessons» from reforming the child care and protection system in Bulgaria

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## **Cooperation and network are the key of successful child and family care and protection system:**

- Need for cooperation between the government, central and local authorities and private service providers
  - Failure of the centralized approach in Bulgaria (example of foster care development) – when foster care is not delegated to state structures which are not stimulated and competent – other conditions are not sufficient
  - Involvement of external service providers caused in a double number of foster families in the country, but their number is still not enough to cover children' needs
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# «Lessons» from reforming the child care and protection system in Bulgaria

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- According to the latest changes in the Law about child protection and Law about social support (2009), suggested by NGO, the “foster care” service can be fully provided by external licenced service providers
  - In June 2009 – initiation of a large joint project of international organizations and International Social Service in Bulgaria for establishment of Foster Care Agencies which will be providing integrated services on selection, evaluation, training and contract with foster family and its support.
  - One of the aims of the project is development of and testing the training program for foster families.
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# «Lessons» from reforming the child care and protection system in Bulgaria

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- **Priority measures to ensure long term child needs satisfaction**
    - foster care, as well as placing in social institution are a temporary care
    - major efforts to be aimed at ensuring a reliable and sustainable environment i.e. biological family, relatives, immediate care givers and adoption.
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# «Lessons» from reforming the child care and protection system in Bulgaria

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- **Services for children and families at risk should be developed in the context of clear and task-oriented policy on social support of families and good parenting**
    - Prevalence of supporting, not family sanctioning measures
    - combination of social services with measures on population employment and social support (cash benefits)
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Thank you for attention!

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