
SUPPORTS – National training needs assessment report

FORWARD

The present report has been developed on the basis of monitoring of the protection system in Bulgaria and also includes a review of national studies in Bulgaria concerning the care for children in institutions and the transition to deinstitutionalization since 2010. Studies based on quantitative and qualitative results show the measures taken at the national policy level, the position of governmental and non-governmental organizations involved in the child protection system and public attitudes to de-institutionalization processes, as well as real present-day results.

For the purposes of this monitoring report, a survey was conducted among professionals working at the 13 residential care settings that agreed to be involved in the project. The study was conducted according to a methodology developed by CESIS – Centro de Estudos para a Intervenção Social (Centre for Studies for Social Intervention), Portugal, under the Project: SUPPORTS – Supporting Children in the Delicate Phase between Adolescence and Adulthood while Leaving Alternative Care Facilities, which was adapted to the conditions in Bulgaria.

The analytical report also included a consultation with foster parents from SOS-Kinderdorf – Bulgaria. Former village officials shared their perspective on institutionalizing and preparing children for independent living. The survey also took into consideration the shared professional positions of employees of approved boarding school 'Hristo Botev' in the village of Podem.

The focus of the study is the need to identify the necessary changes, both normative and practical, that will:



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1. Improve and facilitate the work of teams by supporting the resources and increasing the capacity at their disposal. In this way, the effective functioning of the alternative care system could be guaranteed.
 2. Help and facilitate adolescents from 14 to 18 years of age in the process of preparing to leave the institutional care system.

The obtained results visualize the current situation in the Republic of Bulgaria with regard to children in the delicate phase between adolescence and adulthood, while leaving alternative care facilities, the legal basis governing these relationships, as well as the functioning of the protection system and capacity for residential care.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

SUPPORTS - Supporting Children in the delicate phase between adolescence and adulthood while leaving alternative care facilities. The Project is co-financed by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme by the EU, and is coordinated by the "P.U.L.S.E" foundation, Bulgaria.

SUPPORTS is a transnational project involving a partnership of 3 countries from the EU – Republic of Bulgaria, Portugal and Italy, which join forces in order to develop comprehensive care for children leaving residential institutions.

The project aims:

- To develop skills in teams of professionals working in the protection system and create capacity for residential care for a holistic approach to the child as a preliminary step towards the development and implementation of sustainable follow-up plans;
- To increase the competencies and skills of specialists working in residential care institutions through a methodology based on residential care capacity;
- To create a tool based on a child-friendly and dynamic multidisciplinary approach;
- To encourage the participation of children in residential care, taking into account solutions for their real and future conditions;
- To promote the exchange of good practices in each country and among the European partners.



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The activities planned in the project include an overall program which ensures the education of professionals working for child protective services and institutions for residential care in every country.

Over the course of the project, seminars for children leaving foster care will be held. In all phases of the project, the opinion of children is crucial, and their participation is guaranteed through a consultative group of children and adolescents, which will get directly involved throughout the different phases of the project.

To guarantee the sustainability of the project, courses for mentors will be held, which will provide aid for the professionals working at the institutions for foster care directly involved in the project, and it will be made possible to reproduce the experience in other institutions after its conclusion.

In accordance with this, the “SUPPORTS” project will develop a system of local networks, which will include different professionals and organizations from the educational system, professional training, the labour market, healthcare, social services, residential and therapeutic services and will provide a diverse set of services for children leaving their residential care.

The goal of the local networks is to make the social services available to the adolescents and to facilitate their inclusion through different activities such as advocacy at an individual level, crisis interventions, labour education, support in finding a job, finding a residency, home-maintenance education, and an independent life in all aspects.

Brief overview of the national residential child care system

The legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria governing the rights of children at risk and in particular, the system for care for children leaving residential care houses, is based on the Child Protection Act and its Implementing Regulations, the Domestic Violence Protection Act, Social Assistance Act



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and its Implementing Rules, National Child Protection Programs and Reports on their implementation, National Strategy 'Vision for Deinstitutionalization of Children in the Republic of Bulgaria' and the Updated Action Plan for its implementation, Agreement on cooperation and coordination of the work of child protection authorities at central and local level in cases of children victims of violence or at risk of violence and in crisis situations, and a Coordination mechanism for cooperation when working on cases of children victims of violence or at risk of violence and for interaction in crisis intervention. The legal framework is also consistent with a number of acts of an international nature: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 13 (2011) The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence, General Comment No. 8 (2006) The right of the child to protection against corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment (Article 19; Article 28, § 2, and Article 37, among others), General Comment No. 14 (2013) The best interests of the child – a paramount consideration, the Guidelines on Alternative Child Care, Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, Council Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021), Concluding Observations on the Consolidated Third, Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports on Bulgaria and the Recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016. Analyses on the topic conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund – UNICEF, as well as publications, studies and reports on completed projects and good practices from the non-governmental sector were also taken into account.

The legal framework for the settlement of children's rights is based on the principle of the best interests of the child.

In practice, however, there is a discrepancy between the rights of the child and their actual enforcement. This prompted the Committee on the Rights of the Child as early as 2005 to hold a Day of General Discussion for Children Deprived of Parental Care. As a result of this initiative, the Committee made a key recommendation, calling on the international community of states, United Nations bodies, NGOs, experts, academia and professional organizations to come together and prepare a set of international standards for states and other responsible persons to obtain expert guidance on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Committee



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therefore warmly welcomes the important recognition given by the United Nations General Assembly to the Guidelines for Alternative Child Care on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was celebrated on 20 November 2009.

In Bulgaria, the European Union is funding for the first time a large-scale program for deinstitutionalization through the Program for the Implementation of the National Strategy 'Vision for Deinstitutionalization of Children in the Republic of Bulgaria', adopted in 2010. According to the definition of the process outlined in the document, deinstitutionalization includes both the removal of children from institutions, as well as preventing placement in institutions and creating new opportunities for children and families to receive community support¹.

A systematic and structured process of replacing institutional care for children with services for them and their families in the community began in 2010 in Bulgaria. This process includes the liquidation of institutions created during the socialist period that can accommodate between 30 and more than 100 children, and their replacement with community-based residential care services with a maximum of 14 children².

Over the period 2010-2019, a number of projects were implemented with the aim of developing community-based services; development of the capacity of specialists from all systems involved in childcare; working with communities to receive and involve children. These projects specifically aim at (1) closing specialized institutions for children with disabilities; (2) piloting a model of closing institutions for medical and social care for children; (3) developing foster care; (4) strengthening the capacity of the child protection system and the career development of social workers; and (5) developing local capacity to plan child and family support services.

¹ National Strategy 'Vision for Deinstitutionalization of Children in the Republic of Bulgaria', p. 3.

² DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION 'THE CASE OF BULGARIA' – 2017, Report from the study of the process of deinstitutionalization of child care in Bulgaria, Know-how Centre for Alternative Child Care, New Bulgarian University



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As of 2019, there is still a discrepancy between the rights of the child and their realization, especially with regard to children deprived of parental care who have grown up in institutions and/or alternative care facilities.

These children are **socially deprived and come out unprepared for life**, without adequate education, vocational training, and without any preparation for social integration and life planning after reaching majority age. In this sense, the United Nations, in its Alternative Child Care Guidelines, mentions that throughout the entire 'caregiving period, they should systematically strive to prepare children to become independent and fully integrated into the community, in particular by acquiring social and life skills that are encouraged through participation in the life of the local community'. In addition, caregivers should be encouraged to participate in post-stay life planning.

Legal and administrative framework

The currently enforced legal and administrative framework in Bulgaria shows no significant progress in terms of care for children leaving institutions or alternative care facilities. Several systems – judiciary, administrative and child protection system – have been established, which act in concert and sometimes in parallel, without necessarily guaranteeing the best interest of the child and without meeting the requirements of the international standards in the field of children's rights protection. Despite the efforts put by the state over the last few years towards creating a system for child protection, there is still a lack of a comprehensive approach, which would guarantee the passing of measures for protection of children at risk on the one hand, and would provide real support, reintegration and resocialization on the other.

The social services provided within the community and those of **residential type, which constitute an alternative to the institution-based childcare**, play a key role in the support of children and families, as well as in the process of deinstitutionalization

The social services provided within the community are also a key factor for the efficient social inclusion, the fight against poverty and the participation in community life by all vulnerable



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groups. Over the last few years, policy in the field of social services has been directed towards the development of services within the community and at home, which would substitute the institutionalization-based model of care. Social services provided at the community level include:

- **Social services within the community – daycare facility** (daycare facility for children and/or elderly disabled individuals; daycare facility for elderly disabled individuals – weekly care; daycare facility for children with disabilities – weekly care; daycare facility for elderly individuals); centre for social rehabilitation and integration; social vocational education centre; ‘Mother and baby’ unit; centre for public support; centre for work with children on the street; adoptive care; public dining rooms.

- **Social services within the community of residential type – family-type accommodation centre** (family-type accommodation centre for children/adolescents without disabilities; family-type accommodation centre for children/adolescents; family-type accommodation centre for elderly individuals with psychiatric disorders or dementia; family-type accommodation centre for elderly individuals with physical disabilities; family-type accommodation centre for elderly individuals with intellectual disability; family-type accommodation centre for elderly individuals); centre for temporary accommodation; crisis centre; transient home; safe house (safe house for individuals with psychiatric disorders; safe house for individuals with intellectual disability; safe house for individuals with physical disabilities); homes under surveillance; orphanage.

Children deprived of parental care represent one of the most vulnerable and risk groups, which find themselves in institutions or alternative care facilities. There is a real risk that this target group may become victims of abuse, including trafficking and exploitation, institutional violence, domestic violence, sexual abuse.

The fate of children in **the delicate stage between adolescence and adulthood**, the period when they leave the alternative care facilities in the Republic of Bulgaria, represents a niche which must be studied urgently and be incorporated in a precise way in all spheres of public, social and economic life. What these children need are SPECIAL MEASURES FOR PROTECTION and a SYSTEM



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OF CARE which GUARANTEES THEIR RIGHTS and at the same time provides real support, reintegration and resocialization.

Number of institutionalized children

No fewer than **2.7 billion children worldwide live in institutional care facilities** according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)'s latest research. The statistics shows that the number of children deprived of parental care has been increasing.

According to the data from the Report of the activity of the Agency for Social Assistance for 2018, as of 31.12.2018, the total number of children and families who use social services within the community, including services of residential type, is 14,832. 23 new social services for children have been introduced in 2018, including 3 social services of residential type, with a total capacity of 507 places.

As of 31.12.2018, a total of 620 social services for children with a total capacity of 14,052 places are functioning on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, as follows: ♦135 **Centre for public support**, with a total capacity of 5,378 places; ♦20 **Centre for work with children on the street**, with a total capacity of 389 places; ♦18 **Children crisis centres**, with a total capacity of 196 places; ♦13 **'Mother and baby' units**, with a total capacity of 85 places; ♦145 **Family-type accommodation centre for children without disabilities**, with a total capacity of 1,753 places; ♦110 **Family-type accommodation centre for children/adolescents with disabilities**, with a total capacity of 1,479 places; ♦7 **Family-type accommodation centre for children with disabilities**, with a total capacity of 93 places; ♦8 **Family-type accommodation centre for children/adolescents who need constant medical care**, with a total capacity of 64 places; ♦84 **Daycare centres for children and/or adolescents with disabilities**; children and adolescents with severe multiple disabilities, with a total capacity of 2,403 places; ♦3 **Daycare centres for children with disabilities**; children with severe multiple disabilities, with a total capacity of 92 places; ♦6 **Daycare centres for children and adolescents with disabilities offering weekly care**, with a total capacity of 133 places; ♦1 **Daycare centre for children and adults with disabilities**, with a total



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capacity of 50 places; ◊18 **Transient homes for children**, with a total capacity of 140 places; ◊52 **Centres for social rehabilitation and integration for children/adolescents**, with a total capacity of 1,797 places.

The services are managed either by the local authorities or are delegated by them to NGOs. 85% of social services are managed by municipalities, half of the remaining 15% of companies and commercial companies, and only about 50 of government-delegated social services are outsourced to NGOs.

According to the data published in 'Notebook 2018', written by the National Network for Children, a total of **906 children are placed in specialized institutions**³.

3,116 children are placed in 283 **family-type accommodation centres**.

As of 31 October 2019, children, placed in the families of **relatives or family members, are 4,628**; children places in **adoptive families, are 2,093**;

Children and adolescents placed in services of residential type (family-type accommodation centres) are 2,887; this is the total number of children and adolescents with and without disabilities.

The main problem for all these children and adolescents, who leave the institutions, is the lack of preparation for an independent life and the need to constantly depend on someone else.

A study of International on the rights of individuals with disabilities – Disabilities Rights International shows that 'Bulgaria's service system ... segregates children and young people with disabilities from society and leaves them destined to a lifetime in facilities that are effectively smaller new institutions'. In its report, the Organization points out that the small group homes officially referred to as 'of family type' do not have the features of the family home: „...children sitting

³ http://nmd.bg/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Belejnuk-2018_web.pdf



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motionless on chairs, couches or benches, or on concrete floors sitting in pervasive inactivity, some rocking back and forth, hitting themselves, biting their hands or poking fingers in their eyes”⁴.

The multiple unsolved problems at the institutional and professional level are reflected by the society’s increasing distrust in the institutions, clearly demonstrated by the National Representative Study, conducted in 2018 under the project **CHAPTER “Children Help Movement against Physical Threatening and Emotional Repression”** ⁵. The study showed that trust in the state as a legitimate agent guaranteeing children’s rights has totally collapsed.

A result of the wholesale policy is the current social-political environment in the country, demonstrated through a series of inconsistent and groundless movements against the policies for child protection, the Strategy for the Child (2019-2030) and the 6-month delay in the passing of the Social Services Act.

The leading role in the infuriating social political environment is played by the “ultraconservative” groups, which refer to themselves as “Christian” groups, some of whom have already gained significant experience in fighting against the “non-traditional” laws. Manipulating lack of information in the society, these organized groups are working against democracy and European values. Despite seemingly appearing as a non-representative portion of society, these groups of people, through the use of manipulation, have managed to influence a large portion of parents in Bulgaria to disregard the democratic values, namely the condemnation of discrimination and the respect of the individual rights of every living person. On the basis of this individual picture, an investigation was held, which was significantly influenced by gaining consent of the involved professionals in the investigation.

⁴ <https://www.driadvocacy.org/new-dri-report-finds-appalling-conditions-in-bulgarias-group-homes/>

⁵ https://pulsfoundation.org/images/biblio/Summary_presentation_FINAL_BG.pdf



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Tools

There were two different instruments.

Regarding children: general characterization; reasons for being in an institution and project life contents. This questionnaire was filled by the professionals who are responsible for the follow up of the children and it was one questionnaire per children. **Regarding institutional and professional practices** and it was addressed to all the categories of professionals working in the residential care facilities. No names were collected.

For the purpose of the investigation, we adapted and spread the questionnaires, which reached different centres in the country.

1. Crisis centre for children and individuals suffering from abuse or other forms of exploitation. “New Beginning”, town of Gotse Delchev
2. Foster home for children without disabilities – town of Pernik. Crisis centre for children and people victims of abuse and trafficking, town of Pernik
3. Foster home “Nadezhda”, town of Dupnitsa
4. Foster home “Pazara”, town of Kardzhali
5. Care home for children with disabilities, town of Kardzhali
6. Foster home in “Gledka” neighbourhood, town of Kardzhali
7. Foster home for children with disabilities, town of Kyustendil
8. Foster home “Radiance”, town of Kyustendil
9. Crisis centre for children and individuals victims of abuse and trafficking, “P.U.L.S.E.” foundation, town of Pernik
10. Foster home for children without disabilities, town of Pernik
11. “Concordia Bulgaria” foundation
12. Social care centre, town of Pernik
13. “Agapediya Bulgaria” foundation.



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A total of **24 professionals** were involved in the investigation

18 questionnaires for the professionals, 19 questionnaires for the children

The questionnaires were anonymous.

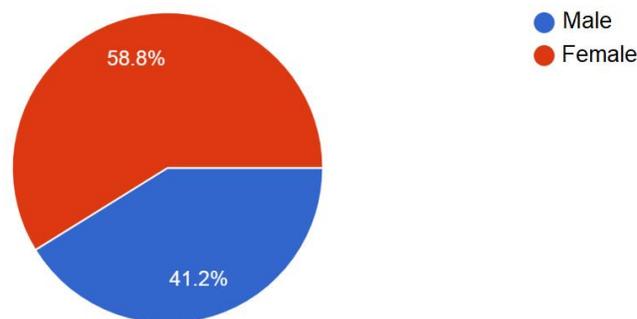
THE STUDY – QUESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. *Who are the children living in foster care who were the subject of our study?*

These are children of ages up to 18, of both genders; two of them were above the age of 18.

Gender

17 responses



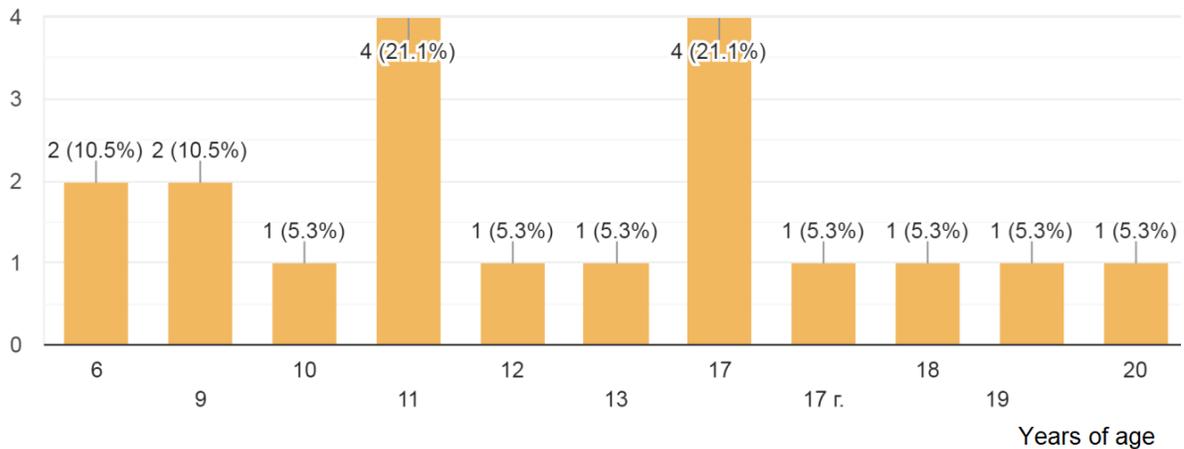
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Age

19 responses



Children without parents, homeless children, victims of abuse or careless misconduct, children whose parents suffer from mental illnesses, children victims of domestic abuse or trafficking, children with disabilities, children of ethnic minorities, children suffering from all kinds of abuse – physical, mental and sexual – since early age.

According to the data provided by specialists working in the institutions:

58% of children have used prior social services of the residential kind, before attending the current one.

42% have not used one prior to the study.



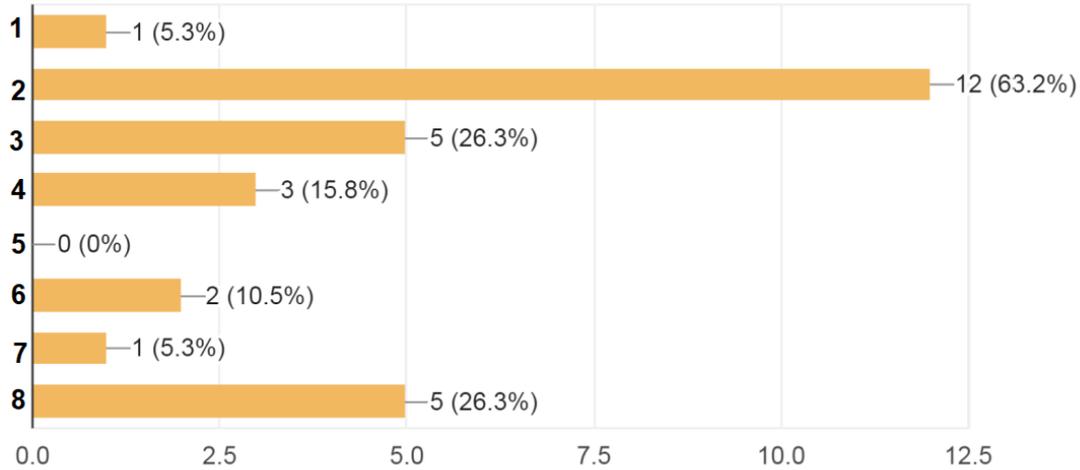
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2. In what type of institution and how many times?

19 responses



- 1 – Emergency care service
- 2 – Crisis centre
- 3 – Family-type accommodation centre
- 4 – Adoptive family
- 5 – Daycare centre
- 6 – Transient home
- 7 – Social-pedagogic boarding schools/approved boarding schools
- 8 – Other

The dominant portion of the aforementioned children have been placed in crisis centres – 63.2%; 26.3% have been placed in foster homes; 21% were placed in care centres for children lacking parental care;



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The investigation makes it evident that between **72.2% and 77.8% of children come from families with biological parents /mothers and fathers/.**

The investigated children have brothers and sisters, of whom:

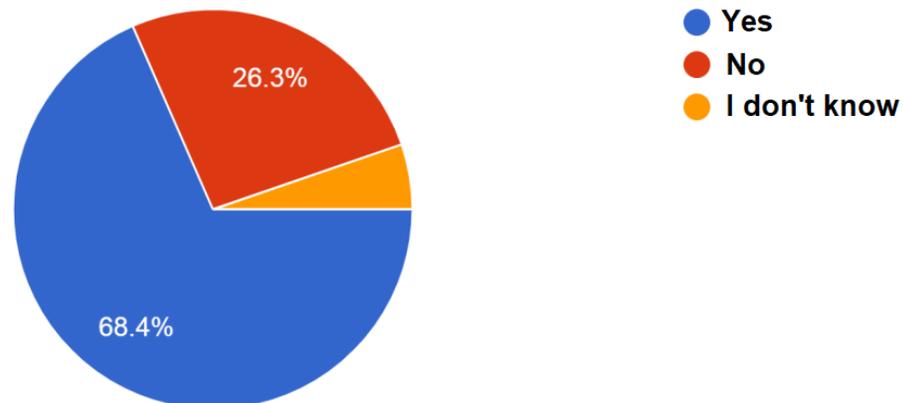
41% are taken care of in institutions

59% are not taken care of in institutions

Regarding the question: **“Is there any measure for protection, aimed at his/her living environment?”** 68.4% of children report such measure for protection.

4. Does the child have a protection measure aimed at his/her living environment?

19 responses



The legislative commitments and duties of the child protection services, which directly correspond to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, are based on the understanding that the best environment for raising a child is the family.



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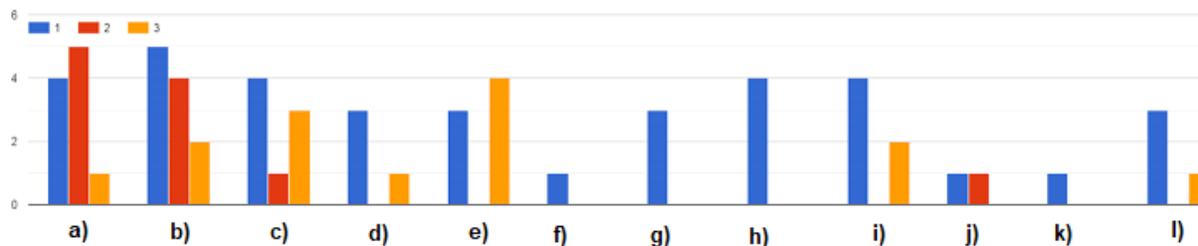
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A guarantee for respecting the child’s best interest is the unequivocal legal requirement for a child to be placed outside the family only as a final measure for protection. This measure is set into motion only after all other measures for prevention and providing care in a family or a similar environment have failed. **Removing the child from the family environment is initiated in situations which involve an immediate danger to the well-being of the child.**

As reasons for removal from the family environment, respondents primarily /over 50%/ indicated the following – domestic abuse, physical, psychological or sexual abuse; neglect; mendicancy, deviant or self-destructive behaviour.

6. What are the reasons for the child to be placed in an institution? (maximum 3)



- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| a) Physical abuse | g) Begging |
| b) Mental abuse | h) Deviant behaviour |
| c) Domestic violence | i) Self-destructive behaviour |
| d) Neglecting | j) Abandonment |
| e) Sexual abuse | k) Unaccompanied minor |
| f) Child work | l) Other |

This characteristics also defines the behaviour and functioning of the investigated children throughout the process of being put into care, adaptation, subsequent work with them and their reintegration into the family and society.

This maladaptive behaviour of the children forms the basis for the results in the following questions, which refer to **the education of the child and his/her abilities to follow through with the educational material.**



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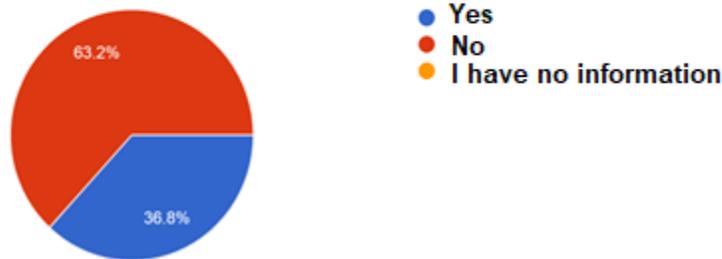
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27% have secondary education
33.5% have primary education
13.4% have basic education
26.7% have supportive education

The main problems encountered in school are reported to be – difficulties with concentration and studying, followed by difficulties in the relationships with the teaching staff and lack of discipline.

9. Does the child have any health or mental problems?

19 responses



63.2% of children have not had a registered physical or psychological disorder.

36.8% have had health issues; the subsequent research question makes it clear that they mostly refer to post-traumatic stress disorder with subsequent psychosomatic and behavioural manifestations of the trauma.

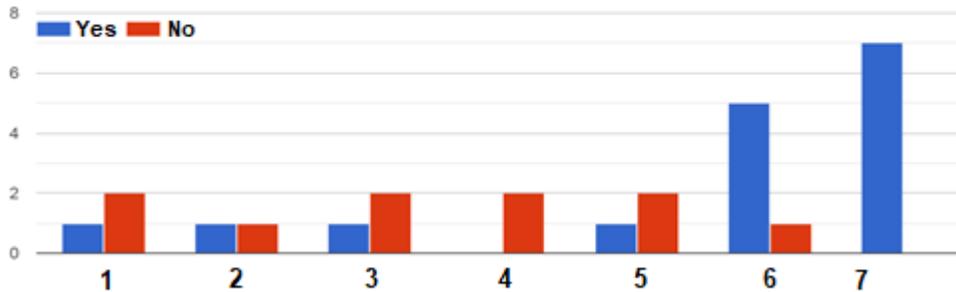


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10. What is the problem?

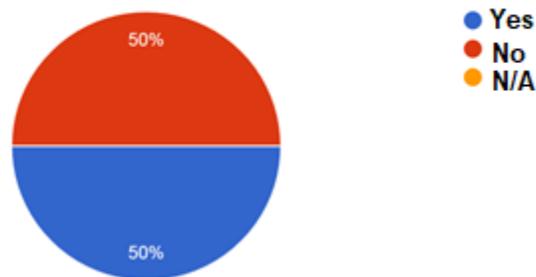


Almost 90% of children have a documented psychological trauma as a result of experiencing domestic abuse /physical, psychological and sexual/, behavioural manifestations of generalized anxiety disorder. Part of the children also report the presence of visual impairment.

Regarding the behavioural disorders:

11. Does the child have any behavioral disorders?

18 responses



50% are reported to have registered behavioural disorders. The other 50% do not have behavioural disorders.



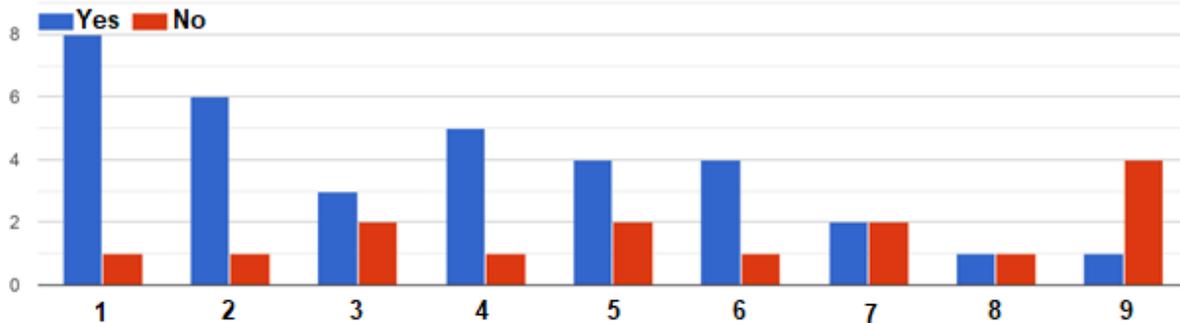
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We made an attempt to specify **what exactly the behavioural disorders are as registered by the specialists working in the institution.**

12. What type of problems does the child have?



Other than the disorders, which are clearly illustrated on the diagram, almost half of the children – **8**, do not follow the established rules; **6** of them easily make use of lying; **5** of them have threatened the adults and authorities.

A display of excessive sexual behaviour in many of the children as identified by the specialists in the institutions and the attempts to recreate sexual scenarios with the remaining children is a key criterion for sexual assault practiced against these children and is a persisting concern, dominated by the extremely unstable environment in which these children have lived.

11. With regard to the preparation for leaving the institution and the subsequent support.

The right to participate, an independent life and a certain degree of autonomy are fundamental to every child. It is of utmost importance to respect the dignity of every child, including his/her right to have an informed choice as they prepare for the transition from organized care to independent (or family) life.



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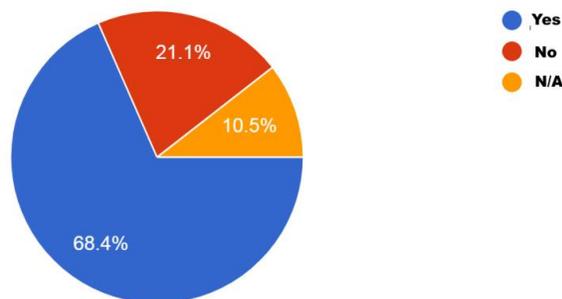
When the attention paid to this key period of the life of a child is insufficient, the consequences in all parts of the world are often catastrophic. They include poverty, homelessness, insult, drug abuse, extension of the dependent /institutional/ behaviour and subsequent need to be placed into institutions for adults, asocial behaviour leading to an already mature child ending up in the institution “prison” (one of the detailed accounts of a young woman turned murderer can be found below) or suicide. The research shows that young people who follow a gradual or extended transition as they leave the institution have better results than those who leave it early or suddenly.

An examination of the conducted investigation shows that **68.4% of the aforementioned 19 cases of children have a plan for the future.**

21.1 % of the children don't have a plan for the future. 10.5% of the professionals have come to the conclusion that this question is incompatible with the future of the children, which are subject to investigation.

13. Does the child have a life project?

19 responses



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The professionals believe that a possible cause behind children lacking a plan for the future may be:

- Ambivalent declarations by the parents on whether the child will be accepted back into the family or not. The parents declare in front of the child that they want him/her to return to the family while at the same time declining to engage themselves in the process of reintegration.
- Depressive states and maladaptive behaviour in the children which reveals the defensive nature of their personality as a result of the suffered trauma.

Based on what professionals believe – **What is the plan for the future for these children?**

What is the plan for the future of these children?

19 responses



42.1% believe the path to be empowering. Empowering is a central element in achieving a social and economic change, rooted in the protection of human rights. Empowering leads to an increase in the capacity of children and adolescents to take control of their lives.



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An important psychological aspect with regard to empowering children in institutions or residential care is:

- The lack of confidence in their own ability to take control of their lives independently, as a result of a continuous institutionalization and/or abusive behaviour and dependence.
- Distrust in certain ages, as a result of failed or completely absent parental authorities.

As mentioned in the General European guidelines for transition from institutional care into societal care, this transitional process isn't just a physical transition of children from an institution into their new living environment. Their whole way of life changes: where and with whom they live, who provides for them, who their friends and neighbours are and even how they eat and dress.

The goal of this lifelong project, is to ensure synergy between what the child needs, how he/she wants to live his/her life and the support which he/she receives, so that he/she can be ready to move out of the institution. This is why it is crucial for the transitional process to take into account the individual life project and to consider the individual skills, preferences, and abilities of the child.

III. The point of view of the professionals.

1. About the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

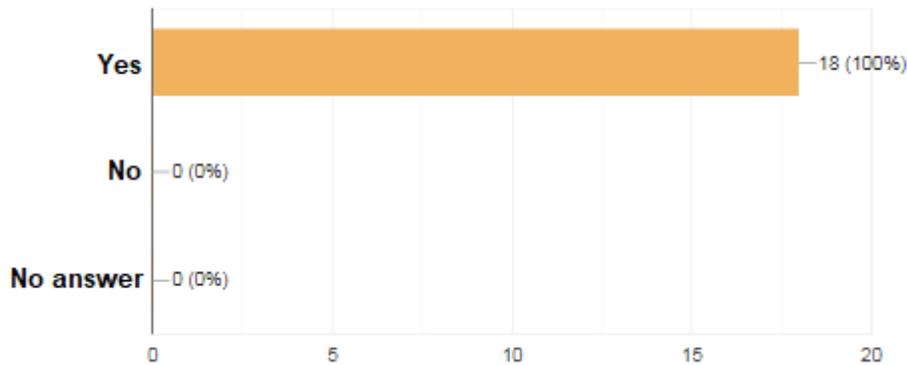
From the respondents to the questionnaire, 18 **professionals** stated that each of them was familiar with the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** (Question 1 from the inquiry).



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To the question: 'From your point of view, how are the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child applied in the institution?'

51% of the respondents said that the Convention was thoroughly known. Professionals have cited much of the basic principles, and they believe that they are largely implemented in the institutions in which they work.

Rights are cited such as: *'... equal rights for all and work in the best interests of the child'; the wishes and feelings of the child, their physical and mental needs are respected; 'the opinion of the child on all matters affecting him/her is respected', 'children placed in the institution have the right to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel forms of violence; children are provided with school education, access to medical care; children are provided with an opportunity for relaxation, rest and access to cultural life', '... participation of the child, hearing children...'*.

39% of the respondents believe that, despite their knowledge of the Convention and the fundamental rights of children, **they are difficult to apply**, highlighting the fact that the other institutions included in the Child Protection System are not aware of the Convention and do not apply its principles. Many of them also point to the **subjectivity** factor in applying and **lack of integration of the principles into practice**.

10% are not familiar and have no opinion on the matter.



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2. Welcoming children, basic rules and regulations within the institution

Thinking in the direction of 'Basic rules and regulations in the functioning of the institution' and 'When the child enters the institution, what information is given to him/her?', **all professionals responded that the organizations they represent have written and regulated rules** and they, being specialists working with children, submit the following information:

- For the functioning of the institution;
- For the team of professionals;
- 16 of them provide information about the environment (schools, services, facilities);
- 12 out of 19 specialist representatives work on the child's life projects, and they work in the direction – different opportunities and perspectives for leaving the institution.

All **18 professionals** respond unanimously that all children are aware of the **rules in the respective institution**.

The main issues incorporated into the rules of the respective residential institutions or care services are:

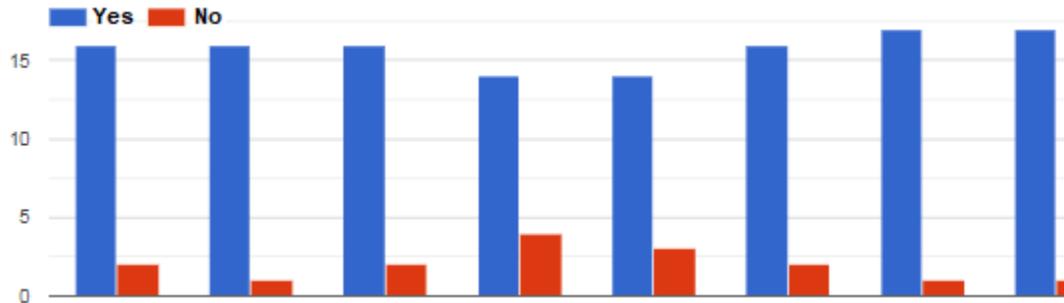
1. Correspondence with outsiders
2. Being in possession of money
3. Visiting the family
4. Visiting a friend
5. Personal use of a mobile phone
6. Rules of conduct in the relationship with service professionals
7. Rules for entry and exit to and from the institution
8. Rules of conduct in the relationships with other children



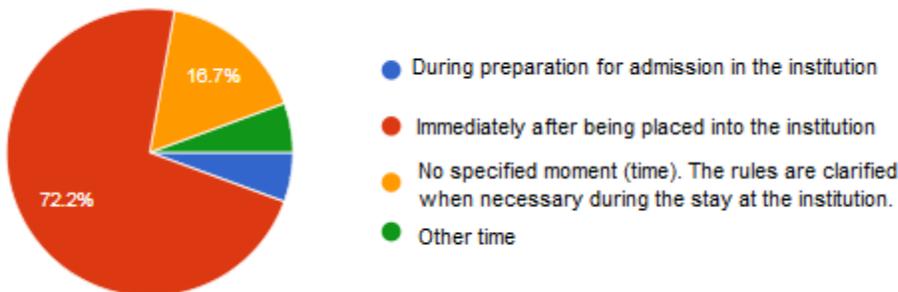
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Between 14 and 17 professionals claim that these rules are clearly laid out, between 1 and 3 of these representatives believe that these rules are not regulated. Specialists who replied to the questionnaire also referred to other rules formulated in the institutions and services, such as: rules of conduct, property protection and personal safety, rules for personal hygiene, and healthy life – no use of psychoactive substances.



13 of them – 72.2 % claim that children become familiar with the rules as soon as they are placed into the institution or residential facility.

16.7 % said that there is no specific moment when the rules are outlined and that they are clarified when it becomes necessary during the children’s stay at the institution.



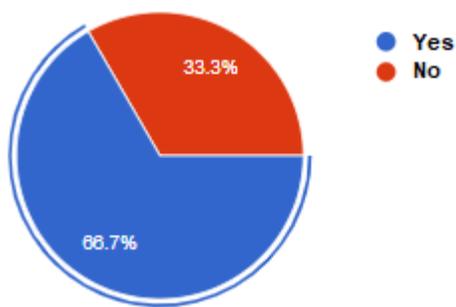
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Two of the professionals claim that the rules in the respective institution are presented immediately before the placement of the child or at another appropriate time, explaining that 'Priority is given to the individual approach according to the specifics of the child'.

At the same time, **33% of respondents** said that children placed in the institution **cannot participate in the development of rules governing the life in the institution**, despite the fact that **16 of the 18 professionals** shared that **the children participate in the life of the institution**.



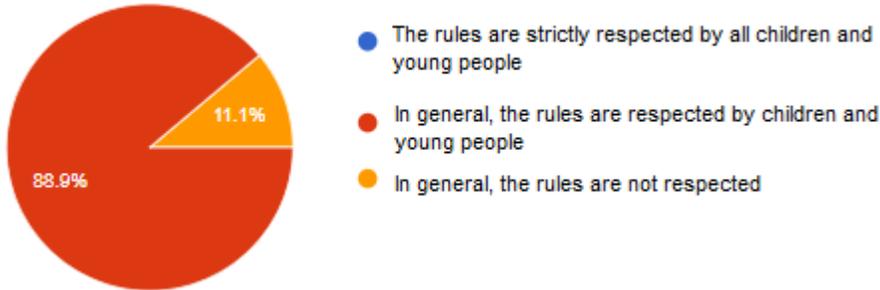
66.7% of the questionnaire respondents indicated that **children and young people are involved in developing and discussing the rules** in their respective institutions. Probably this is the reason why **88.9% of children follow the rules** in the respective institution or service. Participation in the planning and regulation of basic rules results in an experience of security and control in the involved persons.



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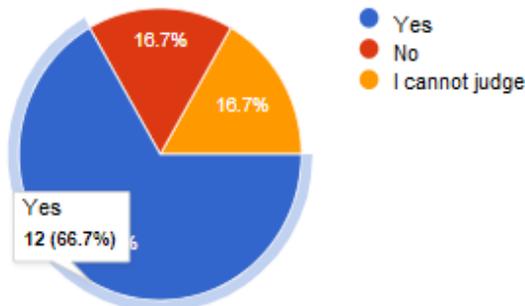
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Despite the declared regulation of rules in institutions and services, **77.8% of the questionnaire respondents think that there is a need for changes in the rules**. Specialists indicate what changes are needed in the institutions represented by them: clear and accurate regulation of rules by means of a Regulations Book; no double standards; children should be involved as much as possible in the process and participate in the introduction of new rules; individual needs and specifics of each user must be taken into consideration when implementing the rules, as well as his/her abilities to fulfil them; the rules should be systematically changed and the ineffective ones should be replaced by new ones.

3. The right of children to participate

However, despite this point of view of the professionals, **a third of them cannot judge or deny that children's opinions are taken into account** when making decisions that affect their lives.



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66.7% of the respondents to the questionnaires believe that **children's opinion are taken into account when making major decisions** in the institution or residential care.

The answers to the question *'How and at what time is this done?'* revolve around major factors which are taken into account, such as:

- Individual characteristic features (age, emotional state) of the child;
- Once the crisis has passed and the psycho-emotional state of the child has been normalized;
- Throughout the entire duration of the stay.

Again, there is significant difference in the provided answers and in the extent to which the team of specialists is prepared to work with this target group of children and the extent to which a sustainable and regulated Methodology for effective work with the children exists within the Organization.

When asked about **improvements** – 15 of the representatives believe that several improvements are possible, and the indicated suggestions include:

- **More psychologists** in the organizations, which work with the children.
- **An increase in the funding** for services, leading to an improved quality of life of the children and the quality of the provided service by qualified specialists.
- **More qualified teams** which work with the children.
- **Including children in different activities** which take place outside the institution.
- **The children's opinion should matter more.**
- **A change in the entire system governing the care for children, which contradicts the law.**

Turning attention to children and providing them with the opportunity to participate in the organizations – **90 % of specialists believe that children take part in the life** within the institutions or residential care facilities, in which they have been placed.

They further clarify that children take part in household activities, similar to those taking place within the family environment; suggestions and opinions regarding the wholesale organization of



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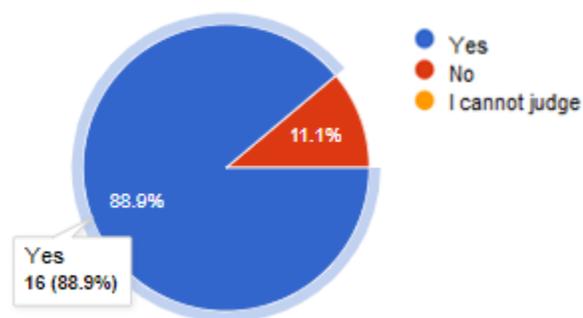
life in the care facility; organization of celebrations and holiday festivities; cultivating plants, taking care of pets; craft studios.

One questionnaire filled out by a representative of an approved boarding school clearly states that children ‘help the newly admitted students and those who are falling behind with school activities; choose their facultative and selective subjects in their own curriculum; choose their extracurricular activities; participate through their representatives in the work of the pedagogical council; take part in the maintenance of proper hygiene’.

66.7 % of specialists believe that further improvements are possible, including:

- A clear regulation of responsibilities and commendations organized in a table view;
- Taking into consideration the individual characteristic features of the child – intellectual, emotional, behavioural;
- More personal freedom of the children and allowing them to take the initiative

A question which illustrates the opportunity for children to participate and to be listened to and heard is Question No. 12 ***‘Do you think that children have the opportunity to talk about their past and their future expectations?’***



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16 (88.8%) of the representatives have answered in the affirmative, while indicating in their subsequent answer that the employees of the respective institution treat children's expectations for the future, which are discussed individually with every child, in a very serious way.

Representatives of one crisis centre have indicated that during the period which the child spends in the crisis centre, the team of specialists works towards planning and meeting the set targets 'in the child's best interest' once he/she has left the facility: 'The social service continues to support and cooperate with the users (depending on their capability) even after they have left the institution in order to promote their development'.

The specialists indicate that usually the opinion of the child is studied and a plan is developed based on the child's desires for a future development. The professional who is primarily responsible for working with a given child is aware of his/her strong sides, deficits, etc., which are considered when the plan is developed.

Other listed factors include **frequent meetings between the children and the staff**; support in the implementation of realistic ideas; individual consultations with the children, which make it possible to discuss important decisions, including the choice of school, a request for reintegration and return to the family.

As a counterpoint to what has been said by specialists working in the crisis centres and the family-type accommodation centres and other types or residential care facilities, the professionals working in social-pedagogical boarding school/approved boarding schools have pointed out that 'usually these types of institutions (social-pedagogical boarding school/approved boarding schools) have no opportunity whatsoever to influence the future of the children and adolescents once they leave the service.' The service itself is established in a region far away from the children's natural environment. 'In such cases, the measures which may be taken by the institution are severely limited, as is the consideration of the children's expectations regarding their future development once they leave the institution. Moreover, over the years, I have witnessed the converse situation – the staff at the institution takes the initiative to find a place to accommodate adolescents who have reached the majority age (18) who would otherwise find themselves on the street or in quite an adverse environment.'



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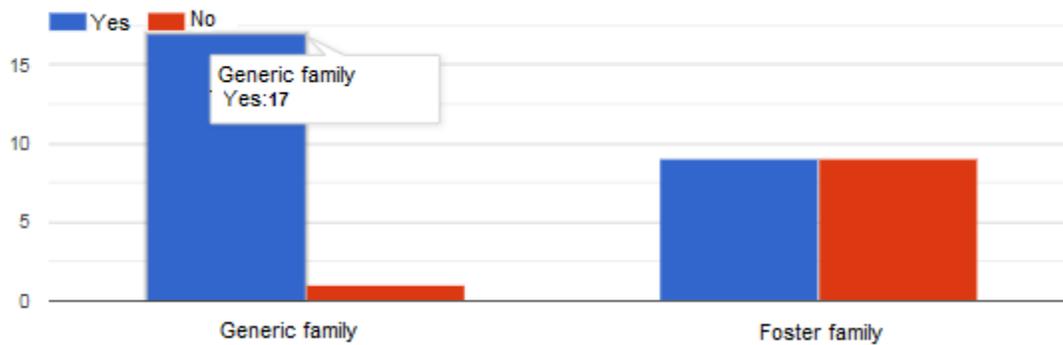
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These expanded answers clearly demonstrate the major differences which exists between the organization of work and the applied methodologies among the various institutions, as well as the achieved results which have a direct impact on the children and their future life choices.

4. Family and development

Strategies for working with children, developing and implementing individual life projects.

The inquiry aimed at residential care professionals reported that in **77.8%** of cases, the institutions promote the contact between the child and his/her generic family, as indicated in the individual life projects of the children, but there is clear distinction between encouraging their return to biological/generic family and ambivalence in promoting foster care. The clear tendency gives a real expression of the role of foster care in Bulgaria and that it is above all a substitute and support in cases of dysfunctional parental care.



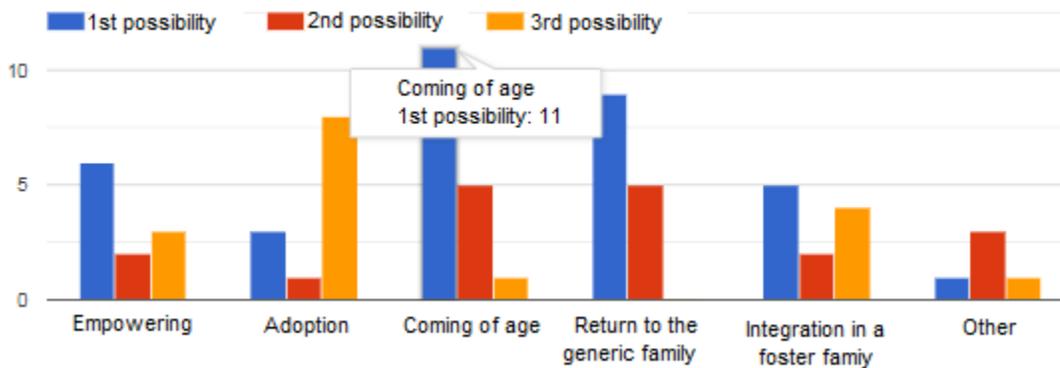
Although experts from the institutions accept that residential care is a temporary solution and despite being almost unanimous that working with children is focused on encouraging the development of skills necessary for living outside the institution, **ambivalence is noted once again**, as the main reason for leaving the institution, in the last 5 years of their practice, is **indicated to be the coming of age**.



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This is followed by a return to the generic family.

Answering Question No. 16 *‘What type of work does the institution carry out in order to prepare children for returning to their generic family?’* the professionals indicate a number of key factors, which outline the policies and methods of work in the respective institutions:



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- Meetings with and visits to the generic family, which are **planned and coordinated** with the Units for Child Protection (UCP). If needed, children are accompanied by a social worker.
 - **Providing support to the family** – psychological, legal, social, financial.
 - **Therapeutic work** with other members of the family (individual and in groups) which aims at understanding the problem and how to influence it.
 - Inclusion of other interested parties, supporting the child to develop the habits necessary for an independent life.

With regard to Question No. 17 ***‘What type of work does the institution carry out in order to prepare children for returning to their adoptive family?’***:

The specialists’ answers demonstrate how being brought up in the generic family is clearly distinguished from being brought up in adoptive care.

When preparing children for their return to their generic family, this is done through making sure they understand the moral values and responsibilities; developing the skills needed to understand the rights and responsibilities of every family member; developing daily routing and hygiene habits; showing feelings of empathy and others.

Conversely, preparing children for their **return to an adoptive family** is related to:

- Developing habits and skills for independent dealing with life events;
- A preliminary study of the child’s attitude towards such a step, conversations with psychologists, social workers, etc.;
- Psychological work with the child and the adoptive family. Social work with regard to other institutions;



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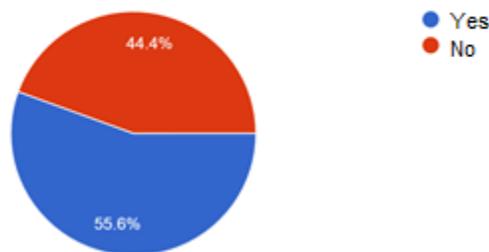
- Lobbying for legislative changes, as well as fighting to make the rights of the child in the country a popular topic on society's agenda.

The emphasis on the functioning of the child and on developing skills for an independent life and bearing personal, individual responsibility for his/her own future is clearly seen. What is needed is investing further resources into lobbying and incorporating the other institutions which are part of this process.

Interestingly, when the questions are addressed to the **specific cases of children with whom they work, specialists say that in many institutions there are no procedures for assessing the satisfaction of children and young people placed in the institutions where they work.**

47. Is there a procedure for assessing the satisfaction of the children/young people in the institution?

18 responses



As a reason for the lack of this type of assessment is indicated that such assessment of satisfaction is not required, and that it should be properly linked to the policy of the whole organization and state policies for child support, and its existence in isolated institutions will not ensure the development of appropriate working methodologies.



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5. Protection

This section of the analytical report, above all else, makes notice of different dangers regarding the health and functionality of the child and the measures and procedures, which are taken towards its protection and care. If we go back to the first part, where we have clear characteristics towards the researched children in the stated institutions. A large portion of them are affected by all forms of abuse, disregard and neglect, without a secure and trustworthy connection with a significant adult. This characteristic assumes a specific manner of functionality, defined by a sadomasochistic manner of creating relations, recreating their former traumatic experience.

Questioned representatives of the institutions “What are the procedures in your institutions, if the child is affected by the following situations: Being abused by people outside the institution?”

Of the received answers, two types of procedures are defined:

- **Vertical order**, regulated by the institution – complaints and signals towards the heads of the institution;
- **Horizontal care** - sharing with a trusting person, inside the institution; consulting – therapy discussions.
- **The use of outside resources, regulated by the law and methods of the profession** – they are informed, and the search for cooperation from a secure institution, registered in the child protective system, police, child protective services, court case, involving the educational system and outside psychological consultations;
- **The use of outside resources and local outreach** – friends and family of the child.

100 % of the interviewed specialists claim that the Organization which they represent has mechanisms in place to protect children and adolescents from external and internal threats.

Once again, as is in most of the questions, the positions of the representatives of The **Educational Boarding-School differ from the rest**. Professionals say that “Contact with people from outside



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the institution are limited and controlled. In the case of abuse outside “home-leave”, the inspector of the child pedagogic room acts, the local committee fighting against antisocial incidents of the underaged, and the local Child Protective Services. If the student, after she returns, shares that she has been a victim of abuse, we inform the same institutions.”

One part of the filled questionnaires **reject and “isolate” the traumatic past of the children**, to such a degree, that the only thing which remains clear is the deviant behaviour of the resident children. From the received results it is marked that: “I’ve never heard of a case like this. The opposite is more common – children being violent towards citizens of the region.”

In interviewing part of the crew, which has researched representatives of “The boarding-school” it was claimed that “The children have not suffered abuse” prior to being placed.

Questioning the same representatives of the institutions, “What are the procedures, in case of abuse, from within the institution?”

In 90% of the cases, professionals point out that, “The regulations and steps taken in reporting and working on a certain case, are identical to those taken in cases of abuse from outside the institution.”

Representatives of the Boarding-institutions, once again acknowledge the question, as if being directed towards the perpetrating children and say “Restrictions are used – for example, the perpetrator is not allowed to attend competitions inside, or outside the city, they can’t go on vacations (this could be requested by the local committee or police), they can’t go to the local stores... overall the basis is, they are not allowed to leave the premises of the institution if convicted.”

In cases of sexual abuse of children, the representatives of the institutions present the same steps of action as in the case of other types of violence behavior committed.

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The main point that we have pay attentions are : Diagnosis, mandatory examination by a doctor, reporting to the police and prosecutor's office, crisis intervention of the victim.

When examined by a court physician in Bulgaria, no confidential criteria are met. Based on the cases that have been submitted to the PULS Foundation, we have registered examinations that have been made in the presence of 5 witnesses and 3 representatives of the health and law enforcement system. Sparing justice is not yet regulated in our country's legislative system and children are subject to the severe regulations of revictimization and violation of child dignity.

In cases of discrimination, professionals working in the institutions do not make a clear distinction and indicate different procedures from those presented above in the analysis.

The representatives of the SBS and the STI again shows the daily reality of these institutions. The agencies state: "This is not considered to be a concern. children are generally discriminated against and offended on a racial basis than by staff to discriminate against them on any grounds. Generally, it is difficult to decide in a situation where a Roma child tells another Roma child offensive words regarding their common ethnic and racial background.

Looking at this part of the results presented, it is important to note the continued discriminatory attitudes, intolerance of differences in age, gender, race, ethnicity or religion.

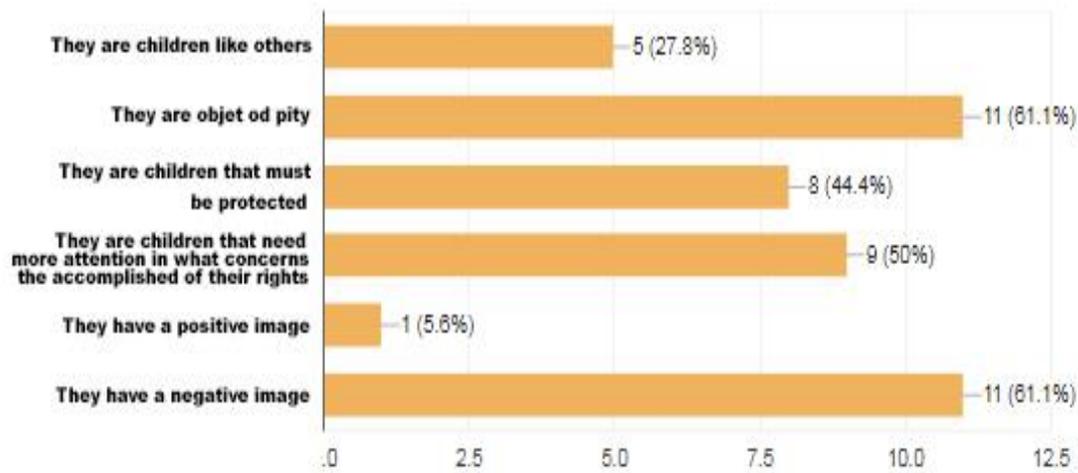
The next step is presented an analysis, of tolerance in Bulgaria society - The image shows the tolerances of society for children and young people living in an institution.



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The results are absolutely indicative. As it reads the child is "An object of pity and a negative image". Only 27.8% of society accept children from an institution, as any other children.

In regards to the social integration to the youths, what are the main hardships and challenges, professionals answer with the following:

- In a post-socialist community, the old attitudes in rejecting children into institutions still stand
- Children live on being outcast and undesired
- Following the expectations of society, that they are dangerous and different, children behave that way / antisocial displays/.
- The main challenges derive from one point, the preparations for the children and what awaits them, but on the other hand the limits of the social system, which is not prepared to make use of their value.



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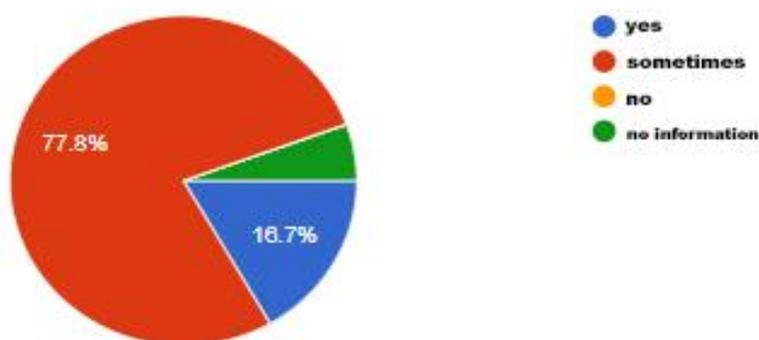
6. Preparing for leaving

In terms of empowerment, 99% of professionals believe that institutions encourage the development of children in them. Professionals believe that during their stay, children and young people should develop or acquire skills for autonomy, autonomous life outside the institution, communication skills, hygiene habits, skills needed for successful realization on the labour market, as well as respect and understanding of social norms.

As tools used for this purpose the professionals have specified the conversation (individually and in groups), occupational therapy, cooking and arts workshops, attending cultural events, following hygiene habits, and supporting regular school attendance and learning.

The prepared plan, for leaving the institution, instills a sense of security and confidence in the children and makes their lives worthwhile when it comes to goals and their following. Specialists say that including the children in group activities, with the goal of rewarding their knowledge and skills, as well as gaining new ones, carries a position of importance and empowerment, in functionality within the children.

After leaving the institution, a portion of the children maintain a relationship with the specialists, and consult with them.



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14 respondents, 77,8% have answered – sometimes.

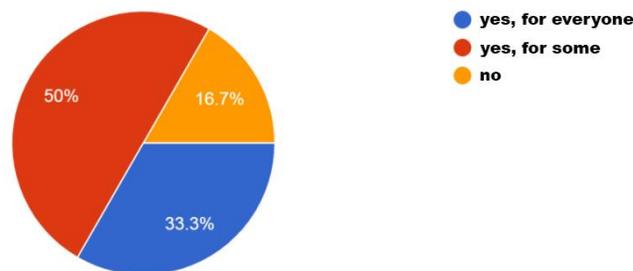
3 of them, 16,7% - definitely

1 respondent, 5,6% - no information

Considering, the presented reasons are – providing technical, administrative documents, visits to the other children in the institution, looking for a channel of communication and consult, acknowledging the representatives of the institution as significant adults.

45. Do you know about the life paths of those youngsters that have left the institution?

18 responses



33,3% of specialists share, that they are familiar with the lives of all the children, that have left the institution, and 50% know about some of the children. This percentage carries the information of a valuable connection, which is established between the children and the professionals.

Basically, professionals are on the opinion that children and young people leaving the institutions are satisfied. The questioned share, that they track them through different channels of contact

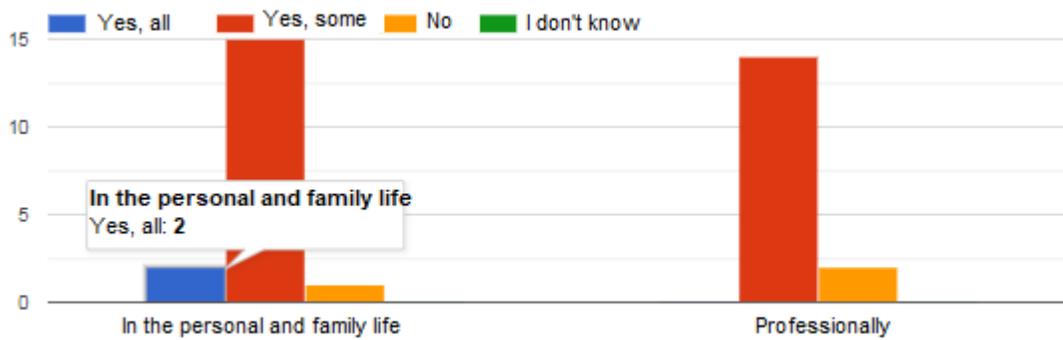


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with the children after they leave. The strategies are all different, like communication with other institutions, personal meetings, home and workplace visits, telephone conversations and a facebook page, specifically made for communication with children that have left. It is also mentioned, that are open dinner nights, where the children that have left are invited.



In addition, the professionals have said that in most cases they have information about the development of children who have been in the institution.

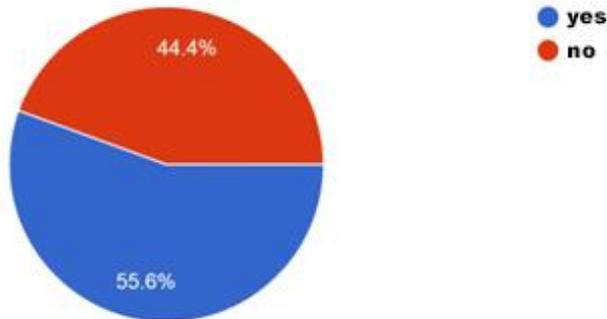
Regarding the question **“In the institution, is there a measure for the satisfaction of the children and youths”**, 44,4% of the questioned answered NO, which on its own part, carries the idea of subjectiveness and relativity of the individual grade of every representative.



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The questioned share that, that there is no requirement, method or regulation for such actions;

Specialists say, that they gather information through personal meetings with the children that have left, and crew meet ups with the other professionals. One portion of them share that after the departure of the child from the institution in the regulated time, an interview is held, in regards to the quality of the service, as well as receiving feedback, which of the presented services has helped them.

The instruments are – surveys, reports, psychodynamic interviews.



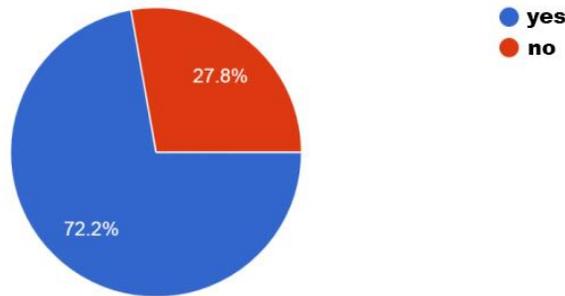
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49. Was it identified aspects of improvement with the evaluation?

18 responses



72,2% of the children believe, that some improvements can be realized within the institutions, and they are primarily in terms of: Activity, Child participation, rules, and information for children.

The improvements, according to specialists, which can be realized in regards to the preparation of the children and youths for leaving the institutions are in the line of:

- Professional preparation in terms of – accepting regress, manifesting in a portion of the children and their return into the institution.
- The coherency and general understanding with the other professionals involved with the tasks of a specific child.

Specialists comment, that “Children leaving due to adoption, the systems (which are entirely outside the organization) don’t allow the opportunity to keep track of them, which leaves a uncertainty in specialists of whether or not the best decision was made for the child.”



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17 of the surveyed specialists believe that children develop skills for an independent life. Regarding questions like “What sort of skills should they develop?”, representatives of the institutions answer:

- Independence, personal mastery and responsibility
- Organizing the personality, work and hygienic habits.
- A positive attitude towards educational and work habits
- Critical thinking, societal education (knowing their basic rights and rules in the free market and in a more general societal plan), financial and functional knowledge and knowledge of the basic institutions.

The manners of which a child is thought these skills prior to their departure of the institution, according to the questioned, it is above all else

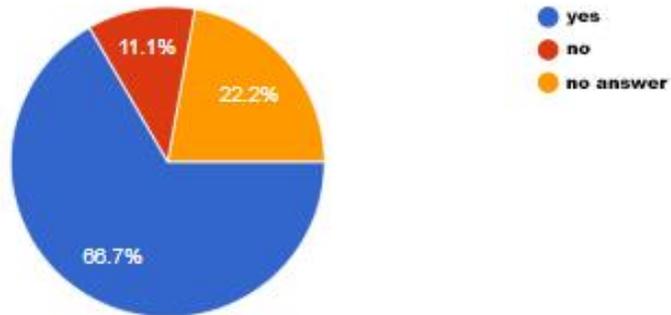
- Individual support and social contact
- Regular school attendance
- Holding additional, targeted courses, lectures, involving the children in educational seminars
- Educated, regular supervisions and trainings, not only for the children, but for the professionals as well
- Participation in extracurricular activities outside the institution



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66,7% that to make such improvements in those terms, it involves:

- Reducing the documentation that specialists, working with the children, have to fill out, as it takes up have of the work time.
- Increasing the human resources and to raise their paygrade.
- A total restructure of child law in accordance to the Ministry of Labour.
- Approving the Child Strategy /20120 – 2030/

In regards to the rules of cohabitation in institutions, professionals are almost unanimous, that amendments could be applied. In addition, said amendments include the amount of trained psychologists working with the resident children, increasing the finances and providing individually specific opportunities for the children and youths. Like offering opportunities for sport clubs, hobby clubs, and the opportunities to participate in cultural initiatives.

In the research, professionals are asked how can their young participants get involved in the life of the institution. The suggestions involve implementing methods to involve the participants to take part in the upkeep of the institution, providing opportunities for initiative for the children and youths, as well as



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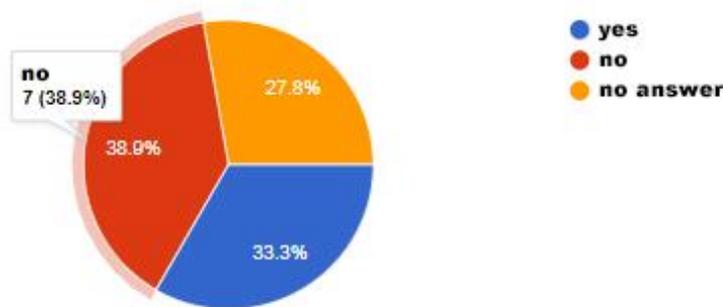
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developing suggestions from the participants, who will take part in the decision making inside of the centers of the residential type.

Those involved in the research, point out, that to guarantee the rights of the child during and after their stay in the institution, it is required to develop systems, that give solace to the departed, so that in the future, they can turn for help once again in the institution, as well as suggestions between the institutional committee, for the case of a child to be coordinated, so that there won't be a repetition of the dysfunctional model of parenting, where the parents offer opposing advice.

Meanwhile 38,9% of professionals say that, to them, the institution doesn't provide the opportunity for societal participation for the children and the youths.

17 out of 18 professionals share that, the children and youths are familiarized during stay **in the institution with their rights**.



6. Cooperation with other organizations

Representatives of the organizations believe that, they have established good partnerships with the other organizations, involved in the child protective services.



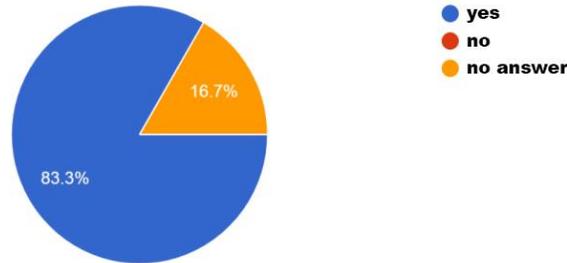
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51. Do you think that the institution has good partnership relations with other organizations?

18 responses



As examples a sequence is shown of government and non-government funded organizations, rights-protecting and security organizations like:

Government funded: court, prosecution, police, school, town hall, cultural institutions, Ministry of education and science, Child protective services, social services

In the government funded organizations, nowhere was there included, health centers, hospitals and doctors.

Non government-funded organizations- Bulgarian Red Cross, "P.U.L.S.E." foundation, "Association Animus" foundation, "Limitless mission" foundation, Institute of social services and practice, International organization of migration, National Child Network, A 21.

As primary challenges, which professionals point out, regarding working with children placed in institutions for care, of the residential type, can be summarized with:



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-
- Too much documentation to be filled out, which most of the professionals believe to be redundant.
 - Complications with working with children – neutralizing aggressive and self-destructive displays.
 - Complications with understanding the children and their behaviour.
 - Working under constant stress and pressure, which in some cases is unbearable.
 - Psychological conditions in the children.
 - Lack of resource in taking care of the children.
 - Lack of a qualified personal, and support from outside specialists.

Conclusions and recommendations:

The conclusions are based on the entire report and by taking into account the discussions conducted with different specialists who work or have worked in the system for child care.

Concerning the rules for cohabitation in institutions, professionals are almost unanimous that changes could be made. The proposed changes include an increase in the number of trained psychologists working with residential children, an increase in funding and providing specific opportunities individually for children and young people by offering opportunities to participate in sports clubs, interest clubs and cultural initiatives.

In the survey, professionals were also asked how their young users could get involved in the life of the institution. The proposals relate to the introduction of methods for engaging users in the maintenance of the institution, providing opportunities for children and young people to show involvement and initiative, as well as developing proposals from the users who will then participate in the decision-making within the residential centres.



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Participants in the study indicated that in order to guarantee the rights of the child throughout and after the institutional stay, it is necessary to develop mechanisms to reassure those who have left the institutions that they will be able to contact the institution again in the future; also, a proposal was made for coordination and inter-institutional communication on a case of a child in order to prevent the recurrence of the dysfunctional model of parenting, in which parents convey contrasting messages.

Regarding the preparation for leaving the institution and subsequent support.

As mentioned in the Common European Guidelines for transition from institutional care to care within the community, this transitional process is not simply a physical move for the child between the institution and their new home. The entire life children changes: where and with whom they live, who offers them support, who their friends and neighbours are, even how they eat and dress. **The aim of the individual life project** is to provide coordination between what the child needs, how he/she would like to live his/her life and the support he/she receives in order to become ready to leave the care facility. This is why it is of pivotal importance that the transitional process be compliant to the individual life project and to take into account the child's individual preferences and abilities.

Shortcomings and strengths of the national system

- There is a lack of support services for children leaving the institutions and/or alternative care. There is no state policy, and the follow-up of the “cases” of children at risk by the Unit for Child Protection is a formal act, often without real support and sensitivity to the past of the children, their individual traumas and their possible reflections.
- Children in alternative care are not treated preventively, but only after a problem has been reported. The accumulated information is not processed and analysed for the purposes of identifying indicators, bringing out good practices and changes in legislation.



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- For most children/young people, the relationships with their previous lives are lost. There is almost no record of past relationships or events in the lives of the children accommodated in the family-type accommodation centres.
 - Children living in residential services come mainly from large social care facilities – institutions, which also predetermines subsequent maladaptive behaviour.
 - The consequences of child abuse and trauma experienced in the past are not recognized as a problem to be addressed.
 - A large percentage of children in institutions are adopted children who have been abandoned by adoptive parents or are children with a traumatic past and generalized anxiety disorder.
 - There is no future planning for some of the children (especially those with severe behavioural problems).
 - Often, the staff are unprepared to deal with children who have behavioural problems and generalized anxiety disorder and do not receive any supervision or consulting.
 - The individual action plans and care plans developed at the point of placement of the children are a mere formality and do not provide any prospects for a successful outcome in the future.
 - For some of the children there were no educational plans, and most of the children were illiterate.
 - For some of the services there was no additional or supplementing support from the community (no other services were used at all).
 - In some cases, independent living skills were not developed.



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- The future of children remains questionable – most of them are likely to remain institutionalized as adults.
 - Interviews with children from institutions revealed the apparent fear of leaving the institution and the perceived "threat" from the outside world. This experience results in a number of maladaptive models of functioning and deviant manifestations with persistent psychotic defensive mechanisms. Children are obviously provocative in social life, outside and inside the institution, refusing to accept their real age. Often, they express these fears through the sheer fluctuation between consciously concealing their age and/or accepting regressively childish emotional and behavioural expression and a total rejection of personal responsibility.

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