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Abstract: The article presents the development of alternative care for children without parents. It deals with their historical development in organizational and structural way. It also presents the contemporary forms for care and up-bringing of children at risk both at residential institutions and at community service centers.

Key words: children without parents, alternative care, Bulgaria

Effective functioning of democratic society goes through the process of recognizing, enforcing human and children rights.

Republic of Bulgaria has gone through a long and important path towards adequate and timely child rights and interests protection. With the Child protection law being accepted in year 2000 the start of the system for child protection was given according to the Convention for children rights (Ratified by the Assembly of UN at 20.11.1989 and also ratified by the Bulgarian parliament on 11.04.1991). Since 2010 when the national Vision for deinstitutionalization was accepted, the government took a new road toward development of social services for children by stimulating the creation of new, up-to-date alternative forms for care and up-bringing of children, deprived of parental care.

In the plan for deinstitutionalization the government directs its policy toward the closer of the existing and mostly ineffective traditional for the country alternative forms for child care. It is important to clarify what we do understand under the term “alternative forms for care and upbringing of children without parents (or deprived of parental care) and then their development can be presented.

One part of the researchers, when speaking about “alternative child care”, mean mostly the social-pedagogical services for children and families, built within the last decade. Other part (including me) put all existent social-pedagogical services under this term, including specialized institutions and community-based services as well. When we speak of “alternative care for children without parents” we actually mean:

- Any *alternative family care* that the child receives by placing him/her at foster family, or by providing opportunities to be adopted, and which child is not taken care of by their biological parents (Procop I., Procop P., 2011);
- *Care for children provided in a family-like setting* like “family-type centers for placement; centers for temporary placement; crisis centers; transitional house, protected house, monitored house and shelters, center for social rehabilitation and integration; center for working with children on the street; social education-professional center; day care center” (Regulations for implementation of the Code for social support, 2013);
- *Care for children provided at specialized institutions of residential type* – these are the so called Homes for children or homes for children without parents, homes for children with physical and mental disabilities (Regulations for implementation of the Code for social support, 2013).

For the past 6–7 years, due to the active involvement of numerous international and national NGOs the state policy focused at closing the “traditional” specialized institutions for residential care for children where a large number of children at different age and with different social-psychological problems used to be placed. The creation of these institutions at the beginning of the 20th century was determined by the quick enlargement of the number of children left without parental care. Social-economic conditions in the country were quite bad as a result of two international and several local wars.

Quick building of big places, where a lot of children could be placed and moved out of the street, was extremely important so their rights can be secured. Of course, the very first children homes were built and sustained by charity organizations like the women societies “Prince Boris Tarnovski”, “Bitola”, “Motherland”, etc. This is the place to mention that the development of the residential care at

Bulgaria goes through three main stages till 2010 when the fourth stage started and is supposed to end at 2025:

First stage of specialized residential institutions for care and upbringing of children without parents was between 1878 till 1947. This is a period of strong decentralization when the child care was given to the charity societies. There is no centralized system for providing care for children in unfavorable social situation. Residential care for children develops quickly and at the end of that stage some trends toward building small family type homes can be seen.

The second stage lasted between 1947 and 2000. During this time the centralized system for child care was established. This period we can divide into three sub-stages: 1947 till 1952; 1952 till 1974 and 1974 till 2000. This separation is connected with the changes at the legal base that determined the operations and the functioning of these institutions. Different institutions for children at risk were created and at the end of the stage the final image of the residential care institutions was shaped.

The third stage lasted between 2000 and 2010. During this stage a transition from centralization to decentralization of child care services has been made. This is one of the most relevant changes along with the double submission of these institutions to both Ministry of Social policy and labor and Ministry of Education.

During this stage some changes were made in the way the residential homes for children operated. The placement of children depends upon the decision of Child protection departments and the court. Different types of children can now be placed in these institutions – both orphans, children whose parents are not able to take care of them and children with physical and mental disabilities.

The last *fourth stage* of specialized institutions development started at 2012 with the acceptance of the National strategy called “Vision for deinstitutionalization for children in Republic of Bulgaria” It is expected that this stage will end at 2025 with slowly closing down all residential institutions for care and upbringing of children without parents.

The main goals set at the action plan of the National strategy¹ are as follows:

- developing a system of services in a family-like setting on national level that will eliminate the necessity of special institutions existence;

¹ Deinstitutionalization is a process of a purposeful substitution of the institutional and residential care for children with a care in an environment closer to family-type environment within the community. This process is not limited to bringing the children out of the institutions but is also related to implementing an early child-abandoning prevention as well as providing opportunities for kids and families to receive adequate support in the community.

- systematic closure of all “traditional residential institutions” in Bulgaria while guaranteeing the providing of short or long-term placement of every needy child at a service of a family-like type;
- development of law framework that will support the transition toward family and community care
- improvement of the efficiency of children and family at risk care system

Of course, in order to close the existing residential care institutions the government envisages some steps to be taken within the frame work of five different projects:

Project one – Project for deinstitutionalization of children living in residential homes for children with different disabilities;

Project two – Project for deinstitutionalization of children living in the residential homes for medical-social cares;

Third project – Project for deinstitutionalization of children living in residential homes for children deprived of family care;

Fourth project – Project for development of foster care;

Fifth project – Project for career development of social workers.

The funds needed for the first two projects are already secured and government and non-government organizations are working actively for their implementation.

Government policy for deinstitutionalization in Republic of Bulgaria starts with the residential homes for children with disabilities which are to be closed till 2015 considering this group the most vulnerable one. The present conditions at these institutions are pretty bad. Since for a long time in the past the government policy was more focused at stimulating parents to leave their children with disabilities at the institutions right after the disabilities were discovered, social services are to be much more effective now in trying to reintegrate the children within their families. The other alternatives are placement at Centers for placements of a family-like type and placement in specialized foster families. Day-care centers and protected homes are to build so the families with children with disabilities to be supported in their everyday life.

The second project for deinstitutionalization aims at children living at Residential homes for medical-social care. This project is more focused at developing services for prevention of child-abandoning as well as creating integrated services for families and children at risk. Such services are family consulting centers/services complexes for support and prevention like “Mother and baby”

department, Day care departments, services for emergency support when the life and the health of the child is at risk and they need to be brought out of the family quick. In these cases the children can be placed in specialized foster families or in substitute foster care. Services like specialized teams providing foster care on local or municipal level are still to be created. Specialized residential care in the form of Family-type centers for placement, crisis centers and others will be developed.

The third project for deinstitutionalization is focused upon children between 3 and 18 years old who are placed at the specialized residential homes for children without parents. "Some of these children need support after school hours and that's why services for such support will be developed" (Plan for deinstitutionalization of children in Republic of Bulgaria). Children that cannot be reintegrated in their families due to different reasons will be placed in foster families or will be put for adoption. If there are no other alternatives for the children they will be placed in Family-type centers. Social-psychological support will be delivered so the child can be reunited with their biological family. If this is not possible children will be able to live in transitional or in a monitored houses. It is planned that services for reintegration will be developed, as well as trainings will be provided for developing social skills for parents with children with emotional and behavioral deviations.

The fourth project for deinstitutionalization of children aims at stimulating and developing of foster care services. "For the stable realization of the three deinstitutionalization projects for children living in specialized institutions and for the providing of alternative family setting, purposeful actions for broadening the scope of the foster care are needed as well as for specialization of professional foster families and development of services that will support foster parents. The plan envisages the development of foster care to be implemented within the framework of an independent project which will be governed by the agency for social support within the Working program "Human resources development", but the specific number of the foster families considered was estimated on the basis of the analysis made for the other deinstitutionalization projects for Homes for children with disabilities, Homes for medical-social care and Homes for children without parents".

The fifth project is aimed at the career development of the professionals working in the system for social protection. Those professionals need constant training in order to raise their efficiency. Trainings are planned for this purpose that

will be delivered by specialists from different fields in the area of social work with children and families.

The creation of specialized Residential type of institutions for children used to be an adequate solution for child rights protection for the time they were started. Wars and bad economic conditions led to a large number of children without parents or whose parents were not able to take care of them. At the beginning of 21st century these “traditional” alternatives to the family care turn out to be unacceptable. The number of children in these institutions is well above their capacity to provide quality social-pedagogical care. Despite the fact that the specialists working in them are qualified they are not able to apply individual approach toward children as well as to show respect due to the children’s high number in a group (30–35 children). The large number of children and the small number of tutors does not support children development and does not stimulate children positive virtues. On the contrary – the institutional setting provokes mostly negative behavioral models like physical and emotional abuse among children, arrogance, lies, etc.

Due to this fact the state takes some steps in order to restructure or to close down these “traditional” institutions and focus its efforts toward the development of a new type special institutions which can provide social-educational services that will guarantee children rights according to the requirements and the necessities of the new era and within the framework of Children rights convention and other international and national documents.

With the development of new alternative forms for child care and upbringing (like Family-type centers, Day care centers, etc.) providing the best possible way for child interest protection is intended. Their rights will be guaranteed as well as their health, social, economic and cultural wellbeing and their development as moral and responsible persons that will successfully integrate in society

This is the place to present the idea for the development of Family-type placement centers. During the four stages of children social services development and especial in the last one government efforts are mostly aimed at development of alternative cares in the community which will provide support for some basic needs of families and single parents so they can raise their children. When it is not possible for the child to be raised in their biological family or by the broader family, then the state strives to provide good alternative forms of child care which care inevitably includes some sort of a family or a setting close to the family setting itself. That’s why the government efforts are aimed at developing Family-type placement centers and at the development of foster care as

well as creating a system for child abandoning prevention. The idea for creating small family homes did not emerge in the beginning of 21st century. It actually started at the beginning of 20th century. For example in 1936 in some issues of the magazine "Our child" the results of surveys were published which surveys were made in Geneva by the International alliance for child protection. These surveys showed the practical impact of the new system for *placement of children at private homes*, which system was known as "Small homes" for children.

The essence of these small families *was to place between 10 and 15 children in approved homes with a family which has a good image in the society and which can be guaranteed for in educational, hygienic and healthy aspect.*

Children in these small families were placed for a long period and were under the protection of the mother who raised them as her own kids while they were supposed to treat each other like brothers and sisters. The acceptance of small babies in this type of families was not allowed. Before choosing children for the small families, specially appointed persons conducted individual educational research of each child. "The head of the family" was a mother who usually had children of her own and by the time of the needy children placement didn't have more than one of her own children inside of the house. For the job of these mother teachers were usually preferred or some women who worked at some sort of social-pedagogical institution where children were raised, like orphanages, shelters, etc.

Small families were put in homes with all hygienic and healthy domestic comforts, usually in low-populated areas, or areas outside of town, with a yard and a garden where provisions could be cultivated for the meals. Kids were supposed to work in the garden as part of their labor education.

The international alliance for child protection recommended for children to be raised and educated in such small families. Child protection association in Bulgaria gradually tried to change the system of orphanages and boarding houses present at that time with this system of small families because it seemed to give good results" (by: Правилник за детските домове. Държавен вестник 44/1961, p. 4-5). We couldn't find any data if such small families have been created in Bulgaria but what's important is that the representatives of the national Child protection association had thought in this direction for creating alternative services for orphans and children who cannot be raised by their biological families.

After social-economic changes in 1944 government efforts to find better alternative cares for needy child care did not end. We can a proof for that in Instruction No RD-09-588 from 23.07.1986, issued to implement Instruction No

RD-34/11.05.18984 and letter No 191.00.54/23.11.1985 of Council of Ministries of People Republic of Bulgaria. The instruction was signed by the minister of Education prof Ilcho Dimitrov and assigned to Peoples' Education departments' chiefs in Vratca, Pernik and Pleven to organize one family home for children in each municipality starting 15.09.1986. The organization of these family homes was set in Decree N 10/23.07.1986 of Ministry of Education With a decision No 247 of Ministry of Education from 5.08.1991 the activity of these family houses was legitimized and Ministry of labor and social support, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health were supposed to develop opportunities for new family homes to be created in the scope of social services system. Unfortunately, no data for the actual existence of such homes was found during the research after 1991.

According Instruction No 10/23.07.1986 family children homes were state educational establishments which, using forms of family care and education must provide opportunities for care and upbringing of children in different social situation, which were constantly disconnected by their families and are not under parental care. These homes also provided conditions for children to be raised closer to the conditions of a family with a family atmosphere which could –provide deep and rich emotional connections. Children could create a sense of safety and stability. Conditions for their development were created so they can become conscious, cultural and socially active citizens. (by Instruction No 10, art. 1–3). Children family homes were created in living places which were owned by the state or by the director. For the latter a contract was signed between the director and the municipal council of peoples' education.

These homes were run by a director. The director had to be a family person – a parent, and sometimes – a person without marriage but who had shown love and abilities for children education and with a pedagogy education himself. The wife/husband of the director should give his/hers consent for the appointment. The director of the family home should fulfill his obligations in good faith and with love for children. He/she was supposed to take care for children lives, health as well as to monitor their behavior in the society, to represent them whenever such representation was needed in their best interest. He/she could give or refuse to give permission for legal actions on their behalf when he was appointed also their guardian and would support their social and professional integration when their live the home. The director gave an account for his work once a year to the municipal educational boards.

Family homes for children accepted children when they turn 3 years old if they have no parents or whose parents didn't take care of them and has completely

disconnected themselves from their families. Children were chosen by the municipal council for peoples' education together with the directors of Residential homes for children and adolescents. Placement took place after the child's opinion was taken into consideration if the child had turned 7 and no placement could be done if a child more than 14 years old didn't give their consent. Brothers and sisters were accepted with priority and their separation was not allowed.

In a family home between 5 and 8 children from both sexes were placed. As an exception (in cases of brothers and sisters) this number could be raised but with no more than 2 kids (on: Иванова 1929, art. 18–20).

Children in these family houses had their own obligations such as: to fulfill consciously and systematically their student's obligations; to go to school regularly and to receive education, and vocational training according to their interests and abilities; to participate, according to their age) in the work inside of the home; to perform tasks given by the director; to show respect to the director and to behave properly among themselves and to keep the home property in good shape (Иванова 1929, art. 21).

For the past 20 years some NGOs started to talk and organize family homes in Bulgaria again. As an example SOS-Kinderdorf International Bulgaria (which started their work in 1991) managed to create two children villages for needy children in Triavna and Dren as well as a boarding house for young adolescents in Sofia and V. Tarnovo. Children villages are organized on the principles of small family homes and in each home between 6 and 8 children can be placed. Each home has its own kitchen, rooms for the kids and common premises for play and gathering. Children in each house are taken care of by an SOS-Mother who supports them in their everyday activity.

Children placed in SOS Family homes are usually orphans of were abandoned right after birth and the parents had signed a declaration of full rejection of family rights. This alternative form for child care managed to prove its efficiency and to establish a long-term presence in the system of social-educational organizations in Bulgaria. It gradually broadens its activity and is now a leading organization among the NGOs working with children in poor social situation. For the past 6–7 years Family type placement centers were developed as well as protected and monitored houses which provide child care services in a more family-like setting. For the past years, according to the implementation of the national strategy for raising child wellbeing in Bulgaria, a lot of attention has been paid to a relatively new for our society alternative form for care and upbringing of children without parents which is the foster family. Art. 31, line 1 from Child

protection law states that *foster family* is “a husband and a wife or a single person who accept a child to raise and educate him/her.” Between the foster parents and the Department for Social Support there is a contract which manages the time of the – placement, the financial issues, the rights and the responsibilities for child’s upbringing. Art. 32 of the same law states what are the restriction for becoming a foster parent: under aged persons, persons under judicial disability or whose parental rights have been limited unless by objective reason and later – restored; foster parents with their parental functions taken for consciously not fulfilling them; people who are not able to fulfill parental functions due to lack of capacity or personal qualities or due to lack of financial or material conditions for raising a child; persons who used to be adopters and the adoption had been canceled through their fault; who are HIV positive or have other serious diseases...; who were convicted for deliberate criminal offence or a criminal case is going on against them (Закон за закрила на детето, art. 32, p. 1 till 10). The foster family is obliged to give the biological parent information about the child and to support the relationship between the child and the parents if this is appropriate for child’s development.

This alternative form for child care is not completely new. This can be seen by Instruction for placement of orphans in families, signed by minister of internal affairs and people’s health with No7383/8.08.1940 which is “a direct expression of the state’s activity and aspiration to create up-to-date law regulations for child placement in foster families, making this and alternative of the orphanages and trying to reach a different goal with different means” (Закон за социално подпомагане, p. 5).

The traditional and alternative forms of child care described above give a good ground for searching an optimization of their organization and governance so children without parents or in a difficult social situation can receive a proper and quality care. In order for this to happen the processes of socialization and social rehabilitation should be studied in the context of a systematic approach so all the aspects of child’s life can be provided.

As a conclusion it can be said that the state policy is aimed at developing alternative forms for care and upbringing of children without parents. In order for this reform in child protection system to be successful and their rights protected the whole system needs to change, making a turn toward more active preventive activity so the number of children abandoning and neglecting could be lowered. To achieve this goal social and health services should do much more field work with the socially excluded groups and to create systematic and purposeful

campaigns for stimulation of responsible parenthood. The families need to be effectively supported to take care of their children and just when all the resources of the family are drained a placement in some alternative form for child care to be considered. Closing of specialized residential institutions and building new structures will not change significantly children's social situation if they are constantly or temporarily left without parental care. The provision of quality social services will do it, if they are in correspondence with child's needs and necessities. This can bring a quality change in child protection system which will give the state an opportunity to take care for the social wellbeing of the next generation. The successful implementation of state policy for development of alternative child care forms depends on the constant training of the professionals working in this system – in Child protection departments.

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