

CONFERENCE REPORT

9TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
SOFIA, BULGARIA, 24TH – 26TH OCTOBER 2012

CO-HOSTED BY THE BULGARIAN MEMBER ORGANISATION
NATIONAL NETWORK FOR CHILDREN

PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN ALTERNATIVE CARE ACROSS EUROPE



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Abstract

Children growing up in care or at risk of being taken into care are among the most vulnerable in Europe. Whilst no consistent data exists across Europe, the number of children concerned is significant, probably well over 1½ million. The conference looked at how the rights of these children can be best protected and promoted and considered how - at a time of unprecedented strain on public finances and on the child protection system – we can ensure the best interest of the child is at the heart of all decision-making regarding children's care. It provided a platform to share experience of what is working across Europe through plenary sessions, workshops, study visits and exchange of good practice. More than 200 leading European experts on children's rights, people working for non-governmental organisations, researchers, and political actors took part, as well as a group of children and young people with experience in the care system who brought their unique perspective to the debate. The conference concluded that de-institutionalisation (the closing down of institutions for children and transformation of children's services) should be a political priority and governments should support non-governmental organisations' efforts to ensure that children are not removed from their families because of poverty and material deprivation. This can never be accepted as a reason for placing a child in an institution. EU Structural Funds can and should stimulate de-institutionalisation reforms to ensure comprehensive reform of educational, social and health services, as well as creating quality alternative services for children. The conference confirmed the high level of political will to end the institutionalisation of children and promote the rights of the child. *"We are committed in Bulgaria to closing our institutions for children.....we are not afraid to discuss the problems, we have a committed team"* Bulgarian President Rosen Plevniev.

Acknowledgements & Authors

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AUTHORS

The report has been drafted by Anne Williams (external consultant), with inputs from each of the workshops rapporteurs. Thanks go to Agata D'Addato and Michela Costa (Eurochild Policy Officers) for the overall coordination and supervision, and to Marie Dubit (Eurochild Membership & Marketing Officer) for layout and design.

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The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries.

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Summary of plenary sessions and workshops

OFFICIAL OPENING

Representatives from the meeting of children and young people with care experience

Participants were welcomed by young people from Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Malta and the Isle of Man, UK. Together, they had over 100 years of experience of alternative care. They came to the conference to exchange ideas about what is good and what is bad about alternative care and because it was their right to participate in all matters that concerned them. They believed that society needs to start looking at the world through the eyes of the child. They did not need pity but support and love. They were strong individuals but negative attitudes undermined their confidence. Conference participants were important to them because they were making decisions for their future. They could change their lives in a positive way by ensuring opportunities for development such as education and job opportunities. They wanted to take part in these decisions, to be heard and understood. They concluded by urging participants to be responsible for the future of Europe's young people.

"Support us to follow our dreams"!

Nevena Madjarova, Chairperson of the Board of the National Network for Children (NNC), Bulgaria

Ms Madjarova welcomed participants, on behalf of more than 100 organisations of NNC, to the conference and to Bulgaria. Organising this event with the biggest children's organisation in Europe brought a message for everyone working with and for children - and for all public institutions in Bulgaria responsible for those in need - to support vulnerable groups in society and most especially children. The event brought recognition of the work already done but also reminded us of our responsibility for determining how we should go forward. We would be working together in the coming days for a better present and future for children, learning together, sharing problems and listening to each other. Ms Madjarova concluded by saying she hoped we would all take with us new ideas and new friendships.

Maria Herczog, President, Eurochild, Member of the UNCRC Committee, Director of Family, Child and Youth Association, Hungary

Ms Herczog, as President of Eurochild, officially opened the conference. Eurochild is an organisation committed to showing what works and the conference aimed to demonstrate good practice and successes, as well as controversies and concerns. The rights of children in alternative care was a subject very close to Ms Herczog, having spent the last 25 years working in this area. De-institutionalisation has not progressed as fast as it should have and there are still too many children in the care system, particularly Roma children who are over-represented. She was particularly sad that her country, Hungary, had just reported to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that it did not propose to de-institutionalise children with disabilities because large institutions were suitable for these children. She hoped the conference would provide some new ideas on how *not* to keep children in institutions. In Bulgaria, there had been lots of improvements in recent times and it was not a surprise that the conference was being held there. The field visits would provide the opportunity to see some pilot projects and meet colleagues for further discussion. Ms Herczog wanted to acknowledge the important role the NNC had played in this process and the contribution of the Director, George Bogdanov, to Eurochild's work in this area.

Ms Herczog said that Eurochild is uniquely positioned in Europe to act as a catalyst for change, to promote the positive work of its members and facilitate mutual learning. It also acts as a watchdog for EU policies to ensure they take account of children's rights. This was not an easy task in view of the many other competing aspects, especially the financial aspects. The next round of Structural Funds programmes would be crucial and are currently a key focus of Eurochild's work. It was encouraging to see that both the European Commission and the Parliament support a specific spending priority for de-institutionalisation and the European Social Fund also identifies children's rights and wellbeing as a priority, an important achievement to which Eurochild contributed.

There will therefore no longer be an excuse for any EU Member State not to transform their child welfare system and not to provide families with the necessary services. In conclusion, Ms Herczog acknowledged the support Hope and Homes for Children had given to Eurochild to increase their activities in this area of work. The next 2 years would be critical for creating and enabling the right environment for de-institutionalisation and Eurochild and Hope and Homes would be working together to start a de-institutionalisation campaign in 2013. The campaign would focus on influencing EU Structural Funds expenditure and supporting national partners' work. It was essential to coordinate activities at EU and national levels if we were to create the necessary momentum for change.

László Andor, European Commissioner for Employment, Social affairs and Inclusion – (link to [video](#))

"The current crisis should not be used as a pretext to delay existing or planned processes of transition from institutional care to community based services.... the EU has an important role to play in supporting and complementing (MS) efforts in terms of financial support and policy guidance."

Commissioner Andor, addressing the conference by video, said that the conference topic was very timely as de-institutionalisation (DI) had become especially significant in the current climate. Through an evolutionary process, we were all now aware that community based care can produce better results for the children, the family and the community itself. In these times of budgetary constraint, we also have to look at the economic aspects. However, the evidence reassures us that the costs of community based care are comparable with those of institutional care. The current crisis should not therefore be used as a pretext to delay existing or planned processes of transition from institutional care to community based services. He knew that DI had been high on Bulgaria's agenda for some time. A recent UNICEF report acknowledges the efforts made to reduce the number of children in residential institutions, which had dropped by over 40% (3000 children a year) in a ten year period. This experience should be shared with those who design and implement quality family and community based alternatives. He therefore congratulated Eurochild and the NNC for having organised the conference.

Commissioner Andor reminded participants that the prosperity of Europe's ageing society depends on its capacity to give its children the best start in life. Yet we know that children and families are being deeply affected by the current economic and financial crisis. He urged investment in children and support to families, regardless of their background. It would not only enhance children's well-being and right to a life in dignity but also help our societies prepare for a better long term future. This was particularly true when it comes to children in alternative care for whom we should make additional efforts. Caring for Europe's children was a shared responsibility where we all have a role to play. While parents remain at the forefront as children's primary carers, public authorities and civil society are essential actors to support families and help them in their parenting role. In some cases the parenting role is taken over from the parents themselves but this should be a solution of last resort. A preventive approach that tries to keep children in a family environment is always to be preferred. If however, this is not possible in the child's best interest, then it is essential that the child is placed in an alternative supportive environment. However, the quality of alternative services depends on good coordination between professionals working in the fields of education, employment, housing, legal services, health and social assistance.

Whilst these policies are primarily the competence of Member States (MS), the EU has an important role to play in supporting and complementing their efforts in terms of financial support and policy guidance. In relation to financial support, a number of financial instruments were currently supporting actions to prevent the need for institutional care and to prepare a smooth transition to independent living for care leavers, for example, a Bulgarian project to recruit more foster carers was financed by the European Social Fund and a social policy experimentation project in Italy, Bulgaria and Romania was financed by the Progress programme. The Commission was also collaborating with the European Expert Group on Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care in the preparation of guidelines on DI reform and would support their dissemination. The next multiannual financial framework should be an opportunity to strengthen EU action and the Commission had identified early years' education and care and the transition to quality alternative care as priorities. An equal commitment was now necessary from MS, which he hoped would support their proposal of allocating at least 25% of cohesion policy resources to the European Social Fund and at least 20% of this amount to social inclusion. In relation to policy guidance, the Europe 2020 Strategy had clearly highlighted that supporting Europe's next generation is essential for Europe's recovery and this should be reflected in MS key policies. A number of country specific recommendations have therefore called on MS to step up their efforts in fighting child poverty, providing adequate income support measures and quality childcare and social services for children. The Commission would work with MS to monitor progress in these areas and would report in the first half of 2013 with renewed draft recommendations.

In conclusion, Commissioner Andor very much welcomed the efforts of the Cyprus Presidency to address child poverty at Ministerial level. This had led to the adoption earlier this month of Council conclusions on tackling and preventing child poverty and promoting child well-being. The Commission would soon adopt a Recommendation on Child Poverty that will propose common principles as well as clear monitoring instruments. The Recommendation will support the EU and MS efforts to develop better policies but, more importantly, *it will send a clear signal that investing in children and families is essential for Europe's future.*

OPENING SESSION

Chair: Jana Hainsworth, Eurochild Secretary General

Tsetska Tsacheva, Chairwoman of the National Assembly, Bulgaria, Official Welcome (link to [video](#))

Ms Tsacheva officially welcomed participants to the conference. She had accepted the invitation to open this high level event as she was deeply convinced that the care of children had to be a leading issue in the political agenda. It should be the top priority of each institution and of society as a whole. This was her position personally and one that she has thus far disseminated. All the MPs in the current National Assembly shared this objective because it was a topic where there are no political affiliations and everyone was agreed on it. Ms Tsacheva was very pleased that Bulgaria has made a commitment to deinstitutionalisation and the setting up of alternative care provision. In her capacity as Speaker of the House, she told the conference that major changes have been introduced this year to the legislation on foster care. This means that for the first time, foster care is defined as a social service. There are also stricter provisions regarding the selection of families, their training and so on. The National Assembly had many initiatives in place, including those involving children with disabilities, but it was one thing to strive for something and quite another to put it into practice. However, the Assembly had extensive relations with the NGO sector and had made a commitment to making the future of children bright so she was confident of the results. She was also confident that the conference was going to be beneficial to everybody on the basis of the exchange of opinions and good practice. There were high ranking representatives of different organisations who, she felt sure, were going to come up with new ideas about children in institutions. Ms Tsacheva regretted that she was unable to spend more time at the conference but she was required at the Parliament that day when the national budget for the coming year would be adopted. She wished the conference every success. The Chair thanked her for taking time out of her busy schedule to be at conference, commending her for her dedication to promoting the rights of children in her work personally, and in the work of the Parliament.

THE POLICY CONTEXT FOR IMPROVING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN ALTERNATIVE CARE IN EUROPE

Marie-Anne Paraskevas, European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, European Social Fund (Ms Paraskevas was unable to attend the conference but shared her conference speech) (link to [Speech](#))

"The upcoming Recommendation on Child Poverty and Well-being will include a strong commitment to DI, including prevention and support to vulnerable families...the EU can play a pivotal role in supporting national governments through this process, particularly through a targeted deployment of Structural Funds."

Ms Paraskevas' contribution focused on the links between child poverty and children in alternative care and the role the EU can play in supporting national governments through the DI process, in particular through a targeted deployment of Structural Funds.

Child poverty and social exclusion has been a priority in the EU's social agenda for a number of years. In all but five Member States (MS), children are more at risk of poverty and social exclusion than the overall population and these children still have too few chances of getting out of poverty as adults. Many of the policies that are directly relevant to addressing child poverty are primarily in the hands of MS, regional or local authorities. Yet the EU had an important contribution to make and, after 12 years of cooperation, we could see some important results. We had come to a better understanding of the causes of child poverty and the policy approaches that work best and we had kept the issue high on the political agenda. EU funding instruments had also been an important lever to

improve the well-being of children in alternative care. However, challenges remained, which had been there before the current crisis. For example, although social transfers reduce child poverty in the EU on average by about 40%, the impact and efficiency of transfers varies considerably. More than 10% of families with dependent children continue to be exposed to in-work poverty and in most countries, having one parent in work is not anymore a sufficient protection. Children who would benefit the most from quality early childhood education and care services (children of migrant parents, Roma children) are actually those who do not have sufficient access. Most relevant to the conference theme, *despite significant progress in recent years, children growing up in alternative care remain in most MS disproportionately exposed to poverty and social exclusion later in their life*. As the crisis is taking its toll, additional pressing challenges have emerged as key services and policies supporting children and families are affected by budget cuts and support measures are shifted away from universal entitlement towards those most in need.

The links between poverty and children in alternative care must be taken into account by the Europe 2020 Strategy. That is why *the upcoming Recommendation on Child Poverty and Well-being will include a strong commitment to DI, including prevention and support to vulnerable families*. The Recommendation will propose common principles as well as clear monitoring instruments to support MS efforts to develop better policies. The Commission has also made further commitments to DI in the context of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, by proposing to use Structural Funds and the Rural Development Fund to support community-based services and pledging to raise awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities living in residential institutions, especially children and elderly people.

We know that DI has long-term benefits for children, society as a whole and the public purse. However, the transitional costs of moving from one system to another can be substantial, incurring both infrastructure costs and costs relating to training and skills development. *The EU can play a pivotal role in supporting national governments through this process, particularly through a targeted deployment of Structural Funds*. A number of measures included in the current regulations provide a comprehensive framework for MS to use Structural Funds to support DI measures. A more focused use of Structural Funds to support the transition from institutional to community-based care is encouraged by provisions included in the proposed legislative package for the EU Cohesion Policy 2014-2020¹. These provisions will allow MS to address the issue in a more systemic way and to plan structural reforms rather than intervene on an ad-hoc basis. Such reforms can be encouraged by the allocation of appropriate resources during negotiation of the programming documents for the period 2014-2020. The Common European Guidelines on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care and the Toolkit on the use of EU funding to support this process will provide an extremely useful input².

Dima Yared, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Regional Office for Europe (link to [video](#))

"It is precisely during times of economic crisis that it is vital to ensure adequate financial and human resources to social services for families at risk or in need..... what is important is not to render those who are already vulnerable more vulnerable"

Ms Yared focused on the impact of the current policy and economic context on the protection of children's rights and the DI process, identifying threats and some of the opportunities presented.

The transition to community-based care for children in alternative care across Europe has been, and continues to be, one of the priorities on the agenda of the OHCHR Regional Office for Europe. Along with key international and national partners, the Office has been active in seeking to ensure that solutions for alternative care of children are sought within families and the community, rather than in isolated, segregated institutions. In October 2010, the Office organised a seminar entitled *Forgotten Europeans, Forgotten Rights* to highlight alarming evidence of the high numbers of persons living in institutions and of the harmful effects of widespread institutionalisation of both adults and children. Within this framework, OHCHR partnered with UNICEF to launch the Call to Action campaign in June 2011 to end the institutionalisation of children under 3 years. The Office in Brussels is also a member of the European Expert Group on DI that has helped to support the elaboration of the Guidelines and Toolkit on DI reform. Later this year, the Office will publish a study coordinated by Dainius Puras on the rights of vulnerable

¹ Ms Paraskevas' speech provides more detail:

http://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/Events/2012/10_AC_Sofia/Presentations/25_Opening_Paraskevas.pdf

² www.deinstitutionalisationguide.eu

children under 3 years and how to end their institutionalisation³. The study illustrates the need for a human rights-based approach to overcoming the institutional mode of care for children, with incontrovertible evidence of the harmful effects, above all the lack of emotional attachment and bonding to a particular carer. The study highlights the obstacles to reform but also makes proposals about how to ensure effective reform in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and other parts of the continent.

Children with disabilities represent a large segment of children currently (and traditionally placed) in institutional care. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which came into force in 2008, includes specific obligations to ensure the rights of children with disabilities are protected (art. 7) and makes the case for DI. Ms Yared outlined the relevant articles that support these protections⁴.

The need for a rights-based approach underpinning all legal and policy decisions cannot be overstated. However, in the current economic context, this rights-based approach can often be left by the wayside, leaving room for some governments to make cuts in areas which they perceived as 'soft' and where they anticipated least resistance. Policies and programmes aimed at protecting the rights of vulnerable groups was, sadly, one of these areas. There was a substantial body of jurisprudence developed under the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, which deals with the limiting principles that circumscribe State behaviour during periods of economic hardship. Ms Yared quoted from Committee statements that "... even in times of severe resource constraints, States parties must protect the most disadvantaged and marginalised members or groups of society by adopting relatively low-cost targeted programmes." She expected that the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities would move in the same direction. She emphasised, however, that until a rights-based approach to child protection is fully integrated by decision-makers, the assumption can remain that smaller, family-based services are a 'mere luxury' rather than a right for children and a corresponding obligation on the State to ensure the protection of the child. The further risk is that the decreasing availability of community-based services, together with the reduction of financial support, would cause re-institutionalisation of children. Stakeholders should therefore make the argument that budget cuts in the area of DI are not only unethical but also worrying in terms of economics, because short-term savings will be offset by long-term losses. At the policy level, *reform solutions that are grounded in a rights-based approach are not only compliant with States' international obligations but also have higher chances of success.* Ms Yared drew attention to some of the elements of this approach, ie: independent monitoring; the establishment of a comprehensive system of data collection; involvement of NGOs and the rest of civil society as equal partners; inter-sectorial coordination and good governance; a paradigm shift in the philosophy underpinning family support and child protection policies and services.

In conclusion, Ms Yared said that, if the knowledge and experience accumulated across Europe in the field of family support were implemented in a systematic and sustainable way, and if both top-down and bottom-up approaches positively reinforce each other, then institutional care of young children will no longer be viewed as a viable option. Research findings have consistently concluded that most children in CEE countries are placed in institutional care mostly because of difficulties parents face with a lack of support. As such, *it is precisely during times of economic crisis that it is vital to ensure adequate financial and human resources to social services for families at risk or in need. What is important is not to render those who are already vulnerable more vulnerable.*

Jean-Claude Legrand, Senior Regional Advisor Child Protection, UNICEF Regional Office CEE-CIS⁵ ([links to video presentation](#))

"Even if we have launched a campaign to prevent the institutionalisation of children, we need to ensure that this is not hiding the main message and that message is that we need to provide whatever support we can provide to vulnerable families....prevention is absolutely the key word"

M Legrand focused on child care systems reforms in his region, in particular why we need to focus on children under 3 years and the UNICEF Call to Action campaign launched in June 2011.

The CEE-CIS region has the highest rates of child separation globally with some 600,000 children growing up in residential care. At least 225,000 are children with disabilities and at least 31,000 are under the age of three. The development of foster care was seen as one of the key solutions to address the issue and now there are more children in foster care than in institutional care. However, *the number of children in institutional care remains stable*

³ 'Institutional care as a violation of rights of children under three years of age' (2011): a study commissioned by the Regional Office for Europe of OHCHR

⁴ See <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml> (Arts.5,10,12,14,15,16,17,19,22,23)

⁵ Central and Eastern Europe – [Commonwealth of Independent States](#)

due to the increase in the number of children overall being separated from their families. Since 2008, as a result of the global economic crisis, alarming trends could be seen. In several countries there had been a major decline in the remittance from people working abroad which had played a critical role in the economy. These people were now returning home without a job and with a lot of adjustment problems. Governments were facing major challenges in maintaining the quality of services and in providing cash transfers. What the statistics did not convey was that the children placed in care were not placed because of abuse or neglect but because of the failure of the state to protect the most vulnerable families, in particular Roma families, single parents and families where drugs and alcohol are factors and poverty is the driver for this. Many children were in institutions because, for many families, it was the only way they could see of providing them with an education. We needed to change that and we needed to do it with some priority. The real problem was that the capacity of the state to identify and reach the most vulnerable families was limited and there were too many obstacles in the way of families accessing services. UNICEF therefore supported the renewed call by the EU to fight poverty as the main issue in the CEE-CIS region because this was what was affecting families most and what needed to be the priority. Although UNICEF had launched a campaign to prevent the institutionalisation of children, they needed to ensure that this was not hiding the main message. *That message is that we need to provide whatever support we can to vulnerable families.*

UNICEF launched the campaign on children under 3 years because of the impact of institutional care on very young children. If you were a very young child, below 3 years, the risk in some countries of being separated from your family was 7 times higher than for all children under 18 years. If you were a very young child with disabilities and you were placed in an institution, the probability of spending all of your life in the institution, whether you died at 5 years or 60 years, was extremely high. Once a child was institutionalised, it was more difficult to place the child outside of the institution. Therefore *prevention was the key word we should take from the presentation.* Bulgaria was now moving in the right direction. Holding this conference and UNICEF's forthcoming Ministerial conference⁶ in Bulgaria was an expression of support for their effort, in particular the use of Structural Funds, for the first time, to bring about change in service provision and not to rehabilitate institutions. M Legrand reminded participants that, when interpreted in the context of the major population decline, there are actually the same numbers of children in institutions in CEE-CIS countries as before but he felt sure that, when he re-visited the data in 2 year' time, the situation in Bulgaria would be extremely different.

To conclude his presentation, M Legrand returned to the issue of prevention. Foster care was still under-developed in the region, particularly for children with disabilities where it was not even reflected in statistics. He hoped the UNICEF campaign would finally break the wall of silence and start to bring about change by supporting families, developing community services, providing respite space, day care centres and appropriate support in the health sector, so that people do not feel alone, or abandoned by society. He wanted to see a change of mind-set in colleagues from the health sector who were still stigmatising mothers who abandoned their children, whereas the very challenging social issues they faced were evident ie: lack of appropriate housing, lack of employment, lack of access to cash benefits etc. The campaign hoped to demonstrate that there are now more and more governments willing to take action, and being seen to take action, on this.

The Chair welcomed the link M Legrand had made with the EU agenda, the need to tackle the underlying root causes of poverty and social inclusion and investment in effective social transfers to prevent child abandonment. She referred, in her absence, to Ms Paraskevas' speech and the importance of the forthcoming Social Investment Package, in particular the upcoming Recommendation on Child Poverty and Well-being which will also set a framework for supporting the use of Structural Funds (see above report).

Key points from presentations and discussion

- Prevention of the need for institutionalisation of children is a critical pillar of DI policy. There must be an investment of adequate financial and human resources to support families at risk or in need. This becomes critical during times of economic crisis when those who are already vulnerable face a real risk of becoming even more vulnerable. The capacity of the state to identify and reach the most marginalised families must be increased
- The need for a rights-based approach underpinning all legal and policy decisions cannot be overstated. In the current economic context, this rights-based approach can often be waived to make cuts in areas where least resistance is anticipated. Reform solutions that are grounded in a rights-based approach are not only compliant with States' international obligations but also have higher chances of success

⁶ *Ending the placement of children under three in institutions: Support nurturing families for all young children* - 21-22 November 2012, Sofia
http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/media_20824.html

- Poverty, social exclusion, lack of access to resources are the causes of child abandonment in the majority of cases but prejudice and stigmatisation of mothers is still prevalent in some countries, especially in the health sector. We need to engage the sector at Ministerial level to break down barriers to effective collaboration and to effect attitudinal shifts
- The CRPD includes specific obligations to ensure the rights of children with disabilities are protected. Yet children with disabilities remain over-represented in institutional care. We must reverse this trend by intensifying efforts to provide community based supports to families and to increase the level of foster care
- The new Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 and the upcoming Recommendation on Child Poverty and Well-being represent an historic opportunity to support and implement systemic reform of children's services across Europe. Targeted use of Structural Funds will be critical to this
- There is an urgent need for data collection on children in alternative care in the EU in the same way as data is being collected in the CEE-CIS region. The Recommendation on Child Poverty and Wellbeing may provide an opportunity and a context for advancing this agenda

WHY A CHILD RIGHTS APPROACH TO ALTERNATIVE CARE IS SO IMPORTANT

Sharon Gibson, Isle of Man College, British Isles, Sessional Lecturer, Channel Islands (link to [video](#))

"It is clear that some of the damage caused to children is through their experiences of family abuse and neglect which results in their being taken into care. However, some of the damage caused is also a result of growing up in care that could be avoided or reduced, if the state seriously committed to a rights-based approach to caring for the children in its care".

Ms Gibson's presentation focused on her own personal experience of growing up in institutional care and the impact of this type of care on children and young people, particularly on early childhood development. She illustrated the way in which children's rights can be violated in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). She also described positive experiences from her last placement that shaped her subsequent achievements. Ms Gibson has a law degree and aims to specialise in child rights and human rights.

Ms Gibson told the conference that she had been in state care for a total of 13 years from the age of 3 months. During this time, she had experienced different care settings, ie: children's homes, foster care, respite care, an assessment centre and, lastly, a residential school. Her experiences of abuse and neglect in her family had been profoundly damaging, physically and emotionally. However, the care provided by the state failed to help her recover from this and unfortunately contributed significantly to further emotional damage and undermined her development into adulthood. Her case was typical of children who grow up in state care. In relation to early childhood care, Ms Gibson said that we know institutional care in the early years is particularly damaging to children's emotional, physical, mental and social development. We also know from attachment theory that children deprived of forming an attachment to a caregiver in the first years of life can suffer damaging consequences in later life, such as permanent detachment in which the child fears rejection and loses trust in adults; the inability to feel empathy for others; an inability to feel guilt appropriately or demonstrate control when they feel angry; chronic depression; low self-concept and self-worth; chronic dependency resulting in an inability to become self-reliant in later years; delinquency; reduced levels of intelligence, as well as other personality difficulties. She could identify with this, given that she spent the first 3 years of her life in a children's home where she was unable, through no fault of her own, to form any type of meaningful attachments to the caregivers due to the high level of staff turnover and consequent lack of continuity of care that is an essential part of the support children require to meet their developmental needs.

The UNCRC places an obligation on States parties to guarantee certain rights of children within their jurisdiction. Some of these rights are particularly relevant to children in state care. Ms Gibson focused on article 3, the best interests of the child; article 6 promoting maximum development; article 12 the child's right to be heard; article 20 special protection and continuity of care. She said it was clear that some of the damage caused to children was through their experiences of family abuse and neglect which resulted in their being taken into care. *However, some of the damage caused was also a result of growing up in care that could be avoided or reduced, if the state seriously committed to a rights-based approach to caring for the children in its care.* She supported this with examples from her own experience.

States parties are under a legal obligation to provide suitable alternative care that promotes the development of the child. When placing children in residential care, initially the best interests of the child are taken into account. However, children's interests are not met if residential care is used as a long term solution rather than limited to emergency or short term care. Article 3 should be more balanced with article 6 and implementation measures aimed at achieving the optimal development for all children. In Ms Gibson's case, this did not happen, resulting in serious personality difficulties in adulthood such as those she described earlier. This was also typical of other children who had grown up in the care system because of a failure of the state to meet these obligations.

Article 12 requires States parties to listen to children's views and give appropriate weight to their views in making decisions about their lives. Ms Gibson described her experience of not being listened to when she was trying to convey her fears about her home situation. She eventually stopped saying what she wanted in her life and allowed others to make the decisions for her. This was a further hindrance to her development because by adulthood she was unable to make decisions for herself and consistently sought out other adults to make decisions for her. Children in care, she said, face this issue everyday of their lives.

Article 20 makes provision for State parties to provide special protection and assistance to children who are looked after by the state. Ms Gibson said that all children in state care should be given professional therapy to assist them to cope with the experiences they have suffered, and to build confidence and self-esteem to enable them to mature into adulthood. When a child is taken into care, the state considers it is best placed to meet the child's needs and best interests but, in Ms Gibson's experience, this was not always the case. To illustrate this, she described a tragic incident in the assessment centre where she was placed, when 2 young women committed suicide together due to the failure of the care authority to provide an appropriate level of care, support and protection.

Ms Gibson told participants that finally she received good care and support in her last residential establishment and shared comments from 2 former members of staff on what they thought was important from a child rights perspective. They emphasised, first and foremost, *the importance of a personal and emotional involvement with the child*, then properly trained staff, continuity of care and adequate staff ratios to the numbers of children. It was also crucial that *adults listen to everything a child is saying and record the information securely* so that a package of care can be put together that is appropriate to the child's needs at every stage of their time in care. All too often, bureaucracy gets in the way of this process. In conclusion, Ms Gibson proposed a 'matching' process when a child is placed in care to determine the most appropriate placement. This would work in the same way as the matching process in adoption where the needs of the child are matched with the care the adoptive parents can offer. This could be achieved by creating a 'Child Life Story Profile' detailing the child's strengths and needs and providing important information on which to base decisions on the most appropriate placement. The matching system would enable local authorities to better meet the requirements of the UNCRC under the above articles and ensure the child has a voice in what is happening. Ms Gibson also recommended mandatory training in children's rights in all child care training courses.

LESSONS LEARNED ON DEINSTITUTIONALISATION IN BULGARIA

Chair George Bogdanov, National Network for Children Executive Director

Valentina Simeonova, Deputy Minister of Labour & Social Policy, Bulgaria (links to [video presentation](#))

"Life in Bulgaria has changed a lot and changed for the better. There are still a lot of challenges but, thanks to the efforts of the NGOs, and the 2 Directorates of the EC, who have worked as partners with the Government, within 2 years, the number of institutionalised children has been reduced by 2000"

Minister Simeonova's presentation described the historical backdrop to DI in Bulgaria, the current state of reform and the legislative and practical steps taken to implement policy change. (Please note that the timetable prevented a full exposé of Minister Simeonova's presentation. Readers are invited to consult the presentation slides for more information).

Modern policy started in Bulgaria about 12 years ago. Before the year 2000, the only way the Government could support families at risk was to take the children and place them in specialised institutions. When parents gave birth to a child with disabilities they were even told to leave the child in an institution because the child would present a lot of problems for them. This is why there was a network of institutions with a very low quality of service and

institutions for children with disabilities were sited in remote villages to hide their existence from society. There was no system for the protection of children and the rights of children were unknown. In these circumstances, in the year 2000, the Bulgarian Parliament passed a Bill for the protection of children based on the UNCRC. This was a very advanced Bill for Bulgaria, a real instrument of policy change, and a system for the protection of children was thus created through the State Agency for Child Protection and the network of child protection departments. Colleagues in NGOs supported the Government in this process. They were the innovators and showed the Government new social practices.

In relation to the current situation, Minister Simeonova said there had been some successes and some drawbacks. There were years during which DI was understood as improving conditions in some institutions, then moving children from low quality institutions to better quality institutions. This was the wrong approach and a lot of time was lost. In 2009, Minister Simeonova was invited by the new Government, as an expert and politically involved person, to become Deputy Minister for Social Affairs. The Government carried out an analysis of what had happened until then and, based on this analysis, mobilised the resources of all actors towards the common goal of closing down all specialised institutions and progressing alternatives that would provide a new quality of life for children. The Government also did a lot of work to support families as a policy for preventing the abandonment of children. On a national, and political, level an Expert Group was created to support the Government in the management and co-ordination of DI reform. This had gained momentum over the past few years and there had been over 30 people, directly involved in the DI process, at the annual meeting the previous day with representatives from the European Commission. In the beginning there were very few.

The DI process started in Bulgaria with the National Strategy, '*Vision for Deinstitutionalisation of Children in the Republic of Bulgaria*', which demonstrated the political will of the Government to close down institutions within 15 years. The Expert Group included Deputy Ministers from all key Ministries that have a bearing on the problems of children in Bulgaria. Thus for the first time, there was coordination of sectoral policies that had until then worked separately. The National Strategy provided the framework for change, outlining the targets and how to reach them through a *Deinstitutionalisation Action Plan*. This Action Plan projected what should happen year on year in the coming 15 years for the policy to be a success. Many people thought it would be just another piece of paper – there were many documents like that until then – but there were 5 important projects in the Action Plan that had deadlines, financial resources and designated people responsible for their implementation. The result, which was very innovative at EU level and for Bulgaria, was that it was possible to access resources from several European funds to reach this common goal, ie: the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Rural Development Fund (EAFRD) and the Technical Assistance programme of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) . *Mobilising these financial instruments created the opportunity to make the projects realistic and reaching the targets realistic as all the projects were, and are, financially supported.*

The first of the 5 projects was targeted at children with disabilities. This was the most difficult issue because these are the worse institutions with a lack of supportive services. To date, 1797 institutionalised children have been evaluated and an assessment made of what community services could replace institutional care. Municipalities are active partners as, with the help of the ERDF programme, the infrastructure for alternative services will be developed. The process has involved contact with families and is exploding the myth that parents of children with disabilities have abandoned them and no longer want contact. Around 80 families are currently showing an interest in what is happening to their children after the bond has been severed for a long time. Another important aspect of the process was to ensure a better quality of care for these children until the infrastructure is in place for alternative services. Some innovative approaches have been introduced, for example, on how better to communicate with the children and how better to feed them.

The second project was about foster care. The UNICEF speaker said there were countries for which foster care was new. Bulgaria was one of these countries but, due to the integrated approach taken to DI, it had been possible to achieve effective results. The number of foster families had steadily increased and was now 3 times the previous number, breaking the myth in national psychology that it was not possible for foster families to care for a child not of their own blood. The foster care project was funded by ESF funds and the national Human Resources Development programme. In just one month, the month of May 2012, there had been 152 applications to be foster carers, which is a great success for Bulgaria.

The third project was targeted towards regional planning of services. This was an important project because one of the problems for Bulgaria was that services were developed chaotically and there were regions where nothing was happening. In the context of the future operational programme "Life in the Community", a study was being undertaken of the existing infrastructure and potential deficits under DI. The programme was orientated towards young adults 18 years old.

In conclusion, Minister Simeonova referred briefly to *the fourth (pilot) project to reform the Homes for Medical and Social Care for Children (HMSCC)* and prepare for the children's reintegration, and *the fifth project to improve the capacity of the child protection service* that included recruiting more social workers and improving the capacity of the State Agency for Child Protection to communicate and coordinate the 5 projects. She said that life in Bulgaria had changed a lot and changed for the better. There were still a lot of challenges but, thanks to the efforts of the NGOs, and the 2 EC Directorates, who had worked as critical partners with the Government, within 2 years the children institutionalised in Bulgaria had been reduced by 2000. This was a great success.

Dani Koleva, Child Policy Director, National Network for Children, Bulgaria (links to [video](#) [presentation](#) [video](#)) and **Marina Dimitrova**, Foster Carer, National Network for Children, Bulgaria (link to [video](#))

- "If there is one key message it's that DI is not about buildings and is not, in the first instance, even about laws, systems and reforms. At the heart of DI, it's about children and families and what's best for every individual child" (Ms Koleva)
- "Foster care should always be considered before placing children in institutions because when you start taking care of small children you can always contribute to their development" (Ms Dimitrova)

Ms Koleva focused on the NGO perspective of DI in Bulgaria to outline key challenges and lessons learned. She set the scene for the presentation in saying that NGOs are often closest to children, parents and families who should not be just beneficiaries of their work but active participants in all the services and policy developments targeted towards them. Ms Koleva co-presented with **Marina Dimitrova** who grew up in an institution for children deprived of parental care until the age of 18 years and is now a foster carer, recruited, trained and supported by an NGO in the NNC network. Ms Dimitrova's presentation focused on her experience as a foster carer.

Ms Dimitrova said she had been a foster carer for 4 years, caring for a little girl who had been with her since she was 4 years old. She herself had grown up in institutional care and she had always felt abandoned and that no-one had really cared or taken an interest in her, even when she had successes. However, she was not going to talk about the past, preferring to concentrate on the situation of children today and her experience as a foster carer. Foster care in her view was the best alternative care.

Ms Dimitrova had decided to become a foster carer in an emergency situation when a young girl, with whom she had lived in one of the institutions, left her little girl with her for 2 hours and did not return for 5 months. She didn't know what to do with the child so she decided to contact one of the Government departments responsible for the care of children. At that time, she was not a foster carer. However, she realised even then, that there are parents who would like to take care of their children but they do not have the means to afford it and they need support. After she had taken care of the little girl for 4 or 5 months she decided to become a foster carer. At first she had been shocked by the appearance of this little girl. She was 4 years 3 months old, yet she was physically tiny, could barely talk except to say 'mummy', and was not able to walk. She was very developmentally retarded. She was not used to leaving the institution so was scared when Ms Dimitrova took her to the zoo. On another occasion when they were outside and it started to rain she began to undress thinking this meant a shower for her. On the very first evening she was with Ms Dimitrova, when she started falling asleep she started sucking her thumb and banging her head on the side of her bed. Later on, she got used to Ms Dimitrova singing to her or reading books to her at bedtime. When she was in the institution she was in a group with children with disabilities and Ms Dimitrova attributed her developmental delay to this. Once she had stayed in Ms Dimitrova's home, she did not want to go back to the institution.

Ms Dimitrova said that children in institutions always have a very low emotional threshold. *Therefore, foster care should always be considered before placing children in institutions because when you start taking care of small children you can always contribute to their development.* She had now cared for this little girl, whom she already sees as her daughter, for almost 4 years and this year she was enrolled in the first form at school. She has undergone significant change and is already independent. This would not have been possible without the help and support of the NGOs in her town. Today, this little girl is almost 8 years old, has gained weight, speaks well, sings and knows a lot of fairy tales. She also has dreams for the future and is no longer scared. There are still some things to overcome but no-one would guess that this is a child she had taken from an institution. In conclusion, Ms Dimitrova appealed to the Deputy Minister to work, not only with foster families, but also with the birth parents. This was much more important.

- **Ms Koleva** said it was much more powerful to hear from people themselves about their successes and challenges and what DI is really all about. *If there is one key message it's that DI is not about buildings*

and not, in the first instance, even about laws, systems and reforms. At the heart of DI, it's about children and families and what's best for every individual child. This was what we needed to pass to the whole community, the general public we are working with, and the media.

As Minister Simeonova had talked about the chronology of DI in Bulgaria, and as there was a time pressure, Ms Koleva did not go into detail on this, except to say again that NGOs were really the pioneers in this field and many people at the conference had been involved in starting the pilot projects and developing new services. However, when we looked at DI as we now understood it – prevention of child abandonment, development of alternative services, closing of institutions, services for children leaving care – there was not at that time this holistic understanding of the process. It was only focusing on new services. Moving on to the time of 'reform and re-structure', five years ago, NGOs were really 'stuck in the middle'. This was not about DI. There were some 'proper' closures of institutions, and new services were being developed, but in isolation and in parallel with the institutional system. The catalyst for change came in 2006 when attention was drawn at an international level to the situation of institutionalised children with disabilities through the closure of the Mogilino institution⁷. This helped NGOs to mobilise and to form the NGO Alliance. It also resulted in proposals for changes in policies and legislation and a draft vision that was used by the Government for the National Strategy. As the next speaker would be talking about the European perspective, Ms Koleva moved on to the key challenges of the current situation and lessons learned from experience to date. (Please note that time pressures prevented full coverage of all the issues in these sections as outlined in the presentation slides).

Key issues:

The child protection system capacity: This concerned the field social workers who are working with the children and families. In Bulgaria, the child poverty percentage is 44.6%. This means that 567 400 children, almost half the child population, is at-risk-of-poverty. On top of that, there are 6226 children in institutions. There are only 351 social workers. Therefore their caseloads are huge, around 290 cases per social worker. If there really was to be meaningful change, then a sufficient number of social workers is essential, well-paid and appropriately trained, especially in children's rights. It was good to see the Government was recruiting 220 new social workers but they are on lower salaries and time-limited contracts and some had already left.

Risks of replacing large institutions with small ones: The NGO concern is that the first pilot project addressing the closure of institutions for children with disabilities will result in replacing 24 institutions with 149 small group homes. The objective will be to create a 'home' environment for children placed on a permanent basis. However, the homes will have a capacity for emergency placements, which has an obvious potential to undermine the primary objective.

Lack of focus on prevention, family support and integrated services: There was a need to look at entry into the system, to start with the baby homes. This is where the biggest damage to children is done. If one of the main causes for placement in institutions is child poverty and social exclusion, then resources are needed to address the main causes. This is exactly what the focus on prevention is about: family support, adequate funding, a multi-sectoral approach that includes health, education, housing, so that DI really happens in practice

Ring fencing the money: This was something the Government was also trying to work on, for example, the money from the reduced institutional capacity from 2011 to 2010 was in the region of 3,4 million EUR. This was a lot of money that could be reinvested in new preventive services and current preventive and alternative services that are under-resourced. Quality services depend on an adequate funding base.

Development of standards and criteria; Lack of independent monitoring and evaluation;

Lack of adequate financing for new services (Readers are invited to consult NNC statements on their website for more information⁸).

Lessons learned:

Engage in a broad partnership in delivering change: A key lesson for NGOs in Bulgaria was that once they started working collectively, they saw that they could bring about change. Participants embarking on a DI campaign or reform should consider a 'stakeholder analysis' to inform planning. Everyone is important and everyone matters.

⁷ <http://www.unicef.bg/en/projects/support-to-children-in-mogilino>

⁸ <http://nmd.bg/en/which-are-the-problem-areas-in-the-deinstitutionalisation>

Stick to values and principles: NGOs need to be strong and disagree with that which opposes their values and principles, for example, NGOs suggested that Government reforms should start with the baby homes, and that a regional approach should be taken instead of a national approach so that all institutions were included in the reform, including correctional institutions and institutions for adults, in order that children are not re-institutionalised when they reach adulthood.

Support across the political system. This referred to the need for a multi-sectoral approach and the engagement of all Ministries, especially the Ministry of Finance, ie: a cross-Governmental structure, with high level people and the commitment to make DI a reality.

Invest in effective communication: Almost 60% of Bulgarian children and 50% of the general population do not know what DI is (survey commissioned by the State Agency for Child Protection). We all needed to work to improve this.

Develop a holistic Monitoring and Evaluation framework: It was crucial to maintain a focus on *outcomes* for children and families. It was not enough just to focus on the numbers of children moved on to new services and the number of institutions closed. DI is about children and families. It's not about the buildings or the number of people sent to different places.

Children, families and quality should be at the heart of the process: Quality cannot be ensured without participation and empowerment. This is not only about the children and families themselves but about the wider input of all the people who are significant in the child's life.

In conclusion, Ms Koleva said that DI is not an end in itself but a journey towards a modern system of family and community based care. It had a lot of foundations – the Government, the NGOs, the donors, the business sector, children and families themselves, the media, the local authorities (see final presentation slide). If one of those foundations fell, the whole 'bridge' might fall, so we really needed to be making this journey together.

Carsten Rasmussen, European Commission, DG Regional Policy, EU policy & funding (link to [video](#))

"...we may not be on track, we may not be exactly where we wanted to be when we started this, but we are on the right track..... we have such momentum that the exercise is irreversible.... we could change Governments 2 or 3 times and we would still have a DI exercise."

Mr Rasmussen focused on the Structural Funds and the perspective from Brussels on the experience of working in Bulgaria on the DI exercise. He gave a brief resumé of the steps that had led to the exercise and a comment on progress.

Historically, the initial phase of agenda-setting was very important and we should remember that this might never have happened were it not for several things that came together at the right time - the Mogilino programme, that everyone was exposed to at some stage, the Expert Group set up by Commissioner Spidla to give an opinion on what we could do about the high level of institutionalisation in the EU, a chance meeting with Jan Jareb (OHCHR Representative for Europe) - all of which conspired to give a clear message that further investment of Structural Funds in the refurbishment of orphanages was not the right thing to do. Children and families was not Mr Rasmussen's usual area of work but, after visiting a few orphanages with colleagues, they were resolved that things could not go on like that. The 'Bansko' conference, *Leaving No Child Behind*, followed in September 2009. This was a totally improvised event, organised by the Bulgarian Ministry of Regional Development, but was a milestone in the DI process as the dialogue with Government led to a consensus that more could be done. A DI policy existed but had not been sufficiently visible and probably inadequately financed. There had been NGO initiatives, even closure of institutions here and there, but these were not part of any cohesive plan. The conference provided the opportunity and stimulus to progress from agenda-setting (identifying the problems) to developing an Action Plan.

Looking back, and without judging where they were with the DI exercise because it was too early to say, Mr Rasmussen said that, had it not been for the Action Plan, and the quality of that Action Plan, they would not have a DI exercise today. Too many initiatives fail because they are not 'through-financed'. What Bulgaria did was to put in place an Action Plan with a timeline, very clear actors and an inclusive approach that had expanded to 7 Ministries around the table at the previous day's meeting, including the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance (which was sometimes represented) and the Ministry of Justice. All relevant Ministries were now participating and all possible EU funds were now mobilised, the Social Fund (the key fund for this kind of activity), the Regional Development Fund, and the Rural Development fund, a very attractive instrument in rural areas

where many of the institutions are located. So there was *an inclusive exercise and a standing dialogue with NGOs and, most importantly of all, a budget*. The Structural Funds, in this exercise, had been used as a tool for reform, rather than a tool to re-paint and repair and continue with what they had. *This was an exceptional exercise as Structural Funds had been used as a policy reform instrument*. This did not, however, make implementation easy.

The annual 'stocktaking' meeting of where they were in the process had been held the previous day, as the Deputy Minister had said. Things were not going as fast as they should but, to a certain extent, this was logical. Things were not likely to go smoothly if policy reform was being undertaken at the same time as expenditure. This is much more difficult than just to spend on the usual budget lines and to feed into what is normally done. Very little expenditure was being pushed through the system now and they should be honest and transparent about that. Mr Rasmussen estimated that it was under 10% of the available budget. However, he emphasised that the available budget was considerable, with over 100 million EUR set aside to 2015. He said that the limited expenditure was due to a certain lack of administrative capacity across the Bulgarian authorities, at national and local levels, as well as very cumbersome, complicated procedures in the Bulgarian Structural Funds system across Ministries, not due to DI in particular, but what he had concluded the previous day was that *they may not be on track, may not be exactly where they wanted to be 2 years ago when they started this, but they were on the right track*. They were facing a process that was now so visible, had received a unilateral commitment from the Government, including the Prime Minister, and had such momentum that *the exercise was irreversible*. At the beginning, he was unsure of the commitment, whether the process would survive a change of Government, but now *he was absolutely confident that they could change Governments 2 or 3 times and they would still have a DI exercise*.

In conclusion, Mr Rasmussen said that they owed a lot to NGOs. They had shown they were durable, reasonable and very professional partners who had provided constructive criticism. Their reaction time was quicker and expenditure faster than the Structural Funds but his message to them was 'please stay with us - we continue to need you'.

Key points from presentations and discussion

- DI in Bulgaria has been built around clear strategic vision, national goals, political commitment, cross-sectoral working and an Action Plan with milestones and achievable targets. This has enabled access to all possible EU co-funding to financially underpin the process and ensures sustainability
- Using Structural Funds as an instrument of policy reform is innovative but can make implementation more challenging and can, at least initially, slow down expenditure. More flexibility in bureaucratic processes is needed, at EU and national levels
- The message for other countries wanting to emulate the DI exercise in Bulgaria is to push this up the agenda in the next programming of Structural Funds for 2014-2020
- NGOs have played a key role in the DI process, as innovators and critical partners, and their continued commitment is crucial to its success. They are stronger and more effective if they work collectively and should maintain their alliances. They should continue to be recognised and supported as active players to maximise the contribution they can make as agents of change
- Children and families should be at the heart of DI. The ultimate goals of systemic reforms are to prevent the need for alternative care, to protect the rights of children living in alternative care and to improve the quality of the care provided for them. To ensure quality, participation and empowerment must also be ensured

Workshops and study visits

There were 5 parallel workshops that took place over 2 days. On Thursday 25th October, each workshop split into two groups to visit projects 'off-site'. Host projects presented their good practice followed by a good practice presentation from an international speaker. On Friday 26th October, participants re-grouped to receive feed-back from the previous day's visits followed by presentation of an international research project. The following reports summarise the presentations, discussions, key learning points and conclusions. Please refer to the **Online Conference Booklet**⁹ for more details of the international practice and research projects and their presenters.

WORKSHOP A: CLOSING INSTITUTIONS

Rapporteur: Michela Costa, Policy Officer, Eurochild

Facilitators: Galya Bisset, Hope and Homes for Children, Bulgaria and Delia Pop, Hope and Homes for Children, UK

1. Introduction

The workshop aimed at sharing experiences and lessons learned among organisations involved in the process of closing children's institutions across Europe.

The study visit hosted by the **Social Activities and Practice Institute (SAPI)** started with a tour of the Community Support Centre opened by SAPI in cooperation with the municipality of Sofia. The centre provides community-based services for children and parents including prevention of family separation, educational and psychological assistance, training of foster parents and specialised support for children involved in court hearings. The visit included a presentation by SAPI on the closure of a baby home in the Bulgarian municipality of Shumen.

Attendees of the study visit organised by **Hope and Homes for Children Bulgaria** learnt about the closure of a Home for Medical and Social Care for Children aged 0-3 in the municipality of Teteven. The institution was closed in December 2010, following a thorough assessment of the 32 children living in its premises and their biological families. As a result, a range of services was developed in the community and different solutions were identified for every child including adoption, reintegration, kinship placement or foster care.

Each study visit was complemented by the presentation of an international good practice.

After outlining the results of a comprehensive audit of social services in Romania, Stefan Darabus presented the approach developed by Hope and Homes for Children for the closure of the Ghiocelil Institution in the Bacau County. In addition to providing quality family-type solutions for the 81 children who were de-institutionalised, the project developed a preventative component aimed at tackling the root causes of family separation - including by establishing a strong cooperation with social workers and Child Protection Departments.

Ludmila Malcoci from Keystone Human Services International Moldova Association (KHSIMA) focused on the experience and lessons learned during the process of de-institutionalisation of children and adults with severe intellectual disabilities from the Orhei Institution in Moldova. The de-institutionalisation model developed was characterised by a very close partnership with like-minded NGOs, as well as a comprehensive approach taking into account all relevant aspects of the lives of people with disabilities and their families. Specific efforts were devoted to bringing positive changes in mentalities and in communities' attitudes, to ensure that children with disabilities are accepted as full members of society.

2. Research project

The research project was presented by **Andy Bilson** and **Galina Markova-Derelieva** illustrated the outcomes of a literature review on social work with vulnerable families and children without parental care published in 2012. Following on from the report, a *tool* to assess and improve social work was developed using the 'Appreciative Inquiry' model. The method has proved to be very effective to gain access to a wide range of experiences and insights from children, parents, social workers and other actors involved in the child protection system.

⁹ http://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/Events/2012/10_AC_Sofia/AC2012BookletWeb.pdf

To demonstrate the theory, participants in the workshop were invited to split into couples and reflect on the positive elements of their work and on the changes they could implement. Following this practical exercise, the group agreed on a number of lessons learned and recommendations for professionals involved in child protection:

- Have faith/belief in a concept in order to make it work
- Get families and children to participate: work with them, rather than for them
- Find the right balance between practical work and organisational learning: social workers should not become bureaucrats
- Avoid patronising: respect different lifestyles, do not impose your own perspective
- Think outside the box: use every opportunity to improve the lives of children and brainstorm together with children and their families

3. Study visits and presentations

Participants shared the key learning points from the previous day's study visits and presentations of good practices, agreeing on the following messages:

- De-institutionalisation is a child-focused, dynamic process sustained by a broad range of partners. One of its crucial elements is the preventative approach
- Professionals need to work together and embrace a paradigm-shift in their approach (from treatment of symptoms to analysis of root-causes - from care to prevention)
- A very broad range of stakeholders should be involved to prevent families from falling into social exclusion
- Whenever a reformed system coexists in parallel with a de-institutionalised one, the risk remains that institutions will keep working to attract children into their services
- What is needed is a movement for change that brings together actors within and across countries, to exchange practice and experiences until the process of change has reached 'the point of non-return'

4. Conclusions

The following key points were outlined by the rapporteurs as a conclusion of the discussion:

- The elaboration of policies should be increasingly based on a combination of values and good practice
- Changing the mind set of policy makers and key stakeholders is indispensable to build sustainable progress
- Perseverance of NGOs and creation of broad partnerships have been demonstrated to be key to social change
- Various factors contribute to effective work in partnerships, but a crucial element is the genuine involvement of local authorities and communities
- The lessons learned from a particular de-institutionalisation process need to be analysed and feed into a methodology, so that they can be implemented at a broader scale

WORKSHOP B: 0-3S PREVENTING CHILD ABANDONMENT

Rapporteur: Anne Williams, Child and Family Consultant.

Facilitators: Jeffrey Coleman, British Association for Adoption and Fostering, UK and Apostol Apostolov, Karin Dom Foundation, Varna, Bulgaria

1. Introduction

The workshop focused on the prevention of child abandonment and care placement of children under 3 years, to consider current transnational research, what it tells us of the extent, causes, consequences and responses to child abandonment, and to look at what we can learn from good practice in Bulgaria and other participant countries about what works and what obstacles remain to be overcome.

The first study visit was hosted by **For Our Children Foundation**, a Community Support Centre in Sofia working with parents of children in care as well as for the prevention of placement in care. The comparative good practice presentation was made by **SOS Children's Villages Latvia and SOS Children's Villages Romania**. It focused on SOS Children's Villages 'family strengthening' projects with illustrations of positive outcomes.

The second study visit was hosted by the **Animus Association**, a Centre in Sofia that provides social services for children and families including a 'Mother and Baby' unit. The comparative presentation was provided by **Dainius Puras**, Professor of Child Psychiatry and Social Paediatrics, Vilnius University, Lithuania. It focused on the transformation of child protection services in CEE countries, examining some of the ideological obstacles to progress.

2. Research project

The research project was presented by **Maria Herczog**, Associate Professor, Eszterházy Károly College, Hungary, Chair of the Family Child Youth Association, Hungary. It focused on the results of the EU Daphne project *Child Abandonment and its Prevention*¹⁰. Previous research within the Daphne programme established that the main factor for institutionalisation of children under 3 years in most countries is child abandonment. This determined the focus of the current project in which 10 EU countries participated and all 27 EU member states were consulted (of which 22 responded) to provide information relating to both open and secret abandonment¹¹. The latter includes anonymous birth, abandonment in hospital wards, public places or 'Baby Boxes/ Hatches' in use in some countries. What emerged from the research was that there is no reliable or comparable data on child abandonment in Europe, legislation is inconsistent and only one country had a legal definition. Abandonment is often used as a 'cover' term, like neglect, and abuse is often unrecognised as there is no proper assessment at the time of referral. The incidence of open abandonment is not high. The incidence of secret abandonment, especially children left on maternity units, is very high and one of the 'gatekeeping' points where properly trained staff could effectively intervene to make appropriate assessments and offer professional counselling to enable the parent to make informed decisions. 'Persuading' parents to give up their children for adoption without professional counselling is against the principles of the UNCRC. The reasons for child abandonment are complex but significant factors include poverty, lone parent status, young mothers, lack of family and community support, lack of adequate preventive services. *The research concludes that preventive strategies - universal and targeted services to young people and families on preventing unwanted pregnancies, trained professionals to recognise crisis situations and offer appropriate help, family services that provide support to keep the child in the family or help to free for adoption - are very effective and not only influence infant abandonment, but also change attitudes towards child welfare and child protection policies.*

3. Study visits and presentations

For Our Children Foundation, and SOS Children's Villages work with the most vulnerable children and families and both demonstrated impressive 'systems based' approaches to supporting families based on individualised assessments of needs and strengths. Their presentations reflected a strong belief that every child should be in a family, including children with disabilities, with appropriate support services mobilised to facilitate this. For Our Children Foundation provided a good example of how it is possible to combine medical and social support to mothers, especially in the first days after birth, the main point to take from their presentation. Poverty and bad living conditions are the main reasons for child abandonment but children's disabilities and mothers' illness are also factors. The Foundation now has excellent connections with the medical profession after some years of work with staff. If a risk is identified, social workers are alerted and work in a complementary way with medical/ education services, acting as coordinators to link the mother to the services. Regarding the projects from SOS Children's Villages, participants welcomed the holistic approach taken to assess the needs of the family and the

¹⁰ <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/iwho/research/projects/childabandonment/index.aspx>

¹¹ Open abandonment is where a child is knowingly left behind, a parent can be identified but no family members are willing or able to provide care. Secret abandonment is where a child is secretly left behind and parents cannot be identified

flexible service response that includes, among others, provision of services in the home and support to get a job. The latter was highlighted as very important to sustain the improved family situation following the support provided. *Providing this level and quality of service was possible because of the state/ NGO co-funding arrangement. This was regarded as a critical success factor.*

The Animus Association focused on their Mother and Baby Unit where they work with up to 10 pregnant women/ mothers with children up to 3 years on a residential basis to assess parenting capacity in situations of risk and, optimally, strengthen the mother/ child attachment to prevent placement of the child in alternative (usually institutional) care. Length of stay is normally 6 months, which can be extended to 18 months where potential for the child to stay with the mother is identified. The approach is psychoanalytic but clearly the mother's financial means and support in the community are critical factors in assessing prospects of successful rehabilitation. In contrast to the previous example, support services for families were identified as the weakest link in the system, together with a serious lack of foster carers and trained professionals, especially in the medical profession, to work with families with complex problems. Dainius Puras said that, in many CEE countries, a moralistic view is still taken of parents and abandonment done with state support. Baby Boxes were considered 'a good thing'. *We were therefore faced with the challenge of effecting a huge paradigm shift and this could only be done through raising public discourse and developing a dialogue with politicians and policy-makers. A stronger rehearsal of the economic arguments of community based support was also put forward as well as support for local groups to self-advocate.*

4. Conclusions

Participants discussed issues from study visits, practice and research presentations leading to agreement of key messages.

Baby Boxes: There was evidence in some countries that public and political opinion supported their use, perceiving them as 'a good thing' on the basis that the child's survival was more important than the child's identity and they at least gave the child a chance to be adopted. In some countries, where they have excellent prevention and intervention systems, Baby Boxes are still in use, perceived as another option, or a kind of 'insurance' policy'. However, the research had not evidenced any correlation between the prevalence of Baby Boxes and levels of infanticide or abandonment. Strong arguments were advanced against their use from a child rights perspective. It was a clear contravention of a child's right to a family and an identity and European legislation should not compromise with the forces of social opinion. One participant spoke from personal experience to say 'you should ask us!' In her opinion, there could be no justification for their use. The psychological effects were overlooked through an over-concentration on the physical aspects. Maria Herczog, as a member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, said the Committee would like to guarantee a proper European wide debate on the issue. Currently there were diametrically opposed and strong views for and against their use. *The overriding view of the meeting was that much greater awareness raising was needed, at political and policy level, on the importance of taking a child rights approach that recognises the child's right to a family and an identity.*

Inter-sectoral working: There was a disparity of experiences reported from the study visits, in particular attitudinal differences amongst professionals. The experience presented by For Our Children Foundation was considered exceptional as it was not usual to have this kind of collaboration between social workers and the medical profession. They emphasised that it had taken 5 years to get the social workers accepted as professionals in the hospitals but it could be done. The research project offered many examples of good practice and participants were encouraged to draw on these.

Return on investment for society as a whole: There was a need to look at child abandonment in a broader context. There must be a challenge to the existing social construct that the upbringing of children is an individual family responsibility. Demographic change demands that every child's potential as a citizen be respected. The wider societal responsibility attached to this must be accepted.

Key messages:

- Unwanted pregnancies must be avoided, otherwise we are just 'fire-fighting'
- Inter-sectoral working is crucial to attitudinal change and, ultimately, more choice for mothers: family friendly engagement should be encouraged
- Money makes a difference: we need to demonstrate the return on investment in community based solutions and we need to make more resources available to provide quality care

- NGOs can become more active players if appropriately supported and resourced by the state
- A holistic approach to family welfare is needed working systemically, on a multi-level basis, to address psychological, social, educational, health and financial issues

WORKSHOP C: SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES

Rapporteur: Janina Arsenjeva, Policy Director, Eurochild

Facilitators: Lynne Hill, Children in Wales, UK and Vesela Banova, Child and Space Association, Bulgaria

1. Introduction

In the framework of the study visit programme, **Cedar Foundation** presented its experience of closing institutions in Bulgaria and re-housing children with disabilities in small group homes in the community. Despite the legal, financial and attitudinal challenges, the experience is considered an inspirational practice and was eventually supported by the municipalities concerned and the educational institutions in the area.

In parallel, the **Bulgarian Child and Space Association** presented three kinds of community-based services for children with disabilities, including a small group home (residential service), where the presentation took place. The association piloted a centre for social rehabilitation and a day centre for children with disabilities (non-residential services).

The study visits were complemented by presentation of good international practices.

Change, the UK-based charity, continued with providing practical advice on how to accommodate the needs of children with intellectual disabilities entering the community. In this respect, it stressed the role of peer support provided by trainers who are persons with intellectual disabilities themselves, and of the role of information about daily challenges provided in accessible easy-to-understand formats.

Heart of a Child presented the work of an early intervention and rehabilitation centre for children with disabilities in Galati (Romania). The Centre aims to complement the medical diagnosis of children with the very much needed individualised rehabilitation, as well as support/information to parents. This approach helps ensure a higher rate of social inclusion and prevents removal of children from their biological families. In the first year of its existence, the Centre contributed to improving the quality of life of 118 children with disabilities.

2. Research project

The presentation focused on the results of the *Childrens Rights for All*¹² project, jointly conducted by **Inclusion Europe**, **Eurochild** and **Charles University Prague**, aiming to understand the implications of the UNCRC on the rights of children with intellectual disabilities. The objective of the research was to provide evidence on the situation of children in order to support advocacy at the European level. The research focused on five areas of life (abuse, education, support for families, living in the community, health, participation) in 22 EU countries.

The report concluded that the statistical information about the respect of the rights of children with intellectual disabilities is limited in all countries; when it does exist, it tends to focus on education and, to some extent, social security or health care. Discrimination against children with intellectual disabilities and their families is widespread, and exacerbated by the barriers to participation of children in the decisions that concern them. Children with intellectual disabilities are frequently denied the right to good quality education, healthcare, recreation and other services. They are often denied adequate support services in the community, which contributes to their social exclusion and sometimes results in institutionalisation.

3. Study visits and presentations

Closing institutions for children with disabilities must go hand in hand with *early intervention measures* to prevent placement of new children in institutions. The lack of *exchange between the medical and social authorities* has been recognised as a major obstacle to accommodating the needs of children with disabilities in the community and eventually leading to their institutionalisation. The *integrated approach* where every child is serviced by a

¹² <http://www.childrights4all.eu/>

multi-agency team of professionals is still not always recognised by the authorities in some countries. This results in children not getting correct diagnosis and, as a result, inappropriate or insufficient sets of services.

De-institutionalisation is a change in the way the community/authority/client thinks. Getting *society to accept children with disabilities* living in the community is difficult and must be 'forced' on to the community to some extent.

The role of *grassroot organisations* in this work is essential. They prepare society for welcoming former residents of institutions and facilitate the smooth transition of children from institutions into the community. Particularly important is the *involvement of self-advocates* (i.e persons with disabilities). In addition to serving as a good example of inclusion, they are a good role model for the children and young people who are starting their lives in the community and help guide them in this process. *Turning Words into Action*¹³ is an inspirational project on empowerment of children, conducted jointly by Change and Lumos in a number of countries. Finally, the support given by persons with disabilities is invaluable in making the environment as accessible as possible to children with disabilities leaving institutions, and to providing them with relevant information about living in the community (daily tasks, sexuality and parenthood¹⁴, employment, etc).

4. Conclusions

First assessment of children with disabilities is important to better address their needs and provide them with early individualised intervention services. In this respect, appropriate training of medical professionals, especially in maternity wards, is invaluable. Training of other professionals involved in the assessment frameworks (those working in the field of education, for example), also cannot be overlooked:

- Multi-agency working is essential: the 'one-stop shop' for children and families makes accessing the services much easier. In order to do that, the seamless cooperation of authorities responsible for the provision of health, education and social services is very important. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that full inclusion also encompasses access to housing, transport, leisure activities, etc
- The De-institutionalisation process must not be hasty: services in the community should be up and running before the children are ready to be moved out of the institutions. This includes development of adequate foster care systems (including appropriate support to foster parents and respite services) and development of a framework to accompany children and their families continuously into adulthood
- Individualised services are the only appropriate form of services. However, they cannot be designed without participation of children, who are the users of these services. To this end, they must be provided with an accessible, inclusive and age-appropriate platform to voice their views and opinions
- Children with disabilities are often subjected to bullying and violence. In fact, this is one of the most serious problems experienced by many children with intellectual disabilities, according to Change. Participation of children that increases their involvement and visibility helps address the underlying reasons of bullying
- The wealth of experience tapped into at the workshop must be capitalised on in the follow-up work. The workshop participants agreed to keep the networking capacity going and to invite Eurochild to consider using technologies to maintain continuous virtual exchange of practices

WORKSHOP D: WORKING WITH BIOLOGICAL FAMILIES OF CHILDREN IN CARE

Rapporteur: Agata D'Addato, Policy Officer, Eurochild

Facilitators: Tony Ivens, Children in Wales, UK, Laura Parker, Independent Consultant and Mariana Pisarska, Alliance for Children and Youth, Bulgaria

1. Introduction

The workshop provided a platform to share experiences and models of providing services that work with the most vulnerable families to prevent family breakdown and out-of-home placement of children, to preserve the contact

¹³ See <http://www.changepeople.co.uk/showPage.php?id=33>

¹⁴ See note 3

between children in out-of-home care and their biological families and to support reunification of children with families where appropriate.

There were 3 study visits: **Tulip Foundation** shared its experience on how Family Group Conferencing is being introduced in Bulgaria; **Health and Social Development Foundation** took the participants to the health and social centre in the biggest Roma neighbourhood in Sofia; and the **Alliance for Children and Youth** shared their experience of working in a day centre for street children which offers support to youth at risk and families to encourage them to take their children back from the streets.

Three practices from across Europe were correspondingly introduced:

Svanhild Vik from Norway presented *a model for children's participation in Family Group Conferencing*. **Patricia Quilez** from Spain presented *In Situ: Back to Family Support Programme* which aims at reintegrating the young person in the family's life. **Patricia Bonello** from Malta focused on *managing contact between children in alternative care and their biological families within a Maltese context* through case study scenarios.

2. Research project

Stephan Sting from the Alpen-Adria University of Klagenfurt in Austria presented the Sibling research project in Austria and shared the main outcomes of international research activities and documentations about sibling relations in alternative care carried out by several SOS Children's Villages associations in Germany, Austria, France, Italy and Spain. The purpose of the project was to draw attention to the importance of sibling relations in alternative care and enhance the quality and support for these relationships. A publication entitled *Sibling Relations in Alternative Care*¹⁵ summarises all international results and is available in English, German, French, Spanish and Italian. All language versions can be directly downloaded from the website.

3. Study visits and presentations

Tulip Foundation and FGC Norway: Maria Petkova, the Director of the Tulip Foundation presented to the group the *Trust in the family* project, implemented in cooperation with Opportunity and Protection Association in 4 municipalities in the Haskovo region of Bulgaria with the support of Unicredit Foundation and Unicredit Bulbank. The aim of the project, which is still in its pilot phase, is to support families at risk/with problems to provide better care for their children, to keep the families intact and to strengthen the role and the responsibility of the (extended) family. The project introduced the Family Group Conference (FGC), which is a successful model for support based on the strengths of the child and the family and also to learn in practice what the decision making process is. FGC is also a model for people and young people to be heard as it was explained by Svanhild Vik, who presented how Norway is including the child's perspective and involving children in decision making in Family Group Conferencing.

Participants then engaged in a discussion exchanging experiences and knowledge about the FGC in their own country and highlighted some of its main strengths: it saves money both in the short and in the long term; families need to be given space to fulfil their social role and to increase their level of maturity; it helps develop trust in the family, builds on their strengths and develops resilience; it is about the family having ownership of the solutions as opposed to an imposed solution; it is a democratic way of keeping the decision making and the responsibility within the family; it is a model for participation of children and young people, which allows children to have an active role, have their perspective included and allows them to decide; it is a tool to mobilise the family circle and the extended network of the family; it could be used for any type of problem – disability, violence, drugs and alcohol abuse, divorce, poverty, delinquent behaviour, school issues, restorative justice, leaving institutions or prison; it can be used for prevention, intervention or crisis intervention.

Health and Social Development Foundation and Resilis Foundation: Zornitsa Stoichkova, a social worker at the Health and Social Development Foundation presented the work of her team in the neighbourhood of 'Faculty'. As the largest Roma community in Bulgaria, the area is home to 25-30 000 people, two-thirds of whom are children.

Starting off as a service providing support to prostitutes in 1999, the organisation grew into a health and social centre that offers services throughout the life cycle to the entire community: early intervention counselling (activities on parenting for pregnant women, preventing child abandonment); early childhood education and care; family support; food supplies; activities for children and young people, etc. The organisation aims to address the

¹⁵ <http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/What-we-do/Research/Pages/Sibling-relations-in-alternative-care.aspx>

root causes of disadvantage faced by children by supporting and empowering families, with the objective of tackling the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Their success lies in building trust among the local population who recognise the staff as members of their community. The centre is supported by the local municipality, and serves as the main social service provider to children and their families in the community.

Discussions were followed by the presentation of Patricia Quilez Villagran, who works as a social educator at the Resilis Foundation on the *In situ- returning home* programme. She explained the essential steps of working with children who are to return to their families from a residential care centre. The centre is home to young boys who have been in contact with the law or have behaviour issues. Supported by the Catalan government, services are provided to facilitate their return to their families. In all the stages of observing the family - identifying the core issues and evaluation of progress made - the work is developed together with the child at the residential centre. Assistance throughout the process includes tutoring, counselling, family visits, and providing educational tools for various life situations.

The similarities in the presentations were: a) the approach to working closely together with children and their families (b) the multi-disciplinary services and support provided (c) the nature of enabling services which empower children and families to change without imposing that (d) the value of community-based services (e) the participation of children in the processes.

Alliance for Children and Youth and Agenzija Appogg: The Alliance implements its projects in the 16 Plus Youth Day Care Centre located in Sofia. The presentation of their work was done through a documentary produced by the Bulgarian National Television. Mariana Pisarska, director of the Alliance, explained that some of the key activities of the Day Care Centre included outreach and street work with children and youth at risk, basic healthcare services, legal assistance and advocacy, courses teaching labour and employment skills, family planning programmes, skills development with gardening, cooking, pottery, etc. as well as showers and laundry facilities and one hot meal a day. Patricia Bonello's (*Agenzija Appogg*) presentation focused on four major dichotomies when managing contact between children in alternative care and their biological families within the Maltese context: identity and stability; involvement and maintaining boundaries; resistance and acceptance; attachment and detachment.

Key points that arose from the discussion that followed included: the need for social cohesion and work with extended families and communities to support children and families; promoting communication with other agencies and intra-agency working; listening to the voice of the child. Arriving at best practice when working with birth families entails using the best interests of the child as the underlying principle and keeping in mind that a distinction has to be made between contact and reintegration. Contact does not have to be face-to-face but may take different forms and different stakeholders often have different perspectives on what the child's best interest is. The need for supportive services, for example social housing, was also identified as well as a number of common issues across Europe such as the difficulty in recruiting experienced and motivated staff, caseloads, training and support for social workers, and how an institution is defined.

4. Conclusions

Key learning from the workshop:

- Listen to the voice of the child, involve children and include their perspective throughout the processes, focus on the child's views, experience and needs
- Build in regular consultation and listen to children and their parents, and incorporate their feedback into service improvement and delivery
- Services need to be driven by understanding the family situation, by taking the parents' circumstances as a starting point rather than imposing or teaching them how to raise their children
- Promote social cohesion and involve as much as possible the extended families and the community to support children and families
- Value and recognise the work of social workers, but also value the volunteer sector, as they are as important and valuable as the professionals
- Involve social workers who can communicate empathically with children and families in greatest need, build trust and 'intimacy' between family members and professionals

- Exchange good practices and learning points at international level, get inspiration and take good ideas but also value local cultures and practices by making sure the solutions proposed fit the needs of local communities, the children and their families
- Build the strengths within the family and give to the family the ownership of the solutions (the more we attempt to control families and children the more we de-skill them)
- Promote a cultural and attitudinal change, change the mind-set of existing professionals/ people/ service providers
- Promote inter-agency working, create meaningful partnerships between different actors and sectors to reform the child welfare system, and create networks between all persons involved in the lives of vulnerable children and their families to ensure that the different perspectives are integrated in the best interest of the child
- Evaluate outcomes for children

WORKSHOP E: SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS LEAVING CARE

Rapporteur: Mafalda Leal, Policy Officer, Eurochild

Facilitators: Gabrielle Jerome, Core Assets, UK and Ivan Ivanov, Agapedia Foundation, Bulgaria

1. Introduction

In the framework of workshop E, study visits took place at **SOS Children's Villages Bulgaria** youth facility and **Agapedia Foundation** group home.

Two international good practices were correspondingly introduced:

Supporting young people making the transition from Government care to adulthood in England, by **Sue Hobbs** from the **National Care Advisory Service**, and *A step to the future – how to help young people leaving care find their way*, by **Jasna Hodzic** from **Hope and Homes for Children, Bosnia and Herzegovina**.

2. Research project

Roxana Anghel, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK presented her research on interpreting the UN Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children and the case of children leaving care. She argued for the development of a culture of learning that can empower all involved with children in/ leaving care in such a way that they understand UNCRC rights and how they should be interpreted to promote change in the lives of young people. She highlighted the need for multi-disciplinary work and the importance of monitoring and evaluation to measure success on creating better outcomes for children.

3. Study visits and presentations

SOS Children's Villages, Bulgaria and National Care Advisory Service, UK: The group visited one of the two youth facilities SOS Children's Villages holds in Sofia and was provided with information on the programme SOS runs in Bulgaria. This includes the 'traditional' SOS Children's Villages, youth facilities (to which children transit around 13-15 years old), support for semi-independent living, and independent living. The service provided by SOS is recognised as a social service under Bulgarian legislation and agreed by the competent Ministries. Details were provided on the capacity and staffing of the youth facilities, daily life of the children, support provided (individual development planning for each child is prepared with the young person) and challenges both service providers and the children face.

Sue Hobbs took participants on a short journey through the evolution of support provided to care leavers by the child welfare system in England and presented the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF)¹⁶, where local authorities, organisations and trusts can share and develop policies and practices with the aim of developing more compliant, efficient and cost effective services to achieve the best outcomes for young people

¹⁶ http://leavingcare.org/?page_ID=49

making the transition from care to adulthood. A Young People's Benchmarking Forum (YPBMF) also exists to involve young people from local authorities who are members of the NLCBF. Ms Hobbs announced a campaign¹⁷, released that same day, to gather positive messages from children in care around the world, aiming to give care leavers the opportunity to celebrate positive achievements, aspirations and experiences of their time in care through photography.

Participants then engaged in a discussion exchanging experiences and projects on how children's voices are heard, such as the *I matter* campaign by SOS Bulgaria, Voices from Care in Wales, and the National Council on Child Participation in Bulgaria. Despite the historical paths different countries have taken, they found common challenges in turning child participation into a reality: formal participation; lack of enforcement in all settings (schools, at home, etc); agendas often being set by adults, which sometimes deterred children from participating.

Agapedia Foundation Bulgaria and Hope and Homes for Children Bosnia and Herzegovina: The group visited a 'small group home' supported by Agapedia Foundation that currently hosts 5 children aged 6 to 14 years old (the maximum number of young beneficiaries is 6). Ivan Ivanov (Director) presented the services, provided by 3 supervisors and 1 social worker, emphasising that all efforts aim at integrating disadvantaged children into society through the development of their sense of responsibility, the improvement of self-confidence and 'soft' skills. Agapedia guarantees long-term support, including after the young person has left the facility and started independent life. A lot of attention is given to individual needs and a lot of energies are allocated to find out whether it is possible to reintegrate the child into his/ her biological family (or extended family). Different questions were raised by the group, in particular with regard to governance issues (the children/ beneficiaries in need are identified by the local child protection authority and before they are included in Agapedia programmes they have usually spent a transitional period in crisis centres). Participants shared a common vision on the following critical issues to be managed in the care leaving process: money management, employment, relationship problems, lack of self-confidence and above all, the need to belong to someone (a reference person).

Jasna Hodzic provided an overview of Hope & Homes for Children young adult support programme (1year) focused on preparing care leavers for independent life (beneficiaries are young people still in institutions). Support is given to additional training in order to complete education; to find a job and accommodation; to improve young people's social skills ('soft' skills) and also material (financial) support. The programme is phased as follows: needs assessment; creation of an individual support plan; implementation; and monitoring. Like Agapedia services, Ms Hodzic explained how individual support works, sharing with the group the lessons learned (timely beginning of support is essential / support from relatives increases the chances of success) and additional key points for achieving the expected outcomes: patience, individual approach and building trust.

4. Conclusions

Main points from participants' discussion of issues from study visits, practice and research presentations:

- Across Europe, organisations face similar problems (financial support being pointed out as a major constraint)
- Children leaving care need continuous support after leaving care: more services created and provisioned; biological and foster families need to receive adequate support; a more pro-active follow-up of the children who have left care
- Beyond the methods used to support children, what matters most is giving attention, creating conditions for attachment, a sense of belonging, and that the children feel they matter and are special to someone

Key messages:

- The need to involve children throughout the processes
- The need to create ownership of the projects/ methodologies being used by involving carers, practitioners, public authorities and children
- The advantages of exchange of good practices at international level as a source of inspiration, but also the importance of valuing local cultures and practices making sure the solutions proposed fit the needs of local communities and the children
- The need to develop handbooks for practitioners to deal with care and after-care

¹⁷ <http://www.catch-22.org.uk/News/Detail/Positive-message-campaign-winners-announced>

PRESENTATION BY THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CARE EXPERIENCE (link to [slideshow](#), [video](#))

The young people presented the work they had done together over the last 5 days. They hoped their experiences and thoughts would help participants in the work they do on alternative care. The presentation was in 5 parts. To begin, young people presented what they had learned on the issue from a national perspective. This was followed by presentation of a poster designed by a young person from Bulgaria that represented some of the themes and feelings of the group over the past week. Participants then shared some conclusions from their discussions in 3 key areas of support, identity and children's rights, followed by some personal accounts of reasons for coming to the conference. To conclude the group presented a slideshow of some extraordinary moments they had shared during their week together. The music of the slideshow had been chosen because of what the lyrics meant to them. The presentation was both poignant and powerful and it was evident that it had engaged participants in a way that is not possible to convey in a report. An unedited report of the presentation of the poster follows as this in itself speaks volumes. Some key quotes from each of the other parts are captured.

The poster

"This amazing poster was designed and made by a young person from Bulgaria. It represents some of the themes and feelings of the entire group over the last week. In the corner we offer the key message that no matter how much we want to change our own lives we cannot do it without your support. The second part of the drawing represents the theme of support. In the middle you can see a child who is smiling. He is smiling because his dream came true thanks to the support he has found. The hands around the face symbolise protection and support. The child in the picture expressed one dream – to have a family. She hopes to have a normal childhood, to be loved and protected, to live in a safe environment. She needs to find out who she is and where she comes from so she can have a strong identity. The picture represents that the children know their place in society. They have their rights and we should stand by them. We should respect their choices and decisions. We should help them to build themselves, to be who they want to be."

What we learned from the conference:

"I learned at this conference of the rights in the social sphere in other countries".... "We learned more about foster care"..... "I have learned that everywhere in the world there are families that have problems and that experience living lives with neglectful families... we can join together here for one reason. This reason is to help and support each other. Help and support is the greatest gift to children"..... "I have learned that children need love and care. Without it they have an unjust and incomplete life.....children living in alternative care have often experienced terrible traumas and negative experiences and we ask that those of you who need to care for us do not disappoint us further"..... "We discovered that there are a lot of children and youth who have plenty of competence and are only waiting for an opportunity and someone who can support them to succeed".... "Our country is in very bad shape regarding alternative care services..... there are only a few who know that and try to do something to improve it.... you cannot leave us alone".... "Through this experience we came up with new ideas on how to improve our current situation... we also learned it is important to reflect on our past experiences and to learn from them, to make a difference in the future..."

What we need (themed around support, identity, children's rights):

- "We need financial and emotional support, not only for the families but for the children too. They need somebody who can help and give advice to them"
- "We need more and better education and training (to) promote youth development, helping them to find a job and start a professional career"
- "We need better infrastructures and services....to give care leavers the opportunities to become independent....Inspectors must ask the children for a services' assessment.... children are suffering adults' wrong decisions"
- "Community based services may be a good choice for improving alternative care"

- “Identity is something that we need for our self-confidence....it gives me the right to vote...it gives me the opportunity to work....Identity is something that confirms I am a person.....it shows me that I belong to somebody and to somewhere..... Identity gives me a right to raise my voice, to make my own choices.....I am not just the next kid coming from an institution...”
- “Every child needs to have the right to a good standard of care...the right to participate in decisions.... the right to support....the right to education.... the right to protection from violence....the right to ask for more help when passing through difficult times...*Building a Europe for and with children*¹⁸”

Why we came to the conference:

“I came to the conference because I still believe in people. I still believe everyone has good inside them....together we can fix the future for children”.... “We need to solve these problems together because they affect us all.... together we can change things.....if we start today, tomorrow can be better”.... “The most important thing for me was to learn how other European countries deal with problems like ours.... I am here to help whatever I can, as well as you who are helping us”.... “I wanted to learn together with others, to find solutions.... it is very useful to discuss solutions, to talk but these words are empty unless we take action now”.

REALISING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE IN ALTERNATIVE CARE

Facilitator: Haralan Aleksandrov, Ph.D, Social anthropologist, Bulgaria (link to [video](#))

Panelists: Margaret Tuite, Child Rights Coordinator, European Commission, DG Justice, Tanja Radocaj, UNICEF Representative, Bulgaria and Audrone Bedorf, Senior Adviser to the Ombudsperson for Children’s Rights, Lithuania

Panelists were asked to address the following questions in their presentations:

- Can you explain more about your role in defending children’s rights in your organisation? Are the rights of children in alternative care a particular concern within this work and why/ why not?
- Is there something that you are particularly proud of that you or your organisation has done that has made a difference for children in alternative care (or is likely to make a difference in the future)?
- What do you think still needs to be done to protect and promote the rights of children in alternative care in the EU? What is the specific role / contribution your organisation can make? What can / should civil society be doing?

Margaret Tuite, Child Rights Coordinator, European Commission, DG Justice (link to [video](#))

The role of Coordinator for the Rights of the Child: Ms Tuite said the Commission is a huge organisation with more than 20 departments, at least half of which have policies that have a direct impact on children so it was extremely relevant to have someone to coordinate and maintain an overview of what is going on. One of her main tasks was to ensure this coordination function and also to play a ‘safeguarding’ role with regard to legislative proposals the EC makes to ensure they are compliant with the UNCRC and that nothing is contrary to the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, which has a specific article on the rights of the child (art. 24) that says children must be protected and children must be heard. She said children in alternative care and DI were very important and of concern to the Commission and wanted to thank all the NGOs and civil society who had raised awareness of these concerns. In February this year, she had organised a meeting with various Commission departments where they had discussed issues around alternative care and DI, the standards in place, and something that comes up time after time, the issue of data, or lack of it. A few weeks ago, the Expert Group ran a seminar on DI for the Commission. This was attended by a broad range of departments so she thought it fair to say that they understood the issues now. She emphasised that they wanted to do the right thing and do it well and they needed the help of NGOs to get there. The issue of DI had been raised in the 2011 Report on the Application

¹⁸ See Council of Europe Strategy 2012-2015 and *Building a Europe for and with children* programme <http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/>

of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights¹⁹. In this, we are reminded that responsibility for the administration of child care institutions lies solely with MS, which might explain why sometimes the Commission was not very 'up front' about it. However, a fantastic opportunity had been taken here to effect change through use of Structural Funds, which was very important.

What the Commission does that might make a difference to children in alternative care: Ms Tuite referred to the EU funding which Mr Rasmussen had spoken about the previous day. She said this was very important and should not be under-estimated. The Commission always followed things up and she and Mr Rasmussen would be meeting to discuss some of the issues that had arisen over the past few days to ensure the money is being spent in the right way. She then focused on The European Forum on the Rights of the Child²⁰ which would be held in a few weeks' time. This brings together a broad range of stakeholders from MS, Ombudspersons for Children, civil society and international organisations. A topic this year would be how the Commission could support child protection systems in MS, which was quite a new departure for them. There would be 5 workshops, 2 of potential interest to the audience. The first concerned the role of child protection systems in preventing violence towards children and the second the role of child protection systems in protecting children with disabilities, where she hoped they would also talk about DI. Her work on coordination and child rights mainstreaming would also, of course, continue. In a few weeks, a study would commence in all MS and Croatia to 'map' legislation, policy and practice with regard to child participation (UNCRC art 12). The objective was to identify good practice, tools and materials that could be shared at EU level. The study would pay particular attention to children in situations of vulnerability as they were the ones whose voices were usually least heard.

What still needs to be done to protect and promote the rights of children in alternative care in the EU: Ms Tuite said we must continue to focus on *quality*. It was much easier for the Commission to be sure they are doing the right thing if they know that what people are doing is in line with the relevant standards - the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children²¹, the 2010 WHO Declaration on the Health of Children and Young People with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families²², the Quality4Children standards²³, the 2005 Council of Europe Recommendation on the Rights of Children living in Residential Institutions²⁴. The Commission would also like to see a child-centred, 'best interest' determination as part of the equation, which mirrored what everyone had been saying over the last few days. We knew that *poverty* was a driver or contributing factor very often for children ending up in alternative care and the upcoming Recommendation on Child Poverty and Well-being would address this. To see a child placed in care simply because of poverty was unacceptable in the EU in 2012 and the Commission wanted to see more help given to families to prevent this. *Participation* (art 12 UNCRC) was still a challenge for children in alternative care. The Commission would like to see more work done in this area and would be looking to fund such participation projects. They would also like to see more adequate preparation for the *leaving care process*. In terms of *children with disabilities*, they would like to see the UNCRC and the UNCRPD applied in parallel and in a holistic manner to bring these two fields of action together. *In relation to the role the Commission could play*, Ms Tuite said the Child Rights Forum in November would help and they could build on the work done there in the future. The Forum should be part of a continuum, not just a random event. The Commission also planned to develop guidelines in 2014 on child protection systems in the context of 'anti-trafficking' which would provide the opportunity to assess the adequacy of child protection systems for children in general. *In relation to funding*, there are 2 programmes in DG Justice that are particularly relevant to children, the Daphne programme on the prevention of violence towards children, young people and women, and a programme on Fundamental Rights and Citizenship. In 2013, they had set a priority in the Fundamental Rights programme that was directly relevant to children in alternative care and would be seeking projects to train practitioners and professionals who deal with children in residential care and detention on the rights of children, and how to communicate with them in an age and context appropriate manner. In relation to other priorities, they would be looking for projects on child participation, child friendly justice and bullying in schools, which presented a fair number of possibilities. In relation to data collection, Ms Tuite had inserted a requirement to collect data on constituencies in all future projects to begin collectively to address this issue. The Commission itself had launched 2 data collection studies in the EU, one on missing children and one on children's involvement in justice systems. *In relation to what civil society should be doing*, Ms Tuite's message was 'please continue the good work'. The DI Expert Group alone had shown what fantastic results could be achieved.

¹⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/2011-report-fundamental-rights_en.pdf

²⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/rights-child/european-forum/index_en.htm

²¹ http://www.unicef.org/aids/files/UN_Guidelines_for_alternative_care_of_children.pdf

²² <http://www.euro.who.int/en/who-we-are/policy-documents/european-declaration-on-the-health-of-children-and-young-people-with-intellectual-disabilities-and-their-families>

²³ http://www.quality4children.info/navigation/cms.id.2,nodeid.2_language.en_country.at.html

²⁴ http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/familypolicy/Source/Rec%282005%295_Children%20living%20in%20institutions.pdf

UNICEF's work in Bulgaria. Ms Radocaj explained that this is part of UNICEF's broader mandate. However, unlike some Western European countries where there is a National Committee - an NGO which has a contractual arrangement with UNICEF - the Bulgaria Office is part of the global organisation, which is an intergovernmental organisation, and this, in a way, defined their role because they are accountable to the Executive Board and agree with the host Government the priorities on which they focus. Sometimes this was not clear and people had different expectations of them. UNICEF, as a global organisation has, from the beginning, focused on the most vulnerable children but, since the UNCRC came into force, they had a different type of role based on child rights (art. 45) where they were tasked with helping States parties deliver on their commitments under the Convention. They had a certain way of doing things, which sometimes was not well understood, but because they were not an NGO they needed to do things in a different way. UNICEF was, first of all, committed to being a voice for children. They had this in common with all the NGOs and by doing it together they tried to make this voice stronger. UNICEF also had a role to support and strengthen national capacity, state and non-state actors, for child rights monitoring, protection and fulfilment. They did this by bringing together different actors - experts from the Government, from the local level, the business sector – by providing technical advice and support for policy development, and through generating and sharing knowledge to work together to create a child friendly society. All these activities are undertaken according to the priorities UNICEF sets in the programme period and agrees with the Government. *In relation to alternative care for children, UNICEF was focusing on this in Bulgaria because this was the challenge for fulfilling child rights in this country*, a challenge to which they all contributed or tried to resolve. Ms Radocaj did not feel she needed to explain why as the conference had evidenced a common understanding of the damaging effects of institutional care for children and agreement that it should be replaced with family and community based care. What had been achieved in Bulgaria had been achieved through working in partnership. UNICEF in Bulgaria was very small, just a few people, but because their work was always done through partnerships, they believed they could be a significant contributor to change.

Initiatives relating to new forms of care for children in Bulgaria²⁵: Ms Radocaj said there had been some excellent experiences in the last few years, not always good results but the effort that was being invested and the direction taken was important. UNICEF had done a lot of 'behind the scenes' work on policy inputs and expert advice, but what she was particularly proud of and wanted to share, especially with people not from Bulgaria, related to *the development of new forms of care for children in Bulgaria and the work they had done with the media to inform and engage Bulgarian citizens, and the business sector, to support the change*. Ms Radocaj said that normally engagement is with activists and experts but *if citizens, parents and community members do not understand the reasons for change it is not likely to be sustainable*. They had focused on children with disabilities and the Mogilino case, the promotion of foster care, where they had made a significant impact, and replacing the infant home in Shumen with preventive services and family and community based services. All three activities had been launched and presented to the public through a very strong partnership with the media. A prominent TV channel had produced a show in a popular format, bringing together celebrities and policy makers who were prominent people in Bulgaria to talk about the damaging effects of institutional care. The Mogilino programme ran for 6 weeks and the programme focusing on young children 0-3 - why it is not good for them to be raised in institutions and what are the alternatives - ran in a similar format for 3 months. It was a unique opportunity to have this kind of promotion and *Bulgarian citizens responded exceptionally*. They wanted to be part of the change and they wanted to contribute to it. UNICEF also raised funds that were directed towards creating the change together with their partners, but more importantly, *this was a sign that society heard what the issue was, why change was needed and how this change could be created, and they wanted to support it*. This was something to be proud of. A different form of public communication was used for the campaign on foster care, a documentary series following the real lives of real foster families, which helped to 'demystify' what foster care is. It was and still is very important to continue doing this in Bulgaria because foster care is still very new.

The remaining challenges: Ms Radocaj said UNICEF's programme in Bulgaria had just been approved for the next 5 years so they would be around and would be working with all of their partners to sustain the change. We had heard Mr Rasmussen say that the change was irreversible and we all wanted to believe so. However, change could be slowed down and could also be de-railed, even temporarily, so *a continuing effort was needed by everyone to support the Government, at central, regional and local levels, in order to sustain this change*. There was a need to keep educating citizens and professionals to ensure understanding is really well grounded, as some, but not all, of the people have been convinced. She said the biggest resistance was sometimes amongst

²⁵ For more info see http://www.unicef.bg/public/images/tinybrowser/upload/Annual_Report_2011_EN_n_OK.pdf

professionals, referring in particular to health professionals, an area where UNICEF will engage more. Some doctors were still advising parents to abandon their children so a continuing educative role was clearly needed. However, it was also about what the sector does, or fails to do, in a wider context. UNICEF was therefore working closely with the Ministry of Health to re-establish the health visitation (visiting nurses) service, something that Bulgaria used to have but was lost in all the reforms of the last 20 years. The service could play an important role in helping parents to cope and to provide better care for their children. In relation to alternative care, the focus would be mainly on the youngest children and we had already heard about the conference November 21st-22nd in Sofia. However, children placed in a type of residential 'correctional' school because they were victims of abuse and neglect was also an area of concern, and something UNICEF wanted to change, so this would be one of their tasks in the future.

Audrone Bedorf, Senior Adviser to the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights, Lithuania (link to [video presentation](#))

The role of the Lithuanian Children's Rights Ombudsperson's Office: Ms Bedorf said the Office was established by Parliamentary decision in 2000. Its purpose is to investigate child rights violation cases, supervise and control the implementation and protection of child rights, and improve the legal protection of children. The Ombudsperson can influence and seek positive changes in both the individual child's life as well as the life of separate groups of children. In particular, he carries out investigations of complaints of child rights violations and starts investigations on his own initiative. Not a small part of this concerns violations of the rights of children in care. The Ombudsperson also assesses children's rights in specific areas. While making an assessment of the situation of children in care, he conducted a number of studies and analyses, for example, on the implementation of the principle of non-separation of siblings, the living conditions and health environment of children in care, the foster care of children under 3 years, the implementation of the rights of children whose parents moved abroad, the so called 'Euro-orphans'. The Ombudsperson submits proposals to the President, Government Ministries and other competent authorities concerning measures that could improve the protection of children's rights. He also participates in the preparation and consideration of the drafts of legal acts and other measures that could improve child's rights protection. The Ombudsperson prepares and submits annual reports to the Parliament and shadow reports of the state reports submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the implementation of the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols. When exercising his duties, the Ombudsperson is free, independent and autonomous. Therefore he may objectively evaluate the current situation in the sphere of child rights protection, monitor the legal regulation and practical implementation gaps, and submit proposals that are necessary to protect every child's rights. Ms Bedorf said that Lithuania was, in a sense, a young country, having restored its independence in the 1990s, and changes had only begun in both the human and child rights protection sphere since this time. Children deprived of parental care, especially children growing up in institutions, were one of the greatest challenges and one of the most urgent contemporary problems. Legal regulation of planned measures in the field of children's rights presents the opportunity to create positive changes and improve each child's situation. However, for a number of reasons - lack of priority given to implementation of the measures, lack of funds and services, lack of the required expertise - the goals and desired level of protection of children's rights are not being reached. Discussions on the damage caused by institutional care to a child's development have been on-going for a number of years, and improvements to legislation and planned measures to address this issue have been drafted. However, there are still a large number of children, especially infants, growing up in institutions, but not in family care

What the Children's Rights Ombudsperson has done to make a difference to children in alternative care:

Ms Bedorf said that to achieve real changes in the protection of child rights is not easy in Lithuania. The Ombudsperson has no special powers and can only make recommendations. In some cases, he also has to demonstrate the relevance and the urgency of the problems. For example, in relation to 'Euro-orphans', the Ombudsperson's study revealed that these children were facing many problems. After long discussions, changes in legislation were eventually made that allow parents going abroad to appoint a person as a temporal legal guardian and to empower this guardian to represent the child's legal interests. The children are also now under the surveillance of the child rights protection services. One of the biggest current challenges for the Ombudsperson is to achieve change in the system of care for children under 3 years. Many are growing up in institutions known as Institutions for Children Having Disordered Development. These are health, not social care, institutions and they can accommodate up to 400 infants. The study showed that a significant number of these children do not need permanent health care and they could be cared of in a family-like environment. However, the public image is that they have serious health disorders and this impedes the process of family care placement or adoption. In the opinion of the Ombudsperson the number of infant homes and children living in them must be reduced

significantly, the activities of such institutions changed and oriented to the child's care and education, and health care services provided only when needed. It is assumed that the children's health problems are used to justify their presence in the health care institutions and hence to justify the need for these institutions and for continued funding. The institutions are maintained from the state budget, thus the municipality referring the child incurs no costs associated with the child's care. The Ombudsperson provided concrete proposals on reform of the system of infant care to the Government and the Government assigned the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour to analyse the conclusions of his report and evaluate the possibilities for implementation of the measures proposed. The Ombudsperson has had re-draw the Government's attention to the slow response in this area but hopes that positive change will be achieved soon.

What still needs to be done to protect and promote the rights of children in Lithuania: Ms Bedorf said that in order to ensure children's rights, especially those growing up in the care system, it was necessary to ensure the practical implementation of the principles and provisions of the UNCRC, in particular, that decisions should be made taking account of the child's best interests and the child's views. Yet children had given accounts of situations where decisions had been taken without considering their opinions and without even informing them of the decisions made. Children growing up in care still suffered discrimination in various spheres of life, for example, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic factors were not taken into account and children separated from their families rarely got the necessary services to cope with the separation. A child who has no possibility of growing up in his own family should be guaranteed the possibility of growing up in a family-like environment. However, it is not enough just to address the financial aspect of foster care. The allocation of additional funds to a foster family will not help to encourage families to take children into foster care. It is necessary to ensure the foster family and the child receives the necessary level and quality of support during the period of foster care. It is also extremely important to change the prevailing critical and negative attitude of society towards children left without parental care and towards foster families. The sense of responsibility of the community and society must be developed and strengthened for every child, for the implementation of his rights and protection, and especially the opportunity to grow up in a family-like environment.

CLOSING SESSION

Key note speech: Kristalina Georgieva, European Commission, Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response (link to [video](#))

"At times of crisis we have to keep the focus on what matters most.... and that is children".

Commissioner Georgieva said that what we did of course matters more than anything else to the children who are hoping that our work will be successful so they can get out of institutions and into communities and families and have their lives enhanced, but it also matters to our society. We in Europe are living in tough times and during tough times it is so very important that the really vulnerable people are not forgotten, that they remain a priority - children who, through no fault of their own fall out of family care, especially those that need care even more, the children with disabilities, who for many decades were seen as being best dealt with in institutions. Fortunately the world came to its senses and that approach has changed. And what is very encouraging is to recognise that in Europe, not only have we come to the conclusion that this is the right way to go, but we are making progress. There are fewer children in institutions today than a decade ago, including in Bulgaria, the Commissioner's own country, and it was thanks to people who had taken this to heart and dedicated their lives to it, the people in the audience, so 'thanks goes to you!'

Why is this issue important? *First of all, it was morally right. It was morally right to give every child the chance to live in a family, the chance to live in a community.* We all knew that children who are deprived of the warmth and the care of a family, not always but more often than not, grow up with difficulties integrating into society. And living in a large institution can be a stigma for a child for a long time. So the problem we face morally is double-edged, how to help families care for their children so there are fewer children deprived of that care – families who have no means or who have, for whatever reason, been pushed to the margins of society – and when keeping children in families is not possible, for whatever reason, how to make sure that these children find a better solution than placement in a big institution. But the moral dilemma was only one part of the problem we face as a society. The other part was that *this is also economically the right thing to do.* We now have plenty of evidence that, if you take a systematic approach, what appears to be cheap, to put children in institutions, is actually more expensive to society. In the long run it costs society more. It costs more primarily because we lose the full capacity of children,

we lose their ability to contribute to a better life for everyone. *Every child matters. Every child is a treasure for society.* And that economic argument is one we also have to be addressing 'up front' in the way we frame this problem.

How can the EU help? *The first element, a very important way to help, is to provide financial support* so the issue of DI can be taken up by all countries, rich and poor, by all communities, and this is where the EU's funding instruments are important. The Regional funds, the Progress programme, the ESF, they are a very important resource and *we must make every effort to use these resources to the full.* In many countries, the possibilities are not fully tapped. Given the argument that this is morally and economically the right thing to do, *we must do more to absorb funds.* To illustrate how this can be done, Commissioner Georgieva shared examples from her own experience of 2 innovative Bulgarian projects where NGOs had accessed the economic instruments Europe offers for the benefit of children.

The second element is the EU focus on prevention as it better that children do not end up in institutions in the first place. We know that the prevention agenda has many angles – poverty, unemployment, lack of social services, stigma and discrimination, to name a few. However, *today, for Europe, the most important prevention angle is to address poverty*, poverty that is growing because of 5 years of financial crisis. It was critical for us as Europeans not to sit tight and be quiet. The crisis was generating more problems of social exclusion, especially for those that are least visible. The recent statistics on Bulgaria were heart-breaking - 46% of the vulnerable are children, because poor families have more children, because poverty hits children more. *At a time of crisis we have to be able to keep society focused on what matters most – and what matters most for Europeans is the value of solidarity, and who best to extend this value to but children.* The Commissioner reminded us that we have the Europe 2020 Strategy where addressing poverty is a major goal. The Commission has proposed that at least 25% of Cohesion funds go to the ESF and at least 20% of this for social inclusion.

The third element for European action is advocacy and bringing forward progressive policies. One thing the EC had done that Commissioner Georgieva believed was one of the best ways to help MS, was to make it a condition for MS to have in place a national strategy for poverty reduction and in this national strategy to have measures to shift from residential to community based care - DI was part of this strategy; there is a European Expert Group on transition from institutional care to community based care; and we must make sure that people with mental disabilities are given a fair chance to stand on their own feet, to be part of society, to live independently. She believed that we are now at the point where *more of this advocacy should be part of our daily lives* because an inclusive Europe is a Europe we all want our children to live in.

Commissioner Georgieva concluded by saying that this issue of caring for the most vulnerable and especially the focus on children was very dear to her heart, also because of the work she does as a Humanitarian Aid Commissioner. What she saw, time and again, was that every humanitarian emergency led to a skyrocketing of pressure and pain on the most vulnerable and especially children, many of whom were lost or separated from their families. She had introduced simple measures to prepare communities at risk of natural disaster by bringing to their attention the importance of children knowing their names, and the names of their parents, from a very early age, to make sure that there are identity documents so they can be connected again with their families. The Commissioner shared a story that had left a strong impression on her of a disabled young man, a Somali refugee, who had been taken in by another family to be part of their community. He was determined to get an education and had been helped by his foster family to get a wheel chair to go to school. He wanted to dedicate his life to helping refugees. *The moral of the story was that we can make a huge difference one child at a time and that we all have an obligation to care about that.*

Ms Hainsworth thanked Commissioner Georgieva warmly for giving time to be with us in a busy schedule. She said that it was very heart-warming and encouraging for us to know that at the highest political level within the EU we have champions. The words the Commissioner used, that every child matters, and that in a crisis we have to focus on what matters most, our children, meant that we would leave the conference inspired and very encouraged. We were honoured to have Commissioner Andor make a video address in the opening ceremony and to have Commissioner Georgieva speaking to us in the closing session.

Conference Round-Up: Jana Hainsworth, Secretary General, Eurochild (link to [video](#))

Ms Hainsworth gave a brief conference round-up - a reflection on what we'd learned and where we go from here. She said we were all committed to change but how do we create that change. She would focus on what she considered to be 3 key ingredients:

The first ingredient is a political will: We could be encouraged from what we had heard from the President, Government representatives, Minister Simeonova, that the political will for change exists in Bulgaria. We also heard from UNICEF that next month there will be a conference in Sofia where Government representatives from all over the Region will be meeting to talk about DI and the banning of placement of children under 3 years in institutions. So we had a key opportunity to motivate other countries to follow in the footsteps of Bulgaria. As civil society actors we had a responsibility to mobilise participating countries, including those from Western Europe, to take that opportunity, to learn and return home as engaged and motivated as we are leaving today. Leadership from the EU was also crucial. The conference had been addressed by Commissioner Andor and Commissioner Georgieva and we could be proud of the language they had used and the commitment they are giving to these issues. It was very inspiring and very encouraging that they had engaged as individuals to take this agenda forward.

The second ingredient is, most importantly, money: Ms Hainsworth said it was very easy, especially in the current crisis, to use money as an excuse not to act. It was a challenge to clearly articulate, and indeed quantify, what are the long term economic benefits of DI. Intuitively, we know that it makes sense but we need those accompanying arguments. We were clearly not saying that it costs less per child to place a child in family-like care than in institutions. This might be so in some cases but that was not the issue. What we believed is that government should be investing whatever is necessary to give each individual child the care and the support it needs. In some cases that might be a very significant investment but, if we got it right for every child, and if, as we heard from Commissioner Georgieva, we treat every child as an individual, we will not only transform the life of that child but will also enable the child to become an active member of society and an active member of the community in the future. We would also achieve a fundamental shift in society's mentality to appreciate that every individual has something to contribute to society. In this respect, Ms Hainsworth said she had been very inspired to hear Sean Webster from the Change initiative speaking about his role as a parent with learning disabilities and how he contributes to society. We all create a society where diversity is valued. With that come the economic benefits of avoiding long term dependency and costs associated with not realising the full potential of every child. *This is the message we need to convey to decision-makers.* We have a unique opportunity with the European Structural Funds to inject the vital resources that are needed to support the transitional phase of DI, particularly in Bulgaria and other Eastern European countries. We can use this opportunity, as reform is implemented, to monitor and evaluate the costs and the long term social and economic outcomes for children and society as a whole. We need this evidence to provide vital information for policy makers to make the right choices, with the economic arguments that substantiate those choices.

The final ingredient is 'know how': What we had heard over the last 2 days was only the 'tip of the iceberg' of the knowledge and experience that exists in transforming early intervention and prevention child care services so we will not need institutions in the future. The initiatives we had heard about on the study visits, the international practice and research presentations, the good practice exhibited at the speakers' corner – these were all evidence that there is a wealth of experience out there and we need to capitalise on this, to recognise and support what exists so that it can become mainstreamed rather than remain isolated pockets of good practice.

There was one other important factor and that was passion and certainly, within the room, we all shared a common passion for what we do. It covered all sectors, NGOs, Government officials, researchers. There was a common energy and a common agenda for us all to move forward. Ms Hainsworth concluded with a well-known quote from Margaret Mead:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has".

Closing words: George Bogdanov, Executive Director, National Network for Children, Bulgaria ([link to video](#))

Mr Bogdanov thanked everyone for being a part of what had been a wonderful conference where a lot of knowledge had been shared. It had been a great pleasure for NNC to host the conference and welcome participants to Bulgaria. He hoped we would take back all the knowledge we had gained and memories of a good experience in Bulgaria.

Annex 1 - List of participants

TITLE	FIRST NAME	FAMILY NAME	NAME OF YOUR ORGANISATION	COUNTRY
Mr	Jan	Folda	SOS Children's Villages International	Austria
Ms	Nicola	Oberzaucher	SOS Kinderdorf International	Austria
Dr	Stephan	Sting	University of Klagenfurt	Austria
Ms	Camille	Latimier	Inclusion Europe	Belgium
Ms	Kélig	Puyet	SOS Children's Villages International	Belgium
Mr	Daniel	Kropf	Universal Education Foundation	Belgium
Mr	Luis	Pinto	Universal Education Foundation	Belgium
Ms	Julia	Kragulj	Hope and Homes for Children	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Ms	Jasna	Hodzic	Hope and Homes for Children	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Ms	Senka	Čimpo	SOS Children's Villages in B&H	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Ms	Jana	Anguelova	Association of the patients with facial anomalies and their parents	Bulgaria
Dr	Apostol	Apostolov	Karin Dom Foundation	Bulgaria
Ms	Ginka	Askova	Agapedia Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Ms	Stefka	Atanassova	SOS Children Villages Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Ms	Rossitsa	Avramova	Agapedia Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Mr	Momchil	Baev	Center Amalipe	Bulgaria
Ms	Vessela	Banova	Child and Space Association	Bulgaria
Dr	Andrew	Bilson	Know How Centre on Alternatives to Care	Bulgaria
Mr	Vladimir	Bojkov	Organozation "Co-participation", Foster care Agency	Bulgaria
Ms	Iva	Boneva	Centre for Inclusive Education	Bulgaria
Ms	Albena	Boneva	Helping Hand Foundation	Bulgaria
Ms	Maria	Brestnichka	National Network for Children	Bulgaria
Mr	Rory	Cleary	Priateli Veliko Tarnovo Foundation	Bulgaria
Ms	Maria	Dantcheva	SOS Kinderdorf International, Continental Office CEE/CIS/Baltics	Bulgaria
Ms	Natalia	Delcheva	Give Smile (Podari usmivka)	Bulgaria
Ms	Nadezhda	Deneva	Lumos Foundation	Bulgaria
Mr	Georgi	Dimitrov	NGOs Center Razgrad, National NGOs Network for Courtwatch - Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Ms	Gergana	Georgieva	Social Activities and Practices Institute	Bulgaria
Ms	Anastasiya	Gotseva	SOS Children's villages Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Ms	Ivan	Ivanov	Foundation Agapedia Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Ms	Elen	Ivanova	Know-how centre for alternative care for children - NBU	Bulgaria
Ms	Emilia	Kardzilova	Worldwide Foundation for Vulnerable Children	Bulgaria
Ms	Violina	Kirova	Animus Association Foundation	Bulgaria

Ms	Tanya	Kovacheva	Oak Foundation	Bulgaria
Ms	Dashenka	Kraleva	FICE-Bulgaria, FICE-International	Bulgaria
Ms	Galina	Markova	Know-how centre for alternative care for children - NBU	Bulgaria
Ms	Antoaneta	Nenkova	Bulgarian Helsinki Committee	Bulgaria
Ms	Radostina	Paneva	SOS Children`s Villages International	Bulgaria
Ms	Evgenia	Peeva	Teach For Bulgaria (Заедно в час)	Bulgaria
Ms	Maria	Petkova	Tulip Foundation	Bulgaria
Ms	Rossi	Petrova	Lumos	Bulgaria
Ms	Nelli	Petrova-Dimitrova	Social Activities and Practices Institute	Bulgaria
Ms	Mariana	Pisarska	Alliance For Children And Youth	Bulgaria
Ms	Tanja	Radocaj	UNICEF	Bulgaria
Ms	Milena	Rizova	Agapedia Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Ms	Diana	Ruseva	LUMOS Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Ms	Lindsay	Saltsgiver	The Cedar Foundation	Bulgaria
Ms	Ivanka	Shalapatova	For Our Children Foundation	Bulgaria
Mr	Georgy	Simeonov	Hope and homes for children - branch Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Ms	Valentina	Simeonova	Deputy Minister Labour & Social Affairs	Bulgaria
Ms	Desislava	Simeonova	Bulgarian Helsinki Committee	Bulgaria
Ms	Velina	Stoyanova	SOS Children Villages - Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Ms	Madlen	Tanielyan	Social Activities and Practices Institute	Bulgaria
Ms	Nina	Todorova	SOS Children Villages Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Dr	Irina	Todorova-Lipcheva	Technical University of Varna, Department of Social sciences	Bulgaria
Ms	Tseska	Tsacheva	National Assembly	Bulgaria
Ms	Petia	Varbanova	Hope and homes for children - branch Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Ms	Veselina	Vasileva	Karin Dom	Bulgaria
Dr	Lyubomir	Zhupunov	"Child and space" Association	Bulgaria
Ms	Kresimir	Sokolic	SOS Children's Villages International	Croatia
Ms	Christina	Hadjisavva	Office of the Commissioner for Children`s Rights	Cyprus
Ms	Lucie	Sanderova	Masaryk University	Czech Republic
Ms	Bohuslava	Skořepová	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	Czech Republic
Ms	Klára	Tomková	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	Czech Republic
Ms	Klara	Ille	Office of the Public Defender of Rights	Czech Republic
Mr	Christopher	Gardiner	V Zájmu Dítěte, o.s. (VZD.cz)	Czech Republic
Ms	Tereza	Gardiner	V Zájmu Dítěte, o.s. (VZD.cz)	Czech Republic
Mr	Geert	Jorgensen	JCCI - Joint Council for Child issues	Denmark
Mr	Søren	Brink	LOS	Denmark
Ms	Jane	Snaith	NGO Oma Pere	Estonia
Ms	Hanna	Heinonen	Central Union for Child Welfare	Finland

Mr	Martti	Kemppainen	Central Union for Child Welfare	Finland
Mr	Vincent	Ramon	ANPF	France
Ms	Eugénie	Cazor	Apprentis d'Auteuil	France
Ms	Sophie	Chabaud	Apprentis D'Auteuil	France
Ms	Madjid	Bourabaa	Clenpdc	France
Ms	Justine	Honoré	CNAPE	France
Ms	Sylvie	Delcroix	SOS Villages d'Enfants	France
Ms	Anne	Williams	Williams Consulting	France
Ms	Katharina	Balmes	Active - Sobreity, Frienship, Peace	Germany
Mr	Stefan	Barth	Agapedia gGmbH	Germany
Mr	Peer	Salström-Leyh	Stiftung Leuchtfeuer	Germany
Ms	Dora	Kassimeris	Iliachtida Association for Children and Family (A Hospice for Children)	Greece
Mr	Christos	Bouritis	Roots Research Center	Greece
Ms	Natalie Georgia	Roberson	Roots Research Center	Greece
Ms	Mary	Theodoropoulou	Roots Research Center	Greece
Ms	Pavlina	Vamvoura	Roots Research Center	Greece
Mr	Odiseas	Zaimi	Roots Research Center	Greece
Ms	Ioanna	Avloniti	The Smile of the Child	Greece
Dr	Agnes	Lux	Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights	Hungary
Mr	Toby	Wolfe	Start Strong	Ireland
Mr	Seamus	Mannion	Youth Advocate Programmes Inc.	Ireland
Mr	MARCO	Cremonte	amici dei bambini	Italy
Dr	Gianni	Paone	Cgil Calabria	Italy
Ms	Beatrice	Gemma	CIFA Onlus	Italy
Mr	Ivano	Abbruzzi	Fondazione L'Albero della Vita ONLUS	Italy
Ms	Francesca	Maci	Il Grillo Parlante	Italy
Ms	Carmela	Simbari	Il Grillo Parlante	Italy
Ms	Laura	Parker	Independent consultant (formerly Director ARK Bulgaria)	Italy
Mr	Alessandro	Negro	Independent expert	Italy
Mr	Marco	Acali	Intermedia Consulting Ngo	Italy
Mr	Gianluca	Limon de Jesus	Intermedia Consulting Ngo	Italy
Mr	Francesco	Planelli	Intermedia Consulting Ngo	Italy
Mr	Reynaldo	Rivera	Intermedia Consulting Ngo	Italy
Dr	Vito	Giacalone	Mentoring Usa Italia	Italy
Ms	Kristine	Veispale	SOS Children's Villages Latvia	Latvia
Mr	Dainius	Puras	Human Rights Monitoring Institute	Lithuania
Ms	Eivile	Zemaityte	Office of the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights of the Republic of Lithuania	Lithuania
Dr	Patricia	Bonello	Agenzija Appogg	Malta
Ms	Annalise	Brigulgio	Angela House	Malta

Ms	Sina	Bugeja	Foundation for Social Welfare Services	Malta
Ms	Melissa	Mifsud	Foundation for Social Welfare Services	Malta
Ms	Debbie	Zammit	Foundation for Social Welfare Services	Malta
Mr	Nicholas	Vella Laurenti	Office of the Commissioner for Children, Malta	Malta
Dr	Ludmila	Malcoci	Keystone Human Services International Moldova Association	Moldova
Mr	Albertus	Benning	Eigen Kracht Centrale	Netherlands
Ms	Lineke	Joanknecht	Eigen Kracht Centrale	Netherlands
Mr	Arie	Koster	Eigen Kracht Centrale	Netherlands
Mr	Robert	van Pagee	Eigen Kracht Centrale	Netherlands
Mr	Sanja	Kuzmanovic	Foster Care Center Rotterdam	Netherlands
Mr	Rene	de Bot	Foster Care Centre Rotterdam	Netherlands
Mr	Tim	de Jong	Mobiel, magazine for foster care	Netherlands
Ms	Lindy	Popma	Mobiel, magazine for foster care	Netherlands
Dr	Nataliya	Dobrova-Krol	Socires	Netherlands
Mr	Eric	Bloemkolk	SOFT Tulip	Netherlands
Ms	Thea	van Zwieten	StichtingEigen Kracht Centrale	Netherlands
Ms	Svanhild	Vik	Buadir	Norway
Ms	Renata	Szredzińska	Nobody's CHildren Foundation	Poland
Ms	Olga	Fonseca	CEBI Foundation	Portugal
Ms	Mariama	Diallo	Ambassade de France en Roumanie	Romania
Ms	Regina	Bulai	FARA Foundation	Romania
Ms	Alexandra	Vlasceanu	Fundatia Inima de Copil	Romania
Dr	Stefan	Darabus	Hope and Homes for Children Romania	Romania
Ms	Adina	Burlacu	SOS Children's Villages Romania	Romania
Ms	Irina	Aglicheva	My Generation	Russia
Mr	Sasa	Stefanovic	Association for Development of Children and Youth – Open Club	Serbia and Montenegro
Ms	Sladjana	Mitrovic	Child Rights Centre	Serbia and Montenegro
Mr	Guillem	Compte	Fundació Plataforma Educativa	Spain
Ms	Ana	Ancheta	Fundación Montessori Sin Fronteras	Spain
Ms	Patricia	Quilez	Resilis Foundation	Spain
Ms	Pia-Maria	Johansson	Regionförbundet Örebro	Sweden
Mr	Urban	Svensson	Regionförbundet Örebro	Sweden
Ms	Darya	Kasyanova	Foundation for Development of Ukraine	Ukraine
Ms	Liudmyla	Volynets	Office of Ombudsman for Children under the President of Ukraine	Ukraine
Ms	Vasylyna	Dybaylo	Partnership for Every Child	Ukraine
Ms	Halyna	Postoliuk	Representative charity "Hope and Homes for Children" in Ukraine	Ukraine
Dr	Roxana	Anghel	Anglia Ruskin University	United Kingdom
Ms	Claire	Milligan	ARK	United Kingdom

Mr	Jeffrey	Coleman	BAAF	United Kingdom
Ms	Anne	Mackay	change	United Kingdom
Mr	Shaun	Webster	change	United Kingdom
Ms	Alison	Todd	Children 1st	United Kingdom
Ms	Joy	Poots	Children in Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
Ms	Pauline	Leeson	Children in Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
Mr	Tony	Ivens	Children in Wales	United Kingdom
Mr	Sean	O'Neill	Children in Wales	United Kingdom
Ms	Lynne	Hill	Children in Wales	United Kingdom
Ms	Gabrielle	Jerome	Core Assets	United Kingdom
Ms	Lis	Gohrisch	Daybreak Family Group Conferences	United Kingdom
Ms	Marilyn	Taylor	Daybreak Family Group Conferences	United Kingdom
Ms	Anne	Begbie	Edinburgh City Council family Decision Making Team	United Kingdom
Ms	Denise	Malone	Edinburgh City Council Family Decision Making Team	United Kingdom
Mr	Alfonso	Lara Montero	European Social Network	United Kingdom
Dr	Delia	Pop	Hope and Homes for Children	United Kingdom
Mr	Mark	Waddington	Hope and Homes for Children	United Kingdom
Ms	Galina	Pourcheva-Bisset	Hope and Homes for Children UK	United Kingdom
Ms	Sally	Whitaker	Independent consultant	United Kingdom
Ms	Sarah	Milan	Independent Member	United Kingdom
Mr	Ian	Johnston	International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)	United Kingdom
Ms	Britta	Schoelin	International Foster Care Organisation	United Kingdom
Ms	Michelle	McCabe	Lifestart Foundation	United Kingdom
Ms	Angela	Carty	London Borough of Havering	United Kingdom
Ms	Mandy	Butler	London Borough of Havering FGC team	United Kingdom
Ms	Dita	Gill	London Metropolitan University	United Kingdom
Ms	Sue	Hobbs	National Care Advisory Service	United Kingdom
Mr	Ross	Oke	Truth and Reconciliation for the Adoption Community of Korea (TRACK)	United Kingdom
Dr	Cath	Larkins	University of Central Lancashire	United Kingdom
Ms	Vivian	McConvey	Voice of Young People in Care	United Kingdom
Ms	Deborah	Jones	Voices From Care	United Kingdom
Mr	Wesley	Gibson		United Kingdom

INVITED SPEAKERS

Mr	Haralan	Aleksandrov	Social Anthropologist	Bulgaria
Ms	Audrone	Bedorf	Office of the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights of the Republic of Lithuania	Lithuania
Ms	Marina	Dimitrova	National Network for Children	National Network for Children
Ms	Kristalina	Georgieva	Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response	European Commission

Ms	Sharon	Gibson	Isle of Man College	United Kingdom
Ms	Maria	Herczog	President, Eurochild	Hungary
Ms	Dani	Koleva	National Network for Children	Bulgaria
Mr	Jean-Claude	Legrand	UNICEF	Switzerland
Ms	Nevena	Madjarova	National Network for Children - Chairperson of the Board, National Network for Children	Bulgaria
Ms	Marie-Anne	Parasekvas	European Commission, DG Employment	European Commission
Mr	Carsten	Rasmussen	DG Regio, European Commission	European Commission
Ms	Margaret	Tuite	DG Justice, European Commission	European Commission
Ms	Dima	Yared	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights	United Nations

FACILITATORS YOUNG PEOPLE PROGRAMME

Ms	Danielle	Douglas		
Ms	Jean Anne	Kennedy	Power4Youth	
Mr	Ronan	Mangan	Coordinator Young people programme, Eurochild	

NATIONAL NETWORK FOR CHILDREN STAFF

Mr	George	Bogdanov	Executive Director	
Mr	Yvo	Bojkov	Project Assistant	
Ms	Marusya	Tsvetkova	Expert projects and programs	
Ms	Mariana	Bancheva	Education & Health Policy Coordinator	
Ms	Vyara	Ivanova	Family & Child Justice Policy Coordinator	
Ms	Ana	Kolarova	Fundraising Director	

EUROCHILD STAFF

Ms	Janina	Arsenjeva	Policy Director	
Mr	Björn	Becker	Communications Officer	
Ms	Michela	Costa	Policy Officer	
Ms	Agata	D'Addato	Policy Officer	
Ms	Marie	Dubit	Membership and Marketing Officer	
Ms	Ana Hilaria	Espin	Communications Intern	
Ms	Jana	Hainsworth	Secretary General	
Ms	Monique	Kesteloot	Office & Events Manager	
Ms	Mafalda	Marinho Leal	Policy Officer	
Ms	Nicoleta	Popstoeva	Policy Intern	
Ms	Reka	Tunyogi	Parliamentary Officer	

Annex 2 – Programme

WEDNESDAY 24 OCTOBER

INTERNAL MEETINGS OF EUROCHILD'S THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS

These meetings are primarily for Eurochild members of the Thematic Working groups. Other registered delegates may attend as observers.

12.15-13.30 LUNCH – MERIDIEN RESTAURANT

13.30-16.30 TWG on Early childhood education & care – *meeting room : Safir*

13.30-17.00 TWG on Children in alternative care – *meeting room : Europe I*

13.30-17.00 TWG on Family and parenting support – *meeting room : Europe II*

19.00-22.00 OFFICIAL OPENING & RECEPTION – DIAMOND HALL

19.00-19.45 OFFICIAL OPENING

Nevena Madjarova, Chairperson of the Board of the National Network for Children, Bulgaria

Maria Herczog, President, Eurochild, Member of the UNCRC Committee, Director of Family, Child and Youth Association, Hungary

László Andor, European Commissioner for employment, social affairs and inclusion (video address)

Representative(s) from the meeting of children and young people with care experience

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

19.45-22.00 BUFFET DINNER & COFFEE & TEA

THURSDAY 25 OCTOBER

9.00-12.00 OPENING PLENARY – RUBY HALL

Chairs: **Jana Hainsworth**, Secretary General, Eurochild & **George Bogdanov**, Executive Director, National Network for Children, Bulgaria

09.00-9.15 OPENING SESSION

Tsetska Tsacheva, Official welcome, Chairwoman of the National Assembly, Bulgaria

Jana Hainsworth, George Bogdanov, Conference road map

9.15–10.15 THE POLICY CONTEXT FOR IMPROVING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN ALTERNATIVE CARE IN EUROPE

Marie-Anne Paraskevas, European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs & Employment, European Social Fund

Dima Yared, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Regional Office for Europe

Jean-Claude Legrand, Senior Regional Advisor Child Protection, UNICEF Regional Office CEE-CIS

Discussion

10.15–11.00 WHY IS A CHILD-RIGHTS APPROACH TO ALTERNATIVE CARE SO IMPORTANT?

Sharon Gibson, Young person with care experience, Isle of Man College Sessional Lecturer, British Isles

Questions & answers**11.00-12.00 LESSONS LEARNT ON DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION IN BULGARIA**

Valentina Simeonova, Deputy Minister of Labour & Social Policy, Bulgaria

Dani Koleva & Marina Dimitrova, National Network for Children, Bulgaria

Carsten Rasmussen, European Commission, DG Regio, EU policy & funding

Discussion**12.00-13.15 LUNCH – MERIDIEN RESTAURANT**

13.15-13.30 TRANSPORT TO STUDY VISITS - Buses will leave from outside the hotel for the different study visits. Each bus will bear the reference of the Study Visit. Information on the participants registered for each Study Visit and which bus to take will be displayed at the registration desk. Following the study visits delegates will be taken by the same buses **directly to the venue of the official reception** with the President of Bulgaria.

14.30-17.30 WORKSHOPS & STUDY VISITS

Workshop sessions are split into Thursday pm and Friday am. Presentations of international good practices will take place at the Study Visit locations, on Thursday. Presentations of research projects will take place at the hotel, on Friday.

WORKSHOP	A - CLOSING OF INSTITUTIONS		B - 0-3S PREVENTING CHILD ABANDONMENT		C - SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES	
	A1 Social Activities and Practices Institute	A2 Hope and Homes for Children	B1 For Our Children Foundation	B2 Animus Association	C1 Cedar Foundation	C2 Child and Space Association
STUDY VISITS	Community Support Centre in Sofia that works mainly with biological parents & children. Includes a presentation on the on-going closure of an institution by SAPI far from Sofia.	HHC Office in Sofia where participants will hear about the closure of an institution for children aged 0 to 3 (infant home) in the city of Teteven.	Community Support Centre in Sofia working with parents of children in care as well as for prevention of placement	Center providing social services for children and families including a "Mother and baby" unit.	Cedar Foundation office and presentation of their services - small group homes for children with disabilities and protected homes located outside Sofia.	Presentation of a Small Group Home for children with disabilities and the association's work related to the closure of an institution (Mogilino).
	New Homes, new beginnings – Hope and Homes for Children Romania	Closing institutions for persons with severe intellectual disabilities: methodology, achievements and lessons learned – KHSIMA (Moldova)	Family strengthening and prevention of child abandonment at the age of 0-3 years - SOS Children's Villages Latvia & Romania	Towards elimination of institutional placement of children from 0 to 3 in Europe: Components of success and the need for in-depth analysis of resistance - Vilnius University, Lithuania	Hearing the voices of children and young people with learning disabilities - Change-People (Rights of Children), UK	Early intervention and rehabilitation centre for children with disabilities - Heart of a Child, Romania

WORKSHOP	D - WORKING WITH BIOLOGICAL FAMILIES OF CHILDREN IN CARE			E - SUPPORTING CHILDREN LEAVING CARE	
STUDY VISIT	D1 Tulip Foundation	D2 Health and Social Development Foundation	D3 Alliance for Children and Youth	E1 SOS Children's Villages Bulgaria	E2 AGAPEDIA Bulgaria Foundation
	Tulip Foundation office in Sofia - presentation about how Family Group Conferencing is being introduced in Bulgaria	Heath & social centre in the biggest Roma neighbourhood in Sofia	Day centre for street children which offers support to families to encourage them to take their children back from the streets.	Youth house in Sofia for children under the age of consent who have lived in SOS children's villages.	Presentation of small group homes and programmes for the support of care leavers.
INTERNATIONAL GOOD PRACTICE	How Norway is involving children in decision making in Family Group Conferencing – FGC Norway	In situ: Returning Home Support Program - Resilis Foundation, Catalunya – Spain	In the child's best interest? – Managing contact between children in alternative care and their birth families in a Maltese context - Agenzija Appogg	Supporting young people making the transition from Government care to adulthood in England - National Care Advisory Service, UK	A Step to the Future – How to Help Young People Leaving Care Find Their Way: - Hope and Homes for Children Bosnia and Herzegovina

19.00-21.00 OFFICIAL RECEPTION WITH THE BULGARIAN PRESIDENT

Reception (walking dinner) hosted by **Rosen Plevneliev**, President of the Republic of Bulgaria. Joined by European Ambassadors and Social Attachés.

21.00-23.00 SOCIAL EVENT - LESSONS IN TRADITIONAL FOLK DANCES, SOFIA LIVE CLUB

After the reception, delegates are invited to the Sofia Live Club (walking distance from the reception venue). Buses back to the hotel will leave from the Sofia Live Club at 23.00. Delegates wishing to go back to the hotel earlier or immediately after the reception will receive information on public transport, taxis or walking route.

FRIDAY 26 OCTOBER

9.00-11.00 WORKSHOPS

Each workshop includes: **feedback from the study visits** from the designated rapporteurs and **Q&A**; a **presentation of a research study** / transnational project linked to the workshop themes; and a **final discussion**.

WORKSHOP	A CLOSING OF INSTITUTIONS Room : Europe I	B 0-3S PREVENTING CHILD ABANDONMENT Room : Europe II	C SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES Room : Safir	D WORKING WITH BIOLOGICAL FAMILIES OF CHILDREN IN CARE Room : Opal	E SUPPORTING CHILDREN LEAVING CARE Room : Ruby
RESEARCH PROJECT	Alternatives to institutions in Bulgaria and Brazil : Appreciating best practice - EveryChild and Know How Centre	Child Abandonment in Europe - Results of Daphne project on abandonment - Family, Child, Youth Association	The implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child for children with intellectual disabilities - Inclusion Europe	Comparative study of siblings in alternative care in Germany, Austria, France, Italy and Spain - Alpen-Adria University of Klagenfurt	In the eye of the beholder: interpreting the UN Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children and the case of leaving care - Anglia Ruskin University

11.00-11.30 COFFEE BREAK – MERIDIEN RESTAURANT

11.30-14.00 FORUM OF GOOD PRACTICE – DIAMOND HALL (INCLUDES BUFFET LUNCH 12.00-13.30)

There are 3 'speaker corners' set up in the exhibition hall and 4 time slots, offering a total of 12 individual presentations. The exhibition stands will also be open during this period.

The presentations are scheduled as follows:

11.35-12.05 SESSION 1

- 1A) *Preventing the separation of children from their families in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Review of Hope and Homes for Children ACTIVE Family Support - Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2003-2010*

Julia Kragulj, Regional Child Care Advisor, Hope and Homes for Children (HHC), Bosnia and Herzegovina

- 1B) *Five Nations One Voice: Raising our coordinated and amplified voice for care experienced children and young people*

Vivian McConvey, Chief Executive, Voice of Young People in Care, Northern Ireland; **Deborah Jones**, Chief Executive, Voices from Care Cymru, Wales

- 1C) *Sibling relations in alternative care*

Sylvie Delcroix, Technical Advisor, SOS Children's Villages France

12.10-12.40 SESSION 2

- 2A) *The Ombudsman's voice for Deinstitutionalisation: A comprehensive investigation on children in care under 3 years*

Agnes Lux, Head of Unit, Office of Commissioner for Fundamental Rights in Hungary

- 2B) *How a children's rights based approach can support social workers to build positive relationships and improve contact between children in alternative care and their families*

Cath Larkins, Senior Research Fellow, University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), UK

- 2C) *Working with biological families and supporting children and young adults leaving care*

Ioanna Avloniti, International Cooperation Coordinator 'The Smile of the Child', Greece

12.45-13.15 SESSION 3

- 3A) *Early Intervention Service for Children with Disabilities: The family-centred approach*

Apostol Apostolov, Programmes Evaluator & **Vesseline Vassileva**, Projects Coordinator, Karin Dom Foundation, Varna, Bulgaria

- 3B) *Family Group Decision Making: An Edinburgh prospectus*

Anne Begbie & **Denise Malone**, Family Group Coordinators, City of Edinburgh Council, Scotland, UK

- 3C) *Fostercare Treatment not Punishment: Piloting a Family Treatment programme with young offenders in Greece*

Mary Theodoropoulou & **Natalie Georgia Roberson**, Roots Research Centre, Athens, Greece

13.20-13.50 SESSION 4

- 4A) *The Right to Quality Early Childhood Education and Care for Children under 3 years old living in prison in Spain*

Ana Ancheta Arrabal, Doctor Assistant Professor, University of Valencia, Faculty of Philosophy and Educational Sciences & Fundacion Montessori Sin Fronteras, Spain

- 4B) *The Family Strengthening Programme as a response in the prevention of child abandonment*

Senka Cimpio, Family Strengthening Project Coordinator, SOS Children's Villages Bosnia and Herzegovina

- 4C) *Prohibiting and eliminating corporal punishment in all alternative care settings*

Ian Johnston, International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), European Executive Committee, UK

14.00-16.00 CLOSING PLENARY – RUBY HALL

Chairs: **Jana Hainsworth**, Secretary General, Eurochild & **George Bogdanov**, Executive Director, National Network for Children

14.00-14.15 PRESENTATION BY THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CARE EXPERIENCE

14.15–15.30 REALISING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE IN ALTERNATIVE CARE

Facilitator: **Haralan Aleksandrov**, Ph.D, Social anthropologist, Bulgaria

Panel discussion: **Margaret Tuite**, European Commission, DG Justice, Child Rights Coordinator
Tanja Radocaj, UNICEF Representative, Bulgaria
Audrone Bedorf, Senior adviser to the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights, Lithuania

15.30-16.00 CLOSING SESSION

Key note speech: **Kristalina Georgieva**, European Commission, Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response

Conference Round-Up, **Jana Hainsworth**, Secretary General, Eurochild

Taster for the 2013 Eurochild Annual Conference, **Albero della Vita**, Italy

Closing words, **George Bogdanov**, Executive Director, National Network for Children, Bulgaria

Annex 3 - Plenary speakers biographies



Nevena Madzharova, Chairwoman of the Board, National Network for Children, Bulgaria

Nevena Madzharova is Chairwoman of the Board of the National Network for Children and one of the founders of the network. Since 2004, she has been Chair of the Club of Non-profit Organisations in the City of Targovishte. The Club unites 33 NGOs from the region and since its establishment has implemented more than 40 projects, including projects financed by EU programmes. Ms Madzharova has been working in the sphere of cultural management for many years. For the last decade, her professional activities have been dedicated to the support of vulnerable groups including children at risk. She is Deputy Chair of the Regional Council for Social Inclusion as well as a member of the Municipal Committee for the Child. In parallel with her work in the social field, Ms Madzharova has implemented numerous projects aimed at active civil participation including the participation of children and young people. She is a member of the board of the Civic Participation Forum that unites NGOs working for better protection of citizens' interests and civil rights. She has been steadily working for many years for the formation of a strong and independent civil sector, including civil monitoring of the activities of institutions and local authorities. Ms Madzharova has written many publications on topical issues concerning the civil sector in Bulgaria.



George Bogdanov, Executive Director, National Network for Children, Bulgaria

George Bogdanov is the Executive Director of the National Network for Children, a network of 109 leading Bulgarian NGOs working with children and families. He has a Master of Arts Degree in European Social Policy and Social Work. Highly experienced in project management and research in the social sphere, he has worked for the implementation of a number of projects concerning deinstitutionalisation, development of social services and antidiscrimination policies for children and vulnerable groups. In addition, he has long experience in delivering training, learning programmes and modules in the civic sector. Mr Bogdanov has a significant background in working with civil groups, NGOs and the Roma community in Bulgaria, as well as with isolated communities, adopting a community development approach. He has worked as a consultant for 'Charity Know How' - Great Britain, and as an evaluation consultant for UNICEF and the World Bank. As a national expert, he is a member of two networks of the European Commission - currently, as socio-economic expert in the field of anti-discrimination and non-governmental expert with DG Employment Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. He is also an expert on social inclusion issues for Bulgaria. Mr Bogdanov is the author and co-author of a number of reports and research reports in the spheres of child welfare, civic organisations, decentralisation, poverty and social inclusion, health, social services and antidiscrimination.



Tssetska Tsacheva Dangovska, Chairwoman of the National Assembly, Bulgaria

Ms Tsacheva will welcome participants at the opening of the conference in her capacity as Chairwoman of the Bulgarian Parliament.

Marie-Anne Paraskevas is a Principal Administrator at the European Commission and she comes from Greece. She studied Law and Political Sciences at Athens University. After a postgraduate course on European Law at the College of Europe in Bruges, she joined the Legal Service of the European Commission in 1980. Since 1995, Ms Paraskevas has been working in the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, firstly on gender equality issues and, from 2004, on issues relating to social inclusion and the fight against poverty. In September 2011, she took up the coordination of the team working on the transnational dimension of the European Social Fund.



Dima Yared, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Regional Office for Europe

Dima Yared is Human Rights Officer at the Regional Office for Europe of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, based in Brussels. Her areas of focus include the rights of the child, rights of persons with disabilities and civil and political rights. Prior to joining the Regional Office, she assisted the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and worked on the Universal Periodic Review, as well as within the Rule of Law section at OHCHR. Prior to joining OHCHR, Ms Yared worked at an NGO engaging armed non-state actors on the involvement of children in armed conflict.



Jean-Claude Legrand, Senior Regional Advisor Child Protection, UNICEF Regional Office CEE-CIS

Jean-Claude Legrand has been working with UNICEF since 1993, mainly in the field of child protection. From 1991 to 1993, he worked for a UN Special Representative. From 1985 to 1991, he worked for NGOs, mainly in situations of emergency and armed conflicts - AICF²⁶, MSF²⁷ France, International Rescue Committee and Oxfam-UK (in Sudan, Malawi and Mozambique). Before that he was a sociology lecturer in France. M Legrand was the Senior Advisor for children in armed conflict for UNICEF, based in New York, from 1997 to 2001 and UNICEF Regional Child Protection Advisor for West and Central Africa from 2002 to 2007. Since October 2007, he has been UNICEF Child Protection Advisor for CEE-CIS. M Legrand is a French national with an academic background in sociology and law.



Sharon Gibson, Isle of Man College, Sessional Lecturer, British Isles

Sharon Gibson resides in the Isle of Man which is part of the British Isles. She studied at London Metropolitan University and gained an LLB Law Degree. She enjoys Human Rights and Child Rights and aims to specialise in this area once she has qualified as a barrister, as well as Family and Child Law. She is currently teaching at the Isle of Man College of Further and Higher Education on the BA Business Degree course, which carries law modules on employment law, tort, the European Union and contract law. Ms Gibson has also worked with 'Who Cares? Scotland', an organisation run by and for children and young people in care, which advocates on behalf of the child in ensuring their rights as individuals are not ignored but promoted by care establishments. Ms Gibson came into law because she was a child

²⁶ Action Internationale Contre la Faim

²⁷ Médecins sans Frontières

in state care until 1991 and, as far as she can see, not a lot of things have changed for the better since she left state care. She felt her skills and knowledge of working voluntarily in the care sector for (roughly) 15 years were best suited to pursuing a career in child rights and policy issues concerning children and young people in state care. This is her first academic paper for a major conference and she hopes to write many more in the future.



Valentina Simeonova, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), Bulgaria

Minister Simeonova is a graduate in Bulgarian Philology from Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'. She has specialisms in the social and educational sphere (from France, Denmark, Ireland, England), including models of working with children, prevention of violence of children at school and family counselling. She worked as Director of 'Standards and Analysis' in the State Agency for Child Protection and was Head of the team that conducted two national assessments of specialist institutions for children, one of the authors of the methodology for social services for children. From November 2007, she was Deputy Mayor for Education and Social Activities in the Municipality of Sofia, 'Slatina' district, and from August 2009, has been Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Policy. In this capacity, she organises and coordinates the activities of the MLSP in the following areas: Policy on Social Assistance and Social Services; Policy for Children; Policy for Persons with Disabilities; Decade for Roma Inclusion. She supervises and coordinates the activities of the Agency for Social Assistance, State Agency for Child Protection, Agency for Persons with Disabilities and the Social Investment Fund Project 'Social Inclusion'.



Dani Koleva, Child Policy Director, National Network for Children, Bulgaria

Dani Koleva is a graduate in finance and business administration (MBA) from the New Bulgarian University. She has been working as Policy Director for the National Network for Children since January 2010. Before that, she worked as Operations Manager for ARK Bulgaria and Programme Director of EveryChild Bulgaria and the European Children's Trust, where she was Programme Officer for Central and South East Europe. She has more than 10 years' experience of field work in the deinstitutionalisation sphere and the development of preventative and alternative services for children and families. She also has significant practical and management experience in the area of children's rights. Ms Koleva is experienced in the management and implementation of projects and programme development, as well as the analysis and assessment of policies, projects and services for children and families. She has provided evaluation input for the Velux, Tulip, OAK, FRGI²⁸ and Dimiter Berbatov Foundations and BAPID²⁹ as part of their funding programmes and/or initiatives.



Marina Dimitrova, National Network for Children, Bulgaria

Marina Dimitrova was raised in institutions for children deprived of parental care in Bulgaria up to the age of 18 years. She graduated from vocational secondary school and, at the beginning of her career, worked for ten years in a factory in the food-oil industry. She also has experience in a building company as a technical assistant. Influenced by an acquaintance who decided to abandon her child to an institution, she determined to become a foster parent. After 15 years of work experience in different companies and organisations, this has now been realised. During her entire professional life, Ms Dimitrova has worked as a volunteer, including volunteering in institutions for children deprived of parental care.

²⁸ Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation

²⁹ Bulgarian Association for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities



Carsten Rasmussen, European Commission, DG Regio, EU policy & funding

Carsten Rasmussen has been with the European Commission since 1993. For the last 5 years he has been a Deputy Head of Unit responsible for overseeing part of the European Union's cohesion policy in Bulgaria. He previously worked within the same policy area on the Hungarian, Cypriot and Slovak desks, and before that on the implementation of higher education programmes in a number of ex-Soviet republics. He holds a major in German language and literature and a minor in political science from the University of Aarhus, Denmark and further studied in France and Germany. Since 2008, Mr Rasmussen has been deeply involved in the negotiations leading to the conclusion of the Bulgarian Government's de-institutionalisation strategy and the earmarking of EU funds for the financing of the transition process.



Haralan Alexandrov

Haralan Alexandrov is an anthropologist, an organisational consultant and analyst of social processes. His interests lie in identity issues, self-organisation of human groups and communities, social development and cultural change. His first PhD dissertation was on the identity of Bulgarian Muslims and the second was on organisational change and leadership. Mr Alexandrov teaches at the New Bulgarian University and is a member of the Bulgarian Institute for Relationships among People. He is also a project consultant in the sphere of education, local development and child care.



Margaret Tuite, European Commission, DG Justice, Child Rights Coordinator

Margaret Tuite has been the EC Coordinator for the Rights of the Child since 1 November 2011 in DG Justice and Fundamental Rights, in the Unit responsible for fundamental rights and the rights of the child, where the focus is on implementation of the EU Agenda for the rights of the child³⁰. The 2012 implementation of the EU Agenda includes the launch of a major study to collect data on children's involvement in administrative, civil and criminal judicial proceedings for EU-27. Ms Tuite and a small team ensure proactive coordination within the Commission and also with external stakeholders. A long-serving Commission official, in her previous post as Deputy Head of Unit for criminal law, Ms Tuite was responsible for European e-Justice³¹, contributing to the improvement of access to justice and cross-border judicial cooperation.



Tanja Radocaj, UNICEF Representative in Bulgaria

Tanja Radocaj was appointed UNICEF Representative in Bulgaria in 2009. Although Bulgaria is an EU member country, UNICEF still maintains a strong collaboration with the Government with the joint aim of addressing a wide unfinished agenda for children, from the development of a comprehensive child care system to addressing poverty and social exclusion of certain population

³⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-agenda/index_en.htm

³¹ <https://e-justice.europa.eu/home.do?plang=en&action=home>

groups. In the period 2002-2009, Ms. Radocaj led the UNICEF team in Croatia, where the office successfully tested a new model of UNICEF engagement, the 'self-funded office', whereby support and funding were mobilised from Croatian citizens, companies and civil society to improve the situation of children. Ms. Radocaj first joined UNICEF during the Kosovo crisis, where she was recruited as a child protection and social services specialist and seconded to the provisional UNMIK Government³² to assure an adequate focus on child protection issues. In the period prior to this, Ms. Radocaj was engaged in assisting victims of war in the former Yugoslavia through her work with state social services (1991-1993) and the International Rescue Committee (1993-1997). In the aftermath of the war, this work continued through a local civil society organisation she founded, 'MI' ('We'), which focused on post-war reconciliation, community building and development of social services. Ms. Radocaj is of Croatian nationality and began her career as a counsellor in public social services, dealing with children and families at risk. She obtained her MA in psychology at Zagreb University.



Audronė Bedorf, Senior adviser to the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights, Lithuania

Audronė Bedorf is a Senior Adviser to the Lithuanian Ombudsperson for Children's Rights and a lawyer by profession. She has more than eleven years' experience working in the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights, which was established at the end of 2000. The main areas of activity are education, socialisation, juvenile justice, law enforcement and protection of child victims' rights. The main functions are: monitoring of child rights protection; identification of violations of child rights; drafting proposals on measures to improve child rights protection; legal framework, formulation and implementation of the child rights protection policy; participation in the sittings and meetings organised by the Parliament, Government, Ministries and other institutions and organisations, etc. Ms Bedorf has participated in working groups, projects and surveys on the situation of children in residential care and education institutions, work with delinquent children in children socialisation centres, the situation of children whose parents are placed in psycho-neurological residential care homes, reform of child rights institutional system, prevention and combating human (children) trafficking, protection of children against sexual exploitation, etc.



Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva, European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response

Kristalina Georgieva joined the European Commission in February 2010. Since 1993 she has held various positions at the World Bank, including Environmental Economist, Sector Manager on Environment for the East Asia and Pacific Region and Director in charge of the World Bank environmental strategy, policies and lending. In 2004 she became World Bank Director for the Russian Federation. In 2007-2008 she held the position of Director for Sustainable Development and finally was appointed Vice President and Corporate Secretary of the World Bank Group. Commissioner Georgieva holds an MA in Political Economy and Sociology and a PhD in Economic Science from the University of National and World Economy in Sofia. Between 1977 and 1993, she worked as Associate Professor at the University and was a Research Fellow at the London School of Economics, which included one year as Visiting Professor at Fiji's University of the South Pacific and the Australian National University. In 1991, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, she did post-graduate research in environmental policy, co-led a course on economies in transition, and consulted on environmental policy in Eastern Europe. Commissioner Georgieva has served as a board member of several educational and environmental organisations. She is currently a member of the Board of Trustees of the University of National and World Economy, Sofia. She has written more than 100 publications on environmental and economic policy topics, including a textbook on microeconomics.

³² the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo

Annex 4 - Workshops summaries

WORKSHOP A: CLOSING OF INSTITUTIONS

A1 - New Homes New beginnings

■ **Presenter:** Ștefan Dărăbuș, Country Director, Hope and Homes for Children, Romania

The context of the presentation is the closure of 'Ghiocelul' Institution, located in Bacau County, which aimed to provide family-type solutions for the 81 children and youngsters in the institution and for those entering the institution during the project³³. On a wider scale, the project targeted a reduction in the number of children in institutions in Bacau County and the increased capacity of professionals within Bacau County Child Protection Directorate (CPD). The approach of HHC Romania was two-fold, firstly, involving the local and county authorities in order to provide project sustainability and increased capacity in the CPD and local authorities to manage such closure projects, and secondly, providing individualised solutions for all children in the institution according to their needs and future development.

Of the 81 children and youngsters in the institution and 12 more admitted during the project, 6 were reintegrated with birth families, 2 placed in foster care, 46 in new Small Group Homes, and 39 supported by existing services at county level. An additional 72 children with special needs and learning disabilities were prevented from entering the institution and were kept with their families.

What attendees will learn from the presentation:

- *DI is child focused.* A child's last move should be a positive change. Each child needs the opportunity to show his/her potential because each child is unique
- *DI is a dynamic and flexible process.* It needs a thorough plan and an approach that focuses on the child in the institution and the context outside the institution because children have to go back to their families. Closing the institution is not a purpose in itself. It is a result in the process of creating alternative, family-based services
- *DI is a contextualised approach.* For sustainability, the state authorities must be involved in all stages of the process and need support to see the process through. The solutions found need to be individualised and provided within the wider context of the family and community. A context must also be created that avoids further institutionalisation of children. Thus a prevention programme is paramount for each DI process

Ștefan Dărăbuș holds a PhD from the Babes Bolyai University in Cluj (2009) and an MBA from The Open University, UK (2012). With 15 years of childcare experience, his professional focus is on childcare system reform, change and strategic management, organisational and capacity development. He is a consultant at national and international level for social welfare purposes and carries out technical assistance projects on management, de-institutionalisation and childcare system reform in Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine and Bosnia. As a National Director of Hope and Homes for Children Romania since 2004, Dr Dărăbuș works with the national government and local authorities to implement child care reform in Romania. He is co-author of several published studies and research, such as: *De-Institutionalisation: A Methodological Guide* (published by the High Level Group for Romanian Children, The National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights, HHC and UNICEF in 2005); *De-Institutionalising and Transforming Children's Services: A guide to Good Practice* (published through the European Commission Daphne Programme in 2007); various studies and good practice guides in childcare; *A Methodological Guide to Preventing Child Separation from Families* (HHC Romania printing house, 2011). He was also a General Coordinator of the *Audit of Social Services for Children in Romania*, published by HHC Romania printing house in 2012.

³³ More data on the project can be found at: <http://hhc.ro/en/project/ghiocelul-bacau>.

A2 - Closing the institution for persons with severe intellectual disabilities: methodology, achievements and lessons learned

■ **Presenter:** **Ludmila Malcoci**, Executive Director, Keystone Human Services International Moldova Association (KHSIMA)

The presentation is focused on the KHSIMA experiences and lessons learned during the process of de-institutionalisation of children and adults with severe intellectual disabilities from 'Orhei' institution³⁴. The presenter will cover both aspects of the process, ie: methodology for the de-institutionalisation and challenges faced by the organisation during the process of de-institutionalisation. Special attention will be paid to the development of community based social care services and the development of a legal framework for services as an important factor for social inclusion of de-institutionalised persons.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- Methodology for de-institutionalisation of persons with severe intellectual disabilities
- Barriers that occur during the de-institutionalisation process and ways to overcome the barriers
- How to ensure the social inclusion of de-institutionalised persons
- The sustainability of newly developed community based social care services

Ludmila Malcoci is a PhD Habilitate in Social Sciences and Senior Scientific Researcher. She is a highly qualified specialist with more than 20 years' experience of applied research in sociology and is a Member of the Association of Sociologists and Demographers. Dr Malcoci has worked for more than 15 years in different projects supported by the World Bank, USAID, UNDP, UNICEF³⁵ and the Soros Foundation related to community development, social protection of vulnerable groups and public health. Since 2008, she has been working as Programme Director of the 'Community for All – Moldova' programme implemented by KHSIMA, in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, and supported by OSF/MHI³⁶ Budapest and the Soros Moldova Foundation. In 2011, she was appointed Executive Director of KHSIMA. She has published 17 monographs and research study reports and 45 articles in various books and scientific magazines.

Research project: Alternatives to institutions in Bulgaria and Brazil: Appreciating Best Practice

■ **Presenters:** **Andy Bilson**, Professor of Social Work, University of Central Lancashire; **Galina Markova-Derelieva**, Director, Know How Centre on Alternative Care for Children, Bulgaria

The presentation builds on a paper '*Making Social Work Work*', a literature review of social work with vulnerable families and children without parental care³⁷, and on findings from the use of a tool developed to assess and improve social work following on from this report. The tool has been developed by Andy Bilson and Emily Delap for Family for Every Child, who funded the work³⁸. It has been tested in Brazil by Family For Every Child member, ABTH³⁹ and in Bulgaria with Galina Markova of the Know How Centre on Alternative Care for Children in Bulgaria.

The literature review calls for families and children in resource constrained countries to be supported in ways that are appropriate to the conditions, culture and resources available. The tool uses an 'Appreciative Inquiry' model to explore the views of children, parents, social workers and others in the social work system about times when support for families and children operated at its best and their ideas for how this level of best practice could become the norm. The aim is to assist stakeholders at all levels to build this into plans and systematic change for social work development that incorporate an on-going focus on locally identified strengths and wishes. Key findings from the use of the tool in Brazil and Bulgaria will be presented, focusing on lessons for providing alternatives to institutional care.

³⁴ <http://www.keystonehumanservices.org/keystone-human-services-international/moldova/programs/community-for-all-moldova.php>; <http://khsima.wordpress.com/>; <http://www.inclusion.md/en/>

³⁵ United States Agency for International Development, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Children's Fund

³⁶ Open Society Foundation Mental Health Initiative

³⁷ The review was co-authored by Andy Bilson and developed for EveryChild, a member of Family for Every Child

http://everychild.org.uk/resources/policy_and_research/making_social_work_work

³⁸ Family for Every Child is a coalition of 13 national NGOs working to support vulnerable families and promote quality alternative care. Emily Delap is Global Policy Advisor <http://www.everychild.org.uk/coalition/>

³⁹ Associação Brasileira Terra dos Homens. Adriana Pacheco, International Consultant contributed to the development of the tool

■ What attendees will learn from the presentation:

- Lessons learned from the evaluation of the closure programmes of three institutions in Bulgaria (used to provide best practice recommendations to the Government on closing institutions)
- What families and children want from alternatives to care in Brazil
- Use of Family for Every Child's tool for assessing and developing social work for children without parental care
- Key findings of the literature review of social work with families and children in resource constrained countries who are, or at risk of, being without parental care

Andy Bilson is Professor of Social Work at the University of Central Lancashire and International Consultant to the Know How Centre on Alternative Care for Children. He has been involved in promoting alternatives to institutional care since 1980 when he managed juvenile justice programmes in the City of Nottingham. He has managed social work organisations, been director of UNICEF and the Council of Europe's observatory on children's rights and worked in many countries internationally. He has been involved in work in Bulgaria since the late 1990s. He publishes widely on alternatives to care and is co-author of the UNICEF and World Bank toolkit on 'gatekeeping' as well as the recent publication *Making Social Work Work*. In addition to the subject of the conference paper, he is currently involved in research into Child Protection in Australia and the evaluation of the UK government's pilot scheme to test new arrangements for providing social work to children in state care.

Galina Markova is Manager of the Know How Centre on Alternative Care for Children, New Bulgarian University, Sofia. Dr. Markova has a Masters in Clinical Social Work at the New Bulgarian University (1995) and a PhD in Social Work from Smith College, USA (2004). Her PhD dissertation is on research into psychological characteristics of parents and children placed in institutions. Her experience in the field of deinstitutionalisation started when she took part in a survey of the impact of institutionalisation of babies. She was involved in closing the Mogilino institution. She has led training programmes and created programmes for working with children in institutions. Her preferred theoretical framework for consulting and teaching is Attachment Theory.

WORKSHOP B: 0-3s PREVENTING CHILD ABANDONMENT

B1 - Family strengthening and prevention of child abandonment at the age of 0-3 years: Experiences from SOS Children's Villages Latvia and Romania

■ **Presenters:** **Kristine Veispale**, National Advocacy Adviser, SOS Children's Villages Latvia; **Adina Burlacu**, Coordinator SOS Counselling and Support Centre for Children and Parents Bucharest, Romania

The presentation is made in the context of SOS Children's Villages 'Family Strengthening Projects' (FSPs) in the CEE/CIS/BALTICS Region⁴⁰, focusing on the prevention of 0-3s child abandonment in Romania and Latvia. FSPs work towards preventing a child's separation from, or reintegration into, its family of origin through individually focused family work within existing community structures. The aim is to enhance families' coping mechanisms to enable families and communities to achieve self-reliance in their care and protection of children. Activities are focused on: ensuring the respect of children's rights by addressing the survival and developmental rights of children in the family and by facilitating access to community services; improving parenting skills and developing family support networks and support groups; creating and promoting a network of integrated social services for families and raising awareness and encouraging social solidarity of community members.

In Latvia⁴¹, there are 5 FSPs. The first project was started in 2006 and each year 700 children with their families receive support, almost 20% of which are children 0-3 years old. Prevention activities include: individual assistance to families (via a social rehabilitator supporting the family in daily activities); an 'emotional upbringing' programme

⁴⁰ <http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/what-we-do/family-strengthening/Pages/default.aspx>: Central and Eastern European/ Commonwealth of Independent States/ Baltics Region

⁴¹ <http://www.sosbernuciemati.lv/en>

(groups for parents who have children under age 7); individual psychological and social consultations and family psychotherapy; educating local communities (events for preschool teachers and parents)

In Romania⁴², three family strengthening projects have been developed since 1998 and 800 children are currently supported to live at home with their families. Support offered includes: material, financial and 'in-kind' support; individual and group counselling for children and parents; parental education and skills' building; leisure and socialisation activities; guidance and support for parents' socio-professional reintegration. Since 2010, families have also had the opportunity to apply for non-repayable 'micro grants' aimed at increasing their autonomy⁴³.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- How SOS Children's Villages approach their work with families of origin in the CEE/CIS/BALTICS Region (core principles)
- Good practice illustrations from Romania and Latvia on how to prevent 0-3s child abandonment
- Key lessons learned from FSPs and recommendations on preventing 0-3s child abandonment

Kristine Veispale has a Bachelor Degree in Social work and a Master Degree in Human Resource Management. She has experience of working as social worker since 2001 and from 2006 - 2010 worked as a child right's protection adviser in the State Inspectorate for Protection of Children's Rights. Two years ago, she joined SOS Children's Villages Latvia as National Advocacy Adviser to undertake advocacy work aimed at improving policies and practices that undermine the well-being of children.

Adina Burlacu has a Degree in Social Work and from 2004 - 2010 worked in SOS Children's Villages Romania as social worker in the Family Strengthening Project in Bucharest. From 2010, she has coordinated the SOS Counselling and Support Centre for Children and Parents in Bucharest, where she has responsibility for coordinating and supervising the work of project staff providing social services to families in need. She also has responsibility for monitoring and evaluation of the project, managing the financial actions, identifying funding sources and submitting applications for local income.

B2 - Towards elimination of institutional placement of children from 0 to 3 in Europe: Components of success and the need for in-depth analysis of resistance

■ **Presenter: Dainius Puras**, Professor of Child Psychiatry and Social Paediatrics, Vilnius University, Lithuania

The presentation will focus on the experience of European countries in their attempts to identify and overcome obstacles in the area of transforming child protection services, addressing the tradition of institutional placement of children on 3 levels: national policies, pilot projects, and individual/family cases. A comparative analysis of the situation in different European countries and regions will be used, based on the study commissioned by the Regional Office for Europe of OHCHR '*Institutional care as a violation of rights of children under three years of age*' (2011)⁴⁴.

Analysis of the European situation in the area of prevention of institutionalisation of children from 0 to 3 years of age has revealed several important components of success, as well as challenges and obstacles which need to be targeted. Countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have been demonstrating during the last years different levels of political will, ranging from successful transformation, through relative success, to failure to progress. Obligatory components of successful transition will be presented, which are needed to neutralise still strong tendencies of justifying the policies and practices based on institutionalisation as a form of protection of children's rights. The presentation will also address the reasons why many governments still continue to feed, with massive investments, both through national budgets and EU funds, child protection systems which rely on institutional care, instead of developing effective family support systems.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

⁴² <http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/where-we-help/europe/romania/Pages/default.aspx>

⁴³ Velux micro grants "Steps for self-reliance"

⁴⁴ The published version of the study is not yet available (expected end of 2012). The findings were presented at an event organised by OHCHR in Prague, November 2011. See http://europe.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Children_under_3.aspx More info can also be found at http://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/TWGs/CIAC/Meetings/20110407/Opening%20plenary_Dainius%20Puras.pdf

- How to identify opportunities, challenges and obstacles for the development of effective policies and practice aimed at eliminating institutional placement of children from 0 to 3
- How to identify the different origins (contextual/cultural, managerial, professional) and levels (systemic, institutional, individual) of resistance to change while transforming child protection systems
- An orientation in strategic and tactical methods of introducing and supporting effective policies and practice and effectively addressing challenges of a prolonged and complicated transition
- Some examples of family support systems that prevent unnecessary initial placement in alternative care

Dainius Puras is Professor and Head of the Centre of Child Psychiatry and Social Paediatrics at Vilnius University. He is chairman of the Board of two NGOs in Lithuania, the Human Rights Monitoring Institute and the Global Initiative on Psychiatry. He initiated the Child Development Centre, Childline and other pilot projects in Lithuania, as alternatives to the system of child care based on institutional care and the biomedical model. Professor Puras served as a member and expert of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child from 2007-2011. He has been a consultant for UNICEF and other international and national organisations in the area of child rights, children with disabilities, child mental health, transformation of healthcare and social services and related areas. He was the author of the study *'Institutional care as a violation of rights of children under three years of age'* (2011), commissioned by the Regional Office for Europe of OHCHR.

Research project: Child abandonment in Europe: Results of EU Daphne project

■ **Presenter: Maria Herczog**, Associate Professor, Eszterházy Károly College, Hungary, President of Eurochild and Chair of the Family, Child, Youth Association, Hungary

The presentation is focused on the results of the current EU Daphne-funded project on child abandonment and its prevention⁴⁵. The project explores the extent of child abandonment across the EU, its causes, its consequences, and prevention programmes that are currently in place. It concludes that prevention, as demonstrated in many countries, is very effective and not only influences infant abandonment, but also changes child welfare and protection policies and attitudes.

Every child has 'the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents'⁴⁶. When a child is abandoned, this right is violated. Infants and young children are those most at risk of being abandoned. This is concerning, as a child deprived of a stable upbringing in his or her early years of life may experience difficulties in terms of emotional and behavioural development. Research has found that child abandonment is one of the key reasons why children under the age of three are placed in institutional care. A comparison of children in institutions revealed that in Western Europe only 4% were abandoned, as opposed to 32% of children in institutions in Central and Eastern Europe. As part of the current project, government departments from all 27 EU member countries were asked to provide information relating to open and secret abandonment. Of the 22 countries who responded, primary causes of child abandonment were found to be: poverty or financial hardship; being a single parent; post-natal depression; mental illness; a lack of sexual health education; poor knowledge regarding family planning; restrictions regarding access to abortion; the child having some form of disability; the child being HIV positive; pregnancy as a result of rape, abuse or force by partner; a lack of services and resources to support parents who have children with disabilities.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- The current European situation concerning infant abandonment
- The different policies and practices to prevent and handle child abandonment
- The future actions needed
- A child rights based perspective on the issues related to some harmful practices

⁴⁵ The project is coordinated by the Institute of Work, Health and Organisations, UK and receives funding from the EC Daphne programme (DG Justice). More info can be found at: <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/iwho/research/projects/childabandonment/index.aspx>

⁴⁶ Article 7 of the UNCRC (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)

Maria Herczog has a PhD in Sociology and an MA in Economics. She is Associate Professor at the Eszterházy Károly College, Hungary, President of Eurochild and Chair of the Family, Child, Youth Association, Hungary⁴⁷. She was elected to the UN CRC Committee in 2007 and re-elected in 2010. Dr Herczog's main area of research is child welfare and child protection. Since 1992, she has been the chief editor of the only Hungarian professional journal 'Family, Child, Youth'. She has also been working with international organisations – Council of Europe, UNICEF, WHO⁴⁸ - as a temporary scientific expert and consultant. She was one of the civil representatives on the European Economic and Social Committee from 2004-2010.

WORKSHOP C: SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

C1 - Hearing the voices of children and young people with learning disabilities

■ **Presenters:** **Anne Mackay** and **Shaun Webster**, European Project Coordinators, CHANGE, Rights of Children – Europe

The presentation will be an opportunity to hear directly from an employed person with a learning disability and an experienced professional on good practice concerning inclusive services and inclusive practice with children and young people with learning disabilities within the UK, as well as the work they are doing with children and young people with learning disabilities who are leaving institutions across Eastern Europe. The presentation will be supported by case examples and some practical 'tips' and advice on how to involve children, young people and adults with learning disabilities when developing new services.

CHANGE⁴⁹ is a leading UK based human rights organisation led by disabled people that works for the human rights of all people with learning disabilities. Its work also extends across Europe through work to promote inclusion. CHANGE is working closely with the children's charity Lumos⁵⁰ focusing on the closure of institutions for children across Europe. The presentation will include discussion of the Social Model of Disability and making Inclusion and Empowerment a reality.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- The opportunity to develop awareness and understanding of the importance of empowering children and young people with learning disabilities in decisions around their care
- Integration of good practice findings concerning inclusive services with some examples from experience
- Some practical 'tips' and advice as to how to involve children, young people and adults with learning disabilities when developing new services

Shaun Webster is a person with a learning disability working with CHANGE as a European Project Coordinator on the Rights of Children - Europe Project, facilitating the closure of institutions for children across a number of European countries. Shaun began working with CHANGE in October 2003 and has worked with parents with learning disabilities across the UK to produce 'Training the Trainers Course' for parents with learning disabilities to train education, health and social care professionals. He has been influential in campaigning with CHANGE for the UK Government to produce and introduce 'Good Practice Guidance' for professionals supporting parents with learning disabilities and their children. He has delivered training within the UK and across Eastern Europe on inclusion, good communication and support and making information accessible. Shaun has also worked with self-advocacy organisations across the UK supporting them to become more sustainable and stronger. Shaun is a role model for young people with learning disabilities, using his skills and expertise to put the messages about Human Rights and Inclusion on an international platform.

Anne Mackay began working with CHANGE as a European Project Coordinator in September 2011. She also works on a free-lance basis for the UK Children's Services Regulator, Ofsted, inspecting Early Years Services. Anne's

⁴⁷ <http://www.csagyi.hu/en/association>

⁴⁸ World Health Organisation

⁴⁹ More information can be found at www.changepeople.co.uk

⁵⁰ See www.lumos.org.uk

background is as a Social Worker and a Social Work Manager within Children's Services in the UK. Anne has worked for the children's charity Barnardo's placing 'hard to place' children in adoptive and foster families, as well working within the Local Authority sector. She has managed a variety of children's services over the years, including child protection and looked after services and services for children with disabilities and complex health needs. Anne was heavily involved in the initiative 'Aiming High for Disabled Children' helping to set up new early intervention services to support children with disabilities remaining in the community.

C2 - The early intervention and rehabilitation centre for children with disabilities

■ **Presenter: Anna Burtea**, Executive Director, Heart of a Child Foundation, Romania

The presentation will describe the work of the early intervention and rehabilitation centre in Galati set up in 2010 by Heart of a Child Foundation⁵¹ to respond to the need for specialised rehabilitation services for children with disabilities and provide information and support to parents, thereby significantly reducing the risk of institutionalisation. The project was financed until December 2011 through the EU Daphne III programme (2007-2013)⁵² and is currently supported by Heart of a Child Foundation, SERA Foundation⁵³ and the Romanian Work, Social Solidarity and Family Ministry.

The evaluation of children with disabilities in Romania is, for the most part, strictly concerned with a medical examination. There is an acute need for early intervention services, so that diagnosis and rehabilitation start as early as possible to ensure a higher rate of social inclusion, as well as an increased level of independence for the child in the future. The Centre works to contribute to the protection of the rights of children with disabilities, to the development of their maximum potential and to the prevention of institutionalisation. Multi-disciplinary assessments are carried out and intervention plans drawn up according to individual needs. 'Know how' from transnational partners is transferred to parents, the local community and specialists through training programmes and seminars. In the first year of its existence, the Centre contributed to improving the quality of life of 118 children with disabilities and their families in Galati and surrounding counties, significantly reducing the risk of institutionalisation. It provided training and seminars for over 50 specialists.

What attendees will learn from the presentation:

- The Centre's approach to working with children with disabilities and their families
- The learning context for parents and professionals
- Reducing the risk of institutionalisation

Anna Burtea is one of the founding members of Heart of a Child Foundation and has been Executive Director since 2006. Graduating from the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Constanța, she was initially a volunteer in developing programmes for HIV-positive children concerning their care, education inclusion and social integration. She has worked at the foundation since 1997, with HIV-positive children, then with children from families in difficulty and children with disabilities. She has a Masters degree from Galați University and has taken part in numerous training programmes and courses in the management of social services.

Research project: The implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child for children with intellectual disabilities

■ **Presenter: Camille Latimier**, Policy Manager, Inclusion Europe

The presentation is focused on the results of a two-year project to improve the rights of children with intellectual disabilities throughout the European Union. Entitled '*Children's Rights for All*'⁵⁴, the project aimed to analyse the

⁵¹ More information can be found at <http://www.inimadecopil.ro/index.php/english>

⁵² The programme involved Heart of a Child Foundation (RO), COS Kingsbergen (BE), ADO Icarus (BE), Comber (Ireland), Samaritans Association (BG). The Manual of the 'PREVI' Project can be found at <http://www.inimadecopil.ro/MANUAL%20PREVI.pdf>

⁵³ <http://www.sera.ro/index-ro.php#>

⁵⁴ The publication '*Children's Rights for All! Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child for Children with Intellectual Disabilities*' was launched in Brussels in October 2011 <http://inclusion->

implementation of the UNCRC from the perspective of children with intellectual disabilities. It was undertaken jointly by Inclusion Europe (lead organisation), Eurochild and Charles University, Prague, and financed by the European Commission Daphne programme⁵⁵.

Under Article 7 of the CRC, children, including children with intellectual disabilities, have the right to be cared for by their parents. Article 9 states that children should not be separated from their parents unless it is necessary in their best interests. It also affirms children's right to maintain relations and contact with both parents. Article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) repeats the provisions of Article 9 adding: '*In no case shall a child be separated from parents on the basis of a disability of either the child or one or both of the parents*'. To prevent '*...concealment, abandonment, neglect and segregation of children with disabilities, States must undertake to provide early and comprehensive information, services and support to children with disabilities and their families* (Article 23).

There are around one million children with intellectual disabilities in the EU. These children often find themselves subject to discrimination and exclusion from society and are frequently denied the right to good quality education, healthcare, recreation and other services. In many cases, their families are also subject to discrimination and are denied access to adequate financial and emotional support. Often children with disabilities are still excluded from the necessary support for living in the community, leading to family placement or return home without good support services, or placement long-term in smaller 'family-type' group homes, often with the same staff and no real change in their care regime.

■ What attendees will learn from the presentation:

- Main conclusions of the project
- Recommendations relating to family support and deinstitutionalisation
- Evidence to inform and stimulate policy development

Camille Latimier is Policy Manager at Inclusion Europe, a European non-profit organisation that campaigns for the rights and interests of people with intellectual disabilities and their families across Europe. Camille Latimier studied political sciences and human rights and has been working for Inclusion Europe for the past six years.

WORKSHOP D: WORKING WITH BIOLOGICAL FAMILIES OF CHILDREN IN CARE

D1 - How Norway is involving children in decision making in FGC (Family Group Conferences)

■ **Presenter: Svanhild Vik**, National Coordinator FGC, Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs

The presentation is focused on the model of children's participation in Family Group Conferences (FGC) that is widely used in the child welfare system in Norway. FGC were first introduced in Norway in 1994, then tested in a nationwide project from 2003-2006⁵⁶ that led to a decision to implement FGC throughout the Norwegian child protection services. In January 2007, the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir)⁵⁷ was given responsibility for implementation and quality assurance of FGC. The plan is to ensure that all 430 municipalities in Norway are offered instruction in the use of FGC. So far more than 350 municipalities have received training and the use of FGC in the child welfare field is increasing.

In Norway, families, relatives and network have recently become an internal and more visible part of the service for children and young people. How we see children, family and upbringing have changed because we have gained more knowledge about children's needs, competence and mastery. Quite often, children and young people's most

europe.org/images/stories/documents/Project_CRC/Presentations/Camille_Latimier.pdf. More information can be found at www.childrights4all.eu

⁵⁵ More information can be found at www.childrights4all.eu

⁵⁶ More information can be found at <http://www.nova.no/id/199.0?language=1>

⁵⁷ See <http://www.bufetat.no/engelsk/bufdir/>

important resources are to be found in the family and the community. Our child welfare system is also facing a democratic challenge that indicates that we must change our way of working. Thus we found it necessary to develop a model for children's participation when FGC are held. The model has a child focus during the whole process, from the first meeting with the social worker, through the FGC and after. FGC are now being implemented in foster care and in many of the state child-welfare institutions. The presentation will therefore discuss the model of children's participation through some concrete examples from these areas, as well as an animation film that underlines the child's perspective.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- How the model of children's participation in FGC works in Norway
- The importance of involving the child during the whole process
- How the Norwegian state has taken national responsibility for the implementation and model-fidelity of FGC

Svanhild Vik was educated at the University of Oslo as a pedagogue and has worked in the child welfare system, in different positions, for over twenty years. In 2003-2004 she was in charge of the national project: Implementation of FGC in Norway, at NOVA research institute. From 2007, she was asked to continue working with implementation of children and families participation. She is employed as National Coordinator of FGC in the Norwegian Directorate for Children and Family Affairs and is in charge of the FGC team in Norway. Her main interests are children and families participation and implementation in practice.

D2 - In situ: Returning Home Support Programme

■ **Presenter: Patricia Quilez Villagran**, Social Educator, Resilis Foundation, 'El Guaret' Intensive Education Residential Centre, Valls, Catalonia, Spain

The presentation is focused on the 'Returning Home Support Programme', addressed to children and youth who have been wards of the state and are returning to their homes of origin from the 'El Guaret' Centre⁵⁸. The Centre was established in response to the needs of young people identified as requiring a contained educational environment with its own intensive resources. The young people are aged between 12 and 18 years. All the young people have a problem of social adaptation and need an intensive intervention. The goal is to return to the family. The Centre provides important assistance and support in achieving this goal.

The programme aims to have an impact on the family system to empower them to be part of the integration process and, with this in mind, the strategy is to develop a monitoring programme which will include different relational spaces (daily life, work/education, leisure, etc). The programme is structured in three intervention areas:

Observation: the professional/tutor participates in and observes the daily dynamics without intervening

Analysis and needs identification: undertaken with the family in order to set guidance, agreements, indicators, routines etc. to develop an integration plan

Monitoring and evaluation: the plan is monitored over time

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- How the 'El Guaret' Centre works with young people, its values and objectives
- How the 'Returning Home Support Programme' works with families through onsite intervention
- How the young people have benefitted

Patricia Quilez Villagran is a member of the Education Team of the Intensive Residential Educative Centre 'El Guaret', run by the Resilis Foundation in Catalonia, Spain. Her responsibilities include the design, control, monitoring

⁵⁸ More information can be found at http://www.resilis.org/en/serveis_crei_can_rodon.php

and evaluation of the Individual Educative Project with the young person and his family, and the coordination and tracking of other agencies involved in the process (Social Services, Mental Health, Formal Education etc).

D3 - In the child's best interest? – Managing contact between children in alternative care and their birth families in a Maltese context

■ **Presenter: Patricia Bonello**, Service Manager, *Agenzija Appogg*, Malta

The presentation will focus on managing contact between children in alternative care and their biological families within a Maltese context. Through case scenarios involving good practice the presentation will explore how service providers attempt to balance:

Identity and Stability: the acknowledgement of a child's roots contributing to his or her identity and the need to safeguard them, balanced with the need for particular children to live away from their families and acquire stability through living with another family

Involvement and Maintaining boundaries: the recognition that care providers are able to build a relationship with birth families, which is usually beneficial to the child, balanced with the need for maintaining boundaries in situations where there is over-involvement which is detrimental to the child (this issue takes on additional implications within the Maltese context)

Resistance and Acceptance: the need to work with the child's, and possibly the family members', ambivalent feelings about contact and the acknowledgement that these may not always be consistent or congruent with each other

Attachment and Detachment: an identification of the possibly devastating effects of attachment problems coupled with the need to provide opportunities for a healthy attachment and the need to detach from those relationships which result in being problematic to the child

The presentation will demonstrate the particular challenges associated with working with biological families in a context like Malta, where over-involvement is more of an issue than isolation. It will highlight the importance of reflective practice and communication.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- The challenges of managing contact with birth families in a small island state
- The difficulties associated with identifying what is in the child's best interest
- Ways in which contact is managed in particular situations
- The importance of reflective practice and communication

Patricia Bonello is Service Manager of the 'Out of Home Care Programme' within *Agenzija Appogg*, the main social work agency in Malta. Dr Bonello has been involved in the social work field for over twenty years and has experience in the fields of out of home care, disability and domestic violence. She has been actively involved in the field of out of home care for the past 15 years and considers the issue of birth families and their involvement in the lives of children in out of home care to be one which merits serious consideration. Dr Bonello has just completed her doctorate in social sciences with University College Cork, where her research focused on the relationship of social workers with their profession.

Research project: Comparative study of siblings in alternative care in Germany, Austria, France, Italy and Spain

■ **Presenter: Stephan Sting**, Professor of Social and Inclusive Education, Alpen-Adria University of Klagenfurt, Austria

The presentation describes the most important outcomes of research activities concerning sibling relations in alternative care. The purpose of the project was to draw attention to the importance of sibling relations in alternative care and enhance the quality and support for these relationships. More than 15 research studies in Austria, Germany, France, Italy and Spain were undertaken by the national associations of SOS Children's Villages in cooperation with external experts and universities.

The research in Klagenfurt was done through detailed case studies amongst sibling groups. It showed that sibling relations are very important, particularly during periods of transition. Therefore a focus is needed, not only on the singular child, but also on the whole sibling group. In the presentation some consequences of particular 'sibling work' will be discussed, ranging from decision making processes to working with the dynamics of sibling groups during their stay in care to supporting the transition to independent living or the reintegration in the biological family.

Finally some recommendations will be outlined which summarise the main outcomes of different international research studies for taking better account of the needs of siblings at each stage of the care process and assuring the visibility of this topic in the child protection services.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- Main outcomes and recommendations from the research project
- Sibling work and decision making processes
- Working with the dynamics of sibling groups during the stay in care
- Supporting the transition to independent living or reintegration into the biological family

Stephan Sting was born in Balingen/Württemberg, Germany and from 1979 to 1984 studied pedagogy, sociology and psychology at the Free University of Berlin. He holds a PhD since 1990 and from 1996 Habilitation in Educational Science. He has been a university teacher in the field of educational science and social pedagogy at the Free University of Berlin, the University of Leipzig and the Technical University of Dresden. Since 2005, he has been Professor of Social and Inclusive Education at the Alpen-Adria University of Klagenfurt.

WORKSHOP E: SUPPORTING CHILDREN LEAVING CARE

E1 - Supporting young people making the transition from Government care to adulthood in England

■ **Presenter: Sue Hobbs**, National Care Advisory Service (NCAS), England, UK⁵⁹

The presentation will explore the historical and contemporary context of supporting young people making the transition from Government care to adulthood in England. It will be delivered in an interactive way and will consider the legislative, research and practice frameworks for supporting care leavers to achieve their potential. The voices and experiences of children, young people, parents, carers, practitioners and managers will be actively listened to.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- The practice framework for delivering services to young people making the transition from care to adulthood in England
- Good practice in supporting care leavers to achieve their potential in England
- Practice experiences and what makes a difference from an international perspective

Sue Hobbs has a background of thirty years' experience of local government social work with vulnerable children and adolescents and their families in England. She has specialised in supporting care leavers throughout her career. Her roles include: practitioner in residential and field social work; operational management; government advisor; service commissioning; service planning; performance management. Ms Hobbs' initial Social Work Degree and

⁵⁹ See <http://leavingcare.org/>

professional training was at Bradford University and post graduate, she obtained her Masters Degree, advanced professional and doctorate qualifications at the University of East Anglia. She is a qualified Practice Teacher and has been involved in social work practice education and training for over 25 years. Over the past year, she has worked as a Project Manager with the National Care Advisory Service which is hosted within a voluntary organisation, Catch22⁶⁰. Her role is to manage the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum promoting good practice and ultimately improving outcomes for young people making the transition from care to adulthood. This includes participation work and research with care experienced young adults as well as with Government departments, managers, practitioners and carers.

E2 - A Step to the Future – How to Help Young People Leaving Care Find Their Way: Hope and Homes for Children Bosnia and Herzegovina

■ **Presenter: Jasna Hodzic**, Country Director, Hope and Homes for Children (HHC) in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The presentation focuses on how to help young people leaving care find their way and navigate through the challenges. It also looks at how to provide professionals with relevant information and materials to work with young people leaving care and will offer ideas for creating similar materials for use elsewhere.

HHC is one of a very small number of organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina supporting young people leaving care⁶¹. Our experience shows that young people, after spending years in institutions, find it extremely difficult to cope with independent adult life. HHC supports young adults through continuous education, mentoring and short term material support with the aim of enabling young people to develop specific skills and build confidence.

In 2011 HHC, in cooperation with SOS Children's Villages in Bosnia and Herzegovina⁶², published a manual for professionals 'A Step to the Future: How to Help Young People Leaving Care Find Their Way' and a guide for young people leaving care 'Now What: Challenges Ahead of You'. 'A Step to the Future' provides information and materials for professionals, including practical workshops, to equip them with the required skills for working with young people without parental care to support them in their transition from care to independent living. 'Now What: Challenges Ahead of You' provides information for young people preparing for independent living, including participation in the process of making decisions important to them, methods of securing their rights, legal solutions relating to young people leaving care, as well as instructions and information on practical everyday things⁶³.

■ **What attendees at the presentation will learn:**

- How to provide professionals with relevant information and materials for working with young people leaving care
- How to support young people in the process of becoming independent
- Ideas for creating similar materials appropriate to their environment

Jasna Hodzic has over 10 years of combined experience in project management, administration, social services, child protection and training in various international and intergovernmental organisations. She holds a Master's Degree in Political Sciences and a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work. Her specialities are child protection, migration, establishing and maintaining cooperation with relevant stakeholders (government, international, intergovernmental and national organisations, media, service providers etc), advocacy, designing and delivering training courses for specific target groups, as well as working on the development of various documents and policies in the areas of children's rights and migration. Since her employment at Hope and Homes for Children, she has designed and delivered numerous specialised training courses for child care professionals and she is a regular guest lecturer at three state Faculties for Social Work in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She is a co-author of the two specialised publications referenced in the abstract: 'Now What: Challenges Ahead of You' and 'A Step to the Future: How to Help Young People Leaving Care Find Their Way'.

Research project: In the eye of the beholder: interpreting the UN Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children and the case of leaving care

⁶⁰ <http://catch-22.org.uk/Services/Detail/NCAS>

⁶¹ <http://www.hopeandhomes.org/what-we-do/where-we-work/bosnia-and-herzegovina>

⁶² See SOS Children's Villages 'I Matter: Preparation for Independent Living' campaign <http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/About-us/Publications/Pages/Leaving-Care-I-matter.aspx>

⁶³ See for example www.getreadyforadulthood.org; www.roditeljstvo.com

■ **Presenter: Roxana Anghel**, Research Fellow and Lecturer, Anglia Ruskin University (UK)

The presentation contributes to the debate regarding the implementation of UN policy on children's rights by offering a theoretical analysis of the conditions in which this takes place. The focus is on practitioners, the 'street-level bureaucrats'⁶⁴ whose conceptual understanding and level of discretion determine how policies are implemented. The presentation will also introduce a proposal for developing alternative methodologies for disseminating global principles of practice to local services.

The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children⁶⁵ were produced to address implementation by introducing two new principles: *necessity* and *appropriateness*. These are expected to clarify the practitioners' decision-making when considering the rights and quality of life of children without parental care. However, whilst work is already being carried out to address the application of this latest document⁶⁶, we propose that, given the challenges of policy implementation, a case could be made for exploring new methodological approaches to dissemination. A participatory action research (PAR) proposal will also be introduced in which we will use the UN Guidelines and the process of leaving care as opportunities to investigate the complex transition process in five countries (England, Norway, Romania, South Africa and Spain) with different cultures and welfare philosophies. In particular we will explore how practitioners understand what *necessity* and *appropriateness* are meant to do; what strategies they employ locally to apply them; and how can a methodology based on participation, critical thinking and experiential learning support successful implementation.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- A broader perspective of the factors affecting the application of the UN policy on children's' rights
- The challenges encountered in three countries (England, Romania and South Africa) which applied imported concepts into local practice
- The relevance of PAR to enhancing practice in this area

Roxana Anghel is a Research Fellow and Lecturer at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK, and a qualified social worker. She has conducted qualitative longitudinal research with young people (17-24) leaving institutional public care in Romania and is developing research focused on the interpretation of global principles of care by professionals who work with vulnerable groups (e.g. young people in care, people with intellectual disabilities) in diverse cultural and welfare contexts. Dr Anghel has a keen interest in care leaving in post-communist countries and is a member of the International Research Network for Transitions to Adulthood from Public Care (INTRAC)⁶⁷ having published several papers on this topic. She also has expertise in service user involvement in research and education, and in using quasi-experimental designs to evaluate outcomes of social work education.

⁶⁴ See <http://bjsw.oxfordjournals.org/content/34/6/871.abstract>

⁶⁵ See <http://www.crin.org/docs/Guidelines-English.pdf>

⁶⁶ e.g. 'Toolkit for practitioners' (2011) a project prepared for the EC programme 'Fundamental Rights and Citizenship' (2007–2013) by the Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI) in collaboration with the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights and the Estonian Union for Child Welfare. See http://www.sm.ee/fileadmin/meedia/Dokumendid/Sotsiaalvaldkond/Sotsiaalhoolekanne/toolkit_leaving_and_aftercare.pdf

⁶⁷ <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/ccfr/INTRAC/about.html>

Annex 5 - Forum of good practice, speaker corners

1a.preventing the separation of children from their families in bosnia and herzegovina: review of Hope and Homes for Children ACTIVE Family Support Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2003-2010

■ **Presenter:** Julia Kragulj, Regional Child Care Advisor, Hope and Homes for Children (HHC)

This presentation details the development and outcomes of ACTIVE Family Support, a model of intervention aimed at identifying and supporting children at risk of being separated from their parents and preventing their institutionalisation⁶⁸. The approach is an integral part of the HHC deinstitutionalisation model that is based on dismantling large scale institutions by developing family-based care and community-based services to support children and parents at risk in a timely and sustainable fashion. HHC has been implementing ACTIVE Family Support in Sarajevo Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2003. The programme is tailored to the individual needs of each child and family and is built on core values of partnership, respect, inclusion, sustainability and the best interest of the child. A multi-disciplinary support team works intensively with parents and children in their own homes to an agreed plan, based on an assessment of strengths and needs. Intervention is time-limited, the average duration of support being seven months.

During the period 2003 to 2010, the programme supported 255 families with a success rate of preventing separation of children from their families in 98% of cases. The amount that would have been incurred by the government on institutional placements in the absence of ACTIVE Family Support is estimated to have been 9.33 times greater than the total cost of implementing the programme, thus demonstrating a significant return on investment. The model is scalable, ie. it can be used effectively on a small scale by different organisations or it can be embedded in policy and made available on a much larger scale.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- How the HHC model of preventing separation of children from their families operates and has been proven to increase children's wellbeing in a sustainable way in a variety of settings, on a small scale, or scaled up and embedded in national policy
- The results of evidence-based research into the effectiveness of this model as implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina over an eight year period
- Concrete evidence of the cost-effectiveness and return on investment achieved by the ACTIVE Family Support model compared to institutionalisation

Julia Kragulj has more than 10 years' experience in the field of international development within the non-governmental sector. She holds a Master's degree in Development Management. Her areas of expertise include strategic planning, system change management, advocacy and negotiation, capacity building, organisational development. She is an experienced trainer and conference speaker having previously been the Hope and Homes for Children (HHC) Bosnia and Herzegovina Country Director. Julia played a key role in the development of a national strategy to reform the child protection system in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She was the key initiator and catalyst of the first project to close a children's institution in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2006-2008) and chaired the steering group which oversaw its implementation. The project involved negotiations with local and national government bodies, evidence-based project design, the development of new family based services for children and collaboration with partner organisations. All new services are now owned and financed by local authorities. This is the first project of its kind in the former Yugoslavia and has been recognised by UNICEF as a regional model of good practice. Under Julia's leadership, Hope and Homes for Children has become the recognised leader in de-institutionalisation of child protection services in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider region.

⁶⁸ The published report *Preventing the separation of children from their families in Bosnia and Herzegovina: review of Hope and Homes for Children ACTIVE Family Support Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2003-2010* can be found at:
http://www.hopeandhomes.org/assets/downloads/media_news/Bosnia%20Activ%20family%20support_final_LowRes.pdf

1B. Five Nations One Voice: Raising our coordinated and amplified voice for care experienced children and young people

■ **Presenters: Vivian McConvey**, Chief Executive, Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC), Northern Ireland;
Deborah Jones, Chief Executive, Voices from Care Cymru, Wales

The presentation will be made by Vivian McConvey and Deborah Jones on behalf of the five member organisations of Five Nations One Voice from the UK and Republic of Ireland⁶⁹. It focuses on the journey the five organisations have undertaken in the last year to create Five Nations One Voice and how they are working together towards common goals.

All members of Five Nations One Voice are independent organisations working with and for children and young people who are or have been in care. They cover the full continuum of care experience, are service user led, have links to statutory agencies and government, influence policy development, and work to promote the voice of children and young people.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- Who we are: the organisations that make up Five Nations One Voice
- How Five Nations One Voice works together to develop and maintain effective relationships for the benefit of care experienced children and young people and how they achieve a coordinated, amplified and stronger voice
- How they intend to promote and develop a single public policy profile based on evidence, research and engagement with children and young people.

Vivian McConvey is Chief Executive, Voice of Young People in Care. She qualified as a social worker in 1986 and has worked across the community, voluntary and statutory sectors in a range of agencies including: Social Services, Juvenile Justice, Save the Children, Barnardo's and First Key. In September 2002, Vivian became Chief Executive of VOYPIC, an NGO working with and for care experienced children and young people aged up to 25 years across Northern Ireland.

Deborah Jones, is Chief Executive and Co-founder of Voices from Care, a national organisation that represents looked after children and care leavers in Wales. Deborah campaigned for the North Wales Public Enquiry into child exploitation that eventually established a Children's Commissioner for Wales. Deborah facilitates the National Assembly for Wales All Party Group on Looked After Children and established the All Wales Child Exploitation Group. In her final year of her MBA with the University of Glamorgan, she is a qualified Counsellor and provides training and lecturing to both the private and public sectors.

1C. Sibling relations in alternative care

■ **Presenter: Sylvie Delcroix**, Technical Advisor, SOS Children's Villages France

The presentation describes the implementation of new actions by SOS Children's Villages in France based on the outcomes of a comparative study of siblings in alternative care in Germany, Austria, France, Italy and Spain. The purpose of the research project was to draw attention to the importance of sibling relations in alternative care and enhance the quality and support for these relationships. More than 15 research studies were undertaken by the national associations of SOS Children's Villages in cooperation with external experts and universities. The main objective of the first part of the research was to develop a 'knowledge pool' of theoretical and practical knowledge. The second part was focused on analysis of sibling situations and 'tools testing'.

⁶⁹ The Who Cares Trust, England <http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/pages/about-us.html> ; EPIC – Empowering People in Care, Ireland <http://www.epiconline.ie/> ; VOYPIC, Northern Ireland www.voypic.org ; Who Cares? Scotland <http://www.whocarescotland.org/> ; Voices from Care Cymru, Wales <http://www.voicesfromcarecymru.org.uk/>

The research project makes recommendations for taking better account of the needs of siblings at each stage of the care process, adapting the educational support to permit the development of positive sibling relationships and assuring the visibility of this topic in the child protection services. The presentation illustrates new actions taken by SOS Children's Villages France as a result of this research.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- Implementation of new tools for psychologists
- Work on the family history with parents and social workers
- Regular meetings of the sibling group with the support team
- Training of co-workers

Sylvie Delcroix studied demography and sociology and is in charge of studies and international projects in SOS Children's Villages France. She launched and coordinates the research project on siblings. She contributes regularly to the magazine of SOS Children's Villages France '*Cahiers SOS*'⁷⁰, focused on this topic. She is in charge of the implementation of actions to improve the care process on this topic in particular with the psychologists. She also coordinates the '*I Matter*'⁷¹ campaign in France.

2A. The Ombudsman's voice for De-institutionalisation: A comprehensive investigation on children in care under 3 years

■ **Presenter: Agnes Lux**, Head of Unit, Office of Commissioner for Fundamental Rights in Hungary⁷²

The presentation is based on an investigation and subsequent report made by the Ombudsman on De-institutionalisation (DE-I) of children in care under 3 years old⁷³. In the investigation, the Ombudsman made visits to institutions without prior notice and gathered wide-ranging information from all 7 Hungarian regions. He reports that though the number of children in care under 3 has reduced over the last few years, with 75% now growing up in foster families, there are still huge regional differences in these percentages and variations in attitudes and service accessibility.

The comprehensive 'ex officio' investigation was carried out in 2010 in the context of the Ombudsman's priority to look at the role of the family in ensuring children's rights, ie. the right of children to be brought up in the family and the role of the state in supporting this, as well as the operation of the system of state provision for substitute family care and the issue of adoption. Special attention was paid to children in care under 3 years, in keeping with mainstream international policies that alternative community based provision is preferable.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- The Ombudsman's proactive and progressive right-defending attitude
- The Ombudsman as an official 'loudspeaker' for DE-I
- The Ombudsman's findings make a difference

Agnes Lux graduated as a political scientist in 2005 from Eötvös University Faculty of Law in Budapest. She completed her law studies in 2010 at the same university. She is a political scientist PhD candidate. Her thesis is on children's rights interdisciplinary approach. Her thesis at the Faculty of Law was about the conflict of the LGBT Pride Marches and the Freedom of Assembly. Dr Lux is currently working in the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, formerly as analyst and project coordinator, currently as Head of Unit at the Special Investigation Department, dealing with children's rights. Since 2010, she has been the leader of the Ombudsman's children's rights project. She holds presentations and lectures about children's rights investigations in national and international fora and also regularly publishes in this field.

⁷⁰ http://www.sosve.org/40-Connaitre/50-10_Cahiers.asp

⁷¹ <http://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/About-us/Publications/Pages/Leaving-Care-I-matter.aspx>

⁷² See <http://www.ajbh.hu/indexen.htm>

⁷³ Only available in Hungarian

2B. How a children's rights based approach can support social workers to build positive relationships and improve contact between children in alternative care and their families

■ **Presenter: Cath Larkins**, Senior Research Fellow, University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), UK

The presentation reports findings from a major research project conducted across eleven local authorities in England. The main focus of the research was to evaluate Social Work Practice (SWP) pilot projects for children in alternative care in England⁷⁴. The five pilot projects were an experiment in giving social workers more autonomy in their work. They devolved some responsibilities from local government social services to non-governmental, private and third sector organisations and sought to improve worker morale and relationships between social workers and children and families. The Evaluation compared the work of these five 'pilots' with child and family social services in six other areas.

The presentation concentrates on the findings from interviews with young people and parents. These suggest that 'keys to success' include: social workers having an explicit focus on work with biological families; listening to children and young people and allowing them to influence levels and frequency of family contact; ensuring adequate resources are available for children and families, including transport and user friendly buildings; involving children and families in care planning and review meetings. Replicating these keys to success can be achieved through a rights based approach in a staged process that starts by challenging existing attitudes and promoting understanding of children's right to live with, or have contact with, their parents as much as possible, as well as children's right to be listened to in decisions that affect them.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- Results of the Evaluation of the SWP pilots, in particular findings from interviews with young people and parents
- How social workers have managed to achieve positive working relationships with children and families, in SWP and other areas
- How some key factors promoting success mirror a children's rights based approach to working with older children, young people and families

Cath Larkins is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Central Lancashire, where she has worked on the Evaluation of Social Work Practices in England and the establishment of www.dvigg.com, a forum for global conversations between young people. Prior to that she co-directed a participation consultancy called 'Ear2theGround'⁷⁵, working with NGOs and governments largely in Wales, to support the development of children's rights and participation through children's active engagement in research. Dr Larkins writes on children's citizenship, participation and rights based approaches to delivering children's services. Recent work includes an evaluation of the EU children's rights Agenda, from the perspectives of marginalised children in France and Wales. She is currently conducting research for the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England on the impact of poverty on disabled children's rights and is a member of the Eurochild Group on participatory methods for the inclusion of all children.

2C. Working with biological families and supporting children and young adults leaving care

■ **Presenter: Ioanna Avloniti**, International Cooperation Coordinator 'The Smile of the Child', Greece⁷⁶

The presentation will include the following: working with biological parents who have lost custody of their children after a court's decision due to abuse or neglect of the child; working with biological parents in daily care centres; working with siblings that live in homes of 'The Smile of the Child'; supporting young adults leaving care to become independent.

'The Smile of the Child' was created in 1995, based on the vision of a 10 year old boy, Andreas. Its objective is to support all children in Greece who may be in danger or whose needs cannot be met by their parent(s) or guardian.

⁷⁴ <http://www.education.gov.uk/a0068761/social-work-practice-pilots-swps-additional-pilots>

⁷⁵ <http://www.ear2theground.net/>

⁷⁶ <http://www.hamogelo.gr/1.2/home>

The Association protects children's rights and provides them with emotional and psychological support. Children who suffer from health problems, any type of abuse, neglect or abandonment, are within the organisation's mandate.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- How 'The Smile of the Child' works with biological parents
- Work undertaken with siblings in care
- How young people leaving care are supported to become independent citizens

Ioanna Avloniti is the International Cooperation Coordinator for 'The Smile of the Child', a Greek Volunteer Organisation for Children that is active in the field of child protection through a wide range of activities. She has a background in International and European Studies with a speciality in Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Health Crisis Management.

3A. Early Intervention Service for Children with Disabilities: The family-centred approach

■ **Presenters:** **Apostol Apostolov**, Programmes Evaluator; **Vesseline Vassileva**, Projects Coordinator, Karin Dom Foundation, Varna, Bulgaria

The presentation will describe an early childhood intervention programme in Bulgaria, developed and implemented by the Karin Dom Foundation⁷⁷. It will elaborate on a number of innovative services implemented by the Foundation for children with disabilities and their families, ie: the home visits service, the parent-on-call service, the playgroups service, the family support network, and breast-feeding support. These services were launched in Varna in 2010 as part of Karin Dom's early intervention programme that seeks to prevent the abandonment of children. The programme introduces the 'family-centred approach'⁷⁸ to services for disabled children in Bulgaria. The presenters will share experiences about the implementation of the programme, drawing on an on-going evaluation of its services. The evaluation itself is carried out in line with the 'Realist Evaluation' methodology, seeking to find out what works, for whom, and in what circumstances

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- Latest developments in an innovative early intervention service in Bulgaria
- The family-centred approach to service provision for children with disabilities
- Aspects of conducting developmental or formative evaluations of services

Apostol Apostolov is leading on the evaluation of Karin Dom's Early Intervention Programme. He undertakes qualitative research with programme staff, partners and families. Dr Apostolov has been specialising in evaluation of children's services since 2004 when he worked on national evaluations of such services in UK universities, commissioned by the British Government. Since 2008 he is an active participant in various aspects of NGO activities in Bulgaria, promoting civic participation and evidence-based service development.

Vesseline Vassileva is Project Coordinator at Karin Dom and Coordinator of the Early Intervention Service. She is also a voluntary breast-feeding consultant, supporting breast-feeding practices at maternity wards in Varna. She is actively involved in promoting the family-centred approach of services for children with special needs.

3B. Family Group Decision Making: An Edinburgh prospectus

■ **Presenters:** **Anne Begbie** and **Denise Malone**: Family Group Coordinators, City of Edinburgh Council, Scotland, UK

⁷⁷ Karin Dom Early Intervention Programme <http://karindom.org/english/early-intervention-programme/>

⁷⁸ See Dunst, CJ Early intervention with infants and toddlers with developmental disabilities in *Handbook on developmental disabilities* (2007) <http://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=TqTobgEPXrcC&oi=fnd&pg=PA161&dq=Handbook+on+developmental+disabilities+Dunst,+C.+J.+%282007%29.&ots=vs2Bs7K8Hs&sig=lmhWRDfM0sZ813c8XoDsVDKMB0#v=onepage&q&f=false>

The presentation describes the Family Group Decision Making Service provided by Edinburgh City Council since 2002⁷⁹. The Council is one of 32 local authorities in Scotland and the only one to provide this service 'in house'. The service is recognised as a key strategy in reducing the number of children and young people cared for by the local authority. Its strengths are also acknowledged in child protection work, safety planning and monitoring.

Edinburgh City Council has embraced the importance of placing children within their families of origin with a clear policy statement which states that: *"Where a child is unable to remain living with one or both parents, either temporarily or permanently, the placement of first choice will always be that they live with a kinship carer provided s/he is able to meet the child's needs."* Family Group Decision Making/ Family Group Conferencing is part of this process. It encourages true partnership working between professionals and extended family, sharing the responsibility for decision making, thus empowering children and their families to make informed decisions, to feel valued and heard. The service is supported by other local authority services aimed at supporting young people to live in their own communities and families.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- An understanding of Family Group Decision Making in an Edinburgh / local authority context - positives and negatives
- How the authority supports kinship care placements and helps to keep children at home and living in their own communities
- Embedding the ethos of the Family Group Decision Making model in practice across the authority
- The wider use of the model in practice (discussion)

Anne Begbie and **Denise Malone** are qualified social workers with 48 years of experience between them of working with children, young people and their families both in statutory practice and the voluntary sector. **Anne** has worked with children ranging from birth to late teens within a variety of different settings. She is also part of the training team which is currently delivering the Family Group Conferencing coordinators accreditation course within Scotland. **Denise** has worked in both the local authority and voluntary sector where she first became interested in working with the Family Group Decision Making model. She also spent 18 months working with children and young people who display sexually harmful behaviour. Anne and Denise are also part of the local authorities Kinship assessors team.

3C.Fostercare Treatment not Punishment: Piloting a Family Treatment programme with young offenders in Greece

■ **Presenters: Mary Theodoropoulou and Natalie Georgia Roberson, Roots Research Centre, Athens, Greece**

The presentation will describe the development of a Treatment Foster Care project in Greece and the benefits to the most vulnerable looked after children, young people and their families. The project is a pilot project targeted at young people with severe behaviour disorders who have committed offences and who are still frequently placed in jail. It seeks to provide an alternative solution to custody based on the multidimensional treatment foster care model developed by the Oregon Social Learning Centre in the United States⁸⁰ and influenced by the Intensive Fostering pilot programmes funded by the Youth Justice Board in the UK⁸¹. This is the first project of this kind in Greece and it will be nationally evaluated as part of a randomised controlled trial.

The project is being developed by the Roots Research Centre⁸² in cooperation with the Office of the Public Prosecutors of young offenders. It is focused mainly on boys referred from the juvenile justice system because of persistent antisocial problems. It is important to acknowledge that their behaviour is the result of neglect and poor parenting, all of which negatively impact on children's emotional and behavioural development. Difficulties tend to multiply with poor school achievement/ exclusion, poor social relationships and escalating challenging and antisocial

⁷⁹ See http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/1373/children_and_family_care-support_and_advice/1155/family_group_decision_making

⁸⁰ Multidimensional treatment foster care is a proven method of care and treatment of juveniles who have committed offences and is an alternative to custody. For more information see Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care in England (MTFCE) at <http://www.mtfce.org.uk/about-mtcfce/general-information.html>

⁸¹ The Intensive Fostering programme, funded by the Youth Justice Board in the UK, is an alternative to custody for children and young people whose home life is felt to have contributed significantly to their offending behaviour. More information can be found at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/youth-justice/reducing-re-offending>

⁸² See <http://www.roots-research-center.gr/?display=aboutus&lang=en>

behaviour. Unsurprisingly, there have been particular difficulties in securing effective placements for these young people. Within the project, foster carers aim to get young people to take responsibility for their actions, whilst at the same time helping them to manage their negative feelings in a positive way.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- The policy context of the Treatment Foster Care project in Greece
- The programmes that have influenced the development
- An example of how the programme is being implemented in practice

Mary Theodoropoulou is a Researcher and Sociologist working at the Roots Research Centre in Athens. The Centre was established in 1999 by adult adoptees with the aim of searching for their roots. The Centre's activities are twofold: to support adult adoptees in search of their roots and to promote the notion of fostering and adoption as a means of social work practice in the field of child protection. Ms Theodoropoulou is currently working with children and young people in institutions in cooperation with the Public Prosecutors of young offenders.

Natalie Georgia Roberson was born in South Africa and has been living in Europe for the past 10 years. She studied Health and Social Care at the Open University (UK) and is currently working and living in Greece. She is now working as a Social Worker in Athens for the not-for-profit organisation 'Roots Research Centre', which is involved in the promotion of foster care and children's rights within Greece and Europe. She strongly believes in the value of children's rights and voices and has been involved in European wide projects such as Speak Up! and represented Eurochild at the Fundamental Rights Platform meeting.

4A. The Right to Quality Early Childhood Education and Care for Children under 3 years old living in prison in Spain

■ **Presenter: Ana Ancheta Arrabal**, Doctor Assistant Professor, University of Valencia & Fundacion Montessori Sin Fronteras, Spain

The presentation focuses on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Spain and the impact of ECEC policies on children's rights. In particular, it looks at the situation of children under 3 years old living in jail with their mothers and, based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its General Comment 7⁸³ as a reference, evaluates whether these rights are being guaranteed or not.

Early Childhood Education and Care in Spain has seen major developments as a system within the last 20 years, particularly over the last 8 years through the implementation of integrated plans and reforms across welfare and educational systems. Nevertheless, the current context of financial crisis and new government is pushing ECEC further down the policy agenda, bringing new challenges from the perspective of children's rights. This introduction will look at the quality of institutional care for children under 3 living in prison with their mothers and the rise of children born in these institutions. Children's rights are biased and conditioned by the right of the mother, under Spanish law, to live with them in jail. However, although the law determines the quality requirements of these institutions and interventions, they are not being controlled and monitored by the authorities. Hence, there is a lack of information and visibility on the state of the rights and wellbeing of young children living in prison. There is also little research to measure the link between the quality of alternative care and abandonment of children under 3 as there is little institutional information. Therefore the work has focused on qualitative research through interviews with experienced professionals from the voluntary sector who know the field and the latest surveys on this issue.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- ECEC in Spain in the current financial and political context
- The quality of institutional care for children under 3 living in prison with their mothers
- The implementation of early childhood rights

⁸³ COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (CRC), UNITED NATIONS (2005): *CRC General Comment No. 7. Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood*. 20 September 2006, CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/460bc5a62.html> (accessed 10 December 2009).

Ana Ancheta Arrabal is a graduate Early Childhood Education Teacher from the University of Alicante and is also a graduate Infant Pedagogue from the University of Valencia. She subsequently became Doctor of Education in the Department of Comparative Education and History of Education in the University of Valencia, where she is currently teaching and researching. Her professional practice is a determinant for the development and improvement of quality in ECEC professionals through their initial and on-going professional training. Her research informs and compares the implementation of the right to ECEC by national and regional bodies with other regions and countries to learn how to improve and work towards better practice.

4B. The Family Strengthening Programme as a response in the prevention of child abandonment

■ **Presenter: Senka Cimpö**, Family Strengthening Project Coordinator, SOS Children's Villages Bosnia and Herzegovina

The presentation is focused on the Family Strengthening Project (FSP) in Sarajevo⁸⁴ and its achievements in preventing family separation and child abandonment. The Sarajevo project is part of the Family Strengthening Programme within SOS Children's Villages Bosnia and Herzegovina⁸⁵ and represents a strategic initiative for the prevention of child abandonment and separation of children from their family of origin. Programme participants are families recognised as 'at-risk' families according to the (national) Family Law. Their problems are different but all amount to a violation of children's rights and inability to meet children's needs. Programme interventions and services include direct work with children, their parents and communities/ stakeholders. Project activities are aimed at ensuring access to essential services for all children, supporting families to build their own capacities to protect and care for their children, and strengthening support systems for vulnerable children and their families within the community. The expected results of project implementation are higher social inclusion of families and greater self-reliance.

After three and a half years of implementation, an external evaluation⁸⁶ has demonstrated that 99.1% of children remained with their family of origin, thus successfully preventing family separation. The results also indicated that the quality of life had improved in the majority of families in areas such as child healthcare, performance at school, involvement in sports and leisure activities, improved skills levels/ job prospects for parents and increased awareness and participation of children and parents in child rights activities.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- How the FSP model of work with families of origin operates to prevent family separation and child abandonment
- Good practice and lessons learned in networking within a local community
- Practice challenges in direct work with children and parents

Senka Cimpö is Coordinator of the Sarajevo Family Strengthening Project. She is a psychologist and gestalt psychotherapist by profession. She has worked as a FSP Coordinator and psychologist within SOS Children's Villages since 2008. Beside psychotherapy and child rights promotion and protection, she has a commitment to informal education of youth and children through extracurricular activities.

4C. Prohibiting and eliminating corporal punishment in all alternative care settings

■ **Presenter: Ian Johnston**, International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), European Executive Committee

The presentation is made by Ian Johnston on behalf of the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children⁸⁷, in conjunction with Ivaylo Milanov (Senior Expert, Children's Rights, State Agency for Child Protection)

⁸⁴ <http://www.sos-ds.ba/index.php?lokacija=strane&otac=&id=3&lan=en>

⁸⁵ <http://sos-ds.ba/downloads/FS-ENG.pdf>

⁸⁶ *External Evaluation of Family Strengthening Project Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Hasanagic S. & Dedic M. (2012) will be published soon on SOS Children's Villages website

⁸⁷ www.endcorporalpunishment.org

and Diana Petrova, representatives of IFSW's local member organisation, the Bulgarian Association of Social Workers. The results of a recent international research project, '*Prohibiting and eliminating corporal punishment in all alternative care settings*' will be presented and discussed⁸⁸. The report aims to accelerate the prohibition and elimination of all corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading punishment in all alternative care and day care settings.

Corporal punishment is inflicted on children in nearly all societies and cultures. Its legal and social acceptance is a potent symbol of children's perceived low status. Although it is just as violent to hit a child as it is to hit an adult, by 2012, only 32 states worldwide had recognised this in legislation. In alternative care and day care settings progress towards prohibition of corporal punishment has been especially slow, with these settings often among the last in which prohibition is enacted. Worldwide, only 50 states explicitly prohibit corporal punishment of children in all group care, including institutional care, and only 38 in formal foster care. At least 127 states have no prohibition of corporal punishment in any form of alternative care or day care. This leaves millions of children, including some of society's most vulnerable, subject to violent and humiliating punishment by those whose role it is to take care of them.

■ **What attendees will learn from the presentation:**

- What corporal punishment is and why it should be prohibited, including in alternative care
- The current legal situation on corporal punishment in alternative care in Europe and worldwide
- How corporal punishment can be effectively prohibited in alternative care

Ian Johnston lives in Perthshire in Scotland. He joined the social work profession in 1971 in Glasgow and held posts of social worker and team leader in Tayside before moving to Fife where he was Regional Manager for Community Care Services. From 1999 until 2009 he was Chief Executive of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW). He is a registered social worker, a non-executive director of Deaf Action and his local Development Trust and a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts (FRSA). A member of the European Executive Committee of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) Ian represents the Federation on the EU Social and Fundamental Rights Platforms and is determined to secure a more inclusive and cohesive society and challenge the abuse of human rights wherever this occurs.

⁸⁸*Ending legalised violence against children: Prohibiting and eliminating corporal punishment in all alternative care and day care settings'* (2012) Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children & Save the Children Sweden
<http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/pdfs/GI%20Alternative%20Care%20and%20Day%20Care%20Report%202012.pdf>
<http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.sehttp://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se>

Annex 6 - Young people conference

The Young People Conference contributed to the main theme of Eurochild's Annual Conference 2012 in Sofia. All young people contributing had direct experience of alternative care and used this experience to deliver key messages for Eurochild members, invited guests and researchers. The active involvement of young people in the conference underlined Eurochild's commitment to the participation of children and the central role they have as experts of their own experiences and realities.

The project gathered 14 young people from Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Malta and the UK from Monday 22 October until Friday 26 October 2012.

The young people worked together on the subject of children living in alternative care and receive a European, as well as, an international overview of this important theme. They also had the opportunity to participate and contribute in different parts of the Eurochild conference, including the Opening Ceremony and the Closing Session. They presented some reflections arising from their work together and from the conference.

The young people are active in the following organisations:

- Roots Research Centre Greece
- Intermedia Consulting, Italy
- FSWS, Malta
- SOS Children's Villages, Bulgaria
- Foundation Agapedia, Bulgaria