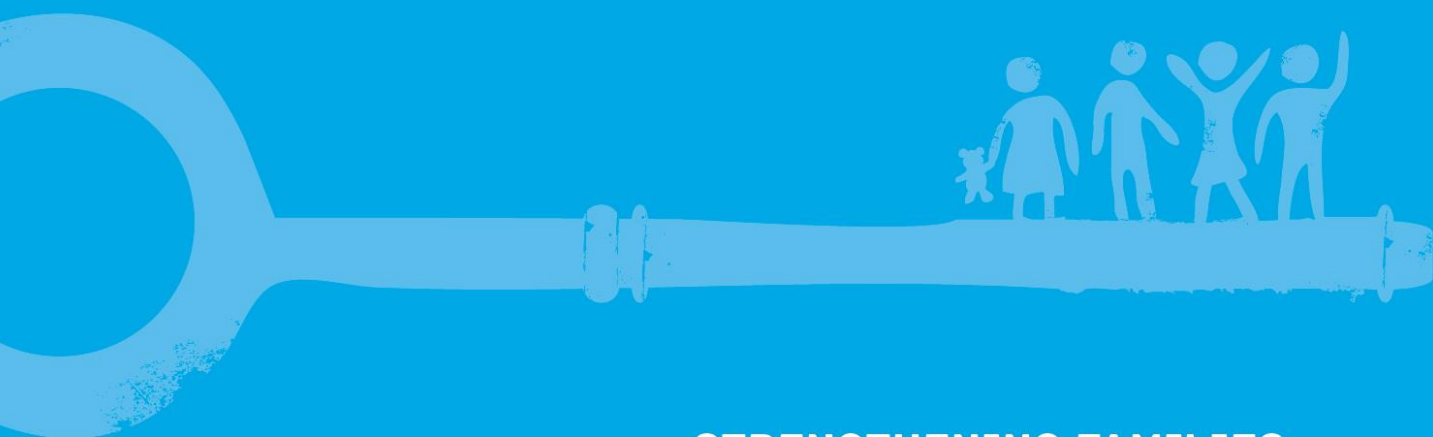


OPENING DOORS FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN

**Call to Action to the Bulgarian
Government**

February 2016



**STRENGTHENING FAMILIES.
ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.**

*This document is connected to the **Opening Doors for Europe's Children campaign** and is based on the proposal made to the Bulgarian Government by the Coalition 'Childhood 2025' to update the structure and content of the updated Action Plan. Members of the Coalition expressed their wish for active inclusion and participation at all levels of the process of elaboration and implementation of the Action Plan for the period of 2016-2020 in regard to the implementation of the **National strategy "Vision for the deinstitutionalisation of children in Bulgaria"**.*

We welcome the recent actions of the Bulgarian Government made at the beginning of 2016, connected to the inclusion of non-profit organisations in the elaboration of the updated Action Plan and we appeal to the Bulgarian Government to continue this process.

A call to action

Bulgarian and international civil society organisations urgently urge the Bulgarian government to update its **Action Plan** for the implementation of the national strategy, **Vision for the deinstitutionalisation of the children in the Republic of Bulgaria**. An updated Action Plan must establish the right conditions to continue the reform of the child protection system, which began in the first stage of the implementation. It must renew the political engagement and set a solid strategic framework, including effective and targeted use of European Union funds through projects during the programming period up to 2020.

The following key principles should be applied in the updated Action Plan:

- The updated Plan should build upon the achievements of the first stage of implementation (2010 – 2014). It should **prioritise the prevention of child separation from families** through supporting specific, customised interventions for children and families. In parallel, efforts to ensure the total closure of institutions must continue. This includes the deinstitutionalization of children accommodated in the institutions for medico-social care of children (baby homes), in institutions for children deprived of parental care and those in educational and socio-educational boarding schools.
- Non-governmental organisations should take part in the updating and implementation of the Action Plan following regulation (EU) 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council from 17th December, 2013¹ being actively included at the highest level of management and taking decisions, this should include the – Inter-ministerial Working Group for Deinstitutionalisation
- The updated plan will apply until the year 2020 and will follow the goals established and integrated in the long-term strategy **Vision for deinstitutionalization of children in the Republic of Bulgaria**.

¹ Laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006

With regard to the above, the goals for the period 2016 – 2020 should be:

1. To prevent the separation of children from their parents and to prevent violence and neglect towards children.
2. To progressively close institutions for medico-social care for children and institutions for children deprived of parental care, ensuring development of quality alternative care services that respond to the needs and developmental opportunities of each child.
3. To increase the effectiveness of multidisciplinary teams, the quality of work in the child protection system, and the network of related services.

These goals should be accompanied with the following related measures and activities:

Goal 1: Prevention of the separation of children from their parents and the prevention of violence and neglect towards children.

- 1.1 Work towards increasing the effectiveness and quality of the existing prevention services.
- 1.2. Develop an inter-agency system to support families in crisis.
- 1.3. Introduce a clear and precise mechanism to include and ensure the participation of the child and his/her parents in the entire decision-making process.
- 1.4. Develop and implement a national programme for early intervention among families of children with disabilities, or at risk of acquiring disabilities, between the ages of 0 and 6 years.

Goal 2: Progressively close institutions for medico-social care for children and institutions for children deprived of parental care, ensuring development of quality alternative care services that respond to the needs and developmental opportunities of each child.

- 2.1. The closure of **all** institutions for medico-social care for children and the development of alternative services in the community.
- 2.2. The closure of **all** institutions for children deprived of parental care and the establishment of a network of alternative services.
- 2.3. A project to provide advisory and community support services assisting independent living for those over the age of 18 who have left residential care, or foster care.
- 2.4. Development and implementation of a long-term plan for the development of foster care.
- 2.5. A project for the closure of all educational and socio-educational boarding schools in the country.
- 2.6. Adoption – analysis and development of a vigorous monitoring system for the adoption process.

Goal 3: Increase the effectiveness of multidisciplinary teams, the quality of work in the child protection system, and the social services network

- 3.1. New policy for child and family support.
- 3.2. A system for monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the child protection system and the network of related services upon the direct beneficiaries - children and families.
- 3.3. A national framework defining the necessary competences, qualifications and continuing professional development of the professionals working with children and families.

3.4. A new approach to funding services, focused on the quality of results and the impact upon the direct beneficiaries - children and families.

In the management and coordination of the process of updating and implementation of the Action Plan, all resources of the NGO sector at political and expert level should be used.

About Opening Doors for Europe's Children



The *Opening Doors for Europe's Children* campaign operates at EU level and in 12 countries across Europe, calling on the EU and national governments to prioritise the transition from institutional to family-based care. We believe that the end of institutional care for children in Europe is possible and within our reach – putting the best interests of children back at the heart of Europe's child protection systems.

About Eurochild



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe

Eurochild advocates for children's rights and well-being to be at the heart of policymaking. We are a network of organisations working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. We influence policies, build internal capacities, facilitate mutual learning and exchange practice and research. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the foundation of all our work.

About Hope and Homes for Children



Hope & Homes
for Children

Hope and Homes for Children is an international organisation working on the eradication of institutional care in three key spheres: service development, capacity building and policy. We close institutions, reuniting children with families or placing them in alternative family-based care; we work in partnership with other agencies – including governments – to develop services such as fostering, adoption and a wide range of prevention services; and we work with governments to underpin family-based care systems through the development of policies and legislation. Our years of experience show us that our model is adaptable to different conditions in countries around the world because it covers these three vital elements of childcare reform.

About The National Network for Children



In Bulgaria, the *Opening Doors* campaign has been coordinated by **National Network for Children (NNC)**, an alliance of civil society organisations, working with and for the children and families across the whole of Bulgaria. Until end 2015, NNC was an active member of the Coalition Childhood 2025. NNC continues to work on the issue of deinstitutionalisation and collaborates closely with members of the Coalition.



In addition, this Call to Action has been endorsed by:

The Coalition “Childhood 2025”



The Coalition “Childhood 2025” is a union of leading civil organizations, networks and individuals from all over the country. Together they have been working on deinstitutionalisation and child protection reform issues since 2000. The Coalition’s main goal is the sustainability of the deinstitutionalisation process and its overarching priority is to **develop individual care within the community for every child and to guarantee the respect of children’s rights.**

Lumos



Protecting Children. Providing Solutions.

Lumos is an international NGO, founded by the author J.K. Rowling, working to end the institutionalisation of children around the world by transforming education, health and social care systems for children and their families and helping children move from institutions to family-based care. We are a founding member of the European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care. Lumos has been working in Bulgaria since 2011 with the aim to provide support and guidance to the Government in the implementation of its Vision for Deinstitutionalisation. It is a founding member of the Bulgarian Coalition ‘Childhood 2025’. To find out more, visit www.wearelumos.org.