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Beleva, Iskra

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THE PROVISION OF CHILDCARE SERVICES IN BULGARIA

Iskra Beleva, Senior Research Fellow, Ph.D. in Economics

1. Introduction

Childcare Services in Bulgaria along with institutions and policies are in a process of development in accordance with the new economic, political and social realities. Thus, when analysing this problem we should consider the ongoing process of transformation of existing structures, on one hand, and the establishment of new structures and policies, on the other.

The development of a competitive market for social services in the country is a priority of the current social policy. When there is no such market, the recently offered childcare services in Bulgaria fell in to a variety of policy areas such as demographic, social, health, etc. In the demographic policy childcare services were presented in the form of state cares to encourage fertility. Childcare is a significant part of the social policy, where various forms of policies are offered, these are directed towards supporting the family, as well as services for children in specialised institutions. Childcare services are also part of the country's healthcare policy, especially concerned with children with substantial health problems. Children involved in anti-social acts or subjects of trafficking, as well as prostitution, drug addiction, etc., get support and help from the Prosecutor's Offices and police. The current governmental discussions and the development of different types of policies is a part of the general discussion concerning how to create and develop a competitive and effective market for childcare services within the country. Active participants in this discussion are the institutions in charge of the policy design and delivery of childcare services and especially the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Healthcare and the State Agency for Child Protection and the Prosecutor's office.

The significance of the childcare services in the current conditions is especially important for Bulgaria due to the increasing demand for such services, as well as to the need to raise their quality, to increase the accessibility and the efficiency, etc. To a great extent the reality of the problem also comes from the real state of these services in the new economic environment, their management, the existence of substantial regional discrepancies between supply and demand of childcare services, the affordability of the prices of offered services, their access, etc.

2. Childcare Services: Facts and Figures

2.1 Introduction

The bringing up of children and the protection of their rights is one of the national priorities in the Child Strategy 2007-2017. The actions to be taken for the realization of this priority are directed towards the family environment, living standard and social support and alternative forms of care. In all three directions there is a need for the development of services connected with raising children and childcare.

Childcare services in Bulgaria, as already mentioned, are in a process of creation and development. The responsibilities for these services and available policies are divided between the state, municipalities, employers and parents. The proportions, in which each part holds responsibilities, have changed substantially with the transformation of the economic and social environment. Before the transition, the State and employers covered significant parts

of the services offered, now they are shared mainly between the families, State and municipalities, but the main care responsibility remains with the parents. There are certain processes to involve the employers in solving this problem, but the processes are limited and only certain employers are involved. The schools had a significant part in the delivery of the state policy for children, but during the years of transition this role decreased substantially. Today there are attempts to revive the role of the school as an environment for delivering child protection policies and childcare.

The role of the state in the area of the childcare services includes: developing the legal framework for the development of policies relating to services and support for children; development of institutions, which are engaged in delivering state policy and concrete policies (services), which (a) concern all children, and (b) are directed towards special groups of children or groups of children at risk. The policies, created for special groups of children, include services in the specialised children establishments and services and activities for children at risk.

A set of services for children and their families are offered outside the special institutions and they include various forms for supporting families with children, programmes for children in school, programmes to support the reintegration of mothers in the labour market after giving birth and raising a child, as well as a benefit package for mothers, covering pregnancy, giving birth and raising a child.

At municipality level childcare services relate to crèches and kindergartens, as well as communal children kitchens. Community childcare development is one of the priorities of the policy in the field of Child Services.

The employers provide some protection for mothers who are raising small children such as opportunities to work flexible hours, additional leave for breast-feeding. These protection tools have been written in to the Labour Code and are obligatory. Employers can provide further support to the mothers with children, such as funds for hiring a nanny, money benefits for raising a child, healthcare insurance for the mother and Children's funds for medical treatment of the child or supporting the family if necessary, etc.

Childcare is a principal function of the family. Over the years in Bulgaria there has been a tradition of solidarity with the family in raising a child. This means that the young family can, to a great extent, rely on their parents during the process of raising a child from birth to adulthood.

2.2 Availability

Since there are no EU-SILC data for Bulgaria in this section, we will present the available national data. The grouping of services, provided to children or to families with children, could follow different approaches/criteria. Here we will base the analysis on supply of services, with an existing legal base.

According to the acting legislation "social services" are activities, which support and expand the opportunities of people to lead individual ways of life and are delivered both in specialised institutions and in the community.¹

As far as social childcare services in Bulgaria go, there were 1,557,873 children (2005) and this represent 20% of the country's population. Their distribution by age is presented in table 1.

¹ Social Support Act, State Gazette, No 120 from 2002, in power since 01.01.2003.

Table 1: Distribution of children by age groups – 2005

Total/ age groups	0	1-4	5-9	10-14	15-19
1 557 873 children	68350	269328	320762	388611	510822
% of total children	4,3	17,2	20,5	25,0	33,0

Source: Statistical Yearbook, NSI, 2006, p. 55.

Types of Childcare Services:

A. The most popular and demanded child service is **providing places in crèches and kindergartens**. The crèches can be either public or private. The public services are delivered at municipality level.

Table 2: Crèches, places and children in crèches

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Number	630	631	637	638	641
Places	21174	21516	21542	21850	22094
Children	21167	21816	21029	22155	22993

Source: Statistical yearbook, National Statistical Institute, 2006, p. 414.

Data point out quite a stable provision of childcare in crèches over the last five years. Whether the provided number of places meets the demand for such a services could be answered by considering the results of a case study. It states that 69.3% of interviewees share the view that children up to 3 years should be brought up by their mothers and fathers. This means several things: firstly – the supply of such services should not be extended over the demand; the policy should be focused on supporting mothers and families in their care during this initial period of child raising, and thirdly – employment issue of mothers becomes a priority after the children turns 3 years old.²

However, this is not the case when the next children cohort is studied – children between 3 and 6 years old. According to the same case study, the importance of kindergartens has been outlined by 46.6% of the respondents declaring that they prefer public kindergartens for their children aged 3-6 years.

Table 2: Kindergartens and children, enrolled in Bulgaria – 1997-2005

	Kindergartens by types		Children enrolled		Pedagogical personnel	
	All day	Half day	All day	Half day	All day	Half day
1997	2801	748	198011	22029	19407	1182
1998	2783	735	198726	19799	19337	1113
1999	2754	678	194431	17476	19037	981
2000	2639	602	184913	15454	17828	849
2001	2627	606	184727	14373	17794	825
2002	2544	573	187467	13685	17470	782
2003	2511	757	184964	16053	17664	991
2004	2482	809	185359	17309	17799	1074
2005	2463	866	186958	19212	18052	1194
2006	2456	-	187899	18772	18130	1165

Source: Statistical Reference Book for respective years.

² Mihova, G. Raising of Children up to the Age of 6 by Employed Individuals in Bulgaria: Preferences and Practices (in Bulgarian). – In: Population Journal, 1-2, 2006, p. 107.

Following the data, we have to outline a tendency to reduce in the number of all-day kindergartens of 13% for the period 1997-2005. The decline in the number of children enrolled in them was 6%. The presented numbers are the only available published statistics. The lack of data on enrolment rates impedes a more detailed analysis, as well as the formulation of relevant conclusions. There is presently a public discussion about the shortage of supply of this kind of child service in big towns - especially in Sofia, the capital of the country. This has happened because of a very intensive migration of population from countryside to the big towns and to the capital in particular. The main reason for this migration has been the demand for better-paid work. Consequently, kindergartens in small towns and villages have closed while in big towns there is a shortage of such services. So, there is a clearly outlined regional imbalance in demand and supply of child services regarding kindergartners.

There are also **public baby kitchens** for children up to 3 years of age, which provide daily food for mothers for a fee. The service is in demand because of the quality of food provided to children, and it reduces the burden for mothers to prepare such food daily.

B: The regulation for social support in Bulgaria determines two types of social services for **children**: **(a)** social services provided in the community, and **(b)** social services provided by specialised institutions.

1. Social services provided in the community

Mainly these are activities concerning daily, weekly and hourly care for children, raised in a family or close to a family environment. It includes visiting the institution for diagnostics, rehabilitation, training and treatment. Some of the homes also provide systematic support for parents, consulting parents, etc.

By the end of 2005 the total number of social services, provided in the community, numbered 86 with a capacity of 2,351 places. In 2006, 72 new social services were delivered, many of which related to children.

The social services provided in the community, which target children, include:

- Personal assistant, social assistant, home assistant;
- Use of services provided in different types of centres like day centre (part-time and daily)³, centre for social rehabilitation and integration⁴, temporary accommodation centre (for families with children), centre for social support, centre for street children⁵, social-vocational training centre⁶, crisis centre⁷;

³ "Day centre" is a complex of social services, which create conditions for overall serving the needs during the day or weekly regarding providing food, satisfying the daily, healthcare, education and rehabilitation needs, as well as the needs of organizing the spare time and the personal contacts. When the service providing is weekly, serving the consumers is Monday to Friday.

⁴ "Centre for social rehabilitation and integration" is a complex of social services concerning rehabilitation, social-legal consultations, education and professional training and orientation, preparation and implementation of individual programs for social involvement.

⁵ "Centre for street children" is a complex of social services concerning prevention of children ending up on the street and school droppings, social rehabilitation and integration of children living permanent or temporary on the street, through individual work with the child and his/her family, family consulting and support, medical and sanitary-hygiene services, working against illiteracy of children, training parental skills.

⁶ "Public support centre" is a complex of social services concerning prevention from abandoning, prevention from violence and dropping off school, deinstitutionalization and reintegration of children, training skills of independent life and social integration of children from institutions, consulting and support of families in risk,

- Foster care⁸ and accommodating children in homes;
- “Mother and baby”⁹ section.

The development of these services goes through a licensing procedure for the suppliers of social services. Suppliers of social services are the State and municipalities, as well as bodies that are registered in the Social Support Agency by the Trade Act, and juridical bodies.

The number of children who have been in homes in the years is as follows: 531 children (2004), 314 children (2005) and 280 children (2006).

The number of children who have been accommodated in day centres increases from 107 in 2004 to 232 in 2005 and 332 in 2006, and from 4 in 2004 the number of day centres reached 10 in 2006.

In the frame of the whole range of services described above, in 2007 the offices for children support had issued 3,332 directions for using such services. The number of children directed to towards the homes for medical-sanitary care at the end of 2006 was 297. Of them 267 children receive day care in the home and in the evening they returned to their families. 30 children received week care. Almost half of the children were aged between 2 and 3. 56% of all day care centres (17) are mostly for children under 3 years of age.

2. Specialized institutions for providing social services are homes for children

There are:

- a) Homes for raising and education children deprived of parental care. This is a specialised institution, which provides social services for bringing up and raising children from 3 to 18 years of age or until graduating from secondary education, but not after 20 years of age.
- b) Homes for children with physical disabilities are a specialised institution, which provides a variety of social services to children with physical disabilities, determined by experts from Territorial Expert Medical Commission (TEMC) or National Expert Medical Commission (NEMC).
- c) Home for mentally retarded children is a specialised institution providing a complex of social services for children with moderate, heavy or deep mental retardation, established by expert decision of TEMC or NEMC.
- d) Homes for medical-social child caring.

The following table presents the dynamic in the number of homes, providers of services and the number of children, placed there.

evaluation and training of future foster parents and adopters, consulting and support of children with anti-social behaviour.

⁷ “Crisis centre” is a complex of social services provided to people suffering from violence or traffic victims, and directed towards satisfying their daily needs and preparing individual programs for social integration.

⁸ “Foster care” is bringing up and raising a child in family environment of relatives or foster family.

⁹ “Mother and baby” section provides temporary accommodation up to 6 months of pregnant women and mothers in risk of abandoning their children, encourages the parental adherence, supports the young mothers through social, psychological and legal consulting and support.

Table 3: Childcare homes and children places by kinds – 2001-2006

Homes –numbers	2001		2002		2003		2004		2005		2006	
	homes	children	homes	children	homes	children	homes	children	homes	children	homes	children
Homes for up-bringing and education of children, deprived of parental care ¹⁰	102	7 145	102	6 920	102	6 151	101	5 567	101	5 506	86	4 717
Homes for mentality retarded children	30	1 803	30	1 773	29	1 742	29	1 763	27	1 251	26	1138
Homes for disabled children (but mentally well) ¹¹	1	98	1	81	1	76	1	72	1	59	1	55
Homes for medico-social care for children ¹²	32	3 563	32	3 141	32	2 906	32	2 882	32	2 960	32	2743
Total	165	12 609	165	11 915	164	10 875	163	10 284	161	9 776	145	8 653

Source: Annual Report of the State Agency for Child Protection,
http://www.sacp.government.bg/downloads/bg/3/3/Pril_1.doc

It should be pointed that the share of children placed in institutions in total number of children decreased during the years from 0.78 in 2001 to 0.60 in 2006.¹³ The current policy has over the last few years worked towards taking the children out of such homes and developing alternative services.

C: **Child protection** services provided under the Child Protection Act (art. 4):

Child protection activities followed from the Child Protection Act (2000), and the institution in charge of its delivery is the State Agency for Child Protection. In each municipality there is a Municipal Social Assistance Centre, whose main priorities are: (a) preventing the abandonment of children; (b) de-institutionalisation of children placed in residential homes and development of alternative foster cares, day-care shelters, etc.

The types of services provided are as follows:

- Assistance, support and services rendered in the child's family environment (placement of the child with relatives or close families; adoption in accordance with the Family Code; placement of the child with a foster family)
- The number of children placed with families of relatives in the period 2005-2007 is 2,552 children. 51 children were placed with foster families. The total number of adopted children approved by court decision is 1, 278.
- Placement of the child in a specialised institution

The number of children placed in institutions decreases. This is due to the development of alternative forms of childcare. For the period 2005-2007 8,653 children were placed in these institutions, a 31% reduction since 2001.

¹⁰ Institutions at the Ministry of Education.

¹¹ The homes are managed by municipalities.

¹² The homes are managed by Ministry of Healthcare.

¹³ Annual Report of the State Child Agency, 2006, p. 5.

- Police protection
- Specialised protection at public places¹⁴
- Provision of information concerning the rights and obligations of children and parents
- Provision of preventative measures for security and protection of the child.

Criteria and standards for social services for children regarding application of the measures are defined in a regulation, adopted by the Council of Ministers under a proposal of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy.

D: Special protection for children against the worst forms of child labour (WFCL); trafficking of children, child street workers children, etc:

Children involved in illicit activities in Bulgaria, children above 14 years of age and thus who are legal liable and who committed crimes are included under the Penal Code. For children under 14 years who committed crimes, and children between 8 and 18 years guilty of "anti-social behaviour" Bulgaria established a separate system for juvenile justice around 1960. Neither international standards (Beijing Rules, the UN CRC and the ILO C 182 for instance), nor other national legislation on children existed at the time. The concept of "child at risk" and "child protection" was included in laws only in 2000. Consequently, two separate systems now function in parallel with some scope for contradiction: the juvenile justice system (applying compulsory re-education/punishment even for anti-social behaviour, which is not criminalized) and the child protection system (whose ultimate goal is to protect and rehabilitate the child). Children involved in WFCL, child beggars for instance, would get different treatments if they are withdrawn by the Police under the Juvenile Justice System or by the Child Protection Authorities under the Child Protection System. Similarly, child victims of trafficking who are returned back to Bulgaria can be temporarily placed in detention homes under the jurisdiction of Police.

Data shows that anti-social acts committed by minors and juveniles increase in the years as follows: from 11,070 total number of such acts in 2002 to 13,196 in 2003; 13,343 in 2004 and reduce to 12,407 in 2005.¹⁵

Working Street Children constitute a category of children who are the most vulnerable to various forms of abuse. The State Agency for Child Protection reports annually and in 2004 707 children and 663 children in 2005 were identified as being involved in WFCL in the streets of five big cities (Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv, Bourgas and Stara Zagora).¹⁶ The types of work the children were performing included begging, car washing, scavenging and prostitution. Life for street working children is marked by many problems related to their health, moral, socialisation and overall development. Working street children are most vulnerable to recruitment to other forms of hazardous work or are easy prey to child trafficking and prostitution. Street life is often the entry point for criminal activities.

Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Act (and implementing legislation for the Temporary Placement Shelters and the Centres for Protection and Assistance of the Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings) provides development of "services to protect the victims of trafficking including children", and witness protection. It establishes a National Commission to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings as a coordinative and advisory body to the Government and Local Commissions (which will use the CLMS).

¹⁴ Services provided by specialized firms to protect order when public events for children are organized.

¹⁵ Statistical Yearbook, 2006, p. 478.

¹⁶ Source: www.sacp.government.bg

E: Services for children provided at school (free of charge books, breakfasts, and transportation to school). There is a National Program of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, which aims at better coverage of children in schooling and decreasing drop-outs. The program is targeted at pupils in 1st to 4th grade and in 2007 it was implemented in 2,335 schools, providing services for 280,000 pupils.¹⁷

2.3 Quality

The quality of services provided in Bulgaria is regulated by state standards in the area of activities delivered and childcare services provided; these are reflected in Regulation of the criteria and standards of social childcare services.¹⁸ The standards refer to number of serviced people, staff providing the services, costs per person or place, etc. The monitoring system, used by the State Agency for Child Protection, monitors the following of the standards.

Financial expenditures standards:

Crèches are municipal or private. The law regulates the standards. The municipal crèches have a delegated expenditure budget from the state. The parents also pay monthly fees. The private crèches are licensed for executing such activity and are totally self-supporting. The monthly fees per child (400 BGN or 200 EUR) are many times higher than the ones in the municipal crèches, but the quality of the services is higher.

In the all-day kindergartens for children from 1 to 5 years of age including, the number of places is determined in groups¹⁹ as follows: first group – 65,956; second group – 31, 963; third group – 41,324 and fourth group – 12,123. The normal funds are 917 BGN per child (about 450 Euro) for the first group, 1,018 BGN (about 509 Euro) for the second group, 1,105 BGN (550 Euro) for third and 1,153 BGN (576 Euro) for the fourth group. Similar funding standards have been developed for children at 6 years of age for the all-day kindergartens and for the half-day kindergartens, as well as for the special kindergartens

The funding standards for children homes foresee expenditures of 1,819 BGN (909 euro) per child, and those for temporary accommodation – 550 BGN (275 euro) per child.

Baby kitchens are also state and private. The difference in the prices is almost three fold – the monthly fee in the state one is 30 BGN (15 euro) whereas in the private baby kitchens it is 80 BGN (40 euro).

The standard funding level of the day care centres for children with disabilities is 1,035 BGN (517 euro) per child, “Mother and baby” section – 1,292 BGN (646 euro) per place, centre for street children – 1,035 BGN (517 euro) per child. For homes to bring up and raising children at 3 to 6 years of age, deprived of parental cares, the standard funding level is 5,590 BGN (2,790 euro) annually.

¹⁷ Report of the MLSP on performance of Governmental program, Sofia, 2007.

¹⁸ Regulation for criteria and standards for social childcare services, Ministry of Labour and Social Support, <http://www.mlsp.government.bg/bg/law/regulation/kriterii%20i%20standarti.doc>.

¹⁹ The grouping is based on specific demographic and economic regional characteristics

Staff standards:

The legal norms regarding the staff, which provide the services, differed depending on the kind of services. Here we will point out several aspects of possible analysis.

Kindergartens:

It was mentioned that in Bulgaria the majority of the kindergartens are public (the private sector offer 3.7% in 2005 and 1.8% in 2001).²⁰ As far as the number of kindergartens, it decreases faster than the number of children enrolled. More children per kindergartner are observed, outlining the increasing efficiency of the existing public childcare system. However, the decrease of the pedagogical personnel by 7% suggests that less specialised personnel take care of the children, which perhaps has negatively influenced the quality of the services provided.

Child protection:

By the end of 2006 the total number of the staff that worked in the area of child protection was 817. The tendency is towards an increase of the number of people employed in this activity from 650 in 2003 to 726 in 2004 and 763 in 2005.

The staffing structure includes 18.4% – chief of departments, 52.4% – social workers, 3.7% – psychologists, 10.6% – jurists, 14.9% are senior experts and 4.7% have other occupational specialists e.g. accountants, specialist under special programs, etc. The average number of children per social worker varies among the municipalities in accordance with the total number of children but in general the distribution is quite uneven, e.g. in Sofia-town, the capital of the country, there are almost 3,000 children per social worker, while in Sofia-region this number is 500.

Personnel in institutional child care services:

At the end of 2006 the total number of staff in all 145 specialised institutions was 6,212 people. According to the type of institution the structure of the employed staff varies.

For example, in the homes for medico-sanitary care of the total 3,031 staff at the end of 2006 the 52% were medical staff, 4% were pedagogical staff, 1.8% were specialised staff, around 6% were administrative and 35% were aid staff .

The structure of the medical staff includes 159 doctors (17 children per doctor), 1,316 nurses (2 children per nurse), 53 rehabilitators (51 children per rehabilitator), 37 medical assistants, masseurs, nutrition instructors, etc.

The aid staff includes sanitary offices, nannies, kitchen staff, and laundresses. The total number of these staff was 1,086 people for a total of 2,743 children in this type of home.

In the homes for children deprived of parental care the number of aid staff at the end of 2006 was 2,032 people. In its structure the number of the pedagogical staff and of the aid staff are equal – 887 people.

Table 4 presents how the pedagogical staff changes in the homes for mentally retarded people in accordance with the changes of the number of the schools and children enrolled in them.

²⁰ Statistical Yearbook for respective years, NSI, Sofia.

Table 4: Schools for mentally retarded, personnel and children enrolled (numbers)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Schools	76	75	73	72	72
Teaching staff	1370	1307	1256	1184	1247
Children enrolled	9489	9193	8655	7996	7355

Source: Statistical Yearbook, 2006, p. 428.

In 2002 one teacher is responsible for 6.9 children, and in 2006 they are 5.9 children per teacher. The decrease of the number of children per teacher is a positive step concerning the quality of the teaching and working with children.

Table 5 shows the change of the pedagogical staff per pupil in different types of special schools.

Table 5: Teaching staff per student in different types of special schools

Type of school	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2005/2006
Convalescent schools	6,7	6,8	6,9	5,7
Correcting boarding schools	3,4	3,6	4,2	3,6
Social-pedagogical boarding schools	10,5	10,1	9,3	7,0
Schools for hard hearing children	3,8	3,2	5,1	3,1
Schools for visually handicapped children	3,4	3,7	3,8	3,4

Source: Statistical Yearbook, NSI, 2006, p. 428.

The data in the table show that in these schools there is a tendency towards decreasing the number of pupils per teacher and improvement the quality of teaching.

To improve the quality of the staff providing childcare in specialised institutions, as well as to provide services (since these homes also provide services to day-children), training is conducted, which in general is divided in two groups: training relating to hands-on work with children and training to improve the qualification of the staff through team working, vocational orientation and development, European good practices, conflicts resolution, etc.

The wages of staff providing services or caring for children in special institutions cannot be stated due to a lack of data. In the state sector the payment is regulated by professions and positions, and in the private sector – on a market basis. However we should state that in Bulgaria the wage levels are one of the lowest in the European Union and for 2006 the average annual wage is 4000 BGN or 2000 EUR. Also, the wage levels in the sectors of healthcare, education and social cares is one of the lowest and there the average wage is lower than the average for the country.

As a whole the evaluation of the quality of the services provided and childcare cannot be high due to the poor facility, as well as due to the low wages and lack of developed criteria for quality evaluation and performance management.

Licensing the service suppliers is important for guaranteeing a certain level of quality of the service. In the period 2004-2007, 285 suppliers of social services for children were licensed.

Art. 40 and 41 of the Regulation for implementation of the Social Support Act states the necessity for following the state standards concerning available staff and quality of service. The control of the system is regulated in separate chapter of the Regulation for implementation of the Social Support Act. It includes an entire monitoring network, represented by public councils, inspectorate of the local Social Support Agency, non-

government organisations, structures of the Agency for Child Protection, legal authorities, etc. The state agency for child protection publishes the reports on the monitoring evaluations on its site. For example, the monitoring of 59 day childcare centre, conducted in 2006, shows differences in the quality of the childcare services provided. These differences come from the quality of the staff, and their experience in delivering such services. For instance, the day care centres, managed by non-government organisations, do not have yet enough experience regarding the service delivery methodology.

2.4 Flexibility

The type of service determines the extent of flexibility. Some of the services mentioned are not very flexible. For instance, the all-day kindergartens have fixed start and end time for work. For the children in institutions the flexibility cannot be discussed since these services are 24/7.

The activity in the day care centres also has some limits, but hourly use of the services of the centre is possible, which shows considerably good flexibility. The flexibility is also measured by the individual work with each child, since each service is specific in accordance with the need of the child.

Other types of services and childcare²¹ are provided if necessary and that is why it is difficult to evaluate their flexibility.

As a whole we can state that there is a normative base, which allows flexibility in terms of methodology and opportunity for individual work. It is a matter of practice whether flexible services are delivered.

2.5 Affordability

To what extent the services provided are accessible is a matter of prices and income of the families that wish to use them? Depending on the types of services provided their accessibility is characterized as follows:

Accessibility of crèches and kindergartens. The average monthly price for visiting all-day kindergarten with municipal ownership is 40 BGN (20 euro). If the family has a second child visiting this kindergarten, the price for the second child is 10 BGN less.

The average monthly prices of services provided in the institutions subsidised by the State for children less than 3 years of age is 673 BGN or 22 BGN per day (11 euro). These amounts are insufficient and institutions rely on donations – both in money and in kind. The prices of the services are different depending on the type of institution. In homes for bringing up and raising children deprived of parental care the average monthly allowance is 273 BGN or 9 BGN per day (4,5 euro). In homes for mentally retarded children the average monthly allowance of a child is 656 BGN or 22 BGN per day (11 euro).

2.6 Attitudes

On one hand, the use of childcare services is a matter of sufficient supply, and demand of certain type of service. In this sense the supply of such services is not sufficient concerning

²¹ For instance, accommodation in homes, work with street children, etc.

the demand – for instance in the big towns and especially in the capital there is a substantial shortage of places in the kindergartens. The use of the institutional services is connected with specific health problems, which are documented by the relevant health bodies and after that the child is directed to the relevant institution. The development of alternative forms of services shows a need for a more flexible approach to satisfying the needs. In practice with insufficiently developed networks of services types and quality, the parents do not have the opportunity to choose.

2.7 Related issues

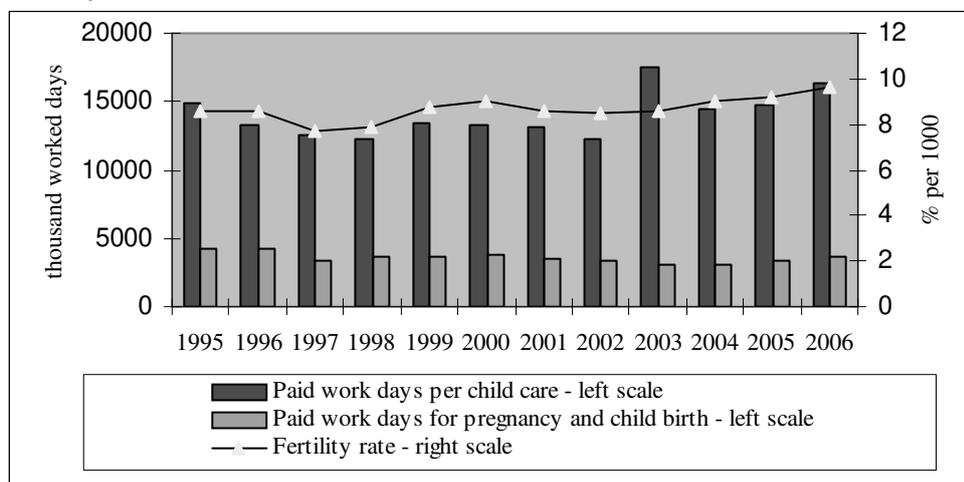
Support for mothers regarding pregnancy and child birth

All parents are eligible to a **Birth Grant** equal to 100 EUR for the first, second and third child and 50 EUR for every additional child in the family.

The period of **maternity** includes 315 days. Within this period the mothers receive benefits. The amount of benefits depends on the level of the insurance income and is calculated as 90% of the daily insurance income. According to the National Insurance Institute data, presented in Figure 1, the amount of money, spent on maternity benefits had increased during the period 2000-2006 from 18 to 36 million BGN. After this period the amount of benefits is determined by Social Insurance Budget Act and is at the level of the minimum wage for the country. The amount of money spent also increased for the period 2000-2006 from 40 to 114 million BGN.

The trends in paid workdays due to: (a) pregnancy and childbirth (maternity leave)²² and (b) parental leave, which refers to childcare after the termination of the legal period for maternity leave²³ are described in the figure 1.

Figure 1: Total paid work days due to pregnancy and child birth, parental leave and fertility rates



Source: Statistical Reference Book, National Social Security Institute, 2003, p. 202.

Figure 1 illustrates that in line with the slow increase in fertility rate²⁴ (from 8.6 in 1995 to 9.6 in 2006) the paid workdays per pregnancy and childbirth had increased as well as that for childcare. Thus, for example, in 2006 the number of children born was 74,495 out of which

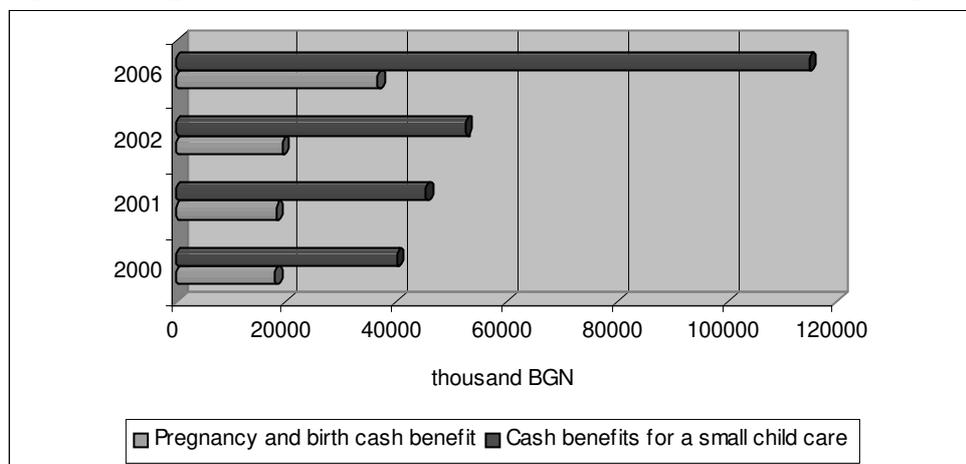
²² The period varies depending on the legal frame, in the present it is 4 months.

²³ This period includes 2 years, during which mothers are paid 90% of their wage and unpaid leave that could be transferred to the father or the grandparents.

²⁴ Per 1000 of average number of the population.

99.3% or 73,978 – lived. This was an increase of 2,903 children on 2005. The childbirth grant under the Family Benefits Acts (2002) is 200 BGN (100 euro) for first, second and third child and 100 BGN (50 euro) for each additional child in the family.

Figure 2: Expenditure on childbirth and childcare benefits for the period 2000-2006



Source: Social Insurance in Bulgaria, 2006, Annual Paper, NII, 2007; Demography, economy and social insurance 1982-2002, Statistical Reference BOOK, National Social Security Institute, 2003.

Family support for bringing up child

The **Family Benefits for Children Act** stipulates two types of benefits for families raising their children, both conditional on the school attendance of the child: 1) the monthly benefit, and 2) the targeted single benefit for children of families receiving Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) to cover their basic needs at the start of the school year (the amount must be returned back if the child is not in the school). Amendments to the **Act** were passed in April 2006 to legalise the concept of the governing of ‘social investments in children’, meaning that the monthly child allowance will be granted to the family (in cash or in kind) on the condition that the child attends school. Whether it is cash or kind depends on the assessment by the Social Assistance Department (Conditional Cash Transfers – CCTs).²⁵ of the capacity of parents.

Table 6: Number of families and children receiving monthly child allowances

Monthly child allowances	2005	2006	2007
Number of families	774160	728717	595277
Number of children	1 129 810	1 055 704	874 441

Source: Report of the MLSP, Sofia, 2007.

The payment of monthly benefits is conditional on the children going to school regularly. The decrease in the number of families and children, receiving such benefits in 2007, is a result of the introduction of this requirement and the cancelling of this benefit if the child has more than 5 unexcused absences from school. Thus 7,535 families and 8,170 children have stopped receiving this benefit in the period 2006-2007.

²⁵ Draft Study on CCT and Child Labour in Bulgaria. Petya Kabakchieva, July, 2006.

Services for employment integration of mothers after childbirth

In the frames of the active policy on the labour market there is a special programme for labour reintegration of mothers after giving birth and raising small children. The programme subsidises the employers to hire mothers, as well as offering opportunities for improving the qualification of the women who have lost their competitiveness on the labour market as a result of maternity.

2.8 Summary and Conclusion

An important question to be answered in this final section is whether demand (both in quantitative and qualitative terms) is met.

The generalization of everything said so far allows the following conclusions:

- The development of childcare services in the country is still in its initial period and this means that both demand and supply are underdeveloped.
- The forms of childcare, which the state has maintained during the years of planned economy, predominate. State and municipality childcare is still provided within the whole set of such services.
- The process of denationalisation runs slowly, the services provided by private suppliers are yet to develop and this reflects on their variety, as well as their quality. The development of alternative forms of services is an exclusively positive phenomenon, still in its initial form of development.
- The evaluation of the actions conducted so far shows that the opportunities created for such services are not completely used because of objective factors – for example the long distances of the centres providing services from the addresses of the children who need them, as well as subjective reasons like poor relationships between institutions, engaged in the service, like municipalities, social support offices, service suppliers, etc.

3. Childcare services: achievements and challenges

3.1 Introduction

As a whole the policy of development of childcare and the services provided for their upbringing and raising aim to create more favourable infrastructure for the parents for raising children. The question is to what extent providing services (for child raising) creates better opportunities for mothers in labour market participation and opportunities for faster labour reintegration, is important for society but unfortunately it has not been studied in detail.

3.2 Labour market achievements

Labour Force Survey data indicate that female participation rates have been lower by nearly 10 per cent compared with male participation rates (Table 7). One reasonable explanation of this lower participation rate is the motherhood and the time childcare consumes.

Table 7: Participation rate – total and by gender

Period	Total	Male	Female
Sept'93	55,4	60,5	50,5
Nov'98	49,2	55,6	45,6
Nov'99	40,8	45,1	36,8
Dec'00	47,5	52,4	42,9
Dec'01	48,1	52,4	44
Dec'02	48,4	53,2	43,9
Sep'03	50,3	53,7	43,6
Sep'04	50,8	54,5	44,3
4Q'05	49,6	55,8	44,2
4Q'06	51,8	57,4	46,8

Source: LSF for respective years

Though the economic activity of the women as a whole is lower than the one of the men, the women in age group 15-24 have a lower employment coefficient than men in this age group. The same is valid for the next age group – 25-34. This is the age when women give birth and raise children and that is why they are less represented in the employment figures.

Table 8: Employment and unemployment rate by age group and gender

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Employment rate				
15-24 women	19,6	19,6	19,3	21
15-24 man	21,7	23,4	23,9	25,4
25-34 women	60,6	61,9	71	73,7
25-34 man	70	72,7	75,6	78,3
Unemployment rate				
15-24 women	24,8	24,5	21,1	20,3
15-24 man	31	26,7	23,3	18,9
25-34 women	14,4	12,7	10,5	10
25-34 man	14,7	12,6	9,8	8,6

Source: LFS

The unemployment coefficients show exactly the opposite ratio – in the age groups of 15-24 and 25-34 men have higher unemployment coefficient. There are fewer women in the unemployment rate because they are engaged in raising children.

Some studies partly reveal the problem of the integration of women in the labour and the difficulties in reconciliation of maternity and childcare with the active participation in the labour market. For example, according to a case study the importance of kindergartens has been outlined by 46.6% of the respondents who declare that they prefer public kindergartens for their children aged 3-6 years. As already has been pointed out, the fact that 69.3% of the interviewees share the view that children up to 3 years of age should be brought up by their mothers and fathers this means that employment issue of mothers becomes a priority after the children turn 3 years old.²⁶ The data mentioned from the study shows that after the child becomes 3 years old there is a need for kindergarten services. The existing demand implies a

²⁶ Mihova, G. Raising of Children up to the Age of 6 by Employed Individuals in Bulgaria: Preferences and Practices (in Bulgarian). – In: Population Journal, 1-2, 2006, p. 107.

need for further development of the services as well as active policies for easier adaptation of the mothers to the work life after the children become 3 years old.

Another study shows what part of the family time is dedicated to raising children. The time budget of the household members per day and the commitments of men and women to childcare (as a time spent on meeting child needs by helping him/her in a more physical sense) and bringing-up of child (reading books, learning school lessons together, going to cinema, theatre, playing games, etc.) indicate that women spend twice more time for childcare, while the time for bringing up child is relatively equally divided between both parents (Table 9).

Table 9: Time budget for childcare and bringing-up child in 2001-2002 (minutes per 24 hours)

Activities	Total	Male	Female
Physical care for raising child	80.2	47.9	86.4
Studying with a child	61.1	65.7	68.7
Reading, playing and conversations	68.3	65.7	68.7
Accompanying the child	64.3	74.2	57.8
Others	55.0	80.0	30.0

Source: Time budget survey 2001-2002, NSI.

The employed women usually combine childcare in a family with household labour and work. In 2001-2002 women spent more time on childcare and child rearing compared to 1988. It means that women stayed at home longer and took more care for the child while men were more engaged with work and provision of income for the family. According to survey data, women in Bulgaria spend 4 hours per day on childcare and housework.²⁷

The conditions of combining work and family life have changed considerably during the transition. On one hand, the participation of women in the labour market and employment requires greater efforts due to the highly competitive environment. On the other hand, there is no adequate or favourable social infrastructure to support child rising and alleviate household work. The opportunities for better combination of work and family commitments through flexible working time are still underdeveloped but the low living standard and the low labour incomes are factors, which reduce the incentives for using them.

A topic of special discussion is the policies, and labour market policies in particular, that have to support women to balance work and family life more easily. In Bulgaria, the focus of the employment policy is on easing women's reintegration in employment after childbirth. The Annual National Plans of Employment include some active measures and policies in this field, particularly in the last two years. As noted above, there are several targeted measures for helping women's reintegration into the labour market after childbirth, including incentives for employers to hire people from this target group, or incentives for updating qualifications and education of young women to increase their employability.

Here we will also point out the family-based taxation as an element of the tax policy. It was introduced in 2006 and its aim was to relieve the family budget depending on the number of children. Since no assessment of its effects on family budgets or employment motivation was made, it is difficult to support or to criticize this policy tool.

²⁷ Time Budget, National Statistical Institute Survey, 2004, p. 357.

3.3 Social Inclusion

As mentioned above, a significant aspect of the policy carried out on children and their families is the social, and that is why the important role of the social policy and mostly of the social benefits in the process of giving birth and raising children was mentioned. All types of benefits in money and in kind are directed towards decreasing family poverty in families with more children, socialisation of the children and their parents through incorporating them to school, and using social services.

Another aspect of the social involvement is incorporating the children with disabilities in social life through taking them out of the institutions and creating a close to family environment for their upbringing and development.

The whole policy for protection of children in risk is also directed towards decrease of the risks, which lead to social isolation and their return to normal social environment for life and development. It concerns street children; children involved in prostitution or drug addicts, trafficked children, children with anti-social behaviour, etc.

The role of the day care centres in supporting the raising of children with disabilities in the family environment, in providing quality specialised care and help, supporting their integration into society, is an especially revealed form of social involvement. It offers opportunity for full education, raising and rehabilitation of the children with disabilities according to their needs and opportunities. On the other hand, the use of the service gives opportunities for social involvement of the parents in the social life, for professional realisation and overcoming the social isolation they often suffer. The conducted monitoring reveals the shared opinions of parents that through the day care centres and their services they have opportunity to get acquainted with the disability of their child and to receive professional help in his/her upbringing at home. They talk openly about the disability of their children, despite the negative attitudes in the society towards children with disabilities, especially in small establishments where this stigma has not yet been overcome. At the same time, the development of day care centres as an alternative form of care prevents the accommodating of children with disabilities in specialised institutions.

3.4 Summary and Conclusion

The evidence and the policies in place, which describe the issue of the socio-economic impact of the (non) provision of childcare services in Bulgaria, are quite limited. There are many aspects of the problem, which have not been studied in detail or are not under regular observation. That is why the debates, as well as the measures undertaken could be defined mainly as incidental rather than systematic. Therefore, more consistent and systematic analysis of the interrelation between the childcare services and social and economic development is needed.

The issue of the impact of childcare services is mostly debated from the point of view of balancing supply and demand and the problem of reconciliation of work and family life, and less from the existing interdependencies between childcare services and their socio-economic impact.

4. Childcare services: Policy Issues

4.1 Introduction

The policy concerning the child, and the provided childcare services in particular, is an integral part of the State's social policy, which is regulated in the Child Protection Act, states that:

- The State protects and guarantees the basic rights of the child in all areas social life for all groups of children according to age, social status, physical, health and psychological state, ensuring all a proper economic, social and cultural environment, education, freedom of expression and certainty (art. 1, para 2).
- The State policy for child protection is carried out based on a suggestion from the Council of Ministers a National Strategy for Child, accepted by the Parliament, created on the principles of this act. Implementing the national strategy the Council of Ministers accepts a National program for child protection, suggested by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and the chairman of the State Agency for Child Protection (art. 1, para 3).
- The statutory bodies in the scope of their responsibly deliver a national policy for child protection and create proper conditions for its development (art. 1, para 4).

4.2 Policies with regard to availability

The question of the availability of childcare in the context of the current Bulgarian experience includes several directions:

Creating of quality alternative family care. It includes:

- Improving the quality of services “accommodating at relatives” and of the voluntary and professional foster care;
- Giving a priority to accommodating children in families of relatives and in foster families after accommodating in institutions;
- Developing services for supporting families of relatives, who raise the child, foster parents and the children, accommodated there;
- Developing the capacity of statutory bodies and the non-government sector in order to increase the quality of care for children, accommodated in families or relatives and in foster families;
- Expanding the circle of suppliers of social service “foster care”.

Another direction of the policies carried out is **adoption and developing** social services for the obligatory preparation of candidate-adopters and the children being adopted, and to support adopters and adoptees. That is why a further improvement of the regulation for adoption is needed, like:

- Easing access of the children to adoption if it is in their interest;
- Improving the procedures on adopting, seeking to balance between the necessity of detailed studying and choice of the most suitable family and the need for the provision of faster care for the family and the child;
- Maintaining national registers of the children for adoption and the candidate-adopters;
- Developing the capacity of the bodies included in the procedures of adopting.

Concerning the **care for children in institutions**, we have to state that despite the policy of de-institutionalisation, developed in 2000, the proportion of children in Bulgaria raised in specialised institutions remains high. Raising children in institutions has its negative effects on the children and has a high financial and social price. Besides the direct costs for maintaining the system, it “produces” people, many of who continue to rely on direct statutory support in these important periods of their lives. In this connection the decrease of the proportion of children, accommodated in institutions, and the supply of this type of care through decreasing the number of institutions is a main priority in the reform of the system for child protection. It will be achieved through the development of social services in the community and alternative family care, as well as through closing and restructuring of the existing specialised institutions. In order to reduce to a minimum the accommodation of children in them, to decrease their stay in them and to create the ideal conditions so they are raised in family environment (as a capacity and methodology), the following is foreseen:

- To continue the process of decentralisation of the management and the financing of the specialised institutions to the local authorities;
- To create mechanism of financing, which encourages the municipalities to develop services in the community and to be based on the principle “money following the child”;
- To introduce new standards of care in a specialised institution, which makes the raising children in it simulating family life in a family environment and to create conditions for good quality of care in them;
- To encourage the improvement and maintenance of the quality of institutional care through applying an individual approach to the children, ensuring an environment close to the family one, optimising the number of staff according to the number of children, creating conditions for keeping personal relations between the child and the family, providing specialised services, etc.
- To develop the child’s skills so they can lead an independent and individual way of life after leaving the specialised institution;
- The State through the State Agency for Child Protection continues to control the quality of the care and services, provided in the specialised institutions, by updating the standards of care and the system of control on the following of the national standards;
- To continue the process of restructuring the specialised institutions in order to transform them into different forms of social services in the community. The process of restructuring will be carried out by the local authorities and will be based on the needs of the community.

The reform in **public finances**, carried out in the last few years, aims to optimise public expenditures, increase **decentralisation**, increase sustainability of the public finances through applying strategic methods of planning and programming and striving for greater added value in providing public services to citizens. The introduction of the new model for programme budgeting, including inter-sector policies, aims at better integration of the policies in accordance with the set goals of the general policy. Introduction of the programme budgeting approach leads to more effective spending by concrete programmes. This approach also allows effective and transparent observation of the delivery through evaluation of the results achieved.

The main source of financing the activities in implementing the strategy is the State budget and the municipal budget. The biggest additional source of financing of these policies will be the Structural Funds of the European Union through the relevant Operative Programs.

Another source will be the continuing financing from the European Commission for specific projects, promoting children's rights. There are more than 15 thematic budget lines, directed to the rights and needs of children.

4.3 Policies with regard to quality

An aspect of the quality issue is the presence of sufficient and reliable information of the state of child services. In this respect, the changes in the Child Protection Act in 2006 normatively regulate the National Information System. The State Agency for Child Protection is the responsible body for creating and maintaining a national information system. The system keeps the following data: children at risk, children with talents, from the registers of the regional directions of social support at the Agency for Social Support by the Family Code, specialised institutions for children, non-profit judicial entities working on child programmes, children outside school, suppliers of social services for children, other data significant for the child protection. The national information system is structured on three information levels – municipal, regional and national.

Another aspect is the regular study and analysis of the problems of the child and family. The creation of institutes or centres for studying the child and family and conducting national studies can be foreseen in this respect in order to form policies in sensitive areas like the modern model of the childhood in the Bulgarian society, physical and physiological specifics of modern Bulgarian children, the level of the family functioning in Bulgaria and models of parental behaviour and expectations.

The next aspect is the regular monitoring and assessment of the efficiency of the ongoing policy. A whole system is developed in this respect, which includes:

- National level of the monitoring of the child policies and their implementation. The monitoring is carried out regarding the goals, measures and expected results of the policies, set in the Strategy for childcare, as well as respecting the child's rights.²⁸
- Local level the monitoring of the child policies is carried out by child commissions in the municipal councils, which have representatives of: municipal administrations, directors "Social support", regional inspectorates on education, employment offices, regional employment inspections, regional healthcare centres, local commission for the fight against anti-social behaviour of under aged and minors, regional police stations, schools and kindergartens, local organisations of civil society and licensed suppliers of child social services. The child commissions develop local child programmes, which follow the recommendations from the analysis of the integrated controls of the children's rights.

4.4 Policies with regard to related issues

Within the environment of recent active public debates on the reconciliation issue, the government has introduced some policies to make the reconciliation process easier for young mothers. Thus, since 2004 the parental leave has become transferable to the father and the grandparents, if they are insured for all risks. This scheme has been operating for a short period and it has not generated enough data to confirm whether this possibility is used and to

²⁸ The monitoring is carried out by the chairman of the State Agency for Child Protection and through periodical (every 3 years) reports from the resource ministries and institutions and reports from sociological surveys for evaluation of the strategy. The mechanism includes also analysis of the integrated controls on the children's rights at local level. Annually the chairman of the State Agency for Child Protection prepares a report with analysis of the achieved results compared with the set goals based on approved year action plan.

what extent the fathers are likely to replace the mothers in raising a child after it becomes nine months old. According to expert evaluations, this right is used more by grandmothers because of several reasons: they are pensioners or unemployed, their wage is lower than the one their son/daughter would receive if they enter employment and in all cases the use of this right is in their interest. They are also interested in using this right even if being employed because the economically better option is to have their adult children in work.

4.5 The Response to the Recommendations given at the EU level

No recommendations have been given to Bulgaria at the EU level.

4.6 Summary and conclusions

In conclusion, we will summarise the most important features of the ongoing policy: development of alternative childcare services and deinstitutionalisation of childcare services in Bulgaria. One instrument for the achievement of these policies is the decentralisation of the budgeting process. By giving more responsibility to the local authorities and to the management of the institutions providing childcare services to operate with the available resources and to attract additional financial resources, the government expects to encourage the expansion of childcare, as well as to increase the quality of supplied services. There are still a number of obstacles to the improvement of the provision of childcare, e.g. the lack of experience, quality of human resources, lack of social understanding and support on childcare policy in some cases, etc. Of course, the limited public finances are one of the main obstacles and perhaps it will always be a problem, but it is also important to point out the lack of compassion and sympathy to these problems and their solution.

5. Summary and Conclusions

The system for childcare and services in Bulgaria is in process of change in accordance with the changed social economic conditions. The main elements in this change are two:

- Decentralising the care and services, provided to the children;
- Development of alternative services.

The demand of child services and the extent to which this is met depend on the type of service. For example, the demand of kindergarten services in big towns in the recent years repeatedly increases and for now remains unmet. At the same time the demand of this type of service in the small establishments and villages is very low and the supply capacity – higher. Obviously, the accelerated migration processes from villages and small towns to the big towns and the Capital lead to strong regional unbalances in the demand and supply of these types of services. Giving more opportunities to the community to decide the priorities and to accumulate and redistribute the funds for development of social services, including children's, should contribute to a better balance between demand and supply.

Another item worth mentioning is the development of new services, enriching the existing set of services and mostly the increase of the quality of the services provided. It has been through the decentralisation of the financial resources and the delegation of more freedom to deciding to the community, as well as the development of alternative forms of services aimed at increasing their quality.

Currently the main difficulties concern the limited resources. It is not only a matter of limited financial resources, but also insufficient human capital such as staff, as well as for its professional qualities. The development of the child services is also a matter of maturity of the society for the need and usefulness of the existence of such services. On the other hand, if the parents are convinced by the quality of the services provided, they will not only increase the demand of services, but will be also be willing to pay higher prices for it. So, there is a need for serious public debate not only for the necessity to develop child services, but also for stimulating their demand.

The countries in transition, including Bulgaria, recognise the need for large social-economic reforms, which completely change the environment in which the children are born and raised. The family models, the relationships in the family regarding the childcare, environment in school and on the street, etc., need change. New opportunities for the children emerge, but also many new risks, from which the society should protect them. The performed changes largely outdistance the readiness to react to them. Therefore in some cases the reactions, like care, are post-factum. Probably there is a need for more attention to preventive childcare, and in this case the effects would be much more substantial to the society as a whole, as well as to the family and the children.

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