



Cities for Active Inclusion

The Quality of Social Services in Cities: Sofia

**EUROCITIES NETWORK
OF LOCAL AUTHORITY
OBSERVATORIES ON
ACTIVE INCLUSION**

EUROCITIES-NLAO

The EUROCIITIES Network of Local Authority Observatories on Active Inclusion (EUROCITIES-NLAO) is a dynamic network of ten European cities - Barcelona, Birmingham, Bologna, Brno, Copenhagen, Cracow, Lille Métropole - Roubaix, Rotterdam, Sofia and Stockholm - each with a Local Authority Observatory (LAO) within its administration. Their aim is to share information, promote mutual learning and carry out research on the implementation of the active inclusion strategies at the local level.

The ten observatories are coordinated by EUROCIITIES, the network of major cities in Europe, and supported through Inclusive Cities for Europe, a partnership between the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) and EUROCIITIES.

EUROCITIES-NLAO website: www.eurocities-nlao.eu

1. Introduction: delivery of social services at city level

1.1 City Context

Sofia is the capital of the Republic of Bulgaria and is Bulgaria's biggest city, with a population of about 1.3 million¹. Sofia City authorities are represented by the Sofia Municipality Council on the one hand, and by the Mayor of Sofia on the other. Each of them has a mandate of 4 years. The Deputy Mayor is responsible for the implementation of the municipality's social policy, through the Healthcare, Integration of Disabled People and Social Affairs directorates.

In 2009 Sofia Municipality established two consultation bodies: the Public Council for Social Policy and the Committee for Child Protection. More specifically, the Social Affairs directorate is implementing Sofia Municipality's social services priorities. The social affairs directorate runs nine local social services offices, which cover the population in all 24 Sofia districts.

In terms of the labour market and vulnerable groups of people, Sofia has a relatively large number of unemployed people with disabilities. They represent 6.9% of the population of working age in Sofia, compared with 4.5% for the whole country², and have particular problems relating to their entry into paid work. According to figures from the Regional Directorate for Social Assistance, in September 2009 there were 103,815 disabled people in Sofia. An active inclusion policy provides opportunities for supporting equal access to employment of persons from these groups.

1.2 Policy priorities for social inclusion

Sofia Municipality's social policy is in line with the Bulgarian legislation as well as EU policy. The reform of social policy in Bulgaria focused on the processes of decentralisation, de-institutionalisation, and the development and delivery of community based social services. This started in 1998 with the adoption of the Social Assistance Act and its regulations. The Act has been revised since then, and this drives the legislative framework for social services delivery in Sofia.

Following the adoption of a new social policy strategy, and the introduction of numerous legislative changes for improving the lives of vulnerable groups, in 2005 the Bulgarian government and the European Commission's Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities signed a Joint Memorandum for Inclusion.

The memorandum focuses on issues concerning social inclusion policy and actions for its implementation at local and national level. Reforms in social services correspond to the European Union's recommendations in the field of social policy, including the alignment of standards for social services in all EU member states. Among the main tasks are the promotion of decentralisation and the design of municipal strategies for the development and provision of social services in the community.³

¹ More statistical information about Sofia City could be found in Annex 2 as well as on the webpage of National Statistical Institute: www.nsi.bg.

² According to the Regional Directorate for Employment at State Agency for Employment.

³ Some of the major documents concerning social services delivery in Bulgaria are listed in Annex 1.

In 2007, the process of decentralising the specialised institutions for children aged three years and older⁴ started. Until then, this target group of children was under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Following an amendment to the Public Education Act, the management of specialised institutions for children in the municipality became the responsibility of the local mayor. In addition, under the Child Protection Act (CPA), every municipal mayor is responsible for child protection in their area.

In 2009, as required by the Social Assistance Act, Sofia Municipal Council adopted a General Strategy for Development of Social Services for Vulnerable Groups in Sofia 2009 - 2013⁵. This strategy is designed to comply with key national and international legal and strategic documents and best practices. It is based on the vision of:

- Affordable, high quality, efficient social services which meet users' needs;
- Services delivered with the committed participation of all stakeholders; and
- Full inclusion of vulnerable groups in community life.

Its key aims are:

- Sustainable social inclusion;
- Prevention of the social exclusion;
- Temporary housing services for vulnerable groups;
- Modern social infrastructure; and
- Effective management of the social services.

The latest amendment to the Social Assistance Act and its regulations was made in March 2010. Under this amendment, the regional authorities are now responsible for designing and planning regional strategies for social services. The governor of the Sofia Region set up a commission to develop the first **Regional Social Services Strategy** for the next 5 years (2011-2015). The purpose of Sofia's regional strategy⁶ is to create a balance in social services development in order to ensure equal access to quality social services for all vulnerable groups in the city. The goal of the strategy is to create a package of local policies for sustainable social inclusion through planning, innovation and the improvement of social services. These services should be flexible and financially efficient, but at the same time, they should meet the user's needs to ensure their quality of life.

1.3 Types of social services provided and responsible departments

According to Bulgarian legislation, social services are based on social work and are addressed to support people in their everyday life towards social inclusion. Social services are provided according to the needs and personal choices of users.

Different types of services, both institutional and community-based, are defined in the Social Assistance Act regulations⁷. Specialised institutions offer board and lodging and

⁴Homes for medical and social care for children up to 3 years are responsibility of the Ministry of Healthcare.

⁵ SM adopted two more strategies for the period 2010-2013 for children and their families, and for elderly people. Source: official website of Sofia Municipality www.sofia.bg.

⁶ The text of the analysis of the situation and the needs of social services on the territory of Sofia Municipality which is integral part of RSSS will be available on the website of Sofia Municipal Council, Section "Sessions", Session N75 of 21.10.2010, report № 93-00-270/05.10.2010: www.sofiacyouncil.bg/index.php?page=sessions&id=238.

⁷ "Institutionalised services = specialised institutions", are well known in the past as "Homes". They are a kind of "old" type of residential care which is different from the new type of residential services considered in Bulgarian legislation as "community based services of residential type". According to Social Protection Act, article 38, the social services of residential type are forms of social

provide a home where people live away from their family environment. Under the new policies, institutions can only be used when none of the community based options are applicable. Community based services are to be delivered in the family home or close by. There are two standard timescales for social services delivery: short-term of up to three months, and long-term of more than three months.

Social services are a taxable benefit for adults, although children's services are tax free. Fees for social services that are financed from the state budget are in a tariff, approved by the Council of Ministers. Charges for social services that are financed by municipal budgets are paid under the Local Taxes and Fees Ordinance. Social services can be state funded or they can be funded from local authorities' budgets.

Sofia Municipality is one of the main municipalities in Bulgaria involved in the delivery of social services to vulnerable groups. Sofia's Directorate for Social Affairs is responsible for more than 40 state-delegated social services, including 27 community based services. The management of five of these services is delegated to NGOs following a tender process. Moreover, Sofia Municipality provides local services to vulnerable people, such as: local assistant services through the Assistance for Independent Living initiative (AIL); and special services for disabled people, including parking in a Blue Zone, public transportation passes and special transport services.

In 2009, mayors were given responsibility for creating conditions for successful foster care development. Sofia Municipality established a commission for children, which involves all the relevant parties, in order to consider the applications of candidates for fostering. For the period mid 2009 - mid 2010, there were 30 approved foster families in Sofia⁸.

1.4 Organisation of service delivery

Under the Social Assistance Act, social services can be delivered in specialised institutions and in the community, and can be provided by the state, by the municipalities and by other providers registered by the national Agency for Social Assistance (ASA).

Local authorities have been entrusted with planning, setting up, changing and funding social services on a municipal level, as well as contracting registered service providers. The municipal council prepares resolutions for opening, closing or changing the type of service or changing the capacity of the service. These resolutions must be proposed by the director of the Regional Directorate for Social Assistance to the executive director of the Agency for Social Assistance, who makes the final decision. If the municipality intends to outsource a service, a competitive tender procedure should be run in order to choose a provider.

services that meet the daily needs of a limited number of persons - not more than 15, providing them opportunity to live in a family like environment.

For more information, please, see the text of the Social Protection Act: www.odit.info/?s=2&i=1893.

⁸ A special section of the official website of the Agency for Social Assistance is devoted to foster care: <http://asp.government.bg>. For more information about the development of the foster care in Bulgaria, please, read the article "The foster care social service - a chance for children to grow up in a family environment", written by Mrs. Detelina Kotevska, Head of Unit "Activities and measures for child protection" at Agency for Social Assistance, published in the Magazine "Informational Labour Newsletter", issue 9, 2010, page 51. The article is available on-line:

www.trudipravo.bg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1139:ibt102010st3&catid=10:ibtbest&Itemid=41.

1.5 Plans to reform delivery of social services

The main priorities in Sofia's Strategy for the Development of Social Services for Children and their Families 2010 - 2013 are de-institutionalisation and the delivery of new alternative social services.

In 2008 and 2009 Sofia offered 10 new alternative social services for children, including foster care, centres for disabled children, family accommodation centres, and community support centres. Yet, there are still seven traditional institutions for children over three years old: six are for children deprived of parental care, while one is for children aged from 3 to 18 years with mental disabilities. One of the institutions for children deprived of parental care is expected to have closed down by the end of 2010. Currently, there are seven children and the other 27 have been reintegrated into families or have moved to family-type accommodation centres.

In order to give better opportunities to children in the remaining six institutions, Sofia is planning to apply for funding if this is available, in order to open 11 new family-type accommodation centres. Priority will be given to providing alternative accommodation for those living in the institution for mentally disabled children.

At a national level, in February 2010 the Bulgarian government adopted a national political strategy known as the vision for the de-institutionalisation of children in Bulgaria⁹. This followed on from public discussions with NGOs and UNICEF. The implementation of this vision should be achieved through adoption of an Action Plan: 2010 - 2013. The context of the strategy is that placing children in institutions violates their rights, which are guaranteed in international conventions, and it leads to discrimination in education and in access to quality care and services.

The effective implementation of the de-institutionalisation policy requires emphasis to be put on prevention of risks, early intervention, support for families, and providing a family environment. Under the plan, children should only be placed in Sofia Municipality's residential care centres when it is impossible for them to live with their own family, or in a family-type environment. The institutions are to reduce their capacity ready to be finally closed after the children have been moved to more suitable accommodation. Priority will be given to the closure of institutions for children with disabilities and homes providing medical and social care for children up to 3 years old. The staff will be actively involved in the de-institutionalisation process, including training. Wherever possible, children are also involved in the decision-making process, in terms of having a say in the type of care they need.

The main objectives of the de-institutionalisation policy are:

- Ensuring adequate legislation, financial costs and staffing for a wide range of community based services.
- Increasing the capacity of the child protection system by the effective distribution of responsibilities across all the parties involved.
- Closing all the 137 institutions for children within 15 year of the adoption of the document.
- Helping to prevent children under three years old being taken into institutional care.

⁹ The document is prepared in accordance with the Guidelines by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and approved by the General Assembly. All the principles, approaches and measures, indicated in the Guidelines, are accepted to be leading in the interpretation and implementation of the document.

Source: official website of State Agency for Child Protection, Section "News" (February): www.sacp.government.bg/novini.

One of the main tasks is to change the way funding is allocated. In future, funding from the national budget for all the state delegated social services should be based on the principle 'the money follows the child'. So, if services are good, they should attract more clients. At present, we still fund institutions by the number of beds they provide. In institutions or care homes providing full 24/7 care, this approach works. But in the new system, the cost of services in a day care centre would depend on the amount of time spent in service by the user.

This would allow more efficient use of funds and will create conditions for competition between providers, ensuring better services. In Bulgaria there are currently 58 day care centers for adults and 71 for children. With the development of new services there will be more than 150 care centres across the country. This would allow people to choose the appropriate service.

1.6 The importance of the quality of social services for active inclusion

The quality of social services is meant to improve the quality of life and independence of the users. This statement can be illustrated with a good practice example from Sofia: the social service known as Assistance for Independent Living. Through this service, users are able to live their everyday life independently: they can go to work or to school, go shopping or to the cinema or anything else they would like to. (See Section 4 for more detailed information.)

2. Quality in SSGI

2.1 Defining quality in social services

Quality in social services should measure the quality of users' lives. But there is no methodology that provides measurable indicators to assess the real effect of services on people's quality of life. The social legislation defines mainly quantitative indicators of quality such as the amount of money spent, or the number of the staff involved. But spending lot of money and involving numerous people to provide a service does not guarantee the quality of the service.

2.2 Measuring and monitoring quality

Criteria and standards for assessing the quality of social services are set out in Bulgarian legislation. For adult social services, they are defined in the national Social Assistance Act, and for services for children they are defined by municipal council ordinance. The law sets out mainly quantitative criteria, and quality standards are simply formally recorded. In addition, there is a lack of differentiation between specialised institutions and community based services.

Monitoring the quality of social services mainly involves tracking how the funds have been spent, and does not deal with the effect of the services on users' quality of life.

Specialised quality control of adult social services is carried out by the inspectorate at the national Agency for Social Assistance. The main bodies entrusted with monitoring the quality of child social services are the State Agency for Child Protection and the child protection units of the social assistance agency. They often overlap their functions. The child protection agency provides the methodological framework while the real work with children is done by the child protection units and social service providers. It is expected the State Agency for Child Protection will be transformed into a Child Commission to Parliament, which will ensure independent monitoring of quality.

In addition, Sofia Municipality conducts internal control over social services delivery on monthly basis.

2.3 Improving quality in delivering social services

In 2010, following the introduction of social welfare legislation, and wishing to improve its social services policy, Sofia Municipality established a Public Council for Social Policy¹⁰. This is a public advisory body with functions related to the quality of social services. This advisory body involves representatives of all the relevant stakeholders, including:

- Agency for Disabled People;
- Regional Directorate for Social Assistance, which is a regional subdivision of the Agency for Social Assistance at the Ministry for Labour and Social Policy;
- National Centre for Social Rehabilitation;

¹⁰ More information about PCSP you can find on the official site of the Directorate "Social Activities" at Sofia Municipality: www.dsd.sofia.bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=130&Itemid=56.

- Union of Visually Impaired People in Bulgaria, which also represents the Union of Disabled People in Bulgaria and the Union of Deaf People in Bulgaria;
- Foundation of International Social Services Bulgaria;
- Other NGOs.

Moreover, Sofia Council ran a small grant program called 'Europe Programme: citizen projects and European practices'¹¹ to support the city's civil society in the development and implementation of best European social practices. One of the components covers improvement of the quality of life through social services that are designed to reduce poverty and social exclusion. Two projects concerning improvements in monitoring the quality of social services are being funded: one for children and one for adults. The purpose is to design measurable criteria for assessing the quality of social services.

¹¹ For more information on this Programme, please visit Sofia Municipality' official website, Section "European Affairs": www.sofia.bg/ei.asp.

3. Main challenges in ensuring quality in the delivery of social services

The de-institutionalisation policy for social services has not yet achieved the intended effect. Although priority is given to the development of community based social services, their distribution over the country is uneven. In addition, there is the need for integrated services to meet users' needs. For example, the problems of the medical approach towards disabled people, as well as the lack of an accessible social and architectural environment, still exist.

The availability of large amounts of money does not necessarily enhance the quality of social services. However, the social exclusion of vulnerable groups could be caused by significant lack of resources for social services provision, including finances. The Bulgarian government decided not to cut its social services budget for 2010, so the current delivery of state-delegated social services, which were planned in 2009, is not directly affected. But new services are mainly only possible through project funding, for example, through EU Funds or Operational Programmes.

Despite low levels of pay for social workers, staff should be more actively involved in the de-institutionalisation process. This could be achieved by raising their motivation through training, supervision, additional support; and by providing information about their new roles and new responsibilities during and after the transition to community based services.

In addition, there is currently no mechanism for creating direct contracts between municipalities and NGO services providers. So even the best NGOs, which have designed, explored, or implemented innovative social services projects, still have to join the procurement process in order to be authorised to provide a state delegated service.

Direct payment schemes should be developed. The concept of personalised budgets is one of the options that could be introduced, to ensure a higher level of independence and the opportunity for users to choose the services that directly address their needs. Personalised budgets help people stay away from institutions.

4. Good lessons

Through local government legislation put in place by the City Council, Sofia Municipality guarantees special opportunities for disabled people, to give them access to services designed for the general public. In 2009, Sofia issued 2,158 permits for parking in blue zones, and 90,000 special season-tickets for public transport, as well as bonus points or preferences, to help them in applying to rent municipal housing. In addition, Sofia Municipality ensures disabled people and other disadvantaged groups can use specialised transportation.

Moreover, Sofia Municipality provides a social service that is unique in Bulgaria, called 'Assistance for independent living' (AIL). This service is for disabled adults up to 65 years old and children aged five years or over. It is based on a special Sofia Municipality statute and is totally financed by the city. In 2009 the assistance for independent living service helped approximately 950 users, and employed over 1,000 assistants. In 2010, 220 children and their families had the opportunity to use the service¹².

'Assistance for independent living' gives disabled people the opportunity to choose and use one or more personal assistants. They are able to select and manage the working hours and activities of their assistants. The service is designed to help the disabled person live a more normal life by meeting their day-to-day needs. This adds to the range of community based social services provided in Bulgaria.

Users of the service can be adults with at least 90% permanently reduced working capacity, who need assistance and have not acquired retirement pension rights. Or they can be disabled children aged more than five years old, with at least 50% reduced capacity for social adaptation, who need assistance.

Assistants are individuals responsible for the users' daily activities. They provide support to users inside and outside their own homes, including at the workplace.

AIL is local service which is entirely funded by Sofia Municipality.

Assistance for Independent Living (AIL)	2008	2009	2010
FUNDS (€)	1,066,828	2,966,740	2,747,882
USERS SERVED (Number.)	over 464	over 720	over 950
ASSISTANTS HIRED (Number.)	over 624	over 900	over 1,000

In April 2009 an internal survey amongst AIL users was conducted by the Sofia's social affairs department. The type of research was a quantitative study, and 85 % of all the Assistance for independent living clients were surveyed: 576 people out of a total of 677 users. The research method was a standardised personal interview.

The research findings show that the 'Assistance for independent living' service is extremely well accepted by users. 90% of the respondents prefer using AIL to other assistance programmes; and according to nearly 98% of the respondents, the service creates favourable conditions for social inclusion. Nearly 93% agree with the conditions and criteria for receiving the service.

Only 1.6% of those surveyed made recommendations, the main one being to expand the scope of the service to a wider range of people. The suggestion is that all disabled adults with at least 90% permanently reduced working capacity should be eligible to use this service, including the ones who have acquired pension rights; the age limits should stay the same.

¹² For more information about the service "Assistance for Independent Living", please, visit official website of the Directorate "Social Activities" at Sofia Municipality: www.dsd.sofia.bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=74&Itemid=31.

5. Future plans

In June 2010 the Agency for Social Assistance signed a grant agreement with the State Agency for Child Protection to implement the first part of the major 'Do not abandon a single child'¹³ programme. The contract is worth €4.96million. The programme is being implemented in two stages, to support the de-institutionalisation of children and to move away from the philosophy of caring for children in institutions.

The first stage will be implemented by the national agency for Child Protection in partnership with the Social Assistance agency and the Ministry of Health. This will involve planning a range of services delivered in the community, for children with disabilities. This first stage also includes a large-scale operational human resources programme to provide the skills and human resources to work with disabled children who have been living in institutions. The main objectives of the programme are focused on developing improved social services in the community for disabled children. This will lead to at least 15 institutions for children with physical and mental disabilities being closed.

Appropriate new social services will then be developed in municipalities throughout the country. This second stage will be financed under the Regional Development human resources operational programme which has allocated more than €11.5 million (23 million Leva). This will be used to fund the new social services for at least two years to ensure services in the community can fully support children who have previously been living in institutions.

¹³ www.asp.government.bg/ASP_Client/ClientServlet?cmd=add_content&lng=1§id=19&s1=41&s2=112&s3=318&ss=654&selid=654.

ANNEX 1. References

Main documents defining social services delivery in Bulgaria:

1. National Strategic Referent Framework 2007. This is the main strategic platform for justification and coordination of the financial assistance from EU Structural Funds, in particular Priority Area 2 - Improving the quality of human capital with emphasis on employment.
2. OP DHR 2007 - 2013
3. OP AC 2007 - 2013
4. National Report of Bulgaria on Strategies for Social Assistance and Social Inclusion 2008 - 2010. The main element of the open method of coordination is a joint analysis and evaluation by the European Commission and Council of Ministers of the national strategy reports.
5. National Action Plan for reforming the institutional care of children in Bulgaria 2008-2011. The plan aims at an effective implementation of the Bulgarian government policy for improving the welfare of children, continuing transition from institutional care to community care and developing services at national, regional and local level.
6. Strategy for Equal Opportunities for Disabled People 2008 - 2015.
7. National Strategy for Demographic Development of Bulgaria 2006 - 2020.

ANNEX 2. Data

Population of Sofia: by residences and by gender (31.12.2009)

National Statistical Institute, www.nsi.bg.

Regions	Total			In cities			In villages			
	Age	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Sofia (capital)		1249798	594449	655349	1192296	566062	626234	57502	28387	29115
0	14420	7359	7061	13884	7085	6799	536	274	262	
1 - 4	51795	26677	25118	49789	25641	24148	2006	1036	970	
5 - 9	52523	27049	25474	50265	25881	24384	2258	1168	1090	
10 - 14	44876	23098	21778	42446	21800	20646	2430	1298	1132	
15 - 19	55258	28237	27021	52205	26608	25597	3053	1629	1424	
20 - 24	89367	45605	43762	85733	43711	42022	3634	1894	1740	
25 - 29	117937	59142	58795	114124	57144	56980	3813	1998	1815	
30 - 34	126075	63570	62505	121573	61286	60287	4502	2284	2218	
35 - 39	103720	52393	51327	99060	49992	49068	4660	2401	2259	
40 - 44	84506	42146	42360	80329	39978	40351	4177	2168	2009	
45 - 49	77998	37728	40270	74007	35723	38284	3991	2005	1986	
50 - 54	81497	37625	43872	77524	35601	41923	3973	2024	1949	
55 - 59	86025	37970	48055	81929	35979	45950	4096	1991	2105	
60 - 64	78497	33955	44542	74487	32086	42401	4010	1869	2141	
65 - 69	54566	23332	31234	51553	21977	29576	3013	1355	1658	
70 - 74	44963	18078	26885	42245	16881	25364	2718	1197	1521	
75 - 79	39730	14466	25264	37295	13492	23803	2435	974	1461	
80 - 84	28597	10139	18458	27161	9601	17560	1436	538	898	
85 - 89	14213	4881	9332	13595	4646	8949	618	235	383	
90 - 94	2593	811	1782	2475	771	1704	118	40	78	
95 - 99	586	167	419	564	160	404	22	7	15	
100 +	56	21	35	53	19	34	3	2	1	



European Commission

This publication is commissioned under the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013). This programme is managed by the Directorate-General for Employment, social affairs & inclusion of the European Commission. It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment and social affairs area, as set out in the Social Agenda, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the EUROPE 2020 goals in these fields.

For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>.

The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.