

Potential to change our system in Bulgaria - Important Questions and Recommendations

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- What needs to change at the political and policy level?

Bulgaria needs to change the concept, goals, objectives, approaches and practices of justice for children. Not yet started the implementation of the adopted National Concept in 2012 for justice for children. Predominate attitudes about punitive approach to children. There is a strong need for understanding the relationship between coping with child behavior of conflicts with the law and the development and implementation of support of social services, including foster care.

The Ministry of Justice has no function in this process, does not have its own structures and it appears that it does not recognize Juvenal justice as its own task, even less as a priority. There is no national structure of the executive authorities, which to initiate the discussion about the problems and to seek and provide between all institutions at all levels. There is need to change this situation and engaging the executive authorities for real change.

- What needs to change within the legislative framework?

Justice for children has to treat only acts which are offenses under the Criminal Code of the country.

Children under the legal age of criminal responsibility, ie under 14 to be subject to social work for children at risk.

To include multidisciplinary approach and multi institutional from the moment of the signal for the behavior in conflict with the law from the child. Obligation of the police to inform the child protection system and social services and to participate in the implementation of the approach.

Seriously improving procedures for interrogation towards ensuring the rights of the child participant. Involvement of the protection system and social services at this stage for all children.

Introducing children's court or at least specialized court. Expertise and training of all those involved in justice for children.

Change in remand measures as content and implementation and their integration with social services. And introducing the alternative choice for the child, including intensive foster care.

Change to enable the court to apply protection measures and social services when determining the decision. Introduction of alternatives to closed institutions through restorative justice practices - mediation, family conference, etc. Entering the alternative and choice for the child.

Create professional structure that is responsible for the implementation of precautions and sanctions in the community. This structure to be a partner with all the actors, especially social service providers.

Creating mechanisms for joint financing of integrated cross-sector services - social, educational, health, legal, etc. for children at high risk of social exclusion, including children in conflict with the law.

The treatment in a closed institution to be an extreme and short-term measure (3-4 m).

- What needs to change at the level of service development and strategy to develop fostering resources and training of the requisite quality?

It is necessary to create of specialized national program for the development of integrated cross-sectoral services, including foster care, which can meet the needs of children at high risk and children in conflict with the law. It is important at the national level to assess the need for high quality, highly professional services for children at high risk. This services will require training and motivation of social workers, psychologists, child psychiatrists, specialists in professional employment, etc.

Will be necessary to develop additional modules for the training program for foster families, their motivation and attract. The additional training is good to cover more knowledge about adolescence, to understand the "meaning" of the child's behavior in conflict with the law and the characteristics of the interventions by adults, which they need. An essential part of the education of all professionals will have to be how to work in a multidisciplinary team and networking.

- What is the role of advocacy activities?

The role of such activities is significant, due to the aforementioned needs. It will be important to have a lobbying in the parliament and the executive. It is also important to provide such activities for the judicial system. We believe also that there is a need for campaigns and other outreach activities to change people's attitude towards these children. This will allow professionals and actors who make decisions to change their own work.

- What is needed to help bring about the changes i.e. what tools/outputs are needed from the project, and how will these tools / outputs be utilised?

Program for training and recruitment of foster families to care for children in conflict with the law.

The protocol of intervention and for multi-agency networks – a training programme for professionals and all briefing documents designed to be effective tools for multi-agency cooperation.

An Intensive and Remand Fostering Programme for young offenders – content, activities, schedule and other relevant information.