

72 Session – Bulgaria

Recommendations to the [United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child](#)

Prepared by Child Helpline International and the Bulgarian National Helpline for Children 116 111 –
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Child Helplines base their work on the principles of the **UNCRC**, which spells out a child's fundamental **right to be heard** in **Article 12**. **Child helplines** are confidential help and support services for children and empower children by educating them about their rights. They can prevent children from being victimised, and offer counselling services by unbiased professionals, who children can confide in. Child helplines can take age appropriate steps to ensure children's safety and protection. Child helplines also serve as a link between child victims and various services such as shelters, legal protection, medical assistance or law enforcement, and are vital reporting mechanisms for severe problems such as violence and abuse.

Background:

Established in 2009, the Bulgarian National Helpline for Children is funded and monitored by the Bulgarian State Agency for Child Protection and run by the Animus Association Foundation (an NGO) after being selected through a tender procedure. It offers a free of charge child helpline service that is available to children non-stop. The Bulgarian National Helpline can be reached through the number 116 111 on the territory of Bulgaria and also provided email-counselling (weekdays).

We call on the government of [Bulgaria](#) to expand its support to [the National Helpline for Children 116 111](#) specifically in making the service more accessible for children, more sustainable and data driven, and to enable them to answer every call, from every child.

Recommendation 1 – Allocate Funding

In 2014 the Bulgarian National Helpline received **193 824** attempted calls but due to funding issues could only answer **102 889**. **The government of Bulgaria should support the National Helpline for children 116 111 financially to so the child helpline can answer every call from every child and that all children get the best protection and care they need.** Furthermore the accessibility of the child helpline is limited to phone and additional ways to contact the helpline need to be introduced. **Hence the government should support the establishment of web-based counselling channels.**

Recommendation 2 – Strengthening the national Child Protection System

The contacts received by the Bulgarian National Helpline for Children 116 111 indicate the challenges that children face on a daily basis. In 2014 responded to **102 889** contacts, mostly from children. Most of these contacts related to relationship problems, family issues, psychosocial problems, violence and abuse and other difficult issues. This information is unique, and when transformed into very powerful sets of data can highlight gaps and flaws in national child protection systems. **The Government of Bulgaria should recognise the Animus Association Foundation as a reliable and credible source for data on children's issues.** This data should be used by the government for **evidence based policy making to create a stronger national child protection system in Bulgaria**

Recommendation 3 – Strengthen Referral Mechanisms

Child helplines often are the main entry point for children into the national child protection system. In addition to providing important information and counselling to children, they also refer them to more specialised services available in the country. **The government of Bulgaria should support the Bulgarian National Helpline for Children 116 in building a strong referral network and raise awareness amongst other crucial child protection services in Bulgaria about the existence and work of the National Helpline.**
