

Child led alternative report



Hope and Homes for
Children

State Party: Bulgaria

February 2021

Written inputs to the
LOIPR

“When I look around, I see people who are very different from each other - in their past, principles, dreams ... But in the end we all resemble each other in that we need a home and love, hope for the future”

Unfortunately, there are many children in Bulgaria deprived of the things we often take for granted. The program for children's participation in Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria opened my eyes to this problem. My work with children at risk motivates me to stand up for their rights when they do not have the voice to do it themselves. I believe that soon our efforts will pay off and we will live in a world where everyone has equal conditions for development”.
[quote from a child during one of the sessions]

Feedback and statements from children in regard to the art. 12

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States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

- Children want to be heard
- The children want to share their opinion
- It is important to have a place where they can talk and share
- It is important to participate
- It is important to respect their opinion
- Everyone has the right to express themselves as they can
- It is important not to worry when you express yourself
- It is important to defend your opinion

- For children, parents and close adults are important „Which are your values for participation?“
- solidarity
- empathy
- interest in the main mission of the organization
- desire to help children develop in a family environment
- desire to be part of a community dealing with social issues
- desire to contribute to the development of the world on a global scale
- putting children first and their well-being
- motive to continue: to further develop the activities of the organization and to change the world
- to do something for others besides yourself
- to support children in need
- to be useful
- to hear my voice
- to be more tolerant
- to work with people with my cause
- communicate with people at my age
- to do something useful in my free time
- to develop my way of thinking

Article 5 of the UNCRC is about recognising that most young people will find that their parents, guardians or family are the people who are most qualified to give them good advice. It's also about understanding how important family is to a young person's wellbeing.

We ask children - How do you think you and your friends can help keep children safe?

- In order to feel secure, you need to be able to trust your friends
- You need to feel like you can share
- Friendly behaviour
- Helping resolve the issue
- Showing that anyone can do what they think is best, keeping some general rules in mind

We want to know how children understand the meaning of safety.

Safety is being able to turn to someone and feel safe with them

Outside home:

- Friends
- School

At home:

- Family
- Attitude
- Environment

The children's view on what safety is:

"For us, safety should be everywhere – both at home and outside your home. It is important to be able to freely express your opinion in front of people p your family and close people. We should be able to feel safe with the people we communicate with."

Key words:

- Safety; Love; Friendship; Trust; Understanding; Happiness; Smiles; Hope; Attention

The kids came up with an amazing "slogan", signifying the importance of trust and the way it wits away if one doesn't handle it with care: Trust is like an eraser – the more you make mistakes, the less there is left!

Right of choice and why is it important

- The right of choice is important not only to us but also to everyone else
- Choice is the way you decide to choose your path
- Choice lets you make decisions on your own, which can bring you joy afterwards
- It is what makes you feel independent
- Choice is one of the ways people go forward – if people had no choice they would have gone down the same path and there wouldn't have been any room for development

Children says: we have the right to access education, we have the right to express our opinion freely, the right to live in a loving family, we have the right to privacy and free time. We would like to emphasize the importance of personal space and free time for us.

MEETING AND LETTER TO THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL POLICY

To have a meaningful life, you need LOVE. One family is enough to achieve all this. For society, the family is a given, but there are people, children, who are rejected by the social environment and their voice is not heard, their opinion remains locked behind steel doors. For them the family is not a given, for them the family is a dream for realization and life.

We children think and say:

- There cannot and should not be babies living in institutions
- Children in institutions do not have the opportunity to do the same as us
- The consequences of being in an institution do not allow children to develop for their age
- Children do not receive adequate care, they need more contacts and communication with different children and people
- Lack of attention to children from institutions harms them not only mentally but also physically
- Children need to receive attention and love from others. They need to feel loved and know that someone is interested in them
- Children are currently trying to attract attention only by harming themselves or simply breaking the rules
- Children raised in an institution do not have the ability to think like a person of their age and are more difficult to accept in normal schools or workplaces
- People who lead and make decisions need to put themselves in the children's shoes and imagine what is wrong with them - how would you feel if your child had to live in an institution? These people have a duty to take care of these children and provide them with a suitable environment
- You need to close all such institutions because the only thing they do for children is harm them
- To help these children, they must grow up in caring and loving families. They should have a social life, play sports, do what they love and grow up and develop in a healthy and appropriate environment, attend cultural events such as cinema and theater just like all other children.
- Let's make the children from the homes happy, to understand what makes them happy
- Let's not think about money, but about children and their lives
- Let the children decide for themselves what to do

– [Cite your source here.]

MEETING AND LETTER TO THE MINISTER OF HEALTH

We will now tell you about two children. Two real kids, real people with their stories.

Mina is abandoned, abandoned by her parents as a baby. She has the misfortune to spend the first years of her life at the Home for Medical and Social Care for Children. This institution for her is a kind of prison. She watches the world through the grills of her wooden cot. Grows out of individual care, locked in the little cot. She sits all day alone without anyone paying attention to her. It tells the world that she is here as well, that she needs care and love, like any one of us like grizzling the grills around her bedchamber. George's story begins the same way. He is a very anticipated and desirable child, but is born with Down syndrome. Doctors advise his parents to leave him in a home for medical and social care, assuring them that they will not be able to take care of himself. The family also has financial difficulties, so she listens to the council. They leave George. For months they feel sorry for their child, feel guilty, but think they do it for his own sake.

Two stories of two real kids. With the help of his parents and Hope and homes for children, Georgi will learn to become a worthy citizen of our society. And Mina no one knows what will happen to her. You can draw your own conclusions.

We are children, like George and Mina. We grow in a family environment, loved and cared for, and really each of us appreciates that there is this opportunity.

That is why we turn to you with the assurance that there is nothing more valuable than living, feeling loved and valued, and asking just to think about the stories of these two children.

We fight:

- Every child can live in a family environment and develop freely;
- No more Homes for medical and social care for children because every child deserves care, love and support that he can not meet in such an institution;
- More children grow happy, confident and loved because such children would be the product of a successful society.

What we children would like to change:

If we as children are so strong and if we are in the position of the Government we would like to start with the Education

MEETING AND LETTER TO THE MINISTER OF HEALTH [CONTINUED]

Article 28 of the UNCRC says that children and young people have the right to education no matter who they are: regardless of race, gender or disability; if they're in detention, or if they're a refugee.

Children and young people have the right to both primary and secondary education and should be able to choose different subjects when in secondary school. This should include the option of technical and vocational training, so they shouldn't have to focus on academic subjects if they don't want to.

- Free education and materials
- Free lunch at school (chair for everyone)
- Free transport for children living in remote areas
- Compulsory classes that inform children and their parents about the rights and obligations of every person in society
- Mandatory counselor in each school
- Each school should be equipped for children with disabilities
- Uniforms
- Work +
- longer breaks to better focus on the study material
- Extracurricular activities and lessons for children from homes

We want a change in the education system - to have more practical activities and not to learn only dry facts; the material to be distributed evenly over the years; to learn more things that would help us in life; people to value our country more, to know its history, to keep it clean; Politicians to listen more to the needs and desires of citizens.

MEETING AND LETTER TO THE MINISTER OF HEALTH [CONTINUED]

Article 24 also says that children and young people have a right to information about their health. They should have a say in how they get this and be able to say what they like and dislike about the information they get.

- Free preventive examinations in all areas of healthcare
- Personal assistant for each child with a disability
- Opening of new day rehabilitation centers
- Dissemination of the national children's line (help for each problem) 116111
- For each family that has a disabled member, benefits should be provided according to the degree of the disease
- Providing a family environment for each child

Context – COVID -19 and impact on children

“The coronavirus sun shone on all the inhabitants of the Earth. It first affected the East, but quickly spread to our daily lives.

There was no one who did not suffer from its scorching rays. Some burned hard, others scalded more easily. And, like those burned on the beach, close contact was limited.

But the Sun of the coronavirus remained too mystical and incomprehensible to us. We watched it through the window, but we didn't really see it. We dreamed of going out again, to see our relatives and friends. The temptation to be together again was too strong, but the risk of the invisible Sun frightened us slightly.

Some remained calm, others went to extremes. We rearranged our priorities, we learned to adapt, we put our friendships to the test. Some of us felt lonely, while others took advantage of the privacy.

We are out today. The coronavirus sun is still shining, but we already know how to protect ourselves. we are not afraid to share our thoughts and feelings and so we become empathetic. Now we enjoy the little moments more, we appreciate the time spent with friends. We know that the Sun will set and then a new day will come”.(a Bulgarian youngster)

Child participation programme of Hope and Homes for Children – Bulgaria

The child participation programme started with the implementation of the project for child participation and consultation of the version of the Child Protection Policy. The children loved all sessions because they were given the time, the space and the instruments (all sorts of drawing and game tools) to share their thoughts in the most fitting way possible. They loved being listened to, they enjoyed being given the opportunity to lead, organize and manage (whilst playing) and they participated gladly in not just one but multiple sessions.

At 2017 year we organized sessions with 15 children from Sofia raised in their own families. Our first presentation of the child participation was during 2017 in our Annual conference. Children played a famous TV game “Child’s family wars” with some changes according to our aim. This game provoked participants in the conference – mainly representatives from the CPDs, Directorates for social assistance, Regional directorates for social assistants, experts, Regional and Municipal administrations, dealing with the children’s rights and protection. We developed the work with the children from Sofia and succeeded to advocate for the rights of children in institutions and reach the Minister of labour and social policy and its team to give them the open letter and posters prepared by the children.

In these documents children clearly expressed their view for the fate of the children in institutions and the harm of them, as well as they insisted all these

institutions to be closed. Children were really touched by the problem of institutionalized care and were so active in setting their personal vision. All of them declared clear vision for the equal rights of children and for the right of every child to be in a family or environment close to family. This session gave opportunity for all children to express freely and give arguments for their statement. The meeting with the team of Minister of labour and social policy inspired all participants. All the attended experts including the Chairperson of the State agency for child protection were really inspired by the words and positions of these 15 children.

During 2019 children from the child participation programme at HHC – Bulgaria met Minister of Health and in front of him also presented their views and statement about the children, placed in institutions and importance of the family. Children prepared also questions to the Minister and declared their statement that all children should have the same rights. In the period of 2020 4 children from the CPP at HHC – Bulgaria was selected to take part in the 13th European Consultation Forum for the elaboration of the European Child Rights strategy, organized by Eurochild. This year the forum was online because of the pandemic. HHC – Bulgaria as an organization having leading position in the DI process will continue to develop and improve the Child participation programme and advocating for the rights of all children.

This is a child led alternative report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in consideration of Bulgaria List of issues prior to reporting (LOIPR) 2021 CRC/C/BGR/6-7.

This has not been edited by adults except for translation into English.

About Hope and Homes for Children

Hope and Homes for Children is a member and co-chair of the Child Rights Action Group (CRAG) and Eurochild and a member of BOND in the UK.

Registered in the EU transparency register (N° 035163533684-92).

An NGO in special consultative status with ECOSOC United Nations since 2019

Participatory status with the Council of Europe and the Conference of INGOs

Hope and Homes for Children is an international non-governmental organisation registered in the United Kingdom. The mission of Hope and Homes for Children is to be the catalyst for the global elimination of institutional care for children. Established in 1994, Hope and Homes for Children has accumulated almost 25 years of international experience of reforming child protection systems through the process of de-institutionalization (DI). DI is the policy-driven process of reforming a country's care system with a focus on transitioning from institutional to family and community based care, alongside the development of prevention and family support services. Ultimately, Hope and Homes for Children aims to achieve systemic and lasting change by supporting the design of robust child protection systems, effective in preventing children's separation from their families and providing quality alternative care.

Hope and Homes for Children works across five Regions to support the development of locally determined and relevant family and community-based care arrangements: Latin America and the Caribbean, Central and South Europe, East and Southern Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and India. Hope and Homes for Children works in partnerships with national governments, civil society organisations, local non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), international agencies and committed donors to build a global movement that will eliminate orphanages in our lifetime. This close cooperation has allowed Hope and Homes for Children to make a major contribution over the years to reducing the number of children in orphanages and institutions globally.

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