

Federal Foundation Mother and Child for pregnant women in emergency situations

Elena Manasieva
Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Bulgaria

Elka Nalbantova
"For Our Children" Foundation, Bulgaria

Introduction

Bulgaria undoubtedly places the support for children and families in the center of the policies for limiting the intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion. Our country accepted for a second time National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion /2008 - 2010/ in which special accent is placed on limiting the intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion and especially child poverty. After the evaluation of the situation of children in Bulgaria was accepted National strategy for the child /2008-2018/ which is the basis of the state policy for the child. According to the evaluation during 2006 the level of poverty of the children up to 15 years of age was 15.1 % at average of 12.3% for the group from 16 to 64 years of age. The risk of poverty is greatest among the children with single parent and children in large families' households. Almost one of every three children with single parent (31.1%) lives in poor household.

The risk of poverty is especially strong among families with many children – 28.6% of the households with three or more children live in poverty and additionally increases for children from vulnerable minority ethnic groups. The risk of poverty is greatest for households in which nobody works but there are children. For the importance of access the labour market speaks the fact that the level of poverty among households where all adults work is insignificant – 1.1 % for households without children and 1.2 % for households with children. The most significant consequence of poverty among children is the violation of their rights and deprivation of their equal opportunities for future development. The dimensions of the child poverty presume examination of correlations and tendencies among children using approach based on the rights, reflecting the current state of the children in several spheres - healthcare, education and personal development, social inclusion and participation, as well as other emerging needs in a rapidly changing world.

Decreasing the risk of falling into poverty and social exclusion is one of the main long-term priorities of the Bulgarian government. One of the problems inherited from the recent past is the institutional model of growing children from the risk groups. As of June 2009 7109 children are being raised in specialized institutions. The National research shows that more than 80 % of the children in specialized institutions have family and are placed there because of impossibility to be raised in family or family-like environment.

The main factors which determine placement of children from families in disadvantaged social situation into specialized institutions are the difficulties which they encounter during their growth (economical, psychological, social), combined with the lack of enough services alternative to the institutional care. The main risks for the children from these families are related to the quality of life, the climate in the family and the children's access to education. These data show the

necessity of relevant preventive and supportive policies addressing limitation of the risk "poverty" as well as the necessity of new flexible forms of social services and support of the family as main factor for the child development.

Family assistance with directly payments

Family assistance is one of the main financial tools which is directed towards supporting the income of the families with children aiming prevention of social exclusion. The institution which gives this kind of support for the families with children is the "Agency for social assistance" which is structure within the authority of Ministry of labour and social policy. The assistance is performed by the "Social assistance" directorates at the territory of the entire country. Different kinds of family allowances for children are provided in Bulgaria. Unemployed pregnant women and mothers with low income, who don't have right of compensation from the insurance system, receive special support. This category of future mothers receives financial support once at a childbirth and monthly for a period of one year. From the beginning of 2009 employed mothers receive compensation for pregnancy and birth for period of 410 days in the amount of 90 % from their own average insured income.

After the expiration of this period the mother has right of paid leave for raising a child up to 2 years of age. During this period the mother receives minimal salary for the country and after that period she can use unpaid leave until the child reaches 3 years of age. Parents whose children are about to be first graders are provided one-time allowance in kind to cover the expenses for starting the school. The legislation guarantees payment of the one-time allowance for childbirth which is different according to the sequence of the child. It also guarantees the payment of monthly family allowances for children which are paid for the period from childbirth to full age or up to 20 years of age if the child is student.

Payment of this allowance is related with the income of the family. During 2009 the threshold for access to this allowance was increased which resulted in 84 % of all children in the country to be covered by the system for family assistance. Payment of this kind of allowances is bounded with visitation of school by the child. Normative possibility has been created for the allowance to be paid as social investment like payment of the fee for kindergarten, pay in kind etc.

In correspondence with the principle for encouraging the equality between women and men by means of their rights related to raising the child as well as for the best protection of the interests of the child, in the country it was regulated the right of the father to use leave at child's birth which has to ensure his active participation and presence in the first days after the child's birth (leave of 15 days after discharge from hospital). Also in order to encourage the participation of the father and to help the mother in raising the child in the regulation is created possibility for the father or the adopter, with compliance of the mother or the adopter, to use the leave instead of her from 6 months of age of the child till the expiration of the 410 days.

One of the successful measures which we realized in Bulgaria aiming better reconciliation of the professional and personal life of the working parents is also the National program "In support of motherhood". Through it is supported the professional development of the mother and her return to work after the period of birth through arrangement of unemployed person to take care of her little child. The main target is on one hand to achieve better reconciliation of the professional and

personal life of the women and smooth transition between the period of birth and the period of work, and the other hand to create job places for unemployed persons.

Pregnant women and mothers of children for whom there is risk of abandonment are object of special protection by the "Child protection act" which is the main regulative law in our country defending the child's rights. According to this law measures for child protection are performed by the "Social assistance" directorates in the country. When the child is new-born and there is a risk of abandonment special measures for his/her protection are taken in place. In cases when the pregnant woman falls into one or more of the following categories: under-age, single, without income, homeless, having psychological disturbances or problem communicating, is object of violence, has one or more children at risk, has one or more children with disabilities or there are other circumstances which put the child at risk, specialized child protection authorities start working the case for prevention of abandonment of the child. The measures for prevention of abandonment of the child include different forms of support for the family, including the use of social services as well as provisioning of one-time financial allowance up to 4 times in the year, which is different from the financial allowance pointed earlier.

Development of family support services

Bulgaria performs series of projects connected to the support of the children and the families. One significant part of them is financed by the European Union with tools of program PHARE and European social fund. The start of project for social inclusion financed by loan from the World Bank is at hand. The main target of the project is support for the families with children. The project will support the efforts of the government for social inclusion through investments in the development from infancy as significant part of the loan will be used for improvement of the infrastructure. Target group of this project are children from the age of 0 to 7 years old and their families. It's expected to initiate services which have to meet not only the social but also educational and health needs of the children. This project aims the following results: improved school readiness of the children from poor families and children with disabilities up to 7 years old; increased child welfare; increased area of services in accordance with child care provided to the children with low income and children with disabilities up to 7 years old.

During the last few years in Bulgaria were developed series of community based services for family support. For the most part they support the family in raising the children as providing different kinds of support - from professionals, day-cares, temporary accommodation, mediation between other spheres etc. Services which most directly concern the early prevention of the abandonment of children are as follows:

Prevention of the abandonment of babies and children - the services are provided in Community support centers. It includes case management of pregnant women and mothers at risk and aims keeping the children and prevention of abandonment or institutionalization. In support of the mother it includes: consulting at the maternity ward, intensive support, consulting and training of parental skills, material assistances by clothing, foods, baby and child accessories, building of supporting environment for mother, child and family; mediation between other services, job finding.

Unit "Mother and baby". The service includes providing of shelter for mothers with children up to 3 years old, which are in direct risk of abandonment. Often in these units remain mothers of new-born children until decision is made whether or not to keep the child and/or gain independence.

The units accept the mothers and their children for period up to 6 months, as the point of the social work is independence to be achieved at the end of this period using other services like the described earlier. The future of the unit "Mother and baby" is in their development as intermediate unit between health and social services.

Both described services are conceptually new for Bulgaria. They are community based services and main factor for their success is the competency of the local authorities during development of both.

The services for early intervention and support for childbirth of children with disabilities are still in early development in Bulgaria. Medical approach in cases of children with disabilities is still dominating and that leads to abandonment of many new-born children with different disabilities and diseases. This is a sphere in which we will develop integrated medical-social approach in health facilities in Bulgaria. We have partial successes but they are mostly in the legislative area which regulates the relations between maternity wards and "Social assistance" directorates. Unfortunately both systems are overloaded with different responsibilities and the area for support of the families before and during the moment of birth of the child is still unoccupied. The multidisciplinary teams which are necessary for the families of new-born children with disabilities are missing both in the medical and in the social sphere. Integrated social-medical services for early intervention exists as pilot project practices at few places, but they need consistent policy for change of the both systems - medical and social.

Social services provision in Bulgaria is carried out by municipalities and non-government organizations. The municipalities decide for themselves whether to provide services or to be outsourced. NGOs working in the area of social services for children must be licensed. The state encourages social services provision from the non-government sector due to the many different responsibilities of the municipalities in the processes of decentralization and deinstitutionalization. NGOs in child welfare sphere are two types. The first type are organizations with traditions from the last 10-15 years, which began their work in the country as branches of international organizations or supported by foreign professional organizations and communities. This type of NGOs develops series of modern models of social services in different districts of the country. For the most part the social services which are delegated from municipalities to NGOs are provided by this type of organizations. The second type NGOs are small local organizations built to meet specific local needs. Both types of organizations participate in series of National and European networks.

Our proposal to Bulgarian practice

The experience of Federal Foundation Mother and Child for pregnant women in emergency situation shows very good linking from family payment to services. That will be good approach to bridging the two independent systems in Bulgaria. That will be our proposal to Government and NGOs sector.