



Bulgaria Fact Sheet on Social Care & Support Services Sector for Persons with Disabilities

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SUBSECTORS OF SOCIAL CARE & SUPPORT SERVICES AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

Early Childhood Intervention

In Bulgaria, early childhood intervention services are coordinated by three ministries: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and Ministry of Health (MH). These institutional services are available for children from zero to seven years old with all types of disabilities.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) provides support under Community centres for children and families from zero to seven years old. The centres offer a wide range of activities aimed at prevention of abandonment, prevention of violence and dropping out of school, deinstitutionalization and reintegration, capacity building of skills for independent living, and social integration. The activities within the centres include, among others, social and psychological counselling for children and families at risk; evaluation of parental capacity; preparing and training of foster parents; and counselling of children with behavioural problems. There are 56 such centres in total, governed and subcontracted out (with financing from the European Social Fund) at the municipal level, and implemented by public service providers.

For children aged three to seven years old, there is a national program, "Inclusive training", of the Ministry of Education and Science, which oversees the operation of 25 pilot kindergartens with a speech therapist and a psychologist who screen each child within the pilot kindergarten for the risk of learning difficulties. Children with special educational needs¹ who are not able to continue their education within mainstream schools, are directed to specialised schools for children with disability - Centres for Special Educational Support (CSES) (for more details, please see: Education Support). The kindergartens are provided by public service providers at a municipal governance level, and through subcontracting mode of financing (European Social Fund).

In the implementation of the National program for improvement of mother' and child health 2014-2020, 31 medical consultative centres for mothers' and children's health are being established (public service provider (Ministry of Health), municipal governance level, national funding), where different multidisciplinary teams provide consultations for preventing the abandonment of children with disabilities.

Education Support

School education in Bulgaria starts at the age of seven years old and is mandatory until the age of 16. The main coordinator of education support in Bulgaria is the Ministry of Education and Sciences (MES). For pupils with disabilities, MES provides special education services through:

- Sixty five Centres for Special Educational Support (CSES). These centres provide day-to-day training and care for pupils, as well as dormitories for them. CSES issue relevant educational qualification. These are 100% public service providers, at a regional governance level with national funding.
- Fourty seven schools for children with intellectual disabilities and five schools for hard-of-hearing children, visually disabled children and speech-impaired children. The service providers, the governance level and the mode of financing is the same as for the CSES.
- Support for children with disability integrated in the mainstream schools, includes using a resource teacher who, together with a psychologist, jointly adapt the educational content to fit the specific special needs of a given student.

¹Special educational needs includes children who encounter different learning difficulties due to: Sensory impairment (impaired vision or impaired hearing); Physical disabilities; Intellectual disability; Speech and language impairment; Specific learning difficulties; Emotional or behavioural disorders; Communication and communication disorders; Chronic diseases; Multiple disabilities.

Employment Support

According to the Bulgarian legislation, persons of working age are women aged from 18 to 61 years and men aged from 18 to 64 years. The Employment Agency (EA) is an executive agency to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) for the implementation of the state policy on promoting employment. The right to work for people with disabilities is determined by the Territorial Expert Medical Commissions (TEMCs), which certify persons for permanent disability / type and degree of disability (50% or more). There are two National programs and projects for Employment Support overseen by the EA, including:

- A national program for the employment and training of people of 18-64 years of age with permanent disabilities (all type of listed disabilities, depending on degree of disability determined by the TEMC). This is provided by private service providers at a municipal governance level with a national subcontracting mode of financing. The main objective of the program is to improve the employability and employment of registered unemployed people with permanent disabilities who have registered with the Labour Office Directorate.
- A national program for interest-free credit for people with disabilities of 18-64 years of age. This is provided through private service providers at a municipal governance level, with national subcontracting mode of financing. The program aims to: develop an entrepreneurial mindset and support the socio-economic integration of people with disabilities; create conditions for development of own business under the project "Guarantee fund for micro-crediting"; stimulate self-employment; and create new permanent workplaces for people with disabilities.

There are two measures for employers (for Employment Support) at the EA, organised as government support for employers in exchange for providing employment for specific target groups for a limited duration of time:

- One is aimed at full-time employment of young persons with disabilities for the duration of 18 months. The specific target groups include persons aged 18-29 with military disabilities, permanent disabilities or other disabilities, based on the degree of disability as gauged by the evaluation board (TEMC). The services (employment for up to 18 months) are governed at the municipal level and subcontracted out with national funding to private providers. The number of individuals employed through this program at the time of drafting this fact sheet is 17.
- The other is aimed at matching unemployed persons with disability aged 18-64 with temporary, seasonal or part-time jobs for up to six months. The services are governed at the municipal level and subcontracted out to private providers. The number of individuals employed through this measure at the time of drafting this fact sheet is 303.

There are two more social services that qualify as Employment Support:

- Labour mediator² for work with people with any type of disabilities in each Labour Office Directorate at EA (265 municipalities), 18-64 years of age. The mediators are private service providers governed at the municipal level with national funding.
- Specialised enterprises³ and cooperatives of people aged 18-64 with any type of disabilities at the Agency for People with Disabilities (APD). There are a total of 283 such institutions, all governed at the municipal level and subcontracted out for delivery by private service providers.

It is important to note that the services provided within day care centres, as well as centres for social rehabilitation and integration through the Agency for Social Assistance, also include support for finding employment, including consulting services and career development as needed. (For more details, please see Day Care).

²Labour mediator is a special service for supporting people with disabilities who are unemployed, to find job.

³Specialised enterprises and cooperatives of people with disabilities are those which meet the following conditions: they are registered under the Commerce Act or the Cooperatives Act; produce goods or perform services; have a relative share of persons with permanent disabilities as follows: for blind and partially sighted persons - not less than 20% of the staff; of hearing impaired persons - not less than 30% of the staff; of persons with other disabilities - not less than 30% of the staff.

Day Care

The terms and conditions for the establishment, provision and use of social services in Bulgaria are regulated by the Social Assistance Act and the Rules for implementation. In Bulgaria, day care services for people with all types of disabilities are coordinated by the Agency for Social Assistance (ASA) under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP).

The below listed services, funded at the national level by the MLSP, are managed by municipalities. Municipalities decide to provide services themselves or issue a tender for contracting out the services to providers that have to be specially certified. According to the Social Assistance Agency data, on average, around 18-20% of all social services in Bulgaria are delivered by non-profit providers. There is no publicly available information on the number of the private providers (same for the sub-sector: Long-Term Institutional and Respite Care).

There are three types of day care services divided in two age groups: children and adults. The three types of day care services include:

- Day care centres for people with disabilities: this is a form of support for people with permanent disabilities, in which conditions are created to meet their daily and rehabilitative needs, as well as the need for organised leisure time. Users are supported by professionals who work towards their social inclusion and to prevent placement in a specialised institutions.
- Day care centres for people with severe multiple disabilities: this is a form of support for people with severe multiple disabilities with over 90% type of disability or permanently reduced working capacity. Users are supported by professionals who work towards their social inclusion and to prevent placement in a specialised institution.
- Centre for social rehabilitation and integration: this is a form of hourly support for people with disabilities related to rehabilitation and social and psychological counselling, assistance for career guidance and support, rehabilitation of independent life skills, preparation and implementation of individual programs for social inclusion.

Day care services organised for children from 0 to 18 years of age include:

- Day care centre for children and/or young people with disabilities aged 0 to 18 years. The total number of such centres is 25, among them ten are public service providers with a municipal governance level and national funding. Some 15 of them are non-profit service providers (NGOs) with a municipal governance level and subcontracting mode of financing.
- Day care centre for children and/or young people with severe multiple disabilities aged 0 to 18 years. The total number of such centres is 1, which is a public service provider with a municipal governance level and national funding.
- Centre for social rehabilitation and integration for children and/or young people with disabilities from 0 to 18 years of age. The total number of centres is 283; among them 269 have national funding, while 14 are non-profit service providers (NGOs), with municipal governance level and a subcontracting mode of financing.

Day care services organised for adults from 18 to 64 years of age include:

- Day care centre for adults with disabilities from 18 to 64 years of age. The total number of centres is 85, among them are 71 public service providers, governed at the municipal level with national funding. Some 14 of them are non-profit service providers (NGOs), with a municipal governance level and subcontracting mode of financing.
- Day care centre for adults with disabilities aged with 18 to 64 years with weekly placements (between community based service and residential). The total number of such centres is four; they are public service providers, with a municipal governance level and national funding.
- Centre for social rehabilitation and integration for adults with disabilities from 18 to 35 years of age. The total number of such centres is 283; among them 278 are public service providers, with a municipal governance level and national funding. Five of them are non-profit service providers (NGOs) with a municipal governance level and subcontracting mode of financing.

Living Support

Living Support is provided within three agencies at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), as follows:

- National Program Assistants for People with Disabilities (all types of listed disabilities), 18-64 years of age at Employment Agency (EA). The providers are private, governance is at the municipal level with national funding. The

main objectives of the program are to: provide care in a family environment (in the person’s own home) to people with permanent disabilities or seriously ill people; and to provide employment support (such as personal and social assistants) to unemployed people.

- Domestic social patronage at the Agency for Social Assistance (ASA), (all types of listed disabilities) aimed at persons with disability of 65+ years of age. There are 45 private service providers of this type, governed at the municipal level with national funding. Domestic social patronage is a form of home care (in the person’s own home) for people over 65 years of age with disabilities (I and II group degree of disability which are determined by the TEMC) who are struggling (alone or with the help of relatives) to organise their lifestyle.
- Supportive equipment at the Agency for People with Disabilities (e.g. provision of wheelchairs, walking sticks, etc.) aimed at persons with disability 18-64 years of age. There are some 347 private service providers of this type, governed at the municipal level with national funding.

Long-Term Institutional Care and Respite Care

The existing residential care for people with disabilities is coordinated⁴ by the Agency for Social Assistance (ASA) at Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP). These services are divided into three types: family-type accommodation centres of residential type (Table 1); sheltered houses (Table 2) and homes (Table 3).

Family-type accommodation centre of the residential type is a place to live in a family-friendly environment for a limited number of persons - no more than 15. The centre can be used in combination with other social, health, educational and other services and in accordance with the needs of the accommodated persons.

Table 1. Family-type accommodation centres of residential type (Source: Agency for Social Assistance, 2018)

Long-term Institutional and Respite Care	Age group	Disability types: Physical, Sensorial, intellectual & learning, Psychosocial, ASD	Nature of the service providers: Private/public, profit/non-profit	Governance level: Municipal, regional, national	Mode(s) of financing: Public procurement, subcontracting, licensing, personal budgets	Total number of providers
Family-type accommodation centre for children with disabilities of residential type	0-18	All types	278 public service providers; 5 non-profit service providers (NGOs)	Municipal	278 national funding; 5 subcontracting mode of financing	283
Family-type accommodation centre for young people with disabilities of residential type	18-35	All types	281 public service providers	Municipal	281 national funding	281
Family-type accommodation centre for adults with mental disorders	18-64	Mental disorders	90 public service providers	Municipal	90 national funding	90
Family type accommodation centre for adults with dementia	18-64	Dementia	99 public service providers	Municipal	99 national funding	99
Family type accommodation centre for adults with intellectual disabilities	18-64	Intellectual disabilities	97 public service providers	Municipal	97 national funding	97
Family type accommodation centre for adults with physical disabilities	18-64	Physical disabilities	89 public service providers	Municipal	89 national funding	89

⁴For more details concerning coordination please see B-4: Day Care.

Sheltered housing is a form of social service for adults (age group 18-64) with disabilities with permanently reduced working capacity. Sheltered houses accommodate persons holding TEMC / type and degree (over 50%) of disability, who, with the help of specialists, lead a relatively independent way of life in an environment similar to a family setting. Such houses accommodate at most eight persons at a time.

Table 2. Sheltered houses (Source: Agency for Social Assistance, 2018)

Long-term Institutional and Respite Care	Age group	Disability types: Physical, Sensorial, intellectual & learning, Psychosocial, ASD	Nature of the service providers: Private/public, profit/non-profit	Governance level: Municipal, regional, national	Mode(s) of financing: Public procurement, subcontracting, licensing, personal budgets	Total number of providers
Sheltered house for people with mental disorders	18-64	Mental disorders	32 public service providers; 2 non-profit service providers (NGOs)	Municipal	32 national funding; 2 subcontracting mode of financing	34
Sheltered house for persons with intellectual disabilities	18-64	Intellectual disabilities	96 public service providers; 3 non-profit service providers (NGOs)	Municipal	96 national funding; 3 subcontracting mode of financing	99
Sheltered house for people with physical disabilities	18-64	Physical disabilities	15 public service providers; 1 non-profit service provider (NGO)	Municipal	15 national funding; 1 subcontracting mode of financing	16



Homes are specialised institutions of a boarding type in which people are separated from their home environment.

Table 3. Homes (Source: Agency for Social Assistance, 2018)

Long-term Institutional and Respite Care	Age group	Disability types: Physical, Sensorial, intellectual & learning, Psychosocial, ASD	Nature of the service providers: Private/public, profit/non-profit	Governance level: Municipal, regional, national	Mode(s) of financing: Public procurement, subcontracting, licensing, personal budgets	Total number of providers
Home for adults with mental disorders	18-64	Mental disorders	27 public service providers; 5 non-profit service providers (NGOs)	Municipal	27 national funding; 5 subcontracting mode of financing	32
Home for adults with dementia	18-64	Dementia	14 public service providers; 14 non-profit service providers (NGOs)	Municipal	14 national funding; 14 subcontracting mode of financing	28
Home for adults with physical disabilities	18-64	Physical disabilities	21 public service providers; 9 non-profit service providers (NGOs)	Municipal	21 national funding; 9 subcontracting mode of financing	30
Home for adults with sensory disorders	18-64	Sensory disorders	4 public service providers; 1 non-profit service provider (NGO)	Municipal	4 national funding; 1 subcontracting mode of financing	5

Leisure and Social-Life Support

Leisure and Social Life Support services are part of the Day care services for people with all types of disabilities in Bulgaria. They are coordinated by the Agency for Social Assistance (ASA) at Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP). These services are available for children, young people and adults from 0 to 64 years of age. This kind of support is provided within the Day care centres, as well as the Centres for social rehabilitation and integration (for more details, please see Day Care).

The National Program for Disability Sport features integration and inclusion through the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS). A total of 36 projects of sports organisations (profit and non-profit) were approved and supported financially by the MYS. The financed projects provide adapted exercise and sports for people with disabilities in accordance with the type of disability for practicing a sport of choice. The projects implemented under the Program engaged as many as 70 specialists in adapted physical activity and 26 sports specialists, who trained the people with disabilities in 16 types of sports.

FUTURE TRENDS

- The government is ambitious to continue deinstitutionalisation and to close down institutions for children by the year 2025 and those for adults by the year 2034. The main focus now is the development of community-based services, as well as the prevention of abandonment of children with disabilities.
- There is a planned reform of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy concerning the training and qualifications of staff working in the field of provision of social services for people with disabilities. It aims to increase the quality of training and to link theory with practice in relevant university specialisations; and address the challenges related to the funding of social services.
- There is a planned reform of the Ministry of Health on Territorial Expert Medical Commissions (TEMCs) which would have people with disabilities attend two committees. The first one will be medical, and will assess the type and extent of the disability. The other will be the National Social Security Institute (a public institution that manages the state social security in Republic of Bulgaria) and will decide on the degree of working capacity.

CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS

Mrs Ivanova, Expert in the Social Services for Adults Department at the Agency for Social Assistance.
Mrs Viktoria Tahova, Deputy Executive Director of the Agency for Social Assistance.

DATA SOURCES

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