

BULGARIA

Building NGO Capacity to Deliver Child Welfare Services

JSDF Facilitates a Key Component of Child Welfare Reform

In Bulgaria, as in many countries in Eastern and Central Europe (ECA), institutionalization of children was a serious problem. In 2000, an estimated 35,123 children (1.78 percent of the total number of children) were living in public care institutions. Most of these children were abandoned for economic or social reasons and many had physical or mental disabilities.



The EU accession priorities for Bulgaria included reduction of the institutionalization of children, protection of the rights of children and the creation of the enabling environment for raising them in the families and communities, especially for those with mental and physical disabilities, and for those who come from poor and marginalized communities, the Roma in particular.

The living conditions in the institutions were poor and the quality of care provided was low due to lack of proper standards or regulations and inadequately trained staff. Little effort was made to prepare the youth for independent living, making them vulnerable to unemployment,

Centers (SCC) were the first ever social services provided by communities and non-government providers and the first community-based alternatives to institutional care. In 2000, a JSDF grant was used to support a community-based child development fund for small-scale sub-projects for the benefit of the disadvantaged communities, notably for the establishment and expansion of pre-school and kindergarten programs.

homelessness, violence, crime, drugs, abuse or prostitution, when they had to leave the institutions at the age of eighteen. Many ended up on the streets - a common feature in many ECA countries. In Bulgaria, an estimated 5,000 children were living or working on the streets.

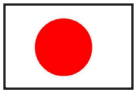
The CWRP was effective at changing child welfare policies and developed municipal strategies and action plans for deinstitutionalization, promoted alternative child care, and carried out civil works and equipping of new and renovated facilities. However, it was widely noted that actual change in the child welfare situation and the reversal of the trend towards placing of children at risk in specialized institutions would only occur when local communities developed sufficient capacity to offer alternative forms of care.

The World Bank Child Welfare Reform Project (CWRP), initiated in mid-2001 supported the establishment of a number of pilot community-based child welfare services in 10 urban municipalities identified as having a high concentration of children at risk. These services, which included Community Support Centers (CSC), Mother and Baby Units (MBU) and Street Children

In 2003, there were more than 1,000 NGOs with a mandate that included the provision of social services for vulnerable children. However very few of these agencies met



The Japan Social Development Fund (JSDF) was established in June 2000 by the Government of Japan and the World Bank as a mechanism for providing direct assistance to the poorest and most vulnerable groups in eligible World Bank Group member countries.



state licensing requirements. A project wrap-up meeting held in September 2003 concluded that while the local NGOs were keen for more active inclusion in the provision of services for children, many required considerable capacity enhancement. This need was underlined by the Mayors and Municipal Councils of the pilot municipalities and the leaders of the poor and marginalized communities there.

The Project

Approved in March 2005, a second JSDF Grant, for capacity building, provided support for consultants drawn from local NGOs to provide technical assistance to other NGOs and Community-based Organizations (CBOs) in the 10 pilot municipalities. These experts would work hand in hand with the potential service providers to help them meet the licensing requirements and to guide them through, (i) the processes of social needs assessment and prioritization; (ii) service design; selection and contracting out procedures; (iii) applications of quality standards for services; (iv) roles and responsibilities between various actors in the social assistance field; (v) social services management and monitoring and, (vi) management of change.

Capacity building would also be provided to staff working in the Social Services Departments and Directorates (SSD) of the pilot municipal authorities and to existing service providers. The grant also provided funds to support implementation and monitoring and evaluation both of which were carried out by the Project Management Unit of the CWRP, within the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MOLSP).

Results

The grant supported:

- Development of 5 training modules and training of 160 people, including 71 representatives of municipal administrations, 69 NGO activists and 20 social workers from the Child Protection departments.
- The assessment of local needs or social services in the 10 pilot municipalities where the Child Welfare Reform Project has been implemented.
- The adoption of local strategies for the development of social services by municipal authorities in all 10 pilot municipalities.
- The design and contracting of community services with private sector providers in the 10 pilot municipalities: such services were designed and piloted in 2006 with outsourced provision to NGOs in all 10 pilot municipalities. The experience has been evaluated and assessed at

Project Data

- Implementing Agency: *Ministry of Labor and Social Policy*
- Grant (TF054221) Amount: *\$0.54 million*
- Implementation Period: *03/30/2005 to 12/31/2007*

the municipal level.

- Following competitive tendering, some of the municipalities signed new contracts with the same service providers for 2007, others selected different NGO providers.

The grant built knowledge and skills among:

- **municipal social workers** allowing them to better target the services for children to the most needy social groups
- **social sector NGO activists** for case management, project preparation and administration, management of social services budgets based on unified financing standards and public-private partnerships.

Following the municipal capacity building the trained social workers in the pilot municipalities managed to contract out the services in all community facilities built under the CWRP and were able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot NGO service provision. This subsequently allowed them to take more informed decisions on modifications of service provision and make the necessary legal and institutional arrangements.

Lessons Learned

- **Outsourcing** the provision of child care services to non-government providers can provide more space for municipal management to focus on policy monitoring and evaluation.
- **Cost-effective child care:** A clear definition of the financial obligations of the state is a prerequisite to the expansion the provision of services and their targeting to local needs.
- **Capacity building** is a powerful tool to empower the NGO community to participate in the provision of community-based child care services, and even the management of institutional care.

Sustainability - The methodologies and pilot training provided under the grant became part of the state standards for provision of social care services. Based on the initial standards piloted with the grant, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy now operates over 200 services standards.



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