

Open-ended Working Group on Ageing - 9th session, 23 -26 July 2018

Input from the Government of Bulgaria on long-term care and independent living

The development of long-term care for older persons is a key priority for the Bulgarian Government in the social sphere considering the trend of population ageing and the ongoing demographic processes in the country as well as the associated risks to the sustainability of related social services systems which are an important element of the long-term care system. The Government of Bulgaria has established the necessary legal framework for the organization and provision of social services for social inclusion and independent living, both in the community and in specialized institutions. Social services are provided as per the free will and personal choice of the concerned individuals following a human rights based approach and an individual assessment of the need for support on the basis of an individual support plan. Social services in specialized institutions are provided only after the availability of social services in the community has been exhausted.

As per the relevant legislation (Social Assistance Act of Bulgaria and the Regulation on its Application) social services for long-term care are the services provided in home environment by a personal assistant, social assistant, home assistant or through home social institutions as well as community day care, counseling and rehabilitation services provided by day centers and centers for social rehabilitation and integration. Another type of long-term care services are resident-type social services - a family-type accommodation center, a temporary accommodation center, a crisis center, a shelter, a transitional dwelling, and a dwelling. Places for public dining and asylums are also recognized as community based services for long-term care. Specialized institutions are institutions for adults with disabilities and institutions for older persons.

Social services in Bulgaria are provided by municipalities with funding from the state budget and municipal budgets, as well as from private providers registered with the Agency for Social Assistance through self-financing and financing from national and international programmes. Services funded from the state budget and from municipal budgets may be entrusted with the management of private providers through a competition process.

As of February 2018 in Bulgaria there are 516 social services facilities in the community for long-term care supporting more than 9 660 adults with disabilities and older persons with funding from the state budget. There are 161 specialized institutions with a capacity of 10 960 people in total.

Considering the increasing trend of population ageing which will also require more public spending on long-term care the Government of Bulgaria adopted in 2014 a National Strategy on Long-Term Care. The main objective of the Strategy is to create conditions for the independent and dignified living of older persons and persons with disabilities by providing quality, affordable and sustainable long-term care services according to the individual needs of every person following a human rights based approach and a better balance between the quality of services and their effective and efficient provision. The Strategy has a strong focus also on the deinstitutionalization of the care for older persons and persons with disabilities through the provision of services in home environment and support to families taking responsibility for the care of dependent family members. Promoting synergies between social and health services, including the development of innovative cross-sectoral services, as well as the implementation of an integrated approach, are also among the key priorities outlined in the Strategy.

In January 2018 the Government of Bulgaria adopted a Plan of Action for the period 2018 - 2020 for the implementation of the National Strategy on Long-Term Care which covers the first stage of the process of deinstitutionalization of the care for older persons and persons with disabilities and includes the following main objectives:

- Improving the quality of life and the opportunities for social inclusion of older persons and persons with disabilities by providing a network of services and support measures in the community and in home environment, including capacity building;
- Preventing the institutionalization of older persons and persons with disabilities and nurturing a supportive environment in the society;
- Reducing the number of specialized institutions as part of a phased plan to close down all specialized institutions for persons with disabilities;
- Establish a regulatory framework for the development of social services and a model of integrated health and social services.

The Plan of Action contains four major groups of measures, as follows:

- Providing support in home environment and in the community to older persons and persons with disabilities who are dependent on care, including social services and patronage care in home environment, creating daily forms of social services in the community, etc.
- Providing quality social services in the community for persons in specialized institutions and working for the gradual closure of institutions, including creation of new social services of residential type in the community.
- Increasing the effectiveness of the long-term care system, including through training and supervision, improvement of the regulatory framework, development of quality standards, etc.
- Building and repairing the infrastructure needed to provide social and integrated health and social services.

The Plan of Action envisages the establishment of 100 new social services facilities for 2140 users, including: 6 Day Care Centers for persons with different forms of dementia and their families; 16 Day Care Centers for persons with disabilities and their families, including severe multiple disabilities; 10 Center for Social Rehabilitation and Integration for persons with mental disorders and for persons with mental disabilities; 68 Care Centers for older persons and persons with disabilities.

The provision of support to older persons and persons with disabilities in home environment will also continue through the services provided by a personal assistant, social assistant and home assistant. Over 30 000 people will be supported in the framework of these activities.

New legislation regulating social and health-care services will also be developed. The capacity of employees and specialists in the long-term care system will be enhanced.

In February 2018 the Interagency Working Group for the Management and Coordination of the Deinstitutionalization of the Care for Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities approved the so

called Community Support Services Map and the Card of the Residential Services designating the municipalities where the new social services facilities will be created within the framework of the Plan of Action for the period 2018-2021 for the implementation of the National Strategy on Long-Term Care.

The Bulgarian Government continues also the implementation of two special projects launched in 2014 for the period till 2020, namely “Independent Living” which follows a new broad-spectrum approach for decentralized provision at the municipal level of hourly services to older persons and persons with disabilities in home environment; and “New Standards for Social Services” which aims to improve the accessibility, efficiency and quality of social services as well as the realization of the process of deinstitutionalization of the care for children and adults, including older persons and persons with disabilities, by developing up-to-date quality standards and financing in line with consumer needs. The implementation of the two special projects supports the reform of social services.

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