



**REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA**  
**MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL POLICY**

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**Statement on the BBC Programme “Bulgaria’s Abandoned Children<sup>1</sup>”**

Brussels - 4 March 2008 - The BBC programme calls attention to a tragedy, not only for the children of the Mogilino home, but for Bulgaria as a whole, which despite multiple initiatives to reform child welfare since 2000, is still striving to provide all its children with the protection, care and respect they deserve. We started these efforts in 2000, and since then we have reduced the number of institutionalised children by 31.4%. We know however that we must do better, and the BBC programme has in fact helped to bolster support for our reforms. We assure you that the Government of Bulgaria remains committed to improving the quality of care for all our children, particularly our most vulnerable. It is for this reason as well that we support the Written Declaration by several MEPs for “a common European policy on the upbringing and education of under privileged children” to provide a safety net for all European children.

What are we doing in Bulgaria? Specifically, with regard to the Mogilino Home, we are taking the following initiatives:

- Qualified multidisciplinary professionals are currently assessing the individual needs of every single child, an evaluation process that takes week for each child;
- Where this evaluation concludes that it is deemed medically possible, community based-services are being encouraged, and some have already found new homes with families;
- We would also like to explain that even before the BBC documentary, the government had urged the closure of the Mogilino home, but that decision lies with the municipalities. Last month (February), the government asked for the closing of seven facilities, including again Mogilino, and has created protected homes where the children can be looked after when these facilities are closed.

All these steps are taking place in the context our general strategy to improve the care of all our children. For example,

- Most recently, in November 2007, the government enacted a ten year National Strategy for Children for the period 2008-2018 which reasserts our commitment to protecting our children and which provides a framework for improving child welfare covering all aspects of welfare notably the family environment, health services, education, special protection measures and protection against discrimination. We are awaiting Parliamentary approval of this strategy.
- At the same time, our aim at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy’s is to further decrease the number of children in institutions and to promote close-to-family environments for children with special needs which we are achieving through actions such as:

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<sup>1</sup>Eighteen months ago, the BBC produced a programme called ‘Bulgaria’s Abandoned Children’ which brought to light the plight of children in the Mogilino home for children with special needs. This documentary is being shown at the European Parliament on 4 March.

- More than 20000 children with disabilities who are cared for by their families receive financial support under different programmes;
  - Reinforcing “Child Protection units” to find ways to keeping children with their families – by the end of 2007, these units had worked with 3616 families and succeeded in avoiding institutionalisation in 1503 cases;
  - 7913 children are placed within families of relatives and friends according to the Child Protection Act;
  - Changing the Family Code to facilitate adoptions, including international adoption while preserving high standards of control (Ministry of Justice);
  - Introducing professional foster care.
- Concurrently, we have also taken measures to improve conditions in homes by improved training of qualified personnel, increasing both decentralisation and the responsibilities of local authorities and by welcoming the involvement of NGOs in the process.

In conclusion, and in line with our national initiatives, the Government shares the objectives set out in the proposed European Parliament Written Declaration for “a common European policy on the upbringing and education of under privileged children.” We, in Bulgaria, will strive to ensure that all our children receive the protection they deserve with or without such a European initiative, but raising awareness at European level can only help ensure that no other children fall by the wayside.

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