

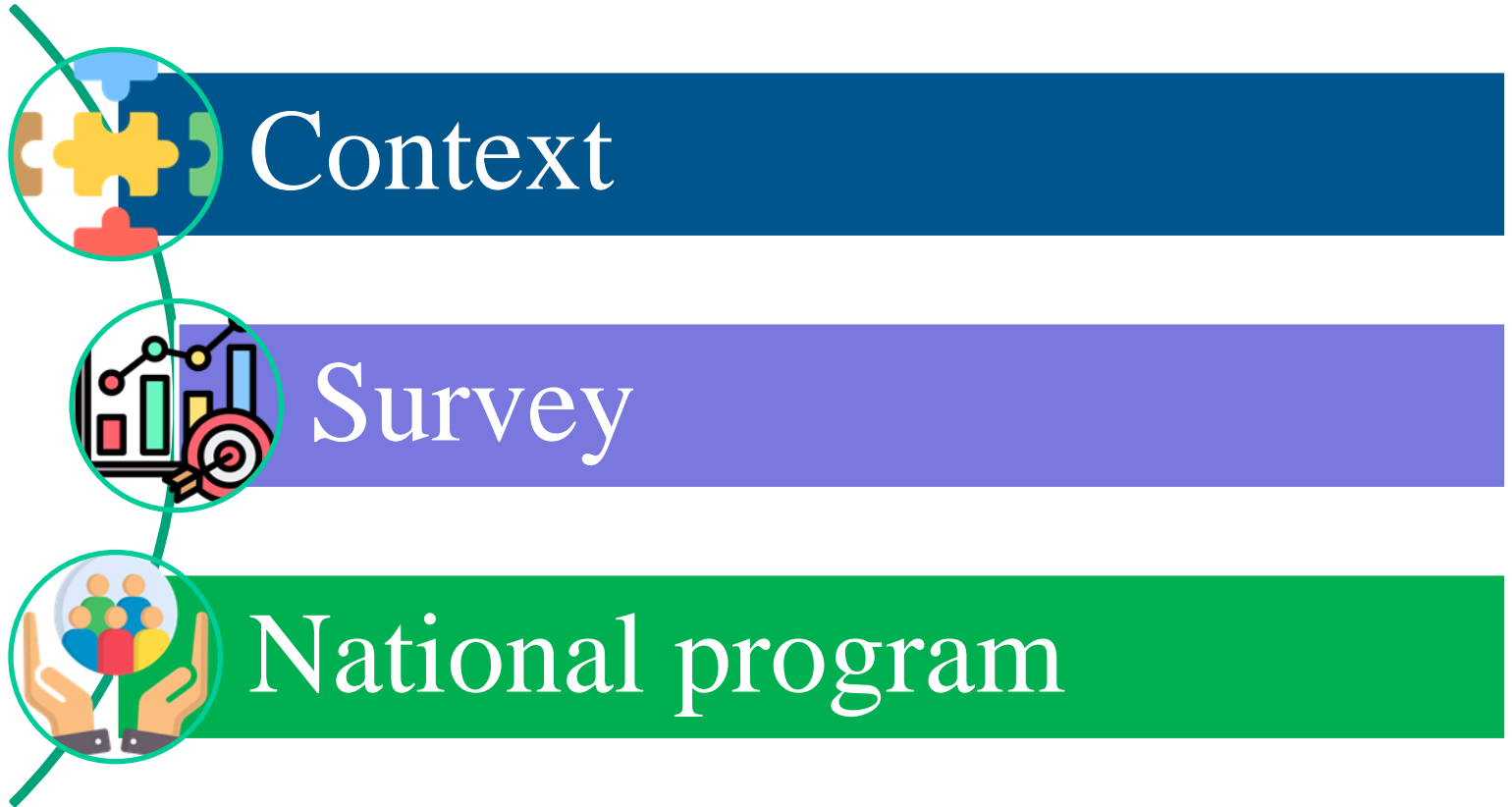


**MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL POLICY,
Bulgaria**

**Community-based social services for
Early Childhood Intervention in
Bulgaria**

*Strengthening national systems for ECI across Europe and Central Asia
Webinar, 12 March 2024, UNICEF ECARO*

Content summary



Context of ECI services development

- **Deinstitutionalisation of care for children**
- **Social Services Act**
- **Preschool education for age 3+**
- **Pilot family-oriented ECI services:**
 - **2010-2015 Social Inclusion Project (WB)**
 - **since 2016: EU Human Resource Development Programs**
 - **after program end – state funded ECI services**
- **NGO good practices**

Legal framework for ECI services

- **Social Services Act (SSA) aims:**
 - equal access
 - quality and effectiveness
 - home- and community-based support
 - integrated approach to providing support
 - public-private partnerships
- **SSA defines the early intervention for children with disabilities. They are free of charge**
- **The Act regulates the provision of all types of social services, including service providers and licensing regime**
- **Quality standards introduced and financial standards upcoming**
- **Agency for the Quality of Social Services – monitoring role₄ and licensing**

ECI services as social services

- **Lead ministry: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy**
- **Funded through transfers to municipalities**
- **Provided by municipalities (can be delegated to NGO partners)**
- **Community-based**
- **Have multi-disciplinary teams (psychologists, social workers, speech therapists, etc.)**

Survey of existing social services with ECI elements (Nov-Dec 2023)

- **177 services surveyed via questionnaire**
- **Detailed analysis of 50 services located in regional centres**
- **Aim:**
 - **determine the readiness of the existing services to implement the national program (under preparation),**
 - **set out criteria for inclusion of services in the national program and,**
 - **determine whether services will join in Phase 1 or Phase 2 of the national program**

Survey findings

Activities provided in existing ECI services

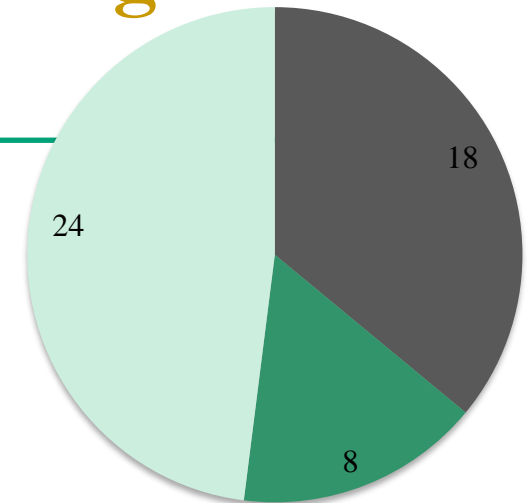
Services for parents

- Trainings for parents
- Counseling for parents
- Social work
- Support groups
- Support from health or educational mediator

Services for children

- Assessment of child development
- Psychological support and therapy
- Speech and language therapy
- Physiotherapy/rehabilitation
- Occupational therapy
- Behavioral therapy
- Special educational support

Parental inclusion in existing ECI services



- Parents not regularly involved
- Strong inclusion of parents
- Mixed or weak inclusion of parents

National Program “Social Services for Early Childhood Intervention” – in preparation

- The system for ECI is one of the requirements of the Action Plan for European Child Guarantee
- Program aim: development of a network of ECI services with national coverage for the provision of timely and quality support
- Facilitating the move towards services which are family-centred & community-based
- 2-year duration (2024-2025) with 3 phases

Objectives of the national program

- **Ensure access to quality ECI services in every region of the country**
- **Implementation of a program for intensive introductory and upgraded training, methodical support and supervision of ECI service specialists**
- **Support the inclusion of children with disabilities and developmental difficulties in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services**
- **Development of national standards and data collection to support the planning of a sustainable national system for ECI**
- **Communication activities to promote the social inclusion of children with developmental difficulties and disabilities, and to address negative attitudes towards them and their families**

Target groups of the national program

- Children aged 0-5 years with disabilities and developmental difficulties, and their parents/caregivers, including:
 - Children with diagnosed disabilities
 - Children whose result from the application of a child development screening tool indicates that the child has developmental difficulties
 - Children at risk of developmental difficulties due to environmental factors
- Specialists working in the services included in the national program, who will receive access to training, supervision and methodical support
- Specialists in ECEC services (nurseries and kindergartens)

National program activities

Establishing a network of municipal ECI services with a regional reach



Training, supervision and methodological support of specialists



Creation of National Coordination Unit and regional coordinators



Creating conditions for building a national system for early childhood intervention

Expected results from national program implementation

- Ensured access to ECI services in each region of the country
- Increased capacity of ECI specialists
- Developed standards for quality of ECI social services
- Developed methodology for the work of ECI teams
- Developed entry and exit criteria for services
- Developed competency profile of ECI specialists
- Strengthened cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms

Thank you for your attention!