

Bulgarian Guidelines

The presented Guidelines for Development of the Foster Care have been prepared by the SAPI research team that is deeply involved in the field for the past 10 years. The Guidelines have been developed based on the Researches made under the Project as well as considering the latest development of the Social policy and regulations for the past 2 years /2010-2011/. The Guidelines reflect the latest national and local discussions on the foster care, the best practices identified for the past years and the one that are in piloting process.

The aim of the Guidelines is to present some practical solutions regarding the development of the foster care in the context of provisioning of alternative social services and the role of the Third sector.



NEEDS ANALYSIS AND PREPARATION PROCESS

WHAT DO I DO?	Who is directly impacted?				HOW DO I DO IT? Traces of innovation	Dilemmas	Third sector's level of involvement
	Minor child	Family of origin	Foster family	Community			
Reduce the number of approved families with no children placed	√	√	√	√	Collect adequate data about the children in need of Foster care and available foster families on local level Optimization of the mechanism of placement of children		Prepare profiles of children in need of foster care Prepare a profile of the foster families that are needed for the exact children

WHAT IS IT

Currently in Bulgaria there is a situation where approved foster families are waiting for months for a child to be placed with them. The reasons for such a situation are complex, but some of them are: Not enough actual data about the children in need of foster care; the process of matching is centralized and mainly led by the Child protection department where there is a lack of human resources.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY

On a first place, there are still 6 500 children placed in residential care that can be placed in foster families as a much better way of care. It is clear that the family environment care is way more efficient than the institutional one.

As long as the approved families are remaining without a child placed as much the risk of loosing interest to help is growing. Often while waiting for long periods the foster parents start questioning themselves if there are some doubts about their competences which raise their tension.

The long period of waiting is crucial especially for the professional foster parents. In Bulgaria there is the category Professional Foster Care that means that these people sign an employment contract with the Social Assistance directorates. The contract is signed after the placement of the child. That means that the approved professional foster parents have to wait for months without being able to receive any income and to start another job.

STRATEGIES TO GET THERE

According to the Bulgarian legislation, the Child protection departments can delegate to the service provider /NGO/ the task to prepare evaluation/ profile of the children placed in institutions. The experience often shows that the existing evaluations of the children in these institutions are mainly formal and not updated. By performing a deeper and actual evaluation of the child situation and needs we can get useful directions about the type of foster families that are needed in the region.

At the same time the service- provider is the one mainly dealing with foster parents starting from information campaigns, through evaluation and training, matching process, placement and support of the foster families after the placement of a child.

This splitting of the parts of one process have to be optimized in order to guarantee the best interest of the children and managed by one responsible provider or/and body.

ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR



All of the above said means that if the service providers are delegated the task to perform the two profiling /the child and foster families/ and keep the role of CPD only as a case management, the process of matching the child with the family could be faster and of a better quality.

WHAT DO I DO?	Who is directly impacted?				HOW DO I DO IT? Traces of innovation	Dilemmas	Third sector's level of involvement
	Minor child	Family of origin	Foster family	Community			
Facilitate the process of reaching potential foster parents	√	√	√	√	Promoting the idea that foster care is support for children as well for their families	Blaming attitude towards parents which children are placed in foster care	Information campaigns for foster care Promote the meaning of foster care through direct contact Influence public opinion

WHAT IS IT

There is still lack of information about the foster care and its meaning. The policy for recruiting foster families is mainly passive and without a particular focus and/ or message.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY

In the public perception there is still lack of clear division and understanding about the difference between adoption and foster care.

Currently the number of approved foster families is not enough to meet the needs of the already mentioned 6 500 children in institutions as well as the rest of the children who are at risk to be abandoned by their parents.

STRATEGIES TO GET THERE

The implementation of targeted and local public campaigns for introducing the foster care could be a successful instrument for recruiting foster families. The campaigns will reach a bigger percentage of the population through using the partnership of TV and radio media- i.e. thematic weekly spots or life shows that presents real experience of foster parents.

ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR

The NGOs can perform an active implementation of information campaigns and coordination of national and local information activities. The development and distribution of information materials, participation in media are other instruments that can be used by the third sector.

Organization of thematic presentation about the foster care in the Labour Office to inform the unemployed people for the opportunity to become foster parents and exploring other opportunities for popularization among different professional groups.

QUALIFICATION PROCESS AND TRAINING

WHAT DO I DO?	Who is directly impacted?	HOW DO I DO IT? Traces of innovation	Dilemmas	Third sector's level of involvement
---------------	---------------------------	--------------------------------------	----------	-------------------------------------



	Minor child	Family of origin	Foster family	Community			
Increase the capacities of foster parents to take care of children with special needs	√	√	√		Provision of additional/specific training Provide favorable environment for development of additional services for the families and information about the existing ones.	Lack of support services for families with children with special needs	Development of training programs Provision of supervision Provision of additional services

WHAT IS IT

The Analysis of the situation in Bulgaria and the interviews performed with foster parents show that most of the foster families are not very much willing to take care of children with special needs. Their main concern is that they don't know much about what exactly does it mean to take care of such child and this lack of knowledge is increasing their anxiety and unwillingness to take care of these children

WHY IS IT NECESSARY

As the foster care is type of care for children and families without limitation of the scope of the challenges, it is very important to guarantee the access of children with special needs to foster care. That means that there is a need of well trained and prepared families ready to meet the needs of these children.

STRATEGIES TO GET THERE

It is of a great importance to provide the foster families with as much information as they need to be able to take care of the children placed with them. In the training program for foster parents are included particular modules targeted

at explaining the particularities of taking care for children with special needs, so that the foster parents can reduce the level of insecurity and will feel more confident and prepared to provide such care.

ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR

The Third sector as a provider of foster care, can and have to put more efforts in developing specialized basic and additional training programs that are targeted on some particularities of the process of caring for people with special needs. At the same time, the sector can gather and make available information about existing services that can support the foster families in the process of care as well as to develop additional one.

Another role of the NGOs is a establishment of Resource Centers targeted at improvement the knowledge and skills of professionals and foster parents for higher quality of the care.

WHAT DO I DO?	Who is directly impacted?				HOW DO I DO IT? Traces of innovation	Dilemmas	Third sector's level of involvement
	Minor child	Family of origin	Foster family	Community			
Profesionalization of foster care			✓		Clear statute of the foster care profession Introducing standards for the profession: - Introducing detailed requirements for the job	Is foster care a profession like any other?	Development and introduction of professional standards

					- performance /competences/ - Training requirements		
--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

WHAT IS IT

Profesionalization of foster care is introducing of national standards and requirements that will define the Statute of the Foster Parent profession and related competences.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY

The foster care is introduced as a profession but without having defined standards for the profession and professional training.

The foster care is introduced as a profession in the National List of Professions, but there are no State Educational Requirements that determine the activities to be performed within the profession and the requirements in relation to the development of the respective competences – knowledge, skills and personality qualities needed for the profession successful implementation. The State requirements serve as a basis for the preparation of the teaching curricula and programmes.

STRATEGIES TO GET THERE

Exchange of know- how and open discussions about the introduction of the profession and its standards. Important tool is getting to know other countries experience in developing the Foster Care as a Profession and adapting existing and creating local requirements and strategies for acquiring the needed competences.

ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR



The third sector can play a key role in providing a space for common creative discussion about the standards for the profession between the involved parties- National Agency for Vocational education and training, Universities, Ministry of labour, respectively Employment Agency, Ministry of education, Training Centers, NGOs providing foster care etc.

WHAT DO I DO?	Who is directly impacted?				HOW DO I DO IT? Traces of innovation	Dilemmas	Third sector's level of involvement
	Minor child	Family of origin	Foster family	Community			
Better preparation of foster parents' for separation with the child	√	√	√		Provide deeper understanding of the foster care as a temporary service Increased competences and skills to establish/perform attachment- detachment behavior		Provision of supervision and self- help groups for foster parents.

WHAT IS IT

Often it appears that even trained and aware that foster care is a temporary care, the foster parents are experiencing extremely difficult time when the moment of separation with the child comes.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY

This unpreparedness reflects on the children, their family of origin or adoptive family in a very dramatic/ traumatic way.

If the foster parents are not prepared for the moment of separation, they can hardly be able to support the child in this transition moment. Going back to their original family or adoptive family is a moment of serious change for the children in which they need a strong and sustainable support and understanding. Apart of the social workers and other professionals who were supporting the child, the foster family remains the closest and best known resource for the children on which they can lean.

Although the idea of foster care as a temporary care is introduced and explored during the whole process of advertising, selection and training of foster parents it is hard to be put into practice after the actual placement of a child. Usually after the placement, the foster parents are facing the fear of attachment and future separation with a new strength. Although the understanding of the temporality of the care, after they start living with the child it is hard to set borders and establish a real emotional relationship. This fact raises the need of constant support in keeping the balance between the emotional relationship and the idea of the temporality of the stay.

STRATEGIES TO GET THERE

A serious tool to manage this issue is the design of the training program for training of foster parents. The training is designed to be performed in a very interactive way that will enable the participants with the opportunity to explore their fears, expectations and fantasies. By doing this they are supported in forming realistic understanding about the foster care.

ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR



The third sector as a provider of foster care is the main figure in provision of support to the foster families. Practically, to assure the easy and less traumatic separation of the foster parents and the child, the representatives of the sector can provide a constant accompanying and consultation of both. Instruments that can be used are the regular supervision for the foster parents and access to self- help groups where the foster parents can share their experience.

PLANNING PROCESS

WHAT DO I DO?	Who is directly impacted?				HOW DO I DO IT? Traces of innovation	Dilemmas	Third sector's level of involvement
	Minor child	Family of origin	Foster family	Community			
Active involvement of children and youth in decision-making	√	√			Introducing procedures that can guarantee the participation of the child in the decision- making and its right to state an opinion according to its age		Development of additional services for preparation of the child for foster care Lobbying and presentation

							of data and analysis for the decision – makers.
--	--	--	--	--	--	--	---

WHAT IS IT

The performed interviews with youths that have been or currently are in foster care showed that the children and/or youths feel like they have not been involved in the process of decisions. Regarding the Participation, 4 respondents were aware of their care plans, one does not know the existence of such. Only 1 of them was involved in the decisions of the plan. For others, the plan is something that exists, but are left with the conviction that "we should participate in it and not know it". All the five respondents believe that they should be involved in decision making regarding the plan.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY

As long as the children placed in foster care are not aware of their future and are not involved enough in discussing it they are becoming and object of one way intervention that can put into risk the success of the care.

"I decide for you" model is typical for the residential care and has proved already its inefficiency as it creates people unable to develop sense of responsibility for their own life and abilities to grow.

The involvement of the children/youths in the decision of their care plane and placement will increase their feeling/perception about the foster care as a positive experience and will develop in them the feeling of appreciation and dignity

The lack of active involvement of children and youth in decision-making requires practice to move toward the direction of expansion of opportunities that children have a right to participate in decision making.

STRATEGIES TO GET THERE

It is needed targeted improvement of the competences of the foster parents and the professionals working with children to prepare and include the children in adequate way in the process of decision making.

ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR

The third sector is the one that can assure the development of services for preparation the child for a placement in a foster care guaranteeing its best interest. The NGOs as service provider can facilitate the process of coordination of the parties involved in the process of planning the care and introduce practical instruments to represent the child/youth opinion about it.

Another possible involvement is the Lobbying for the need to guarantee children's rights to state an opinion.

WHAT DO I DO?	Who is directly impacted?				HOW DO I DO IT? Traces of innovation	Dilemmas	Third sector's level of involvement
	Minor child	Family of origin	Foster family	Community			
Enlarged access of children and youths with special needs, babies and children from the gipsy ethnicity to	√	√	√	√	Increase the number of specialized Foster families for children with special needs, babies and children from the gipsy ethnicity Lower the anxiety of the Foster families		Information public campaigns targeted/focused on potential candidate Foster families for these



foster care							children Develop specialized training programs for basic and supportive training with focus on the particularities of the care for these groups of children Mapping of additional services for the Foster families, Biological families and the children placed in foster care
-------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

WHAT IS IT

During the process of application to become foster parents most of the candidates share that they are willing to support a child without special needs, preferably healthy and from Bulgarian ethnicity. That means that there are

groups of children for which the period of finding a foster family is too long which can lead to a deepening of the problems experienced and limitation of the right to live and get care in a family environment.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY

The practice shows that most of the children who have passed through institutional care are developing special needs, suffer of physical, emotional, psychic lack of maturity and most of them are with roma ethnicity belonging. Since in Bulgaria the tendency is to move children from institution and place them in a foster care or/and later integrate them in their family of origin and/or adoptive family, that means that there is the need for foster families for these particular children. On the other hand, the Bulgarian State decided the closing of the institution for babies age 0-3. To be able to do this reform, the professionals should be able to guarantee the access of these children to family type of care.

STRATEGIES TO GET THERE

Fighting the prejudices and fears through provision of information and creativity is a milestone for facing the needs of the children. In that sense, it is of a great importance to introduce the concept that "children are children" no matter of their background, age, sex, ethnicity or needs. At the same time focusing on finding foster families with experience in the mention fields of need could be an adequate answer. I.e. Motivating families from roma communities to become foster parents or families who have or have been taken care for children with special needs or professionals which job has to do with taking care of babies. This type of "specialization" could answer the actual situation.

ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR

The third sector is the one that can promote broadly the understanding that "children are children" no matter of their background, age, sex, ethnicity or needs through public campaigns. The NGOs can focus and create targeted campaign for recruiting foster families for babies and children with special needs.

On the other hand, the NGOs as trainers of foster families can introduce additional training modules focused on the particularities of different types of needs and provide constant support to both families and children. Part of this support is Mapping and dissemination of information about existing services for children and families.

SYSTEM SUPPORT

WHAT DO I DO?	Who is directly impacted?				HOW DO I DO IT? Traces of innovation	Dilemmas	Third sector's level of involvement
	Minor child	Family of origin	Foster family	Community			
Provision of enough financial upkeep of the fostered children and reasonable salary for the families	√		√		<p>Development of flexible financial standard, based on precise indicators related as well to the particular case /case-by-case/, local particularities, inflation etc</p> <p>NGO to be recognized as a provider of foster care with delegated budget and becoming a Foster families employer.</p>		Lobbying and presentation of data and analysis for the decision – makers.

WHAT IS IT

The interviews performed with active foster parents showed that most of them find the financial upkeep for the fostered child as not enough as well as their salary.

The definition of the amount received is based on the children age and the number of children places, but does not take into consideration the local economic situation.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY

The not enough financial upkeep limits the possibilities of the foster families to meet the children's needs, such as kindergarten, private lessons, some medical tests etc. On the other hand the law salary of the professional foster parents can decrease their interest in performing this care/ profession and resign.

STRATEGIES TO GET THERE

A possible solution of the issue could be the development of a financial mechanism that will include detailed indicators that will take into consideration more factors such the economic situation of the region, inflation, presence and need of additional services etc. and to give opportunity to define the amount of the upkeep on case base. This will be possible if the service provider is also an employer of the foster parents which is not the case in Bulgaria.

ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR

The main role of the third sector is to lobby for the proposed changes through presenting analysis, data and good practices showing the advantages of such an instrument.

WHAT DO I DO?	Who is directly impacted?				HOW DO I DO IT? Traces of innovation	Dilemmas	Third sector's level of involvement
	Minor child	Family of origin	Foster family	Community			
Provide a possibility for the foster families to use their annual leave/holiday or leave based	✓		✓		Development of additional services and flexible mechanisms for support of the foster families and the children placed		Lobbying and presentation of data, analysis and creation of new services.

on health problems						Promoting the substitute care.
--------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--------------------------------

WHAT IS IT

The right to the foster families to use annual leaves and leaves because of health problems is guaranteed in the legislation regulating the foster care, but it is not clear enough and most of the families practically do not have the chance to use it.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY

The possibility to use annual leave will provide the foster parents with the chance to have time to take care of themselves as well, which will prevent the risk of burning out. Receiving professional support during the time of care for a child is not the only support and not necessarily enough. The opportunity to spend time without the child will result in increased capacities later and will assure keeping the balance between stress- reliefs.

STRATEGIES TO GET THERE

To assure the right of annual leaves it is necessary to have prepared and available substitute families that can take care for the children for these periods. Such families can often be found among the groups /like communities, self-help groups/ of foster parents and are a good opportunity as they already know each other and the children they are taking care of also know each other. This option will make less stressful the period of separation.

ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR

The third sector can be active in promoting the need of substitute families and provide services for the children during the periods of leaves such as camps or trips.



IMPLEMENTATION

WHAT DO I DO?	Who is directly impacted?				HOW DO I DO IT? Traces of innovation	Dilemmas	Third sector's level of involvement
	Minor child	Family of origin	Foster family	Community			
Involvement of the biological parents	√	√	√	√	<p>Facilitating the process of receiving adequate/correct information about the place of stay of the Biological families /address, relatives./</p> <p>Provision of support to the Biological families before, during and after the placement of their child in FC</p> <p>Changing the perception of Foster care to trustful family support</p>		<p>NGO could be assigned with the stage of Finding and motivating the BF for cooperation</p> <p>Provisioning of practical support to the Biological families</p> <p>Concentrate efforts in information events promoting the idea of co-parenting and</p>

					Strong coordination between the key parties involved in the Case and improving the access to services for biological parents		Provide "Free" accompanying Provide information for services for the child, the foster family and the biological family.
--	--	--	--	--	--	--	---

WHAT IS IT

According to the performed interviews with biological parents which children are placed in foster care, the family of origin suffers lack of information about the care for their child and there is a basic feeling of being kept in distance.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY

The involvement of the biological parents is crucial for the success of the foster care. Since the family of origin is present and especially when the long term goal of the placement is reintegration, the biological family is supposed to get the needed support to get back to the state of being able to take care of its child. Placement in foster care does not mean support only for the child and the foster families which is often the case in the practice. In Bulgaria there is still not enough practice for issuing Referrals from Child protection departments for support of the biological parents. This can lead to a deeper isolation and lack of sustainability of the care. There are still not enough services for the families of origin while the focus is on supporting the foster families. Basically the family of origin is mainly informed about decisions and it is not involved in the planning of care.

STRATEGIES TO GET THERE

Since the Child Protection Departments usually do not have enough resources /staff, time, finance etc./ they have experiencing problems to find the biological parents of the children /talking about the case when the children are placed in institutions/. As we already agreed that the presence/ involvement of the biological parents is important for the child story, this task could be outsourced to the service providers.

Provision of support to the Biological families before, during and after the placement of their child in Foster care should be mandatory, which means strengthening the practice of issuing referrals for support of biological parents.

To be able to support and motivate the family of origin it is needed a change of the perception of Foster care to trustful family support.

It is basic the strong coordination between the key parties involved in the Case and improving the access to services for biological parents.

ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR

The third sector is the one that can concentrate efforts in information events promoting the idea of co- parenting and Provide "Free" accompanying to the families of origin. That means changing the perception about the foster care as a care and help for families as well and not only for the children.

Provisioning of practical support to the Biological families is another role of the NGOs as service providers.

WHAT DO I DO?	Who is directly impacted?				HOW DO I DO IT? Traces of innovation	Dilemmas	Third sector's level of involvement
	Minor child	Family of origin	Foster family	Community			
Increase the understanding about the	√	√	√	√	Provision of trainings and supervision	Blaming attitude towards	Development of services for biological

need and importance for the child to be aware of its own history/identity					Provision of support for the child	the Biological families	parents
							Facilitating the private meetings between child and biological families in a safe and external environment /centers/

WHAT IS IT

It is an often case when after the placement in foster care the issue, the conversations and the idea of the family of origin is reduced at maximum and in some cases it is missing at all.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY

The knowledge about the personal history, background or origins is basic for the development of a sustainable Self. It is happening sometimes that this personal history is not the happiest and it is related to traumatic experiences but it is still a part of one's self. Having the knowledge about it helps the individual to manage its own life story and continue its development in a healthy way.

It is an often case where this life story is tried too be replaced by a new one or just ignoring it which usually leads to raise of serious issues in the later development.

The practice knows cases where the foster parents are showing blaming attitude towards the family of origin which raises the tension and provokes problems in the foster family- child relationship. This can put into serious risk the results of the care provided.

STRATEGIES TO GET THERE

Showing respect and not rejecting the existence of family of origin and life story is the answer to build a trustful relationship between the foster parents and the child.

To be able to do that, the foster parents still need a constant support for changing their attitudes towards the family of origin and to understand the key importance of knowing your own personal story, so one can grow as a healthy and mature person. This could be achieved by supervisions and additional interactive trainings.

ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR

The third sector is one that can facilitate and strengthen the process of changing the attitudes towards the families of origin by introducing the idea that there is no space for "competition" between the foster and biological parents, but rather it is a co- work for the wellbeing of the child.

One way to do that is to provide "visibility" of the family of origin by involving it as user of supporting services.

Another tool for facilitating this process is providing safe environment for regalement meetings between the children and their family of origins. After the meetings the professionals can provide a space for discussing the meaning of it with each of the involved parties.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION PROCESS

WHAT DO I DO?	Who is directly impacted?	HOW DO I DO IT? Traces of Dilemmas	Third sector's
---------------	---------------------------	------------------------------------	----------------



					innovation		level of involvement
	Minor child	Family of origin	Foster family	Community			
Ongoing Monitoring	√	√	√		Monitoring visits Periodical review of the Care plan		Participate in the monitoring process Provision of trainings for monitoring and Planning

WHAT IS IT

The Ongoing monitoring as well as the Periodical review of the Care plan are tools that ensure the successful implementation of the foster care intervention and allows the undertaking of the timely corrections and/or improvements of the care if needed.

WHY IS IT NECESSARY

The two instruments are needed in order to be able to follow the development of the case. The Review of the plan will allow the professionals to consider the progress in achieving the set goals, if needed to reformulate them and/ or set new ones in case of achievement. That way they can guarantee the consistency of the care provided and its adequateness.

STRATEGIES TO GET THERE



The Ongoing monitoring is realized through monitoring on the spot visits and meetings on a regular basis during the placement in foster family and after the reintegration in the family of origin.

Based on the information gathered through the monitoring process, a Review of the care plan is performed. The review is happening every half of the planning period. I.e. if the Care plan is for 6 months, the Review is performed on the 3rd month.

ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR

In the cases where the third sector is providing the service, it participates in both the monitoring and the planning review.

The NGOs as representatives of the sector could develop and implement training programmes for performing monitoring and planning.