

Country Profile

BULGARIA¹

Children in care in Bulgaria

- There are about 10,000 children in alternative care.
- Male children account for more than 50%
- About 2,000 children in alternative care are registered as disabled
- About 6,000 are Roma
- The caseload of care professionals in the state sector may vary between 15 – 70 children.

'Some children never meet the social worker from the state child protection offices'

National expert

Overview of care arrangements

The process of de-institutionalisation in Bulgaria was significantly reinforced in 2010. There is currently a national strategy designed to reduce the number of child care institutions while creating family-based alternatives. All child-care institutions are set to be fully replaced by 2025.

The Strategy has seen the number of institutionalised children drop rapidly, falling from around 8,000 to about 1,300² today.

Formal inclusion of children's rights

At national level the rights of children in alternative care are explicitly mentioned in a number of national documents – e.g. the Child Protection Act, the Social Assistance Act, Foster Care Guidelines, etc. There is a National Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria who is responsible for monitoring the rights of children (including in alternative care). However, this monitoring is judged to be ineffective as a result of:

- The lack of an effective child protection system
- The large number of agencies responsible for the rights and welfare of children
- A lack of motivated and qualified professionals in the field
- The absence of a training and development system for professionals
- A lack of coordination among the monitoring bodies.

Child Care Service Workforce

Social workers and professionals giving specialized support to children are required by law to have a university degree. For caregivers in family-like care a degree from a lower vocational education is sufficient. None of these three professions however, requires any follow-up training. These further educations are moreover not regularly available and Child Rights do not make up a substantial part of the training. Professional foster parents and volunteer foster parents on the other hand are required to follow an accredited/official preparatory course as well as subsequent follow-up training on a regular basis.

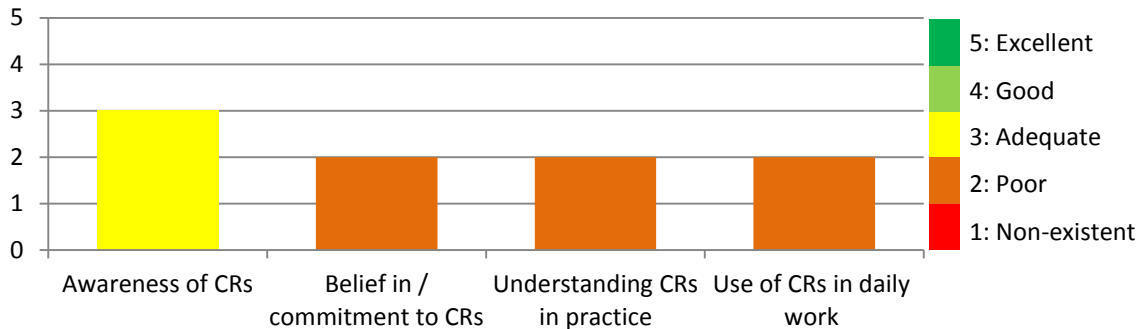
¹ The information in this country profile was drawn from the responses to three surveys which were answered by four national experts.

² This figure refers to big residential institutions and does not include children in small group homes

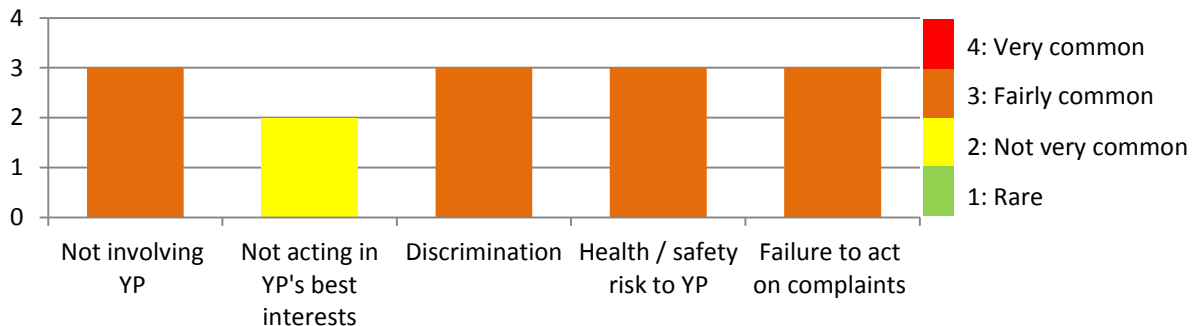
Assessing the state of children's rights

Respondents were asked to give their personal assessment on a number of rights-related issues. They were asked to think about the 'average' care professional, the 'average' child or young person in care and the average trainer of care professionals. Some of the results are shown in the charts below.

Your assessment: care professionals and children's rights



Your assessment: how common are the following?



Key challenges

- There is a common belief that the care professional is better able to judge the child's best interests than the child himself / herself
- There is a lack of real understanding about the meaning of children's rights: many care professionals believe that rights are contingent on children's obligations
- There is little awareness that rights extend beyond practical matters such as the need for food and a place to live and also include issues relating to empowerment and participation
- The implementation of rights is hindered by the bureaucracy of the system, for example within child protection departments and state child care institutions