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EUROPEAN SOCIAL CHARTER

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Social Charter

submitted by

THE GOVERNMENT OF BULGARIA

Follow-up to Collective Complaints No. 31/2005, 41/2007,
46/2007, 121/2016, 125/2016 and 151/2017.

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REPORT FOR FINDINGS 2023

NATIONAL REPORT

For the period from 01.10.2020 to 30.09.2022,
Presented by the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria before the Council of Europe in
accordance with Article C and Article D of the European Social Charter (revised) on
implementing measures for the provisions adopted under it

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Introduction

This Report has been prepared after consultations and in cooperation with the relevant competent departments.

The Bulgarian national currency is BGN (lev) and its exchange rate is fixed to the Euro at 1.95583 BGN for 1 Euro (0.511292 Euro for 1 BGN).

The Bulgarian side shall remain available for any further questions or clarifications that may arise in the process of reviewing this Report.

1. Follow-up actions on Complaint No. 31/2005 filed by the European Roma Rights Centre against Bulgaria for the period after 01.10.2020.

1.1. Regarding the inadequate housing conditions of Roma families and the lack of appropriate amenities:

Considering the importance of the housing policy as a basic policy for the state administration of the country and the need to speed up the procedures for drafting and approving the strategic documents in the housing sector, a project of the National Housing Strategy (NHS) was developed, and the overall process of its preparation was supported by an interagency working group with broad public participation ensured.

The NHS sets out the general framework for the development of the housing sector. It will be implemented with national/targeted programmes aimed at the implementation of specific goals. The planned programme package will be aimed at building the framework of the national housing system and solving its priority problems. Some of them include the implementation of specific activities to improve the housing conditions of vulnerable groups of the population.

The strategic goals of the NHS are oriented towards finding sustainable long-term solutions to the issues addressed to the housing sector, and their direct implementation on the ground will be within the competences of municipal administrations. The NHS will outline a policy of direct support for vulnerable people.

The implementation of the joint project "Assessment of the housing and living conditions of the most marginalized and vulnerable communities (with a focus on the Roma) in North-western Bulgaria", initiated in 2019 with the World Bank, was successfully completed. Within the framework of the project, an analysis and assessment of the living conditions among vulnerable groups, housing and a general overview of the institutions and policies related to the integration of the Roma were made. Part of the results of the project will be used for the preparation of the "Improving the housing conditions of the most vulnerable groups of the population" programme, which is part of the currently developed NHS project.

Within the framework of the 2014-2020 Operational Programme for Regional Development (OPRD), which is implemented with funds from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), support for infrastructural measures for social inclusion and integration of marginalized groups of society is foreseen, as follows:

Projects for social housing are being implemented under procedure BG16RFOP001-1.001-039 "Implementation of Integrated Plans for Urban Reconstruction and Development for 2014-2020". The procedure was announced in July 2015 in order to support the implementation of the Integrated Plans for Urban Reconstruction and Development in 39 cities of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd hierarchical level in accordance with the National Spatial Development Concept of Bulgaria for the period 2013-2025. According to the OPRD 2014-2020 Procedure BG16RFOP001-1.001-039 Application Guidelines, support for the provision of modern social housing for the accommodation of vulnerable population groups and other disadvantaged groups is carried out within a Social Infrastructure group activities under Investment Social Infrastructure priority 4. The current submission of project proposals under procedure BG16RFOP001-1.001-039 "Implementation of Integrated Plans for Urban Reconstruction and Development 2014-2020", including social housing, ended on December 31, 2019.

- As of 31.12.2021, 24 contracts for the provision of grants for social housing projects were concluded with the municipalities of Ruse, Stara Zagora, Blagoevgrad, Pernik, Kardzhali, Lovech, Smolyan, Razgrad, Silistra, Velingrad, Varna, Plovdiv, Burgas, Vidin, Haskovo, Shumen, Vratsa, Lom, Kazanlak, Montana, Gotse Delchev, Targovishte, Petrich and Svishtov with a total BFP value of BGN 52.3 million. In 2021, 4 BFP contracts for social housing were completed by the municipalities of Blagoevgrad, Lovech, Ruse and Stara Zagora, with the implementation of which 329 housing units in urban areas were rehabilitated;

It should be borne in mind that the above-mentioned interventions implemented under the OPRD 2014-2020 are not exclusively aimed at the Roma population, but at all identified vulnerable groups of the population.

In addition, the process of developing the 2021-2027 Regional Development Programme (RDP) is currently being finalized. In it, the principled support for the OPRD 2014-2020 measures will continue. The indicators and their target values in the programme are yet to be approved. The new RDP is focused and aimed at the implementation of the territorial objective of policy 5 "Europe Closer to the Citizens", by financing projects for the development of the planning of regions of level 2, linked to investments under the other programmes and included in integrated territorial investments (ITI). The scope of the RDP 2021-2027 includes the territories of all urban municipalities on the territory of the country, as follows:

- **Priority 1 "Integrated urban development" - 10 large urban municipalities:** Vidin, Pleven, Ruse, Veliko Tarnovo, Varna, Burgas, Stara Zagora, Plovdiv, Sofia-city municipality and Blagoevgrad;

- **Priority 2 "Integrated territorial development of the regions" - the remaining 40 urban municipalities:** Vratsa, Lovech, Lom, Montana, Troyan, Gabrovo, Gorna Oryahovitsa, Sevlievo, Razgrad, Svishtov, Silistra, Dobrich, Targovishte, Shumen, Sliven, Yambol, Nova Zagora, Aytos, Karnobat, Kazanlak, Svilengrad, Harmanli, Dimitrovgrad, Kardzhali, Haskovo, Asenovgrad, Velingrad, Smolyan, Pazardjik, Peshtera, Panagyurishte, Karlovo, Botevgrad, Gotse Delchev, Dupnitsa, Kyustendil, Pernik, Petrich, Samokov and Sandanski.

Eligible activities: The main groups of activities eligible for support under the RDP are in the sectors of health, education and social infrastructure, housing, energy efficiency in the building stock, sustainable urban mobility, road infrastructure, green urban environment, culture, sports, tourism and infrastructure measures to promote economic activity.

To ensure that the needs of the most deprived individuals and communities are met, projects targeting vulnerable groups, including Roma, as well as the most deprived communities or areas will be given priority during the selection process through specific criteria and higher grading.

1.2. Regarding the finding of lack of legal security of ownership and non-compliance with the conditions applicable to the removal of Roma families from their illegally occupied dwellings

As of August 2022, the authorities of the National Construction Supervision Directorate (NCSO) have issued 339 orders for the removal of residential buildings on the territory of the country, whereas 200 of them refer to the homes of Bulgarian families of Roma origin, which have not been fulfilled. The non-implementation is due to the established practice

of the NCSD, according to which, before proceeding with the enforcement of the order to remove illegal construction - housing, the authorities of the NCSD must request from the mayor of the relevant municipality and the director of the relevant Social Assistance Directorate information **whether the illegal construction constitutes a sole dwelling for its occupants. In cases where the dwelling is the only one or the municipality does not have the possibility to accommodate the person(s) in an alternative dwelling, NCSD does not proceed with the execution of the issued order for the removal of an illegally constructed residential building.**

Offering accommodation in social housing to families scheduled for forced removal of their illegal constructions is a practice that often remains unaccepted by citizens affected by legal provisions and measures, and their refusals are recorded. It is also important to note the fact that social services are provided after the stated desire of the citizens, and not as a coercive administrative measure.

When exercising the powers under Art. 222, para. 1 of the Spatial Development Act (SDA), including when taking actions to implement enforcement orders for the removal of illegal constructions, NCSD authorities shall respect the rights and freedoms arising from the principles enshrined in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCPNM), as well as the principle of proportionality, regulated in Art. 6 of the Administrative Procedure Code (APC) and further developed in the provision of Art. 272, para. 1, point 1 of the APC. The cited norms provide that administrative bodies shall exercise their powers in a reasonable manner, in good faith and fairly, and administrative acts and their implementation cannot affect rights and legal interests to a greater extent than is necessary for the purpose for which the act is issued.

In June 2018, the European Court of Human Rights imposed temporary measures on the Republic of Bulgaria, instructing the country's government to refrain from taking actions related to the demolition of the only dwellings. This decision explicitly states that any non-compliance with it will constitute a violation of Art. 34 of the Convention. In this regard, **the NCSD authorities refrain from actions related to the destruction of the only dwelling, including the demolition of illegal dwellings of Bulgarian citizens when they are of Roma origin and/or these are their only dwellings.**

With the entry into force of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the SDA (promulgated, SG No. 82 of 2012), which divides the powers to remove constructions, including residential buildings, according to their category according to the nomenclature of types of constructions, no orders were issued by the NCSD authorities after 26.11.2012 for the removal of illegally constructed residential buildings of the third category. After this date, orders for the removal of illegal residential buildings of the fourth and fifth category are issued by the mayors of the respective municipalities in accordance with the procedure of Art. 225a of the SDA.

It is also important to note that when initiating proceedings to remove illegal constructions, the competent administrative authorities do not aim to establish the origin and ethnicity of the perpetrators of the illegal constructions, but only aim to comply with the legal order established in the interest of society and the state. Conduct aimed at circumventing or non-fulfilment of the applicable norms is inherently illegal. Tolerating it would have a negative

impact on the disciplinary effect of the law, which in turn would create an attitude of disrespect for it and preconditions for citizens and society non-compliance with it.

1.3. Regarding the strategy of the Bulgarian authorities for the coming years and providing information on the results achieved in the implementation of the various current projects regarding the provision of suitable housing conditions and suitable amenities for the Roma population; current data on the availability of social housing for Roma (supply and demand) and on the number of Roma individuals/families provided with social housing

In the 2014-2020 Operational Programme Human Resources Development (OPHRD), the integration of Roma is set by implementing the following 3 approaches: "mainstream", "targeting" and Community-led Local Development (CLLD) - local/territorial. In total, according to the three approaches under 2014-2020 OP HRD, as of 01.01.2022, almost 60,000 persons from the Roma community have been included.

The mainstream approach covers priority axes 1 and 2 of the programme, and through it, as of 01.01.2022, **43,424 persons** from the Roma community have been covered by the measures.

- Priority Axis 1 - **20,781 persons**;
- Priority Axis 2 - **22,643 persons**.

The targeted approach is fully implemented according to investment priority 2.1. "Socio-economic integration of marginalized communities such as the Roma". The most significant procedure under this approach is the so-called **"integrated procedure"** under the name *"Socio-economic integration of vulnerable groups, integrated measures to improve access to education"*, which is implemented in two components with the financial support of OP HRD and Operational Programme Science and Education for Smart Growth (OP SESG). Until now, under component 1, in which the projects are coming to end and their final reporting is in progress, **48 contracts** have been concluded, with a total value of **18,980,000 euros, with 12,343 persons from the Roma community involved**.

Component 2 of the procedure was implemented with the support of the three operational programmes OP HRD, OP SESG and the Operational Programme for Regional Development (OPRD), and under this component beneficiary municipalities under Priority Axis 1 of OPRD 2014-2020 applied, in which Integrated urban regeneration and development plans include measures to build social housing.

By the end of October 2022, under component 2, 20 contracts were concluded with the following municipalities: Stara Zagora, Plovdiv, Burgas, Pernik, Lovech, Ruse, Petrich, Gotse Delchev, Velingrad, Shumen, Montana, Haskovo, Smolyan, Varna, Kazanlak, Blagoevgrad, Vratsa, Svishtov and Kardzhali and Vidin with a total value of BGN 24,738,154.47.

Next, with Order No. RD-02-14-1000/10.10.2018 of the Minister of Regional Development and Public Works, an interdepartmental expert working group was created at the proposal of the Ministry of Justice to analyse the current legislation and to propose legislative changes to the SDA, the State Property Act (SPA) and the Municipal Property Act (MPA).

The proposal was made in conjunction with the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in court cases *Yordanova et al. v. Bulgaria* and *Ivanova and Cherkezov v. Bulgaria*. With them, it was accepted that both cases are related to the non-application of the principle of proportionality in the administrative process of removing illegal constructions or

confiscation of state and municipal property in cases where the right to respect for private and family life and housing is affected pursuant to Art. 8 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) of the Council of Europe.

The working group includes representatives of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW), NCSD, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria, the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Supreme Administrative Court.

The draft law aims to introduce an obligation to apply the principles of proportionality when carrying out the inspection and assessment of the circumstances, which the administrative body competent to issue an order for the removal or forfeiting of a dwelling is obliged to apply before issuing orders for the removal of illegal constructions and for forfeiting of state and municipal property. There are no provisions in the current legislation that would require, in the cited cases, an assessment based on certain criteria.

When preparing the proposals, it is taken into account that the concept of "dwelling" in the sense imposed by the practice of the ECtHR, given the provision of Art. 8 of the ECHR, does not coincide with the concept of "dwelling" within the meaning of the SDA. Dwelling in the sense of the convention is the permanent attachment of a person to a certain space, to any place designated by him as a place/site of living, which performs such functions, while the SDA sets specific requirements for buildings and, in particular, for housing - in terms of functionality and basic premises, compliance with sanitary and hygienic standards, resistance and safety in case of fire, accessibility and safety during operation, mechanical resistance, noise protection, energy saving and heat preservation, etc., as well as the legality of its construction.

2. Follow-up actions on Complaint No. 41/2007 filed by the Mental Disability Advocacy Centre (MDAC) against Bulgaria for the period after 01.10.2020.

2.1. Data on the percentage of children with intellectual disabilities living in family-type centres for children and adolescents with disabilities or other types of accommodation that replace homes for mentally disabled children (HMDC) educated in mainstream and/or special schools

2.2. Measures taken to implement the policy of "inclusive education" and results achieved for children with moderate, severe or profound intellectual disabilities (residing in family-type centres for children and adolescents with disabilities or other types of accommodation that replace the homes for mentally disabled children (HMDC))

2.3. Current information on the percentage of children with moderate, severe or profound intellectual disabilities (living in family-type centres for children and adolescents with disabilities or other types of accommodation that replace homes for children with mental disabilities) who are educated in mainstream and special schools and the percentage of all other children who have access to education

Regarding the above questions, we provide the following information:

In the institutions of the preschool and school education system, activities are carried out to provide conditions and resources to build a supportive environment for the

implementation of inclusive education, as well as to provide general and additional support for personal development with a focus on children and students with special educational needs.

For the academic year 2021/2022, a supportive environment has been provided in the kindergartens and schools themselves or by the regional centres to support the process of inclusive education for a total of 24,986 children and students in the preschool and school education and training system, of which 18,920 in schools and 6,066 in kindergartens. Children and students with special educational needs who are educated in the preschool and school education system have various disabilities and disorders - sensory disabilities, physical disabilities, multiple disabilities, intellectual disabilities, language and speech disorders, specific learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, emotional and behavioural disorders. In accordance with their special educational needs, which arose as a result of these disabilities and disorders, they are supported by 5,288 pedagogical specialists assigned to kindergartens and schools, including: resource teachers - 1,432, psychologists - 1,394, speech therapists - 922, hearing and speech rehabilitators - 78, teachers of visually impaired children - 135, teachers of hearing impaired children - 12; pedagogical advisors - 801, teachers of children with mental disabilities - 21, educators - 412, other pedagogues - 79, kinezitherapists - 2.

8,799 of the children and students with special educational needs who study in schools and kindergartens (excluding special schools and centres for special educational support) were provided with additional support by 966 pedagogical specialists from the regional centres for supporting the process of inclusive education (resource teachers - 675, psychologists - 126, speech therapists - 137, hearing and speech rehabilitators - 17, teachers of visually impaired children - 11).

In 42 Centres for Special Educational Support (CSES) on the territory of the country, a total of 2,838 children and students are educated - 137 children and 2,701 students. These children and students have more complex special educational needs and multiple disabilities and are supported by 762 specialists, including: psychologists - 48, speech therapists - 49, auditory-speech rehabilitators for children with hearing impairment - 2, pedagogical advisors - 3, teachers of children with mental disabilities - 456, educators - 69, pedagogues - 20, other pedagogical specialists - 50, pedagogical specialists with management functions - 65.

A proportion of these 2,838 children and students who study at CSES are placed in social services centres in the community, such as family-type accommodation centres for children and adolescents with disabilities or in other services that replace homes for mentally disabled children (HMDC).

There are a total of five special schools for students with sensory disabilities on the territory of the country - three for children and students with impaired hearing and two for children and students with impaired vision. They teach a total of 688 children and students, who are supported by 289 pedagogical specialists, of which 183 are special educators.

It should also be noted that in the Ordinance on the quality of social services adopted in 2022, specific standards and criteria are also regulated to guarantee the rights of users, including access to education, training and employment. For example, in the standards and criteria for the quality of the specialized social service Residential care for children/adolescents with permanent disabilities from 3 to 18/25 years, a standard is laid down that the specialized social service shall provide support to each child/adolescent to appropriately access an institution for pre-school and school education and upbringing, and for adolescents also

assistance for inclusion in training programmes for the acquisition of work skills and inclusion in suitable employment. The criterion for this standard explicitly regulates that all children in the social service shall attend the mandatory forms of education for their age - kindergarten, school, centre for special educational support and/or centre for support for personal development. Accordingly, the indicators to the criterion track whether all users attend the relevant institutions in the preschool and school education system according to their age and capabilities, whether all individual care plans (individual support plans) contain specific activities to support users in the education process, whether all users are provided with the necessary learning materials, tools, aids, etc., and whether all users receive additional support through appropriate services, for example, counselling, therapy, etc. Also, the social service provider is obliged to support adolescents in the process of vocational guidance and/or their inclusion in training courses to acquire professional skills depending on their interests and level of development. All individual care plans (individual support plans) according to the age, capabilities and interests of the users include activities for the acquisition of work skills, vocational guidance and job search support and, where applicable, training courses for the acquisition of vocational skills. Identical standards and criteria are also included regarding the integrated health and social services Residential care for children with permanent disabilities in need of constant medical care and Residential care for children with aggressive and problematic (high-risk) behaviour, including adolescents up to 20 years old.

The focus of the standards is on empowering people using services and promoting their independence and social inclusion. The standards are developed in such a way that they take into account the opinion of users at each stage of the provision of the service, and a large part of the indicators to the criteria formulated for each standard include the survey of the opinion of users. The procedure for filing complaints and reports of violated rights under the Law on Social Services and the normative acts for its implementation is also regulated. In this way, the control and monitoring functions in the field of social services, which are carried out at three levels, are significantly strengthened.

3. Follow-up actions on Complaint No. 46/2007 filed by the European Roma Rights Centre against Bulgaria for the period after 01.10.2020.

3.1. Measures to ensure effective access of the Roma population to health services; specific health education campaigns/activities and awareness-raising activities specifically targeting Roma health behaviour (on topics such as sexual and reproductive health, STD prevention, healthy eating and physical activity, smoking, alcohol and drugs, health and Environment)

In Bulgaria, at the national level, the measures included in the Healthcare priority, in the country's two consecutive strategic documents: National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for 2012-2020 and National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma for 2021-2030 are being implemented. In the latter, the aim is to build on what was achieved during the implementation period of the National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for 2012-2020.

The included measures have been developed according to the policy of the Bulgarian government, aimed at creating better conditions and ensuring equal access to health services

for all citizens of Bulgaria, regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity, social affiliation, as well as facilitating access to health care of disadvantaged groups. The measures and activities are systematized in the following areas and directions:

1. Prevention and control of HIV, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections among vulnerable Roma communities.

The activities carried out in 2021 under the National Programme for the Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS and STIs (sexually transmitted infections) are aimed at reducing the vulnerability to HIV of people from the Roma community. Activities are held year-round in the 12 Offices for anonymous and free HIV/AIDS counselling and testing (OAFACT) at the Regional Health Inspectorates (RHIs) Blagoevgrad, Burgas, Varna, Veliko Tarnovo, Vratsa, Dobrich, Pleven, Plovdiv, Ruse, Sofia regional health inspection, RHI - Stara Zagora and Haskovo.

The total number of HIV tests performed by the laboratory network on the territory of the country is 255,592.

Access to the Offices for anonymous and free HIV/AIDS counselling and testing (OAFACT) was provided to the regional health inspectorates, and 1429 persons were tested and their HIV status found out.

HIV and STI prevention activities were carried out with the help of a non-governmental organization on the territory of Dobrich and Varna. The following services are provided: field work; motivating and accompanying people from the community for voluntary counselling, testing and treatment of HIV/STIs, performing and providing the Case Management service; counselling and support of seropositive persons and their partners/families; distribution of health and educational information materials.

A national ANTIAIDS campaign is held annually with the support of the Ministry of Health. The campaign aims to draw attention to the AIDS problem and increase public awareness of the ways of transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, to motivate people to take responsibility for their own health.

2. Activities to improve the control of tuberculosis among the Roma community by conducting risk screening, accompanying and testing for tuberculosis; support in the treatment process of tuberculosis patients.

In 2021, a total of 8 non-governmental organizations carried out activities among the Roma community under the National Programme for the Prevention and Control of Tuberculosis in the Republic of Bulgaria, working among compact Roma communities in the following areas: Varna, Dobrich, Veliko Tarnovo, Vidin, Gabrovo, Plovdiv, Ruse, Razgrad, Silistra, Stara Zagora.

The following results were achieved according to key indicators through fieldwork in a Roma community:

- A total of 4,531 individuals were reached during fieldwork with questionnaire screening;
- A total of 1,415 persons received a medical examination (sputum examination, Mantoux TCT sample and/or radiographic examination) with a view to early detection of tuberculosis cases;

- 463 referrals and escorts to medical institutions of persons at high risk were carried out;
- The Case Management service was received by 87 persons with directly observed treatment in the long-term phase or with latent tuberculosis infection;
- All persons with active tuberculosis are offered free treatment with first-line anti-tuberculosis medicinal products, and other costs related to treatment, including diagnostic procedures, medicinal products and hospital stay are covered by the Ministry of Health budget.

3. Implementation of projects in the field of improving the health status of marginalized communities:

In 2021, a contract was signed for the implementation of the Health for All project No. BGLD-1.006-0001 **under the Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Improved Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups Programme**, which is financed by the 2014 – 2021 Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area. The budget of the project is 1,109,718 euros, and the period for the implementation of the project activities is from 01.11.2021 to 30.04.2024. The project is implemented in partnership with the National Network of Health Mediators Association.

The implementation of the Health for All project addresses the needs for improving health status and more effective implementation of national health policies among marginalized communities living in conditions of extreme poverty and social exclusion. The project will develop an analysis of the main problems facing the implementation of the national health mediation policy. The implementation of the project will support the policies of the Ministry of Health to increase access to health care for vulnerable groups, more specifically in the field of maternal and child health, including family planning and STIs, especially syphilis and congenital syphilis.

The main goal of the project is to improve communication, resources and coordination at the local level in the implementation of health policies for marginalized communities by optimizing the health mediation system.

The main activities of the project are:

- Improvement of the mechanism for the implementation of national health policies at the local level;
- Building a model for working in crisis situations such as Covid-19 in relation to socially excluded and isolated communities;
- Improvement of the system for regular provision of health information;
- Testing services and work approaches to overcome existing deficits;
- Expanding the activity of health mediators.

Within the framework of the **Improving Access to Social and Health Services** projects, various health and information campaigns are carried out with the aim of preventing health issues of the Roma communities, including increasing the health culture through talks on healthy eating, prevention and control of HIV, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections, promotion of family planning and responsible parenthood, as well as providing various examinations for persons without health insurance from the Roma community.

3.2. Updated information on monitoring and screening of the health status of Roma pregnant women and children

As a result of actions taken to improve and modernize the regulatory framework in the field of established medical care for pregnant women without health insurance, an amendment was made to Ordinance No. 26 of 2007 on the provision of obstetric care to women without health insurance and for carrying out studies outside the scope of compulsory health insurance for children and pregnant women. The amendments and additions are promulgated in SG No. 69 of August 26, 2022. The number of preventive examinations has been increased to four, the package of medical-diagnostic examinations during pregnancy for women without health insurance has been expanded. The scope of medical services is also being expanded, with the possibility of providing inpatient care for high-risk pregnancies on a clinical pathway up to twice the duration of pregnancy. A completely new appendix to the Ordinance has been developed, in which the type and frequency of examinations during normal pregnancy monitoring are determined, allowing optimal planning of the relevant examinations and appointment of tests. The changes are fully in line with the Bulgarian government's aspiration to improve access and provide a sufficient amount of medical assistance to pregnant women who cannot enjoy rights as health insured persons, to health activities during their pregnancy.

The purpose of the changes is to guarantee better access to obstetric care for pregnant women without health insurance and to reduce infant mortality for the country by improving the quality of maternal and child health care in our country, by introducing an effective system for prevention, screening, prophylaxis and early diagnosis of predictable and preventable conditions and pathologies during pregnancy.

Taking into account the need to provide additional examinations during the pregnancy period of pregnant women without health insurance, with the 2021-2030 National Programme for the Improvement of Maternal and Child Health, approved by the Council of Ministers, an opportunity is included for an additional examination by an obstetrician-gynaecologist and additional consultations in the presence of diseases that occurred during pregnancy. The programme envisages ensuring the sustainability of the activity of the existing 31 health and advisory centres for maternal and child health in order to improve the access of pregnant women and children to quality medical services outside the scope of mandatory health insurance and to the necessary psychological counselling and social care. Through its implementation, conditions will be ensured for active promotion of health and prevention of diseases, for the provision of timely, quality and complex medical and health care, as well as for the development of health and social services.

The policies of the Bulgarian government are aimed at improving the access of all citizens of Bulgaria, regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity and social affiliation, to quality and timely health services and effective management of public health care costs. Protecting the health of citizens as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being is a national priority and is guaranteed by the state by applying the following principles: provision of affordable and quality health care, with priority for children, pregnant women and mothers of children up to one year and special health protection for children, pregnant women, mothers of children up to one year old and persons with physical disabilities and mental disorders.

Funds for health activities under the budgets of the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) and the Ministry of Health are increased annually, which ensures the expansion of the scope of health activities guaranteed by the NHIF budget. With changes introduced in 2021 to Regulation No. 9 of 2019 to determine the package of health activities guaranteed by the NHIF budget, an opportunity is provided to carry out activities related to the detection of malignant tumours of the ovaries, cervical cancer, which ensure quality and timely diagnosis and treatment of patients with various conditions and diseases.

In the package of preventive activities carried out in accordance with Ordinance No. 8 of 2016 on preventive examinations and dispensation, additional types of research are included, which have improved the quality of disease prevention services within the framework of mandatory health insurance. The new activities are aimed at children, pregnant women and persons over 18 years of age, namely: medical diagnostic examinations for school-age children; additional ultrasound examinations within the framework of preventive examinations - for the period of pregnancy, two more such examinations are added to the two obstetric ultrasound examinations performed, as well as an ultrasound examination for foetal morphology and an examination for hepatitis C. For women aged 30 to 50 years a mandatory periodical ultrasound examination of the mammary glands is provided, with which, at an early stage, it is possible to identify possible changes and take follow-up actions for the early diagnosis of possible malignant diseases of the mammary gland.

3.3. Information on screening Roma for diseases that are major causes of death (e.g. cancer)

With the 21 mobile medical offices available in the regional health inspectorates, the following screening examinations were carried out for persons without health insurance and persons living in remote areas from medical facilities:

- a total of 1,637 examinations were carried out with paediatric mobile offices, and diseases were diagnosed in 150 children, in the districts of Sliven, Pernik and Montana;
- a total of 750 examinations were performed with the general practice mobile offices. A total of 541 immunizations were carried out with the general practice mobile offices of children from 0-18 years of age with incomplete immunization status according to the National Immunization Calendar, in the areas of: Varna, Sofia Region, Sliven and Pleven;
- a total of 2,145 examinations were carried out with the mobile gynaecological offices, and diseases were diagnosed in 648 women, in the areas of: Vratsa, Pazardzhik, Stara Zagora and Sliven;
- a total of 500 examinations were carried out with the mobile mammography offices, and diseases were diagnosed in 90 persons, in the regions: Burgas and Silistra. No examinations were carried out in the Silistra region due to the complicated situation caused by Covid-19;
- a total of 1,468 examinations were carried out with the mobile fluorography offices, and diseases were diagnosed in 182 persons, in the areas of: Sliven and Stara Zagora;

- a total of 1,557 examinations were carried out with the mobile ultrasound offices, and diseases were diagnosed in 660 persons, in the regions: Dobrich, Montana and Shumen;
- a total of 6,270 examinations were carried out with the mobile clinical laboratories, deviations from the norm were found in 975 of them, in the regions: Dobrich, Stara Zagora and Razgrad.

The above-mentioned activities continue to be implemented through the measures set out in the "Healthcare" priority under the National Action Plan (2022-2023) to the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for equality, inclusion and participation of the Roma (2021 - 2030).

For the period 01.01-30.06.2022 under objective 2: "Improving access to quality public healthcare for persons in a situation of poverty and social vulnerability", measure 2.1. "HIV prevention and control activities through anonymous and free counselling and testing services for HIV and sexually transmitted infections in OAFAC and mobile health clinics" 1,318 individuals in HIV/AIDS free counselling and testing clinics were examined.

Under objective 2., measure 2.2. "Activities to improve the control of tuberculosis among the Roma community by conducting risk screening, accompanying and testing for tuberculosis; support in the process of treatment of tuberculosis patients", the following results were reported by non-governmental organizations working among the Roma community in Yambol and Sliven:

- 572 persons from the target groups, were covered during field work with questionnaire screening;
- 184 persons from the target groups, who showed an increased risk for tuberculosis, surveyed and screened with a Mantoux test;
- 205 persons accompanied to a medical facility for diagnosis, chemoprophylaxis or treatment of tuberculosis;
- 14 persons, with directly observed treatment in the long-term phase or with latent tuberculosis infection, accompanied and receive the Case Management service - individual clients.

Under objective 3: "Reducing stigma and discrimination of people from vulnerable groups", measure 2.2. "Implementation of information campaigns and campaigns for the provision of low-threshold and mobile prevention services for HIV/AIDS, STIs, viral hepatitis and tuberculosis" thematic days have been marked.

For the reporting period under objective 4: "Development of the concept of health mediation", measure 4.1. "Training of new health mediators to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills pursuant to Art. 7, para. 2 of Ordinance No. 1 of 2020 on the requirements for the activity of health mediators, training of new health mediators was conducted at the Faculty of Public Health of Sofia Medical University - in the period 21.03.2022 - 14.04.2022. 21 new health mediators were certified.

Explanatory activities were carried out for the prevention of socially significant diseases:

- immunization campaigns, including explanatory ones to limit the spread of COVID-19 - 4,500 units;

- information campaigns to mark thematic days such as the World Day Against Drug Addiction, Smoking - 280;
- talks with presentations – 3,500;
- working meetings – 1200;
- over 15,500 pieces of personal protective equipment (disinfectants, protective masks and gloves) were distributed.

3.4. Measures to prevent and address infectious diseases/epidemics among Roma population and available vaccines for Roma children (including coverage levels), especially in relation to the Covid-19 situation and reported discrimination

Given the emerging pandemic situation, the main priority in the activities of the regional health inspectorates is the undertaking of adequate anti-epidemic measures among the Roma population.

A vaccination campaign was conducted in all areas of the country. With immunization offices moved with the cooperation of the municipal administration and health mediators, a significant part of the Roma population was immunized against Covid-19.

Talks were held on public health prevention topics:

- with young mothers, about the meaning and importance of visits to the personal doctor, immunizations and motivation for their regular application, according to the National Immunization Calendar;
- for activities to limit infectious diseases: Hepatitis - symptoms and prevention of infection Sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis - symptoms and prevention of infection;
- with the surveyed adolescents about the ways to prevent unwanted pregnancy and the dangers that early pregnancy hides for the mother and the child;
- to learn about the ways to protect against the most common infectious and chronic non-infectious diseases; the harm of smoking, alcohol abuse and unhealthy eating; the importance of preventive examinations for early diagnosis of cardiovascular diseases;

On the territory of the Roma settlements, many different health video materials have been provided to the population, such as the films Mothers too Early, "What We Know About Puberty, Hookah, The Invisible, Yana's Day, Last Core, the cartoon Let's Live Healthy.

Training and implementation of health mediators:

Health mediators are financed with funds from the state budget, as an activity delegated by the state. For 2021, funds have been provided for 290 full-time health mediators, compared to 260 full-time numbers for 2020.

Additionally, health mediators have been appointed in the following municipalities: Belitsa, Strumyani, Sozopol, Primorsko, Dulgopol, Veliko Tarnovo, Lyaskovets, Belogradchik, Borovan, Mizia, Oryahovo, Gabrovo, Tervel, Ugarchin, Boychinovtsi, Bratsigovo, Lesichovo, Cherven Bryag, Karlovo, Perushtitsa , Rakovski, Zavet, Isperih, Razgrad, Vetovo, Ruse, Tsenovo, Sliven, Kotel, Dospat, Sofia Municipality, Kostenets, Etopole, Ihtiman, Pavel Banya, Radnevo, Antonovo, Opaka, Popovo, Dimitrovgrad, Varbitsa, Nikola Kozlevo, Smyadovo, Shumen, Bolyarovo, Yambol.

During the reporting period, the main achievements and results achieved by the health mediators pursuant to the provisions in Art. 9, para. 1 of Ordinance No. 1 of 2020 on the requirements for the activity of the health mediators, the report form summarizes activities in six main areas are:

1. Assistance of general practitioners:
 - 1.1. Planned immunization campaigns among children – 14,720 and among adults – 3331;
 - 1.2. Preventive examinations among children – 14767 and among adults – 7426;
2. RHI support: planned immunizations and immunization campaigns among children – 1554 and among adults – 4159;
3. Assistance of dentists:
 - 3.1. Preventive and/or curative activities - a total of 635 units;
 - 3.2. Preventive programmes - a total of 216;
4. Supporting access to medical care:
 - 4.1. Consultations – 74046;
 - 4.2. Filling out documents – 8396 pcs.;
 - 4.3. Following procedures - 6441;
 - 4.4. Escort to health institutions - 9417;
 - 4.5. Restoration of health insurance rights - 1,495;
 - 4.6. Patronage – 16405;
5. Health promotion activities: health information campaigns:
 - 5.1. Prevention of infectious diseases, hygiene, nutrition - 6,644;
 - 5.2. Family planning, sexual and reproductive health – 1589;
 - 5.3. Number of distribution of health and educational materials – 84,600 pcs.;
 - 5.4. Joint work with RHI and other institutions, participation in trainings, seminars - 10552;
6. Activities for solving complex cases:
 - 6.1. Consultations – 47363;
 - 6.2. Filling out documents – 40605 pcs.;
 - 6.3. Following procedures - 8370;
 - 6.4. Escort to social institutions - 6462;
 - 6.5. Patronage – 11408.

3.5. Measures to overcome the environmental dangers to which the Roma communities are exposed, namely measures to improve the living conditions in the Roma neighbourhoods, related for example to water supply, electricity supply, sewage, garbage collection

In the National Strategy of the 2021-2030 Republic of Bulgaria for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma population under Priority Housing Conditions an **Operational Objective has been set: Improvement of housing conditions, including the adjacent technical infrastructure and infrastructure for public services.**

The general objectives are:

1. Creation of an integrated geographic information system and introduction of orthorectified images taken with a drone.
2. Creation of a cadastral map and cadastral registers of territories including areas with a compact Roma population.
3. Priority development by the municipalities of general and detailed development plans in order to regulate the status of the territories and impose the requirements for infrastructure and residential and other construction.
4. Implementation of improvement measures (construction of outdoor and indoor playgrounds and sports halls) in neighbourhoods with a predominant Roma population, with the aim of improving the living environment of the local communities.
5. Search for tools to improve the legal and economic conditions for the elimination of non-compliant housing and neighbourhoods.
6. Development and implementation of long-term programmes for an integrated residential environment.
7. Assistance in providing social municipal housing for the most marginalized and vulnerable communities.
8. Construction/renovation of the social infrastructure of healthcare, education, culture centres, etc. in neighbourhoods with a concentration of poverty, incl. to provide integrated health and social services and development services for children and adults in the community.
9. Expanding legal access to quality water, electricity and sanitation in designated neighbourhoods with a concentration of poverty.
10. Support and implementation of innovative and effective solutions to overcome energy poverty among Roma communities in the country, and inclusion of neighbourhoods with a predominant Roma population in energy renovation programmes.

The measures to achieve the goals are laid down in the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy.

The implementation of the measures under the Housing Conditions priority will contribute to the implementation of the indicators under the Social inclusion and Local development priorities from the NDP and has a major role in the implementation of Goal 11 "Transforming cities and towns into inclusive, safe, adaptive and sustainable places to live" and Goal 6 "Ensure access to and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all" of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Follow-up actions on Complaint No. 121/2016 filed by Association for Equal Rights against Bulgaria for the period after 01.10.2020.

The Committee finds that to ensure Roma families' access to family benefits, the simple statutory guarantee of equal treatment as a means of protection against any discrimination based on race and gender is not sufficient. The Committee considers that Article D imposes an obligation to take into account the relevant differences as well as the

impact that the measure may have on a part of the population, in this case the Roma and among them minor girls.

In connection with the criticized provisions of the Family Allowances Act (FAA), as we have repeatedly noted, the scope of the FAA includes families who raise their children in Bulgaria, **and all families with children who meet the conditions for this have access to family support, regardless of any specific features.** The purpose of the law is to support families to raise children in a family environment, while promoting their preschool and school education, access to health care, etc.

Again, we should note that after the changes in the FAA entered into force on 28.07.2015, neither the MLSP nor the Social Assistance Agency (SAA) received a complaint from citizens or the Bulgarian civil sector regarding the provisions regarding the provision of benefits in kind, including to minor parents, termination of benefits when the child has become a parent or when children are not regularly attending school or a preschool group.

It should be borne in mind that family allowances for children represent specific support for families with children. They are not social benefits that aim to supplement or replace income with a view to meeting the basic life needs of individuals, but aim to provide support to families in raising children in a family environment. **In view of the reference period for reporting complaints (after 01.10.2020), we would like to note that with the Law on the State Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria (LSBRB) for 2021, changes have been made to the FAA (published SG No. 104 of 2020, in force from 01.01.2021), through which the universal approach to support for families with children was expanded.** As of 2021, the income criterion for awarding the one-time aid for students enrolled in first grade has dropped, and the new conditions are applicable from the 2021/2022 school year. At the same time, with the changes made in the FAA, the one-time aid for students enrolled in the eighth grade, which for the academic year 2020/2021 was provided with an income criterion under Art. 12a, para. 9 of the Law on Measures and Actions during the State of Emergency and to Overcome the Consequences (LMASEOC), announced by a Decision of the National Assembly of March 13, 2020. The aid is already granted without an income test starting from the 2021/2022 academic year. With the ZDBRB for 2021, the amounts of these two benefits have also been increased from BGN 250 to BGN 300. The income criterion for the one-time pregnancy benefit and monthly benefits for raising a child up to one year has also been increased - from BGN 450 to BGN 510, as well as the amount of monthly allowances for raising a child up to the age of one - from BGN 100 to BGN 200. Also, with the aim of equalizing support for families raising children with permanent disabilities, through the Transitional and Final Provisions to the Amendment Act of the LMASEOC (promulgated, SG No. 14 of 2021, in force from 17.02.2021) introduced changes in the FAA related to equalizing the amounts of monthly benefits for raising a child with a permanent disability under Art. 8e of the FAA, granted to the families of relatives or relatives and to voluntary foster families, with those of parents (adoptive parents). To ensure care and support in a family environment, this monthly allowance is already provided both to the parents (adoptive parents) of children with certain 90 and over 90 percent permanent disabilities, as well as to the families of relatives or loved ones and voluntary foster families where such children are accommodated under Art. 26 of the Child Protection Act (CPA).

With the LSBRB for 2022 (promulgated, SG No. 18 of 2022), as of April 1, 2022, the following have been increased:

- the income criterion for granting the monthly family benefits for raising a child until the completion of secondary education, but not more than 20 years of age (Article 7 of the FAA), with BGN 100, respectively from BGN 410 to BGN 510 - to receive the full amount of the aid and from BGN 410.01 to BGN 510 to BGN 510.01 to BGN 610, inclusive - to receive 80 percent of the full amount of the aid;
- the amounts of the monthly benefits under Art. 7 of the FAA, respectively: for families with one child – with BGN 10 (from BGN 40 to BGN 50), for families with two children – with BGN 20 (from BGN 90 to BGN 110), for families with three children – with BGN 30 (from BGN 135 to BGN 165) and for families with four children – with BGN 30 (from BGN 145 to BGN 175). The principle of increasing the amount of the aid by BGN 20 for each subsequent child in the family after the fourth is maintained;
- the income criterion for access to the remaining two family allowances for children, which are provided with an income criterion - the one-off pregnancy allowance and the monthly allowance for raising a child up to the age of one, with BGN 100 - from BGN 510 to BGN 610;
- the amount of the monthly allowance for a child without the right to an inheritance pension from a deceased parent, by BGN 35 – from BGN 115 to BGN 150.

Also, it should be noted that in 2022, a bill to amend the FAA was developed. With the proposed changes, the regulations guaranteeing the right to monthly family allowances for children with one or two deceased parents are systematized and refined, and the support for these children will continue to be provided on a reduced basis - without an income test, regardless of whether or not they are entitled to inheritance pension from a deceased parent. The bill was approved by Decision No. 673 of 15.09.2022 of the Council of Ministers.

5. Follow-up actions Complaint No. 125/2016 filed by the European Women's Institute against Bulgaria for the period after 01.10.2020.

- **Ensuring access to adequate and effective means of protection for victims of pay discrimination;**
- **Defining the concept of equal pay in legislation;**
- **Providing measures to improve pay transparency, giving workers the right to request and receive, in the context of legal proceedings, information about a colleague's pay, while duly respecting the applicable rules on the protection of personal data and commercial and industrial secrecy;**
- **Extending the scope of salary comparisons in the private sector outside the same enterprise;**

- **Strengthening the powers of the Commission for the protection of competition to ensure proper follow-up of its actions in the field of equal pay;**
- **Review and strengthen existing measures aimed at reducing and eliminating the gender pay gap and consider the adoption of new measures that can lead to measurable progress in a reasonable time in this regard;**
- **Promoting effective parity in the representation of women and men in decision-making positions, both in the public and private sectors.**

In view of the above, the Committee requests that follow-up actions be taken in connection with the collective complaint decisions be indicated.

Labour legislation in Bulgaria guarantees gender equality. Pursuant to Art. 243, para. 1 of the Labour Code, women and men have the right to equal remuneration for equal or equivalent work. The right of women and men to equal remuneration for equal or equivalent work is expressly regulated. This principle applies to all payments under the employment relationship.

It is required that the criteria for evaluating the work are the same for all workers and employees and are determined by the collective labour agreements or by the internal rules for the salary, the job description for the position held, which is provided to the worker, pursuant to Art. 127, para. 1, item 4 of the Labour Code, as well as with the legally established conditions and procedure for evaluating employees in the state administration. Every enterprise in the country has internal rules for the salary, and the method of its formation is defined in them. The basic salary is determined on the basis of evaluation and grading of jobs and positions and is agreed in the employment contract between the parties to the employment relationship in the specified ranges (Article 4, Paragraph 3 of the Ordinance on the structure and organization of the salary). Legislation has created mechanisms for the formation of labour remuneration, guaranteeing gender equality.

According to the Civil Servant Act (Art. 7, Para. 6), discrimination, privileges or restrictions based on race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, origin, religion, beliefs, membership in political, trade union and other public organizations or movements, personal, social and property status or the presence of a disability. The appointing authority determines the individual amount of the civil servant's basic salary, taking into account the level of the position held, qualification and professional experience. The minimum and maximum amounts of the basic salaries by levels and degrees, the amounts of additional remunerations, as well as the procedure for receiving them, are determined by an ordinance of the Council of Ministers and cannot be lower than those defined by the labour legislation.

The gender pay gap in the EU is narrowing. In 2020, it decreases to 13%, while in Bulgaria it is 12.7%. According to the Wage Structure observation, which is conducted every 4 years by the NSI, in 2018 men made up 49% of the total number of employed persons, the remaining 51% were women. The relative share of men exercising the so-called worker professions (or "blue collars" - classes 6,7,8 and 9 of the National Classification of Professions and Positions (NCPP) - 2011), is 49.8%, while for women 76.1% belong to the so-called "white collar workers" (i.e. non-manufacturing workers - classes 1,2,3, 4 and 5 of the NCPP - 2011).

As of 2020, more than half of the women in Bulgaria work in low-paid industries, with an average salary of BGN 701 to BGN 1,124, with the average salary for the country being BGN 1,391.

It is noteworthy that in two of the most feminized economic activities, Education and Health, the average wages of men exceed the average wages of women. In Human Health, 77.5% are women, the average salary of men exceeds that of women due to the nature of the positions held by the latter, such as nurses and orderlies.

The relative share of women is the largest in medical-social care with accommodation and social work without accommodation - 83.3% are women. In this economic activity, one of the lowest average salaries is reported - BGN 868, while the general average salary of women is BGN 872 and exceeds that of men by BGN 22.

Male employment dominates in two of the three highest-paid economic activities, and pay gaps remain high.

Conversely, women's employment predominates in two of the three lowest-paid economic activities, with a lower wage level than that of men - hotel and restaurant industry, textile and clothing production; leather processing; manufacture of shoes and other articles of treated skin without hair, other activities, medical-social care with accommodation and social work without accommodation, culture, sports and entertainment. In manufacturing of textiles and clothing; leather processing; production of shoes and other products from processed skins without hair the average salary of women is 390 BGN lower than that of men, in culture, sport and entertainment the average salary of women is 432 BGN lower than this of men.

It should be noted that housework is not counted as work, there is no hourly rate. For the period 2009-2010, on average, women spent 4.40 hours per day doing housework, men - 2.49 hours.

The correct analysis of the difference in the values of the reported average wages requires taking into account the individual characteristics of the employed persons and the characteristics of the enterprises and industries in which they work.

The right to equal pay for men and women for equal work or work of equal value is one of the founding principles of the EU enshrined in the Treaty of Rome. The requirement to guarantee equal pay is enshrined in Directive 2006/54/EC, supplemented in 2014 by the Commission's recommendation on pay transparency. Despite this legal framework, the effective application and implementation of this principle in practice continues to be a challenge in the EU.

6. Follow-up actions on Complaint No. 151/2017 filed by the European Roma Rights Centre against Bulgaria for the period after 01.10.2020.

The European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) in its Findings for 2021 states that it has already examined several times the follow-up to the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) v. Bulgaria, application no. 46/2007, decision on the merits of 3 December 2008 and concludes that the state has not fulfilled its obligations to ensure equal access to medical services for the Roma population. In this regard, the Committee recalls its findings of 2020, in which it noted that the overall health status of the Roma is significantly lower than that of the rest of the population and that there is "an overall discrimination

that Roma still suffer in accessing health care", which has not been corrected in the 10 years since the ECtHR's decision in ERRC v. Bulgaria, application no. 46/2007.

The Committee noted that the previous report did not refer to any new elements showing that health care, and in particular the access of Roma women to maternity services in public hospitals, had improved, and therefore considered that the situation was not brought into line with the Charter.

Within the framework of the projects under the direction **Improving Access to Social and Health Services** (under the 2014-2020 Development of Human Resources Operational Programme), various health and information campaigns are carried out with the aim of preventing the health issues of the Roma communities, in increasing the health culture through talks on healthy eating, prevention and control of HIV, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections, promotion of family planning and responsible parenthood, **as well as providing various examinations for persons without health insurance from the Roma community.**

With the amendments made to Ordinance No. 26 of 2007 on the provision of obstetric care to women without health insurance and on the performance of examinations outside the scope of compulsory health insurance for children and pregnant women. The amendments and additions are promulgated in SG No. 69 of August 26, 2022. The number of preventive examinations has been increased to four, the package of medical-diagnostic examinations during pregnancy for women without health insurance has been expanded. The scope of medical services is also being expanded, with the possibility of providing inpatient care for high-risk pregnancies on a clinical pathway up to twice the duration of pregnancy. A completely new appendix to the Ordinance has been developed, in which the type and frequency of examinations during normal pregnancy monitoring are determined, allowing optimal planning of the relevant examinations and appointment of tests. The changes are fully in line with the Bulgarian government's aspiration to improve access and provide a sufficient amount of medical assistance to pregnant women who cannot enjoy rights as health insured persons, to health activities during their pregnancy.

The purpose of the changes is to guarantee better access to obstetric care for pregnant women without health insurance and to reduce infant mortality for the country by improving the quality of maternal and child health care in our country, by introducing an effective system for prevention, screening, prophylaxis and early diagnosis of predictable and preventable conditions and pathologies during pregnancy.

Taking into account the need to provide additional examinations during the pregnancy of uninsured pregnant women, the 2021-2030 National Programme for the Improvement of Maternal and Child Health, approved by the Council of Ministers, includes the possibility of an additional examination by an obstetrician-gynaecologist and additional consultations at presence of diseases that occurred during pregnancy. The programme envisages ensuring the sustainability of the activity of the existing 31 health and advisory centres for maternal and child health in order to improve the access of children and pregnant women to quality medical services outside the scope of mandatory health insurance and to the necessary psychological counselling and social care. Through its implementation, conditions will be ensured for active promotion of health and prevention of diseases, for the provision of timely, quality and complex medical and health care, as well as for the development of health and social services.

The policies of the Bulgarian government are aimed at improving the access of all citizens of Bulgaria, regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity and social affiliation, to quality and timely health services and effective management of public health care costs. Protecting the health of citizens as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being is a national priority and is guaranteed by the state by applying the following principles: provision of affordable and quality health care, with priority for children, pregnant women and mothers of children up to one year and special health protection for children, pregnant women, mothers of children up to one year old and persons with physical disabilities and mental disorders.

Funds for health activities under the budgets of the NHIF and the Ministry of Health are increased annually, thus ensuring an expansion of the scope of health activities guaranteed by the NHIF budget. With changes introduced in 2021 to Regulation No. 9 of 2019 to determine the package of health activities guaranteed by the NHIF budget, an opportunity is provided to carry out activities related to the detection of malignant tumours of the ovaries, cervical cancer, which ensure quality and timely diagnosis and treatment of patients with various conditions and diseases.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

Abbreviation	Description
APC	Administrative procedural code
CPA	Child Protection Act
CSES	Centre for Special Educational Support
ECHR	European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EFRD	European Fund for Regional Development
FAA	Family Allowances Act
FCPNM	Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
HMDC	Home for mentally disabled children
LMASEOC	Law on measures and actions during the state of emergency and to overcome the consequences
LSBRB	Law on the State Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
MPA	Municipal Property Act
MRDPW	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works
NCSD	National Construction Supervision Directorate
NHIF	National Health Insurance Fund
NHS	National Housing Strategy
OP SESG	Operational Program Science and Education for Smart Growth
OPHRD	Operational Program Human Resources Development
OPRD	Operational Program Regions Development
RDP	Regional Development Program
RHI	Regional Health Inspectorate
SAA	Social Assistance Agency
SDA	Spatial Development Act
SPA	State Property Act