

unicef 

for every child

75

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

UNICEF in BULGARIA

2021 - YEAR IN REVIEW

In 2021, UNICEF marked a milestone anniversary – 75 years of unstoppable work for every child. For 75 years, UNICEF has stood for a powerful truth: Every child has the right to grow up healthy and strong. To be nurtured and protected. To be educated and prepared to contribute to their societies. And for 75 years, UNICEF and our partners have worked to help children realize those rights, wherever they are. Yet multiple crises in 2021 threatened those hard-fought gains for children. The COVID-19 pandemic, a worsening climate crisis, armed conflict, displacement, and other humanitarian emergencies are depriving children of their health and well-being.

During 2021, at a time of unprecedented global crisis with the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to have a severe impact on children and young people, exacerbating existing equity gaps, UNICEF in Bulgaria worked to mount a child-focused response to the pandemic and to provide support where it was needed the most.

MAJOR RESULTS ACHIEVED

Together with state and local authorities, UN agencies, EU institutions, non-governmental organizations, media and corporate partners, UNICEF continued to invest in and support various programmes and models of services for children and families in Bulgaria with focus on the most vulnerable - children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, children with disabilities, children at risk of abandonment, victims of violence, children without access to education, children in contact with the law, refugee children and unaccompanied children.



Child poverty

UNICEF in Bulgaria started the implementation of the **pilot project “European Child Guarantee” (ECG)** with funding from the European Union and in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The main objective is to expand the access to and improve the quality of 4 types of services - home visiting services for families with small children; early childhood intervention for children with disabilities and developmental difficulties; quality inclusive pre-school education, and child and family-centered preventive and support services in 10 pilot municipalities on the territory of three districts – Burgas, Sliven and Stara Zagora.

The program reached over **10,000 children, 3,500 parents and 500 professionals**. Children and young people were also involved in the ECG through child-led community research and U-Report digital consultations – as means for behavioral and social change engagement.



ECG and child care

- **1,125 families and 1,680 children (924 girls and 756 boys)** from vulnerable and excluded communities benefited from the **outreach and preventive services provided by the Family Consultative Centre for Community Support** in Novi Pazar, Shumen region. The model was scaled-up in the pilot project “EU Child Guarantee”, implemented by UNICEF in three other regions of the country. Objective was to improve the quality and strengthen the prevention capacities of existing family support social services by establishing mobile teams for outreach support to children and families in precarious situations, focusing on marginalized Roma communities. **7 mobile teams have been established and trained in 6 social services and one municipal administration and, in less than 6 months, reached 976 parents and 1,277 children (617 girls and 660 boys).**

- **4,529 parents of 5,101 of children under 3 years** of age in Shumen and Sliven districts benefited from individualized support, guidance and information on nurturing care provided through the **home visiting services**, established with UNICEF support. Also, the **home visiting services** provided essential guidance on prevention of COVID-19 to families with young children. **Additional 8,065 parents of children under 5 years of age strengthened their parental competencies** through other parenting support modalities, including community-based parenting support programs and digital platforms.



Inclusive education

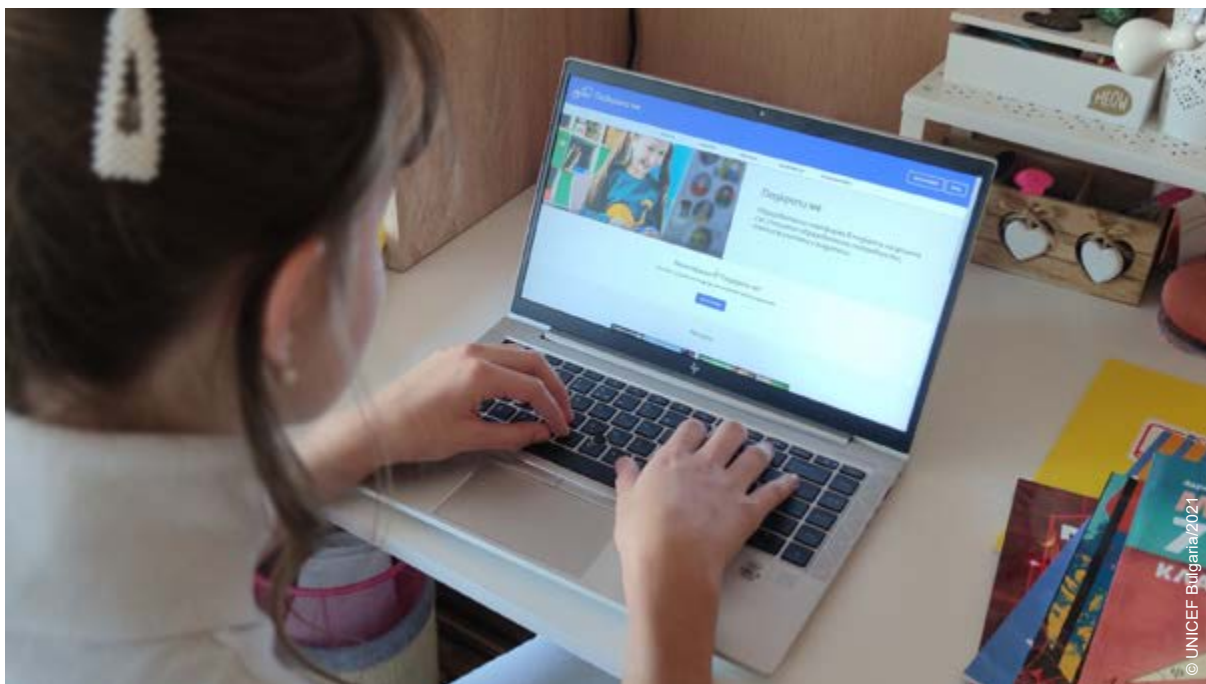
- With UNICEF support **11,664 children and adolescents (6028 boys and 5636 girls)** benefitted from enhanced pedagogical practices in kindergartens with a focus on children with disabilities and special needs and participated in social and emotional skills development and adolescent empowerment sessions, including non-formal for children on the move. UNICEF engaged further in supporting national policies for children with disabilities through introducing assistive technologies for alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) by initiating Voice for Every Child project and adapted for Bulgaria an open-source AAC application [C-Board](#) for non-verbal children and [training package](#) for professionals.
- **The Learn@Home initiative** triggered by global pandemic, **engaged 2000 young** children and their parents in interactive lessons designed to provide a comprehensive support in the child development and learning.
- Joint UNICEF and Ministry of Education and Science initiative for safe school environment - **STEPS Together reached 1545 girls and 1370 boys who participated in social and emotional skills development workshops and peer-to-peer support sessions.** Through EU-funded project another 202 teachers and psychologists from 153 schools were trained to deliver the programme.



- Under the component for early inclusive education within pilot project “**European Child Guarantee**” 3312 girls and 3023 boys age 2-7 from 30 kindergartens benefitted from more inclusive environment, pedagogical practices, and intensified support to children with special needs.



- The online platform “[Help me thrive](#)”, developed with the support of UNICEF corporate partners, was launched at the end of the year, and integrated in the IT structure of the Ministry of Education and Science. In December 2021 alone, 370 professionals registered on the platform and 18 boys and 11 girls benefitted from tailored made professional support.



Protection from violence, child justice and children on the move

- **1,295 children (586 girls and 709 boys) and 1,295 parents** have benefitted from specialized services to prevent and respond to violence.
- **4,086 children in contact with the law** accessed different legal services - through specialized court panels and units in prosecutor's offices (2,684 children), provision of specialized legal aid (186 children), child-sensitive hearing and forensic interviewing in Blue rooms (77 children). A specialized legal aid was provided to 883 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) and 349 accompanied children on the move benefitted from best interest assessment /best interest determination (BIA/BID).
- **The three pilot Child Advocacy Centers (CaCs)** in Sofia, Shumen and Montana regions continued with provision of **integrated services to vulnerable children** and parents – 809 persons benefitted from different protective services – 418 children (236 girls and 182 boys) and 394 parents (290 female and 104 male).



- UNICEF with partners (Animus Association, Caritas, Council of Refugee Women, Mission Wings Foundation, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and Center Nadja Foundation) and within the DG Health supported Project, reached **3,617 children on the move**. Children were provided access to health care (including immunization), direct support based on vulnerability assessment, child protection legal and mental health support.

COVID19 infodemic

- In 2021 Health Buddy chatbot and mobile application were successfully launched together with WHO to support the Government and partners in raising the levels of health literacy and thus elevating the confidence in vaccines as means to cope with the public health crisis. The chatbot promotion reached 380,517 in UNICEF Bulgaria digital channels and is downloaded and used actively by over 14 000, whereas the COVID-19 risk communication and community engagement materials reached a total of 5,796,061 people. This initiative for obtaining evidence-based information about the global pandemic was supported with the 3 campaigns ('Embrace life', "Summer Sense" and "Do it all") carried out in partnership with the European Commission and WHO. The campaigns provided advice for protective behaviors and reached another 650,447 via UNICEF digital channels.

The graphic features a blue robot-like character with a funnel-shaped head. Inside the funnel are several speech bubbles with text in Bulgarian: "Заблуждаваща информация?", "Социална дистанция?", "Слухове? Инфодемия?", "Гореща линия? Ваксина?", "Лечение?", "Симптоми?", and "Физическа дистанция?". To the right of the robot, the text reads: "HealthBuddy+ има отговорите." Below this, it says: "Свали го от Apple App Store или Google Play Store." The robot's body shows a chat interface with a green message bubble and a blue response bubble, and a small profile icon of a woman.

COMMUNICATION AND ADVOCACY

In 2021, communication and promotion of child rights spanned over the CO programme priorities and fundraising initiatives. Throughout the year, communication address the ongoing issues related to COVID-19, vaccines hesitancy, UNICEF 75th anniversary, poverty and social exclusion violence against children and inclusive education.



UNICEF has prepared the ground for the European Year of Youth in 2022 and carried out two integrated social and behavioral change, advocacy and fundraising campaigns – on digital literacy and 21 century skills of adolescents, and on mental health and resilience of adolescents. This enabled the creation of multiple strategic partnerships with institutions, civil society, youth, academia, media, businesses and is a case of social mobilization to break stigmas (around mental health issues), negative practices (online bullying and disinformation) and create innovations which are targeted solutions for adolescent skills and competences required for sustainable behavioral and social change. As a result of resource mobilization and social mobilization, “Cyber Survivor” and “Love Yourself” will be piloted in 2022 and 2023 in the form of web-based progressive mobile apps.



SUPPORTERS ENGAGEMENT

In 2021 the ongoing COVID-19 crisis continued to challenge ways of working, but supporters and partners stepped up beyond expectations in the call to action to mitigate the pandemic and engage across sectors to uphold the rights of children in Bulgaria.

UNICEF raised BGN 1,668,311 from private sector with strong individual giving program and corporate engagement activities. Individual donations remained the largest private sector revenue source contributing 78% of the total funding.

Despite the great challenges the business sector was facing due to the COVID-19 situation in 2021 it continued to play an important role in the ability of UNICEF to raise awareness, to fundraise and to deliver results for children.



We truly appreciate the generosity of all the people who supported our work, the dedication of the UNICEF Bulgaria national ambassadors Elena Petrova, Sonya Yoncheva and Vladimir Ampov-Grafa as well as the commitment of corporate partners like FANTASTICO, IKEA, Orange Center and H&M. A big thank you!



FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

In 2021 the funds that we raised comprised local fundraising, donor funding, as well as UNICEF Institutional budgets at a total amount of 7,255,632 BGN for children in Bulgaria. The financial resources were distributed among all program areas and contributed to the results presented in this report.

Program area	Budget
Childhood development and childcare	2,357,196 BGN
Inclusive education and early learning	1,424,311 BGN
Prevention of violence and access to justice	1,641,042 BGN
Partnership for child rights	328,037 BGN
Resource mobilization, programme and operational effectiveness	1,505,046 BGN

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