



# Co-Creation Space

COMMON GROUND FOR SHARED VALUE PARTNERSHIPS

With UNICEF Bulgaria | January, 2021

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## I. WHY A FOCUS ON CHILDREN AND THE WORLD OF BUSINESS?

Children have incredible energy, curiosity, an innate sense of justice, and an insatiable appetite for knowledge. They are determined, adventurous and resilient. Given the opportunity, children are the doctors, teachers, inventors and leaders of tomorrow! Children of today will be running successful businesses and will be leading nations. Yet, at the same time, children can also be among the most marginalized and vulnerable global citizens. It is essential that all global actors, governments, civil societies, communities and the private sector join efforts in protecting children and ensuring they are able to survive and thrive. When businesses respect and value all stages of childhood, they foster the strength of future generations. However, businesses and other powerful players in society can often disregard children's issues.

Companies interact with children on a daily basis, although often neither directly nor purposefully. Children are workers in factories and fields, family members of employees, and community members in the neighborhoods where they operate. In many countries, children are increasingly recognized as a consumer group themselves, with discretionary income to spend and increased influence on family purchases. They are a market force to be reckoned with; however, they need protection from inappropriate advertising and from unhealthy or unsafe products and services. Business possesses immense power to protect them from harmful practices whilst improving their quality of life, through the operation of facilities, developing and marketing products, and exerting influence for economic and social development. By joining forces, we at UNICEF are confident that the journey we are starting will improve lives of children in Bulgaria.

## II. WHY PARTNER WITH UNICEF?

***As the leaders of tomorrow, children's ability to protect the future for us all depends on what we do to secure their rights today!***

In working together UNICEF and Business sector will have the opportunity to unlock their potentials to cause significant change in the lives of children. This menu of options acknowledges that through its business products, services, supply chains, as well as through environmental impact and investments in local communities – business leaves a footprint on the lives of children. Companies may also be a source of technology and innovation, with strong reach, voice and influence. As partner of UNICEF in Bulgaria, companies have an opportunity to:

- ◆ Engage with UNICEF and link their brand with the world's largest child support organization with a mandate of safeguarding children's rights
- ◆ Demonstrate efforts to ensure inclusive practices and access to care and services for vulnerable children
- ◆ Have access to various resources related to children, child rights and Sustainable development goals
- ◆ Establish partnerships that demonstrate progress on global Sustainable Development Goals
- ◆ Position the company as part of the leaders in SDG's implementation in Bulgaria
- ◆ Opportunities to engage employees, partners and customers to a mutual cause
- ◆ Expand the network of partnerships within the business sector in Bulgaria - with reputable organizations.



### III. UNICEF IN BULGARIA

The United Nations Children's fund works in over 190 countries and territories to protect the rights of **every child**. UNICEF works in the world's toughest places to reach the most disadvantaged children and adolescents - to help children survive, thrive and fulfil their potential, from early childhood through adolescence.

In Bulgaria UNICEF works together with the Government, State institutions, United Nations partners, media, private sector, academia, civil society organizations, parents, children and adolescents to contribute to results in the following four areas:

#### 1. EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD CARE

- ◆ Parents of young children, especially the most vulnerable families, get improved access to support and services, parental programs, child development programs, health care and education, employment and housing to provide nurturing care
- ◆ Children at risk of developmental difficulties are identified early in the health care system and receive quality early childhood intervention in the community
- ◆ Children who are separated from their parents grow up in a family or close to family environment and develop their full potential
- ◆ Support to children and parents at local level is coordinated and integrated.

In **2020**, 5074 parents of children under 3 years benefited from individualised support, guidance and information on nurturing care provided through the home visiting services. The home visiting services actively engaged in the provision of evidence-based messages on COVID-19 to families with young children, as well as in delivery of essential guidance and information on health and caregiving during the months when the national prophylactic child health services were suspended due to the pandemic.

#### 2. EDUCATION

- ◆ More boys and girls, especially children with specific needs, children with ethnic minority background, or refugee and migrant children, attend kindergartens and schools and receive quality education
- ◆ New flexible forms of early learning are developed to suit the needs of vulnerable children and families
- ◆ Cross-sectorial measures are developed to support enrolment of out of school children and prevention of school drop-out
- ◆ Teachers' skills are strengthened to reflect diverse needs of children through improved pre-service and in-service teacher training
- ◆ Schools are promoting child rights and child participation and preventing violence.

In **2020**, we provided 2290 vulnerable children and adolescents with education materials and delivered 233 tablets before the start of the school year. 450 kindergarten teachers and over 1000 parents took part in the Learn@home initiative and were provided with early education materials tailored for parents to support their children learn at home.

#### 3. PREVENTION AND RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

- ◆ Society is mobilised to prevent and respond to violence and discrimination against girls, boys, and adolescents, particularly the most vulnerable;
- ◆ Children improve their capacity to negotiate risks, prevent violence, contribute to the response and know where to go for help and denounce;



- ◆ Children victims of violence receive timely and suitable protection, support for restoration and redress through legal procedures adapted to their needs.
- ◆ Refugee and migrant children, including unaccompanied and separated children, and gender-based violence survivors are protected from violence, exploitation and abuse, and have access to comprehensive and culturally appropriate services, referral mechanisms and legal aid.

**In 2020** the 3 Child Advocacy Centres in Sofia, Shumen and Montana, have supported 538 children (female:318 male: 220) and 413 parents (female: 323, male: 90) with integrated services related to prevention and response to violence against children and women (crisis interventions, therapeutic and legal support, medical and forensic expertise, etc) The Child Advocacy Centres were among the few services which continued providing essential services during the lockdowns and were critical part of UNICEF COVID-19 response plan. Since the beginning of the pandemic the services provided 1428 mental health and psychological support consultations to their clients.

## ACCESS TO JUSTICE

- ◆ The Juvenile Justice System is reformed in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and international standards, so that restorative justice and community-based alternatives to detention provide adolescents in conflict with the law with opportunities to understand the effect of their actions, repair the damage and achieve social integration
- ◆ Children are heard in a way that is adapted to their age and individual development in all legal proceedings that concern their life and wellbeing
- ◆ Children, especially from vulnerable groups, have access to free specialized legal aid ensuring that their rights are guaranteed in every proceeding in which they are involved.

**In 2020**, 480 unaccompanied children benefited from tailored information sessions on regular and safe movement opportunities and 299 unaccompanied children **received specialized legal aid and 91 unaccompanied children received support for family reunification.**

## ADOLESCENTS

- ◆ Society's perceptions are changed to identify adolescence as a positive stage of children's development which offers huge possibilities for the expansion of their potential
- ◆ National interventions are supported to better equip adolescents with skills for learning, personal empowerment and employability
- ◆ Adolescents' participation is promoted in the decision-making on topics that affect them through different platforms in schools, communities, clubs, etc.
- ◆ Adolescents are empowered as agents of social change.

**In 2020**, we engaged adolescent girls and boys and young people in online activism around COVID-19 (reaching over 2 million people via social media with videos, blogs, podcasts, articles, youth challenges on protective behaviors, role-modelling, empathy), in co-creating digital solutions for media literacy (where over 100 teenagers participated directly in trainings and the first ever youth-led hackathon with businesses where 5 proposals were initiated on countering fake news, ethical reporting of incidents, cybersecurity, online bullying, digital society for youth projects), in virtual participation and engagement around important topics (we launched U-Report Bulgaria, recruited 650 U-Reporters and reached over nearly 2 million people in digital campaigns).

#### 4. COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC ADVOCACY

- ◆ UNICEF is identified as a strong voice of and for children to influence the development of normative frameworks, budgets, policies and programmes for child rights
- ◆ Ethical reporting programme on child issues and promotion of child rights in top-tier media was created – more than 200 journalists, PR specialists, photographers and videographers and students were trained and engaged in ethical communication and reporting on child rights
- ◆ Social norms and harmful practices are addressed to tackle discrimination, prejudices and stigma against disadvantaged children
- ◆ Public communication campaigns are implemented to mobilize the society in support of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children (children with disabilities, children victims of violence, children in detention, etc.)
- ◆ Partnerships with businesses, NGOs, media are harnessed to promote child rights, monitor the situation of children in the country and develop gender-sensitive practices.

The Spring integrated campaign “**Education for every child**” was dedicated to children with disabilities and offered an online solution for them to prevent their exclusion from education, beyond COVID-19 pandemic. The Bulgarian National television (BNT) was the official media partner, and more than 10 other media outlets supported the campaign that had reached **3,100, 402** people through UNICEF channels and traditional media (TV, radio, online and print). Advocacy messages reached **538,500+** people through the channels of corporate partners.

The Autumn integrated campaign was to support non-verbal children “**A voice for every child**”, providing solution - assistive technologies to support education. An extensive media coverage was negotiated with **4, 572, 523** people reached through TV, radio, print and online media and UNICEF Channels.

#### IV. WHAT IS PROPOSED IN THIS PARTNERSHIP?

UNICEF in Bulgaria is recognized as a particularly important convener of multi-stakeholder partnerships for children, engaging all actors around issues of child rights, this unique position can be used to facilitate activities that lead to progress in the area of corporate social responsibility in relation to children's rights.

After the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the corporate sector plays a significant role in creating the world that all of us need, and that children are demanding. Together UNICEF and Business can improve existing partnerships, develop new ones and further establish platforms for fostering the Goals related to child welfare.

The analysis of the impact of business on children in Bulgaria finalized in July 2020 concluded that children are and will be the most precious social target group for businesses. The future engagement of business to children welfare may scale by working in collaboration for co-creation of smart solutions to improve children' lives and to support advocacy actions to foster the voice of other stakeholders in society. In order to bring maximum results, UNICEF Bulgaria proposes a model for shared value partnership that allows engagement with business beyond financing.

## A. MODEL OF SHARED VALUE PARTNERSHIP

For UNICEF, shared value partnerships occur where there is a convergence between the **creation of social impact at scale with the creation of strategic economic value for businesses (Win-Win)**. Their range includes both financial and non-financial elements organized in four categories:

1. Core Business & Assets
2. Advocacy
3. Business Practices
4. Financing



Shared-value partnerships bring together ideas, expertise and resources, and require in-depth participation of all stakeholders from the initial phase of goal setting and planning through the implementation and reporting. This collaboration fortifies the experience to both UNICEF and Business, and enriches their societal issues expertise and mutual understanding.

### Contact information

**Dr. Jane Muita**  
Representative Bulgaria  
jmuita@unicef.org  
+359-887-136-752

**Marina Stefanova**  
Business for Results Consultant  
mstefanova@unicef.org  
+359-888-637-654

## V. MENU OF OPTIONS

The document presents some of the current programmes and initiatives UNICEF is supporting. This list is not exhaustive but provides a starting point to link with current UNICEF's interventions. In case of a thematic interest, the UNICEF team is open to discuss further, and to co-create innovative solutions to identified problems and to develop shared value partnerships with corporates and/or multilateral partners.

Four possible entry points are proposed that could allow UNICEF and Business to engage in their areas of interest. Each issue is presented with an introduction and a brief summary of the situation in Bulgaria, which would allow discussion on possible solutions and areas of joint intervention. These proposals build the basis of co-creation thus forming mutually beneficial shared value partnerships. UNICEF acknowledges that this is a living document and will be updated continuously as more knowledge is generated.



## A. PROGRAM “SUPPORT FOR PARENTING”

### EXPANDING SUPPORT FOR PARENTS SOLUTIONS, INCLUDING THROUGH DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

UNICEF believes that the family is the best environment for the growth and development of every child. Supporting children means supporting their parents. This is UNICEF’s firm belief all over the world. In Bulgaria UNICEF aims at starting a dialogue with institutions, NGOs, media, businesses for strengthening the overall support for parents and implementing family-friendly policies. The goal is to realize the right of every parent to receive essential support, information and guidance for parenting of children, with a specific focus on early childhood. The right of parents to support is promoted by the UN Convention on the Right of the Child.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has brought new challenges for families across the globe. The current COVID19 crisis additionally limited the possibility parents to receive timely and quality guidance through the “traditional” mechanisms.

#### Situation in Bulgaria

- ◆ Studies indicate that there is a need to enhance parenting skills and resources across different socio-economic groups.
- ◆ Parents lack skills and knowledge to provide nurturing care or recognize/detect development difficulties
- ◆ Very limited services offering support for young/new parents
- ◆ Most services focus primarily on health and nutrition - do not address the need for strengthening parental care
- ◆ Web-based and mobile solution for delivery support (guidance, information) to families, including the most disadvantaged, are not sufficiently developed in Bulgaria

#### UNICEF Initiated intervention

To address needs of parents and improve their skills UNICEF Bulgaria has been developing different tools to support parents:

- ◆ Parenting Website /<https://roditel.unicef.bg/> - knowledge Hub for parents, which contains range of resources, videos, toolkits and information to provide web-based solutions to families, including the disadvantaged
- ◆ Parenting Mobile App - high number of mobile phone users in Bulgaria, is an opportunity to reach to more families, including the most vulnerable parents. The app will be a well-matched tool to provide support and guidance while facilitating interaction as a mobilizer for parental engagement.
- ◆ Digital campaign “Fun at Home”- we have facilitated learning, play and shared educational resources that are valuable to children and their parents.
- ◆ Parenting Workshops “Let’s Grow up Together”: programs for group work with parents, including parents of children with disabilities, consisting of 11 to 14 sessions for parents. The workshops aim to promote positive parent-child interaction and communication.
- ◆ Digital tools for practitioners -creating online training modules for relevant practitioners engaged in support of families and children in hard to reach communities.

#### Areas that need financial investment

Estimated budget for digital solutions is approximately 51 000 USD (BGN 84 000), which includes:

- ◆ Restructuring the website
- ◆ Creation of videos and content
- ◆ Content creation and adaptation for Mobile App, including promotion
- ◆ Expansion of the parenting programs “Let’s grow up together

## B. Program “Education”

### ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES FOR AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION /AAC/ FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

#### A Voice for Every Child

UNICEF’s core mandate is to give a voice to every child so that they learn and develop to their full potential. Assistive technology /AT/ for augmentative and alternative communication /AAC/ help children who cannot speak or have communication challenges to communicate with their peers, teachers, parents using symbols or text, have access to computers, Internet, social media, e-learning, etc. thus allowing them to fully participate in all areas of life. Supporting teachers and specialists who work with non-verbal children in kindergartens and schools to be aware of such technologies and know how to use them in education will make those kindergartens and schools more inclusive and will help children with disabilities learn and achieve more.

#### Situation in Bulgaria

- ◆ The latest data from MoES for 2019/2020 shows that the total number of children with disabilities and special needs in kindergartens and schools is over 25,000. At least 18 000 of them are enrolled in education and have challenges in communication with teachers, specialists and peers.
- ◆ Those children and their teachers, specialists, particularly in mainstream education, lack appropriate tools for augmentative and alternative communication /AAC/. Even more, only 10 % of special education teachers in Bulgaria use low-tech AAC and less than 5% use them in their practice.

#### UNICEF Initiated intervention

The project aims to raise awareness on alternative and augmentative communication and available tools and technologies and to strengthen the capacities of 150 teachers in five regions to use these tools and technologies in everyday activities in classrooms, no matter face-to-face or virtual. A training programme for specialists and teachers will be developed and mainstreamed to reach more teachers in the country. The project will also introduce innovative tools in education, incl. an application for symbol communication, to further support the participation of children with communication challenges in education and school life in general. The project will support directly minimum 150 children with disabilities and will make at least 150 classes of children more inclusive thus reaching at least 3000 children.

#### Areas that need financial investment

The estimated cost is approximately 90 000 USD (150 000 BGN) for 1 year, which includes:

- ◆ Development of training modules for introducing augmentative and alternative communication in education
- ◆ Trainings of specialists and teachers
- ◆ Development of basic communication kits
- ◆ Development and testing of application for symbol communication
- ◆ Provision of devices for augmentative and alternative communication for children who need such
- ◆ Monitoring, assessment and management of the project

## SAFE, TOLERANT AND ENABLING POSITIVE SCHOOLS /STEPS TOGETHER/

Quality and safe education is of key importance for the subsequent professional fulfilment of every individual and the prosperity of societies. Although school violence has become a major challenge, it is not the education system per se that causes it. It merely reflects the prevailing social norms, making them visible to everyone. At the same time, the education system makes it possible to prevent and address school violence, but only in partnership among all stakeholders: school, children, parents, community.

Violence prevention in education can be prevented through a combination of measures and approaches such as development of social-emotional learning programmes, peer support initiatives, school mentoring, enhanced teacher training, etc.

### Situation in Bulgaria

- ◆ Bulgarian school children are among the top ten, out of 43 countries surveyed, in terms of being affected by the problem of 'school bullying'. The discomfort with and alienation from school, the low grades and bullying are driving factors for risky behavior on the part of adolescents.
- ◆ Over 1/3 of all pupils share that they have become victims of violence or bullying, of physical and verbal aggression at school at least once during the past year.
- ◆ Data shared by the Ministry of Education and Science shows that around 8.000 cases of bullying and violence are recorded annually.
- ◆ Online bullying has increased significantly in recent years, while part of the cases of online bullying occur exactly between pupils at the same school.
- ◆ School closures has resulted in decrease of reported violence cases, yet assessment of COVID-19 on impact of children and adolescents indicates: students experienced negative feelings, such as loneliness, insecurity, irritability, anxiety due to the reduced social contacts. As a result, 35% of parents assess their children's mental health as worse than before.

### UNICEF Initiated interventions

UNICEF is developing and implementing a comprehensive whole-school program for a safe school environment and prevention of bullying and violence jointly with the Ministry of Education and Science, where over 3000 students and over 500 education staff are engaged through empowering children and adopting restorative approaches in education, developing support mechanisms, incl. peer-to-peer, enhancing the leadership capacities of directors and skills of teachers to deliver classes on social-emotional learning and conflict resolution, engaging parents in a more effective way. The piloting will improve the school prevention mechanism and will be scaled up through the EU funded programmes.

### Areas that need financial investment

Estimated budget is approximately 120 000 USD (198 000 BGN) for 2 years, which includes:

- ◆ Development and delivery of trainings and capacity building activities for students, teachers, directors, parents
- ◆ Mentoring support for each school
- ◆ Development and sustaining of support mechanisms, incl. peer-to-peer support for student counsellors, parent-teacher groups, restorative approaches mechanisms, etc.
- ◆ Development of class activities, tailored for face-to-face or online delivery
- ◆ Needs assessment, monitoring and evaluation and overall programme management

## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PLATFORM

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide, impacting around 1.6 billion children and young people. Several remote learning strategies have been adopted by delivering education through various digital tools, such as platforms, online digital materials, radio, television and distribution of printed materials. While remote learning strategies are applied to ensure continued learning for all children, some groups of vulnerable children, including those with disabilities, are not able to access these opportunities. This may be due to various reasons such as lack of access to internet, lack of the required equipment or simply because the remote learning modalities are not adapted to their specific needs. Children with disabilities and special needs require resources which are tailored to their needs. Such resources are scarce and not easily accessible at one platform. Apart from resources and training opportunities for teachers, such a platform can provide a tool for professionals and families to work together in an improved and more coordinated way so that children achieve more.

### Situation in Bulgaria

- ◆ According to the Ministry of Education and Science, nearly 89% of the Bulgarian students were involved in online learning during the crisis.
- ◆ It is estimated that only around 7000 children with disabilities have been supported to learn online during the crisis. This means that one in five children with disabilities, and in some regions the share is higher, does not receive additional support.
- ◆ Children with disabilities and special needs and the specialists supporting them require resources which are tailored to their needs. Such resources are scarce and not easily accessible at one platform.

### UNICEF Initiated intervention

UNICEF in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), the National Association of Resource Teachers (NART) and Regional Inclusive Education Support Centre (RIESC) is developing an online interactive platform in support of children disabilities and special needs.

The project will support 3000 children with disabilities and special needs to learn and be supported in an improved and better coordinated manner through development of an online interactive platform. The platform will include videos and other resources and will link together the family and the professionals supporting the child so that he or she achieves more. The project will as well reach 500 professionals and minimum 200 parents. The platform will include the following elements:

- ◆ Online resources and methodological tools – in the form of videos, guidelines, handouts developed by specialists
- ◆ Training tools for specialists
- ◆ Live chat and online consultation
- ◆ Mechanism for improved collaboration between all specialists and teachers working with one child towards one goal
- ◆ A link to the presentation of the platform.

In July, UNICEF completed an 'Education for Every Child' campaign, which was focused on awareness raising, advocacy and fund raising for creation of the platform

### Areas that need financial investment

Estimated budget is approximately 313 800 USD (500 000 BGN), which includes:

- ◆ Development of the platform /design, hosting, functionalities
- ◆ IT support and online support
- ◆ Provision of devices to access the platform
- ◆ Development and integration of training tools and webinars
- ◆ Adaptation of existing/ development of new videos and resources
- ◆ Management and monitoring, mid-term and final assessment.

## C. PROGRAM “CHILD PROTECTION”

### ZONA ZAKRILA - CHILD ADVOCACY CENTRES FOR INTEGRATED SUPPORT

Ending violence against children (VAC) requires a whole of society approach. Violence robs children of their childhood and compromises every other investment in them. It undermines their health and education and prevents them from developing to their full potential – often with negative lifelong consequences and intergenerational impact. VAC has long-term psychological impact on the development of each child. The recovery of a child requires timely, highly specialized, children focused response. The global direct and indirect costs of VAC is US\$9.5 trillion or 11% of global GDP.

Children are often too afraid to seek help and can be exposed to violence for a prolonged period. Once faced with the complex system of different support services, children face the risk of further revictimization, as they have to navigate through bureaucratic and non-child friendly services, thus resulting to more trauma and delay in the recovery process. In the COVID-19 situation in Bulgaria approximately 800 000 children are not attending schools or nurseries. The majority of those children is exposed to increased risk of violence and can become hidden victims of psychological and physical abuse due to social isolation, movement restrictions and loss of income. Distance education has increased the risk of cyber bullying and risky online behavior. Access to major support services is limited or completely cut off, and this is why children need accessible services and support to help them to adapt to the difficult situation.

#### Situation in Bulgaria

In February 2017, the Council of Ministers approved a National Program for the Prevention of Violence and Abuse of Children for the period 2017 - 2020, however violence against children continues to be a serious problem. A large portion of the incidents, however, remain hidden from view as public’s attitudes still tolerate moderate forms of corporal punishment of children – almost 68% of parents accept the use of ‘violence within reasonable bounds’ as a disciplining method. There is lack of trust in the testimony of children, lack of specialized services for children victims of violence and their parents, the judicial procedures of investigation and court hearing are still not adapted for children. Violence can be prevented and reduced.

#### UNICEF Initiated intervention

The Child Advocacy Centers provide integrated preventative and response VaC/violence against children/ services - a 'one stop shop' where children victims of violence and crime and their parents can receive consultation, support, legal aid, psychological and social support, assistance for medical examination, child-sensitive forensic interview or hearing and advocacy for their best interests. The centers are piloted in 3 districts/regions and provide a 24/7 VaC response.

By the end of June 2020, the CACs have supported 1308 clients of which 756 children and 552 parents. They have provided psychological support to 561 children; legal support to 272 and child friendly hearing to 146 clients. An independent external evaluation of the model and the services provided was completed in June 2020, which show that 86% of parents reported the CAC’s made it easier for their child to receive help and support and 100% of the children shared that the centers helped them to feel better and recover from the violence and victimization. The services and support provided also led to positive changes

The Child Advocacy Centres were also a critical part of UNICEF Bulgaria COVID-19 response in the three regions providing psycho-social support to vulnerable children and families, crisis interventions and emergency support.

### Areas that need financial investment

Estimated budget is approximately 242 500 USD (400 000 BGN), which includes:

- Staffing
- Training
- Supervision

The Child Advocacy Centers provide different programmes as follows:

- Psychological and therapeutic support
- Legal support
- Social work and support
- Capacity building including training and supervision
- Prior COVID 19, the centers also provided a prevention programme at the educational system (kindergartens and schools) and outreach work in communities

### Information platform for children and families – how and where to seek help and support

Children and families in the country encounter a variety of risks and problems related to their safety and wellbeing that are both due to external factors and internal dynamics: violence, crime, parental conflicts, alcohol and drug abuse, educational challenges, conflicts with administrative bodies and many more, which make it necessary to seek help and support from different systems: healthcare, education, child protection and welfare, justice and others. Lack of information and knowledge where to seek help and how to access support can have an immediate and long-term negative effect on the life and wellbeing of children and families.

### Situation in Bulgaria

- Children and families have to go through numerous information sources in order to understand where they can find help and support
- Going through disjointed information sources that do not give exhaustive information and concrete contacts to local institutions and service providers not only creates frustration, but can discourage seeking help at all
- The COVID-19 pandemic and response show that it is possible to have a platform where you may find exhaustive information, referral to other information sources and where to seek help in one place, but the everyday life of children and families is full of risks, situations and needs for which they do not have a comprehensive and reliable information platform.

### UNICEF Initiated intervention

An innovative information platform where every child and parent may find crucial information on how and where to seek help and support in the region and municipality where they live, an interactive map of local institutions and their contacts: police, prosecutor's office, court, Bar Association, healthcare facility, child protection department, social services providing support. The platform should be adapted to children, easy to access and navigate and regularly updated.

### Areas that need financial investment

Estimated budget is 100 000 USD (165 000 BGN) for 2 years to co-create the platform with business, which includes its conceptualizing, developing and rolling-out.

## CHILD-SENSITIVE LEGAL AID

Every year thousands of children participate in legal proceedings – administrative and judicial that have immediate and long-term impact on their lives and wellbeing: access to universal services like education and healthcare, right to live in a family environment, to claim their rights and gain redress as victims of crimes, to receive timely and effective measures focusing on rehabilitation and integration when they commit a criminal offence. In all these cases receiving quality legal aid has a positive impact on the way the child and parents go through the proceedings and on the decision of administrative and judicial bodies. Quality legal aid provided by a specialized lawyer can strengthen the belief in justice and rule of law and encourage lawful behavior.

### Situation in Bulgaria

- Annually, around 20 000 children participate in legal proceedings that have immediate and long-term impact on their lives and wellbeing
- There is no available data on the number of children who have access to free legal aid provided under the Legal Aid Act, but approximate calculations of the National Legal Aid Bureau put the number of children between 5 000 and 10 000
- Specialized trainings on child rights for legal professionals are done on a project basis, without a minimum standard for the content and horarium for receiving a certificate.

### UNICEF Initiated intervention

UNICEF has developed Guidelines for child-friendly legal aid and modules for inception and specialized training on child right for lawyers through extensive consultation with legal professionals in Europe and Central Asia and Bulgarian human rights and child rights lawyers.

A dedicated project/initiative for disseminating and implementing the Guidelines for Child-friendly legal aid and rolling out an inception and specialized training on child rights in the Lawyer's School will empower lawyers to provide child-sensitive legal aid and facilitate children's and families access to legal professionals who are responsive to their complex needs. In addition, a further step in ensuring quality free legal aid to children and families is the establishment of a separate registers of lawyers to provide legal aid to children under the Legal Aid Act.

### Areas that need financial investment

Estimated budget is approximately 80 000 USD (132 000 BGN) for 2 years, which includes:

- Presentation, dissemination and discussion of the UNICEF developed "Guidelines for child-friendly legal aid" to the Bar Association and the Supreme Lawyer's Council;
- Strengthening the capacities of lawyers to provide specialized quality legal aid to children and parents, through inception training for all junior lawyers and specialized training for practicing lawyers in the Lawyer's School;
- Advocacy and technical support for regulating a separate register for lawyers trained to provide legal aid to children in the National Legal Aid Bureau.

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE APPROACH FOR ADOLESCENTS IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW

Restorative justice approach is a way of responding to criminal behavior, which emphasizes repairing the harm caused by the crime and 'restoring' harmony as much as possible between offender, victim/survivor and society. Its implementation with regard to adolescents in both Europe and globally show considerable effect on prevention of re-offending, encouraging lawful behavior and assisting reintegration of an adolescent in conflict with the law and at the same time increase the sense of safety, justice and reintegration of the victim.

### Situation in Bulgaria

- Restorative justice approach is not regulated in legislation, hence its implementation in criminal cases with adolescent or young adult offenders is extremely rare;
  - In 2019 the Prosecutor's Offices worked on 2007 pre-trial proceedings against children (0.9 % of all proceedings), of which the newly initiated cases were 997, and only 115 of them are for crimes against persons;
  - In 2019 1174 children were convicted with an effective court decision (enforceable sentence): 722 children - public reprimand and probation, 358 children – conditional sentence, 114 children – deprivation of liberty, 30 children – administrative penalty; 1 child – placement in correctional educational boarding school, 16 children – educational measures;
  - All off the sentences could include restorative elements in order to balance the needs of victims and offender, encourage the sense of just resolution of conflict, and encourage the strengths and positive qualities of the adolescent offender in order to prevent future criminal offences.

### UNICEF Initiated intervention

UNICEF is developing a concept for the introduction of restorative justice approach for child offenders in consultation with national and international experts, key stakeholders and professionals working with adolescent offenders: lawyers, judges, prosecutors, probation officers, social workers. The concept explores the possibilities in current legislation: Criminal Code, Criminal Procedure Code and Detention and Execution of Penalties Law devising a mechanism for utilizing restorative practices like Victim-offender mediation, restorative conferencing and restorative agreement in the pre-trial proceedings, the sentencing and execution of sentencing phases.

### Areas that need financial investment

Estimated budget is 100 000 USD (165 000 BGN) for 2 years which includes:

- Advocacy and technical support for adoption and roll-out of the Restorative Justice; Concept by key stakeholders: Ministry of Justice, Prosecutor's Office
- Implementation in Pilot Court Regions
- Training of professionals
- Monitoring and evaluation of the pilot phase and communication of the results
- Analysis and recommendations for necessary changes in legislation.



## D. Program “Adolescent development and participation”

### TRANSFERRABLE AND DIGITAL SKILLS IN ADOLESCENTS

Adolescence is increasingly recognized as a significant period in human development and there is now strong evidence, which suggests that adolescence provides a second window of opportunity to influence developmental trajectories. The physical, cognitive, social and emotional capabilities acquired during adolescence underpin wellbeing throughout the life-course, including the capacity to engage effectively in work and leisure, family life and communities. It is transition period when children begin to move out from the boundaries of the family and emerge to embrace a wider range of social networks and forge powerful associations with peers.

The world and the environment in which adolescents are growing up have changed including for example earlier onset of puberty, longer years in education, urbanization, globalization and increased access to digital media, as well as the way adolescents and their peers communicate and connect. Today, adolescents are more and more viewed as powerful agents of personal change and community development and actively shaping their environments.

#### Situation in Bulgaria

Young people in Bulgaria face significant social and economic challenges, low digital and media literacy levels, high levels of violence, very limited opportunities for accessible and meaningful participation. In Bulgaria nearly 1/3 of the population is under 30, and yet 70% of young people aged 16-30 continue to feel excluded from economic, social and democratic life.

- ◆ 35% of Bulgarian young people aged 16-24 are at risk of poverty, social exclusion and marginalization
- ◆ High rate of early school leavers (12.7%), particularly in rural areas and economically disadvantaged regions.
- ◆ Young people do not yet fully share the benefits of an improving labor market indicated by the high rate of young people NEET's (15% of 15-24 years old)
- ◆ New technologies bring fundamental changes to the lives of 21st century children and adolescents but not every child, unfortunately benefits equally from online opportunities. Social inequalities also deepen the differences among youth in digital technology and media usage.
- ◆ High rate of risky health behaviors, interpersonal violence and poor mental health including increased prevalence of overweight and obesity, use of alcohol and drugs and risky sexual behavior resulting in high adolescent pregnancy and abortion rates
- ◆ Low participation in civic activity (only 10% of young people aged 15-29 report to have taken part recently in some type of civic activity), limited access to decision making and use of technology to facilitate participation

#### UNICEF Initiated Intervention

In 2021, the theme of the UNICEF CO integrated campaigns (programme interventions, innovative solutions, strategic communication, fundraising) will focus on adolescents and youth. The decision follows the overall goal of the country partnership for the period 2018-2022 to support Bulgaria in its efforts to enable all children and adolescents in the country, including the most disadvantaged, to enjoy their rights and develop to their full potential. Specific interventions are targeting adolescents with focus on providing them with opportunities and skills needed for productive life, personal empowerment, future work

and active citizenship and engaging them in platforms and mechanisms that elevate and amplify their voices, ideas and creativity:

#### 1. **Connection and Participation**

Adolescent girls and boys are provided with space to connect, participate and influence decisions that impact them, including through innovation – such as U-Report Bulgaria (it's a suitable platform for businesses to also engage with youth).

#### 2. **Social inclusion at scale**

Social inclusion of youth with disabilities (via education and employability) – building informal coalition among publishing houses and online educational platform on the basis of a universal checklist for accessibility and inclusivity of children and youth with disabilities; mapping of existing good business practices for employment of youth with disabilities and disability-led entrepreneurship and solutions. (it's suitable for businesses and exchange/adoption of promising practices).

#### 3. **Skills and Innovations**

Adolescent girls and boys are provided with opportunities to develop critical thinking, respect for diversity, digital skills and skills for active citizenship - incl. peer-to-peer trainings and creation of the first ever in Bulgaria youth fact-checkers network, skills for non-violent communication and solution-seeking via co-creation formats (hackathons) on mental health/resilience, non-discrimination, climate action, etc. (it's suitable for business mentoring, CSR, job-specific and transferable skills of future employees).

#### 4. **Advocacy and Empowerment**

Adolescent girls and boys are empowered and systematically participate in decision-making processes of UNICEF and partners, incl. via CO Youth Advisory Group, Youth Goodwill Ambassadors, National and Global U-Report Champions. (it's suitable for joint awareness raising, advocacy, social mobilization, behavioral change with businesses and youth and informing policy reforms or youth engagement at scale).

### Areas that need financial investment

Estimated budget for 2 years of youth-led innovations, from which business can benefit, is compartmentalized below.

- 1) 100 000 USD (165 000 BGN) for U-Report (<https://bulgaria.ureport.in/>):
  - ◆ a campaign with digital agency;
  - ◆ Technical vendor and platform support;
  - ◆ Coordination and consultancy;
  - ◆ Promo materials, printing, video shooting, etc.
  - ◆ Media partnerships (including with youth media)
  - ◆ Implementing partners (incl. youth NGOs and networks)
- 2) 40 000 USD (65 000 BGN) for social inclusion at scale which includes:
  - ◆ Checklist and coalition building for universal access and inclusivity of children and adolescents with disabilities to online platforms and educational materials;
  - ◆ Mapping and promotion of existing good practices among businesses for employment and entrepreneurship of young people with disabilities
- 3) 100 000 USD (165 000 BGN) for skills and innovations which includes:
  - ◆ Creation of first ever in Bulgaria youth network of fact-checkers (incl. Peer-to-peer trainings, website, pool of youth content-creators based on [CO's guidebook for adolescents](#))
  - ◆ Youth hackathon in search of youth-led solutions (incl. business) on mental health and resilience.
- 4) 10 000 USD (17 000 BGN) for advocacy and empowerment which includes:
  - ◆ Convening a network of various young people with different background and abilities to function as UNICEF Youth Advisory Board, National Champions, Youth Ambassadors – activities and events to engage them in, including with businesses.

## Ethical Reporting on Children in Media

In Bulgaria, traditional and new media (mainly TV and digital) remain a leading anchor for influencing people's knowledge, attitudes, practices, beliefs, value systems and social norms. Media are a key business partner, and how media portray children – whether their rights and opinions are respected or violated – makes a big difference. In an environment of deteriorating media freedom and rise of misinformation, vulnerable children and young people risk being victimized by their own circumstances but also by public perceptions, if treated with lack of professional media standards.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century children and youth are both consumers and creators of media content. Therefore ethical – meaning child-sensitive and inclusive – treatment of children in media and among adolescent peers is essential for the realization of the rights to access credible information, to enjoy freedom of expression and to gain skills for civic engagement and participation. The media and political landscape in Bulgaria have been increasingly hostile to those who are “different” so children living in institutions, children victims of violence, children with disabilities, children of ethnic background or refugee origin, children in conflict with the law need special attention. And this comes only with a special set of skills needed for the capacity building of media professionals and youth content creators.

### Situation in Bulgaria

UNICEF Bulgaria and the Association of European Journalists, together with key experts in public communication, law, psychology, journalism, online safety, created the first ever in Bulgaria (and one of the very few globally) Guidebook for Ethical Reporting on Children's rights and Children's issues in Media. As a result the partners offer a solution-oriented model of change. As a result, in the past 3 years, a total number of nearly 300 leading journalists from national and local media were sensitized and empowered as agents of change in a series of in-service capacity development trainings. The guidebook was also integrated into the curriculum of leading Bulgarian universities and now ethical reporting of children in media is also being taught as a pre-service training to journalism students.

Seeing the positive impact among professionals, UNICEF Bulgaria decided to expand the ethical reporting standards beyond traditional media and to engage new-age content producers, so the CO and the Coalition for Media Literacy created a Guidebook for adolescents – on how to create ethically their own content online. It resulted in a series of peer-to-peer trainings on digital skills, a national school competition on the right to an opinion, and an online youth-led hackathon on digital solutions for media literacy. Engaging over 100 adolescents in these activities in 2020, the result was the creation of 5 youth projects: for cybersecurity, recognizing fake news, ethical reporting of incidents, countering online bullying, enabling an online community for youth opinions. The virtual youth-led hackathon was documented globally as a promising practice for Business for Results.

## UNICEF Initiated intervention

The plan is to scale-up the Ethical reporting initiative in 2021-22 by:

- ◆ Creating with key state institutions and corporate partners a National media contest for ethical reporting to acknowledge the role of those promoting the human rights standards in public communication and to stimulate more professionals and youth to join the cause
- ◆ Integrating the ethical reporting principles into the internal regulations of mass-media in Bulgaria by signing the Charter on ethical reporting that UNICEF and AEJ created. This way all current practitioners will follow unified standards for reporting on child matters in media
- ◆ Deepening the collaboration with academia by signing more Memorandums of Understanding for teaching Ethical reporting in lectures and exercises. This way all future practitioners will have a solid basis for reporting on child matters in media
- ◆ Initiating partnerships with state institutions – such as State Agency for Child Protection and Council for Electronic Media – to provide them with the UNICEF-designed package of solutions: Guidebook, Impact Assessment; Training methodology; Educational video – in order to institutionalize the initiative
- ◆ Creating the first ever in Bulgaria Youth network of fact-checkers who will function under the auspices of AEJ's Cool media and will expand trainings and engagement of more and more adolescents into critical thinking, countering fake news, creating their own ethical contents in social and youth media.

## Areas that need financial investment

Total budget needed for 2 years - 130 000 USD (209 620 BGN)

- ◆ For ethical reporting contest, media trainings and partnerships: 60 000 USD
- ◆ For youth fact-checking network and youth digital skills trainings: 70 000 USD



**For every child**