

**UNICEF**  
Bulgaria

ANNUAL REPORT

**2022**





*UNICEF works in over 190 countries and territories to save children's lives, to defend their rights, and to help them fulfil their potential, from early childhood through adolescence.*

*And we never give up.*

For the past 76 years UNICEF has been working across globe in the most challenging circumstances and UNICEF has helped save and improve the lives of millions of children in need with the support of our many partners. For the past 20 years, UNICEF has been actively working in partnership with the Bulgarian government to improve the quality of life of children in Bulgaria. In the following lines, we present the main results of the work of UNICEF Bulgaria in 2022.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2022, we faced multiple challenges and crises in Bulgaria and around the world: a worsening climate crisis, natural disasters, armed conflicts, displacement and other humanitarian emergencies which are depriving children's health and well-being. The war in Ukraine devastated the lives of millions of children and their families and triggered an unprecedented humanitarian and economic crisis. Together with the Government and local authorities, UN agencies, partners, diplomatic community, 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 a 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 conflict with the law, refugee children including unaccompanied children and children separated from their families.

In the last year of the UNICEF Bulgaria Country Programme 2018–2022, the focus remained on the following key programme areas, including:

1. Child poverty;
2. Early Childhood Development;
3. Inclusive Education and Early Learning;
4. Violence prevention, protection of victims and access to justice for all children;
5. Mental Health and Youth Empowerment;
6. Partnerships for monitoring, communication and promotion of child rights in Bulgaria and globally;
7. In addition, in 2022 the emergency response to the Ukraine refugee crisis was added to UNICEF's programme priorities.



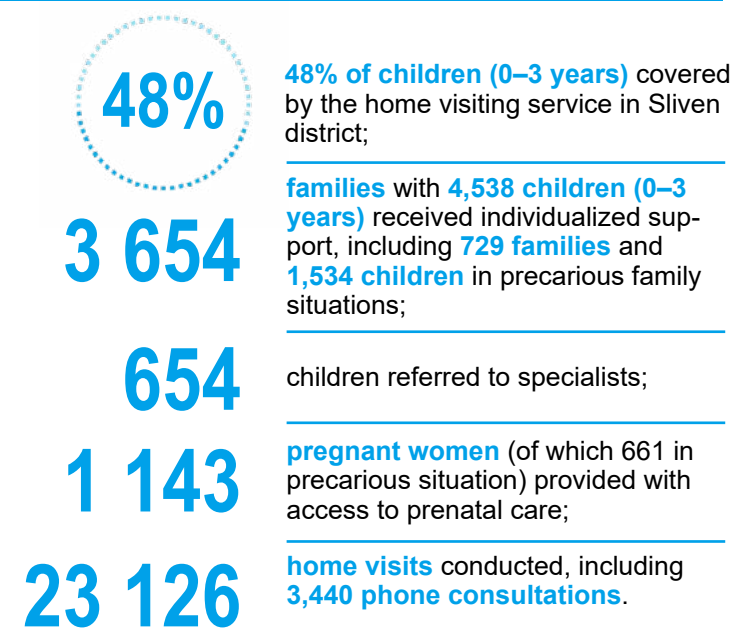
## MAJOR RESULTS ACHIEVED



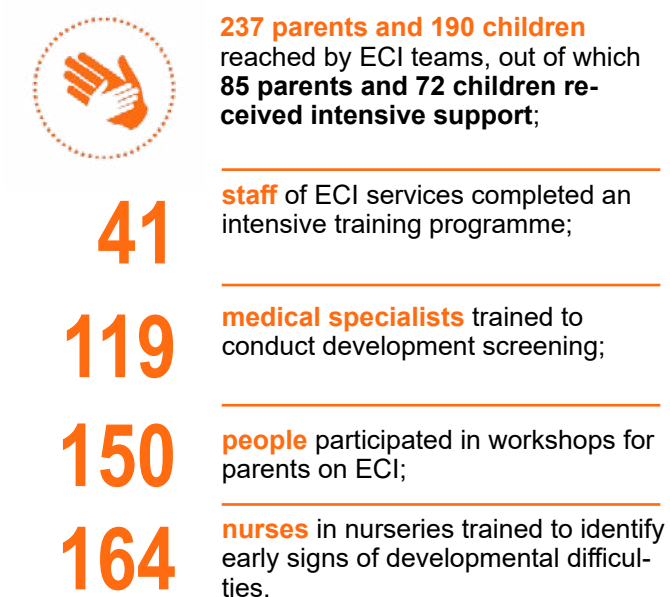
### Reducing child poverty and social exclusion

UNICEF Bulgaria continued 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 and other key stakeholders. The main objective is to improve the quality and expand the access of vulnerable children to 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 for children with learning difficulties and child and family-centred preventive and support services in 10 pilot municipalities on the territory of three districts – Burgas, Sliven and Stara Zagora. The European Child Guarantee (ECG) pilot project supported **16,315 children** and **10,059 parents** and strengthened the capacities of **816 professionals** from the health, education and social sectors. UNICEF supported the development of the National Action Plan for ECG 2030, which was informed by the key findings and recommendations of a “Deep Dive Analysis of child poverty and social exclusion” and by the evidence and lessons learned, and was generated by the ECG pilot project.

### HOME VISITING FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN UP TO 3 YEARS



### EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION







## INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

- 6 614** **children**, including **193 children with disabilities and special learning needs**, in 30 kindergartens, supported with access to improved inclusive preschool education;
- 2 691** **parents** were involved in kindergarten activities and counselling;
- 489** **principals, teachers and kindergarten specialists** completed a multi-module training programme on inclusive education;
- 45** **additional specialists** - speech therapists, resource teachers and psychologists were recruited;
- 65** **staff members** from the three Regional Centres for Supporting the Process of Inclusive Education (RCSPE) in Burgas, Sliven and Stara Zagora received specialized training;
- 10** The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care was tested by **10 pilot kindergartens**.

## PREVENTION AND SUPPORT SERVICES



- 901** **children** provided with access to education and healthcare;
- 1 005** **parents** provided with access to social benefits and other services;
- 97** **social workers and assistants** provided with intensive training;
- 11** **additional social workers** in 10 CPDs, trained;
- 615** **new cases** opened in CPDs and 151 multi-disciplinary coordination meetings conducted.

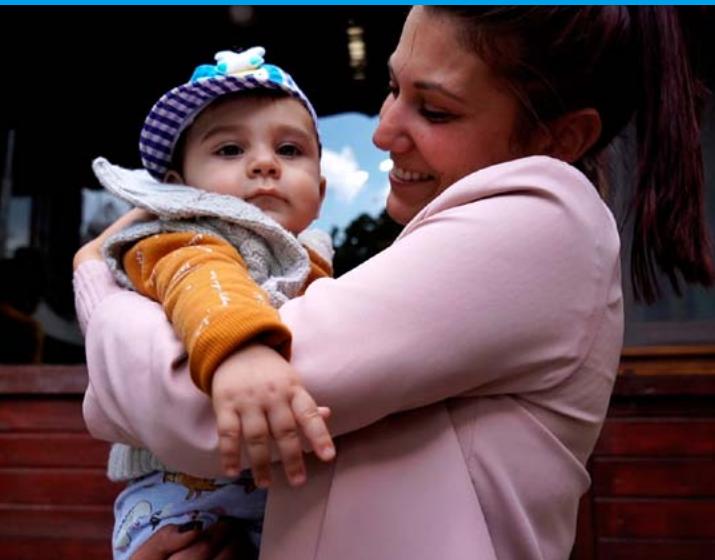


The pilot project has demonstrated the potential of the European Child Guarantee to reach and improve the lives of the most vulnerable children and UNICEF will support the effective implementation of the ECG National Action Plan 2030 as a key instrument for reducing child poverty and social exclusion in Bulgaria.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND CHILDCARE

In 2022, UNICEF continued to strengthen the overall cross-sectoral approach, including through strategic modelling (EUCG), evidence-based advocacy and key partnerships for holistic ECD and ECI policies. During the year, more than 103,000 people were reached through messages and information in the field of ECD. More than 25 strategic partnerships were conducted for evidence-generation or advocacy for ECD, including with Professional Associations, Academia, CSOs, Municipalities, Medical structures.





In 2022, UNICEF provided **53,461 vulnerable families** with young children with family care services and support and provided individual consultations through home visiting service to 256 pregnant women and 1,699 families with young children (0–3 years).



UNICEF also reached over **20,000 parents** with messages on nurturing care and the importance of early childhood interventions for children with developmental delays, trained **114 kindergarten staff** and developed a global toolkit on addressing stigma against children with disabilities, which will be tested in Bulgaria in 2023.



Mobile teams established under the pilot project, “EU Child Guarantee in Bulgaria reached **961 parents and 1,358 children** from **vulnerable and isolated communities** and **421 new cases related to family separation prevention** were managed by the **social workers** in the 10 Child Protection Departments implementing this pilot project.

As an innovative approach, the Bebbio parenting app was introduced in partnership with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education as a powerful digital parenting program for strengthening the caregivers’ skills for provision of nurturing care. The app was launched in June 2022 and it has been downloaded more than 24,000 times in just over 6 months in Bulgaria. During the year, additional 27,055 parents of children under 5

years of age strengthened their parental competencies through other parenting support modalities, delivered with UNICEF’s support, including community-based parenting support programs and other digital platforms (a dedicated parenting website [www.roditel.bg](http://www.roditel.bg)).

## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND EARLY LEARNING

In 2022, UNICEF reached 19,350 children and adolescents (10,002 girls and 9,348 boys) with formal and non-formal learning activities. Out of those, 8,891 are young children (2–7 years old, 3,865 are children with disabilities and 4,940 are refugee and migrant children. UNICEF contributed to the development of the first

plan for the implementation of the Strategic Framework for the development of education, training and learning (2021–2030), as well as to the development of the first cross-sectoral early childhood education and care (ECEC) quality framework in Bulgaria.

**3 312**  
young boys and  
**3 023**  
young girls

aged  
**2-7**

**30** kindergartens  
benefitted  
from enriched  
environment

Under the component for early inclusive education within the EU Child Guarantee, **3,312 young boys and 3,023 young girls, aged 2–7**, from **30 kindergartens** benefitted from enriched environment, more inclusive pedagogical practices and enhanced provision of additional support for those with special needs. **554 professionals benefitted from inclusive education trainings and supervision.**



In 2022, MES took over the maintenance of the UNICEF supported digital platform [www.podkrepime.mon.bg](http://www.podkrepime.mon.bg) and fully integrated it into its own digital learning infrastructure. The platform was a trigger for legislative changes in the inclusive education state standard, allowing online provision of additional support to children with disabilities and special needs. A total of 2,324 boys and 1,148 girls were supported through the platform. 805 trained specialists are providing additional online support through the platform to children in distant settlements or where specialists such as sensor therapists are not available. UNICEF also commissioned and conducted an independent evaluation of the Steps Together Joint Programme between UNICEF and the Ministry of Education and Science on the prevention of violence in

schools to inform the scale up of the model and initiated a mapping of good national practices of social and emotional learning and skills in education. Steps Together reached 1,545 girls and 1,370 boys who participated in social and emotional skills development workshops and peer-to-peer support sessions. 515 professionals were involved in training, mentoring and supervision sessions, including with international consultants on the prevention of violence and bullying in schools and the provision of social and emotional learning, leadership and burnout prevention, parents’ engagement and enhanced cross-sectoral collaboration. In addition, UNICEF has begun mapping good national practices for building social and emotional skills in the education system.



UNICEF engaged further in supporting national policies for children with disabilities and Assistive technologies for Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC).



In the last year, within the **A Voice for Every Child Project**, UNICEF developed and adapted in Bulgarian the first free-of-charge mobile application **Cboard** with typical Bulgarian symbols.



The app supported the inclusion and learning of **162 non-verbal children** and increased their competencies to cope with everyday tasks, adaptability and self-esteem.



UNICEF developed a free online interactive training course and trained **41 national AAC trainers**, as well as **765 teachers, professionals and parents**, to work with AAC tools.

PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE, JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN

In 2022, 40,775 children and 52,639 parents/caregivers were supported with essential services, care and protection interventions (prevention and response to violence against girls, boys and women, legal aid, MHPSS and reintegration services).



**335 children (203 girls, 132 boys), 408 parents (303 women, 105 men)** supported with specialized services to prevent and respond to violence against girls, boys and women by the **Zona ZaKрила Child Advocacy Centres** and **361 children** reached with preventative services;



**2,759 people (340 children: 184 girls, 156 boys; 2,419 adults: 2,042 women, 377 men)** reached with GBV prevention, response and risk mitigation and information on how to access safe channels to report sexual exploitation and abuse;



**136 children (59 girls, 77 boys) and 19 adults (16 women, 3 men)** consulted by the Safer Internet Centre Helpline and 8,788 signals received and processed by the Hotline for the September–December 2022 period.

UNICEF has continued to strengthen the capacity of frontline workers with a focus on violence against children, gender-based violence and child protection, reaching 554 frontline workers in 2022.





## SUPPORT FOR REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN



In 2022, around 150,000 Ukrainians and 600 people from Russia, Armenia, Moldova and other countries received temporary protection in Bulgaria. At the same time, the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) registered a record number of applications for international protection:

**20 407**, of which  
**8 598** were submitted by Syrian nationals,  
**7 164** by Afghan nationals and  
**1 721** by Moroccan nationals.

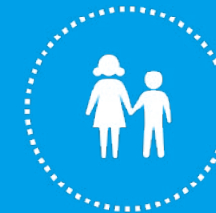
**3 348** of the applications were from **unaccompanied children**. UNICEF continued to work closely with the State Agency for Refugees and relevant line ministries, local authorities and civil society organizations to support refugee and migrant children and their families.



To reach affected children and families from Ukraine, UNICEF supported the provision of initial adaptation measures and services in Bulgaria, strengthened the capacity of frontline workers and supported national systems in close coordination with the government, UN agencies, the donor community and civil society organizations. Thus, in 2022, UNICEF was able to support over **86,000 children and families** from Ukraine **with essential services**.



As part of the measures to support Ukrainian refugees, six **Blue Dot Centres** were established, supporting more than **15,378 children** and **35,690 caregivers** with legal and psychosocial assistance, informal educational, cultural and sport activities for children, information and assistance to access various services including health care, education, accommodation, social assistance, etc. Additionally, **7,411 children (4,060 girls and 3,351 boys)** and **12,900 adults (9,925 women and 2,975 men)** received psychosocial support.



UNICEF reached 4,180 Ukrainian refugee children with non-formal education and learning opportunities by creating a network of learning centres and play facilities, supporting Ukrainian teachers and educators among the refugees, providing teaching aids, improving access to the internet and providing additional support for learning the Bulgarian language and catching up on learning material. Within the education centres in Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna and Burgas, UNICEF supported the education of **1,799 boys** and **3,141 girls**. In addition, UNICEF trained **175 professionals to work with children who have experienced trauma**.

In 2022 UNICEF implemented its first winterization humanitarian support programme, reaching 15,000 people with blankets, winter clothing and hygiene materials. In addition, as a preventive measure, an inter-agency contingency plan was developed to provide shelter, food, legal assistance and protection to an additional 10,000 people in the event of a mass influx of people from Ukraine.

UNICEF and its partners reached over 3.4 million people - Ukrainian refugees and Bulgarian host communities - with messages for social and behavioural change for prevention and access to services. Social cohesion events such as visits by UNICEF's Global Goodwill Ambassador, participation of children and families in summer and Christmas celebrations, arts and sports initiatives were organized, targeting 80,000 people in host communities and reaching 1.8 million people through radio, TV and digital channels. 4,500 Ukrainian parents were directly involved in information sessions in the „Welcome to School“ initiative, including on childhood immunisations, and 4,221 health workers were trained on interpersonal communication to strengthen trust in vaccines.

As part of its support for refugee and migrant children from the near and Middle East, UNICEF, through its partners, supported the identification and timely release from immigration detention of **847 unaccompanied children**. Such detention of unaccompanied were informed in an accessible way about their rights as asylum seekers in Bulgaria, about the possibilities to be reunited with their family and about all other aspects of their stay in the country.

As part of the preparations for the winter period, UNICEF provided a donation to the State Agency for Refugees for the children and refugee families accommodated in the SAR registration and reception centres, which included 4,000 blankets, 7,000 children's winter clothes, 3,200 hygiene kits and 284 educational kits. Additionally, more than 6,000 toys were provided to SAR for more than 530 children placed in the agency's centres.



## UNICEF ALSO PROVIDED:



**3,136 children and 1,705 refugee and migrant parents** with psycho-social support, legal assistance and assistance to access health, education and social services.



**518 refugee and migrant children and parents** participated in awareness-raising activities on preventing, responding to and reducing the risk of gender-based violence and reporting and seeking help for sexual exploitation and abuse.



**1,996 refugee and migrant children and parents** were supported and participated in awareness-raising activities on their rights, health risks and available immunisation services.



**54 refugee and migrant children and their mothers** received access to maternal and child health care, including nutrition counselling for infants and young children.

A video in Arabic, Farsi/Dari, Pashto and English on alternative care and social services in Bulgaria was developed to support the State Agency for Refugees and to better inform unaccompanied and separated children.



## Adolescents and Youth

In 2022, UNICEF continued to mobilize and engage adolescents and young people as partners, including through the establishment of its first Youth Advisory Board. UNICEF and the Ministry of Youth and Sports strengthened their partnership on the occasion of the European Year of Youth.

## Through its partners in 2022, UNICEF supported:



The involvement of **478 boys and 546 girls** in civic engagement activities on climate change, mental health, bullying and violence prevention, volunteering and to promote social cohesion and solidarity in local communities.



**1 465 boys and 2 151 girls** to participate in programmes for skills development, entrepreneurship and activities to build confidence, resilience and empower young people to be engaged citizens and participants in change.





In 2022, in partnership with the Ministry of Environment and Water, Bulgaria was amongst the first countries from the region to sign the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action. This strong political will in the area of climate and environment was reconfirmed during the joint UNICEF – Government of Bulgaria launch of the Innocenti Report Card 17: **Places and Spaces – Environments and Children's well-being**, followed by various forms of youth engagement.

## COMMUNICATION AND ADVOCACY

The media, NGOs, professionals, partners, children and adolescents are increasingly involved in alliances for communication and promotion of children's rights. The war in Ukraine and the subsequent economic crisis amplified this phenomenon.

Throughout the year, UNICEF communication was focused on topics related to the education crisis, the growing problem of violence against women and children in Bulgaria, the EU Child Guarantee pilot project, climate change and its impact on children's lives and the promotion of the new platforms: the parent's application Bebbio and the digital platform for mental health of children and youth **Razkazhi mi**.

In January 2022, a new TV fundraising format **"The great little ones"** was created on the initiative of UNICEF and in partnership with NOVA; it was aired on 29 January. The show generated huge public interest

and raised awareness for several UNICEF causes. The funds raised through the campaign supported an innovative mental health platform for children and young people – **"UNICEF room" /Razkazhi mi/**, which was released on the World Mental Health Day on the 10 October 2022.

A major fundraising campaign focused specifically on the needs of children in Ukraine, as part of UNICEF's general humanitarian appeal, was released in the first months after the conflict started. It was followed by several awareness and tolerance campaigns during the summer months and by promotion of UNICEF Bulgaria's actions to support refugees from Ukraine in the country – including **the opening of the Blue Dot centers and a Back to School campaign** to enrol refugee children in local schools. UNICEF's **"Christmas is possible For Every Child"** campaign was launched in December to give a voice to Ukrainian families who have found refuge in Bulgaria and to further promote their integration and solidarity in local society.



In the last three months of the year, UNICEF ran an integrated awareness- and fundraising campaign called **"Support the team of the future - children of Bulgaria"**. With this campaign, UNICEF focused the public's attention on Early Childhood Development, Protection from Violence and Education for Children with Special Needs.


Without the support of UNICEF's national ambassadors Elena Petrova, Vladimir Ampov – Grafa and Sonya Yoncheva and all celebrities, influencers and public figures, involved in our causes, these results wouldn't have been possible.




SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE:

Positive changes in knowledge, attitudes, practices and beliefs can affect every aspect of a child and family’s life. UNICEF Bulgaria is applying innovative approaches to influence social norms, prejudice and stereotypes and to help unleash the true potential of all children and communities – on an individual and system level. Here are a few examples:






**123,584 people** were reached online with digital community engagement campaigns and there were **22,686 downloads** of the **Health Buddy+** mobile application of UNICEF and WHO for COVID-19 information and protective behaviours;



**239,874 people** were reached online via digital promotion and there were **7,394 downloads** of the new **UNICEF Room** within the **Razkazhi Mi** mobile application for mental health help-seeking behaviours and self-care of adolescents, launched on World Mental Health Day (October 2022);



Another **69,326 people** were reached online via multi-platform promotion and **2,439 people** were engaged via the new youth-led mental health podcast series by Teen Station “Inside Out”, supported by **UNICEF Bulgaria** and launched during European Mental Health week (May 2022);

In addition to working directly with children, adolescents, families and communities, UNICEF Bulgaria supported the Government in designing strategic documents for behavioural and social change. Here are a few examples:

- UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health to develop a National Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) Strategy for COVID-19 response;
- UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health and WHO to conduct a joint assessment of the health system to respond to the needs of refugees and migrants in Bulgaria;

- UNICEF conducted and disseminated a National social norms research highlighting the attitudes and discrimination against children with disabilities;
- UNICEF supported the organization of the first National conference on Vaccines Preventable Diseases in Bulgaria and its subsequent Declaration with recommended actions.

PARTNERSHIPS

In 2022, UNICEF continued to work in partnership with the National Assembly, the Government, local authorities, the media, civil society, academia, business, children and youth to promote, protect and help ensure the effective implementation of children’s rights in Bulgaria. Leading influencers, politicians, national and international celebrities have supported UNICEF’s work on children’s rights and specific causes.

The results achieved in 2022 and mentioned in this report were made possible thanks to the generous support of the following partners: Fantastico, IKEA, Orange and many other large and small companies.

UNICEF Bulgaria would like to recognize its continuous close collaboration with both State Ministries and the private sector, as well as with European Union Institutions and other Governments and entities which provide flexible funding to UNICEF Bulgaria and UNICEF globally, as these resources have been instrumental in achieving quality results for children.

Over 34,000 individuals, BLAGODETELI, supported our programme with monthly donations. Our results for children would not be possible without their constant support and the generous contributions of our corporate partners and media who supported our campaigns.

Our fundraising efforts were supported by more

than **28 motivated and inspiring fundraisers from the UNICEF team “Champions for Children”** who worked tirelessly at different locations provided by our partners in Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv and Blagoevgrad in order to enlarge our family of monthly donors.

Together we raised **2,522,376 BGN** for children in Bulgaria. The donations from corporate partnerships amounted to 532,068 BGN and the donations from our individual donors reached 1,990,308 BGN. Of the total funds collected, BGN 645,000 were in support of the humanitarian aid that UNICEF provided to children and families who fled to Bulgaria from the war in Ukraine.

Thank you for the continued commitment and your generosity to children in Bulgaria!

In 2022, the funds raised were generated from local fundraising, donor funding and UNICEF institutional budgets totalling **BGN 11,181,257** for children in Bulgaria. The funds were allocated to all programme areas and contribute to the results presented in this report.

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

PROGRAMME AREAS	Expenses (BGN)
Early childhood development and childcare	2 542 534
Inclusive education and early learning	1 129 788
Prevention of violence and access to justice	977 827
Partnership for child rights	649 334
Resource mobilization, program and operational effectiveness	1 402 622
Ukrainian crisis response	4 479 152
	11 181 257





# THANK YOU!

Thanks to the support of state institutions, local authorities, medical centers, kindergartens and schools, non-governmental organizations, media and other partners, in 2022 we continued advocating for children's rights in Bulgaria.

Together, we provided support to parents in their care for their children and to numerous families from vulnerable communities.

We improved the access to inclusive education and safe school environment for children, especially those from disadvantaged groups.

We've worked tirelessly to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation and to empower and listen to the voice of young people.

Protecting children's rights and well-being and achieving these positive results would be impossible without the dedication and generosity of all our partners, individual and corporate donors.

To all of you, we say a big and heartfelt "Thank you"!

unicef  | for every child