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Document Type	Simplified Programme Document						
UNICEF Office	Bulgaria CO						
Organization Name	NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WORKERS IN CENTERS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT						
Programme Title	Strengthening the capacity of the Centers for Special Educational Support to support families of children with disabilities						
Planned duration	Start date: Feb. 9, 2025 End date: June 30, 2026						
Geographical coverage	Bulgaria						
Budget	UNICEF Cash:	76,250.00	Supplies:	0.00	Capacity Strengthening Costs:	3,000.00	Total: 76,250.00
	Partner Cash:	0.00	Supplies:	0.00			Total: 0.00
Total	Currency:	BGN					Total: 76,250.00

Strategy

Context:

Context:

As part of the transformation process of inclusive education in Bulgaria, in 2015, measures were taken by the Ministry of Education and Culture to reorganize special schools into centers for special educational support. In Bulgaria, there are 42 centers for special educational support where education for over 3,000 children with disabilities is provided. Centers for Special Educational Support are institutions in the educational system, and they carry out activities to support children with the most severe disabilities, providing them with intensive pedagogical and additional support for personal development. These centres provide rehabilitation, therapy and developmental support by qualified professionals. Another key function is in terms of implementing programs to support and educate the families of children and students and to support their social inclusion. Centers for Special Educational Support are also the main structures to ensure vocational training and skills building for adolescents with disabilities, with the possibility of subsequent realization on the labour market and independent life.

For many children with severe and multiple disabilities, special educational support centers are the only institutions where they can receive an adequate education, socialization and critical life skills. To further strengthen the support those centers to better provide in the continuum of inclusive education, there is a need for an in-depth analysis of the policies and practices of these centers in the country, their mechanisms of interaction with parents and schools in the process of inclusive education, as well as their programs for vocational and skills training for independent life. The analysis will further inform the adjustment of the national policy for inclusive education regarding the children that require intensive additional special education support.

In the past few years, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education and Science and relevant centers under the ministry through training for professionals to build more inclusive environments, enhance collaboration with parents and deliver inclusive education. While the Regional Centers for Supporting the Process of Inclusive Education are becoming more and more methodological and training centers, the Centers for Special Educational Support is expected to gradually become a key resource for the direct provision of support for children with disabilities and special needs and their families. The Ministry of Education and Science announced this transition during the Annual Meeting of the Centers for Special Educational Support in 2023 and there is a need and niche for UNICEF to support this process.

The lack of collaboration between parents of children with special needs and the education institutions is a serious challenge for the quality provision of inclusive education services. A recent analysis of the services for children with developmental delays (2019), conducted by UNICEF Bulgaria, confirms that families are not fully involved in the process of additional support provided for their children, as ECD services are entirely focused on the child and do not recognize the role of the parent as a partner. As stated in the Global Report on Children with developmental disabilities: from the Margins to the Mainstream (WHO, UNICEF; 2023), family-centred services have long been identified as best practice for professionals working with families of children with developmental disabilities. To provide the model, services should work closely with families to understand the priorities of parents and caregivers for their child's progress and well-being and their resources and constraints in bringing up their child. When parents and caregivers are provided with opportunities to strengthen knowledge, understanding, and skills to engage with and support children, both the caregivers' well-being and their children's development improve.

In order to expand the available opportunities for parental support, in 2018 UNICEF Bulgaria adapted and tested Workshops for Parents "Let's Grow Together PLUS" (Pećnik, Starc, Ljubešić, Jeić, Pribela-Hodap and Grubić, 2014; Starc, 2014) programme with various partners across the country, supplying them with an instrument to provide family-centred services. The program is organized as thematically related group sessions for parents, conducted by specially trained teams of facilitators. Workshops aim, through a facilitated process, were to promote the exchange of information, experience, knowledge and skills, to support parents in realizing their parental potential, thereby contributing to the well-being of the whole family. The results from the evaluation of the implementation in Bulgaria showed an overall significant tendency for a positive change in parental feelings toward their parenting and the relationship with the child. At the end of the programme, parents reported that they experienced fewer negative emotions. The most pronounced change was the reported increase in the frequency of optimism, satisfaction and happiness, as well as decrease in anxiety and guilt. Parents indicated higher levels of confidence. Also, reduction of negative practices, (as yelling at the child or physical punishment) was reported at the end of the Programme. These results from 2019 show a positive change in the dynamics of the child-parent relationship and prove the programme Workshops for Parents "Let's Grow Together PLUS" as highly supportive parent resource, that provides a better understanding of the child's needs, personal responsibility, and opportunities to support the child's development.

There is an opportunity through this partnership for the programme to be scaled with the support of the Centers for Special Educational Support's network and to be sustained as a core programme of those centers aligned with their role in supporting parents of children with special needs in the country.

The National Association of Workers in Centers for Special Educational Support in Bulgaria is the official organization that represents and unites the teachers and specialists working in the sector and is also recognized by the Ministry of Education and Science as a partner to participate at an expert level and as a civil organization in the development of policies and programs within the sector. The National Association of Workers in Centers for Special Educational Support supports the introduction, implementation and validation of good pedagogical practices related to the special education and support of students, children and persons with disabilities.

Given this context, UNICEF and the National Association are willing to enter into partnership to support the national policies related to improving the quality of inclusive education in Bulgaria.

Implementation Strategy & Technical Guidance:

The partnership between UNICEF and the National Association of Workers in Centers for Special Educational Support will contribute to the national policies related to the quality of inclusive education and early childhood development by strengthening the system for implementing family-centred practices and providing the Ministry of Education and Science with recommendations, reflecting the needs and challenges in the sector for the effective transformation of inclusive education services.

The current partnership also aims to strengthen the capacity of special education support centres and their role as units supporting families of children with disabilities. Workshops for Parents “Let’s grow together PLUS” program consists of 11 conceptually and thematically related workshops (group sessions) conducted with the same group of participants. The workshops are developed on the principles of groups for sharing personal experience and development, combining the principles of training groups.

During the first year, planned program activities provide training for specialists from 15 Centers for special educational support in the country (Gabrovo, Blagoevgrad, Dobrich, Velingrad, Berkovitsa, Sofia, Stara Zagora, Kardzhali, Harmanli, Lovech, Gotse Delchev, Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Varna, Kubrat) who will be trained to facilitate Workshops for parents “Let’s grow together PLUS”. A minimum of 30 professionals working with children with special education needs will be trained as facilitators of the program Workshops for parents, and then conduct the program sessions with groups of parents.

During the second year of the project implementation, additional training will be provided for the second cohort of 30 facilitators, who will conduct the programme with groups of parents during the 2025/2026 school year.

The project activities also envisage the preparation of an in-depth situational analysis of the policies and inclusive practices of the CSES in the country, the opportunities they provide for vocational training and independent living, the interaction of the CSES with other institutions in the preschool and school education system and with the families.

The project aims to directly reach at least 270 parents of children with special educational needs for a two-year period through regular workshops under the program "Let's Grow Together PLUS" by the trained facilitators in minimum 15 Centers for special educational support in the country (Gabrovo, Blagoevgrad, Dobrich, Velingrad, Berkovitsa, Sofia, Stara Zagora, Kardzhali, Harmanli, Lovech, Gotse Delchev, Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Varna, Kubrat).

Description of the project activities:

Output 1. Strengthening the capacity of the Centers for Special Educational Support to support families of children with disabilities and provide direct support through the program "Workshops for parents - Let's grow together PLUS"

- 1.1. Organization and delivery of two training sessions for facilitators of workshops for parents for a minimum of 30 specialists from 15 Centers for Special Educational Support in the country
- 1.2 Direct support for families of children with disabilities by conducting the "Workshops for parents - Let's grow up together PLUS" program in Centers for Special Educational Support in the country (15 centers for the first year: Gabrovo, Blagoevgrad, Dobrich, Velingrad, Berkovitsa, Sofia, Stara Zagora, Kardzhali, Harmanli, Lovech, Gotse Delchev, Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Varna, Kubrat; and up to 15 centers for the second project year).
- 1.3. Provision of supervision for the facilitators – a total of four supervision sessions will be provided for the facilitators for the project period. Supervision will be provided by the trainers, contracted for the training for facilitators of the programme.

Output 2. Institutional analysis and policy recommendations

- 2.1. Preparation of situation analysis (practices, cases, interaction with other institutions (schools, kindergartens, Regional Centers Supporting the Process of Inclusive Education), interaction with parents; professional education and employment after graduation, etc.).
- 2.2. Organization of a conference event with stakeholders (Ministry of Education and Science, Regional Centers for Supporting the Process of Inclusive Education, ECD and ECEC services, parents and other stakeholders) to reflect on the outcomes of the situational analysis and validate recommendations for quality inclusive education and the role of the Centers for Special Educational Support.

Output 3. Identify cases to promote practices and share experiences.

Output 4. Project management

- 5.1. Effective management and coordination

Capacity Development:

The National Association of Workers in Special Education Support Centers will use the provided amount for capacity-building activities and training for the members of the association.

Other Partners involved:

Ministry of Education and Science and the Regional Centers for Supporting the Process of Inclusive Education (no funding engagement)

Other Document Details:

None

Data Processing Agreement: No

Activities involving children and young people: No

Special Conditions for Construction Works by Implementing Partners: No

Gender Rating: Marginal

Although, there is no specific focus on boys or girls and the expected distribution of beneficiaries is expected to be relatively equal, the gender lense is reflected in the fact that the data collected for the initiative will be sex disaggregated, which will allow for analysis of the way in which activities affect boys and girls differently, and whether implementation needs to be further tailored.

Equity Rating: Principal

Equity focus is in the core of UNICEF supported interventions.

Sustainability Rating: None

None

Risk & Proposed Mitigation Measures:

Financial: Funding will be provided in small portions to mitigate financial risks.

Organizational: UNICEF will provide ongoing support and will conduct quality assurance activities, incl. more regular meetings at the beginning, so that trust is built between partners and quality is guaranteed. UNICEF will nominate the master trainers for the workshops for parents from a pool of trained professionals and will participate in the selection of the organization or consultant that will lead the analysis.

Strategic: Centers for Special Educational Support provide intensive educational and additional support specifically for children with disabilities, with limited interaction with mainstream schools, though children who they support are enrolled in mainstream schools. On the other hand, these centers are the only units where children with severe disabilities can receive an adequate education, socialization, vocational training and the possibility of subsequent realization on the labour market. Project activities address Centers for Special Educational Support's inclusive role by strengthening parental empowerment, both in terms of enhancing parenting skills and involving them as active participants in improving processes and practices. The planned situational analysis aims to serve as a reflective tool on the practices of these educational centers, and their interactions with other stakeholders – schools, kindergartens, RCSPIE, and parents; and as a foundation for policy recommendations.

Workplan Result					
Result statement	Performance indicator/s	Location	Baseline	Target	Means of Verification
QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE ECEC	Availability of education materials and communication that support the inclusion of children with disabilities - score (1-4)				
Strengthening the capacity of CSES to support families of children with disabilities and provide direct support through the program "Workshops for parents - Let's grow together PLUS"	Number of beneficiaries	Bulgaria	0	540	Participants lists; photos (Parents/ caregivers: 135 + 135; Children with disabilities: 135 +135)
	Number of facilitators capacitated to conduct Workshops for parents	Bulgaria	0	60	IP reports (*target - 30+30)
	Percentage of parents/caregivers who self-report increased parental capacities by participating in the new parenting support programme	Bulgaria	0	70	Report; self-assessment protocols (pre and post intervention)
Identify a minimum of 6 cases to promote practices and share experiences	HIS delivered to UNICEF	Bulgaria	0	6	None
QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION	Existence of national strategies to address inequities in education access, participation and retention - score (1-4), see guidance (22-01-L3-27)				
Situation analysis	Situational analysis report is available, and recommendations to inform Inclusive education standard are discussed with the MoES and other stakeholders	Bulgaria	0	1	Report
	Conference validation event is conducted	Bulgaria	0	1	List pf participants

Workplan Budget					
Result Level	Result/activity	Timeframe	Total (CSO + UNICEF)[BGN]	CSO contribution	UNICEF contribution

Prog. Output	QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE ECEC Strengthening the capacity of CSES to support families of children with disabilities and provide direct support through the program "Workshops for parents - Let's grow together PLUS"		40,000.00	0.00	40,000.00
Activity	Organization and conduct of two two-day trainings for facilitators of workshops for parents	2025 Q1, 2025 Q3	32,800.00	0.00	32,800.00
Activity	Direct support for families of children with disabilities by conducting the "Workshops for parents - Let's grow up together PLUS" program	2025 Q1, 2025 Q2	6,000.00	0.00	6,000.00
Activity	Provision of supervision for the facilitators (4 supervision sessions X 2 supervisors X 150lv)	2025 Q1, 2025 Q2	1,200.00	0.00	1,200.00
Prog. Output	QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE ECEC Identify a minimum of 6 cases to promote practices and share experiences		1,200.00	0.00	1,200.00
Activity	Cases for promoting practices and media publicity	2025 Q1, 2025 Q2, 2025 Q3, 2025 Q4, 2026 Q5	1,200.00	0.00	1,200.00
Prog. Output	QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION Situation analysis		22,150.00	0.00	22,150.00
Activity	Preparation of situation analysis from external consultant	2025 Q1, 2025 Q2, 2025 Q3, 2025 Q4	10,000.00	0.00	10,000.00
Activity	Conference event	2026 Q5	12,150.00	0.00	12,150.00
Prog. Output	Effective and efficient programme management		9,900.00	0.00	9,900.00
Activity	In-country management & support		7200	0.00	7200.00
Activity	Operational costs		2,700.00	0.00	2,700.00
Activity	Planning, monitoring, evaluation, and communication		0.00	0.00	0.00
Sub-total for programme costs			73,250.00	0.00	73,250.00
Capacity Strengthening Costs			3,000.00		3,000.00
Total Cash budget			76,250.00	0.00	76,250.00

Supply Contribution Plan				
Provided by	Item	No. of units	Price/unit	Total Price
Total supply Cost				0.00

Others

Partner non-financial contribution	None
Cash Transfer modality	Direct Cash Transfer, Reimbursement
Activation Protocol	None

Signatures and date			
CSO Authorized Officer:		UNICEF Authorized Officer:	
Signature:		Signature:	
Date:	<i>Christina de Bruin</i> 10-02-2025	Date:	<i>Milen Nakon</i> 12-02-2025

Signatures and date			
Date Uploaded	Document Type	Document	Invalid
Feb. 6, 2025, 2:09 p.m.	Other	https://etools.unicef.org/api/v2/attachments/file/791/	No
Feb. 6, 2025, 2:08 p.m.	Other	https://etools.unicef.org/api/v2/attachments/file/790/	No