



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF
BULGARIA**

TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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“We Are Not Merchandise”: Modern Slavery and Children in Institutions

High-level discussion hosted by the Permanent Missions of Bulgaria, the UK, the UAE and Argentina in partnership with Lumos

New York, 28 November 2017, 1.15 – 2.45 pm, CR 8, UNHQ

H.E. Mr. Georgi Panayotov, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN

Dear guests,

Our event today deals with a particular aspect of the broader topic of violence against children which has not received enough attention at global level so far - residential care for children and the link to modern slavery.

The UN General Assembly *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* adopted in 2009 remain the only comprehensive UN document to date to guide Member States in the implementation of their commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child in this specific area. In 2011 UNICEF and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights launched a *Call to action to end all use of institutional care for children under the age of three years* followed in 2012 by OHCHR’s specialized study on *The Rights of vulnerable children under the age of three*. These developments have led to changes in national childcare policies in a number of countries, including Bulgaria and other Eastern European states. Furthermore, through strong partnership with UNICEF, the impact is now extending beyond Europe to Central Asia and Latin America.

The child care reform in Bulgaria is entering its final stage and there is a strong political commitment to successfully complete the process of deinstitutionalization by 2025 or earlier. Since 2009 when the long-term deinstitutionalization plan was adopted by the Bulgarian Government the number of children in specialized institutions in Bulgaria has dropped by 74% (137 institutions in 2010 and 36 in 2017), whereas integrated services in the community have increased 3 times (241 in 2010 and 612 in 2017). Measures are taken to prevent child abandonment, ensure a family-like environment for every child, support parents and children at risk, promote foster care, etc. The active involvement of civil society, social partners, media and the private sector is crucial for the success of the child care reform and for ensuring the social integration of children and youth leaving the institutions.

Bulgaria is strongly advocating for integrating children's rights in intergovernmental processes as well; the concerted efforts in this direction have brought good results with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which for the first time has recognized children as agents of change. The Agenda is also the first global agreement that includes clear targets to eradicate modern slavery, human trafficking and the worst forms of child labour envisaging a world in which children can grow up free from violence and exploitation. Bulgaria has endorsed the *Call to action to end forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking* initiated by the UK Prime Minister during UNGA72 High-level week with the ambition to strengthen global action on this important topic.

The upcoming 30th anniversary of the CRC and the 10th anniversary of the UN *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* in 2019 give us a good opportunity to renew our commitment to children and I would like to encourage all of us to promote the inclusion of language on children's rights in different resolutions and other UN documents with a particular focus on eliminating institutional care for children, child trafficking and all forms of exploitation and modern slavery involving children.

Thank you.