

SOCIAL INCLUSION PROJECT

Key Dates:

Approved : November 04, 2008

Effective: April 16, 2009

Closing: October 31, 2013

Financing in million US Dollars*:

<i>Financier</i>	<i>Financing</i>	<i>Disbursed</i>	<i>Undisbursed</i>
IBRD Loan	59	0.9	56.3
Government of Bulgaria/ESF	108.4		
Communities	34.4		
Total Project Cost	201.8		

*** As of August 4, 2011.**

Note: Disbursements may differ from financing due to exchange rate fluctuations at the time of disbursement.



Bulgaria entered the EU with per capita income at only 37 percent of the EU average. As analyses showed that one of the main factors for poverty is intergenerational transfer of poverty, and in order to speed up convergence of living standards and provide equal opportunities for children, the Government – with World Bank support – launched the *Social Inclusion Project*. The project aims at early-age inclusion of children from disadvantaged and poor families.

The Project Development Objective is to help children below the age of seven from poor and disadvantaged families, as well as children with disabilities, to prepare for school. Because of their social situation, many vulnerable children reach school age and go to school without the necessary preparation. They are not on equal footing with their peers and they drop out early from school. The Project will improve their welfare by using early involvement mechanisms, safeguarding their health and education opportunities, and working with parents before the children reach school age. The Project will target low-income and marginalized families (including children with a disability and other special needs), and will contribute to the sustainability of the school readiness program by supporting the absorption of European Social Fund financing.

Key Expected Results and Current Achievements:

- Improvements in school readiness of children from low-income backgrounds and with a disability below the age of seven, measured through improvements in cognitive skills, including (i) memory, verbal and visual-motor skills development; copying scores (age 3-5); (ii) fluency in Bulgarian (age 5-6); (iii) achievement test results, including reading tests (age 6-8); and child nutrition in target population (as proxied by anthropometric measures).
- Improvements in child welfare, measured by improvements in (i) enrollment of children under age seven from low-income and marginalized households (including children with a disability) in mainstream preschool, kindergarten and child care centers in participating municipalities, (ii) parenting skills (as proxied by frequency and quality of parent-child interaction), and (iii) the number of children having received full set of immunization; and
- Expansion of coverage of child care services to low-income children and children with a disability below the age of 7, measured by increases in (i) the number of parents having completing parenting skills sessions, (ii) the number of children newly placed into kindergarten or child care facilities through the project interventions (including children with disabilities), (iii) the rate of inflow of children from poor and marginalized families into institutional care, (iv) the number of new child care places created through the project, and (v) the number of kindergarten and child care facilities staff having received training.

A few months after project effectiveness, a change of the project management mechanism was required, so actual project implementation was delayed. However, project implementation is now gaining speed. Pilot municipalities for the first round of micro project implementation have been identified, and more than 60 micro projects were approved for financing and field work has already started in June 2011.

Key Partners:

The World Bank team works closely with (i) the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of the Republic of Bulgaria, which is responsible for overall policy setting as well as for the project management; (ii) Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Bulgaria, which is the main partner on all World Bank loans; and (iii) the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, Ministry of Health, the State Agency for Child Protection, the Social Assistance Agency and other institutions and NGOs that are stakeholders in the early inclusion and child care policies and process.

Key International Partners include the European Union (EU), through its respective offices responsible for overseeing the financing from the European Social Fund.