**Third Cycle of Universal Periodic Review of the Republic of Bulgaria**

**Geneva, 6 November 2020**

**Statement of Mrs Zornitsa Rusinova, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Policy**

**Madam President,**

**Distinguished delegates,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present the progress achieved by Bulgaria in the implementation of the recommendations of the Second Universal Periodic Review.

Bulgaria is committed to implement consistent social policy, aiming at promoting the well-being to each individual and protecting the rights of all vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, children and young people and elderly people.

All the efforts of the government in the last several months have been focused on how to thrive with the pandemic situation.

The first steps introduced by the government was to, on one hand, support the health system and, on the other hand, to support the most vulnerable groups in our society - elderly people, people with disabilities, people that are in risk and high risk because of Covid, and also to mobilize support for the economy of the country.

One of the most successful measure of the government has been the implementation of the short-term working arrangements schemes, so-called 60/40 scheme in Bulgaria that has been expanded for the transport and for the tourist sector to 80/20, which means that the government is covering 80 percent of the Social Security thresholds of the people.

These measures have managed to keep more than 300 000 working places in the country. And also this measure is important because it only managed to keep the level of unemployment relatively low. Right now, the level of unemployment is approximately 7 percent, which is 2.5 percent higher than last year.

We have also managed to mobilise different type of assistance to companies in order to support people who have lost their jobs. We have mobilised 160 million leva for short-term arrangements in order to support people who have lost their jobs with subsidising the minimum wage and employing them in companies.

A special emphasis have been given to families because in the first months of Covid all kindergartens and schools have been closed and we have introduced two types of different assistance for families. Almost 4000 families have managed to use the social benefit that was exactly introduced to support the father or the mother if they don't have enough income because they have to go on their regular vacation, or they cannot use their unemployment benefits.

Also, we have introduced a new social assistance this year, especially for children at the eighth grade, in order to support, again, families that are not able to provide enough school, different things that are needed for the school or for the coming year.

In order to support families in cases where children had to be quarantined and stay at home and cannot go to school, we have introduced a new monthly targeted assistance that is based on the level of the minimum wage for the country. And, it is expected that about 30 000 families can be using this assistance if, again, there is a closure of schools and kindergarten.

The whole budget for the Ministry for next year has been almost doubled, and this means that a lot of emphasis have been also put to elderly people.

In the first months of the Covid situation, we have managed to mobilize the European funding in order to provide Patronage carer, someone to regularly visit elderly people, people with disability in order to support them with their everyday tasks or to provide them with food or the necessary medicines.

Together with local authorities, almost 50 000 people every day are receiving this Patronage care. Since August, the Ministry and the government have introduced special assistance to elderly people. Each month each retired person in the country is receiving an additional 50 lev to the pension, and this would continue during the whole economic crisis.

We are also working in different areas how to support companies first in order for them to be more resilient to the situation of the economic crisis, with more emphasis on digitalization, working conditions, but also to provide support to people not to lose their jobs.

In the last several years one of the big steps for Bulgaria was the big reform in the specialised institutions for children. Almost seven years ago, we have managed to close all institutions for children with disabilities and this year we are closing the last institutions for children.

This means that we have managed to, on first hand, provide more conditions for more community work and support to families not to leave their children.

For example, we have introduced new types of social benefits for next year that support all children that in the first grade and all children that are in the eighth grade in order to, again, support families and to have better binding of the policies in the social and educational area.

We have implemented a long 10-year plan for closing all the institutions, and one of the big steps that the Bulgarian government has made is to establish more community services, to have more and better network of foster families and to have better targeted integration measures in order to keep children in the families.

The investments in early childhood development have been one of the priorities for this government.

We have established more than 60 community centers where we provide integrated health, social and medical services and more than 5000 children every day are visiting these centers.

This year, a major reform in the social sphere was the adoption of the new Social Services Act.

That is a big reform in order to provide better targeted, better high quality social services, not only for children, but also for people with disabilities and for elderly people, people and families, that are in risks.

We are now working on the planning of the services because in 2022 we are supposed to have a new map of social services.

We are also working on improving the conditions of people who work in the social sphere with special regulation of how we pay the people in the services. And for example, for next year, we have almost 20 percent increase in the budget for social services that would go to municipalities.

People with disabilities who have been also in the core of our policies during the last several years, nearly 650 000 adults with permanent disabilities receive financial support under the new Law on people with disabilities. In addition to financial support, people with disabilities are provided with funding for personal assistance, employment measures and many other incentives for their full inclusion.

The government has increased by 4 times the funds for policies on people with disabilities, where only for the last 2 years they have been doubled. In 2020, the funds already exceeded - 921 million compared to 245 million almost 10 years ago.

Measures are also implemented towards the deinstitutionalization of care for people with disabilities and elderly people. We are now in implementation of the long term care with a strategy, with an action plan by the period of 2018-2021. It is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the main focus of this plan is to have a smooth transition from institutional care to home based services, especially for elderly people and also to community services.

One of the big reforms is the establishing of new daycare centers for people with disabilities and their families. We have managed to establish 10 new centers for social rehabilitation and integration for persons with mental disorders and for persons with mental retardation. We have also supported local authorities to provide integrated health and social mobile services for people with disabilities and elderly people.

Gender equality is also one of the core Bulgarian legislations that have been implemented in the last several years. We have numerous examples of Bulgarian female officials holding high ranked posts in Bulgarian politics, Council of Ministers, Parliament, also private companies.

Reconciliation of work and private life has an impact on the employment of women and their position in the labour market, income and economic independence.

Bulgaria is one of the countries with the longest in Europe maternity leave, but also we are introducing different incentives in order to support working women in their everyday life with taking care of families and career development.

We have introduced special measures for parents in employment, where we provide from the Labor offices someone to take care of the children.

We are supporting companies for better corporate responsibilities and we have established a different pathways how we acknowledge social innovation and social entrepreneurship within the policies of the government.

**Madam President,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Enhancing the welfare of population whilst following human rights based approach has been and will continue to be of key importance in the development and implementation of our social policies.

I will pursue to provide support to those most in need and to act towards ensuring decent working and living conditions for all, as well as to foster an enabling environment for sustainable development.

**Thank you, Madam President.**