
SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION - SCIENCE AND/OR PRACTICE

Thematic Collection of Papers

**SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION - SCIENCE
AND/OR PRACTICE**

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FOSTER FAMILIES AS A FORM OF NON-INSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Summary

With the Social Protection Law, Republic of Macedonia provides help for the children without parents and parental care, on a population-wide basis or only for the children with special educational needs, through one of the forms of non-institutional protection, fostering in an another family. With reference to children with special educational needs, we wouldn't be able to base the study only on their individual monitoring, and a thorough analysis of the information obtained from the foster families and the social work centers is inevitable.

KEY WORDS: *non-institutional (out-of-authority) protection, children with special educational needs, foster families.*

Introduction

Most children grow up in their biological family where their life needs are fulfilled and where they are provided with permanent emotional safety – love and belongingness. However, a certain number of

children are deprived of immediate parental care – due to a parents loss, or their inability to take care for them caused by illness or any other reason, leaving or inappropriate performance of their parental duties. The state takes over the care for these children and it has an obligation to provide social, psychological or any other kind of support to the biological families in order to overcome the crisis situations. In such cases, the state provides services regarding out of home accommodation, such as adoption, foster families and institutional protection.

Taking into consideration its functions, the family is one of the most complex groups satisfying various human and social needs. The family exists as well as a unity of bio-social, socio-cultural and psycho-social factors. This statement deeply expresses the essence of the necessity of the family in the past and in particular in the present and the future. The emphasis is placed on the family as a social community and not solely a biological one. However it is pointed out that, besides the biological aspect based on the instinct for offspring birth, the family is still a social group.

That is the exact reason why the society should take care all children to grow up in a warm emotional environment, where besides food and clothes they will receive care, upbringing and education. Republic of Macedonia has an experience of over 30 years within the sphere of children placement in foster families, and as far as children with special educational needs are concerned, the experience has been particularly intensified after 2000, when a new period begins regarding the protection, upbringing and education of children with special educational needs, a period of deinstitutionalization and integration of these children. Children with intellectual disability were also included, and especially children with heavy mental retardation, and particularly the children placed in the Special institution in Demir Kapija, an institution for treatment of children and adults with heavy and severe mental retardation. The process of deinstitutionalization comprises activities related to the preparation of the users placed in institutions for the return in their biological families, or placement in some other form of noninstitutional protection (foster family, home family or a small group home). On one side, through the development of this protection forms at the local level, the number of users placed in institutions will be decreased and on the other

hand the need for new institutions will be prevented. Deinstitutionalization is a process which should enable every child to be in its family, in its local community and to have the right to live in an environment which will accept him, support him and limit him the least.

In accordance with the Law on Social Protection of Republic of Macedonia, the right to a placement in a foster family can be enjoyed by persons with severe obstacles in their mental development and persons with a permanent physical disability which require permanent fostering and care. The law provides fostering of children without parents and parental care, as well as persons which do not have living conditions in their own families or for any other reason need a placement in a foster family. Due to the fact that the second category may include all other types and levels of disability, which are also part of our area of interest, we decided to include in this research the children with other types and levels of disability, i.e. the children with mild intellectual disability as well as children with hearing and visual impairment, without the chronically ill children.

The purpose of the research is:

- To determine the number of foster families for children with special educational needs on the territory of Republic of Macedonia;
- To examine the reasons due to which the foster families have decided to foster children in their families;
- To explore the attitude of the foster families towards the application on non-institutional form of protection of children with special educational needs;
- To explore the attitudes and the opinions of the social work centres regarding foster families as a form of non-institutional protection;
- To define the characteristics of the foster families (family structure, socio-economic status, educational level, age, place of residence, motivation for fostering);
- To determine the number of children with special educational needs fostered in other families;
- To define the characteristics of the children with special educational needs placed in foster families (reason for placement, where they are brought from, age and disability type, health condition, sex, length of the placement duration);

- To identify the problems related to fostering children with special educational needs;
- To identify whether an additional education of the potential fosterers and foster families is required.

The sample is composed of 3 groups of examinees:

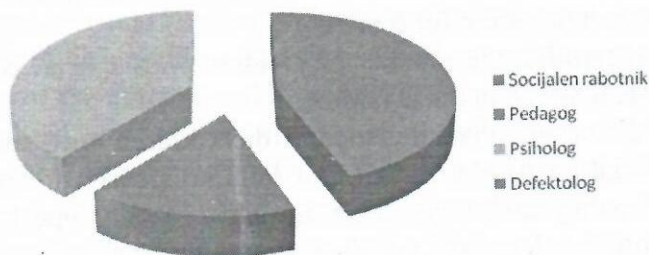
- Representatives from the social work centres within the municipalities with children included in the fostering process in another family;
- Foster families, i.e. fosterers and
- Children with special educational needs placed in foster families

The sample is composed of team representatives directly involved with the placement in foster families from the social work centres in Kocani, Kriva Palanka, Skopje, Prilep, Krusevo, Makedonski Brod, Ohrid and Veles, as well as the foster families from these municipalities. These are the eight municipalities with tradition in placing children in foster families from their own municipalities, but also from all the other municipalities in republic of Macedonia.

18 experts with different professional profiles from the above-mentioned centres for social work have been interviewed (social workers, pedagogues and psychologists). Also 71 fosterers were interviewed which provided us with information about 107 children with special educational needs placed in these foster families.

A total of 18 experts from the social work centres were interviewed from these municipalities. The pie chart 1 presents their expert profiles.

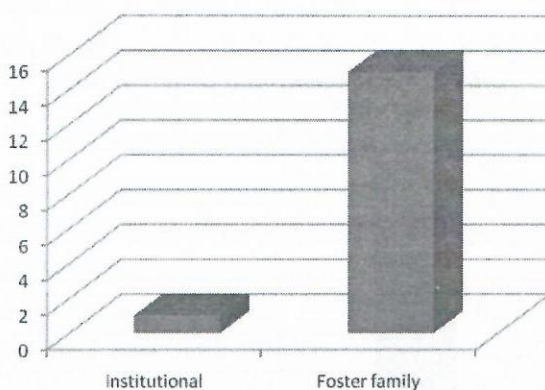
Graph 1. *Profile of experts included in the research*



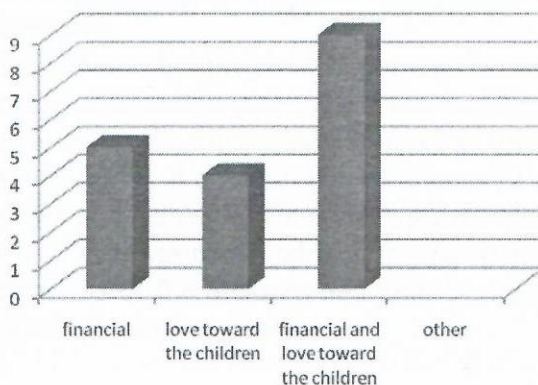
We discovered interesting data that no social work centre included in the research has a special educators and rehabilitators in its team dedicated to placement of children with special educational need, and only one centre has employed 2 special educators and rehabilitators working within the field of living with support.

We asked from the expert profiles to state their attitude towards the support regarding the placement in another family, the motivation for fostering. The approval rate for the form of placement in another family is shown in Graph 2.

Graph 2. *The most appropriate form of protection in case of absence of the biological family*



Graph 3. *Fostering motivation*



The questionnaires offered three possible answers to the question regarding the motivation to foster a child with special educational needs, financial/love for children/other, but 9 examinees could not decide and pointed out that the financial moment and the love towards children are inseparable as a motivation for fostering children and they asked their answer to be noted as such (Graph 3). The majority of the interviewees declared that there are very significant changes in the development of the children after their placement in foster families (Graph 4), and it is a direct consequence of the warm emotional climate and the ability of the fosterers to pay more attention to the child in comparison with the institutional fostering.

Graph 4. *Developmental changes of the child after its placement in a foster family*

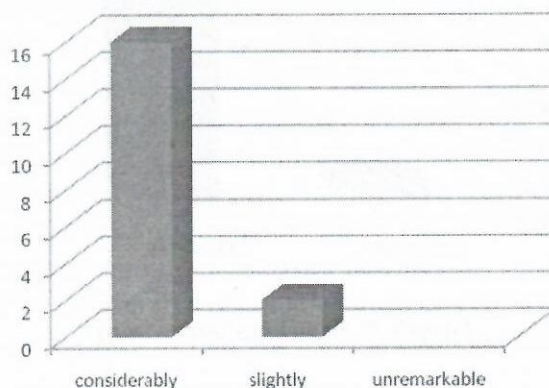


Table 1. *Number of children placed in foster families which accommodate children with special needs.*

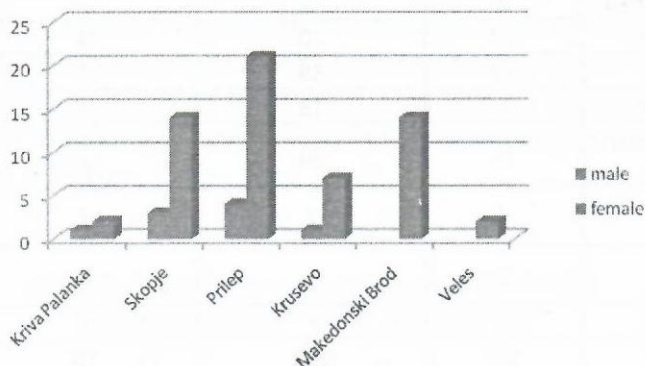
Municipality	Number of foster families	Number of children with special educational needs	Number of healthy children placed in the same families.	Total
Kriva Palanka	3	7	/	7
Skopje	17	20	4	24
Prilep	27	39	4	43
Krusevo	7	13	/	13
Makedonski Brod	14	24	2	26
Ohrid	/	/	/	/
Veles	2	4	/	4
Kocani	/	/	/	/
Total	68	103	10	117

During the research the social work centers from Kocani and Ohrid informed us that they do not have placed children with special educational needs within their municipalities, i.e., they have developed the form for placing children in foster families, but for children without parents and parental care and children with educational-social problems. One child from Kocani is placed in Prilep, two children with special educational needs from Ohrid are placed in a foster family in the village of Krivogastani. We visited all these children and the data for them are obtained from the social work centers within the municipalities of their placement.

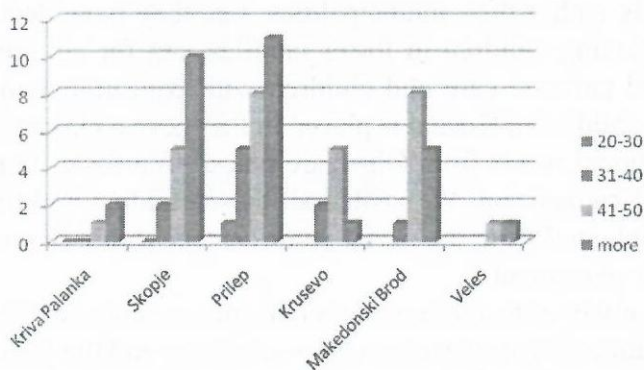
The number of foster families is not a permanent one; it is the number at the time of visit of each social work center and the foster families in their municipality. At the moment the number is probably changed, but insignificantly. During the research period some of the centers had potential fosterers, and others had a fostering procedure in progress. Also, a reverse situation was observed with few families, i.e. there were intensive preparations of the children and their biological parents for their returning in the biological families.

The majority of the fosterers in Republic of Macedonia are women, probably due to the traditional view of our people that the children are the concern and obligation of the woman (Graph 5).

Graph 5. Sex of the fosterer



Graph 6. Age of the fosterer

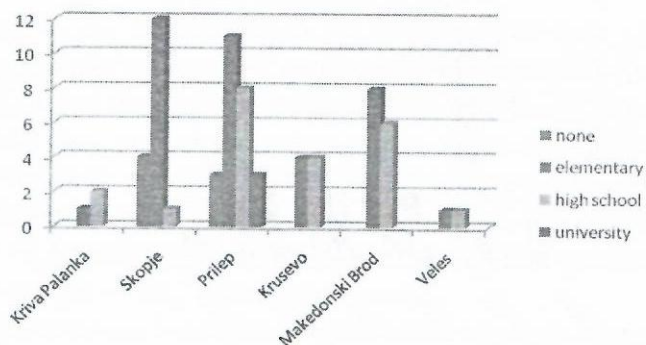


The greater the age of the fosterer, the easier they decide to foster children with special educational needs, as represented in graph 6. That is the current situation on the field, but some of the fosterers accept children in their homes for more than 15 years (Graph 9).

There are a certain number of fosterers without completed primary education which is one of the criteria to be fulfilled in order to obtain a

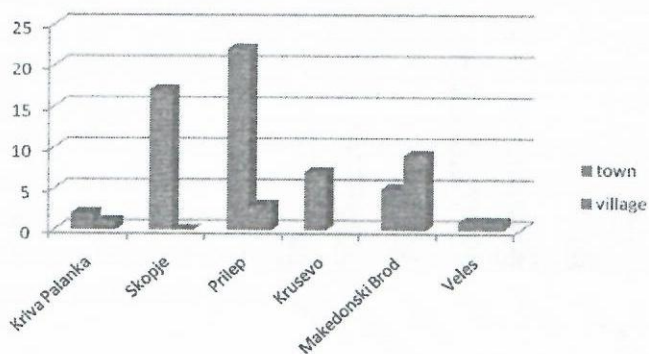
foster family status according to the Rulebook for foster family selection criteria and at the moment in these families a change of the fosterer is in progress. In such families the husband will be registered as the fosterer (Graph 7).

Graph 7. Educational level of the fosterer



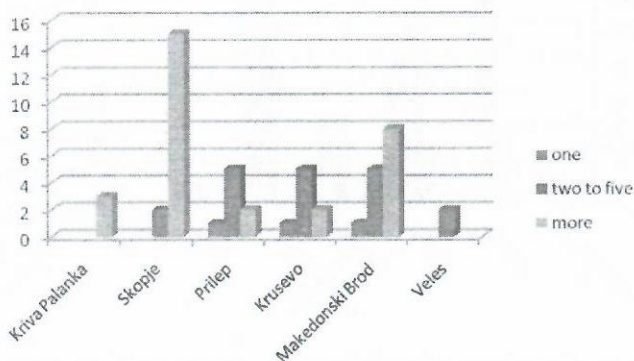
As far as the place of residence is concerned, in Kriva Palanka, Skopje, Prilep, Krusevo and Veles, the majority of fosterers live in urban areas. Only in the municipality of Makedonski Brod the fosterer network is more developed in the countryside, i.e. the villages of Manastirec and Lag have a fostering tradition.

Graph 8. Place of residence of the fosterer



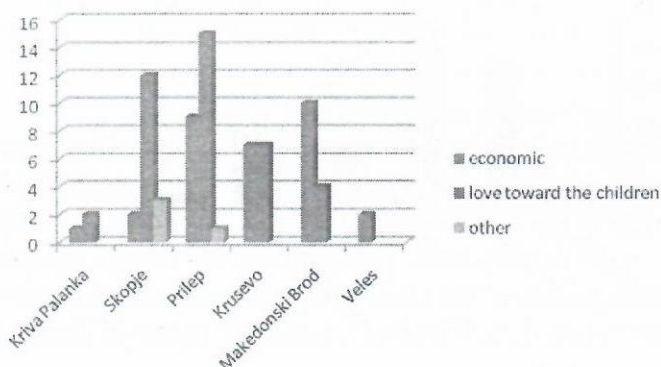
Most often the foster families are complete families, i.e. the husband and the wife live together with their children or they have children with their own families. The structure of a traditional Macedonian family is also present here. In case of an incomplete family, it is a case of a woman fosterer.

Graph 9. Years of fostering



As far as the fostering motivation is concerned, the fosterers had the possibility to choose between the financial, love toward children and other motivation (Graph 10). Under other motivation, the religious motivation and the need for company after staying alone regardless the reason were mentioned.

Graph 10. Fostering motivation



Due to the need to select one of the answers offered, the largest number of fosterers chose the economic motivation as the primary fostering motivation which is basic regarding the decision of fostering, but also here, as with the expert profiles from the social work centers we should emphasize that the economic motivation and the love toward children are inseparable when making the decision regarding fostering.

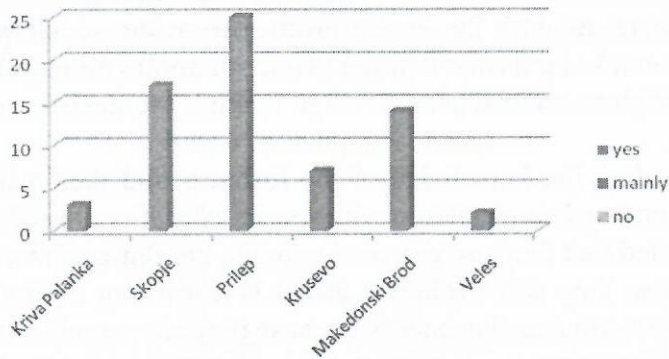
Regarding the knowledge of the fosterers and their readiness to take care and up bring children with special educational needs, the fosterers replied that they are prepared enough, but during the nonofficial conversation they still explained that it is a learning through experience and situations and primarily because they are parents to their own children. They attend a fosterer training, but this is a unified training regardless of the fact that these are not healthy children without parents, but children with special educational needs.

The greatest number of families has low economic status. The only source of income in the majority of families is fostering. Families living in the countryside cultivate certain cultures, but only for their own needs, and it represents a relief for the family budget. A small number of fosterers, in particular in the Skopje region are involved in trading activities, but due to the fact it is not a registered activity, the fosterers insisted not to have recorded additional revenues, which are in any case very low. In cases with recorded certain additional revenues, they come from the pension of the fosterer or the employment of some of the children.

In most cases the fosterers have provided a bedroom for the fostered children, but they all mention that they share the entire living space with the fostered children, and frequently the children cannot be left alone in the night.

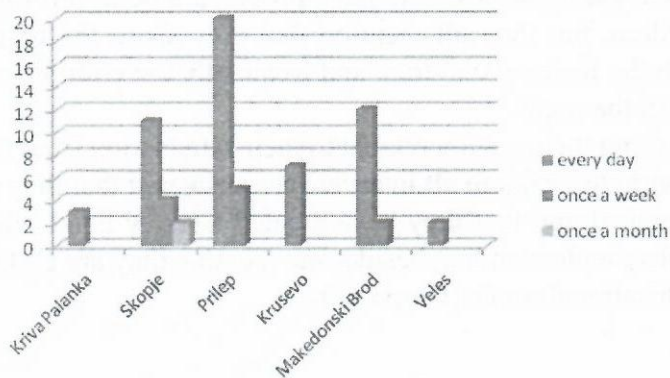
Regarding the question related to their satisfaction from their relationship with the children all interviewees answered that they are completely satisfied and that they have created a really good relationship and complete understanding besides the fact that they are children with special educational needs (Graph 11).

Graph 11. Satisfaction level regarding the relationship with the children

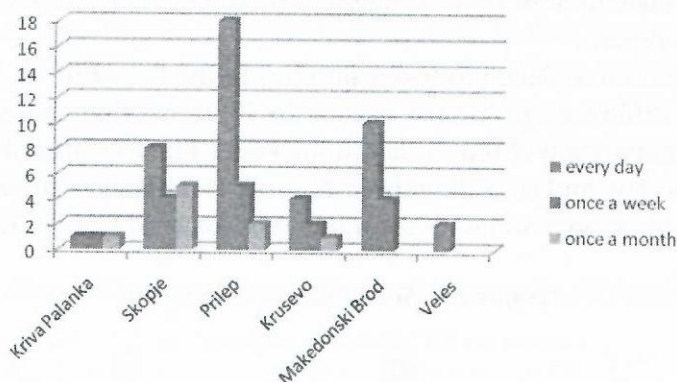


As far as the social status of the foster families is concerned, unlike their economic status it is high. The families receive visits in their homes but also often, together with the foster children visit their relatives, friends and neighbors. Only in cases with children with combined obstacles in their development, particularly with children with severe intellectual disability and heavy physical invalidity, the fosterers point out that besides their wish, they are not able to visit friends or go for a walk outside their courtyard. The social status is confirmed by Graphs 12, 13 and 14.

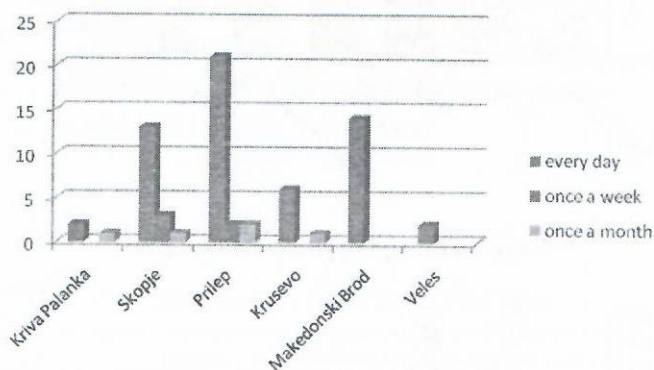
Graph 12. How often they visit relatives and friends



Graph 13. *How often they have guests in their homes*



Graph 14. *How often they go for a walk, excursions or any cultural events*

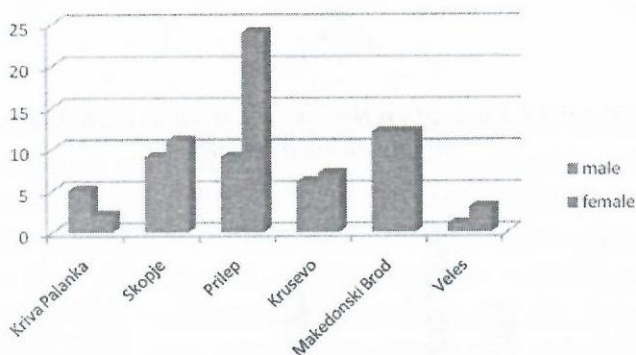


The majority of children are placed in foster families from institutions and most frequently from the Infants and Small Children Home in Bitola and the Special Institute from Demir Kapija through the project of deinstitutionalization. The fosterers themselves, but also the experts from the social work centers emphasize that there is a significant improvement with the children after leaving the institutions and their life in family conditions. The improvement is related to the emotional, social as well as their physical development. In several occasions we observed a drastic difference between the findings and the opinions and the actual condition of the children. This is especially

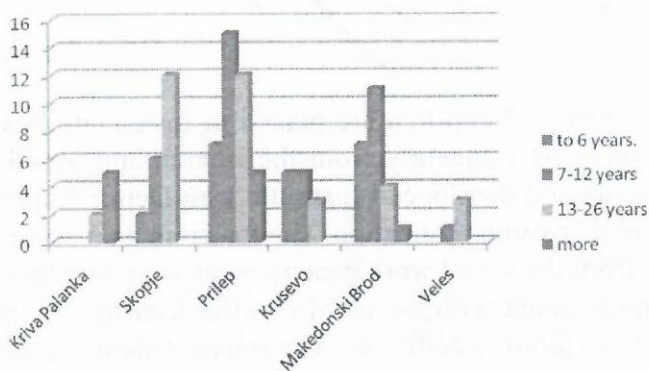
present with the children of younger age who still are not reexamined with reference to their specific needs in their physical and psychological development.

The children placed in foster families in the Republic of Macedonia are of different age (from 1 year to 26 years, but there are some exceptions and certain children stay in the foster families after the age of 26) (Graph 16), and regarding the sex ratio, the number of fostered girls is greater in comparison with the number of fostered boys (Graph 15).

Graph 15. Sex of fostered children



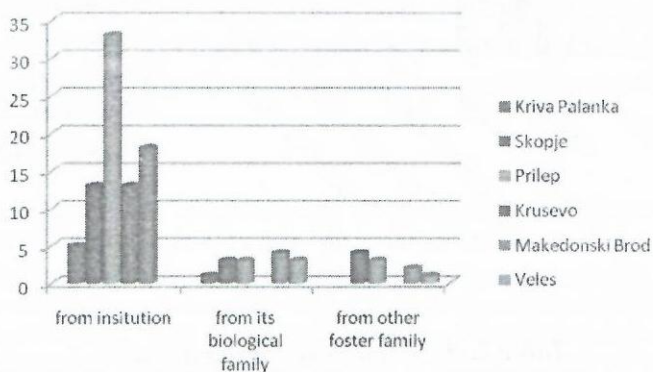
Graph 16. Age of fostered children



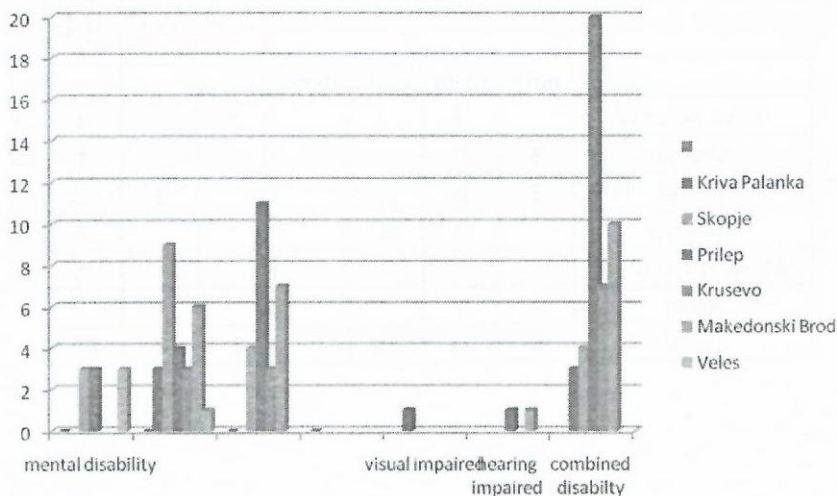
The majority of children with special educational needs placed in foster families undergo a certain kind of treatment, i.e. in a day center

or a special type of upbringing and education within our educational system. The children who depending upon their impairment, are placed in the Visually Impaired Children and Youth Rehabilitation Institute "Dimitar Vlahov" in Skopje, the Hearing Impairment Children and Youth Rehabilitation Institute "Koco Racin" in Bitola and Children and Youth Rehabilitation Institute "Topansko Pole" in Skopje are categorized within the group of children included in a treatment in special primary schools.

Graph 17. *Where are the foster children brought from?*



Graph 18. *Type and level of impairment*



With reference to the type and level of impairment of the children there is a great variety. The type and the level of impairment are shown in Graph 19 and Table 2.

Graph 19. *Type of treatment the children are undergoing at the moment*

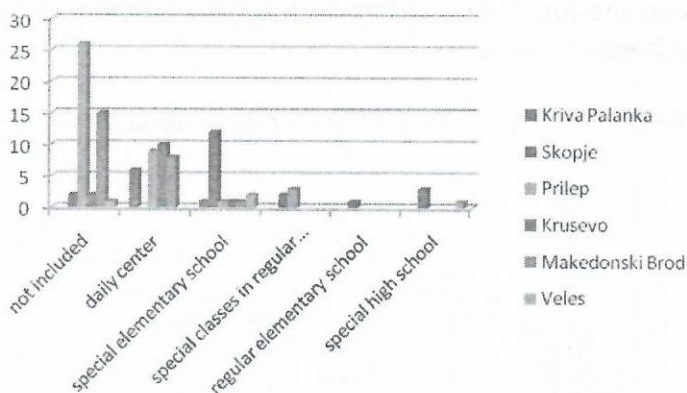


Table 2. *Type and level of impairment*

CITIES	mental disability				visually impaired	hearing impaired	combined disability
	easy	slight	hard	deep			
Kriva Palanka		3			1		3
Skopje	3	9	4				4
Prilep	3	4	11			1	20
Krusevo		3	3				7
Makedonski Brod		6	7			1	10
Veles	3	1					
TOTAL	9	26	25		1	2	44

Conclusion

The values, the attitudes and the emotional climate in the family where the child lives, as well as the behavior of the parents are of utmost importance with regards to the creation of the personality of the child. The state has an obligation to provide the children with special educational needs with the best possible living conditions. Non-institutional protection is accepted and rated as a better and more suitable alternative by the experts in the social work centers and the fosterers of children with special educational needs. In addition to taking care of the children the state should also provide their inclusion in an appropriate treatment and inclusion in the educational system, in order to improve the quality of life of the persons faced with a certain type of invalidity.

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