Education Minister Misir Mardanov gave his presentation on the theme of “Five-year report on the execution of the 2006-2015 State programme for the placement of children living in State institutions in families (deinstitutionalization) and alternative care, and future obligations.”

Noting the importance attached to education as one of the key directions for the sustainable development strategies in Azerbaijan, as well as in the world, the Minister said that according to the concept of human development every child should be provided with the favourable economic, social and cultural environment to develop its personnel capability and potential. The country has adopted 16 development and state programmes to improve the quality of the education and welfare of children. According to the Minister, from this viewpoint, ‘The 2006-2015 State programme for the placement of children living in State institutions in families (deinstitutionalization) and alternative care’ approved by the Executive Order of President Ilham Aliyev in 2006 has a special meaning.

Noting the Ministry of Education has closely collaborated with the ministries of Health, Finance, Justice, Internal Affairs, and Labour and Social Protection of Population, as well as with the State Committee for Family, Women and Children and local executive authorities on the execution of the State Programme, Mr. Mardanov said that various international and non-governmental organizations have contributed to this work as well. According to him, prior to the adoption of State Programme, based on the “Development of orphanages and boarding schools Programme” developed through the personal initiative of the First Lady of Azerbaijan, President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO and ISESCO, MP Mehriban Aliyeva 38 boarding schools and orphanages for disabled children of the country were refurbished and provided with the latest equipments over the last 5 years.

Misir Mardanov gave detailed information on measures implemented within the execution of the State Programme over the last 5 years, future obligations, and praised the transformation of boarding schools into the public schools as a high success. Touching upon issues of the placement of children living in state institutions in families, their social protection and protection of their rights, the Minister stressed the importance of Department for deinstitutionalization and children protection established at the Ministry of Education based on the order of the Cabinet of Ministries of 13 January 2010. He also spoke about the ongoing large-scale projects to ensure the rights of children to live in families and their protection, transfer of children deprived of parental care to the biological family in the pilot areas, measures to support families and establish alternative services within the State Programme after the creation of the Department.

According to the general plan for transformation of the State child institutions, there were established 4 daily cares and rehabilitation – development centres, which were provided with the developing training manuals, rehabilitation equipments and minibuses to transport children. Mr. Mardanov noted that after the establishment of these centres 298 children were avoided from being placed in the orphanages, and stressed that the financial support for foster carers is one of the major problems needed to be solved within the implementation of deinstitutionalization.

The Minister drew attention to the systemic preventive measures implemented among families with children at risk to prevent the increase in the number of children living in the orphanages and noted the existence of close collaboration with the ministries of Health, Finance, Justice, Internal Affairs, and Labour and Social Protection of Population, as well as with the State Committee for Family, Women and Children, city and district executive authorities. According to him, over the past years 13 children aged 12-17 years, who were included in the centralised list, were adopted, and the issue for the adoption of 12 children are being considered in the district courts.

Noting, overall, 465 children were avoided from being placed in the orphanages, 38 street children were involved in the education and placed in the state child institutions to ensure their safety, the Minister said that there are 9 776 children studying at 44 state child institutions in 2011/2012 academic year. According to him, 3750 children are living in these institutions, 6 026 children just studying and using the daily services of the institution, but living with their family. Stressing that in recent years, the number of children studied at boarding schools and child-care centers has fallen every year, the Minister said that, their number amounted to 14 389 in 2008, 10 055 in 2009, 9 874 in 2010 and 9 776 children in 2011.

Talking about children graduated from the boarding schools and child institutions operating under the Ministry of Education, Mr. Mardanov noted measures implemented in the cooperation with UNICEF to provide inclusive education for disabled children at all stages of their studies along with other children. He stressed the importance of informing the public about deinstitutionalization and praised the special programmes and discussions periodically organized on TV.

Noting the European social network is highly praising ongoing reforms in the country on the de-institutionalization and protection of children, the Minister said that the English version of documentary film on works done in the fields of child protection were prepared by the support of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and placed on the website of European social network. In conclusion, the Minister thanked UNICEF and other relevant organizations for their support for reforms implemented in Azerbaijan to protect children.

Speaking at the conference UNICEF representative in Azerbaijan Mark Hereward, Spouse of the Prime Minister of Turkish Republic Northern Cyprus Gulin Kucuk, MP Ganira Pashayeva, international expert of UNICEF Vesna Bosnjak, Ankara Provincial Social Services Director Lale Ocal, Head of the Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Turkish Republic Northern Cyprus Aydan Baskurt, Senior consultant of Department for Adoption and Guardianship of the Social Service Agency of Georgia Lia Mamatsashvili expressed their opinions on deinstitutionalization process and organization of child social services. Moreover, in their speech they have praised the measures implemented in this field in Azerbaijan.