



Projekat finansira Evropska unija



Република Србија
Министарство рада и
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A child's place is within the family

“Transforming Residential Institutions for Children and Developing Sustainable Alternatives” is an initiative implemented by UNICEF in partnership with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and funded by the European Union (2008 – 2010).

The overall aim of this project is to ensure full capacity of the child care system in responding to the needs and rights of the most vulnerable children in Serbia. In line with the Social Welfare Development Strategy and the National Plan of Action for Children, the project assists key stakeholders in:

- transforming residential institutions into child-centered community based services which respond to local needs,
- strengthening and expanding the existing foster care system and developing urgent and specialized fostering,
- building professional capacities and accountabilities of the transformed and decentralized system of child care.

The project addresses the following critical **areas of child care reform**:

- Policy development and support to legislative reforms so as to ensure the fulfillment and respect of the rights of the child without parental care or with special needs,
- Capacity building and support to increasing the quality of care – through enhancing child-centered programs, increasing professional competencies, accountability and independent monitoring,
- Up-grading and development of family and child support services – including foster care, day care services and home care assistance.

Expected results

- Residential institutions for children undergo transformation so that:
 - The number of children in institutions is reduced,
 - Institutional and professional capacities are transformed into child and family support services,
 - Children (still) remaining in institutions receive high quality care, while getting prepared for social (re)integration.
- The foster care system is advanced so that:
 - The number of children in foster families is increased,
 - Specialized and urgent foster care standards, procedures and services are developed,
 - Professional staff competencies are upgraded,
 - Foster families are prepared for taking care of children with disability.
- The support system for families and children with disability is improved, so that:
 - Maternity hospitals incorporate new procedures for preventing the separation of new-born children from their families,
 - Outreach support services are introduced and professional capacities built.
- Professional accountability is upgraded, so that:
 - New legal instruments are adopted to prevent and sanction child rights violations,
 - Independent monitoring structures are put in place.
- The level of awareness, on the rights of vulnerable children to equal opportunities and social integration, is increased.



A child's place is within the family

Why is this project needed?

Every child has the right to grow up in a family environment. The family plays an essential role in nurturing and supporting the child in development of her full potential. The State is accountable to provide support to the family through the systems of education, health, justice, social assistance and protection.

When the family or the child are faced with difficulties, the support of the State gains in importance. If timely and adequate support is not provided, the child may be separated from the family and placed in a residential care institution, which is the least stimulative environment for child development.

Even though our culture highly values the importance of the family, for decades, the focus was on creating and maintaining a system which relies heavily on the provision of residential care.

In Serbia, there are 12 residential institutions and 1 centre (with 5 residential care units) for children without parental care, 5 residential institutions for children and youth with disabilities and 3 educational institutions for children with behavioural difficulties.

Even though the placement of a child in residential care is treated as a temporary measure, only 7% of children without parental care and 3% of children with disability are placed in institutions for a period of less than 6 months. Most of them stay for many years and some even spend the rest of their lives in institutions.

Only 17% of children in residential care institutions maintain regular contact with their families.

Foster care is traditionally present in Serbia, however, more recognition and systemic support is required for this care option to become the preferred measure in situations where the biological family is not able to care for the child.

During 2007, according to data from residential institutions, around 150 children were transferred from institutions to foster families. Only 3 of these children were children with disability.

The ongoing reforms of the social protection system in Serbia are directed at overcoming these barriers and providing support to the most vulnerable groups of children and their families. As a result, recent years have been marked by a trend in the reduction of the number of children without parental care in institutions, the rise in the number of children placed in foster families and the introduction of measures aimed at stimulating the development of services for families in their local communities. This is a complex process, which can be demonstrated with the following facts:

There are around 2.000 children and youth in residential institutions in Serbia, out of which 1.200 are children with disabilities.

Nearly 4.000 children are cared for by foster families. Even though this number is constantly on the rise, specialized and urgent fostering has not yet been developed.

The largest proportion of municipal budgets for social protection is spent on one-off financial support.

Only 60 children without parental care and around 600 children with disabilities had access to locally funded day care services in 2007.

Advancing the system of protection and support for children and families requires simultaneous short-term and long-term measures and coordinated action of central and local actors. While working on creating the conditions for the return of children to biological and foster families, we should keep in mind that quality standards, need to be developed and abided to. At the same time, a continuum of community services, supporting children and families (both foster-care and biological) need to be developed – not only for children returning from institutions, but also for those that are at risk of being placed in residential care.