



**OPENING DOORS
FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN**

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.

SERBIA

2018 COUNTRY FACT SHEET

There is no established public strategy focusing on the transformation from institutional to family- and community-based care in Serbia. The reforms in child welfare and child protection are not happening fast enough and the national funding for deinstitutionalisation (DI) reform is neither sufficient nor effective. The current financial system needs reforming because funding is based on the intervention logic of the available services and not on the individual needs of a child. Expenditures for residential and family care are the largest part of a total consolidated budget for social care services in Serbia^{1,2}. The system also lacks quality standards for all services recognized by the Law on Social Protection. The government's current priority is to create smaller residential settings for children in care by transforming larger institutions into small group homes (SGHs).

It is a worrying fact that the new draft Law on Social Protection, introduced in July 2018, proposes that settings for children and young people should accommodate up to 25 users. Such provisions are unacceptable, primarily because of the high probability for additional admissions to residential institutions.

The total number of children who live in alternative care in Serbia is 5,986, out of whom 666 are living in residential care, while 5,320 are placed in foster care. The number of children living in disadvantaged families in Serbia has increased by 27% compared to 2011 and is now totaling to more than 162,000 children (13% of children's population in Serbia)³. In 2017, there were 9,119 children under the guardianship in Serbia.

In 2015, 818 children lived in institutional care in Serbia, of whom almost 80% were children with disabilities⁴. Children with disabilities grow up in overcrowded institutions where prescribed accommodation capacity of 50 children is often exceeded. In many instances, children are institutionalised in the same facilities as adults. Only 30% of these children are attending education. There is a significant number of children with disabilities who remain in the long-term institutional care.

¹ This amounted to approximately 5.8 billion dinars (about 0.14% of GDP) in 2015

² Data from the survey "Mapping of social services in the mandate of local governments", Center for Social Policy, 2016

³ <http://zadecu.org/en/contribution-serbia-2019-progress-report/>

⁴ This number refers to the total number of children (aged 0-18 years) who have been in total of institutions for children and young people in 2015. There was 77% number of children with disabilities in total of institutions for children and youth. Report on the children in residential care in 2015, ISP, 2016

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU



TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE ALLOCATION OF EU FUNDS FOR DEINSTITUTIONALISATION REFORMS AND FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAMMES IN SERBIA

Despite the ban on placing children under three years of age in institutional care, their institutionalisation continues. In 2017, 36 children under the age of three were placed in institutional care on the justification that they need constant medical attention.

In Serbia, there are currently 5 small group homes in Niš, Negotin, Aleksinac, Banja Koviljaca and Belgrade for children with less severe disabilities. The accommodation capacity limit is 12 children per setting. The equipment in these SGHs is still underdeveloped and children need to visit institutional care settings to receive adequate medical treatment.

Last year, 698 families with 1,398 children accessed the family outreach service for families with children with disabilities; the family outreach service for families in crisis was accessed by 490 families (including 800 adults and 1,190 children)⁵ in 2017. After its piloting phase, the service has stopped

due to the lack of finances. The service was only accessible in four cities in Serbia (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Kragujevac and Niš) and not available for the rest of the country where approximately 70% of the population lives. The project “Family associate” can be seen as an example of a positive community-based practice, but due to the low outreach and unsustainability, it cannot be seen as an indicator of general improvement in the provision of this type of services in Serbia. There is an utmost need for prevention services to support families in crisis situations.

There are semi-open institutions in Niš and Belgrade for children with behavioural difficulties between the age of 15 to 18. These facilities also accommodate refugee and migrant children. However, these institutions have only around 60 places and other unaccompanied children stay in temporary shelters known as “refugee aid centers” together with unrelated adults or open reception centers. Out of the 2,570 school-age children living in reception and accommodation centres, only 130 were attending formal education and barely 23% of all children were in some form of education.⁶ Few collaborative projects were launched to tackle this issue, including the development of enrolment and support plans in eight preschools and two primary schools in Belgrade and Lajkovac with the aim to include refugee and migrant children in formal education next year.

Reintegration of children and young people leaving institutional and alternative care is insufficient due to the lack of adequate housing, legal, health or social services, and educational and vocational training opportunities⁷.

DI reform in Serbia have been funded by various donors. “EU Support to Social Welfare in Serbia”, funded under IPA 2013 and implemented by NIRAS Consortium in 2017- 2019, has awarded 30 grants to local communities throughout Serbia and held a number of consultative events. It is considered as a relevant contribution to the new Social Welfare Strategy for Serbia. Another positive development towards the DI reform in Serbia was establishment of two working groups on intensive family support services and on the transformation of institutions by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs in cooperation with civil society, including MDRI, the Opening Doors campaign coordinator in Serbia. The outcomes include development of a Rulebook on good parenting and provision of support services to families at risk.

KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT



TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE THAT THERE ARE SUFFICIENT INVESTMENTS AND POLICIES TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES TO SUPPORT FAMILIES AT RISK, FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES OR ROMA FAMILIES TO PREVENT THEIR SEPARATION. ACCESSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF SERVICES IN ALL MUNICIPALITIES MUST BE ALSO SECURED.

⁵ Report on implementing the Action Plan, Ministry of Justice, August 2017, Chapter 23

⁶ [Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe](#), UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM, 2017

⁷ [Concluding observations on the combined 2nd and 3rd periodic reports of Serbia](#), Committee on the Rights of the Child



OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN SERBIA

The Network of Organizations for Children of Serbia (MODS) advocates for the rights of the child in the country. MODS gathers 75 CSOs and focuses in particular on child poverty reduction, available high-quality formal and informal education and culture, affordable and quality health protection and healthy environment for children to grow up in and be protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence. MODS also campaigns for adequate and transparent public spending, and for the establishment and further development of inclusive societies. To find out more visit www.zadecu.org/en/

NATIONAL PARTNERS

In Serbia, the campaign is supported by: MDRI-S, VelikiMali, IDEAS, Commissioner for Protection of Equality

The Opening Doors for Europe's Children campaign supports national efforts to develop child protection systems that strengthen families and ensure high-quality family and community-based alternative care for children, by leveraging EU funding and policy and building capacity in civil society.

It is a partnership between 5 international organisations and civil society across 16 European countries. For more information go to www.openingdoors.eu