

Social services for the youth at risk in the Western Balkans: a collection of policy briefs



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Podgorica, October 2022

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ALBANIA

Initiative for Social Change (ARIS)

POLICY PAPER

Availability of support services for the
youth at risk in Albania

Anduela Valle

1. Overview of the current situation regarding support services for the youth at risk with whom partner organizations are working

In terms of social and economic empowerment of the youth at risk, support services have been an impetus for their social inclusion, as one of the most important aspects of the integration of this target group in the social and economic life of the country.

The challenges created by natural and civil emergencies during the last three years in Albania, such as the 2019 earthquake and the global Covid-19 pandemic, increase the need for support services for the youth at risk.

Youth groups that are most vulnerable to the phenomenon of social exclusion, such as the youth belonging to Roma and Egyptian communities, the youth coming from informal settlements, at risk of exploitation, trafficking, and illegal migration, or target groups in conflict with the law, present increasing problems. Therefore, a need to develop multi-disciplinary services emerged over the years, addressing the aforementioned phenomena, and bringing a systemic approach to the provision of more sustainable community-based services. This approach will favour and influence the youth empowerment in addressing their needs, reducing phenomena related to exploitation, abuse, trafficking, and will promote the values of active citizenship as such.

During these years of transition, the Albanian government has made efforts to provide support and services to the youth in the country. The opportunities offered are mainly related to the programs of professional training and economic empowerment of youth. But the number of youth centres and resource centres remains very limited and focused in the bigger municipalities. Existing youth centres are mostly run by the CSOs and depend on their project funding.

The model of support services offered by the sector of non-profit organizations is one of those that have proven to be efficient in the context of the integration of youth at risk. Even though the primary duty of state institutions is to offer integration services to this target group, it turns out that there are very few services of this category offered at the national level.

The services provided mainly by the state institutions and partner organizations with NISMA in Albania, defined in the new reform for social care services in the country, are mainly divided into the following categories:

- a) pre-social services;
- b) services in community centres, including development centres;
- c) services in residential centres, including shelters;
- d) social services in an emergency situation;
- e) alternative care services for children without parental care;
- f) specialized services;
- g) telephone or online counselling service.

The model of support services, which aims to empower young people, offers a proactive approach to social services, which focuses on the prevention of exhausting phenomena for youth and the identification of their potential, channelling their abilities to confront the problems and provide solutions at a comprehensive level for the most vulnerable communities.

Community-based social services are the most effective models offered by the sector of non-profit organizations in Albania in recent years, to clearly identify the needs of the youth at-risk target groups and create opportunities to address them.

The systemic approach offered by this sector with regard to youth empowerment, emphasizes the role of the family as the nucleus for finding solutions, considers the role of the community in supporting the addressing of the needs, and specifies the impact of preventive and empowering services within the promotion of social and cultural integrity of youth.

2. Overview of the major reform processes focusing on inclusive support to youth at risk and other important aspects

During the last 10 years, the Albanian government has made efforts to improve the position of youth in the country. Meanwhile, during the period 2019–2020, it counts about 661,365 young men and women within the age group of 15–29, thus representing almost a quarter (23.2%) of the entire population (INSTAT, 2020). The main focus of these reforms has been in the direction of improving policies for providing quality and comprehensive education, youth employment and entrepreneurship, youth participation and representation in politics and decision-making, art, sport, and culture (public space for young people), support of youth organizations and initiatives, social issues, health and public services for youth.

This continuous effort has required the commitment of a number of institutions, both at the central and local levels, but we must also mention the civil society sector which has been playing an extraordinary role in these processes, including the provision of services to target groups of youth at risk.

Reform processes in this area are faced with numerous obstacles such as the lack of financial and human capacities, unstable political situation in the country, frequent migratory movements, lack of services and many factors related to demography, and lack of coverage with quality services for a great part of the population in the country.

Despite the challenges encountered, we have to mention serious commitments shown within the framework of reforms for comprehensive services for youth at risk, which are some of the most important cornerstones in the approach that our country pursues toward the integration of youth, and one of the main preconditions for the EU integration.

The National Youth Strategy (2007–2013) was the first document, drafted by the Albanian state, which highlighted and prioritized youth issues in the country. This document aimed at designing integrative youth strategies and policies at the national level, in order to address the problems faced by young people. In 2013, the new Albanian government (the political force that still governs the country today) placed a strong emphasis on youth by presenting a youth political platform to directly and specifically address youth-related issues.

This Strategy would be escalated in the drafting of concrete plans for youth, mainly involving the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth in 2014, which was tasked to collaborate closely with all line ministries to build an effective document that the youth in the country would benefit from. The mission of the document was to improve the quality of life of youth and strengthen their status, through the creation of more opportunities in education, employment, health, culture, and increase the full participation of youth in society and decision-making processes.

The National Action Plan for Youth (2015–2020) prioritized objectives aimed at the inclusiveness of youth, their empowerment for participation in democratic processes and the creation of coordinating mechanism at the national level. As some of the set objectives have not been realized yet, this document remains operative until they are fulfilled.

Despite the improvement of the legal infrastructure, the provision of empowering services for youth in our country still requires improvement in the focus of comprehensive interventions for youth at risk. The National Action Plan for Youth for the period 2015–2020 implied the creation of a basic document for the coordination and implementation of cross-sectoral policies for youth, starting with employment and education, health protection and social protection, culture, sports and volunteering, and especially increased participation of young people in democratic processes and political decision-making.

The main objectives of the National Action Plan for Youth are related to the following:

- (i) promotion and participation of youth in democratic decision-making processes;
- (ii) promotion of the employment of youth through effective labour market policies, improvement of the legal framework, support to start-up programs, expansion of the courses offered by Vocational Training Schools and creation of competitions that encourage innovative ideas;
- (iii) health, sports and environment hold preservation and protection of youth health through integrated health policies as strategic objective, accompanied by the gasification of sports culture;
- (iv) education of youth – this objective aims to improve curricula related to life skills, by enhancing and strengthening the chain of the educational system;
- (v) social protection – activities prescribed by this Plan aim at strengthening the links of the system, starting from capacities to community interactions;
- (vi) culture and volunteering – the purpose of this objective is to improve opportunities for youth to organize their free time within various fields of activities.

The National Social Protection Strategy 2015–2020 (SPS), has postponed the due date of its implementation until 2023. The Strategy consolidates monitoring and control of

the benefits system and facilitates application and decision-making processes. However, it has not elaborated and regulated the current social protection system, which continues to include three priority areas: alleviating poverty, improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities, and developing social care services. The SPS underlines the measures for vertical reforms in these priority areas, but the instruments, standards, and measures to provide integrated social protection, and in particular for youth at risk, are still missing.

The Law on Social Care Services in the Republic of Albania (No. 121/2016), offers an opportunity for policymakers at the central level and service providers at the local levels, both private and state, to create the possibility of providing sustainable services for the empowerment of young people. Besides the services which are provided by the state institutions, the non-profit and private sector can also be licensed and engaged in provision of these services to all categories of individuals in need, including young people, as one of the most vulnerable groups.

This Law is one of the main documents, which provides a solid form for the decentralization of social services provision. It obliges local government units to establish and provide services for young people.

The Law on Youth (No. 75/2019) – the object of this Law is to protect the rights of youth in a comprehensive way, to create the necessary conditions for the activation, participation, and support of young people, to define the functions and competences of institutions at the central and local levels, as well as to encourage cooperation with organizations that exercise activities in the field of youth. The purpose of this Law is to define activities, mechanisms, and authorities responsible for the protection and promotion of youth rights in the Republic of Albania and those of young Albanians in the diaspora, as well as the financing of youth activities, within the framework of youth rights under special protection from the state. This Law sets up structures at the central level, engaging the Ministry of Youth, the National Youth Council, while it also obliges the local government to set up Local Youth Councils, and seeks to engage youth in social organizations. In the meantime, it plans to empower youth organizations by allocating funds for the development of their activities.

Despite being already used as an official document, a report published by Albania National Youth Network (August 2020) highlighted the inadequacy of this Law in the service of youth in the country. The report emphasized that the Law was accompanied by many debates during its drafting and approval, without taking into consideration the position of many civil society organizations, while serving only the interests of politics in the country rather than those of the youth.

3. Policy implications and the situation in practice (main challenges in reform processes and how big was the actual impact of the policy changes)

Albania has come a long way in moving the focus of social inclusion from a conceptual idea to its implementation through policies and generating better results for vulnerable target groups, especially youth at risk.

For Albania, the process of drafting youth legislation, social policies, and action plans for youth has been quite challenging. But we must emphasize that their implementation in practice still remains one of the biggest challenges. The various reports produced in the country on youth issues show a large gap between the functioning of the central and local government in the provision of services to the youth. Efforts are mainly aimed at the target groups of young people with disabilities and the Roma and Egyptian communities.

In this context, referring to the material presented above in terms of important institutional reforms in improving the social approach for youth at risk, Albania has improved its legislative framework, but there are still difficulties with the implementation of the Action Plan for Youth. Although it has been a duty of the local government to establish local plans for youth, only five municipalities in the country have drawn up such a document, while the drafting was mainly supported by the non-profit organizations sector.

The role of institutions in the country and the shortcomings that this state sector has in the implementation of policies for the protection and empowerment of youth, and in particular youth at risk, are highlighted in the report published by the Albania National Youth Network (August 2020).

One of the main challenges identified was related to the transfer of relevant institutional competences from one ministry to another, or from one directorate to another, which has influenced a radical disorientation of the institutional system for youth in Albania.

In the implementation of the National Action Plan for Youth (2015–2020), the Albanian Government should have already established a complete institutional framework to support the youth in Albania. However, the non-implementation of the Plan and the reformation of the Ministries of Social Welfare, Youth and Sports in 2017, resulted in the transfer of youth issues to the administration of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, creating a weakening and incoherence of youth issues¹.

The lack of institutional structure at the central and local levels did not make it possible to implement the Plan and the foreseen activities, and therefore to fulfil the set objectives. Although there was a plan to form an inter-ministerial group in order to monitor the implementation, it does not appear that this group was ever established or functioned. The lack of full staff dedicated to youth in the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Youth (MESSY), the extremely limited capacities of this institution to carry out work for youth, the lack of transparent information on their roles and responsibilities, only added to the ambiguity about the roles of the structures and their respective functions.

The need for the urgent establishment of the Directorate of Youth Policies in the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth has been addressed over a period of time, but to this day, this directorate has not been established. The urgent need for its establishment comes from the fact that this department could serve as an implementation unit of the National Action Plan in Albania, as well as to include youth in governance. In addition, this body should have the task to prepare periodical reports on the implementation of the Plan and empowerment of youth organizations, and develop proposals for specific policies for young people, etc. It is important to emphasize that having only one Deputy to the Minister for Youth is not enough to do all the work that would serve 23.2% of the Albanian population belonging to the young people category.

In addition to the above indicators in the institutional framework, decisive data related to the large migrations of young people, disturbing facts about the growing requests for asylum of Albanian citizens aged 15–23 and unaccompanied minors in the EU countries, represent important aspects that must be evaluated when analysing and monitoring the reform processes developed in the country within the development of youth social policies.

On the other hand, the high degree of involvement of youth in criminal activities, human trafficking, abuse and use of narcotics are also important indicators of the failure of integration policies for youth in the country.

¹ Albania National Youth Network (National Report, Youth in Albania 2020)

Within the EU membership processes, participation in the Social Inclusion Process is an important task for Albania. To make it possible, further development and improvement of the institutional framework for monitoring social inclusion is required. This approach must be based on and go beyond the content of the strategies – it requires qualitative monitoring of the provision of services within the territory.

Reports prepared by various non-governmental organizations identify a number of problems in terms of reforming the system, more specifically: a) the lack of data, especially those that serve to identify the most excluded groups and their specific problems, which makes it difficult to measure the degree of material shortages and their social exclusion; b) the lack of funds for the implementation of strategies and action plans both at the central and local levels and c) the lack of human resources and/or suitable professional capacities, within the existing personnel of the public administration.

Likewise, the reports emphasize the need for: (a) the creation of strong institutional cooperation between central and local government bodies on issues of poverty and social inclusion of young people; (b) enhancing understanding among service providers in order to improve the quality of provided services, transparency and accountability; (c) communication strategy of the objectives and indicators of the Social Inclusion Strategy and (d) detailed action plan with calculation and allocation of funds at an appropriate level, including realistic deadlines for the implementation of the programs.²

Due to the need for an integrated, comprehensive and improved system for managing the entire policy cycle in key sectors, the Government of Albania has established Integrated Program Management Groups to guide the design, implementation and evaluation of policies, such as a new approach to guide and monitor policy development, implementation and evaluation of strategies, and strengthening coordination between the sector and donors.

On the other hand, the vision of a modern and efficient system for measuring and monitoring social inclusion of youth in Albania will be achieved through the implementation of several instruments: capacity building, changes in mentality and attitude, a technical resource structure with competitive funds, re-conceptualization, and reshaping the processes. The progress of measuring and monitoring social inclusion requires significant investments in human and financial capacities.

² Social Inclusion in Albania, Political Document 2016–2020

4. To which extent is the access to services decentralized for specific target groups (i.e. which support services are available outside the capital cities in WB countries)?

The provision of social services is one of the biggest structural challenges in the functioning of the child and youth protection system in Albania. According to assessments made over the last few years by international and local organizations operating in the country, service providers and clients unanimously evaluated service provision as poor (UNICEF, Terre Des Hommes and Save the Children). Regardless of the provisions of the normative framework, the weak capacities of the personnel for the protection of vulnerable groups, together with the inappropriate allocation of resources, hinder the availability, access, coverage and effectiveness of services aimed at the protection of these target groups. Consequently, they mostly take the form of interventions (ad hoc) and not of systematic services, which means that they are not planned and integrated, thus difficult to achieve, while relying on insufficient capacities and resources, and struggling to comply with quality standards.

Decentralization is an ongoing process in Albania, that began as early as 2000, with the *Law on the Organization and Operation of Local Government (No. 8652) as amended*, and the *Law on the Administrative-Territorial Division of Local Government Units in the Republic of Albania (No. 8653)*, including decentralization of social protection at the district and municipal level.

The current context offers an excellent opportunity for further decentralized improvements in the area of protection of vulnerable groups, with a special focus on children and young people.

On the other hand, the *Administrative-Territorial Reform of 2015* brought a series of changes in terms of territorial division, but also in terms of the way of organizing responsibilities at the local level by defining them in municipalities and administrative units of local government. Also, through the *Law on Local Self-Government (No. 139/2015)*, the territorial reform defines the responsibilities of municipalities for (i) the

creation and administration of social services at the local level, for those in need, including youth at high risk; (ii) construction and administration of social housing; (iii) construction and administration of centres for the provision of local social services; (iv) creation of the social fund for the financing of services, in cooperation with the ministry responsible for social welfare.

With the priority set in the Social Inclusion Policy Document and the *Law on Local Self-Government*, the Albanian Government drafted another Law on Social Services, which has reformed the approach to social services at the local level.

The Law on social care services in the Republic of Albania (No.121/2016) defines the social services that must be provided in order for every citizen in the Republic of Albania to realize their security and social protection rights. Social care services are organized as community services, care institutions, and families for all identified categories of beneficiaries.

Articles 36 and 37 of the Law on social care services in the Republic of Albania (No. 121/2016) has defined not only the role of local government from the perspective of social care services, but also the structures that must be established and function as a part of them, in order to make a local community system of these services operational. From the perspective of the Law, the municipality must have structures set up on two levels – first, in structures responsible for social care services in the municipality, and second, in the needs assessment and referral unit.

The roles and functions of these two structures, which should be set up at two different levels of the municipality's organization, should be essentially different. The responsible structure at the municipality level should have roles and functions related to strategic direction, planning of services, their monitoring and procurement, support of *the structures of the Needs Assessment and Referral Unit (NARU)* with capacities, as well as act as a bridge link between the latter and the decision-making leadership of the municipality, from the social care services perspective. *NARU* should be the implementation structure of local and national social policies, providing direct services to individuals in need, including youth at risk.

Although the legislative framework is complete, the biggest challenge is presented within the institutional framework. Many municipalities in the country still do not have the appropriate structures in place regarding the implementation of this legislation.

The decentralization process requires each municipality to draft *Local Social Plans* and *Social Plans for Youth Development*, but still only few municipalities have done so.

The decentralization process requires each municipality to draft *Local Social Plans* and *Social Plans for Youth Development*, but still only a few municipalities have done so.

Another long-term obstacle to the provision of quality social services is the slow progress in developing and implementing a coherent and consistent decentralization model that supports local authorities in fulfilling their delegated responsibilities to plan, procure and deliver a comprehensive portfolio of relevant youth-centred social services. Municipalities now have more responsibility for service delivery, but have not yet been delegated the resources or authority to fulfil their mandate. The available financial resources of *Local Government Units (LGUs)* are insufficient, and the social fund mechanism is not yet operational.

The central government allocates only about one percent of the *Gross Domestic Product (GDP)* to *LGUs*³, which is the lowest level in the Western Balkans.

Due to a low tax base in most municipalities, their capacity to provide quality public services is limited, and will likely remain so for a long time. It is important that this barrier related to resource allocation is overcome, and that the mechanisms that ensure the fair and timely distribution of the necessary funds and resources are quickly established, in order to guarantee the appropriate and equitable delivery of services to youth and their families in all municipalities.

On the other hand, 3-4 main municipalities in the country have been identified as having public spaces in the form of multifunctional centres for young people. At the local level, it is mainly the sector of non-profit organizations that make it possible to facilitate the conditions of youth for a healthier lifestyle and opportunities for non-formal education, through multidisciplinary services or various activities related mainly to short-term projects, with a focus on empowerment of youth for lobbying, advocacy and active participation.

It should be emphasized that an important role in providing empowering services for youth is played by local CSOs that try to make their services and activities sustainable, but are struggling with obtaining regular and sufficient funding.

3 Byrne K., Kulluri E., Gedeshi I., 2021. Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Albania. UNICEF Albania, Tirana

In order to improve the situation of youth in the country, work has been done within this framework for more than 10 years through the Youth Strategy, and then through the National Action Plan for Youth, and recently through the drafting of Local Plans for youth, which aim to include interest groups in the consultation process, having in essence the necessity of building clear platforms for youth to create spaces in the cultivation of their potential and creativity.

5. Set of concrete recommendations for policy changes, in order to provide higher inclusion of youth at risk, with special attention on missing social services

Despite continuous improvements over the years, there is no complete system in Albania to ensure the social protection of youth. As a result, youth is often at high risk of exploitation, abuse, neglect, and social exclusion.

While existing protection and empowerment structures are limited, mechanisms for identification, assessment, referral and provision of appropriate services are limited or non-existent in most municipalities and administrative units in the country.

The National Action Plan for Youth envisaged a series of measures to be taken on capacity building and community response. A series of reforms have been undertaken in different sectors, considering the protection and empowerment of young people as a priority issue; however, a greater institutional commitment is still required to achieve quality results.

Strengthening action for the protection and empowerment of youth in Albania is not aimed solely at creating a legislative system and policies, which focus almost exclusively on the capital and some of the largest municipalities in the country. The development of a national program is needed to respond to the needs of youth at risk, in a way that can only be done through an inter-sectoral approach – better coordination of actions between national and local government for a better distribution of financial resources.

The coordination of actions between national and local authorities should focus on the adoption of a systemic approach, through the integration of the work of the Ministry of State for Children and Youth, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the Ministry of Education and Sports, departments and agencies, and organizations that bear this responsibility, to ensure the care and protection of all youth at risk, according to their special needs and vulnerabilities.

To achieve these central recommendations, the following points could be helpful:

- Adopting a social risk management approach to protect youth at risk and their families, to ensure that their risks and vulnerabilities are assessed in order to detect, define and understand the risks to which they are exposed.
- Drafting and implementing elements of a national program for the protection of young people at high risk, which includes a combination of social services at the local level, to help and empower young people and their families.
- Drafting Local Action Plans for Youth in municipalities that do not yet have such a document. This process would help analyse the situation of youth and prioritize issues that concern youth, thus creating the possibility for sustainable funding for youth at the local level.
- Strengthening youth structures at the local level, as a sector that seems to give breathing space to young people in every local government in Albania. In that sense, the Youth Sector should be established in every municipality and a budget item for youth must be approved in the annual budget of each municipality.
- Empowering service delivery personnel at the local level in order to provide quality services that respond to the needs of youth at risk and their families, wherever they live.
- Creating an advisory structure for youth, such as the Youth Advisory Board. This Board is created by youth and aims at influencing the decisions of the City Council regarding issues that affect young people and the community in which they live, as well as conveying their voice in local decision-making.
- Establishing and operating Youth Centres throughout the country, as friendly spaces, structures for innovation, social businesses, or any other activity for the benefit of the well-being and empowerment of youth.
- Creating community services, also defined in the Action Plan for Youth, services that are intended to be sustainable and empowering in terms of psychosocial, professional, career, and economic aspects for youth in the country.

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BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

POLICY PAPER

Support services for Youth at Risk in Bosnia
and Herzegovina

Fedja Mehmedovic, Amer Džekman

1. Introduction

Every child and young person deserves the opportunity to succeed and achieve their maximum educational, social, and economic potential. Social inequalities, unfavourable economic and educational conditions, and dysfunctionality inside the family are among many factors that can affect the ability of a child or an adolescent to meet their developmental milestones, but also expose young people to various risks which can affect their health, wellbeing, and quality of life.

Access to comprehensive, individualized, and proactive support services can have a crucial role for young people who are facing different challenges in their transition from adolescence to adult age. Without such support, young people, particularly youth at risk subpopulation groups are facing an increased risk of being socially excluded, discriminated against, less educated, unemployed, and becoming susceptible to risky and unhealthy behaviour. All these circumstances can have a negative economic and social impact on individuals, as well as their families and communities.

Youth at risk is a general term for a range of circumstances that place a young person at a higher level of vulnerability for problem behaviours such as the use of psychoactive substances, dropping out or neglecting school and schoolwork, juvenile delinquency and mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (At Risk Youth Programs, 2021).

Although there is no agreed and accepted definition of “youth at risk” in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in a broader context it can include children and adolescents who face a significant risk of an unsuccessful transition from adolescence to adulthood. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, unfavourable economic conditions and poverty, family instability and dysfunctionality, low-quality education system, social exclusion, lack of resources at the community level, and unwanted childhood experiences are key factors that put adolescents at increased risk.

Regardless of whether a young person grows up in an urban, suburban, or rural part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the factors that place young people in a position of pronounced vulnerability can be equally present in all geographic regions. However, it is obvious that support services are not equally available for young people in urban



compared to those living in rural parts of the country. Differences also exist among specific urban centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with certain services not equally available in all larger urban centres either.

For the purpose of this Policy paper, young people from the following population groups are recognized as youth at risk: Roma children and adolescents, youth and children in conflict with the law, youth and children who use drugs and alcohol, children and young people from dysfunctional families and families with history of alcohol/drug use and abuse, children without parental care and migrants.

Based on the national law, youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina are persons between the age of 15 and 30, and in total, there are 777 000 young people⁴ and 607 100 people under the age of 15 living in Bosnia and Herzegovina today.

The main national priorities of young people are reflected in the following areas:

- Education
- Employment
- Health
- Social status
- Participation in public life
- Culture, sport, and leisure

⁴ Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (2022). Retrieved from URL: http://www.mladi.gov.ba/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=46&Itemid=34&lang=en

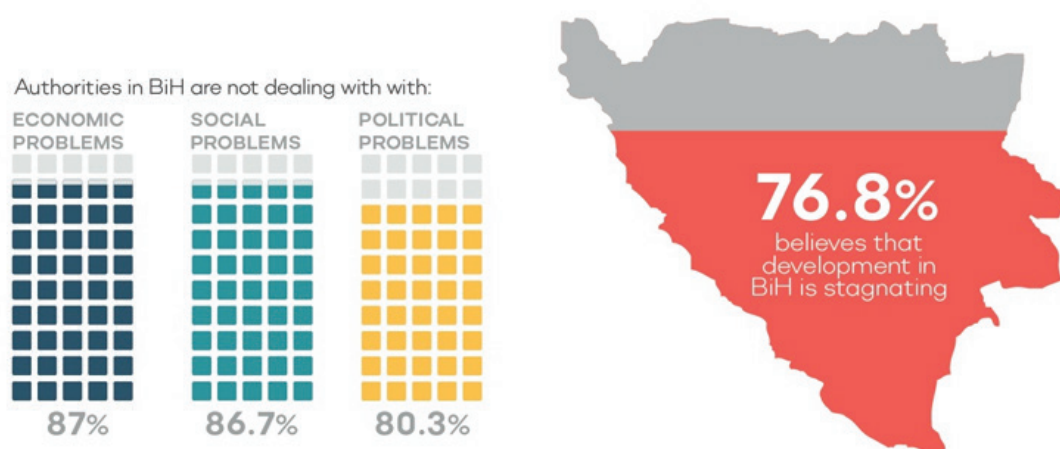
Youth unemployment is one of the main issues that many young people are facing. More than 60% of youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina are unemployed. Young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina deal with numerous risks in this field, the most intense being: war effects, worsened life conditions, increased abuse of psychoactive substances, alcohol, and tobacco products, poor mental health (with an increased rate of suicides), poor physical health caused by not doing sport, peer violence, lack of information about sexual reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, etc. Also, a substantial part of the youth population, i.e. 10% of them, has no health insurance⁵.

Unemployed young people are exposed to multiple risks of social exclusion, poverty, stigmatization, and even long-term social isolation, especially considering the fact that “any long-term non-use of acquired knowledge and skills leads to the loss of abilities and the obsolescence of knowledge, thereby reducing employability”⁶.



5 Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (2022). Retrieved from URL: http://www.mladi.gov.ba/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=46&Itemid=34&lang=en

6 Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e.V. (2019). Study on youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018/2019



Source: Europa.ba: 76.8% of young people believe that development in Bosnia and Herzegovina is stagnating

The total population of young people is considered a vulnerable group, much closer to poverty than the population of adults. Young people who did not continue their education after completing primary school have the largest share of the population of poor – 57%.

Strategic priorities in the field of social policy are reflected in the following:

- Harmonization of standards, regulations, and policies (differed among the administrative units)
- Establishment of institutional framework (which will allow for the inclusion policies)
- Improvement of the effectiveness of social assistance services
- Making a long-term housing policy

Social support and social assistance are one of the fundamental human rights that Bosnia and Herzegovina is obliged to ensure to its citizens on the basis of the signed international conventions (the European Social Charter, 1961), as well as the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitution (Annex I, which contains the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).

2. Overview of the current situation regarding support services for the youth at risk with whom partner organizations are working

As a former republic of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina inherited a fully articulated modern system of education, healthcare, social insurance, and social assistance. Although the basic structures of the system remain in place today, the consecutive impact of the 1990s conflict, economic transition, external economic shock, austerity policies, low growth, and rising inequality have left many parts of the system unable to provide the quality of care and equality of access required by citizens⁷.

Although the legal legislation and the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina clearly emphasize the *right to support and improve their development and social co-responsive personality without discrimination on any basis, the circumstances in which young people are growing do not place them in the focus of institutions that are responsible for them.*

At the state level, there is no law that regulates the general issues of young people or a coordination body for young people. In 2004, a significant step was made by establishing the Commission for Coordination of Youth Issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a permanent body of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers. The Commission operates at the Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Civil

Affairs and is responsible for coordinating the activities of all actors relevant for the promotion and protection of the role and position of the youth in the country.

There is still no Youth Strategy in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Republic of Srpska is in the process of preparation of the Youth Policy for the period 2022 – 2026.

⁷ ibid

After the adoption of the Law on Youth of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, all levels of government in the Federation have developed and adopted strategic documents related to youth. Those strategies include the defined problems and needs of youth, the strategic directions of the objective and measures for the realization of its objectives. However, the adoption of this Law did not resolve the issue of young people at risk.

Youth Strategies have been developed only on some lower levels of government (cantons and municipalities): Sarajevo Canton Strategy (2019 – 2023), Youth Strategy for Tuzla Canton (2020 – 2024), Youth Strategy for new City of Sarajevo (2014 – 2020), Youth Strategy for Municipality of Centar (2014 – 2020), Youth Strategy for Novo Sarajevo (2022 – 2027), etc. Developed Strategies have similar goals; however, being adopted at different times (and with different duration), they further contribute to the awkward position of young people at risk in cantons and/or municipalities. In the Republic of Srpska and Brčko District, this Strategy has been made at the level of entities (i.e. the District) and represents a lighter / simpler management and implementation model.

The current state of play in terms of Youth Strategies is the following:

- The issue of youth is regulated by the specific laws and strategies at the level of administrative units and there is no common framework at the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- There is no Youth Strategy at the Federation level;
- At the level of the Republic of Srpska, the third Youth Strategy – the Youth Policy of the Republic of Srpska 2016 – 2020 was adopted;
- Youth Strategy has been adopted at the level of the Federation of two cantons (Una-Sanski Canton, Zenica-Doboj Canton) in 2018;
- Youth Strategies currently exist mostly at the level of local authorities. In 2013, the Youth Strategy existed in 32 municipalities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Out of 9 municipalities in Sarajevo Canton, 7 municipalities (Municipality of Ilidža, Municipality of Novi Grad, Municipality of Novo Sarajevo, Municipality of Hadžići, Municipality of Ilijaš and Municipality of Trnovo and Vogošća) have not adopted Youth Strategy so far.

Three basic goals of strategic youth documents (adopted at different levels of government) are related to the following areas: education, work, youth health protection, culture and sports, youth, activism, information and volunteering, and youth safety. They determine the priority areas of action, strategic goals, measures, and activities in the field of young people, and define the competencies of different institutions.

For the purpose of more effective implementation of youth policies at the municipal level, it is necessary to clearly define the institutional framework of local youth policy that describes the actors who deal with (or should deal with) youth issues. According to the Law on Youth of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the institutional framework for drafting and implementing a policy aimed at young people at the local level consists of: Referent/Associate/Officer for Youth, Youth Commission and Youth Council.

A desirable/ideal model of the institutional framework of local policy towards young people, which is based on positive European practices, is a model whose backbone is the Service/Office for Youth – a body of the executive municipal authority responsible for coordinating the implementation of policy aimed at young people at the municipal level. However, the limited financial resources available to municipal authorities and the lack of a systematic approach to youth policy are some of the key reasons why it is difficult to revive the practice of establishing youth services in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even though Youth Council is not a municipal administration body, it makes an integral part of the institutional framework for the implementation of youth policy at the municipal level. The initiative to establish the Youth Council was prompted by the desire of youth organizations to unite and implement joint activities for young people. The Committee for Youth Affairs plays a significant role in coordinating the activities of all relevant bodies involved in the implementation process of the Action Program for Youth Action.

In accordance with the legal recommendations and the real needs and problems of young people, the youth strategies have defined seven key areas (the level of cantons and at local levels), as follows: (i) Work, employment and entrepreneurship of young people; (ii) Youth education and science; (iii) Social care of young people (iv) Youth health care; (v) Youth activism – participation, volunteering and mobility; (vi) Culture and sports; (vii) Youth safety.

Development of the Action Plan for children is an obligation that arises from the Action Plan for the Children in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which will determine measures in the field of child human rights in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, measures related to education, health care, social protection, special forms of child protection, as well as measures related to children belonging to vulnerable groups, reporting and coordination. The Federation is obliged to establish the Chamber Development Council, as well as to provide budget funds for the Council, while the development of action plans for children is the obligation of cantons and local communities.

Research conducted by the Institute for Population and Development during 2021 shows that the pandemic caused by Covid-19 significantly affected access to services that are important for reducing the risks to which young people at increased risk are exposed. The research finds that services related to mental health, sexual and reproductive health, services for reporting violence and access to specialized services for victims of violence both during and prior to the pandemic have not been available for many subpopulation groups of young people at risk, including young people from Roma communities, youth belonging to the LGBTQI+ population, youth in remote locations and youth living in unfavourable socio-economic circumstances⁸.

Civil society organizations make exceptional efforts to shape their programs to contribute to reducing and eliminating factors that put young people in a position of increased risk, as well as to empower those categories of young people who practice certain risky behaviours.

Programs to strengthen psychosocial competences, violence prevention programs and responses to violence, development of peer support systems, improvement of mental health and sexual and reproductive health, and prevention of the use and abuse of psychoactive substances, are part of the program strategies implemented by civil society organizations.

So far efforts in the context of social support reforms have not been successful and complex administrative landscaping has significantly reduced the capacity of institutions to respond to the needs of the young population. Existing strategies define the needs of young people, highlight the active involvement of young people in resolving the challenges they face while growing up, but the situation in the field shows that the implementation of the strategies defined is not adequate. It is

⁸ Institute for Population and Development. (2022). Young people's access to information about sexual and reproductive health, education and health services in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the time of Covid-19

important that the reforms of the social systems do not focus only on the financial bottom line but also remain effective in addressing their ultimate purpose: to fight poverty and inequality, and to leave no one behind . Therefore, the development of mechanisms for the involvement of marginalized and vulnerable categories of young people is an important aspect of the company's social and professional dialogue on the provision of social support to risk and should be given special significance and extra attention.

Generally, the study's results show that social protection of youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not adequate and has many shortcomings and insufficiently effective solutions⁹. Compounding this poor socio-economic situation, the social protection system in Bosnia and Herzegovina fails to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged ones among its citizens¹⁰. The adequate institutional framework for active social policies implies well-designed, quality and affordable social services¹¹. However, the social protection system in Bosnia and Herzegovina suffers numerous problems and shortcomings in this domain. When it comes to social services in Bosnia and Herzegovina, they are mostly underdeveloped, limited or missing.

9 Dialog for Future (2016). Youth voices research on youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Consolidated report of quantitative and qualitative research. Retrieved from URL: <https://www.unicef.org/bih/media/856/file>

10 Aida Malkic, Tea Hadziristic. Analitic. (2016). Intersecting Inequalities in Social Protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina Results of an Empirical Study

11 Analitic. (2016). Social Assistance System in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Neglected Potential of Active Social Policies. Policy brief 20

3. Policy implications and the situation in practice (main challenges in reform processes and how big was the actual impact of the policy changes)

In addition to the harmonization of youth-related social support services across the country, the introduction of new and revision of the existing youth policies and strategic frameworks are some of the key priorities regarding the reform of social support and social inclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Another important implication for future reform processes is the recognition of youth at risk population as a priority population for the provision of social support all across Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Revision of existing strategies, policies and social support frameworks finds that youth at risk population is not recognized as such and is mostly referred to as the general term “vulnerable groups” across the spectrum of strategic documents. Furthermore, multiple youth types of vulnerability are not adequately addressed with existing services available within the social support system.

Social support system is still based on traditional and inefficient work methods. Using obsolete methods does not allow space for improvements and introduction of the innovative tools. For example, the capacities of the professional staff working with youth at risk remain limited and they are not able to provide services that are tailored towards specific and individual needs of the end users. It is therefore important that in future advocacy activities, civil society organizations advocate for the introduction of the Socio-Ecological Model of Youth Empowerment, in order for the services to be able to respond to the specific conditions the person is growing up in. The application of this model would allow professional workers to take into consideration all relevant aspects in designing the intervention program. That means that each individual empowerment initiative would be built on the range of factors that affect child’s development (family environment, education, financial situation, cultural norms present within their micro- and macro-environment, etc).

Youth at risk is still on the margins of social support and relevant institutions invest very small or no efforts to make young people at risk enjoy the right to achieve

maximum capacity, to treat them with dignity, respect their specific needs and ensure their access to services that are tailored to the needs that make them vulnerable.

Although certain initiatives seek to create better conditions for youth at risk, they are most often facilitated by civil society organizations, which are an important social service provider for youth.

Social support for youth at risk is available within the work of civil society organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through the implementation of projects, civil society organizations offer education services, social support, psychosocial competence, economic empowerment, adoption of healthy living habits, damage reduction programs, etc. These civil society organizations are most often implemented in cooperation with local institutions such as social work centres, mental health centres, upbringing centres and counselling centres. Specific projects are focused on building capacities of professionals to provide individual services to youth at risk, but common problem in facilitating such support outside of the project framework are lack of funds, lack of human capacities, and sustainability of provision of innovative and project-driven social support.

Even though different youth strategies envisage continuous cooperation between local governments and local CSOs, this is usually not achieved in majority of local units. Even though CSOs have proven their expertise in working with specific populations, local government are still reluctant in cooperating with them in more substantial manner.

An important disadvantage in the development of a social support system that is effective in addressing vulnerability factors is the lack of evaluations that would measure the effects of existing approaches and services. At the same time, those groups that certain policies are dedicated to are not sufficiently included in the decision-making process.

Social inclusion of children from vulnerable groups in secondary education represents a challenge for Bosnia and Herzegovina while the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the education of children and youth, and threatens to exacerbate social inclusion and the existing learning inequalities. Further studies on the influence of Covid-19 on access to social support services need to be implemented and the collected information should be used to prepare local governments and institutions to respond adequately to youth-related needs in crisis situation.

Fragmented and complex administration of the country contributes to the inequality in the availability of services, the type of services available, the volume of services available and equality in achieving the use of social protection and support services. Future reform processes should be focused on harmonization and reframe social support to become equally available to all categories of young people, in every part of the country.

Social norms around xenophobia, gender-based violence and the needs of youth with disabilities, stigma and shame frame discriminatory behaviours towards vulnerable groups, including Roma youth, youth with disabilities, youth in conflict with the law, and youth on the move. Poverty and exclusion inhibit access to health, education, family-based care, justice, and other services, as some groups of youth face more barriers than others.

The report *Social inclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina - National Human Development*, published in 2021 finds the following: “Almost a third (31.6 per cent) of children in Bosnia and Herzegovina aged 5 to 15 are at risk of poverty. Children in female-headed households and families with two or more children are substantially more likely to be poor.” The same report emphasises that 2015–2018 Action Plan for Children has not been implemented adequately due to insufficient funding and a lack of coordination. According to the analysis conducted in 2016 by UNICEF, there are around 1,640 children without parental care in the country, of which 49 percent live in residential institutions. Only a small number of cases of violence against children are reported, with only a few cases being brought before the courts.¹²

Roma people are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged minority group in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The rights of persons belonging to minorities are guaranteed by the Constitution. The Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted the Law on the Protection of Rights of Members of National Minorities in 2003, committing the country to respecting, protecting, preserving and developing the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of the 17 recognised national minorities. The Roma Strategy has been in place since 2005 and is being implemented through the 2017–2020 Roma Action Plan on Housing, Employment and Healthcare and the 2018–2022 Action Plan on Roma Educational Needs. The Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees allocates about EUR 1.2 million each year to fund Roma-related activities, along with funds from entities, cantons and municipalities as well as international organisations,

¹² United Nations Development Programme (2021). *Social Inclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina. –2020 National Human Development Report*

particularly in the area of housing. However, Roma youth still live in very poor conditions, with limited social integration and in informal settlements.

The marginalization of Roma youth may be affected by poor living conditions, in addition to deficiencies in the access to and use of health care, education, social care and other services. A significant share of Roma households experience food insecurity, resulting in the exceptionally high level of underweight and stunting of Roma children. Registration requirements are inherently problematic for Roma. Unemployment is fuelled by limited education and prejudice.

Roma people face the highest level of discrimination in terms of employment opportunities and are almost completely absent from the workforce, working instead in the informal sector. The legislation on equality between women and men is largely in place, but the implementation of both policy and legislation is ineffective. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is one of the human rights agreements to be applied in Bosnia and Herzegovina and yet women remain underrepresented in politics and in public life.

The COVID-19 crisis has had a significant negative impact on the already weakened social protection system in Bosnia and Herzegovina and across the Western Balkans region¹³. According to predictions of the World Bank, due to the COVID-19 crisis, poverty in Bosnia and Herzegovina would rise from an estimated 11.8 percent in 2019 to 12.9 to 14.6 percent in 2020¹⁴. The social impact in terms of increased poverty, exclusion, precarity and vulnerability is likely to be both severe and long-lasting¹⁵.

13 United Nations Development Programme (2021). Social Inclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina. –2020 National Human Development Report

14 *ibid*

15 Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Centre for Social Policy, Social Protection in the Western Balkans: Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis, 2020.

4. To which extent is the access to services decentralized for specific target groups (i.e. which support services are available outside the capital cities in WB countries?)

The complex administrative arrangement of Bosnia and Herzegovina makes it difficult to synchronize national, entity and cantonal laws, policies and services available to youth at risk. Bosnia and Herzegovina is composed of two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republic of Srpska, Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina and ten cantons within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In total, it has 14 constitutions and legal systems, and more than 150 ministries. Although this arrangement is a response to concerns in terms of the competence of lower levels and representation, one of its consequences is a reduction in the effectiveness of policy coherence and the provision of effective public services.

Complex administrative arrangement, inconsistency of laws and policies at lower levels of government and lack of vertical and horizontal coherence in the creation and implementation of laws and policies have a direct negative impact on the state's performance in ensuring the rights and obligations arising from the Constitution, laws, ratified treaties and conventions.

The fact that social inclusion strategies and social protection policies are not sufficiently implemented presents an additional difficulty¹⁷, the more due to the lack of evaluation mechanisms and monitoring of the implementation of strategic documents.

Both the Federation and the Republic of Srpska legally prescribe partial or full payment of preschools for families at social risk, however, these are most often implemented by municipal governments that often lack the financial resources for this purpose.¹⁸

16 Mirna Jusić. (2015). "Protection of Families with Children in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – Analysis of the Situation, Key Challenges, and Reform Priorities

17 Gender Centre of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2022). Social Protection.

The consequence of an approach that favours certain categories is a social protection system based on the status of the individual and insufficient opportunities to aid vulnerable groups of the population, limiting their access to social assistance resources and services¹⁸. For young people who do not belong to the populations defined by the social protection system, certain services remain unavailable or unadopted.

Analysis¹⁹ of the Social Protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina published in 2022 finds the following: “Social services are an underdeveloped and underfunded branch of social protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These services are provided through centres for social work and other institutions, such as kindergartens and day care centres at the level of local self-governments. In addition to the services provided by entity laws, local authorities can provide additional services according to identified needs in their communities. However, the limited financial and institutional capacities of local self-governments, and the large disparity in the needs of urban and rural areas, result in inadequate provision of these services. Some of these services are also provided by non-governmental organizations on a project basis (with funding from foreign donors); however, only a few local communities have integrated these services into the public system”.

Leading the reform process implies the establishment of a democratic policy-making process through tripartite and social dialogue. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, discussions on social protection reforms are often blocked due to the complex and conflicting interests of different actors. Also, the policy-making process often lacks transparency and genuine involvement of actors. However, it is only through long-term commitment and continuous efforts of all stakeholders that the reform agenda can be advanced and public confidence in the social protection systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be restored.²⁰

The analysis of the implementation of the Law on Youth carried out in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina shows that the adoption of the Law on Youth in 2010 made it possible to define youth issues at all levels of government in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the Republic of Srpska, the Law on Youth Associations was adopted in 2006. As a result of the adoption of the Law in the Federation of Bosnia and

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ International Labour Organization 2022 Challenges of social protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina: coverage, adequacy, expenditures and financing. Retrieved from URL: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms_842892.pdf

²⁰ *ibid*

Herzegovina, youth councils were established at all levels of government, which at the same time represents the strongest mechanism through which young people exercise their right to participate in decision-making. However, important mechanisms that have the potential to solve the issue of young people at risk are the Council for Youth and Commissions for Youth that have not been formed.

Social protection, social support and implementation of social policies are arranged differently in both entities:

[Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – Department for Social Welfare and Protection of Families and Children of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy \(Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina\)](#), is responsible for the following services: social welfare and solidarity policy; pension and disability insurance; welfare of the civil victims of the war; family welfare, children adoption and custody; social protection.

[Republic of Srpska – Department for Social, Family and Child Protection of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare](#) is responsible for the following services: child and youth care; social insurance and other forms of social care; social welfare, family and child protection; planning and operation of social, family and child protection; planning and financing of realisation of individual social protection rights; programmes on construction, reconstruction, adaptation and equipping of institutions for social protection; development programmes aiming at the improvement of social, family and child protection; supervision of professional work of institutions for social and child protection; planning and coordination of additional professional training of social workers; introduction of standards of professional performance and services provided in social welfare institutions; participation in development, preparation and implementation of strategies and programmes on social, family and child protection; fostering and promoting of family protection and social forms of child care, youth care and care for adult individuals without families; monitoring and promoting of programmes for social, family and child care, social rehabilitation and training of persons with disabilities; monitoring, analysis and study of the phenomenon and needs in social, child and family protection; [monitoring of vulnerability](#) and the social needs of the population; encouraging and coordination of social and humanitarian activities; harmonisation of legal regulations with the EU standards.

Intermediate level

Cantons (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

- Implementation and provision of services
- Housing

Responsible ministries/bodies

- Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of the Republic of Srpska

Local level

Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina' Municipalities

- Housing (creation and implementation of housing policy; adoption of programmes for housing development and other kinds of property developments)
- Social welfare: assessing the work of institutions and quality of services
- Ensuring funds required for the improvement of their work and quality of services in accordance with the citizens' needs and the local self-government units' capabilities

Republic of Srpska's Municipalities

- Centres for Social Work
- Monitoring the social needs of its citizens, families and individual vulnerable groups and defining social care policy in their area
- Developing a municipal social care programme
- Creating conditions for the provision of quality social services to its citizens (services for children, elderly, disabled people, families with problems, and other socially vulnerable persons)
- Establishing centres for social work and taking care of staffing, housing, financial and technical conditions for their work
- Providing funds for payment of the rights set by the law
- Monitoring and assisting the social work of humanitarian organisations and citizens in performing humanitarian activities
- Developing other activities in accordance with needs and possibilities in social care

Republic of Srpska

The Law on Social Protection in Republic of Srpska

Article 14 of the Law defines that the bearers of social protection are the Republic and the local self-government unit. The Republic regulates the system of social protection, adopts policies and development strategies, determines the rights, criteria and beneficiaries of social protection, provides part of the funds for the realization of the rights prescribed by this law, monitors the state and realization of rights, establishes and directs the work of social protection institutions, and ensures that optimal development of social protection within the framework of economic and social policy is achieved. The local self-government unit adopts the annual and mid-term social protection program based on the analysis of the social situation of the residents in the area.

According to the law, local government units are responsible for deciding on the rights and services that will be provided on the local community level, based on the local community's needs. The law defines services relevant for some subpopulation groups: personal assistance for people with disabilities, schooling support for children from socially vulnerable families, and support in the education of children with learning and physical disabilities.

The profile of social protection beneficiaries is defined by Article 17. The following juvenile subpopulation groups are noted as beneficiaries: those without parental care, with developmental disabilities, whose development is hampered by family circumstances, victims of violence, victims of child trafficking, with socially unacceptable behaviour, those exposed to socially risky behaviours, who need social protection due to special circumstances. Among young adults, the following groups are recognized as beneficiaries: materially unsecured, with a disability, with socially negative behaviour, victims of abuse of psychoactive substances, victims of domestic violence, victims of human trafficking and those who need social protection due to special circumstances..

Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH)

Social protection and social assistance in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina are extremely divided and consist of 11 almost independent systems, with a low degree of mutual coordination and cooperation. As a result, there are numerous differences in the realization of the social rights of citizens, which prevent

uniform access to all resources and opportunities provided by the social assistance system. The existing network of laws and the vagueness of some of them left certain provisions to be defined by lower levels of government and thus led to significant differences in the types, amount, and quality of social assistance provided to beneficiaries in different cantons.

Law on Institutions for Social Protection of the Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina

Article 3 describes key terms used in the Law and defines some of the key services relevant for youth at risk²¹:

- Psychosocial support is a set of professional procedures providing assistance and support to encourage the development of cognitive, functional, communication or user's social skills;
- Rehabilitation is a process of systematic, planned and organized professional support with the aim of eliminating all negative and harmful effects on the individual, caused by unfavourable life circumstances or his specific health, legal, socio-economic and other conditions that make it difficult for him to fully reintegrate and return to society;
- Reintegration is a set of professional procedures and activities aimed at the full inclusion of an individual as a full and equal member of the social community after a certain period of social exclusion, regardless of its cause;
- Resocialization is a process of systematic, planned and organized professional support for the purpose of training an individual, especially a minor, to respect social norms and rules, in order to become a useful member of the social community.

Although the aforementioned services are part of the jurisdiction of centres for social work, many centres do not have the capacity to provide all of them in a quality manner. Therefore, a significant part of the mentioned activities are provided by civil society organizations, but such activities are not sustainable and are part of the program/project activity of these organizations, which implies a limited time period (project/program duration) in which these services are available.

²¹ Law on Institutions for Social Protection of the Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina. Retrieved from URL: <https://fmrsp.gov.ba/?wpdmpo=zakon-o-ustanovama-socijalne-zastite-federacije-bosne-i-hercegovine&wpdmdl=7630&refresh=632b1737a75d71663768375>

Social protection services are provided within cantonal centres for social work and departments located in municipalities that are part of 10 cantons. The services provided by centres for social work depend on the budget of the cantons, which leads to the unevenness of the services available in each of the 10 cantons and unevenness in the implementation of policies and strategic documents, given that not all cantons have the same financial and other capacities that are necessary for providing quality services for youth at risk.

Social assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina varies between the entities, cantons and municipalities. The highly fragmented governance structure in Bosnia and Herzegovina has resulted in differences not only in eligibility criteria but also in coverage, targeting, efficiency, availability and the level of benefits based on the place of residence rather than the level of need²².

Social assistance funding in Bosnia and Herzegovina is chronically under-resourced and sometimes inaccessible, with wide inequality in terms of access across the cantons and municipalities²³.

The social protection system in Bosnia and Herzegovina is at a critical crossroads. The current situation requires urgent measures to stop the collapse of the social security system, and the adoption of measures to strengthen social assistance benefits and social services in order to improve gender equality. The COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasized the critical importance of investing in a social protection of the entire population, both from systemic shocks and social risks that accompany different stages of the life cycle ²⁴.

22 United Nations Development Programme (2021). Social Inclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina. –2020 National human development report

23 *ibid*

24 International Labour Organization. (2022). Challenges of Social protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Coverage, Adequacy, Expenditures and Financing. Retrieved from URL: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms_842892.pdf

5. Set of concrete recommendations for policy changes, in order to provide higher inclusion of youth at risk, with special attention on missing social services

During the process of achieving both equality as humans and equality in realizing the right to social support, young people at risk in Bosnia and Herzegovina face different obstacles. Youth at risk are not recognized in many youth policies and strategies as such. Instead, the system recognizes the population of young people at risk as a homogeneous group (vulnerable group), which reduces the opportunities to approach their empowerment by respecting the specific and individual needs of a person who belongs to the category of young people at risk. In many parts of the country, access to services is uneven, sets of available services depend on the economic capacity of local communities, which in case of the lack of funds is reflected in the type, quality and comprehensiveness of the available services. Although many services are available within the framework of the work of civil society organizations, there is no cohesion between social support system and the non-governmental sector. Therefore, the access to such services is project driven and their duration is defined by the project duration. Mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of strategic documents and evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of social protection services and empowering young people at risk are lacking. Also, there is not enough dedication to identify science-based programs for which there is evidence of effectiveness in empowering youth at risk. Another important issue is related to lack of competences of service providers for the application of scientifically based and proven effective models of social support and empowerment of young people at risk. The gender perspective is not an integral part of the design and provision of social support.

In accordance with the above-mentioned shortcomings, and considering the recommendations of the conducted studies and analyses, as well as those of international practices for which there is evidence of success, the following is proposed within the framework of this policy paper:

- Establishing and financing youth centres with a special focus on youth at risk. Within the framework of youth centres, providing access to training programs, acquisition of competencies that are significant for preserving health, safety and future economic opportunities for young people at risk;

- Developing and adopting a Youth Strategy at the level of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which will address the needs of youth at risk;
- Promoting healthy lifestyles should be at the centre of preventive programmes. Policies focused on the improvement of prevention, early identification and adequate treatment of noncommunicable diseases should be accompanied by firm policies focusing on changing lifestyles of the population that are presently marked by high health risks, including smoking, alcohol consumption, unhealthy eating habits and insufficient physical activity;
- Giving priority to helping social welfare authorities develop the capacity to fulfil their responsibilities related to their work with juvenile offenders and youth in conflict with the law; exploring the possibility of increased cooperation with civil society; and defining the role of new services so as to complement rather than duplicate, that of the CSWs;
- Strengthening intersectoral cooperation, especially with education and health, as well as ensuring the involvement of social partners and the civil sector in the creation of labour market policies and social policies;
- Strategic defining of active inclusion measures at different levels of government, following relevant EU policies and good practices, which will be adapted to the local socio-economic context and complementary to future strategies on development, employment and social inclusion, and incorporated into current socioeconomic reforms;
- Establishing coordinating bodies for monitoring the implementation of strategies and policies for youth, which include youth and representatives of CSOs that work with youth at risk;
- Strengthening intersectoral cooperation, especially with education and health;
- Implementing social protection reform at the level of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska. As part of the reform, attention should be given to marginalized and hard-to-reach youth groups;
- Supporting outreach programs that improve communication between certain social and health care services with young people at risk;
- Intensifying cooperation between the governments of the Western Balkans and ensuring access to information on good practices in improving access to services relevant to youth at risk;
- Mapping local civil society organizations that provide evidence-based services relevant to youth at risk;

- Identifying scientifically based and proven effective programs that are relevant for youth at risk and encouraging the exchange of good practices among civil society organizations;
- Establishing an Advisory Group that will deal with the situation of young people at risk;
- Encouraging social cohesion through the engagement of citizens and local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Affirming the application of proven effective methods, i.e. methods of working with young people at risk, which are based on evidence;
- Improving access to mental health centres by implementing innovative solutions such as telemedicine and online counselling;
- Implementing comprehensive programs of gender transformative education for young men and young women in the areas of: violence, health and mental health, use and abuse of psychoactive substances;
- Implementing economic empowerment programs for young people at risk;
- Ensuring quality social protection for young people of school age (free education, health care, accommodation in childcare institutions);
- Carrying out practical reforms to strengthen democracy through better governance, the rule of law and more accountable institutions to provide effective public services that are gender sensitive and include vulnerable groups;
- Harmonizing social standards, regulations and policies among different administrative units in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Improving availability and efficiency of social assistance services;
- Developing and implementing individualized support programs for young people at risk;
- Strengthening cooperation between CSOs and centres for social work, with the goal of achieving a synergistic approach in providing specific services for young people at risk;
- Developing early intervention programs for working with children at risk;
- Developing and implementing inclusive policies in the field of education, health and projecting the social protection policy through social dialogue, which should be affirmed as a special value of society;

- Establishing direct cooperation with Youth Councils at all levels of government and active use of existing decision-making mechanisms in order to place the issue of access to services for at-risk youth on the priority list;
- Establishing effective coordination mechanisms between various levels of government responsible for social policies, especially in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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KOSOVO

NGO Labyrinth

POLICY PAPER

Availability of support services for the youth
at risk in Kosovo

Muharrem Ademi

1. Overview of the current situation regarding support services for the youth at risk

Compared to 2020, when the availability of social services was limited due to the Covid-19 prevention measures, in 2021 they were once again more widely accessible to citizens in need. It should be noted that the need for social services has been increasing throughout 2021, while the capacities of social service providers have not increased.²⁵

In 2021, the capacities of municipalities for the management and provision of social services remained as deficient as in the previous two years. The lack of professional staff in social services within the DHSW has been reported as a key difficulty in managing services.

The provisions of the Draft Law on Social and Family Services are regulating the role of NGOs in providing social and family services. Article 8 stipulates that municipalities can conclude contracts with non-governmental organizations for the provision of specific social and family services within their territory, provided that such contracts are in accordance with the annual plans of the municipality for social and family services in its territory.²⁶

Administrative instruction (MPMS) No. 02/2020 for the licensing of non-governmental organizations and private legal entities that provide social and family services regulates the licencing procedures for the NGOs involved in the provision of the mentioned services. In addition, this By-law has enabled not only NGOs, but also other entities organized in the form of legal entities to offer social and family services upon licencing.

The lack of professional staff has been reported as a key difficulty in managing services. CSWs need an increased staff number in all municipalities, especially in terms of social services officials. The average number of case treatments by a social service official at the Centre for Social Work in Prizren is 170 cases.²⁷

25 https://komfkosova.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Raporti-i-monitorimit_ENG-1.pdf

26 http://www.civikos.net/repository/docs/KORNIZA_LIGJORE_alb_58662.pdf

27 file:///C:/Users/PC/Downloads/Raporti-i-monitorimit_AL-1-1.pdf

2. Overview of the major reform processes focusing on inclusive support to youth at risk

The Government's Work Plan and Legislative Plan for 2021 foresaw the drafting and approval of the new Law on Social and Family Services by the Government until December 2021, with the aim of developing a deep reform of social services. Main novelties were related to the process of decentralization as well as the role of NGOs. Although this Draft Law was finalized and validated by the working group in October 2021, it has still not been approved. I. Also, even during 2020, the approval of this Draft Law was expected by November 2020. However, this did not happen, because the Working Group assessed that the draft Law still needed intervention.²⁸

In 2022, Administrative Instruction and Draft Law on the Rights and Protection of Children and Youth were adopted.

ADMINISTRATIVE INSTRUCTION (GRK) - NO. 07/2022 AUTHORITIES FOR THE RIGHTS OF A CHILD²⁹

The purpose of this Administrative Instruction is to coordinate the actions of central and local level institutions on issues related to the rights and protection of a child, including cooperation and coordination between institutional structures and mechanisms at the central and local level, their joint work, implementation of the Law on Child Protection, legislation in force and state policies on the rights and protection of children.

In addition to the mandate and responsibilities defined in laws and sub-legal acts, the relevant Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers shall coordinate actions in terms of implementation of obligations as stipulated in the Law on Child Protection in the following areas: 1.1. Protection of children with high vulnerability, with special emphasis on Children with disabilities, children without parental care, children in streets and those who are victims of trafficking, children who have committed multiple criminal offenses, children who use narcotics and psychotropic substances, children living in extreme poverty and homeless children, children who are victims and witnesses of domestic violence and children at risk or whose wellbeing is compromised; 1.2. Protection of Children under the age of criminal responsibility; 1.3 Prevention of juvenile delinquency; 1.3. Fighting antisocial behaviour where children are participants; 1.13. Development and implementation of

28 https://komfkosova.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Raporti-i-Monitorimit-2021-Shqip_compressed.pdf

29 <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/UDHEZIM-ADMINISTRATIV-QRK-NR.-07.2022-PER-AUTORITETET-PER-TE-DREJTAT-E-FEMIJES.pdf>

resocialization programs for juvenile offenders; 1.4. Development and implementation of rehabilitation programs for juveniles and their parents; 1.5. Supporting family and community reintegration programs after serving sentences or measures; 1.6. Capacity building of professionals working and providing services to children and their families; 1.7. Drafting policies and laws in accordance with international standards guided by the Convention on the Protection of Children.

ADMINISTRATIVE INSTRUCTION (GRK) NO. 04/2022 ON MEASURES FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AGAINST WEBSITES WITH PORNOGRAPHIC CONTENT AND THOSE THAT HARM THE HEALTH AND LIFE OF THE CHILD³⁰

The purpose of this administrative instruction is to determine measures to protect children from pornographic content and other inappropriate content that may have a negative impact on their physical, cognitive, and emotional development, and harm their lives.

Centres for Social Work take the necessary measures to identify, report, refer and manage cases of child abuse and mistreatment through pornography and other forms of online exploitation.

Centres for Social Work take preventive and awareness-raising measures in schools, neighbourhoods and communities regarding the dangers posed by the Internet and video games. They provide professional services to protect child victims of abuse and pornography, and those at risk of exposure to video games that are dangerous for their well-being. Each Centre for Social Work must designate at least one (1) relevant responsible and specialized official to coordinate measures and interventions for child protection, as well as exercise any other competencies, according to the legislation in force.

30 <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Udhezim-Administrativ-Nr-04-2022-per-masat-per-mbrojtjen-e-femjeve-kunder-faqeve-te-internetit-2.pdf>

3. Policy implications and the situation in practice

The analysis of the situation of children in Kosovo this year also shows that children still encounter difficulties in fully exercising their rights. These difficulties are manifested in almost all areas of their lives, especially in realizing the right to education and social and health protection.³¹

The Law on Child Protection authorized the competent institutions to issue 18 by-laws within one year from its entry into force in July 2020. These acts are particularly relevant for the protection and respect of children's rights, enabling among other things the following: coordination of the relevant authorities at the central and local levels; operation of the Council for the Rights of the Child; establishment and operation of Teams for the rights of the child; operation of the establishment of multidisciplinary tables for assistance in case management; organization and scope of child protection homes; taking appropriate measures to protect children from narcotics and psychotropic substances; taking appropriate preventive and protective measures in banning their presence in night clubs and gambling; ways of protecting children in mass media – with special emphasis on children who are under institutional care; taking appropriate measures to protect children from Internet cafes and video games, including specific measures against pornographic content, punishing child abusers on the Internet, reducing the child's access to material harmful to their health and life, providing assistance to the child who is at risk of all forms of violence through the Internet.

During 2021, the Ombudsperson Institution received eleven complaints against courts and prosecutors. The complaints were mainly about the trust in the custody of a minor child, the delay of the judicial procedures for compensation of damages, the postponement of the execution of sentences, the lack of contact with children and the right to a fair and impartial trial.

Also, at the request of the parties, the IAP has monitored court hearings related to children's trust.³²

In order to be as close as possible to the cases, the CSWs have also engaged a 24-hour guardian social worker, not only on working days but also on weekends

31 <https://oik-rks.org/2022/03/31/raporti-vjetor-2021/>

32 <https://oik-rks.org/2022/03/31/raporti-vjetor-2021/>

and holidays, so that no minor feels alone and unprotected during the initial interview and then also in the acceptance of services. According to the current Law, the PSC is responsible for the implementation of the supervision measure by the guardianship body.³³

CSW has a mandate to provide services to the category of children who use narcotics, alcohol, tobacco products, toxic products, psychotropic substances and other substances that are declared harmful by the relevant authorities. However, it should be noted that CSW in Kosovo currently does not have the basic knowledge regarding the identification, access and provision of services for this category of children. There is a lack of a database system for the accurate identification of the number of users, as a basis for creating adequate social policies, while the figures presented in the media or reports are not very accurate. There is a lack of staff who are prepared for training, a lack of public institutions that provide support; instead, all services are supported by professionals from NGOs, of which there are not many in Kosovo, with the exception of the NGO Labyrinth, which helps CSWs in different forms (during the last year they managed to engage support staff in some CSWs to deal with these cases).³⁴

33 <https://labirinti-ks.org/f/19/148/Analize-per-rolin-dhe-pergjegjesite-e-Qendres-per-Pune-Sociale-ne-Kosove>

34 <https://labirinti-ks.org/f/19/148/Analize-per-rolin-dhe-pergjegjesite-e-Qendres-per-Pune-Sociale-ne-Kosove>

4. To what extent is the access to services decentralised for specific target groups

The decentralization process of social services commenced in 2009, with the transfer of competencies from the central level (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare) to the municipalities of Kosovo. The transfer of competencies was based on the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2009 between the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Local

Government Administration, the Ministry of Finance and the municipalities. The purpose of decentralization of social services was to bring these services as close as possible to the citizens.

According to the LSFS, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare is the institution responsible for all policies, licensing, monitoring, inspection and regulatory issues related to operation and social welfare. Meanwhile, according to the LLSG, municipalities have full and exclusive competencies for the provision of social and family services within their territory. Regarding the financing of social services, according to the Law on Local Government Finance, they are financed by the General Grant and municipal own-source revenues.

Based on the analysis of the legal framework, numerous deficiencies that prevent the completion of the decentralization process but also the improvement of the state of social services, have been identified in Law No. 02/L-17³⁵ on Social and Family Services, Law No. 04/L-081 on Amendments to the Law No. 02/L-17 on Social and Family Services³⁶ and Law No. 03/L-049 on Local Government Finances.³⁶ The process of drafting both the Law on Social and Family Services and the Law on Finances and Local Government started in 2018. Although they have been finalized for a long time now, due to the lack of political will, the Covid-19 pandemic and the political instability situation in the country, these two draft laws were not approved even during 2021.

In addition, Law no. 03/L-040 also determines that municipalities are responsible for providing social services, including: care for children, family and social services, care for vulnerable groups, family housing, care for the elderly, etc. Furthermore, the Law on Social and Family Services, the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence and the Juvenile Justice Code define the Centre for Social Work (CSW) as the main

35 <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2447>

36 <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2525>

municipal authority for the provision of social services and the provision of related social care services with the protection of the individual, the group and the family.³⁷

Municipalities are responsible for providing social services within their territory, according to the standards and policies of the Government or relevant ministries. The Municipal Directorates for Health and Social Welfare are responsible for municipal social welfare issues and manage the Centres for Social Work. PSCs are public institutions that have the responsibility to provide social and family services to people in need. All municipalities of Kosovo have Centres for Social Work. There is a total of 40 Centres for Social Work in the territory of Kosovo with about 400 social workers.³⁸

Specifically, the biggest uncertainties about decentralization are related to the establishment of new institutions of social services, management, contracting, reporting, monitoring and communication. For this reason, it is recommended to address these deficiencies within the Draft Law on Social and Family Services.

37 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362426549_Vleresimi_i_nevojave_te_perdoruesve_te_sherbimeve_sociale_ne_Komunen_e_Prishtines

38 https://komfkosova.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Raporti-i-monitorimit_ENG-1.pdf

5. Set of concrete recommendations for policy changes

Along with the decentralization of social services at the municipal level, it is very important to carry out special analyses of the social services users in order that the services can be planned to meet the identified needs.

Urgently approve the Law on Social and Family Services for the regulation of issues such as: division of responsibilities of central and municipal level institutions; creation of an open scheme for the provision of social services between the public, non-governmental and private sectors; division of the function of inspection and monitoring between the central and municipal level, strengthening of the inspection unit through granting of executive powers; transformation of the internal inspection unit into a unit outside the ministry, which would affect independent inspection; licensing of social services provided by the public sector.

Raising the capacities of the Directorates for Social Welfare for planning, management and monitoring of social services. It is recommended that the Municipal Directorates for Health and Social Welfare develop and profile the professional staff in the field of social services. It is recommended to have at least one person profiled for managing social services within this Directorate in each municipality.

Creating a sustainable scheme by municipalities for contracting social and family services from the non-governmental sector. Contracting should be done in the name of purchasing services and not through subsidy. Municipalities should draw up the specifications for the purchase/contracting of social services from the non-governmental sector and must adhere to the minimum standards of MFPT during the contracting process.

Raising the capacities of officials responsible for social services in the PSC for the provision of social services. It is recommended to increase their number to meet the minimum standards of the Ministry of Education and Culture for the number of officials compared to the number of beneficiaries. Also, it is recommended that the PSCs have in their composition professionals from the fields required by law, such as social workers, psychologists, teachers, sociologists and lawyers. Furthermore, it is recommended to profile social services officials in the PSC according to the categories of service beneficiaries. Given the limited human resources, this process should be developed gradually, in a progressive manner. As a first stage, the profiling of social service officials for working with children and adults is recommended.



MONTENEGRO

AVAILABILITY OF SUPPORT SERVICES
FOR THE YOUTH AT RISK IN THE
MONTENEGRO

Marija Ružić Stajović

1. Overview of the current situation regarding support services for the youth at risk

The social welfare system in Montenegro requires a greater commitment of decision-makers on the highest levels, especially when it comes to youth at risk.³⁹ In recent period, social policy in Montenegro was going through a very turbulent phase related to frequent changes of the Government, which caused the abolition of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare at some point, and slowed down important steps on a social policy level. In April 2022, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare was re-established, and due to the ongoing situation, including slow state administration procedures, Montenegrin citizens are still waiting for a continuation of a long-awaited social reform related to legislation, development of social services and policies, which are targeting the needs of the most vulnerable citizens in our country, including youth groups.

The creation of social policies must be a human-centred process with a holistic approach, implemented in close cooperation with other relevant sectors. As stated within the Law on Social Protection, decentralization and pluralism of services must be enabled. This implies regional dispersion of the needed services, their quality, availability, and accessibility. It also implies deinstitutionalization and more community-based services and outreach work. In order to implement these principles, professionals have to participate in decision-making, especially those involved as outreach workers who deal with the most marginalized population, such as youth at risk, on a daily basis. This implies not only opinions of professionals from the state system, but also of a huge number of those who work in civil society organizations. The state has to recognize the work of licensed providers of non-governmental services, which contribute to more than half of the existing social services within the Montenegrin social system. CSOs are providing a full range of services across Montenegro, such as shelters for victims of violence, drop-in centres for people who use drugs, LGBT, sex workers, youth living on the street, etc.) Despite that, CSOs in Montenegro don't have stable financing by the state, while delays in funding programs lead to reduced financial stability and bring up the question of sustainability of specific services. In addition, the lack of calculated and

³⁹ The youth whose chances for successful transition to adult life are hindered by certain circumstances or factors experienced during their childhood. A young person facing one or more of these factors will have a more challenging time growing academically, social maturing, and contributing to the community and workforce.

agreed costs of the service for many CSOs providers contributes to this problem. Rulebooks which are regulating this area are often inadequate in terms of a low understanding of the nature of the services and their beneficiaries. This brings us to the question of how the state can respond and be profitable in general if it doesn't invest in sustainability of service providers, and what will happen if some CSOs have to terminate their services due to the lack of funding. Availability of services suffers from disparities on regional level. According to research conducted by Juventas at the end of 2021⁴⁰ among 78 providers of social services, one of the key problems faced by service providers is that, although certain services are available in all municipalities, some municipalities actually face a lack of specific services, especially when it comes to young people in need.

40 Juventas' Conference on presentation of preliminary research results: <http://juventas.me/urediti-programsko-finansiranje-i-vezivanje-usluga-nevladinih-organizacija-sa-javnim-sektorom/>, December 2021.

2. Overview of the major reform processes focusing on inclusive support to youth at risk and other important aspects

During the last decade, the reform of social and child protection system was carried out through several important strategic directions, which included improvement of the legislative framework, development of child protection standards and monitoring mechanisms, strengthening capacities of professional workers, transformation of residential childcare institutions, and introduction of licensing services, professionals, and programs.

Regarding the legislative framework, different legal documents are regulating the social policy system in Montenegro regarding children and youth, starting with the highest legal documents – the Constitution of Montenegro, and further the Law on Social and Child Protection, the Law on Travel Privileges for Persons with Disabilities, the Law on Movement of Persons with Disabilities with the Help of an Assistance Dog, the Family Law, the Law on Treatment of Minors in Criminal Proceedings, as well as numerous related laws, strategies, rulebooks and other legal documents.⁴¹ Article 74 of the Constitution of Montenegro⁴² stipulates that a child enjoys rights and freedoms adequate for its age and maturity, and is guaranteed special protection from psychological, physical, economic and any other exploitation or abuse. However, the Law on Social and Child Protection from 2013⁴³, which underwent several amendments and changes during the previous decade, is still quite archaic and due for a change, especially in the sense of inadequate material benefits and incompatibility with other laws (i.e. the Law on Employment), but also regarding other aspects such as the development of new social services. People living under the poverty line or at risk of poverty are candidates for some material benefits under this Law. The system does not provide criteria that are clear and fair enough for the selection of people at risk of poverty or those living under the poverty line. Some recipients of the material benefits are working in the grey zone. At the same time, some families are not able to use

41 Strategy for Development of Social Welfare and Child Protection System in Montenegro, for the period 2018–2022.

42 The Constitution of Montenegro, (Official Gazette of Montenegro 1/2007 and 38/2013 – Amendments I–XVI)

43 The Law on Social and Child Protection of Montenegro Official Gazette of Montenegro 27/2013, 1/2015, 42/2015, 47/2015, 56/2016, 66/2016, 1/2017, 31/2017 – Decision of the Constitutional Court, 42/2017 and 50/2017)

material benefits due to restrictions coming from the shortcomings in the cadastre system, among other issues. The system of work activation exists on paper, but has very limited results in practice.

Centres for social work, which represent the main link with social system beneficiaries and implement direct outreach work, are functioning in poor conditions (often unadjusted to people with disabilities), with inadequate offices for work with children, victims of violence, and many other marginalized groups, and their staff is not valued as professionals. One case worker in a centre for social work is dealing with around 100 cases in average, what leads to a burnout syndrome and inability to provide adequate support to vulnerable groups. For that matter, it is quite hard to discuss the improvement of the quality of work or strengthening the capacity of professional workers. In addition, society's position towards the professionals employed in centres for social work and in general towards everything that represents social policy is highly disrespectful.

Institutions that deal with social and child protection are in a better position compared to the centres for social work, but they also need to be more open to communities and develop different social services, depending on their target groups (elders, children without parental care, children with behavioural problems, etc.). Montenegro achieved a very significant result in terms of deinstitutionalization of children –from 2010 to 2019 the number of children placed in institutions in Montenegro decreased by 50%, while in 2017 the country reached a major milestone by not having a single child under three years old in institutions. This highly significant progress must be continued with a stronger development of foster care (with an emphasis on specialized fostering), development of the missing support services for children and youth after leaving the institution, as well as strengthening preventive mechanisms, such as family associate service. Considering deinstitutionalization and other marginalized groups, for example, three homes for elders (Pljevlja, Niksic, Podgorica) have been founded in Montenegro since 2018; however, social services in local communities for elders who can live in their own homes with adequate support, and who won't thereby become a great expense for the society, remained insufficiently developed.

Although Montenegro has developed a "Social Card" system (SWISS), which is very useful and represents a positive step in social reform, it needs to be constantly improved and followed by new digitalization processes. This would simplify the work of professionals, which is currently mainly limited to administrative tasks. The "Social Card" system (SWISS) should also provide valuable data for analysing the state of social

protection in Montenegro, in order to give recommendations for policy improvement, but its use is currently too limited.

Finally, the connection of the social and child protection system with other systems, such as the health, protection, education and employment systems must be strengthened, especially since they are in an interdependent position and also very complementary (especially when it comes to Roma community, children and youth living with autism, children living on the streets, victims of violence, labour activation of unemployed people, etc.). Besides the main Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Institute for Social and Child Protection can significantly contribute in this process, provided that it takes over a more active role in social policy reform with research and advisory activities. The multisectoral approach mustn't be declarative and represented through signed memoranda of cooperation, but citizens of Montenegro should rather feel it through improved quality of their lives and respect for their human rights. This implies that strengthening of the social system itself must start from the inside, with a greater appreciation of the humanitarian profession, along with strong and active decision-makers and professionals.

3. Policy implications and the situation in practice (main challenges in reform processes and how big was the actual impact of the policy changes)

Although social policy reform in Montenegro brought some important changes, it is still moving very slowly, with decision-makers showing lack of understanding and willingness to address numerous development needs of the social system and the most vulnerable groups. Different groups of children and youth are particularly affected by the problems present in social reform and the slow pace of the process itself.

Children and youth in institutional care in Montenegro still have very limited educational opportunities in terms of the quality of extracurricular work, space for direct one-to-one work, practical learning and use of technology in the education process. The situation has further worsened after the emergence of the pandemic and the transition to online schooling. The outbreak of the coronavirus has led to even worse consequences, where many children are being affected by lack of socialization with their peers, the closing of schools, depression and many other challenges and radical changes to their everyday routine. The situation was far more serious among the children from different marginalized and vulnerable groups, since schools have been moved online through alternative means in order to ensure the continuity of children's education. Many of these children did not have the necessary equipment for online schooling or the support of parents/legal guardians to follow that process, which greatly influenced their educational achievements.

Findings in the EU country report on Montenegro for 2021 on deinstitutionalization of children in care state that not enough has been achieved to ensure that Montenegro successfully continues to set up community and family-based services. Further efforts are needed to achieve deinstitutionalization and child-friendly justice; to tackle child marriages and child begging; to improve support for children with disabilities and their families; and to address poverty and improve the social inclusion and health status of vulnerable children.

Government institutions, together with stakeholders and CSOs, need to ensure effective continuation of the deinstitutionalization process of children, but also

simultaneously develop [foster care with an emphasis on specialized foster care](#). Also, institutions which deal with children must be more open to citizens and their needs, i.e. they need to [develop social services for children](#) and their parents as prevention of different kinds of problems which affect children in Montenegro (behavioural problems, violence, challenges of adolescence, lack of information about children's rights, importance of education, positive parenting, etc.). Related to this, [family associate service](#) is one of the most preventive methods in a social system when it comes to the protection of children from different kinds of problems, especially protection from violence, [prevention](#) of school drop-out, prevention of mental health problems, support to children with behavioural problems and prevention of institutionalization. State institutions must pay more significant attention to development of all social services in the system, particularly those which are crucial for protection of children, such as family associate service.

In the previous year, the National Council for Children's Rights was given closer attention by the Montenegrin Government and in November 2021, with the support of the UNICEF and Council of Europe, it started working on the foundation of [Children's House \(Barnahus\)](#), which will deal with the [protection of children from sexual violence and trauma](#). Given that so far Montenegro has not developed any social services for the protection of children – victims of sexual violence, this is considered a significant effort and we hope that during 2022 we will see concrete steps which will lead to the implementation of this idea. So far, social workers have been contacted with a case of a child who was suspected of being a victim of sexual abuse, but the child could only get support outside the borders of Montenegro. The same situation applies to children who have tried to commit suicide or who live in an institution and deal with addiction, promiscuity, or complicated mental problems. There are [no drop-in centres for children and minors who have addiction problems](#). There is only one civil society organization in Montenegro⁴⁴ that provides support to [children on the street](#). It is currently supporting more than 200 children and youth, and is working with more than 70 families. This CSO, like many others, doesn't have stable financing, which must be an alarm for decision-makers in a social system to speed up the process of social protection reform and find a way to enable sustainability for social services of this kind.

44 www.defendologijamne.com

4. To which extent is the access to services decentralized for specific target groups (i.e. which support services are available outside the capital cities in WB countries)

Before the implementation of the social and child protection reform in Montenegro, state authorities were the main actors in providing social protection policy. That was inefficient and non-stimulating for many reasons, but especially because the state support was not enough to meet the needs of the most vulnerable citizens, or stimulate social beneficiaries to use the rest of their abilities for developing their lives in the most positive way. Division of responsibilities, from the central (highest) state to local level regarding creators of social policy is the essence of the reforms in the social policy systems. In that way, the state enables better recognition of real problems faced by vulnerable groups and timely response to social problems and needs that arise in local communities. Besides, parallel with the social policy system reform, the process of deinstitutionalization is inevitable.⁴⁵

With the reform of the social protection system in Montenegro, decision-makers are trying to increase the role of local communities (municipalities and civil society organizations) in Montenegro and to overcome the paternalistic character of social protection system. On that way, Montenegro succeeds to open [daily centres for children/youth with disabilities](#), [creates a transformation plans](#) (first and second) for Children's Home "Mladost", stimulates municipalities to develop [local action plans for social welfare and child protection](#), introduces a [system of licensing](#) of social service providers, social programs and professional workers in social protection system.

However, from December 2021 to March 2022, NGO Juventas conducted research on "*Mapping social and child protection services*" among 24 units of centres for social work and 78 civil society organizations in Montenegro, which are social service providers. The main goal of the research was to identify the needs and priorities in the social and child protection system, in order to adequately plan the future development of social services in Montenegro. Research has shown that centres for social work need more qualified professional workers, improvement of spatial capacities and most importantly

⁴⁵ "Decentralization of the Social Protection System in Montenegro", Jankovic S. Ugljesa, Faculty of Political Science, University of Montenegro, 2014.

– development of more social services in local communities. Many concrete social services don't exist in a number of local municipalities except Podgorica, which makes it impossible for professional workers to give the necessary support, leaving the most vulnerable categories of the population without additional support.

The main problem faced by social service providers in Montenegro is that most of them are operating with insufficient support from the state or the local municipality budget, which prevents children and youth at risk from satisfying their needs in an equal way. This means that process of decentralization of social protection system needs to be more efficient and continued, by being brought down to the local levels, and by enabling vulnerable citizens to use the necessary social services in their own communities. Available funds for local service providers are very limited, while services provided by licensed civil society organizations are mostly financed on a project basis from the funds of various domestic or foreign donors. The sustainability of social services remains a concern, as full decentralization of service provision and funding has not yet occurred.

5. Set of concrete recommendations for policy changes, in order to provide higher inclusion of youth at risk, with special attention on the missing social services

In the forthcoming period, the Government of Montenegro needs to undertake crucial steps regarding the social policy reform implementation, making decentralization of social protection system a priority for decision-makers in this field. Attention should be put to the following areas:

- Implementation of the process of deinstitutionalization: transformation and closure of institutions;
- Improvements of the policies for the prevention of institutionalization, which includes activation of the family associate service and its development in all parts of Montenegro;
- Development of the necessary social services in all municipalities of Montenegro, especially according to specific categories of youth at risk;
- Increasing the number of licensed social service providers in the local communities;
- Opening to the community all institutions which need to exist in a certain form and which are supporting the most vulnerable youth, through the development on new services which are changing their negative image in local communities (for example Centre for Youth "Ljubovic", Children's Home "Mladost");
- Insufficient capacities in social and child protection institutions with the development of other social services which are preparing them for leaving the institution as early as possible;
- Enhancing continuous education of social professional workers and associates who work with children and youth;
- Strengthening mutual communication and cooperation between institutions and organizations which are service providers and which will create precise protocols for a multisectoral approach, especially regarding specific categories of children and youth;

- Continuous improvement of the SWISS software in a way that it collects data from all key institutions and organizations (CSOs, The Red Cross, local municipalities...), and use of its data for periodic analysis, which will enable the creation of better policies for the most vulnerable categories, especially youth at risk;
- Increasing financial allocations for social and child welfare services, especially those which are provided exclusively by civil society organizations and which face the possibility of being closed due to the lack of funding;
- Activation of the role of the Institute for Social and Child Protection in the sphere of advisory and research-related activities;
- Creation of the functional system of licensing and financing licensed service providers which act outside the public sector and make their work sustainable;
- Speeding up administrative procedures, especially regarding the development of the new Law on Social and Child Protection and other key activities relating to giving support to the most vulnerable categories.

It is clear that civil society organizations play a vital role in providing social services and are crucial for achieving a higher level of social cohesion and preventing social exclusion. The Government needs to acknowledge the role of CSOs as important social partners in meeting the needs of vulnerable populations, as well as important partners in enhancing social inclusion and human rights protection within the countries. Funding CSOs that provide social services cannot be perceived as fulfilling the obligation towards another budget unit, but rather as an investment in social care and social inclusion of the most vulnerable groups.

Finally, social welfare and child protection system need to be better connected with other systems, especially during the creation and implementation of different economic, health, and education policies, and always consider the consequences it has on it.



NORTH MACEDONIA

Children and youth who use
drugs in North Macedonia

Vlatko Dekov

1. Overview of the current situation regarding support services for the youth at risk with whom partner organizations are working

According to the 2019 [Report on the Use of Cigarettes, Alcohol, and Drugs among School Youth](#), based on the findings of the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs in the Republic of North Macedonia, the most used illegal substance among pupils is marijuana.

Table no. 1

Marijuana (cannabis)	1999	2008	2015	2019
Cannabis use during lifetime	4.5%	5.5%	5 %	6.1%
Cannabis use in the last 12 months	/	4%	3.9%	4.8%
Cannabis use in the last 30 days	1.3%	2.2%	2.2 %	2.7%

The lifetime prevalence of cannabis use among the young population appears to be slightly increased according to – data and previous research, i.e. 4.5% in 1999, 5.5% in 2008, 5% in 2015 and a marginal rise of 6.1% in 2019. In terms of cannabis use in the last 30 days, the trend remains relatively stable with 1.3% registered in 1999, 2.2% in 2008 and 2015, and a small increase by 2.7% in 2019.

Table no. 2

Other psychoactive substances (use during lifetime)	2015	2019
Ecstasy use	2.1%	1.1%
Inhalant use	1.9%	1.9%
Amphetamine use	1.4%	0.6%
Cocaine use	1.5%	0.9%
Crack use	0.9%	0.2%
Heroin use	0.9%	0.5%
Magic mushroom use	0.6%	0.5%

GHB use	0.7%	0.2%
Anabolic steroid use	0.6%	0.6%
Use of drugs by injection with a needle	0.8%	0.5%
Use of painkillers to get high	4.2%	2.0%
Simultaneous use of alcohol and painkillers	2.8%	1.6%

Pursuant to the 2019 survey findings, the percentage of students using other types of drugs during their lifetime ranged from 0.5% for magic mushrooms and heroin, 0.6% for amphetamines and anabolic steroids, to 1.9% for inhalants and 2% for painkillers.

A comparison of the 2019 ESPAD's findings with the findings from previous research shows a minor drop in heroin and LSD use, as well as stagnation in anabolic steroids use. Cocaine use increased between 2008 and 2015 (0.9% in 2008 and 1.5% in 2015), while again experiencing a decrease of 0.9% in 2019.

In 2019, 2.2% of the students responded that they used new substances that imitate the effects of illicit drugs, which is a decrease in comparison to 2015 when this figure was 3.7%.

Even though according to data, the number of children and young people using psychoactive substances is not insignificant, the country lacks services specifically created for this population. There is a counselling service for drug prevention and early use, as well as HOPS's program offering outreach services for children on the streets using drugs and children in the institutions. Both services are provided by NGOs. Only one service is provided by the state intuitions – a treatment of addiction that is available for children who reached the age of 16. Specially designed treatments, harm reduction programs, and re-socialization and integration programs for minors are also lacking.

2. Overview of the major reform processes focusing on inclusive support to the children and youth who use drugs and other important aspects

In 2010, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed its concern about the absence of prevention measures and rehabilitation services for children using drugs or alcohol, and recommended that North Macedonia should develop prevention measures and rehabilitation services for children abusing drugs and alcohol.

Civil society organizations, particularly HOPS (Healthy Option Project Skopje), has been advocating for many years for the development and adoption of a comprehensive program for the treatment and integration of children and young people who use drugs. Since 2013, HOPS has been conducting, mapping, and organizing different events, reaching out to children who use drugs. HOPS uses its field experience and collection of relevant data on the number of contacted children who use drugs to raise the question of the children and youth who use drugs, as well as to advocate for launching treatment programs. As a result of the advocacy, the Government established a working group in 2019 in order to develop a program for the treatment and care of children who use drugs, assigning the Ministry of Health to coordinate the group. The group consists of representatives of institutions and NGOs that work in the field. So far they have drafted the program, but it remains uncertain when the Government will adopt it. Although the adoption is the first step, there is also a need for the allocation of sufficient resources for the implementation of the program.

By organizing the regional meeting on the topic of “Children who use drugs”, HOPS managed to restore the relevancy of the issue, not only at the national, but also at the regional level.

HOPS is also working on establishing the sustainability of Harm reduction programs in the country, including sustainability for social and health services for marginalized groups.

We cannot expect immediate results on this issue, but raising the issue at the regional level means seeking a solution to the problem.

Children and young people who use psychoactive substances take up an insignificant percentage in documents released by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (2011-2021 National Strategy for the Reduction of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Macedonia), while keeping records for this population remains uncommon. Children and young people are also mentioned in the Law on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Official Gazette of RM 103/2008), in the section on the ministries' competences, more precisely the protection and education of children and young people as a category. In the National Drugs Strategy of Macedonia (Ministry of Health, 2014), children and young people who use psychoactive substances are mentioned in the section on reducing the drug demand, using protective measures, timely detection and counselling.

3. Policy implications and the situation in practice (main challenges in reform processes and how big was the actual impact of the policy changes)

In 2020, the civil sector submitted several amendments to the Law on Health Protection, requesting that civil society organizations be allowed to provide health services to minors, including a needle exchange program for minors who inject drugs. However, the initiative to amend the Law failed to enter the parliamentary procedure.

The system for data collection on minors who use drugs is insufficient. This problem needs to be addressed first, since it is the basis for tackling all other problems. The population's invisibility leads to a lack of proper policies and planned interventions, which causes a systematic absence of quality services intended for this population.

The public sector also lacks treatment and support services for minors who use drugs. The problem results in a low rate of successfully treated minors and a higher rate of minors using drugs.

In addition, both the public and the civil sectors also lack support programs (harm reduction, psychosocial support, rehabilitation, social integration) for minors, as well as proper youth programs. This leads to a higher rate of young people who use drugs, but also to the risk of endangering the individual and public health.

One of the main challenges in the process of developing quality policies is an apparent lack of political willingness to face the needs of children and young people who use drugs, as well as limited financing of service providers which results in limited services.

4. To which extent is the access to services decentralised for specific target groups

In the Republic of North Macedonia there are no decentralized programs for children and young people who use drugs. The number of programs covering this category of citizens is small and based in the capital city of Skopje.

In the Republic of North Macedonia, the number of programs covering this category of citizens is small and based only in the capital city Skopje. There is only one decentralized program for children and young people who use drugs provided by the state institutions, i.e. treatment of addiction with buprenorphine. Only this program offers treatment for children over 16 years of age. There are no treatment programs for children under the age of 16. The problem is the lack of political will to launch programs for children and youth under the age of 18.

5. Recommendations

- All competent ministries, institutions and civil society organizations working with children and young people who use drugs should strive to improve their data collection system.
- The national drug focal point should produce and publish statistical and analytical data reports from databases, at least annually. Research among children and young people who use drugs should be conducted when possible in order to allow policy and practice monitoring and evaluation of institutions and organizations with regard to children and young people who use drugs.
- The Government should work on improving the legal framework in order to provide medical treatment, harm reduction and psychosocial support for children and young people who use drugs, tailored to the child's interests. A change in the legislation would allow civil society organizations to be recognized as social and health services providers.
- The Ministry of Health should introduce a proper medical treatment for minors, opioid substitution therapy (OST), as well as harm reduction programs.
- The Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, should introduce proper treatment, including psychosocial support for minors who use drugs and their families, pursuant to international standards (such as UNODC/WHO International Standards on Drug Use Prevention).
- Pursuant to the recommendations issued by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy should develop rehabilitation services for children abusing drugs and alcohol.
- The Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and other relevant institutions should provide proper infrastructure and capacities for implementation of the mentioned measures, including human resources and an annual budget for policy implementation.

- Institutions should introduce a better internal network; the role of primary health institutions, including pediatricians, social work centres, educative institutions and civil society organizations, should be strengthened.
- The Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and other relevant institutions should strengthen early intervention capacities.
- The Government should ensure implementation of preventive measures, pursuant to the 2015 UNODC International Standards for Drug Use Prevention.
- Relevant ministries, civil society organizations and other interested parties should increase awareness of the problems and needs of children and young people who use drugs.
- Relevant ministries, civil society associations and other interested parties should increase the visibility of the population concerned. Governments and civil society institutions have to guarantee that the voice of children and young people is heard, and ensure their participation in the decision-making process with complete respect of their dignity and integrity.
- The Government, civil society organizations and other interested parties should increase capacities (study visits, training, etc.) of the key decision-makers in order to achieve sensitization.
- Competent ministries should increase financial support for governmental and non-governmental service providers.



SERBIA

Prevent Association

Availability of support services for youth
at risk in Serbia

Ivana Jovanović

1. Overview of the current situation on support services to the youth at risk with whom partner organizations are working

The competent institutions for the provision of social care services operate in accordance with the Law on Social Protection and all other relevant laws, while the Centres for Social Work, as guardianship bodies, perform a number of guardianship functions within the domain of public authorities.

Service provision is regulated in such a way that accommodation, financial social benefits and services from the domain of public authorities for all citizens of Serbia, as well as for young people at risk, are provided at the national level. In addition to these services, the Law regulates the possibility of providing other services aimed at the specific needs of young people at risk, which are established on the basis of decisions of the local self-government units and financed from their budgets, in accordance with the estimated needs.

The Rules on Detailed Conditions and Standards for the Provision of Social Protection Services define the conditions for providing a certain number of services; however, the legal framework allows for the development of services for which standards are still not defined. This contributes to the development of new, innovative services and the improvement of system responses to the needs of all users, including young people at risk.

All services defined by the normative acts for the provision of social protection services are provided to young people at risk, in line with the needs and resources of local communities. Despite the need to create preconditions for providing services to youth at risk, a number of local self-governments failed to do so. Due to the lack of financial, human and other resources in some local communities, local social services have not been established or are not available to a sufficient extent.

In accordance with the Law on Social Protection, social protection services are divided into the following groups:

1. assessment and planning services - assessment of the state, needs, strengths and risks of users and other important persons in their environment;

assessment of guardians, foster parents and adoptive parents; creation of an individual or family service provision plan and legal protection measures, as well as other assessments and plans;

2. daily services in the community – daycare; help in the house; shelter and other services that support the user's stay in the family and immediate environment;
3. support services for independent living – housing with support; personal assistance; training for independent living and other types of support necessary for the user's active participation in society;
4. counselling-therapeutic and social-educational services – intensive support services for families in crisis; counselling and support of parents, foster parents and adoptive parents; support for a family that takes care of their child or an adult family member with developmental disabilities; maintenance of family relationships and family reunification; counselling and support in cases of violence; family therapy; mediation; SOS phone lines, activation measures and other advisory and educational services and activities;
5. accommodation services – accommodation with relatives, foster or other families for adults and the elderly; home accommodation; accommodation in a shelter and other types of accommodation.

In addition, in accordance with the Law on Social Protection, a beneficiary of social protection rights or services is an individual, i.e. a family that faces obstacles in meeting their needs, which prevents them from reaching or maintaining the quality of life, or that does not have enough means to meet basic life needs, and cannot achieve them through work, income from property or from other sources.

A minor (hereinafter: a child) and an adult up to the age of 26 (hereinafter: a young person, youth) is a beneficiary in the sense of paragraph 1 of this Article, who faces difficult family and other life circumstances, threatened health, safety and development, i.e. when it is certain that without the support of the social protection system they cannot reach the optimal level of development, in particular:

- 1) if they are without parental care or at risk of losing parental care;
- 2) if their parent, guardian or other person directly responsible for them is unable to take care of them without the support of the social protection system, due to health reasons, mental illness, intellectual difficulties or unfavourable socio-economic circumstances;

- 3) if they face disabilities in development (physical, intellectual, mental, sensory, speech and language, socio-emotional, multiple), and their needs for care and material security exceed the family's capabilities;
- 4) if they are in conflict with their parents, guardian and the community and if their behaviour threatens them and their environment;
- 5) if they face difficulties due to abuse of alcohol, drugs or other intoxicants;
- 6) if there is a danger that they will become a victim or if they are a victim of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation, i.e. if their physical, psychological or emotional well-being and development are threatened by the actions or omissions of parents, guardians or other persons who directly take care of them;
- 7) if they are victims of human trafficking;
- 8) if they are foreign citizens, i.e. people without citizenship, unaccompanied;
- 9) if their parents argue about the way of exercising parental rights;
- 10) if there are other needs for using social protection.

An adult from the age of 26 to the age of 65 (hereinafter: an adult) and an adult over the age of 65 (hereinafter: an elderly user) is a user in the sense of paragraph 1 of this Article, whose well-being, safety and productive life in society is threatened due to age, disability, illness, family and other life circumstances, and in particular:

- 1) if they face physical, intellectual, sensory or mental difficulties, or difficulties in communication, and when, due to social or other obstacles, they encounter limitations in performing in one or more areas of life;
- 2) if there is a danger of becoming a victim or if they are victims of self-neglect, neglect, abuse, exploitation and domestic violence;
- 3) if they face difficulties due to disturbed family relationships, addiction to alcohol, drugs or other intoxicants or due to other forms of socially unacceptable behaviour and other causes;
- 4) if they are victims of human trafficking;
- 5) if they are foreign citizens and stateless people in need of social protection;
- 6) if there is a need for home accommodation and other needs for the use of social protection.

Several CSOs implement outreach work with youth at risk (PWUD, sex workers, LGBT, MSM, PLHIV) in cooperation with public health institutes or with local institutes

for health care. Those organizations are funded by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. These populations can benefit from a set of services (health and social care) without going to an institution, but outreach workers refer clients to health centres, hospitals, centres for social protection, communes for the treatment of addiction and other institutions and organizations if they have a need for that. Due to highly complicated licensing procedures, organisations that provide these types of services mostly choose not to go through that process and remain without a licence.

The Network of Organizations for Post-Penal Support in Serbia, founded in 2019, began developing and piloting programs to support people who leave institutions for the execution of criminal sanctions. These programs in Serbia were supported by the OSCE mission and the Dutch Embassy.

2. Overview of the major reform processes focusing on inclusive support to youth at risk and other important aspects

Below is the overview of the ongoing process related to the changes to the legal and strategic documents.

The process of amending the Law on Youth began in 2021 and has not been completed.

The initiative to amend the Law on Social Protection was launched more than 5 years ago. No amendments have been made to this Law yet.

Commenting on the new Youth Strategy in Serbia, which will be valid from 2022 to 2030, is in progress. The old one is still running and is valid until 2025.

The Provincial Action Plan for Youth for the period 2022–2025 was developed. The next step is adoption by the local government.

By the end of the year, the Local Action Plan for Youth of the City of Novi Sad for the period 2023–2026 will be written.

In the employment sector, some programs have been launched and include the employment of youth, who are treated as a harder-to-employ category. “My first salary” program was launched in 2020, with the aim to encourage the training of youth for work, as well as their employment, and to provide support to the economy in solving the problem of the lack of personnel. Young people without working experience apply for free positions in different sectors. Selected candidates sign contracts for 9 months. During that period, they undergo the process of learning and getting working experience for their profession. They don’t have social and health insurance, but receive only net earnings.

Every year, the National Employment Service offers several funds for the employment of people from less employable categories and funds for self-employment. In addition, some cities have that program on the local level, while the regional government has the program for Vojvodina.

When it comes to the employment of people from less employable categories, the subsidy is granted to employers in a one-time amount, for the purpose of employing unemployed persons registered in the records of the National Employment Service from the difficult-to-employ category based on the Public Call, namely:

- young people up to the age of 30 – without completed secondary education, young people in residential care, foster families and guardian families;
- those older than 50 years;
- Roma population;
- persons with disabilities;
- able-bodied users of cash social assistance;
- unemployed people who have been on the unemployment register for longer than 12 months;
- victims of domestic violence.

An unemployed person can apply to receive a subsidy for self-employment provided that they are registered with the National Service, have completed training for the development of entrepreneurship according to the training plan and program organized by the National Service or another appropriate organization, fulfilled previous obligations and settled all debts due to the National Service and within the allowed framework of the determined amount for de minimis state aid in the current fiscal year and the previous two fiscal years, in accordance with the regulations for granting state aid.

The Law on Social Entrepreneurship was finally adopted on February 4th, 2022. This gives a chance to improve the position of people from socially sensitive groups, especially youth.

In the sense of this Law, members of socially sensitive groups are considered to be persons who are part of the social protection system, unemployed persons who are more difficult to employ in accordance with the regulations in the field of employment and other persons from particular sensitive categories who are more difficult to employ, as well as members of other sensitive social groups determined by the Law. A business entity with the status of social entrepreneurship has the obligation to obtain at least 50% if it:

- 1) reinvests in internal support programs for socially vulnerable groups or in costs related to employment of able-bodied members of socially vulnerable

groups, i.e. in activity programs aimed at solving community problems in the areas of action referred to in Article 7 of this Law; or

- 2) donates to other legal entities or entrepreneurs with the status of social entrepreneurship to solve community problems in the areas of action referred to in Article 7 of this Law.

The National Investment Plan “Serbia 2025” envisages the construction of cheap apartments for young people. However, that document doesn’t exist anywhere on the internet presentations that are made by the Government of the Republic of Serbia. It was only presented by the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic of Serbia at the end of 2019.

3. Policy implications and the situation in practice (main challenges in reform processes and how big was the actual impact of the policy changes)

Inclusion in education was launched many years ago in order to engage children and youth from vulnerable social groups in education and prevent them from early dropping out of school. However, the current way of implementing inclusion is not good enough because there are not enough human resources in educational institutions and education according to an individual plan is carried out only with the consent of parents. School institutions do not employ defectologists, speech therapists, personal assistants, or pedagogical assistants. There are support services and teams of experts, which cannot sufficiently cover the needs of the schools.

On the other hand, there are local Action Plans for Youth in several local governments which are specifically aiming at improving the position of youth in risk and improving social inclusion. Those projects and programs can't result in big changes, but they can contribute to policy changes on local and national levels.

Unemployment among the general population of youth has decreased, but there are no concrete data for the youth at risk.

There are still no results from the new Law on Social Entrepreneurship.

At the level of the City of Novi Sad, funds for HIV prevention were provided in a modest amount, in accordance with the Paris Declaration.

The following section lists all major bodies in charge of youth issues in Serbia:

The Youth Council Council is an advisory body of the Government of the Republic of Serbia that encourages and coordinates activities related to the development, realization and implementation of youth policy, and proposes measures for its improvement. The Youth Council is made up of representatives of state administration bodies whose scope includes areas of interest to youth, provincial administration bodies responsible for youth issues, youth associations and unions, youth office, joint

representatives of national councils of national minorities and distinguished experts. At least one-third of the members of the Youth Council are youth representatives.

National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS) is an umbrella association of youth associations in Serbia, recognised by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Besides the **National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS)** there are also three important unions that work on the improvement of policies for young people – NAPOR, OPENS and NOF.

National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS) is an association of youth organisations and youth-led organisations with more than 100 members. KOMS is an advocacy platform that serves for improving the position of young people and acts as a link between young people, its member organizations and various decision-makers and providers of programs and services for young people (primarily the state and its institutions). Therefore, KOMS advocates for the improvement of the position of young people in Serbia. Since 2017, the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS) has been conducting research and issued a publication “The Alternative report on the position and needs of young people in the Republic of Serbia” and based its advocacy activities on its results. “The Alternative report on the position and needs of young people in the Republic of Serbia” is the largest annual research on young people in our country. KOMS participated in various consultation processes regarding youth policy and in the creation of documents regarding youth.

The National Association of Youth Workers (NAPOR) was created in 2009, as a result of the initiative of civil society organizations in Serbia, which implement youth work. They recognized the need to ensure the quality of the youth work program, standardize it, and professionalize it in order to be recognized by young people, institutions that work with young people, the state and society in general. Guidelines for ensuring the quality of youth work were adopted at the founding assembly, and served as the basis for the creation of all other documents, processes and mechanisms that NAPOR has developed so far. NAPOR published “A practical guide to outreach youth work” and offered training for working with NEET youth.

The Novi Sad Youth Forum (NOF) is the largest independent representative body of young people, youth associations and informal youth groups that enables the participation of young people in decision-making processes related to youth policy through the partnership of organizations and the city administration in Novi Sad. NOF is directly involved in realization of Local Action Plan for Youth in Novi Sad through the delegation of two representatives of NOF in Commission for the allocation of funds for projects and programs intended for young people, including youth at risk. Also,

NOF representatives participated in various consultation processes regarding youth policy and in the creation of documents at the local, provincial and national levels. NOF participated in the creation of a proposal of the goals of the ReLOaD2 project funded by UNDP in Novi Sad, where a total of 31 goals were proposed in 4 areas and 12 of them were aimed at youth from vulnerable groups.

OPENS Association is the federation of associations whose task is to show along with its partners through a set of activities, projects, programs, events, and initiatives, that there are many doors that can be opened for the transfer of energy, knowledge, experience, information, as well as that the capacities of young people can thereby be empowered. After Novi Sad was pronounced the European Youth Capital for 2019 in Varna (Bulgaria), a team was created, the program was set and clear goals were defined. OPENS had funded associations for youth and association of youth for three consecutive years in order to improve the position of youth in Novi Sad. There were several areas and one of them was aimed at youth from social sensitive groups. After those three years, almost every program or project from this area stopped due to the lack of funds. OPENS still exists and works with youth. When the COVID-19 pandemic started, OPENS and 10 organisations from Novi Sad launched the “Constellation of Support” campaign for young people, which still works.

The National Association of Youth Offices is an umbrella association of Youth Offices from cities and municipalities in the territory of the Republic of Serbia that have established Youth Offices and are actively working on developing local youth policy. It was founded with the aim of ensuring the quality of youth policy at the local level.

All those listed above work in the interest of young people and are trying to improve the position of young people in general, but also young people from vulnerable groups, through certain mechanisms. One of the obstacles they face is the lack of funds to finance the numerous strategies and action plans that exist, but are either not implemented at all or not fully implemented.

4. To what extent is access to services decentralised for specific target groups (i.e. which support services are available outside the capital cities in WB countries)

There are 145 local governments in the Republic of Serbia. Most of them provide at least one of the social protection services, but there are also those in which none of the services prescribed by law are provided. This is either due to the lack of human resources or the lack of money. In some local governments, some services are not needed.

The following social protection services are under the jurisdiction of local government units: daily community services, support services for independent living, advisory-therapeutic and social-educational services, except counselling and training of foster parents and adoptive parents, accommodation services in the shelter, as well as other services of interest to local governments. The Law on Social Protection does not recognize the services of a personal companion and respite accommodation.

The services provided by the organizations mentioned in section 1 are provided mostly in larger cities such as Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Kragujevac and Šabac. Those services are only rarely available in smaller municipalities which are the majority in Serbia. This means that a large part of youth risk that lives outside of the main regional administrative centres remains deprived of important services of support. This remains one of the most important issues regarding youth at risk and in the forthcoming period it is important to work on increasing regional availability of the services. There are different models that can be established, and Serbian authorities need to find the one that corresponds the most to the needs of the youth at risk as well as to the capacities of the existing institutions. Additionally, this is the area where CSOs that provide services could be of specific importance having in mind that they are usually more flexible in providing services, more easily adaptable, have developed outreach work, and should therefore be considered the main partner in providing higher regional coverage with specific services.

5. Set of concrete recommendations for policy changes, in order to provide higher inclusion of youth at risk, with special attention on the missing social services

- Amend the Law on Social Protection and the inclusion of drug users and sex workers in the target groups covered by the Law
- Provide funds for the implementation of strategies and action plans that also concern youth at risk
- Continue to work on the prevention of an early drop-out of school
- Improve inclusion in education by providing funds for the employment of defectologists, speech therapists, personal assistants and pedagogical assistants in schools
- Improve the system of data collection regarding youth at risk
- Decentralize access to services for youth at risk and make the process of licensing in the field of social protection easier
- Ensure implementation of programs of social integration of youth at risk
- Provide training for education and sensitization of employees in all sectors that come into contact with young people at risk (health, education, social protection, police, judiciary...)
- Improve infrastructure and capacities of institutions dealing with social protection
- Provide training for education and sensitization of media
- Promote politically correct language
- Strengthen the capacities of institutions for early interventions
- Increase the visibility of services for young people at risk that are implemented in institutions and within CSOs
- Increase regional availability of the services for youth at risk

