



**OPENING DOORS**  
**FOR EUROPE'S CHILDREN**

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**STRENGTHENING FAMILIES. ENDING INSTITUTIONAL CARE.**

**SERBIA**

## **COUNTRY FACT SHEET**

Although Serbia has the lowest institutionalisation rate of children in Europe<sup>1</sup>, there are numerous challenges that stall progress with the child protection system reform. Lack of comprehensive strategy on deinstitutionalisation (DI) and the action plan for its implementation remain several of them. In 2017, two working groups on intensive family support services and on the transformation of institutions have been established by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs in cooperation with civil society. However, due to the lack of a deinstitutionalisation strategy, there is no priority or focus given to end institutional care for children. There is an urgent need for the Government of Serbia to prioritise the development of a comprehensive strategy and the action plan on DI that, with sufficient funding from national and EU resources, will lead to a sustainable transformation of Serbian child protection system.

In 2016, there were 818 children in institutions in Serbia of which almost 80% were children with disabilities. Children with disabilities grow up in overcrowded institutions where prescribed accommodation capacity of 50 children is often exceeded. In many instances, children are institutionalised in the same facilities as adults; they have limited access to education and cannot participate in any decisions that affect their lives.

In June 2017, the Prime Minister of Serbia Ana Brnabic declared that the Government will prioritise measures to improve situation of children, including transformation of the residential care institutions and the development of community-based services.

### **KEY DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS CHILD PROTECTION REFORM**



**IN 2017, THE  
INSTRUMENT OF PRE  
ACCESSION FUNDING  
2013 WAS RELEASED  
FOR DEINSTITUTIONA-  
LISATION REFORMS IN  
SERBIA.**

<sup>1</sup> Opening Doors data in Serbia

## KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU



**TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE THAT IPA II FUNDING CONTINUES TO BE PRIORITISED FOR DI REFORMS IN SERBIA. CONDITIONS SUCH AS EX-ANTE CONDITIONALITIES, NATIONAL DI STRATEGY, POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING, INVOLVEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY, SHOULD BE INTRODUCED WITH SERBIA'S OBLIGATION TO FULFILL THEM IN ORDER TO ACCESS THE EU FUNDING.**

However, Serbia has not yet adopted or considered a consolidated law on child protection and the rights of the child. There is no clear deinstitutionalisation strategy or Master Plan for the transformation of institutions for children. In 2017, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs initiated two working groups to develop regulations for intensive family support services and to proceed with the transformation of institutions for children. However, these working groups are not part of the broader strategy or action plan on DI, which results in the lack of priorities and focus. The process of transformation remains too slow, and the governmental plans to restructure existing institutions into smaller units without adequate planning lack support from the civil society.

In Serbia, institutional care is mainly provided and funded by the state. In 2017, there were 20 institutions for children out of which six were institutions for children with disabilities. Expenditures for residential and family-based care are the largest parts of the consolidated budget for social care services in Serbia. In 2015, this amount totaled to 5.8 billion (about 0.14% of GDP)<sup>2</sup>. Expenditures for institutional care include infrastructure costs, human resources, material allowance to children living in institutions and costs associated with their education. At the same time, there is no funding of deinstitutionalisation reforms.

Allocation of funds from both national and EU budgets is a key to success for deinstitutionalisation in Serbia. National funding aims to support institutional care settings and does not have deinstitutionalisation in focus that would bring sustainable change in the system of child protection. The Instrument of Pre-Accession Funding has a key role to play in covering the transition costs and supporting the Serbian government with deinstitutionalisation reforms. Through the IPA 2013, seven projects were approved for DI reforms, with the total amount of €1,450,642.97 in funds. Although their realisation has started in 2017, there is no precise information on how much of these funds is allocated for deinstitutionalisation of children, since the process of DI includes both adults and children. There are also concerns that the funds will not be sustainable since there is no DI strategy or the action plan to align their usage with. Deinstitutionalisation has not been prioritised in IPA 2015 and IPA 2016 which means that the national government needs to ensure sustainability of these reforms since there will be no continuity of the funding. Programming of IPA 2017 is on-going and civil society in Serbia advocates for the prioritisation of DI in the next funding period.

In recent years, child protection system in Serbia has been challenged by the influx of children in migration who are not sufficiently protected. Especially for unaccompanied children, the only available care option is either institutional care settings or asylum centers. Often, due to the lack of available places, children in migration have no other choice but to live on the streets, exposing themselves to the dangers of being trafficked.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Mapping of social service in mandature of local governments<sup>4</sup>, Center for Social Policy, 2016.

## KEY RECOMMENDATION TO THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT



**TAKE ACTION TO ENSURE THAT NATIONAL BUDGET IS RING-FENCED SO THAT SERVICES CONTINUE TO OPERATE AFTER THE END OF EU-FUNDED INTERVENTIONS.**



### OPENING DOORS NATIONAL COORDINATOR IN SERBIA

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

### NATIONAL PARTNERS

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

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

It is a partnership between 5 international organisations and civil society across 16 European countries. For more information go to [www.openingdoors.eu](http://www.openingdoors.eu)