



Government
of the Republic of Serbia



SOCIAL INCLUSION AND
POVERTY REDUCTION
UNIT

AVAILABILITY OF LOCAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND MEASURES FOR ROMA CHILDREN



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC

AVAILABILITY OF LOCAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND MEASURES FOR ROMA CHILDREN

PUBLISHER:

Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Republic of Serbia

AUTHOR:

Jelena Marković

EDITOR:

Slavica Denić

YOUNG RESEARCHERS:

Monika Ajvazović, Tanja Jovanović, Petar Todorović

TRANSLATION:

Tijana Mahieu

DESIGN AND PREPRESS:

Dalibor Jovanović

PUBLISHED:

March 2020

SUPPORT: This publication was prepared with the support of the Government of Switzerland within the Project entitled “Support to Improve Social Inclusion in the Republic of Serbia”.

DISCLAIMER: This publication does not represent official views of the Government of the Republic of Serbia or of the Government of Switzerland. All terms used in the male grammatical gender include both male and female gender of the persons referred to.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	6
2. Purpose and Methodology of the Evaluation	6
3. Status of Roma Children in the Republic of Serbia	9
4. Legal Framework	13
4.1. The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia	13
4.2. Law on Local Government	14
4.3. Law on the Planning System	15
4.4. Law on Prohibition of Discrimination	15
4.5. Law on Social Welfare	15
4.6. Rulebook on Social Care Facilities Licensing	17
4.7. Regulation on Earmarked Social Transfers	17
4.8. Law on Financial Support to Families with Children	17
4.9. Family Law	18
4.10. Law on the Education System Foundations	18
4.11. Law on Primary Education	19
4.12. Law on Preschool Education	20
4.13. Rulebook on Additional Support for the Educational, Health, and Social Needs of the Child, Learner and Adult	20
4.14. Rulebook on SEN Teaching Assistants and Teaching Assistants in Adult Learning .	21
4.15. Rulebook on Secondary School Admission Requirements and Procedure for Roma Students	22
4.16. Rulebook Amending the Rulebook on Student Loans and Scholarships	23
4.17. Rulebook on Detailed Criteria for Identifying Discrimination in Educational Settings .	23
5. Policy and Institutional Framework	24
5.1. Operational Conclusions on Roma Social Inclusion	24
5.2. Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016–2025	24
5.3. Strategy for Education Development in the Republic of Serbia until 2020	26
5.4. Strategy for the Prevention of and Protection from Discrimination	26
5.5. Procedures for Social Welfare Centres for Meeting their Obligations Relating to the Enforcement of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence	27
5.6. Social Welfare Strategy	27
5.7. Roadmap for the Elimination of Child Labour	28
5.8. Coordination Body for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in Serbia	28

6. National Support Systems for the Social Inclusion of Roma Children	32
6.1. Support for the Development of the Preschool Education System	32
6.2. Teaching Assistants	33
6.3. Scholarships for Roma Students	34
6.4. Romani Language with Elements of National Culture	34
6.5. Admission of Roma Students to Secondary Schools	35
6.6. Health Mediators	35
6.7. Earmarked Social Transfers	36
6.8. Projects Approved Through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance – IPA	36
7. Systemic Support for the Social Inclusion of Roma Children at the Local Level	37
7.1. Planning and Monitoring System at Local Level	38
7.2. Roma Coordinators	39
7.3. Roma Inclusion Mobile Units	40
7.4. Roma Civil Society Organizations	40
8. Support Measures and Services for the Improvement of Social Inclusion of Roma Children at Local Level	42
8.1. Support Measures from the Social Protection Domain	42
8.2. Educational Support Measures	47
8.3. Health Care Support Measures	48
8.4. Support Activities and Measures Provided by CSOs at Local Level	49
9. Key Findings	52
10. Recommendations	56
11. REFERENCES	58
12. ANNEXES	61
12.1. Annex 1 – Questionnaire for Civil Society Organizations	61
12.2. Questionnaire 2 – List of Surveyed Civil Society Organizations	64

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSO	Civil Society Organization
EU	European Union
FSA	Financial Social Assistance
GoS	Government of Serbia
GSI	Group for Social Inclusion
IE	Inclusive education
LESF	Law on the Education System Foundations
LGU	local government unit
LG	local government
MICS	Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey
MoESTD	Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development
NPA	National Plan of Action for Children
PPP	Preparatory preschool programme
PSE	Preschool education
RS	Republic of Serbia
SCTM	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
SEDS	Strategy for Education Development in Serbia
SIPRU	Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit
SORS	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia
SWC	Social Welfare Centre
WB	World Bank

1. Introduction

Improving the situation of Roma children is recognized as one of the national priorities in many of the national strategies of the Government of Serbia (GoS). Improving Roma social inclusion and, primarily, their educational, social and health status, requires a clear strategic commitment from decision-makers and institutions at national level, as well as the delivery of comprehensive local institutional and non-governmental support services to children and families. The Roma Social Inclusion Strategy 2016–2025 envisages the improvement of the situation of the Roma minority primarily through local community-based action.

With a view to contributing to monitoring the implementation of the Roma Social Inclusion Strategy, the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, in cooperation with the GoS Council for the Rights of the Child, launched an evaluation of the Availability of Local Support Services and Measures for Roma Children.

2. Purpose and Methodology of the Evaluation

The purpose of this study is to assess the availability of local support services and measures for Roma children. This assessment covers social, educational and health care services available to children up to 18 years of age, as well as services/measures designed to prevent discrimination of Roma children.

Key evaluation questions this study proposes to answer:

- Does Serbia's legislative and strategic framework provide a basis for improving the situation of Roma children?
- What are the prerequisites for meeting the local legislative and strategic priorities for improving the situation of Roma children?
- What are the key challenges and capacities in developing, implementing and monitoring local services and measures for Roma children?

The key findings and recommendations are based on: 1) an evaluation of national and local regulations and policies; 2) an evaluation of the national and local strategic and institutional framework; 3) an evaluation of key findings of surveys and reports of relevant local and international institutions; 5) the identification of challenges in the implementation, management and coordination of the support system at local level.

The assessment of the national and local legal, policy and institutional framework focuses on the key national commitments, as well as on the aspects that constitute the

basic prerequisite for enabling access to rights, for implementing as well as upgrading local support services and measures for Roma children.

The desk research included: an assessment of strategic goals, regulations and policies from the three reference systems (education, health care and social welfare); an analysis of regulations governing the functioning of towns and municipalities; reports and assessments by institutions, independent bodies and civil society organizations on access to rights by members of the Roma ethnic minority.

Considering that a significant share of activities and services for children are provided by civil society organizations (CSOs), the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU) conducted an online survey¹ of: services/activities implemented by CSOs at the local community level; the characteristics of children participating in the activities; the capacities and challenges the CSOs are facing in their work.

SIPRU collected and analysed answers by 61 CSOs² providing services for Roma children at local level. Most of the surveyed civil society organizations (more than 60%) have extensive experience in working with children from the Roma community (more than 10 years of continued efforts). Forty percent of CSOs include school-age children (11–15 years of age) in their activities, while activities organized for preschool children and their parents are the scarcest.

The evaluation of the content of relevant national and local policy documents, and the survey of CSOs provided the basis for proposing a set of **recommendations for improving the availability of local support services to Roma children**, to ensure the efficient implementation of national strategic commitments and improve the situation of Roma children in Serbia.

The lack of data on the number of Roma children included in various local and national programmes and measures is **a limiting factor in this analysis**, as available data of official institutions are generally not disaggregated by nationality, and frequently not even by children's age. Although the Roma Inclusion Strategy recommends that data be collected about the measures implemented to improve the situation of the Roma population and Roma children, self-declaration of ethnicity is voluntary in Serbia and institutions have neither the legal authority, nor the obligation to collect data disaggregated by ethnicity. The Law on the Protection of National Minority Rights and

¹ Survey questionnaire for CSOs – Annex 1.

² List of CSOs that participated in the online survey – Annex 2

Freedoms defines that, in accordance with Serbia's Constitution, no one shall suffer harm for choosing to declare their nationality or to refrain from doing so. Any registration process that requires members of national minorities to declare their ethnicity against their will is prohibited.³

A database was created for monitoring Roma inclusion at national and local level with statistical and textual data about Roma inclusion measures implemented by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD), Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure (MoCTI), Ministry of Health (MH), the National Employment Service (NES), the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS), and local government data.⁴ The database is an important tool for monitoring the efficient implementation of policies at national and local level designed to ensure the storage, the keeping of and retrieval of data from a centralized repository.⁵ However, because of the lack of human capacities and Roma coordinators, a large number of local governments has not been reporting the data in a timely manner, thus impairing the ability to take stock of the situation at local government level.

Rather than providing a comprehensive list of national and local support systems for Roma children, or mapping all existing support measures, this analysis proposes to identify **key factors that impact both the availability and the monitoring of the effects of support services and measures implemented primarily at local levels.**

³ FRY Official Gazette No 11/02, Serbia and Montenegro Official Gazette No 1/03 –Constitutional Charter and RS Official Gazette No 72/09 – as amended, Official Gazette No 97/13 –Constitutional Court decision and Official Gazette No 47/18).

⁴ Available at: www.inkluzijaroma.stat.gov.rs

⁵ This system was developed with the support of the European Support for Roma Inclusion project, funded by the European Union and implemented by the OSCE mission in Serbia. The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of Serbia is tasked with the technical maintenance and development of the database, with the support of the Government of Switzerland and through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

3. Status of Roma Children in the Republic of Serbia

There are significant differences between the Roma and the general population in Serbia in terms of access to education, health care and social services. Many studies reveal that the Roma are the poorest and most vulnerable population group in Serbia, due to generational poverty and social exclusion, poor living conditions and living standard, and discrimination.

Individuals and families living in substandard settlements are particularly disadvantaged. **In total, 583 substandard Roma settlements in 169 towns and municipalities** were mapped in Serbia. In total, 65,784 Roma live in these settlements, most of them – 29,642 in the South and East Serbia Region.⁶

In the absence of any official **data on the average income of the Roma population**, it is estimated that the number of Roma living in absolute poverty is on the increase, and that about 40% face discrimination. The Roma population is still frequently the target of hate speech and threats which are neither investigated nor sanctioned.⁷

There is a widespread perception of institutional discrimination among the Roma population, primarily in terms of impaired access to social protection rights, and in terms of the discriminatory language of public administration officials.⁸

In December 2019, the Council of Europe (CoE) submitted its **Fourth Report on the Implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities**⁹. The Report concludes that minority rights in Serbia should be significantly improved and that the situation of Roma is particularly alarming. While laws have been improved, and are in accordance with European standards, mechanisms are lacking to enable the efficient monitoring of compliance with the law and the measures and activities envisaged in national policy papers.

⁶ Substandard Roma settlements in Serbia: An Overview from Geographic Information System for 2016, Mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Belgrade, 2017. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/sr/mission-to-serbia/309401?download=true>

⁷ Roma inclusion index, Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2015.

⁸ Assessment of the application of affirmative action measures in the field of Roma education and recommendations for the improvement of measures, Centre for Educational Policies (CEP), Belgrade, 2015.

⁹ Fourth Periodical Report submitted to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe pursuant to Article 25 of the Framework Convention, Belgrade 2018. Available at: www.ljudskaparava.gov.rs

The overall situation of Roma is poor, and remains particularly alarming in terms of discrimination relating to most aspects of their daily life, be it employment, housing, access to education, or access to healthcare services.

A survey implemented by the Ombudsman on the implementation of the Roma Social Inclusion Strategy 2016–2025,¹⁰ reveals that as many as 40.68% of the population believe that public institutions are not equally accessible to Roma as to other citizens; 26% of Roma families have seen an improvement in their family's situation over the past five years, while 74% have not seen any improvement at all.

Population Census data indicate that in the 87% of the Roma population has primary education or lower, and less than 1% a higher education degree.¹¹ The Census data also indicate that the population with just primary education is at the highest risk of poverty and social exclusion.

The enrolment rate of children in the early childhood education and social care system in Serbia is not satisfactory. According to the MICS 5 survey,¹² **just over half, to be precise 50.2% of children aged three to five-and-a-half** are enrolled in preschool education (PSE), which is well under the average in the EU member states (87%). The enrolment of children from socially vulnerable backgrounds is significantly lower: a mere 5.7% of children in informal Roma settlements, only 9% of children from the poorest families, 22% of children from rural areas, showing a declining trend in comparison with the previous survey period.

According to the findings of the same survey (MICS 5),¹³ only 69% of children living in Roma settlements aged 6–7 years is enrolled in primary school, relative to 97% of the general population. Only 64% of Roma children complete the primary school cycle, and 59% continue secondary education. According to estimates, only about 22% of secondary school-aged Roma children (relative to 88% of the entire population) is enrolled in secondary school. Of the total number of Roma children living in settlements, 21.6% attend secondary school, of which only 14.9% are girls and 28% boys. Very few Roma children enrol in reputable secondary or vocational schools that offer better education and employment opportunities.

¹⁰ Special Report of the Protector of Citizens on the Implementation of the Roma Social Inclusion Strategy with Recommendations, Ombudsman, Belgrade, 2019.

¹¹ Population Census in the Republic of Serbia, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2013. Available at: <http://popis2011.stat.rs/>

¹² Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) and UNICEF, Monitoring the Situation of Women and Children – Serbia Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey, 2014, and Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey, Belgrade, 2015.

¹³ *Ibid.*

The ethnic gap in the school drop-out rates is very wide: the drop-out rate for Roma secondary school students is close to 50% relative to the 12% rate for their non-Roma peers. They frequently attend adult primary education schools, where they complete the basic education cycle according to a fast-track curriculum,¹⁴ while the enrolment rate in special schools is 36 times higher for Roma children than the rest of the population.¹⁵

Thanks to the numerous measures introduced in recent years to support the inclusion of Roma children in the education system, the enrolment rate of Roma children is expected to rise and the drop-out rate to decline. Official statistical data on the education status of the Roma population will be available after the 2021 Population Census which will be implemented by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development keeps records on the number of students enrolling in secondary schools under affirmative action, and the number of students who qualified for scholarships, but there are no data available on the impact of these measures, or on the secondary school completion rate for students benefiting from them.

Financial social assistance (FSA) and child allowance are **the most important cash benefits in Serbia's social and child protection system targeting the poor.** According to the UNICEF's MICS survey,¹⁶ the coverage ratio of the vulnerable Roma population is quite high. Almost every other household in Roma settlements received FSA in 2014, and as many as 63.8% in the poorest quintile, according to the wealth index quintile. The MICS survey reveals that complicated administrative procedures are a major reason why the less educated and the poor, in particular the population living in Roma settlements, are reluctant to submit FSA applications, while a fourth of the poorest Roma households stated, as a reason for not applying, that they were told they were not eligible.

The coverage ratio of children living in Roma settlements with child allowance is high for primary school-age children and low for secondary school-age children. According to MICS 5 data, of the total number of primary school-age children living in Roma settlements in 2014, more than 70% received child allowance, whereas the

¹⁴ UNICEF, 2007; Open Society Foundation, 2010.

¹⁵ Roma inclusion index, Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2015.

¹⁶ Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) and UNICEF, Monitoring the Situation of Women and Children – Serbia Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey, 2014, and Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey, Belgrade, 2015.

coverage ratio for secondary school-age children stood below 30%.¹⁷ This gap in the coverage ratio is evidently correlated with the school drop-out rate of the older Roma children.

A total of 11 victims of child labour were registered with the social welfare centres (SWC) in 2018 (five boys and six girls). Of the total number of victims of child labour, six children were not in school, although they were of primary school-age, nine were recipients of some form of material benefits, all children were in parental custody, and ten out of eleven were ethnic Roma.¹⁸

According to data of the Juvenile Correctional Institution in Belgrade, where the **Family-based Intensive Treatment Programme (FIT)** is being implemented, 145 youths have participated in this programme since its introduction in 2004. In the initial period, no accurate records were kept on the ethnicity of the beneficiaries, however, by reconstructing the data, it was established that 83 of the 145 beneficiaries aged 6 to 14 years were ethnic Roma. According to data for 2018, six boys aged 8 to 14 years attended FIT, of which three were ethnic Roma.¹⁹

For years, the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child and numerous Roma organizations have been warning about the **over-representation of Roma children in residential care and the high rate of children in alternative care** and that no efforts are made to reunite these children with their families as soon as possible.²⁰ The UN Committee for the Rights of the Child also highlighted “the lack of special culturally sensitive programmes designed for children, support to families, and efforts toward family reunification”.²¹

The mortality rate of Roma infants in Roma settlements declined from 14 to 13 infant deaths between the two MICS surveys in 2010 and 2014, respectively, but it is

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Available at:

<http://sociojalkucivanje.gov.rs/rs/izvestaj-o-implementaciji-operativnih-zakljucaka-sa-seminara-socijalno-ukljucivanje-roma-i-romkinja-u-republici-srbiji-za-period-oktobar-2017-oktobar-2019-godine/>

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under article 44 of the convention: Concluding observations: Hungary 2006.

Available at: [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/CRC.C.HUN.CO.2.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/CRC.C.HUN.CO.2.En?OpenDocument)

²¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, consideration of reports submitted by states parties under Article 44 of the Convention: Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Romania 2009. Available at: <http://www.unicef.org/romania/CRC-C-ROM-CO-4.pdf>

still double compared to the infant mortality rate in the general population of Serbia.²² The immunization coverage ratio of children below three years of age living in Roma settlements is lower than that for children in Serbia's general population according to the 2014 MICS survey data.

4. Legal Framework

The legal framework regulating the education, social welfare and health care systems has been significantly improved in recent years in Serbia, by explicitly defining different provisions relevant for improving social inclusion and the situation of vulnerable groups. In addition to sectoral laws (in the area of education, social welfare, and healthcare), other laws relevant for improving the situation of Roma children and attaining the objectives set out in the Roma Social Inclusion Strategy are: the Law on Local Government, because of the aspects that are within the purview of local governments, the Law on the Planning System, the Law Prohibiting Discrimination, and the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia.

4.1. The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia²³ guarantees the right of each individual to education, life, development and protection from discrimination. From the management aspect, the Constitution envisages the statutory delegation of certain powers from the central government to the provincial and local administration – in the interest of the efficient and rational implementation of the rights and obligations of citizens, and fulfilment of their needs of direct interest to their lives and work. Pursuant to the law, the municipality/town, through its bodies, is responsible for providing a range of services to meet the needs of its citizens, in the sphere of education, culture, health care and social welfare, children's protection, sport and physical culture. Local government functions are funded from the local government's own revenue sources and the national budget.

²² Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) and UNICEF, Monitoring the Situation of Women and Children – Serbia Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey, 2014, and Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey, Belgrade, 2015.

²³ RS Constitution, RS Official Gazette No 98/06.

4.2. Law on Local Government

The sphere of competence of the municipalities/towns is defined by the Law, while the status and sphere of competence of the City of Belgrade are regulated under a separate law. **Amendments to the Law on Local Government of 2018**²⁴ envisage that the municipality/town, through its bodies, is responsible for providing a range of services to meet the needs of its citizens in the field of education (preschool, primary and secondary education), culture, health care and social welfare, children's protection, sport and physical education. The Law on Local Government requires municipalities/towns to adopt development programmes, including the development of social welfare; to establish, monitor and secure the functioning of social welfare institutions; to adopt regulations on social protection rights, and similar. Certain affairs of the central government may be delegated by legislation to all or individual municipalities/cities, in the interest of a more efficient and rational implementation of the rights and obligation of citizens and fulfilment of their needs of direct interest to their lives and work. Devolved services are funded from Serbia's national budget in line with the type and scale of function. Amendments to the Law on Local Government of 2018 envisage the establishment of a unique register of functions of the local government, to facilitate taking stock of the type and structure of functions exercised by the local government, which should contribute to improving performance monitoring and assessment of capacities, including financial resources, needed for discharging these functions.

The Law on Local Government defines that the central government bodies that devolved certain functions to local government shall exercise oversight powers, i.e. perform both regularity and performance audits. However, as far as the core functions of local government are concerned, central government shall only perform regularity audits. No regulations are in place that explicitly define the way in which performance monitoring of core functions is done, so that there is a lack of information in practice about the performance quality and the challenges faced by LGUs in implementing legal provisions and, in turn, no adequate mechanisms that can contribute to improving the quality and effectiveness of regulations at local level.

²⁴ RS Official Gazette No 129/207, 83/14 – as amended, 101/16 – as amended and 47/18.

4.3. Law on the Planning System

The Law on the Planning System was enacted in April 2018.²⁵ The purpose of this law and its implementing bylaws is to establish an efficient, transparent, coordinated and realistic planning system to cover all key aspects of the social and economic policy, regional development, and land development, with optimal use of budget funds; and ensure the sustainable growth and development of Serbia and the implementation of the EU accession process. This law introduced a system of accountability and set the framework for evaluating the efficiency of the public administration. Provisions of this law also address the improvement of the planning, monitoring and reporting system of local governments. The enactment of this law also entails the setting up of systematic and functional vertical and horizontal cooperation and coordination between national and local tiers of government. This law also prescribes the obligation of each LGU to adopt its Development Plan, as an umbrella strategy, by 2021.

4.4. Law on Prohibition of Discrimination²⁶

The Law regulates the prohibition of discrimination, forms and cases of discrimination, and procedures for protection from discrimination. Among other, the Law defines that everyone shall have the right to medical and social care, as well as to enjoy access to all levels of education on equal terms and without being discriminated against. This Law prescribes the procedure for the election and mandate of the Equality Commissioner. The Commissioner is required to submit an annual report on the situation in the field of equality protection, along with an evaluation of the performance of the public administration, service providers and other entities, weaknesses identified and recommendations for their elimination.

The legislative framework in the field of social welfare and child protection primarily consists of the Law on Social Welfare, Law on Financial Support to Families with Children, and Family Law.

4.5. Law on Social Welfare

Serbia's social welfare system was pluralized and diversified, at the level of social services as well as at the level of service providers, with the enactment of the Law

²⁵ RS Official Gazette No 30/18.

²⁶ RS Official Gazette No 22/09.

on Social Welfare of 2011²⁷. The priority objectives of the social welfare system are implemented through the delivery of material support to individuals and families in need, as well as through the delivery of social protection services that enable: minimum financial security and independence of individuals and families to cover their subsistence costs; access to social services and entitlements; equal opportunities for independent living and boosting social inclusion; the preservation and improvement of family relationships, as well as family, gender and intergenerational solidarity; prevention of abuse, neglect or exploitation, and the elimination of the consequences thereof.

Social protection services are divided into the following groups:

- Assessment and planning services – assessment of the situation, needs, strengths and risks of the client and other significant persons in his/her life; assessment of guardians, foster and adoptive families; development of an individual or family service and legal aid plan, and other evaluations and plans;
- Community-based day services – day care; home help; drop-in centres and other services that support the client's stay in the family or in its immediate vicinity;
- Independent living support services – supported living; personal assistance; training for independent living, and other types of services required to support the active participation of clients in society;
- Counselling, therapy, social and educational services – intensive support services for families in crisis; counselling and support services for biological, foster and adoptive parents; support to caregivers of children or adult family members with disabilities; support for family relationship maintenance and family reunification; counselling and support in cases of domestic violence; family therapy; mediation; SOS helpline; activation and other counselling and educational services and activities;
- Placement services – placement in kin, foster or other family for adults and elderly; residential care; placement in shelters and other types of placement services.

²⁷ RS Official Gazette No 24/11.

4.6. Rulebook on Social Care Facilities Licensing

The Rulebook on Social Care Facilities Licensing²⁸ governs the procedure for the assessment of compliance of social care facilities, i.e. social care providers, as well as the practitioners working there, with the criteria and standards for providing social care services. All social care facilities providing community-based day services, and family and institutional placement services, are subject to the licensing procedure. A social care services provider must fulfil certain requirements to acquire a license, specifically, the provider must be registered pursuant to the law, have at least two years of experience in providing social care services, and meet the licensing standards for the services the provider applied for, with respect to the location, premises, equipment, facilities, number and qualifications of the staff, assessment, planning and service delivery activities.

4.7. Regulation on Earmarked Social Transfers

The Regulation on Earmarked Social Transfers²⁹ ensures that additional funds are allocated from the central government budget to the local government for financing social protection services within their purview. The Regulation determines the amount, the criteria for the allocation of funding, as well as eligibility criteria for local government units (LGUs). These criteria specify that the funds are intended to finance social protection services in underdeveloped LGUs, and in municipalities in which social protection facilities are undergoing transformation, as well as to finance innovative and social protection services of major national interest.

4.8. Law on Financial Support to Families with Children

The Law on Financial Support to Families with Children and the Law Amending the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children (2017 and 2018, respectively)³⁰ define the rights of vulnerable families with children, and the support systems designed for them. Financial support to families with children includes, among other, the right to: reimbursement of expenses for preschool child care services for children without parents; reimbursement of expenses for preschool child care services for children with disabilities; subsidized preschool child care services for children of financial social

²⁸ RS Official Gazette No 42/13.

²⁹ RS Official Gazette No 18/16.

³⁰ RS Official Gazette No 113/17 and 50/18.

assistance recipients; subsidized preschool child care services for children living in materially deprived families. Subsidized preschool child care services are within the purview of the municipalities and towns. Provided that they have secured funds, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, municipalities and cities may establish additional rights, or a greater scope of rights envisaged by this Law and more favourable eligibility requirements. Reimbursement of childcare costs for children without parents, children with disabilities and children of financial social assistance recipients are considered a right of general interest and are funded from the national budget. This Law also prescribes new eligibility requirements for child allowance, specifically, that all children in the family must be immunized and regularly attend school, or the preparatory preschool programme (PPP) in the case of preschool children. If any child from the family has not received all mandatory vaccinations or is not attending school, or PPP regularly, the family will not be able to qualify for the child allowance.

4.9. Family Law

The Family Law³¹ regulates marriage, marital and partner relations, child-parent relations, adoption, foster care, guardianship, alimony and child support, family proprietary relations, protection from domestic violence and other. Affairs related to family protection, support to families and foster care, within the meaning of this law, are within the purview of the social welfare centres. The organization of the activity of the guardianship authority, the professional standards and the content and method of keeping records and documentation is prescribed by the Minister responsible for family protection.

4.10. Law on the Education System Foundations

Law on the Education System Foundations (LESF)³² envisages numerous provisions relevant to the improvement of inclusive education. The Law prescribes that educational institutions shall ensure that physical and communication barriers are removed, that curricula are adjusted and individual education plans developed, adopted and implemented for all children, learners, and adults who are in need of additional educational support because of social disadvantages, developmental challenges, disabilities, learning difficulties, early school leaving risk, or other reasons.

³¹ RS Official Gazette No 18/05, 72/11 – as amended and 6/15.

³² RS Official Gazette No 88/217 and 27/18.

The Intersectoral Commission assesses the needs of the child/learner/adult for additional educational, medical and social support. Additional support refers to the rights and services designed to enable the child to overcome physical and social barriers so that they carry on with their daily-life activities relevant for their inclusion in the education process, community life and development unhindered. The Intersectoral Commission is established by the local government body responsible for social affairs, on the basis of a cooperation agreement between the institutions of the education system, public administration and local government, social protection and health care. The local government unit determines its business seat, allocates and disburses funds to compensate its members for their work, provides for technical and other support for its activity, as well as funding for the support recommended by the Intersectoral Commission, enables the archiving and storage of documentation, collects reports on the activity of the Intersectoral Commission, the proposed support and its effects, at least twice a year.

Bilingual education is available for national minority members—in the national minority language and script and in the Serbian language. Any direct or indirect, overt or covert discriminatory action or omission, or discriminatory behaviour toward individuals or groups, members of their families or people close to them, resulting in the unwarranted unfavourable or unequal treatment of these individuals or groups, be it exclusion, restriction or preferential treatment, is prohibited in educational institutions.

4.11. Law on Primary Education

The Law Amending the Law on Primary Education³³ envisages that children from vulnerable groups may enrol in school even without submitting evidence of the parent's permanent residence address or other required documents, provided they submit a medical fitness certificate. Students living more than four kilometres away from the school are entitled to free transport. Free transport is available also in case of students attending school in another local government unit, if that school is more than four kilometres away from their home, and is the closest school to the student's residence address.

³³ RS Official Gazette No 55/13, 101/17, 10/19 and 27/18 – as amended.

4.12. Law on Preschool Education

Preschool education is regulated for the first time by a separate Law on Preschool Education,³⁴ which was enacted in 2010, and by the 2017 amendments to this Law. Funds are allocated from the local government's budget to providers of preschool education (half-day and full-day stay, food, care and preventive care services for preschool children) covering up to 80% of the economic cost per child; and for providing additional support to the child and learner, in accordance with the opinion of the Intersectoral Commission, except for children whose preschool education is funded from Serbia's national budget. National budget allocations are also provided for the implementation of the preparatory preschool programme (PPP) in the year preceding the school year of entry into primary education lasting four hours per day, in and outside the preschool facilities; implementation of the preschool curriculum for children with developmental disorders and disabilities; delivery of the preschool curriculum to children in hospital treatment.

The preschool programme defines, among other, forms of cooperation with the family, the local community and the parent council established in the local government unit, as well as the method for developing the individualized approach in teaching and delivery of additional support to children and families, in particular children and families from vulnerable social groups, taking into account the developmental, educational, medical, social, and cultural needs of the child. With a view to improving the quality of educational work, diversifying the programme, forms of activities and services, and increasing the enrolment rate of children, preschool institutions also implement different early childhood education and care activities and programmes, rest and recreation, support to families, fostering national minority languages and cultures, cultural mediation, science and arts, according to the needs and interests of children and families and the specificities of the local community.

4.13. Rulebook on Additional Support for the Educational, Health, and Social Needs of the Child, Learner and Adult

This Rulebook³⁵ **regulates in detail the criteria for the assessment of additional support required to meet the educational, health and social needs of a child, learner, and adult.** The needs assessment is based on a comprehensive and individual

³⁴ RS Official Gazette No 101/17.

³⁵ RS Official Gazette No 80/18.

approach, on equal opportunities in understanding the needs of the child, learner, and adult, with the ultimate goal of facilitating their social inclusion, by providing them with adequate support, through access to rights, services, and resources. Support for additional educational needs includes different measures, such as engaging SEN assistant teachers, overcoming the language barrier in the case of children whose mother tongue is not Serbian, counselling parents or caregivers in need of extra support, extended school day, or day care in social care facilities, providing for food, clothes and footwear, textbooks and school supplies, as well as other forms of support in accordance with the needs of the child/learner/adult.

In providing additional learning support (ALS) services, the school cooperates with local governments, and with special schools for students with developmental disorders and disabilities, or schools that have special classes for students with developmental disorders, and other organizations, establishments and institutions at local level and beyond. The school is required to establish cooperation with other schools in which the student receiving additional support is continuing his/her education, to ensure the continuity of additional support.

In October 2018, a new Rulebook was enacted setting out detailed instructions for determining eligibility for, and implementing and evaluating Individual Education Plans,³⁶ with additional rules on how to define the content of an Individual Education Plan (IEP), introducing a new element in the IEP – a personalized curriculum – also envisaging a transition plan which may be included to support the child's/learner's inclusion in education when transitioning to the second level of education or relocating to another school, as well as a school drop-out prevention plan for children/learners at risk of early school leaving.

4.14. Rulebook on SEN Teaching Assistants and Teaching Assistants in Adult Learning

The Rulebook on SEN Teaching Assistants and Teaching Assistants in Adult Learning³⁷ prescribes detailed criteria for the work of, as well as the level and type of qualifications and training programme required for teaching assistants in children's and adult education. Teaching assistants provide guidance and support to children and learners with additional support needs in preschool, primary and secondary school, in accordance with their needs, as well as to school staff so that they may improve their

³⁶ RS Official Gazette No 74/18.

³⁷ RS Official Gazette No 87/19.

performance. A teaching assistant for adults provides support to adults with a view to their inclusion in the education system, and to teaching staff in implementing the curriculum. A teaching assistant for Roma children/learners with additional educational support needs, provides support to groups of children/learners and assists and supports school/preschool teachers, and specialist non-teaching staff, both in and outside the classroom (extra-curricular activities), with a view to improving their skills for working with Roma children/learners in need of additional education support. A teaching assistant for Roma children/learners with additional education support needs actively and continuously cooperates with parents, or other legal representatives of the children/learners, to empower families and improve the social and emotional status of the child/learner in the educational setting. This Rulebook operationalizes the role of SEN teaching assistants in working with Roma children/learners and their parents, with preschool/school teachers and with specialist non-teaching staff.

A Training Programme designed to build the capacities of teaching assistants for working with groups of Roma children/learners. **A teaching assistant for Roma children/learners with additional education support needs** is required to have a four-year secondary education degree, knowledge of the Romani language and must have completed the training programme, pursuant to the Rulebook.

4.15. Rulebook on Secondary School Admission Requirements and Procedure for Roma Students

The Rulebook on the Requirements and Procedure for the Admission of Roma Students to Secondary School Under Favourable Conditions to Achieve Full Equality was enacted in 2016.³⁸ Starting in the 2017/2018 school year, the admission of Roma students under affirmative action is regulated by the Rulebook on Secondary School Admission.³⁹ This Rulebook requires primary schools, starting with seventh grade, to take action to inform parents/caregivers of Roma students about the criteria and procedure for the admission of students to secondary school under favourable conditions. Pursuant to this Rulebook, the National Council for the Roma National Minority is tasked with informing parents/caregivers about the requirements and procedure for the admission of students to secondary school under affirmative action. According to these requirements, the score of the student, based on their grade-point average, and on their performance at the final school-leaving exam, will be increased

³⁸ RS Official Gazette No 38/17.

³⁹ RS Official Gazette No 23/18.

by 30% of the number of points short of 100. In the case of students living in a family receiving financial social assistance, their score, based on the combined grade-point average in school, and final exam performance, will be increased by 35% of the number of points short of 100. These students are allocated to schools based on their choices and their scores, together with other students.

4.16. Rulebook Amending the Rulebook on Student Loans and Scholarships

In early December 2017, the Rulebook on Student Loans and Scholarships⁴⁰ was amended to relax eligibility criteria for scholarships for members of vulnerable social groups.

4.17. Rulebook on Detailed Criteria for Identifying Discrimination in Educational Settings

The Rulebook on Detailed Criteria for Identifying Discrimination by Employees, Students or Third Parties in the Educational Institution,⁴¹ and the Rules of Procedures for schools⁴² in case of suspected or detected discriminatory behaviour, regulate: the implementation of preventive and reactive interventions, the obligations and responsibilities of the staff, child, learner, adult, the child's parent or other legal representative, or third party in the educational institution, its agency or body, and other issues relevant for protection from discrimination.

Numerous laws in the field of health care lay down provisions that are relevant for, among other improving the health care system for Roma: **Law on Public Health, Law on Health Registration and Records, Law on Health Insurance** and other.

⁴⁰ RS Official Gazette No 46/10, 47/11, 56/12, 75/13 and 111/17.

⁴¹ RS Official Gazette No 22/16.

⁴² RS Official Gazette No 65/18.

5. Policy and Institutional Framework

The improvement of Roma children's social inclusion has been recognized as a priority in numerous national strategies which envisage the implementation of local measures and programmes relevant for improving services, access to rights, and the situation of children. It must be noted that the strategies in the area of education, social welfare and non-discrimination have expired or are expiring in 2020 and that Serbia is currently in the process of drafting new ones.

Priorities and objectives related to the improvement of Roma inclusion have been integrated in the **EU accession negotiations process, in the Action Plan for Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights**. One of the goals of the Action Plan for Chapter 23 is the implementation of a new multi-annual strategy and action plan for improving the living conditions of the Roma.

5.1. Operational Conclusions on Roma Social Inclusion

The Seminars on Social Inclusion of Roma in Serbia, held every other year since 2011, are an opportunity to determine the priorities for the forthcoming period, in the form of Operational Conclusions, in the area of social inclusion of one of the most vulnerable population groups in Serbia. This approach is designed to facilitate dialogue between the various stakeholders through a broad consultations process and constructive intersectoral dialogue. The Operational Conclusions provide an overview of the situation and commitments that Serbia undertook to fulfil in the two-year period to further improve the situation of the Roma population in Serbia.⁴³

5.2. Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016–2025

The goals of the Roma Social Inclusion Strategy 2016–2025⁴⁴ are to: improve the socioeconomic status (SES) of the Roma in Serbia, to secure the full enjoyment of all minority rights, the eradication of discrimination and greater social inclusion of Roma in all segments of the society.

⁴³ Available at:

<http://sociojalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/rs/izvestaj-o-implementaciji-operativnih-zakljucaka-sa-seminara-socialno-ukljucivanje-roma-i-romkinja-u-republici-srbiji-za-period-oktobar-2017-oktobar-2019-godine/>

⁴⁴ Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016–2025, available at: www.ljudskaprava.gov.rs

The Strategy sets five specific objectives relevant for the improvement of the situation of children:

- 1) The full inclusion of children and youth from the Roma community in all levels of education, along with the introduction of efficient anti-discrimination mechanisms;
- 2) Improvement of housing for the Roma population in Serbia;
- 3) Increasing Roma employment;
- 4) Improving the health of the Roma population, facilitating access to health care services and full enjoyment of the right to health; and
- 5) Improving access to social security services and availability of financial assistance to reduce poverty.

The Strategy also recognizes the need for assessing the availability of local services for Roma children. The following are key measures designed to achieve the operational target related to the topic of this study:

- Identify methods for intensifying the inclusion of children from the Roma community in local social protection services, improve support programmes for mothers and strengthen the role of counselling services in working with Roma families;
- Promote local cooperation agreements between social welfare centres, social service providers and schools, as well as agreements on support to families in which children are not attending school, or are at risk of dropping out;
- Social welfare centres will work towards intensifying the inclusion of Roma children in local social protection services, with special focus on children without parental care and improving the support programme for mothers;
- Develop and institutionalize local protocols for the protection of Roma children living and/or working on the street and provide sustainable financial support for community-based services in the cities, such as shelters, which contribute to the protection and social inclusion of Roma children.

Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for the 2019–2020 period has still not been adopted, which adversely impacts the optimal progress of activities and the monitoring of the effects of the measures at national and local level.

5.3. Strategy for Education Development in the Republic of Serbia until 2020⁴⁵

The Strategy is a comprehensive national policy document that defines the priorities, goals and instruments for the functioning and development of all levels of education in Serbia. The long-term education development objectives defined in the Strategy are as follows: improve the quality of the education process and its outcomes; increase participation of Serbia's population at all levels of education, from preschool to life-long learning; increase the relevance of education, and the efficient use of all educational resources; enhance completion of education within the envisaged period, with minimal extensions, and reduce early leaving of education.

The Action Plan for the Implementation of the 2020 Strategy for Education Development in Serbia⁴⁶ defines in detail the individual activities designed to achieve the strategic priorities, as well as the procedures for reporting on and evaluating the impact of the activities. Special focus is put on the improvement of inclusive education, and on measures and activities intended to improve the situation of Roma children at all levels of education. The development and adoption of the new Strategy for Education Development is expected in 2020, with the support of EU IPA 16 funding.

5.4. Strategy for the Prevention of and Protection from Discrimination

With the adoption of the Strategy for the Prevention of and Protection from Discrimination,⁴⁷ Serbia has undertaken to systematically develop the institutional and legal framework as well as the mechanisms to tackle discrimination. The purpose of this strategic document is to ensure compliance with the constitutional non-discrimination principle which prohibits the discrimination of any person or group on the grounds of their personal characteristics, and in particular the discrimination of vulnerable social groups. The framework for the implementation of the strategic goals was developed in the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Prevention of and Protection from Discrimination for the 2014–2018 period, which defines the specific measures and activities, implementing agencies and resources required for the attainment of the strategic goals. An Impact Assessment was performed in 2019, which also served as the baseline for the development of the new Strategy for the Prevention of and Protection from Discrimination for the 2020–2025 period.

⁴⁵ RS Official Gazette No 107/12.

⁴⁶ Available at: www.mpn.gov.rs

⁴⁷ Available at: www.ljudskaprava.gov.rs

In late 2019, at the initiative of the Council for the Rights of the Child, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, with the support of UNICEF, developed a **Draft Strategy for Preventing and Protecting Children from Violence 2020–2023, with accompanying Action Plan**. The draft strategy envisages the involvement of children in designing a programme for the prevention of violence, as well as the participation of children in the reporting activities of the Working Group for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy. The implementation and monitoring of implementation of activities at local level, and the improvement of vertical and horizontal coordination and cooperation are defined as a key aspect of the successful fulfilment of the goals in this strategic document.

5.5. Procedures for Social Welfare Centres for Meeting their Obligations Relating to the Enforcement of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs adopted binding Procedures for Social Welfare Centres for Meeting their Obligations Relating to the Enforcement of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence.⁴⁸ In addition, this ministry and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development adopted Procedures for Educational Institutions and Social Welfare Centres – Guardianship Authority for Protecting Children from Violence.⁴⁹ These procedures were disseminated to all social welfare centres in Serbia and they define the obligations of these institutions in preventing, identifying and addressing violence against children, the forms and modalities of cooperation between these institutions and other institutions, in dealing with suspected or reported cases of violence against children.

5.6. Social Welfare Strategy

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs launched the process of development of the **Social Welfare Strategy 2019–2025** in 2018.⁵⁰ This process was supported under the Support to the Development of Social Welfare Regulatory Mechanisms funded by the European Union. This policy document has yet to be adopted. In the past few years, reforms of the social welfare system in Serbia are being implemented without a social welfare strategy in place. The last Social Welfare Strategy

⁴⁸ Available at: <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/>

⁴⁹ Available at: <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/>

⁵⁰ The Draft Social Welfare Strategy 2019–2025 is available at: www.zavodsz.gov.rs

was adopted in 2005. Its basic goal was the development of an integrated social welfare system in which social stakeholders use existing resources in the most effective way and develop new, accessible, excellent and diversified services to preserve and improve the quality of life of vulnerable and marginalized individuals and groups, empower them to lead a productive life in the community and forestall welfare dependency. The basic components of the social welfare system reform defined in the previous Social Welfare Strategy (2005) were: deinstitutionalization, decentralization and democratization of social welfare services. Even though the period of implementation was not defined in the Strategy itself, the proposed activities covered the period until 2009.

5.7. Roadmap for the Elimination of Child Labour

A Roadmap for the Elimination of Child Labour for the 2018–2022 period was developed with the support of the “Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labour” project.⁵¹ The National Social Protection Institute accredited a training programme titled “Street Children – Development of the Foster Care System for Children Living and/or Working on the Street”. This programme was designed for social welfare centres’ practitioners working as child case managers, foster care counsellors, supervisors, experts at drop-in centres for children and NGOs providing support to children in a street situation, foster parents and future foster parents. In 115 social welfare centres, internal teams of experts were established tasked with the care and protection of children living and working on the street.

5.8. Coordination Body for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in Serbia

The Government of Serbia adopted a Decision Establishing the Coordination Body for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in Serbia.⁵² Under this Decision Coordination Body is entrusted with the task of coordinating the activities of the public administration agencies in the field of Roma social inclusion. The key task of the Coordination Body is to review all issues and coordinate activities within the scope of national and local government agencies, public enterprises and other organizations. Furthermore, his body is also tasked with the

⁵¹ Available at:

<http://sociojalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/rs/izvestaj-o-implementaciji-operativnih-zakljucaka-sa-seminara-socialno-ukljucivanje-roma-i-romkinja-u-republici-srbiji-za-period-oktobar-2017-oktobar-2019-godine/>

⁵² RS Official Gazette No05/17

improvement of intersectoral cooperation in the area of Roma social inclusion, reviewing and providing recommendations for resolving urgent situations that could aggravate the vulnerability of the Roma population, and submitting proposals in connection with the implementation of statutory measures, as well as additional measures/activities contributing to the greater social inclusion of this national minority group, and to the European integration process.

In the same Government Decision, the Expert Group of the Coordination Body was established to handle all current technical tasks related to Roma social inclusion. In addition to providing operational support to the Coordination Body, the Expert Group is also tasked with monitoring the work of Roma coordinators and mobile units entrusted by the local government with the task of improving the situation of Roma at local level.

The **Working Group for drafting the National Plan of Action (NAP) for Children** was established in April 2018 by the minister of labour, employment, veteran and social affairs on the basis of the decision of the Council for the Rights of the Child,⁵³ as a multiannual document defining short-term, medium-term and long-term children-related policies and identifying key problems in the implementation, protection and improvement of the rights of the child in Serbia. With the help of the NPA, the Government of Serbia will take measures to guarantee equality, accessibility, quality and efficiency of public services for children (in education, health care, social protection, culture, legal and judiciary protection, and other). The NPA should ensure the integrity and coherence of children-related policies, i.e. the coordination of actions and measures in different areas and in different children's public services. The NPA for Children will act as a mechanism for monitoring children's rights and welfare in Serbia. In this sense it should serve as an instrument for the mobilization of all social partners: the Government, the Parliament, the Ombudsman, the local government, citizens' associations, media, parents, expert institutions and child experts.

Furthermore, in April 2018, the **Working Group for Early Childhood Development** was established by decision of the Council for the Rights of the Child. This working group is tasked with coordinating activities of different departments and other social stakeholders in the field of early childhood development; initiating measures for developing a comprehensive and coherent policy focused on early childhood, including the integration of early childhood support policies into the National Plan of Action for Children; formulating recommendations for reaching important social targets in the early childhood support area, as part of the European integration process, and achievement

⁵³ RS Official Gazette No 3/18. Available at: <http://www.savetzapravadeteta.gov.rs/>

of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); analysing and reporting to the Council for the Rights of the Child on the situation of the youngest children, and the effects of the measures targeting them.

The Joint Body for Support to Social Inclusion supports and oversees the work of intersectoral commissions tasked with the assessments of children's and learners' needs for additional educational, health and social support. The Joint Body consists of state secretaries of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, as well as the representatives of the Office for Human and Minority Rights, the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, UNICEF, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities and representatives of civil society organizations – Inclusive Education Support Network, Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, the “Veliki Mali” Inclusion Initiative, Mental Disability Rights Initiative of Serbia (MDRI-S) and the Parents Association.

In 2015, a **Group for Social Inclusion (GSI)**⁵⁴ was established by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD) with the aim of ensuring the continuous improvement of early childhood development and the inclusive approach at all levels of education in Serbia. This Group was established for several purposes, but most importantly for: providing support to the MoESTD in coordinating, planning and implementing the inclusive education (IE) policy; providing support for a full implementation of existing legislative measures and the development of new mechanisms for the further improvement of IE at all levels of education; ensuring that intersectoral networking is in place across all management segments and empowering all MoESTD employees to apply the IE principle. The GSI proposes and coordinates various initiatives for the development of policies related to inclusive education through cooperation with other sectors and partners. The activity of this group focuses on developing an inclusive education action plan, improving regulations in the area of inclusive education, initiating intersectoral cooperation, designing different ways to improve the competences for inclusive education of staff in public administration and education, as well as on coordinating direct support to educational institutions, children, students and their families.

⁵⁴ Since 2017, the Group for the Education of Minorities, Social Inclusion and Protection from Violence and Discrimination.

The Network of Support to Inclusive Education (NIE) was established in 2010 by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development with the support of UNICEF. It was created in response to the needs of educational institutions for additional support in developing accessible, excellent and equitable education practices for every child, with special focus and care for children from vulnerable groups. By connecting experts from various fields and education stakeholders and developing a horizontal learning model, this network strives to facilitate the sharing and dissemination of best inclusive practices in all educational institutions in Serbia. The purpose of this network is to increase the level of professionalism of all staff in educational institutions and ensure that adequate support is provided to children in need of that support.

At the initiative of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality and UNICEF a **National Coalition to End Child Marriage**⁵⁵ was established in early 2019 with the aim of empowering all stakeholders at national and local level to address the problem of child marriage in Serbia through coordinated action. The overall goal of this coalition is to contribute to ending child marriage in Serbia, especially among the Roma population, by removing institutional and social barriers to the enforcement of the law, as well as by promoting best practices in partnerships between local communities, non-governmental, governmental, and private sectors, and the media.

Procedures for social welfare centres were adopted on how to proceed in cases of child, early and forced marriages which oblige them to take action, and an outreach model was piloted for working with families with children at risk of early marriage through the services of family assistants.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Available at:

<https://www.unicef.org/serbia/medija-centar/vesti/nacionalna-koalicija-protiv-decijih-brakova>

⁵⁶ Available at:

<http://sociojalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/rs/izvestaj-o-implementaciji-operativnih-zakljucaka-sa-seminara-sociojalno-ukljucivanje-roma-i-romkinja-u-republici-srbiji-za-period-oktobar-2017-oktobar-2019-godine>

6. National Support Systems for the Social Inclusion of Roma Children

A number of existing systemic measures for the social inclusion of Roma children is funded from Serbia's national budget, while various other measures are funded by international organizations and from European Union funds. Some of the most important systemic measures are set out below, along with measures implemented with the support of international organizations with the primary goal of piloting support services so that they can be integrated into the system whilst securing their future sustainability.

6.1. Support for the Development of the Preschool Education System

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, in cooperation with relevant partners, is implementing a **continuous campaign to increase children's enrolment into the preparatory preschool programme and first grade of primary school**. The campaign entails the printing of flyers and posters in Romani and Serbian, communication with preschool establishments and other institutions providing child and family care services at local level, the establishment of local teams, the development and implementation of local action plans, the sharing of experiences between local communities with 100% enrolment rate, and those in which this target has still not been reached. All these activities aim to encourage preschool institutions to promote the importance of early participation in preschool education, especially for children from the age of three to five; to increase the number of preschool groups offering shorter excellent preschool programmes in line with the families' needs; and to find ways to support regular school attendance.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development is implementing an **Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care Project** under the Loan Agreement signed between the Government of Serbia and the World Bank⁵⁷, to increase access, quality and equity of preschool education for preschool children up to six-and-a-half years of age, especially for children from socially vulnerable groups.

One of the major project components is establishing communication and improving cooperation with families from vulnerable social groups. The project envisages support for 50 LGUs to improve the PSE system. A total of RSD 4.5 million in grants was

⁵⁷ The programme is worth approximately EUR 47 million, and EUR 900 thousand were secured through the IPA 14 programme.

disbursed to the first 20 towns and municipalities in Serbia for improving preschool education and coordination and cooperation among relevant stakeholders in providing holistic, high quality preschool education services at local level (including health care, adequate nutrition, early detection of behavioural and developmental issues, and stimulation of early childhood development and learning) targeting children up to the age of six-and-a-half years and their parents, with focus on the most vulnerable social groups. Additional funding for the improvement of the early childhood education system was provided through IPA 14 assistance.

On the basis of the Law on Education System Foundations (LESF) **primary school admission procedures were streamlined** to increase enrolment of Roma children in primary education. Children from vulnerable groups may enrol in school even without providing any proof of the residence address of the parents or other supporting documents. Children are tested after enrolling into school and can be tested in the Romani language. In addition, support measures are adopted in the course of primary education if necessary, by developing an individual education plan, with the involvement of other institutions as well, e.g. social welfare centres and healthcare institutions.

6.2. Teaching Assistants

The introduction of special education needs (SEN) teaching assistants, as a resource designed to support educational institutions, is recognized as a best practice example. A SEN teaching assistant cooperates with all local stakeholders, works with parents, and monitors students and their learning outcomes. In recent years, the number of teaching assistants significantly increased and currently there are 261 teaching assistants engaged in preschools and primary schools, of which 221 in primary schools, and 40 in preschool institutions. A total of 229 teaching assistants are funded from Serbia's national budget, and the remaining 32 from local government budgets. In 2018, the teaching assistant position was included in the Decree on the Job Catalogue in Public Services and Other Public Sector Organizations,⁵⁸ whereby their status was institutionalized and the conditions created for the future sustainability of this educational policy measure. The expansion of the network of teaching assistants is realized through the IPA II programme – sectoral budget support. The Rulebook on Teaching Assistants in Children's and Adult Education regulates in detail the terms and conditions for the work of, the degree and type of qualifications and training programme for teaching assistants in children's and adult education. In addition, a Network of SEN Teaching Assistants was established with the support of UNICEF and MoESTD.

⁵⁸ RS Official Gazette No 81/17, 6/18 and 43/18.

6.3. Scholarships for Roma Students

The scholarship scheme for Roma students was improved, which resulted in a year-over-year steady increase of the number of secondary school students receiving scholarships from the national budget and with the support of international donors and EU funds. In the school years 2015/2016 and 2016/2017, 520 scholarships were granted to secondary school (1st to 4th grade) Roma students with a grade point average (GPA) ranging from 2.5 to 3.5 under “IPA 2012 – Technical Assistance for Roma Inclusion (TARI)”. In the school year 2015/2016, 176 scholarships were granted to Roma students (of which 65% girls) with top GPA, and in the 2016/2017 school year, 139 scholarships to Roma secondary school students with top GPA (of which 60% girls), from Serbia’s national budget. The scholarship scheme continued under the new IPA 2014 project, through which 300 secondary school students received scholarships from Serbia’s national budget. A total of 303 scholarships were granted to Roma students in the school year 2017/2018, and 547 in 2018/2019, through a Competition for student loans and scholarships. In the next four-year period, 1,000 Roma students will be granted scholarships under the IPA 2014 project.

A **mentorship support** scheme was introduced under the IPA 2012 TARI project, and 201 assistant teachers worked with Roma students in 2015/2016, continuing throughout the 2016/2017 school year, regularly monitoring the situation of the students, according to a predefined set of criteria. Thereafter, the Roma Education Fund (REF) continued to support the activity of teaching assistants in the 2017/2018 school year, while further funding is also envisaged under IPA 2014 for the mentors’ work.

6.4. Romani Language with Elements of National Culture

By decision of the Science and Education Council of the Faculty of Philology of Belgrade University, a **Lectureship for the Romani Language** was established in 2015 at the Centre for Professional Training and Evaluation, where the Faculty organizes Romani language courses to enable graduate teachers to acquire a Romani language certificate so that they can teach Romani Language with Elements of National Culture in mainstream primary schools where this elective subject is taught. A continuous increase has been registered in the number of students attending the Romani Language with Elements of National Culture elective subject, which stood at around 2,500 students in 75 primary schools in the 2018/2019 school year. With the aim of further improving Roma national minority education and the elective course in Roma Language with Elements of National Culture, the MoESTD, in cooperation with

the Preschool Teacher Vocational Training College “Mihajlo Palov“ in Vršac, agreed to issue a Romani language certificate for graduate students who studied and graduated in the Romanilanguage according to the same syllabus. This means that these graduate students will also be able to teach the Romani Language with Elements of National Culture elective course.

6.5. Admission of Roma Students to Secondary Schools

The number of Roma students enrolled in secondary school under affirmative action significantly increased following the adoption of the Rulebook on the Requirements and Procedure for the Admission of Students –Members of the Roma National Minority to Secondary School Under Favourable Conditions for the Achievement of Full Equality in 2016. In the school year 2016/2017, 1,713 children enrolled in secondary school under affirmative action, in 2017/2018 – 1,969 children, and in 2019/2020 – 2,220 ethnic Roma students enrolled under affirmative action⁵⁹ (relative to 422 students in the school year 2015/2016).⁶⁰

6.6. Health Mediators

Pursuant to Serbia’s Law on Health Care, as part of its efforts to improve the health of high-risk population groups for various diseases and their access to health care services, **starting in 2008, the Ministry of Health supported a project for the introduction of health mediators in Serbia’s health care system.** The health mediators’ role is to keep track of the state of health of the members of the Roma national minority, raise their awareness about the need to vaccinate children and the importance of proper nutrition and hygiene. Health mediators provide the system with a better insight into the health situation in Roma settlements, and inform Roma citizens about the importance of seeing a doctor regularly. In the recruitment process of health mediators, the Ministry of Health gave precedence to Roma women who are mothers and who live in Roma settlements. Ever since their introduction in Serbia’s health system, health mediators have been a component of the polyvalent community nursing (visiting nurse) service of primary health care centres, where they cooperate with the health centres’ staff, social

⁵⁹ Available at:

<http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/rs/izvestaj-o-implementaciji-operativnih-zakljucaka-sa-seminara-socijalno-ukljucivanje-roma-i-romkinja-u-republici-srbiji-za-period-oktobar-2017-oktobar-2019-godine>

⁶⁰ Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction, Government of Serbia, Belgrade, 2018. Available at: <http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Treci-nacionalni-izvestaj-o-socijalnom-ukljucivanju-i-smnjenju-siromastva-nacrta.pdf>

welfare centres, the local branch of the National Health Insurance Fund and the local government. Taking into account that they are in daily communication with the Roma community, they provide a significant contribution to the activity of the Roma inclusion mobile units. A total of 85 mediators are engaged in 70 municipalities in the Serbia. One of the goals defined in the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in Serbia is to improve the health of the Roma population and their access to health care services. Through the measures concretized in the Action Plan, commitments were undertaken to mobilize the entire primary health care system, further increase the capacities of health mediators, including their number, resolve the issue of their employment status, and incorporate this occupation in Standard Occupational Classification.

6.7. Earmarked Social Transfers

In the past two years, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs supports local government units (LGUs) whose level of development is below the national average by funding the **development of social protection services** within the purview of LGUs **through earmarked transfers**. In 2017, 123 LGUs received support for this purpose. Pursuant to the Regulation on Earmarked Social Transfers, agreements for the improvement of existing and development of new community-based services were signed with 144 local governments in 2019.⁶¹ Services within the purview of LGUs financed from earmarked transfers include community-based day services, supported living services, and counselling and therapy services.

6.8. Projects Approved Through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance – IPA

The introduction of **family assistants and family-based respite care services** was financed through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA 2013) and with the support of UNICEF. These services were introduced to support families in crisis, to prevent the placement of children in residential care. So far, the monitoring of the pilot family assistant service reveals that it helps families create a secure and stimulating environment for the child's development and reduce the risk of having to separate the child from the family. Furthermore, UNICEF supported the implementation of a project titled "Strengthening the Justice and Social Welfare Systems to Advance the Protection

⁶¹ Available at:

<http://sociojalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/rs/izvestaj-o-implementaciji-operativnih-zakljucaka-sa-seminara-socijalno-ukljucivanje-roma-i-romkinja-u-republici-srbiji-za-period-oktobar-2017-oktobar-2019-godine>

of Children in Serbia“, focused on introducing sustainable mechanisms for the practical implementation of the principle of the child’s best interest in the juvenile justice or social welfare setting. Empowerment of the family, prevention of the separation of the child from the family, and improvement of case management in the SWCs are highlighted as the project’s major outcomes.

Under the EU-funded “**Technical Assistance for Roma Integration (TARI)–empowering local communities for Roma inclusion – IPA 2016**“, implemented by the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM), 36 LGUs are implementing projects supporting the improvement of the socioeconomic status of the Roma population in the local communities. Furthermore, cooperation agreements were signed to provide support packages to assist Roma inclusion at local level, through the following key mechanisms: Mobile Roma Inclusion Units were established; the preparation of Local Action Plans (LAP) for Roma Inclusion was launched; regional trainings were held in human rights and non-discrimination, as well as in project preparation and management according to EU procedures; cooperation agreements were signed with LGUs, and urban development plans were adopted in 11 LGUs designed to improve living conditions in Roma substandard settlements.

7. Systemic Support for the Social Inclusion of Roma Children at the Local Level

As emphasized in the **Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in Serbia, local governments have the mechanisms to manage and implement inclusive public policies**. “Policy measures target the individual and his/her immediate and extended environment, so that this strategic approach facilitates the monitoring of the implementation of Roma rights and progress in the implementation of inclusive policies in the local community, in the first instance.”

Although this Strategy envisages numerous goals that are to be achieved at local level, the survey conducted by the Ombudsman⁶² shows that only 50% of respondents think that issues relevant for Roma inclusion should be tackled in the communities they live in, a significant 40% believes this should be done by the central government, while 5% of respondents, respectively, stated that these issues should be tackled by the international community and the Roma themselves.

⁶² Special Report of the Ombudsman on the Implementation of the Strategy for Roma Social Inclusion with Recommendations, Belgrade 2019, Ombudsman

A prerequisite for the improvement of the situation of Roma children at local level is the establishment of systemic solutions, multisectoral cooperation and the efficient implementation and monitoring of measures and services within the purview of towns and municipalities.

7.1. Planning and Monitoring System at Local Level

The formulation of **local policy documents and the operationalization of goals and measures for the improvement of the situation** of Roma at local level is of the utmost importance. An overview of data on Roma social inclusion at the level of towns and municipalities for 2018⁶³ reveals that a Local Action Plan (LAP) for Roma social inclusion was adopted by 38 towns and municipalities of a total of 89 LGUs that completed the questionnaire, while 45 local governments earmarked funds for the improvement of the situation of Roma.

On the other hand, the **Assessment of Local Capacities in Social Protection and Social Inclusion of vulnerable groups conducted in 2019 on a sample of 31 LGUs**⁶⁴ reveals that only four LGUs from the sample adopted a programme for the improvement of social welfare for 2018. Possibly, one of the reasons why there are so few is that the Law on Social Protection requires LGUs to adopt local programmes for the improvement of social protection that are aligned with the GoS National Strategy, whereas the new strategic framework has not yet been adopted. A significant share of LGUs, 22.5% of the total survey sample, has no valid policy or planning document relevant for social inclusion. Even more alarmingly, in most LGUs (close to 60%) **none of the staff ever participated in strategic planning trainings in any of the areas relevant for social inclusion (social protection, education, health care, employment, inclusion of Roma, etc.)**.

This survey also revealed that **there is hardly any intersectoral cooperation in the area of social inclusion in the municipalities and that, wherever present, it is limited due to lack of human resources as a consequence of the hiring freeze in the public sector**. Only four of the 31 LGUs surveyed have signed intersectoral cooperation protocols, and not one municipality or town participating in the survey has established integrated service delivery. In fact, the establishment of integrated and

⁶³ Overview of data on Roma social inclusion measures at the level of towns and municipalities in 2018, available at www.inkluzijaroma.stat.gov.rs

⁶⁴ Assessment of Local Capacities in Social Protection and Social Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups, conducted under the Swiss Pro project in partnership with the Centre for Social Policy, Belgrade, 2019

cross-municipal services is the worst-rated segment of local government capacities. The conclusion is that local governments missed the opportunity to invest the central government transfers intended for the development of social services in developing adequate social protection strategies that incorporate inclusive policies.

7.2. Roma Coordinators

The local Roma inclusion policy entails a multisectoral approach and the participation of several institutions at local level, with the active involvement and coordination of local mechanisms for the inclusion of the Roma community. The Strategy recognizes that the **employment of local Roma coordinators in towns and municipalities** is one of the local mechanisms that contributes most to the implementation of strategic action at local level in the domain of Roma community participation. With the introduction of the position of Roma Coordinator, the local government created opportunities for regular and direct communication with the Roma community and improved the efficiency of the implementation of the national policy at local level, taking into account the characteristics of the local environment. “The role of a Roma Coordinator is to provide technical assistance to the local government in developing and implementing existing and new Roma inclusion policies and programmes in accordance with the national and local strategic framework; to collect and analyse data on socioeconomic needs as the basis for developing and monitoring local strategic documents related to Roma inclusion; to communicate and mediate between the Roma community and the local administration.”

Guidelines for Roma coordinators and local government staff monitoring Roma inclusion at local level were developed in 2016, defining the role of Roma coordinators in the local government, recommendations concerning their employment status, and the role of the local government in promoting human and minority rights.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, **data from the Ombudsman’s analysis**⁶⁶ indicate that as many as 51.98% of respondents are not familiar with the activity of Roma coordinators, and that 17.51% of respondents rated the work of the coordinators with the lowest rating, while only 19.21% of respondents rated the work of Roma coordinators with the highest rating.

⁶⁵ Available at: <https://www.osce.org/sr/serbia/>

⁶⁶ Special Report of the Ombudsman on the Implementation of the Strategy for Roma Social Inclusion with Recommendations, Belgrade, 2019.

In addition, it is important to note that of the total number of Roma coordinators engaged in LGUs, based on data for 2018, 24 of them are working under an open-end contracts, while 34 coordinators are included in the staffing plan.⁶⁷

7.3. Roma Inclusion Mobile Units

A Roma Inclusion Mobile Unit is a Working Party of the town/municipality assembly or council, established for the purpose of strengthening cooperation between staff of the relevant local institutions. Members of mobile units organize joint outreach activities, visiting Roma settlements, and providing joint and coordinated support and assistance to individuals and families. Members of the mobile unit are: the Roma Coordinator engaged in the municipal/town council, a SEN teaching assistant, a health mediator, a representative of the Social Welfare Centre, and a representative of the National Employment Service. The establishment of mobile teams has led to a more rational use of local institutional resources, a coordinated approach to service delivery, increased availability and faster delivery of services to users. The mobile teams act on the basis of six-month operational plans. Roma inclusion mobile units have been established in 50 towns and municipalities in Serbia with the support of EU funds (IPA12, IPA13, IPA16). The Mobile Unit performs the following tasks: provides joint and coordinated support to individuals and families; assesses the needs of Roma communities in towns/municipalities, especially in the area of education, housing, employment, health care and social welfare; promotes and assists the inclusion of Roma in the social life of the community; proposes activities with the aim of improving the situation of Roma in the town/municipality and in other relevant agencies and organizations; promotes interculturality and educates the majority population about the Roma community.

7.4. Roma Civil Society Organizations

Civil society organizations have an important role in the inclusion of Roma children at local level and it is therefore important that they be recognized as an important partner of institutions and decision-makers at local level.

A survey conducted in 2019 by the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of Serbia⁶⁸ reveals that most CSOs included in the survey are funded

⁶⁷ Overview of data on Roma social inclusion measures at the level of towns and municipalities in 2018. Available at: www.inkluzijaroma.stat.gov.rs

⁶⁸ Annex 1 – questionnaire for civil society organizations; Annex 2 – list of civil society organizations that participated in the survey.

from the following sources: donor funding – 40 CSOs (18.33%); local government budget – 7 CSOs (11.48%); a few organizations are funded with the support of the private sector – 4 CSOs (6.56%) and 1 CSO (1.64%) from the national budget.

Although few CSOs receive support from the central level, it is important to draw attention to some of the good practice examples of partnerships between the institutions of the system and CSOs for the improvement of the status of the Roma population.

In the school year 2018/2019, the MoESTD launched a public competition inviting applications for grants from prominent non-governmental and other non-profit organizations in the field of education.

The purpose of this competition was to contribute to the improvement of the education system through the introduction of educational activities designed to support elementary and secondary school students. Three of a total of 40 approved projects targeted Roma students. The proposed projects implemented activities focusing on the improvement of the Romani Language with Elements of National Culture in primary schools.

Under the “Preventive Health Care Programme– Improving Roma Access to Health Care”, through a public competition in 2018, the Ministry of Health earmarked and disbursed RSD 5,499,100.00 to 14 CSOs actively engaged in Roma health policies.

Under the competition for projects of associations engaged in the improvement of the situation and status of Roma in Serbia, the Office for Human and Minority Rights supported a total of 37 civil society organizations with RSD 12,677,029.35 in 2018, and 30 CSOs with RSD 16 million in 2019.

Source: Report on the Implementation of Operational Conclusion for the Period from October 2017 to October 2019– Seminar on Social Inclusion of Roma in Serbia

The funding and sustainability of results and activities was reported as the key challenge in their activity by most CSOs, 56 (91.80%). Also, the lack of cooperation with relevant institutions at local level was cited as a challenge by a significant number of CSOs– 28 CSOs (45.90%), while 10 CSOs (16.39%) highlighted the lack of cooperation with children and parents as a challenge.

8. Support Measures and Services for the Improvement of Social Inclusion of Roma Children at Local Level

In addition to the systemic measures funded from Serbia's national budget (such as the health mediators, SEN teaching assistants,⁶⁹ subsidized preschool education for children from families receiving FSA, scholarships for Roma students and similar), there is also a number of support services and measures for improving the social inclusion of Roma children, which are under the competence of the local government.

8.1. Support Measures from the Social Protection Domain

As mentioned earlier, **community-based social care services** envisaged under the Law on Social Protection, and the Rulebook on Detailed Requirements and Standards for Social Care Service Providers,⁷⁰ **include** evaluation and planning services, community-based day services, supported living services, counselling and therapy, social and educational services, as well as residential care services. These services are partly funded from the central level (evaluation and planning services, residential and family placement, shelters for victims of trafficking in human beings, and sheltered housing for persons with disabilities, except in the most developed towns and municipalities), and partly by local governments. Potential clients are referred to social welfare rights and services by the Social Welfare Centres (SWC). The latter are also designated as the guardianship authority, pursuant to the Family Law⁷¹.

If there are needs that local social protection institutions cannot meet, the **LGU may launch a public procurement procedure and sign a service agreement with a licensed CSO**. Minimal service standards must be defined for the selection of the services providers. Only service providers that meet the defined minimal standards may be granted a license and entrusted with service delivery.⁷²

Based on data collected through a survey titled **Mapping of Social Protection Services within the Mandate of Local Governments in Serbia for 2018**,⁷³ relevant information

⁶⁹ SEN teaching assistants hired by preschool establishments are funded from the local government budget.

⁷⁰ RS Official Gazette No 42/13.

⁷¹ RS Official Gazette No 18/05, 72/11 – as amended, and 6/15.

⁷² Guidelines for CSOs – Standards for Community-Based Social Care Services and Licensing Procedures, Belgrade, 2013.

⁷³ Mapping of Social Protection Services within the Mandate of Local Governments in Serbia, Belgrade, 2020. Available at: www.socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs

was obtained about the availability and funding of individual services, service providers, as well as gender-disaggregated data on clients, while information on the ethnicity of clients are not a part of the standard records kept by social welfare centres and other services providers, consequently, accurate data on Roma children users of these services cannot be obtained.⁷⁴

According to mapping data from 2018, social protection services within the mandate of local government units (LGUs) are available in 137 out of a total of 145 LGUs, with a minimal increase relative to 2015(133 LGUs). A more comprehensive set of services is only available in the larger cities, and municipalities with just two to three services in place are predominant. No local social protection services were available in eight municipalities in 2018 (Bosilegrad, Gadžin Han, Odžaci, Požega, Svrlijig, Trgovište, Ub and Žitorađa).⁷⁵

Community-based day services are still the most prevalent group of social services, as in the previous few years (2012, 2015). In 2018, this group of services was available in 135 LGUs. Children and youth services were available in 105 LGUs. The most prominent change, in terms of availability of services, was registered with respect to personal assistant services for children with disabilities, which were available in 76 LGUs in 2018. The demand for support for the inclusion of all children⁷⁶ in education, and the active role of local intersectoral commissions contributed to the rise in both demand and supply of this service.

Services **supporting clients to attain their independence** are available in a total of 29 municipalities and towns. Supported living services for youth are mostly organized in the major cities of Serbia, specifically, in only 14 local government units. Residential placement services, which are within the mandate of local governments, are provided in a total of 26 LGUs, of which more than half are larger cities. Certain social services, such as **drop-in centres, day care services for children in conflict with the law, shelters for children and respite services, are not widely available. Counselling, therapy, social and educational services were available in a total of 37 LGUs in 2018**, and the number of LGUs providing these services increased relative to 2015. The increase in the number of LGUs providing these services is likely a result of the

⁷⁴ Institutions of the system do not have the statutory obligation to keep records disaggregated by nationality, as information on nationality is provided by the citizens on a voluntary basis.

⁷⁵ Mapping of Social Protection Services within the Mandate of Local Governments in Serbia, Belgrade, 2020. Available at: <http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/rs/category/dokumenta/>

⁷⁶ Increasing the participation of children in education is one of the top priorities of the Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia 2020.

Available at: http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wpcontent/uploads/2015/08/strategija_obrazovanja_do_2020.pdf

funds received through earmarked transfers, in fact, in 7 of a total of 8 LGUs that introduced these services in 2018, between the two mapping exercises, these services were funded exclusively from this source.

Although the service of family assistant proved to be an adequate form of support for families with children from non-stimulating environments, in 2018 this service was implemented in only 5 LGUs (relative to 7 in 2016 when the standards were developed for family assistant services). In the period after 2015, family assistant services have remained in place only in the major cities (Belgrade, Kragujevac, Niš and Novi Sad),⁷⁷ where they were piloted in 2014/2015. Having recognized the importance of this service, Kraljevo, where the service was piloted in 2018, also joined these cities. It is especially noteworthy that Kragujevac, Niš and Novi Sad earmarked funds from their budgets for this purpose, whereas in Belgrade they were still funded with the support of donors in 2018.

Family assistant services are extremely important for families with numerous and complex needs and difficulties, and have proven to largely meet the needs of Roma families. Roma families accounted for 37% of the total number of families using this service.⁷⁸ Standards have been set for the services of family assistants and occasional foster care, which are mostly used by Roma families, and efforts are currently invested in developing these services further, and expanding the network. The development and scaling of these services in local communities requires changing the normative framework, and securing the material and human resources for the adequate enforcement thereof.

In early 2019, a Shelter for Youth and Children was established in Belgrade, as an independent social care establishment within the mandate of the local government unit. The Shelter's facilities consist of 16 bedrooms for children, separate rooms for daytime activities, workshops, individual treatments and other. A sufficient number of bathrooms has been made available, and a separate medical ward as well as a ward for the admission of new beneficiaries. The shelter has the capacity to take in 48 children. In addition to the shelter, in a separate section of the building there will be an area where drop-in services will be provided, with contents that will change the way

⁷⁷ The family assistant service was piloted in four cities (Belgrade, Kragujevac, Niš and Novi Sad) through the programme implemented by the National Social Protection Institute, in partnership with UNICEF.

⁷⁸ Available at:

<http://sociojalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/rs/izvestaj-o-implementaciji-operativnih-zakljucaka-sa-seminara-sociojalno-ukljucivanje-roma-i-romkinja-u-republici-srbiji-za-period-oktobar-2017-oktobar-2019-godine/>

children with inadequate lifestyles function. The drop-in centre has the capacity to take in 30 children.⁷⁹

Public sector establishments still dominate among the services providers. The state sector continues to take the lead in providing placement services, supported housing, day care for children and adults, and counselling and therapy services. The public sector's domination is in decline among the most prevalent services – home help and personal assistance for children with disabilities – whereas, in the case of day care services for children with developmental disorders and disabilities, it is on the rise. Private sector providers of commercial home help services and personal assistance for children with disabilities have made their first appearance.

The share of clients of public, i.e. state sector services accounted for 57.9%, showing a decline relative to 2015, whereas the share of clients using the services provided by non-profit organizations significantly increased (35.2%). For the first time, commercial private sector providers appeared, with a client reach of 6.9%. Thanks to the licensing of social service providers, private providers were able to enter the social care services market.⁸⁰

A breakdown of local services by **sources of fundings** shows that approximately three-fourths of the funding for local services is provided from local government budgets, and that a significant share of local services is funded through earmarked social transfers (17%). The remaining share of funding comes from international donors (2.8%) and out-of-pocket payments of clients (2.2%).

According to the data of the survey of the institutional capacities of LGUs,⁸¹ when it comes to the structure of support available via the social welfare system, the most commonly used type of support by Roma families are financial social assistance (FSA) and one-off financial assistance provided from local sources. Also, a significant share of clients uses food kitchen services, and foster care services.

Although the action plan for improving Roma inclusion for 2017/2018 envisaged that **social welfare centres should hire Roma minority staff** to improve outreach activities, and that these centres should be made accessible to social welfare recipients from

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Mapping of Social Protection Services within the Mandate of Local Governments in Serbia, Belgrade, 2020. Available at: <http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/rs/category/dokumenta/>

⁸¹ Assessment of Local Capacities in Social Protection and Social Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups, Belgrade, 2019. Available at: https://www.swisspro.org.rs/uploads/files/140-170-sp_procena_institucionalnih_kapaciteta_sr.pdf

the Roma community by engaging in direct outreach activities in Roma settlements, the SWCs clearly lack staff capacities to regular visits to Roma settlements, and the implementation of various activities designed to improve Roma social inclusion.

Thereasons for inadequate social services development at local level, accordingto the employees of the local social welfare system, are: the lack of financial resources, the lack of human resources, the hiring freeze in the public sector, inadequate awareness of local government about their mandate in the area of social welfare.⁸²

*Guidelines for local governments – models and recommendations for the enforcement of the social protection regulatory framework,*⁸³ published by the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities in 2017, pointed to the **challenges for local governments in carrying their mandate in the social protection sphere, especially in the part related to the revision of the Decision on Social Welfare** in accordance with the applicable Law on Social Welfare. The analysis conducted for the purposes of this report identified the following trends: the normative regulation of social services at local level is non-existent or incomplete, so that we cannot say they are fully institutionalized; 67.8% of local government units adopted a Decision on Social Welfare that is aligned with the currently applicable Law on Social Welfare, so that local governments that failed to adopt this legal instrument leave room for the arbitrary interpretation of important issues; most local governments do not have Rules for Service Providers, except for the Rules for providers of home help services for adults and the elderly, which most municipalities have – 72.1%.

It must be noted that in addition to social welfare services, the LGUs also provide other **specific programmes and measures for Roma children that cannot be considered as social welfare services because they are not standardized.** According to data obtained from the social service mapping exercise from 2016, in 2015 various types of support programmes had a client reach of almost 3,000 users in 20 local governments. The local governments earmarked around RSD 55 million for this purpose.⁸⁴ A new element in the process of mapping social services implemented in 2019 was the collection of data on material support provided at local level, i.e. cash and in-kind benefits secured by the LGUs from their budgets under the Law on Social Welfare,

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Available at: <http://skgo.org/files/fck/File/2017/Februar/3.2./Vodic%20za%20JLS%20-%20Socijal-na%20zastita%2002022017.pdf>

⁸⁴ Mapping of Social Protection Services within the Mandate of Local Governments in Serbia, Belgrade, 2020. Available at: www.socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs and at: www.zavodsz.gov.rs

including data on population policy programmes and measures for which the towns and municipalities are earmarking funds, pursuant to the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children. The results of this analysis will be published in 2020.

8.2. Educational Support Measures

Preschool education is the area in which the LGUs have the biggest mandate, and the strategic policy framework encourages **local governments to fund various programmes to increase the number of children in preschool programmes**, to identify Roma children aged five-and-a-half to six-and-a-half, i.e. the eligible age for attending the preparatory preschool programme (PPP), and organize various activities to increase the number of children from Roma families in PPP.

In the education system, LGUs, in cooperation with schools and other institutions, provide **support for children designed to contribute to better learning outcomes** through support measures, such as: individual education plans, teaching assistants, and support for accelerated learning of the language of instruction. Some of the measures implemented by local governments are: identification of reasons for absenteeism and formulation of a plan for the prevention of school drop-out among Roma children, and working with parents (Kraljevo); notification of parents, contacts with the Centre for Social Work, interviews with the psychologist and school counsellor, inclusion of children in school activities and groups, workshops for parents about the importance of regular school attendance; organizing trainings to address school drop-out (Niš); formulating a plan for the identification of risk and prevention of schools drop-out, development of a strategy for the enrolment of first-grade pupils, establishing a mechanism in schools for parents to report they are going to spend some time abroad, and instructing them to ensure that children return to school upon coming back (Novi Sad); daily cooperation with parents with the aim of improving parent competences and raising their awareness about the importance of education (Požarevac).⁸⁵

In addition, Roma families need support from the local government to make education accessible to them and increase the participation of Roma children in the education system. In addition to educating and sensitizing teachers and other education system specialists, as well as peers, **funds from local government budgets are allocated to** financing the procurement of teaching materials (equipment, books, school

⁸⁵ Available at:

<http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/rs/izvestaj-o-implementaciji-operativnih-zakljucaka-sa-seminara-socijalno-ukljucivanje-roma-i-romkinja-u-republici-srbiji-za-period-oktobar-2017-oktobar-2019-godine/>

supplies), the extended school stay for children, transport, school lunches, as well as for procurement of clothes and footwear.

Table 1: Educational Support Measures at Local Level⁸⁶

Support Measures	Number of LGUs
LGUs that granted scholarships to Roma secondary school students	5
LGUs that keep records on the number of Roma secondary school students receiving scholarships	26
LGUs that granted scholarships to Roma university students	9
LGUs that keep records on the number of Roma recipients of university scholarships	48
LGUs that fund the procurement of textbooks for Roma secondary school students	11
LGUs that fund transport costs for Roma primary school students	9
LGUs that fund transport costs for Roma secondary school students	55
LGUs that fund school meals for Roma secondary school students	10

In the 2018/2019 school year, 11 towns and municipalities allocated a total of RSD 2,046,000 for the procurement of textbooks for Roma school students, spearheaded by Koceljeva (RSD 850,000), Kovin (RSD 356,000) and Subotica (RSD 300,000). Fifty-five towns/municipalities allocated a total of RSD 38,043,941 to finance transport expenses of Roma students attending secondary school. Ten towns/municipalities allocated a total of RSD 12,386,577 to finance school meals for Roma children, spearheaded by Kikinda (RSD 8,696,577) and Odžaci (RSD 2,200,000).⁸⁷

8.3. Health Care Support Measures

As mentioned earlier, a total of **85 health mediators was hired in 71 municipalities** in Serbia, and members of the Roma national minority are represented in 8 health councils. Paraćin, Pirot and the Belgrade Municipality of Voždovac met all of the three conditions for the improvement of Roma health care at local level: engagement of

⁸⁶ Overview of data on Roma social inclusion measures of towns and municipalities in 2018. Available at: www.inkluzijaroma.stat.gov.rs

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

health mediators, formation of the LGU's Health Council, and participation of Roma in the Health Council.⁸⁸

8.4. Support Activities and Measures Provided by CSOs at Local Level

Civil Society Organizations are an important resource for the improvement of social inclusion of Roma children at local level. A share of local governments, in cooperation with local CSOs, are implementing various programmes/activities designed to improve social inclusion and provide material support to socially disadvantaged Roma children.

The CSOs that participated in the survey conducted by the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of Serbia⁸⁹ mostly implement the following activities: activities focused on improving education – 56 CSOs (91.80%); activities in the social protection sphere – 47 CSOs (77.05%); activities focused on improving the population's health – 39 (63.93%); and activities in other areas, such as legal and humanitarian aid, sport and cultural activities, development of life skills and similar – 46 OCD (75.41%).

Activities provided by CSOs:

- Psychosocial and counselling support for children and parents;
- Education of parents about the rights and importance of children's education, and protection from violence;
- Workshops with children and parents designed to promote and stimulate early childhood development, encourage children's and parental engagement in completing and continuing education;
- Improving cooperation and coordination by establishing working parties, associations and networks, and participation in the activities of local and national bodies in the area of social inclusion;
- Support in the process of employment, and increasing awareness and knowledge about labour legislation;
- Campaigns for the collection of clothes, hygiene packages, school supplies;

⁸⁸ Overview of data on Roma social inclusion measures of towns and municipalities in 2018. Available at: www.inkluzijaroma.stat.gov.rs

⁸⁹ Annex 1 – questionnaire for civil society organizations; Annex 2 – list of civil society organizations that participated in the survey.

- Support for participation in sport and cultural activities at the level of the school and local community;
- Support in collecting and obtaining documents;
- Toy library, as a gathering place for children and parents;
- Public advocacy and free legal aid for protection from discrimination;
- Support in meeting eligibility requirements for admission to secondary school under affirmative action, and in accessing scholarships;
- Activities relevant for the prevention of discrimination, inclusion of children from marginalized groups in programmes relevant to social inclusion;
- Building capacities of practitioners across all sectors for providing support to social inclusion and strengthening the capacities of institutions in the local community;
- Information and counselling services in the process of late registration in birth registers and acquiring citizenship;
- Raising awareness and providing workshops for children and parents on the prevention and elimination of child, early and forced marriages, and meetings with local stakeholders.

CSOs often take on the role of mediators between Roma families and social welfare institutions – assisting in obtaining the documents required to qualify for social assistance, material benefits, and child allowance, writing applications, appeals, requests, and completing forms. CSOs also assist Roma families in obtaining health cards, providing hygiene packages for families, organizing preventive medical screenings for parents and children, organizing educational workshops, in cooperation with healthcare professionals and health mediators, on hygiene, nutrition, reproductive health, and vaccination.

CSO activities focus on children:

- living in substandard settlements, extreme poverty, without a decent living and learning environment, socially isolated, vulnerable and not registered in the civil registration system;
- living and working on the street, or children at risk thereof;
- children with no health care access, clothes and footwear suited to weather conditions;

- children who are beneficiaries of social services, from families with low socioeconomic and educational status that are often on the move because they take up seasonal jobs, or from families of returnees under the Readmission Agreement;
- Children without parents, or at risk of being removed from their biological families, children in alternative care, or transitioning to independence;
- Children outside the school system, or at risk of dropping out of school, with no work discipline, motivation and with low self-esteem, inadequately supported by the family and teaching staff;
- Children who do not speak the Serbian language or use the Cyrillic script well enough;
- Children at risk of child, early and forced marriage.

Most organizations (77%) include not only Roma but also non-Roma children in their activities, because it contributes to bridging the ethnic gap, and most of these organizations' activities focus on supporting children from different vulnerable groups. **On the other hand, 33% of organizations say their activities target predominantly Roma children**, because they believe these children are at greater socioeconomic disadvantage, and at greater risk of dropping out of school than children from the majority population. Through their activities these CSOs wish to draw attention to the need for extra support for Roma social inclusion and the improvement of living conditions of the Roma in all segments of society.

A significant 90% of organizations believe that their activities help empower children from the Roma community, and their interaction with non-Roma children, because they strengthen the children's self-confidence and socialization, and promote equality and independence of children.

The CSOs highlighted the following key outputs of their activity:

- Thanks to civil registration, Roma children are able to exercise other fundamental rights in the field of education, healthcare and social protection;
- By becoming aware of the importance of education, and the harm caused by child, early and forced marriages, families and children are empowered to continue their education, self-confidence is instilled in them so that they can choose a career path that will improve the safety and quality of their lives;
- Different activities contribute to the integration of Roma children into mainstream society, and to curbing discrimination; to increasing independence, self-

confidence, critical thinking, activism, developing the children's talents; to bringing about a change in the attitude of the school and community toward Roma children; to increasing access to rights, learning new skills and knowledge, improving health and security, learning the Serbian language, improving children's academic performance, increasing regular grade completion, increasing the number of children completing primary school, increasing the number of children enrolling in and completing secondary school; changing the approach of parents and children to education;

- Direct work with parents contributes to raising the awareness of the Roma community about the importance of education, and of reducing the number of underage marriages; to developing social skills for life in the community, acquiring and improving work discipline.

9. Key Findings

The legislative and strategic framework for social inclusion of vulnerable groups in Serbia has been significantly improved over the past 10 years. Strategic priorities related to the improvement of social inclusion of Roma children are decisively advocated in education, health care and social welfare policies.

In spite of this, there are some challenges, primarily related to the fact that **most strategic documents have expired, and new ones are yet to be developed or adopted**, which could lead to a disparity between the implementation of measures and monitoring progress of the situation.

For instance, the Draft Social Protection Strategy has been developed but not yet adopted, a new Strategy for the Identification and Prevention of Discrimination was announced, and a new Strategy for the Development of Education is in the making.

In addition, one of the challenges concerns the **creation, implementation and monitoring of the implementation of action plans** designed to operationalize strategic priorities.

The Action Plan for the Implementation of the Roma Inclusion Strategy 2019–2020 has still not been adopted, thus making it difficult to monitor the situation at national and local level.

While the Law on Planning System has been adopted, the mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of strategic priorities in the various areas are still insufficiently

developed. **At local level, many municipalities evidently lack relevant Roma social inclusion strategic documents** (strategy for Roma social inclusion, social protection, education), and the opportunity was missed to make the use of earmarked transfers for social services in underdeveloped municipalities conditional upon the adoption of medium-term development plans in certain areas of the Social Protection Strategy. Despite the fact that the Law on Local Government envisages a list of the functions of LGUs to be compiled, this process has still not been completed, and one of the key questions that arise is: **what are the mechanisms for monitoring the process of planning and implementing strategic measures at local level**, considering that the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Government has no authority to monitor the implementation of the Roma Social Inclusion Strategy.

The database for monitoring Roma inclusion measures⁹⁰ was developed with the support of the European Support for Roma Inclusion, funded by the European Union and implemented by the OSCE Mission in Serbia. Even though the database is an important mechanism for monitoring the state of affairs at local level, evidently there is a need to improve the quality of reporting, as LGUs lack data that are disaggregated by nationality.

The Law on the Planning System⁹¹ and the Regulation on the Public Policy Management Methodology⁹² require policy creators to perform an *ex-ante* or *ex-post* impact analysis when developing public policy documents, however, the monitoring of the implementation of local strategic and action plans through the use of appropriate indicators is evidently absent, as are continuous data collection, and systematic assessments of whether the goals were met, of the efficiency and effectiveness of measures and policies, even in the local communities where a strategic frame is in place. Without external assessments and/or self-assessments to identify the reasons why the goals were not achieved, there is no point in implementing the next strategic planning cycle.

The Roma Social Inclusion Strategy envisages that **affairs related to the implementation of the Roma inclusion policy should be decentralized**, as a more rational approach, and establishes that local governments have the mechanisms for managing and implementing inclusive public policies, in accordance with the Law on Local Government which requires them to protect human and minority rights. **However, it is clear that a significant number of local governments still lacks adequate**

⁹⁰ Available at: www.inkluzijaroma.stat.gov.rs

⁹¹ RS Official Gazette No 30/18.

⁹² RS Official Gazette No 8/19.

capacities, and in some cases also the expertise to efficiently implement Roma social inclusion measures.

Numerous limitations are also evident in the implementation of measures and services at local level as well as the monitoring of the implementation of these measures and the systems in place for supporting Roma children. Research shows that in most LGUs only a few employees participated in strategic planning trainings in areas relevant for social inclusion (social welfare, education, health care, employment, Roma inclusion, etc.).

Local Roma inclusion policies entail a **multisectoral approach and the participation of several institutions at local level, with the active participation and coordination of local Roma inclusion mechanisms.** The status of vulnerable groups cannot be improved without a comprehensive mapping of and cooperation among institutions from different sectors. Some issues also require the setting up of integrated services or, at the very least, precisely defined cooperation protocols, exchange of information and the establishment of joint bodies/commissions.

While important mechanisms have been put in place for providing support to Roma families and children at national and local level (such as Roma coordinators, SEN teaching assistants, health mediators, Roma inclusion mobile units and similar), numerous challenges are still evident in practice with regard to their employment status, defined roles, recognition of their role in the system's institutions, and also with regard to increasing their number, and continuously improving the quality of their work through trainings.

Roma coordinators are a local mechanism that significantly contributed to the implementation of strategic policy measures at local level in the domain of the Roma community's inclusion in the social, economic, cultural and political life. Despite this, assessment results indicate that their employment status has still not been resolved in a number of LGUs, that there is no clear job description at the level of the LGU, and that the Roma population in a number of towns/municipalities is unaware of their existence and/or dissatisfied with their performance.

While the Rulebook on Teaching Assistants in Children's and Adult Education, the work of teaching assistants is still ridden with different challenges, primarily their employment status, opportunities for professional development, understanding of their role by other staff in the education system, and their participation in the activity of school teams. One of the major challenges is the further improvement of their employment status, bearing in mind that the Law on Education System Foundations

envisages that fixed-term contracts for teaching assistants cannot be converted to open-end contracts.

It is common ground that **health mediators** had a significant role in facilitating not only the Roma's access to health care and, consequently, improved health, but also their right to medical and social insurance, to obtaining personal documents, and other. Despite having achieved excellent results, in terms of facilitating the health protection and education of the Roma population, issues related to the health mediators' numbers and employment status have still not been fully resolved. They still work under service contracts, and their positions have not been included in the staffing plan. In addition to this, the compensation for their work is below the minimum wage in Serbia.

The important role of **social welfare centres** in the Roma social inclusion process is recognized in all strategic policy documents, including the Roma Social Inclusion Strategy, but it must be noted that many of the centres lack the capacity for implementing the measures envisaged in the policy documents. The SWCs do not have sufficient human resources to be able to regularly visit Roma settlements and implement various Roma social inclusion activities. In most SWCs, visits to Roma settlements are organized only when emergency intervention procedures make it imperative, or as part of the standard procedure for processing social benefits claims.

The formation of Roma inclusion **mobile units**, an activity implemented with the participation of staff of the SWCs, has to some extent improved contacts with members of the Roma community, but few centres have the capacity to regularly visit the settlements.

Support measures and systems for improving social inclusion of Roma children are still not at a satisfactory level. Community-based social services in many LGUs are underdeveloped and do not meet the needs of Roma families and children. This particularly applies to counselling and socio-therapeutic services, family assistant services, as well as sheltered housing/placement of children.

Although the Social Protection Law envisages that community-based services can be provided not only by public social care institutions, but also by CSOs and private sector providers, the latter are still underrepresented. **Few CSOs meet the standards for social service providers** and the funding of their activities at local level is mostly project-based, which has an impact on the sustainability of the activities they implement.

On the other side, **other support systems at local level**, such as the procurement of textbooks, school supplies, clothing, footwear, and other types of material support to families targeting the inclusion of children in the education system and the prevention

of school drop-out are insufficient to satisfy the basic needs of families living in extreme poverty. Only a small share of local governments plans and allocates funding for supporting Roma families and children, providing *ad hoc* rather than systemic support.

Despite the very important role of CSO in working with Roma children at local level, their capacities and efforts often remain unacknowledged by the local institutions. Their role in assessing the needs of the Roma community, their capacities for connecting Roma families with the institutions of the system, and their role in the local policy planning process have yet to be recognized.

10. Recommendations

Despite the significant improvement of the legislative and strategic framework, further efforts are needed to **improve the implementation of statutory obligations and strategic priorities**. Maintaining continuity in formulating and implementing strategies and actions plans, and improving the monitoring and evaluation of their impact is of the utmost importance. To secure the conditions for system-wide monitoring of impact, further action is needed to improve data collection and reporting, both at national and local level, and build the institutions' analytical capacities.

It is essential that a consensus be reached with key national stakeholders with regard to the collection of data that are disaggregated by nationality in accordance with the law, to gain a precise understanding of the support measures and systems available to the Roma community.

Pursuant to the Law on Planning System and the Law on Local Government, as well as relevant sector laws, it is important to continue building the planning and monitoring capacities of local governments, and the system for monitoring the local governments' and institutions' performance and compliance. **The compilation of a list of functions of towns and municipalities**, as envisaged by the Law on Local Self-Government, can provide a good basis for monitoring the LGUs' compliance with their obligations.

In addition, efforts should be invested in **building the capacity of local governments for mapping the needs of their citizens**, which is a condition for reviewing the accountability of local governments for providing a community-based social care system, and the opportunity for a change in social policies.

Clear prioritization, in line with needs, should be supported by corresponding budget headings in local budgets for activities that are relevant for the social inclusion of Roma children.

In particular, it is important to spread awareness about the need for formulating joint measures, programmes and policies in the local social sector and strengthen the capacities of LGUs for intersectoral planning, cooperation, and **establish integrated social welfare services**.

Whilst continuing to build the planning and monitoring capacities at national and local level, it is also important to continue **building the capacities of existing social service provider and new potential service providers primarily from the ranks of CSOs**. It is essential that further trainings be organized to establish new or improve existing social services with innovative approaches that can include outsourcing service providers who are not registered in a given LGU, the establishment of cross-municipal services, with special focus on the advantages and reasons for the establishment thereof.

The following action is needed in order to improve existing mechanisms:

- find a long-term solution for the status of health mediators and secure funding to increase the number of health mediators hired by the primary health centres;
- improve the status of teaching assistants and increase their number, especially in the preschool education system in order to improve the participation of Roma children in preschool education;
- standardize the Roma coordinators' employment status and job requirements;
- following the establishment of LGU Roma inclusion mobile units with the support of donor funding, secure their sustainability.

Additional trainings are needed for staff in all local level systems (social, health care and education) about all aspects relevant for the improvement of social inclusion and the prevention of discrimination of Roma children.

Establishing cooperation with and funding the activity of CSOs at local level (through budget line 487) is one of the key mechanisms for implementing a set of activities that will ultimately contribute to improving the support system for Roma children.

11. REFERENCES

1. Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia until 2020. Available at: www.mpn.gov.rs
2. *Analiza primene afirmativnih mera u oblasti obrazovanja Roma i Romkinja i preporuke za unapređenje mera (Analysis of the Impact of Affirmative Action in Roma Education and Recommendations for Improving these Measures)*, Centre for Education Policies, Belgrade, 2015
3. Committee on the Rights of the Child, “Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under article 44 of the convention: Concluding observations“, Hungary, 2006. Available at: [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/CRC.C.HUN.CO.2.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/CRC.C.HUN.CO.2.En?OpenDocument)
4. Mapping of Social Protection Services Within the Mandate of Local Self-Governments in the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2016. Available at: www.socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs and at www.zavodsz.gov.rs
5. Draft Social Protection Strategy 2019–2025, available at: www.zavodsz.gov.rs
6. Decision Establishing the Coordination Body for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia, RS Official Gazette No05/17
7. Decision Establishing the Council for the Rights of the Child, RS Official Gazette No 3/18.
8. Operational Conclusions on Roma Inclusion – Seminar on Roma Social Inclusion in RS, available at: www.ljudskaprava.gov.rs
9. Substandard Roma settlements in Serbia: An Overview from Geographic Information System for 2016, Mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Belgrade, 2017.
10. Population Census in the Republic of Serbia, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2013.
11. Special Report of the Ombudsman on the Implementation of the Roma Social Inclusion Strategy with Recommendations, Ombudsman, Belgrade, 2019.
12. Family Law, RS Official Gazette No18/05, 72/11 – as amended and 6/15.

13. Rulebook on additional support for the educational, healthcare and social needs of the child, learner, and adult, RS Official Gazette No 80/18.
14. Rulebook on licensing social service providers, RS Official Gazette No42/13.
15. Rulebook on detailed instructions for exercising the right to an individual education plan, the implementation and assessment thereof, RS Official Gazette No74/18.
16. Rulebook on the Requirements and Procedure for the Admission of Roma Students to Secondary School Under Favourable Conditions to Achieve Full Equality, RS Official Gazette No38/17.
17. Rulebook on Detailed Criteria for Identifying Discrimination by Staff Members, Students or Third Parties in the Educational Institution, RS Official Gazette No22/16.
18. Rules of Procedure of the Institution, RS Official Gazette No65/18.
19. Rulebook Amending the Rulebook on Student Loans and Grants, RS Official Gazette No46/10, 47/11, 56/12, 75/13 and 111/17.
20. Special Report of the Ombudsman on the Implementation of the Roma Social Inclusion Strategy with Recommendations, Ombudsman, Belgrade 2019.
21. Overview of data about Roma social inclusion measures at the level of towns and municipalities in 2018, available at: www.inkluzijaroma.stat.gov.rs
22. Assessment of Local Capacities in Social Protection and Social Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups, Belgrade, 2019.
23. Rulebook on Detailed Requirements and Standards for Social Service Providers, RS Official Gazette No 42/13.
24. Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey of the Situation of Women and Children in Serbia, 2014, and Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey of the Situation of Women and Children in Roma Settlements in Serbia, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, Belgrade, 2015.
25. Report on the Activity of Social Welfare Centres for 2016, National Social Protection Institute, Belgrade, 2017.
26. Roma inclusion index, Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, 2015.

27. Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in Serbia 2016–2025. Available at: www.ljudskaprava.gov.rs
28. Strategy for the Education Development in Serbia until 2020, RS Official Gazette No107/12.
29. Strategy for the Prevention of and Protection from Discrimination. Available at: www.ljudskaprava.gov.rs
30. Third National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction, Government of Serbia, Belgrade, 2018.
31. Law on Social Protection, RS Official Gazette No24/11.
32. Law on Local Government, RS Official Gazette No 129/07, 83/14 – as amended, 101/16 – as amended and 47/18.
33. Law on Planning System, RS Official Gazette No30/18.
34. Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, RS Official Gazette No22/09.
35. Law on Financial Support to Families with Children, RS Official Gazette No113/17 and 50/18.
36. Law on Education System Foundations, RS Official Gazette No88/17 and 27/18.
37. Law Amending the Law on Primary Education, RS Official Gazette No 55/13, 101/17, 10/19, 27/18 – as amended.
38. Law on Preschool Education, RS Official Gazette No101/17
39. RS Constitution, RS Official Gazette No98/2006.
40. Decree on Earmarked Social Transfers, RS Official Gazette No18/16.
41. Decree on the Job Catalogue in Public Services and Other Public Sector Organizations, RS Official Gazette No 81/17, 6/18 and 43/18.
42. *Guidelines for CSOs – Standards for Community-based Social Care Services and Licensing Procedures*, Belgrade, 2013.
43. *Guidelines for Local Governments – Models and Recommendations for the Improvement of the Legislative Framework in Social Protection*, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, Belgrade, 2017
44. Fourth Periodical Report submitted to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe pursuant to Article 25 of the Framework Convention, Belgrade, 2018. Available at: www.ljudskaparava.gov.rs

12. ANNEXES

12.1. Annex 1 –Questionnairefor Civil Society Organizations

By participating this survey, you will contribute to the assessment of the availability of local services for children from the Roma community. Information from this survey will be used to formulate recommendations for improvements in this area intended for all relevant stakeholders (institutions, local government units and civil society organizations).

The assessment of the availability of local services for Roma children is performed by the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit in cooperation with the Council for the Rights of the Child of the Republic of Serbia.

1. General data:

First name and last name of the person completing the questionnaire:

Name of organization:

Job title, position, e-mail address and contact phone (optional):

2. Your core services pertain to the domain of (you can circle more than one answer):

a) education

describe the service(s) that you provide: _____

b) social care

describe the service(s) that you provide: _____

c) health care

describe the service(s) that you provide: _____

d) _____

describe the service(s) that you provide: _____

3. Are you in the process of licensing the service(s) you provide?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
4. What is the target population of the services you provide?
 - a) Children aged 0 to 3,5
 - b) Children aged 3,5 to 5,5
 - c) Children aged 5,5 to 7
 - d) Children aged 7 to 11
 - e) Children aged 11 to 15
5. Describe the characteristics of the children you are providing service(s) for (living conditions, environment, interests, talents, potentials, educational habits, characteristic forms of behaviour, barriers/challenges/aggravating circumstances...)

6. Are the service(s) you provide intended only for children from the Roma community?
 - a) Yes, because _____
 - b) No, because _____
7. What are the sources of funding for the services you provide (you may circle more than one answer)?
 - a) The national budget of the Republic of Serbia
 - b) The town/municipality budget
 - c) Donor funding
 - d) Private sector funding
 - e) _____

8. How long have you been providing the service/services?
- a) Less than 2 years
 - b) Between 2 and 5 years
 - c) More than 5 years
9. What are the key positive changes that you notice as an effect of this service/ these services?
-
10. Please state the key challenges that make it important to provide this service/ these services?
-
11. What are the most frequent challenges/difficulties you encounter in your work?
- a) Funding and sustainability
 - b) Cooperation with relevant institutions
 - c) Cooperation with children and parents/guardians and/or foster parents
 - d) _____

12.2. Questionnaire 2 –List of Surveyed Civil Society Organizations

- NGO EduLink, Aranđelovac
- Association of SEN Teaching Assistants, Kragujevac
- Roma Student Association, Niš
- Centre for Social Integration, Vranje
- Youth Style, Ruma
- IDEAS, Beograd
- Centre for Roma Integration, Valjevo
- Centre for Girls, Niš
- Roma Society Association, Zaječar
- Roma CulturalCentre, Vranjska Banja
- The Rom Humanitarian Centre, Obrenovac
- The Novi Sad Humanitarian Centre
- AGORACentre, Bela Palanka
- Opre Romalen, Pirot
- The NEXUS Citizens' Association, Vranje
- Little Happy Colony, Novi Sad
- The PROTECTA Centre for the Development of Civil Society, Niš
- Slavica Veljić, Kragujevac
- The “Our Dreams“ Association, Valjevo
- The “Hands of Friendship” Citizens' Association, Kraljevo
- The “Vrdničak” Centre for Work with Children, Youth and Families, Vrdnik
- The Play Centre for the Development of the Potentials of Children and Youth, Novi Sad
- The “Iskrica” Initiative for Additional Support, Zaječar

- Coalition of Roma Youth of Serbia, Belgrade
- GRIG, Belgrade
- The “Kokoro“ Citizens’ Association, Bor
- Youth Roma Education Forum, Bujanovac
- The “Ternipe” Citizens’ Association, Pirot
- Okular, Čičevac
- Centre for Children and Youth, Vranjska Banja
- The Agenda Family Support Centre, Belgrade
- Youth Integration Centre, Belgrade
- Bibija, Belgrade
- OKZ Romanipen, Kragujevac
- Novi Bečej Roma Association
- Know-How Centre, Novi Sad
- Education Society, Surdulica
- The “Duga” Citizen’s Association, Ada
- Romani cikna, Kruševac
- ROSA – Roma Restoration, Cooperation and Alternative, Leskovac
- Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), Belgrade
- Roma Centre for the Rights of the Child, Belgrade
- Roma Cultural Centre, Leskovac
- Give Me Your Hand, Belgrade
- ASTRA, Beograd
- Škogled, Beograd
- HHU “Bread of Life“, Belgrade
- Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization, Novi Sad

- NGOPRAXIS, Belgrade
- The “Daje” Roma Centre for Women and Children, Belgrade
- The “Indigo” Group for Children and Youth, Niš
- Drop-in Centre for Children and Youth, Novi Sad
- Rroma Rota, Kikinda
- The “Little Prince” Children’s Centre, Belgrade
- CIM, Beograd
- Roma Educational Centre, Subotica
- Youth Forum for Roma Education
- The “Atina” Citizen’s Association for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and all Forms of Gender-based Violence, Belgrade
- SOS Children’s Villages Serbia
- Association of Roma Intellectuals, Vladičin Han



www.socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs