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VISIT TO THE CENTRE FOR PROTECTION OF INFANTS, CHILDREN AND YOUTH, BELGRADE ZVECANSKA CHILDREN'S HOME 16 October 2019

The visit of a group of 15 – 20 parliamentarians to the *Zvecanska* Children's Home will take place from 10 to 11 a.m. on 16 October.

SCENARIO OUTLINE

- Welcome to the *Zvecanska* Children's Home, Mr. Zoran Milacic (10 minutes)
- Briefing about the situation of children in *Zvecanska* by the core team of professionals (10 minutes)
- Visit to the unit for small children with disabilities (20 minutes)
- Visit to the Mother-and-Baby unit (20 minutes)

N.B.

- UNICEF's videographer will film the visit and produce a short video to be used by the IPU
- Photographs of children can be taken and posted on social media channels **only** with the permission obtained from the Centres for Social Work.

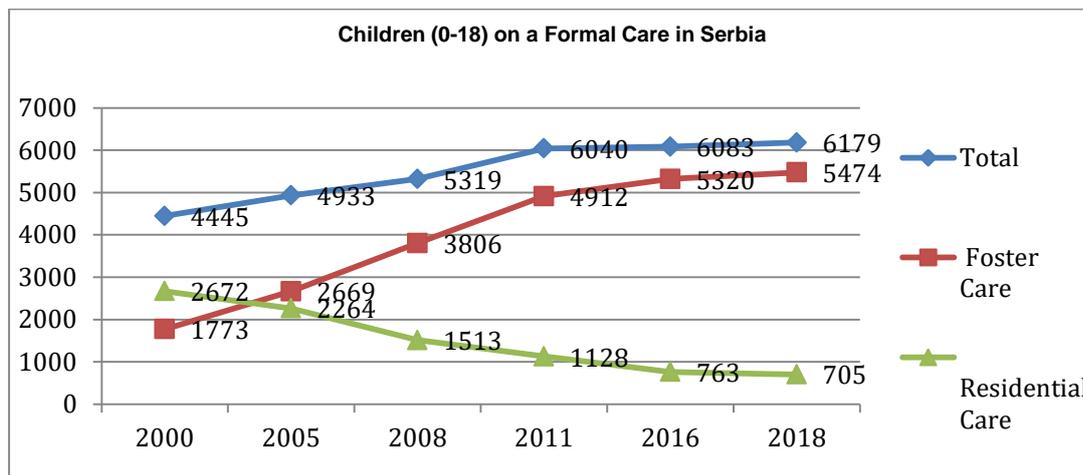
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BACKGROUND NOTE

1. De-institutionalization overview

The process of de-institutionalization (DI) was initiated in 2000 as a priority facet of the overall social system reform and as one of the long-term priorities of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. Today, Serbia is one of the countries with the lowest institutionalization rate in the region. Out of 6,179 children in formal care in 2018, 11.4 per cent are in residential institutions and 88.6 per cent in foster care.



Despite the progress made, the overall rate of child/family separation remains high (around 1,000 annually) which calls for further investments in strengthening family support measures and community-based services, including those leading to child/family reunification. Children with disabilities are of particular concern, as they represent 72 per cent of all children in residential institutions.

Although the Law on Social Welfare (2011) stipulates that a residential institution for children cannot have more than 50 clients, 5 (out of 20¹ institutions) considerably surpass this number, and are still considered as large-scale institutions specialized for children and youth with disabilities. Most of those institutions do not provide adequate living conditions, including access to health, education and rehabilitation programmes. Other residential institutions (regular children's homes) ensure better quality of care (including access to education).

Once placed in institutions, 35 per cent of the children and youth stay in care for an average of 5 years, while 25 per cent stay between 6 to 10 years. In large-scale institutions, over 70 per cent of children stay in care more than 11 years. Most children in institutions do not originate from the municipality where the institution is located, making contact with biological family members and relatives very difficult. Although only 2 per cent of children in institutions do not have any parents or relatives, one third of institutionalized children have no contact with their parents or relatives.

In spite of the 2011 ban on placing children under-three years of age in institutional care, it continues to occur. After a gradual decrease, it started to increase again in 2016. In 2018, close to 200 children age 0-2 were placed in residential care, including in shelters where almost 60 per cent stayed longer than 6 months. Currently (as of 3 September), there are 67 children aged 0-2 in two large-scale institutions (*Zvecanska* and *Kolevka*).

¹ 17 homes for children and youth (12 regular children's homes and 5 specialized for children with disabilities) and 3 education institutions for children in conflict with the law.

2. The Centre for Protection of Infants, Children and Youth, Belgrade

The Centre for Protection of Infants, Children and Youth, Belgrade, is the largest institution for children in Serbia. In 2018, the Centre accommodated a total of 355 children and youth (280 at the end of the year –which represented 40 per cent of all children in residential institutions in Serbia).

The Centre has six departments located in different municipalities in Belgrade:

- 3 "regular" children's homes (school-age children), each home can accommodate 48 children;
- 1 high-quality small residential facility for children with complex disabilities, capacity: 12;
- 1 facility for youth without parental care who are under-graduate students, capacity: 40;
- 1 large-scale facility, with a total capacity of 230 (*Stacionar* – capacity: 150; and a Unit for intensive support for children with complex disabilities – capacity: 80).

Other residential facilities include:

- Mother-and-baby unit (for single pregnant women and mothers with babies), capacity: 20 mothers and 20 babies;
- Shelters for urgent placement of preschool children (for children 0-3, capacity: 12; for children 3-7, capacity: 30);
- Shelter for children victims of violence, capacity: 20;
- Shelter for unaccompanied foreign children (established recently, capacity: 10).

The Centre also manages the *National Child SOS line* and *Parent-line* (financed from the national budget) and provides additional community-based services: day-care centre with an early intervention programme for children with disabilities and their parents; counselling for children and families; supported living for children leaving care; etc.

Professionals working in the centre are constantly trying to improve the quality of care, including: engaging volunteers, organizing outdoor and inclusive activities, enrolling children into preschools, actively facilitating contacts between parents and children whenever possible (including realization of some "shared arrangements" – children spending weekends with parents), etc.

3. About UNICEF's cooperation with the Centre

UNICEF in Serbia has a long and fruitful partnership with the Centre. The cooperation includes – strategic and operational planning for transformation of children's institutions, establishment of small residential units for children with complex disabilities, modelling family support services (family outreach service for the most vulnerable families to prevent family separation) and units for protection of child victims of crime, establishment of a Parent-line, promotion of inclusion of children with disabilities through recreation and sports.

Currently, UNICEF is supporting (in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, and the Republic Institute for Social Protection) the implementation of an action-plan aimed at the de-institutionalization of children 0-3 currently being placed in care.