

GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Republic of Serbia: National Progress Report on the Objectives of the Special Session of UN General Assembly on Children (2002)

1. Introduction

This National Report was prepared under special conditions. Namely, in the course of this year, a major change took place in the state organization of our country. By mid 2006 the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro was officially in place, and then Montenegro held a referendum deciding to secede from the State Union.

Thus, this Report refers only to Serbia as an independent state.

Disintegration of the State Union was associated with a series of consequences. *Inter alia*, each of the states was supposed to take over the competences previously operated on the union level. This refers to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well. Therefore, a delay ensued in communication of information that was transmitted via the common Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Because of that, notification of the UNICEF New York office on this report reached the Serbian Government with delay. Consequently, it was impossible to organize consultations necessitated to draw this report.

Absence of consultations on the Report was compensated, at least to a degree, by involvement of a large number of partners into design and implementation of most national actions for children presented in this report: NGOs, regional and local governments, professional institutions working with children, young people and children themselves. This issue will be covered in respective places of this report.

Also, representatives of relevant ministries, individual experts in areas relevant for children were consulted, and most of all, staff of the UNICEF Belgrade Office who also placed the rich database of the Office at our disposal.

2. Major national actions for children since 2002

Undoubtedly, the « +5 » years (five years after the Special UN Session on Children held in 2002 when the document „*A World Fit for Children*“ was adopted and after *Millennium Declaration* was also adopted) were years in which major progress was made in development of an integrated national system of care for the rights of the child. The aforementioned international documents provided the main impetus to this progress.

The achievements resulted from a synergy of internal and external factors.

In the 1990-2000 decade, Serbia, like the other countries resulting from disintegration of former Yugoslavia, experienced a large number of dramatic changes: breakup of the common state, wars, economic, social and political transitions, economic crisis and pauperization of the country, change of regime in 2000. It may be suggested

that only as of 2000 the country stabilization ensued, and was subsequently followed by recovery and initiation of normal development.

Therefore, in the post-conflict country, the one that is starting to emerge from the economic, social and political crises, country in transition, the recovery began in all aspects of life. This was the internal fruitful context in which, albeit with serious problems and oscillations, the process of struggle for the rights of the child has been evolving.

The process was greatly stimulated by the Special UN Session in 2002 and adoption of the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

It may be suggested that the case of Serbia is paradigmatic: It illustrates how a modern national system of care for the rights of the child is gradually established within the comprehensive country recovery program in a country that experienced dramatic crisis.

Under the pressure of facts on difficult position of children in the demolished economy and anomic society, the new national government and civil society were mobilized to follow the main messages of the UN Special Session and Millennium Declaration. In the first years of the process towards the targets of the international documents great help was provided by the multinational organizations and agencies. UNICEF took the lead, but there were others, as well (World Bank, EU, European Council), international NGOs (primarily Save the Children Alliance, Open Society Fund). Aid was also provided by many countries on the bilateral grounds: Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, France, Italy, Japan, Denmark, United Kingdom, Ireland.

The major achievement in this «+5» period is a serious **initiation of the building of the national system for protection and promotion of the rights of the child**. The main components of the national system include:

- **At this stage of development, the national system of protection and promotion of the rights of the child was focused: legislative activity, building of the system and institutions, adoption of strategies and national plans and systems for monitoring of the implementation thereof. The process is still in progress;**
- **Setting up of the Council for Children's Rights of the Government of Serbia (2002).** This is a governmental consultative body composed of the representatives of the Government (six ministries with competences relating to children) and civil society (representatives of national NGOs, experts for children's issues). UNICEF, representative of the Serbian Government for implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Save the Children have the status of associated members. The main competences of the body include providing help to the Government to produce an integrated and long-term policy for children and young people, to contribute to better coordination of individual sectors, to analyze the impact of all governmental measures (new legislation, budget, strategic development plans) on children and family, to contribute to advocacy and raise awareness of the society on problems and rights of the child;

- **Setting up the ombudsman for children.** Awareness has been raised and general public mobilized for the need of establishing such institution, together with mobilization of civil society whose representatives participated in discussions and in the working group that produced the draft law. The Law on Ombudsman for Children was endorsed by the Government of Serbia (2006) and it is currently in the parliamentary procedure in the Serbian Parliament. In the province of Vojvodina, however, the institution of ombudsman has been operational for years now;
- **Setting up and launch of operation of the sub-committee for the rights of the child in the Serbian Parliament (2006).** This is the first body of the kind in the Serbian Parliament and it has already conducted a debate on the Report of the UN Secretary General on violence against children. The proposal to establish a special Committee for the Rights of the Child has been defined;
- **Adoption of a series of laws incorporating measures resulting from CRC.** These include : *Family Law, Law on Juvenile Delinquents and Legal and Criminal Protection of Minors (Juvenile Justice Law)*;
- **The National Plan of Action (NPA) for Children was adopted (2004).** The NPA defined the national priorities for child protection and institutions as well as the mechanisms and resources for realization thereof. The process of writing and adopting the Local Plans of Action (LPA) is in progress in many municipalities in Serbia;
- **The DevInfo system for follow-up of realization of NPA and national MDG (2005).** The data base of indicators for follow up and monitoring of NPA and MDG realization has become a part of the routine national statistics. Thus, the national statistics has become greatly child sensitive which previously was not the case;
- **MICS 3 study was conducted (2006) . It is one of the systems for follow-up of implementation of all measures targeting children, particularly the vulnerable groups;**
- **The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper was adopted (2003).** (The strategy and its impact are elaborated in section 6.2);
- **The Government adopted the national MDGs as its own goals (2005); the system of indicators for monitoring of realization of MDGs has been elaborated (2006);**
- **Integration Strategy has been prepared implying higher powers to Roma as the most vulnerable social and ethnic group;**
- **A large number of sectoral measures have been adopted.**

However, we must recognize that children were the most serious victims of transition and in many areas the level of child protection has not reached the pre-transition levels. This particularly applies to the vulnerable groups such as children with developmental disorders, poor children, rural children, and children from some ethnic groups, particularly the Roma.

Such state of the rights of the child may be explained primarily by the fact that the governmental bodies prioritize urgent political and economic problems (state order,

political system, economic and, particularly, macroeconomic problems). In a situation like this, the problems of children are not likely to top the political agenda of the governmental bodies.

3. Resources allocated to the national actions for children

Resources, particularly the financial ones in the central budget and municipal budgets are the single most limiting factor for the improvement of the position of children in Serbia. The country has only embarked on the economic recovery process (manifested primarily as the rise of GDP, reaching 5% and 7% in recent years) since in the decade 1990-2000 the GDP was literally halved.

In the case of Serbia, the true problem is whether the public allocations for children kept up with the increase of GDP or increased even at a higher rate, since this would substantiate that the children were the true priority of the Government. This report includes analyses illustrating whether development of care for children progressed faster of the overall economic recovery of the country.

The main indicators of resources available for the child care system include:

- Trends of public expenditures for child-related sectors, presented below:

Table 1. Total public expenditure, by the year, in percentage of GDP:

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total public expenditure	48.0	47.3	47.0	45.7	44.6	43.5	42.5
Health	6.7	6.4	6.9	6.6	6.5	6.4	6.3
Education	4.0	3.5	3.7	3.9	4.0	4.2	4.3
Social care	18.3	19.1	18.5	18.4	17.5	17.0	16.5

Note: 2005-2008 are presented by projections

Source: Ministry of Finance (Memorandum on the 2006 Budget)

- This table illustrates that the global expenditure reduction policy is in place in the country. Within this global policy, the budgetary allocations for education have a mildly rising trend (these are earmarked for children), while in the health and social sector they have a falling trend (although more detailed analysis illustrates that within these sectors the funds earmarked for children are not reduced).

Nevertheless, the percentage of GDP for child-related sectors and the total financial resources are very modest (in the light of the total GDP of the country), but it is important here to recognize the policy of at least modest increase of public expenditure for children, within the overall total public expenditure decreasing trend.

- In 2006, using the revenue generated from privatization, the Government of Serbia set up the National Investment Plan (NIP). Thus, a new opportunity for

increased investment in the country has been promoted. Funds for financing child-related sectors have been allocated from this NIP. The following financial resources have been channeled to these sectors from this NIP:

- **health** (reconstruction of the local health care centers, reconstruction of hospitals, etc.) : EUR **311,350.000**;
- **education** (IT equipment and Internet, teacher training, improvement of overall conditions in schools) : EUR **54,614.000**;
- **social care** (*inter alia*: building family-type accommodation for children without parental care after they turn 18 and leave the foster families, care for children with developmental disorders on the municipal level, etc.) : EUR **33,697.000**.

- It is particularly important that providing funding for the *Poverty Reduction Strategy* (including MDG) has become a part of the Budget of the Republic of Serbia and is represented via pertinent sectors. The cost of implementation of the *Poverty Reduction Strategy* are covered via three pillars: 1. Economic development focusing employment promotion; 2. Prevention of new poverty, particularly in the company restructuring process; 3. Effective implementation of measures to support the poorest and most vulnerable groups. The expenditures of poverty reduction described in the aforementioned manner are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Cost of implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy

	Previous public expenditures (% GDP)						Projected public expenditure (% GDP)		
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	
Pillar 1: cost as % of GDP	7.38	8.76	8.28	8.62	8.19	8.13	8.08	7.94	
Pillar 2: cost as % of GDP	7.29	9.13	8.92	8.74	8.29	8.23	8.17	8.16	
Pillar 3: cost as % of GDP	14.39	17.65	18.00	17.68	16.85	16.24	15.82	15.46	
Total cost of PRS as % of GDP	29.06	35.54	35.19	35.04	33.33	32.59	32.08	31.56	
Pillar 1: cost as % of public expenditure	18.9%	18.3%	18.6%	19.5%	19.6%	20.0%	20.4%	20.6%	
Pillar 2: cost as % of public expenditure	18.6%	19.1%	20.0%	19.7%	19.8%	20.2%	20.6%	21.2%	
Pillar 3: cost as % of public expenditure	36.8%	36.9%	40.4%	39.9%	40.2%	39.9%	39.9%	40.1%	
Total cost of PRS as % of public expenditure	74.3%	74.3%	79.1%	79.1%	79.5%	80.1%	81.0%	82.0%	

Source: *Implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategy* (Draft, 2006), Team of the Government Vice-President for Implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy

- Since 2005 an innovation in providing financial resources has been introduced: in some municipalities for the first time in addition to funding by the sectors, initial funds for LPA are allocated, as well.
- Private funding of actions for children in Serbia is negligible, and only sporadic cases are recorded.

- In some years of the period covered by this report, substantial financial resources were provided from abroad: World Bank loans, EU credits and donations, UNICEF funds, UNHCR, UNDP, bilateral aid of many countries, assistance of international NGOs (Save the Children, Open Society Fond)

4. Development and use of monitoring instruments to track WFFC/MDG targets

One of the greatest problems in realization of objectives of all plans and strategic documents in both former Yugoslavia and Serbia after disintegration of Yugoslavia was the absence of „evaluation culture“ and absence of the monitoring system to track realization of these documents by a system of precisely defined indicators. To be quite fair, there was and still is the national statistics system which, children-wise, generates a set of data by the sectors (education, health, social care).

However, the system is associated with many problems when children are concerned. Firstly, the system is insufficiently child-sensitive. Thus, there are no specific data on children in ethnic minorities, children with developmental disorders, children affected by poverty, accessibility of social services to marginalized and vulnerable children, etc. Also, the current national statistics system mainly was unable to produce disaggregated data (e.g. for certain categories of children, by the municipalities and settlements, etc.)

In the period after the UN Special Session and under the influence of requirements to base the policy targeting WFFC and MDG on the reliable and disaggregated data and to enable systematic monitoring to track the targets, the process of development of specific, sensitive systems and mechanisms for monitoring, tracking and practical implementation thereof has been initiated.

The main components of the newly established system for monitoring of all child-related measures and, in particular, monitoring instruments to track WFFC and MDG targets include:

- **Development of DevInfo (2005)** that resulted from the UNICEF initiative and developed on the basis of UNICEF software. The database has been made to enable monitoring of all NPA indicators (operationalizing WFFC, MDG, EFA and similar targets). The database is increasingly enlarged and it has been developed to suit the local level, as well. Most importantly, the database has been integrated with the regular national statistics system kept with the National Statistics Bureau. In most of its domains, the database has already become operational.
- **The system of indicators to monitor MDG targets has been prepared for the Government of Serbia.** The indicators relate to all MDG targets, they are precisely defined and the baseline has been set for each indicator against which the MDG targets will be tracked. The indicator system is a party of the DevInfo system.
- **Within the Poverty Reduction Strategy, an original system for monitoring of the strategy implementation has been developed and a system of tracking indicators defined.** Among these, some relate to poverty of children. Within the Strategy, two household surveys were conducted, covering their material situation, i.e. level of poverty.

- In the course of 2006 **MICS 3 research** was conducted that enables analysis of changes by all parameters monitored in the MICS against MICS 2 (2002). The study provides the data on an average population as well as on 20% poor families and 20% families from the Roma settlements.
- **In the education area, the Institute for Evaluation of the Quality of Education was set up (2003).** At the Institute, a system for evaluation of the quality of student achievements has been developed. The system for the national assessment of student achievements was put in place in 2005. Under the guidance of the Ministry of Education and Sports Serbia participated in two international systems for the assessment of student achievements (PISA 2003 and TIMSS 2003, and PISA 2006 which is in progress).
- **There are partial information systems in some sectors that are used for regular monitoring of some indicators relevant for WFFC and MDG targets (at the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Protection).** In the Ministry of Education, a comprehensive information system setup is in its final stage. It will comprise all schools and classes covered by the Ministry (support provided by the World Bank). The information system of the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Policies is funded by the National Investment Plan.)

In conclusion: (a) By 2002 the national statistics monitored some basic parameters important for tracking of the WFFC and MDG targets (data from regular population censuses, vital statistics, basic data on education, social care, etc.), but these were aggregated data and were not sufficiently sensitive for specific problems of children and young people; (b) In the period covered by this Report building of the national system to record all data important for monitoring of the WFFC and MDG targets and other strategic documents aimed at realization of the rights of the child and analysis of the situation of children in Serbia has been initiated; (c) The new part of the system of the national statistics is child sensitive and disaggregated sufficiently to enable tracking of specific categories of children on the central and local levels; (d) A part of the system has already been operationally integrated in the regular national statistics, and a part is currently upgraded.

5. Enhancing partnership, alliances for children and participation to attain the WFFC and MDG targets

Serbia inherited a fairly centralized and etatized political system. Various forms of partnership (governmental and non-governmental sectors, local and central authorities, Government with domestic and international NGOs, civic initiatives, etc.) are something new and challenging. More massive forms of this kind of partnerships have been developing since the onset of transition in the early nineties. The processes were intensified after the political changes in Serbia in 2000, but have still remained in its initial stage.

In an effort to reach the WFFC and MDG targets partnerships have been established with numerous institutions and organizations.

- **Primarily, we have collaboration with the organizations in the UN system.** Most important of these was our collaboration with UNICEF, but also with the World Bank, UNHCR, UNDP and UNESCO. This collaboration included both the financial aid, but also significant technical assistance. Again, the role of UNICEF has to be underscored since the organization played the leading role in promotion of the rights of the child in Serbia;
- **Collaboration with European institutions** (EU, Council of Europe, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, OESC) also comprised both financial and expert assistance;
- **Bilateral collaboration with many countries, particularly the European ones** (Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Canada, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, United Kingdom, Spain, Finland, Ireland) both in financial and expertise form, within a large number of projects relating to protection of the rights of the child, children's health, education, social care, help to children of refugees and IDPs;
- **Collaboration with child-focused international NGOs** (Save the Children, Open Society Fund, JEN);
- **Collaboration of the governmental and non-governmental sectors** (establishment of the Council for Children's Rights composed of representatives of the Government, domestic NGOs, collaboration aimed at setup of the Ombudsman for children, numerous projects of the government and domestic NGOs such as Friends of Children of Serbia, Child Rights Center, Civic Initiatives, several Roma NGOs, etc.);
- **Collaboration of the central Serbian government and local governments** within the sectoral policies and integral strategies and programs such as Poverty Reduction Strategy, development and implementation of the *National Plan of Action for Children (NPA)* and particularly development of the *Local Plans of Action for Children (LPA)*;
- **Participaiton of children and young people in actions relating to them:**
 - Participation of Serbian children at the UN Special Session on Children (2002);
 - Survey of representative sample of children aged 9-10 yrs on what they perceive as their main problems, on the occasion of development the NPA in 2003 (UNICEF and NGO Friends of Children of Serbia);
 - Discussions in representative focus groups of adolescents in the process of NPA development (UNICEF and NGO Friends of Children of Serbia);
 - Participation of children during LPA development in 15 Serbian municipalities (UNICEF, 2006);
 - Design of the « *I ti se pitaš* » (You are asked, as well) manual to encourage participation of children in local communities (UNICEF, 2006);
 - Student Parliaments have been set up in many secondary schools;
 - Participation of children in the local media and use of media for promotion of the rights of the child (Swedish Save the Children and Friends of Children of Serbia 2004/05);

- Establishment and strengthening of the peer education network for promotion of healthy lifestyles;
- Participation of the young in design and implementation of anti HIV/AIDS actions.

6. Achievement of WFFC and related MDG targets

This section will illustrate the main results/actual achievements in the area of WFFC and related MDG targets.

At the very beginning, it should be underlined that in the period 2002-2006 **the activities were focused at the development of the national system for protection of the rights of the child (building the system and institutions, defining the strategies and national plans, as well as building the system for monitoring the process and tracking the effects). Even the building process is still in progress. The period was too short to expect any major direct effects on children in general and some of the categories in particular.**

Therefore, the section of the report contains only the initial data that may suggest if it may be expected that the national policy of abiding by the rights of the child would yield tangible results.

The data will be presented by the categories of WFFC and MDG targets.

6.1. NPA and LPAs

The National Plan of Action for Children (NPA) is a document combining almost all actions that are undertaken in Serbia for the benefit of children.

NPA was adopted in early 2004. It defines the basic priorities of actions for children (poverty reduction, quality education for all children, better health for all children, improvement of position and rights of children with developmental disorders, protection of children without parental care, protection of children from abuse, exploitation and violence).

The priorities were defined on the basis of an extensive consultation process involving experts, representatives of local authorities, NGOs, members of Parliament, young people (focus group discussions), children aged 9-10 writing on their problems in the form of letters to the President (based on original children's writings a book entitled *Children Write to the President* was compiled and delivered to the President of Serbia).

It should, however, be noted that from the adoption of NPA no resources have been allocated from the Serbian Budget to implement it.

NPA served as a framework for LPA (local, i.e. municipal plans of action for children). Firstly, a series of 15 regional workshops was held (fall 2005) where the Serbian municipalities were introduced to the idea of LPA development and motivated to participate in development of their own plans of action for children (the regional events were set up by the Council for Children's Rights and UNICEF).

In the course of 2007 recruitment of new municipalities for participation in development of LPA will be continued.

UNICEF supported three Serbian municipalities that composed their pilot LPAs. These experiences served as the basis for guidelines to develop LPS that was prepared by UNICEF. In the following stage, UNICEF and the Council for Children's Rights organized training for LPA development in 15 municipalities and then directly in 13 municipalities that embarked on their respective LPAs in 2006. Concomitantly with LPAs in these municipalities, analysis of situation of children in these municipalities was conducted as well as training for local DefInfo databases on children as the instrument for monitoring and tracking implementation of LPAs.

In 2006 in some of municipalities that developed their own LPAs financial resources for implementation of these LPAs have already been allocated in the municipal budgets.

The overall action on development and implementation of LPAs in Serbian municipalities is conducted with the intention to incorporate the LPAs for children into the current development plans of municipalities and already initiated projects within these plans to make the LPAs an integral part of sustainable development of each municipality.

6.2. Poverty reduction

Poverty is one of the most serious Serbian problems. For children of Serbia, moreover, it is a problem with long-term effect.

Definition of the problem of poverty was undertaken in 2002 in Serbia (in collaboration with the World Bank). The first survey on standard of living in households was conducted in 2002. The survey was repeated in 2003, and ever since 2004 the Household Budget Survey is regularly conducted by the National Statistics Bureau.

The national poverty line is set at USD 2.4 of daily consumption per unit of consumption.

On the basis of this criterion the poverty statistics may be summarized as follows (2002): The total of **10.6% of the population** or about 800.000 people are poor (if the line is raised to USD 2.9 as much as 20% of the population, i.e. 1,600.000 people will be considered poor. Poverty is more widespread among the rural population, in underdeveloped regions and among people with lower educational level.

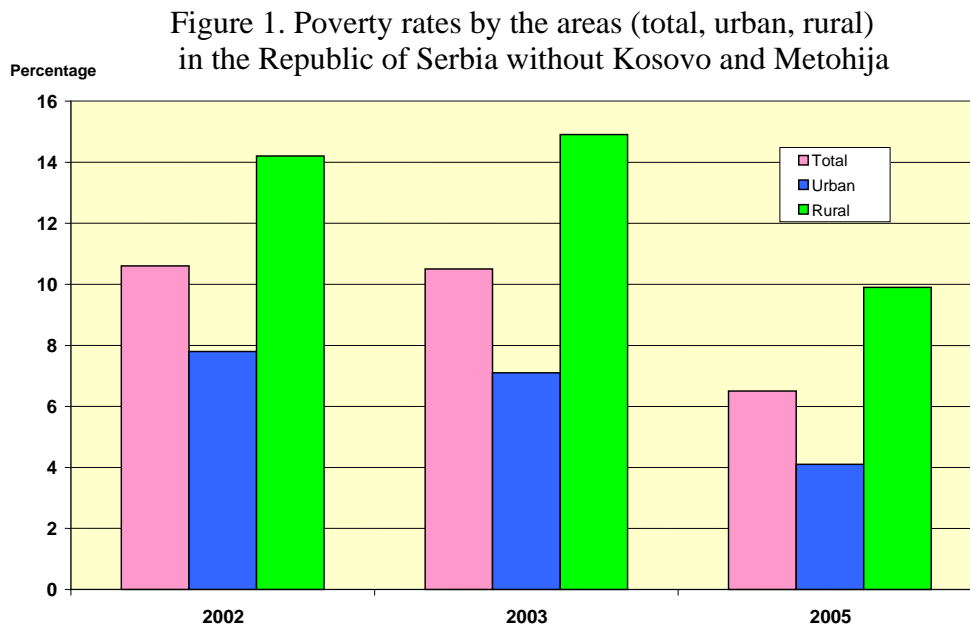
Pertinent to this report is also the fact that the percentage of poor children exceeds the national average, amounting to 12.7% or 200.000 children (if the line is raised to USD 2.9 daily per consumer unit, 400,000 children will fall in the category of poor).

The *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* was adopted in 2003. This is a strategic multisectoral document suggesting a series of measures. These include: various forms of employment and training for employment, increased accessibility and quality of social services (in health, education and social care), prevention measures such as elevation of educational level, financial assistance to poor families, etc. The document incorporated MDGs, as well. It is an integral part of the policy of the Government of Serbia and integral part of the development policy of Serbia.

The *Strategy* incorporates a monitoring and tracking mechanism.

The *First Report on Implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy in Serbia* was submitted to the Government of Serbia. It covers 2004 and the first half of 2005. The report presents investments into implementation of the strategy, all measures undertaken through different sectors on the central and local levels.

The main data on trends of poverty indicators in Serbia from 2002 through 2005 are presented in Figure 1.¹



Source: National Statistics Bureau (Household Budget Survey,
poverty line set at USD 2.7 per unit of consumption)

The data presented in the Figure suggest: (a) from **2002 to 2005 the overall poverty rate was reduced**; (b) differences among the regions in Serbia, between urban and rural areas are maintained and even increased in relative terms; (c) data on certain categories of the population, particularly the marginalized groups and those affected by chronic poverty (such as the Roma) have not yet been reported ; (d) data on poverty among children that we are particularly interested in have not been reported, either.

Based on the data on poverty reported so far, more permanent forms of poverty – trans-generation poverty – have not been subject to targeted measures of the governmental bodies and are very resistant to improvement.

6.3. Living conditions and environment

There are five main areas of environmental protection and sustainable development that are covered by the national strategic documents and development

¹ Figure 1 taken from the Report submitted to the Government of Serbia, entitled National Millennium Development Goals in Serbia (draft report, December 2006)

policy: Water protection and providing clean potable water, air protection, protection of forests and biodiversity, energy efficiency and waste management.

Since mid 2004, the new legislative framework comprises: *Environmental Protection Law*, *Law on Strategic Assessment of Environmental Impact* and *Law on Integrated Prevention and Pollution Control*.

According to a comprehensive international definition, almost all population of Serbia use improved sources of water supply and live in households where sanitary waste is disposed of in one of the recommended, safe manners.

However, the quality of water is generally unsatisfactory. There are significant regional differences (physico-chemical pollution is the main problem in Vojvodina, while bacteriological contaminations is the key problem in Central Serbia). The distribution network is old, inappropriately maintained, and associated with huge loss in the system.

Only every other household in Serbia is linked to the sewerage system, and in rural areas only one in five. The sewerage systems are inadequately maintained. Only five percent of waste water is discharged into recipients with appropriate processing. Only 28 municipalities (out of 163 in all) in Serbia have systems for processing of communal waste waters, out of which only 5 are operational.

Waste management in Serbia is inadequate. Only 60 percent of the communal waste is collected, mostly in towns. The system of organized collection and disposal of communal waste covers 55 percent of households. Communal waste is displaced on communal dump sites that are usually just simple garbage dumps, without sanitary conditions for proper waste disposal.

Serbia is a country of poor private apartment owners. At the moment, there is no proper strategic or legislative framework to define accessible, i.e. community housing or any obligation of stakeholders to implement the accessible housing policy. As to the accessibility and quality of housing, the Roma population is most vulnerable. Settlements occupied by Roma are unsanitary, the status is not legally regulated, no infrastructure is available. Besides, most Roma have no proper title deeds for their home or land. These problems are also acute in refugees and the population below the poverty line.

6.4. Health of children and young people

After the World Summit on Children, many aims and objectives relevant for children's health have been incorporated into the national development concept, through most important strategic documents (*Poverty Reduction Strategy*, *National Millennium Development Goals*).

Health of children was and has remained to be one of the priorities of the overall public health care system. The *Better Health for All in the Third Millennium* strategy adopted in 2003 and particularly the new *Health Care Law*, adopted by the Parliament in 2005 define the rights of children to health care in greater detail. The Law formally gives generous rights, including the right to free therapy, health care of children and students, as well as to women in all aspects of family planning, childbirth and maternity.

Special progress has been made by the legislative stipulations of the rights of the child to express his/her own opinion in issues relating to personal health, as well as the right have that opinion taken into account depending on the level of development and

maturity of the child. Rights of most vulnerable population groups in the country have been expanded, and even more importantly, in 2007 actual funds will be allocated for realization of these rights. In principle, important progress has been made in recent years by prioritization of public health, i.e. health promotion and prevention of diseases. A wide network of health care institutions provides for geographic accessibility and is one of the factors guaranteeing that the granted rights will be realized in practice. Again, the importance of community work has been recognized together with partnership with local NGOs, media and donors. Owing to revenue generated from privatization and funding provided by international donors, reconstruction of infrastructure of the existing institutions has been started. Fortunately, shortages of medicines and medical supplies are left behind.

6.4.1. Main indicators of health of children under 5 years of e age

The mortality rate of children under 5 years of age has a declining trend: from **12.7/1000** live births in 2000 it fell to **9.6/1000** in 2005. If the trend is continued, it is predicted that the Millennium Development Goal to reduce the child mortality rate by two thirds in comparison with the 1990 values will be reached. In order to achieve this, there are three main lines of action jointly undertaken by the Ministry of Health of Serbia and international partners: reduction of perinatal death accounting for 75% of infant mortality in Serbia, reduction of injury-related mortality that has become the leading cause of death after the first year of life, and reduction of mortality rate of most vulnerable populations. To exemplify: mortality rate of Roma children in unsanitary settlements exceeds the national average by more than three times, reaching **26 per 1000 live births** in 2006 (MICS 3).

Other indicators of children's health are on a satisfactory level:

- Prevalence of total and acute malnutrition of children in Serbia is below the cutoff values for reference population (only 1 and 3 percent of children under 5 years of age, respectively). Although prevalence of growth retardation was also low, the rising trend of this indicators is a reason for concern (1996 – 3%; 2000. – 5% and 2005 – 6%). Obesity remains the main nutritional problem of Serbian children, since one in 7 children under 5 years of age is moderately to severely obese. Poor and Roma children do not follow this trend, suggesting that interventions focusing these population groups are needed.
- The rates of exclusive (15 percent) and continuous (22 percent) breast feeding are low. Solid and mushy food are introduced too early to the infant diet and mothers stop breastfeeding too soon. Nevertheless, the achieved improvement in infant diet in Serbia is significant – the increased rate of exclusive breastfeeding by 20 percent has contributed to reduction of infant mortality.
- According to official statistical data, coverage of children by basic vaccination exceeds 90 percent. However, a study of multiple indicators has identified some of the problems – the **total** coverage by all vaccines at the recommended age is low, only about **66 percent**. There are also significant regional differences in implementation of the program. Coverage of the Roma children is significantly below the national average (**only 22 percent of Roma children received all**

- planned vaccines** at the specified time). Although some new vaccines, namely, hepatitis B and haemophilus influenzae type B, have been introduced to the immunization calendar, the vaccination is not conducted in a satisfactory manner (in 2005 coverage of children with these vaccines remained below 50 percent).
- Eradication of polio, substantiated by Certificate awarded to Serbia in 2002, is still sustained.
 - According to the current physiological criteria, Serbia has eliminated nutritional iodine deficiency. International acknowledgment of the achieved results is expected in 2007.

6.3.2. Health of adolescents, reproductive health, protection from HIV/AIDS

- In 2006 the *Strategy for Development and Health of Young People* was adopted together with action plan for its realization;
- The *National Strategy to Combat HIV/AIDS* was also adopted (2005)
- The Ministry of Education and Sports (in collaboration with UNICEF and Ministry of Health) elaborated a program targeting young people, entitled *Education for Health through Life Skills*. The total of 27 schools have been included with a tendency to spread it to other schools, as well;
- At the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Policy a program for protection of reproductive health has been elaborated and tested at workshops and conferences. A resulting manual entitled *ABC of Reproductive Health* was published (in collaboration with USAID). It is intended for elementary school teachers.
- **Overall health of the young people:**
The recent studies in Serbia (UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA) indicate the following leading health risks for young people: increasing abuse of tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs, high level of injuries (traffic accident trauma, abuse and neglect). Also, health of young people is characterized with poor mental health with increasing rates of risky behaviors, addictions, depressions and suicide, as well as low rate of contraceptive protection and corresponding increase of sexually transmitted diseases.
- **Main data on changes in reproductive health and protection from HIV/AIDS in adolescent population:**
 - MISC III study suggests that significant awareness rising on HIV and knowledge in this area has taken place in the last 5 years. The improvement was most encouraging in the population of young people aged 15-24 as a result of numerous interventions and prevention programs in this area. Accordingly, in 2005 almost every other girl has sufficient knowledge on HIV (in 2000 only one in 15 knew enough). The situation is substantially different in the population of young Roma and poor girls where only 1 in 20 and 1 in 5 knew enough, respectively;

- The use of contraception is low in general population and among the young alike (nevertheless, in risk-associated sexual relations condoms are used in 75%);
- High quality, but unfortunately sporadic and insufficiently coordinated and spread prevention activities of numerous NGOs and institutions in the form of communication campaigns, peer education programs, teacher focusing programs covered only a limited number of young people, and have not been incorporated into institutions. Most intensive work has been done in the area of HIVB prevention, promotion and protection of reproductive health, and prevention of addictions, mostly among general population of the young;
- In spite of numerous initiatives, the role and place of health education within the school system of Serbia have still not been specified so that children and young people do not have systematic access to information and knowledge in the area although in 2006 a program entitled *Health Education through Life Skills* was designed and launched in 18 schools in Serbia, with potential for spreading to all elementary and secondary schools;
- Important progress was made in the area of promotion of reproductive health of adolescents. Although primarily regionally oriented, numerous counseling services were open for the young (for the area of reproductive health) at the local health care centers. In some towns pertinent curriculum for elementary schools was designed and implemented;
- Multidisciplinary counseling services for the young were specified in a rulebook on internal organization of health care institutions as a part of services for health care of school children where elaboration of standards of volume and quality of work are currently in progress;
- *The National Standards for Peer Education* have been prepared, general ones and for areas of HIV prevention, promotion and protection of reproductive health, as well as for prevention of addictions aimed at improvement of quality of this type of (in)formal training;
- One in five girls starts to be sexually active before the age of 18, and as many as 75% of them used condom at the last risk sexual intercourse (with a casual partner or outside marriage);
- It is estimated that about 50 pregnancies ensue per 1000 girls aged 15 to 19 each year. The magnitude of this psycho-social problem in the Republic of Serbia is illustrated by the fact that in the same age group there are 7 pregnancies in Holland, and 28 in the United Kingdom, country with the poorest indicators of health of adolescent population in Western Europe.

6.5. Pre-school and elementary education

Changes in the educational system from 2002 relied on important achievements in education made during the lifetime of socialist Yugoslavia.

In the course of crisis, 1990-2000, many of these achievements were jeopardized (particularly hard blow was suffered due to fall of budgetary expenditure for education resulting in deterioration of the quality of conditions for education, drastic fall of salaries

of the teaching staff and the consequent loss of their motivation, and also a lot of instruction time was lost due to strikes, lack of heating at schools, etc.). Recovery of education after the crisis is still in progress.

The main data on education of children and young people in the “+5” period include:

- Enrolment in preschool education (children aged 3 to 6.5 years) is very low and still falling mildly: 2003-**36.3%** , 2005 – **32.02%** (Source: National Statistics Bureau);
- Network of pre-school institutions and coverage of children with pre-school education are insufficient for the country needs and cannot satisfy requirements of families and many categories of children;
- The greatest problem is the lack of coverage of children that need it most (as prioritized in the EFA Program in Dakar Declaration): children from poor and rural areas; children of marginalized ethnic groups, children with developmental disorders. Thus, based on MICS 3 study of children aged 36 to 59 months, 45% of urban children as compared to only 14.4% rural children are covered by preschool education, only 7.5% children from families where parents have only elementary education, 7.0% in the poorest group, and just 3.9% of children in Roma settlements;
- At the age of one year before school the total of 88.6% of children are covered by some form of preschool education (whole day, half day or 4-hour programs) (56.9 % of Roma and 77% of the poorest);
- Since the academic 2006/07 an important measure has been enacted which may contribute to equality of children before they start their compulsory schooling: one year of compulsory, universal and free preparatory pre-school program.
- **Elementary education** (the Serbian system of compulsory elementary education implies 8 years of schooling, and from 2006/07 an additional compulsory one year of pre-school program has been introduced)

Table 3. Basic information on elementary education :

	2001/02	2002/03	2003/4	2004/5
Enrolment to 1 st grade	98.35	96.10	97.74	99.03
Transition to 5 th grade	97.5	93.9	-	97.8
Completion of 8 th grade	94.95	91.80	98.02	99.11
Enrollment to secondary school (after completion of 8 th grade)	97.99	96.96	99.99	97.59
Generation coverage by secondary education	61.18	62.15	77.53	77.09

Source: National Statistics Bureau (the statistical data compiling methodology does not enable calculation of the net enrolment)

- The table above makes it possible to draw the following conclusions: (a) The aim of coverage of children with elementary education has been achieved; however,

the national statistics still has no disaggregated data for certain categories of children, so that we do not have reliable data on coverage of these groups; (b) the statistics methodology used for registration of those who complete 8th grade (i.e. percentage of those that have enrolled the 8th grade in the same year) does not allow for calculation of the number of children in the same generation i.e. one cohort that eventually complete 8th grade; other sources of the National Statistics Bureau reveal that the rates of completion of the 8th grade (ISCD 1 and 2) **for the 2002 and 2003 cohorts were 94.7% and 94.7%, respectively; the total of 5-6% of students in current generations do not complete elementary education (acc. to MICS 3 only 23.0% of Roma do)**; (c) almost all students who complete the 8th grade progress to secondary education; (d) there is a clear trend of increase the percentage of students in one cohort covered by secondary education, suggesting that in Serbia the problem of coverage of children in general population has shifted from the elementary 8-year education to secondary education (ISCD 3 and 4).

- Referring to boy vs. girl parity, the recent data suggest the following: in 2003 out of all children in elementary and secondary schools, **48.7% and 50.49%** were girls, respectively (ISCED 3 and 4);
- **The general conclusion is that in the “+5” period Serbia approached the target of coverage of all children with elementary education, that enrolment into secondary schools and completion thereof is now on the agenda (ISCED 3 and 4), and that boy vs. girl parity is about to be reached soon.**
- **Quality of education**

Assessment of quality of education and assessment of student achievement is an innovation in the educational system of Serbia. Serbia participated in PISA and TIMSS assessments in 2003 (only 8 graders, i.e. the 15-year olds). The country also participated in the recent PISA assessment in 2006 (results of the latest studies are not open to public yet). Following the methodology very similar to the one applied in the PISA assessment the national assessments of student achievement were initiated (in 2004 the 3 graders were assessed and in 2006 the 4 graders, but the results of the assessment of the 4 graders are not available to the public). The assessment was conducted by the Institute for Evaluation of the Quality in Education, which is a new type of institution in the educational system of Serbia, set up in 2003 as one of the educational system tracking mechanisms.

The results of all external assessments of the quality of student knowledge in Serbia schools are not satisfactory.

Thus, on the basis of PISA 2003 results, Serbia is at the bottom of the European list (in math the average score was 430 which is at the lower end of level 2; in reading proficiency the average score was 436 which is also between levels 1 and 2); while only about 1% of students in Serbian schools reached the top level 6.

These findings of the quality of student achievement in Serbia have been substantiated by several independent studies.

Results of TIMSS study on 15-year old students are somewhat better. Thus, the math achievement of Serbian students was even above the international average (exceeding some of the European countries).

In the country efforts are made to improve the quality of education. Thus, in the education policy of the country for the period covered by this report, the basic mission is defined as “quality education for all”.

Some concrete measures were undertaken to elevate the quality of education, including: (a) policy of professional development of teachers, characterized with introduction of licenses for teachers, (b) accreditation of a large number of programs for training of the teaching and other staff in educational institutions, and (c) organization of a large number of courses for training of teachers. Substantiated by a loan of the World Bank, a program to define the standard of student achievement at the end of compulsory 8-year education is implemented.

Quality improvement should be supported by changes in the curricula that are gradually introduced into some grades of elementary school as well as by the new system of self-evaluation and assessment of schools introduced in 2006.

All of the above illustrates that the quality of education in Serbia is one of the main problems and that solving it is now on the agenda. Analyses of quality determining factors in the assessments conducted so far clearly identify the causes of the current situation and suggest how the educational policy may contribute to the education quality improvement in Serbia.

6.6. Protection of children from abuse, neglect and violence

Some of the main child protection measures include the already mentioned ones: Establishment of the Council for Children’s Rights, ombudsman for children (in progress), sub-committee for children’s rights in the Serbian parliament, child protection program in the NPA and LPAs.

We present a summary of other child protection measures undertaken. The main measures are:

- *The Family Law* (adopted in 2005) stipulates measures for child protection in concert with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, protection from family violence, recognizes rights of children above the age of 15 to participate in decisions relating to their personal affairs; ten by-laws have been enacted supporting implementation of this law;
- *Law on Juvenile Delinquents and Legal Protection of Minors i.e. Juvenile Justice Law* (adopted in 2005) defines specific procedures for treatment of underage perpetrators and underage victims of crime;
- *The Law on Prevention of Discrimination of Persons with Disabilities* (adopted in 2006)
- *The Law on Basics of Education and Upbringing* (2003/2004) enacts prohibition of corporal punishment and personal insults of children and protection of children from violence at schools;

- The concept of the *National Strategy to Combat Violence* (2005) was adopted, and the drafting of the *National Strategy to Combat Violence against Children* is in progress
- *The Strategy for Development of Social Protection System* (2005) stipulates de-institutionalization of care for children without parental care; accordingly, an individual program for 2,300 children has been developed and 800 children have already been placed in foster families (there are about 8,000 children without parental care in Serbia);
- A series of by-laws for child protection have been adopted, such as : *General Protocol for Child Protection from Abuse and Neglect* together with guidelines for its implementation; *Special Protocols* (for treatment of children in social care institutions, for procedures to be applied by the police officials in child protection); *mobile teams* for child protection have been set up, trained and incorporated in the child protection system
- The project entitled *School without Violence* (2005, collaboration of UNICEF, Council for Children’s Rights, Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Care and Ministry of Health): so far, 60 schools have been included in this project, wide campaign for promotion of the action has been conducted; study of the incidence of violence in schools has been conducted; public and private enterprises have been mobilized to sponsor the action in schools of their choice;
- In late 2006 the *Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings* was adopted by the Government of Serbia.
- Extensive training of staff involved in child protection was conducted (we present here only the data on training for actions listed in this section, not all training programs for child protection and rights of the child): training of juvenile justice judges, training of associates of local centers for social work, training of all members of mobile teams for implementation of the Protocols for Child Protection, training of 1,500 foster families; 27 courses for policemen, where 430 policemen were awarded the certificates, students in 95 schools trained in mediation and conflict resolution (project entitled *Conflict Transformation and Empowerment of Young People* – Pedagogical Society of Serbia), in the Ministry of Education and Sports teams for prevention of delinquent behavior were trained (1,200 participants) and staff of 450 schools were trained in child safety.

7. Summary of Lessons Learned and initiatives undertaken for accelerating the progress towards achievement of WFFC and MDGs

Serbia has a long tradition of sectoral child care. Nowadays, most of the policies for children and most of measures for the benefit of children are implemented via individual sectors (health, education, social care, etc.).

From the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and particularly the Special Session and WFFC and MDG, the process of building the intersectoral integrated policy for protection of the rights of the child has begun.

Important progress has already been made in the process:

- **The process of building the integrated protection and promotion system for the rights of the child has begun;**
- **Some new institutions have been established (Council for Children's Rights, ombudsman for children – in progress);**
- **Many strategies and strategic plans for children (NPA and LPAs, Poverty Reduction Strategy, etc.) have been defined;**
- **Laws stipulating the norms relating to the rights of the child have been enacted for the first time;**
- **Some new systems for follow-up and tracking of the implementation of the strategies and plans have been introduced. Some of them have been integrated into the national statistics system (DevInfo, system to monitor implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and MDG, sectoral information systems);**
- **In the five year period some initial results of integrated policies for children and young people relating to some categories of children (summarized in section 6 of this report) have been achieved;**
- **Modest improvement of the impact of actions for children resulted mostly from overall economic recovery of the country, and only to a small degree from specific decisions aimed at implementation of actions for children;**
- **Participation of children and young people in defining and implementing measures relating to them is in its early stage, but the experiences have been positive.**

In the course of these five years, some major problems have been identified and some lessons learnt, as follows:

- **The awareness on how defining and realization of long-term policy of the rights of the child is important for a country in general (and particularly in the light of the dramatic demographic fall in the country) and how important it is to integrate realization of the rights of the child into the overall development policies of the country is not raised sufficiently;**
- **Financial resources of the public consumption allocated to actions for children are very modest and this is the key limiting factor for realization of the plans and strategies;**
- **Concrete measures for children from vulnerable groups are insufficient and problems of these children are resolved very slowly: poor children, children with developmental disorders, Roma children, rural children from some rural communities;**
- **Actions for the benefit of children are not sufficiently integrated and coherent;**
- **Most of the actions from the strategies and plans for children have not been recognized in the budget of Serbia;**
- **The current systems for monitoring of realization of plans and strategies are not used sufficiently, although they are powerful tools for support of the implementation processes;**

- **Mobilization of local government in realization of the rights of the child is not sufficient; collaboration between the Government of Serbia and local governments is also insufficient;**
- **Mobilization process of all partners in realization of plan documents and care for the younger generation is only in the early stage.**