



IRIS Network

IRIS NETWORKing

CSOs for protection sensitive migration management

REGIONAL BROCHURE OF INNOVATIVE CASE STUDIES



This project is funded by the European Union

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Publisher: IRIS Network
www.iris-see.eu
Belgrade, 2021

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This project is funded by the European Union

About Iris network



IRIS Network connects more than 200 organisations delivering social services within the region of Western Balkans. CSO involved in the work of IRIS are providing necessary social and health services to 10.000 beneficiaries each day.

IRIS network was founded in 2012 with a huge support from our partners in the European Union and in the Civil Society Facility (CSF) program. Network was founded as part of the project “Improving the provision of SSD in South East Europe through the empowerment of national and regional CSO networks”, financed by EU and implemented by Arbeiter-Samariter Bund e.V. from Germany. ASB is the coordinator of the network that operates through five national secretariats in Albania, B&H, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

IRIS network aims to strengthen the role of non-for profit social service providers in entire SEE and to ensure their recognition as equal partners to the public sector. Specifically, the project IRIS NETWORK-ing – CSOs for protection sensitive migration management is aiming at increasing capacities and bringing together CSOs providers of social services for migrants and involving them in advocacy and awareness raising network activities. The project is funded by the European Union, and implemented by project partners from five countries.

Executive Summary

The main objective of this document is to highlight the achievements and success of the Youth activist groups formed in Kruja and Tirana within the project “Second Chance – a Chance for Life” and “Return to Thrive” implemented by ADRA Albania. A good practice is not only a practice that is good, but a practice that has been proven to work well and produce good results, and is therefore recommended as a model. It is a successful experience, which has been tested and validated, in the broad sense, which has been repeated and deserves to be shared so that a greater number of people can adopt it.

Background

ADRA Albania is a Non- Governmental Organization with a purpose “To serve humanity so all may live as God intended.” The structure of the organization is composed by the: I- Director ,II- Program Director, III- Finance director, IV- Project manager ,V-Project coordinator , VI-Project teacher, VII-Psychologists and social worker of



the project ,VIII- Logistics, IX- Facilitators ,X-Driver ,XI-Volunteers from the EU Aid volunteering program, XII- Volunteers from Faculty of Social Science.

Characteristics of beneficiaries: ADRA Albania during the implementation of projects evaluates the needs, based on the information provided by field facilitators in rural and urban areas, feedback from official and informal meetings with employees of the Municipality and the Education Office, from observations and visits to Roma and Egyptian communities.

The target groups are selected based on the following criteria:

- People from poor families and vulnerable groups
- Adults and children who are illiterate
- People with poor economic conditions
- Children at risk of dropping out of school
- Returnees
- Familie affected by the disaster & Coming from disadvantaged minorities accordingly with the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians in country.
- Coming from areas where no other NGO or public institution has intervened.

ADRA Albania is a Non- Governmental Organization that functions in Albania since 1991 with development projects aiming to bring positive change and innovation into the marginalized communities.

For more than 25 years, ADRA Albania has worked in the cities of Tirana, Durres and Kruja with Roma and non-Roma communities. ADRA Albania for a long time has paid major attention to the education of children from poor families, and in particular Roma /Egyptian children.

Recently, our mission was to provide children from low-income communities with a high-quality education, enabling them to maximize their potential and transform their lives. We work with parents, families and other organizations, to prepare children with the necessary skills and values, so they can reach their potential and give a positive contribution to the society, too.

We Engage CHILDREN into education and social programs, build bridges of cooperation between SCHOOL and FAMILY, Empower PARENTS with information, knowledge, skills and right tools to help their Children to learn and get re-integrated. Based on ongoing project implemented by ADRA in the Kruja region, the majority of Returnees to Albania are asylum seekers, whose applications were denied - most of them from Roma and Egyptian minorities, but not exclusively.

Due to this, Albania was facing a new phenomenon: the return of rejected asylum seekers. Additionally, considering the high rate of legal or illegal migration for employment or education purposes and their expected returns, the local institutions are not prepared to integrate them. The local public authorities do not act with proper structures or capacities to monitor and manage the migration flux.

ADRA Albania sees as important the intervention in the area for the facilitation of the access of adults and children to the public institutions and rise of awareness toward significant issues such as: service on health, social and migratory issues with regards

to public service; accessing job and vocational training; strengthen the literacy, numeracy and social skills of Roma and Egyptian adults and children.

During the implementation of projects ADRA has found that the lack of social workers at the level of administrative units has made it impossible to fulfill legal obligations at this level, therefore, usually the responsible structures of social services in the municipality are directly engaged in the management of cases.

Presentation

The object of this case study is the re-integration of migrants (Roma and non-Roma) in society especially when it comes to the access of children in the public education and of adults to the labor market. ADRA Albania has a long work experience working with Roma and Egyptian communities in Fushë-Kruja and Tirana. The overall scope of its programs has been to facilitate the integration of Roma and Egyptian adults and children into Albanian society, last 2 years with special focus on those returned from Germany and third countries.



The project covers the Kruja and Tirana region and the beneficiaries are children, parents, community returned after migration. ADRA evaluation conducted in the frame of 2 projects “Second chance- A chance for Life” financed by ADC in January 2016-December 2018 and “Return to Thrive” financed by BMZ in January 2019 – May 2020.

The evaluation is being undertaken at the end of the projects’ implementation, constituting a summative evaluation. The evaluations were carried out to evaluate activities individually as well as holistically from each project to learn if they have led toward the projects’ objective, to understand the lessons learnt, and sustainability of the project, to provide information that will be helpful for the next programming. It has been used to inform ADRA

Albania management team in understanding the achieved outcomes, positive effects and aspects, and side-effects of their project. The case study that we want to bring to your attention regards the establishment of activist groups composed by Roma and Non-Roma adults, and youngsters activated for offering supplementary classes with creative methods, support to the community members and ad-

vocate for their rights.

The activist groups were formed by students of the Second Chance-Chance for life project for the first time applied in public school of Borizane village, Kruja region. The target group of second chance classes were children with learning difficulties in risk of drop-out, vulnerable suffering from social exclusion and discrimination in the class as well as everyday life.

The aim of the second chance classes were to build social skills and provide children a safe environment to develop. As outcome, students of this school formed an activist group taking action in improvement of the school environment independently, only with small help and assistance of ADRA Albania and the school. Later, another group was formed by Roma children from the secondary education to support with homework children from the elementary levels in the premises of ADRA Albania community center in Fushe Kruja. Each Roma student volunteering as a mentor had the responsibility to support and supervise the progress of 5-6 other children (Roma and non-Roma) from the elementary level.

The third activist group consisted of Roma adults who were empowered as leaders for organizing the other community members and leading the plan of awareness raising activities in full coordination with ADRA team. With the initiation of the new project “Return to Thrive” ADRA continued the practice of activist groups activation and empowerment by adding new elements :

The engagement of public local stakeholders (Public social service workers, school directors and coordinators, labour office, Roma role models), student volunteers from the Faculty of social sciences, and international volunteers who brought new approaches such as initiation of free language courses (English and German) to motivate further the adults and youths activists. Methodology used was based in three components:

1. Empowering social and life skills of youngsters, children and adults using the REFLECT child-focused method based on training in social topics (communication, self-respect, empathy and respect for others, teamwork, conflict management, problem solving). As outcome children built their confidence, sense of belonging, and motivation to take action for their personal development such as improving their school results and for their school and community such as take own initiatives.
2. Formation and consolidation of the youth activist group. Once the class or group showed the ability of working in the team, respecting one another and their ideas, the second-chance class was ready to form and activist group and choose its leader in equal voice voting. The activist group was composed mainly by adults and youngsters who showed motivation, discipline, will and engagement to be a change agent for their communities.
3. Facilitation and support of the youth activist group. As the activist group is run purely by youngsters and adults, who proposed and implemented their own initiatives, ADRA Albania together with the school psychologist, teachers and director took the role of facilitator and mentor. Moreover, ADRA Albania supported the group with materials and logistic when needed.

Achievements

In total 379 beneficiaries have been supported by facilitating their access to public services (facilitating the access in civil offices by providing them with legal documents; registration of children to schools or kindergartens; supporting health care providers by getting children vaccinated; assisting employment offices in providing their registration and labor market orientation; registration to VET courses, legal assistance for children registration and divorce cases); 212 Roma and Egyptian adults/parents have attended supplementary in literacy and numeracy classes organized in Community Center in Fushe Kruja and Tirana; 130 classes have been organized in the Community Centers in Fushe-Kruja and Tirana.

During COVID-19 the classes have been conducted online; 140 beneficiaries have benefited from the workshops; topics related to social issues, health issues were treated; 291 Roma/Egyptian children (children in risk of drop out, children with learning difficulties, returnees passing through a cultural shock, children who need to improve their motor skills) were enrolled in supplementary and social classes organized at the premises of Fushe-Kruja Community Centre and Tirana Community Centre “Gonxhe Bojaxhi”; 141 supplementary classes are organized at the premises Fushe Kruja Community Centre and “Gonxhe Bojaxhi” Community Centre and in two public schools “Gjergj Fishta” and Skender Laurasi” in Tirana; 141 social classes are organized at the premises Fushe Kruja Community Centre and “Gonxhe Bojaxhi” Community Centre and in two public schools “Gjergj Fishta” and Skender Laurasi” in Tirana;

Case study Evaluation

Evaluation questions were developed for each of the four criteria; furthermore, these were equipped with anticipated data gathering methods and judgement criteria to allow for the validation of the proposed evaluation questions. The design of the evaluation was based on a careful selection data collection methods and data analysis methods, as detailed below.

Methods

Desk review: The purpose of the desk review was to gain an overall understanding of the project's context, design, implementation and monitoring during implementation. It has formed the basis for developing further evaluation methods.



Desk review based on secondary sources (project progress reports, other information on the project, governmental policies, strategies and plans, etc.) has been conducted during the inception phase of this evaluation. The reviewed material has provided the evaluators with a better understanding of the project as well as to identify the crucial information gaps that have to be complemented by the below mentioned evaluation method (i.e. structured interviews) together with complementary desk review of material gathered during the data collection phase.

Semi - Structured interviews: The purpose of structured interviews was to gather information about specific issues related to concrete aspects and the consistency of the project.

Structured interviews were another crucial method in the evaluation of the project as they allowed views and opinions of different stakeholders that were either involved in the project or are able to report on its observed results or effects. Interviewed stakeholders include project staffs, municipality worker, and staff from public institutions, children and parents (Annex 2).

Data analysis methods

Data analysis took place against the evaluation questions in the Evaluation Matrix which was designed during the inception phase. The information obtained on each question by the data collection methods was updated on a regular basis during the data collection process, allowing for the possibility of applying different analytical methods and techniques already during the collection process.



The following methods were used to analyse the collected data: Qualitative data analysis was the main method used to analyze all collected data. It included documentation, conceptualization, coding and categorizing. This allowed capturing the complex environment and wide range of new issues and propositions that

Sustainability

The investment in education of parents and children is very important because it increases the employment possibilities for parents and children in the future. The groups of parents who have been attending the project activities and the informative sessions are more aware about the importance of employment and its benefits. Women are more motivated to work at least on part-time jobs. It's very important to expose the group of women gradually to the employment sector as their roles predominately have been in the home by taking care for family. The role models that parents develop in family are very important for children who are waiting to have a work in the future based on the social and professional skills that they will develop.

The support provided from the project activist group to adults during the transition period helped them to properly direct their needs and requirements and to adapt to new context and reality. The ongoing support that the beneficiaries received helped them to learn how to ask about their rights related to the services as the legal structures doesn't respond always in time to citizens' requests especially to vulnerable categories such as the Roma migrants who in most of cases lack the proper documentations.

This knowledge and skills developed by the beneficiaries will be important in the future because they have a better understanding for their rights and obligations toward public institutions. Additionally, the support provided for the public services has helped them to raise their capacities and to offer the proper services to the returnees. During the project several public institutions representatives have been involved directly through formal and informal meetings to address different needs of the returnees. The staff of the project has worked to change the professional bias toward Roma/Egyptian community; they have to use some different approach with this group and to understand what are their expectations and strong points.

All this was achieved through the active engagement of Roma activist groups who challenged the prejudices and stereotypes. Due to the new circumstances brought by the COVID-19 even the application of ADRA programs changed and it directly has affected the impact of the project. Most of project's activities such as group gatherings and awareness raising activities in the frame of advocacy campaign 'Every child. Everywhere. In school' undertaken by ADRA in 2020 have been slowed down or interrupted in March 2020. With the Government announcement of the Prevention Protocol for COVID-19 ADRA initiated its activities via online where the activist groups of youngsters now formed even in other areas of Kruje region such as Bubq and Thumana played a major role in displaying the news and coordinating the groups of children who have been assisted through an online school support program.

Since IRIS Network is piloting training programs for migrants for employment purposes and orientations by supporting civil society practices, the case study brought by ADRA may serve as a model to be promoted within the network of partners as a social inclusion Practice by contextualizing it to the needs and means of beneficiaries.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the gender context, in rural areas of closed and strong masculine mentality the prejudice towards girls taking leadership persists. At the beginning the youth group met with negative attitude and skepticism towards their initiatives among their peers and even some teachers. The initial discouragement was challenging, however it dissolved with the first success. Besides, parents hardly give permit for their daughters to participate in activities outside of village. At the time of the first travel security measures were taken, but as we gained the trust of the parents the girls were allowed to travel to ADRA Albania activities without outside supervision.

The lessons learnt from this experience:

- Engaging Roma/Egyptian family in communities where they are known, trusted and respected is one of the most important elements of the intervention by providing concrete tailor-made assistance meeting specific immediate family needs on the one hand and on the other, empowering the community members to learn how to help themselves and others.

- When people are given an opportunity to express their views in dialogue with local authorities, it gives them a better chance to fight for their rights and has the potential to lead to greater emancipation. Local authorities learn how to listen to their citizens' needs and views, and local residents learn how to develop more realistic expectations. Empowering people can help break the stereotypical image of Roma in perpetual victimhood and encourage them to stand as equals in claiming their share of social development and progress.

- The interventions need to be accompanied by a long term vision that includes complex programs, and not short term based projects. The amplitude of issues to be addressed revealed by the implementation of singular projects stresses that a broader and cohesive strategy and plan is absolutely necessary.

Recommendations

- Design specific training/employment programs for Roma people that take into consideration their educational and cultural particularities and which should be combined with other supporting actions. Special attention and support should be given to facilitating and promoting access of Roma women.

- Providing ongoing support for Roma families to inform and understand the importance of their children enrolment in school.

- The model of literacy and numeracy classes created by ADRA must continue, Roma adults should be provided with opportunities for participating in specific educational/training and awareness- raising seminars, as well as in the “second chance schools”

- The development of entrepreneurial skills and attitudes is an increasingly appealing strategy for promoting labour force participation among the young and breaking down the segmentation that dis-advantages Roma youth. Entrepreneurship education has high potential for Roma youth. It develops skills and confidence by drawing and building on individual talents and creativity. It contributes to developing resilience in the face of labour market discrimination and enables Roma youth to help their families and communities overcome their marginalized positions.

- Supporting women’s entrepreneurship. As a group, women from disadvantaged communities have a great need for training in vocational and technical areas. They may also benefit from support in developing business ideas.

Contacts

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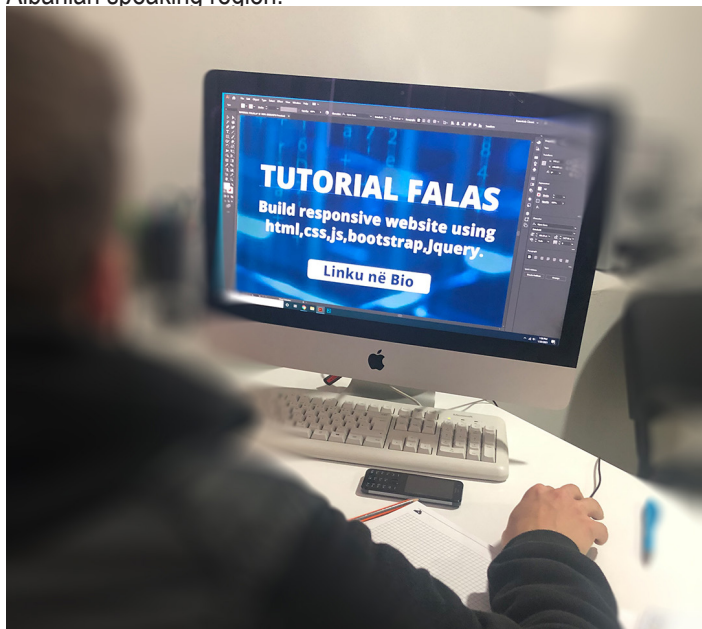


Executive Summary

In Albania, the human rights of LGBTI+ people have only been brought to the public's attention over the course of the last decade. Although the legal framework prohibits discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI+) people, violence and discrimination against those with a minority sexuality and/or gender identity remains widespread in Albania.

There remains an immediate need to define and implement long term strategies to improve the quality of life and resource for LGBTI+ people in Albania. There is also an obvious need to educate the Albanian general public on issues that relate to LGBTI+ identities. Discrimination and violence against LGBTI+ individuals are still widespread, and Albanian society continues to be very conservative with homophobic attitudes remaining normative and firmly entrenched, leading to LGBTI+ people facing both psychological and physical violence in their homes and their community.

The main objective of this document is to highlight the achievements and success of the services that "Streha" provides to LGBTI+ community as a unique, essential and meaningful service in Albania and Albanian speaking region.



"Streha" contributes to the empowerment of LGBTI+ people, mainly young people, through multidisciplinary and residential services, capacity building of service providers, public awareness and advocacy in order to overcome the barriers and difficulties encountered in the family and society by LGBTI+ community and this is a successful experience to be shared and recommended as a model to be followed by institutions offering similar services or new similar institutions that can be opened to support the LGBTI+ community.

In general, Albanian social services available for vulnerable groups are very fragmented and unstandardized, which leads to issues when dealing with LGBTI+ community members who face stigma, prejudice, discrimination, who do not have access to available services, and also face a lack of professional expertise when dealing with the specific needs of LGBTI+ people.

The services Streha provides, the practices it uses, and the successful forms of LGBTI+ community support may serve as a valuable knowledge to share.

Background

The Streha Center was established as an NGO on 13 November 2015 and started as a joint project of the organizations "Alliance against LGBTI+ Discrimination" and "ProLGBT" (united for the LGBTI+ cause) in December 2014. "Streha" operates 24 hours per days. It is the first residential center in Albania and in the region that comes to the aid of the LGBTI+ community in cases of emergencies in terms of housing but also offers other services for the empowerment and integration of LGBTI+ individuals. The target group of the center are members of the LGBTI+ community, mainly young people.

The main focus of the shelter is the empowerment and reintegration in society of at-risk youth within the LGBTI+ community (age range from 18 to 29). The service is provided in Albania's capital Tirana. However, it is not limited only to the country and often provides shelter services to youth from Albanian speaking region countries such as Kosovo or Macedonia.

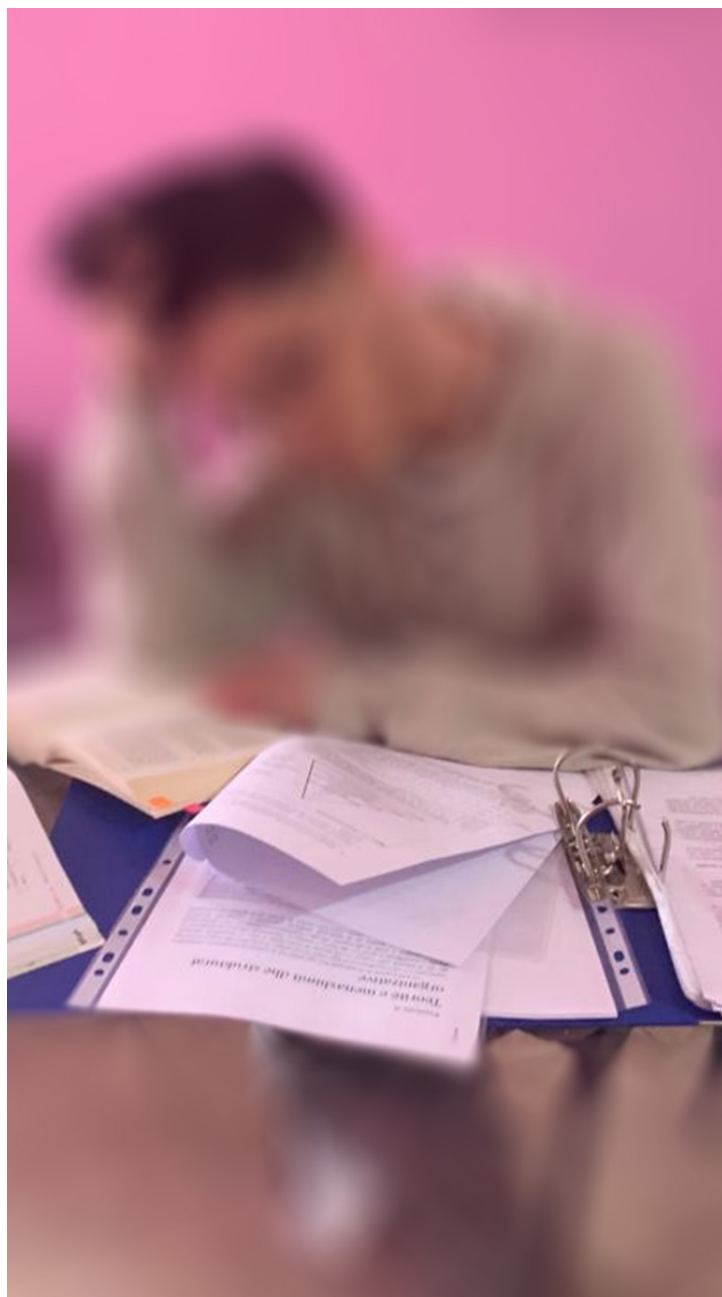
Streha offers support through providing: Safe accommodation and meeting basic needs; Individual and group psycho-social counseling; Legal aid; Health services (educational sessions, health analysis and dental services, mediation for obtaining health care, support with medication, etc.); Mediation for the benefit of professional training; Life skills training (maintaining personal hygiene, managing personal finances, efficient communication, drafting a CV, preparing for an interview, living in the community, etc.); Employment mediations (professional needs assessment, employment plan drafting, labor market information, incentive to be an active jobseeker, direct mediation); Socio-cultural and entertainment activities; Capacity building training for service providers; Advocacy campaigns; Awareness activities.

Streha's vision is "For a freer, open, equal, inclusive and inclusive society for people with different sexual orientations and gen

der identities”

Streha’s mission is” To contribute to the empowerment of LGBTI+I people, mainly young people, through multidisciplinary and residential services, capacity building of service providers, public awareness and advocacy in order to overcome the barriers and difficulties encountered in the family and society.”

The structure of the organization is composed by: I Director, II- Manager of the”Streha”, III- Finance admin, IV- Project coordinator, V-Case Workers (5 employees), VI-External consultant (Legal Expert), VII-Psychologist, VIII-Volunteers.



The organization reports a high staff burn out for this reason it has 2 years now that “Streha” provides Clinical Supervision for staff to increase service quality and reduce staff consumption. The shelter staff is also mentored for case management by a mentor with long national and international experience in providing services to vulnerable groups.

The sensitive nature of the work of “Streha” makes it very challenging to engage volunteers in the organization, except for fund-raising activities of the organization and also the volunteers that help the beneficiaries in learning foreign languages.

Characteristics of beneficiaries

So far, Streha has supported 230 beneficiaries through the LGBTI+ residential service aged 18-29 and outside the residential service all members of the LGBTI+ community in need. These beneficiaries have different needs and risk levels and based on the evaluation by the team Streha are helped to meet the different needs they have.

We supported 54 beneficiaries only during lockdown. Most of the cases that ask for help to be part of our services are victims of various forms of violence, mainly victims of domestic violence, evicted from home, exploited, discriminated, potential victims of trafficking, abused, returnee’s asylum seekers LGBT+, etc.

Social reality

The capacity of governmental institutions to aid LGBTI+ people are unsatisfactory, and there remains mistrust towards those same institutions. This leads to a breakdown in communication and limited information for LGBTI+ people on the services that are provided by dedicated community centers.

The first major problem encountered by LGBTI+ people is marginalization and social exclusion in almost all areas of life, including home, schools, workplace, community, and family. Furthermore, there are no strategic documents that give a full panorama of the needs that LGBTI+ people have and how the system of social protection fulfils these needs.

Streha in 2020 conducted a need assessment in national level for the LGBTI+I community. These findings were an alarming call for intervention, in relation to the experience of violence among LGBTI+ persons, where 62% of them report being violated in their families, 73% report violence and bullying in schools and 63% report being violated in neighborhoods simply and solely because of sexual orientation and / or gender identity.

The same study highlights the inability of many members of the LGBTI+I + community to meet even their most basic needs, with about 41% reporting that they have not been able to meet their medical treatment needs and 35% reporting that they have not enough to eat during the last month. Even more alarming is the fact that four out of five members of the LGBTI+I + community (80%) in Albania see leaving Albania as the only solution to their problems.

This is a data confirmed by three different studies in recent months. The situation is exacerbated by the low trust that LGBTI+ individuals have in institutions and their difficulties in reporting violence and discrimination. The situation related to COVID-19 has further aggravated the situation of many members of the LGBTI+ community, where according to a study by the LGBTI+ Alliance, 3 out of 4 members of the LGBTI+ community could not meet basic

It is difficult for most LGBTI+ youth to find employment and further challenging to maintain employment because of prejudices and discrimination they experience related to their sexual orientation and gender identity.

When LGBTI+ people have not come out at their jobs, they live in constant fear that their sexual orientation will be discovered and that they will be harassed, bullied or become jobless.

Additionally, many LGBTI+ people drop out of school because of bullying and discrimination, and thus have less access to different avenues of employment. Being in a homeless situation, disconnected from services, without jobs, not enrolled in school, and without the information needed regarding available services, they often find themselves in the margins of our society.

The second major problem is related to the fact that advocating for and offering services for LGBTI+ people is relatively new in Albania. Most social workers, psychologists, and other grassroots professionals have limited skills and lack basic knowledge when it comes to working with the LGBTI+ community. There are no guidelines, manuals, or curricula that give a clear and approach about how to work with vulnerable and at risk young LGBTI+ people. Professionals often lack basic skills on how to assist young LGBTI+ individuals, and, in many cases, they act unprofessionally and exhibit discriminatory behavior.

Funding

The shelter has a fundraising strategy. The finances of the organization are project-based, donor-funded and individual fundraising (through the annual gala). The fundraising gala comprises approximately 20-30% of the Shelter's annual budget. The approach to fundraising is donor driven and includes mapping donors, following their open calls, cooperation with business sector and acquiring in-kind contribution. There is no system to collect funds from the public through individual donations.

Streha has been supported by various donors for the realization of its activities such as the Delegation of the European Union, USAID, the Dutch Embassy, the American Embassy, the British Embassy, German Embassy, IREX, Planet Romeo, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, UNDP, UNTF, etc. So far, we have implemented 38 Projects. The financial support has been for periods of 1 to 2 years, which makes the financial sustainability of Streha and the implementation of the programs foreseen vulnerable. During 2019, for the first time, the District of Tirana financed Streha with basic funds for the salaries of 5 case workers who provide services in Streha.

Presentation

The object of this case study is the re-integration and empowerment of vulnerable LGBTI+ community in society by the services of Streha center.

Methodology used was based on five components:

(a) Supporting their empowerment with multidisciplinary and residential services; This program addresses the urgent need of LGBTI+ youth for adequate safe housing and provides safe accommodation and fulfils basic needs. This program aims to improve the mental and physical health and socio-economic status of LGBTI+ persons by providing quality residential and multidisciplinary services and increasing professional capacities, employment opportunities and self-employment. The program also offers psycho-social counselling, strengthens life skills and offers



support for re-integration in society. As a result of this program beneficiaries often manage to finish their high school studies, enroll in a university of their choice, get professional certifications and qualifications, learn a new language, start a new job, improve their health conditions. etc.

(b) The "support in distance" method, TIL (transition to independent living/support in distance) was launched to provide support for LGBTI+ youth when the residence of the shelter reaches its maximum occupational capacity or to support those who fall outside the target age group or criteria's. Cases that are supported on distance are supported with all services as well as cases that stay in residential service, the only difference is that they are not housed inside the residential service but are supported with safe accommodation outside the Shelter when it is assessed by the multidisciplinary team that staying outside the shelter is safer or more sourcing for the case.

(c) Capacity building of service providers; This program aims to Improve the standard of services provided to persons of the LGBTI+ community by increasing the knowledge and skills of professionals to provide tailored and friendly services to LGBTI+ people and increasing cooperation with central and local institutions relevant to support professionals in service delivery.

(d) Public awareness; This program aims to raise public awareness on the rights of the LGBTI+I community by increasing information of LGBTI+ persons on their rights, increasing family support for LGBTI+I people, increasing the engagement of public institutions in informing LGBTI+I persons about public services, increasing public information about LGBTI+I people.

(e) Advocacy; This program aims to improve the legal framework related to the implementation of the rights of LGBTI+I persons by increasing the Streha's contribution to the implementation of applicable legislation on discrimination and violence against LGBTI+I persons and by increasing the Streha's commitment to drafting new policies and laws on the rights of LGBTI+I persons.

Achievements

Streha not only offers residential services but also community and mobile services, especially in areas outside of the capital of Albania, Tirana, where the reality for LGBTI+ people is even worse and where they face constant violence and discrimination also in western Balkans including Kosovo and Montenegro. These services are provided 24 hours a day, 7 days per week, by 10 staff members.

Streha is the only residential long-term emergency service based on the standards of social care in Albania. Most of the cases that are accommodated with safe accommodation in the residential service come in times of crisis due to the experienced violence, eviction from home, economic difficulties to survive in the area where they live due to social exclusion and lack of opportunities to integrate and empower, discrimination, bullying at school and society, difficulties in obtaining services they need.

All cases that have received services in Streha have been helped to pass the period of crisis in which they find themselves through services and all beneficiaries of this service report to have been helped and empowered by the services received.

The level of assistance and perceived empowerment from case to case may vary at certain levels for different beneficiaries but is reported to be a helpful service. Many of the beneficiaries of the service have had their lives totally changed, they have managed to get out of the violent, exclusionary and discriminatory systems of which they have been a part, and this is a great achievement in the life of each of them.

After the period of major crisis, the beneficiaries have been assisted with services for independence, empowerment and social integration through the increase of professional capacities, provision of necessary services that increase their well-being, integration into work that has slowly helped them towards a better independent life. During years we offered 87 vocational courses to the LGBTI+ community.

Through the services of Streha many of the beneficiaries have managed to finish school interrupted due to bullying and have started university thanks to support, others have been successfully certified in vocational courses which they have easily integrated into the labor market. Other cases that have needed support in improving

mental and physical health have received the necessary support services.

Streha's work and achievements are focused both on delivering direct services to LGBTI+I people, as well as contributing to improving larger systems of protection and advancing the rights of LGBTI+I people through advocacy and increasing skills of professionals in contact with LGBTI+I people.

Streha has also contributed immensely in building a system of protection for LGBTI+I people in Albania, by strengthening the capacities of professionals involved in the protection system through training and coaching. In the past two years, more than 200 professionals' psychologists, social workers, police officers, and teachers, have been trained and coached by Streha's staff.

Streha has also contributed to revising and drafting key political and legislative frameworks in Albania, such as the National Plan on Protection of Rights of LGBTI+I People in Albania (2016–2020). Because of its contribution, in 2019 Streha was one of the only 6 services in Albania (together with the National Hotline on Reporting Situations of Children in Need of Protection and four other shelters for victims of domestic violence and trafficking) that was supported financially by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in Albania.

This marked the first time that Albanian state authorities supported the shelter (the support covers only 30 percent of the general operating costs of the shelter).

Between 2014 and 2020, Streha has provided 10 800 bed nights of accommodation and supported 230 cases of which 150 beneficiaries have been helped through the distance support program. Case Study Evaluation: These methods used for evaluation are carefully selected respecting the privacy and confidentiality of data of the cases, respecting the will and emotional state, the load of cases that have participated, especially the participants in the methods of data collection in a qualitative way as described below:

This case study was conducted through the following methods:

- Desk Review- This method has been used in conducting the case study to give a full understanding of the situation, context, needs, changes realized and occurred in dealing with cases, changes in applicable legislation, or the publication and drafting of documents that have influenced in the work of the institution and the impact that this service has on the beneficiaries and the LGBTI+I community as a whole.

- Track referral database of the institution for the cases supported with multidisciplinary services in shelter: The use of this data is an important indicator of the access that the LGBTI+I community has to this service and how many services we have provided to understand the changes made and our impact on cases that have received service in times of crisis through the multidisciplinary residential service.

•Database of the institution for the cases supported in “distance”: These data collected through this method are indicators of how many cases have had to rely on the services of the Streha center at a distance and the impact that this service has had on them.

•Completed assistance plans: The realized assistance plans are an indicator of the progress of the cases supported by the services of the Streha center and an indicator of the concrete changes realized in their life.

•Pre-Posttests anonymous evaluations from beneficiaries after exit: The data collected through this method are data that have helped us in the evaluation of this case study as they are anonymous data and with an explanatory character of the impact that the services of Streha have had in improving their lives.

•Focus-Groups with beneficiaries are important to see real feedback and perceptions about our services divided into a group.

•In depth interviews with beneficiaries to understand and evaluate in depth the impact of the services of “Streha”. These types of interviews give a full understanding of the impact of services on changing their lives.

Data analysis methods

The following methods were used to analyze the collected data: Qualitative data analysis are the most important data that in this case study help us to understand the impact and perceptions that each individual who receives or has received services in Streha, is directly and indirectly affected by changes in legislation that we have achieved, from the memoranda’s of understanding established for the provision of certain services through various institutions give a full understanding of the impact that “Streha” services have had on the lives of individuals who have received these services. These qualitative data were important in the conception of this case study and its drafting.

Quantitative data analysis are important indicators used to measure the impact that “Streha” services have on the lives of vulnerable individuals in the LGBTI+I community.

Quantitative data reviewed for the case study are indicators of how much “Streha” service has been accessed over the years, how many beneficiaries have been supported with multidisciplinary services within the shelter, how many beneficiaries have relied on TIL after leaving the shelter service, how many are cases supported remotely through the “Streha” programs, how many cases are currently monitored after leaving the Shelter service.

Conclusions and Recommendations

During Streha’s work with cases they have learned that in addition to the emergency services we provide for cases that are victims of violence, eviction, or severe trauma, the TIL (transition to independent living/support in distance) program of transition from the service to independent living was essential for a large number of cases. Based on the initial support programs, they worked hard to secure the funds that support the transition program of the beneficiaries after leaving the service, their independent living. In recent years this program has been very productive and the impact and positive

changes in the lives of the beneficiaries that we support through this program have been great.

Over the years they have learned that collaborating with partners and stakeholders, advocating for important issues for the LGBTI+I community, working with members of the LGBTI+I community to recognize the rights they enjoy have also been successful interventions in improving the well-being and life of the whole LGBTI+I persons in Albania.

Cooperation with Streha’s partners in Albania and the region that provide services and support to this community such as the Alliance for Protection against Discrimination LGBTI+, PRO LGBTI+, CEL KOSOVO, SAFE HOUSE MACEDONIA have been important partnerships that have helped to improve the life of the community in Albania and Albanian Speaking Region.

Streha is the first non-public residential center in Southern Eastern Europe and we are created especially with the assistance of the shelters network of “Albert Kennedy Trust” in Great Britain that works since 1989 and our staff is trained by their team so our institution is a successful case so far that proves the importance of the existence of such a service for the LGBTI+I community and the impact that this type of service has on the LGBTI+ community. Our expertise so far can serve for the establishment of other similar institutions in the region and beyond.

Streha has offered its expertise in 2017 for the creation and establishment of a similar service in Macedonia called “Safe House Macedonia”. The team working in ‘Streha’ has the first experts in Albania and the region working on sexual orientation and gender identity issues trained by the “Albert Kennedy Trust” as well as experts trained through SIDA, KVINNA TILL KVINNA and SWEDISH POLICE programs for the prevention and responding to gender-based violence.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been very challenging for many LGBTI+I + people in Albania. Many members of the community fail to meet even basic needs for housing, food and medicine. Two groups of LGBTI+I + persons in Albania are at increased risk: (1) LGBTI+ youth and (2) transgender people, who are often homeless. The first category is young LGBTI+ living mainly in Tirana.

Most of these young people have no domestic support, have experienced domestic violence, have been victims of trafficking or exploitation, and have worked as sex workers being homeless due to their sexual orientation and / or gender identity.

The quarantine situation initially and the impact that the pandemic has had on businesses has left many of these young people without help and without jobs. As these young people do not have family support, their financial security network does not exist, and the risk of being part of exploitation and trafficking networks is extremely high. Since March 2020, the Streha in cooperation with the Alliance against Discrimination against LGBTI+ Persons has provided food packages, medicine and safe accommodation.

The second category is transgender people who are homeless. They suffer from high levels of violence and discrimination due to

their gender identity, are found homeless as it is almost impossible for someone to rent them a house, it is difficult for someone to hire them and they have no income and access to the health system for them is extremely difficult. The pandemic has worsened their already difficult situation towards this community and Streha needs to continue providing services to help them cope with this situation that fundamentally threatens their well-being and livelihood.

Before and during the Covid -19 pandemic, the Streha service often has a vital role to play for many members of the LGBTI+ community. During the lockdown of the pandemic the difficulties and problems that the LGBTI+ community in Albania had were great and for most these difficulties have increased. The levels of all forms of violence reported have been great, the need for support with safe emergency housing has increased, the needs for support with food packages, psychological service etc. have increased.

All this panorama shows that Streha's intervention with certain services as needed for many members of the LGBTI+ community has ensured their well-being and survival by increasing the impact of Streha services on their lives. More than ever this impact has been measurable and the feedback and change achieved have been consistently reported by individuals that Streha has supported. The change in their lives because of our intervention has been great, and we have used every possible mechanism to provide quality support and services even during the full quarantine period where direct contacts were at a minimum.

To adapt to the needs of the institution in pandemic conditions since June 2020, they have changed the location of the shelter due to the need for larger spaces to create quarantine conditions from the Covid-19 pandemic and now we have increased our capacities in bed too, from 8 beds to 11 beds and also, we have now a room of emergency to provide immediate support for the cases that need support and sufficient space for the staff.

Contacts

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Association of Citizens for the Promotion of Roma Education “Otaharin” Bijeljina



Executive summary

The position of the Roma in the area of the City of Bijeljina has always been difficult, the events of the war (1992-1995) further affected their position in society, and their number was drastically reduced due to the war and by going to the countries of Western Europe. Nowadays, the Roma in the area of the City of Bijeljina face extremely complex socio-economic challenges. Unemployment, poor living conditions, begging, forced labor, low level of education, are just some of the problems of this nation. Non-acceptance and non-recognition of the traditions and customs of Roma culture are most often the cause of intolerance, but also discrimination and segregation of Roma. In these circumstances, Roma are socially excluded and placed on the margins of socio-economic events. The Association of Citizens for the Promotion of Roma Education “Otaharin” was founded in 2005 in Bijeljina, with the aim of highlighting the problems of the Roma national minority and removing obstacles to their social inclusion. Using various methodologies, the Association strives to ensure a quality flow of information and to have up-to-date information on the current situation and needs of Roma communities, in order to improve not only living conditions but also their education and their integration into society. The challenges that the Association faces in its work are the fight against “anti-Gypsyism”, discrimination, unemployment, begging, underage marriages, child labor, inclusion of Roma children in education, health care and domestic violence. The Association actively works on economic empowerment of the community, through programs of economic strengthening and social entrepreneurship. Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, the Association, with the support of donors and partners, has shown good organization of work and humanity, even in extraordinary circumstances. Numerous innovative approaches support all children's rights, in accordance with the predispositions and developmental needs of children.

Background

The Association of Citizens for the Promotion of Roma Education “Otaharin” from Bijeljina was founded in February 2005 with the aim of improving all aspects of the educational process of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The vision of the Association is a responsible society in which all citizens are equal, especially educationally, socially and economically excluded, marginalized and vulnerable groups. The mission of the Association is to increase the degree of educational, social and economic integration and inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups, through professional, dedicated and innovative work, recognition and credibility. The main goals are the inclusion of Roma children in the education system of Bosnia and Herzegovina, raising awareness of the importance of educa-

tion within the Roma population, protection and promotion of the rights of national minorities, especially the Roma population, protection and promotion of human rights, information activities and support, care for the environment, encouraging and developing creative skills, working to improve human health, contributing to the promotion and development of the NGO sector, creating a network across the country and internationally, humanitarian activities, support to Roma during schooling, organizing seminars, lectures, counseling, promotional activities, material support and support for the development and strengthening of the whole society. The target group are all socially vulnerable families, with a focus on the Roma population, children and their best interests as one of the most important priorities in the work of the Association. The most common forms of violations of children's and human rights that the Association encounters are violations of the right to education, abuse and neglect of children, early marriages, forced labor and begging.

The Day Center for children who live and/or work on the street and who are at risk of becoming so, which operates within this Association, has existed since October 2014. Since its establishment until today, 459 service beneficiaries have been registered- 290 children aged 6 to 18 and 169 parents. On average, on a monthly basis, the Day Center is visited by 70 children, and 25 receive at least one service per day. Services available are a public kitchen, kindergarten, workshops with school-age children and parents, laundry, personal hygiene, psycho-social support for children and parents, legal assistance and support programs for parents. The Association has been a member of the IRIS network since 2012, and has a major role in advocacy activities and strategic positioning of the organization between the civil, public and private sectors.

The integrated action of all actors in the community is the basis for achieving results and solving problems that are recognized in the community and towards which the work of the Association is directed. In order to fight to raise the quality of life of the individual, preventive measures and referral mechanisms have been developed. Within the innovative practice in the field of protection of the rights of vulnerable categories, the Association applies certain mechanisms of action in accordance with the principles of the best interests of the child in the exercise of rights. Preventive activities enable better access of children and parents to the educational, health and social system, through direct information, counseling, educational programs, education as well as through volunteer engagement. These activities include psycho-social support, fieldwork, workshops based on the principles of positive discipline, peer education and volunteerism. Psycho-social support is one of the most important areas of work of the Association, which involves direct and/or indirect work with beneficiaries

based on their needs and real problems in order to meet the needs, and successfully overcome problems and build trust necessary to work with children. Field work is one of the most important activities of the Association and implies constant communication with beneficiaries in the field and support in exercising rights. Roma mediators and field workers are in charge of field work, and their responsibilities are daily presence in the Roma community and family visits, needs and risk assessment, distribution of humanitarian aid, filling out forms for exercising rights, referring users to the Day Center and connecting with relevant institutions, monitoring the regularity of children in school, cooperation with schools and promotion of the services of the Day Center. Since 2017, the Day Center has been implementing workshops based on the principles of positive discipline in everyday parenting, as one of the ways to raise awareness of children's rights among parents and guardians, but also among children, and conducted by professional staff, implementers and volunteers.



Promotion of projects and services of the Day Center; Workshop with parents, 2018.

Peer activities take place in the Youth Senate, in the Day Center, but also in high schools in Bijeljina. Every form of discrimination can be reported in the Day Center through the "Anti-Discrimination Point", where four volunteers work, and workshops for younger children are held at least once a month. The Youth Senate called "OMOTE" also operates within the Association, which is available to all young people who want to engage in socially useful work.



Peer education for Youth Senate volunteers, 2020.

Referral mechanisms for the protection of child safety and children's rights are in the service of absolute protection of children. These mechanisms are aimed at a multidisciplinary approach and interaction of all actors from the community. In the area of the city of Bijeljina, the initiative of the Association established four referral mechanisms aimed at ensuring the rights and protection of safety and best interests of the child: Expert Team for dealing with violated safety and rights of the child, Mobile Intervention Team, Pro-

tol on the conduct and cooperation of competent entities for the protection and care of children caught in begging and the Working Group for the Protection of Child Safety. The purpose of the Expert Team is to preserve children's rights and safety, it consists of an executive director, lawyer and professional staff-psychologist, special educator and social worker and is the first mechanism used in various cases where the rights of the child or children are violated in any way. The Expert Team has regular and emergency meetings, and if the case is high-risk and cannot be resolved by just one institution, other referral mechanisms are involved. The Mobile Intervention Team consists of representatives of the Center for Social Work, the city administration, the primary school and the Day Care Center. The Team is composed of experts of different profiles, who act with a multidisciplinary approach in cases of risk of dropping out of school identified in pupils of different ages. The target group are children who are included in the school system but do not attend classes regularly; school-age children who have never been included in the school system; children who have reached psycho-physical maturity for enrollment in the first grade; children from marginalized groups who attend school regularly but are at risk of dropping out and children who exhibit undesirable behaviors at school, as well as their families. The Mobile Intervention Team organizes visits once a month, during the school year. On average, eight families are visited during one visit, and 50 different families and 100 or more children of school and preschool age are visited annually. Of great importance in everyday work is the early identification of pupils who are at risk of early school leaving/non-enrollment in the school system. In total 144 Roma children are currently included in the school system in the area of the City of Bijeljina- 133 in primary and 11 in secondary school. In 2012, the municipality of Bijeljina, the Center for Social Work and the Center for Public Safety signed a Protocol on the conduct and cooperation of competent entities for the protection and care of children caught begging in the City of Bijeljina, with the aim of better cooperation and work of competent entities in the municipality combating child begging and their protection. In 2013, the Association signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on which a Working Group for the Protection of Child Safety in Bijeljina was formed in 2014, consisting of representatives of various institutions, which, at the initiative of the Association, was later multiplied in Zivinice, Brcko District and Tuzla.



Working Group meeting, 2019.

The Day Center employs 8 people- a coordinator, professional staff (psychologist, special educator and social worker) and four field workers, who are available to beneficiaries every working day, 10 hours a day. The working hours of the Day Center are 8

am- 6 pm. Professional staff, in addition to providing psycho-social support to beneficiaries, participates in the application of all innovative practices of the Association and cooperates daily with representatives of institutions in order to multidisciplinary approach in solving various problems. The activities of the Association are based on four basic principles: the best interest of the child, the right to life, survival and development, the right to express one's opinion and the right to protection against discrimination. Within the framework of cooperation with institutions, there is participation in the development of strategic documents. The Association is working on the implementation of recommendations related to the best interests of the child, which were adopted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The target group includes all children aged 0-18 who are at medium or high risk when it comes to their safety. The criteria for medium and high risk are defined on the basis of a detailed and combined assessment of the three main factors of the child's condition: risk, vulnerability and protective factors. After an initial assessment of the child's situation under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in accordance with the Universal Indicators for the Welfare of Children in the Fields of Safety, Health, Achievement, Care, Activity, Respect, Responsibility and Inclusion, the case is assessed according to the medium/high risk criteria. Also, the activities are complementary to laws and bylaws in this area- the Law on Social Protection of Republika Srpska, the Law on Child Protection, the Law on Protection and Treatment of Children and Juveniles in Criminal Proceedings of Republika Srpska, the Law on Personal Data Protection and other relevant acts.

Presentation of the case study

This case study describes a large family living in the center of the Roma community. The family consists of four minor children and a father. The mother left the family when the children were small. This was difficult for the children to accept, and they often came into conflict with their father, blaming him for everything. However, over time, they accepted and continued to live the life they had to- without the presence of their mother. The oldest girl Sandra is 14 years old and is constantly on the street. Sandra, by the way, took on the responsibility of taking care of younger children after her mother left the house. The father was often absent under the pretext of working, but there was no investment in life and the house. S. has been a beneficiary of the services of the Day Center since she was 10 years old, she comes to workshops, goes to counseling talks, uses all available services. A year later, Milena, now 13, joins the Day Care Center. Both brothers, who are now 15 and 10 years old, after sister S., in 2014, came to the Day Center and still actively use the services that are available. As part of the fieldwork activities, Team often came to the family's house and they would mostly find a situation where S. cleans and cooks for younger children, and her father was never home.

Children and family were provided with maximum support in the field of meeting basic and material needs, and active engagement when it comes to children's education. The father was quite negligent, he didn't even have personal documents. All children are included in the educational system, with the support of the Association they are provided with all services within health care. However, the oldest girl, Sandra, started running away from home more and more often, saying that she was running away from problems, referring to the

frequent, in the middle of the night, father's intrusion into a small old family house, and frequent physical harassment and attacks. In 2017, Sandra spent more and more time in the Day Center, after that she went to school, and the rest of the time she spent on the street. The Day Center Team included all the resources of the Association- referral mechanisms and preventive measures.

The children were provided with every service in the Day Center, and in that way it was determined that there is domestic violence. It was revealed that the girl was on the street when she was not at home, in the Day Care Center or school, and that due to lack of money she slept with men for money. Soon, the 14-year-old girl was induced to have sex even when she did not want to. Changes in the girl's behavior could be noticed in the Day Center, but she did not open up in counseling. The turning point was when one morning the girl received a video from a group of men in which she was the subject of sexual abuse. The men blackmailed her that, if she did not continue to come to them every night and allow everything, that the video would be posted on social networks. The girl often came with injuries, which she justified through "I fell, I hit myself", etc. The expert team of the Day Center decided to inform the institutions that there are certain suspicions, but that the girl has not confirmed anything yet. The persistence of professional workers paid off, with long and daily work the girl admits what she is going through.

The reaction of the Day Center as a provider of social services was aimed at maximally protecting children and girls. The Day Center includes this case in the referral mechanisms of the Association, and the case of the girl Sandra is brought to the Working Group for the Protection of Child Safety. All the time, the Mobile Intervention Team is in the field where they motivate children to regular education and to take responsibility for themselves. This case was worked through a multidisciplinary approach, the problem could not be solved without adequate participation of all relevant institutions. By the decision of the guardianship authority of the Center for Social Work, the girl was taken care of, relocated from Bijeljina and placed in the Children Home "Rada Vranjesevic" in Banja Luka.

Now the girl is safe, going to school and has a completely different life than the one she had in her hometown. It is done gradually with other children to strengthen their personal capacities and resilience in order to avoid similar scenarios.



Workshops with children in the premises of the Day Center, 2019/2020.

Efforts continue to empower the father to take on parental role and responsibility. Younger children are still beneficiaries of the services of the Day Center, trust is built and quite stable. All children go to school and have health papers, receive appropriate social assistance and are regularly visited by a representative of the Center for Social Work and the Day Care Center.

Conclusions and recommendations

Through fifteen years of work, the Association of Citizens “Otaharin” Bijeljina, has positioned itself in the local community through the provision of various services to beneficiaries, and progress is reflected in the recognition within the local community and at the country level. For this reason, it is recommended to lobby at various levels in order to achieve sustainability in terms of providing social services. This is especially important for reducing the passivity of institutions in recognizing certain problems faced by the Roma population. The recommendations are aimed at strengthening existing work models and adapting to different problems that beneficiaries face.

Some of the most important recommendations for further work are the following:

- Flexibility and innovation in work is necessary in order to achieve the expected results;
- Respect for the principle of individuality is necessary in working with each beneficiary;
- A multidisciplinary approach in resolving cases should be the basis for dealing with children whose rights and/or safety have been violated;
- Working on the sustainability of services is a very important segment for successful operation and functioning;
- When it comes to the work of day centers and innovative approaches applied in working with beneficiaries, the recommendation is to be equally recognized in laws and policies at the entity and country level of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also at the regional level. During the COVID-19 pandemic, all activities of the Association were modified and aimed at supporting beneficiaries in all segments, primarily in the form of security measures, material support, psycho-social support and support for education. The services were provided in accordance with the recommendations of the Institute of Public Health, and the organization of group activities took into account the prescribed protection measures. Psycho-social support took place through telephone conversations with beneficiaries, but also through field visits. Activities were aimed at strengthening the resilience of families and overcoming fear. Distance learning has been introduced, tablets and Internet cards have been provided. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Association, with the support of various donors, has distributed a total of 1766 humanitarian packages in the form of food, hygiene, baby food and vouchers, and 2760 disinfectants and protective masks.

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Association “Zemlja djece u BiH” Tuzla



Executive Summary

Migrant children in Bosnia and Herzegovina face limited access to education, social and health care. Accommodation of migrants, including children in the city of Tuzla, has not been resolved by local authorities, there is no toilet for migrants at any point in the city, nor is access to running water for drinking and personal hygiene guaranteed. Food is provided exclusively with the help of non-governmental organizations. Centers for social work as key institutions in the child protection system still do not have the necessary human, technical and material capacity to realize their obligations in the protection of children's rights. Reform processes in the field of social protection are stalled, processes related to raising and quality control of services have been slowed down. According to the results of the UNICEF survey (2013) on the assessment of child begging and other forms of street work in Bosnia and Herzegovina, children make up 2/3 of the total number of identified victims of trafficking, and begging is the most common form of child exploitation.

The first Day Care Center for children involved in living and/or working on the streets and children at risk in Southeast Europe was established in Tuzla in 1999, as a result of a public campaign conducted by the Association “Zemlja djece u BiH” Tuzla public awareness and the responsibility of the competent institutions regarding the growing number of children living and working at Tuzla's intersections and streets. The core values on which the Association's innovative practices are based derive from the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant international policies and standards. Innovative practices are based on personalized approaches, in which the assessment and determination of the best interests of the child plays a key role. In accordance with its mission, the Association is committed to providing support to migrant children on the move, those who arrived in Tuzla with their families and a large number of unaccompanied children. In direct work with children at risk, the Association learns about real life problems that these children face, which arose as a result of systemic discrimination, ie, disabling and/or violating the basic rights of the child, such as the right to identity, the right to education, adequate and unconditional health care, social security and protection from violence, neglect and exploitation. Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, the Association's Mobile Team has urgently responded to emerging needs, with an organization and model that can be used as an example in other communities.

Background

The Association “Zemlja djece u BiH” is a non-profit and non-governmental organization, founded in 1995 in Tuzla, in order to help, develop and advocate, dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice and reach its full potential. The mission and vision of the Association are to create a society in which every child enjoys all the rights recognized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The program activities of the Association respond to the specific needs and problems of vulnerable groups, especially in the field of social protection, health, education and protection from violence and human trafficking. The services of the Day Center are based on ten key principles recommended by the Council of Europe in its 2001 “Social Policy Agenda” to support the social inclusion policy of vulnerable groups: subsidiarity, holistic approach, transparency and accountability, user-friendly services, effectiveness, solidarity and partnership, dignity and human rights, participation, personal development, continuous improvement and sustainability. The Association is making great efforts to contribute to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030- a world without poverty (implementation of adequate social protection plans), health and well-being (unconditional and quality health care), quality education (adjusted, affordable and quality education), reducing inequality (promoting equal inclusion) and peace, justice and strong institutions (focus on stopping violence against children). Standards for the protection of children in Bosnia and Herzegovina derive from the Guidelines for the Assessment and Determination of the best interest of the child, and a series of laws in the field of family law, criminal law or social protection, education, health and regulation of state border crossing.

The Association is the founder of the first network of NGOs- Reference Group Tuzla, is one of the founders (national and regional) of the Network of Day Care Centers for Street Children and the National Network of NGOs for the Protection of Children's Rights “Stronger Voice for Children”. Since its establishment, the Association is a member of the IRIS network of Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the end of 1999, the Association launched a public campaign entitled “The street is our present, is it our future”, with the aim of pointing out to the competent institutions and citizens the growing number of children who live and work at Tuzla intersections every day, which is later resulted in the establishment of a Day Center for street children involved in life and/or street work and children at risk. Children come to the Day Center voluntarily, alone or accompanied by parents/guardians, as instructed by another service. The primary user groups of the Day Center are

children who are victims of violence and exploitation and children at risk of reaching the streets. The Day Center is dedicated to the prevention of exploitation, abuse and neglect of children and raising awareness of children's rights, and provides children with standardized and structured activities- hot meals and laundry services, educational activities, leisure and creative activities, psychological assistance to children and their families within the Counseling Center for Children, Youth and Family, by professionals, through individual and group work.

The services of the Day Center were directly used by over 1,483 children who were involved in living and/or working on the streets and children at risk of becoming so, as well as members of their families. On a daily basis, the residential services of the Day Center are used by an average of 20-30 beneficiaries, on the field by 15-25 children, and annually that number goes up to 300 children, both in the Center and in field locations. Over 32,356 different services were provided to beneficiaries, and 175 children who were not registered in the birth register were given legal visibility. Total of 95% of children achieved social integration in a biological or foster family, only 7 beneficiaries were institutionally cared as potential victims of human trafficking. By mediating access to health insurance, the right to unconditional health care was exercised for the first time by 287 children.



Group work

developed- educational program for children, gender transformative work with young men and future fathers, info desk for potential migrants and returnees to/from the EU. The educational program for children consists of three segments: an alternative program of preschool education for children (various contents intended for children aged 3-6, the professional team consists of a teacher, pedagogue and social worker), the program "Education for a second chance" (intended for children who never were not in the educational process or left it prematurely, aged 9-18) and the Program for strengthening parental competencies (support to mothers of children/beneficiaries under 15 years of age who raise children in more demanding life circumstances, and the Program is implemented by specially trained teams of experts- social pedagogue and psychologist).

Gender-transformative work with young men and future fathers is designed to ensure the education of young men and young



Mobile Infodesk



Info session on the dorsetp

fathers from marginalized groups for family decision-making, planning, anger control, violence prevention and peaceful conflict resolution.

This innovative program lasts 12 months, with the support of field associates who come from the community itself, and with the group works a team consisting of one social worker and pedagogue/psychologist, with the possibility of involving external educators.

Infodesk for potential migrants and returnees to/from the EU, as a completely innovative practice in the prevention of illegal migration, is intended for families with children, potential migrants to the EU and returnees to B&H, who belong to socially excluded categories of citizens in Tuzla. The goals of the functioning of Infodesk are the prevention of illegal migration of B&H citizens and informing and educating returnees in B&H and potential migrants to the EU, who belong to socially excluded categories in the city of Tuzla. Infodesk also operates in field locations, and the service team consists of a social worker and a psychologist. Infodesk services are provided through individual and group sessions and advisory support and mediation.



Day Center



Info flyer

The key members of the Day Center team are the coordinator, two social workers, a psychologist/pedagogue, a social pedagogue, a teacher and a lawyer. In addition to professionals, the Center includes external associates and volunteers (a number of volunteers come from a group of former users). In certain segments of its activities, the Day Center has developed several innovative practices and models of work with children and families, of which the program for prevention of social exclusion of children and their families, referral mechanism for protection of children's rights from violence and exploitation, Mobile team to support migrant children and families with children and advocating for the rights of the child. In order to prevent social exclusion, several preventive innovative programs have been

The information leaflet was created for the purpose of informing beneficiaries and provides basic information on the services to be contacted and what should be regulated before migrating to the EU, ie when they return to B&H. The info leaflet also has a bar code reader, which, by reading via a mobile application, gives the user information and instructions, as well as the direction of movement to the service to which he should report. Referral mechanisms for the protection of children's rights in Tuzla Canton, initiated by the Association, provide comprehensive protection of children at risk, are based on multisectoral and interdisciplinary cooperation of all entities in the child protection system in the local community, and reflected through the operation of the Protocol for dealing with cases of begging, vagrancy, labor exploitation and other forms of child abuse in Tuzla Canton and the Multisectoral mobile team for the prevention of begging. The Protocol was signed in 2014, it is the first multisectoral document of its kind, adopted at this level of authority, which defines the manner and responsibility of relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations in the system of protection of children from begging and abuse in Tuzla Canton (regardless of whether domestic or foreign nationals). The innovativeness of the Tuzla referral mechanism is reflected in the establishment of a completely new social service for children exposed to violence and

Since October 2019, over 70 families and 700 minors for whom there are well-founded indications that they are unaccompanied children, although these children are very rarely registered as unaccompanied children, have received the support of the Mobile Team. In its work, the Association uses different types of advocacy-public education, lobbying, legislative advocacy and media advocacy.

Presentation of the case study

The minor boy M.M. (11 years old) comes from a six-member family with permanent residence in a Roma settlement near Tuzla. The family lives in old and completely unconditional house owned by the city administration, where they suffer daily pressure from local structures to leave the building. No one in the family is formally employed, they have no permanent sources of income. Despite her poor health, the mother takes care of the children on a daily basis, while the father often goes out of town to work for a living and thus support his family. Recently, the father had to



Signing of the Protocol, 2014.



Shelter Opening, 2014

exploitation- Shelter for children without adequate care, which was opened in 2014 at the initiative of the Association.

The Multisectoral mobile team has been operating in the city of Tuzla since 2017, consisting of three members (two social workers and one police officer). On an annual level, the Mobile Team realizes at least 15 regular field visits, and its preventive action has influenced the reduction of child begging in the city by 80%. In the second half of 2019, the Association structured its activities through the formation of a Mobile team to support children on the move (available 24/7) consisting of three social workers, an animator and a cultural associate. Team members are trained to identify potential cases of trafficking.



serve a prison sentence, which he received for illegal logging of a nearby forest, in order to provide firewood for the family. This additionally endangered the existence of the family. During the tour of the settlement, members of the field team were addressed by mother M.M. of the boy with a request for assistance to include a minor M.M. and his two younger siblings into the regular school system. The mother pointed out that due to the extremely difficult socio-economic situation, the children were never enrolled in school. Although the competent social services were aware of this family, the intervention by this institution, as well as the nearby school, was not about the obligation and support in the inclusion of children in the school system. M.M. was restless and out of focus, did not show interest in work and did not have developed hygienic habits. To get involved in the educational process, the boy M.M. had to catch up with his school generation. The boy is involved in the activities of the Day Center, the focus of which was attending instructional classes at the Center, and continuous individual psychological support for the boy, within the counseling services. The Association also provided support to parents, in terms of providing basic foodstuffs and heating. Continuous work with the minor M.M. as with the whole family, resulted with progress in behavior, hygienic habits have been developed, and responsibility for group work has been raised to a high level. After successfully passing two classes of primary school, in the 2018/2019 school year M.M. today attends classes regularly. He is a very good pupil. He is often smiling, loves to sing and often reaches out to play an instrument, mostly a synthesizer. The boy



First day at school



Learning support

has gained strong trust in the staff of the Association and for every problem or difficulty in school or family he turns for help.

After father M.M. was released from prison, the family faces new challenges. The father often came home in an alcoholic state, destroyed things around the house and physically attacked the mother and children. As the situation in the family worsened, the boy asked to talk to a social worker in the Day Center in private. After the conversation with the boy and his mother, a report for domestic violence was made to the competent Center for social work. The father was taken to the police station for an interview, the case was processed, and he was given a suspended prison sentence. The boy's father often threatened because of the report. The boy often talked about how his father still consumes alcohol, but that he no longer causes problems in the house for fear of the police. Through fieldwork and family visits by the Association's social worker and psychologist, the father eventually begins to accept the counseling support of the Day Center's professional team. After six months, he completely stopped consuming alcohol and occasionally helps to encourage men to join the "Young Men, Future Fathers" program, while the boy's mother was hired as a field assistant to work with mothers. The Day Center continues to provide help and support to the boy and his family, and continuously monitors the family's progress.

Conclusions and recommendations

All innovative and complementary programs that are part and/or directly related to the Day Care Center for children involved in life and/or work on the street and children at risk, have left positive effects on beneficiaries, the wider community in which children live, and the whole child protection system. Despite the fact that the Day Center service is not yet recognized in the existing social protection system in the Federation of B&H, the relevance and quality of the service and its innovative programs are contained in the recommendations of the Cantonal Ministry of Social Protection to multiply this service and referral mechanisms to other local communities. There are still seven active day centers in B&H that were created according to this model of work, which shows that this innovative practice in working with children at risk is applicable and effective in the field of protection of children's rights in almost all environments. In order to strengthen and raise the quality of service from the aspect of users and sustainability, it is necessary to continue to work and take certain activities to improve innovative practices. Some of the most important recommendations are:

- Improve the legislative framework in the field of social protection so that children victims of violence and exploitation are recognized as beneficiaries of social protection, and the services of the Day Center with innovative practices as services in the social protection system in terms of their sustainability;
- Create normative preconditions for licensing services and accreditation of programs, including the services of the Day Center and its innovative programs;

- Revise the cantonal protocol on dealing with violence and child begging, localize it in communities where this problem is present, and form multisectoral mobile teams for the prevention of child begging;

- Ensure the geographical accessibility of innovative practices to children in remote areas, through the establishment of a network of social services;

- Make guidelines for assessing and determining the best interests of the child applicable in all activities in working with children in NGOs and public and private services and services for children.

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, the presence and activities of the Association's Mobile team in the field have increased, and through an additional team member- COVID-19 Prevention Assistant, whose task is to provide newly arrived migrants with information about risks and dangers through information materials in various languages (Farsi, Arabic, English). Migrants also received hygiene kits containing protective masks and disinfectants, as well as basic personal hygiene items and underwear. In March 2020, the situation became even more complicated because the local government, through measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, prevented the contact of volunteers and organizations with migrants. The pressure on the migrant population has increased, the police are expelling migrants from the gathering places, banning associations and free delivery of humanitarian aid. There is still little information about the risks and dangers of a pandemic, which can be very dangerous for the whole community.

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Udruženje
"Zemlja djece u BiH"



Executive Summary

The Day center for Children and Family is the only service in Montenegro that works with children who beg or are at risk of becoming street children. The Day center offers a large number of services and provides the exercise of rights to children exposed to various forms of labor exploitation, other forms of exploitation and to children who are at risk of becoming street children. The users of the Day Center are members of the Roma and Egiptian populations, so the activities are aimed towards improving their jeopardized lifestyle, which prevents them from healthy and normal development. Therefore, the goal of the Day Center is to improve the social position of our users by providing material assistance services, cooked meals, as well as showering, bathing, washing and drying services. In addition to taking care of meeting the basic existential needs, the Day Center works directly with users and their families, so the most important methods of work are realized through the implementation of various workshops (educational, creative, recreational, Heart). The Day Center also runs accredited programs, namely the ECCD, SEL, and FSP programs, which aim to care for the early growth and development of children, the development of socio-emotional competencies, strengthening families and helping to strengthen parental resilience. The organization of field visits to families is aimed at gaining knowledge of possible problems that the family encounters,



connecting users with relevant institutions and providing material assistance. In order to continue the work and so that children and parents do not feel the lack of professional help during the corona virus pandemic, the expert team of the Day Center regularly and intensively maintained the continuity of work with our users and their parents. The values that the professional team adheres to in working with children are based on respect for children's rights, participation of children and representation of their best interests.

Background

In Montenegro, begging is not a separate phenomenon of prohibited behavior, and there is no special law to sanction it. The key legal regulation of Montenegro that guarantees special protection of children and respect for their rights is the Law on Family which regulates relations between parents and children, in which the state undertook, among other things, to "take all necessary measures to protect children from neglect, abuse and exploitation." . The Law on Protection from Domestic Violence prescribes sanctions if "a family member does not take sufficient care of nutrition, hygiene, clothing, medical care or regular school attendance or does not prevent the child from harmful association, wandering, begging or stealing or otherwise to a greater extent. neglects the upbringing and education of the child. In terms of procedure, it is important to mention the following regulations: the Law on Treatment of Juveniles in Criminal Procedure, which defines special treatment of children who have the status of victims of criminal offenses, the Law on Public Order and Peace and the Code of Criminal Procedure in accordance with the conditions prescribed by the Criminal Code of Montenegro.

In 2012, the European Commission funded and conducted The Study on the Typology and Policy Responses to Child Begging in the EU, which emphasizes the need for coordinated and synchronized efforts in the European Union to address the situation which poses serious threats to the health and development of children who are often stigmatized and live in an unfavourable environment. The report presents research conducted in 15 European countries and a total of 30 European cities, which approach child begging at the national and local level from the perspective of children's rights, taking into account the need to punish exploiters and traffickers and involve families in finding solutions to this violation of human dignity.

The Law on Social and Child Protection and the accompanying strategy for the development of the social and child protection system emphasize the improvement of social and child protection services, the improvement of the normative framework, the improvement of the quality system, but still do not mention the increase of child begging in difficult socio-economic circumstances. The system still does not recognize this category and is not able to properly combat this problem and provide adequate support to children and their families. It is necessary to pass a special law, and revise certain legal regulations, as well as sets of legal and financial assistance measures.

Local context

The research on the frequency and intensity of averaging problems at the level of Montenegro was conducted by CEDEM in cooperation with the German organization “Help”. The research showed that the problem of child begging is the most pronounced in Berane and Podgorica, and quite pronounced in Nikšić and Bar. Common to all municipalities in which the research was conducted is that child begging in most cases is initiated, supported or tolerated by parents.



When it comes to Nikšić, there are about 20 children all of which, as well as their families, are known to the representatives of the competent institutions. However, the most significant finding in Nikšić is the existence of the “Day Center for Children and Families”, which works with the street children. The problem of child begging in Nikšić is pronounced, family begging is key and spontaneous child begging is especially present. The research also highlighted the frequency of punishment and exposure to domestic violence. It is important to mention the Local Action Plan for Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians in the Municipality of Nikšić, which is a planning act by which the local government defines measures for the implementation of policies that will improve the position of the Roma and Egyptian communities. This document is a precondition for the implementation of policies to protect the rights of the Roma and Egyptian populations. The basic principle that respects all measures envisaged by this plan is the principle of equality and non-discrimination.

Description of the Innovative Example

The Center for Security, Sociological and Criminological Research “Defendologija” is a civil society organization, based in Nikšić, founded in 2012. An organization emphasises and through its essential goals nurtures the respect for human rights, equal access to justice for all, analysis of the situation in the field of security and respect for human rights, the importance of education, health and support services for vulnerable groups, and informing the public about support mechanisms. Scientific research work in the Defendology Center is performed through the work of the organizational unit of the Scientific Research Center in the following areas: violence in schools, family, juvenile delinquency, combating corruption, drug addiction and youth crime, human and children’s rights, international police cooperation, fight against begging children etc.

During its nine years of work, the Defendology Center has implemented various projects and activities aimed at working directly with

children living and working on the streets as well as children who are at potential risk of being forced to work on the streets, children exposed to various forms of exploitation, violence, children with behavioural issues, as well as children coming from socially disadvantaged groups. Realized projects and activities were important for the later creation of the Day Center, which is the culmination of work with these marginalized groups. Among the most important projects are: “Shelter for children endangered by exploitation from begging” in 2014. About 50 children from socially marginalized groups, children endangered by exploitation from begging, as well as children who are at potential risk of becoming beggars, passed through the Shelter, on the territory of the Municipality of Nikšić. Then “Daily center for children exposed to exploitation by begging” in the period 2015-2016 and “Day care for children and family” since 2017.

The Defendologija center has repeatedly carried out actions aimed at empowering young people to talk about burning issues, their basic needs and problems in the RE community and to inform the public and citizens about the dangers of begging called “Please, hear my voice”, “The street is not my home”, “Give less offer more” and “Give candy to those who do not have any”. A social mapping was carried out, which included all RE settlements on the territory of the Municipality of Nikšić, and a social note on insight into the situation of social need was made for approximately all the families from the RE communities in Nikšić. In 2017, with the help of the International Organization Save the Children in the North West Balkans, the Defendologija center opens the Day Center for Children and Families “Defendologija”, which is a unique support service for children who are begging or at risk of starting to beg, as well as their families. In addition, the Day Center provides a number of other services for children from socially disadvantaged families, which will be discussed below. The day center is a licensed service by the Ministry of Social Work and Welfare, and is also the author of an accredited training program for professionals and associates and other professionals in the field of social and child protection on the occurrence, types, mechanisms of prevention of child begging. This service is an example of good practice, for all municipalities in Montenegro, of dealing with and addressing of the issue of begging and helping children and parents in a comprehensive manner.

The Day Center employs people who have graduated from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities and are additionally trained to work with children who are engaged and begging. Additionally, an innovation introduced by the center is the employment of an engaged mediator in the community who is the link between the RE community and the Day Center. Also, volunteers are hired in the Day Center who provide additional help and support in working with children.

Service specificity

Day center for children and families “Defendologija” is the only inclusive service in Montenegro that is licensed by the Ministry as a day care center for children with behavioral problems and is intended for direct work with socially vulnerable categories including children living and working on the streets, children without parental care, children victims of abuse, neglect and domestic violence, children with learning disabilities and behavioral prob

lems.

The envisaged model formed for children living and working on the streets, as well as children who are at potential risk of starting to work on the streets, enables these children to spend their time better, through increasing awareness of risk factors, strengthening awareness and sense of belonging to the family for the target groups as well as representatives of relevant entities. It also provides better access to services aimed at protecting the rights of children, especially children living and working on the streets as well as children at potential risk of starting begging and possible future conflicts with the law.

Services provided by the Day Center

From January to December 2020, the day center had 183 direct users aged 3-18 who stay in the center on a daily basis, using services to meet basic hygiene needs (showers, haircuts, washing and drying clothes), psychosocial support, counseling work with children and family, individual psychological conversations, humanitarian aid, educational, creative, recreational workshops, learning assistance, mastering materials, preparation for school, connecting cross-section with the institutions of the system, organization of excursions etc.

Also, work with children takes place through the implementation of accredited programs:

- Early Growth and Development (ECCD) program that deals with motor, cognitive, socio-emotional development as well as speech development of preschool children aged 3-6 through workshop work and activities adapted and structured to meet the needs of an individual child or a group of children.
- The Program of Positive Discipline intended for parents of children of all ages, which deals with common problems that occur in the period from birth to the end of adolescence and which helps to prepare for facing the life challenges of parents and solving them.
- The Art Healing and Education Program (HEART) is an art-based approach that aims to provide psychosocial support to children who are under severe or chronic stress. It uses art to help children process and express feelings related to their experiences and a socio-emotional learning program (SEL).

Programs aimed towards working with parents

Given that children, users of the Day Center come from socially marginalized groups, growing up in dysfunctional families with a high presence of deviant behavior (domestic violence, alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling), the Day Center's engagement is based on a positive discipline approach. Workshops, parent meetings are organized for parents of young children, and the success of children in school is monitored and in cooperation with family institutions they connect with the necessary representatives of relevant institutions, because Day Center has good cooperation with the Center for Social Work, Police, Prosecutor's Office, Court, Schools, taking in consideration the best interests of the children.

What is worrying is the fact that these children come from essentially dysfunctional families, they are often completely stateless, their parents are mostly unemployed and they are completely out

of the system. The life of these families is on the very edge of existence, without healthy goals and clear cohesion within the family. Helping to maintain healthy contacts and relationships between parents and children, from 2018, the Center implements a FSP program or support program to strengthen families in which families from the Center are included in a program that leads to strengthening family relationships, better communication, recognition and overall better family functioning. Recognizing the fact that parents are the most immediate and influential factor in the process of physical, cognitive, social and emotional progress and development of the child, FSP promotes a balanced approach to risk and protective factors, trying to reduce and neutralize the effects of risk and emphasize the effects of protective factors. In this sense, FSP whenever possible, encourages positivity, develops potentials, improves skills, stimulates functional relationships and connections, ie, promotes the empowerment of children, parents, families and their connection with the informal, personal and / or formal support network in the community. As a special activity, we mention monitoring the condition of the RE population by a field worker with whose help we make special records and databases of user families that allow us to continuously monitor the condition, and in case of negative changes, timely response to them. Professionals of the Day Center, realizing that strengthening family relationships provides the foundation for a healthy family infrastructure, maintain contact with parents through numerous workshops on empowerment to accept change, face communication problems, maintain a sense of control with an emphasis on proactive action that will help them in stressful life situations and intervene to preserve physical, mental, emotional health and well-being.

By establishing the Day Center, children use support programs in accordance with the needs and assessments of the Center's professionals, which has proven to be a quality solution which reduces the risk of exploitation because children spend less time on the street.



They are presented quantitatively in Table 1:

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Obrok	0	1874	3 594	2 167
Humanitarna pomoć	56	96	89	421
Radioničarski rad	72	361	436	319
Psihosocijalna podrška	17	547	526	835
Podrška u učenju	20	452	550	241

Table 1 Overview of services provided since the establishment of the Day Center

During the period from 2017 to the end of 2020, the day center provided over 7,000 meals for children, over 600 humanitarian aid to families (food, hygiene, school supplies, clothes), and professional workers conducted more than 1,000 workshops of various contents, over 1,000 individual conversations with users, as well as individual and group lessons.

COVID 19 crisis

During the crisis of the Corona virus pandemic (which is still ongoing), the Day Center helped all the families from the RE community living on the territory of the Municipality of Nikšić with distributed aid. The help consisted of food, hygiene items, school supplies, clothes etc. From March to December 2020, over 300 aid packages were distributed.

Also, during the lockdown, work with children took place online, viber groups were formed in which children and professionals communicated on a daily basis and professionals provided the children with support in learning, homework, giving advice on how and what are the activities that will help overcome the challenges of the situation, how to maintain work habits and when to have time for play and recreation. In this way, a total of 672 online calls were conducted. Daily contact by phone with users and their parents was helpful in fulfilling school obligations, creative expression, cognitive development, improving mental health and helping to organize daily obligations with an emphasis on play and recreation. Providing psychosocial assistance to children and parents was a mandatory form of intervention in this crisis situation.

During its work so far, the Day Center has briefly "remedied" the consequences of the Covid crisis through psycho-social support, connecting users with relevant institutions and donated assistance. What has also been worked on in this challenging period is helping parents to act proactively, maintain a sense of control but also to encourage child development and enrich family relationships through joint activities. Due to the crisis, 200 New Year's packages were provided for all direct and indirect users.

Key challenges in the work of the organization - lessons learned

The problems that the organization faces are related to the recognizability in the system, financial and spatial sustainability. When it comes to financial sustainability, as previously mentioned, the Day Center has been funded by the International Organization Save the Children since 2017. The problem is that after the completion of the project, it is uncertain whether this service will be recognized as necessary in the social protection system and will be financially supported by the local government or institutions of the system. When it comes to spatial sustainability, as one of the main conditions of financial sustainability, efforts are taken to provide new spatial capacities and solve facilities problems. Also, during 2020, the organization began to apply and charge for a licensed service, according to the price list for services of this type, which is an additional plus in addressing the ongoing sustainability of the service. In the coming period, the organization will lobby in the system of social and child protection, relevant institutions and the Government of Montenegro.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The existence of the Day Care Center for Children and Families, as part of the social and child protection system, offers additional options and mechanisms for preventing children from being on the streets, so one of the goals of "Defendologija" is to respond to the challenges faced by street children and develop a comprehensive strategy to combat begging. There is a need to understand the heterogeneous determinants that push children towards street life, and thus the social needs of children need to be protected in order to address the problem at a fundamental level. Also a very important goal is to raise awareness of the majority population and eliminate or reduce prejudice and stigmatization of the RE population, but also to raise awareness of parents of children about begging through direct work with them, which seeks to accept the importance of education and integration of children into the school system.

Given the situation, we have learned that it is necessary to create a plan of action in cases of crisis situations, with elaborated mechanisms of assistance and work in these situations in the field and in the Day Center. In such situations, already endangered categories encounter additional problems, so the quality of constant contact, interest in the functioning of the family, monitoring the regularity of children in school activities, psychological support, which results in strengthening community trust and awakening parental interest in children's progress, their responsibilities.

It is necessary to involve all relevant institutions and even better cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Finance and Social Welfare as well as the NGO sector to take measures to meet the needs of street children and expand the range of services.

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Executive Summary

Violence against women and domestic violence is a serious and complex problem in Montenegrin society, and a direct violation of the European Convention on Human Rights (right to life, prohibition of torture and prohibition of discrimination). The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence and Violence against Women, to which Montenegro is a party, seeks to provide protection and support to victims through specialized support services (SOS hotlines, crisis centers, counseling centers, legal process support, etc.). The Government of Montenegro has made efforts to, through the adoption of laws and strategies, create a legal and policy framework that would provide an adequate response to the current situation, but support services at the institutional level are not developed, primarily because social work centers do not have sufficient human resources to provide the necessary service. Except in women's NGOs, there is no place where women with experience of violence can talk, share their traumatic experiences and their behaviors as victims, plan concrete steps and decisions, and find ways out of violence. There was no crisis center in Montenegro that offered both counseling and emergency accommodation and the constant presence of a trusted person, although national strategies seek to establish specialized support services to comply with the standards set by the Istanbul Convention.



Having in mind the needs of women with experience of violence, in 2019 the SOS telephone Podgorica started the process of establishing the Crisis Center service, which included licensing two key services necessary for effective protection and recovery of victims, defined by the Law on Social and Child Protection, accompanying protocols and binding acts of the Istanbul Convention. The purpose of the Crisis Center, which is currently the only one of its kind in the region, is to improve the safety and security of women and children with experience of violence through the provision of a licensed specialized service for help and support in crisis situations. The task of the engaged staff is to do everything to stop acute violence against women and children and provide help and support in situations of acute violence, provide temporary emergency accommodation, work on developing internal strengths and potentials of women with violence, especially in overcoming trauma and protection from phys-

ical violence, as well as the psychological integrity of victims, familiarizing the victim with her rights, opportunities and forms of support, mediation between the victim and the police, social work centers, and other services in the municipality of residence.

Background

In Montenegro, the number of reported cases of domestic violence has increased in recent years. For example, in 2009, 481 victims were registered, while in 2019, 2,059 victims were registered in cases from the area of the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence and 327 victims from the area of criminal offenses. The need for comprehensive victim support services is growing. However, support services at the institutional level have not been developed. For 20 years, women's NGOs have been a key support for people at risk of violence. They are characterized by knowledge, experience and commitment, but also good practice in providing support services to victims of violence. Women victims of domestic violence represent an extremely large and multiple discriminated vulnerable group in the community and, in accordance with the law, have the right to psychosocial, social and legal protection. Although well-distributed territorially, social work centers, unlike civil society organizations, do not have sufficient human resources to provide the necessary services and reach all extremely vulnerable groups of citizens.

At the beginning of 2016, the European Commission in Montenegro supported the project "Social inclusion and the rule of law in the process of European integration in Montenegro", which was implemented by the Montenegrin IRIS network. Through this project, relations with key actors responsible for the implementation of social policy in Montenegro have been improved, which has led to the identification of common interests in the development of social protection services. Based on the achievements of the SOS telephone Podgorica, with the support of UNDP in Montenegro, in January 2019 the project "Creating a favorable environment for women's CSOs to provide sustainable social services and influence the development of customer-oriented services" was launched. During the implementation of the project, SOS prepared the necessary documentation for licensing the services of the Crisis Center for Victims of Violence in accordance with the Istanbul Convention. However, it turned out that the Montenegrin legislation and the accompanying Regulations do not recognize the Crisis Center as a special service, and that the organization, in order to establish a Crisis Center, must license two services, namely counseling and emergency accommodation. An additional problem was that the Ordinances did not "recognize" the emergency accommodation service, so accordingly, an initiative was launched to amend the Ordinance that regulates accommodation issues, which was done with the participation of an SOS expert. Defining the emergency accommodation service created

key conditions for the establishment of the Crisis Center.

In 2019, SOS Telefon licensed the “Counseling Service Program”, after which, in 2020, with the support of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, it provided the funds necessary for licensing the “emergency accommodation” service. At the same time, SOS accredited two training programs for professional workers and associates with the Institute for Social and Child Protection, and thus created the possibility for their training, which was a basic condition for obtaining an individual work license, and with it the necessary professional staff to run the Crisis Center was provided.

Description of an innovative and sustainable example

SOS telephone for women and children victims of violence Podgorica, since its establishment in 1997 actively works on the promotion of women’s and children’s human rights, prevention and elimination of violence against women and children. The program goals of the SOS telephone Podgorica are: Improving the level of security and social protection of women and children victims of violence; Reducing domestic violence through better access to services; Improving the legal status of women and children; Strengthening the capacity, knowledge and capabilities of institutions and NGO sectors relevant to the field of protection of women and children from violence; Changing public attitudes and behavior and greater influence on pol-



icies, laws, structures and institutions; Strengthening women’s activism through networking, exchange of knowledge and experiences.

SOS achieves its program goals through a number of programs and activities such as the Service for Support of Women and Children Victims of Violence, which includes an SOS line for women and children victims of violence; counseling services that include psychological support over the phone, individual psychological support at our premises, feminist support, self-support groups for women with experience of violence; legal assistance and monitoring through institutions by the role of a confidant. At the same time, actions for initiating amendments to the legislation dealing with the problems of violence against women and children are being carried out continuously.

Another important activity is research and monitoring programs through scientific research projects related to violence against women and children: monitoring of laws, strategies and policies in the field of violence against women and children and gender equality in general. The educational program includes training of volunteers

to work on the SOS hotline and treatment of women victims of violence, education of women, children and youth on types of violence, women’s and children’s human rights, training of employees in Police, Justice, Center for Social Work, Health and Local Government on treatment of women victims of violence and the topic of gender equality.

Having in mind the needs of women with experience of violence, in 2019 the SOS Telephone Podgorica started the process of establishing the Crisis Center service, which included licensing two key services necessary for effective protection and recovery of victims, defined by the Law on Social and Child Protection, as well as accompanying protocols and binding acts of the Istanbul Convention. and these are: a) The counseling service program which includes the SOS hotline, Counseling and Support through the legal process and b) Emergency accommodation.

The licensing of these services was preceded by legislative harmonization of the existing Ordinances, which did not recognize either the crisis center service or the emergency accommodation service. This was successfully completed at the end of 2019 with the commitment of the SOS Telephone team. At the same time, SOS accredited two training programs for professional workers and associates with the Institute for Social and Child Protection, and thus created the possibility of obtaining their individual licenses, and thus provided the necessary professional staff to run the Crisis Center.

The overall objective of opening the Crisis Center is to improve the safety and security of women and children with experience of violence in Montenegro by providing a licensed specialized service for help and support in crisis situations.

The specific objectives of this innovative service are:

- Stop the acute violence against women and children victims of violence;
- Provide assistance and support in situations of acute violence;
- Provide temporary emergency accommodation;
- Initiate or contribute to the development of the inner strengths and potentials of women and children with experience of violence;
- Begin the process of overcoming the trauma of violence and protecting the physical and psychological Integrity of victims;
- Increase the ability to identify dangerous and threatening situations for the life and health of victims of violence;
- Inform women victims of violence about their rights and protection procedures.
- Crisis Center service program

As already stated, the Crisis Center includes 2 key services necessary for effective protection and recovery of the victim, defined by the Law on Social and Child Protection, accompanying protocols and binding acts of the Istanbul Convention and those are: a) Counseling program that includes SOS hotline, Counseling and Support through the legal process and b) Emergency accommodation

The SOS hotline service (Article 24, Chapter 2.4 of the Istanbul Convention) includes: empowerment and support for victims of violence through information, referral and psychological counseling. Introducing the victim to her rights, possibilities and types of support, mediation between the victim and the police, social work centers, and other services in the municipality of residence, as well as information on possible support within the organization.

Crisis Counseling (Article 16-paragraph 3; Article 18-paragraph 2; Article 22-paragraphs 1 and 21 of the Istanbul Convention) is a service that provides daily support, advice, practical and emotional support to women victims of violence and their children. Individual support includes mandatory support activities for overcoming violence, which must be in accordance with the requirements of the system, which includes the development of an Individual Safety Plan and risk assessment and victim assistance plan. This plan is done in close cooperation of all sectors (police, social work center, health services ...) in order to determine a better plan to help the victim and coordinate activities in the process of helping the victim, in accordance with her needs and choices.

Support through the legal process (Article 55, paragraph 2; Article 56, paragraph 1 of the Istanbul Convention) includes:

- Legal support aimed at acquainting women with the legislation and the possibilities of its application through institutions, advice, consultations, writing lawsuits, requests, complaints, as well as lobbying in institutions for their interests in order to exercise their rights.
- The service of Confidant is a key segment of support through the legal process. Specially trained counselors for domestic violence and other types of violence will provide support to the victim during the investigation and legal process. Includes psychological / emotional preparation of the victim to withstand testimony in the presence of the accused, escorting the victim to court and / or assisting in any other practical and emotional way

Emergency accommodation means the possibility for the victim to be housed in a safe and supportive place, inaccessible to the perpetrator, for up to 7 days, which are considered extremely risky for the victim. The length of stay is defined by the service contract between the user and SOS Telephone. In cases where there is a justified need, the Crisis Center may make an exception for both women and children with experience of violence to extend their stay beyond the specified period. During this period, the user of this service will have the full support of professional workers and associates of SOS, ie. all the above mentioned services will be available to her.

Time availability of the service

Advisory services are available at different time intervals, as follows:

- SOS hotline every working day from 8 am to 4 pm. For the needs of clients and institutions that intervene in the acute phase of violence after 4 pm, telephone calls will be redirected to a mobile phone which will be located at the on-duty professional worker and / or professional associate.
- Crisis counseling provides daily support every working day from 8 am to 4 pm.
- Support through the legal process, including the monitoring of cli-

ents in the role of a Confidant will be provided in accordance with the needs of clients. The service of Confidant may also include situations during the night hours.

- Urgent accommodation is available 24/7,

The professional staff of the Crisis Center, together with the beneficiary, performs a needs assessment within 24 hours of the arrival of beneficiary, in order to provide adequate assistance and support. Needs assessment includes: security, sense of love and belonging, respect and self-accomplishment. Based on the needs assessment, the staff of the Crisis Center creates an individual work plan with the user. The needs assessment and individual work plan are revised in case of unforeseen circumstances. The degree of achieved goals is assessed in relation to the plan, process dynamics, challenges.

The crisis accommodation service is intended for women and children from the territory of Montenegro who are in an acute situation of violence that endangers their safety, life and health. Bearing in mind that out of the total number of detected acts of domestic violence in Montenegro, 56% are registered in Podgorica, the establishment of the Crisis Center service in this city is of great importance. Women and children come to the crisis center on request, which can be sent: in person at the organization's offices, through the SOS hotline for victims of domestic violence, by security centers, social work centers and other non-governmental organizations, and in other ways. Only users with their children, as well as officials of the SOS hotline of Podgorica, can stay in the Crisis Center. If necessary, the Crisis Center can be entered by officials from institutions / organizations and third parties who may carry out repairs with a special approval stating for what period of time and for what purpose it is issued.

The counseling service is intended for women, girls, children and the elderly who are victims of abuse, neglect, domestic violence and exploitation or who are at risk of becoming a victim, as well as persons who support victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence. It is important to note that children who are victims of violence will be additionally referred to special teams within Center for Social Work, and men who are victims of abuse, neglect and exploitation or who are at risk of becoming victims will be referred to other services in the protection system, thus, except the referrals, they will not be users of our services.

In the past year, SOS Telephone Podgorica had 132 users and provided 175 services related to information, legal counseling, applications to CSW and Police institutions, psychological counseling, individual psychological counseling, mediation in shelter accommodation, escorting by the Confidant. Services were provided on the territory of Podgorica, but there were also clients who approached us from the municipalities: Tuzi, Niksic, Kotor, Herceg Novi, Tivat, Plav, Bijelo Polje, Ulcinj, Bar and Pljevlja. The types of violence that were predominantly represented among the users in the past year are psychological and physical violence, in addition, the SOS hotline had cases of cyber violence, peer violence, sexual violence, neglect, human trafficking, economic violence, labor rights (mobbing). When it comes to the age of users, the largest number of users belonged to the group from 31 to 45, then 46 to 67, 19 to 30 years, and the least users

belong to the age group from 62 to 71 years and over 71 years of age. When it comes to children in the past year, the SOS hotline recorded 13 cases with children, of which 9 children were victims of violence, neglect, abuse and children with behavioral changes, 4 children were endangered by the relationships of parents who do not agree about exercising parental rights, then single parents with children without adequate support and adequate living conditions and children without parental care. It is important to note that we are talking about children who were our direct beneficiaries.

Impact on beneficiaries

The impact on beneficiaries is visible on several levels. Women with experience of violence lacked comprehensive 24-hour support during the crisis period after filing a report against the perpetrator, but also continuous support during the process of overcoming the abused woman syndrome, which was overcome by establishing a crisis center and is heading to continuity and diversity of social services at the local level but also improving the social inclusion system.

The key impact on beneficiaries, ie. the changes that occur as a result of the received support are:

- enhanced ability to accept change;
- better psychosocial development and preservation of personal potentials;
- improved quality of relationships with family, group and other persons important to the beneficiary;
- developing skills for recognizing and solving problems;
- development of communication skills;
- developing self-protection and decision-making skills and taking personal responsibility.

Description of the situation before and during the COVID-19 crisis.

The changes caused by the COVID pandemic have greatly affected the user groups involved in the SOS hotline Podgorica, primarily women and children victims of domestic violence. The telephone counseling service in the SOS telephone office in Podgorica before the COVID 19 pandemic was available every working day from 8 am to 4 pm. The global pandemic COVID-19 was an opportune moment to increase the scope of all forms of domestic violence. Therefore, since the beginning of the pandemic in Montenegro, there has been a reorganization of the SOS telephone Podgorica, which has introduced a 24-hour on-call service and, in addition to the two existing ones, has activated another mobile number available to clients. In this regard, the campaign on social networks has been intensified to make contact phones more visible.

As part of counseling services, staff provided 24/7 support and assistance to victims of violence, which in addition to counseling services also included emotional support, which was very important for users during the pandemic. The cases were processed by professional staff at the institutions of the system with the consent of the beneficiary, with joint work on the rapid suppression / cessation of violence. The services in the office were provided depending on the urgency and nature of the case and in accordance with the possibilities, respecting all the recommendations and measures established

by the National Coordination Body in Montenegro. When the situation in the country included a ban on movement at certain hours, this made it impossible to monitor clients through institutions. But a little later, solutions arrived, that is. permissions by which SOS telephone staff were excluded from the ban on movement for the needs of client protection and provision of services.

Government measures during the pandemic greatly affected the functioning of families, especially in situations where both spouses lost they jobs, or were working from home and the like, because space was created for longer and more frequent domestic violence. Women victims of violence also found it very difficult to call for help due to the constant presence of their partners. In this regard, SOS launched a campaign on social networks aimed at motivating citizens to report violence they hear or witness, which has yielded significant results. The SOS telephone, also in order to make it easier for victims to report violence, together with other women's NGOs through the UNDP office, was part of the "Be Safe" campaign, which enabled victims to report violence in a less visible way through an online application.

During the pandemic, the SOS hotline had a 40% increase in the number of reported cases of domestic violence compared with the same period in previous years. The nature of the assistance sought has also changed. Psychological violence, which is characterized by quarrels and conflicts between partners, but also between parents and children, especially adolescents, has come to the fore. Some of the families pointed out the material vulnerability caused by the lack of funds for basic living needs, where the SOS team responded by providing food, chemical and protective equipment packages for clients who turned to us for help.

What is recognizable in this period is the pressure of family, relatives and friends on women "that it is not the time to report violence, because now the priority is to preserve the health and life of the family." All of the above points to the fact that with this pandemic, "the spirit of patriarchy came out of the bottle", which will result in the return of "family values" in the sense that everything, even violence, should be suffered for the sake of preservation of the family.

An area of serious concern that has unexpectedly surfaced in the past is the unwillingness of state authorities to provide adequate support and protection to victims of violence. Special emphasis is placed on police and social services with which employees had daily communication during the pandemic. Serious cases of ignorance of laws and existing procedures, ignorance on the issue of domestic violence, especially when it comes to police services that go out to the field, have surfaced.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Sustainability of the service, which includes budget and project financing

The state conditioned women's NGOs to have a license to operate and raised the standards to the maximum in order for the services to be licensed, but there was no response from the state, as the established licensed services are not yet in the state budget. Although the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare currently funds SOS services, these are funds obtained by the project through the IPA program implemented by the ministry.

When it comes to project funding at the level of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (now the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Social Welfare) there are no clear criteria for obtaining funds in the field of protection against gender-based violence, so contrary to the Istanbul Convention funds to work with women victims of violence are being granted to organizations run by males, with dubious credibility, instead of empowering women's organizations that have been providing support to women victims of violence for decades

Human resources

The Ministry, through its regulations, sets the engagement of professional workers and associates with an individual license for work in social protection as a condition for obtaining a work license. Licensing of them started only a couple of years ago, and these licenses are mostly obtained by people who have just graduated from college, without any previous knowledge and experience in the field of working with victims of violence. In order for the organization to meet the requirements for licensing services, it was forced to hire people without prior knowledge, which could seriously jeopardize the quality of victim support. In order to overcome this problem, the SOS hotline provided numerous trainings for within the organization engaged persons as well as long-term mentoring of their work.

Also, one of the key challenges in the work of the organization since it belongs to the predominantly helping profession is burnout syndrome caused by long-term and intense stress and it reduces the productivity of people with long-term engagement in SOS. Therefore, it is necessary to provide financial resources for working with employees in terms of various types of meditative assistance as well as organizing team building with employees in the organization.

Autonomy of work

Women's NGOs are not equal to other service providers, they cannot, as licensed providers, make an assessment in the field for which they specialize, which is contrary to the spirit of decentralization of the social and child protection system. Centers for Social Work decide who will be placed in emergency accommodation and make a decision in accordance with their assessment, which can cause problems in the work, because it is an emergency service which means "now and immediately" and not after the sessions and consideration by expert teams and / or case managers in CSW. Also, the CSW's staff is given the right to assess the "personal feeling of vulnerability of the victim", which is contrary to all principles and standards of successful treatment and may lead to less access to

emergency accommodation for women. Fortunately, during the amendments to the Ordinance on detailed conditions for providing and using, norms and minimum standards of accommodation services in the shelter, we managed to single out emergency accommodation as a special service, within which clients are accommodated by emergency procedure and the social work center is given 7 days to make a decision on accommodation, which is exactly how long emergency accommodation lasts.

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North Macedonia

Executive summary

Innovation can only be defined as “a new idea, device or method”. However, innovation is often seen as the application of better solutions that meet new demands, unarticulated needs, or existing market needs.^[2] This is achieved through more efficient business products, processes, services, technology, or business models that are readily available to the market, government, and society. The term “innovation” can be defined as something original and more effective, and as a consequence, something new, in the market or society.^[3] Stemming from this perspective and definitions, we are taking into consideration the entire living and political context in which new methods for providing services were implemented as regards to the needs of particular vulnerable groups. One must take into account that what is innovative in one country, it may not be innovative in another, due to the reasons that it already exists as a method or a process. Therefore, the existing national context plays a significant role into constructing this study.

Two NGOs have come forward to be the most suitable role models for bringing upward the innovation on a national level:

La Strada, Open Gate Macedonia - The Association for Action against Violence and Human Trafficking- Open Gate has been working for 20 years on lobby, prevention, education, public awareness raising, direct victim assistance and reintegration, research and networking. It provides long-term care for victims of trafficking and victims of sexual exploitation, including accommodation, medical services, legal services, anonymous consultations and advice, vocational training, and study and employment support. Open Gate represents victims of trafficking and has an active role in creating national policies; run the state shelter for victims of trafficking and sexual violence; conducted a numerous researches and monitoring reports that contribute to improvement of the National programs for assistance of victims of trafficking; running the first and only SOS hotline service in Macedonia specialized for the problem of human trafficking. When the migration crises happened, the Open Gate applied its expertise and in 2014 executed programs for an integration of asylum seekers at the Reception Center in Vizbegovo and provision of outreach protection and support services to refugees and migrants passing through North Macedonia or being accommodated in Reception centers (Vinojug-Gevgelija and Tabanovce –Kumanovo). Staff of over 120 persons were involved in supporting the migrants in the Reception Centers, invested immense time and energy to support the refugees and migrants, trying to identify potential trafficking with human beings among them, operating on the field 24/7, providing services.

Given the gravity of the situation, it also continued to support them with specific focus given to the vulnerable groups (women and children) in early identification of potential abuse¹.

¹ 20 years Action against THB La Strada –video podcast, 11 January, 2020,

HOPS – Healthy Options Project Skopje is an association of citizens that since 1997 has been actively implementing its programs and activities in Skopje and other cities in the Republic of North Macedonia. In 1997, it introduced the first needle exchange program for prevention of HIV/AIDS among drug users and their families in R. Macedonia and three years later it began implementing the first program for support of sex workers in Skopje. Since then, it has successfully developed and implemented programs for drug harm reduction, prevention of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections, as well as programs for social inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized communities in the Republic of North Macedonia.

In working with vulnerable and marginalized groups, both organizations encountered national, financial and/or health crisis at some point, which triggered the changes in methods, approaches, processes or delivery of services in order to meet the needs of the target groups. **The NGOs were not only offering solutions but they very much became the solution.** In certain period of country's development both organizations proved to be an inevitable part of the national system and an innovative model of multi-stakeholder's approach to solving a problem.

Background

Since 2014, the phenomenon of mass migration of economic migrants and refugees from the Middle East and North Africa, who followed the so-called Balkans route, urged the relevant institutions for combating trafficking in humans and illegal migration to take prompt measures. Faced with a complex and troublesome process of identifying victims of human trafficking amongst the migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, required a prompt national response and change in the provision of help and protection to the victims. The institutions didn't seem to have enough capacity to deal with the pressing situations on a very short notice and a prompt response and support was needed.

Following the growing number of migrants who would illegally cross the border, in 2015, Open Gate La Strada moved its work to the field, providing immediate help and support to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, but also working in identification of trafficking in human beings. For this purpose, Mobile Task force teams were established in the Reception centers Vinojug – Gevgelija and Tabanovce. The political context in the country (the political crises) and shift in political power in 2017 meant a delay in administrative procedures.

Having in mind the promptness of the situation, the NGO sector already had the ability to take over numerous provision of ser

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLEgkmP9aes&feature=youtu.be>

vices to a state-owned facility and capacity.

This shift in the model – non-formal approach - representing a national response system - was seen as a necessity. The national response to the prevalence was transferred to an NGO, which already had the professional background with dealing of such cases.

Since 2005, it has been running the first and only shelter for victims of trafficking in human beings, providing immediate help and support to victims in overcoming the trauma inflicted. Up until 2011, it operated as an independent center for victims of human trafficking and was supported by international donors. In 2011, the shelter was transformed into a state center for victims of human trafficking, and since then has been operating under the authority of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, and run by Open Gate. The Ministry covers the running costs, while the program activities, which run 24/7, are provided by Open Gate staff. The shelter receives financial support from various state and international funds. The cooperation is regulated by signed a Memorandum of cooperation with the MLSP for providing its services of the program for reintegration and as well services within the Center for Victims of Trafficking. Additionally, the organization has signed MoU with Ministry of Interior related to identification and referral of cases. The state and institutions are recognizing the expertise of the NGO and see the necessity of joint cooperation. Open Gate is part of the National referral mechanism for victims of trafficking in human beings and has close cooperation with local centers for social work. The knowledge and best practices, as well as the capacity to organize and sustain the provision of needed services were already there. This advantage was recognized by the national authorities as a reliable partnership for cooperation and maintain the operability of the Center. Since 2018, aside from helping victims of human trafficking, the shelter has been offering help and support to victims of sexual violence, too. It is run by a highly competent team of social workers, psychologists and child counsellors, all of whom have vast experience in working with human trafficking cases.

During the peak of the migrant crisis, Open Gate/La Strada provided recruitment and training for over 120 professionals (social workers, psychologists, school counselors, translators and interpreters, etc.), who were subsequently organized in specialized mobile teams, providing services such as:

- Securing humanitarian aid to refugees/migrants and asylum seekers, based on their specific needs (first aid kit, food and drinks, toiletries, clothing, etc.);
- Provision of emotional support, psychological and social counseling, support in overcoming trauma inflicted in the home country or in the course of migration;
- Provision of initial identification, help, support, and referral of at-risk persons in the course of migration, paying particular attention to vulnerable categories;
- Advice and counseling on the possible ways of being reunited with family members;
- Counseling for parents on how to provide care for their children in the course of migration;
- Helping mothers cope with challenges of caring for their newborns;
- Maintaining adequate child hygiene;
- Advice and counselling on dangers and adequate safety mea-

sures during migration;

- Referral to existing services for specific cases. Responding to urgent requests and referral to specific cases where additional support and services are needed;
- Organizing and implementing various educational, recreation and professional activities for children and adults;
- Organizing awareness-raising workshops for refugees on issues related to human trafficking, smuggling, sexual and reproductive health, and family planning.

Between September 2014 and December 2019, a total of 2 545 migrants (799 men, 319 women and 1 428 children) were beneficiaries of the program for vulnerable categories in the process of migration, administered at the Reception Center for Asylum Seekers. During the period of 2016 and 2019, at the Reception Center for Asylum Seekers the Open Gate assistance program encompassed a total of 180 unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, 152 women travelling alone, 62 single parents travelling with their children, 247 children and at-risk adolescents, etc. Moreover, between 2015 till 2019 the mobile teams of Open gate in the Reception Centers Vinojug and Tabanovce assisted in total 118 610 persons, out of which 30 459 women, 44 128 man and 44 023 children (4201 unaccompanied minors). Since the creation of the Program for assistance for victims of trafficking 2005, Open Gate professionals helped and provided services for recovery and reintegration to 168 victims, including 131 persons were placed in a safe and secure environment in the shelter.

HOPS - Options for Healthy Living Skopje has been developing harm reduction programs for more than twenty years. It opened its first program for support of sex workers in 2000 while in 2014 it has opened a Daily Centre for Rehabilitation and Resocialization of Drug Users and their families. Since 2013, HOPS has been developing an outreach program for children who use psychoactive substances. The goals of the program include health and psychological support, social and economic support, legal support, and their empowerment to advocate for their own rights and interests. The drug harm reduction program has multiple services and is available in drop centres or outreach. Drug services are low-threshold services, no documentation required, anonymous and confidential, free of charge and available at a drop in centre and outreach. The program began in 1997 for the prevention of HIV and other blood and sexually transmitted infections through the exchange of injecting equipment and the distribution of condoms and printed materials, health support through basic treatment of long-term and improper injection wounds, and social support. The perceived need for legal support has been provided by HOPS since 2004. According to the needs of the users and the possibilities, the services are being upgraded, so today HIV counselling and testing, creative workshops for creative expression are available.

With the pedagogical and psychological support of the children, the people who use or have used drugs are provided with: literacy, socialization, group and individual educational workshops, help with homework, development of cognitive skills, attending sports and cultural and artistic events and sights. Individual and group lectures and counselling are organized for

the parents of these children on methods and approaches for: proper parenting, strengthening family skills, prevention of domestic violence, stimulating the development of children, developmental needs and opportunities of children and early protection from regression. In addition, literacy classes are held for those people who have used drugs who have not had the opportunity to get an education.

Given the situation, in January 2000 the non-governmental organization HOPS created a comprehensive program for the prevention of HIV / AIDS and STIs among sex workers, men, women and transgender, working outdoors (on the streets) in Skopje, and later among sex workers in Roma settlements in Skopje, as well as sex workers working indoors (private apartments, massage parlours). In accordance with the identified needs of the contacted sex workers, which the existing institutions cannot meet, HOPS upgraded its services by introducing social, health and legal support services; opened its first drop-in centres for sex workers in 2017, started programs aimed at group who are clients of sex workers, but also their families, partners and children, and continuously work on strengthening the community that led to the establishment of a new informal group of sex workers STAR¹. STAR has been operating as a civil society organization ever since².

Governmental and political authorities do not consider sex work to be a matter of discussion, except perhaps only as a public health problem and HIV / STI prevention (Ministry of Health and GFATM-supported grant), the media treats this problem only through its connection with crime and because of sensationalism, the general public is ignorant and interested only in the moral perspective, while the human and labour rights perspective is absent at all levels. All of this underscores the need for future greater involvement of sex workers and their allies in advocating and raising the issue of sex work on the political and public agenda not only as a health issue but also as a human rights and labour issue.

Support for sexual workers and their families program includes direct work with sex workers and their families on outreach that takes place on the territory of the City of Skopje, as well as in the day care centre of HOPS. The program covers a wide range of services whose main goal is to increase the availability of health care and to promote the rights related to human health, as well as to contribute to the process of their social inclusion as full citizens of the country who enjoy their human rights and actively participate in the life of the community.

In the last ten years in Macedonia, only 2 (two) new cases of HIV have been recorded as a result of drug injection due to these programs, while in the last few years, there are no positive HIV case among drug users. Thanks to the legal support of HOPS in particular (as in 2019 a total of 1341 legal services, 3267 social services, 1379 needle and 472 syringes exchange, etc.³) many of their clients (people who use drugs and sex workers) are receiving the necessary free legal aids and strategic litigation due to protection of their rights as well as representing victims of human trafficking before the domestic courts.

Discrimination toward these vulnerable groups mostly comes from institutions, such as police, healthcare institutions and social care centres. The opening of a treatment centre recently received much public attention. Protests were organized because the local population was against the it. Huge segregation is ongoing on all levels for these clients. these clients.

Presentation of the case study

THE CASE OF IMANI

Imani is a 15-year-old girl from Nigeria. She and her six-year-old sister were raised by her mother while her father died two years ago. Imani's life in Nigeria has been very difficult, due to the current political instability in the country and economic hardship:

“There are certain problems in the country. In Nigeria, you know, there is the Boko Haram group and they have a problem with the government. People do not feel safe there and everyone wants to leave Nigeria and go to Europe because life in Nigeria is so hard. So, even if you finish school you can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, you just wander the road without light and that's why everyone wants to go to civilized countries.”

For Imani, Nigeria as a country is insecure and patriarchal with the traditional division of gender roles still present. According to Imani, a woman in Nigeria is expected to respect her husband, no matter who he is or what he does.

After graduating from high school in early 2016, Imani was persuaded by her mother to leave the country due to economic hardships facing the family and political instability in the country. Imani's mother arranged her trip through a person. Imani did not know the person and did not know if her mother had paid for the trip. Her final destination was Denmark because her uncle lived there.

For Imani, the journey was extremely difficult because she traveled for days and could not even remember how long she was with the rest of the group. During the conversation she emphasized that she was traveling in a truck with 30 people (women, children, girls, boys, etc.). Based on her storytelling, the group often received neither food nor water. Also, the space in the truck was very small and there were times when Imani felt that she could not breathe.

Yet she felt that they need to be united, as one family, and help each other, otherwise they would be caught by the border authorities.

Furthermore, when Imani arrived in Turkey, she faced a new problem. A trip from Turkey to Greece, where smugglers usually transport Turkish refugees to the Greek coast in rubber boats, has affected Imani's mental health.

“It was very scary, I was crying and I wanted to go back because the sea swallowed many lives.”

After arriving safely in Greece, Imani continued her journey to Athens. In Athens, she met a friend from Nigeria who was living in an apartment with her family. Imani did not want to say whether

¹ HOPS column, Support for sex workers and their families, <https://hops.org.mk/poddrshka-za-seksualni-rabot-nitsi-i-za-nivnite-semejstva/>

² STAR organizational information <https://starsexwork.org/en/about-us-2/>

³ Data are from the HOPS Annual report for 2019, page 15, link <https://hops.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Godisen-izvestaj-na-HOPS-za-2019-FINAL.pdf>

she paid for food and accommodation. She just said:
-“Nigerian people care about your life and safety.”

In Athens, Imani received a temporary residence permit for a limited period of 2 months. A few days later, after being cared for at her friend's apartment, she decided to leave Athens.

However, during the trip from Greece to Macedonia, Imani experienced an awkward situation. On the way she met three people who



Children sitting at the border crossing point train station

offered to transport her to the Macedonian-Serbian border. Imani thought that people wanted to help her because she was traveling alone and got into the car. She did not think or expect that this would turn out to be a horrible and terrifying experience for her. In the car, one of the boys asked me, “Are you thirsty?” And I said, “Yes.” He gave me water and from that moment on I do not remember what happened. When I opened my eyes I was in some bushes and I saw people's faces, I was tied up and when I asked where I was one of them hit me on the head ... please, I do not want to talk about it... “ Imani later learned that she was in a remote village near the Macedonian-Serbian border. A few days later, Imani managed to escape from those people.

-“I remember it was getting dark and I ran and came across some villagers and asked them for help, and they called the Red Cross. Then the Red Cross took me to camp in Tabanovce - Macedonia and the police came there. “

Imani's case was reported to the local police station in Kumanovo, and then from the Transit Center in Tabanovce she was sent to the Reception Center in Gevgelija. When she arrived at the camp in Gevgelija, she was assisted by field workers from La Strada as an unaccompanied minor. Field workers for initial identification from La Strada provided psycho-social support to Imani. Having previous broad professional experience and expertise, during the initial interview La Strada Open Gate workers have recognized the indication for human trafficking in the case of Imani. Based on the Imani case and information she shared, the team was able to tailor the program in accordance to her individual needs. Social and cultural aspects were taken into consideration while creation of individual assistance plan. Different occupational programs were developed in order to elevate the trustworthiness and cooperation, but also to provide safe environment in the camp. Women and younger girls were taught and



La strada Open Gate worker in the camp in Gevgelija,

given creative activities such as: to sew, to embroider, to learn different occupational skills. Imani wanted to be a hairdresser. After visiting such creative workshops, she was able to articulate positive approach for her future and to find herself in some of the occupations learnt.

Imani, being a minor, passing all of those situations, was scared and gone through severe trauma. The field workers from La Strada provided emotional support, psychological and social counseling, and support in overcoming trauma inflicted in the course of migration. Imani is just one of the numerous vulnerable cases identified on their migration route that were supported by Open Gate La Strada in order to overcome the trauma and to regain its own resilience strengths. Victimized persons often are scared to talk, have fear from additional institutionalized procedures. Involving non-formal/creative method, with very professional support in that individual case represents the entire system how it should work. So the lack of an appropriate mechanism, in such national crises, can be easily supported, by a professional NGO's work and engagement.

HOPS' case is E.

She is a woman with many years of experience in the use of various drugs, but addicted only to opiates. She has not used drugs for a long time and she is on methadone substitute treatment. In the meantime, she works and takes care of her several-year-old child on her own¹. She believes women –drug users can be a working successful mums too. Yet, the prejudices are prevailing and instead of helping them, the system is additionally burdening women-drug users to feel faceless and voiceless..² It was noticeable that it was not easy for E. to express her feelings openly, especially when talking to a man, but she still agreed to talk, happy for the opportunity to share her experiences as a woman who has been using drug use. She started at the age of thirteen, at puberty.

¹ <https://hops.org.mk/zhenamozhe-dakoristi-drogi-i-dauspec-vozhivotot-dabide-majka-daodi-narabota-2/>

² <https://hops.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Screenshot-2020-05-09-at-16.47.16.png>



Photo taken from the website of HOPS

As a teenager, vulnerable to “peer pressure”, friends smoke a joint and “when you are fourteen you want to be “cool”. You want to be accepted, right? And you are too young, you cannot understand some things. And so I started taking drugs. I started with marijuana, so it turned into going to parties with MDMA, ecstasy, speed, cocaine.

There was a lot of cocaine while I was living abroad. And then, at seventeen, eighteen, I already had a problem. So, I was already addicted to heroin. By the time I finished high school, I was already addicted to heroin.”

Coming from a gender –based violence and environment where women using drugs are more vulnerable to sex trafficking and abuse, E. is a case that initiated to consider gender-specific services for girls and women who use drugs:

– „Women are much more vulnerable than men. For example, when she goes to those places to buy drugs, she must be ready for a situation and the woman is much more vulnerable to those situations where a man can fight, a woman must endure. And that’s it. They take their drugs, rob them, there are rapes, there are cases of humiliation out of pleasure. There are many different situations.“

Moreover, the case reflects on the institutional discrimination and building frustration without support for E while she was pregnant, only because she was a drug addict/methadone therapy user.

“As a woman, you can get pregnant. And if you use drugs, it is already another world and Macedonia is not ready for that situation. I mean, the institutions still do not know how to deal with that. As a woman, I love family, right, and I’m addicted. And discrimination has a nasty effect. It makes you feel so horrible that it can push you into serious depression, into clinical depression. That discrimination. “Who let you have a baby?” They tell you to leave the baby in front of the monastery.

There is no one here to sit next to you, hold your hand and explain what to expect. I go to the gynecologist pregnant and if they see a F11 in the booklet and there is no information about you, there are many bad comments, suggestions on where to leave the child. A woman –drug user is nine months pregnant and nine months she is discriminated, every day. Not to mention when I was giving birth. Because you go to the hospital and you have to tell them that you are on methadone therapy. And here there is discrimination, when you give birth. They do not want to touch you, for example. They hold the baby as if a dog had given birth. You have no right. They do not put you with other mothers. They isolate the baby; they isolate you too.¹

¹ <https://hops.org.mk/zhenamozhe-dakoristi-drogi-i-dauspee-vozhivotot-dabide-majka-daodi-narabota-2/>

After domestic violence cases and police not taking immediate actions, E. turned to HOPS and the social and psychological services they provide.



HOPS workers collecting used needles and syringes and drop new medical equipment

“HOPS helped me a lot. They helped me to get my citizenship documents, took me to the hospital, to the Family Center where I could talk about what was happening to me. But I think many women do not know what HOPS offers. Why I was surprised when they covered some expenses for me, for example for the electronic health card. I did not know that HOPS does that if you do not have the opportunity.”

Early prevention and identification are the most important tools to successful case management. In both cases the NGOs played a significant role in the early detection and prevention mechanism, thusly successfully closing the gaps in the national framework. When vulnerable target groups are in question, there is no doubt that there has to be a case-by-case handling approach and non-formal methods used, due to the fact that the laws, by-laws and procedures can’t cover all the details. This is a very positive signal for the NGOs in the region, since it proves that if each has a specific element that sets them apart from the rest, then that value proposition is something that is innovative and it can be scaled up with other organizations as well.

The value proposition is something that differentiate the NGOs from the rest, but can teach others how to think of new methods/ approach that would be the new solutions of the existing problems in different areas.

Both organizations managed to support the beneficiaries in a long – term way, not acting as a one -stop shop system for help. In this regard, both NGOs are continuously altering their methods in order to act as an extended and extensive support to these vulnerable groups. They are successful case studies only because each case is managed at its own pace and need and with methods that bring forward a sustainable wellbeing of the beneficiary.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The work of Open Gate has been recognized as an outstanding example of contributing towards the good cooperation within the protection system. New practices were introduced but many lessons were learned from what was happening on the ground. Compliments were given to its involvement as it was seen as inevitable at that time. This enabled to continue to further deploy its expertise as having an already established solid basis for migrant's management. And without that support, the process of movement through the Balkan route would not be possible to take place¹. Latest statements given from the users of services of La Strada enforces the value they create in the society. "They do not see me as a victim"², was the statement given by a woman - beneficiary of their social service and protection/education/prevention program.

It was not only involving the migration crisis into the system of action, but also incorporating the NGO into the national response mechanism. The method of imminent action and reaction is a win-win situation for both, the institutional and the NGO stakeholder. Migration management has been built up to a model of having a multi-stakeholder approach. With such a framework, this model is seen not only as a complementary work for the institutions, but as an architectural innovation that brings innovation into the overall country system. Bringing altogether the national authorities, inter-sectoral governmental bodies, a CSO and international donors, into creating a joint response towards the migration management can be the only sustainable answer towards social services improvement in this specific vulnerable group. At the same time, funds can be easily distributed and business operation agreed when multi-stakeholders are bringing on the table the resources, capacities, funds and knowledge.

The innovation element in both organizations is present into creating new values in the society. Early identification system is improved, which decreases the risk of trafficking in human beings and potential victims are identified. The HIV prevalence at the national level is very low, with zero new cases among the people who are injecting drugs in the last 10 years. This helps the healthcare system to recover quickly especially in COVID pandemics, not to burden it additionally with these treatments.

One may conclude that providing social services and support programs from NGOs to the beneficiaries may bring forward the feeling of security and stability for the target groups. Therefore, beneficiaries would no longer feel discriminated and rejected. All of this decreases the risk of violent behaviour and increase in criminal cases. Programs created for people who use drugs, sex workers, etc., through their active involvement in activities based on creative-artistic activism³, are more than innovative approach to solve the persistent issue of discrimination and public judgement, and judgement from the public institutions as well.

The service beneficiaries already see that although the state should be providing greater access to free psychological and psychiatric services, yet, it would be more appropriate if this is applied in non-formal approaches and locations. Even getting out of the buildings that represent the institutions is seen already as a step towards a new method and building a trustworthy relation with the beneficiary. This applies to men, women and transgender, but especially to women. There should be testing centers for sexually transmitted infections and they should be gender sensitive, because there are women who have been raped or engaged in sex work.

When working with vulnerable groups, the approach it is from utmost importance. Having an informal organization, and not an institution, may be seen as less formal and intimidating. At the same time, it can also bring value to the society by increasing the trustworthiness in the system by providing an NGO to take over the provision of services.

Creating societal values is the greatest challenge for all societies. Receiving funding from the institutions as for the Shelter Center and for the medical equipment for HOPS, only proves this is a model that the country sees it as a very valuable contribution and sustainable innovation. The migration management shifts the country from representative case study to a successful participatory story of early identification. All measures for the target groups are fragmented into handling individual human being cases, and not general statistics. Each case has its own story and prevalence, therefore the approach and service is customized.

Both organizations are people-centered and solution-oriented, as NGOs must be at all times and situations ready to be very innovative to address different situations. Using these non-formal approaches as national supported and funded programs and services shows the readiness of the country to implement multi-stakeholder approach both on a horizontal and vertical level. Therefore, we acknowledge and repeat the statements that would give boost to further implementing this model: "The representatives of the authorities highly value the contribution and dedication of the NGOs in addressing migration issues and assisting migrants and victims of trafficking, especially vulnerable categories⁴. NGOs suggested a more planned and coordinated action of the competent ministries with the relevant stakeholders⁵, as well as enhancing their role in the provision of services⁶.

The entire value that is created from both organizations are trustworthiness in the support system and the increase of the scale of personal/human security. Both organizations were creating values for the society, and at one point became THE value for the society.

1 IRIS re-granting promo video, 07 October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fNjZV-9Jioc&list=PLSquS4wwDMNH61-88whtFObBz0QyCcyt&index=3>

2 IRIS networking. The role of the civil society sector, 11 January, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Re-79iMcZ5bw&list=PLSquS4wwDMNH61-88whtFObBz0QyCcyt&index=5>

3 Project – Re-use mind, 2020, link <https://hops.org.mk/reupotrebi-go-umot-2/>

4 Chapter 24 – North Macedonia Shadow Report, Association for action against violence and trafficking in human beings Open Gate, page 15, 10/11/2020

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

Contacts

OPEN GATE

www.lastrada.org.mk

<https://www.facebook.com/OpenGateMacedonia>

<https://twitter.com/OtvorenaPorta>

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HOPS

www.hops.org.mk

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Smile Vlasotince



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ongoing COVID-19 epidemic has seriously endangered social dimensions and realities around the globe. At the European level, it challenged the attempt to rebalance European integration and reduce social inequalities between and within countries as well as between generations. Secondly, it hindered the attempts to enhance welfare systems that could respond to the current global challenges of climate change, digital transformation, globalization, ageing and migration. Apart from spreading an unprecedented health threat, COVID-19 exerted enormous pressure on economies, social protection systems, human rights, democratic values and governance, both at local and national levels. As Serbia needs to strengthen social dialogue and generally increase the level of preparedness and crisis response mechanisms to reach out to the most vulnerable, there has been a variety in the levels of capacities, resources and creativity in combating the repercussions of the pandemic by civil society organizations and municipalities.

Moving forward through this unparalleled crisis, some CSOs such as Association of Citizens “Center for Education - SMILE”, managed to maintain a positive outlook, discover agility and resilience within its own organization and in partnering up with the beneficiaries and the local community. Despite all the hardships, “SMILE” used the COVID-19 predicament as an opportunity to reinforce its team with new skills and to build on the trust between its beneficiaries and the local citizens based on shared accountability and responsibility.

BACKGROUND

Association of citizens “Center for Education - SMILE” is a non-governmental and non-profit association, founded in 2011 to attain goals in the field of community service. It provides social protection services for people with disabilities of different ages, as well as for people with intellectual and mental disabilities and challenges. “OSMEH” is seated in Vlasotince in one of the least developed municipalities of the Republic of Serbia. Within the Association, 58 employees and about 20 volunteers are engaged in providing services in the field of social and humanitarian work, on the territory of the Municipality of Vlasotince and the Municipality of Crna Trava with a total of 33,000 inhabitants.

The Association currently provides services in the area of: homecare assistance to elderly and people with disabilities in the municipalities of Vlasotince and Crna Trava, Child personal companion, as well as Work and Educational Unit Bee Working Unite(ed) – a program to support people with mental and intellectual disabilities. This program enables beneficiaries to improve their skills of independent living in the community, acquire work habits and a more positive image of themselves, as it also prevents the risk of institutionalization by organizing creative-developmental and educational trainings in the premises of Bee Working Unite(ed). Through its scope of work, seeks to increase social inclusion of people from vulnerable social groups, as well as the degree of community sensitivity to the specific needs of people with disabilities.

As part of the Home Help for the Elderly service, the “SMILE” Association provides assistance and support to improve the quality of life for 217 users from the elderly population, people with physical and sensory disabilities and mental and neurological disorders with the age span of 26 to 96.

The Service “Personal Companion of a Child” covers 27 users with pervasive developmental disorders and intellectual and multiple disabilities of the age group from 6 to 18. The Bee Working Unite(ed) program includes four users with disabilities and intellectual and mental development difficulties from the age group 24 to 45, as well as 15 people from 12 to 24 years old.



PRESENTATION

The beginning of the pandemic caught "SMILE" in the routine implementation of its regular services and activities. Once the corona virus has spread and the measures have taken place, the Association's professional team reacted promptly and began to adapt to the new situation. They were challenged to urgently change the way they behave and work, and started thinking of new ways to implement the activities they had already planned out prior to the crisis. Since business as usual was not an option any longer, they managed to quite efficiently adapt the activities in accordance with the needs of their beneficiaries and the community, as well as to come up with several new ones:

- Volunteer activities to provide homecare services for the elderly
- Bee Working Unite(ed) - Making masks and instructions on self-protection of citizens
- Providing the service "Child Personal Companion" via Internet
- Psychosocial support - SOS telephone
- Humanitarian actions

Volunteer activities to provide homecare services for the elderly
As a part of the Home Help service, 40 volunteers were organized to carry out this activity throughout the corona virus pandemic. These volunteers supplied regular beneficiaries of this service every day, but also provided assistance to all others in need, primarily elderly fellow citizens who needed help the most. Volunteers of the "SMILE" Association visited more than 250 elderly people who are not regular beneficiaries of the service, but due to the imposed state of emergency, they found themselves in dire need. A large number of volunteers contributed to a greater coverage of populated areas. Thus, in addition to the central part of the town, they were able to pay visits to the elderly from 17 rural areas on the territory of the Municipality of Vlasotince. As the volunteers were able to drive to even the remotest areas, the reach was outstanding.

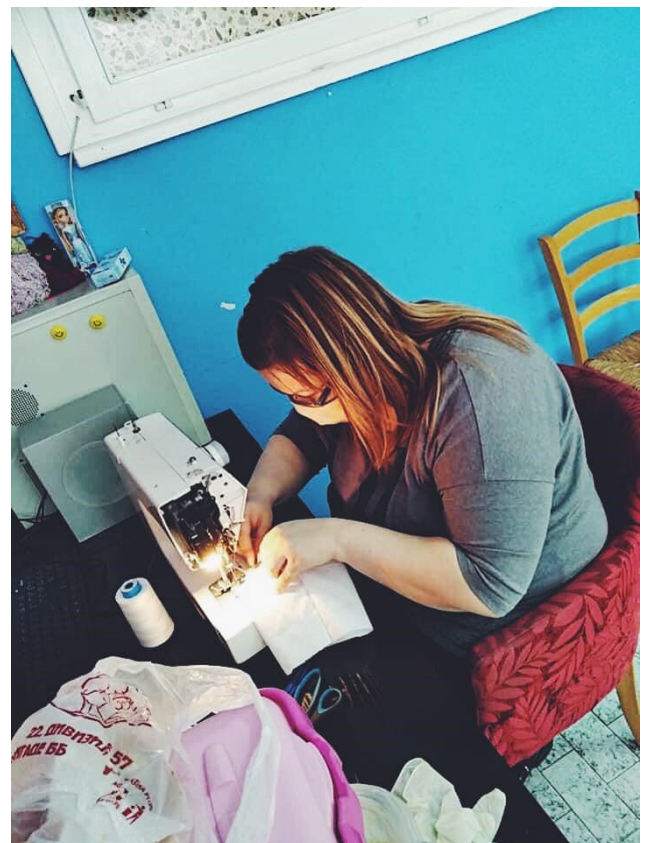
During the visits, all volunteers acted in accordance with the recommendations of the Ministry of Health, wore protective equipment and did not enter the homes of the beneficiaries. The services provided by the volunteers were primarily related to the procurement of basic life supplies, hygiene products, purchase of medicines, delivering pension pay checks, paying bills and representing the beneficiaries in the local Health Center, the Center for Social Work and other public institutions, with the authorization of the beneficiaries. Every day, three drivers with two vehicles were at the disposal to the citizens in need, who volunteered in different shifts so that as many people in the field as possible could be reached in one day.

Thanks to the self-protection and precautionary measures taken, no cases of Kovid 19 have been reported among volunteers, but there have been two cases of infection among beneficiaries. According to SMILE, the virus was brought by family members who were later treated for it. For volunteers who worked with infected beneficiaries, a preventive test was performed on Corona, and the results were negative. This data pointed to the fact that the highest risk of virus infection is present among family members who move from home to work. Based on that, SMILE gave recommendations to all beneficiaries and their relatives to pay additional attention to the hygiene of the household, as much as possible.

"Bee Working Unite(ed)" - Making masks and instructions on self-protection of citizens

Due to the lack of protective masks in the first weeks of the pandemic, volunteers of the "SMILE" Association, the hardworking Bees - people with mental and intellectual disabilities - joined the national initiative of sewing masks which has been started out by NGOs, workshops, and individuals across Serbia.

Thus, the premises of „Bee Working Unite(ed)“ became a true tailoring workshop for sewing masks free of charge. As there was general deficiency of masks in the country, reusable cotton and chiffon masks were sewn for medical workers, geronto-housewives, beneficiaries in the field, as well as for the fellow citizens. During the production process, Pcelice beneficiaries were in charge of cutting strips, rubber bands and ironing masks, which were distributed further without any compensation. In addition to the masks, flyers with recommendations for self-protection of citizens during the pandemic were also distributed. The action was more than successful and the hardworking beneficiaries of Pcelice felt useful and good about themselves, as they contribute to combating the COVID-19 crisis in their own capacity.



Reusable cotton masks, which were made by the "Bees" in accordance with their capabilities, were distributed to citizens who were currently without any masks, as well as to those who needed a spare one, in order to raise awareness of the importance of respecting prescribed measures and protect any personal, as well as the health of family members, co-workers, and members of the community.

Through the direct participation in this action, the Bees contrib

uted to the improvement of the quality of life of the community to which they belong, positively influenced the collective responsibility and once again showed their great humaneness.

Providing the Child Personal Companion service via Internet

The provision of the service in the changed circumstances also required changes in the modality of providing and using the service. For the dramatic changes in communication, SMILE needed to switch to virtual communication platforms and channels, which was a great novelty for the Association.

The remote work was performed by employees with the beneficiaries of the Child Personal Companion service, which included daily online communication (via video call) and electronic communication with the parents. The activities were related to helping and supporting the beneficiaries to continue to progress in their social, emotional and intellectual field during the prolonged epidemic.



Beneficiaries were supported in the following areas: assistance in getting used to the changed living and educational conditions, work on improving and retaining attention, improving communication and social skills, encouraging independence in daily activities, encouraging prosocial behaviors. Also, the role of the professionals at SMILE was reflected in the structuring and organization of free time for the beneficiaries (watching TV content, reading books, educational and social games), as well as encouraging both the youngest and older beneficiaries to engage in physical activities, stay in shape, and go out in the fresh air in the nature whenever possible. This entire activity, even though entirely switched online, had positive repercussion for both physical and mental health of the beneficiaries and enabled a continuation of support despite the grave and challenging circumstances.

Psychosocial support - SOS telephone

In order to protect the mental health of the elderly, but also of all citizens who needed psychosocial support during the pandemic, the expert team of the Association "SMILE," consisting of two psychologists and one special educator, opened communication platforms for online psychological support, and were available to fellow citizens

via SOS phone line every working day.

The impact of the pandemic on mental and psychological health was severe. In that sense, psychosocial support provided during the pandemic was reflected in the physical and mental empowerment of beneficiaries to better cope with the stress, anxiety, fear and difficulties that come with the situation in which we have all found ourselves, as well as ways in which these emotions can be overcome or at least mitigated.

Humanitarian Actions

Even in the dramatically changed circumstances which pulled our lives inside out, the Association "SMILE" remained consistent with its core mission and vision and turned to organizing humanitarian actions in a totally new way. In order to protect the health of their employees and beneficiaries alike, as well as all the fellow citizens, SMILE organized online humanitarian auctions where handicrafts made by Bees in cooperation with their assistants were sold. When the epidemiological situation was favorable, bazaars were held in the town center in compliance with the prescribed epidemiological measures.

The funds raised from the bazaars and online auctions were used to purchase educational materials and materials needed for art workshops for children, youth and adults with disabilities. Part of the money was paid for the treatment of children, youth and adults from the "Be Human" Foundation. One of the humanitarian actions organized by the "SMILE" Association was the collection of well-preserved second-hand clothes and shoes as well as hygiene products that were intended for fellow citizens in a state of dire social need, and especially for families with many members and elderly households. The Association also organized the traditional New Year's Bazaar where all the funds gathered were used to purchase additional educational and didactic material for the beneficiaries.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The pandemic has exhausted, preoccupied, alienated and affected everyone around the globe. It exerted ongoing pressure on individuals, societies, local communities, governments, countries, and systems. In such gloomy and unpredictable time, the SMILE Association has decided to stay true to its mission to put smiles on people's faces. In order to succeed in that endeavor, they have planned to launch new creative workshops within the Bee Working Unite(ed) ¹program in 2021. They have planned to devise innovative approaches in providing services to the fellow citizens every day and find new ways to bring back the much needed smiles on the faces of their beneficiaries, co-workers, partners and supporters.

One of the most crucial lessons learnt during the pandemic was development of new communication and social skills, strengthening of personal capacities to overcome the crisis and helping the beneficiaries and fellow citizens alike to more easily deal with

1 (the Association uses a symbolic translation of the program- Bee working unit(ed)) since "Pcelica" means "bee" in English

problems that are global in nature but affect all individuals at the local level.

Moreover, the experience in planning short-term and adapting to rapid changes, which has been absolutely necessary for the design and implementation of activities in critical situations caused by COVID-19, was especially important to the Association and shaped the manner of decision making and preparing for unpredictable outcomes in the future. The overall COVID-19 experience has shown them that a current lack of a plan that would hold the situation could be compensated by the innovation and creativity of the members of the organization, as well as better mutual communication and exchange of ideas.

Also, the unconditional help of the fellow citizens was of great importance to the Association, because in the initial phase of the pandemic, when everyone was caught off guard and there was not enough material to work with, it was exactly the members of the community who responded positively to the Association's call for help. Thus, SMILE has learned the overall valuable lesson - the crisis can be a huge factor in uniting communities and organizations, bringing about the best in people - kindness, empathy, togetherness, sacrifice and at the end – victory over any situation. And a smile is their victory!

From the standpoint of what the entire world has been experiencing with the COVID-19 threat and within the corona virus context, it is extremely rare to meet an organization that went through one of the most challenging and difficult years health and business wise with so much optimism, a positive approach and a variety of activities such as SMILE. They reacted to problematic situations with solutions, to challenges with ideas, they learned a lot about the capacities of their organization, but also about the local community in which they provide services. Such an example of innovative practice, but above all a positive approach, is needed by everyone in the region and beyond.

The joint forces of civil society organizations, local communities and local self-governments are the best way to approach the needs of the beneficiaries of social services and citizens alike. Association of citizens "SMILE" recognized and practiced this during the times of the unprecedented crisis, and that is one of the most important messages with which they are turning to new challenges.

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Jesuit Refugee Services



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JRS Serbia is a humanitarian non-governmental organization that has a mission to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights and needs of refugees in the country. COVID-19 predicament has seriously challenged the ways JRS Serbia operated and fulfilled its activities. Besides that, European migration policy, either at the EU level or within the member states, continued to adversely affect refugees, asylum seekers and other forcibly displaced person which reflected on Serbia, as well. Refugees and migrants, children in particular, became ever more vulnerable. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a massive public health crisis with numerous fatalities around the globe. In order to provide timely response to the prevention of pandemic, the countries have introduced various measures, aiming at the protection of public health. The spread and transmission of COVID-19 in Serbia also had a profound impact on the ability of national health system and primary health care to respond to the scenarios and maintain continuity in the delivery of essential services. All relevant actors, including CSOs, have struggled to adequately and timely adjust their roles and activities to the current health context. Innovating, adapting, improvisation, and make-do have replaced business as usual and called for new methods and approaches in the face of the unprecedented predicament while the roles, responsibilities, capacities, and the means of funding were seriously challenged on a day to day basis.



On the brighter note, JRS Serbia marked a three - year anniversary of its Integration House “Pedro Arrupe” for the most vulnerable unaccompanied and separated minors in Serbia. The Integration

House not only continued to provide safe accommodation, food and clothes, paying special attention to highly traumatized children, victims of trafficking, victims of labor exploitation and victims of abuse, but also provided children the opportunity to continue their education and with a chance for a safer childhood, despite the circumstances. Throughout the crisis, JRS continued to advocate for the rights of refugees, against negative and simplistic media representations and narratives, by including positive examples and voices of those they support. JRS Serbia experience described in this Innovative Case Study may serve as an example of good practice to all actors involved in refugee protection in Serbia in the fields of integration, protection and promotion of human rights of children.

BACKGROUND

Unaccompanied minors belong to one of the most vulnerable groups in the refugee population given that they travel alone without anyone to protect them. The number of children on the move worldwide is still on the rise. In 2018, for instance, 19.700 asylum seekers applying for international protection in EU were unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) while in 2019 there were 14.100 applications from unaccompanied minors. At the same time, more than 2.800 UASC were identified in the Republic of Serbia. Only last year, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia accommodated 1.888 unaccompanied minors in its centres. Government of Serbia has put the protection of UASC high on the priority list, but due to an increased influx of UASC since 2015, most of them are accommodated in the asylum and reception centres together with adults, where they are exposed to risks of violence and exploitation. Alternative available shelters in Serbia specialized for accommodation of UASC can accommodate only a small number of children – between 5 to 10% (in 2019 there were nearly 1.500 UASC identified in Serbia, and the capacity of accommodation facilities was at 72 beds – 40 in state institutions and additional 32 beds in alternative shelters.)

Jesuit Refugee Service in Serbia (JRS) was established in 1994 to cater to the needs of refugees and displaced persons from the Balkan wars. With an increased influx of migrants, it reopened its operations in Belgrade in 2016. JRS staff counts 12 professionals, who over the years provided support for more than 8.000 refugees, migrants and asylum seekers. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it hosted dozen international volunteers every year. Apart from its core mission, JRS Serbia works to strengthen the integrative (multi-sectoral) approach to support refugees in Serbia as well as to run a shelter for unaccompanied and separated children refugees – Integration House “Pedro Arrupe” – and to work on other segments of support to refugees and asylum seekers in Serbia.

Central project of JRS Serbia is Integration House “Pedro Arrupe” – Shelter for Children Refugees – providing accommodation and support for unaccompanied minors 24h a day, 7 days a week, funded in total by foreign donors, as JRS has no access neither to government funding nor to the EU or other international organizations’ funds directed at Serbia, due to the non-existing procedure for funding of non-government shelters (home) for children in the country.

Bearing in mind a large number of migrants stranded in Serbia, creating a situation that Serbian public and authorities did not encounter so far, JRS’s operations and efforts are directed to demonstrate that CSOs are an important part of the pillar to deal with this situation. It’s activities and goals are aiming to show the relevant ministries, the city authorities and all other decision makers that this type of support for migrants and asylum seekers will contribute to their future participation in the overall development of the society and social reality we share.

PRESENTATION

Compared to the EU countries, the WB6 region has less experience with integration of migrants, especially children and youth. In that sense, the Integration House itself is an innovation in Serbia and the region. Through the extensive field work, communication with other CSOs and the government institutions, JRS identified a gap in the protection of unaccompanied minors and established the above mentioned Integration House in May 2017. Since then, it provided accommodation to more than 80 children, who were identified as victims of physical, psychological and sexual violence, exploitation, smuggling and potential victims of human trafficking or they were just too young to be on their own. Integration House is for boys exclusively, since there are no capacities to accommodate girls separately. JRS Integration House “Pedro Arrupe” provides full protection for UASC - social protection, medical care, educational opportunities, socialization, and integration support. Children refugees who arrive in Integration House are coming from different national and individual backgrounds, so their individuality in education, socialization, and integration process is particularly important. Numerous challenges can only be addressed if unaccompanied and separated children refugees are recognized as individuals with specific needs, rather than as a homogenous group for whom the same interventions are planned as applicable.

The House ensures that the children have the opportunity to continue an active education in Serbia. Beneficiaries who stay longer than a month, are enrolled in the local school system while informal educational and creative activities are organized to strengthen their education. Pedagogues at the House are available to help with schoolwork and maintain strong ties with the teachers. Apart from schooling, pedagogues at the House are also working on cultural integration. In cooperation with partner organization Psychosocial Innovation Network, physiological support is also provided to those who suffer consequences of the trauma they survived. JRS staff is not only trained through different non –

formal education trainings, but also licensed by the government of Serbia to provide social protection. This is significantly contributing to the level of expertise and quality of protection provided in the JRS Integration house. The Integration House gives children the opportunity not only for a solid education but also encourages quality leisure time to explore the environment, hobbies, and passions.



Different sports and athletic activities, field trips and excursions are an integral part of the boys’ life at the House. Naturally, many things have changed in the face of the pandemic. JRS housed 15 beneficiaries last year, ages from 8 to 18, mostly from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. The House’s capacity is 12 children while 15 is the maximum that could be maintained for a shorter period. Throughout the pandemic, Integration House has been strictly applying all preventive measures in protecting children and personnel, and still providing full scope of education and integration activities. As the school year was not over when the epidemic emergency and lockdown were announced, JRS team has concentrated on mastering the education material through online classes and assisting children, so that everyone successfully finished the academic year (two high school students with excellent grades). JRS continued to receive regular support from psychologists and child psychiatrists. Although it was a state of emergency, it had several cases for which it was necessary to go to the hospital and which needed to be monitored. JRS team also focused on occupational therapy for children. COVID-19 threat has left children worried and perplexed not only about what might happen to them if they catch the virus but mostly how their dear ones back home are coping. JRS team organized a series of illustrative and interactive workshops explaining what corona virus is, how it is transmitted, what are the mandatory steps to protect oneself and included children in a contest where the work of the creator of the best COVID-19 inspired material, be it a drawing or illustration or a writing, would be exhibited in the joint living room area as a reward. This resulted in the fact that all children understood and accepted the anti-corona measures and there was not a single case of curfew violation throughout the lockdown and other restrictions. Together with children, JRS team arranged a garden and terrace, decorated it with flowers and plants in order to be able to spend more time outdoors. Every morning, sports and physical activities of children and educators alike were practiced, while afternoons were reserved for online classes, workshops and home

work. Teachers were involved via Skype for academic consultations when necessary, while legal guardians from Social Welfare Centre were contacting children online, at least once a week, and had conversation with them about their problems during epidemics, school issues, and all other teenage problems. In the evening, JRS organized a home cinema 3 times a week, where children selected movies and also played various board games. Excursions in the nature were organized whenever possible.

Apart from successfully running the Integration House throughout COVID-19 threat, JRS team had a unique and challenging experience in providing institutional psychiatric support to an unaccompanied minor which serves as a basis for a change in future practice. At the end of February 2020, a boy from the Integration House left the accommodation with the intention to illegally cross border and continue the journey due to the constant family pressure. In conversations with professional workers and educators, he stated on several occasions that he has a sincere intention to remain in Serbia, but his family strongly opposed. Upon leaving the Integration House, the boy spent two weeks in an abandoned factory near Hungarian border. Other groups of migrants repeatedly physically attacked him, stole his phone and other possessions. Unable to cross the border, he returned to Belgrade and on the request of a government social worker, he was again accommodated in the Integration House. Child psychologist was immediately engaged to work with the boy to overcome the trauma.

At the same time, lockdown was declared in Serbia, and all the beneficiaries who were accommodated in social protection institutions were banned from leaving the premises. During the state of emergency, JRS organized activities for beneficiaries according to their needs and the new situation. The minor's condition worsened rapidly, he became self-aggressive (auto destructive) and seemed to have lost contact with reality. The boy was taken for examination to the Clinic for Neuropsychiatry and Psychiatry for Children and Youth, accompanied by JRS social workers, because his legal guardian did not have a movement permit during curfew. The boy was denied admission due to the deficiency in capacity to provide adequate care and treatment along with the management's explanation that the majority of patients at the Clinic are small children treated for epilepsy, typically accompanied by their mothers, but due to coronavirus these children were hospitalized alone with just one doctor and a nurse in the entire hospital ward. Since the minor was not admitted that day, JRS staff returned with him to the Integration House and organized additional personnel to watch over the boy. Even with prescribed medicaments, his condition worsened and he soon needed to be taken to hospital again, which refused to admit him once again. In a meantime, JRS staff visited several other psychiatric institutions, but all had some bureaucratic reason to refuse the boy, despite an evidently bad health condition. As he could not be accommodated in the Integration House any longer, the case manager from the Social Welfare Centre took him to "Miksaliste" where he was assigned a 24h supervision, until an adequate solution (hospital) was found. After more than a week, through a lot of pressure exerted by JRS, other NGOs, and government institutions, the boy was finally hospitalized and received the treatment that stabilized his mental condition.

This grave experience opened Pandora's box when it comes not only to the approach toward psychiatric assistance for unaccompanied children refugees and migrants in Serbia, but it also exposed a much broader problem of the limited capacities to tend to children with mental problems in general. JRS has mapped the steps it has taken in its endeavours to improve the overall approach to psychiatric assistance for all children, regardless if they are migrants or local. Firstly, Ministry of Social Welfare and their Coordinator of Team in Charge of Unaccompanied Migrants has been informed about the situation from the beginning. Coordinator of Legal Guardians, and the Head of Service for Children and Youth of the Social Welfare Centre Belgrade were informed as well. JRS also consulted psychologist and the child psychiatrist from an NGO PIN who were involved in working with a minor and who are also members of the Working Group for Mental Care of Refugees and Migrants in the Republic of Serbia. None of them had an adequate solution at the time. After 10 days of pressure from several sides, mostly from the government social protection system, the minor was hospitalized at the Institute for Mental Health. Moreover, JRS, PIN, and other non-governmental organizations for the protection of human rights reported the case to the Ombudsman of Serbia who was obliged to propose further action under the assumption that a right and access to healthcare has been violated. The Ombudsman organized a meeting gathering representatives of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, Social Welfare Centre Belgrade, PIN, "Laza Lazarevic" Psychiatric Clinic, and JRS. It was stated that lack of capacity to hospitalize minors with psychiatric disorders is an old, unsolved problem. The Psychiatric Clinic has a department for minors, but in insufficient capacity for older teenagers and this problem affects all minors in the Republic of Serbia, not just migrant children. Representatives of JRS suggested that it is necessary to involve all relevant actors as soon as possible and open additional accommodation facilities for minors with psychiatric problems. The Ombudsman's recommendation was sent to the Working Group for the Protection of the Mental Health of Refugees, which includes state bodies and decision-makers on the government level. Due to Covid-19 emergency and additional hospitals being constructed and adapted for COVID-19 patients, this problem is not yet in the focus of the Health Ministry, but JRS is following this issue and will continue to advocate for the improvements in this domain.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic, JRS Serbia has maintained the work of their Integration House for unaccompanied and separated children refugees in Belgrade. All the children who found a shelter there during epidemic have continued their education under supervision of JRS social workers, pedagogues, and tutors. At the same time, JRS team employed additional efforts to provide medical support to the children in need. Additional needs that arose during epidemic included:

- Increased need for disinfection and protective items and materials for children and employees, such as medical masks, disinfection materials, hygiene materials, hygiene gloves, etc.

- Increased need for fuel for transport of employees during closure of public transport
- Creating larger food reserves for children due to limited work time of shops and lockdown
- Providing clothes, bedsheets, and towels for children
- Providing more workshop materials
- Additional engagement of employees in work with children in closed environment the House
- Increased number of classes, Serbian, English, and IT in particular, and homework assistance

The ongoing COVID-19 epidemic proved to be a learning experience for JRS. The team in Serbia has learned how to organize work and transport of employees in the epidemic emergency and closed public transport, how to protect health of children and employees from the COVID-19 infection, but to maintain education, socialization, and integration activities. So far, JRS Integration House is among a few children shelters in Serbia that remained without any case of COVID-19 infection among children and em-

to support refugee and migrant children in Serbia. Understanding Serbian social welfare legislation as it relates to refugees is a basis to build a strong network with partners from government and non-government sector, to identify appropriate resources and obtain services to beneficiaries.

JRS has been connecting children refugees to timely, appropriate medical care in the Serbian health and social system without creating parallel structures that could further stigmatize refugees. More so, JRS is in a good position to advocate for the rights of children in other fields such as education, healthcare, community-based services and better legal protection. Having experienced staff members who are working directly with UACS since 2017, JRS is the most relevant NGO in Serbia that have the capacity to provide support and trainings to employees of key actors in the field.

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ployees. JRS team has also learned how to re-arrange educational activities and organize additional classes from school subjects in the period of prohibited visits of teachers and colleagues from other NGOs and how to maintain regular contact with partners from government and NGO sector, and to continue information exchange on the issues regarding the provision of support to the most vulnerable population of refugees and migrants in Serbia. However, Integration House is working with a bare minimum of employees. If the financial resources allowed, the recommendation is definitely to employ additional pedagogue, psychologist, or social worker, to provide a more stable base of employees in case that illness or other emergency occurs.

Finally, JRS has been strengthening an integrative approach



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ASB SEE, Germany - Arbeiter Samariter Bund - is actively involved in return and reintegration of refugee and displaced persons program, socio-economic inclusion of marginalized groups, the provision of transitional inclusion of Romani people, and the strengthening of civil society in South-Eastern Europe.

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Initiative for Social Change ARSIS, Albania – delivers quality programs for children in vulnerable situations, disadvantaged youth, marginalised women and families by establishing strong and influential relationships with government bodies and civil society organisations.

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