

first years
first priority



Early Childhood Development in

SERBIA

Country Profile 2021*

Serbia has made some efforts over the past years to deliver on **early childhood development (ECD)** policies and to support families with young children. Specifically, the Government of Serbia has issued a national “Call for Action for Support to Early Childhood Development” which aims to initiate coordinated and comprehensive ECD action and invest in children from the prenatal period to entry into school. There is almost no national legislation however guaranteeing access to basic ECD services in Education, Health, Nutrition, and/or Social and Child Protection for ALL children under six. Thus, for the moment, universal ECD policies with a cross-sectoral approach are one of the first priorities.



POLICY AREAS
IMPACTING ECD →

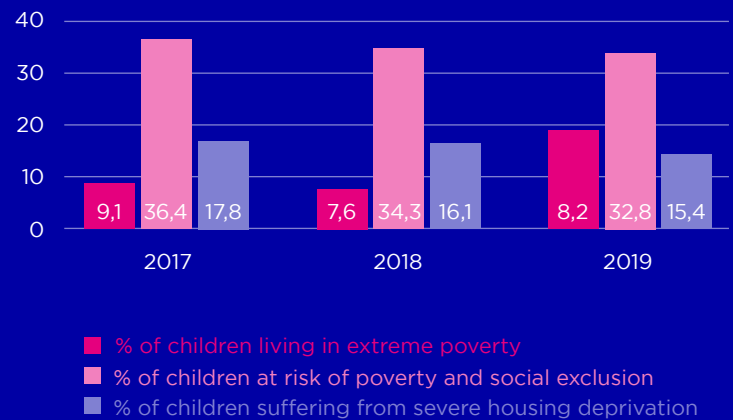
Country PRIORITIES

- Develop a coherent cross-sectoral approach to ECD supported by legal and strategic documents.
- Develop a systemic comprehensive system of support to all parents from a child's prenatal period to six years of age.
- Ensure that each child up to six years of age has access to health, social and education services.
- Include child-specific priorities in the documents of the Economic and Financial Dialogue.
- Introduce specific measures for targeted support for families and children in view of the COVID-19 crisis.
- Give special attention and support to families near the poverty line.
- Strengthen social dialogue with various stakeholders, including civil society organisations and parents.

CHILD POVERTY

In Serbia, there is **sufficient data on child poverty and social exclusion**. Data available indicate that over the last years the percentage of children suffering from poverty and social exclusion slightly decreased. However, according to the National Statistics Bureau, the percent of children living in extreme poverty or at risk of poverty and social exclusion is constantly higher than 40% of all children in Serbia (45,5% in 2017, 41,9% in 2018 and 41% in 2019). Single parent households and households with more than three children are at higher risk of poverty. In addition, data suggest that the lower the educational level of parents the higher is the risk of poverty for children.

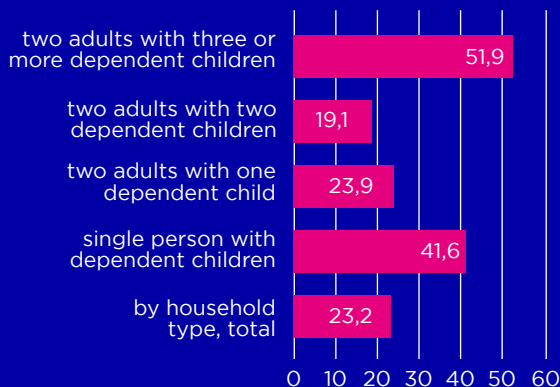
Child poverty



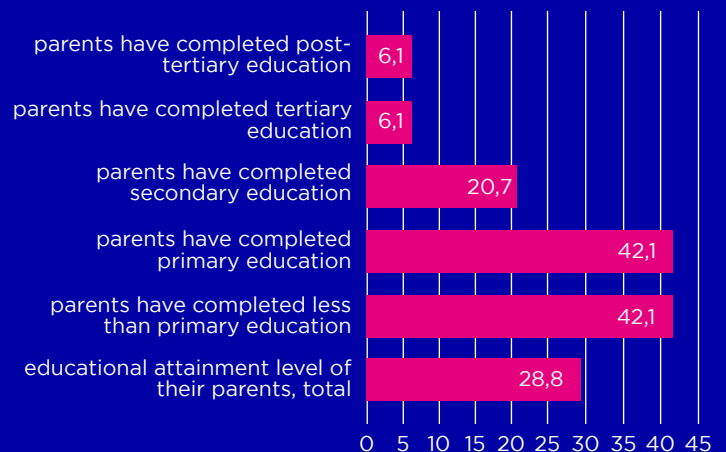
Source: *National Statistics Bureau; Eurostat, 2018 and 2019 data*

At-risk-of-poverty rate for children by educational attainment level of their parents (%)

At-risk-of-poverty rate by household type (%)



Source: *National Statistics Bureau; Eurostat, 2018 and 2019 data*



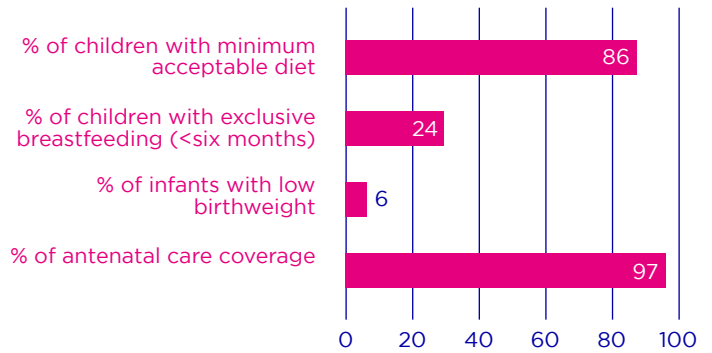
Source: *National Statistics Bureau; Eurostat, 2018 and 2019 data*

2

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Emergency medical care and vaccinations are the only health services guaranteed for everyone, and which do not require personal documents. Available data indicate that in 2019, 97% of women were attended four or more times during pregnancy by any health service provider. There are some differences by socio-economic status. Only 78% of women from the poorest households had a visit during the first trimester of their last pregnancy while this was the case for 91% of women from the richest households. In 2019, six percent of infants weighed less than 2,500 grams at birth and 24% of children aged birth to five months were fed exclusively with breast milk, whilst 86% of children aged six to 23 months received food from less than four (out of seven) food groups during the previous day.

Maternal and child health



Source: *UNICEF*
2019 data

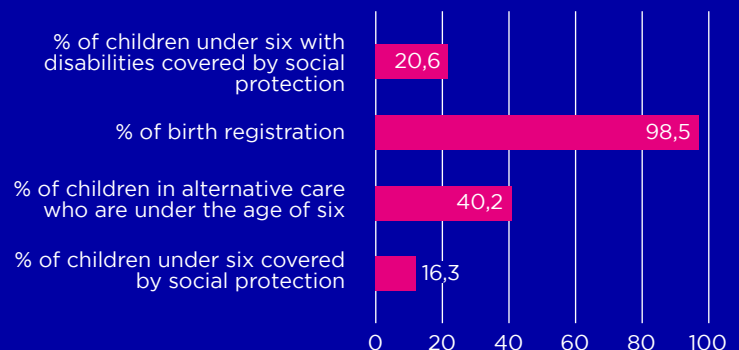


3

CHILD SAFETY AND SECURITY

In Serbia, children below three years of age are protected by law from institutionalisation, but there is no such guarantee for children above three years old. Available data from 2019 indicate that in Serbia **not all children are registered after their birth**. Only 16,3% of children under six years of age are covered by social protection and only 20,6% of children with disabilities under six years of age are covered by social protection. In addition, out of all children in alternative care, 40,2% of them are under six years of age.

Child safety and security



Source: *National Statistics Bureau*
2019 data

EARLY LEARNING

In Serbia, one year of preschool is mandatory (age five years and six months to six years and six months) prior to enrolment in elementary school. This service is accessible to all children regardless of possession of personal documents. Available data indicate that the early learning coverage for children aged zero to three is extremely low and that is also the case for children from three years to five years and six months – especially when comparing to the EU targets and all the strategies, including the National Strategy for Education Development in Serbia.

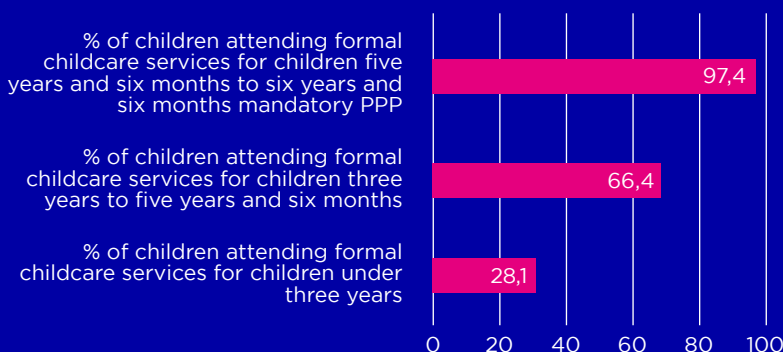
Types of policies available to facilitate ECEC access of children from vulnerable families:

- [Law on Preschool Education](#)
- [Law on Foundations of Education](#)
- [Strategy for Education Development in the Republic of Serbia until 2020](#)
- [The Action Plan for the Implementation of the 2020 Strategy for Education Development in Serbia](#)
- [Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2025](#)

The capacity of ECEC services to ensure the inclusion of children under six from historically marginalised groups

- Mandatory inter-sectoral teams for development screening and early intervention
- Individual educational plan as a means for the inclusion of all children. This includes two types: one for children with developmental difficulties and the second for children who lack knowledge of the language
- A free, half-day, mandatory preschool programme for nine months prior to enrolment in elementary school
- Special education needs teaching assistants

Early learning



Source: [National Statistics Bureau](#)
2019 data



PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT

In Serbia, there are **various parenting support** services for families with children up to the age of 18-years-old who belong to vulnerable groups. These include, but are not limited to: a special monetary compensation; the right to an allowance for providing assistance and care to another person; a one-off monetary allowance accessible to cover basic needs during difficult financial situations; accommodation services (institutional care, accommodation in the home of a relative, foster care or other family for adults and the elderly, accommodation in a shelter and other types of accommodation); daily community services (daycare, home-based help for supporting families of children with developmental difficulties that need sustained assistance); evaluation and planning services (assessment of the condition, needs, strengths and risks of the beneficiary, assessment of the guardian, foster care and adoptive parents, etc.); support services for independent living (supported housing, training for independent living, etc.); advisory-therapeutic and social-educational services (intensive support services for families in crisis, counselling and support for parents, foster parents, adoptive parents and others); and emergency and temporary accommodation services.

Types of policies available regulating work and family life balance

- Right to maternity leave for up to one year after the first child, two years after the second and three years after the third
- Right to father's parental leave¹
- Right to work from home and distance work

Benefits available to parents with young children

- Means-tested child allowance
- Parental allowance: one-off payment for every mother who gives birth (up to the fourth birth); the lump sum amount (adjusted twice every year) depends on the number of children.
- Cash benefits for unemployed new mothers*
- Cash benefits for victims of domestic violence*
- Cash benefits for families for the fourth-born and every subsequent child*

**Note: In the box the benefits marked with an asterisk refer to benefits that a local municipality can but is not obliged to provide in addition to the regular ones that are available at the state level.*

¹ Fathers are allowed to take leave for child care only once the child is three months old and they can use this right up until the child is one year old.

CROSS-SECTORAL COORDINATION

In Serbia, although there is no legislation guaranteeing access to basic ECD services in Education, Health, Nutrition, and/or Social and Child Protection for all children under six, there are **two explicitly stated national multi-sectoral ECD strategies** in place (or other policy documents):

1. [Government of the Republic of Serbia: Call for Action Support to Early Childhood Development](#)
2. [Rulebook on Additional Support for the Educational, Health, and Social Needs of the Child, Learner and Adult](#)

In addition, formal mechanisms for collaboration between services also exist in the [Decree on the National Programme for Improvement in the Development in Early Childhood 2016/2017](#). At local levels, the mechanisms include local Inter-sectoral Commissions, Inter-sectoral Commissions for early interventions at municipality level and the Strategy for Preventing and Protecting Children from Violence 2020–2023, with an accompanying Action Plan.

*The information provided in this Country Profile reflects the situation at the end of May 2021.



Country Profile Contributor

POMOC DECI

This material has been produced with the financial support of the European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) 2014-2020: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi> and with support from Open Society Foundations.

The views expressed by the authors do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

THE PARTNERSHIP

Eurochild is a network of almost 200 member organisations from 35 European countries working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. Eurochild influences policies to build internal capacities and facilitates mutual learning and exchange practice and research.

International Step by Step Association (ISSA) is an early childhood regional network founded in 1999, which through its programmes and services connects early childhood practice, research, and policy to improve the quality of early childhood systems in Europe and Central Asia. More than 90 ISSA Members from 43 countries implement programmes and cooperate to ensure quality and equitable early childhood services for young children, especially the most vulnerable.

European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) is Europe's leading NGO alliance advocating for better health. A member-led organisation made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups, EPHA works to improve health, strengthen the voice of public health and combat health inequalities across Europe.

Roma Education Fund (REF) was created in the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005. Its mission and the ultimate goal is to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. To achieve this goal, the organisation supports policies and programmes which ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems.

Campaign coordinator: Dr. Agata D'Addato, Senior Project Manager Eurochild (agata.daddato@eurochild.org).

National Coordinators: [Trust for Social Achievement \(Bulgaria\)](#), [Ensemble pour l'Éducation de la Petite Enfance \(France\)](#), [Central Union for Child Welfare \(Finland\)](#), [Family, Child, Youth Association \(Hungary\)](#), [Children's Rights Alliance \(Ireland\)](#), [Fundação Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso \(Portugal\)](#), [Step by Step Center for Education and Professional Development \(Romania\)](#), [Pomoc Deci \(Serbia\)](#), [Plataforma de Infancia \(Spain\)](#).

#FirstYearsFirstPriority
FirstYearsFirstPriority.eu



Eurochild
Putting children at
the heart of Europe



epha european
public health
alliance

