

Child-Protection Systems – Serbian Perspective

Veljko VLAŠKOVIĆ

ABSTRACT

It is in the best interests of the child that he or she grows up with both parents who take care of him or her jointly within a functional family. However, certain situations necessitate support and assistance for the child and the family from society and the state for the child to continue to exercise his or her rights within the primary family environment. If such support and assistance is sufficient, the child may be temporarily or permanently deprived of a family environment, states are obliged to provide the child with alternative care. Through the structure of a country-report, this paper presents the main features of the child protection system in Serbia and the way in which Serbia respects the obligation to provide the child at risk with the right to special protection and assistance in accordance with Art. 20 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children. Although the outlook provided is general, it is an integral overview of the child protection system in Serbia, including the normative framework of protection, guiding principles that are applied when providing support and protection, the structure of the child protection system, followed by a review and consideration of a wide range of welfare services and protective measures that are available to children and families in crisis situations. Special attention is paid to the child's participation within the protection system, as well as the position of children with disabilities and children in street situations, who are extremely vulnerable groups.

KEYWORDS

child rights, child protection system, Serbia, support, social services, measures of protection, alternative care

1. Introductory Notes

The results of the population census conducted in 2022 shows that the Republic of Serbia has 6,647,003 inhabitants.¹ Serbia is an old country in terms of the average age structure of its population, which is close to 44 years, while the largest share of its population (29.20%) comprises residents over 60 years of age.² The share of children

1 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2023.

2 Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2023; see also: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2023.

Veljko VLAŠKOVIĆ (2025) 'Child-Protection Systems – Serbian Perspective' in Jakab, N., Benyusz, M. (eds.) (2025) *Child-Protection Systems*. Miskolc–Budapest: Central European Academic Publishing, pp. 227–259. https://doi.org/10.71009/2025.njmb.cps_6.

in the total population of Serbia is only 17.4%, which is a consequence of its extremely negative natural growth.³ All these indicators emphasise the greater need to establish an adequate and efficient national child protection system.

In 2022, the share of children in the social protection system in relation to total number of children was 14.5%.⁴ In the same year, in relation to the total number of children in the social protection system, 7.32% of them were children with disabilities, although this share is significantly higher when considering services from the domain of social protection, especially residential accommodation service.⁵

2. The Core Aim of the National Child Protection System

The normative framework for the national child protection in Serbia was primarily established by the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (2006),⁶ Family Act (2005)⁷, Social Welfare Act (2011)⁸ and the Act on Financial Assistance for Families with Children (2017),⁹ being further developed by a series of appropriate by-laws adopted by the Government or the Ministry responsible for family and social protection.¹⁰ Furthermore, Serbia has ratified all major global and regional international treaties on human rights and child rights that involve economic, social and cultural rights.¹¹ Some of the child rights recognised and formulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter: CRC)¹² have been incorporated into the Family Act, but even without this, the CRC, as ratified international treaty, may be directly applied by the courts and administrative authorities in Serbia, whose position in the

3 Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2023, p. 5.

4 Ibid., p. 6.

5 Ibid., p. 45.

6 Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, 'Official Gazette of the RS', No. 98/2006 and 115/2021.

7 Family Act, 'Official Gazette of the RS', No. 18/2005, 72/2011 and 6/2015.

8 Social Welfare Act, 'Official Gazette of the RS', No. 24/2011 and 117/2022 - decision of the Constitutional Court.

9 Act on Financial Assistance for Families with Children, 'Official Gazette of the RS', No. 113/2017, 50/2018, 46/2021 - decision of the Constitutional Court, 51/2021 - decision of the Constitutional Court, 53/2021 - decision of the Constitutional Court, 66/2021, 130/2021, 43/2023 - decision of the Constitutional Court and 62/2023.

10 For example, Rulebook on Detailed Requirements and Standards for the Provision of Social Services, 'Official Gazette of the RS', No. 42/2013, 89/2018 and 73/2019; Rulebook on Foster Care, "Official Gazette of the RS", No. 66/2022, Rulebook on the Organization, Norms and Standards of the Work of the Social Work Centre, 'Official Gazette of the RS', No. 59/2008, 37/2010, 39/2011 - other Rulebook, 1/2012 - other Rulebook, 51/2019, 12/2020 and 83/2022.

11 For example, Serbia ratified the following United Nations treaties in the years listed below: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1971), Convention on the Rights of the Child (2001), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2009). When it comes to the international human rights treaties of the Council of Europe, Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms was ratified in 2004, as well as the European Social Charter (revised) in 2009.

12 The United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989.

hierarchy of legal acts is just below the Constitution and above any other national source of law.¹³

According to the Constitution, every family and child in Serbia enjoys special protection in accordance with the law, with particular reference to the protection of children with physical or psychological disabilities.¹⁴ Simultaneously, individuals and families that need social assistance and support in order to overcome social and life difficulties and create conditions for meeting basic life needs have the right to social protection.¹⁵

A family is recognised as the fundamental social unit in the Family Act and, hence, is entitled to the special protection of the state.¹⁶ This provision should be interpreted extensively in terms of protecting and providing support to the family environment in which the rights of each and every child is exercised to the greatest extent possible. In this context, the principle of the best interests of the child implies that a child should grow up and develop within stable family surroundings that include a functional family with adequate parental care.

Consequently, the state's obligations include enabling the broader social and legal preconditions for the establishment of a functional and supportive family, protecting a stable and nurturing family environment, providing assistance and support to a family in crisis in order to strengthen family and parental capacities as much as possible, or providing the child with alternative family-based surroundings or family-like environment whenever required.

Thus, according to the Family Act, the state is under the obligation to provide a child bereft of parental care with protection in a family environment whenever the need arises.¹⁷ Such an approach reflects a family-oriented policy in which priority for the protection of a child without parental care is given to the family or a family-like environment, while residential care is seen as an exception or the last resort.

However, protection is provided not only to a child without parental care, but also to a child who is at risk of losing parental care, as well as to other vulnerable categories of children whose development is jeopardised due to various psychological, health, moral or financial issues concerning themselves, their caregivers or relationships within the family or wider social surroundings.¹⁸ Therefore, social protection of the child involves not only the provision of alternative care services, but primarily and, above all, ensuring that families and parents 'have the access to adequate forms of assistance and support in their caregiving role'.¹⁹ These measures and assistance services are provided both by the Family Act and the social welfare law aimed at

13 Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, Art. 194 paras. 4–5.

14 *Ibid.*, Art. 66 paras. 1, 3.

15 *Ibid.*, Art. 69 para. 1.

16 Art. 2 para. 1 of Family Act.

17 Art. 6 para. 6 of Family Act.

18 In that context, see the Social Welfare Act, Art. 41, para. 2.

19 The United Nations, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2009, 64/142 Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (Hereinafter: UN Guidelines), para. 3.

preventing the breakup of the family, elimination or reducing the deficiencies in the exercise of parental responsibility, strengthening parental capacities and enabling the appropriate exercise and protection of the child's rights. Family law measures are fully child-oriented, including preventive and corrective measures over the exercise of parental responsibility. Social protection and welfare services, as well as measures of material support provided by the Social Welfare Act, are more diverse and family-oriented with the aim of having impact on the very causes that led to the endangerment or violation of the rights of the child.

Considering that a family is 'the natural environment for the growth, well-being and protection of children',²⁰ one of the key proclaimed goals of the national child protection system in Serbia is to preserve and improve family relationships.²¹ Therefore, various measures of personal and material support for the family are legally recognised and provided by a normative framework in order to ensure that the child is not to be separated from his or her parents and remains in their care whenever possible. Thus, efforts are made to prevent disturbing the child's emotional attachment to his or her parents or caregivers. In this context, competent state authorities are the ones to decide on alternative care only if the previously implemented family support measures and services did not lead to adequate protection of the child's rights. Unfortunately, in certain cases, alternative care becomes a necessity, for instance, situations where parents are no longer alive or when they are unknown or deprived of parental responsibility in accordance with the law.

In recent decades, Serbia has been making significant efforts to improve the child protection system, making it more efficient and ready to respond to various challenges and problems in the protecting child rights. However, significant problems persist, making it difficult to implement rules effectively in the field of child protection, which inevitably has a negative effect in the achievement of the proclaimed and desired goals in this area. The general causes of the problems lie primarily in the insufficient availability of material and personnel resources, a relatively low national income, prevailing social prejudices, as well as the increased need for the inclusion of children and their families in the social protection system due to global and local crises, financial insecurity and pandemics that adversely affect the mental health of the population and individuals.

For example, some of the specific problems observed in the domain of alternative care concern reducing the number of children under the age of three, including those with disabilities, in residential care institutions;²² strengthening support to children leaving alternative care;²³ and raising awareness to combat stigmatisation and dis-

20 UN Guidelines, para. 3(4).

21 Art. 3 para. 1(4) of Social Welfare Act.

22 The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia, 7 March 2017, para. 40(a). Hereinafter: CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3.

23 CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3, para. 40(f).

crimination of children in alternative care.²⁴ Further, it has been shown that children in foster care stay too long in foster families, which contradicts the goals of this temporary form of child care that aims to reintegrate the child into his or her family of origin or have the child adopted.²⁵ Another unfavourable trend is the transfer of children within the child protection system from one foster family to another or from one residential care institution to another facility.²⁶

3. Guiding Principles of the National Child Protection System

Respecting the CRC, other international treaties on human rights, the UN Guidelines and other relevant international documents, the child protection system in Serbia is based on the following guiding principles: the best interests of the child,²⁷ prohibition of discrimination,²⁸ the right of the child to have his or her views duly taken considered in accordance with the child's age and maturity,²⁹ respect for the integrity and dignity of the child and his and her family members,³⁰ providing services in the least restrictive environment,³¹ provision of timely and comprehensive protection³² and accessibility and individualisation of social protection.³³

As pointed out in legal theory, the obligations of the States Parties to guarantee the best interests of the child represent the central idea of the CRC.³⁴ Considering the child's best interests is one of the general principles of the CRC, according to which the scope of all rights of the child is interpreted and determined.³⁵ In accordance with the Family Act, 'everyone is obliged to be guided by the best interests of the child in all activities concerning the child'.³⁶

The entire system of child protection rests on the idea of appropriate application of the concept of the child's best interests. Therefore, this principle is applied when choosing the type of support and assistance for the child and his or her parents or caregivers, regarding all decisions concerning alternative care, as well as on determining the most suitable measures for the child leaving alternative care. The child

24 Ibid., para. 40(g).

25 Thus, according to one conducted research, children between the ages of 5 and 12 have the least chance of leaving foster care. Žegarac, 2014, p. 16.

26 Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2023, p. 14.

27 Art. 6 para. 1 of Family Act; Art. 26 of Social Welfare Act.

28 Ibid., Art. 25.

29 Art. 65 para. 3 of Family Act.

30 Art. 24 of Social Welfare Act.

31 Ibid., Art. 27.

32 Ibid., Arts. 29–30.

33 Ibid., Art. 33.

34 Schmahl, 2021, p. 71.

35 Art. 3 para 1 of CRC and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 5 (2003) General measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Arts. 4, 42 and 44 para. 6), 27 November 2003, para. 12. Hereinafter: CRC/GC/2003/5.

36 Art. 6 para. 1 of Family Act.

protection system in Serbia involves some by-laws, whose contents regarding the best interests of the child are more closely determined by specifying certain elements or by providing guidelines for its interpretation based on adopted international standards in this area. Thus, the Rulebook on Foster Care from 2022 provides the elements and guidelines for determining the content and interpretation of the best interests of the child in this form of alternative care. For example, these elements and guidelines, among others, include giving preference to kinship foster families if the child's relatives meet the legal requirements for foster parents, choosing foster parents primarily from the child's original environment, non-separation of siblings, limitation on the number of children in the same foster family (maximum of three children or two in the case of children with disabilities), preserving the identity on the child and review of the eligibility of foster parents on a regular basis.³⁷

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child also singles out the prohibition of discrimination as one of the general principles of the CRC.³⁸ As a generally and widely recognised legal standard from international human rights treaties, non-discrimination is guaranteed by the Constitution of Serbia,³⁹ Act on the Prohibition of Discrimination (2009)⁴⁰ and through a series of legal sources from various fields, including the Social Welfare Act.⁴¹ The Act on the Prohibition of Discrimination defines the concept of discrimination and its forms and types besides providing mechanisms of protection against discrimination (lodging a complaint with the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, initiation of special proceedings before civil court and so on).⁴² In accordance with the highly detailed and comprehensive definition provided by this Act:

‘the terms ‘discrimination’ and ‘discriminatory treatment’ mean any unjustified distinction or unequal treatment, i.e. omission (exclusion, limitation or priority), in relation to persons or groups as well as members of their families, or persons close to them, on an open or covert manner, based on race, colour, ancestry, citizenship, national or ethnic origin, language, religious or political beliefs, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual characteristics, income level, property status, birth, genetic characteristics, state of health, disability, marital and family status, convictions, age, appearance, membership in political, trade union and other organisations and other real or assumed personal characteristics.’⁴³

37 Art. 11 of Rulebook on Foster Care.

38 CRC/GC/2003/5, para. 12.

39 Art. 21 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia.

40 Act on the Prohibition of Discrimination, ‘Official Gazette of the RS, No. 22/2009 and 52/2021.

41 Art. 25 of Social Welfare Act.

42 Arts. 2, 5–7, 35–40, 41–46 of Act on the Prohibition of Discrimination. It is not within the competence of the Commissioner to decide on the rights and obligations of the individuals and legal entities, but to issue appropriate warnings and recommendations, or to submit legal initiatives, See: Petrušić and Grubač, 2014, p. 73.

43 Art. 2 para. 1 of Act on the Prohibition of Discrimination.

Regarding discrimination of children, it is expressly forbidden to treat them differently solely upon

‘their state of health, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual characteristics, ethnic origin, nationality, marital or illegitimate birth, public appeals to give preference to children of one gender over children of the other gender, as making a difference according to the state of health, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender characteristics, ethnic origin, nationality, property status, profession and other characteristics of social position, activities, expressed opinion or belief of the child’s parents, i.e. guardians and family members.’⁴⁴

One of the examples of discrimination faced by the child in Serbia is related to the problem of removing a child from parental care solely due to the financial or material poverty of his or her parents. This deeply disturbing malpractice that occurred occasionally was opposed strongly by the issued opinion of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality⁴⁵.

When it comes to the possible grounds of discrimination against a child or other users of services in the social protection system, the Social Welfare Act also prohibits discrimination based on ‘the nature of social exclusion’.⁴⁶ Social exclusion does not necessarily involve discrimination, but it is often its consequence.⁴⁷ Hence, it is important to provide every child with access to social protection services, regardless of the grounds of discrimination that resulted in his or her social exclusion.

All decisions concerning child care and protection should take into account the child’s right to express his or her own views freely in all matters in accordance with the child’s age and maturity.⁴⁸ The principle of child participation is recognised by making each decision about the child in the social protection system by referring to the provisions of Family Act, the Social Welfare Act and the CRC and in accordance with the best interests of the child.⁴⁹ In certain cases, the views of the child have decisive importance (e.g. a child who has attained the age of 10 and who is able to reason has to give his or her consent to the establishment of foster care).⁵⁰

Furthermore, the national system of child protection is also based on the principle of respect for the identity and dignity of the child and his or her parents. This principle implies respect not only for the physical and psychological integrity of the child,

44 Ibid., Art. 22.

45 Opinion of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality regarding the complaints of A.Ž.C. against centres for social work due to discrimination on the basis of financial status in the field of social protection, No. 07-00-401/2013-02 from 15 October 2013.

46 Art. 25 of Social Welfare Act.

47 Jelić and Kolarević, 2016, p. 215.

48 Art. 65 paras. 1, 3 of Family Act.

49 See also: Art. 35 para. 3 of the Social Welfare Act.

50 Art. 116 of Family Act.

but also for the moral, cultural and religious beliefs of the child and his or her parents and family in accordance with the child's best interests.⁵¹ Further, authority measures and social services should be provided to the child in the least restrictive environment by choosing measures and welfare services that allow the child to remain in his or her family or family-based surroundings whenever possible.⁵² The principle of 'the least restrictive environment' corresponds to the principle of proportionality, which is recognised in family law when deciding on measures of corrective supervision and, in particular, when making decisions on the deprivation of parental responsibility.⁵³

The child protection system in Serbia also follows the principle that services and forms of child protection must be available, accessible, adjusted to the individual child and provided in a timely manner. The national child protection system must be flexible, since the need for social protection and child welfare services may often arise suddenly when it is necessary to act urgently in order to protect the rights of the child. In this context, it is extremely important that the child's needs are recognised in a timely manner and appropriate care and protection are provided to the child as soon as possible. The timely provision of social protection measures and services comes to the fore especially in extreme cases of domestic violence, child abuse or gross neglect, child abandonment, situations when the child lives on the street and all other cases where the safety or health of the child is directly endangered. To deal with such situations, various forms of protection and social services are available, such as immediate accommodation in a shelter, urgent kinship placement, urgent foster care and emergency placement in residential care.⁵⁴

4. Maintenance of the Child Protection System

The child protection system in Serbia is based on preventive, corrective and other protection measures, social welfare services and material support for the child and his or her family. Protection measures are taken by the competent administrative or judicial authorities in cases where state intervention is required due to deficiencies in the exercise of parental responsibility or to decide on the care of a child without parental custody. These measures mainly involve the decisions of the state authorities in the domain of family law protection. Social welfare services and material support include assistance and various forms of social support for a child and his or her family in order to preserve or improve family relations, create opportunities for independent living, social inclusion and development of a child to the extent possible, as well as ensure his or her safety.

51 Art. 24 of Social Welfare Act.

52 Ibid., Art. 27.

53 The principle of proportionality is the international standard by which courts must be guided when restricting certain qualified human rights. See: Vujović, 2019, p. 55.

54 Arts. 47 and 49 para. 1(3), Art. 53 para. 1(3) of Social Welfare Act, as well as the Rulebook on Foster Care, Arts. 5, 8.

In accordance with the Social Welfare Act, the child, in addition to other beneficiaries, realises his or /her right to social protection through appropriate social welfare services and by providing material support aimed at ensuring the existential minimum and support for social inclusion of the child as a beneficiary.⁵⁵ The social welfare services provided to the child by the social protection system of Serbia can be divided into assessment and planning services, day services in the community, support services for independent living, counselling and therapy services, socio-educational services, as well as child placement services.⁵⁶

Social protection of the child is organised at the national, regional or local level, which implies the obligation of the state, regional or local authorities to ensure provision of appropriate social welfare services.⁵⁷ Most of these services may be provided by private licensed organisations, or can be entrusted to them by the Republic of Serbia; an autonomous province or local self-government can sign a contract with the best licensed service provider that responded to the announced public tender.⁵⁸

Funds for social welfare activities are provided in the budget of the Republic of Serbia, by the autonomous province or local self-government unit, as well as through the performance of activities of social welfare institutions.⁵⁹ These funds can be obtained through donations, as well as by assigning property or establishing endowments and foundations in accordance with the law.⁶⁰ Funds for social welfare services are also provided by the user or his or her family members who have the duty of maintenance established by law, as well as third parties who have taken on the obligation to bear the service costs for the child.⁶¹

In the domain of social welfare services, Serbia has decentralised social protection in terms of decision-making and financing, but not in the field of providing material support, which, with the exception of providing one-time assistance, is the responsibility of the central government.⁶² In terms of financial support significant for child protection, the state allocates the most funds for compensation of earnings during maternity leave and leave from work to carry out child care (54.7%), followed by expenses for parental allowance (19.9%).⁶³ It should be noted that these two mentioned measures are not from the field of social policy, but their primary goal is the protection of parental employment rights, as well as the implementation of the pronatal population policy (e.g. the parental allowance usually belongs to the mothers for the birth of the first four children).⁶⁴ The expenses for the accommodation of children in the social protection system, as of 2021, the state bears 64.9% of the share

55 Ibid., Art. 4 para. 2; Art. 5 para. 2.

56 Ibid., Art. 40.

57 Jovanović, 2020, p. 8.

58 Art. 64 of Social Welfare Act.

59 Ibid., Art. 22 para. 1.

60 Ibid., para. 4.

61 Ibid., para. 6, along with Art. 212, para. 21.

62 Matković, 2014, p. 16 and p. 25.

63 The given data refer to 2021: Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2023, p. 58.

64 The given data refer to: Ibid., p. 57.

of expenses for family accommodation (kinship care and foster care) while it bears 35.1% of the share in the expenses for residential accommodation.⁶⁵

Regarding the responsibility for providing child welfare services, the competence is divided among central, provincial and local authorities. Thus, the central or provincial government is responsible for assessment and planning.⁶⁶ Unlike these services, day welfare services in the community, involving activities that support the child's stay in the family and in his or her close environment, are provided by the local self-government.⁶⁷ Local self-governments also provide services in terms of supported housing to adolescents who are leaving the social protection system. However, the central government is obliged to provide supported housing to a child or a young person with disability, unless the child is under the jurisdiction of a local self-government, which is above the national average, according to the degree of development.⁶⁸ In such cases, more developed local self-governments finance these services. Local authorities provide counselling and therapeutic services and socio-educational services, with the exception of counselling and training of foster and adoptive parents.⁶⁹ In this context, local self-governments can also provide the services of a family assistant, which is not the standardised welfare service, but it is recognised through the systematic interpretation of the Social Welfare Act. A family assistant is a social welfare professional, who, with the support of an expert team, cooperates with the family aiming to prevent the removal of the child from the family of origin, providing support for the child's return to the family and preventing child neglect or abuse.⁷⁰

Finally, for the provision of the child accommodation services, the responsibility is divided among the central government, regional authorities and local self-governments, in accordance with the Social Welfare Act.⁷¹ Thus, central and regional authorities provide family accommodation (kinship care, foster care) and residential accommodation services, while local self-governments are responsible for the

65 The given data refer to: *Ibid.*, p. 58.

66 Assessment welfare services include assessment of the condition, needs, strengths and risks of the beneficiary and other persons important to him/her, as well as the assessment of guardians, foster parents and adoptive parents, while planning services involve adoption of individual plans for the protection of child and his or her family (e.g. a plan for the independent life of a child who, before turning 14, was deprived of parental care, or he or she did not live with the parents). See: Art. 43 of the Social Welfare Act.

67 Art. 44 of Social Welfare Act. Those day welfare services include: day care, home assistance, drop-in services or service of the child's personal assistant. See: Art. 44 para. 2 of the Social Welfare Act and the Rulebook on Detailed Requirements and Standards for the Provision of Social Services, Arts. 67–87.

68 Art. 209, para. 3 of Social Welfare Act.

69 *Ibid.*, Art. 45 para. 2, in relation to Art. 209 paras. 2–3.

70 Miloradović et al., 2016, p. 11. After the implementation of the pilot project in 2014 and 2015, the family assistant service survived in the largest cities of Serbia (Belgrade, Kragujevac, Novi Sad and Niš). See Matković and Stranjaković, 2020, p. 17.

71 Art. 47 para. 2. of Social Welfare Act.

services of providing shelters for children, shelters for victims of violence, as well as respite accommodation.⁷²

In general, local self-governments finance those child welfare services that they are required by law to provide. However, a local self-government unit whose level of development is below the national average may finance welfare services within its jurisdiction through dedicated transfer sources from the budget of the Republic of Serbia.⁷³

According to a comprehensive survey that ended in 2018, about 17% of social welfare services at the local level were financed from dedicated transfers.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the importance of financing local welfare services through dedicated transfers is much greater than the previous data shows because the share of the city of Belgrade in the total expenditures of local government units is over one third, although this city has not used dedicated transfers.⁷⁵ Consequently, over 60% of local self-government units used dedicated transfer sources to a lesser, greater or almost exclusive extent in order to provide social welfare services.⁷⁶

Among the child welfare services provided by local self-governments, the most widespread services are those for the child's personal assistant, day care and counselling.⁷⁷ In terms of overall social welfare services provided to children, the most prevalent are family accommodation services. However, the accommodation services under the competence of local self-governments are significantly less available. Thus, during 2018, shelters for victims of violence existed in 10% of municipalities and cities in Serbia, while respite services were organised in 5% of local communities.⁷⁸ Regarding the most widespread daily service in the community, a personal assistant for the child was available in 52% of local self-government units, whereby service providers were in 92% cases private for-profit or non-profit licensed organisations.⁷⁹ The service of a child's personal assistant is 74% financed from the budget of local self-governments, 24% through dedicated transfers, and around 2% from other sources.⁸⁰

In terms of support service for independent living, supported child housing is financed entirely from the funds of local self-governments and user participation, but

72 Ibid., Art. 45 in relation to Art. 7 of the Regulation about the Network of Social Protection Institutions, 'Official Gazette of the RS', No. 16/2012, and Art. 206 paras. 5, 7 of the Social Welfare Act. In addition, see: Matković and Stranjaković, 2020, p. 17.

73 Art. 207 para. 1(1) of Social Welfare Act.

74 Matković and Stranjaković, 2020, p. 34.

75 Ibid., p. 30.

76 Ibid., p. 34.

77 Ibid., p. 15 and p. 17.

78 Ibid., 2020, p. 17.

79 Ibid., 2020, p. 61.

80 Ibid., p. 62.

this service has been available in only 10% of local self-governments, and it has been rarely used in practice so far.⁸¹

5. Defining a Child at Risk

In terms of rules on social welfare, a child at risk may be defined as a child ‘whose health, safety and development are jeopardised due to a family situation and other life circumstances, or if it is certain that he or she cannot reach the optimal level of development without the support of the social protection system’.⁸² The ‘optimal level of development’ should be understood as the maximum possible level of development of an individual child.⁸³

Various reasons and circumstances may place the child or his or her parents or other caregivers in a disadvantaged situation, thereby requiring social protection measures and social welfare services. These situations may be the result of the absence of the child’s family environment or an interruption in the child’s relationship with his or her parents or other caregivers, as well as the insufficiency of parental capacities to adequately care for the child or their abuse or neglect of parental responsibilities.

The Social Welfare Act provides examples when a child is considered at risk and he or she or his or her family needs assistance, support or protection within the social welfare system.

Accordingly, a child is considered to be at risk if⁸⁴ the child is without parental care or at risk of losing it; the parent, guardian or any other person who directly takes care of the child is unable to care for him or her without the support of the social protection system, owing to health reasons, mental illness, intellectual difficulties or unfavourable socio-economic circumstances; the child has developmental disabilities (physical, intellectual, mental, sensory, speech-language, socio-emotional, multiple), and his or her needs for care and material security exceed the family’s capacities; the child is in conflict with his parents, guardian and the community and his or her behaviour endangers himself or herself and the environment; the child faces difficulties due to abuse of alcohol, drugs or other intoxicants; the child may be at risk of becoming a victim of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation, i.e. if his or her physical, psychological or emotional well-being and development are threatened by the actions or omissions of parents, guardians or other persons who directly take care of the child; the child is a victim of human trafficking; the child is a foreign citizen or a person without citizenship, unaccompanied; the child’s parents are in

81 Ibid., p. 16 and p. 41. Furthermore, the Republic Institute for Social Protection found that supported housing welfare service was provided the previous year in a single case to a boy between the age of 15 and 17 by only one licensed service provider: Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2023, p. 14.

82 Art. 41 para. 2 of Social Welfare Act.

83 Art. 6 para. 2 of CRC.

84 Art. 41 para. 2 (1-10) of Social Welfare Act.

dispute over exercising parental responsibilities; the child has other needs for using social protection.

Relying on the social welfare legislation, the Republic Institute for Social Protection recognises several categories of children at risk, involving children without parental care, children who are victims of domestic violence, those with behavioural problems, children from families in crisis, children with disabilities and materially vulnerable children.⁸⁵ In the most disadvantageous position is the child who falls under more than one category of children at risk, such as a child with disability who is without parental care. Such a child is provided with measures of intensive support and protection, along with special programmes of training and preparation for those who take care of the child (e.g. foster care with intensive and additional support).⁸⁶

Family Act provides an exhaustive list of situations in which a child is considered to be without parental care, involving following cases:⁸⁷ a child who has no living parents; a child whose parents are unknown or their dwelling place is unknown; a child whose parents are fully deprived of parental responsibility or active legal capacity; a child whose parents have not yet acquired full active legal capacity; a child whose parents are deprived of the right to protect and raise or educate the child; a child whose parents fail to take care of the child or take care of the child in an inappropriate manner.

Such a child is placed under guardianship and provided with alternative care. However, it does not necessarily mean that a child without parental care is directly eligible for adoption.⁸⁸

6. Children With Disabilities in the Child Protection System

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereinafter: CRPD), ‘persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’.⁸⁹ Making a sharp turn in the understanding of the concept of disability, the CRPD abandons the medical model of disability, replacing it entirely with the social approach according to which persons with disabilities do not need isolation and separation from the family environment for the purpose of treatment, but support and assistance in order to integrate them into society, overcoming the social barriers with the support of their family and local community services.⁹⁰ In Serbia, a Special

85 Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2023, p. 4.

86 Art. 7 of the Rulebook on Foster Care.

87 Art. 113 para. 3 of Family Act.

88 Thus, a child who is without parental care for the reasons listed under 4, 5 and 6 is not eligible for adoption. See: Ponjavić and Vlašković, 2022, p. 307.

89 Art. 1 para. 2 of CRPD.

90 Vlašković, 2021, p. 573.

Act on Preventing Discrimination of Persons with Disabilities (2006), was adopted to fully embrace the social model of disability.⁹¹ However, the national child protection system rests on measures and welfare services that represent a combination of medical and social approaches to disability, struggling to reduce the importance of the former in practice.

In 2022, 13163 children with disabilities were registered within the social protection system in Serbia, which is 7.32% of the total number of children from the records of social welfare authorities.⁹² A child with disability and his or her parents or caregivers are provided with increased material support, financial assistance and appropriate social welfare services.

The rights to material support and financial assistance are recognised and regulated by the Social Welfare Act and the Act on Financial Assistance for Families with Children. Thus, a child with disability has the right to increased allowances for the help and care of another person, which is usually the child's parent.⁹³ Furthermore, one of the parents who directly takes care of a child with disability is entitled to an increased child allowance under the conditions stipulated in the Act on Financial Assistance for Families with Children.⁹⁴ Further, preschool children with disabilities have the right to be reimbursed for the costs of their stay in preschool institutions. It should be noted that one of the parents or other caregivers of the child with disability has the right to "leave from work" until the child attains the age of five, in accordance with the rules of labour law,⁹⁵ as well as the right to compensation for special care of the child with disability.⁹⁶

A child with disability is provided a range of welfare services including primarily day services in the community, accommodation services and support services for independent living. Regarding day services in the community, children with disabilities may be beneficiaries of the day care service; they might be provided with home assistance, as well as the services of a personal assistant. First, day care is available to a child with disability who needs daily care, supervision and support in maintaining and developing his or her potential in a way that does not interfere with the child's schooling.⁹⁷ Day care service includes developmental, educational and therapeutic types of support and activities for the child with disability in order to improve quality of his or her life in the social environment where the child lives, providing parents and

91 Act on Preventing Discrimination of Persons with Disabilities, 'Official Gazette of the RS', No. 33/2006 and 13/2016, Art. 3 para. 1.

92 Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2023, p. 46.

93 Art. 94 in conjunction with Art. 92 para. 1 of Social Welfare Act.

94 Art. 26 paras. 1 and 11; and Art. 31 para. 2 of Act on Financial Assistance for Families with Children.

95 Labour Act, 'Official Gazette of the RS', No. 24/2005, 61/2005, 54/2009, 32/2013, 75/2014, 13/2017 - decision of the Constitutional Court, 113/2017 and 95/2018 - authentic interpretation, Arts. 96-97.

96 Act on Financial Assistance for Families with Children, Arts. 12-16.

97 Art. 68, para. 1. of Rulebook on Detailed Requirements and Standards for the Provision of Social Services.

other caregivers free time for work and other life activities.⁹⁸ In 2022, the share of children with disabilities in the total number of the day care service users was 16.5%.⁹⁹

Home assistance service is also oriented towards the social model of disability, being available for the child and his or her family members who, due to various forms of disability, are unable to live independently in their homes performing usual life activities (e.g. preparing meals, maintaining personal hygiene and apartment hygiene, paying utility bills and everything else needed for the maintenance and functioning of the household).¹⁰⁰ Home assistance service is provided by a professional and specially trained caregiver-housewife, but sometimes informal caregivers help a certain child and a family free of charge; hence, it is desirable that employers consider introducing flexible working hours or enable work from home for these persons.¹⁰¹ The home assistance service is used by an extremely small number of children with disabilities; in the last five years, the share of these children among the total number of users of home assistance was only 0.7%.¹⁰²

Unlike day services, the service of a personal assistant is available only and exclusively to a child with disability. The personal assistant service is a typical example of the social understanding of disability, and it is primarily designed to enable a child with disability to exercise his or her right to education on an equal basis with other children. In other words, the purpose of a personal assistant is to provide the child with disability appropriate individual practical support for inclusion in regular schooling and activities in the community in order to establish the highest possible level of independence.¹⁰³ The activities of a child's personal assistant involve providing help to the child at home (in dressing, feeding, preparing books and school supplies) and providing assistance within the community (help in using public transport, helping the child to move easily, provide support and facilitate the child's communication with the third parties).¹⁰⁴ Among the daily services in the community, the personal assistant is by far the most prevalent child welfare service, showing a constantly increasing trend.¹⁰⁵

A child with disabilities may also use accommodation services that provide protection and support both to children without parental care and to children under parental care. Thus, a child with disability without parental care can be provided with alternative care in a kinship or foster family (family-based accommodation) or,

98 Ibid., Arts. 69–70.

99 Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2023, p. 45.

100 Arts. 73–75 of Rulebook on Detailed Requirements and Standards for the Provision of Social Services

101 Urdarević, 2020, p. 200.

102 Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2023, p. 46.

103 Art. 84 of Rulebook on Detailed Requirements and Standards for the Provision of Social Services.

104 Ibid., Art. 86.

105 In 2022, 2869 children with disabilities used the personal assistance service, which is an increase of 193,9% compared to the five years ago. See: Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2023, p. 45.

as the last resort, he or she may be cared for in an institution (residential accommodation). On the contrary, children with disabilities who are under parental care and their parents may use the welfare services of occasional foster care and respite accommodation.

Family-like accommodation of a child with disabilities without parental care is implemented as kinship or foster care with intensive and additional support, while its content and duration are regulated by the child support plan made by competent welfare authorities (social work centres and centres for family accommodation and adoption).¹⁰⁶ If the child with disability without parental care cannot be placed in kinship or a foster family, he or she is referred to residential accommodation in appropriate institutions. The Social Welfare Act prohibits the provision of residential accommodation for children under the age of three, except for particularly justified reasons, whereby the child cannot stay in such accommodation longer than two months, except with the consent of the minister responsible for family protection.¹⁰⁷ The law also stipulates that an institution for accommodation of children cannot have capacity exceeding 50 users.¹⁰⁸ It is also possible to organise a special form of residential accommodation in small home communities of up to 15 children.¹⁰⁹

Although Serbia has made significant progress in reducing the number of children in residential care, this is not the case with children with disabilities. Thus, in 2022, children with disabilities still comprised an overwhelming majority of the total number of children in residential care (66.4%).¹¹⁰ In addition, the reports of some non-governmental organisations indicate serious omissions and violations of the rights of children with disabilities in residential care in certain institutions, especially in terms of inadequate health care.¹¹¹ Furthermore, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has expressed deep concerns regarding the number of children with disabilities living in institutions, as well as the fact that despite legal prohibition, children under the age of three are still placed in institutions, some even directly from the maternity ward.¹¹²

Occasional foster care and respite accommodation for a common goal offer support and assistance to the biological family and the child's parents in order to preserve their capacities for further care of the child and to maintain the functionality of

106 Art. 7 para. 2 of Rulebook on Foster Care.

107 Art. 52 paras. 2–3 of Social Welfare Act.

108 *Ibid.*, Art. 54 para. 2.

109 Art. 54 para. 1 of Rulebook on Detailed Requirements and Standards for the Provision of Social Services.

110 Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2023, p. 45.

111 Rosenthal et al., 2021, p. 2.

112 The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Concluding observations on the initial report of Serbia, 23 May 2016, para. 13. Hereinafter: CRPD/C/SRB/CO/1. In 2022, children under the age of three accounted for 6.8% of the total number of children in residential care: Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2023, p. 13.

the family.¹¹³ Occasional foster care may last several hours a day, from one to 15 days continuously, and on annual basis up to 60 days.¹¹⁴ This type of foster care is primarily intended for children with disabilities who are under parental care, but it can also be used as an aftercare measure for children over 10 years of age who have been in residential care for a longer period of time in order to prepare them for independent living and to enable them to gain life experience in a family-like environment.¹¹⁵ Respite accommodation is a welfare service that provides daily, weekend or multi-day accommodation for children with disabilities, supporting both the child and the child's family in maintaining and improving the quality of their life with the aim of the child remaining in the family of origin.¹¹⁶ A child must be older than five years in order to use the respite accommodation service, which can last no longer than 45 days within a calendar year and no longer than 20 days in a row.¹¹⁷ In 2022, children made up 24.2% of the total number of respite accommodation users, and they were mostly boys between the ages of 15 and 17.¹¹⁸

7. Definition of Necessary Intervention

In the broadest sense, necessary interventions are protective measures taken by the competent state authorities for a child at risk in order to protect his or her right to life, survival and development. Thus, if family support measures do not or cannot provide the desired outcomes, the competent welfare authorities are obliged to intervene, take protective measures involving separation of the child from the family, provide the least restrictive accommodation and alternative care, undertake guardianship measures and place the child under guardianship.¹¹⁹ A child has the right to live with his or her parents and to be cared for by them, which can be limited only exceptionally by a court decision in the child's best interests (reasons for deprivation of parental responsibility could be domestic violence).¹²⁰ This rule of family law should be interpreted in the context of the CRC in the sense that the decision of the competent authorities to separate the child from his or her parents does not necessarily have to be made by the judicial authority, but that such decision must be subject to judicial review.

Necessary interventions sometimes include especially urgent measures and services taken by competent welfare authorities in order to ensure the safety of the child

113 Art. 9 of Rulebook on Foster Care; Art. 28 para. 1 of Rulebook on Detailed Requirements and Standards for the Provision of Social Services.

114 Art. 9 para. 2 of Rulebook on Foster Care.

115 *Ibid.*, para. 7.

116 Art. 28 para. 1 of Rulebook on Detailed Requirements and Standards for the Provision of Social Services.

117 *Ibid.*, Art. 27.

118 Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2023, p. 46.

119 On child protection measures, see: Žegarac, 2014, p. 94.

120 Art. 60 paras. 2-3 of Family Act.

in situations where his or her life, health and development are directly endangered,¹²¹ or when there are justified reasons that failure to take those measures and services would endanger the life, health and development of the child in need of protection.¹²² Urgent interventions are provided by the centre for social work as a social welfare institution that decides on the use of the social welfare services. If there is a need for urgent intervention, the procedure for using the urgent intervention service is carried out by the centre for social work in whose territory the child who requiring this kind of intervention lives.¹²³ The measures and services in the form of urgent interventions are provided 24 hours a day.

A professional social worker is obliged to evaluate each submission from the point of view of the priority of action and if it is assessed that urgent action is needed, the social worker will organise emergency intervention.¹²⁴ The undertaking of urgent interventions is further elaborated in the General Protocol for the Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect (Hereinafter: GPPC).¹²⁵ Thus, if circumstances of the case dictate that the child should be separated from the parents as soon as possible, the centre for social work will appoint a temporary guardian for the child, in accordance with family law, ensuring the immediate and short-term protection of the child's rights until the decision is made by the court.¹²⁶ In this process, the centre for social work, as a welfare institution, will decide on the urgent placement of the child, that is, its removal from a dangerous environment at the latest within 24 hours of learning about the need to separate the child from the family. These emergency interventions are aimed at providing a safe environment for the child in the shortest possible time until the child is placed under guardianship.

Furthermore, the establishment of urgent (emergency) foster care is also based on the goals of urgent interventions. This type of foster care is applied in situations when there has been abandonment of a child by parents or other caregivers, domestic violence, gross neglect or abuse, and in cases when parents or caregivers are prevented from taking care of the child.¹²⁷ Urgent foster care lasts until the resolution of the crisis situation in the family or until the appropriate measure of protection is applied in accordance with the best interests of the child, for a maximum of 60 days; after this, it may continue as a standard form of foster care or foster care with intensive or additional support.¹²⁸

121 Art. 56 para. 1 of Social Welfare Act.

122 Art. 51 of Rulebook on the Organisation, Norms and Standards of the Work of the Social Work Centre.

123 Art. 68 para. 5 of Social Welfare Act.

124 Art. 49 para. 1 of Rulebook on the Organisation, Norms and Standards of the Work of the Social Work Centre.

125 General Protocol for the Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect, adopted by the decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia in the form of conclusion, No. 011-5196/2005.

126 Section V(2), para. 2 of GPPC.

127 Art. 8 para. 1 of Rulebook on Foster Care.

128 Ibid., Art. 8 para. 2.

8. Structure of the Child Protection System

The structure of the child protection system in Serbia and the services and measures it includes have already been discussed in previous parts of this report. Thus, only a brief review of the structure of the child welfare system will be described here, involving the social welfare services that have not been considered more closely so far.

The structure of the child protection system rests on family law measures and the implementation of services and measures of support in the field of social protection. Family law measures involve decisions made by competent state authorities that include preventive and corrective measures regarding the exercise of parental responsibility and, as the last resort, a decision on partial or full deprivation of parental responsibility. The latter decision is within the competence of court, while decisions on preventive and corrective supervision over the exercise of parental responsibility are within the jurisdiction of the centre for social work as an administrative body. Unlike corrective measures, the measures of preventive supervision are not explicitly enumerated in the Family Act. Nevertheless, examples of these measures may be found in family law, such as the case when the centre for social work determines the name of the child because the parents cannot decide on the child's personal or family name within a certain period.¹²⁹

As mentioned earlier, the child social protection system includes material and financial support and various other social welfare services. Material support and financial assistance intended for children and their families reflect the social or population policy, as well as the rights that parents enjoy in the domain of labour relations. In terms of the Social Welfare Act, the child and family may under certain conditions be entitled to the following forms of material support: financial social assistance, an allowance for assistance and care of another person, an increased allowance for assistance and care of another person, assistance for training for work, as well as one-time assistance in money or in kind, which is the only material benefit within the competence of the local self-government.¹³⁰ Furthermore, the child and his/her family may exercise the right to financial support based on the rules of the Act on Financial Assistance for Families with Children, which aims to provide material support to parents not only to beget the desired number of children, but also to improve their financial situation overall, including families with disabilities.¹³¹ Benefits are paid based on birth and child care or special care of the child as salary compensation during maternity leave, leave from work for child care and leave from work for special child care, parental allowance, the right to funds for construction, participation in the purchase or purchase of the first apartment, children's allowance, one-time allowance for the birth of the second and third child, compensation for the

129 Art. 344 para. 4 of Family Act.

130 Art. 79 and 110 para. 3 of Social Welfare Act.

131 Art. 1 of Act on Financial Assistance for Families with Children.

costs of staying in a preschool institution for children without parental care, compensation for the costs of staying in a preschool institution for children with disabilities, compensation for the costs of staying in preschool institutions for children receiving financial social assistance and regressing the costs of staying in these institutions for children from materially disadvantaged families.¹³²

It has already been pointed out that social welfare services are divided into the following groups: assessment and planning services, day services in the community, support services for independent living, counselling and therapy services, socio-educational services, as well as services of accommodation.¹³³ Assessment services involve not only evaluation of the needs, risks, abilities and interests of the child at risk and other persons important to him or her, but also assessment of the capacities of service providers.¹³⁴ Upon the results of the assessment, the level of support for the user is determined and an individual service plan is made.¹³⁵ Each individual service plan concerning the child is reviewed at least once every six months.¹³⁶

Day services in the community are primarily available to children, including children with disabilities, mainly to support the child's stay in the family and close environment strengthening parental capacities. However, the day service of drop-in centres is intended to be temporary and occasional, but a comprehensive protection of children in street situations, as one of the most vulnerable categories of children at risk. This protection involves mostly the provision of accommodation, meals and personal hygiene.¹³⁷ Simultaneously, the drop-in centres play a significant role in connecting children with other forms of protection in the community (health care and more permanent forms of social protection). Thus, the drop-in centre is obliged to inform the centre for social work about the admission of the child without delay, no later than the next working day after the first admission.¹³⁸

According to the General Comment No. 21 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, children in street situations are those 'who depend on the streets to live and/or work, whether alone, with peers or with family'¹³⁹ and 'children who periodically, but not always, live and/or work on the streets, as well as children who do not live or work on the streets but who regularly accompany their peers, siblings or family in the streets'.¹⁴⁰ In 2022, Serbia adopted the Plan for the protection of children in street situations from violence, neglect and exploitation in an effort to implement the CRC/GC/21. In this context, the Plan envisages tasks for the centres for social work,

132 Ibid. Art. 11.

133 Art. 116 of Family Act.

134 Art. 13 para. 1 of Rulebook on Detailed Requirements and Standards for the Provision of Social Services.

135 Ibid. Art. 13 para. 7.

136 Ibid. Art. 17 para. 2(1).

137 Ibid. Art. 79.

138 Ibid. Art. 82 para. 1.

139 The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 21 (2017) on children in street situations, 21 June 2017 (Hereinafter: CRC/GC/21), para. 4.

140 CRC/GC/21, para. 4.

police departments, public prosecutor's offices and the city of Belgrade in order to coordinate the protection of this extremely vulnerable category of children. Despite this, a major problem is the extremely limited number of licensed drop-in service providers within the local self-government units.

The service provided by drop-in centres has certain similarities with the service of a shelter, which belongs to the group of accommodation welfare services. However, shelters are available primarily to victims of domestic violence, abuse and human trafficking. In those shelters, a separate room must be provided for a mother with children, while a maximum of three unaccompanied children who have been victims of abuse may be in one room.¹⁴¹ Vulnerable persons, most often a mother with a child or children, sometimes come to shelters without instructions from competent welfare authorities. In such cases, the shelter service provider is obliged to inform the competent centre for social work about the admission of the vulnerable persons within three days.¹⁴²

In addition to respite accommodation, the shelter is the only accommodation service that is under the jurisdiction of local self-governments.¹⁴³ Thus, local authorities more closely regulate the way a shelter service is used, in terms of financing and conditions for exercising the right to accommodation. This service usually includes accommodation, food, health care, legal aid, counselling, psychosocial support, referral to training for work, as well as connection with other social welfare authorities and institutions.¹⁴⁴ Accommodation in shelters is temporary and lasts until other social welfare services are provided or until a safe return to the family home is enabled. Considering the acts of local self-governments on social protection, it may be concluded that accommodation in shelters can last no longer than six months, although examples can be found of exceptions made to vulnerable persons to stay in a shelter for up to a year, as is the case with the city of Niš.¹⁴⁵

9. Guardianship of Those Under Child Protection Care

Guardianship always includes children without parental care, while certain measures of guardianship protection can be taken to protect the rights and interests of a child under parental care in particular situations. In the latter cases, the child is not formally placed under guardianship, but a special and temporary guardian is appointed

141 Art. 58, para. 2 of Rulebook on Detailed Requirements and Standards for the Provision of Social Services.

142 Ibid. Art. 60 para. 1.

143 Matković and Stranjaković, 2020, pp. 16–17.

144 Todorov, 2022, pp. 22–24.

145 Ibid.

in order to protect certain rights and interests of the minor ward or to undertake specific legal acts in the name and on behalf of the child (minor ward).¹⁴⁶

First, a child without parental care must be placed under guardianship by a decision of the competent welfare authority, whereby the child's guardian will also be appointed by the same decision.¹⁴⁷ In Serbia, the function of guardianship authority is performed by the centre for social work as an administrative body founded by the local self-government unit.¹⁴⁸ A full and permanent guardian is appointed for a child without parental care in order to ensure his or her comprehensive legal protection until the end of the need for guardianship (reaching majority, adoption of a child, return of the child to the biological family). Furthermore, the decision on a child's placement under guardianship simultaneously contains the care plan for the child and the decision on the accommodation of the minor ward.¹⁴⁹

According to family law provisions, there is no obligation of a relative or any other person to accept the role of a child's guardian. However, a child's relative or foster parent is primarily appointed as guardian, unless the ward's interests are otherwise.¹⁵⁰ A minor ward who has attained the age of 10 and who is able to reason has the right to propose the person to be appointed as his or her guardian.¹⁵¹

If a relative or foster parent cannot be appointed as the child's guardian, either because he or she does not want to accept that role, or because the guardianship authority (centre for social work) finds that such an appointment is not in the interest of the minor ward, the centre for social work may decide to perform the duty of the guardian directly. In that case, the guardianship authority will appoint its own social welfare expert to perform the activities of the guardian on its behalf, and the concerned person is then called a direct guardian according to the Family Act.¹⁵² It should be noted that in 2022, experts of the guardianship authorities performed the duties of child's guardians in 45.8% of total cases, which is a substantial share.¹⁵³

The guardian is under obligation to take care of his or her minor ward conscientiously, whereby taking care of the ward includes, taking care of the child's personality, representing the minor ward, acquiring assets to support the ward and managing and disposing of the ward's property in accordance with the law.¹⁵⁴ The guardian is obliged to take care of the personality of the minor ward in a way that will lead to his/her ability to have an independent life, although there is no obligation of the guardian

146 Art. 132 para. 1 of Family Act. For example, a temporary guardian ('collision guardian') will be appointed for a child if his or her interests are in conflict with the interests of the child's parent or if it is judged that he or she has not been adequately represented by the parent in family proceedings.

147 Art. 124 para. 3 of Family Act.

148 Art. 14 para. 2 of Social Welfare Act.

149 *Ibid.*, Art. 125 paras. 2-3.

150 *Ibid.*, Art. 126 para. 2.

151 *Ibid.*, Art. 127.

152 *Ibid.*, Art. 131 paras. 1-2.

153 Republic Institute for Social Protection, 2023, p. 12.

154 Art. 134 of Family Act.

to live with the ward. However, it is also possible for a minor ward to live with a guardian in cases where the child is at the same time in family-based accommodation with a relative (kinship care) or a foster parent (foster care), who is also appointed as his or her guardian. Simultaneously, the guardian legally represents the minor ward the same way a parent represents his or her child.¹⁵⁵ However, unlike the parents, the guardian cannot independently decide on certain issues that significantly affect the child's life, but he or she needs the prior consent (permission) of the guardianship authority (centre for social work) to do so.¹⁵⁶

A guardian may perform activities that exceed the regular management of the minor ward's property only with the permission of the guardianship authority (e.g. leasing real estate owned by the minor ward).¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, the guardian disposes of the minor ward's property that was not acquired through work only with the prior consent of the guardianship authority (movable property of greater value and immovable property).¹⁵⁸ The guardian may use the principal of the minor ward's property only for the child's support or when so required by another important interest of the minor ward.¹⁵⁹

10. Aftercare

The Social Welfare Act provides for the aftercare of the child, which involves the creation of a plan for leaving social protection and becoming independent, as well as the provision of support services for independent living, including supported housing.¹⁶⁰ The main goal is to enable a child (adolescent), who leaves the system of alternative care and whose return to the biological family is not possible, to be included in society on as equal basis as possible with other children. Such children remain under guardianship until they reach majority.

First, a plan for leaving social protection and becoming independent is made for all children in alternative care (kinship care, foster care, residential care), at the latest when the child attains 14 years of age.¹⁶¹ The plan for leaving alternative care and becoming independent is prepared by the case manager with the participation of the child himself or herself, his or her parents, relatives, foster carers and other

155 *Ibid.*, Art. 137 para. 3.

156 Kovaček-Stanić, 2014, p. 399; Art. 137 para. 4 of Family Act. For example, a guardian can consent to medical treatment of a child under the age of 15 only with the permission of the guardianship authority.

157 Art. 139 para. 3 of Family Act.

158 *Ibid.*

159 *Ibid.*, Art. 140 paras. 1–3.

160 Art. 40 paras. 1–2 of Social Welfare Act.

161 Art. 75 para. 1 of Rulebook on the Organisation, Norms and Standards of the Work of the Social Work Centre.

appropriate services and institutions, as well as other persons the child identifies as important.¹⁶²

Support services for independent living are provided to children and young persons between the ages of 15 and 26 who, upon termination of family-like accommodation (kinship or foster care) or after leaving residential accommodation, are unable or unwilling to return to their biological family, and nor are they able to start living independently.¹⁶³ Among these services, the supported housing service stands out in particular. Supported housing can last for a maximum of two years, and this service may also be provided to victims of human trafficking for a maximum of one year.¹⁶⁴ This service is realised through the implementation of programme activities, in accordance with the assessment of individual needs of the child with the aim of ensuring a safe environment in which the safety of users will be monitored. Furthermore, service providers should provide help and support in meeting the daily life needs of the users, including the provision of an environment in which a variety of social, educational, health and cultural services are available.¹⁶⁵ Supported housing involves activities aimed at developing and preserving the potential of the minor user, as well as providing assistance for continued education or employment. At the same time, each child or young person should have a professional worker available as a counsellor for independent living.¹⁶⁶

11. Institutional and Procedural Background

The child protection system encompasses a network of institutions and licensed providers of social welfare services that cooperate with educational and health institutions, the police, judicial authorities, local self-governments, as well as other legal entities and citizens. The Social Welfare Act recognises various institutions that carry out the activities of social protection of children, including the centre for social work, centre for family accommodation and adoption, and institutions for education of children and young people who have been sentenced to certain educational measures.¹⁶⁷ Further, the protection of the rights and interests of the child is decided in court proceedings governed by the Family Act.

The main pillars of the child and family protection system are the centres for social work as organisations established by local self-governments, but that exercise the most diverse and numerous public powers in the field of child protection entrusted to them by the state. Thus, the centre for social work makes decisions on

162 Ibid., Art. 75 para. 2.

163 Art. 88 para. 2(1) of Rulebook on Detailed Requirements and Standards for the Provision of Social Services.

164 Ibid. Art. 88 paras. 2–3.

165 Ibid. Art. 90.

166 Ibid. Art. 94 para. 2.

167 Arts. 119–133 of Social Welfare Act.

the realisation of the child's rights in the domain of social protection, as well as in the provision of welfare services to children. This body also performs a wide variety of other tasks in which it provides support and assistance to other authorities and persons in the social protection system.

Exercising its public powers, the centre for social work, among other issues, makes decisions on establishing alternative care for children (foster care, kinship care and residential accommodation).¹⁶⁸ The competence of this body to carry out adoption procedures and make decisions on the establishment of parental legal relationship through adoption is also highly important. The centre for social work also imposes measures of preventive and corrective supervision on the child's parents and decides on placing the child under guardianship. This expert and professional body also decides on the realisation of the child's right to material support.¹⁶⁹ In court proceedings that decide on the exercise or deprivation of parental responsibility, or on the rights of the child, the centre for social work may have the procedural position of the party, intervener, legal representative, specific expert or an auxiliary body of the court that assists in gathering evidence.¹⁷⁰

The centre for social work carries out the procedure for using social welfare services, whereby the procedure may be initiated *ex officio* or at the request of the service user.¹⁷¹ The need to initiate the procedure for using social welfare services can be indicated by any other legal entity (e.g. health care institutions, non-governmental organisations, local self-government units) or a natural person. The centre will initiate the proceedings *ex officio* when it is necessary to take a decision on measures of guardianship of children, measures on corrective supervision over the exercise of parental responsibility, as well as in other cases determined by law.¹⁷² Unlike these situations, the procedure for realising the right to material support can be initiated only at the request of the beneficiary.

The procedure for using social welfare services is according to the rules that apply to the administrative procedure in accordance with the case management standards prescribed by the ministry responsible for family and social protection. The local jurisdiction of the centre for social work is determined according to the user's place of residence.¹⁷³

According to the case management standards, the expert worker of the centre first receives the submission of the applicant or the person who reported the case

168 Art. 4 para. 1 of Rulebook on the Organisation, Norms and Standards of the Work of the Social Work Centre.

169 Ibid., Art. 4 para. 1(1).

170 Vujović, 2018, pp. 310–321.

171 Art. 68 para. 1 of Social Welfare Act.

172 Art. 48 para. 2 of Rulebook on the Organisation, Norms and Standards of the Work of the Social Work Centre.

173 Art. 68 para. 3 of Social Welfare Act.

or the incident and checks the admissibility of the submission.¹⁷⁴ Then, based on an interview with the applicant and considering the pieces of information from the submission, the expert worker decides whether to refer the applicant to other competent authorities or forward the submission to the appropriate head of the service. The submission will be forwarded to the head of the service if the available information indicates that it may be a case of a) child abuse or neglect, b) a child who does not have parents or whose parents are unable to take care of him or her, c) a child who has behavioural problems, d) a child whose parents argue about exercising parental responsibility, as well as e) a child with disability.¹⁷⁵

The expert worker who receives the submission is obliged to make the assessment from the aspect of priority and if he or she judges urgency in the situation, action must be undertaken to organise an emergency intervention.¹⁷⁶

The head of the service assigns the case to a specific expert of the social work centre who is assigned as the case manager. The case manager together with the supervisor decides on the opening of work on the case.¹⁷⁷ In certain cases, the head of the service will have to form an expert team comprising supervisor, case manager and experts from different areas so that the centre for social work can take a decision on the use of social welfare services or social protection measures. For example, an expert team must be formed to decide on adoption or foster care, or giving consent to the parents for the disposal of the child's property.¹⁷⁸

In order to decide on the choice of adequate welfare services or protection measures, the case manager, with the support of the supervisor, must assess the condition, needs, strengths and risks of the beneficiary and other significant persons in his or her environment. If the case manager or the expert team of the social work centre assesses that the individual user needs appropriate social welfare service, the centre for social work issues to the user the instruction for using that service. The instruction is an authentic instrument that directs the user to use the social welfare service in a social welfare institution or with a licensed service provider.¹⁷⁹ If the user needs more services, a separate instruction is issued for each service.¹⁸⁰ An integral part of the instruction for using the service can also be the individual service plan drawn up in the centre for social work.

If the case manager or the expert team assesses that the user does not need the service, the request for using the social welfare services will be rejected by the

174 Submissions are considered to be requests, electronic submissions, petitions, appeals, complaints, initiatives and other communications addressed to the centre by the user or another natural person or institution. Art. 45 para. 2 of Rulebook on the Organisation, Norms and Standards of the Work of the Social Work Centre.

175 Art. 46 para. 5 of Rulebook on the Organisation, Norms and Standards of the Work of the Social Work Centre.

176 *Ibid.*, Art. 49 para. 1.

177 *Ibid.* Art. 32 para. 1(6).

178 *Ibid.*, Art. 38 para. 3.

179 Art. 70 para. 1 of Social Welfare Act.

180 *Ibid.*, para. 2.

decision of the centre for social work. An appeal may be filed within 15 days against the decision rejecting the use of social welfare service and a decision on appeal must be made within 30 days.¹⁸¹ The jurisdiction of the appeals authority depends on whether the specific service is provided by the Republic of Serbia, an autonomous province or a local self-government unit. Thus, in the first case, the ministry responsible for social protection will decide on the appeal against the decision of the centre for social work.¹⁸² In the second case, the competent authority of the autonomous province will decide on the appeal, while in the last situation the decision on the appeal will be made by the competent authority of the local self-government unit.¹⁸³ If they are dissatisfied with the decision of the second instance authority, the parties can initiate an administrative dispute before the Administrative Court.

12. Participation of Children in the Child Protection System

As previously mentioned and explained in the part of this report that refers to guiding principles of the national child protection system, the general formulation of the child's right to express his or her views is given in the Family Act.¹⁸⁴ Hence, the child has the right to freely express his or her views in the procedures in which decisions are made about the provision of social welfare services concerning the child and his or her family, as well as in the procedures in which child protection measures are adopted. In this context, the child has the right to duly receive all the information necessary to form his or her own views.¹⁸⁵ A child who has attained the age of 10 may address the court or an administrative body by himself or herself or through another person or institution, and request assistance in realisation of his or her rights to free expression of views.¹⁸⁶

Furthermore, the court is always obliged to consider how the child will express his or her views in all the proceedings concerning the rights of the child (proceedings in a dispute for the protection of the rights of the child, proceedings for the exercise of parental responsibility, proceedings for the deprivation of parental responsibility). If the court finds that the child is not adequately represented in these disputes, it is obliged to appoint a temporary representative for the child or to request the appointment of a collision guardian from the centre for social work.¹⁸⁷ This type of temporary guardian is especially obliged to ensure that the child receives all the information

181 Art. 73 para. 1-2 of Social Welfare Act.

182 Ibid., Art. 73 para. 2(1).

183 Ibid., Art. 73 para. 2(2-3).

184 Arts. 2, 5-7, 35-40, 41-46 of Act on the Prohibition of Discrimination. It is not within the competence of the Commissioner to decide on the rights and obligations of the individuals and legal entities, but to issue appropriate warnings and recommendations, or to submit legal initiatives, See: Petrušić and Grubač, 2014, p. 73.

185 Art. 65 para. 2 of Family Act.

186 Ibid., Art. 65 para. 5.

187 Ibid., Art. 266 para. 2.

in a timely manner in a way that he or she can understand to be able to form and express his or her views, then to provide the child with information about the possible consequences of the actions he or she undertakes, as well as to inform the court of the child's views if the child is not able to directly express them before the court.¹⁸⁸

In procedures for the use of social welfare services or when adopting child protection measure implemented by the centre for social work, a particularly important role is played by the case manager. This social welfare specialist constantly maintains communication with the child, ensuring the child's active participation during his or her numerous activities on the case and informs the child about the results of his or her work and the prepared reports and decisions in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.¹⁸⁹ The case manager must also enable the child's participation in creating the plan of services and measures for the child and his or her family, in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.¹⁹⁰

Serbia has ratified the CRPD according to which:

'States Parties shall ensure that children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realise that right.'¹⁹¹

Considering the provisions on the prohibition of discrimination, the child's right to express his or her views from the Family Act also includes a child with disability. In this context, when taking any decision on the protection of the rights and interests of the child, it is necessary to consider the views of the child with disabilities, the scope of which is determined in accordance with the child's best interests. In the procedure for using social welfare services, the case manager and the supervisor must ensure that the best interests of the child with disabilities are protected in every phase of the procedure. In this context, the case manager must provide access to persons with disabilities, including children, to all courts, administrative authorities and other bodies where the right and interests of the child with disability are decided.¹⁹² Furthermore, the case manager can make a proposal to the supervisor or head of the service to form an expert team if he or she judges that additional assistance is needed in order to determine the views of the child with disabilities, which is necessary in order to

188 Ibid., Art. 267.

189 Art. 53 para. 4, Art. 57, para. 2. of Rulebook on the Organisation, Norms and Standards of the Work of the Social Work Centre.

190 Ibid., Art. 68 para. 1.

191 Art. 7 para. 3 of CRPD.

192 Art. 32 para. 1(13) of Rulebook on the Organisation, Norms and Standards of the Work of the Social Work Centre.

assess the user's needs, to plan activities or for providing social welfare services and undertaking legal protection measures.¹⁹³

13. Adoption Overview

The Family Act recognises only full adoption as a way of establishing parental legal relationship by which the child is fully integrated into the family. A minor child who has reached the third month of life and whose parents are not alive, are not known or whose place of residence is unknown, can be adopted, as well as a child of parents who are fully deprived of their parental responsibility or active legal capacity.¹⁹⁴ Further, a child may be adopted if his or her parents gave their consent to adoption.¹⁹⁵ Parents give their consent to adoption with or without designating the prospective adopters.¹⁹⁶ Giving consent to adoption with the designation of specific adoptive parents is not a transfer of parental responsibility, since the eligibility of designated adopters must be determined in the adoption procedure, as well as whether such adoption is in the best interests of the child.

Only a person who possesses established personal characteristics upon which it may be concluded that he or she will exercise parental responsibility in the best interests of the child may adopt a child.¹⁹⁷ In most cases, spouses and cohabitants may adopt together. Exceptionally, a child can be adopted by an individual if he or she is the spouse or the cohabitee of the child's parent, or if the minister responsible for family protection has granted adoption for a person who lives alone due to particularly justified reasons.¹⁹⁸ A foreign citizen may adopt a child if the adopters cannot be found among domestic citizens within the period specified by law, and if the minister responsible for family protection gives his or her consent to adoption.¹⁹⁹

A blood relative in a straight line may not be adopted, and among relatives in a lateral line, a brother, a sister, or a brother or sister of the same mother or father may not be adopted.²⁰⁰ Further, the difference in age between the adopter and the adoptee must not be less than 18 years nor more than 45 years, although the effect of

193 Ibid., Art. 38 para. 2.

194 Art. 91 paras. 1-4 of Family Act.

195 Ibid., Art. 91 para. 5.

196 Ibid., Art. 95 para. 2.

197 In this context, the following persons are not eligible for adopting a child: a person fully or partially deprived of parental responsibility, a person fully or partially deprived of active legal capacity, a person suffering from an illness that may have detrimental effects on the adoptee, as well as a person convicted for criminal act belonging to the group of criminal acts against marriage and family, against sexual freedom and against life and body. Art. 100 para. 2. of Family Act.

198 Ibid., Art. 101 paras. 2-3.

199 Ibid., Art. 103 para. 1.

200 Ibid., Art. 92.

this adoption obstacle can be removed as an exception by the decision of the minister responsible for family protection if it is in the best interests of the child.²⁰¹

The general and special eligibility of the adopters and adoptee for adoption is determined by the centre for social work in cooperation with the centre for family accommodation and adoption. The decision on establishing adoption is made by the competent centre for social work, and the adoption is established on the day the ruling on adoption is issued.²⁰²

14. Concluding Remarks

Over the last decades, Serbia has been making significant efforts to reform the child protection system adjusting it as much as possible to the international human rights treaties it has ratified. The reform began with the adoption of the child rights-based Family Act in 2005, and later the new Social Welfare Act and the Act on Financial Assistance for Families with Children were adopted, which were further elaborated by highly important by-laws.

In general, the child protection system rests on family law protection measures, available social welfare services and the right of the child and his and her family to obtain material and financial support. Child protection is carried out through cooperation among several institutions, organisations and individuals, judicial and administrative authorities, central, provincial and local self-government bodies and licensed service providers, which are meant to provide support and protection to the child and his and her family. Thus, a child at risk is enabled under the conditions stipulated by law to use various social welfare services (assessment and planning services, day services in the community, support services for independent living, counselling and therapy services, as well as services of accommodation).

In addition to courts, which decide on the protection of the child's rights in family disputes, the key authorities in the child protection system are the centres for social work, as social welfare expert bodies established by the local self-governments but entrusted with significant and numerous public powers by the state. The centres for social work make decisions on implementing the right to material support, decisions on the use of social welfare services, including the decisions on the alternative care for the child, and they also adopt measures of preventive and corrective supervision over the exercise of parental responsibility in accordance with the rules of family law.

Despite the efforts made in the domain of child welfare services, Serbia still faces considerable problems in certain segments of child protection. Thus, there are problems with insufficient and uneven distribution of most day services in the community. Further, the state cannot yet eliminate the placement of children under the age of three in residential care. At the same time, a huge problem is that the vast

201 Ibid., Art. 99.

202 Ibid., Art. 320 para. 2.

majority of children in residential care are children with disabilities, who, in practice, face various forms of discrimination according to the reports of non-governmental organisations.

Bibliography

- Jelić, S., Kolarević, V. (2016) 'Fenomen socijalne isključenosti u periodu tranzicije u Srbiji', *Sociološki pregled*, 50(2), pp. 209–228; <https://doi.org/10.5937/socpreg1602209J>.
- Jovanović, V. (2020) *Vodič za obezbeđenje usluga socijalne zaštite u jedinicama lokalne samouprave*. 1st edn. Belgrade: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit.
- Kovaček-Stanić, G. (2014) *Porodično pravo: partnersko, dečje i starateljsko parvo*. 5th edn. Novi Sad: Faculty of Law University of Novi Sad.
- Matković, G. (2014) *Decentralizacija socijalne zaštite u Srbiji*. 1st edn. Belgrade: Centar za liberalno-demokratske studije.
- Matković, G., Stranjaković, M. (2020) *Mapiranje usluga socijalne zaštite i materijalne podrške u nadležnosti jedinica lokalnih samouprava u Republici Srbiji*. 1st edn. Belgrade: Team for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction of the Government of the Republic of Serbia.
- Miloradović, S., et al. (2016) *Pilotiranje usluge 'porodični saradnik' i evaluacija rezultata pružene usluge*. 1st edn. Belgrade: Republic Institute for Social Protection.
- Petrušić, N., Grubač, M. (2014) 'Uzajamni odnos postupka pred Poverenikom za zaštitu ravnopravnosti i drugih antidiskriminacionih', *Zbornik radova Pravnog fakulteta u Nišu*, 66(2), pp. 72–90.
- Ponjavić, Z., Vlašković, V. (2022) *Porodično parvo*. 7th edn. Belgrade: Službeni glasnik.
- Republic Institute for Social Protection (2023) *Deca u sistemu socijalne zaštite 2022*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.zavodsz.gov.rs/media/2587/deca-u-ssz-2022-final-2672023.pdf> (Accessed: 20 November 2023).
- Rosenthal, E., et al. (2021) *Zaboravljena deca Srbije*. Disability Rights International [Online]. Available at: <https://www.mdri-s.org/public/documents/upload/tortura-i-zlostavljanje/Zaboravljena%20deca%20Srbije.pdf> (Accessed: 30 November 2023).
- Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2023) 'Serbia census 2022: census of households, population and dwellings' [Online]. Available at: <https://www.stat.gov.rs/> (Accessed: 20 November 2023).
- Todorov, D. (2022) *Specijalizovana usluga sigurne kuće u Srbiji: potrebe, kapaciteti i sredstva za stabilno, dugoročno i nesmetano funkcionisanje*. 1st edn. Belgrade: UN Women office publishing: Serbia Country Office.
- Urdarević, B. (2020) 'Pomoć u kući kao usluga iz oblasti socijalne zaštite' in Vujisić, D. (ed.) *Zbornik radova: XXI vek – vek usluga i uslužnog prava*. Kragujevac: Institute of Legal and Social Sciences of the Law Faculty, pp. 193–202; <https://doi.org/10.46793/XXIV-11.193U>.
- Vlašковиć, V. (2021) 'Osvrt na prava dece sa invaliditetom sa težištem na pristup zdravstvenim uslugama' in Vujisić, D. (ed.) *Usluge I vladavina prava*. Kragujevac: Institute of Legal and Social Sciences of the Law Faculty, pp. 569–585; <https://doi.org/10.46793/UVP21.569V>.

- Vujović, R. (2018) 'Procesni položaj organa starateljstva u sudskom parničnom postupku u vezi sa porodičnim odnosima' in Draškić, M., Šarkić, N., Arsić, J. (eds.) *Porodični zakon – 12 godina posle*. Belgrade: Union University Law Faculty – Službeni glasnik (Official Gazette), pp. 307–325.
- Vujović, R. (2019) *Lišenje roditeljskog prava*. 1st edn. Belgrade: Službeni glasnik (Official Gazette).
- Žegarac, N. (2014) 'Rezime' in Žegarac, N. (ed.) *U lavirintu socijalne zaštite: Pouke istraživanja o deci na porodičnom i rezidencijalnom smeštaju*, pp. 371–386 [Online]. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/serbia/sites/unicef.org.serbia/files/2018-08/U_lavirintu_socijalne_zastite.pdf https://www.unicef.org/serbia/sites/unicef.org.serbia/files/2018-08/U_lavirintu_socijalne_zastite.pdf (Accessed 25 November 2023).
- Žegarac, N. (2014) 'Sistem Zaštite Dece u Srbiji' in Žegarac, N. (ed.) *U lavirintu socijalne zaštite: Pouke istraživanja o deci na porodičnom i rezidencijalnom smeštaju*, pp. 77–114 [Online]. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/serbia/sites/unicef.org.serbia/files/2018-08/U_lavirintu_socijalne_zastite.pdf (Accessed 25 November 2023).