

Getting it right for the kids

The EU is helping protect children and keep families together in the enlargement countries. This project in Bosnia and Herzegovina shows how the EU works with government partners to give social protection for children a new and higher profile. The benefits are felt not only by vulnerable young people and their families, but also by policy makers and professionals.

CAREFUL PLANNING

The project started by examining the existing framework for social protection, through a careful consultation with authorities and civil society organisations. This highlighted some of the challenges that Bosnia and Herzegovina faces: widespread child poverty, high levels of youth unemployment, and limited pre-school education. In particular, displaced families and ethnic minorities suffer exclusion and discrimination, and uneven social provision leaves vulnerable families fragile, with high risks of disadvantage for children. Entitlement to rights and benefits, particularly for disabled people or for groups such as Roma, has been based largely on status – such as citizenship – rather than on needs. Financial benefits and services are in many cases not sufficient to prevent families from falling into poverty, and many vulnerable categories do not receive adequate protection.

EU and international experts worked alongside government and other authorities on improvements to management and coordination, developing plans for integrated and inclusive approaches to social protection. With 11 selected municipalities, the project focused on building up communication between social agencies and local government to ensure seamless delivery of client-focused, high-quality services.

The project's results ranged from new activities and opportunities for children, to improved systems and services. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds or with disabilities took part in a special football match with Edin Džeko, the international star and striker in the national football team, to celebrate his 27th birthday and to raise public awareness of neglected needs. Workshops have given hundreds of young people the chance to express themselves, develop their self-esteem, access new opportunities, and learn new skills – including making movies recounting the difficulties many of them face.

Parents appreciate the results too. Mika Knežević, the mother of a child with hearing difficulties, says getting help from a speech therapist “made a great difference to him and improved his performance at school. It meant a lot to me at home, as well”. Zlata Paprić, head of the mental health centre in Brčko district, says “We benefit immensely from the programme. The analysis and the action plan that followed are huge steps towards an integrated and holistic approach to children and youth-related issues”.



INCLUSIVE SERVICES

In the end, 5,000 children and their parents benefitted from increased access to inclusive and protective social services. A move from a status-based system towards a needs-based system, which offers quality services to all citizens, is underway. Reform of the social protection and inclusion systems is intended primarily to help families in need, but at the same time projects

of this sort are designed with the broader objective of aligning the country with the EU pre-accession agenda, and promoting its socio-economic development. Ultimately, the aim is country-wide coordination on social protection and inclusion, with clear priorities and targets and ways of measuring achievements. The participative approach engaged a wide range of ministries, institutions, UN agencies, international organisations, NGOs and other partners.

PROJECT DETAILS –

Enhancing the social protection and inclusion system for children in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Partners:

UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina

Total cost in €:

1.75 million

EU Contribution in €:

1.4 million (80%)

Start date:

November 2011

End date:

November 2013

Results:

5,000 children and their parents benefitted from increased access to inclusive and protective social services

Techniques:

Cooperation with authorities at federal and cantonal level on management and organisation; promotion of collaboration between local authorities and social services providers in 11 selected municipalities; training

