

# Upgrading care for children in need in Montenegro

*Vulnerable young people need careful attention, and in Montenegro the EU has been helping to prevent separation of children and families, and supporting community-based care and the provision of better homes.*

## CHILDREN CARE INSIDE THE COMMUNITY

Children who lack parental care, or who have disabilities, or who come from minorities that suffer discrimination are getting a new chance in Montenegro. Children in need are benefiting from a new framework that is transforming institutional care, promoting fostering, and opening up opportunities in day-care and education.

New legislation has shifted the focus away from institutionalisation and towards care in the community. In the country's largest care institution, Komanski Most, the number of children dropped from 154 in 2010 to 107 in October 2013 – a 30% decrease. Admissions to this institution are down, too: until 2010 the annual average for admissions was 31.5, but only 21 and 23 children were admitted in 2011 and 2012 respectively. And a moratorium is now in force on placing children less than three years old in institutional care.

## DEVELOPING FOSTER CARE

Meanwhile, foster care is being developed. The number of foster-families has doubled over the last two years, and media campaigns to attract foster parents have led to a recent boost in the number of families under training as foster carers. Training of social workers has also been adapted, with expert support in the introduction of new foster-care standards.

Changes also include reform of the network of centres for social work and the country's day-care centres for children and young people with disabilities. Specialised training to enhance quality of care, provision of additional equipment, and the introduction of new methods and tools such as case management and individual planning have upgraded services. Attendance at day-care centres has increased by 150% since 2010, from 53 to 133 in February 2013. And across the country, proper data collection and management have been put in place through a new electronic child protection database.

"My son will acquire work habits, and, despite his severe disabilities, he can still know that he needs to go somewhere, to have obligations and, simply, to create some rhythm in his life and become a member of society as much as all the others without a disability," said Sehada Osmankadic, one of the parents whose son just started attending a day-care centre in Peljvlja.



## LINKS TO EDUCATION

Cooperation has been promoted among authorities responsible for health, education and social welfare. Staff are being trained in intersectoral approaches to supporting families and children at risk of separation, and new children with disabilities are being increasingly included in mainstream education. The number of children with special educational needs that have benefited from assessment and support by multi-sectoral teams rose from 654 in 2010 to 1,220 by August 2013. Media campaigns have raised

awareness about the rights of children with disabilities, and prompted greater demand for services and enhanced inclusion.

Training of school staff has included specialised assessment and care of children suffering autism, along with models of schooling of children with autism. Nejra Mekic, a psychologist at an elementary school who has received training, said she was shown “a completely different approach towards children with autism, including methodologies in communication, and how to better respond to their needs.”

## PROJECT DETAILS – Child Care System Reform

### Partners:

Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Montenegro  
UNICEF Montenegro

### Total cost in €:

1,374,560

### EU Contribution in €:

1,249,600 (91%)

### Start date:

January 2011

### End date:

July 2014

### Results:

Shift from large institutionalised care to smaller homes and foster-care and community-based care;  
new and modernised day-care centres;  
new staff skills and greater inter-sectoral cooperation

### Techniques:

Development of policies, legislation, and monitoring mechanisms;  
strengthening institutions; training of staff;  
development of services;  
promotion of foster care

