



## **Child Rights in Serbia 2005, Summary**

Marija Petrović

Nevena Vučković Šahović

Ivana Stevanović

Published by

CHILD RIGHTS CENTRE

Belgrade, Dositejeva 4

33 44 170, 21 84 122, 184 096

[www.cpd.org.yu](http://www.cpd.org.yu)

[cpd@eunet.yu](mailto:cpd@eunet.yu)

For the publisher

Ljubomir Pejaković, Director

Editor of all publications

Vesna Dejanović

Translated by

Jelena Popović and Svetlana Orlić

Design and Prepress

OMNIBUS, Belgrade

Printed by

DEDRAPLAST, Belgrade

Circulation

100

ISBN 86-83109-38-0

This report was made possible by the help of *Save the Children Norway and Democracy Commission Small Grants, US Embassy Belgrade.*



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Marija Petrović  
Nevena Vučković Šahović  
Ivana Stevanović



Child Rights Centre  
*Belgrade, 2006.*

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## CHILD RIGHTS IN SERBIA IN 2005

This Report on the rights of the child in Serbia for 2005 has been drafted by the Child Rights Centre. The Report aims to inform the domestic and international public about the practical exercise of the internationally-guaranteed rights of the child in Serbia. In order to address the issue, we opted for a structure somewhat different from that of the previous Report. For reasons of convenience, a full report was put up on the Centre's web page. An abridged version was prepared for print and was published both in the Serbian and English languages.

The form of the Report is based on the General Guidelines of the Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding the form and contents of reports to be submitted by the States parties under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter referred to as: the Convention). As for the content, it is still based on the control list of questions compiled by UNICEF. The offered list is tailored to our needs and circumstances, hence some indicators untypical for Serbia were omitted, while others were added up.

By virtue of this methodology, this **Report** comprises an introduction and eight chapters. Each chapter includes an overview of individual rights. **The introduction provides** a brief overview of general political, economic and social circumstances in Serbia over the period covered by this Report. It also features a general evaluation of the exercise of child rights in Serbia and of the institutional framework for the exercise thereof. Finally, the introduction supplies recommendations to the competent government bodies for general and individual areas action is required.

Under the heading ***The Rights of the Child in Serbia and the Convention on the Rights of the Child*** in Chapter I, an analysis is presented of general implementation measures. These measures include a string of legal, administrative and other measures undertaken for the exercise of the rights recognized by the Convention. Chapter II deals with ***the definition of the child*** and Chapter III ***addresses general principles***. The initial three chapters are related to the corresponding provisions of the Convention and refer to the entire concept and all of child rights. Other chapters (IV - VIII) ***tackle specific rights of the child***.

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF: Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF 2002, New York

The Report also features the most important results of the study the Centre conducted in the course of 2005 on child labour - the recognition of the problem and views of both children and adults, tolerance of diversity - the views of adolescents on the diversity issue and a research into the views of adolescents on the educational and health systems.

Opting for the above form and substance, we wished to cover all areas of child rights and make a comprehensive overview of the exercise of these rights in Serbia.

As in the previous Report, notwithstanding extensive efforts invested in the compilation of this Report and the best of our wishes and intentions, we were not able to draw up a balanced and complete analysis of the child rights sphere, which was due to several factors. First, our work was hampered by limited data that we were able to obtain due to the unsystematic monitoring of the field on the part of the relevant state authorities. For instance, the issues of child labour, domestic violence, child trafficking, street children, torture and many more are not particularly dealt with by the competent government services. Thus, available to us were solely fragmentary data, supported by other sources provided by international or non-governmental organizations. This is why many elements are still missing, which makes it difficult to paint a full picture of the level of exercise of child rights. Secondly, only limited human and material resources necessary for systematic and daily monitoring were available. This is particularly mirrored in the fact that we could not follow court and administrative proceedings in cases of importance for children. This problem would, for the most part, be overcome if all relevant administrative and court decisions were made available to the general public e.g. by placing regular updates on the Internet.

The Centre is grateful to all peers and collaborators who helped to draw up the Report. As always, their expertise and impartiality made an invaluable contribution to the compilation of this Report.

The Centre also thanks numerous national and foreign government and non-governmental organizations for allowing us to use and publish the results of their studies.

We are especially grateful to The Redd Barna Organization of Norway, which has been our most devoted friend and partner ever since the Centre began to operate, and the Democracy Commission Small Grants, Embassy of the United States of America in Belgrade deserve our credit for the material assistance in defining specific indicators and compiling the Report and database.

# INTRODUCTION

## Child Rights in Serbia in 2005

|  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Basic data:                              |                                    |
| Area:                                    | 88.361 km <sup>2</sup>             |
| Population:                              | 7.463.157 <sup>2</sup>             |
| Ethnic makeup:                           | Serbs - 6.212.838                  |
|  | Roma - 108.193                     |
|  | Hungarians - 293.299               |
|  | Bosniacs - 136.087                 |
|  | Albanians - 61.647                 |
|  | Montenegrins - 69.049 <sup>3</sup> |
| Population (up to age 19) <sup>4</sup> : | 1.662.029 (22,27%)                 |
| GDP per capita:                          | 3.100 USD (estimated)              |
| Inflation rate in 2005:                  | 15,6%                              |
| Average net monthly salary:              | 18.191 CSD                         |

The past year **2005** (including the first two months of 2006 when this Report was concluded), **brought no essential changes** to the ambiance into which children are born and raised. General measures for the implementation and exercise of child rights will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter. Presented here will be only the most general facts, primarily in the context of overall economic, social and political circumstances in Serbia.

Thus, **the following two events deserve special attention:**

- » In Serbia in 2005, a new **Family Law** was adopted. This law represents a milestone in the field of child rights because the notion of child rights and a series of specific principles and rights were introduced for the first time into domestic legislation. Unfortunately, the law does not provide the definition of family, nor does it explicitly prohibit physical abuse of children. Furthermore, it only indistinctly governs the

<sup>2</sup> An estimated number of inhabitants in 2004.

<sup>3</sup> According to the 2002 population census.

<sup>4</sup> The Serbian Statistics Bureau collects no data for category of up to 18 years of age, the 2004 estimate.

exercise of child rights sphere. However, we believe that, despite its deficiencies, the **Family Law** constitutes the basis for furthering the rights of the child related to the family environment and providing support for children without parental care.

- » In 2005, the **Juvenile Justice Act** was introduced in Serbia for the first time. This is yet another important stride, this time in the protection of children in special circumstances. The enactment of the Act was preceded by a lengthy and participatory process, which involved participation of judges, police representatives, social work centres, the office of the prosecutor, prosecution bodies, professors of law, international government and non-governmental organizations such as UNICEF, the Council of Europe, the Danish Institute for Human Rights, international and domestic experts and children themselves. It is still too early to speak of any effects of the Act because, although it came into force, its application may begin only after many accompanying by-laws have been formulated and adopted. The enactment of the Act was a significant step in harmonizing national legislation and practice with international standards and, above all, with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

#### **Other activities of systemic importance:**

- » The only coordinating body in this area in Serbia - the Child Rights Council, continued its work, but was not strengthened institutionally and system-wise. However, the fact that the body "lived through" the change of the Government instils hope in its sustainability and hopefully, its strengthening as well.
- » The Serbian Assembly set up a Children's Rights Sub-Committee within the Committee for Gender Equality. Except several initiatives and calls for talks with the CRC, no other public information of the activities of the Sub-Committee has been released so far.
- » The office of children's ombudsman in Vojvodina within the Office of the Provincial Ombudsman continued its work and advancement.
- » The Strategy for the Development of the Social Welfare System in Serbia was adopted.

#### **In 2005, activities were taken:**

- » To reduce the number of children living in poverty. Unfortunately, it is still too early to discuss effects, but the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy drew up the first annual report on the activities in the implementation of the Strategy for the Reduction of Poverty.

- » To implement the National Action Plan. In 2005, the Child Rights Council of the Serbian Government conducted one-day consultations with municipal representatives in all regions of Serbia with the aim of launching activities to prepare local action plans on children. The Local Plans drawn up by the municipalities of Pirot, Sjenica and Kragujevac, with the assistance of UNICEF, served as a model and guideline for the formulation of local plans.
- » To introduce the human rights champion function (ombudsman). The Law was adopted, but the ombudsman was not appointed as yet.
- » To introduce the child rights champion function. A decision was reached to adopt a special law on children's ombudsman. The draft was prepared, but the law was not adopted.
- » To compile and maintain a single data bank on all children-related fields. A special database was established with indicators laid down by international instruments (the Millennium Development Goals) and indicators for monitoring domestic instruments - the National Action Plan for Children and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, but the database still does not include all the necessary input.
- » To promote the health of children, adolescents in particular, and elimination of their health-damaging habits. The efforts invested in this field are still minimal and do not form part of a specific strategy. The measures related to the enforcement of regulations prohibiting smoking in public institutions (schools in particular), if applied, may prove to be effective.

**In 2005, the following was not accomplished:**

- » A law on discrimination was not adopted, although a preliminary draft on discrimination against people with disabilities was drawn up
- » A law on children (the rights of the child) was not adopted
- » An increase in and specification of the budget intended for children
- » A higher degree of political interest in, awareness of and concern over children (the number of politicians who are highly, or at least, superficially interested is still negligible).
- » The essential reform of the educational system in accordance with international standards
- » The development and implementation (with institutional, professional support) of a special strategy for adolescents
- » The legal regulation of the status of non-governmental organizations
- » A higher level of education and dissemination of information concerning the rights of the child among as broad a circle as possible, including children, parents, teachers and health professionals

- » The establishment of an efficient system for the protection of children (and emergency actions) from all forms of abuse and exploitation, including those occurring in the context of trafficking, in the media and through the publication of harmful content on the Internet

### **The factors that may have had a positive impact on the exercise of child rights:**

Unfortunately, economic, political and social advancement in Serbia in 2005 was minimal.

- » The most important event in the course of the past year was progress made in relations between Serbia-Montenegro and the EU. The Feasibility Study for the Stabilization and Association Agreement between Serbia and Montenegro and the EU was accepted and negotiations were underway, but against the background of sustained threats of suspending the accession process due to poor cooperation with the Hague Tribunal.
- » Some economic indicators are encouraging: this primarily refers to an increase in production, continuation and speeding-up of the privatization process as compared to 2004, an increase in exports and a reduction in foreign trade deficit, and an improved collection of public dues, primarily VAT. Of no less importance is an intensive legislative activity which is to promote the framework for the pursuit of economic activities. Besides these, also significant are the processes of cooperation with the organizations and governments of developed countries and **technical and financial aid** lent to Serbia in support of the overall reform and development in specific spheres. As for the rights of the child issue, even in 2005, the most important was the support of UNICEF. Given the unwillingness of the Serbian government to allocate a special budget for children, the state of affairs in the child rights sphere could not have been improved without its continued assistance.

### **The factors that hindered the exercise of child rights:**

There are still much more factors hampering the exercise of child rights and slowing down the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international treaties, as well as domestic regulations and strategies. Unable to offer a more detailed analysis of all factors bearing on a child's possibility to exercise his/her rights, we will focus on some of them manifested through the problems we deem to have been important in 2005. In brief, they could be described as:

## □ Organizational

Good coordination at both the micro and macro levels is of great importance for the child rights. Serbia still lacks **political will, awareness, knowledge and human and financial resources to set up efficient and functional systems**. In the child rights sphere, this becomes evident through the work of the national coordinating body - the Child Rights Council and most of the institutions dealing with children without parental care, schools and social work centres.

## □ Economic

As evidenced by the foregoing general statistics, a large number of children in Serbia live in poverty. Continuous political problems shift the activity focus from the economic issues; hence, the reforms are not progressing at an envisaged pace. Two major problems are unemployment and inflation (15.6% last year). Due to an increase in real terms in the costs of living, a large number of families are not able to ensure sound upbringing and quality education for their children. Education-related costs additionally worsen the position of a large number of families.

## □ Political

We believe that organizational, economic and social problems might be overcome more swiftly if the Kosovo issue, fate of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro and cooperation with the Hague Tribunal were resolved. Status quo, unwillingness to confront the truth and abuse of history, tradition and culture by some members of political elite diminish our chances to create a political ambiance where the promotion and protection of human rights would be the first priority. It is only in the context of politics that recognizes human rights, political objectives of inclusion into European integration processes and development of a healthy society, that a more significant progress could be expected as regards the respect for and exercise of the rights of the child. Unfortunately, every child in Serbia is still a hostage of politics. The efforts of some politicians to improve certain walks of life for children remain eclipsed by the autistic and insensitive attitude of the majority. The fact that children and their rights are seldom a topic of political discourse (and action) fully supports the above assertion.

□ **Social factors** in Serbia are numerous and remain one of the major obstacles to the exercise of the rights of the child.

They are primarily evident in the framework of the **crisis of the system of values**. Society as a whole is facing the crisis of identity, or more precisely, no clear moral objectives are in place. There is no general social and political consensus over the objectives, so that it is difficult to expect a clear and relatively uniform vision statement about any relevant activities to be formulated. Society, family in particular, and family members cannot orient themselves and choose from among the values offered in the form of tradition, history, Europe, human rights, globalization or church. The effects of this have the most striking bearing on the education system.

The lack of a clear vision of the future of society and poor educational system affect the society modernization process. Consequently, the attitude towards children, youngsters, rights and freedoms changes slowly. The patriarchal and authoritarian attitude towards women and children is still dominant. This is reflected in familial relations, as well as in relations within the school, institution, health care system and local environment. The fear of diminishing or losing authority is still an obstacle to a child's right freely to express views, to expect that his/her view would be taken into consideration, or independently to take part in the making of all decisions of his/her concern (family, school, administrative or court proceedings, medical interventions, participation in free activities and the like). The evolution of the respect for the weaker or for diversity is still in its early stage. Children are often mistrusted because they are smaller, weaker and less powerful, which is also frequently subject to manipulation (the example of an inadmissible stalling of the court proceedings, inadequate response of law enforcement and essential distrust of children had its most drastic form in the proceedings against bishop Pahomije who was charged with sexual abuse of boys. The court decision as such is not so much subject of our interest as the fact that the bishop, not the children, was in the focus of attention and that the proceedings were conducted to the detriment of the interest of the children concerned and in contravention of the fundamental principles applicable to cases involving minors as victims).

**Family** is the most desirable environment for a healthy and happy development of children. However, the abovementioned economic, political and social factors in Serbia have a negative impact on its security, cohesion and vitality. With the adoption of the Family Law, Serbia demonstrated its readiness to introduce a novel and more modern view of family and familial relations. This topic will be tackled in more detail in a special chapter. It is important to stress here that the state too is resolved to promote the economic standing of the family. What **is still**

**missing** is the **support** for present-day and would-be **parents**, and special support for single parents. The over-concern of family members with subsistence issues often leads to child neglect and abuse.

**The attitude towards diversity** is insufficiently fostered in Serbia. The educational reform in the 2001-2003 period rested on a vision of multiculturalism and co-existence between diverse individuals, but that vision was crushed. Unfortunately, attempts made in 2005 to make a difference through "pilot" projects had a small target group and produced modest effects. The respect for diversity (discrimination ban) is a priority at the political platform level, but not necessarily in political discourse and action.

**Political (non)culture**, which is primarily manifested directly - in speech, dialogue, relations with others (children, for instance), sets no good example. Politicians are public figures and often represent role-models for children and youngsters. The media in Serbia promotes the often vulgar and violent language and behaviour of politicians. The attainment of political goals by negating other people and everything that is different represents the already quite normal and expected behavioural pattern of many politicians. It seems that in their public appearances, politicians lack public awareness and are even unwilling to change their discourse and behaviour, thus contributing to the promotion of the culture of society, particularly its youngest segment.

**The attitude of the media towards children** is inconsistent. In 2005, it was mainly sensation-driven, which is reflected in the fact that the media swiftly lost interest in a particular case. In their coverage of specific cases that arouse public attention, the media focus is on an adult rather than a child. Some improvement was observed in terms of a greater respect for the child's right to privacy. Likewise, some media, that is, some reporters, prove to be sensitive to child victims of the violation of rights, but rarely address the participatory rights of children.

**The professional ethics** of health professionals, teachers, educators in institutions, employees in social work centres and others dealing with children, was particularly interesting to the Child Rights Centre in the course of 2005. The absence or low level of professional ethics was not evident vis-a-vis children only, yet children are most certainly the greatest victims of the problem. In Serbia, some efforts were invested, primarily in the social welfare sphere, in shedding light on the issue and drawing up a system reform plan aimed at raising professional and ethical awareness of all those dealing with children within the system.

**Social violence**, particularly violence against children, is still a problem in Serbia. It is committed in four contexts - school, family, institutions and local environment - mostly by adults against children. However, an increase and change in the quality of peer violence is particularly disconcerting. In Serbia, no quality plan or strategy is in place for the resolution of the problem. Current activities are aimed at repression and security, taking no account of the causes, and do not promote the amicable settlement of conflicts.

**The attitude towards civil society** i.e. civic organizations, somewhat deteriorated in the course of 2005. It is observed that in political discourse and behaviour such activities are largely distrusted, sometimes even dismissed as uncooperative and obstructive and not infrequently branded as treasonous. Pressure is substantially milder when at issue are organizations dealing with the rights of the child or some other less politically controversial issues. In practice, many government bodies are cooperating with non-governmental organizations in the implementation of projects.

### ***Conclusion***

Despite the criticism of the degree of exercise of child rights in Serbia during the course of 2005, the hope remains that the positive strides made so far will lead to a shift in 2006 and the years to come. The fulfilment of child rights is a process, just as is the development of political decision-makers' understanding of the need for securing a more prosperous future for Serbia and all its people primarily through raising awareness, the respect for human rights, and the promotion of children's education and health.

# I GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION

The state union of Serbia and Montenegro has still not submitted its Initial Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Republic of Serbia has prepared its part of the Report, but the part of Montenegro is not yet finalised, and the developments on the political scene in the country suggest that we should not expect the submission of the Report in 2006.

## 1. National Strategy

There is no consensus in the Republic of Serbia about a long-term and comprehensive strategy to improve the status of children in Serbia, and no progress in that direction was made in 2005.

The activities that contribute to the improvement of the status of children, to be specified further below, are based on the National Action Plan for Children that was adopted in February 2004 and that contains the necessary guidelines for improvement of the status of children, defining the directions of development in specific areas. However, this is a document of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, i.e. of the executive power, which means that it may be easily changed. Besides, this document does not contain solutions for all relevant areas, but only partial solutions. Nevertheless, the existence of the National Action Plan for Children is valuable, and based on that plan the following activities were performed in 2005:

- » **three Local Action Plans** were prepared - for the city of Kragujevac, and the municipalities of Pirot and Sjenica - and an initiative launched to have local action plans prepared for all municipalities in Serbia.
- » **General Protocol for Protection of Children from Molestation and Neglect** was prepared, envisaging intersectoral cooperation aimed at better protection of children in all stages of the process - from detection to care and rehabilitation.

Other action plans that are related to specific areas are the following:

- » **Strategy for the Development of the Social Welfare System** represents a document containing the fundamental principles harmonised with international standards. It is based on the principles of availability of social services to users; participation of service users in decision-making; possibility to choose services

and service providers; best interests of service users; comprehensive analysis and satisfaction of the needs of service users; provision of services in the least restrictive environment; and encouraging independence of. **The Strategy** envisages decentralisation of the system and individualisation of the measures used, and focuses on measures to reduce the number of social service users. Inefficiency has been identified as the biggest problem of the present system; therefore, the Strategy stipulates a higher level of intersectoral cooperation, with centres for social work as coordinators, in order to increase efficiency.

- » **Strategy of the Ministry of Education and Sports for the 2005 - 2010 period**; however, we believe that this strategy does not contain the necessary elements to ensure its implementation, but is more of a declarative character.
- » **General framework for the national strategy against violence**, which should in the forthcoming period serve as a basis for preparation of a comprehensive strategy. The general framework represents a good basis because it incorporates all elements of the system (criminal justice protection, family law protection, and necessary concrete measures).

The activities within the framework of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of continued in 2005 and the first report on the achieved results was prepared.

## 2. Harmonisation of National Legislation with the Convention

The legislative solutions related to children and to the exercise and promotion of the rights of the child improved to a certain extent in the previous year. The greatest contribution was made by the adoption of **Juvenile Justice Act**, which introduced a special criminal justice system that embraces the fundamental principles established by international documents, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The new Family Law is also a very important act since, for the first time, it introduces the rights of the child, adopts the concept of joint guardianship by parents who are separated, and introduces family law protection against violence in the family. A step forward in terms of quality of measures imposed in case of neglect and molestation of children was made by directing the measures primarily toward the offender and not to the child as was the case earlier. However, this Law has not fully met the demands put before it by the expert community, and has failed to explicitly prohibit physical punishment of children, to introduce the obligation of the state to provide parental education, and to provide guidelines to define the child's best interests, nor has it shown consistency in application of the child's right to express views and has not fully acknowledged the child's ability to develop. Nevertheless, the most serious deficiency of this Law is that it contains neither the definition of the child nor the definition of the family.

Certain improvement is also evident in the sphere of health care, since every child is entitled to the highest health care standards, and enjoys general rights of patients that ensure (at least on the legislative level) maintenance of integrity and protection of the patient's personality.

Nevertheless, the general assessment of the harmonisation of domestic and international regulations is not favourable. A large number of domestic regulations have not been harmonised, and include partial solutions that are often inconsistent.

### **3. Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

In the Republic of Serbia, international treaties are applied directly, which means that if there is any legal void or discrepancy between domestic rules and international law, the provisions of the Convention may be applied. However, in practice, local courts apply international regulations in a negligible number of cases, but no concrete data are available on their actual number.

### **4. Efficient Measures of Protection**

The system of protection of rights of the child in the Republic of Serbia provides for the exercise of regular and extraordinary remedies, including appeals to the Constitutional Court of Serbia in the last instance. The system of legal remedies, however, does not cover certain situations when matters pertaining to the child are decided but the child is not accorded the status of a party to the proceedings, which is the result of insufficiently recognised and imprecisely defined rights of the child to express views.

The process of establishment of a children's ombudsman was not completed in 2005; the draft law is currently in the parliamentary procedure. Also, the issue of independent legal representation of the child in all relevant legal and administrative proceedings is still not regulated.

The novelty in this field is the introduction of the SOS Hotline for children. The Serbian SOS Hotline project was implemented by the Foundation of HRH Princess Katarina Karadjordjevic in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy, the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Ministry of Health, the People's Office of the President of the Republic of Serbia, and Centre for Protection of Infants, Children and Youth.

## 5. Coordination and Implementation of the Convention

The main coordinating body for implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and child rights-based activities is the **Child Rights Council**, which was set up by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in 2002. However, the Council was not sufficiently institutionalised in 2005, which makes its work more difficult. Nevertheless, thanks to the efforts of that same coordinating body, progress was made in the development of local action plans and formation of a database for the monitoring of the status of children.

Despite the Council's activities, the mechanisms of intersectoral cooperation are weak and there is no appropriate coordination between the relevant subsystems - education, social welfare, judiciary, finances, health care, internal affairs. The same problems exist in the cooperation between the governmental and non-governmental sectors, as well as in the relations between the government and the local government authorities. Poor coordination is, *inter alia*, the result of complete lack of reforms in some of the said subsystems, primarily in the judiciary.

In the past year, however, the foundation was laid for better intersectoral cooperation in the social welfare field, since the starting point of the Strategy for the Development of the Social Welfare System is precisely the intersectoral cooperation of centres for social work as system coordinators.

The establishment of a Children's Rights Sub-Committee at the Serbian Assembly should give a better picture of the entire system from the starting or normative level, which could result in more harmonised efforts of specific sectors.

**On the level of implementation** of regulations and strategies, a lack of implementation mechanisms, absence of monitoring of results and evaluation of achievements are still hampering progress. An additional problem lies in the fact that most strategies are prepared without a full and comprehensive analysis of the current situation and a realistic assessment of capacities available for their implementation.

## 6. Oversight of Implementation

Mechanisms for oversight of implementation are non-existent in most areas. No progress was made in that direction in 2005. It seems that there is no awareness of the necessity of systematic control over accomplishment of the set goals (in the areas for

which they were set), since no indication was given of any such actions and projects in the future period. The currently existing mechanisms of supervision of activities move within the limits of regular control of everyday activities by the bodies themselves. Since independent oversight is still not introduced (children's ombudsman has not been established yet), it is only the non-governmental organisations that supervise the exercise of children's rights within the frame of their organisational capabilities.

## **7. Budget Analysis and Allocation of Necessary Funds**

Budgetary allocations in the Republic of Serbia are made by sectors, which makes the analysis of the amount of funds assigned for children's needs and of their allocation more difficult, and it is not evident how much funds from the budget are set aside for children. The Serbian Government allocates the biggest portion of funds for children's needs through the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy (all contributions related to social welfare of children are provided through this ministry) and the Ministry of Education and Sports.

If we analyse the budget funds allocated to the stated ministries, it is obvious that the funds of the Ministry of Education and Sports have suffered a realistic reduction compared to the preceding year, as well as the funds intended for families and children (within the budget of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy).

In 2004 the budgetary expenditures for education in the Republic of Serbia accounted for 3.7% of the GDP, which is more than in 2003 (3.5%) but less than in 2002 (4%), which puts Serbia behind all the countries in the region measured by the share of GDP that is allocated for education purposes.

The data related to improvement of children's health is impossible to obtain, because there are no special budget lines within the budget for the health care system intended exclusively for children.

## **8. Data/Indicators**

Collection of data relevant for the monitoring of the status of children's rights is a challenging task, because of the existence of significant problems. The Serbian Statistics Bureau keeps information of public interest that represent the basis for analysis of other indicators, but the age groups used by the Bureau are not in compliance with the definition of a child provided in the Convention. Namely, the

Bureau does not use the 18-year age limit, and its data cannot be applied to the entire juvenile population in Serbia. Furthermore, the Bureau does not even have the information on the number of children in Serbia (under 18 years of age).

Other data related to specific areas are collected partially and it is difficult to cross-reference them because they are based on different methodological approaches.

However, a big shift was made in this field in 2005 that should ensure in the period to come better monitoring of indicators of relevance for the assessment of the status of children's rights. Namely, the DevInfo database was developed, containing 48 indicators based on the Millennium Development Goals that may be changed only by the global DevInfo database administrator, and leaving the possibility for the database user to define its own indicators on the national or regional level. On the national level in Serbia, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper was added to the local set of indicators in October when the latest database was published and now the database contains 396 indicators, with the data available for 312 of them, but without the data for 2005 and in many cases even for 2004.

## **9. The Role and Status of Non-governmental Organisations**

The role and status of non-governmental organisations remain undefined as respective legislation has not been enacted yet. Hence, at the moment important preconditions for strengthening cooperation among non-governmental organisations and state institutions do not exist. As in the past period, their cooperation was implemented on a project basis in the situations when the government authorities were mostly in need of professional support from the civil sector. However, concrete support to the non-governmental organisations dealing with child rights is still wanting, as are legal solutions envisaging financial facilities for the activities of the civil sector.

A good example of an attempt to upgrade the cooperation to a higher level was the participation of the Child Rights Centre in the establishment of the Mediation Centre together with the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Belgrade Bar Association, and the National Bank of Serbia. This provided foundation for a long-term cooperation between the civil sector and governmental institutions from the early stage of introduction of this new institute - mediation - into the national legal system. The Centre also works closely with the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy on the implementation of the "Transformation of the Social Welfare System Institutions for Accommodation of Children and Youth" project, and this Ministry funded a child labour research carried out by this Centre.

It is also worth pointing out that the Fund for Social Innovations, which funds the local community projects within the social welfare system, has imposed a requirement on the principals to have a partner coming from among local non-governmental organisations in order to become eligible for project funding.

## **10. Dissemination, Training and Raising Awareness**

Non-governmental organisations still play the main role in information dissemination and raising awareness about child rights. On the local level, certain institutions specialising in the work with children (and parents) have now started to include child rights-related topics in their programmes. By way of illustration, in 2005 the Children's Culture Centre of Belgrade organised seminars and a round table discussion about Children's Ombudsman, and a workshop for parents with the aim of raising their awareness about child rights. The idea of the previous Government to disseminate information through education system, which would have been a good systemic solution, came to no fruition, so that there are no systemic measures in place for dissemination promotion, and any efforts depend on the individuals who have become aware of the pertinence of this issue. In the long run the absence of systemic measures may lead to decline in the interest for this topic, which is reflected in a smaller number of newspaper articles about child rights published in 2005 in comparison with 2004, and in their changed structure, as the first indicators of this trend. Namely, the articles were mostly informative in nature, and failed to present critical consideration of a problem underlying the reported information.

## **11. International Cooperation**

A large number of international organisations taking active part in the child right programmes and projects are present in the Republic of Serbia. (UNICEF, Save the Children, the European Agency for Reconstruction, and the World Bank). It is important to note that most of the projects implemented through the national institutions and the civil sector are funded by international organisations (UNICEF), international non-governmental organisations, and foreign governments. Despite the improved cooperation in 2005, the same problems persist as in other sectors - lack of a clear picture of the objectives that want to be achieved and lack of systemic solutions.

