

# Current national legislation on diversity in Serbia

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Achieving cultural diversity and creating a context in which everyone can express their uniqueness and fulfill their personal potential requires a society based on democratic values, tolerance, social justice and the rule of law. Such a context is built by the implementation of an adequate legal framework, with the Constitution at the top of the pyramid of legal acts, followed by laws and bylaws.

Therefore, we begin review of the Serbian national legal context relevant to achieving cultural diversity by summarizing some of the most important provisions of the Constitution relating to equality and non-discrimination. That is followed by a summary of laws that are not directly related to the education system, social protection and youth work, but are also essential for establishing a system based on the principle of equity and respect for the personal dignity of every citizen.

**Constitution of the Republic of Serbia**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 98/2006 and 115/21, contains a significant number of provisions related to the protection of the rights of members of minority groups and provisions on the creation of overall conditions and opportunities which are necessary for the development of culturally sensitive society. Thus, pursuant to Art. 14, the state guarantees special protection to national minorities, in order to achieve full equality and preserve their identity, while Art. 15 guarantees the equality of men and women while ensuring equal opportunities for both sexes. Human and minority rights are directly guaranteed by the Constitution, so that laws cannot affect their essence, pursuant to Art. 18. The provisions on both human and minority rights are to be interpreted in the spirit of democratic values and in accordance with international standards, as well as the practice of relevant international institutions. The Constitution explicitly proclaims the prohibition of discrimination, stating that before the Constitution and the law everyone is equal, in the sense of Art. 21.

The Constitution guarantees special protection of the family, mother, single parent and child (Art. 66), while the right to social protection is exercised in accordance with the principles of social justice, humanism and respect for personal dignity (Art. 69). The right to social protection belongs to those citizens and families who need social assistance in order to overcome life's difficulties and satisfy basic needs. According to Art. 71, everyone has the right to education, with primary education being compulsory and free, while all citizens are entitled to an equal right to access higher education.

When it comes to members of national minorities, in addition to the rights that belong to all citizens, they also have special individual and collective rights aimed at protecting the specific rights of these persons. Individual and collective minority

rights are exercised in accordance with the Constitution, national regulations and international standards. Any form of discrimination on the grounds of belonging to a national minority is prohibited, as well as violent assimilation of members of national minorities (Art. 76 and 78). The right of members of national minorities to preserve their identity includes the protection and development of cultural, religious, ethnic and national identity, which includes school programs in national minority languages, the use of national minority languages in official procedures and the establishment of minority public media resources, in accordance with Art. 79 of the Constitution. In the event of a state of emergency or war, derogations from human and minority rights are allowed, but only to the necessary extent. Measures derogating from human and minority rights must not result in discrimination based on sex, racial, religious or national origin, or language or social origin, under Art. 202.

The Constitution states that Serbia encourages the development of tolerance and intercultural dialogue in the field of education, culture and mass media, in order to promote understanding and cooperation among all people living on its territory, regardless of their personal identities (Art. 81).

In the part related to the territorial organization of the state, the Constitution stipulates that municipalities as local self-government units have several specific competencies important for meeting the needs of citizens, including competencies in meeting the needs of citizens in education, culture, health, social and child protection, sports and physical culture (Art. 190).

**Criminal Code**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 85/2005, 88/2005, 107/2007, 92/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016 and 35/2019, envisages a series of incriminations that protect the equality and equity of citizens and that prevent discrimination and the spread of hatred and intolerance. Some of the criminal offenses are: violation of equity (Art. 128), violation of freedom of expression of national or ethnic origin (Art. 130) and incitement of national racial and religious hatred and intolerance (Art. 317). A special aggravating circumstance that affects the sentencing is the notion that the crime was committed out of hatred due to race and religion, nationality or ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity of the victimized person, so that this circumstance will be considered aggravating by the court, except if it is not prescribed as a distinct feature of a criminal offense (Article 54a).

**Law on Prohibition of Manifestations of Neo-Nazi or Fascist Organizations and Associations and Prohibition of the Use of Neo-Nazi or Fascist Symbols**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 41/2009, among other things, it prohibits the production, presentation and dissemination of materials prepared in order to spread hatred and intolerance towards citizens of specific origin or background. It is prohibited to provoke or encourage religious, racial, or national hatred and intolerance (Art. 3).

**Law on Public Information and Media**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 83/2014, 58/2015 and 12/2016, stipulates that the rules on public media functioning are designed in such a way as to ensure the exchange of information, ideas and opinions and to preserve democratic values, peace, truthfulness and personal development (Art.

2). Public media resources are not to be subjected to censorship, pursuant to Art. 4, provided that, at the request of the public prosecutor, the court may prohibit the distribution of certain media content if that is necessary in a democratic society and if the content calls upon direct violence against a person or group of persons based on their national, racial, religious, sexual orientation, disability or any other personal characteristic (Art. 59). Hate speech is prohibited, so media content must not encourage or spread hatred based on any personal traits of citizens, regardless of whether such an announcement is a criminal offense (Art. 75).

**Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities**, Official Gazette of the FRY, no. 11/2002 and the Official Gazette of RS, no. 72/2009 and 97/2013, defines a national minority as any group of citizens of the Republic of Serbia that is sufficiently represented and permanently seated on the territory of the state. A national minority should be characterized by special characteristics such as language, culture or nationality. Members of certain minority groups are interested in preserving their distinctive identity (Art. 2). The law prohibits discrimination against persons belonging to national minorities, while stipulating that the application of special measures in order to achieve full equality of minority groups shall not be considered discrimination (Art. 3 and 4). The law provides for a number of rights through which the prerogative to preserve national specificity is exercised, so that they include, among others: the right to use native languages, the right to nurture culture and traditions and the right to education in native languages. When it comes to schooling in the native languages, members of national minorities have the right to be educated in their own language in institutions within the public education system, provided that the law may prescribe a certain minimum number of students as a prerequisite for exercising this right. The curriculum for schooling in the native language should contain topics related to the history, culture and art of the specific national minority, under Art. 13 of the law.

**Law on Official Use of Languages and Scripts**, Official Gazette of RS, No. 45/91, 53/93, 67/93, 48/94, 101/2005, 30/2010, 47/2018 and 48/2018, among other things, defines issues regarding the official use of languages and scripts of national minorities. It envisages that members of a national minority are entitled to use their native language and script in the territories of local self-government units where these national minorities traditionally live in larger numbers. The unit of local self-government is obliged to introduce certain minority languages and scripts into official use if the percentage of members of that national minority in the total population in the given unit reaches at least 15% of the total population. The national minority language is to be in official use within 90 days of determining the conditions prescribed by law (Art. 11). The official use of language in this sense implies the use of the language and script of the national minority in judicial, administrative and other legally regulated procedures, as well as in official communication with the authorities. It is envisaged that the names of streets and other public signs should be stated both in the Serbian language and in the languages and scripts of the respective national minorities.

**Law on Prohibition of Discrimination**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 22/2009 and 52/2021, provides that the terms "discrimination" and "discriminatory treatment"

signifies any unjustified discrimination or unequal treatment or maltreatment (exclusion, restriction or preference), overt or covert, of persons or groups, as well as members of their families or persons close to them, based on race, color, ancestry, nationality, ethnicity or ethnic origin, language, religion or political affiliation, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, income level, wealth, birth, genetic characteristics, health status, disability, marital and family status, conviction, age, appearance, membership in political, trade union and other organizations and other real or assumed personal characteristics. Discrimination is prohibited by all means.

**Law on Prevention of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 33/2017, regulates, among other things, the area of potential discrimination in connection with upbringing and education, as well as it prohibits placing barriers to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the educational process, pursuant to Art. 18. Harassment, insulting and belittling of a preschool child or student is defined as a particularly severe form of discrimination.

**Law on Gender Equality**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 52/2021, defines the concept and meaning of the term gender equality/equity, policy measures for achieving and promoting gender equality and other important issues related to gender equality. Measures provided by law should enable equality of women and men in all areas and activities, as well as prevention and suppression of all forms of gender-based violence. According to Art. 3 gender equality/equity signifies "equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities, equal participation and balanced representation of women and men in all areas of social life, equal opportunities for exercising rights and freedoms, use of personal knowledge and skills for personal and social development, equal opportunities and rights in access to goods and services, as well as achieving equal benefits from the results of work, while respecting biological, social and cultural differences between men and women and different interests, needs and priorities of women and men in public and other policies and decisions on rights and obligations." The legislator clarifies that "gender" implies roles, characteristics and relationships that society considers appropriate for women and men, while "sex" signifies a biological characteristic on the basis of which people are defined as women or men (Art. 6, para. 1, 1 and 3). All forms of discrimination, both direct and indirect, on the basis of sex and gender are prohibited, including harassment, degrading treatment, threats, extortion, gender-based hate speech, gender-based violence and other, in accordance with Art. 4.

Among the areas in which special measures for achieving full gender equality are implemented, the legislator especially emphasizes the field of social and health care, as well as the field of education, upbringing, science and technological development. In the field of education, upbringing, science and technological development, the authorities should take special care to integrate gender equality topics into teaching content, while excluding gender stereotypes, sexist content and the like, taking into account the age of students (Art. 37).

**Strategy for Gender Equality** from 2021 to 2030, Official Gazette of RS, no. 103/2021, states that in the period of validity of the previous strategy for gender

equality some fine results were achieved in the normative field, as well as some normative improvements were made in order to get closer to some international standards relevant in this field. However, modest results were achieved in the field of economic empowerment of women and in the field of gender-sensitive education. Some of the key challenges in achieving gender equality are: changing patriarchal attitudes and patterns that are conflicted with achieving full equality between women and men, combating misogyny and anti-gender discourse and implementing specific support measures for women who face additional problems in achieving gender equality due to belonging to marginalized groups.

The strategy explicitly states that without gender-sensitive education there is no possibility for the development of a gender-equal society, and therefore for such a society that respects differences. It is necessary to introduce a gender perspective in the education system, which requires gender-sensitive curricula, as well as to improve the gender competencies of teachers. It is necessary to reconsider the status of the subject of Civic Education and to work on the development of competencies of teachers who teach this subject, given that the program of Civic Education primarily teaches about issues of gender equality.

There are certain disparities in terms of attending certain levels and types of education, so it has been noticed that a slightly higher percentage of women receive higher education, but also that women are more represented in the social sciences and humanities, while a higher percentage of men receive higher education in areas of technical and natural sciences.

When it comes to gender equality in the field of social protection, it was noticed that there are no adequate data on gender sensitivity in the provision of services in this area. It is indisputable that women with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable categories and that they encounter multiple obstacles in exercising their right to social protection.

The general goal of the strategy is to overcome the gender gap and achieve gender equality for boys and girls and women and men, which is also the basis for the overall progress of society. Specific objectives are related to the development of a gender equality education system, which should strengthen the capacity of relevant institutions. In that sense, one of the measures is the revision of teaching content in order to eliminate gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes. Also, the equality of Roma girls and girls with disabilities should be encouraged in this and many other areas.

**Strategy for Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children and Protection of Victims 2017–2022**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 77/2017, devises an approach to combating trafficking in human beings, bearing in mind that in recent years it has been noticed that the number of victims among Serbian citizens has increased and that types of possible exploitation are multiplying. One of the special goals is the protection of children from human trafficking and in order to achieve it various measures are to be applied, including preventive programs that will be adapted to the needs of children and especially the needs of children from vulnerable social groups.

- Measures should also include the implementation of programs about gender discrimination and its consequences, which should be organized in the education system for children of primary and secondary school age.

The following review summarizes legal documents important for the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity in the sectors of education, social protection and youth work.

## Education

Respect for cultural diversity, nurturing of democratic values and the rule of law are unattainable ideals without an adequate education system. In order to create a democratic and humanistic context, certain knowledge, skills and abilities are to be acquired. The education system in Serbia is regulated by a series of laws and bylaws that inevitably emphasize the need to respect the rights of all citizens, regardless of their cultural values and personal traits.

**Law on Fundamentals of the Education System**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 88/2017, 27/2018, 10/2019 and 6/2020, stipulates that the education system must ensure: respect for human rights and the rights of every child, respect for human dignity and education in a democratically organized and socially responsible institution that fosters openness, cooperation, tolerance, awareness of cultural and civilizational connections in the world and commitment to basic moral values, values of justice, truth and solidarity (segment related to the General Principles of Education and Upbringing (Art. 7, para. 1, item 3...)). All citizens of the Republic of Serbia are entitled to equal rights to education, while persons with disabilities have the right to education and upbringing that respects their needs, which could also include individual or group support, according to the individual circumstances of every person (Art. 3).

The goals of education and upbringing, among other things, are: providing support for the overall development of the child; developing of self-awareness, critical thinking and motivation; developing positive human values, solidarity and sense for cooperation with others; developing respect for racial, national, cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, sex and age equality, tolerance and respect for diversity and development of personal and national identity, developing a sense of belonging to the Republic of Serbia, respect and nurture of Serbian language and native languages, preservation of Serbian and national minority tradition and culture, development of interculturality and preservation of national and world cultural heritage (Art. 8).

The law defines the concept of key competencies for lifelong learning as a set of integrated knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by each individual for personal fulfillment and development. On the other hand, general interdisciplinary competencies are based on key competencies and are developed through the teaching of all subjects, so that they are applicable in different situations and contexts and also in solving various problems and tasks (Art. 11 and 12).

If needed, it is possible to adopt an individual educational plan in the cases of students who, due to social deprivation, developmental disabilities, other disabilities, learning difficulties, risk of early school leaving and other reasons, need additional support in education, as well as for students who achieve results that exceed expected level of educational achievement. Also, the institution provides the removal of physical and communication barriers according to the needs of certain students.

**Law on Primary Education**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 55/2013, 101/2017, 27/2018 and 10/2019, envisages, among the goals of primary education: providing a stimulating and safe environment for the overall development of students; developing non-violent behavior and establishing zero-tolerance policy for violence; developing a sense of solidarity, understanding and constructive cooperation with others and fostering camaraderie and friendship; development and respect for racial, national, cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, sex and age equality; development of tolerance and respect for diversity and of personal and national identity; development of awareness and sense of belonging to the Republic of Serbia; developing respect and nurture of Serbian language and native languages of national minorities; nurturing tradition and culture of the Serbian people and national minorities with the development of interculturality and developing respect and preservation of national and world cultural heritage (Art. 21).

**Law on Secondary Education and Upbringing**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 55/2013, 101/2017, 27/2018 and 6/2020, envisages that one of the goals of secondary education is to respect racial, national, cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, sex and age equality, and to develop tolerance and respect for diversity. (Art. 2).

**Law on the Use of Sign Language**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 38/2015, stipulates that deaf people have the right to use sign language, which includes the right to learn the language and the right to use the services of a sign language interpreter, whereby parents and elders of a deaf child, as well as all other persons, cannot prohibit a child to learn and use sign language (Art. 4). When it comes to the use of sign language in educational institutions, activities and programs could be conducted in sign language, while attending such a program is conditioned by the assessment on the need for additional support by appropriate interdepartmental commission (Art. 9).

**Law on Pupil and Student Standards**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 8/2010, 55/2013, 27/2018 and 10/2019, defines activities in the field of providing more accessible, efficient and quality education and upbringing for pupils and students. A high school student, among other things, has the right to: accommodation, food, educational work, student scholarships and additional activities such as cultural, artistic and non-formal education activities (Art. 3). In principle, all high school students from the territory of the Republic of Serbia can exercise their rights in the field of living standards, with the proviso that students belonging to vulnerable groups can exercise their rights under privileged conditions and in accordance with the law. The legislator defines students from vulnerable groups as students from economically deprived families, children without parental care, children belonging to Roma national minority, refugees, displaced persons and others (Article 4).

**Law on Textbooks**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 27/2018, defines the notion of textbooks, textbook sets, manuals and additional teaching aids. When it comes to the preparation, printing and distribution of textbooks, the Government decides on financing these activities, especially taking into account students coming from deprived settings, as well as students with disabilities. The legislator defines the term “low-circulation textbooks”, which include, among other things, textbooks in the languages and scripts of national minorities, as well as textbooks for special programs, such as programs for gifted students. Special funding rules apply to low-circulation textbooks. Textbooks and other resources should encourage equal opportunities and respect for diversity with their content and form (Art. 13).

**Law on Adult Education**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 55/2013, 88/2017, 27/2018 and 6/2020, envisages that adult education is part of the unique education system of the Republic of Serbia, which provides for the acquisition of competencies and qualifications necessary for personal and professional development, work and employment, or socially responsible behavior, in which adult education is realized as formal education, non-formal education and informal learning. One of the principles of adult education is the principle of equal opportunities, which includes inclusion in education regardless of age, gender, disability, developmental disabilities, racial, national and religious affiliation, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics.

**Strategy for the Development of Education and Upbringing in the Republic of Serbia until 2030**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 63/2021, builds on the strategy applied until 2020, as well as on the Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence for the period from 2020 to 2023. The new vision of the development of education in Serbia is based, among other things, on educational institutions that will build their own culture in which everyone is respected and cared for, as well as a culture of solidarity and mutual respect. The general goal is to provide quality education in order to realize full personal potential. Achievement of such a general goal implies setting a special goal in the form of improving teaching and learning. Improving teaching and learning, among other things, means reaffirming and strengthening the educational role of educational institutions that should also have an important public and cultural function:

The strategy states that the existing positive legal framework in the field of education is mostly harmonized with the relevant international anti-discrimination standards. Legislation in the field of education that has been adopted in recent years supports inclusive education by all means, not only when it comes to students with disabilities, but also for students who are at increased risk of exclusion from the system due to specific socio-economical conditions. However, this strategic document emphasizes that despite some progress, there is still no relevant data on the extent to which the goals of inclusive education have been achieved. It was noted that the appropriate level of inclusion has not been reached when it comes to people with disabilities and children with disabilities, so that the practice of forming special classes for these students is present even nowadays. Also, there is a lack of special measures for children who, due to social exclusion, do not use all the benefits of the educational process. Furthermore, the Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Serbia until 2030 recognizes groups



that are at special risk of social exclusion and poverty and whose rights in the field of education should be especially guarded, so that among them are: children, pupils and students whose families have low socioeconomic status; members of the Roma national minority group, especially those living in disadvantage neighborhoods; persons with disabilities; residents of rural areas, especially residents of villages in border areas, etc.

It was noticed that a high number of children enrolled in primary education should be considered in the context of other data indicating that as many as 15% of children from Roma neighborhoods are outside primary education, and that Roma children most often drop out of schooling. Roma children continue to face discrimination and segregation and frequent enrollment in special schools, although modern science and international standards argue that educational neglect and material deprivation should not be the reason for enrollment in special schools. Schools attended exclusively by Roma children are still represented in the Serbian education system. It is worrying that the completion rate of secondary school in the general population is significantly higher than the rate for Roma. Inequalities are also present in the education of children with disabilities in relation to the education of the remaining student population.

The strategy emphasizes that individual discrimination is present in education in Serbia, as well as sexual harassment and homophobic behavior. Discriminatory and homophobic content is present in textbooks and teaching materials. There is a lack of content in teaching materials and textbooks that would encourage the nurturing of interculturality. Therefore, within the measures for improving programs in educational institutions, teaching and learning in pre-university education and upbringing, it is envisaged that textbooks should be adapted in order to be sensitive to gender equality and the specifics of different social groups, including vulnerable groups (without stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination). Also, activities to strengthen the capacity of employees in education should be aimed at fostering the principles of gender equality and non-discriminatory attitudes and behavior.

**Strategy of scientific and technological development of the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2025, “The Power of Knowledge”**, is based on the assumption that Serbia will become a progressive and prosperous state if the fund of knowledge available to its people increases. The general goal of the strategy is a scientific-technological and innovation system that contributes to the accelerated development of Serbia through improving the quality and efficiency of science, technological development and innovation and to the further integration into the European Research Area, which contributes to reaching the standards of developed economies.

The document **Strategic Priorities for the Development of Culture from 2021 to 2025 - Cultural Policy, Challenges Today and in the Future Years**, adopted by the RS Government, identifies 20 priorities of cultural policy that require special attention. Policies in the world, Europe and the region are at a major turning point. One of the priority points is the preservation of cultural and historical heritage, bearing in mind that the preservation of national cultural heritage has a direct

impact on the adoption and nurturing of cultural and social values as a whole.

**Rulebook on the protocol of actions in the institution in response to violence, abuse and neglect**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 46/2019 and 104/2020, prescribes the content and methods of implementation of preventive and intervention activities, conditions and methods for risk assessment, methods of protection against violence, abuse and neglect, and monitoring the effects of measures and activities. The rulebook is to be applied in all sorts of institutions in the education system.

**Rulebook on detailed criteria for recognizing forms of discrimination by an employee, child, student or third party in an educational institution**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 22/2016, defines discrimination and discriminatory treatment in the educational context, while emphasizing that every participant in the education system has the right to be protected from discrimination. According to the Rulebook, discrimination and discriminatory treatment cover any unjustified discrimination, unequal treatment (exclusion, restriction or giving priority) or neglect, in relation to a person or groups of persons, as well as members of their families or relatives, in an open or covert manner, based on their personal characteristics.

**Rulebook on the conduct of the institution in the case of suspicion or established discriminatory behavior and insult to the reputation or dignity of the person**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 65/2018, defines the procedure to be applied in the institution when discriminatory behavior is suspected or established or when it is suspected or established that the reputation or dignity of a person has been insulted. The rulebook covers; ways of carrying out preventive and intervention activities; obligations and responsibilities of the child, student, adult, parent, or other legal representatives, employee, a third party in the institution, bodies of the institution and other issues. It is especially important that this bylaw also refers to segregation in the education system and that it defines preventive and interventional activities to combat this negative phenomenon.

**Rulebook on performing community service and humanitarian work**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 68/2018, defines community service and humanitarian work, which is determined for the student in parallel with the imposition of educational and educational-disciplinary measures. It is a work that includes activities which should nurture socially responsible behavior of students and which should help to restore the damage in the community.

**Rulebook on quality standards of work of the institution**, Official Gazette of RS – Education Gazette, no. 14/18, in the second part of the text which refers to the quality standards of school work in the field of quality number 4- Support to students – prescribes that the school has a support system for students from vulnerable groups, while in the field of quality number 5 – Ethos, it implies that adequate interpersonal relations are to be established at the school, measures and sanctions are to be consistently applied for discriminatory behavior, as well as the system of protection against violence should be functional.

## Social protection

Different human rights are essentially intertwined nowadays, which implies that the establishment of a system in which cultural diversity is highly respected requires the realization of at least a minimal social rights.

**The Law on Social Protection**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 24/2011, defines the activities in the field of social protection, goals and principles on which the social protection system is based, as well as other issues essential for exercising the rights of users of social protection services. It should be emphasized that this law is based on a significantly different paradigm compared to previously valid regulations, given that the focus is on the service user who is seen as a bearer of potential for positive change and as a center towards which the entire social protection process is directed to. In a given system, the holder of a crucial role is the case manager, as an expert involved in the process of assessing and planning the necessary services, as well as an agent arranging access to necessary services. Social protection is defined as an organized activity of general interest, whose main goal is to provide assistance to achieve a productive and independent life, as well as to prevent and eliminate the consequences of social exclusion, in accordance with Art. 2. The right to social protection is exercised by every individual and family in need of help and support in overcoming life's difficulties and satisfying basic living needs, while the rights of the citizens are realized through social protection services and material support (Art. 4). Beneficiaries of social protection are citizens of Serbia, but they can also be foreign citizens and stateless persons, if it is in accordance with the law and relevant international agreements. Institutions that provide social protection cooperate closely with the education system, police, judiciary, health care system and all other sectors and institutions, primarily based on signing cooperation agreements.

The key institution in the social protection system is the center for social work, and next to it there are institutions for the education of children and youth, institutes for social protection and other entities. Funds for performing social protection activities come from the budget of Serbia, territorial autonomies and local self-government units, as well as from performing social protection activities. It should be emphasized that social care institutions, as well as social protection service providers, can be established with both public and private funds.

Among the principles on which social protection has based some principles especially stand out: the principle of respect for the integrity and dignity of beneficiaries, the principle of the best interests of beneficiaries and the principle of non-discrimination, Art. 24-32. The principle of accessibility and individualization of social protection implies that social protection services are provided in a way that implies their accessibility to users and also in a way that respects cultural and other differences, Art. 33.

The basic groups of beneficiaries of social protection are children and youth, under which entity the law recognizes minors and adults under 26 years of age. Children and young people may need social protection because they cannot meet their

basic needs within the family or they cannot overcome social exclusion, while the reasons for their difficult situation may include: lack of parental care or parents who are unable to meet their needs of young people; development issues; addiction and conflict with the law.

Social protection services are divided into: assessment and planning services, daily community services, independent living support services, counseling-therapeutic and social-educational services and accommodation services. In situations where the poverty and survival of the beneficiaries are endangered, emergency intervention services are also provided.

The administrative procedure needed for children and young people in order to exercise social rights is conducted exclusively by social work centers, which applies to all groups of users, whereby the centers with case managers decide on specific services that users will be catered to. The Center for Social Work issues referrals for the use of the social protection services, whereby the service is realized in the social protection institution or with the assistance of another authorized service provider. Depending on the circumstances of the specific case, the service will be financed from the budget or with partial or full coverage of costs by the service user or persons close to him.

In addition to using social protection services, children and young people can be beneficiaries of the right to material support. Material support includes financial social assistance, one-time financial assistance, training assistance and other types of material support. The right to financial social assistance can be exercised under certain conditions, while the basic condition refers to the fact that an individual or his family cannot satisfy their basic needs with their own income. A family in a state of social need is entitled to increased financial assistance if there are children under the age of 15 within the family, or if the family member is a young person under 26 and in regular schooling, since the law considers these two categories of persons incapable of work (Art. 85).

When it comes to children and young people, various social protection services, as well as the provision of material support, can be particularly important in preventing their social exclusion. Therefore, there is often talk about the need for cross-sectoral cooperation, so that with the cooperation of different services, children and young people would be able to realize their human rights and fulfill their personal potential.

**The Law on Social Card**, Official Gazette of RS, no 14/2021, defines the establishment and maintenance of the public register Social Card. This register records data on the users of social protection services and persons related to them, on the socio-economic status of these persons, as well as data related to the services and social protection rights used by these persons. The purpose of keeping such a register is, among other things, to improve the procedure for exercising the rights and services of social protection, equitable distribution of social services and insight into the effects of applied social policy measures, while the register is maintained by the competent ministry. Other data on members of vulnerable and socially vulnerable groups is also collected for the purposes of providing and planning assistance (Art. 6).

**Law on Financial Support to Families with Children**, Official Gazette of RS, no 113/2017, 50/2018, 46/2021, 51/2021 and 53/2021, contains provisions aimed at providing support to families with children, in order to enable exercise of the rights of the child and to provide support to parents in upbringing their children. Some of the rights that can be exercised in accordance with the provisions of the law are: the right to child allowance, the right to parental allowance, the right to funds for construction, participation in the purchase or purchase of a family building or apartment based on the birth of a child and one-time assistance for the birth of the second and third child. Families whose total income per member does not exceed the statutory threshold are entitled to the right to child allowance. The beneficiary of financial social assistance whose children attend school does not have to submit proof of financial status periodically, while the beneficiary whose child receives allowance for assistance and care of another person realizes the right to child allowance regardless of his income, in the sense of Art. 30.

**Family Law**, Official Gazette of RS, no 18/2005, 72/2011 and 6/2015, defines the property and personal family relations, as well as the status and rights of the child. Article 6 stipulates that everyone is obliged to be guided by the best interests of the child in every activity related to the child, while the state must take all measures to protect the child from neglect, abuse and exploitation. Children born outside marriage are completely equal to children born in marriage, while the same rules apply to the relationship between an adopted child and an adoptive parent as to the relationship between a child and a parent. When it comes to children without parental care, the state is obliged to provide them with family protection whenever possible.

The legislator has dedicated a special part of the text to the rights of the child. Thus, the child, among other things, has the right to be provided with the best possible conditions for proper and complete development, as well as the right to education in accordance with his wishes, preferences and abilities (Art. 62 and 63). Also, a child who is able to form an opinion has the right to express that opinion, as well as the right to be informed in a timely manner in order to form his/ her opinion. Due attention must be paid to the child's opinion, especially in the case of decisions related to the exercise of his rights, while a child who has reached 10 years of age may independently address the authorities to exercise the right to express an opinion (Art. 65). When it comes to foster care, it is based on the decision of the competent guardianship authority in order to protect the child's best interest. A child older than 10 years of age and capable of reasoning must agree with a foster care status, while foster parents should be persons who have passed the foster care preparation program (Art. 110-118).

**The Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection**, Official Gazette of the RS, no 24/2018, regulates the legal status of asylum seekers and persons granted asylum and temporary protection. Persons seeking or enjoying asylum and temporary protection shall not be discriminated against on the basis of any personal characteristics. The law provides special rights for minors who are asylum seekers or beneficiaries of asylum and temporary protection. Thus, the principle of protection of family is applied, so that based on it the authorities take all necessary measures to maintain the unity of the family of asylum seekers and other protected persons.

The law is applied in accordance with the principle of protection of the best interests of the minor, taking into account the welfare, social development and origin of the minor, his opinion depending on age and maturity, the principle of family unity, as well as the protection and safety of the minor. Special care is needed if there is a suspicion that a minor is a victim of human trafficking or a victim of domestic violence (Art. 10), while an unaccompanied minor is immediately assigned to a temporary guardian (Art. 12). Asylum seekers and users of asylum and temporary protection, as well as minors with their families, have the right to social assistance, health care and education. Under Art. 55 of the law, an asylum seeker is entitled to free primary and secondary education, in accordance with special regulations, while a minor asylum seeker is immediately provided with education services. It should be emphasized that users of asylum have the right to pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education under the same conditions as citizens of the Republic of Serbia, based on the regulations governing the field of education (Art. 64). According to Art. 71 Serbia is obliged to ensure the inclusion in the social, economic and cultural life of persons who have been granted the right to asylum. Persons who have been granted temporary protection (for a period of up to one year), which may occur in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons, are also eligible for free primary and secondary education in public schools (Article 76).

**Strategy for the Development of Social Protection**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 108/05, included activities in the social protection sector to be implemented until 2009, and its key objectives were: deinstitutionalization, decentralization and democratization of social protection services, improving social protection of the poorest citizens and developing the network of community services.

When it comes to social protection in Serbia at present time, the DRAFT Strategy of social protection in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2019 to 2025 is currently available (initial version). The existing draft is in line with European values and good practices, bearing in mind the ongoing process of negotiations on Serbia's accession to the European Union.

The draft strategy states that the general social and demographic situation in Serbia is still characterized by a high emigration rate, intensive aging of the population and a high poverty rate. When it comes to the state of the social protection system, it was stated that the number of users of the social protection system is growing, while material support measures in the form of financial social assistance and child allowance are very common. About a third of children in Serbia receive a child allowance, with its amount in 2016 amounting to 2.660,00 dinars, while the increased child allowance amounted to 3.450,00 dinars. It is noticed that families with children are provided with fragmented and insufficiently coordinated support, while children who leave institutional accommodation are among the most vulnerable categories. Furthermore, when it comes to social protection services that are under the jurisdiction of local self-government units, it can be noticed that they are insufficiently represented and underdeveloped, with the most developed services being those for the elderly and for the children and youth with disabilities. Nevertheless, social care for elderly citizens is not at a satisfactory level.

It was stated that the social protection system has a significant role in providing educational support, especially for marginalized categories of the population, but that in this field the cooperation between educational institutions and the social welfare system is not sufficiently developed. There is an obvious lack of capacity and resources in social work/care centers that do not have an adequate number of skilled workers and are burdened with administrative work to the detriment of work with beneficiaries of social services.

One of the special goals of the Draft Strategy is the system of social protection which contributes to reducing social exclusion and encourages the active participation of citizens in society, with an emphasis on supporting families at risk and promoting gender and intergenerational solidarity. In that sense, the target values that should be reached by the end of 2025 are the increased share of funds of local self-government units in the provision of social protection services by 25%, and reduced rates of children and youth in institutional accommodation by at least 20%. Measures to be implemented to achieve these goals relate to the transformation of institutional accommodation capacity, primarily through their downsizing, while at the same time redirecting resources to satisfy social needs in the community, with a focus on protecting families and providing support for education.

**Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Roma Women in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2016 to 2025**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 26/2016, refers to the verified reports according to which the majority of Roma men and women face social exclusion and poverty, as well as open, and even more often, covert discrimination. The financial situation of Roma men and women is extremely difficult, so that according to relevant data, the share of users of social protection services in the Roma population is almost four times higher than in the total population in the Republic of Serbia. When it comes to education, children from the Roma community face numerous difficulties in exercising their rights to quality education, and are exposed to negative stereotypes and discrimination by educational institutions. Roma children are often not involved in the educational process, which has an extremely negative impact on their competitiveness in the labor market. It can be said that the Roma are in fact discriminated against in the exercise of all human rights, given that certain rights are intertwined, so that the strategy is aimed at improving the overall position of the Roma. The focus is on involving the Roma community in the process of defining and implementing measures, while eliminating discrimination. In this regard, the fact that scientific research on the issues of inclusion, life and customs, status and identity of Roma is insufficiently present in the social sciences and humanities in Serbia should be taken into account.

In order to improve the position of Roma, it is necessary to provide their equal access to the education system, but also to implement measures that will support the completion of the appropriate level of education by Roma students. It is indisputable that Roma students face discrimination in the education system, that they often do not have access to quality education and that they are unjustifiably enrolled in special schools. This is evidenced by the fact that the coverage of primary education in the general population is almost complete, while among the

Roma it is only 85%, with a significant number of students who do not complete primary education. Problems were noted regarding insufficient knowledge of the language in which teaching takes place, as well as insufficient support for learning the Romani language and the development of Romani cultural identity within formal education. Segregation of Roma is still present, so that despite some changes, there are cases of forming special Roma departments or entire Roma schools, especially within or near Roma neighborhoods. Segregated schools then face a lack of adequate teaching staff and inadequate curriculum quality. These phenomena naturally result in a lack of professional staff within the Roma population that could support the educational empowerment of Roma.

Having in mind the described situation, the general goal of the strategy is to improve the socio-economic position of the Roma national minority with full realization of minority rights, elimination of discrimination and achievement of greater social inclusion of Roma men and women in all segments of social life. One of the special goals is the inclusion of Roma children and youth in the education system, as well as the inclusion of young people and adults who have not been educated at all in a formal way. One of the measures to be implemented is the provision of additional social, economic and other support needed for inclusion in education, as well as, if necessary, the engagement of pedagogical assistants who would support the inclusion of Roma children in standard schools. In addition to the above, a number of measures and activities in the field of guaranteeing the right to housing and social protection are needed, in order for the Roma to truly become equal members of the community. In this regard, the workers of the centers for social work should develop culturally competent practices that would enable them to reach out to those citizens who actually need social protection services the most.

Within the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2016 to 2025, one of the measures envisages the development of educational institutions as inclusive, intercultural, non-discriminatory and safe environment for Roma and all other children. development of an inclusive educational environment based on respect for diversity and promotion of equality, children's rights and human rights, while among the activities that should be implemented is the development of appropriate guidelines for anti-discrimination rules, and the removal of curricula that spread negative stereotypes about Roma, providing affirmative content about the Romani language, culture, history and traditions in the programs of various subjects, as well as elements of intercultural education.

**The Strategy for Improving the Position of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia for the Period from 2020 to 2024**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 44/2020, and the accompanying Action Plan envisage that the main goal of implementing measures is to improve the overall social and economic position of persons with disabilities and to foster the realization of their full equality.

A person with a disability is defined as a person who has permanent physical, mental, intellectual or sensory difficulties that hinder the full realization of personal potential and participation in social processes. The strategy points out,



referring to the data from 2011, that as many as 8% of the population in Serbia are people with disabilities. Of particular concern is the fact that a significant number of people with disabilities continue to live in social care institutions, although the general trend is to force deinstitutionalization. Various stereotypes about the roles and characteristics of persons with disabilities are still present in the public, while an approach based on the “medical model of disability” is often present among professionals, although such an approach is known to be outdated. Particularly vulnerable categories are women with disabilities who may be discriminated against in multiple ways and also exposed to gender-based violence.

The vision the strategy is striving for is Serbia as an inclusive society in which persons with disabilities can exercise their rights on an equal basis and enjoy the freedoms guaranteed by national and international legal frameworks. The general goal of the strategy is to equalize the possibilities of persons with disabilities in relation to the possibilities of other citizens, and this is to be achieved through measures such as ensuring full accessibility of facilities, the inclusion of persons with disabilities in public life, providing measures to support community living instead of institutionalization, adequate and personalized support to include people with disabilities in an inclusive education system.

**Strategy for Prevention and Control of HIV Infection and AIDS in the Republic of Serbia, 2018-2025**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 61/2018, calls upon full exercise of the rights of persons infected with HIV, as well as to the eradication of their discrimination. The document states that Serbia is one of the countries with a low frequency of HIV infection, so that according to the data from 2017, there were about 3,100 infected people in the country, with an assumption that there is also around 3,100 people who are not aware of their HIV positive status. The vision of the strategy is Serbia as a country without new HIV infections and discrimination against people living with HIV and against key populations at risk of HIV. One of the specific goals is to reduce stigma and eliminate discrimination against people living with HIV, by implementing measures to improve the capacity to combat discrimination. It is necessary to implement activities in the form of training for professionals in various sectors, including the education and social protection sector, in order to raise their awareness of the need to fully realize the notion of human rights of people living with HIV.

**Strategy for deinstitutionalization and development of social protection services in the community for the period 2022-2026**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 12/2022 envisages the development of a network of community-based services, which will enable citizens to fulfill most of their needs at the local level and consequently reduce the number of citizens who in need of institutional accommodation services. The document is primarily aimed at people with mental disabilities, who are at the highest risk of institutionalization and social exclusion. The strategy emphasizes that it is indisputable that the number of children and young people in institutions has decreased in recent years, while the situation is not so favorable when it comes to adults.

The main problem that the strategy focuses on is the lack of services that are provided in the community, as well as the insufficient investment of funds at the local level in the organization and subsequent maintenance of such services.

Namely, the idea that came from the implementation of the previous strategy was to gradually transform institutions for accommodation into institutions that will provide accommodation services with only a minimal part of their capacity, while focusing on support services for families and children with disabilities and on respite services. At the same time, it would increase the number of users with social protection services provided in the community. However, such an idea was realized on a modest level, primarily due to inconsistencies in the financing of services at the local level. Hence, the new strategy envisages measures and activities to improve the system in terms of personnel and infrastructure.

The vision of the strategic document implies a society in which everyone lives in the community and has their needs met in the natural environment, while the general goal is to completely finalize the processes of deinstitutionalization and social inclusion. One of the special goals is to empower users for the deinstitutionalization process, but also to empower professionals and other actors to implement and advocate for the deinstitutionalization. Relevant trainings should be organized to develop skills and knowledge of professionals and their coworkers in the social protection system. All professionals should pass at least one accredited program in the field of deinstitutionalization, while both professionals and the general public are expected to manifest greater knowledge about the rights of people with intellectual disabilities at the end of the strategy period.

**Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination for the period from 2022 to 2030**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 12/2022, is based on the vision of the Republic of Serbia as an inclusive society, with zero tolerance for discrimination, in which all citizens, regardless of personal characteristics, have equal opportunities to enjoy all rights and freedoms. However, the strategy states that, despite the successes achieved in achieving the goals of the previous strategy, there is still a risk of social exclusion of many members of different marginalized groups. Unlike the previous strategy, which singled out groups at special risk of discrimination (national minorities, women, LGBT persons, persons with disabilities, elderly, children, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants, religious minorities and people discriminated against due to health conditions), the current strategy deals with the analysis of the risk of discrimination in various areas of human rights. The following areas have been highlighted: public administration and the judiciary; defense, home affairs and security; education, vocational training and science; work and employment; social protection; housing; health care and sports, culture and media.

The change that needs to be achieved through the implementation of the strategy is to build an inclusive society that does not tolerate, but notices and respects differences, and in which each person can realize their full potential, feel accepted and participate equally in all areas of social life. The basis for building such a society is the elimination of stereotypes, harmful patterns and prejudices, the promotion of a culture of human rights and respect for every person regardless of personal characteristics that characterize him or her.

**Rulebook on additional educational, health and social support for children, students and adults**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 80/2018, regulates conditions for

assessing the need for providing additional educational, health and social support for children, students and adults, as well as the composition and modus operandi of the interdepartmental commission that values the need for additional support. Additional support includes rights, services and resources that provide the student with help for overcoming physical, communicational and social barriers within educational institutions and in the community. Support measures include the provision of additional resources and services to meet the educational, health and social needs of students with disabilities, but may also include the provision of support measures to overcome the language barrier for students whose native language is not spoken at school and also the application of other measures that are needed in a particular case.

**Rulebook on conditions and standards for the provision of social protection services**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 42/2013, 89/2018 and 73/2019, stipulates the minimum standards relating to the provision of all social protection services. Minimum standards include the minimum structural standards, which refer to the infrastructure, personnel and organization, and the minimum functional standards, which refer to the necessary traits and structure of professional procedures. There are some common minimum standards that apply to all services and to all groups of users and special minimum standards that can apply to a specific service and a specific group of users, taking into account the specifics of both services and groups of users. Common minimum structural standards address issues such as publicity of work, hygiene and working hours of the service provider, while common minimum functional standards relate to the reception of users, assessment of needs, development of staff competencies and other.

When it comes to providing daycare services, these services are available for: children and young people with physical disabilities; persons with intellectual disabilities, who need daycare and supervision as well as support in maintaining and developing their potential and children and young people in conflict with the law, parents, school or community (Art. 68). As for the purpose of the daycare services, it is reflected in improving the quality of life of users in their own social environment through maintaining and developing social and other functions and skills, in order to enable them to live as independently as possible. Development needs of users are being met through the daycare service, so that they acquire and develop life skills, personal and social responsibility, as well as develop other functions (Art. 69).

Among other services, some users can have access to the shelter service, which is founded for children, young people, adults and the elderly who live or work on the street and who voluntarily request or agree to this service. The purpose of the shelter service is to provide temporary or occasional interventions and to meet the current needs of users, as well as to mediate in ensuring the availability of other services in the community (Art. 78).

**Rulebook on professional affairs in social protection**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 1/2012, stipulates that the basic professional activities in social protection are giving information, assessment, planning, mediation and advocacy in the exercise of rights for users, guidance, socio-educational activities, implementation of protective

measures and monitoring the effects of services and measures in direct work with the user. A professional worker can be by education: social worker, psychologist, pedagogue, andragogue, special educator and special pedagogue, who has a license to perform basic tasks in social protection. Specialized social protection activities include: individual and group counseling and family therapy, mediation, implementation of accredited programs of intensive family support services, accredited socio-educational programs and accredited treatment programs (Art. 6), while these activities can be performed by professionals who have acquired knowledge, skills and a license to perform a specific specialized task.

**Rulebook on prohibited actions of employees in social protection system,** Official Gazette of RS, no. 8/2012 emphasizes that physical, emotional and any other abuse and neglect of users of social services is strictly prohibited. It was pointed out that discrimination based on nationality, ethnicity, cultural and linguistic differences, religious, gender, socio-economic differences and differences due to disability and sexual orientation or other personal characteristics is considered a form of abuse. In the case of abuse and neglect of the minor, the Protocol on the Protection of the Child from Abuse and Neglect must be applied.

## Youth work

**Law on Youth,** Official Gazette of RS, no. 50/2011, regulates the principle of equality and non-discrimination of young people, stating that all young people are equal, and that any discrimination, direct or indirect, or unequal treatment of young people is prohibited, especially if it is based on race, sex, nationality, religious beliefs, language, social origin, economic status, membership in political parties, unions and other organizations, mental or physical disability, health status, physical appearance, sexual orientation, gender identity and other real or presumed personal characteristics. The law stipulates that youth policy includes measures and activities of state bodies, institutions, associations and other entities aimed at improving the position of youth, while the youth sector includes all areas in which youth activities are performed, which are defined by the general goals of the National Youth Strategy.

All persons who are over 15 and under 30 years of age are considered young people. Youth work covers all sorts of youth activities that are organized with young people and for young people based on non-formal education. Youth activities take place within the free time of young people and are organized to improve the conditions for personal and social development of young people in accordance with their needs and abilities and with their voluntary participation.

Non-formal education for young people is a set of organized and youth-friendly educational activities that are not provided for in the formal education system. Non-formal education activities are based on the needs and interests of young people, and the principles of voluntary and active participation of young people in the learning process and the promotion of democratic values, so that young people acquire competencies necessary for personal development, active participation in society and better employability.

The basic principles in working with young people are: the principle of support for young people, the principle of equality and non-discrimination, the principle of equal opportunities, the principle of raising awareness of the importance of young people and their social role, the principle of active youth participation and the principle of responsibility and solidarity.

When it comes to conceiving and implementing policies in the youth sector, the Government, at the proposal of the relevant ministry, establishes the Youth Council as an advisory body that encourages and coordinates activities related to the development and implementation and of youth policy and proposes measures for its improvement. The Youth Council consists of representatives of state administration bodies whose areas of interest are youth and representatives of the provincial administration body responsible for youth issues, associations and federations, youth offices, as well as a joint representative of national councils of national minorities and distinguished experts. At least one-third of the members of the Youth Council are representatives of young people from the ranks of associations and federations.

The Provincial Youth Council, the Youth Council of Local Self-Government Units, the Youth Office and the Youth Agency can also be established, all in the spirit of mobilizing young people to participate in political life, both in terms of issues directly related to them and in matters of general social interest.

**National Youth Strategy for the period from 2015 to 2025**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 22/2015, envisages the principle of respect for human and minority rights, equality and non-discrimination as one of the key principles on which the implementation of youth policies is based on. Strategy is oriented towards improving the social position of young people and creating conditions for exercising the rights and interests of this population in all areas, The strategy stipulates that the term "young" covers all persons aged from 15 to 30 and emphasizes that all young people are equal, so that they should enjoy the same position and equal legal protection regardless of personal characteristics. The analysis of the current situation in the youth field indicates the need to strengthen the capacity of the ministry responsible for youth and sports, as well as the need to build local infrastructure to support youth. There is a need for a more transparent decision-making process with timely information for young people and the need for greater youth strategic activities, which is especially true for young members of vulnerable social groups. Among the strategic goals defined by the strategy some goals are: capacity building for youth qualifications and competencies, active participation of young men and women in society, support for social inclusion of young people at risk of social exclusion and youth participation in creating cultural content.

When it comes to youth education, it is emphasized that in addition to acquiring qualifications, the basic goal of education is to collect quality knowledge and build skills and attitudes for personal achievement and development, inclusion and employment. In addition to formal education for young people, increasing the capacity for non-formal education is extremely important. The number of non-formal education programs should be increased and also it is necessary to formally recognize the competencies acquired through youth work. Experience

indicates that the competencies acquired through non-formal education are those that have a positive effect on finding employment, as well as that the level of development of competencies is significantly influenced by the length of participation and frequency of participation in non-formal education programs. The strategy notes that the activities should be aimed at strengthening the competencies of members of marginalized groups, such as Roma, but that the development of competencies of talented young people should also be supported, which is already done to some extent through the support provided by the Fund for Young Talents.

Encouraging volunteerism is also important, both in society as a whole and especially among young people. In the spirit of encouraging volunteerism, the strategy suggests the implementation of activities such as: supporting the inclusion of young volunteers in short-term and long-term volunteer programs; encouraging educational, cultural and sports institutions to recognize and support youth volunteering and establishing a system for recognizing skills acquired through volunteering.

The social inclusion of young people should also be encouraged, especially bearing in mind that young people are at very high risk of poverty. The enjoyment of social protection services by young people is greatly influenced by the fact that they are not seen as a separate social group, bearing in mind that social regulations recognize young people between 18 and 26 years of age, while according to categories from the census young people are those that are less than 29 years old. In addition, there is a significant number of young people from vulnerable groups within the youth population, such as LGBTI people and Roma, so their age and marginalization should be taken into account when meeting their needs. When it comes to social protection, it is extremely important to increase the number of local social services for children and youth, given that mostly only daycare services for children and youth with disabilities have been developed so far.

**Strategy for Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence for the Period from 2020 to 2023**, Official Gazette of RS, no. 80/2020, is based on the postulate that the prevention and suppression of violence against children and the protection of children from violence are among the crucial priorities of the national policy of Serbia. It is further stated that 1.263.128 children live in Serbia, which represents 21% of the total population of the country, and that various types of abuse and neglect of children are unfortunately widely represented. Thus, violence against children is manifested in the family, as well as in educational institutions, communities, social institutions and the digital sphere. The strategy defines 11 key priorities on which the policy of treatment of children should be based, whereby children must not be exposed to any kind of discrimination concerning origin, family status, language, gender or any personal characteristics. Some of the mentioned priorities are: to support the family in order to develop parental competencies, develop prevention services for children, direct support and protection of children from vulnerable groups (such as children with disabilities and children in conflict with the law) and encourage deinstitutionalization with a better system of supervising the remaining institutions for the accommodation of children. One of the special goals of the

strategy is to change attitudes towards violence against children, in which sense measures and activities are taken to strengthen the competencies of those who work with children, but also measures and activities are taken to sensitize wider public in order to understand the phenomenon of violence against children.