

## EDUCATION OF MIGRANT STUDENTS IN SERBIA 2018/2019.

Regarding the access to education, registration of students, equal treatment principle, prevention of xenophobia and intolerance, Republic of Serbia fulfils its obligations in accordance with the International Convention for the Protection of the Rights of Workers and Migrants and Members of Their Families, Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international documents, as well as the national regulations. Article 71 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia **stipulates that everyone has the right to education which is free and compulsory in elementary school, while secondary education is free. All citizens are entitled to the access to higher education, under equal conditions. The Law on the Foundations of the System of Education** lays down that **each individual on the territory of the state has the right to education.**

In 2013, for the first time, we enrolled the children – asylum seekers in Serbia to the school (elementary school in Bogovađa), and in 2014, additional seven students were enrolled in the educational system. In the first 6 months of 2015, 30 children – asylum seekers were enrolled to elementary school. In May 2017, the total of 101 students attended schools in Palilula, Vozdovac, Lajkovac, Zemun, Rakovica, and the programme was implemented in accordance with the model: 2 lessons in class (subject teaching) and 2 lessons in the form of workshops (language and topical), or 2 subjects selected by students who spoke English or Serbian language.

The challenges our educational system is facing are the facts that children refugees rarely have documents regarding previous education on them, and in the majority of cases it is impossible to have an insight into previously acquired education and accomplishments. Also, it is not possible to determine to which grade should the child be enrolled based only on age, despite the recommendation to include them in peer groups, or to make the least possible age difference; the children in reception centres have either been excluded from education in their countries of origin for an extensive period already and received no education during transit, or had a prolonged stay in transition countries where they received certain form of education (with frequent interruptions due to moving), or had never been included in education, neither in the country of origin, nor in transient countries. Schools should fulfil their educational and emotional needs taking into account their competences, difficult living conditions and deprivations they have endured, but it is important that the children are motivated and ready to learn.

**Expert Instructions for the inclusion of student refugees/asylum seekers, into the education system** were developed, detailing the responsibilities of schools regarding the preparation of the **School Support Plan**, as well as the **Student Support Plan**, containing: adaptation and stress relief programme; intensive learning programme aimed at improving the learning of language of the host country, following the methodology of an accelerated acquisition of Serbian as a foreign language programme in additional classes, but also through participation in regular syllabus and extracurricular activities implemented by the school; individualization of teaching activities through the adaptation of school attendance schedule, didactic materials, methods and models of work; inclusion in extracurricular activities with peer support.

**This approach proved to be very effective; it differs from the approaches practiced in Western European countries, resorting to migrant integration approach in which the host-country language is first learnt in special classes or schools for migrant children, and only after having learnt the host language, the children would be admitted to the state schools. In our education system, total inclusion of migrant children is devised, in which the schools adapt to the needs of children.**

Thanks to the good organisation of the system of collaboration with other ministries, institutions and organizations, overall 98, 22% of children from reception centres of the age corresponding to preparatory preschool programme and elementary school age in Serbia, have been placed in Serbian educational system. The young students above 17 years of age also have the possibility to attend

secondary schools, provided that there are free places there, selected in accordance with their interests.

### ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED WITHIN THE MIGRANT EDUCATION PROCESS

After the experience in working with migrant students in 11 pilot schools in 2017, the Ministry implemented the following:

- In May 2017, the Minister adopted the **Expert instructions for the inclusion of student refugees/asylum seekers in the education system**, which stipulates that the school is obliged to prepare and implement the Support Plan for migrant children at the school level, and Individual Support Plan for each child.
- In collaboration with the UNICEF office in Belgrade, an Implementation Handbook for Expert instructions was prepared (available at: <http://www.mpn.gov.rs/o-ministarstvu/grupa-za-obrazovanje-manjina-socijalnu-inkluziju-i-zastitu-od-nasilja-i-diskriminacije/grupa-za-obrazovanje-manjina-i-ljudska-i-manjinska-prava-u-obrazovanju/>)
- In collaboration with UNICEF, the Centre for Educational Policies, the Ministry prepared the leaflets that were distributed to parents at collective centres in August 2017, by the Commissariat for Refugees of the Republic of Serbia. **The leaflets providing information about the enrolment of children were prepared in the following languages: Farsi, Urdu, Arabic, English and Pashtu**, in order to provide adequate information about the possibilities of education for the children during their stay in the Republic of Serbia, to their parents and guardians. In August 2018 we organized parental meetings in reception centres where in addition to the leaflets, the school administration, councils from school administration conducted the discussions with parents of current and future students.
- We organised for school administrations of MoESTD to facilitate the distribution of school bags, **school supplies and equipment** provided by UNICEF, to migrant students and our students from families with lower income, at the schools providing education for migrant children.
- Schools were forwarded **the Instructions on protection against digital violence** and the requirement to ensure the continual informing of all children about the potential abuse and consequences of unauthorised usage of video materials on social media.
- **Since September 2017 we have been educating all the elementary school age children staying in reception centres for migrants or integrative houses for children without parental guidance.**
- About 2500 children have been successively enrolled in our educational system. In November 2017, full teaching program was organised for all the children from collective centres in 45 schools in Serbia, to include 503 students attending classes at schools and 83 students who attended the classes at collective centres, considering that they stayed there for only a short period of time; in December 2018, 454 students attended classes at schools and 59 of them at the collective centres. Due to migrations, the number of students changes daily.
- School teams received a two-day training in the implementation of the **Expert Instructions for the inclusion of student refugee/asylum seekers in the education system** in August 2017, with **750 teachers and expert associates participating in the training; the training was developed by MoESTD and implemented by the Centre for Educational Policies, together with UNICEF. The capacities of teachers were strengthened through the training sessions implemented in 2018/2019 under the MADAD2 project, in collaboration with the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, by implementing 28 certified two-modular trainings delivered to 765 teachers and expert associates. The online training is in progress**, and it will have a broader coverage of the educational staff and the anti-discrimination topics, intercultural education, psychological and social support, individualization, methods for learning Serbian as foreign language, the concept of

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migrations, acculturation, social psychology, ethnic identity issues, encouraging of peer support, creating safe and encouraging environment.

- We ensured the **mentor support to schools provided by counsellors for external associates**, but it is particularly important that education counsellors from nine **school administrations (Belgrade, Niš, Baljevo, Leskovac, Kraljevo, Novi Pazar, Sombor, Zrenjanin and Novi Sad)** prepared **Action Plans for the support to children, teachers and schools** together with mentors and commissioners for refugees, the implementation of which is in progress.
- In parallel with the activities related to organizing the education of migrant students, the Ministry has been preparing the project to be funded by the Madad Trust Fund. The implementation of MADAD 2 which commenced in April 2018, will be ended on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2019.
- In the previous period, 45 schools attended by migrant children **received the UNICEF grant** in 2017, while in 2018, from the resources of MADAD 2 project (with which we applied for the EU funds to the European Committee), the Ministry **allocated the grants** of up to **EUR 6,000 to 52 schools, with the aim of strengthening and supporting the implementation of *Expert Instructions for the inclusion of student refugees/asylum seekers in the education system***, provision of school equipment and didactic materials enabling the teachers to enhance the quality of their performance with students who do not speak the teaching language; to create their own didactic material, use ICT in teaching; to provide the school supplies for migrant children, for activities encouraging collaboration between the school and local community; hiring translators and Serbian language teachers in the initial period.
- UNICEF, MoESTD, together with the Centre for Education Policies have been preparing and editing a special **website** presenting the best practice in teaching, monitoring outcomes and other information, at <https://remis.rs/immigrants-in-gymnasium/>. Since April 2018, when the Ministry took over the website, it has been updating it by uploading the details about the progress of MADAD 2 project activities;
- **Since the school year 2018/19 we have been enrolling children aged 5.5 to 6.5 to compulsory preparatory preschool programmes, for the first time.** Systemic medical check-ups are being conducted in health centres, and we implement them in collaboration with the Ministry of Health.
- In collaboration with the Institute for Improvement of Education we developed **standards and curriculum for the subject *Serbian as a foreign language*** within the Madad 2 project; its publishing is in progress. The development of the training for teachers in its implementation is under way.
- In addition to the Memorandum of Cooperation with the MoESTD, **Save the Children** organization, facilitated the implementation of the research *Safe and Enabling Elementary Education Environment for Refugee and Asylum Seeking Pupils*, which explored the support required by schools, including the support to the Ministry.
- Each child that leaves the system in order to be settled in the countries of their final destination will, apart from knowledge and good experience with the education system, bring along **the school report** prepared in Serbian language by teachers, accompanied with the English translation, containing the description of accomplishments based on cross-curricular competences (rather than on teaching subjects), so as to be recognizable in other states.
- Manuals published:
  - **Handbook for schools involved in the implementation of Expert Instructions for the inclusion of student refugees/asylum seekers in the education system**, which represents support to the employees in schools, in order to enhance intercultural

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competences, stress relief for children, as well as the development and preparation of the Support plan for students coming from a different cultural environment;

- Handbook for the subject **From Serbian as a Foreign Language to Serbian as the Language of the Environment**;
- **Handbook with examples of good practices from schools educating migrant students.**