



## What we do in South East Europe

- We're enabling 3,239 disadvantaged children to access education
- We're enabling 13,991 children to get quality inclusive education
- We're helping 850 children with disabilities get the help they need
- We're reaching 14,693 vulnerable children through protection services
- We're supporting 3,450 children to live in a foster family



The region of South East Europe – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo – is still undergoing a painful transition. The past two decades have seen dramatic socio-economic changes, the collapse of former socialist regimes, a series of violent inter-ethnic armed conflicts and the uncertain process of transition from centralised, planned economies to liberal market economies. The region is now characterised by political instability, divisions between religious and ethnic groups, corruption and organised crime.

South East Europe is home to approximately 17 million people. Children and young people make up nearly a quarter of the total population. About 855,000 children in the region are living in poverty, and there's increasing inequality, discrimination and displacement. Many children don't have enough to eat, don't go to school and cannot get treatment when they are ill. Some 13,500 are not looked after by their parents. There are more than 2,800 reported cases each year of children being mistreated and exploited.

Aspirations to join the European Union have resulted in the initiation of a major reform process across South East European countries, including education and child protection. But implementation is slow due to a lack of firm political commitment and a shortage of human and financial resources.

## Save the Children in South East Europe

We began working in South East Europe after the First World War, providing food to people who were hungry. We set up our first office in the region in 1993, to help people affected by the conflict. Since 2005, we have adopted a regional approach, linking our work in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia. We also support work in Albania by the International Save the Children Alliance.

Over the last 15 years our work in South East Europe has focused on poverty reduction, an end to discrimination and helping people influence the economic and political decisions that affect their lives. In particular, we've been working to make sure that all children get a good quality education, whatever their background. And we've been working to keep children safe – particularly those who can't be cared for by their parents – by helping local governments develop their own systems of child protection and by working to combat child trafficking.

As the countries of South East Europe make progress on their different paths towards EU accession, we've decided that it'll soon be time to hand over to local partners and other Save the Children Alliance members. We're committed to fulfilling our promises to the region's children (and our project partners and donors). So as we work on a smooth transition, we're also continuing to drive forward our ambitious aims to achieve change for children.

To do this, we're building on our strong tradition of working with partners so that civil society support is deeply rooted prior to our departure. And we've been stepping up the pressure on the region's duty-bearers to make sure that essential policies and practices are firmly in place. We hope that in this way the children of South East Europe, regardless of ethnicity, disability or social status, will be able to enjoy their right to education and protection long after our operations wrap up in December 2009.

## Key areas of work

### We're enabling more children go to school

More than 90% of children attend primary school, but rates of enrolment vary greatly between ethnic groups. Many children drop out. The children least likely to go to school are those with disabilities, refugees, those who have been displaced from their homes, or children from minority ethnic groups – fewer than a third of Roma children go to school, for example.

In the past year, we've helped 2,173 children (nearly half of them girls) go to preschool and primary school, across BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia. For example, the local authority in Pirot, Serbia, set up a database to identify Roma children and children with disabilities who were missing out on school. They allocated funding to get these children back into school, and their model has been copied in other towns. Schools, community representatives and local NGOs in all four countries have organised community surveys and

meetings with parents to help identify Roma, refugee and disabled children and overcome the reasons why they're not in school.

## **We're enabling children with disabilities to get an education**

In Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro, we've helped 346 children with disabilities gain access to non-formal education, through our support to nine community-based rehabilitation centres. And in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Doboj), we've set up a daycare centre for children with disabilities.

In Albania, the International Save the Children Alliance (the Alliance) trained 160 early childhood development specialists in methods to successfully include children with disabilities in mainstream education. The reports from preschool education inspectors show that kindergarten teachers are now more welcoming of children with disabilities but that crèche workers are still less confident. We're working with parents and early years teachers to ensure that children with disabilities get the help they need: 504 children now have individual plans and are attending kindergarten or a crèche, or receiving more specialised support.

We're also working for changes at government level. In March 2008, the government of Montenegro adopted a National Strategy on Inclusive Education, and in Kosovo the Ministry of Education approved a strategy to ensure that *all* children can go to school.

## **We're enabling children to get quality inclusive education**

Last year, Save the Children supported preschools and schools to improve the quality of education for 13,991 children (almost half of them girls). Children themselves advocate for equal access and better quality of education for all children: In October 2007, groups of children presented their requests to the President of Serbia, two entity Prime Ministers and the Minister of Civil Affairs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the Prime Minister in Montenegro. Their requests were signed by respective politicians in BiH and Serbia.

Children take part in decisions in their schools through being actively involved in developing and implementing school plans, work in children's parliaments, child-led video groups, humanitarian activities, etc. Schools and preschools are undertaking activities that help children, parents and staff to be more tolerant and respect diversity. In six schools in BiH, mechanisms for reporting violence have been established, and the schools cooperate with other services in resolving the cases.

In the past year, 799 teachers, university professors, postgraduate students and other education professionals have been trained in inclusive education techniques. More than 120

preschool teachers and parents were trained on children's rights, and 57 teachers received training in conflict resolution and establishing procedures for protection of pupils.

The Ministry of Education of Tuzla Canton in Bosnia and Herzegovina has now employed a Roma Officer, after piloting this position with Save the Children support. This person is responsible for promoting Roma culture, tradition and language in 36 primary schools. In this way, 24,017 children are benefiting from a learning environment that is more respectful of diversity and that is welcoming for all children. More than 750 Roma children (251 girls and 500 boys) benefit from improved learning opportunities thanks to better cooperation between teachers and Roma families.

## **We're working to ban corporal punishment**

Although banned in schools, physical punishment of children is still considered to be acceptable by many people throughout South East Europe.

In Serbia, we're a member of a coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who are campaigning for a law to ban physical punishment of children.

In Albania, the Alliance has carried out in-depth research in secondary and primary schools to examine the levels of violence. We've trained 100 teachers and school principals in alternative, positive forms of classroom disciplines. Next year, we'll work with schools to develop ways of preventing and dealing with bullying.

## **We're improving children's care**

Some 4,400 children in South East Europe are looked after in children's homes – in particular, children with disabilities, Roma children, children whose parents are not around or who cannot cope, and children who have come into conflict with the law. We're working to improve the quality of care these children receive and to promote family-based care as an alternative.

We're providing support to foster families through government structures and NGOs. More than 1,170 children across the region have benefited from our activities. Working with a local partner, Familija, in BiH, we organised a four-day event to set up a national fostering network. The model of foster care practised in BiH was promoted through a popular TV talk show. We're also training foster care teams, and developing materials to launch a campaign on fostering. Working with the relevant ministries, we've published 1,000 copies of the Foster Families Assessment Manual, a key resource for social workers involved in children's care.

In February 2008, the government of BiH adopted a policy to protect children who can't be looked after by their parents, which states that family-based care will always be preferable to being looked after in an institution.

In Serbia, we've carried out research into the level of violence in residential care institutions. We'll use our report, *In the Labyrinth of Violence*, to argue the case for family-based care. In close cooperation with the Ministry of Social Welfare in Serbia and Kosovo and local NGOs, we are enhancing local capacities for development of specialised foster care and enabling 1,400 children with disabilities currently in residential homes to be looked after by family.

## We're helping to keep children safe

In nine locations in Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro and BiH, we are implementing two three-year projects funded by the EC to develop child protection standards and services to support families and help to ensure that children are well looked after. Working with the local authorities and other stakeholders, we have facilitated the assessment of the needs of the vulnerable children in their areas, developing of tailored services and building links between all the agencies involved in supporting families and children.

Our child protection work has reached 14,693 vulnerable children in BiH, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo (ie, those living in poverty, children with disabilities, children whose families can't care for them, and children in conflict with the law).

We've set up child protection groups at community and municipal level in Kosovo.

We've published *Children Speak Out* – a research report on child trafficking in the region, based on children's own views and perceptions. Children in Kosovo used this research to develop a theatre performance, called 'We Have the Right, Too!' and Roma children from a youth club in Konik refugee camp, Podgorica, used it to raise awareness of children's rights in their community.

In Albania, we've worked with vulnerable young people to help them deal with the risks of HIV and AIDS, being exploited at work, and trafficking. We've trained young people as 'peer educators'. Some 2,700 young people benefited at youth centres in Cerrik and Kucova, and 500 young people from the Roma community in Kinostudio.



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