



What we do in South East Europe

- We've helped 1,970 disadvantaged children to access education
- We've enabled 32,000 children to get a good-quality, inclusive education
- We're reaching 21,640 vulnerable children through protection services
- We're supporting 3,800 children and their foster families



The region of South East Europe – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), 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. The global financial and economic crisis has hit the region hard. Increases in the prices of food and fuel have put even greater pressure on families living in poverty, with serious consequences for children.

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 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 reducing poverty, ending 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. In 2008–09, our programmes benefited 68,318 children across the region – more than half of them girls.

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 March 2010. Our programme in Kosovo will then be taken over by Save the Children Sweden.

We're enabling children to get a good-quality, inclusive education

Many children in the region have been denied their right to education. Discriminatory cultural attitudes, language barriers, lack of teacher training and outdated curricula are just some of the things that keep children out of school. Children affected by poverty, hunger or health issues are even more likely to be excluded from schools that are ill equipped to meet their needs. Inclusive education ensures that the education system adapts to the child so that they can achieve their full potential. It often involves changing school culture, policies and practice, introducing new teaching and learning methods, and putting children's needs at the heart of school management and education planning.

In Serbia, more than 11,000 children in 22 primary schools and 6 preschools benefited from a more inclusive learning environment. In Kosovo, 1,062 children in five kindergartens benefited from a better quality education through teacher training support.

Also in Serbia, the Ministry of Education announced plans to develop its first National Education Strategy, which is a significant development. And the country's national report on inclusive education – Road to the Future – was presented at the UNESCO conference on inclusive education in November 2008. The report was prepared with significant input from Save the Children, and included many examples of good practice based on our work in Serbia over the years.

The Ministry of Education has recommended that the model of inclusive education that we have developed and demonstrated be replicated in kindergartens and schools across Serbia. We are also providing more examples of good practice, including a model of differentiated subject teaching in grade V of elementary school, and a model of how a special school can be transformed into a resource centre.

Our Index for Inclusion (IFI) is a key tool to enable individual schools to deliver inclusive education. It has been used successfully by schools around the world. The IFI was implemented in two preschools and nine primary schools in Serbia, nine schools in Montenegro, six primary schools in BiH, and four kindergartens in Kosovo. One of our partners in BiH, the Pedagogical Institute from Zenica-Doboj Canton, is replicating the IFI in 10 schools. And in Serbia, the Institute for Quality Evaluation put replication of the IFI into their annual plan and requested funding for it from the national budget. Across the region, more than 400 teachers in Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and BiH received training on how to implement the IFI.

In Albania, we trained 400 teachers, education specialists and inspectors on child-centred teaching methods and inclusive education, focusing on effective classroom management and children with learning difficulties. These teachers provided the same training to another 4,500 teachers. Due to the improved skills and practices of these teachers, 85,000 children are enjoying better-quality education. They are benefiting from progressive teaching techniques such as group and pair work, brainstorming and idea mapping. They are now able to discuss and debate more freely with their peers and teachers during learning activities.

On a broader level, we've established national coalitions or networks for inclusive education in four countries of the region, who will take forward information sharing and cooperation.

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 2008–09, we helped thousands of children enrol in primary school for the first time, including 587 Roma children, 291 children with disabilities, 392 refugee children, and 52 socially deprived children in specific project areas. We've continued our work with schools, community representatives and local NGOs in all countries of the region to tackle the reasons why children from Roma communities, refugee children, children with disabilities and other disadvantaged children are not in school.

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. We're working with children and young people to create a safer and better learning environment in schools. In BiH, we supported a conference attended by 50 representatives from the Ministries of Education, Social Welfare and Health, as well as NGOs and civil society groups, to establish a Framework Curriculum for the Prevention of Violence. The framework includes programmes with children, teachers and parents.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, children from four schools in Mostar and Doboј have raised awareness of the issue of violence in school with their peers, teachers and parents, through workshops, promotional material, music and sports events.

In Albania, the International Save the Children Alliance (the Alliance) is supporting pilot projects to reduce violence against children aged 3 to 15. These projects raise awareness of children's rights to protection, and promote positive forms of discipline in targeted educational settings, as well as working to improve policies at a national level. A 'whole school' approach that fosters the creation of a safe school environment and promotes child protection policies and practices is now in place, and so far has benefited about 1,100 children and 91 teachers.

We're enabling children with disabilities to get an education

Across the region, we helped 291 children with disabilities gain access to non-formal education, through our support to nine community-based rehabilitation centres. And in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Doboј), we're running a daycare centre for children with disabilities. In partnership with education authorities, teachers, social workers, psychologists, parents and other children, our activities aim to create a more welcoming and stimulating atmosphere and environment for children with disabilities, so that they can learn and play with other children.

In Albania, the Alliance trained and supported 130 preschool teachers and 450 school teachers in 66 schools and preschools, to improve their competencies. These teachers have applied their learning about inclusive practices and developed individual educational plans,

benefiting 355 children with disabilities to progress in the mainstream education system and to develop their academic, social and interaction skills.

Through our early childhood development (ECD) programme, we've worked with caregivers, teachers, education and health specialists and parents to improve the quality of services offered to children (aged 0–6) within institutions and families. We trained 160 ECD specialists on various issues, including children's welfare and child protection. They, in turn, transferred their knowledge and skills to another 1,000 caregivers and teachers, benefiting a total of 19,500 children. Children who benefited from the services offered by the trained ECD specialists showed higher verbal and intellectual development and were more competent socially and emotionally than before.

We're also working to bring about changes at government level. In Serbia, the Ministry of Education has expressed support for our proposal to carry out a pilot project whereby children with disabilities currently at special schools would be integrated into mainstream schools. This would also involve national legislation to guarantee a child's right to inclusive education.

In Serbia, we've helped set up a database of 2,000 children with disabilities, so that those with specific needs can access the relevant professional support. More than 30 children with disabilities are benefiting from good-quality inclusive education in five kindergartens in four municipalities of Kosovo.

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. In Kosovo, our programme of support to foster carers and social workers, which we implement with our partner organisation, HandiKOS, benefited 2,361 children. Also in Kosovo, 3,000 children with special needs are benefiting from provisions in the new Law on Support to Families with Children with Special Needs. And in Serbia, working with the Centre for Family Placement and RU Parents, more than 2,900 children benefited from our activities. Together with other international agencies and donors, we're supporting reform of the social sector, aiming to get children with disabilities out of residential homes and into family care arrangements.

We're also working to support national networks across the region. In BiH, the first National Network of Fostering Associations – *BiH Familija* – was established, and the Foster Care Network in Kosovo was revitalised.

We're getting children's voices heard

We've had a number of successes with getting children's voices heard. Across the region, we're helping children and young people to raise awareness among their communities and to let decision-makers know their views. Children in 12 cities in BiH, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro took part in activities to mark Save the Children's Day of Action Against Violence Against Children. In Montenegro, we supported a public awareness campaign – Do Not Turn Your Head: There is a solution! – explaining child protection issues and the existing protection system and services. And in Serbia, we launched a national campaign – For Real – to encourage the public and businesses to support the government in delivering the inclusive education policies that children need. This campaign is also being run in BiH and Montenegro.

In Albania, the child and youth-led groups we support in three districts have signed agreements with local authorities and are acting as advisory groups for children's rights issues. One of the greatest achievements of these groups was their participation in and contribution to the National Strategy for Children state conference. In front of senior delegates, including the prime minister and other ministers, representatives of key state institutions, international and local NGOs, UN agencies and donors, representatives from the children's groups presented their report and called for improvements in children's rights. In their report, they highlighted the need to invest more to improve communication in the school environment, to increase children's participation in decision-making, to increase the number of activities – both curricular and extracurricular – that promote knowledge of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); and to invite more parents to school settings. This report was prepared by 30 children from the groups, in consultation with 1,190 of their peers.

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.



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