



Serbia: Using the CPMS in the European refugee and migrant crisis

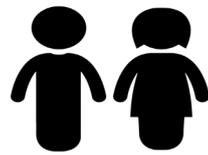
“In Serbia, we are now working to protect children in the context of the European refugee and migrant crisis (...) We have faced multiple challenges in recent years (...) In 2013, for example, extensive flooding meant that one third of the national territory was declared to be in a state of emergency. We are also at risk of earthquakes (...) In these situations, the country faces significant difficulties in protecting children, stemming from the under-developed procedures for responding to such situations, problems in coordination of activities, both between the State and NGOs, and between national systems themselves.” Biljana Zekavica, Representative of the Serbian Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs.

In 2015, the Western Balkans experienced an unprecedented movement of migrants and refugees headed towards the European Union. This created a wider European challenge affecting both EU Member States and candidate countries located along their route, particularly Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Serbia’s role has mainly been that of transit country; nevertheless, the migration flows have placed a humanitarian and financial strain on its asylum system.

“Existing systems here in Serbia were put under tremendous pressure by the migrant crisis,” explained Svetlana Radosavljevic, Regional Refugee Advisor for SOS Children’s Villages. “At one point in 2016, over 600,000 refugees and migrants were passing through Serbia. Put that into perspective – the population of the entire country is only 7 million. Extra stresses and strains inevitably highlighted flaws and dysfunctions in the existing child protection system, especially with regards to coordination and case management.”

“It was in this context that [Serbian NGO] IDEAS discovered the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action,” said Marko Milanovic, Director of IDEAS. As Coordinators of the national network of child rights NGOs, IDEAS has an established track record in social research and policy, as well as experience supporting local government to deliver social services. “At the height of the migrant crisis in 2015, we were contracted as UNICEF’s implementing partner. Together with the Serbian government, we developed the Standard Operating Procedures for Protection of Refugee and Migrant Children. They aim to support child protection coordination, defining an organizational response model and answering ‘who does what, when, and how’”.





**Total
population:
7 million**



**600,000 refugees
and migrants
passing through
Serbia**



**46% refugees
and migrants are
children, 20%
unaccompanied**

Using the CPMS to improve coordination and case management: We weren't starting from square one

"Trainings workshops on the Standard Operating Procedures and CPMS were extremely useful," said Marija Nijemcevic, Child Protection Coordinator for SOS Children's Villages Serbia. "I lead a team of 13 field-based Child Protection Officers, and I was well-equipped and supported to train my staff to ensure that we followed the SOPs. I also trained volunteers from other organizations. In the Serbian context, the most useful Standards were probably Coordination and Case Management. We weren't starting from square one: Serbia does have a pool of well-qualified and experienced social work professionals, both in the State-run Centres of Social Work and in civil society organizations. The challenge here was rather the sheer number of cases. Our regular systems were swamped!"

From a frontline worker's perspective, the CPMS took far too long to translate (...) It took over 18 months to get the translated standards into frontline workers' hands. In my opinion, that's too slow.

"As for 'lesson learned' from a frontline workers' perspective, the CPMS are a wonderful resource but they took far too long to translate" said Svetlana. "When a humanitarian emergency strikes, the reality is always somewhat chaotic. We needed guidance, and we needed it quickly. There's a place for perfectionism, but also a place for a 'good enough' approach. It took over 18 months to get the translated standards into frontline workers' hands. In my opinion, that's too slow."

"Translating the CPMS was quite a challenge," said Marko. "The text includes many terms that don't exist in Serbian. We wanted to render the text in plain language, so that it could be picked up and used by as many child protection workers as possible. We certainly couldn't assume any degree of familiarity with technical terms derived from international law!"

"We also translated the Interagency Case Management Guidelines," added Marko. "I can say for sure that Case Management is one of our greatest weaknesses here in Serbia, and that was certainly highlighted by the migrant crisis. The national child protection system underwent major reform back in 2012, and 'case management' was introduced, but only really as a vague concept on a checklist. Honestly, no one really knew what it meant in practice and it didn't really change the way social workers functioned! It was quite normal for the same child to have been seen by four different child protection workers, not to mention health, education and legal professionals. There is a general need to improve data



This is Samira [short animation] accompanies the CPMS very well. It's a simple and effective way to get people thinking about the many risks a child is exposed to in a humanitarian setting -- and how prevention is so closely intertwined with protection

It became clear that the Standards were useful to anyone trying to build a comprehensive protection system -- even in a non-humanitarian context.

collection and exchange (...) It's not something we've fully mastered yet, but the clear and systematic guidance provided by these newly translated resources are a great help."

"When we ran workshops with national social workers, we asked them to consider situations where a child faces multiple child protection risks. The activity proved to be a real stumbling block! Social workers just weren't used to thinking in that way. In real life -- especially in the midst of a humanitarian emergency -- child protection risks are interconnected and compounding. It's very artificial to consider child protection issues in isolation. We know, for example, that an unaccompanied or separated child faces heightened risk of trafficking, physical and sexual violence, and other forms of exploitation."

"As a training resource, we found that This is Samira accompanied the CPMS very well. It's a simple and effective way to get people thinking about the many risks a child is exposed to in humanitarian setting -- and how prevention is so closely intertwined with protection.

"We first used and translated the CPMS in the context of the migrant crisis. But in the course of the roll out and training, it became clear that the Standards were useful for anyone trying to build a comprehensive protection system -- even in a non-humanitarian context (...) We appreciated their holistic approach and step-by-step detail" said Marko.

After extensive consultation with colleagues at the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the CPMS training was deemed beneficial to all centres of social work. "If you really want to change a system, you need to be systematic from the start", explained Marko. "You need to introduce change throughout. Otherwise we knew the CPMS would just be another one of those publications that busy frontline workers look at once and don't have time to pick up again".

The social protection system in Serbia is structured around "Centres of Social Work": hubs for social work training and practice, spread across the various regions of the country. There are 141 Centres of Social Work in total. The CPMS and Interagency Case Management Guidelines in Serbian were distributed to all centres, as well as to 74 civil society organizations. The government was a key partner from the outset. Ministry representatives reached out directly to the Centres of Social Work management, and consequently 90% sent a Director or a Deputy Director to attend a CPMS training workshop. "This is important because senior staff are better positioned to mainstream and train their teams on new working methods" adds Marko. A series of CPMS training workshops were held across Serbia from September to December 2016. In total, 203 social work professionals and civil society representatives participated in 5 workshops in Belgrade, Niš, Novi Sad, Kragujevac and Užice.



Our approach has been hand-in-hand with the government (...) The CPMS mainstream the role of NGOs and encourage a genuinely collaborative approach.

“Responding to crisis of this magnitude is like shining a big spotlight on a country’s existing structures and systems,” said Svetlana. “Working to protect children caught up in the 2015 migrant crisis really showed us where our national child protection system wasn’t working well. But I really think this process has allowed us to ‘Build Back Better’: the Serbian child protection system is now stronger and better equipped to respond to future emergencies.”

In addition, an accredited continuing education module for social workers on the CPMS was developed by IDEAS in line with the accreditation criteria of the Serbian Republic’s Institute for Social Care.

“Our approach has been very much hand-in-hand with the government throughout the CPMS rollout. But I would add that a key lesson we’ve taken from the CPMS is the role of civil society (...) The CPMS effectively mainstream the role of NGOs, and encourage a genuinely collaborative approach. So it’s not about building duplicates and unofficial structures. A lot of NGOs here in Serbia are competing for funding, without necessarily taking the time to carefully reflect on how to create a really effective child protection system, with optimum collaboration and knowledge sharing and without duplication and waste. Seriously, there’s space for everyone! We need to think ‘How can everyone participate and contribute? How can we work together to keep children safe?’”

“As a frontline Child Protection Team Leader, I appreciated how the Standard Operating Procedures and the CPMS effectively codified how exactly civil society should work together – with other sectors and with state structures” said Marija. “For example, in practice we knew that it was our responsibility as first responders to conduct an initial assessment, then to refer high-risk cases to the Centre for Social Work for a BID [Best Interests Determination].”

“Looking forward, IDEAS is currently planning a project to support local communities to develop child protection preparedness plans based on the CPMS,” said Marko. “We’re in talks with the UNHCR to explore the possibility of developing an assessment framework based on the CPMS to track the child protection response across Serbia. We have proposed e-learning modules for frontline workers, as well as an online helpline and regular Skype support from an expert child protection team. And we’re also scheduling CPMS briefings with other important government ministries, notably the Ministry of Interior. All this should help ensure that the CPMS are met in Serbia, and that children’s right to protection from all forms of violence and abuse is fulfilled!”



Photo © Terre des hommes / 2015

The CPMS Working Group would like to thank IDEAS Serbia, SOS Children’s Villages and the Serbian Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs for their support in developing this case study.