



21 June 2017, Belgrade

**THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**  
**THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT**

Ana Brnabic, the Minister

RE: Children's Rights in the Work Program of the Government

Dear Ms Brnabic,

The Network of Organizations for Children of Serbia - MODS is a federation of associations which gathers over 80 civil society organizations working on the child rights protection. In July 2016, prior to the formation of the Cabinet, MODS sent a proposal to the Mr Aleksandar Vucic, who served as a Prime Minister nominee at that time, to pay special attention to the area of **children's rights** in his Keynote Speech. On that occasion, MODS submitted a letter to Mr Vucic in which we expressed our expectation that the rights of the child would rank high among the priorities of the new Government. We also pointed out to the concrete measures that were supposed to be taken in order to improve the position of children in Serbia. Taking into account the key MODS proposal, for the first time since 2000, the rights of the child were singled out as a separate policy area in the **Program of the Government of the Republic of Serbia** within the section entitled *Human Rights, Social Welfare and Social Responsibility*.

The inclusion of children's rights in the Keynote Speech of the Prime Minister represented a positive precedent and a significant step forward for further development of the child protection system. In this regards, MODS wishes to express expectation that you will build up on this milestone of the previous Government, and that you will also recognize child rights protection as one of the priorities in your Keynote Speech. Additionally, MODS would like to point out to some of the key measures that the new Government should take in order to demonstrate its commitment to the improvement of the quality of life of children in our country.

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The child care system in Serbia is characterized by the absence of an adequate normative and institutional framework. Serbia currently does not have basic strategic documents in the field of children's rights, nor does it have mechanisms for the coordination of activities and measures in the child protection system.

**The National Action Plan for Children** ceased to be valid in 2015, but thus far the process of drafting a new document that would serve as a framework for the state policy towards children has not even started. As a consequence, the child protection system does not have a clear focus and priorities. Despite the recommendations of the **UN Committee on the Rights of the Child** that it is necessary to work on further harmonization of national legislation with the provisions of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, Serbia still does not have a **Law on Children's Rights**. Moreover, Serbian legal system does not even contain a legal definition of the term "child" in accordance with Article 1 of the Convention. Regarding the institutional framework, the **Council of the Child Rights** was re-appointed in November 2016. The Council, however, remained mostly inactive, despite the clear Government's commitments from **the Action Plan for Chapter 23** to strengthen its role in the formulation and monitoring of child rights policies.

In order to circle the institutional framework of the child protection system, MODS expresses hope that the new Government will take action to strengthen the capacities of **the Council for Child Rights** so that it could develop into a leading inter-sector coordination mechanism with substantial competencies in the child protection sector. The Government should initiate processes of drafting and adopting the **National Action Plan for Children, the Law on the Rights of the Child, the Law on Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure**, and to demonstrate commitment to the drafting of a new **National Strategy for Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence**.

The new Government should put greater effort in reducing child poverty. The rate of children at the risk of poverty is among the highest in Europe and stands around 30 per cent. The priority should, therefore, be to adopt amendments to **the Law on Social Protection and the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children** in order to increase the coverage and adequacy of cash benefits.