Impact of Decentralisation on Social Services
Policy Forum
Vienna, 10-11 May 2016

Forum Report

June 2016

Paul Stubbs

1. INTRODUCTION

On 10-11 May 2016 in Vienna, Austria, the Child Protection Hub for South East Europe organised a Regional Policy Forum on Decentralisation of Social Services. This event brought together over 60 participants, including policy makers, local authorities, experts, ombudspersons, representatives of NGOs and academics from 14 countries of Europe to exchange experiences and foster cooperation.

The Policy Forum provided an important opportunity to share practices on decentralising social services in the region. Key lessons learnt and promising practices from the region, particularly in terms of the delegation of responsibilities, decision-making, monitoring and financing, helped to inform processes for improved service provision and develop recommendations for the future.

Participants worked hard for two days analysing decentralisation processes and their impact on social services, exploring lessons learnt with particular reference to services for vulnerable children, exchanging information and exploring priorities for future reforms in the interests of children across the region.

This report provides a summary overview of the Policy Forum and the outcomes from small group work and discussion. It will be accompanied by a longer, more analytical, synthesis report on decentralisation of social services in South East Europe, based on a number of country reports commissioned as part of the Forum process.

2. POLICY FORUM AIMS & OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse decentralisation processes in the countries of South East Europe and their impact on social services.
2. To explore lessons learnt from processes of decentralisation with particular reference to services for children in general and vulnerable children in particular.
3. To exchange information and explore priorities for future reforms in the interests of children across the region.

3. AGENDA

Tuesday, May 10, 2016 Theme: current situation, gaps and good practice

9.00-10.30	Welcome Addresses	**Robert Zeiner** Director of International Programs and Projects, ADC **Miroslav Jurešić** Deputy Minister for Work and Social Welfare of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
	UNICEF contributions to social welfare reform in South East Europe Introduction of ChildHub	**Jean-Claude Legrand** UNICEF **Sendrine Constant** Terre des hommes
10.30-10.50	Coffee break	
10.50-12.30	Presentations: current state and drivers of change for decentralisation in Serbia, Albania, and Macedonia Questions and Answers Facilitated by **Paul Stubbs**	**Gordana Matković** and **Milica Strajnaković** **Elira Jorgoni** **Zoran Stojanov**
12.30-13.45	Lunch	
13.45-15.30	Analysis of decentralisation and its impact on children	Parallel small group discussions
15.30-16.00	Coffee break	
16.00-17.30	Presentation of discussions Questions and Answers Conclusions	Plenary
19.00-21.30	Cocktail and dinner buffet	Magdas hotel

Wednesday, May 11, 2016 Theme: Action Plans

9.00-9.15	Review of Day 1	**Paul Stubbs**
9.15-11.00	Reflections: Roadmap for future reform work	**By country**
11.00-11.30	Coffee break	
11.30-13.00	Presentation and discussion of future plans Concluding Remarks	**Plenary** **Paul Stubbs**
13.00-14.30	Lunch	
14.30	Departure	

4. Policy Forum Outcomes

I. Country Presentations

Three country presentations were given from:
Serbia - Gordana Matković and Milica Strajenković
Albania – Elira Jorgoni
Macedonia – Zoran Stojanov

These presentations are enclosed as Appendix One of this Report.

II. Small Group Work: Analysis of Decentralisation and its Impact on Children

Four small groups, of uneven size because of language considerations, were created to explore four interlinked themes relating to decentralisation:

Group 1: The functioning of decentralisation: finances, responsibilities and capacities
(in English facilitated by Sendrine Constant)

Group 2: Challenging inequalities: towards equity in access and outcomes for children
(in English facilitated by Judit Almasi)

Group 3: Building effective partnerships: horizontal and vertical integration
(in various languages facilitated by Estella ------)

Group 4: Putting children first: prevention, transformation of institutions and community-based services
(in Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian facilitated by Jelena Tomić)

Group 1: The Functioning of Decentralisation – finances, responsibilities and capacities

Brief for the Group

Given the different sizes, levels of development and specificities of each country, there is clearly no 'one size fits all' model of decentralisation for all of the countries of the region. Indeed, the nature and type of decentralisation in any country is often a political decision which may or may not consider more 'technical' questions of efficiency. When considering decentralisation of social services, it is important to try to ensure the following:
1. that the responsibilites of each level of government (central, regional and local) are clear and appropriate (fit for purpose);
2. that decentralised responsibilities are aligned with adequate financial support, through local and central budgets and transfer payments;
3. that those with responsibilities have the capacity in terms of knowledge, skills and competences to carry out these responsibilities as effectively as possible.

Questions for the Group

In this group, participants should:
1. discuss the positives and negatives of decentralisation of social services in the region in terms of these three elements: **responsibilities**, **finances** and **capacities**.
2. explore what **lessons can be learnt** across the region in terms of what has worked well and what has worked less well.

Feedback from the Group (flip chart transcription)

Finances

Pros	Cons
Conditional transfers in Serbia (although poor performance)	Needs assessments lacking so many funds wasted
Social innovation fund as a transitional mechanism	Lack of political will and high turnover of local authority staff
Lessons to be learnt: provide incentives, need for strong monitoring	Putting most of the money at local level with little or no accountability
	Local authorities prefer to invest in buildings

Responsibilities

Pros	Cons
Some examples of clear responsibilities (e.g. Serbia) but not in other cases Importance of integration of sectors (e.g. Moldova) Importance of multipurpose spaces Lessons to be learnt: may be useful to specify preventive services Example of a minimum package of prevention services (Romania)	Existing structure of responsibilities is often asymmetric and/or unbalanced Too little integration of services Little or no preventive services There are many 'sleeping' or 'inactive' regions Lack of accountability in common
C: some have monitoring (Moldova) and accountability Participation of service users (Romania and Moldova) Ideas: constant work on competency building Include NGO and service users in monitoring	Civil society week Inclusion

Capacities

Pros	Cons
Some good examples of monitoring (Moldova) and accountability Importance of participation of service users (Romania and Moldova) Lessons to be learnt: important of constantly working on competences and capacity building	Weak civil society across the region

Group 2: Challenging Inequalities – towards equity in access and outcomes for children

Brief for the group

Decentralisation can lead to a situation in which poorer regions have poorer, and/or fewer, services available. In some countries in the region, a number of important services are only available in the larger cities. Equal outcomes for children across a country depend on equal access to universal services such as early childhood services, pre-school education, education, and health care. In addition, children at risk need access to as wide a range as possible of targetted preventive and support services. If services are not available or only available a great distance away, this can lead to additional disadvantage for families on low incomes and can even lead to uneccessary reception into residential care.

Questions for the Group

In this group, participants should discuss the impacts of decentralisation on inequalities across the region. They should address the following three groups of questions:

1. Are appropriate social services available for all who need them regardless of **place of residence**? If not, which localities and regions are under-served?
2. Are appropriate social services available for all who need them regardless of the type of need and **type of client group**? If not, which needs are unmet and which types of client group are underserved?
3. What **lessons can be learnt** from across the region which can improve access to services for those who are underserved?

Feedback from the Group (flip chart transcription)

1. Underserved regions

    - Issue of rural versus urban areas: underdeveloped versus developed areas
    - Lack of knowledge of professionals on available services
    - NGOs are also serving some but not other regions (depending on budgets)
    - Need for a 'basket of services'; minimum baskets, perhaps based population size
    - Per capita system could be complemented by additions services and benefits based on needs assessment and mapping
    - Primary services are mostly covered but not so more specialized services
    - Quality is the issue not the number – good practice of mobile specialized teams in Plovdiv (Bulgaria)
    - Transportation (access) is an issue
    - Dilemma between having centralized and specialized services versus more evenly distributed and general services
    - Importance of attitude of social workers/ do not necessarily need to be highly skilled professionals

2. Underserved groups

    - Children needing child psychiatric services

- Children with long-lasting, serious health conditions
- Children in need of long-term therapy and treatment
- Roma communities
- Those communities and groups lacking access to transportation
- Focus on cash benefits not on providing adequate social services (Albania)
- Lack of long-term vision and concrete steps/action plans
- Importance of prioritizing services
- Services which have been created earlier sometimes become inadequate or unnecessary for the needs of today's population

Lessons to be learnt and recommendations

- Information needs to be available in all languages (including minority languages)
- Importance of regular, on-going evaluation of needs for services
- Mapping of existing services
- Bottom-up approach to strategies is needed
- More specialized training for social workers (continuous development and in-service training)
- Emphasize the economic benefit in investing in people and services
- Outreach to vulnerable groups – mobile teams
- Partnerships between government and NGOs are needed
- Importance of multi-sectoral co-operation not only social workers
- Awareness-raising (voluntarism, about services, entitlements and accountability mechanisms)
- Strengthening communities (empowerment, initiatives for innovative services, solidarity, humanistic approach)
- Helplines for children who are underserviced needed
- Mediators (helping outreach services)
- More planning at all levels is needed

Group 3: Building Effective Partnerships – horizontal and vertical integration

Brief for the Group

Decentralisation poses challenges for the building of effective partnerships in the interests of the clients of social services, including children. These challenges relate both to vertical integration – integration between services which are the responsibility of different levels of government (central, regional and local); and to horizontal integration – integration at the local level between state and non-state providers (both non-governmental organisations and the private sector). An additional challenge can occur when sectors which are important to the well-being of children, and which need to collaborate to form a network of support, such as early childhood services, education, health, criminal justice and social services operate according to different territorial divisions. Crucially, unless there is clear and consistent social planning across all levels of responsibility, there is a danger of failling to meet emerging needs.

Questions for the Group

In this group, participants should discuss the impacts of decentralisation on vertical and horizontal partnerships. In particular, they should address the following questions:
1. To what extent are **NGO and private sector service providers** integrated into the system at the local level?
2. Are effective **monitoring and evaluation procedures** in place to assess social service providers?
3. To what extent do different **levels of government** provide a **co-ordinated** service and to what extent do they offer a **parallel** service?
4. Are responsibilities for **social planning** clear and consistent across all levels?
5. What **lessons can be learnt** from across the region which can improve the quality of partnerships in social services?

Feedback from the Group (flip chart transcription)

1. To what extent are NGO and private sector service providers integrated into the system at local level?
Kosovo:
   - in the law, it is specified all responsibilities of all actors (at local level, central and with professional standards)
   - Partnership with NGOs and/or private partners in the last 15 years – licensing for 3 years by professional body if needs cannot be covered by local level, they can be covered at national level

Albania:
   - examples of co-operation for providing social services: centres for children, elderly, organisation providers co-operate with the municipality – residential centre for elderly
   - NGOs have roles defined in law of social services
   - Challenges: funding of NGOs (Role of donors)
   - In law: financing by local level municipalities is based on price, not quality

- Standards of social assistance are monitored by inspectorates (they only give recommendations on sanctions)
- Licensing of social services providers has started; it will be evaluated in the future; community based services and residential care services;
- NGOs: provide other services (family empowerment – counselling; home visits for elderly)
- All services are mentioned in the new law which will regulate the situation in conjunction with the core social services law

Romania:
- Law 2 & 2/2006 for protection of children: all aspects were considered: NGOs that offer social services, but issues with funding (depending on part of the country)
- Personnel: in rural areas are not well qualified
- Staff are not managing well the budgets (planning, prioritization of issues that are financed more)
- NGOs are accredited, and licensed to provide different services

Moldova:
- Decentralisation is in process, laws exist (specifying all attributes of all institutions)
- Implementation problems: lack of capacity
- Vertical integration: no partnerships, more collaboration
- There are partnerships between NGOs and public institutions
- NGOs are not financed by public institutions but donors
- Most services were financed in the last 2-3 years by donors (public funds are not enough to cover taxes from local level – depends on income and needs)

2. Are monitoring and evaluation procedures effective?
Albania:
- There is an M&E mechanism which supervises the application of standards and gives sanctions

Kosovo:
- Monitoring is directly by the employer, namely municipalities and there are sanctions; inspections are more detailed based on referrals; there are strong legal procedures

Romania:
- Monitoring is undertaken by several institutions: one drawback is that the ombudsperson is not allowed to investigate, but the national authority can act
- Wish to have children's ombudsperson
- Other committees exist for monitoring regarding different types of children
- Monitoring has clear attributes in cases of child abuse

Moldova:
- Ombudsperson includes protection of children
- Labour and family ministry has this task, but also local public authorities should be included

3. To what extent do different **levels of government** provide a **co-ordinated** service and to what extent do they offer a **parallel** service?

Kosovo:
- some social services at central level (centres for victims of violence) – no parallel services
- Municipality might offer support services (complimentary)

Albania:
- 16 out of 28 are under local level centres supported by regional and national governments, responsible for co-financing

Moldova:
- primary services, higher services by the state with quality standards, specialised services

Romania:
- no parallel structures: well defined responsibilities
- some services would need to be implemented by one institution
- county level institution is distributing responsibilities to municipalities
- no clarity regarding the percentage from which institution is to be used on specific services

4. Are responsibilities for social planning clear and consistent across all levels?
Romania:
- issues regarding who offers services: lack of information exchange between central and local levels

Kosovo:
- sectoral strategy planning for 20 years; each municipality has its own strategies based on national strategies
- municipality is prioritizing issues but in line with national strategies
- Approval of plans by ministry of social welfare
- Municipalities receive funds based on plans from ministry
- 2015 national strategy on decentralisation
- 2016 action plan: implementation

Albania:
- 2015 the action and strategy plan was defined: 80% is covered by state budget; 20% by donors
- NGOs cooperate at municipality level to plan the budget
- Local budget with central budget

5. Lessons to be learnt:
Moldova:
- Decentralisation process is difficult, we need to identify minimum services (separate local budget from national budget) – severe difficulties with foster care
- Clear responsibilities of different institutions should be defined

Albania:
- Civil society that provides services are of higher quality than from municipalities where personnel is limited
- Need for outsourcing of services to private service providers in parallel with current providers (state ones)
- Finding a balance between receiving funding from different sources and finding a balance between state actors and non-state actors
- Importance of education and awareness raising re EU accession: use of funds; specific planning on services needed

- Careful planning is important to direct the funds to specific groups and needs

Group 4: Putting Children First – prevention, transformation of institutions and community-based services

Brief for the Group:

A clear regional consensus has emerged that the placement of children in residential institutions should be very much a last resort. There is recognition that transformed residential institutions may have an important role to play in an emerging network of preventive, reintegrative and supportive community-based services as well as foster-care services. At the same time, it has been widely recognised that the appropriate scale for residential and community-based services are likely to be very different. Considerable progress has been made in terms of the process of transformation of institutions, sometimes termed deinstitutionalisation, with the clear goal of reducing rates of children in residential care, across the region. There are concerns, however, that the decentralisation of services poses particular challenges to a shift towards non-residential forms of care and support for children.

Questions for the Group

In this group, participants should discuss the impacts of decentralisation on the transformation of institutions and the reduction in the rate of children in residential care. In particular, they should address the following questions:
1. How has the process of decentralisation impacted on the development of alternative services for children at risk including preventive services, community-based services, and foster-care services?
2. How has the process of decentralisation helped or hindered a reduction in the rate of children in residential care, often termed deinstitutionalisation?
3. What lessons can be learnt from across the region which can contribute to fewer children being placed in residential care?

Feedback from the Group (flip chart transcription)

1. Development of alternative services
   - Different services in different ratio of community (l budget and the work of NGOs)
   - The number of services and the number of service providers has increased
   - There has been a diversification of services
   - Priorities at the local level
   - Customer participation in covering the costs, free for the poorest – asset and income census
2. Impact on Deinstitutionalisation
   - Reduced the number of children in institutions
   - Prevention of institutionalization
   - Support to biological families
   - Development of foster care

3. Lessons Learnt: the need for an holistic approach
   - A difficult and lengthy process
   - Requires finance

- Deinstitutionalisation may face resistance from employees
- Fundamental importance of political will
- Synchronization in terms of proper sequencing of passing of laws
- Good preparation is needed
- Quality services (maintaining quality) is important
- Control mechanisms are needed
- Integrated system

III. Summary of Key Messages from Day One

At the start of Day Two, Paul Stubbs presented a brief overview of the key messages from the first day. The power point presentation is included in the Annex to this Report. Here, I expand on some of the points made.

CONTEXTS

It was very clear from the discussions that there is no dominant pattern across the region regarding the allocation of responsibilities in general to different levels or tiers of Government. Some countries have a fully functioning regional tier of Government and others do not. This is unsurprising given the diversity of the region and the very different size of the participating countries. At the same time, the fact that decentralisation of responsibilities for social services has been both uneven and asymmetric, with devolved and decentralised responsibilities not always matched by appropriate fiscal decentralisation has created a number of obstacles to the development of an adequate network of social services responsive to changing local needs.

As a relatively small and marginal 'sector', social protection as a whole, and social services in particular, are not a political priority either at national or sub-national levels. Decisions about the nature and type of decentralisation in any given country is usually made on the basis of immediate political considerations with little or no consideration of the impacts on social services for those in need. In addition, many countries in the region reported what was termed a 'yo-yo effect' in which decentralisation implemented by one political option was often reversed, in the form of recentralisation, by a different political option, with little or no reference to evidence as to which works better.

A strong theme throughout the day was that it is not the nature and form of decentralisation *per se* which matters most but, rather, whether there exists strong, robust and transparent mechanisms and procedures for accountability and monitoring. There was a general feeling that these are underdeveloped throughout the region and that there are particular problems when responsibilities are transferred to lower levels of Government with little or no preparation. Some participants remarked that the principle of subsidiarity, whereby responsibilities rest with competent authorities as close as possible to the population, does not function well in situations where local Mayors set priorities as if they are autonomous actors. At the same time, others pointed to good practice where local authorities had taken their new responsibilities very seriously and expanded the provision of social services.

Crucially, a number of participants from some countries pointed to the continued dominance of social assistance/cash transfers over social services in much of the region. Where social services exist, they tend to be more institutionally- or residentially- than community-based. In addition, responsibilites for different services often rest with different levels of government which can make a shift towards more preventive and community-based services and away from large scale institutionally care extremely difficult.

UNDER-SERVED GROUPS AND LOCATIONS

Notwithstanding the diversity of countries, there was a large degree of commonality regarding which groups and locations tended to be under-served in terms of the provision of social services across the region. In some countries, in part as a result of the

financial crisis and, also, as a result of internal migration, there has been a noticeable increase in poverty in urban areas and in new urban peripheries around some major cities. At the same time, rural and hard-to-reach communities were referred to consistently as tending not to benefit from community-based services. Examples of good practice, notably in terms of the establishment of outreach measures and mobile teams, were also noted in some countries, however.

Although only mentioned by participants from some countries in the region, the importance of social services for the Roma community was noted as a priority with members of the Roma communities, as well as other minority groups, being disadvantaged in part as a result of discriminatory practices. Community-based services, community workers and Roma mediators were seen as crucial in ensuring that Roma children, in particular, receive appropriate health care and are able to integrate into mainstream education whilst maintaining their cultural identity.

Another group mentioned as under-served were those leaving the residential or formal care system when upon reaching the age of 18 or, in some cases, later when formal education was completed. Some cities in the region do have integrated support programmes for those leaving care which, crucially, includes social housing and support to employment.

Two groups widely recognised to be underserved where children with disabilities and chronic and long-term health issues and children, young people and parents with mental health issues. The importance of good co-ordination between health and social services were particularly noted as important for these groups. In addition, the problems of transport costs to facilities which may be some distance away from home were also noted. In terms of mental health, the underdevelopment of integrated community mental health services was noted as a major challenge by many participants.

In general terms, the importance of gatekeeping to ensure that children and young people were not inappropriately placed in care were noted as of immense importance. Incentives for local authorities to pilot and, where appropriate, scale up, innovative services responsive to changing needs, was also mentioned.

SOME PROMISING PRACTICES

Although not a specific focus of the first day, a number of important and promising practices were noted which may well be important in overcoming some of the key challenges posed by decentralisation and which are, certainly, worthy of further investigation and discussion. One of the most important, developed or being developed in some parts of the region, relates to what has been termed a 'minimum basket' or a 'minimum package' of community-based social services or, in one particular case, preventive services. Although not a panacea for all the problems of decentralisation, the idea of a minimum basket of services is an attempt to ensure minimum standards across a country regardless of where people live. At the same time, participants from countries where such a minimum package is in place stressed the importance of ensuring a degree of flexibility so that the minimum package could change to reflect changing needs.

Another important example was provided by Serbia which, a number of years ago, introduced a Social Innovation Fund as a transitional mechanism and flexible funding mechanism to promote new, innovative, community-based social services and strengthen partnerships between local state and non-state actors. SIF become an important vehicle for channelling donor-funds in a way which reflected nationally- and

locally-defined priorities and not, as often occurred in the region, donor-driven initiatives and unsustainable 'pilot' projects. The fact that, after several years, SIF ceased to exist is also an important message that there is a need to avoid transitional mechanisms becoming semi-permanent.

Although most countries in the region had standards in place for social services, these could often be a barrier to innovation and a disincentive to local providers. Crucially, quality standards can be an important element in ensuring the equalisation of services across a territory. One particular example of good practice seemed to be the participation of all stakeholders including service users, communities as well as professionals in drawing up and evaluating standards. Alongside participatory budgeting, then, participatory planning and participatory setting of quality standards, may be one area to explore further in the future.

Although there was relatively little discussion of statistical systems as crucial to the development of evidence-based policies, it was noted that official statistics not only can be inaccurate but, crucially, are often already out of date and overtaken by new trends by the time they are released. One idea was that more could be made of 'real time' data as a way of understanding trends, with an example given of the nature of calls to telephone helplines and hotlines which, whilst far from perfect, could give 'early warning' of worrying social trends and be used as evidence for strengthening innovative services to address these challenges.

Although in a number of countries, a regional tier, between national and local levels either does not exist or exists only for statistical purposes, the importance of a meso-level of services, neither national nor local, was noted by a number of participants. In addition, the importance of legal frameworks and fiscal arrangements which not only allow for, but also actively promote and encourage, inter-municipal co-operation, was emphasised. These arrangements are important because, as many pointed out, the appropriate scale for institutionally-based and community-based services are very different and there is a need to ease the transition from the former to the latter. In any case, certain specialised services do not need to be available in every municipality and all services can benefit from being provided in a way which allows for economies of scale to be realised without jeopardising the well-being and access to needed services by service users.

The importance of a 'welfare mix' involving not-for-profit and other non-state actors in all aspects of social services, including delivery, was also an important message reiterated several times during the conference. There were examples given of more sustainable ways of ensuing that services provided by NGOs in particular are funded consistently, appropriately and sustainably. Although the contracting of NGOs as service providers is a common practice across the region, there were only a few examples of procedures which ensured value for money and sustainability and which met the needs of service users appropriately.

Although well-trained, continuously trained, and motivated professionals, including social workers, are crucial to the success of any decentralisation reform, an emerging good practice which was referred to on a number of occasions, involves the use of semi-professionals and volunteers and a move away from expert-led solutions towards more active participation by communities themselves. Again, this is an issue which merits further discussion.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

Again, although not a central element of discussion on Day One, a number of challenges which are contextual in nature, were referred to. These included demographic challenges which, although they differ across the region, relate to emigration, rural-urban migration, rapid again of the population in some of the countries of the region or parts of those countries and, of course, the significance of the refugee crisis in the last two years.

In addition, although the economic and financial crisis had an uneven impact across the region and reached its peak some time ago, the impacts on social services of austerity measures, often in line with IMF, World Bank and EU-imposed reform packages, represent an important challenge. At the very least, there is a need to ensure that Ministries of Finance are included in discussions about social services and that the case for targeted social investments to meet growing social needs is made clearly.

In some ways linked to a shift towards volunteers and semi-professionals, there is also an emerging challenge in terms of the changing nature of work, the relationship between formal and informal employment, and worryingly low employment rates, particularly of women, young people and older people across the region.

Whilst noted above, it is also clear that international donor interest in the region has tended to decline or, rather, that the majority of funding now comes from the European Union which, in itself, can cause problems, particularly for smaller NGOs. In addition, declining donor interest means that there is less support for training programmes including social work training, both in colleges and on the job training. There is still a lack of post-qualification training for social workers and some of the new competences required in decentralized systems of social services, including casework and inter-agency working, are still not well developed or supported. This is likely to become an even bigger issue in the future.

Finally, throughout the conference, there was a concern raised about the rather tokenistic way in which certain laws and measures were implemented in the countries of the region. Participants referred to 'cut and paste' laws which were often transplanted from elsewhere, often to fulfil EU requirements, without being properly implemented. Often, associated byelaws and regulations which are crucial for Laws to function, were not drawn up until some time later. A 'cut and paste' approach to social planning, particularly regional social planning, was also noted by a number of participants. Again, this gap between the passing of laws and plans and their implementation, if not addressed, will have important implications in the future.

IV. Reflections: Roadmap for Future Reform Work

The Task

In country groups, participants should discuss planned and prospective reforms relating to the decentralisation of social services as well as their impacts on children. What are the reforms which are most needed in the medium-term (2-3 years) and the longer term (5 years) which would help to secure improved outcomes for children. Discussion should also focus on the prospects for these reforms actually being implemented and on the factors which are likely to support such reforms and those likely to hinder such reforms.

One person should feedback the group's discussions for a maximum of 5 minutes, focusing on:
1. The impact of reforms already planned
2. Needed reforms in the medium-term
3. Needed reforms in the longer-term
4. Those factors which might support and those which might hinder the implementation of desirable reforms.

Feedback from Country Groups (flip chart transcription)

9 Country teams presented feedback. In alphabetical order, these were as follows:

Albania

1. Impact of reforms
   - Unclear role and function
   - Financing, lack of resources
   - Lack of Instruments
2. Medium-term
   - Legal framework
   - Awareness campaign
   - De-institutionalisation
   - Foster-case and kinship
   - Social Planning
   - Child Protection Units' strengths
   - Management Information System for social services

Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH, RS and District Brčko)

I.
   - RS: strategies for children without parental care (2015-2020)
   - FBiH: policies to protect children without parental care (2006-2016)
   - FBiH: Strategy for deinstitutionalization and transformation of social protection (2014-2020)
   - The focus is on: support biological parents; development of foster care; transformation of institutions

- FBH and RS: Strategy for Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (2010-15) now evaluated; programmes for early childhood growth and development

II.
- Strategy for older people
- Strategy for persons with disability
- Programmes for Early Childhood Development
- Changes to Labour laws
- Social Protection Strategy
- Privacy protection of the family for children
- Laws on foster care

III.

Innovative strategy of social protection
- Developed foster care
- Strengthening some institutional forms of care
- Reducing maternity benefits

IV.
- The commitment of all levels of government to more effective social protection
- Better targeting of social welfare
- Support from international donors
- Using the experience of good practices
- Research into the area of social protection
- Planning a budget according to the needs of beneficiaries!

Risks
- Insufficient material and human resources
- Lack of political will!!!
- Exclusion of other systems - educational administration, health care, the judiciary in the area of social, family, and child protection
- Insufficient development of social awareness of the necessity and importance of the reform in the field of social protection (cash benefits and services)
- Lack of professional training and supervision

Bulgaria

1.
- Fewer institutions – centres with services; foster care, group homes
- Policy/legal reform to better integrate services (legal/correction, education, NGO sector)

2. and 3.
- Improve integration/ streamlining of services (cooperation – collaboration)
- Mechanisms to increase local authorities to participate actively in policy/legal development

4.
- Fully integrated services remains unrealised
- Sustainability for NGO project funded services
- Disproportionality service-delivery – geographic location
- Many reforms but no support or training

Croatia

1. Planned reforms
- National Reform Programme of the Govt of Croatia – goal: poverty reduction; measures include: single benefit centres (JNC), foster care, deinstitutionalisation
- Improving the strategic and normative framework – passing of the operational plan for deinstitutionalisation and transformation of institutions that remain
- Service providers: evaluation of existing and delivering of new social plans and network of social services at County (Županija) and national levels.
- Culminating in: New Law on Foster Care; Revisions and Additions to: Law on Maternity and Family Benefits (ZORRP); Law on Child Benefits (ZODD); Law on Social Welfare (ZOSS); Family Law (OBZ) and necessary by-laws.

2. and 3. Needed reforms – our wishes
- Integrated social services at local level for children and families (example of Istria County)
- The development of services for young people after leaving institutions
- More equal regional balance of services and financial support to poorly developed areas – new providers of services for children

4. Supportive and hindering factors
- Provided financial assistance from the World Bank; European Social Fund; European Regional Development Fund; State Budget
- The existence of political will
- Co-ordination of horizontal and vertical levels
- Resistance of employees
- Models of good practice: Centre for Service Provision in the Community (CPUZ) 'Izvor' – Selce; CPUZ Svitanje

Kosovo

1. Reform to continue – to complete the reform of service that are not completed Residential/family care for abandoned children (kinship care and care by non-family members)
2. Creation of national grant at the local level for all social services

Setting priorities based on specific needs of the municipalities in line with the national grant
3. Development of alternative forms of child protection in preventing child abandonment (unemployment, stigma, poor families, etc.)
   Social workers becoming specialised in providing specific services
4. Lack of sufficient funds at the local level
   Willingness of decision makers to support social services
   Raising of awareness and understanding of real problems that require support by the authorities
   Implementation of the law on child protection

Moldova

- Deinstitutionalisation reform
- Means tested cash benefits reform
- Administrative decentralisation reform
- Local public finance decentralisation reform
- Reform on protection policies for persons with disabilities
- Sectoral strategy on decentralisation of social services

Montenegro

Social and child protection system reform has started in 2011, supported by EU IPA funds, UNICEF and UNDP

New law on social and child protection adopted in 2013 (not all relevant bylaws, have been passed so far)

Mechanisms needed for implementation not established yet

Local action plans for development of social services are adopted (16 municipalities) as a very important part of reform

The lack of financial resources for implementation

Empowering partnership: (cross-sectoral): example: premises provided by local government MLSW and NGO provide financial resources for adoption and establishment of services;

Supporting factors: IPA on one hand is supporting, on the other it is hindering, having in mind all the criteria that have to be met and harmonised with law

Partnership with civil society partners and local government (already established EU Accession process.

Romania

- Public/private partnership 2020: integrated package/ monitoring system ministry preventing child abandonment in maternity wards
- Easy access to education in rural communities and isolated communities
- Mobile teams
- Increasing development of technical/vocational schooling and mentorship
- Development of new services (addiction),
  e.g. child ombudsperson (professionally trained and motivated)
  standard costs for services alongside quality standards;
  intersectoral collaboration of human resources
  fundraising
  political factors
- State budget: real strategies at local level based on real needs
  Procurement law for social services
  Needs assessment
  Package of minimum preventive integrated services
  Mapping of social services

Law 272 (child protection rights)
Law 448 (disabilities rights)
Accreditation and licensing of social services

Serbia

1. planned reforms:
   - lack of agenda, national strategy: NPA; local plans
   - Potential reversible/ opposed processes

2. and 3. Needed reforms:
   - Preventive PMMs
   - Support to high risk families
   - Inter-sectoral cooperation (inclusive agenda)
   - Optimum level of services (regional/ inter-municipal participation and co-operation)

4.
a) Factors of support: EU integration; new professional consensus; evidence-based policy
b) obstacles: lack of capacities of CSWs; unfriendly environment to CSOs (civil sector); unwillingness of health/education to cooperate; lack of accountability/local/national; insufficient funds (low priority)

V. Conclusions

Although the Forum did not reach any formal conclusions, it is apprent that there is value in this kind of exercise for a range of stakeholders. Amongst possible ways forward, the following seem to be most important:

1. There is a clear value in continuing the analytic work and synthesising the individual country reports in ways which can distill the most important messages for the region.

2. In future, particular themes could be explored in greater depth including: accountability and control mechanisms; realising economies of scale; the establishment of quality standards; good practice in regional social planning; etc, etc.

3. There may be a casse for peer review in which one country takes the lead in presenting their experiences in a formailsed setting and other countries with an interest in the particular issue under discussion prepare their own responses.

Annex: Presentations on Decentralisation