MANUAL ON METHODOLOGY AND INTERVENTION ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

November 2019

KOMF

Karin dom

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Within the framework of the project, KOMF conducted a needs assessment process based on the needs of the member NGOs and partners of KOMF in order to build early childhood capacity in Kosovo.

During the needs assessment process, the legal framework and early childhood reports were analyzed and a workshop was organized with key stakeholders. The needs assessment process involved KOMF member organizations and partners, including representatives of the Ministry of Education, preschool institutions and civil society organizations working in the field of early childhood development.

Based on the Needs Assessment Report, a three-day Early Childhood Development Training was conducted for KOMF members and partners, led by Zvezdelina Atanasova and Andreas Andreou, trainers at Karin Dom Foundation Training Center from Varna, Bulgaria.
This guide summarizes the information provided during the training and gives guidance on methodology and intervention for early childhood.

For the preparation of this guide training materials were used provided by the University of Oregon, USA, summary report by Emily Vargas-Baron, RISE Institute, 2018, materials from Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, National network for Children and UNICEF, training modules, brochures, reports and methodical guides of Karin Dom, Varna, Bulgaria.

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WORLD EXPERIENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION (ECI)

Legal basis for ECI in international legislation:

"The support for the child from prenatal development to the age of eight is necessary in order for his right to survival, protection and care to be realized, which will guarantee him the best development. Education and care are inextricably linked to the birth of a child: The UNESCO International Classification defines early childhood education as 'level 0', i.e. as a basic level of the educational levels.

"Young children with disabilities are entitled to appropriate assistance from a specialist, incl. Support for their parents"!
/United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child/

"By 2030, to ensure that all children have access to quality early childhood development, care and preschool education so that they are ready for primary education."
This includes children at risk, with developmental delays, disabilities and behavioral disorders.
Early Childhood Intervention services are essential to ensure that all children reach their potential!
/United Nations Sustainable Development Program, 09.2015/

What is Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)?

ECI is defined as an interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral and coordinated system of personalized and intensive services for parents and young children (from 0 to enrollment in the education system) who are at risk, with developmental delays, disabilities, and behavioral problems, or the need of mental health support.

Early intervention is defined as provision of support for families of infants and young children and supporting the access to available resources to improve child development and family life.
Early intervention has a preventive nature.

Arguments for increasing investment in the earliest stages of life:

Biological argument – greater vulnerability of the developing vital organs and systems to the environment.
The child acquires biological patterns and behaviors that are difficult to reverse.
Social argument - Inequality starts early and tends to increase over time. Early intervention bridge the gap is among the most effective in reducing health, early education and development inequalities.
Economic argument - Higher return on early investment. Good childhood care leads not only to improved cognitive skills, but also to improved socio-emotional literacy.
Better social status of the child as an adult and lower costs to society for health, social services and justice.
/ National Network for Children Guidelines, Overview of ECI Policies and Practices /

Principles of Early Childhood Intervention:

The first principle is that services should start from the earliest possible age /best from birth / in order to maximize the potential effects of the intervention and reduce the effects of neglect and lack of action.

The second principle is that the services are provided in the child's natural environment (usually home) to ensure the development of useful skills that can then be transferred and easily used in another environment.

The third principle is that services are provided through a family-centered approach whereby professionals and families work together as equal partners.

The fourth principle is that successful delivery of services involves building partnerships between different sectors, programs and individuals.

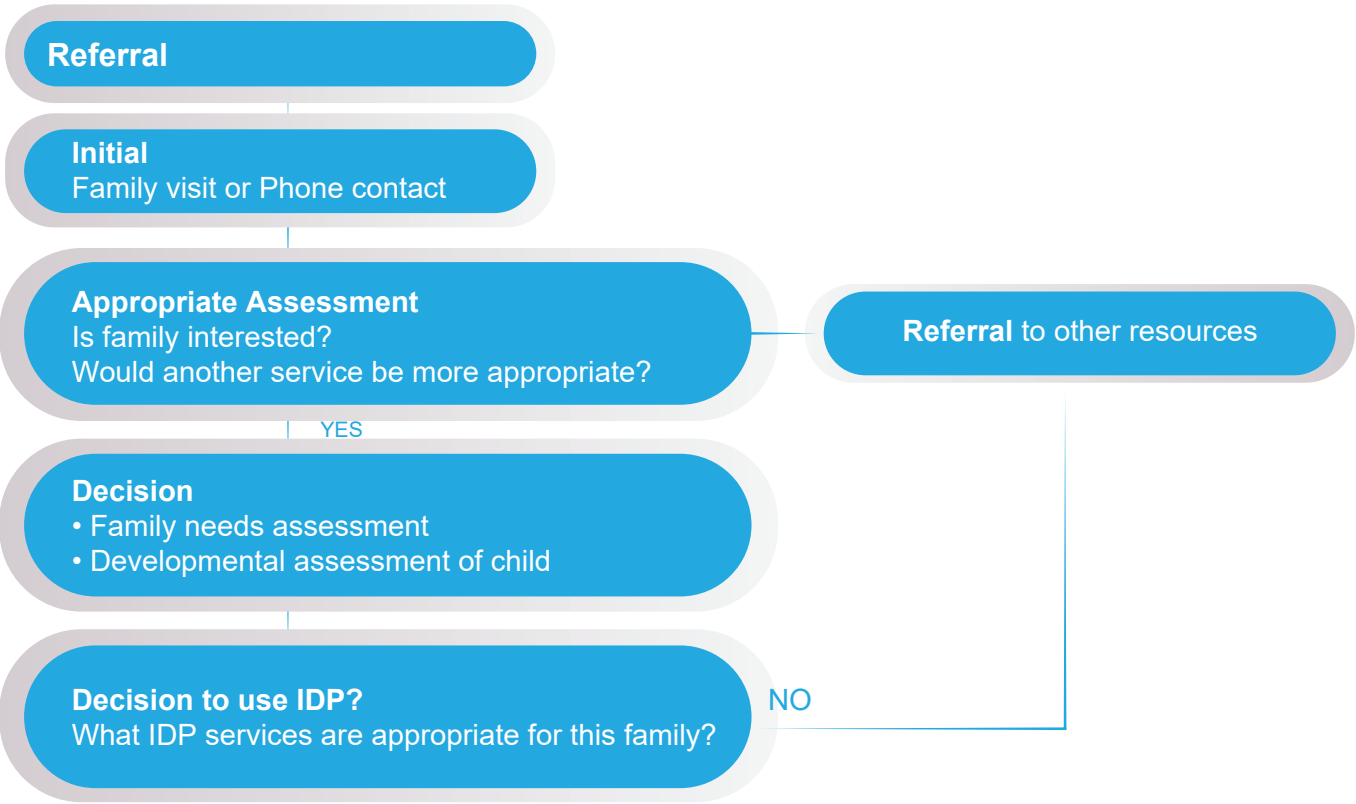
Table 1.

Important changes in the development of Early Childhood Intervention over the last 25 years globally

FROM	TO
Isolated and uncoordinated services - the family wanders and goes to different institutions	Building a network of community services. Collaboration between health, education and social sector.
Corrective nature of the intervention. Services for children with diagnosed disabilities.	Preventive nature. Includes children at risk, incl. living in poverty, social exclusion, with limited access to resources
A model focused on the child and his deficits	A model focused on the family and its strengths and resources
Intervention in a clinical setting, rehabilitation center	Working in the child's natural environment - at home, on the playground, in the kindergarten
Expert approach - Leading role of professionals / experts	Family-centred approach - active role of the family
It is the experts who make the decisions	The professionals help the family in decision making
Direct services for children	Consultative services directed towards the whole family
Multidisciplinary teams - professionals with different specialties work together	Transdisciplinary teams – professionals share knowledge and experience with each other so the boundaries between the different disciplines cross

Figure A

Model of services in early childhood development programs in British Columbia, Canada



Components of the Early Childhood Intervention System in Oregon, USA:

1. Identifying children: search and referral, screening, evaluation, determining eligibility for entrering into the program

2. Developing an individual plan using functional assessments

3. Providing the service - determining the team, location, methods

4. Progress monitoring - review of plan, goals and results, change of plan

5. Plan for transition to other services - identification of available resources, preparation for transition

ECI IN BULGARIA
THE CONTEXT IN BULGARIA

ECI begins to develop in Bulgaria at a time when the process of deinstitutionalization is underway. Priority is being paid to closing down the institutions for children 0 to 3 and the need for alternative community services. The expert model of providing services for children with disabilities is still prevalent, and children from 0 to 3 years with developmental problems remain out of focus - lacking early identification and early development support.

In 2010, with the support of Open Society Foundations - Early Childhood Development Program, London a Partnership Program was launched between Karin Dom and Varna Municipality, Varna Child Protection Unit, maternity homes, breastfeeding consultants, nurseries and kindergardens.

Karin's Dom quickly gained experience. Families enrolled in the program appreciate the effectiveness of the service and the benefits for their children's development and their own capacity, knowledge and skills. MLSP recognizes the Karin Dom Early Intervention service as good practice and entrusts the development of a Methodological Guide for the provision of the service Early Disability Intervention through the establishment of the Early Disability Intervention Center - 2014. (Figure 2), as well as training at newly opened Early Disability Intervention Centers in 46 cities in the country (Figure 1). Information materials have been developed and provided to the community, brochures, flyers for the RI service / Figure 3 /

ECI services in Bulgaria for children from 0 to 7 years are offered by

- Five NGOs working with children from 0-3, 0-4, 0-7 years of age
- State and municipal structures under the leadership of MLSP
  - Complexes for integrated social services for children and families
  - Community support centers

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Cooperation with other services:

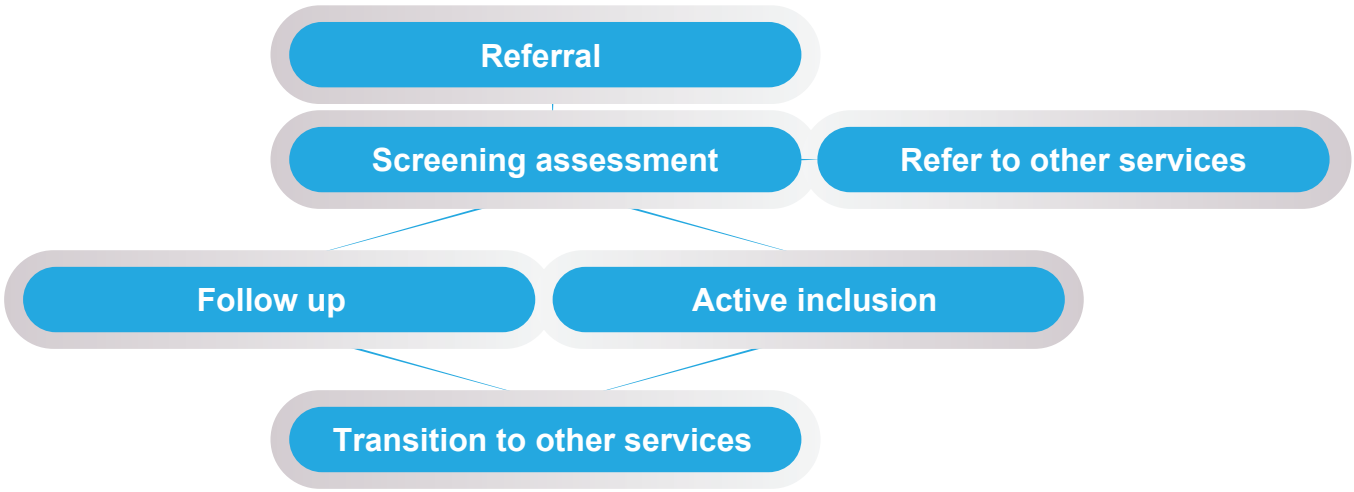
- Homes for medical and social care and the services provided in them, under the guidance of the Ministry of Health;
- Services for deinstitutionalization, prevention of institutionalization, foster care and adoption support, under the guidance of MLSP;
- Nurseries under the guidance of the Ministry of Health;
- Kindergartens, preschool groups under the guidance of the Ministry of Education and Science;
- Private centers and kindergardens and other NGOs.

Complementary services: Clinics and medical practices, hospitals, maternity hospitals and neonatal intensive care units, home visiting nursing care.

Partners: Bulgarian Pediatric Association, National Network for Children, UNICEF, National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Figure 4

How Karin Dom's Early Intervention Service is organized



Target group

Families with children aged 0 - 3 who are:

- at risk of developing a disability, including premature babies or low birth weight babies,
- with delay in any of the areas of development - cognitive, motor, communicative, social, emotional,
- have been diagnosed with a disability.

What does the Early Intervention Program offer?

- Home visits
- Playgroups, Family-Mediated Intervention
- Parent Support Group
- A resource library with assistive equipment, toys and literature
- Breastfeeding support

The ECI consultants in the team are specialists with the following specialties:

- Psychologist – 1
- Speech therapist – 2
- Rehab / kinesitherapist -1
- Social worker – 1
- External breastfeeding consultants -1
- It is advisable to have a pediatrician -1 on the team

Specialists' knowledge and skills are integrated to enable them to act as consultants rather than experts.
We work using Family-centred approach.

Consultants have:

- Theoretical Knowledge and Practical Experiences
- Assessment skills
- Skills for working with families
- Service provision related skills
- Knowledge of the scope of the program
- Professional Development
- Professional ethics
- Personal qualities of the consultant
- Qualities that are not obligatory but are useful, such as durability of various weather conditions, flexibility, logistics skills

Karin Dom partners:

Varna Municipality, Nurseries and Kindergartens, Department of Child Protection, Maternity Hospital "Prof. Dr. D. Stamatov"- Varna, Regional Hospital "St. Anna"- Varna, Colorful Future Association - Breastfeeding Support Consultants, Foster Care Centers, NGOs from the Country.

Monitoring and evaluation of the Early Intervention Program

Database is generated through an electronic information system specifically designed for the needs of the program.
Focus groups are held with partners, team members.
Interviews and surveys are conducted with parents, medical professionals, kindergartens and nurseries, municipal institutions and team members for the satisfaction, benefits and challenges of the service.
Monitoring data are publicly disclosed through media events, brochures, and publication of reports.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECI SERVICES IN KOSOVO

The organization and management of work processes in Early Childhood Intervention is key to its more effective and efficient functioning. Through the description of the work processes, a structured model of the way in which early childhood intervention services will be implemented in the country is built.

Key elements of a national ECI system:

- Provision of a legal framework for the ECI system through ECI Act and / or the preparation of a Strategic Plan and an Action Plan for the development and implementation of the ECI system
- Development and adoption of national guidelines and procedures for ECI
- Introducing standards for services and staff

The national ECI system should be built on the strengths of existing early childhood services and in cooperation with related services.

- The government designates a leading ministry in developing the ECI system, as well as other ministries that will work closely with it.
- It is recommended to partner with other ministries and participate in the planning activities of the ECI system.
- Local cooperation
- Collaboration with child protection structures
- Collaboration with NGOs

The ECI strategic planning process goes through the following main steps:

- Designation of a lead ministry and other ministries working closely;
- Establishment of an intersectoral technical group on ECI;
- Preparation of a comprehensive analysis of the situation regarding ECI;
- Conducting consultative seminars at local and central level;
- Interviews with senior executives at all levels;
- Preparation of selected policy instruments;
- Gradual adoption and implementation of the instruments, until full national coverage is achieved;
- Ministries and / or the National Assembly adopt and monitor the implementation of legal and strategic documents.

Regulatory framework of the national ECI system

It is crucial for the legal regulation of the ECI services that the drafting and adoption of the ECI Law and / or their incorporation into the current up-to-date normative documents of the lead ministry, as well as documents of the ministries working in partnership to achieve integrated services.
Guidelines and procedures for ECI are needed to create a comprehensive basis for the National ECI System.
Subsequently, standards for services and staff for ECI should also be adopted.

ECI consultants in the team can be specialists with the following specialties:

- Psychologist
- Speech therapist
- Rehabilitator / kinesitherapist
- An occupational therapist whenever possible
- Social worker
- Collaboration with breastfeeding consultants
- It is advisable to have a pediatrician on the team
- Mediator as needed for specific communities

Depending on the needs of the families, there may be more than 1 specialist in a specialty per team. Specialists' knowledge and skills are integrated to enable them to act as consultants rather than experts.
Transportation is provided for the home visits of the team. If necessary, a driver is appointed, a car is provided to travel to remote addresses.

Consultants working in ECI services must have professional and personal qualities:

- Knowledge of the content and scope of the areas of child development (gross and fine motor skills, receptive and expressive language, cognitive, socio-emotional development and self-care);
- Knowledge of the etiology and characteristics of common disorders and conditions in childhood development;
- Understanding the impact of a disability on the child's functioning and needs;
- Ability to observe, gather the necessary information and analyze the development of the child in various natural environments for its functioning;
- Knowledge and skills of using various assessment tools: tests, including screening tests; preparation of program evaluation; functional ongoing assessment and assessment of family needs;
- Ability to interpret the information collected and present it to parents or other professionals;
- Have the skills to apply a family-centred approach, respect the right of the family to make a choice when making decisions and show willingness to work in partnership;
- Respect for the family, responsiveness and tolerance in the context of their culture, religion, ethnicity and specific family circumstances;
- Active and supportive listening skills;
- Ability to communicate with the family in understandable language;
- Demonstrating approaches and techniques related to the child's daily routine activities;
- Identification and effective use of the strengths of the family;
- Assisting families in setting goals for their children's development;
- Knowledge of other available resources within the community and providing information to families;
- Knowledge of the objectives of the Early Intervention Program, which includes: Objectives and principles of the program; Target audience; Eligibility criteria; Documentation requirements; Procedures for joining and leaving the program; Standards for work.
- Improving professional knowledge and skills through participation in appropriate training and exchange of practices;
- Knowledge of research, therapeutic methods and approaches in the field of early childhood development;
- Self-assessment, personal development plan and professional supervision of work cases;
- Compliance with the principle of confidentiality of the shared information;
- Compliance with the principle of non-discrimination: providing counseling / support to everyone involved in the program regardless of its socio-economic status, hygiene and living conditions, level of education, race, ethnicity and religion;
- Hearing, empathy, support, encouragement and advice when desired and needed;

- Communication skills with young children;
- Teamwork skills: sharing information, seeking additional support, delegating activities, showing mutual respect, contacting other institutions and agencies when needed;
- Flexibility and adaptability to changes in work plans, schedules or attitudes of families;
- Listens to all parties;
- Collaborates with other specialists;
- Works in natural environment;
- Studies and consults with parents and other professionals;
- Make suggestions;
- Looking at the child holistically;
- Considers the child in the context of his family;
- Endurance of various weather conditions, flexibility, logistics skills.

We recommend working on a Family-centred approach

A brief historical overview:

- Carl Rogers, a psychologist, first discusses family-centred ideas - 1951.
- Parents are the recipients of specialist decisions (1950s-1970s)
- Parents are trainees and trainers (1970s)
- Parents lobby for their children's rights

The family-centred approach is at the heart of providing early intervention services.
Early intervention emphasizes resources, not deficits, based on the strengths of the child and family.
The family is an equal partner with specialists in early intervention services.

Family-centred practices:
- The philosophy, principles and practices for services to children and families that place the family at the center of the services play a leading role in their planning and implementation.
- The family is the driving force based on the recognition of its strengths and competencies.
- Supporting his existing abilities and developing new knowledge and skills.

Family-centred practices consist of a set of values, attitudes and approaches to services for children with special needs and their families. They recognize that the family is: Unique; A constant in the lives of children in it; Expert on the child's abilities and needs.
The family-centred approach is effective because everyone involved is important to understand in the same way what a family-centred service means.
The common understanding includes families, service providers, physicians, experts, program directors and organizations. It is easier to talk about a family-centred service than to put it into practice. This requires training for staff working in these services. Practice is closely related to attitudes. We need opportunities that reflect what we think and how we feel about the way we work.

Possible obstacles

- Staff is trained to work with children, not adults;
- The expectations of the families;
- The expectations of service managers;
- Cultural problems;
- Control problems;
- Misconceptions about family-centred service.

Basic principles of family-centred practices

- Families are treated with dignity and are recognized as a constant in the life of the child.
- Specialists are sensitive to family diversity (racial, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic).
- Family choice and decision take place at all levels.
- Information is shared on an ongoing, complete and impartial basis (informed choice).
- The focus of the intervention is determined by the family.
- The support offered is provided in a flexible manner.
- A wide variety of support tools are used.
- The strengths of families are used as resources.
- Relationships are characterized as partnerships and collaboration between a parent / specialist.
- The ways of providing support are empowering.

Engaging families makes the assistance support provided more effective. Empowering families means providing information and ensuring their rights. Interaction with families happens in a way that they maintain or gain a sense of control over their family's lives and imparts the positive changes that result from early intervention to their own strengths, abilities and actions. Families feel in control, they make decisions and choices regarding the practices, resources, and interventions that are appropriate for them. Family autonomy is preserved or enhanced. The family is actively involved in the desired opportunities.

Key instructions for development of the sistem of Intervention in Early Childhood in Kosovo

Its recommended that Republic of Kosovo undertakes the following steps:

Suggestions for development of policies and legislation on Intervention on Early Childhood:

- Drafting and adoption of the ECI Law for establishing the Intervention on Eearly Childhood;
- Drafting the National Strategy and Action Plan for ECI;
- Adoption of instruments, regulations, standards for services and professionals and other relevant documents for ECI;
- Adopt procedures for horizontal and vertical interagency cooperation and coordination between services.

Suggestions for responsible institutions and structures for Early Childhood Intervention in central and local level

- Designate a leading ministry to play a leading role in strategic planning, gathering all stakeholders and ensuring the successful development, adoption and implementation of ECI policies.
- Designate other responsible support ministries for the successful development and implementation of ECI policies and programs.
- Establish a Cross-Sectoral Committee on ECI, with defined competencies. This body should draw up analysis of the situation; conduct consultative workshops at municipal, regional and central level; hold consultations with senior officials; review and approve ECI reports; provide guidance on

the preparation of ECI instruments, regulations and other documents; hold public consultations with professionals and citizens to review legal documents; and review all ECI instruments.

- The Intersectoral Committee on ECI reports to ministries and others during the various stages of drafting documents to ensure that they are fully engaged in their drafting.
- Ministries and / or Assembly approve and monitor implementation of legal and strategic documents for ECI.
- Establish Local Committees for ECI in municipalities.

Financing the National System for Early Childhood Intervention

When preparing budgets for the ECI program, initial analyses are made of existing services for children. Based on the analyses, estimations are prepared, and are used in the preparation of the ECI Action Plan, which includes budgets for all activities.

Governments usually provide support for ongoing expenditures on ECI services / salaries, insurance, training, supervision, monitoring and evaluation /, while other sources of funding are sought for program innovation costs. Such additional sources of support may be national and local public subsidies for service programs, project activities, foundations grants, lottery and tax revenues, support from corporations, banks, businesses and other private sector sources, private donors, parental donations, fundraising events and more.

- The Government of the Republic of Kosovo together with the municipalities should finance the ECI services. ECI services may also be supported by other sources.

Advocacy for the creation of a National System for Early Childhood Intervention

Advocacy activities for the ECI program and policies may be:

- Advocacy for the ECI program at central and municipal level;
- Contribution to the drafting of the Law and strategic documents for ECI;
- Monitoring the implementation of ECI legislation and strategic documents;
- Increase awareness on ECI toward institutions, professionals and the public;
- Advocacy by parents and organizations of parents of children with disabilities.

Advocacy and communication with the public on the policies and building the national ECI system is essential to help all parents and citizens understand the benefits of ECI services.

Public awareness activities should impact in the citizens' awareness for the acceptance of diversity, abilities and contributions of all people, including the contribution and potential of people with disabilities.

Conclusion

The introduction of ECI services will have a positive impact in many areas:

- Better quality of services and activities for children - more effective and supportive;
- Better parental care;
- More accessible services - increasing the coverage of children enrolled in services;
- Better integration of children from the most vulnerable groups;
- More trained professionals and caregivers.
- Better policies and programs for children at national and regional level;
- More active involvement of civil society in decisions concerning the care and education of children.

Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection Kosovo – KOMF, is a coalition composed of 29 local and international NGOs working in the field of child protection, with the joint mission to advocate for and protect the rights of children in Kosovo.

The Coalition works to promote protection, respect, well-being and the advancement of the rights of children, in accordance with the UNCRC.
www.komfkosova.org

KOMF member NGOs, are:
Association for Social Training, Research and Advocacy – ASTRA, Action for Mothers and Children – AMC, Balkan Sunflowers Kosova, Childproof/CIPOF, Education Comes First – ECF, Initiative 6, Organizata Rinore Akti – Ora, Organization for Children without Parental Care – OFAP, OPFAK-KOS, Civil Rights Program – CRP/K, PL4Y International, Kosovo Education Center – KEC, Qendra e Kujdesit Ditor – PEMA, Center for Protection of Victims and Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings – PVPT, Center for Advanced Studies – FIT, Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims –KRCT, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages Kosovo, Shpresa dhe Shtëpi për Fëmijët Kosovë – SDSF, Patient's Rights Association in Kosovo – PRAK, Association of Paraplegics and Paralyzed Children of Kosova – HANDIKOS, Terre des hommes, The Ideas Partnership, Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians – VoRAE, World Vision, Public Organization for Local Initiatives and Supports – POLIS, Network of Peace Movement – NOPM, Educational & Social Center SOS Kindergarten and Nevo Koncepti.

Karin Dom is a non-profit organization founded in 1996 by hereditary diplomat and philanthropist Ivan Stancioff.
https://karindom.org/en/

23 years after its establishment Karin Dom is an organization with a leading role in providing professional services for children with special needs and their families. Over the years, Karin Dom develops and grows as a therapeutic center for children with special needs, which employs highly qualified specialists: physiotherapists, rehabilitators, speech therapists, psychologists, special teachers, social workers.

The main activities are realized by: Center for providing services for children with special needs and their families (for children aged 3-8), Center for Early Intervention (for children aged 0-3) and by a Resource and training center (qualified training for organizations and professionals). Karin Dom annually supports over 300 children and families and trains over 1200 specialists.

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