

Protection through Education

Brief update, as of 7 May 2020

Following nationwide closure of schools, kindergartens and preschools on 16 March, advice on social distancing and ban on group and mass gatherings, certain activities have been temporarily suspended – outreach work in settlements, assistance during school classes, workshops, leisure group activities such as theater plays, cinemas, etc. Due to one of the CYI team members contracting the Covid-19 (outside of work), all outreach activities were been put on hold and project team members were self-isolating until mid-April.

The number of unique child beneficiaries from the start of the project in November 2019 until suspension of activities due to outbreak and introduction of emergency state was 122 (71 girls and 51 boys).

The adjustment of the program due to COVID-19 declared pandemic was the following:

The team is in daily contact with all children and their families via phone (there are 7 mobile phones dedicated to this), talking with them at least twice a week and providing advice on the situation, hygiene measures and health concerns, and keeping them updated on government's pandemic measures. The staff is also keeping up to date with beneficiaries' health status.

The team continues being the link between preschools/schools and families. The teachers have contacted the team many times to help them get in touch with children and families. Most of the teachers have arranged Viber-based teaching groups. The project team surveyed families on the availability of Viber application and internet access. As expected, not all beneficiaries have access to internet at their homes. With those who were able to use the app, homework assistance was given through the app – including sending videos with additional explanations. The rest of the children were supported via regular phone and provided with support to master school tasks. The Ministry of Education broadcasted program for primary school on national television and children were invited to follow it (for those who have access to TV in their homes). Parents reported that the pace of lectures on TV was too fast for their children, so a lot of them requested additional school support from the PtE team, which was provided.

One of the schools made arrangements for children to come on Wednesdays, leave their homework and pick-up new assignments following all safety measures and precautions.

Since April marks the start of the first-grade enrollment process in Serbia, all staff is focused on facilitating that process with parents of beneficiaries – advising on health checks, collecting documentation needed, liaising with schools. This year, the enrolment process is administered online.

Assessment of future beneficiaries (future preschoolers) is being done using Google Earth application (to locate households in two settlements) and information are also obtained from current beneficiary families. So far, there are 12 children mapped in Vuka Vrcevic settlement and 9 children from Mali Leskovac settlement, that will be enrolled in preschool in September.

For now, the families didn't report any coronavirus cases. There was one suspected case, but fortunately, the test result was negative. Most of them are reporting that they do not have any health problems, but note the consequences of restrictions and curfew.

Project team has also started working on a volunteer handbook - designing the content, organization plan and structure of the handbook.

PtE team was involved in research done by the Network of organizations for children of Serbia titled „To be a child at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic“. Since it is important to obtain perspectives of children living in extreme poverty, the team talked with several children and included their inputs in questionnaire.

Other activities in the program (team meetings, reporting, payments) continue without disruption.

The curfew and emergency state in Serbia have been lifted on 7 May. The team is resuming outreach activities first through distribution of aid packages, with all safety measures in place – keeping appropriate social distance and wearing PPE. The schools and preschool will remain closed for now with little or no chances to be re-opened before the end of school year in June. CYI is considering bringing back educational workshops for the beneficiaries (groups will be smaller) and the modalities of how to organize them to be safe for both children and staff are being discussed at moment.

Budget implications:

The assessment is that around 6% of the budget won't be utilized as planned. The proposal is that all budget savings are used to purchase and deliver hygiene and basic food packs to Roma families and children.