






# Weekly Briefing

**Serbia Social briefing:**  
**The societal situation in the Republic of Serbia**  
**IIPE**

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## **The societal situation in the Republic of Serbia**

During the last couple of weeks societal situation in the Serbian society has been further complicated influenced by two factors. The first one is increasing frequency of "peer violence" and the second is the epidemic of small pox which is related to the negative odium that parents recently started having towards the issue of obligatory vaccination of children.

The issue of violence among the younger population has been present for a long time. Nevertheless, in the last few weeks, it was particularly intensified. Unfortunately, there is a justified fear that an increase in peer violence can impact the entire society. In the last three months, a considerable number of the school population in Serbia has experienced some form of peer violence.

"Peer violence" appears in the younger ages. It is characterized by beatings, insults, verbal and psychological harassment, humiliation on social networks, etc. It happens in schools and can permanently damage or destroy someone's life. The whole society are aware that peer violence exists and that it become more brutal, but question is how to prevent it, how to fight against it?

As a solution, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development formed the Group for Protection against Violence and Discrimination.

Anti-Violence and Discrimination Protection Group concluded that the most frequent violence is verbal violence. Within verbal violence the most frequent is insulting, misleading, giving names, laughing, gossiping, spreading lies, but also more serious forms such hitting, kidnapping, sexually harassing and sending disturbing text messages (SMS). The results of the research showed that 44.2 percent of pupils experienced some form of violence in the last three months (47.2 percent of younger and 42.7 percent of the elderly).

Violence is carried out either individually or when a whole group turns against one person. The reasons are mostly minor: who has better shoes or who

has better phone. Yet the underlying reason is the demonstration of power and power over someone who is weak. Also, reason is a wish to present itself as the meanest one and to get attention by showing off

Unfortunately, this problem often is linked with family situation. Violators often come from dysfunctional families. It does not matter if parents are doctors or professors. Even the material status is not crucial. Crucial thing is how much parents are involved in raising of their children and how much do they know them.

In the elementary school "Dragojlo Dudić" in the Belgrade settlement Mali Mokri Lug, there was a case of sexual peer violence, to which pupil was, by his schoolmates, exposed for two years. The girl reported this case when she was given forcefully a bag of narcotics, and then she was forced into oral sex.

The second major case of violence happened in Arandjelovac in school "Mileta Nikolić" when two girls beat the third one while someone recorded it with a phone camera. Prosecutor's Office in Kragujevac will initiate criminal proceedings against three pupils for violent behavior.

The educational system and family are two of the most important links, which must work together in order of early detection and suppression of these phenomena.

Among possible solutions is the creation of a special program that will include parents, students and all employees in schools. „School without Violence“, is one of programs which include 274 schools. The result of this program is that during its implementation, more than half of children have declared that they feel safer in schools, and that the percentage of violence is reduced. However, this program is implemented only in some schools, while in the rest situation is still critical and violence is present there.

Children should be encouraged to report immediately, as soon as possible, if they get into violence.

A clear message of authorities is that if they suffer violence, pupils should always address to someone whom they trust. It can be anyone from family or employed at school: teachers, psychologist... Young people most often address their friends, but, unfortunately, they do not know how to help them, so it's important to contact someone who could help to solve the problem and protect those who are in need.

Therefore it is extremely important that employees know what and how they should work, which procedures to follow or apply, what steps should they make. The Group for Protection against Violence and Discrimination organizes various trainings and expert meetings for employees in the education system.

What implies as necessary is a decisive attitude and multilayer action of the highest authorities of the Republic of Serbia. Among of possible actions certainly should be considered one that will ban content of violence and reality programs to be presented on TV stations in daytime and without any previous warning. That is the role of the Republic Regulatory Body for Electronic Media that even is authorized to suspend the given TV station in case of breaching the rules. Unfortunately, such measure has never been used (by now). Because of that one might be puzzled and got impression that society still hasn't started the combat against violence.

Of course, there are media with a positive role. Thanks to the media attention towards this problem, the initiative to for more efficient work of professional services in schools has prompted. Also, there is a request for defining more severe penalties for misconduct of educational staff, psychologists, pedagogues and school directors, as well as the parents of children who commit violence.

Another issue is epidemic of small pox. According to official data, 194 persons were affected and get sick of small pox in Serbia and Kosovo and Metohia. This is information of the Institute of Public Health - "Dr Milan Jovanović Batut". Twenty-nine new cases have been registered in the last three days in whole country. The youngest among ill is a three months old baby, while

the oldest is 48 years old. The epidemic of this disease in Serbian enclaves on Kosovo was reported on October 23 and from then until yesterday, a total of 139 people were affected.

Symptoms of the disease are any kind of rash and temperature. If some of children have this symptoms they must be tested. This is one of the stringent epidemiological measures, which is in force in whole country. The majority of patients, namely 89 percent, did not receive (or there is no data on it) an MMR (vaccine against small pox, mumps and rubella), vaccine that protects against this disease. Currently, 36 percent of patients are on hospital treatment. There are several cases with complications, while pneumonia was diagnosed in case of 13 patients.

In order to prevent an epidemic, it is necessary vaccinations of children aged from 12 months to 14 years.

Bearing in mind the all circumstances, the period of infectivity, seasonality, realized contacts, measures of intensified surveillance should be carried out until further. As a matter of fact, this special treatment must be in power at least during the period of double maximum incubation from the last registered case.

The problem with the possible epidemic could be avoided within a full vaccination.

This is unique problem in Serbian society considering that for decades vaccination was carried on smoothly. Problem arose several years ago when some rumors caused doubt that MMR vaccine leads to autism at children. At the same time, Serbia started to import vaccine from abroad while until then children were given vaccines produced in domestic Institute of Virology, Vaccines and Serums – Torlak. Allegedly, while children were vaccinated only with domestic ones there were no cases of autism at children. Serbian Minister of Health, Zlatibor Lončar, denied such allegations and stresses out that in spot is a conspiracy of certain pharmaceutical companies and that investigation will be carried on. Also, he called media and individuals to stop spread lies on this

matter because in this manner they are not only disturbing public but jeopardize entire society with this irresponsible attitude.

There is no doubt that in the following period, health centers and all pediatric institutions must report once a week whether they have had a patient suspected of having small pox. If they still appear, epidemiological services must investigate the patient, determine with whom he was contact, to isolate those people in order to reduce the transmission of the virus to a minimum, or to avoid the occurrence of the epidemic. If it turns out that a diseased person has entered our country, all those who have been in contact with him/her, and who were not protected against small pox, must be vaccinated. In the epidemics of smallpox, fatal outcomes can occur, especially among younger malnourished children.

Apparently frightened by the epidemic of small pox, in the last two weeks, parents have vaccinated their children in a significantly larger number.

In the past 15 days many children have been vaccinated, and now the number of protected people has already reached 46 percent. The situation is the worst in the biggest cities, but the situation regarding immunization is seriously improving. These weeks, many people responded to the call for vaccinations, and we are now much safer.

In order to secure complete protection, at least 95 percent of children need to be vaccinated. Stronger epidemiological surveillance measures are still in place, and they are then subsequently directed towards children aged from 12 months to 14 years who have not been vaccinated or have not received second dose of vaccine.

Although we are on the right way to be completely protected, we should not relax when the small pox are in question. Since it is a high-risk illness with which one patient can infect another 17, it should continue with vaccination. We recall, only during the epidemic of small pox in Romania, 43 patients died. In Serbia last year, the coverage of immunization by the MMR was 65 percent, which is much less than 95 percent, which is necessary for collective immunity.