

## COUNTRY REPORT: SERBIA

(Source: Vigor Majić, Petnica Science Center, Valjevo, Yugoslavia)

### EDUCATION IN SERBIA<sup>1</sup>

#### GENERAL DATA

Serbia is located in central South-East Europe, on the main road and traffic routes between Central Europe and the Near East.

It covers the area of 88,361 square km (including Kosovo).

The north of the country is flat, and moving south the uplands gradually turn into mountainous areas with the highest peaks rising above 2000 meters above sea level.

Without Kosovo, Serbia has about 7.5 million inhabitants – 95 per sq. km.

Average family has 3.2 members.

About 1.5 million or 20% of Serbia's population belongs to more than 15 different ethnic groups (estimated data for year 2000):

SERBS	6,000,000
HUNGARIANS	380,000
MUSLIMS (as ethnic group)	160,000
CROATIANS	120,000
MONTENEGRIANS	110,000
ALBANIANS	80,000
SLOVAKS	70,000
ROMANIANS	55,000
MACEDONIANS	50,000
BULGARIANS	30,000
NON-SERBS & NOT DECLARED	550,000
OTHERS	30,000

The number of Roma people is very unclear varying (depending of source) from under 100,000 to over million.

There are near 600,000 refugees from Bosnia and Croatia and about 250,000 refugees from Kosovo.

The natural population growth recorded a sharp drop over the last ten years, from about 2.5 (per 1000) to –2 (estimated for 2000). Annual number of births is about 95,000 (compared with about 146,000 in 1948).

For the year 2000, the infant mortality is estimated at 17+/-2, and is continuing to increase.

About 28% of the total population are young people and children up to the age of 19.

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<sup>1</sup> NB: Region Kosovo not included.

The mean life expectancy is 65 years for men, and 72 years for women. The mean age is 35 years.

The overall literacy is about 93% (between 10 and 19 years = 99%). However, according to UNESCO indicators, over 65% of work capable population is functionally illiterate.

Over 65% of population lives in cities, but large areas in Vojvodina and in central Serbia remain rural.

## **ECONOMY**

It is very difficult to give relevant parameters of the economic situation because of the country's specific position (UN sanctions and economic isolation), but the most significant fact is an almost fivefold fall of the GNP in 2000 compared to 1990. The GNP per capita stands at about USD 700 and average salaries have radically decreased to about 10% compared to 1990.

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The average monthly net salary in education is less than USD 40.

The public expenditure in education is about 5.5% of GNP and less than 200 USD per students a year.

## **EDUCATION**

School education starts at age of 7. Eight-year primary education is compulsory.

Secondary schools are mostly four year long, both general (grammar schools, gymnasiums), art schools, and various types of vocational schools.

There are two main types of tertiary education – colleges (2–3 years), art academies and university (4 to 6 years).

Special education (education for young people with mental or physical disabilities) is organized through a separate network of schools and, in some cases, through regular schools.

For some ethnic groups primary and secondary education is available in their respective mother tongues (Hungarian, Albanian, Romanian, Slovakian, Bulgarian) – 284 schools with 50,000 students.

The education is fully state-controlled (Republic of Serbia) through two ministries – Ministry of Education and Ministry of University (Advanced) Education. There are only two private secondary schools and one private university.

The number of school going children – school contingent (average and rounded number of 9-year old children) is about 100,000.

## Appendices

	No. of schools	No. of students	No. of teachers	Student per teacher ratio
primary	3600	760000	44000	18
secondary	470	310000	24000	13
tertiary	120	180000	9500	19

About 30% of the child population under 7 years of age attend pre-school educational programs or institutions.

In primary schools, the first grade enrollment ratio is about 98%, but about 72% finish the 8th grade.

Net enrollment of appropriate age group in primary education (grade 1–8) is about 94%, in secondary education – 65%, and in tertiary education – 25%.

Schooling expectancy for a 5 year-old child in 1999 is about 13 years.

Differences among cities and rural area are significant in the most of educational indicators, especially in the rate of students who leave primary or secondary education.

The ratio of students per teacher is 20 for pre-school institutions, 18 for primary schools (8 grades), 13 for secondary schools (grade 9–12), and 19 for tertiary education.

Intensity of education expressed in hours of instruction a year for 9 year-old pupil is 756 and for 14 year-old pupil is 1104 hours.

School facilities (buildings, equipment, libraries) are in an appalling condition.

Out of about 5,500 school buildings, 25% are older than 60 years. More than 55% buildings need partial or complete reconstruction.

In the 1998 earthquake some 60, mostly village schools, have been damaged, and in the spring of 1999, during the NATO bombardment, additional 150 or so schools were damaged, some beyond repair.

More than 25% of schools (primary and secondary) are not connected to any type of sewage system. About 45% schools are connected to public water supplying system.

Less than one third of schools have a separate room for the school library.

Since 1991 hardly anything has been invested in the new teaching equipment. A majority of school labs and cabinets are equipped with instruments older than 30 years, with most of this equipment not in function anyway. There are very few computers in schools. In primary schools (grade 1–8) there are about 300 students per one PC-computer. In secondary schools the ratio is about 1 PC-computer per 100 students. Less than 10% secondary schools are in some way connected with the Internet, but only about 2–3% has permanent access.

Although the public schools (i.e. almost all primary, secondary, or tertiary schools) are financed from the state budget (and, in a small part, through local communities), and the educational process is, by law, free of charge (except for

part-time studies in some secondary schools and for part-time studying in higher schools and universities), there is significant costs to be pay by students (families) for books, learning aids and tools, extracurricular programs, additional education, etc.

Since 1997 there is increasing number of hours and days lost in schools because of strikes. In spring 1999 because of NATO bombardment the school-year has been broken and students lost about 12 weeks.

### **Actual problems**

#### *1. Impoverishment*

The consequence of a deep economic and political crisis in the country, further intensified by the UN sanctions, economic isolation, and a high number of war refugees from Bosnia and from Kosovo, is a general impoverishment of population. Owing to the restructuring of the government's political priorities, the education ceased to be in the focus of social and political interests as long as two or even three decades ago. In education the public expenditure per student has been drastically reduced. From close to \$ 1,000 in 1990 it dropped to less than \$ 100 in 1999. Today teacher average salaries are almost ten times less than ten years ago and are much lower compared to the salaries in some other professions. More than 55% of school buildings are in need of partial or complete renovation. Investments in teaching equipment, literature, and extracurricular activities have been reduced almost to nothing.

#### *2. Inadequate Educational System*

The excessive centralization in the period since 1991 has blocked local initiatives, links between schools and local communities, the teachers' active position in designing the educational process, and, even, the school initiative in looking for practical solutions to education-related urgent needs. School headmasters (principals) are directly appointed by the minister of education and regime-linked political parties have crucial influence in the nomination process. Any sign of disobedience is punished, mostly by dismissal. A teacher can be fired if using textbooks other than the ones strictly prescribed by the minister of education. More than 98% of textbooks for primary and secondary schools are published by a single centralized institution controlled by the government.

A centralized curriculum, the absence of initiatives, as well as poor links with the local community hold back the schools from adapting their programs to actual local needs. In turn, this creates numerous problems in the education of ethnic minorities and refugees.

#### *3. Teacher Drain*

Although this problem is strongly linked with the general problem of impoverishment, it needs to be analyzed as a specific problem, very likely to affect the future,

“post-crisis” development of the education in Serbia. Although there are no official data on the personnel restructuring in schools, there is evidence that a considerable number of teachers are thinking of leaving and looking for better paid job outside the profession. Two key categories have a better chance of achieving that: young teachers and scientific workers who are already respected in the local community as highly successful and innovative. Education, as a career, is among the less attractive ones, and very soon the Serbian education will be faced with the acute lack of trained and qualified personnel. The classical “brain drain” affected by the general crisis and, especially, by the war, has already left its mark on the universities. Some faculties have lost more than 80% of their young, most promising, teaching and research staff.

#### *4. Teaching and Learning Methods*

Traditional education based on the strong authority of teacher, transmissive learning style that needs more memorization than creative and analytical thinking, leaves no room for teacher’s creativity and flexibility, and blocks any active cooperation of children and the active involvement of parents and local community in the educational process. The lack of appropriate teaching equipment, no investments in school libraries and information sources, and inadequate updating of teacher’s knowledge, are additional causes of poor teaching practices. Combined with a decline in teachers’ motivation and the general political and economic situation in the country, it makes the school education in Serbia one of the most critical points in the transition process.

#### *5. Sanctions and Isolation*

UN sanctions and, especially, economic isolation have affected the education in Serbia in many ways. There is no production of the teaching equipment and instruments in Serbia. Even the simplest microscope, overhead projector, TV set, wall chart, transparency, most of chemicals, etc. have to be imported. The consequences are enormous prices. The complicated visa regime makes it almost impossible for teachers to travel outside the country. Hence, there are currently no teacher or student exchange programs.

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The published data are collected or estimated from existing data (SY98, census data, Serbian Ministry of Education, UNICEF reports and analyzes, Petnica Science Center’s documentation, oral consultations with experts).

The estimation of actual trends are based on various types of data (including data from unofficial and private sources) and assumed on relatively uniform non-catastrophic development of economic, social, and political situation in the country.

## *Strategies of Educational Reform in South East Europe Countries*

### Objectives

i.e. what can be done without cooperation with government

<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>Strategy</b></p> <p><b>Short-term goals</b></p> <p><b>Long-term goals</b></p> <p><b>Comments</b></p>	<p>To intensify the in-service training and other types of professional training for primary and secondary school and university teaching staff.</p> <p>To organize relevant training programs, develop resource centers, establish good quality cooperation with teacher associations, organize short- and medium-term international exchanges and study visits; to join the existing UNICEF, Fund for Open Society, AAEN, Petnica Center, and other NGO programmes.</p> <p>To improve the quality of education, bearing in mind the financial difficulties and the lack of modern equipment and literature.</p> <p>To build up the local capacities in anticipation of the reform of the entire educational system.</p> <p>In the situation of an intensified drain of good teaching staff from schools and universities, and with the international community unable to provide assistance for higher salaries of the teaching staff, a demonstration of readiness to facilitate professional development could prove extremely effective in keeping enthusiastic teachers in schools and in introducing new methods through which the quality of education would be improved.</p>
<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>Strategy</b></p> <p><b>Short-term goals</b></p> <p><b>Long-term goals</b></p> <p><b>Comments</b></p>	<p>To supply schools with serviceable equipment, teaching tools, and literature.</p> <p>To ensure financial or material assistance for the provision of school supplies through the existing UNICEF and Fund for Open Society programmes, or through teachers associations and independent teacher unions.</p> <p>To decelerate (slow down?) and (eventually) enhance the quality of the teaching process; to demonstrate good-will and readiness on the part of the international community to assist the education as the key factor of the transition process.</p> <p>To strengthen the basis for the future educational reform processes</p> <p>At some level, it must be done in cooperation with the government, even the local authorities.</p>
<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>Strategy</b></p> <p><b>Short-term goals</b></p> <p><b>Long-term goals</b></p> <p><b>Comments</b></p>	<p>To support the local capacity build up for the educational reform.</p> <p>To fund research projects, field study projects, training programmes, student/teacher exchanges.</p> <p>SHORT-TERM GOALS</p> <p>To identify the actual local situation, facilities, problems and needs. To prepare educators as well as students, parents, and local community for necessary improvement and transformation of educational system and practice.</p> <p>To prepare the basis for the reform of the educational system.</p> <p>For the actual Serbian regime, education is among the top strategic questions and it is to be expected that government is ready to do many things to prevent such "independent initiative".</p>
<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>Strategy</b></p>	<p>To support local initiatives, especially the initiatives coming from schools and teachers.</p> <p>To fund projects, meetings, the development of teaching &amp; learning material directly or through the existing international or national institutions and foundations.</p>

## *Appendices*

<b>Short-term goals</b>	To keep good, enthusiastic, and ground-breaking teachers in schools, to encourage local initiatives, and show that solutions to many real problems can be achieved locally.
<b>Long-term goals</b>	To make teachers, school administration, and school as an institution, more flexible, and improve links between the school and the local community. To support the capacity build up for the anticipated educational reform process.
<b>5</b>	Support to non-formal and alternative education as a possible way to introduce new teaching methods, new ideas and concepts.
<b>Strategy</b>	To finance projects, support the existing NGOs, training programs, student/teacher exchange, local and regional programs, workshops, meeting, training programs, camps, youth projects.
<b>Short-term goals</b>	To promote and expand the existing good practices and innovative programs, expand the networks of non-formal and alternative education programs, keep good and enthusiastic teachers if not in schools, then in educational activities.
<b>Long-term goals</b>	Capacity building for the expected reform processes.
<b>6</b>	Support to the existing minority education programs, special education (education of people with physical or mental difficulties), and education of refugees, especially the Roma education.
<b>Strategy</b>	To provide a more substantial financial support to the existing and new projects, training programs for trainers and local activists, exchange programs; to purchase the teaching equipment and books for schools and local communities, to support media programs.
<b>Short-term goals</b>	To halt a decline in the quality of teaching and the enrollment of pupils and students in the existing minority education programs; to increase the Roma children enrollment in special and regular education, to increase the public interest and understanding of minority education and bilingual/transcultural education in multicultural/multiethnic communities.
<b>Long-term goals</b>	To establish multicultural education in every multicultural community. To successfully integrate all Roma children in regular primary and secondary schools.
<b>Comments</b>	
<b>7</b>	Support to life-long job-oriented educational programs.
<b>Strategy</b>	To assist the existing programs and projects; to provide a special support to new projects for undeveloped regions, refugees, and the Romas; to organize the training of trainers, to fund publishing activities and media programs.
<b>Short-term goals</b>	To increase the participation in the in-job education projects and the training of people with low education levels and the unemployed in order to reduce the unemployment rates and stimulate the growth of small and medium size private companies.
<b>Long-term goals</b>	To restructure the existing labor force and make it more adaptable to rapid changes in science and technology, the local and global markets.
<b>Comments</b>	