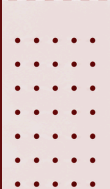




REPORT

FROM A MONITORING VISIT

*Public Institution Children's Home
"11 October" – Skopje*



REPORT FROM A MONITORING VISIT TO THE PUBLIC INSTITUTION CHILDREN'S HOME "11 OCTOBER" – SKOPJE

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Introduction

This report was prepared within the framework of the project "Strengthening human rights and services for children and vulnerable persons at risk in closed institutions" funded by the European Union. The main objective of the project is to contribute to the improvement of services for target groups through a human rights-based approach. The specific objectives are aimed at improving conditions and protecting human rights, strengthening the capacities of personnel and encouraging cooperation between local activists, institutions and the community.

As part of the monitoring and visit activities, a visit was carried out to the Public Institution for the Care of Children Without Parents and Parental Care "11 October" - Skopje, with a special focus on the residential units Karposh, Kapishtec and Kozle. The visits were carried out on 26.02.2026 and 27.02.2026.

The monitoring was conducted by a team of representatives of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, who gained direct insight into the living conditions of the children, the organization of the daily functioning of the housing units, the relationship between the children and the employees, as well as access to education, health care, psychological support and extracurricular activities.

During the visit, discussions were conducted with the children placed in the housing units, with the educators, caregivers and other professional staff, in order to obtain a realistic and comprehensive picture of the functioning of the care system and the daily challenges faced by both the children and the employees.

The visit was implemented based on a previously prepared methodology, and the purpose of the monitoring was to determine the level of provision of adequate living conditions, protection and development of the children, as well as to identify systemic weaknesses and the needs for improving the quality of care. Particular attention was paid to material conditions, nutrition, health and psychological support, respect for privacy, preparation for independent living, as well as the involvement of children in activities that contribute to their socialization and personal development.

Based on the determined findings, recommendations were made aimed at improving the conditions in the housing units, strengthening the professional staff and providing better quality and more sustainable support for children without parental care.

Findings from the Monitoring Visit

GENERAL INFORMATION

Children receive a monthly allowance, the amount of which depends on their age. Children up to the 5th grade receive 600 MKD, those from the 5th to the 9th grade receive 1,000 MKD, while children above the 9th grade receive 2,000 MKD. Older children pointed out that the amount of financial support is very low, while younger children stated that the funds they receive are sufficient.

Each residential unit has house rules that children are required to follow. A hygienist comes to maintain the hygiene in the units, but the children themselves actively participate in maintaining the space. Every day, one child is on duty and has the obligation to help with household activities, such as setting the table, washing dishes, sweeping etc

Nutrition

Each residential unit has a cook who comes every working day in the first shift, as well as one Saturday and one Sunday a month. The cooks prepare food according to a set menu, and the institution procures the food through public procurement and distributes it to the residential units. The menu is prepared in accordance with the applicable norms and standards for nutrition in institutions, taking into account the nutritional balance, the variety of meals and the seasonal availability of food. Some of the children complained that the food was monotonous. As a positive experience, they pointed out the example when they received vouchers for shopping at the market, which allowed them to choose products themselves.

Mentoring support and preparation for independent living

Each child has their own mentor, i.e. an employee in the housing unit who monitors their development and progress. After turning 18 and completing secondary education, children receive one-time financial support from the state in the amount of 3,000 euros. There is a positive example from the Municipality of Gevgelija, where a child was provided with an apartment to live in after turning 18 and leaving the housing unit.

Education and personal time

Children who show interest have the opportunity to attend additional activities, such as courses, sports activities, Red Cross activities, as well as various workshops organized by the institution in cooperation with non-governmental organizations or individually.

Staff members regularly participate in training and educational programmes, and children have the opportunity to participate in various workshops and activities, as well as to socialize with children from other housing units.

Contacts and use of mobile phones

The children have their own mobile phones, some of which were obtained through donations, which they use in agreement with the employees. They leave the phones with the employees at 10:00 PM and pick them up again in the morning. The younger children do not have SIM cards in their phones and use them mainly for playing games.

Children who have relatives with whom they maintain contact have the opportunity to see them.

Health and psychological care

In terms of health care, the children have a primary care physician and are exempt from paying participation. However, some of the children indicated that for certain occasions they had to pay the required co-payment for medical examinations from their own monthly allowance. When visiting a doctor, they are accompanied by a nurse.

Psychological support is provided through a citizens' association, but the children pointed out that meetings with a psychologist are held irregularly and expressed a wish for them to be more frequent. Medical documentation and medications are kept in the staff office and are locked.

Continuous support measures are taken for children with increased emotional sensitivity, including individual work with professionals, regular psychological support and engagement of external experts. These are children who have often experienced losses and traumatic experiences, which is why the approach is individual, continuous and long-term.

Clothing and seasonal activities

The institution organizes summer and winter vacations for the children. In terms of clothing, the children indicated that they have enough clothing, and additionally receive donations from various donors.

Staffing capacities

The employees work in three shifts – first, second and third shift, after which they have two days off, but are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week if necessary. They indicated that they are facing a shortage of staff, especially of professional staff with higher education. The shortage of professional staff with higher education is a challenge that has been going on for a long time and arises from the existing systemic conditions. The institution is continuously working to improve the staffing structure within the available possibilities. Only employees with higher education can perform the role of mentors, while the rest are engaged as caregivers.

According to them, the goal is to fill the gap as much as possible and create conditions for children to feel happy and accepted.

Findings from the visit to the housing units

KARPOS RESIDENTIAL UNIT

The housing unit accommodates 5 children, 4 of whom are girls and 1 boy. The four girls are accommodated in one room, which is small for all four, while the boy is accommodated in a separate room. Among the girls, two are in the first year of secondary education and two are in the fourth year of secondary education, while the male child is a fifth-grade primary school student.

The housing unit also accommodates two sisters. Two of the girls are 18 years old and are in their final year of secondary education, after which they are preparing to leave the institution.

The male child is significantly younger than the girls and expressed that he would like to have a male friend with whom he could spend time and socialize.

The material conditions in the housing unit are satisfactory, and hygiene was at a good level. The atmosphere in the housing unit was positive, as was the relationship between the children. The children indicated that they mostly spend their free time together, playing different games, watching television, etc.

In terms of involvement in activities, one of the girls has completed a nail technician course, another girl is actively involved in Red Cross activities, while the boy attends chess and football activities. One of the children is also involved in school competitions, and so far they have won first and second place in mathematics and a chess competition several times.

The children say that they sometimes quarrel with each other, but they say that they love each other.

Some of the children (older ones) smoke cigarettes and electronic cigarettes, and very rarely drink alcohol when they go out on the town (spritzer, but also hard alcohol such as cognac or diluted vodka).

One of the girls, who has an intellectual disability, regularly attends speech therapy and psychiatric appointments. On one occasion, she was hospitalised at the Psychiatric Clinic, within the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Following a traumatic event approximately one year ago, she also developed trauma-related symptoms/disorder. Regarding the same girl, staff reported that they had noticed her meeting with some unknown persons after school. As a result, she is currently no longer attending school in person and is following classes through online learning.

KAPISTEC RESIDENTIAL UNIT

The residential unit accommodates 5 children, 3 of whom are girls and 2 boys (brothers). Of the three girls, two are sisters. The age distribution of the children is not appropriate, with the youngest girl being 11 years old and not having a peer with whom she could socialize, although she expresses a desire to do so.

The atmosphere in the residential unit was negative, and the children indicated that they rarely spend time together and do not socialize with each other. The relationship with some of the employees was described as rigid, with the children noting that teachers often address them in a raised tone and do not pay enough attention to them, and it happened that two employees would sit together and not look at the children.

The children also indicated that some of the employees smoke in the premises of the housing unit. In the living room, there was an unpleasant smell of smoking indoors. In addition, they stated that the teachers sometimes eat the food intended for them, and they generally assessed the food as monotonous and insufficient. Some of the children eat dry food or buy burek and other food themselves. Regarding fruit, the children reported that most often the only fruit available is an apple.

Some of the children also smoke cigarettes, but not in the premises.

For one of the children they reported that he is easily upset, hits the wall, swears and says rude things, says that he will cut his wrists, teases some of the other children, and has even physically hit another child and injured him, and they also say that he does not take the therapy prescribed by a psychiatrist. When children argue or engage in physical fights, some staff members reportedly normalized such situations by telling them that they fight because they care about each other. The same child was subjected to a disciplinary measure and is currently not allowed to go out independently in the city. There have also been instances where boys entered the girls' rooms without knocking on the door.

The unit is supplied with basic medications, such as paracetamol and vitamins, which the employees also use for themselves.

Regarding hygiene products, the children reported a lack of sanitary pads, which the girls purchase themselves.

The material conditions in the residential unit are poor. The children reported the presence of mould and dampness, and complained that the rooms are small and lack sufficient space, including an insufficient number of desks and storage space for their books. They also indicated that there are inadequate conditions for studying and that the beds are old.

The heating system is insufficient, the two air-conditioning units in the common living room are not functioning, and the rooms are heated with panel heaters, which do not provide adequate warmth. The children emphasized that the rooms are cold and that there is draught coming through the windows.

Additionally, the children expressed dissatisfaction with the publication of photographs on social media by the institution, as not all children have given their consent to this practice, even when their faces are blurred. They also stated that they do not want to be identified at school as children from the “11 October” institution, as some peers look at them with pity. They further explained that they feel insecure because such information could potentially be misused by others.

Regarding the use of mobile phones, the youngest girl stated that she does not have a phone and is not allowed to use one.

During their free time, some of the children participate in various activities. One child attends football training, one child goes to a fitness club, while one of the older children is employed and continues education simultaneously as a part-time student.

KOZLE RESIDENTIAL UNIT

The residential unit accommodates 5 children: a 14-year-old girl, an 8-year-old boy who attends the 3rd grade, a 13-year-old boy, a 13-year-old girl and an 18-year-old girl. The 18-year-old girl is currently in her third year of high school, and she intends to enroll in the fourth year so that she can stay in the institution for another year. Three of the children are siblings.

The children are satisfied with the accommodation in the residential unit. The heating is central, there is air conditioning for hot days, and they especially like the location – there is a park in front of the building, the elementary school is nearby, and they also like the fact that the “City Mall” is just a short walk away.

Regarding involvement in activities, one of the children previously practiced football, but gave up because there was no opportunity for someone to regularly take him to trainings. According to the allegations, the coach was not ready to take on that responsibility, and the employees in the institution do not have enough capacity for that. Another child actively practices football twice a week.

They indicated that donations play an important role, and the children are especially happy when they have the opportunity to buy things themselves. The children also expressed a desire to shop independently in the market more often, because they sometimes find the food monotonous.

The atmosphere in the housing unit was positive. The children seemed close to each other and in good relations. Hygiene was at a satisfactory level. The housing unit has two bedrooms, and the space is relatively narrow. Some of the children sleep on mattresses placed on the floor, which is their own choice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the interviews conducted, the direct observations made, and the established factual situation, the following recommendations are provided:

MATERIAL SUPPORT AND ALLOWANCE

- *Consider the possibility of increasing the monthly allowance for older children, taking into account that some of them indicate that the current amount does not cover their basic and social needs.*

NUTRITION AND INDEPENDENCE OF CHILDREN

- *Take measures to ensure greater diversity in the children's diet, in accordance with nutritional standards and needs.*
- *Consider the possibility of occasionally allowing them to shop for food independently, in order to encourage their autonomy, responsibility and satisfaction.*

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

- *Provide regular, continuous and structured psychological support for children, taking into account that it is currently organized irregularly and through external organizations.*
- *Establish a clear schedule of meetings with a psychologist and monitoring of the psychological state of children.*

MATERIAL CONDITIONS IN THE HOUSING UNITS

- *To take urgent measures to improve the conditions in the Kapistec housing unit, especially with regard to the presence of moisture and mould, as well as to improve insulation.*
- *To ensure adequate and functional heating and cooling in all housing units.*

INDOOR SMOKING

- *Ensure consistent compliance and enforcement of the indoor smoking ban in all housing units, in order to protect the health of children.*

AGE DISTRIBUTION AND SOCIALIZATION

- *Consider the possibility of a more appropriate distribution of children by age in housing units, in order to enable peer interaction, better socialization and reduce isolation among younger children.*

STAFF STRENGTHENING

- *Take measures to strengthen the staff capacities of the institution, by hiring additional professional staff, especially people with higher education, who can work as mentors.*
- *Improve the continuity and availability of professional profiles (psychologist, special education teacher, social worker).*

EXTRACURRICULAR AND SPORTS ACTIVITIES

- *To enable increased support for children's participation in sports, cultural and other extracurricular activities.*
- *To provide logistical support (transportation, coordination with clubs and coaches) in order to continuously include children in sports and other extracurricular activities.*

PRIVACY AND DIGITAL PROTECTION

- *To respect the right to privacy of children, especially when publishing photos on social networks.*
- *To ensure clear and informed consent from children before any publication, as well as to establish internal rules for digital protection.*

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND ACTIVITIES

- *To continue organizing educational activities, workshops and joint gatherings between children from different housing units, in order to strengthen social integration, communication skills and personal development.*

IMPROVING SCHOOL SUPPORT

- *To strengthen cooperation with educational institutions in order to provide individualized educational support, especially for children with learning difficulties or emotional difficulties.*

