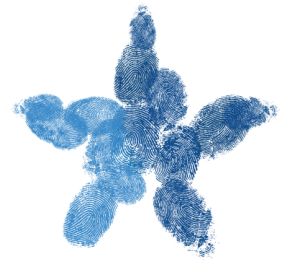


# IRIS NETWORK NEWSLETTER - #SOCIALSERVICESFORALL



SEPTEMBER 2021



Campaign  
**Social services  
for all**

This project  
is funded by  
the European  
Union



## ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

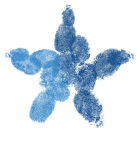
IRIS Network regional online advocacy campaign **Social Services for All** is commencing, focusing on the promotion of needs of the social services beneficiaries and more inclusive policies, with the aim to influence, in our own capacity, migration-related policies in the WB countries.

With the campaign itself, we wish to highlight the importance of social services provided by the civil society organizations in the countries of the region and their impact on the beneficiaries coming from the most vulnerable categories.

Through specific examples of our partners' activities, who have initiated significant changes in their communities and beyond, we are hoping to contribute to the advocacy efforts for more inclusive policies.

Apart from the overarching IRIS Network regional campaign, each partner organization, namely Initiative for Development and Cooperation and its partners from ASB (Germany), SOS Podgorica (Montenegro), LIR CD (Bosnia and Herzegovina), La Strada (North Macedonia), and Initiative for Social Change ARSIS (Albania) will conduct their own national campaigns in local languages.

Since the aim of the IRIS Network is to strengthen the role of CSOs - social services providers in South East Europe and to ensure that these organizations are recognized as equal partners by the public sector, the overall goal of the IRIS Network advocacy campaign is to raise public awareness and sensitivity to the challenges faced by vulnerable groups, including migrant population, as well as to promote good practices in addressing these challenges, where the social services will be available to all who need them.



## The expected results of the online advocacy campaign

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## RESULTS

- 1) Implemented an effective and efficient online campaign in all five partner countries, which is needs-oriented and based on the cooperation of partners in five countries;
- 2) Developed instruments for sending messages in accordance with the strategies of partner organizations. We are happy to announce the beginning of a challenging yet exciting journey where a joint voice of IRIS Network members and partners will have a chance to resonate in unison on a series of significant topics.

## BACKGROUND

The 2nd pillar of the project “IRIS NETWORKing - CSOs for protection sensitive migration management” is devoted to influencing social policies in the target countries, but also to active participation in a debate on migration management and inclusion at the European level. National networks of CSOs providing social services and the regional network IRIS established during the first phase of the project supported by the ASB provide a solid platform for advocacy actions in Western Balkans and monitoring of the key social sector reforms that relate to the migration management and provision of social services to migrants, and advocacy initiatives that will contribute to the better assistance/integration of the migrant population at the local level.

Moreover, the advocacy actions aiming to better support the integration of migrants on national levels will be extended to the regional level ensuring that the social aspect of the migration management is added to the contemporary agenda which is at the moment observed merely as the humanitarian and security challenge. The purpose of the campaign is to contribute to the implementation of agendas and policies through solid partnerships across Western Balkans.

Under the scope of the Project “IRIS NETWORKing - CSOs for protection sensitive migration management,” the IRIS Network has continuously conducted activities pertaining to policy processes. Shadow Reports (Country Shadow Reports (CSR) and Regional Shadow Report (RSR), as well as the Gap Assessment, have been produced. These IRIS Network documents serve as a baseline for the online advocacy campaign and we’re looking to pass the key messages and findings onto a large number of stakeholders in the region.

Finally, a series of Public Hearings will be organized at the end of the regional advocacy campaign to round up the efforts and present the overall results in each respective country (five national Public hearing events in total). At these events, we are expecting to present our findings on the regional cooperation within the Network, highlighting the experiences, hardships, and good practices of the overall cooperation in the online environment and the unconventional setting caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.



## The specific context shaped by the COVID-19

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COVID-19 pandemic hindered the activities, capacities, and even the role of CSO's in the Western Balkans due to the fact that a number of CEOs' social service providers lost sources of finance, depended heavily on donations, and on the inconsistent cooperation with local governments and other stakeholders. CSOs' social service providers across the Western Balkans took a heavy toll during the ongoing pandemic and the repercussion of the COVID-19 predicament will yet become visible in the near future. While attempting to assist the vulnerable, they have become vulnerable themselves.

Iris Network Report on Social Services during Coronavirus Pandemic in Western Balkans showed that the vast majority of IRIS Network members expect continuous support from the Network in facilitating dialogue between relevant stakeholders in the WB region, in order to bring together those working in the same field to provide a more streamlined service. There has been a dire need to reinforce advocacy initiatives in a joint campaign directed at relevant government authorities, the donor community, and other key actors and stakeholders.

Budget revisions across the region reduced the funds for CSO social services providers, attempting to cut costs at the expense of the civil sector.

Moreso, COVID-19 impacted negatively on already weak social protection systems in the region. The broader social impacts of the crisis are likely to be both severe and long-lasting. With such actions, social protection is back in the corner, which is a reason more to seize the momentum for a joint advocacy campaign through IRIS Network.

Whilst the aim of the campaign is also to increase the number of identified relevant stakeholders in all five partner countries and beyond, as well as to achieve a substantial outreach in disseminating the key messages and findings through advocacy efforts directed toward the targeted audience, we need to bear in mind the unprecedented context of COVID-19 predicament around the globe and therefore in our region, as well.

Although initially envisaged as a conventional advocacy campaign, due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation in the WB region, we have decided to undertake this endeavor online. As digital engagement plays a pivotal role in the IRIS Network's response to the COVID-19 crisis, the successful online advocacy campaign will strengthen the position of the Network, expand the outreach and broaden engagement around migration-related issues in WB.



Shadow reports of the IRIS Network provide an independent answer against the issues related to migrant protection for which the state has committed. Annual Shadow reports monitor migrant-related social services from the point of view of the relevant policies: how social welfare services are developed from the point of view of migrant-related policy - inclusive education, social inclusion, inclusion at the labor market, etc. This approach links the development of the migrant-related social services with impacts in different relevant policies and provides another aspect and quality to the EU advocacy mechanism.

Under the “IRIS NETWORKing - CSOs for protection sensitive migration management” project Shadow Reports for Chapters 19 and 24 have been produced for all partner countries.

### CHAPTER 19:

Despite the considerable progress in aligning the legal framework with the EU Acquis all WB countries still have issues to track poverty, provide systematic and integrated social services for vulnerable groups, combat child labor, to create functional schemes of offering standardized social services for children without parental care out of residential care, family empowerment, still has difficulties to link the labor market with skills leading to a high rate of unemployment among young people.

IRIS Network and its members have the expertise and provide examples of services that might help the government to deal with the identified issues.

For country-specific information, please follow the [link](#).



## CHAPTER 24:

Migration management and its interaction with social systems and child protection seem to be characterized by a lack of coordination between institutions in general, combined with a lack of financial and human resources (both in number and relevant professional skills). Despite the multifaceted aspects of migration underlined in Shadow Reports on Chapter 24, it appears that the assistance and protection provided to persons, families, and children affected by migration still rely on a narrow definition of "vulnerable groups" that excludes those in need of support.

Moreover, all WB countries need to improve reintegration schemes for the returned families and individuals as well as address the issue of unaccompanied minors.

All countries must also involve all the institutions that provide social services to migrants at the local level in the development of standard operating procedures, as well as identifying the responsible institutions in each phase of action and the interaction between migration and social service structures. The mandate of these institutions needs to be reviewed to improve service delivery as much as possible and to avoid duplication.

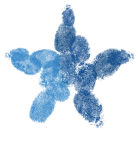
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The Regional GAP Assessment on the current situation in service provision for migrants and the future desirable state has been developed in order to identify the discrepancies between the current situation in service provision for migrants and the future desirable state in Albania, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. Very few analysis of this kind exists in the countries in the region, and none at the regional level. This results in the lack of knowledge of the real needs of the migrant target group and the problems they face every day which leads to a wide range of discrimination and violations of their human rights in all segments. Therefore, the Gap Assessment does not only pinpoint the discrepancies between the current situation and the desired one, but it also offers potential solutions and lays out the tasks needed to overcome the existing gap.

The Regional GAP Assessment has been prepared through desktop research, interviews with relevant stakeholders, analysis of compiled data, and identifying current gaps. With such a holistic approach, the Regional GAP Assessment identifies gaps in terms of existing services, beneficiary needs, quality and standardization of the services, allocation of the funds for the services, and at the end, offered the solutions and determined the tasks needed to be completed to close this gap.

You may find the document in its integral version, or browse the data per country [here](#)



**Join the campaign!**

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Seeing the need for a more unified approach toward external actors, be it government institutions, donors, stakeholders, and other decision-makers in relation to their support for the CSOs and their beneficiaries, the online advocacy initiatives toward all levels of government, relevant stakeholders, decision-makers, the donor community and the public need to be streamlined and voiced in a coherent, effective unison.

That is exactly what we are aiming to achieve with the IRIS Network Social Services for All online advocacy campaign.

Stay tuned for what we have to share in the upcoming period through the IRIS Network social media channels, individual social media of our respective partners, and finally at the series of national Public Hearing events taking place this fall.

You may also join our advocacy campaign endeavours, thus making our voice stronger and more influential.