

DOI: 10.47152/YouthWork2026.4

4. Youth Work and Juvenile Justice Landscape in Serbia

Milica KOLAKOVIĆ-BOJOVIĆ, PhD⁵

The rights of the child belong to the constitutional rights protected by the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, which prescribes that children enjoy the human rights appropriate to their age and mental maturity, while children's rights and their protection are regulated by law (Article 64).

A child-friendly juvenile justice has been gradually introduced in Serbia starting almost a full century before this concept has been officially recognised through the adoption of the Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child-friendly justice. It was fully framed in 2005 through the adoption of the Law on Juvenile Offenders and the Criminal Law Protection of Juveniles (hereinafter: Law on Juveniles) introducing:

- the diversional mechanism in criminal proceedings,
- the mandatory specialisation of all professionals involved in criminal proceedings involving juvenile offenders,
- a broad scope of specialised penal sanctions and corrective measures,
- a set of procedural guarantees for juvenile offenders and victims in criminal proceedings.

⁵ Principal Research Fellow, Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research, Belgrade, kolakius@gmail.com

4.1. The Age of Criminal Responsibility

The Law of Juveniles is applied together with the 2006 Criminal Code and 2011 Code of Criminal Procedure that provide a general criminal law framework in Serbia and sets out four age categories relevant for the criminal responsibility:

- 1) **Children:** under 14 years, cannot be subject of criminal responsibility.
- 2) **Younger juveniles:** 14-16 years old, can be subject of criminal responsibility in accordance with the special legal regime provided by the Law of Juveniles. Those criminal proceedings can result in imposing the corrective measures only.
- 3) **Older juveniles:** 16-18 years old, can be subject of criminal responsibility in accordance with the special legal regime provided by the Law of Juveniles. Juvenile offenders belonging to this age category can be subjected to both-corrective measures and penal sanction (juvenile prison).
- 4) **Young adults:** 18-21 years old, despite being adults, they can be punished like older juveniles which means that this age stage serves as a transitional period from the childhood to the adulthood.

In addition to the previously mentioned legislative framework, the system of enforcement of penal sanctions against juveniles is governed by the Law of Enforcement of Penal Sanctions and the Law of Enforcement of Non-institutional Sanctions and Measures, both adopted in 2014, together with the accompanying bylaws.

4.2. The key institutional actors

As previously mentioned, all criminal justice professionals taking part in the proceedings involving juvenile offenders must obtain a special certificate in the field of child friendly justice, issued by the Judicial Academy.

This means that only **police officers for juveniles, public prosecutors for juveniles and juvenile judges** may investigate, prosecute and decide in cases involving juvenile offenders. Those cases are in the exclusive competence of the higher courts, while professional legal aid of the lawyers certified in the field of juvenile justice is ensured from the beginning of the procedure.

In conducting juvenile justice proceedings, the justice system is supported by the **Centre for Social Work (CSW)** that are in charge of providing individual assessments of each juvenile offender, including his/her personality, family and wider social context surrounding the juvenile. This assessment serves as a basis for judicial decision and a proper choice of the educational measure of penal sanction.

Under the hat of the Ministry of Justice (Prison Administration) operates the network of the **Probation Offices** in charge of monitoring the enforcement of non-custodial sanctions and measures.

4.3. Ongoing Efforts to Improve Normative and Institutional Framework

In 2025 the draft of a new Law of Juveniles has been prepared bringing the attempt for further broadening the child friendly solutions in line with the relevant international standards that have been develop since the adoption of the 2005 Law. A new Law hasn't bed adopted yet, as the consultative process with the European Commission is yet to be finalised. Namely, this law belongs to the list of the main priorities in fulfilling benchmarks defined in the field of rule of law reforms in the context of EU accession processes.

4.4. Diversion of Criminal Proceedings and Work Engagement

Law on Juveniles introduces a diversional model of criminal proceeding for juveniles through application of educational orders. Its procedural function is not to initiate criminal proceedings against the minor or to suspend the proceedings, but substantial purpose is to influence the proper development of a minor and strengthen his/her personal responsibility so that he/she does not commit crimes in the future. (art. 6)

The following types of the measures can be imposed under the **educational orders** can be imposed according to art. 7 of the Law on Juveniles:

- 1) settlement with the injured party in order to eliminate, in whole or partially, the harmful consequences of the act through compensation, apology, work or in some other way;
- 2) regular school attendance or regular going to work;
- 3) involvement, free of charge, in the work of humanitarian organizations or in the various activities in the field of social care, environmental protection or community work;

4) subjecting himself/herself to appropriate examination and withdrawal from addiction caused by the use of alcohol or narcotics;

5) inclusion in individual or group treatment in an appropriate health institution or counselling centre.

Namely, one or more educational orders may be applied to a juvenile offender for a criminal offense for which a fine or a prison sentence of up to five years is prescribed by the Criminal Code. It can be applied by the juvenile public prosecutor or a juvenile judge, taking into account his/her confession of the criminal offense and his/her relationship to victim of the criminal offence. (art. 5)

For the scope of this publication, the most relevant are educational orders under points 2) and 3) as they are focusing on both: regular commute to work for those juveniles who are already employed (as employment is possible being age of 15 in Serbia) as well as involvement in *pro bono* work.

When choosing an educational order, the juvenile public prosecutor and the juvenile judge will take into account the best interests of both, the minor and the victim, taking care that the application of one or more educational orders does not interfere with the schooling or employment of minors, as the primary schooling is mandatory and lasts usually until being age of 14-15. The selection and implementation of the educational order is carried out in cooperation with the parents, the adoptive parent or guardian of the minor and the competent Guardianship Authority (Centre for Social Work).

An educational order can last for a maximum of six months, during which time it can be replaced by another educational order or terminated. (art. 8)

The implementation of the educational orders is voluntary based. The principle of voluntariness implies the assumption of rights and obligations, in this case in the application procedure, implementation and fulfilment of the educational order with full consent and with the minor's awareness of his own responsibilities.

The implementation and **supervision of corrective measures** applied to juveniles in Serbia is directly monitored by the guardianship authority, namely the competent Center for Social Work (CSW).

The role of the CSW in general and in particular as a guardianship body related to the organization the application of educational orders is divided into three areas:

a) identification of resources within the local area communities for the implementation of educational orders,

- b) launching an initiative to establish social services protection in the local community with appropriate programs and
- c) organizing, through the case manager, implementation of a specific educational order.

Although the measure is formally imposed by the **juvenile public prosecutor** or the **juvenile judge**, the law defines a clear division of responsibilities throughout the process.

- **Center for Social Work (Guardianship Authority):** Acts as the "case manager" who directly monitors the juvenile's behavior. Social workers communicate with the school, employer, healthcare institution, or humanitarian organization (depending on the type of measure) to check if the juvenile is fulfilling their obligations. Upon completion, the CSW drafts and **submits an official report** to the judicial authorities.
- **Juvenile Public Prosecutor:** Monitors the process if the measure was imposed in the pre-trial phase before criminal proceedings were initiated. If they receive a positive report from the CSW confirming that the measure has been successfully fulfilled, they issue a decision to **dismiss the criminal complaint**.
- **Juvenile Judge (Juvenile Panel):** Monitors implementation if the measure was imposed after the initiation of the preliminary proceedings. Once the judge receives confirmation of successful fulfillment from the CSR, they issue a decision to **suspend the proceedings**.

If the juvenile refuses or stops fulfilling the corrective measure without a justified reason, the Center for Social Work immediately notifies the prosecutor or judge, after which the standard criminal proceedings are initiated or resumed.

If the juvenile fully fulfils the educational order (which needs to be verified by the report by the guardianship authority), the public prosecutor for minors will issue a decision on rejecting the criminal complaint. (art. 62, par. 4.)

4.4.1. Major challenges in practice

As a bylaw needed to govern implementation of educational orders has never been adopted, twenty years period since the adoption of the Law of Juveniles resulted in the development of the jurisprudence in this field which fills the legislative gap.

However, there are still visible discrepancies between the level of cooperation between CSW and the prosecutor's offices with the local communities, NGOs and companies across the country which affects the efficiency of educational orders in some cities, affecting the number and variety of available arrangements for enforcement of educational orders. Consequently, this affects also the possibility of fine tuning the content of the educational order in line with the individual needs of the juvenile offenders, the type of the crime committed, gender specificities, etc.

4.5. Penal Sanctions and Measures and Work Engagement

As previously explained the choice of the penal sanctions and correctional/educational measures is highly dependent of the age of a juvenile offender.

Namely, younger juveniles as individuals who, at the time of committing a criminal offense, have reached 14 years of age but have not yet reached 16 can only be sentenced to correctional/educational measures. They cannot be sentenced to juvenile prison which is applicable to older juveniles (age 16-18).

In line with Article 10 of the Law on Juveniles, the purpose of penal sanctions against minors is defines as influencing the development and strengthening of personal responsibility of minors, the upbringing and proper development of their personality, in order to ensure the reintegration of minors into the social community through supervision, providing protection and assistance, as well as providing general and professional training. The purpose of juvenile prison, in addition to this general-purpose purpose from, is to exert a stronger influence on the juvenile offender not to commit criminal acts in the future, as well as on other minors not to commit criminal acts.

From such a defined purpose of penal sanctions it is clear to what extent the legislator recognised their role in "remodelling" the developmental path of juvenile offenders through the strengthening their personal and social skills and professional competencies in order to ensure their reintegration in the society, also through the employment.

4.5.1. Correctional/Educational measures

The court has three main groups of correctional/educational measures at its disposal:

A. Measures of Warning and Guidance

These measures are used for minor offenses when it is sufficient to reprimand the juvenile and raise their awareness without restricting their freedom:

- **Judicial Reprimand:** A formal warning issued by the judge when the offense is light and the reprimand itself is deemed sufficient to reform the juvenile.
- **Special Obligations:** The court can order the juvenile to fulfil specific tasks, such as:
 - 1) to apologize to the victim;
 - 2) to compensate the damage caused by him within his own possibilities;
 - 3) to regularly attend school or not miss work;
 - 4) to train for an occupation that corresponds to his abilities and inclinations;
 - 5) to participate, free of charge, in the work of humanitarian organizations or in affairs of social, local or environmental content;
 - 6) to engage in certain sports activities;
 - 7) to undergo appropriate testing and rehab from addiction caused by the use of alcoholic beverages or narcotic drugs;
 - 8) to participate in individual or group treatment in the appropriate health institution or counselling centre and to act according to the work programs drawn up for him in those institutions;
 - 9) to attend courses for professional training or to prepare and pass exams that test certain knowledge;
 - 10) that he cannot leave his place of residence or stay, without the consent of the court and the special approval of the guardianship authority.

Supervision over the execution of special obligations is carried out by the court, which may also ask for a report and opinion of the guardianship authority.

When imposing this educational measure, the court will warn the minor that in the event of non-fulfilment of one or more special obligations, they may be replaced by another obligation, i.e. another educational measure.

Those special obligations may be imposed as individual measures or as supplementary measures combined with the measures of intensified supervision.

B. Measures of Intensified Supervision

These apply when parental control has failed, and ongoing oversight by professionals or family is required:

- **Intensified Supervision by Parents or Guardians:** If parents failed to control the juvenile but have the capacity to reform their parenting with court support.
- **Intensified Supervision in Another Family:** If the parents are completely unable to care for the juvenile, they are temporarily placed with a foster or alternative family.
- **Intensified Supervision by the Social Work Authority:** The juvenile remains at home but is regularly monitored and guided by a professional social worker from the local Centre for Social Work.

C. Institutional (Residential) Measures

These are the strictest measures that can be imposed to younger juveniles. They involve a complete removal from their current environment and placement into an institution:

- **Placement in an Educational Institution:** The juvenile is sent to an open-type shelter/home for education and training. These institutions belong to the social protection system, and they are placed in Belgrade (Institute for the Education of Children and Youth, Belgrade (traditionally known as “Vasa Stajić”), Niš and Knjaževac. This measure can last between six months and two years. Every six months, the court considers whether there are grounds for suspending the execution of the measure or for replacing it with another educational measure.
- **Placement in a Correctional-Reformatory Home:** The institution where this measure is executed (Correctional-Reformatory Home Kruševac, known as VPD Kruševac) belongs to the justice system and operates under the Prison Administration. However, its organisation is significantly different from prisons. It is used when previous measures failed or the severity of the crime demands stricter intervention. It lasts from six months to four years, where the exact duration of the measure is not initially determined by the court, but it results from the progress made in the treatment of a juvenile in the Institution. Every six months, the court considers whether there are grounds

for suspending the execution of the measure or for replacing it with another educational measure.

- **Placement in a Special Institution for Treatment and Rehabilitation:** The idea of the legislator was to use these measures in cases when a juvenile committed the offense due to mental illness, developmental delays, or severe addiction. However, the State authorities have not managed yet to establish such an institution which prevents the courts from imposing it to the juvenile offenders.

4.5.2. Juvenile prison

As earlier said, juvenile prison is the only penalty that can be imposed to (older) juveniles.

Juvenile prison is only applied if the youth committed an offense for which the law prescribes an adult prison sentence longer than five years. The court will only issue this sentence if it determines that a standard correctional measure is unavailing due to a high degree of guilt, the severe nature of the crime, and the specific circumstances of the case. The sentence generally cannot be shorter than six months or longer than five years. However, for a criminal offense for which a prison sentence in duration of twenty years or more, or in the case of at least two criminal offenses for which a prison sentence of more than ten years is prescribed, juvenile imprisonment may be imposed for up to ten years.

4.5.3. The relevance of work engagement in the context of enforcement of various correctional measures

Even though older juveniles *can* go to prison, it remains an exception. Even when it is imposed, as this is possible only for those who commits the crime being older than 16, this means that the chances that someone will be still underage at the time of execution of juvenile prison sentence are minimum.

Therefore, from the point of view of youth work of juvenile offenders, the mechanisms and modalities of youth work implemented in the scope of the institutional correctional measures are more relevant, together with a youth work in the community within the scope of the special obligations, that can be also combined with the intensified supervision.

4.5.4. Work engagement in the community

As previously mentioned, special obligations prescribed by the law allow for several modalities of work engagement of juvenile offenders such as in the context of work aimed at repairing the damage to the victim or taking part in the community work.

In the first case the Law allows such a work to last a maximum of 60 hours in a period of three months, as long as this special obligation can last, but in such a way that this work does not interfere with the schooling or employment of minors. (art. 14)

The community work can last a maximum of 120 hours in a period of six months, as long as this special obligation can last, but so that this work does not interfere with his education or employment.

4.5.5. Work Engagement of offenders placed in the Educational Institution (The case study of "Vasa Stajić")

The nature of the Educational Institution determinates also the scope of its activities with the juveniles placed there. Namely, those activities include the care, upbringing, education, professional training and health protection of children and youth in conflict with the law and with behavioural disorders.

This institution accommodates young people of both genders, aged 14 to 18, who have been sentenced to an educational measure of placement in an educational institution. A total capacity of the Institution is 36 users, divided in the four educational groups: The two educational groups for boys, the one educational group for girls and a group in which a special program is implemented (the intensive treatment program).

For children placed in the "Vasa Stajić", classes are in most cases organized right inside the facility, but through a specialized and official educational institution called School for Elementary and Secondary Education "Vožd" (ŠOSO "Vožd").

The schooling process in this Institution brings the comprehensive approach combining education and vocational training, through the following principles:

- **In-house schooling:** Equipped classrooms and specialized practical workshops are located inside the complex. Children complete their elementary school or receive vocational high school training (professional training for various crafts and trades) using a shortened and adapted curriculum.

- **Combined model:** While classes within the facility are primarily attended by the institution's residents, the ŠOSO "Vožd" school also enrolls external students. These are children living with their families who attend the school upon recommendation from the Center for Social Work.
- **Regular schools outside the Institution:** In specific, individual cases, certain residents may be allowed to attend regular high schools in Belgrade. This only happens if the expert team assesses that it is safe and beneficial for the child's resocialization, especially toward the end of their court-ordered stay

When it comes to the **vocational training**, the following three-year and two-year vocational profiles (trades) are organized for the residents according to a special curriculum and program tailored for children with social behavior disorders: Car body repairer / Panel beater (three-year vocational profile); Hairdresser (three-year vocational profile); Food preparation assistant (two-year vocational profile); Textile sewer (two-year vocational profile). The school has three specialized workshops located within the school/institution facility itself, where students perform practical training and learn their trade. The diplomas that residents earn through ŠOSO "Vožd" are formally and legally fully recognized and valid. The diploma itself does not state that the individual was a resident of a correctional facility, which prevents discrimination and makes it easier to find a job with any employer.

In addition to the work in the context of vocational training, for juveniles aged 15 or more there is an opportunity for **employment outside the institution (open treatment)**. Namely, young offenders who demonstrate a high degree of responsibility, good behavior, and progress in their rehabilitation process can transition to an "open" or "semi-open" status. With the permission of their educator and the court, this allows them to go to work for private employers outside the institution grounds and return to the facility after work hours.

The young offenders are not entirely free to independently and uncontrollably manage their entire earnings while placed in the institution, even though that money legally belongs to them. The management of money earned by a resident working for an external employer is strictly regulated by the Institution's rules and the individual treatment plan, primarily for educational and safety reasons. The majority of the earnings is deposited into a special, dedicated account held in the resident's name, but under the supervision of the Institution and the competent guardianship authority (CSW). The main goal of this model is for the residents to

accumulate financial resources that will be handed over to them at the moment they leave the facility. This money serves as starting capital for their independence, renting an apartment, or covering their first months of living in freedom. However, the juveniles are approved of a certain amount from their earnings for current monthly needs (pocket money). Financial literacy is a part of the rehabilitation process. Through cooperation with their educator, residents learn how to spend money rationally, plan a budget, and understand the value of their own labor.

A special attention is paid to organizing **free time and free activities** in order to build additional **soft skills**. Young people have access to a gym, internet club, workshops, sports courts and a club-lounge as well as time to time activities such as planting the trees, traveling to the mountains or the seaside, visiting Zoo, or parks of the nature, etc.

4.5.6. Work engagement, education and vocational training in the Correctional-Reformatory Home ("VPD Kruševac")

The legislation approaches to education and employment of young inmates as interconnected and complementary processes. Therefore, the primary and secondary schooling are organised for juvenile offenders placed in the Correctional Institution together with vocational training, work engagement out of vocational training as well as with additional courses aimed at strengthening of their other life and soft skills.

A. Education

Continuation and/or completion of the educational process is a vital prerequisite for reducing the recidivism of juvenile offenders and effective reintegration into society. Although the numbers are constantly fluctuating, on average, half of the total number (160-180) of the inmates are attending primary or secondary school at any given time.

When it comes to high school education, residents are allowed to attend high schools as part-time students, while the primary schooling is organised in the premisses of the Institution, but by the regular primary school teachers who are coming to deliver the classes. Such an approach was introduced in 2015 when the Institutional, in-house school was abolished to avoid stigmatisation of the inmates through the diplomas issued by the easily recognisable in-house school.

B. Work engagement- normative framework

When it comes to the employment of minors during the implementation of the educational measure of referral to the VPD, the starting point and legal basis for such employment is Article 128, point 12 of the ZMUKD, which guarantees the right of minors to work in a correctional facility according to their abilities in accordance with their obligations to attend classes. For minors who do not attend classes, working hours are in accordance with general regulations.

Potentially inadequate is the present provision of Article 33 of the Rulebook on House Rules in the Correctional Institution, which stipulates that a minor has **the right and obligation to work** in the Correctional Institution, whereby the right and obligation defined in this way is justified by the need for the minor to acquire, maintain and increase his work skills, work habits and professional knowledge and to earn an income. Article 33 of the Rulebook provides for the protection of minors from economic exploitation and performing jobs that could be dangerous for their health, physical, mental, moral and social development, as well as jobs that would interfere with their education.

In addition to the potential controversy in relation to the prohibition of forced labour, the aforementioned provision of the Rulebook is also problematic from the point of view of Article 24 of the Labor Law, which limits the ability to work to the age of 15, but also the accompanying by-laws, which condition the establishment of an employment relationship with a minor on the consent of parents or guardians.

C. Work engagement in the context of vocational training

In addition to the primary and secondary education that are offered to the young inmates in the Correctional Institution Kruševac, as the only correctional institution of the closed type, a number of vocational training programs are available for strengthening their skills and competences.

At the moment, 17 different vocational training courses are offered, all of them developed to address the present trends at the labour market, as well as taking into account an available time for their implementation and the space and equipment in the Institution. The professional profiles vary from the traditional ones affiliated to the construction industry such as painters, ceramists and carpenters to more modern ones such as CNC machine control.

The needs of the girls are taken into account too, so they can take e.g. manicure classes.

For all those who successfully finalise the training the certificates are issued by the certified agencies, without indication that the training has been provided in the Correctional Institution.

D. Strengthening the life and soft skills of young inmates

In addition to this typical vocational training courses, special training programs are provided in order to strengthen specific skills of young inmates, such as IT literacy training, poetry and drama classes, dog dressage classes, etc.⁶ In addition to developing the practical skills, this also affects their resilience, creativeness and focus, preparing them for reconnecting with their families and peers. (Kolaković-Bojović & Batrićević, 2021) Being able to adopt dogs they trained and taking care of during their stay in the Institution, allows them to bridge the gap “between the two worlds” after being realised.

A number of sport activities is offered, such as football, basketball and chess. All the abovementioned activities are developed in a manner of strengthening the collective spirit in the institution as the Institution’s team often take part in the national and international championships achieving the remarkable results.⁷

For those juveniles who are still attending the school, the working day is organised in a manner that they can manage to attend both, the school and the training.

E. Work engagement out of vocational training and relationships with the local community

As the Correctional Institution is organised as a self-sustainable system to the great extent, the young offenders work hand in hand with Institution’s staff on daily duties associated with maintaining the hygiene in the Institution, cooking, doing laundry, taking care of animals at the animal farm that belongs to the Institution, working in the vegetable garden and flower garden, etc.

Products resulted from their work are often used to improve the life of the local community, e.g through planting flowers produced in the green houses in the Institution are used for the city park and other public surfaces. This changes the

⁶ See more at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YdyNq4kQNU> , last accessed at July 29, 2026.

⁷ See more at: <https://www.fide.com/2nd-continental-championships-for-prisoners-conclude-with-a-record-number-of-countries-teams-participating/> , last accessed at July 29, 2026.

perception of young offenders by the citizens and the local community and stimulates local company to financially support the Institution to renovate, built or equip the Institution's premisses.

In addition to this, young offenders take part in various cultural manifestations in the local community, e.g. presenting their poems, theatre, paintings, etc.

F. Remuneration and progress in relation to the work engagement

For their work, young offenders receive remuneration. A part of it goes to Institution's deposit to be returned to them at moment of releasing from the Institution, while the part of the amount is available to them to sell it in the Institution's shop.

The health protection is also ensured by the Institution itself, by the internal medical staff, or through bringing the young offenders into the external medical institutions when needed.

Every single element of their behaviour in the institution is evaluated and valorised in terms of the duration and conditions of enforcement of the measure. Namely, their decision to work, take the vocational training and regularly attend the school are valued through the reports of treatment staff to the court that decides on the duration of the measure. It also affects the decision to place them in the open or close department of the institution, to allow them to go home for a weekend more often or to take part in some of the recreative activities in the groups with a limited number of participants, such as work with the dogs, poetry and drama classes etc.

G. The present challenges

One of the greatest challenges in terms of the youth work in the Correctional Institution is associated with the fact that a certain number of young offenders faces intellectual and developmental challenges preventing them from meaningful engagement into the educational and work activities. The reason for having those juveniles in the institution arises from the fact that a special institution for treatment and rehabilitation has never been established, despite the Law on Juveniles recognises it a solution for those juveniles whose treatment requires an extensive involvement of the medical staff.

4.6. Youth Work in the Context of Post penal Care

4.6.1. *Legal and institutional set up*

Mechanism of preparation for release involves the synergistic action of the treatment staff, family, probation service and social care centres, whereby the preparation for release practically begins already after the classification of minors into appropriate programs, departments, residential communities and educational groups. However, the Law on Juveniles does not directly regulate the provision of post-penal support and assistance to minors, so this issue is governed by the Law on the Execution of Criminal Sanctions and the Law on Enforcement of Non-Custodial Sanctions and Measures ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", No.55/2014, 87/2018), which provides that the post-release assistance programme shall represent a set of measures and procedures which the offender voluntarily accepts after having served the prison sentence, and which are applied to facilitate the inclusion in the life after prison. The post-release assistance programme shall include, among others, support and assistance for finding employment, completing education or vocational training and courses. (art. 57)

Together with the housing, food, education, and legal aid, opportunities for (self)employment remain the main prerequisites for effective social reintegration of juvenile offenders and for decreasing the risk of recidivism.

After being released, juveniles can get **free legal aid** in all seats of the local self-governments if need to understand or resolve their legal situation.

If still underaged after being released, CSW will ensure their further placement in **foster care** institutions or families if the primary family does not exist or cannot take care of a juvenile. Those juveniles that have become adults in the institution can count only on **housing** in some of the limited number of public shelters (up to a few months). They can also get **one-time financial support** from the CSW. In addition to this, they can receive **meals** in public and/or charity kitchens run by Red Cross and Serbian Orthodox Church. The same goes for the necessary clothes.

In terms of **employment**, the strategic framework and the legislation do not recognize former convicts as especially vulnerable group. The National Employment Strategy for period 2021-2026 does not explicitly list former convicts as especially vulnerable group. However, the broader interpretation of provisions allows for individuals to be included in some of the listed categories. The overall inclusion of many former convicts within the 'hardly employable' category is missing in the

Strategy, The Law on employment and the insurance for unemployment. The ‘hardly employable category’ is stated as being “unemployed persons who due to health condition, insufficient education, socio-demographic characteristics, regional or professional disparity of demand and supply situation at the labour market, or due to other objective circumstances hardly could find job”. The State envisaged specific programmes and measures for developing an active employment policy to incentivize equality of these individuals within labour market.

4.6.2. Work engagement of youth offenders in the context of post penal care

The released convicted person will be included in the labour market as an unemployed person. During 12 months after registering at the National employment service (NES), the NES will try to find employment within the level of education and area of specialization of the ex-prisoner. After 12 months the individual is offered a job in the lower skill category in line with the individual’s employment plan developed with the NES.

The post-release assistance program includes, among other areas, support and assistance for finding employment. However, the support is voluntary and provided by the Probation Services. For effective support in finding employment the Probation Service should establish cooperation with local office of the National Employment Service and Chamber of Commerce. In practice, this cooperation is still underdeveloped and varies to a great extent across the country, mostly to the huge workload of the probation officers.

Information on available employment opportunities is available online, at the NES website. There is whole section of the website with forms and instructions, including forms for registering as unemployed. To enable easier navigation through the possibilities for employment the CSO prepared detailed instruction for released offenders on the issues that might arise related to self-employment, initiation of own business and searching for job. Former convicts can also apply for prequalification programs organized by the NES, as well as to take part in public calls for allocation of financial and logistical support to self-employment. However, as the whole process of finding relevant information and applying for the support or starting its own small business is fully digitalized it raises the concerns in relation to digital literacy of released offenders. Kolaković-Bojović & Matić Bošković, 2025).

Developed, implemented and recognised as the one of the leading initiatives in such an environment, four stages **Help e.V. support within the resocialisation programme**, covering the period from September 2014 until December 2019

provided significant support to the correctional institutions through the procurement of equipment necessary for the working engagement of inmates, accompanied with complementary training for CIs' staff and inmates to enable them to use the equipment. In parallel, numerous trainings, workshops and other capacity building activities have been provided to the inmates and CIs' staff to foster rehabilitation and reintegration, reduce risks of suicide, self-injuries and recidivism, support and develop personal competences, promote creativity, self-respect and self-confidence and enable more efficient social reintegration after being released. In addition to this, significant support for self-employment of ex-inmates has been provided through the procurement of necessary equipment and provision of training. Support was provided in the form of small grant that could be used for purchase of equipment for start of the business. HELP organization had an ownership over the equipment for two-year period, which could be considered as probation period. Released offenders need to register own business to be eligible to receive support. (Kolaković-Bojović & Batričević, 2020:3)

4.6.3. Youth work and NGO sector support at the stage of post penal care

In Serbia, **there is no single umbrella NGO⁸** focused exclusively on youth work with youth offenders. Instead, there are **several civil society organizations and professional associations implement specialized prevention, resocialization, and post-penal support programs** using youth work methodologies. These organizations collaborate closely with centers for social work, courts, and correctional institutions to offer non-formal education, psychosocial support, and employment programs.

- **CEPORA (Center for Positive Youth Development)⁹** is one of the leading expert NGOs in Serbia when it comes to applying prevention science and youth work methodologies to vulnerable youth demographics. CEPORA actively supports youth who are preparing to leave the social welfare system (residential homes or foster care). CEPORA provides mentoring, counseling, and employability training, focusing on youth in NEET situations (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). They run drama, creative, and socio-educational workshops

⁸ Even though, there is NAPOR (National Association of Youth Work Practitioners) which functions as an umbrella association. It currently brings together over 70 member organizations across the country. Their main goal is to ensure that youth work has a clear quality standard, framework, and legal backing.

⁹ See more at: <https://cepora.org/en/>, last accessed on August 1st, 2026.

designed to build emotional and social skills, effectively preventing the development of behavioral issues.

- **Center for Youth Integration (CIM)**¹⁰ focuses its work to the support street-involved children. They target youth in conflict with the law or at high risk, providing mentoring, vocational training, formal certifications, and psychosocial aid to prevent recidivism.
- **Child Rights Centre (CRC)**¹¹ implements educational programs and workshops for youth in conflict with the law, focusing on the application of alternative sanctions and diversionary measures through peer education and awareness raising on the child's rights and participation, mental health, digital literacy and safety, etc.

4.6.4. Present challenges in post-penal care

Establishment of the Probation Offices and upgrading their work in last 12 years have brought an important added value to the efficiency of the system. However, it seems that the following issues should be more precisely regulated and developed in practice:

- the method of involving the probation officers in the phase of preparation for release;
- the way to involve the family in this preparation process;
- Mechanisms of cooperation (on a practical, operational level) of treatment officers and CSW in the context of preparation for release (standardization of procedures, forms and terms of action, as well as the responsibilities of both parties in case of non-compliance that harms the interests of minors);
- the support that the CSW provide to minors after being released.

In addition to this, a chronic staff overburden, both in CSWs and Probation Offices significantly affects their ability to monitor individual cases and to ensure sustainable and meaningful support to them.

¹⁰ See more at: <https://cim.org.rs/?lang=en>, last accessed on August 1st, 2026.

¹¹ See more at: <https://cpd.org.rs/latest-news/?lang=en>, last accessed on August 1st, 2026.

4.7. Conclusions

The success of youth offenders' rehabilitation is influenced by diversion of criminal proceedings and providing them the second chance without entering the criminal proceedings as well as by the institutional treatment and social climate with the focus on post-penal care.

Both, education/vocational programs and post-penal care were introduced in Serbia after World War II and over time they have changed and evolved. More tangible progress has been made in terms of the rehabilitation, where youth work appears in different modalities: as an educational order whose enforcement leads in avoiding the criminal proceeding, as a special (community) measure or as a part of the institutional treatment in the educational or correctional institution. In all of those mechanisms, there is a strong intension to ensure compatibility between education, work and strengthening the soft skills.

Compared with this, the use of youth work as a mechanism of post-penal care is still underdeveloped, where a clear legislative framework and efficient inter-institutional and cooperation with CSOs is still missing, while the low number of CSOs operate in the sector exclusively project based.

References

- CEPORA (Center for Positive Youth Development), <https://cepora.org/en/>, last accessed on August 1st, 2026.
- Center for Youth Integration (CIM), <https://cim.org.rs/?lang=en>, last accessed on August 1st, 2026.
- Child Rights Centre (CRC), <https://cpd.org.rs/latest-news/?lang=en>, last accessed on August 1st, 2026.
- Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, "Official Gazette of RS", No. 98/2006 and 115/2021;
- Criminal Code, "Official Gazette of RS", No. 85/2005, 88/2005, 107/2005, 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016, 35/2019 and 94/2024;
- Criminal Procedure Code, "Official Gazette of RS", No. 72/2011, 101/2011, 121/2012, 32/2013, 45/2013, 55/2014, 35/2019, 27/2021 - Constitutional Court Decision and 62/2021 - Constitutional Court Decision;

- Karić, T, Protić, S, Kolaković-Bojović, M, Paraušić, A. i Drndarević, N. (2021) *Analiza uticaja primene Zakona o maloletnim učiniocima krivičnih dela i krivičnopravnoj zaštiti maloletnih lica u periodu od 2006. do 2020. godine*. Misija OEBS-a u Srbiji, Institut za kriminološka i sociološka istraživanja, Beograd.
- Kolaković-Bojović, M. and Batričević, A. (2020) *IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF Help e.V.'S RESOCIALIZATION PROGRAMME (Improvement of the treatment programmes in correctional institutions for adults and juveniles - SOE03-19)*. Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research, Belgrade.
- Kolaković-Bojović, M, Batričević, A. (2021) Children in Correctional Institutions and the Right to Communicate with their Families during the Covid19 Pandemic. Teme (4), 1115-1130, <https://doi.org/10.22190/TEME210824065K>
- Kolaković-Bojović, M. and Matić Bošković, M. (2025) *Challenges of Post-Penal Care in Serbia: Access to Education for Former Offenders*. Journal of Legal and Political Education, 2 (1). pp. 5-20. ISSN 2955-2389
- Kolaković-Bojović, M. (2021) *Information and Communications Technology as a Tool to Substitute In-Person Visits in the Serbian Prison System During the Covid-19 Restrictive Measures*. Journal of Liberty and International Affair, 7 (3). pp. 21-35. ISSN 1857-9760
- Kolaković-Bojović, M. (2021) *Life Imprisonment and Parole in Serbia - (UN) Intentionally Missed Opportunity*. Revija za kriminologiju i krivično pravo, 59 (1). pp. 93-108. ISSN 1820-2969.
- Law on Adult Education (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 55/2013, 88/2017 - other law, 27/2018 – other law and 6/2020 – other law.
- Law on Juvenile Offenders and the Criminal Law Protection of Juveniles (Official Gazette, No. 85/2005)
- Law on Enforcement of Penal Sanctions (Official Journal RS, No. 55/2014, 35/2019)
- Law on Enforcement of Non-custodial Sanctions and Measures (Official Journal RS, No. 55/2014, 87/2018)
- Law on the National Qualifications Framework of the Republic of Serbia (Official Gazette, No. 27/18)