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Realizing Human Rights in the Transition to Adulthood: A Parental Perspective on Barriers Facing Youth with Intellectual Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia

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Abstract
Children and adolescents with developmental disabilities, along with their families, require flexible and comprehensive support to ensure the full realization of their human rights during the processes of growing up, socialization, and social inclusion. Adolescents with intellectual disabilities represent a distinct group; however, in the Republic of Serbia, they are not adequately recognized in national and local policies. This lack of visibility represents a significant systemic barrier to the fulfillment of their right to equal participation and tailored support. This paper presents the results of a study involving 103 parents of young people with intellectual disabilities from Belgrade and Niš. The findings highlight a profound gap between de jure human rights and de facto reality: upon completing education, young people face social isolation and a lack of community-based services, which directly infringes upon their right to social integration and peer contact. The study also reveals that parents feel overwhelmed due to the state's failure to provide the necessary support structures, leaving families to bear the burden of systemic deficiencies. The paper concludes that a shift from a medical to a rights-based model is essential to transform social welfare services from 'hard to access' benefits into guaranteed entitlements that foster dignity and autonomy for young people with intellectual disabilities.

Keywords
Human rights, adolescents with intellectual disabilities, social welfare services and support, transition to adulthood

Introduction

Contemporary approaches to supporting youth with intellectual disabilities are rooted in the human rights model, which views disability not as an individual medical deficit, but as the result of the interaction between

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persons and the environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society (Degener, 2016). The central pillar of this framework is the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UN CRPD, 2006), which promotes the principles of dignity, individual autonomy, and the freedom to make one's own choices. During the transition from adolescence to adulthood, the realization of these rights becomes particularly critical. *Article 19 of the Convention* emphasizes the right to independent living and community inclusion, which implies that youth with intellectual disabilities must have access to support services that prevent isolation and marginalization (United Nations, 2006). However, in practice, the transition period is often described as "falling off a cliff", as the systemic support structures available during childhood frequently disappear upon entry into the adult world (Quinn and Flynn, 2012).

In the Republic of Serbia, although a legal framework aligned with international standards exists - such as *the Law on the Prevention of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities* (2006), the *Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities* (2009) the *Law on Social Protection* (2011) and the *Law on the Protection of Persons with Mental Disabilities (2013)* the implementation of rights to work, education, and social protection remains uneven across local communities. The lack of specific policies that recognize adolescents with intellectual disabilities as a distinct group leads to their right to participation remaining merely declarative, while families are left to rely on their own resources to navigate systemic barriers (Mitrović and Vidojević, 2015).

Transition refers to the shift from childhood to adulthood in terms of service provision, restructuring daytime activities, and more holistically, attaining increased independence and proficiency across various adult roles. While some authors, such as Wyn and Dwyer (Wyn and Dwyer, 2000), define transition specifically as the move from school to work, others, like King (King, Baldwin, Currie and Evans, 2005), see it as a more gradual process in which young people develop the skills required for adulthood. Thus, transition can be viewed as a prolonged period spanning much of adolescence and early adulthood, encompassing the years leading up to and following school exit. (Arnett, 2000) suggests this occurs between the ages of 18 and 25 and refers to it as “emerging adulthood” (Arnett 2000, 469).

Despite improvements in the legislative framework in the Republic of Serbia in recent years, young people with intellectual disabilities and their families continue to face difficulties related to the quality and availability of social, educational, and healthcare services, employment opportunities, as well as insufficient financial support to cover the additional costs required to address these challenges. Young people with intellectual disabilities in Serbia are not recognized as a distinct target group; instead, they are

categorized within a highly heterogeneous group of young people with developmental disabilities or impairments. The current Youth Strategy recognizes all adolescents from vulnerable social groups, as it hinders a comprehensive analysis of their needs and the challenges they face. Needs are analysed in a fragmented manner, by sectors, which results in measures, services, and programs for improving their situation not reflecting the actual needs (National Youth Strategy for the period 2022-2030, 2023). Additionally, the support services offered to them are not designed to address the specific challenges faced by this group. Upon completing formal education, young people lose their entitlement to the service of a personal child assistant, which is provided to children up to the end of their schooling period (the Rulebook on Detailed Conditions and Standards for the Provision of Social Protection Services, 2019, section 5). On the other hand, home assistance services are typically organized for the elderly and are rarely available to children and young people, even though there is a legal basis for their development and provision (the Rulebook on Detailed Conditions and Standards for the Provision of Social Protection Services, 2019, section 5). The service of a personal assistant is provided to adult users who are entitled to an increased allowance for assistance and care from another person, who are capable of making independent decisions, and who are employed, among other criteria - conditions that are not commonly met by individuals with intellectual disabilities. The availability of day-care centres is low, and support services for independent living are extremely underdeveloped. Consequently, it can be said that, after finishing high school and during the transition to adulthood, young people with intellectual disabilities are left without adequate systemic support. There is no service that addresses their needs for support in daily activities, vocational training, and community integration.

Existing research on the aforementioned topics rarely addresses the family perspective regarding the transition of adolescents with intellectual disabilities into adulthood. On the other hand, for services to be developed (and implemented), it is crucial to consider the wide range of goals that families with a child with disabilities identify as necessary for a successful transition to adulthood. With this in mind, this paper provides an overview of research on the needs of adolescents with intellectual disabilities who are in the transitional period from adolescence to adulthood, from the perspective of parents living in the cities of Belgrade and Niš. The results of this study may contribute to identifying critical areas where support is needed for these young people and their families to facilitate a successful transition into adulthood and to maintain family functionality, considering the challenges faced in raising a child. The paper is structured as follows: the first part discusses the challenges in the functioning of adolescents with intellectual disabilities in the Republic of Serbia. The next part presents the

research findings. Subsequently, the main findings are discussed, and recommendations are provided for improving the position of young people with intellectual disabilities in the Republic of Serbia.

Challenges in the Functioning of Adolescents with Intellectual Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia

The definition of intellectual disabilities has undergone various stages of development, reflecting changes in societal attitudes toward individuals with intellectual disabilities. Today, intellectual disabilities are not only viewed through the lens of reduced cognitive abilities but also recognized as conditions with diverse origins requiring different resources and forms of support to address them. Support is aimed at personal development for individuals with intellectual disabilities to enhance their functioning within their environment. Broadly defined, intellectual disabilities are characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour, manifested in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills. These disabilities emerge during the developmental period, typically before the age of 22, but current functioning is considered in the context of age, culture, peers, community environment, etc. (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 2024).

Schalock and other authors propose that an individual is considered to have intellectual disabilities based on the following three criteria:

- Intellectual functioning is below average. This criterion pertains to general mental capacity, including learning, reasoning, and problem-solving abilities. A common benchmark is an intelligence test score below 70, indicating intellectual disabilities.

- There are significant limitations in two or more adaptive skills, specifically conceptual, social, or practical skills used in everyday life. Conceptual skills include language use, literacy, understanding the concept of money, time, and numbers. Social skills involve social responsibility, self-esteem, communication, susceptibility or caution in social relationships, social problem-solving, relationship-building skills, and the ability to follow rules. Practical skills encompass activities of daily living, such as personal care and hygiene, independently meeting basic needs (e.g., feeding, dressing, using the toilet), navigating transportation, managing money, ensuring personal safety, using a phone, and understanding routines and time.

- The condition manifests before the age of 22, with evidence of difficulties and developmental impairments appearing during childhood and early adolescence (Schalock & Luckasson, 2021; Schalock, Luckasson, and Tassé; Arora et al., 2020).

Adolescents with developmental disabilities and impairments are among the most vulnerable groups in the Republic of Serbia in terms of accessing rights and equal opportunities across various areas of functioning. They face numerous challenges and barriers related to accessibility, information access, education, the labour market, and their rights and participation in political life. The situation of young people with disabilities has been sporadically addressed within the domestic system. There is a limited amount of research on the status, needs, and quality of life of adolescents with intellectual disabilities in Serbia, and information is often inferred indirectly from studies of the broader group of children and youth with disabilities. The total number of people with disabilities in Serbia is not reliably known, but it is estimated that this group constitutes 8% of the total population (Strategy for Improving the Position of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia for the Period 2020-2024, 2020). The total number of children and young people with developmental disabilities and impairments is also unknown, but previous research indicates that this target group is highly discriminated against, more exposed to violence and neglect, faces barriers to accessing their rights, and is at high risk of social isolation (Stefanović and Lazarević, 2023). Nevertheless, this target group faces specific challenges both in terms of development and social inclusion, particularly during the transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. At the same time, the quality of life of young people with intellectual disabilities impacts the overall quality of life of their parents and the entire family system.

When discussing the situation of adolescents with intellectual disabilities in Serbia, it is important to note that there are no specifically designed services for this target group, as they are not recognized as a distinct group. The normative framework provides services for young people with developmental disabilities and impairments, including personal assistance services, day care for children and young people with developmental disabilities, supported living, and respite care (the Rulebook on Detailed Conditions and Standards for Providing Social welfare Services, 2013, section 5). Although active employment policies are in place in Serbia, there remains a significant number of long-term unemployed individuals and those lacking the necessary skills and knowledge for labour market integration. Additionally, individuals with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, are among the most frequently discriminated groups in all areas of social life. They also face a high degree of social distance, especially in the domains of employment, education, social relationships, and marriage (Korać, 2018). Institutional care in Serbia still houses the majority of children and young people with developmental disabilities, with more than half of these children not being integrated into

the educational system or any educational programs (National Organization of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia, 2017).

According to the normative framework, children and young people are entitled to use personal assistant services during their formal education (the Rulebook on Detailed Conditions and Standards for Providing Social welfare Services, 2013). Upon completing formal education, the right to this service ceases, and there is no service to replace it, leading to the family members resuming the overall care of the young person. On the other hand, home assistance services are typically organized for older individuals and are rarely available for children and youth, despite the legal basis for their development and provision (the Rulebook on Detailed Conditions and Standards for Providing Social Welfare Services, 2013). Personal assistant services are provided to adult users who qualify for an increased allowance for personal care, who are capable of making independent decisions, and who are employed, among other criteria (the Rulebook on Detailed Conditions and Standards for Providing Social Welfare Services, 2013), which is not often the case for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The availability of day-care services is low, and support services for independent living are extremely underdeveloped. Consequently, it can be said that after completing secondary school and during the transition to adulthood, adolescents with intellectual disabilities remain without adequate systemic support, and there is no service that meets their needs for support in daily activities, professional training, and community integration (Matković and Stranjaković, 2020).

For many young individuals with intellectual disabilities, daily life often involves facing various barriers to achieving and experiencing social relationships similar to those of their peers or siblings without disabilities. Common activities that are easily accessible and available to most young people, such as participating in sports, going out, and socializing with friends, are often not readily achievable for this group. On the other hand, due to developmental specificities and vulnerabilities, these young individuals require specially designed support programs in the process of gaining independence to have opportunities to learn new skills, maintain, and enhance existing life skills. This aspect is particularly important in the context of preparing for employment and the process of workforce engagement.

A study conducted by the *National Organization of Persons with Disabilities* in collaboration with the UNICEF office in Serbia revealed that individuals with intellectual disabilities are among the most discriminated social groups in all areas of social life and face high levels of social distance, particularly in employment, education, social relationships, and marriage (National Organization of Persons with Disabilities Serbia, 2017). The same

study notes that families of these children and young people also face numerous difficulties, as they contend with negative public attitudes, with nearly half of the parents reporting experiences of derogation, insults, or harassment due to their child's developmental challenges. However, it is encouraging that most respondents in this study believe that children and young people with intellectual disabilities can achieve significant success in life if provided with adequate support (National Organization of Persons with Disabilities Serbia, 2017).

Method

In this study, data on the needs of young people were collected from their parents. Given the nature of the research participants, it is a convenient sample and belongs to the non-probabilistic type of sample. This method involves selecting participants based on a specific characteristic that defines the target population. In this study, the specific characteristic is that participants are parents of young people with intellectual disabilities. This selection ensures that participants can provide the most comprehensive and insightful responses regarding the challenges and a deeper understanding of the topic.

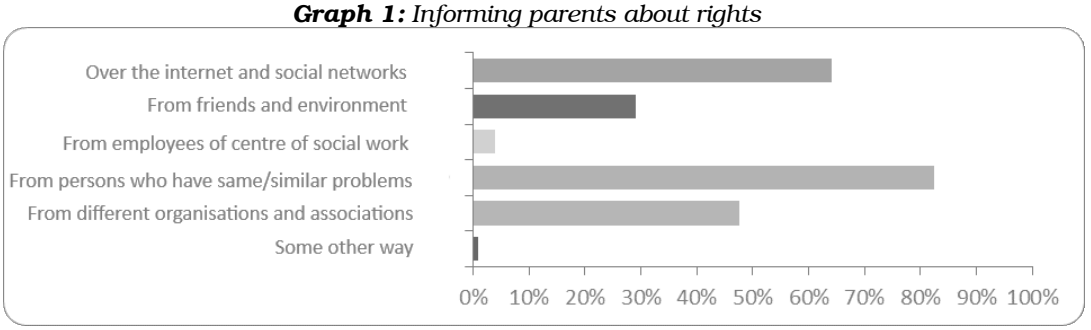
Parents were given the opportunity to respond to a questionnaire designed for this purpose, which was distributed online during April 2024. The questionnaire covered topics related to education, health, and utilization of social services, leisure time, socialization, and social inclusion of adolescents with intellectual disabilities. Additionally, parents were able to indicate the extent to which available social support is sufficient, adequate, and aligned with the needs of young people and their families. They also had the opportunity to highlight necessary changes and improvements through open-ended questions. A total of 103 parents responded to the questionnaire, including 44 parents from Belgrade and 59 parents from Niš. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and an independent samples t-test was employed to examine differences between parents across various parameters. Data analysis was conducted using the IBM SPSS Statistics 23 software package.

Results

Regarding the educational needs of young people, parents participating in this study indicate that the majority of children with intellectual disabilities, 85.4%, have not completed high school. Among those who have finished high school, only two are currently employed, and none have undergone a job preparation program. On the other hand, the majority of parents (86.4%) believe that job preparation programs are essential for better preparing young individuals with intellectual disabilities for

employment. Additionally, all respondents agree that employers should be educated about the needs of young people from this target group. Regarding services intended for adolescents with intellectual disabilities, the largest percentage of parents believe that there are no such services available in their community - 39.8%, while 35.9% are unaware of the existence of these services. Just under a quarter of respondents, 24.2%, report that services for young people with intellectual disabilities do exist.

Graph 1: *Informing parents about rights*

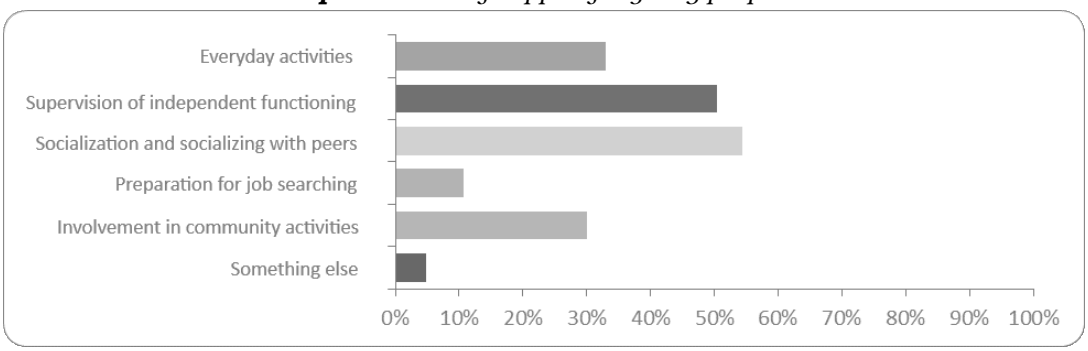


(Source: author's own preparations)

When it comes to the primary sources of information for parents about rights to specific social welfare services intended for young people with intellectual disabilities, *Graph 1* shows that the largest number of parents obtain information from other individuals with similar issues (82.6%), followed by the internet and social media. The smallest percentage of parents receives information from employees of the Social Welfare Centre, at 3.9%. Just over a quarter of respondents (28.2%) are unfamiliar with both the content and the methods of accessing social welfare services intended for children and adolescents with developmental disabilities. Only 4.9% of parents believe that the available social welfare services fully meet their child's support needs. Regarding specific social welfare services, 60.2% of parents report that their child does not have access to personal assistance support. When asked about the areas where their child requires the most support in functioning, parents identified socialization and peer interaction (54.4%) as well as supervision in independent functioning (50.5%). Regarding the health needs of young people, parents predominantly report that they have access to all necessary health services for their child in their community (76.7%). However, opinions are divided on whether they receive all the required information from doctors regarding their child's health status. On a scale from 1 to 5, parents rate the accessibility of health services with an average score of 2.7. Statistically significant differences were observed in responses between male and female respondents, with males rating the accessibility of health services higher. Additionally, there were differences between respondents from Belgrade and Niš, with respondents from Niš considering health services to be more accessible

compared to those from Belgrade. Aside from the aforementioned, when discussing the areas where their child needs the most support in functioning, parents identify socialization and interaction with peers (54.4%) and supervision in independent functioning (50.5%), as shown in *Graph 2*.

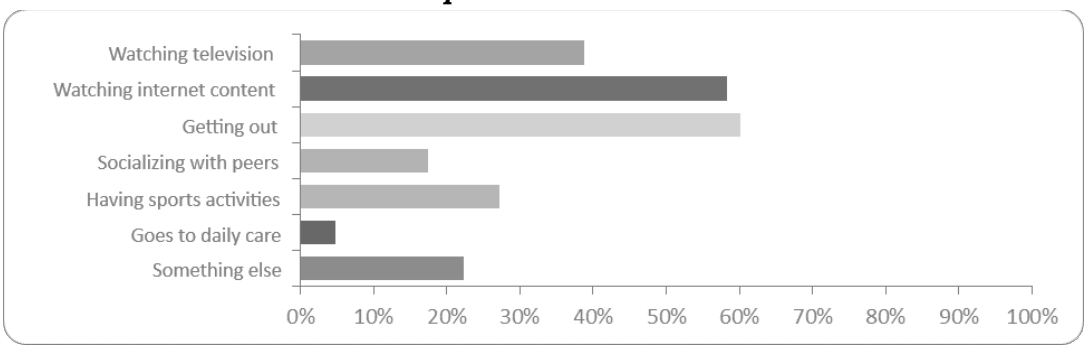
Graph 2: *Fields of support for young people*



(Source: author's own preparations)

Graph 3 illustrates how young people with disabilities spend their leisure time and their social interactions. The largest percentage of parents report that their children use their free time by going outside (60.2%) and watching content on the internet (58.3%), while the smallest percentage of young people attend a day centre (4.9%). Consistent with the responses to the previous question, most parents believe that their children most enjoy walking (78.7%) and watching television and internet content (55.3%). Nearly half of the respondents report that their child has contact with peers only during school hours (49.5%), while 12.6% of parents state that their child has no contact with peers at all.

Graph 3: *Leisure time*

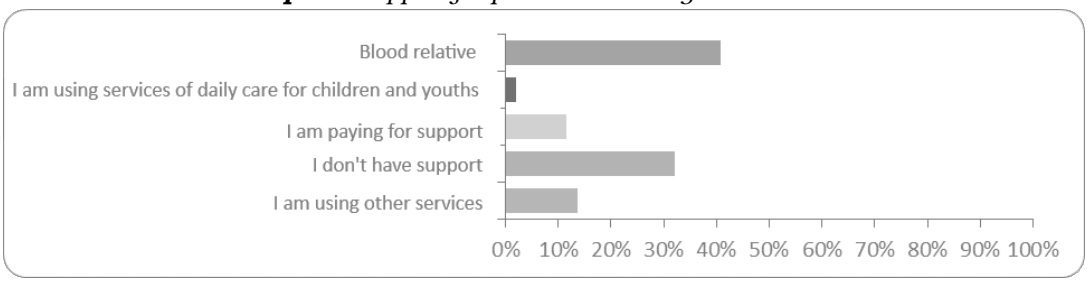


(Source: author's own preparations)

On a scale of 1 to 5, parents rate their child's integration into the community with an average score of 2.5, and the utilization of available community resources with an average score of 2.4. Statistically significant differences were observed between male and female respondents as well as between respondents from Belgrade and Niš. Fathers rate their child's

integration into the community and the use of community resources higher than mothers, while respondents from Niš give higher average scores for both statements compared to those from Belgrade. Parents also report that they receive the most support in raising their child from relatives (40.8%), while 32% of respondents state they receive no support at all. A total of four respondents indicated using the personal assistant service, two parents reported using the day centre service for children and adolescents with developmental difficulties, and one parent reported using respite care (*Graph* 4).

Graph 4: *Support for parents in raising their child*



(Source: author's own preparations)

When it comes to parents' responses to different segments of support, respondents rated statements on a scale from 1 to 5 regarding their relevance. The highest average score was given to the statement *„I feel overwhelmed in the parenting role"*– 3.88, while the lowest score was for *„We have access to free support from a special educator or speech therapist"*– 1.82 (*Table 1*).

Table 1: *Average Ratings of Respondents on Statements*

Statement	N	AS
We have access to free support from specialists, such as defectologists and speech therapists.	103	1.82
I receive support in caring for my child.	103	2.14
I feel lonely in the community where we live.	103	3.38
I feel exhausted in my parenting role.	103	3.88
I need additional psychological support to overcome the daily challenges I face.	103	3.75
When I need a "break", I have someone who can take care of my child.	103	2.64
We have enough money to pay for treatments and services for our child.	103	2.21
I can work without interruptions because my child is cared for during the day.	103	2.13
The environment we live in understands my child's needs.	103	2.85

(Source: author's own preparations)

In this case, several statements showed statistically significant differences between male and female respondents. Fathers provided higher average scores for statements such as *"I have support in caring for my child"*, *"I can work without interruptions because my child is taken care of during the day"* and *"The environment we live in understands my child's needs"*. On the other hand, mothers rated the statements *"I feel exhausted in my parenting*

role" and *"I need additional psychological support to cope with the daily challenges I face"* higher than fathers. Additionally, for the statement *"I feel lonely in the community where we live"*, a statistically significant difference was observed between employed and unemployed parents, with unemployed parents giving higher scores compared to their employed counterparts.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The completion of the educational process and the transition from a school environment to the world of work or further education can pose a challenge for any adolescent. However, for young people with developmental disabilities, this transition can be particularly difficult, both for them and their families. One reason for increased stress in these families is the additional burden related to various challenges, such as finding, coordinating, and financing different services for adults. Young people with developmental disabilities and their families often have to become advocates for services and support after leaving the educational system (Hetherington, Durant-Jones, and Johnson, 2010; Austin, 2000). Considering this, they argue that the process of preparing for the transition into adulthood should be based on coordinated planning, collaboration, and making concrete decisions for each individual. This process should involve not only the young person and family members but also stakeholders from educational institutions and community service providers (Hetherington, Durant-Jones, and Johnson, 2010; Austin, 2000).

However, research conducted in the cities of Belgrade and Niš revealed that after completing secondary school, the majority of adolescents with intellectual disabilities are left without support, with the burden of care once again falling on family members. Parents who participated in the study pointed out that the current system lacks tailored programs that can adequately meet the needs of both young people and their families in both cities. The available programs and services are primarily focused on providing day care centres in both Belgrade and Niš. However, these centres often lack sufficient capacity, resulting in waiting lists for accessing the service. Furthermore, the activities offered at these centres are not specifically designed for young people with intellectual disabilities. Parents also emphasized the need to develop new services tailored to the needs of adolescents with intellectual disabilities, including the development of social and healthcare services. Some parents noted that their children do not have friends and lack a social life, with limited contact with peers outside the school system, which mirrors findings from a similar study conducted in Norway in 2023. The Norwegian study found a high percentage of parents reporting that their child had no friends and that they made efforts to involve their child in their own social lives to compensate for the lack of acceptance from others. This situation, as the research shows, leads to weakened mental health and

burnout among parents (Skagestad, Østensjø, and Ulvik, 2023). Parents in these circumstances rely on various resources, which seem fragmented when it comes to comprehensive support. A lack of daytime activities and reduced opportunities for social interaction after finishing school may limit physical activity and increase sedentary behaviour (Hamilton, Mazzucchelli and Sanders, 2015). This combination can lead to negative physical health outcomes for young people as they transition from school to adult life (Luftig and Muthert, 2005). Our research findings also confirmed that young people spend most of their free time in unstructured activities, such as going outside or watching content online.

The transition from school to adult life can significantly affect mental health and well-being, as it marks a major change in a young person's life. Leaving behind the structured environment of school can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, especially if the young person has no activities to fill the void left by school, a situation more common among those with intellectual disabilities. The expectations to assume adult roles or the possible absence of such expectations for individuals with intellectual disabilities can create familial tensions, contributing to poor mental health outcomes (Foley et al., 2012). Adapting to new adult roles and shifting family and peer group dynamics can be particularly stressful and isolating, especially if cognitive deficits or social stigma prevent the young person from fulfilling expected adult roles. This situation can result in a particularly challenging emotional and psychological period (Cooper et al., 2016). A specific area identified through the research on the needs of young people in Belgrade and Niš is the establishment of support services for family members, particularly mothers, given the significant challenges they face throughout the upbringing of a young person. The findings suggest that these families primarily rely on their own resources, with one-third of respondents stating they receive no support, while those who do receive support primarily rely on relatives. In this regard, emphasis is placed on the need for psychological support and the provision of respite care services. An interesting aspect of parental support revealed gender differences in the responses. Most mothers reported having little to no support, whereas fathers generally stated they received sufficient understanding from their environment and were able to work without disruption. These findings are significant as they highlight the potential overburdening of mothers with caregiving responsibilities, often leading to their withdrawal from the labour market. Combined with the lack of support services, this can result in fatigue in fulfilling parental duties. Another research has also confirmed that it is essential to building a strong and effective support network for this vulnerable population (Skrobić and Vranić, 2024).

Existing services within the social welfare system that could potentially be applied to this target group are also not being utilized sufficiently. An

example of this is the home care service, which, although prescribed by the Rulebook on Detailed Conditions and Standards for the Provision of Social welfare Services for children and young people with developmental disabilities, is primarily provided automatically to adults and the elderly. In this context, it would be necessary to improve the standards for providing this service, as well as the practices and development of the service, to increase its availability and coverage for adolescents with intellectual disabilities. Another recognized need in terms of services is the expansion of the personal assistant service to include young people who have completed their education. To better map and address needs, as well as monitor the quality of service provision, it is important to enhance the existing system of monitoring and recording young people who use various social welfare services.

Regarding the employment of young people from this target group, it is evident that there are no programs designed to prepare them for the labour market, nor are there programs to support their adjustment process in the workplace. Additionally, the data indicate that the jobs young people are involved in are often not aligned with their potential or adapted to their capabilities, which can negatively impact their long-term motivation to work and attend their job. Even when they do find employment, their earnings are often modest and insufficient to meet basic living needs (Nicoricou and Elliot, 2023). Another study (Ivey, 2004) showed that parents are most concerned about whether their child will have secure housing, developed social networks, and constructive leisure activities in adulthood. Additionally, concerns related to the transition to adulthood also included the ability to take care of themselves, while issues related to sexuality preoccupied a group of parents. Alongside the development of employment preparation programs, it would be important to create programs aimed at raising awareness among employers about the needs of adolescents with intellectual disabilities. Employers often lack sufficient information and skills regarding this group. In this regard, professional monitoring is also crucial to provide support to the young person and assist them in adjusting to the demands of the work environment.

Another significant aspect identified is the issue of service funding and ensuring stability in that area. Improving the funding mechanism would increase the availability of services, ensure the sustainability of existing ones, and foster the development of new services. This would provide families with continuous support, which is crucial for enabling adolescents with intellectual disabilities to reach their potential in the communities where they live. In their work, Leonard and other authors also identified three possible strategies that could be beneficial for the transition of adolescents with intellectual disabilities. They noted that parents recognized the importance of young people receiving more information on financial assistance, having access to programs for independence training, and building informal

community support. The research also highlighted parents' concerns about these young adults' ability to adapt to the changes brought by adult life, their difficulties navigating services and programs, challenges in establishing social relationships, and tensions within family functioning, all of which negatively affect family well-being. Financial challenges and concerns about long-term future prospects were also prevalent among the parents who participated in this study (Leonard et al., 2016). In their work, Matković and Stranjaković emphasized that social welfare services, particularly community-based day services and independent living support, play a crucial role in this process, as they are based on the child's right to live in a family and on providing support to prevent institutional placement of children and young people (Matković and Stranjaković, 2020).

The findings of our study underscore a critical gap between international human rights standards and the daily lived experiences of families in Serbia. To bridge this gap, the transition to adulthood must be redefined as a guaranteed entitlement. Inclusivity is not achieved merely by the absence of segregation, but by the presence of proactive, tailored support systems that foster self-determination. Moving forward, policy reforms in Serbia must transition from a 'care' perspective to an 'empowerment' perspective, ensuring that every young person with an intellectual disability can transition not into isolation, but into a life of dignity and active citizenship.

Given the above, it is essential to develop a variety of services that cater to the specific needs of young people with developmental disabilities or impairments, as well as their families. If families are not supported during the transition to adulthood, the overall well-being of these young people may be (further) jeopardized. The research revealed that parents face significant difficulties transitioning from a relatively integrated child care system to a fragmented, uncoordinated, and inconsistent system of care for adults with various intellectual disabilities and/or disabilities. Additionally, despite the widespread discussion of inclusive practices, the study showed that social practices within communities are often incompatible with the legal frameworks intended to guarantee the protection of basic human rights. In this regard, the findings of this research can serve as a starting point for discussions on more proactive mechanisms for protecting this group of young people, as well as ensuring their rights are upheld into adulthood.

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