

to accessing health care and improving the efficiency of the health system, supported by international organisations and in the context of the EU accession negotiations.

Key messages:

- Some vulnerable groups have more barriers in accessing adequate care in Serbia.
- National initiatives are in place to increase access to the health system but there is scope for further work.

How accessible is the Serbian health system? Main barriers and challenges ahead

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Background:

Access to health care is a key health policy issue faced by countries in the WHO European Region and Serbia is not an exception. There is increasing concern that financial and economic crisis may have delay progress regarding the performance of the Serbian health system. While substantial development has been experienced by the Serbian health system since 2000, we analyse whether barriers to health care access exist in the country and the underlying causes.

Methods:

We combine quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the accessibility of the Serbian health system. We use the latest data available both at national (e.g. National Health Survey) and European (EUSILC) level to understand whether barriers to access exist and the underlying causes. On the qualitative side, we analyse the different policies implemented by the Serbian government to improve the accessibility of the health system in the last decade, identifying the challenges ahead for the country.

Results:

We find that, in 2018, 5.8% of the Serbian population reported unmet need for medical care due to costs, travel distances or waiting lists, well above the EU28 average and much higher than in neighbouring countries. Financial constraints are reported to be the main reason for unmet needs for medical care. Long waiting times also impede the accessibility of health services in Serbia.

Conclusions:

Serbia has a comprehensive universal health system with free access to health care, however, some vulnerable groups, such as those living in poverty or Roma people in settlements, have more barriers in accessing health care. It is expected that Serbia will continue to develop policies focused on reducing barriers