STRATEGY FOR EXERCISING THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD IN MONTENEGRO 2019–2023

VERSION FOR CHILDREN

We are glad that you have involved us in drafting the Strategy on Children, and that today we can say what we think and that no one is judging our answers…

Even when adults ask us, most often it is just a formality, they rarely listen to us.

Primary school pupils, focus group participants

Let’s teach all those who don’t know how, to love, to be good and to respect.

A child with disabilities, focus group participant
Dear children,

When adults make decisions about your life and about the things that matter to you, they need to bear in mind that your needs come first. The first question they must ask is “What is the best for this child?” Every decision made by adults must represent the best solution for you. This is called the best interest of the child.

We have taken into account the best interest of the child during the preparation of the plan to be implemented in the next five years in Montenegro, with the aim of ensuring that the rights of all girls and boys in our country are respected.

The plan is presented in the document the *Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child*, but we will here call it the *Plan for Exercising the Rights of the Child*.

The *Plan for Exercising the Rights of the Child* was prepared together by children and adults, and your involvement has really helped us understand what children and young people, like you, think and, most importantly, what steps we can take together that are in the best interest of the child and that create a child-friendly environment.

Why is it important for you to become familiar with this *Plan*? Because it concerns you – children! You will know best whether the *Plan* has been implemented, whether the conditions you live in have improved, whether the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* is being complied with. Thus, you will actively participate in all the processes that affect you and your rights.

Thank you for your participation and we hope to implement the *Plan* together in full!
You know this yourself: when you create a plan, the first thing you do is to take a good look at everything – you check what has been done so far, what the situation is, you keep asking questions and seeking answers. So in this, our joint Plan, we also carefully looked first at how the rights of the child in Montenegro have been exercised so far.

Thirty years ago, with the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the world pledged to guarantee equal rights for all children. The Convention has helped change children’s lives, and its basic message is that every boy and girl is entitled to a childhood. That’s why the adults who work for the Government of Montenegro, UNICEF and numerous organizations have prepared together with you the Plan which contains the steps we need to take together over the next five years so that all the children in our country are happy, safe and healthy.

WHAT IS THE PLAN FOR EXERCISING THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD?

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

You know best how to identify the problems that bother you, and that is why it is very important that you talk about them. Thus, you and adults are looking for ways to solve them. By talking to you, we identified 10 of the most significant issues you are dealing with:

- Problems in education
- Adults do not understand or respect children’s opinions
- The search for self
- Lack of understanding among peers
- Discrimination against children and violation of their rights
- Behaviour unacceptable in society (violence, alcohol, drugs...)
- Problem of children and youth employment
- Poor quality of the media and the cultural offer
- Problem of how to spend free time
- Child and family poverty

In addition to identifying the issues that are troubling you, you also identified and specifically singled out groups of children who face additional problems in exercising their rights, such as:

- Children who are different for some reason from most children and, as a result, are discriminated against (children of other religions, other nations and sexual orientations and children who are different from the majority; children with disabilities; children living and working on the street; child victims of violence; children placed in institutions, etc.);
- Poor children;
- Children from families with broken relationships, and
- Child drug and alcohol addicts.

HOW WAS THIS PLAN PREPARED?

While the adults interpreted the data, numbers and documents, you simply talked about how you feel and which children’s rights you thought were being least respected. With our forces joined together, the Plan for Exercising the Rights of the Child was thus created, and it will ensure that children’s rights extend to every girl and boy in Montenegro over the next five years.
HOW DID YOU DESCRIBE THE PROBLEMS IN EXERCISING YOUR RIGHTS?

DISCRIMINATION
We are often portrayed as being bad – when something bad happens at school they immediately blame us; when we are with other children they leave us out because of the colour of our skin, our religion, because we are poor.

A Roma child, focus group participant

Some children need a lot of luck to enrol at school, some do not go to school at all, they go to the day-care centre.

Some people do not accept us, and some do.

It happens that they laugh at children with disabilities, they mock them.

Children with disabilities, focus group participants

LACK OF RESPECT FOR CHILDREN’S OPINIONS
When we say something, adults think we are too immature to deal with some issues and therefore do not respect our opinions. Children are never taken seriously, even when they have a problem.

Secondary school students, participants in consultations

USE OF ALCOHOL, CIGARETTES AND DRUGS
I believe that young people want to escape from reality by using alcohol and psychoactive substances.

A secondary school student, participant in the consultation process

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN
I think that people are not aware of the extent to which peer violence affects the mental health and normal development of children. Some are encouraged to respond to such violence with more violence, and some build walls around themselves, creating a form of barrier against everyone who approaches them.

A secondary school student, participant in the consultation process

POVERTY OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
Hardship also affects the mental condition of young people, because even though today I may have enough money for a snack, that may not be the case tomorrow...

A secondary school student, participant in the consultation process

CHILDREN LIVING ON THE STREET
A lot of Roma children beg on the streets, some even go to coastal towns to beg there, their parents take them there and make them beg, only to take all that money away from them later.

For some, it is a habit, for others it is the only way to make living.

The police come to us, to the camp (Konik) and tell our parents that they should not let their kids beg. However, some still do it.

Roma children, focus group participants
THE VISION OF EXERCISING THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

After we took a good look at the status and saw what had been done so far regarding the exercising of children’s rights in our country, we identified what exactly we wanted to achieve by implementing the Plan we had prepared. That future condition that we want to achieve is called the vision.

The vision of the Plan for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019–2023 is:

Children in Montenegro are able to exercise all their rights, to feel that they are respected and protected citizens and to accept the values and responsibilities which contribute to the progress of society.

Montenegro is investing in children as its most valuable asset, encouraging them to actively participate in social life and to develop their potentials.

This means that all responsible people in Montenegro will advocate for every child to be able exercise his or her rights, assume responsibilities, participate in the life of society and develop, because the state believes that children are its most valuable treasure.

THE PLAN’S GOALS

In order to fulfil this vision – that is, the key change we want to achieve – it is necessary to accomplish the goals that we also defined in our joint Plan. These goals are to be accomplished through a series of steps that we must take together.

GOAL I

IMPROVE COOPERATION BETWEEN ADULTS WHO MAKE DECISIONS AND OTHER KEY CONDITIONS FOR EXERCISING THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

1. Quality gathering of data on children and exchanging the data between all those who are responsible for exercising children’s rights

2. Improved application of laws and plans related to children, financing and coordination of everyone involved in exercising and monitoring the rights of the child

GOAL II

ALL CHILDREN ARE ENTITLED TO QUALITY SOCIAL PROTECTION AND HEALTH CARE, AS WELL AS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

3. An effective system of alternative care for children without parental care is provided

4. Improved support to children with disabilities and other children from vulnerable groups and adolescents in exercising free-of-charge and timely health care and proper social protection

5. Reduced material poverty of children

6. Increased accessibility to education for children from vulnerable groups, quality of education for all children and access to quality cultural and media content

7. Improved support for children’s early development

GOAL III

PREVENT ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND IMPROVE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SPECIAL MEASURES FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

8. Improved prevention of all types of violence against children and support for child victims

9. Greater support for children to whom special protection measures apply

10. Improved protection of children from sale, child prostitution and child pornography and from involvement in armed conflicts
HOW WILL THE PLAN BE IMPLEMENTED?

Every plan includes a series of steps that need to be taken in order to achieve the desired goal. When we play a game, we come up with the next steps ourselves to reach the desired goals. That is exactly how we, by joining forces, have designed the steps that we should take to implement the Plan.

We now know exactly how long each step that we are taking will last, how much money we need to spend in order to take those steps, and also how to evaluate whether we are being successful. The Government of Montenegro has also decided that every year we need to check and evaluate whether all the steps we designed in the Plan are being taken and whether they are being implemented in a quality manner.
Now, you are probably wondering who is going to check and evaluate whether the steps included in the Plan are being implemented exactly as we designed them?

Since there were many of us involved in preparing the Plan for Exercising the Rights of the Child and the steps for its implementation, we came up with the idea of improving the work of the Council for the Rights of the Child. The Council for the Rights of the Child is a group of adults and children who will carefully monitor whether everything is going according to the Plan. We will also get assessments to know exactly the areas where we are being successful, and the areas where we have failed.

The Council for the Rights of the Child is responsible to:
- Track whether our country is fulfilling its commitments written in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international documents related to the rights of the child;
- Protect and improve children’s rights in all areas of relevance for the interests of the child;
- Follow whether and to what extent the rules related to the protection of children’s rights are being applied;
- Propose new rules to improve the protection of children’s rights;
- Improve cooperation with municipalities, non-governmental organizations and others involved in protecting children’s rights.

The Parliament of Montenegro — is a group of people, politicians, who are chosen in elections to represent all the people living in Montenegro, including you — children and young people. This group of people enacts laws, discusses and adopts international documents important for protecting children’s rights. The role of the Committee on Human Rights and Freedoms, as well as of the Committee on Health, Labour and Social Welfare, is particularly important in the Parliament, as they primarily deal with matters relating to the rights of the child.

The Government of Montenegro consists of different ministries, and each ministry separately deals with specific matters relating to children and their rights. Our goal is for the ministries to work together in the coming period to improve and protect the rights of all boys and girls.

The Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms, and especially the Deputy Ombudsman for the Rights of the Child, works to promote and protect the rights of the child, but at the same time they also closely monitor whether children’s rights in Montenegro are being respected and they alert institutions in the event of violations of those rights.

International organizations and domestic non-governmental organizations, both individually and through cooperation with others, monitor whether children’s rights are exercised and contribute to improving conditions for exercising the rights of the child.

Those to whom this matters most — and, of course, that means you — children and the young people, as well as your parents, have a particularly significant role in exercising children’s rights. You are the main source of information on the state of children’s rights and you can contribute to the improvement and promotion of the rights of all boys and girls. With this Plan, we have envisaged for every child and parent to become aware of what they can do to improve the lives of all children in Montenegro.

The Media can be a good partner in promoting and exercising the rights of the child, but it is necessary for employees in the media to be trained and to understand what protection and promotion of the rights of the child mean.

Some of the most relevant participants in exercising the rights of the child are shown in the graph below.
WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THIS PLAN?

GOAL I
IMPROVE COOPERATION BETWEEN ADULTS WHO MAKE DECISIONS AND OTHER KEY CONDITIONS FOR EXERCISING THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

One of the most important changes in exercising the rights of the child is that all the responsible adults (various ministries and other institutions, organizations and relevant individuals) need to improve their mutual cooperation, so that every child has better chances to exercise his or her rights.

Better cooperation will be accomplished through: (1) Quality gathering of data on children and the exchanging of this data between all those who are responsible for exercising children’s rights; (2) Improved application of laws and plans related to children, financing and coordination of everyone involved in exercising and monitoring the rights of the child.

The following is required in order to make all decisions on how to improve the exercising of the rights of the child:

• Collect data regularly on children who are helping to exercise children’s rights;
• Segregate the data by sex, age and other important characteristics of the children;
• Store the data in various databases;
• Exchange data between all the adults responsible for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child and regularly analyse them, with full protection of the personality of every boy and girl.

The exercising of the rights of the child in accordance with this Plan will be successfully monitored based on this data.

In order for every child to really exercise his or her rights, it is necessary to:

• Improve the implementation of all laws and plans related to children;
• Allocate more funds for children;
• Improve cooperation between all the people involved in exercising and monitoring the rights of the child.

GOAL II
ALL CHILDREN ARE ENTITLED TO QUALITY SOCIAL PROTECTION AND HEALTH CARE, AS WELL AS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

A child living in a large city and a child living in a small town or in a remote mountain village, on the street, in poverty, without parents or in other adverse circumstances do not have equal access to social protection, health care and education. It is therefore important to make it possible for every child to exercise his or her rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This Plan requires the following in order for every child to exercise his or her right to accessible and quality social protection and health care and quality education: (3) An effective system of alternative care for children without parental care; (4) Improved support for children with disabilities and other children from vulnerable groups and adolescents in exercising free-of-charge and timely health care and proper social protection; (5) Reduced material poverty of children; (6) Increased accessibility to education for children from vulnerable groups, increased quality of education for all children and access to high-quality cultural and media content; (7) Improved support for a child’s early development.

The focus will be on:

• Further development of foster care and on increasing the number of foster families;
• Providing a dwelling and counselling services for children without parental care who leave the Children’s Home in Bijela and from foster families;
• Developing services for children with disabilities and for their families;
• Developing counselling centres for adolescents1 for safe sexual behaviour, reproductive and mental health;
• Developing services for children with disabilities and their families that enable the child to stay with the family (assistance at home, parenting programmes2, respite services3, etc.);
• Different programmes and activities aimed at reducing child and family poverty;
• Continuous development of early childhood and preschool learning;
• Improving cooperation between educational, healthcare and social protection institutions in the area of promotion and support to inclusive education;
• Improving the quality of education for all children;
• Creating educational and cultural media content for children and with children;
• Improving detection and intervention for children with disabilities at a young age;
• Developing new programmes at centres for children with disabilities within healthcare centres (parents learn the skills they need to be better parents);
• Emphasizing the importance of early childhood development and learning for personality development.

1 An adolescent is a person who is not a child any more, but neither is an adult. Various experts define adolescence differently, but in most cases it is considered to refer to the age of 10 to 19.
2 Various programmes that help parents learn to apply “positive” parenting, i.e. methods that avoid punishment, and education is based on conversations with the child and the introduction of a positive value system.
3 Respite services refer to services that allow a parent (parents) to leave their child with a disability for a short period of time, for example for several days, or a so-called respite centre, where he or she gets appropriate professional support and care. These services are used mainly when the parents of a child with a disability need to be absent for several days from the place where they live.
GOAL III
PREVENT ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND IMPROVE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SPECIAL MEASURES FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

Boys and girls are often victims of various forms of violence, abuse and exploitation, and there are also children who commit acts of violence against other children and/or adults. In both cases, children need a special approach, support and protection to enable them to exercise all their rights in those situations.

This Plan will therefore lead to: (8) The prevention of all types of violence against children, and support for children victims; (9) Greater support for children to whom special protection measures apply; and (10) Improved protection of children from sale, child prostitution and child pornography, and from involvement in armed conflicts.

In order to achieve these goals, we will take several steps. The following are very important ones:

• To inform all people living in Montenegro about how harmful violence against children is, how to recognize various forms of violence and the fact that they are required to report violence against children;
• To inform all people living in Montenegro, and especially you – children and young people – about the free SOS child hotline;
• To implement the programme on the prevention of peer violence in schools;
• To implement programmes for parents, staff in schools, welfare and healthcare institutions and the police, through which we intend to teach them the benefits of positive educational methods;
• To set up child-friendly interview rooms in courts;
• To train lawyers to provide free legal aid to children;
• To assist the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms to inform children who they should talk to when their rights are violated and how they can get free legal help from a lawyer;
• To demand a clear provision in the law that would prohibit the participation of individuals under 18 in armed conflicts and emergencies, and also demand special protection measures for boys and girls in armed conflicts and emergencies, etc.

HOW WILL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN BE MONITORED?

An annual report on the implementation of the Plan for Exercising the Rights of the Child will be prepared every year. The report will measure the steps we have taken to achieve our defined goals. This means that data will be collected throughout the year, and at the end of every year an annual review of the steps taken will be made, which will serve as the basis for the preparation of the annual report. The annual report should provide answers to the following questions:

• What has been done and how much it has contributed to the achievement of the Plan’s goals?
• How much does the implementation of the steps from the Plan contribute to the implementation of the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child?

A working group in charge of monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Plan will be appointed to successfully monitor the implementation of the steps defined by the Plan. Each time, a different ministry (from the group of those most involved in the implementation of the Plan: the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice) will report on the steps from the Plan that are taken and inform the Government of Montenegro and other institutions about them.

Once the working group evaluates the implementation of the Plan, a report on how the steps from the Plan are being implemented will be submitted to the Council for the Rights of the Child. The Council for the Rights of the Child will discuss the report and give a recommendation for its adoption. The Council for the Rights of the Child will forward the annual report with a recommendation to the Government of Montenegro, which will give an opinion on its adoption and on further necessary steps to improve the exercising of the rights of all boys and girls in Montenegro.

* Child migrants and child foreigners, child victims of human trafficking/buke of children/ pornography/prostitution, child victims and witnesses of crimes, children with behavioural problems and in conflict with the law, and other similar groups of children.
YOUR ROLE IN EXERCISING YOUR RIGHTS

Dear children, you can also contribute a lot to the exercising of your rights. Some of the most important ways of giving your contribution include:

- Familiarizing yourself properly with your rights and obligations, i.e. reading and studying the United Nations on the Rights of the Child; (https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/izvjestaji/kratak-pregled-konvencije-o-pravima-djeteta)
- Understand and recognizing all forms of violation of the rights of the child and responding to each of these instances by warnning your parents, teachers and other adults with whom you have permanent contact;
- Respecting the rights of other boys and girls, yourself;
- Telling other boys and girls, always and on any occasion, whenever you get an opportunity, about the rights of the child and the importance of respecting them, as well as about the responsibilities of each child;
- Cooperating with others who are involved in protecting the rights of the child, by means of being proactive and asking, directly or through other children – your representatives – to be involved in making decisions of importance for you.

Dear children,

We hope that we have helped you better understand the goals we defined in our joint Plan and what their impact on your everyday life is.

We can achieve these goals with the help of all the people in our community – people like you, your family, teachers, friends, relatives, the Government, UNICEF and many other organizations.

Remember that even small steps can lead to huge progress in the exercising of children’s rights!

Together we can create a better life for all the boys and girls in our country!