REPORT ON CONSULTATIONS WITH CHILDREN ON THE STATE OF CHILD RIGHTS

DECEMBER 2018
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SUMMARY

The aim of the consultations with children as an interested party during the development and implementation of the Strategy for the Exercise of Child Rights 2019–2023 was to collect their views on the problems that children in Montenegro face, as well as on the possibilities for solving them. The consultations involved around 100 children in total: the NGO High School Students Union of Montenegro (40 participants), Golden Advisors (1) of the Office of the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms (nine participants) and primary school children (9) – who participated in the focus group discussions organised by the NGO Centre for Child Rights (a total of 45 pupils in four focus groups). The consultations with members of the NGO High School Students Union of Montenegro were conducted using a web-based questionnaire (Google Forms) with open-type questions. The survey took place in the first half of December 2018 and fully respected the recommendations of the UNICEF’s Ethical Committee.

Those who participated in the consultations identified the significant problems of children in Montenegro, which should be taken into account when creating the future Strategy for the Exercise of Child Rights 2019–2023. In total, nine groups of problems were identified: problems in education, a lack of understanding by adults and a lack of respect for children, a lack of understanding by peers, anxiety and the search for identity, discrimination against children and disrespect/violation of their rights, socially unacceptable behaviour (violence and use of psychoactive substances), lack of civil participation, problems in the family, low quality of media and cultural content and problems of leisure time, and the problem of youth employment, as well as one individual problem – the poverty of children and families.

Three groups of problems of children have been singled out: (1) a lack of understanding by peers, anxiety, the search for identity; (2) education-related problems; and (3) discrimination against children and young people and disrespect/violation of their rights. It can be concluded that the children who were consulted are most sensitive to these types of problems.

When it comes to the most vulnerable groups, the participants recognize: children who are somewhat different from the majority and therefore discriminated against (children whose material and social status is low, children belonging to a religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation different from the majority group, children with disabilities, street children, children victims of violence, children in institutional care, etc.), poor children, children from families with troubled relationships and children who are addicted to psychoactive substances.

In addition, they identified all the key actors from the public and civil sectors that could contribute to solving the problems of children in Montenegro: the Government and the relevant institutions (highlighting the Ministry of Education in particular), municipalities, schools and professionals working in schools (principals, teachers, psychologists and pedagogues), parents, UNICEF, the NGO sector (Centre for Child Rights and other NGOs dealing with children), the media, various counselling centres and the children themselves, and they also listed the most important ways or mechanisms for solving children’s problems: legal measures, media reporting on all issues important for children and young people; educational and counselling work; support for communication between parents and children and greater commitment from schools (educational institutions) to the preservation of the mental health of children.

The results of these consultations indicate that children are not sufficiently informed about activities through which they could realize their interests and rights; that social incentives for their active involvement are also lacking; and that they personally face a lack of time for and interest in social participation.

Teachers can play an important role in encouraging children to participate socially because they are potential role models. Of course, this implies that teachers have good communication with their students. However, children have also highlighted some positive examples of support and encouragement coming from teachers and schools.

One of the most important open-type questions was how to develop intrinsic motivation in children for their social participation, that is, what values should be communicated to children. The proposals express faith in the energy and power of young people, and the keywords used in these are: rights, equality, children, youth and change.
1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the consultations with children as an interested party during the development and implementation of the Strategy for the Exercise of Child Rights 2019–2023 was to collect their views on the problems children in Montenegro face, as well as on the possibilities for solving them. The consultations involved around 100 children in total: the NGO High School Students Union of Montenegro (40 participants), Golden Advisors of the Office of the Protector of Human Rights (nine participants) and primary school children – who participated in the focus group discussions organised by the NGO Centre for Child Rights (a total of 45 pupils in four focus groups). The consultations with members of the NGO High School Students Union of Montenegro were conducted using a web-based questionnaire (Google Forms) with open-type questions. The survey took place in the first half of December 2018 and fully respected the recommendations of the UNICEF’s Ethical Committee.
### 2. RESULTS

The participants identified several groups of the most significant problems that children in Montenegro face:

- **Problems in Education**
- **A Lack of Understanding by Adults and a Lack of Respect for Children’s Opinions**
- **A Lack of Understanding by Peers, Anxiety and the Search for Identity**
- **Discrimination Against Children and Young People and Disrespect/Violation of Their Rights**
- **Socially Unacceptable Behaviour (Violence and Use of Psychoactive Substances)**
- **A Lack of Civic Participation by Children**
- **Problems in the Family**
- **Low Quality of Media and Cultural Content and Problems of Leisure Time**
- **The Problem of the Employment of Young People**
- **Poverty** was singled out as a particular problem

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The problems above were not ranked according to the perceived level of importance.

TABLE 1: The biggest problems that children in Montenegro experience on a daily basis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION</th>
<th>A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING BY PEERS, ANXIETY, THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The education system in general</td>
<td>• Problems with society (with peers);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The education system – children are required to take 15 subject courses, while most of them are not interested in more than five subject courses;</td>
<td>• A lack of understanding by friends;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Too many classes per day – we have an average of seven classes every day;</td>
<td>• Mocking successful students;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A large number of obligations;</td>
<td>• A lack of team awareness in children;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An inconsistent manner of assessing and grading – some teachers are too demanding and demand quite a lot, even to get a passing grade, while some are too lenient;</td>
<td>• Social anxiety – fear of public speaking, of giving wrong answers...;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Education does not focus on a future profession, and as a result, we end up having unmotivated, educated citizens;</td>
<td>• A lack of enthusiasm;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nepotism is present in education;</td>
<td>• A fear of expressing opinions in public – fear of ridicule;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An insufficiently modern and rather boring teaching process;</td>
<td>• Excessive use of mobile phones is a key component of the lack of communication between young people and the world;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Every year there is a change in the textbooks and curricula due to minor changes – this creates a financial issue;</td>
<td>• A lack of information on sexual and reproductive health. I am familiar with the practice that children under 18 often do not use any STD- or pregnancy-prevention methods, and we are not able to educate ourselves on this topic because our society considers this to be taboo, although the sexual instinct is one of our biological drives;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overpriced textbooks and education, overall;</td>
<td>• Indecision in the choice of school/faculty – children do not know enough about their abilities, values, and interests, and often do not find adequate assistance and support in making one of the most important steps for their future;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Insufficient help and support.</td>
<td>• The fact that they cannot find their place in the world. They do not know which school to enrol in or how to find a job after completing education;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Loneliness and an increasing frequency of depression among children/adolescents;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Depression, insufficient level of psychological support;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Poor mental health, many children's mental health is worsening.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Obligations always present a problem, especially in the period of adolescence when we want to devote that time to meeting other people and learning about everything that life can offer.

Insufficient development of critical thinking – it is easier for people to tell us how things are and for us to be satisfied with that kind of communication; those who have the patience to help us and force us to develop important critical thinking, instead of taking all the information for granted and accept them as such, are very rare.

A lack of information among young people about various life issues (they do not know how to choose a person to contact if they have a problem that requires someone’s professional attention).

A lack of understanding by adults; adults do not respect our opinions. Children are never taken seriously, even when they have a problem.

The insufficient help and support stems from a lack of understanding of our needs.

We cannot achieve our goals because adults do not want to support innovative and other ideas that come from out-of-the-box thinking.
We (the Roma) are often seen as bad: when something bad happens in school, we are the first to be blamed. Society segregates us because of the colour of our skin, our faith... because we are poor...

A lack of information about the different pathways of formal and informal education – children are not informed about all the ways in which they can expand their education, so most of them cannot list more than two organizations working with young people.

We are delighted that you have involved us in the development of the Children’s Strategy. This is a good example, including the fact that what we can say what we think with no one judging our responses.

We do not think about what happens after physical or psychological violence, we do not think about the other side, how the person suffering such violence will feel, etc. and we are primarily trying to solve problems through some kind of violence.

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A large number of young people are used to violence.

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A lack of respect for differences;
• Belittling other children;
• Avoiding friends for some reason;
• Homophobic behaviour.

A lack of information about the possibilities of participation by children;
• Inactivity and a lack of interest among young people, because most young people are rarely involved in various activities;
• Citizens’ lack of awareness, passive citizens;
• The conviction of a young person that he/she is not capable of changing what he/she is dissatisfied with.

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• Rights – I think that child rights are not respected in Montenegro. I am aware that many children are mistreated by their parents and that such things are being ignored. I also think that child rights, apart from being ignored, are often violated, and there are no answers to the question of why they are being violated. We are not given the right to have our say in changing the society.

I think that young people want to escape reality, which is why they resort to alcohol and psychoactive substances.

Digital violence – online violence – children are no longer safe either in the real or in the virtual world.

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In addition to the problems identified by the entire group of respondents, children of primary school age raised two more issues: the lack of specialist health care for children from small towns and child marriages in the Roma and Egyptian populations.

In small towns there are no specialist medical doctors, so we have to go to Podgorica for any kind of special medical examination, and when we are there we have to wait for a long time to be seen by the doctor.

There are children who do not have enough money to get food and who need help, there are many of them at Camp Konik. Sometimes we, who have something, help them out, but they need more.

In our community (Roma), we remain under the major influence of our parents – young girls get married early and this represents a big problem. I told my sister that she should decide for herself what is best for her, and not listen to adults, because it often happens that such a husband is violent. At the same time, she cannot return home, because her father would kill her.

Poverty affects the psychological state of young people, because today I may have enough money for a snack, but tomorrow that may not be the case...
When it comes to the reasons behind the small number of children who are actively involved in various activities through which they could realize their interests and rights, children identified three key groups of reasons: a lack of information among children, a lack of social incentives and a lack of time and interest among children. Table 3 lists all the reasons in greater detail.

**TABLE 3: Reasons behind the small number of children and young people who are actively involved in various activities, through which they could realize their interests and rights**

**A LACK OF INFORMATION AMONG CHILDREN**

- The biggest reason is the lack of information. A large number of children do not know what all these activities are, and those who know often do not want to be involved, simply because that it is not something that their peers do, so they do not want to stand out or be on their own in some activity – the lack of information leads to children's relatively large lack of interest in informal education;
- Some of them are not informed, but there are a large number of children who think that all extracurricular activities are boring and are nothing but a waste of time;
- We are not sufficiently informed, we simply need to find a way to get information about activities and try to make them more interesting and not too formal;
- A lack of self-confidence, maybe even laziness as a consequence of depression;
- A lack of appreciation of activism, insufficiently developed awareness about activism...
- I believe that children are often not informed and do not know about the existence of some organizations; however, there are a large number who consider such things an unnecessary waste of time, a useless effort, boring, or merely a way to avoid attending classes;
- All these organizations should present what they do in an interesting way, so that children get an idea of what they do.

There is insufficient knowledge of what these activities can offer and how helpful they can be in working on our personality and our personal values.
A LACK OF SOCIAL INCENTIVES

- It is in the spirit of our present mentality for a child to end up doing routine actions, being smothered by an already closed community;
- They are not aware of how much an environment where no one teaches them to give and receive can affect their development and growth;
- Awareness of the importance of these kinds of actions is not sufficiently developed – children do not understand what this means;
- Children are not motivated enough.

No one encourages young people; nobody informs them and no one does anything to make them interested and to take them down the right path.

A LACK OF TIME AND INTEREST IN YOUNG PEOPLE

- A lack of time and interest;
- It requires a lot of time;
- Children are increasingly turning to the Internet and the virtual world today;
- It is more interesting for them to spend their time in some other way than participating in important activities they can benefit from;
- It is more interesting for them to spend their time using their phone than getting tired and dealing with it;
- Also, participation in all these activities is conditioned by the academic achievements of students – I can tell you for sure that they are less likely to enrol pupils who are not doing well at school;
- I believe that most of them (children) think it is a waste of time, working for nothing, and – above all – something which is not worthwhile since it is not paid – today, however, money is everything; I simply think that they do not look at it as improving their personality, but only as a reputation they can benefit from in the society, or perhaps they are not a helpful type of person;
- After the school day ends there is a lot of free time and most children could use it to have fun in many other ways;
- A lack of desire for change;
- Fear of failure.

Personally, I like to be involved in as many activities as possible, since I can make use of my free time properly. However, when I talk to my friends about my activities, they tell me that I am not normal for doing that...

Tables 3 and 4 show the answers of children who had the opportunity to express their opinions about who (which actors) and what could encourage children to become more involved in activities, through which they could realize their interests and rights. Table 4 reveals that the key actors who can provide incentives are peers, teachers, parents and families and children/young people themselves. Table 5 indicates that the main incentives are: personal activism, the number of children involved in various activities; changes in parenting attitudes – a greater level of respect for children and young people; the possibility of having direct satisfaction (or benefit) from participation; the direct experience of an individual; mutual exchange of experiences among peers and motivation to excel.

TABLE 4: Actors that can encourage children and young people to get involved in various activities

- Peers;
- Parents and families;
- We ourselves – self-motivation.

Teachers – encouraging/motivating for extracurricular activities; students spend six hours a day with their teachers and professors, which makes them very important to us, their behaviour, words, and reactions are at the centre of our attention during classes, and we absorb them like sponges – that’s why their incentives are very important for children and young people; we perceive them as our role models and their words mean a lot to us.

TABLE 5: Potential incentives for children and young people to get involved in various activities

- If children had some direct and visible benefit from the activity;
- Only direct contact with various activities and learning about their value can encourage them to participate actively in the community and beyond;
- Peers need to talk to each other about their experiences and promote it to other young people;
- Motivation to excel.

I think that everything starts with us... the more we are present and the more we participate and advocate, the more young people around us will see that it is all right to participate and fight for something. A change in attitudes begins with the family. Children should be encouraged to share their opinions from the early days of their lives... It would be best to have parents attend workshops and learn how to raise their children normally.
The children who were consulted identified a number of proposals for a potential slogan for exercising child rights. All the proposals are presented in Table 6.

**TABLE 6: Potential slogans for exercising child rights in Montenegro**

- Equality connects us!
- Everyone has the same rights
- Respect our rights or else we will discuss them
- Your voice matters! Say what you want!
- Equality is the path towards a better future
- We, the small, yet big people, are equal
- Do you want your child to live like this?
- I have a life – I have rights
- We are not to blame for anything. We just want love, happiness and equal rights!!!
- We should be asked / Our lives matter
- We are building a society in which we want our child to live
- Your opinion matters – engage, let your voice be heard
- Let’s love one another – no one ended up being happy from hatred
- Look into the mirror of the youth
- Know your rights and use them in a productive way
- Equality for all
- Power lies in specialness – every child is special
- Get involved, let your voice be heard
- Every child should be equal
- All children under the same sky – we have equal rights
- Young people can and will change the world
- And the young shall inherit the earth
- Youth represent the future
- Every day is a new chance to wake up and do something for ourselves and all our peers
- Children can change the world
- To love children means to love the world
- Every child should have equal rights, since none of these children asked to be born and they should be allowed everything so that they can feel useful and enjoy a carefree time growing up
- For all the children of Montenegro, for their healthier and better lives
- We know how, we can, so let us get involved

The children provided very few additional comments on the exercising of children’s rights regarding the need for all people – especially children and women – to exercise their rights, that any disrespect and violation of rights should be severely punished, and that all institutions and parents should actively participate in the protection of child rights. The following comment, in a way, summarizes their views on the exercising of child rights:

> Every child in the world is equal in terms of his/her rights. Moreover, these rights should not be violated or ignored, but rather exercised and serve the purpose for which they are intended – for the protection of children.
3. CONCLUSIONS

1. The children who participated in the consultations identified significant problems faced by children in Montenegro, which should be taken into account when creating the future Strategy for the Realization of the Rights of the Child 2019–2023. In total, nine groups of problems and one individual problem have been presented (Table 1) covering a whole range of social issues important for the development of the personality of children and young people.

2. Three groups of children’s problems were singled out: (1) a lack of understanding by peers, anxiety, the search for identity; (2) education problems; and (3) discrimination against children and disrespect/violation of their rights. It can be concluded that the children who were consulted are most sensitive to these types of problems, since they face multiple problems every day. This can be related to the developmental characteristics of childhood and adolescence in particular, because it is obvious that these are problems related to (non-)acceptance by their peer groups, the development of their own self, the formation of a system of competencies and the experience of equity and equality.

3. Identifying the particular problem of child poverty leads to the conclusion about how serious this problem is, because this was recognized by the children themselves, who have experienced it themselves or who have witnessed children from their immediate surroundings experiencing it.

4. From what the children said about the problems of various groups of children, we can conclude that the most vulnerable groups they recognize are: children who are somewhat different from the majority and therefore discriminated against (children whose material and social status is low, children belonging to a religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation different from the majority group, children with disabilities, street children, children in institutional care, child victims of violence, etc.); poor children; children from families with troubled relationships and children who are addicted to psychoactive substances.

5. High school students identified all the key actors from the public and civil sectors that could contribute to solving the problems of children in Montenegro. The identified actors are, at the same time, those who can engage in preventive work in the areas of the identified problems.

6. In addition to this, the consulted children identified the most important ways or mechanisms for solving the problems of children that should be covered by the future Strategy for the Exercise of Child Rights 2019–2023: legal measures; media reporting on all issues important for children and young people; educational and counselling work; support for communication between parents and children and greater commitment from schools (educational institutions) for the preservation of mental health of children and young people.

7. It can be concluded: that children are not sufficiently informed about the activities through which they could realize their interests and rights, that social incentives for their active involvement are also lacking, and that they personally face a lack of time for and interest in social participation.

8. Teachers can play an important role in encouraging children to participate socially, because they are potential role models. Of course, this implies that teachers have good communication with their students.

9. One of the most important open-type questions was how to develop intrinsic motivation in children for their social participation, that is, what values should be encouraged in them to participate actively in society in accordance with their capabilities.

10. As a potential slogan for exercising the rights of children in Montenegro, the consulted children offered a number of solutions. Proposals express faith in the energy and power of children, and the keywords used in them are: rights, equality, children, youth and change.