Report on the Implementation of Child Rights in the Republic of Serbia

From the Perspective of Children and Youth
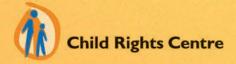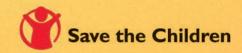
Child Rights Centre

Save the Children

Report on the Implementation of Child Rights in the Republic of Serbia

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Contents

Introduction

Five years after the initial children's report on the implementation of child rights in Serbia prepared by the Children and Youth Coalition in late 2007 and presented before the Committee on the Rights of the Child in February 2008, and three years following their participation in the preparation of the report on the implementation of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the children in our country once again had an opportunity to take part in a new cycle of reporting. Based on our experience from the previous reporting cycles and believing that the best insight and the most comprehensive picture on the implementation of child rights in our country could be obtained if we included as many of our peers as possible, we again opted to prepare the report on the basis of research results.

Unlike the reporting processes in the previous period, when child rights coalitions were established in both instances, this time the report was prepared jointly by three child and youth groups from three towns in Serbia:

Children's Information and Cultural Service, Belgrade

- DX — Children's Information and Cultural Service, a group of children active in the Child Rights Centre (Belgrade);
- Young activists of the Open Club's Society for the Development of Children and Youth (Niš) and
- Young members of the Youth Club at the Užice Child Rights Centre (Užice).

These three groups are involved in the *Living Child Rights* Project, which has been implemented by the Child Rights Centre since 2010, with support from the Save the Children. Through this project, groups of children and young people have been empowered for monitoring and advocacy in the implementation of child rights.

The preparation of this report began when group leaders familiarised us with recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Based on the analysis of these recommendations, which we conducted together with them, we selected six areas in which we wanted to research the views and opinions of our peers and thus gain better insight, from their perspective, into whether and how child rights are implemented in these areas. Then, with the assistance of adult leaders and research professionals, each of the three clubs created questions from the selected fields. Thus, members of the Užice club prepared the questions in the domain of health and education, the group from Belgrade chose safety, culture of non-violence and the implementation of the right of the child to non-discrimination, while the group from Niš opted for the questions in the field of peer violence and participation.

The questionnaire was completed in April 2012, comprising all the questions defined in these three clubs. It was then sent to all participating clubs to be reviewed and discussed. In May 2012, the questionnaire was distributed in 10 towns throughout

Young activists of the Open Club's Society for the Development of Children and Youth, Niš

Serbia: Beograd, Niš, Užice, Novi Sad, Zrenjanin, Vrbas, Loznica, Zaječar, Kraljevo and Prijepolje. The interviewees were children and young people of both sexes, aged 12 to 18 (some of the interviewees were students of the third year in secondary schools, some of whom had already turned 18, but we did not wish nor we could exclude them from the lessons when the survey took place, so we included them in the sample). Since we wanted to collect data from as many groups of children and youth as possible, we distributed the questionnaire to children and youth living in homes for parentless children, to Roma children and youth, street children and youth and children and youth with disabilities.

The total number of questionnaires we collected and processed was 1,358, of which 660 (48.6%) were filled in by male and 693 (51%) by female interviewees, while in five cases the gender was unknown. The average age of interviewees was 15. A total of 0.09% interviewees stated that they did not live with parents or carers because they are either placed in institutions of alternative care or they live and work on the street.

After the questionnaires were processed and the results acquired, each group discussed the results, singled out those they found the most important and prepared their recommendations on the basis of this analysis. When all the groups completed this part of the research, their results and recommendations were compiled into a comprehensive joint report, which was likewise analysed and discussed by each of the three groups of children and youth. This was the final stage of the successful process, resulting in the report presented before you.

In the preparation of the report we were assisted by group leaders, who guided and steered us through this comprehensive activity. We were supported by the Child Rights Centre, the Child Rights Monitoring Coalition in Serbia, Save the Children and the Republic of Serbia Office for Human and Minority Rights, which showed their understanding of the importance of including children in the process of reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Young members of the Youth Club at the Užice Child Rights Centre

2 Implementation of the Child's Right to Health

2.1 Awareness of Counselling Centres for Children and Youth

The first question in the domain of health we posed to our peers referred to how informed they were about the existence of health counselling centres in their places of residence. The results acquired show that 31.1% of the interviewees do not know whether there is a counselling centre for children and youth in their town, while 44.0% know that there is one but do not know its location. Only 15% of children can say where a youth counselling centre is. As expected, the number of interviewees who know that a counselling centre exists increases with age, but no age group has more than 23% of children and youth who can say where the counselling centre is in their place of residence.

Key results

▸ Every third interviewee does not know whether there is a counselling centre for children and youth in his/her place of residence, while each second interviewee does not know its exact location.

▸ 4/5 young people would not know how to find a counselling centre if they needed it.

2.2 Nutritional Habits of Children and Youth

Believing that appropriate and good quality nutrition is of high importance for children's and youth's health, we wanted to know what our peers' habits are in terms of healthy nutrition. To this end, we made a list of foods and asked our interviewees to grade how often they ate or drank them. Grade 1 was given if a food was never consumed and 5 if it was consumed every day. When we calculated the average value of the frequency of the consumption of these foods, the result was the following ranking list:

1. Fruit — 4.27
2. Dairy products — 4.23
3. Vegetables — 4.18
4. Sweets — 4.07
5. Meat — 3.87

6. Carbonated soft drinks — 3.31
7. Fast food — 3.22
8. Fish — 2.55
9. Coffee — 2.02
10. Energy drinks — 1.92

As we can see, according to our peers, the foods consumed most often by them are fruit and dairy products, on average, several times a week. A fact raising concerns, however, is that 25.3% of children and youth often take energy drinks (at least several times a month), 28.7% often drink coffee and 43.2% eat fish very rarely or never.

Other results acquired:

- 54.3% of children and youth eat meat several times a week, 22.2% of them eat it every day, while 6.9% eat meat very rarely or never;
- 41.5% of children and youth eat fish several times a month, while 13.4% of them eat fish several times a week or every day;
- 15.3% of children and youth do not meet their needs for fruit because they eat it several times a month, very rarely or never;
- 54.9% of children and youth eat fruit every day, while 28.1% of them eat it several times a week;
- 81.6% of children and youth eat vegetables every day or several times a week, 10.6% only several times a month and 6.0% very rarely or never;
- 18.6% of children eat fast food every day, 25.3% several times a week, 24.4% several times a month, while 29.8% say they eat fast food very rarely or never;
- 81.7% of children and youth eat dairy products every day or several times a week, 9.7% only several times a month and 7.3% very rarely or never;
- 45.2% of children and youth eat sweets every day, 31.1% several times a week, 13.1% several times a month, while 9.4% of children and youth eat sweets very rarely or never;
- 54.3% of the interviewed children and youth never drink coffee, while 12.5% of them drink coffee every day;
- 49.3% of children and youth drink carbonated soft drinks every day or several times a week; 21.6% several times a month and 27.4% drink them very rarely or never;
- 44.4% of children and youth never tasted energy drinks, while 27.8% drink them very rarely.

There are no particular differences between genders when the consumption of specific foods is concerned, with the exception of girls eating/drinking more frequently:

- vegetables, every day (53.2% F, 45.3% M);
- sweets, every day (48.6% F, 42% M);
- coffee, every day (15.9% F, 9.1% M).

When we compared the results by the interviewees' age, we acquired some rather interesting results about the nutritional habits of children and youth:

- The consumption of meat increases slightly with age (daily consumption increases from 21.3% in the youngest population to 29.7% in the oldest group).
- The consumption of fish decreases slightly with age, except in the category "several times a month", where it increases from 31.5% to 51.5%.
- The daily consumption of fruit drops significantly with age (from 73.2% to 43.6%), but increases from 15% to 33.7% in the category "several times a week" and from 5.5% to 13.9% in the category "several times a month".
- The daily consumption of vegetables drops with age (from 65.4% to 51.5%), but increases from 20.5% to 34.7% in the "several times a week" category.
- The percentage of children and youth eating fast food every day or several times a week increases with age from 27.6% to 45.5%; on the other hand, the total percentage of those who eat it very rarely or never drops from 36.2% to 24.8%.
- An interesting fact is that the consumption of dairy products and sweets remains at the approximately same level throughout adolescence, regardless of age.
- Coffee drinking increases with age, so the total percentage of those drinking coffee every day or several times a week increases from 3.2% in the fifth grade of elementary school to 51.5% in the third grade of secondary school.
- The daily consumption of carbonated soft drinks increases with age from 9.4% to 21.8%.
- The consumption of energy drinks significantly increases with age and the percentage of those who never tasted it decreases from 74.8% to 31.7%.

Key results

- Children and youth say that the foods they consume most often are fruit, vegetables and dairy products.
- Children and youth consume more sweets, carbonated soft drinks and fast food than fish.
- Every other child eats fruit every day.
- Every other child eats meat several times a week and every fifth child eats meat every day.
- Every fifth child eats fast food every day and every fourth child, several times a week.
- Every other child consumes dairy products every day.
- Almost every other child eats sweets every day and every third child, several times a week.
- The consumption of dairy products and sweets remains at the approximately same level throughout adolescence, regardless of age.
- Almost every eighth child takes energy drinks every day or several times a week.

2.3 Children's and Youth's Awareness of Health Issues

We wanted to know where children and youth are informed about issues of importance for their health (the dangers of using drugs, alcohol and tobacco; healthy eating, contraception, etc.) Here are their most important information sources:

1. parents — 54.7%
2. school — 42.0%
3. the Internet — 33.7%
4. the media — 27.1%
5. peers — 20.4%
6. health institutions — 17.2%
7. other — 2.4%

We would particularly like to point out the fact that only 17.2% of children and youth are informed about health related issues in health institutions and 42% in their schools.

Girls are informed about health at school more often than boys (45.9% F, 37.6% M) and as far as other information sources are concerned, there are no notable differences between genders. The importance of being informed about health through parents and health institutions decreases significantly with age (from 71.7% to 44.6% and from 33.9% to 8.9% respectively). High-school children tend to replace parents and health institutions as the main sources of information by the Internet (from 11.8% of 12-year-olds to 52.5% of 17-year-olds), school (from 26% to 49.5%), the media (from 14.2% to 38.6%) and their peers (from 7.9% to 37.6%).

We asked our peers to estimate how much they were informed about psychoactive substances, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, eating disorders and the preservation of mental health and, as a result, we got a small ranking list showing how much they know about these themes — the number in parentheses shows the percentage of interviewees who said they were informed sufficiently, rather well or thoroughly:

1. Psychoactive substances (91.2%)

2. Contraception (77.3%)

3. Sexually transmitted diseases (75.8%)

4. Eating disorders (74.0%)

5. Preservation of mental health (70.6%)

We would like to emphasise the fact that 22.6% children and young people believe they know nothing or very little about sexually transmitted diseases and 27.6% believe they know very little about the preservation of mental health. Girls' replies show that they are much better informed about contraception (62.9% F and 48.7% M are informed rather well or thoroughly) and eating disorders (55.4% F, 41% M). As is the case with the questions about counselling services, the awareness of these issues increases with age.

2.4 Children's and Youth's Views on Addiction Diseases

We also wanted to know about the opinions and assessments of our peers with regard to vices, such as alcohol, tobacco, drugs and games of chance. The result we acquired was that 48.8% of children and youth agreed with the following statement: *"If I wanted to buy alcohol, I could always find a place where the salesperson won't ask about my age"*, while 34.1% of them did not agree with this. As expected, with age, children and youth know much more about where to buy alcohol without being asked about their age, so as much as 80.2% 17-year-olds are familiar with this, unlike 12-year-olds, of whom 12.5% know this information.

15.4% of children and youth agree with the statement that *"An occasional cigarette at my age is not a big problem because smoking can be kept under control"*, while 83.3% of them do not agree with this. There are no significant differences between sexes in this and the number of those who believe that smoking is a problem significantly decreases with age (from 90.6% to 53.5%).

45.4% teenagers agree with the statement: *"I don't understand why some people need to alter the state of their consciousness artificially, with the assistance of various substances"*, while 34.3% of them do not, thus exhibiting an understanding for altering the state of consciousness. Boys exhibit more understanding for altering the state of consciousness than girls (38.9% M, 29.3% F). It is interesting to note that the understanding for altering the state of consciousness decreases with age (from 40.2% to 29.8%).

13.4% of young people agree with the statement: *"Marijuana should be legalised because it is not a bigger problem than alcohol"*, while 72.0% do not. Boys are more likely to support the legalisation of marijuana than girls (16.7% M, 10.4% F). Rather unexpectedly, while the understanding for altering the state of consciousness decreases with age, the support for the legalisation of marijuana increases (from 6.3% in elementary to 23.7% in secondary schools).

46.5% interviewees agree with the statement: *"Betting and gambling have become worryingly widespread in my generation"*, 31.9% of them do not. Both genders agree on this issue, and with age, children and youth are increasingly worried about the problem of gambling and betting among their peers (from 26.0% to 67.3%).

Key results

- ▶ Almost one half of children and youth know where they can buy alcohol without being asked about their age.
- ▶ 1/3 of children and youth understand why people have the need to artificially alter their state of consciousness.
- ▶ Every eighth child thinks that marijuana should be legalised.
- ▶ Almost one half of children and youth believe that betting and gambling has become worryingly widespread among their peers, while 1/3 do not agree with this.

2.5 Recommendations by Children and Youth for the Promotion of Peers' Health

- Open counselling centres for children and youth in municipalities where they do not exist.
- Continual work on the promotion of counselling centres, informing children about their existence and services offered to young people.
- Better informing of children and youth about the threats of eating disorders, preservation of reproductive health and contraception.
- Increased engagement of schools and health institutions in the education of children and youth about health related issues.
- Improved use of the Internet for the health education of children and youth, particularly of secondary-school age.
- Better education of children and youth about the importance of healthy diets and the harmful effects of coffee, sweets, carbonated drinks and fast food.
- Moving fast food places further away from schools, encouraging the opening of health food stores, opening school canteens with healthy meals.
- Ban selling and advertising energy drinks to minors.
- Increased control in the sale of alcohol and cigarettes to minors, heightened penalties for those violating this provision, insisting on changing the existing law.
- Introduction of more frequent inspections checking for the presence of minors in betting offices, higher penalties for those violating this provision, insisting on the implementation of the existing law.
- Heightened education of children and youth about the dangers of addiction diseases, with the use of interesting methods such as dialogues with former addicts, etc.

Implementation of the Child's Right to Education

3

When speaking of the implementation of child rights in our country, education is certainly one of the unavoidable subjects. We have therefore included some statements in the questionnaire through which we wanted to see how our peers see the situation in this area. We were particularly interested in how they are satisfied with the quality and applicability of the knowledge they acquire in school, the work of their teachers, the quality of textbooks, how classes are organised and other issues of importance for the implementation of the right to good quality education.

Thus, among other things, we got the result that 70.8% of children and youth agree with the statement: *"I'm satisfied with the quality of the knowledge I'm acquiring at school"*, while 15.9% do not agree and 11.6% have no opinion. On average, girls are more satisfied than boys (74.6% F, 66.7% M). It should be noted here that with age, the students' satisfaction with the quality of knowledge acquired at school decreases (from 82.7% to 61.4%).

60.3% of young people agree with the statement: *"In school, every student is given the opportunity to advance to his/her full potentials"*, while 25.2% do not agree with this and 12.4% have no opinion. The satisfaction with the opportunities offered in school in accordance with individual potentials significantly decreases with age (from 74% to 48.6%).

Almost one half of the interviewees (48.7%) agree with the statement: *"In classes, teachers work on the curriculum in a manner which motivates and encourages students to take part in activities"*, while 31.5% do not agree and 17.7% are undecided. It is noticeable that the students' satisfaction with the manner in which teachers work on the curriculum decreases with age (from 70.1% to 40.6%).

61.3% of children and youth agree with the statement: *"I have the opportunity to apply and use most of the knowledge I acquire in school in everyday life"*, while 22.5% do not agree and 13.9% have no opinion. Again, it is noticeable that with age, the students' satisfaction with the applicability of the knowledge acquired in school decreases significantly (from 74.8% to 49.5%).

Almost half of the children and youth (48.9%) agree with the statement: *"The curricula and the contents taught in school are close to my interests"*, while 27.7% do not agree and 20.0% have no opinion. This level of satisfaction, from the initial 64.6%, also decreases noticeably with age.

46.1% of children and youth agree with the statement: *"I'm satisfied with the quality of school textbooks"*, along with 25.8% who do not agree and a rather high percentage of undecided interviewees — 22.9%. The satisfaction with the quality of school textbooks significantly drops with age (from 66.9% to 30.7%).

46.5% agree with the statement: *"What I hear from teachers and school staff has a significant influence on my views on various life issues"*, while 28.0% do not agree and 22.7% have no opinion. This influence by teachers on students' views decreases significantly with age (from 60.6% to 42.6%).

29.3% of our interviewees agree with the statement: *"There are more useful ways of spending my time than sitting in classes"*, while almost one half does not agree with it (48.6%) and 18.3% have no opinion. Boys tend to agree more with this statement (33.9% M, 25.3% F). With more years spent in school, students increasingly agree with this opinion (from 21.3% to 34.6%)

37.6% children and youth agree with the statement: *"Physical education in school is poorly organised and is therefore useless"*, while 45.8% disagree and 14.1% have no opinion. Agreement with this statement increases noticeably with age (from 30.7% to 54.4%).

More than half of the children and youth (51.4%) believe the following statement to be true: "*Teachers are often unable to establish discipline in class*", while 28.2% do not agree and 18.3% do not have an opinion. Unlike the other statements in this part of the questionnaire, there are no significant changes with age, although it is still possible to notice that with time, agreement with this statement slightly increases (from 48% to 56.5%).

At first glance, the results acquired here referring to the quality of education show that on average, children and youth are rather satisfied with the educational system in Serbia. However, it is very noticeable that as they grow up, their satisfaction with the educational system drops significantly in almost all of the analysed elements. The older and the more independent in their thinking our peers are and the more awareness they have of their personal needs — the less they are satisfied with what the existing educational system offers. This is particularly so in relation to the quality of school textbooks, teachers' work methods and the applicability of the acquired knowledge.

Key results

- Almost 3/4 of children and youth are satisfied with the quality of knowledge they acquire in elementary and secondary schools. This satisfaction drops with time, but by the end of the secondary education, it remains at about 60%. This seemed as a rather unexpected and surprising result and our research was unable to provide an appropriate explanation for it, so we believe that additional research should be organised to this end.

- A majority of children and young people believe that school offers them an opportunity to develop in accordance with their potentials. However, by the end of secondary school, this opinion ceases to be prevailing. The situation is similar with the students' satisfaction with the applicability of the knowledge acquired in school — the older the children, the less satisfied they are, so by the end of secondary school, the number of those who are satisfied drops below 50%.

- The students' satisfaction with the work of their teachers drops from 70% in elementary to 40% in secondary school.

- About one half of the children and youth say that the school curricula are close to their interests and this percentage decreases with age.

- On average, one half of students are satisfied with the quality of school textbooks. This percentage drops from 2/3 in elementary school to less than 1/3 in secondary school.

- Approximately every third student believes that the time spent in school would be spent more usefully elsewhere.

- The number of students dissatisfied with the quality of physical education increases from 1/3 in elementary school to more than 1/2 in secondary school.

- 1/2 of students believe that teachers do not have the authoritativeness to maintain discipline in class.

- Slightly fewer than a half of children and youth say that what they hear from teachers in school influences the forming of their attitudes on various issues.

- At the age from 12 to 18, about one half or slightly above one half of children are satisfied with the educational system (between 45 and 60% in most questions), but the percentage drops very noticeably with the interviewees' age, level of information and awareness of their needs, most noticeably in their satisfaction with the quality of school textbooks.

3.1 Recommendations by Children and Youth for the Promotion of the Quality of Education

- Regular and improved education of teachers, increased number of hours spent in seminars for teachers, checking to what extent they use this knowledge in working with children.

- Education of teachers in the following areas: how to motivate students to work, how to use workshops, debates, group work and other forms of interactive work.

- Reducing pointless memorising of school materials and learning them by heart.

- Improving curricular contents by eliminating what is unnecessary and what lacks practical use.

- Modernising textbooks to make them more interesting, up-to-date and understandable to children.

- Inclusion of children and youth in the reform of curricula to harmonise them with their interests as much as possible.

- Construction of gyms in schools lacking them, providing additional equipment and hygienic facilities in the existing gyms, better planning of physical education classes in order that they have actual effects on students' physical fitness and health.

- Returning authority to school and teachers by assigning more gravity to disciplinary measures and grades in behaviour.

- Working with parents in order that they too understand their part of the responsibility in bringing up and teaching their children work habits, rather than just going to school and insisting that their children get better grades.

- A campaign for creating a social environment where the education of children will be truly important and where learning will be interesting.

4 Implementation of the Child's Right to Safety and Life in a Culture of Non-Violence

In this part of the research we wanted to know what kind of unpleasant experiences, violence and violation of privacy our peers experienced from their parents/carers and in relationships with partners, if they had any. In this, we were particularly interested in how often they experienced physical punishment and whether they, and to what extent, justify it. We also wanted to know how safe their everyday environment is perceived by children and youth and to what extent they are susceptible to aggressive and violent reactions in certain situations.

4.1 Safety and Privacy of Children and Youth in Relations with Parents/Carers

The following results were acquired concerning parents:

- ▶ 13.3% of children experienced insults and humiliation;
- ▶ 16.9% of children and youth experienced their parents checking their telephone calls and text messages;
- ▶ 7.1% of children and youth experienced their parents/carers checking their e-mail and Facebook accounts;
- ▶ 40.1% of children and youth experienced being grounded by their parents/carers as educational measures;
- ▶ 29.9% of children and youth said that they were hit by parents/carers and that they saw some justification for this, while 6.6% said they were hit by parents without any reason or justification;
- ▶ 38.7% of children and youth said that none of the above happened to them in their families.

Girls are grounded more often by parents/carers than boys are (44.4% F, 35.8% M). As for other forms of parental/carer control, there are no significant differences between genders.

We have noticed that the older the children, parents/carers are less interested in their e-mail and Facebook communication — the percentage of those interested drops from 11.8% to 4.0%. On the other hand, the older the children, parents/carers tend to ground them more frequently (from 31.5% to 44.6%). As for other measures of parental control, there are no significant changes with age.

4.2 Safety and Privacy of Children and Youth in Intimate Relationships

With regard to relationships with partners, 35.7% of interviewees stated that they had not been in a relationship. Those who have, had the following experiences:

- 11.7% were insulted and humiliated by boyfriends or girlfriends;
- 17.3% reported that their mobile telephones were checked by their partners;
- 9.9% reported that their partners checked their e-mail and Facebook messages, of whom 1.5% experienced misuse of their e-mail or Facebook accounts by the person they were in a relationship with;
- 3.2% of children and youth complained that their boyfriends or girlfriends limited their going out and socialising with friends;
- 3.8% of children and youth reported that they were hit by their partner with a reason, while 3.5% reported being hit without a reason;
- 34.5% of children and youth reported that none of the above happened to them in a relationship.

An interesting fact is that more boys reported being hit for a reason by their girlfriends (6.1% M, 1.6% F). As for the frequency of other forms of violent behaviour in a relationship, no significant differences appeared between genders.

The number of unpleasant experiences in intimate relationships among young people increases with age, but this is to be expected because the number of relationships increases with age — from 32.3% of some experience in intimate relationships in elementary schools to 94.1% in the third year of secondary schools.

4.3 Children's and Youth's Perception of Safety in Their Living Environment

The following answers were provided when our peers were asked how they perceived safety in their environment:

- 86.0% of children and youth see their homes as safe;
- 47.4% of them see their schools as safe;
- 43.1% of children and youth feel safe in their neighbourhoods (part of the town);
- 20.3% children and youth find their places of residence safe;
- 29% children and youth find the places where they usually go out safe;
- finally, 3.6% of them do not perceive any of the aforementioned environments as safe.

Girls feel slightly safer in school than boys (50.6% F, 44.2% M). On the other hand, boys feel much safer in their neighbourhoods (48.0% M, 38.7% F) and in their places of residence (26.7% M, 14.3% F). This perception of safety changes only with regard to places for going out, where it increases with age from 20.5% to 36.6%, while in no other environment is there a significant change in the perception of safety during growing up.

Schools are perceived as safe by 50.4% of children and youth who were never victims of money snatching and by 33.3% of those who were, several times. Similarly, 51.9% of those who were never hit by anybody outside of their home see their schools as safe, as opposed to the 35.9% of those who were hit several times outside home. It transpired that neither the experience of being a victim of money snatching nor being beaten outside home have any significant influence on the perception of safety in places where children and young people live and go out, but they rather tend to only influence the perception of safety in schools. We can hence conclude that the largest number of unpleasant experiences concerning beating and money snatching occur in schools.

It is interesting to note that according to the results acquired, there are no significant differences in the perception of family homes by children and youth who were beaten by parents and those who were not. This research did not reveal what actually influences the perception of safety at home.

Key results

- More than half of children and youth do not feel safe in school.
- Most of children and young people's experiences with money snatching and physical violence occurring outside of their homes happened in schools.
- More than 2/3 of children and youth do not perceive the places where they go out as safe.
- Every ninth child for some reason says he/she does not feel safe at home.
- Experiences of physical punishment by parents are not in a clear relation with the feeling of safety at home because the percentage of children and youth who do not feel safe at home is equal among those who were physically punished by parents and those who were not.

With regard to safety, we wanted to know what kind of unpleasant experiences children had in their environments. We got the following list of the most frequent unpleasant experiences (the number in parentheses represents the percentage of those who experienced this at least once):

1. insults by peers (76.8%)

2. deliberate damage of possessions (56.4%)

3. telephone harassment (50.7%)

4. humiliation due to one's beliefs and affinities (47.4%)

5. insults by teachers (46.6%)

6. being beaten outside one's home (38.9%)

7. Internet harassment (35.5%)

8. humiliation due to one's physical appearance (33.0%)

9. money snatching (20.3%)

10. lunch snatching (13.6%)

11. assault with a weapon (7.6%)

Boys have more experiences with being beaten outside of their homes (47.5% M, 30.8% F) and are more often assaulted with weapons (11.3% M, 4.2% F). On the other hand, girls were insulted by peers more often (81.8% F, 71.7% M) and were victims of telephone harassment more often (54.2% F, 46.9% M).

While growing up, children experience a noticeable increase of the number of insults by peers (from 71.6% to 82.3%) and a significant increase of the number of insults by teachers (from 34.6% to 58.5%). The older they are, the more often they experience humiliation due to their personal beliefs and opinions (from 40.2% to 55.4%). With age, telephone and Internet harassment double (from 31.5% to 60.5% and from 22.8% to 47.6% respectively). The frequency of other unpleasant experiences is not subject to significant change with age.

Key results

- 1/2 of interviewed children and youth have experienced telephone harassment and about 1/3 of them Internet harassment.
- More than one half of children have experienced someone damaging their belongings and property.
- 2/5 of children and youth were hit by somebody in a public place (outside of home).
- 1/5 of children and youth were victims of forcible money snatching.
- Every ninth boy was the victim of an assault with a weapon.

4.4 Children's and Youth's Readiness to Use Violence

We also asked a question which was to show us the types of aggressive behaviour our peers are willing to use when irritated by somebody. Here are the results:

- 36.5% of children and youth would shout at a person who has irritated them;
- 13.6% would mentally harass this person (public humiliation, excommunication from friends, etc.);
- 1.8% interviewees would damage this person's valuable possessions in a fit of rage;
- 15.8% of them would physically assault a person who has irritated them, while 3.2% would be willing to send somebody else to hit this person;
- 33.2% of children and youth said that they would refrain from aggressive behaviour under such circumstances.

Finally, 14.7% were unable to say what their reaction would be towards another person if they irritated them.

Girls are somewhat more likely to shout at whoever has irritated them (40.4% F, 32.4% M), while boys are more likely to hit them (25.0% M, 7.1% F). Children's and youth's tendency to shout at somebody who has irritated them increases significantly with age (from 19.7% to 50.5%), but their readiness to hit this person doubles (from 10.2% to 19.8%). On the other hand, their readiness to get over the conflict calmly is reduced by half (from 45.7% to 24.8%).

- In the event of a conflict with somebody, 1/5 children and youth are willing to harm this person physically, by themselves or with the assistance of somebody else.
- 1/3 would express their rage by shouting at the person.
- 1/3 would try to avoid the conflict.
- Children's patience for refraining from aggressive reactions decreases with age.

4.5 Recommendations by Children and Youth for the Promotion of Safety and the Culture of Non-Violence

- Initiate a widespread campaign to change the general social climate towards reduced tolerance for violence by popularising and rewarding positive examples, along with clear public condemnation and punishment for negative examples.
- Create specific programmes for boys aimed at reducing aggressive behaviour, increasing tolerance and changing their perception of the male role and gender identity to reduce peer pressure among boys for tough and intolerant behaviour.
- Improve the security situation in schools by installing cameras and hiring adults to take care of security (school policemen, janitor).
- Intensify teachers' activities and engagement so that they may oversee the security situation among students in schools.
- Programmes and workshops on non-violence and intercultural education should be revised and adapted to be more efficient than they are now, because there is much space for improvement in this respect.
- Introduce psychological workshops and support services for children and youth who were victims of aggravated forms of peer violence (beating up, money snatching, bullying) perhaps in the form of a peer support network.
- Introduce psychological workshops for anger management among children and youth.
- Initiate a campaign among children and youth about the dangers of disclosing e-mail and Facebook account passwords to other people.
- Educate parents about their children's electronic communications (Facebook and mobile telephones) so that they could recognise the real dangers and learn to respect the privacy of children and youth.

5 Implementation of the Child's Right to Non-Discrimination

Our peers who took part in the research were offered a number of various statements and asked to say to what extent they agreed with them so that we could see what the system of values of today's children and youth looks like and how their right to non-discrimination is implemented through it. The following is given in the parentheses after each of the statements below: total percentage of children and youth who agree with the statement fully or mostly / total percentage of those who disagree with the statement fully or mostly / total percentage of undecided or invalid replies.

1. *"With regard to the size of their population, other nations did not have so many important people as mine."* (I agree 29.3% / I do not agree 34.6% / I don't have an opinion 36.1%)

   Boys tend to agree with this statement slightly more (33.5% M, 25% F). Agreement with this statement increases with age (from 19.7% to 31.7%).

2. *"Each nation should live by itself in its country, without mixing with the others."* (I agree 25.7% / I do not agree 55.1% / I don't have an opinion 19.3%)

   While the agreement with this statement is similar for both sexes, girls tend to express disagreement more often (60.6% F, 49.4% M). This opinion does not change significantly with age.

3. *"I wouldn't mind being in a relationship with somebody of a different ethnicity."* (I agree 56.7% / I do not agree 21.8% / I don't have an opinion 21.5%)

   There are no noticeable differences between the sexes, but agreement with the statement increases significantly with age (from 43.3% in elementary school children to 61.4% in secondary school children).

4. *"A person who is of different religion than the majority of his/her people is not needed by his/her people".* (I agree 11.8% / I do not agree 66.4% / I don't have an opinion 21.7%)

   Boys tend to agree more with this statement: 15.1% M and 8.8% F agree with this, while 59.8% M and 72.4% F do not agree. Agreement with this statement decreases with age (from 16.5% to 8.0%).

5. *"People who don't believe in God are not able to distinguish good from evil."* (I agree 23.0% / I do not agree 49.9% / I don't have an opinion 27.1%)

   No significant differences were shown between the sexes, but agreement with this statement drops significantly with age (from 27.6% to 15.8%).

6. *"A man who does not support a sports club is not a complete person".* (I agree 15.3% / I do not agree 68.3% / I don't have an opinion 16.5%)

   Boys are more in favour of this statement: 19.8% M and 11.1% F agree with it, while 61.0% M and 75.2% F do not agree. There are no significant differences by age groups.

7. *"People with impaired hearing and speech disorders should not communicate using their hands in a public place."* *(I agree 7% / I do not agree 79.7% / I don't have an opinion 13.3%)*

Although the degree of agreement is similar in both sexes, girls tend to agree less with this statement (85,1% F, 73,9% M). There are no siginificant differences by age groups here either.

8. *"Persons of homosexual orientation have the right to work as public figures."* (I agree 33.3% / I do not agree 34.3% / I don't have an opinion 32.4%)

Girls support this statement much more frequently: 41.3% F and 25.1% M agree with it, while 27.4% F and 40.9% M do not agree. Agreement with this statement increases with age (from 28.4% to 48.6%).

9. *"HIV positive persons should have the right to regular education in our schools."* (I agree 48.9% / I do not agree 19.0% / I don't have an opinion 32.1%)

Girls support this statement slightly more frequently (54.1% F, 43.8% M). Agreement with this statement increases considerably with age (from 48.8% to 61.3%).

10. *"Homosexuality is an illness that needs to be treated, if necessary, by force."* (I agree 36.0% / I do not agree 36.4% / I don't have an opinion 27.6%)

Boys support this statement much more frequently: 44.5% M and 28% F agree with it, while 26.2% M and 45.8% F do not agree. Agreement with this statement drops noticeably with age (from 37.0% to 26.7%).

11. *"For national interests, it would be justified to force healthy women to bear children"* (I agree 19.5% / I do not agree 50.0% / I don't have an opinion 30.4%)

Boys support this statement more frequently: 24.7% M and 14.7% F agree with it, while 39.8% M and 59.6% F do not agree. There are no significant changes with age.

12. *"Women should have access to all responsible state and corporate jobs."* (I agree 67.9% / I do not agree 10.5% / I don't have an opinion 21.6%)

As expected, girls support this statement much more frequently (77.5% F, 58.2% M). Agreement with this statement increases generally among the young with age (from 58.3% to 81.2%).

13. *"The story of human rights is a novelty imported from the West."* (I agree 14.2% / I do not agree 33.7% / I don't have an opinion 52.1%)

Boys support this statement more frequently: 19.6% M and 9.1% F agree with it, while 29.4% M and 37.5% F do not. No noticeable differences emerged with age.

14. *"Members of the white race are more competent and advanced than the others."* (I agree 11.2% / I do not agree 63.8% / I don't have an opinion 25.0%)

Boys tend to support this statement more frequently: 15% M and 7.7% F agree with it and 57.9% M and 69.2% F do not. Agreement with this statement slightly decreases with age (from 14.9% to 8.9%).

15. *"Young people participating in programmes organised by non-governmental organisations may be used for espionage."* (I agree 14.5% / I do not agree 37.2% / I don't have an opinion 48.3%)

Boys display slightly higher agreement with this statement than girls (17.4% M, 11.8% F) and there are no noticeable changes concerning this statement with age.

16. *"I'd rather be friends with peers who have more money and dress better."* (I agree 4.9% / I do not agree 80.8% / I don't have an opinion 14.4%)

Girls tend to agree less with this statement (85.6% F, 75.9% M). There are no noticeable differences with age.

17. *"Listening to music in a foreign language is a sign of lacking patriotism."* (I agree 8.6% / I do not agree 70.5% / I don't have an opinion 20.8%)

Boys tend to support this statement more frequently: 12.8% M and 4.6% F agree with it, while 63.2% M and 77.6% F do not. There are no noticeable differences with age.

18. *"I wouldn't mind if children with disabilities were in my class."* (I agree 66.4% / I do not agree 14.0% / I don't have an opinion 19.6%)

Girls support this statement more frequently (71.5% F, 61.2% M) and there are no noticeable differences with age.

19. *"Straight A students are most often uninteresting people living boring lives"* (I agree 18.9% / I do not agree 63.7% / I don't have an opinion 17.5%)

Boys tend to support this statement more often: 21.9% M and 15.9% F agree with it. Agreement with this statement increases with age (from 12.5% to 20.8%)

20. *"A person who thinks differently from the majority of his peers is probably a problematic character."* (I agree 15.2% / I do not agree 60.5% / I don't have an opinion 24.3%)

Boys support this statement more frequently: 18.8% M and 11.8% F agree with it, while 51.7% M and 68.9% F do not. No significant changes occur with age.

If we show these data in the form of a ranking list of the total percentage of children and youth who support negative views on population groups, we will get the following picture (the figures in parentheses show the total percentage of negative views):

1. people of a different sexual orientation (36.0%)

2. atheists (23.0%)

3. members of other ethnicities — general (21.8%)

4. HIV positive persons (19.0%)

5. straight A students (18.9%)

6. men who are not sport club fans (15.3%)

7. people who think differently from the majority (15.2%)

8. participants in NGO programmes (14.5%)

9. persons with disabilities (14.0%)

10. compatriots of different religions (11.8%)

11. members of other races (11.2%)

12. women (10.5%)

13. people who listen to music in foreign languages (8.6%)

14. people with impaired hearing and speech (7.0%)
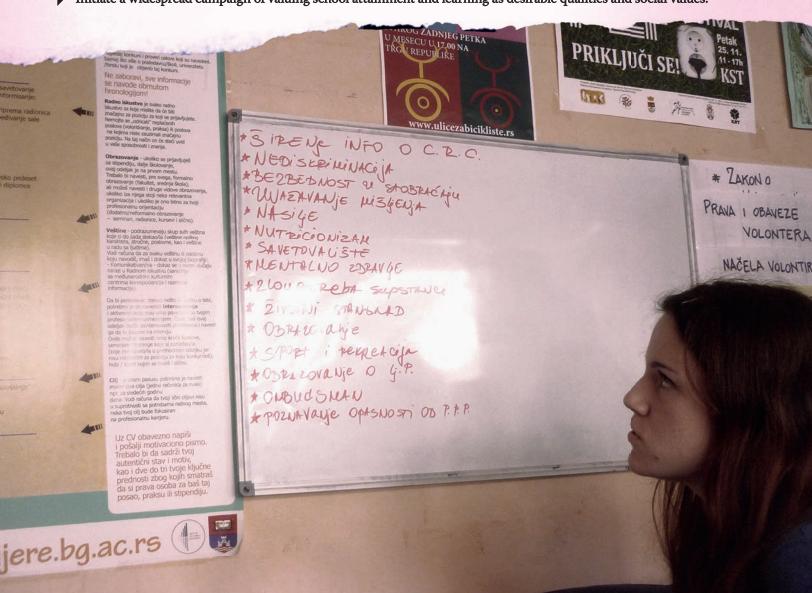
15. poverty-stricken people (4.9%)

Please note that these results were acquired without any mention of specific ethnicities.

Key results

- In relation to a similar research conducted in 2005 by the "Living Together" Children's Network, supported by the Pestalozzi Foundation from Switzerland, the number of children and youth who do not have an opinion about human rights has increased significantly (from 40 to about 50%), which suggests that the existing educational programmes focused on this subject are inefficient and insufficient. As a consequence, half of the children and youth in Serbia do not know what to think about human rights.

- In relation to the previous research conducted seven years ago, the number of children and youth supporting the notion of an ethnically clean state increased (from 22 to 26%).

- 1/5 of children and youth would force healthy women to bear children for national interests.

- 1/4 of children and youth in Serbia believe that atheists are persons without morals, unable to differentiate good and evil.

- Every ninth child believes that the white race is superior to other races.

- Less than one half of the interviewed children and youth believe that their HIV positive peers are entitled to regular education in our schools.

- 1/3 of children and youth believe that responsible state and corporate jobs should not be accessible to women.

- Many children and youth do not have a good opinion about their peers with excellent school attainment and this percentage increases with age.

- 43% of children and youth do not know what to think about their peers who attend NGO programmes (this question had the highest percentage of undecided answers after the question about human rights).

- Almost 1/2 boys are very hostile towards people of different sexual orientation, while only 1/4 show tolerance in this respect. The situation is quite the opposite with girls: 1/4 are hostile towards people of different sexual orientation and almost 1/2 of girls do not have such prejudice.

- In general, boys are significantly less tolerant than girls with regard to many issues and views, but their intolerance decreases with age.

5.1 Recommendations by Children and Youth for the Reduction of Discrimination

▶ Organise the introduction of children and youth with the basic notions in the domain of human rights through an educational programme which would relate to them in a language understandable to their generation. This should be introduced as a compulsory part of the school curricula.

▶ Create an educational TV series and publish a handbook to explain the notion of human rights to children and youth in an approachable manner.

▶ Create interesting activities and programmes with the aim of reducing intolerance towards people of different sexual orientation and atheists, particularly among younger children.

▶ Introduce more intercultural contents in schools and the media in order to enrich the knowledge about other ethnicities living in Serbia, but in an approachable, contemporary and attractive manner, not only through folklore and old customs.

▶ Organise educational programmes on gender equality, particularly in partnerships and relationships among young people.

▶ Initiate a widespread campaign of valuing school attainment and learning as desirable qualities and social values.

Implementation of the Child's Right to Protection From Peer Violence

6.1 Children's and Youth's Willingness to Report Peer Violence

In this research we wanted to know to whom the children and youth would report if they experienced physical, mental or sexual violence on the part of their peers. In this case, most of them would trust their parents (73.5% said they would report it to their parents, while 25.3% would not), the police (33.4%), form teachers (27.8%), friends and peers (27.0%), the school psychologist (19.9%), etc. A few of them would opt for reporting it to somebody else (6.6%), a few said that they would not report it to anybody (4.9%) and the smallest number of children said they would report it to the media (2.8%).

Girls would be more likely to report any violence they experienced to their parents (82.7% F, 63.6% M). Boys would be more likely than girls not to report it to anybody (8.0% M, 2.0% F). With age, the willingness of children and youth to report violence experienced by them to their form teachers is cut by half (from 39.4% to 21.8%). Their willingness to report it to parents is likewise reduced considerably (from 81.9% to 63.4%), or even threefold when school psychologists are concerned (from 35.4% to 12.9%). On the other hand, their willingness to report violence to their friends and peers is three times higher (from 14.2% to 47.5%). Another noticeable trend with age is the increased willingness to keep the violence one experienced to oneself and not mention it to anybody (from 1.6% to 7.9%).

Key results

- When deciding about where to report physical, mental or sexual violence exercised by their peers, most children and young people have the most confidence in their parents (3/4), considerably less in the police, form teachers, friends, school psychologists (about 30%), but there is a certain, albeit small, number of children and youth (about 5%) who would not report peer violence.

- Older age groups lose trust in school psychologists and form teachers and their willingness to confide in parents drops, whereas their willingness to confide in peers increases.

6.2 Children's and Youth's Proposals for Reducing Peer Violence

We also posed an open question to our peers, where they were asked to provide suggestions for the reduction of peer violence, if they had any. The largest number of children and youth (a total of 75) suggested that stricter punishments be introduced, followed by increased security — school policemen (37) — and security cameras placed everywhere (30). A slightly smaller number of children and youth (27 interviewees) suggested that more workshops be introduced focusing on this issue and that parents pay more attention to children, raise them better and "teach them how to behave" (25). Some of the interviewees see the solution in greater engagement by teachers, psychologists and pedagogues and in their conversations with violent children (20), and some see this in more lectures for students and parents (12). Some interviewees supported radical measures, such as expulsion from school (8) and physical punishment (8).

Some children and youth think that uniforms should be introduced in schools to avoid humiliation of some students (3); that those responsible should pay attention to peer violence in school (2); that teaches should pay more attention to students (2); that derision should be punished seriously (2); that violence in schools is discussed more frequently in class (2); that children's and youth's awareness of everybody being equal is raised; that the number of lessons in civic education is increased (2); that programmes are created in which children would socialise instead of fight (2); that a reform of the educational system is needed (2); raising awareness and returning to real values (2); more physical activities, etc.

Here are some other suggestions:

- more enthusiasm by teachers;
- that children do not pay attention to the attacker and ignore them;
- that everybody try to avoid conflicts and report this to adults, who would resolve this in a nice manner;
- that there is an organisation in schools where students can talk about this;
- that discrimination against the Roma is reduced;
- that several institutions and counselling centres are opened in the town;
- that a weekly class against violence is introduced in the regular school timetable and that it is attended by everybody, as well as the civic education classes;
- that there is more talk about this, so that children could gather up the courage to report violence;
- if some teachers changed their work methods or if children of other religions, other colour of the skin or other ethnicity would be accepted in the social circles (if parents would influence the children more to disregard these differences);
- mediator;
- the right to reduce violence in the family;
- this should be controlled as early as in kindergarten, because the society has a large influence later.

We see that only a small number of children offered replies focused on promoting friendship and closeness and organising joint activities. Some of the interviewees believe that peer violence could be explained by insufficient attention paid by the educational system and teachers and that a reform of the educational system and increased interest by teachers would be a huge step towards a solution. Some believe that peer violence would be prevented most efficiently by education in the form of various workshops, educational films, work groups and school programmes.

The smallest number of interviewees said that the root of the problem is within the children who engage in peer violence and that they should be separated from other children and youth who do not pose a threat. One of the proposals was that a mediator should be introduced whenever a conflict or abuse occurs. New laws were also proposed and one of the ways to avoid violence, according to some children and youth, was to avoid engaging in discussions with anybody. There were also proposals for the reduction of violence in the family. Still, the largest number of children and youth believe that only stricter punishments and enhanced supervision can influence the solution to this problem.

- When it comes to the reduction of peer violence, the largest number of children propose stricter punishments (75), followed by enhanced security through school policemen (37) and security cameras set up everywhere (30);

- A slightly smaller number of children proposed more workshops (27) and that parents should pay more attention to children, raise them better and "teach them how to behave" (25).

- Some children see the solution in greater engagement by teachers, psychologists and pedagogues and if they were to talk to violent children (20) and some see it in more lectures, for children and parents as well (12).

6.3 Participation of Children and Youth in Programmes Focused on the Reduction of Peer Violence

We asked our peers how much they knew about programmes and workshops focused on the reduction of violence, whether there were any in their schools and how interested they were in them. The results showed that more than 1/3 of children and youth were not interested in programmes implemented in their schools and focused on the reduction of peer violence (35.1%). A slightly smaller number of children participated in such programmes (28.1%), while almost every fourth child said that such programmes did not exist in their schools (23.3%). There is a number, albeit small, of children and youth who actually do not know what this exactly means (8.2%), which is not beneficial to the reduction of peer violence.

Key results

- About 1/3 of children and youth were not interested in programmes focused on the reduction of peer violence in their schools.

- Every fourth child says that there were no such programmes and there are children, albeit few (8%), who do not know what this actually means.

6.4 Children's and Youth's Views on Peer Violence

In this research we offered the interviewees some views on peer violence because we wanted to see to what extent they would agree with them. As a result, we got an equal number of children and youth who believe that it not always necessary to hit somebody back (43.3%) and those who believe that it is stupid not to strike back if they were hit first (41.6%), while 12% do not have an opinion. With age, agreement with the statement *"If somebody hits you first, it is stupid not to hit them back"* increases significantly (from 30.7% to 47.5%). Boys tend to agree more with this statement (48.2% M and 35.4% F, agree with it and 37.3% M and 49% F do not).

About 3/4 of children and youth (73.8%) believe that it is always possible to solve problems in a non-violent way, while 13.4% believe that violence is sometimes necessary. Girls tend to support the statement *"I think there is always a way to resolve a conflict in a way other than violence"* more frequently (84.5% F and 62.2% M agree with it, while 7.1% F and 20.3% M do not). Although a large number of interviewees (27.5%) do not have an opinion about this, most of the children and youth believe that the state cannot offer them physical protection and that they have to take care of themselves (a total of 45.2%). Each fourth interviewee (23.7%) does not agree with this statement. It is interesting to note that agreement with the statement *"Young people need to protect themselves because the state is incapable of protecting them"* doubles with age (an increase from 32.2% to 59.4%). 15.8% of children and youth agree with the statement *"If we are taught in school to avoid violence, we'll become a nation of sissies"*, 57.3% do not agree, while 22.8% do not have an opinion. Agreement with this statement increases significantly with age (from 7.9% to 19.8%). Boys support this statement more frequently (20.9% M and 10.8% F agree with it, while 52.9% M and 61.4 do not).

22.3% of children and youth believe that the way to respond to a personal insult is to use physical force, 17.2% do not have an opinion and 57.0% do not agree with this. Boys agree more frequently with the statement *"It is justified to hit somebody if they insulted you"* (28.2% M and 16.5% F agree with it, while 49.4% M and 64.4% F do not). Agreement slightly increases with age (from 15.7% to 21.8%).

Some of the children and youth in Serbia (42.9%) believe that sexual abuse is not talked about sufficiently and that more importance should be attached to this issue. 26.6% do not have an opinion and 26.9% believe that this issue has already been discussed too frequently and that girls are making it an issue without real reasons. Gender differences are very noticeable here: boys agree far more frequently with the statement offered that *"Girls make too much fuss about sexual harassment"* (38.9% M and 15.4% F agree, while 31.2% M and 54% F do not agree).

According to the results acquired, about 85.1% of children and youth who attended non-violence programmes support peaceful conflict resolution, as opposed to 67.3% of those who were not interested in such programmes and 53.5% of those who were not informed about this. Likewise, while 18.9% of those who attended non-violence programmes agree that it is justified to hit somebody who has insulted you, a much larger percentage (27.9%) of children who are not interested in such programmes agree with this. Furthermore, it should be noted that while 11.3% of participants in non-violence programmes would be willing to hit somebody who has irritated them, twice as many (22.2%) of those who are not interested in such programmes and (19.6%) of those who are not informed about them would do the same. This could suggest that programmes focused on non-violence achieve the desired effects to a certain degree after all, or that children who attend them are initially interested in non-violent approaches.

Key results

- Over 40% of children and youth believe it is stupid not to hit somebody back if they hit you first.

- About 3/4 of children and youth believe in non-violent conflict resolution, while 15% believe that violence is necessary after all.

- Almost half of the children and youth believe that the state cannot protect them and that they should take care of their own protection. The percentage of children and youth who do not believe in state protection increases from about 30% to almost 60% among secondary school students.

- While almost 60% of children and youth do not believe there would be harmful consequences if schools taught non-violence, 15% of them believe that this would lead us to becoming "a nation of sissies".

- Over 20% of children and youth believe it is justified to hit somebody who has insulted them.

- Boys are generally more prone to aggressive and belligerent reactions.

- 1/4 of children and youth believe that girls "make too much fuss" about sexual violence and boys tend to agree with this much more than girls.

6.5 Recommendations by Children and Youth for the Reduction of Peer Violence

- Introduce parents with this report in order that they become aware that it is them whom children trust the most; educate them so that they would know how to contribute to the reduction of peer violence (where to report violence and how to act when they find out about it).

- Organise various programmes, training and activities focused on raising awareness among children and youth of the importance of reporting peer violence in school and elsewhere; introduce the reduction of peer violence as a compulsory theme to be discussed in regular classes.

- Introduce special education on sexual violence.

- Create interesting programmes (plays, short films, events), which can also be created by students and later presented to their peers in schools.

- Introduce compulsory education on peer violence for all staff in schools.

- Make the reporting of peer violence easy and accessible in and outside schools.

- Establish school clubs for combating violence, to be led by students, with support by professional services.

- Introduce rewards for "good" behaviour and punishments for peer violence at school level.

- Enhance security measures in schools (increase the number of school policemen and cameras).

- Adopt stricter laws against peer violence.

- Introduce systemic solutions (strategy for combating peer violence, etc.) which would be actually implemented in practice in order to regain children's and youth's trust in the care and protection by the state.

- Strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation (school, police, municipality, social services).

- Strengthen cooperation between schools and NGOs focusing on this issue, which could offer interesting programmes, experience and knowledge in this field.

- Improve the media coverage of combating violence among children and youth.

Implementation of the Child's Right to Participation

Of all the child rights we dealt with in this research, the right to participation was of particular interest and significance. Apparently, various possibilities for participation in decision making at various levels have emerged lately in our country, so we wanted to know what this actually looks like in practice. For this reason, our questionnaire contained questions about the participation of children and youth in the family, school, peer groups, places of residence and also in decisions pertaining to state and world problems.

7.1 Importance Attached to Participation at Various Levels by Children and Youth

Our results show that our peers find it most important that their opinions are taken into account in the family (75.7%) and peer groups (62.3%), followed by the school (21.6%), place of residence (18.3%) and, finally, in the state (13.3%) and the world (9.9%). To an extent, this was to be expected because at this age, children's awareness of being able to do something in a wider context has not yet fully developed. A surprising and disturbing fact, however, is that a large majority of children and youth, as many as 4/5 of them, said that they did not find it particularly important that their opinions are heard in school — an institution where they spend a large portion of time and where it is very important that their right to participation is implemented. This research showed that members of student parliaments are twice more interested in participation in schools than other students. Still, even among them, the percentage of those interested in participation in school is low (36.7%) — in other words, about 2/3 of student parliament members are not essentially interested in this role.

Participation in decision making in the family is much more important for girls (82.8% F, 68.2% M) and so is decision making in peer groups (66.1% F, 58.6% M). On the other hand, decision making in a state is more important for boys (17.1% M, 9.8% F). The importance of participation in decision making in the family increases significantly with age (from 65.4% to 83.2%) and so does the importance of decision making in a peer group (from 50.4% to 83.2%).

Key results

- Children and youth find it most important that their opinion is taken into account in the family (for 3/4 of children) and in peer groups (for almost 2/3 of them).

- Children and youth find it the least important that their opinion is taken into account in their place of residence (18%), country (13%) and the world (10%).

- Only 1/5 of children and youth find that participation in schools is important.

- A point of concern is that there is insufficient interest in participation in schools even among members of student parliaments, of whom almost 2/3 are not interested and thus the reasons and motives for their membership in the parliament is seriously questioned.

7.2 Participation of Children and Youth at Various Levels

More than half of the children and youth said that when decisions are made in their families, they are always asked about their opinions (54.1%); 29.5% say that their parents/carers consult with them often, 9.7% rarely and 3% never, which is a rather encouraging fact. Moreover, the participation of children and youth in their families increases considerably with age, where the total percentage of those who participate in family decision making always or often increases from 72.4 to 90.1%. The situation in schools is quite the opposite, unfortunately. The results show that children are not sufficiently involved in decision making in schools. The smallest number of children said that they are always asked for opinions (10.8%); 23.6% say this happens often, while 40.2% say that this happens rarely and 20.8% — never. It is obvious that this is a serious problem that needs to be addressed.

Two thirds of children and youth (67.9%) said that nobody had ever asked them about issues of importance for living in their towns and municipalities. About one fourth of them (25.6%) participated in a survey on the problems of children and youth in the town, 3.1% participated in public debates on the issues of children and youth, only 2.8% attended meetings with municipal representatives and only 0.7% replied that they had participated in some other way. The exclusion of children and youth from decision making in the municipality decreases with age, the number of those who never participated in any form decreasing from 75.6% to 58.4%. Given that the most frequent form of participation are surveys and questionnaires, participation in municipal surveys increases significantly, from 11% to 39.6%.

7.3 The Work of Student Parliaments

In reply to the question about how much they knew about the work of student parliaments in their schools, around one third of children and youth said that they were insufficiently informed about the work of parliaments, but that they knew that they existed (36.3%). One fourth of the interviewed students said that they knew absolutely nothing about this (26.1%). Also, one fourth of interviewees, members of the parliament or not, said that they were well or very well informed about the work of the parliament (a total of 27.4% of the interviewed children and youth). A small number of children and youth said that student parliaments existed "only on paper" (4.6%) or that they did not exist at all (2.7%).

7.4 Recommendations by Children and Youth for the Promotion of Participation

- Education of children from an early age (kindergarten) on their rights, but also on how to exercise them and how to express their opinions.

- Education of parents, school staff and general public on the importance of the child's right to participation, campaigns raising awareness on the importance of this right (the media, street events, promotional materials, brochures).

- Monitoring authorities' openness to participation of children and youth.

- Establishing bodies similar to student parliaments in schools and bodies like "Children's Councils" which would participate in decision making in towns.

- Organising "open lessons" or "student lessons" dedicated to student issues and opinions.

- Setting up boxes for students' suggestions and questions in schools.

- Reform of the educational system to, inter alia, equip children with knowledge and skills empowering them for participation.

- Inviting children and youth to roundtables, meetings, discussions with them or at least asking about their opinions through questionnaires and surveys.

- Creating a website or a Facebook group for children's issues, opinions and suggestions at town level.

- Introducing a requirement that a specific number of form teacher classes be dedicated to this theme, whereby this would not be the end of the participation issue, but that participation is actually implemented.

- Active monitoring of the implementation of the Law on Foundations of the Educational System; student parliament is the only body at school level enabling participation of children and it is therefore unacceptable if it is non-existent or if it exists only technically.

- Introducing rules on the transparency of parliaments' work (class representatives should inform their classes about the activities of the parliament).

- Networking of parliaments from different schools to enable cooperation, joint activities and exchange of experiences.

- Informing teachers that membership in parliaments should be voluntary and independent from the students' school performance.

- Creating an encouraging and welcoming environment in schools, which would enable children to exercise their right to participation through student parliaments.

Conclusion

8

From the numerous results presented in this report, we would particularly like to single out and emphasise the following conclusions:

- The foods most often consumed by children and youth are fruit, vegetables and dairy products. Sweets, carbonated soft drinks and fast food are consumed more often than fish.
- Children and youth inform themselves about important health issues primarily from parents, then at school and, thirdly, on the Internet. With age, the Internet replaces parents as the primary source of information about health.
- About 1/4 of children and youth do not know anything or know very little about the preservation of reproductive and mental health.
- Almost a half of minors know where they can buy alcohol without being asked about their age.
- At the age from 12 to 18, about one half or slightly more than a half of children are satisfied with the educational system (between 45 and 60% concerning most questions), but this percentage drops noticeably as the interviewees get older, more informed and more aware of their needs. This is the most obvious in their satisfaction with the quality of school textbooks, which drops from 2/3 in elementary schools to less than 1/3 in secondary schools.
- About 40% of parents/carers punish their children by grounding them and about 30% by hitting them.
- 1/3 of the interviewed children and youth have experienced a form of violence or abuse in a relationship.
- More than a half of children and youth do not feel safe at school. Most of the money snatching incidents and physical violence experienced outside home occur in school.
- 1/2 of the interviewed children and youth have had unpleasant experiences and harassment on the telephone and 1/3 of them experienced this on the Internet.
- More than a half of children and youth have had an experience of someone deliberately damaging their belongings and property.
- 2/5 of children and youth were hit in a public place (outside home).
- 1/5 of children and youth were victims of money snatching.
- Every ninth boy was a victim of an assault with a weapon.
- In the event of a conflict, 1/5 of children and youth are willing to physically harm the other person by him/herself or with the assistance of others.
- Over 40% of children and youth believe it is stupid not to hit back the person who hit them first.
- About 3/4 of children and youth believe in non-violent resolutions, but 15% still believe that violence is necessary.
- Almost a half of children and youth believe that the state cannot protect them and that they should take care of their own protection. The percentage of children and youth not trusting the protection of the state increases from about 30% among elementary school students to almost 60% of secondary school students.
- About 1/3 of children and youth were not interested in programmes focused on reducing peer violence implemented in their schools.

- 1/4 of children and youth believe that girls "make too much fuss" about sexual harassment, and boys tend to agree with this far more than girls.

- 1/2 of children and youth do not have any opinion about human rights.

- 1/4 of children and youth support an ethnically clean state.

- 1/5 of children and youth would approve of forcing healthy women to bear children for national interests.

- 1/4 of children and youth in Serbia believe that atheists are persons without morals, who are unable to tell the difference between good and evil.

- Less than a half of the interviewed children believe that their HIV positive peers are entitled to regular education in our schools.

- 1/3 of children and youth do not believe that responsible state and corporate jobs should be accessible to women.

- Almost one half of boys are very hostile towards people of different sexual orientation and only 1/4 exhibit tolerance in this issue. With girls, the situation is quite the opposite: 1/4 are hostile towards persons of different sexual orientation and almost 1/2 of girls have no such prejudice.

- Boys are generally significantly less tolerant than girls with regard to many issues, but this intolerance decreases with age.

- Children and youth find it most important that their opinions are taken into account in the family (this is important for 3/4 of children) and peer groups (important for almost 2/3).

- Participation in decision making in schools is considered important by only 1/5 of children and youth and only 1/3 of student parliament members.

- More than 4/5 of children and youth say that they are asked either always or often about their opinions in decision making in their family.

- Almost 2/3 of children and youth say that in schools they are asked about their opinions very rarely or never.

- 2/3 of children and youth said that nobody had ever asked them about their opinions relevant for living in their towns and municipalities.

- 1/4 of children and youth say that they are thoroughly familiar with the work of the student parliament in their school. The same number of children and youth, 1/4, say they do not know anything about the work of their student parliaments.

When we compare these results with the research carried out earlier by members of the same children and youth groups, we would like to single out the following trends in relation to the previous report by children and youth to the Committee on the Rights of the Child:

▸ The situation regarding children's and youth's relation towards human rights has deteriorated because this notion has now become even less close and familiar to them than five years ago.

▸ Children's and youth's support for the notion of an ethnically clean state has increased.

▸ Children's and youth's intolerance and willingness to use violence against people of different sexual orientations have increased.

▸ Boys are still rather willing to support violence.

▸ Participation in schools is still insufficient and students' interest in taking part in decision making is still alarmingly low.

Finally, we would like to mention that in the spring of 2012 we took part in a consultation process about the Draft Law on Child Rights through focus groups organised among our peers. We organised 30 focus groups, which included 779 children. Some of the comments given in these focus groups also had an impact on this report, one of which being when our attention was drawn to the threatened freedom of thought of children atheists in schools, which later prompted us to look into this problem through our questionnaire. Some other comments and suggestions which emerged in these focus groups are consistent with some results of this research:

▸ Children and youth in focus groups asked for the enhancement of the network of health counselling centres, as well as their visibility.

▸ One of the unanimous conclusions was the request for a consistent implementation of banning minors from betting offices, which is currently not carried out in practice. In addition to stricter legal regulations about children's access to betting offices, also proposed were heightened control and the introduction of stricter penalties for violators.

▸ As in this report, the activities in focus groups also proved that children and youth have different viewpoints on the use of physical punishment. A large number of participants in focus groups said that they approved of certain mild forms of disciplining by inflicting pain. However, they are always in favour of talking to the children rather than using other disciplinary methods, but there are differences about their perceived efficiency.

▸ In the focus groups on the Draft Law on Child Rights, children and youth stated that their opinions were not taken into consideration sufficiently outside their families and peer groups and they would like to have the opportunity to give their opinions about important themes and issues. They proposed surveys and focus groups as the most important forms of expressing their views and commended the efforts of the authors of the Draft Law on Child Rights to ask about the opinions of those for whom the Draft Law is primarily intended and emphasised this as a very good model, which they would like to see implemented more frequently in the future.

Notes