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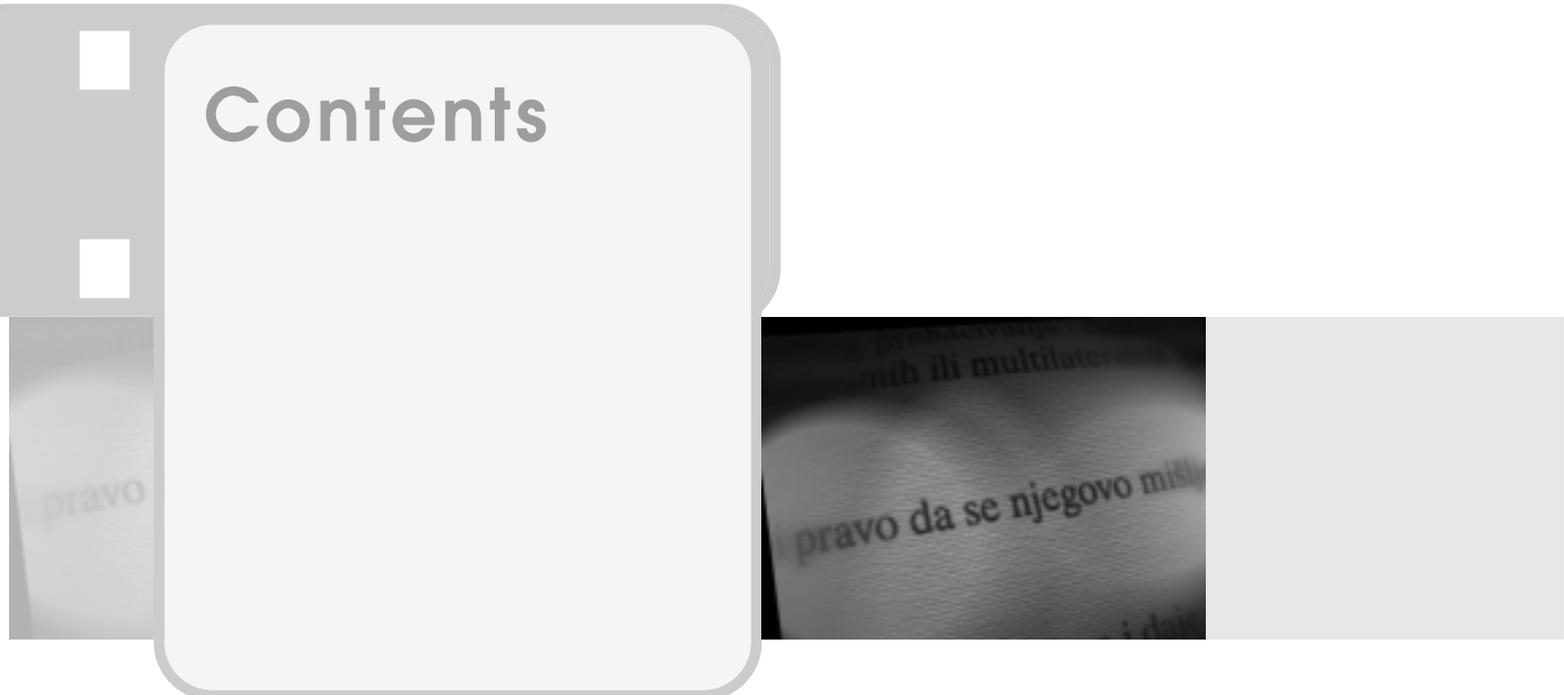
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Children of Today for  
Children of Tomorrow



# An Agenda for the Future

A Serious Talk about  
Serious Things



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## Foreword

The creation, implementation and promotion of child rights policy is a serious and responsible task. In the mind of the average adult, the words "serious" and "responsible" almost automatically awaken the image of a group of stern-looking experts and politicians with briefcases, who sit around offices heaped with documents, making momentous decisions. Whatever precedes these decisions, or follows, is most often seen through the hazy lense of a mystifying hierarchy of power.

We are not concerned, now, with how adults share this power. We leave that to their mechanisms, criteria and reasons. Here, we propose arguments to penetrate a different barrier that almost no one has ever questioned. How absurd - trying to break through a barrier that no one disputes? No! We are drawing attention to the adult-child barrier that has always been regarded as inviolable and marked "Not for discussion", and as such was treated as axiomatic.

Why is the position of the adult equated with the position of power? It is because the position of the adult tacitly implies the right to observe, analyse, draw conclusions, decide and act. Adults build their power on the attributes of formal power (the right to vote, the obligation to act) and the postulates of power (experience, knowledge, capability, capacity).

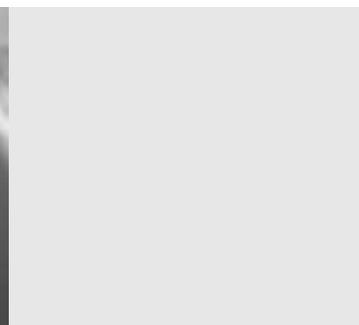
When adults do something in the name of children and for children, one cannot but believe that they do it with the best of intentions. However, is the experience of childhood, as adults remember it, a sufficient reason to give them the right to claim that their perception, or understanding, of the child and its needs is the right one? How can they be sure that what they are doing is in the best interests of the child? Are they justified in believing that they and they alone are responsible for important decisions? Is it true that children are incapable of having any part in this?

What you are about to read points to the fact that major responsibility does lie with adults. But, it also reminds us that children also carry part of this responsibility, too. We would also like to present evidence that the competence of children cannot be denied, that it should not be ignored, nor should it be misused.

Signed by:

746 children, who took part in the survey,  
34 associates, who worked on the survey,  
41 schools, institutions and organisations that supported the survey,  
UNICEF and the Yugoslav Child Rights Centre.

# Introduction



This publication is the result of the joint project, "Children of Today for Children of Tomorrow", launched by UNICEF and the Yugoslav Child Rights Centre, within the framework of the activities of the Global Movement for Children and preparations for the UN General Assembly's Special Session on Children, in September 2001.

The FR Yugoslavia has joined in the preparations for this important, historical, world gathering, whose goals and messages open the door to the third millennium in the best possible way. A particularly significant aspect is the cooperation of the state and the civil sector and all those processes leading up to it. The government of the FR Yugoslavia has prepared a National Report on the Follow-Up to the World Summit for Children. Our report is a contribution by the local non-governmental sector in partnership with UNICEF, enabling a significant number of children, in a sincere and fundamental way, to express their views and play their part in it. Both reports will represent the FR Yugoslavia at the Special Session, as will the two - governmental and non-governmental - delegations.

A group of young people, who are active in local organisations, are involved in the process of national and regional consultations, thanks to the support of the British "Save the Children UK" organisation. The elected delegates from these groups will also take part in the Special Session.

Our desire is for the recommendations of children, featured in this report, to help in the formulation of global messages, and mechanisms to accomplish them.

As organisations, whose goals and activities promote the Convention on the Rights of the Child and thereby the right of the child to participate in decisions that concern him/her, UNICEF and the Yugoslav Child Rights Centre will continue to build their programme policy

on foundations that respect the needs, views and suggestions of children.

Apart from that, our intention is to encourage the FR Yugoslavia and its government, and all those who are responsible for the creation of child rights policy to do the same, and create a world WITH children, not only FOR children.

### Basic principles

The right of the child to freely express its opinion and for its opinion to be taken into consideration in all cases and action that concern it, undoubtedly, is a revolutionary achievement in the domain of the international legal protection of the child.

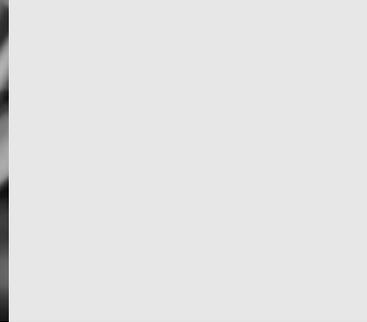
This right has its own psychological, pedagogical and sociological consequences and values. To grow up in an environment that respects the views of children and encourages their initiatives, certainly strengthens their individuality and stimulates their healthy social and emotional development. Through communication and cooperation that respect the integrity and right of the child, it learns that its rights are not unlimited, and that those same rights also belong to others. By taking part in making decisions, the child attains a better comprehension of their reasons and consequences and it also accepts their implementation more easily (regardless of whether they are restrictive or not).

The right to freely express an opinion and for due weight to be given to this opinion extends over a vast range of areas and situations in education, health, administrative procedure, leisure, family life, the social environment, etc. The degree and quality of child participation depends on the nature of the decision itself, the context in which it is made, the maturity of the child, as well as the rights and interests of the other parties who are involved. Often, the measure in which the opinion of the child is built into a decision is less important than the process in which the child becomes accustomed to being heard and having its words considered, or the child hears out and pays heed to the words of another person.

To create a world WITH children is an imperative that proceeds not only from logical or ethical, but also from legal, psychological, pedagogical and sociological premises. We have no justification at all in creating programmes for children without paying attention to their true needs and views. The MANNER in which adults do this, especially those who are responsible for creating child rights policy at all levels, must rely on ethics and professional principles. The dividing line between authentic and decorative respect for the opinions of the child and its involvement in all important activities and processes is a very fine one. And, from decoration to manipulation, the path is even shorter.



# About this Survey



The title of the research project - Children of Today for Children of Tomorrow - illustrates its long-term objectives. In order to contribute to the advancement of child rights policy, we asked the children themselves - adolescents - those to whom all the concrete measures refer:

- how they view the current situation in child rights, and afterwards
- what they perceive as priorities to focus on and what they recommend in that sense to the people who are responsible for this domain.

The topic of our interest<sup>1</sup> referred to some crucial contents that should feature in the daily experience of every child, that serve the purpose of its normal survival and development: education, health, leisure, protection from violence and neglect, protection from drug abuse, non-discrimination and the expression of his/her opinion (general population).

In addition, we were interested in the views of children from particularly vulnerable groups, such as: children without parental care (in institutions and foster families), children in conflict with the law (in institutions and families), children with disabilities (mental, physical and sensory disorders in institutions and families), refugee and displaced children (in private accommodation or collective centres), and children that belong to national minorities or ethnic groups.

In the formation of samples, we also paid attention to even regional distribution.

The survey encompassed 746 children aged 14 - 18 years, from the territory of Serbia and Montenegro, more precisely, from Kikinda, Novi Sad, Sremski Karlovci, Sremska Kamenica, Veternik, Novi Banovci, Bela Crkva, Belgrade, Loznica, Milosevac, Kraljevo, Krusevac, Nis, Podgorica, Budva and Kotor.

<sup>1</sup> A project team consisting of four consultants, two young people and a co-ordinator conducted the survey.

The research method was based on:

- a questionnaire requiring an assessment of the situation regarding child rights, and
- creative workshops for defining priorities and recommendations.

The Convention on the Right of the Child served as the conceptual framework, which helped when it came to comparing the results, given the broad range of themes/domains that were involved, and the complexity of the sample.

All the questionnaires, requiring the assessment of the situation regarding child rights, had a common foundation, defined through the domain of research, that is, the rights in the Convention. The contents and the number of individual questions in each domain were adjusted to the specific features of each subgroup in the sample. The questionnaires for children from particularly vulnerable groups included additional questions that were connected with their specific needs.

A separate block of workshops was created with a uniform methodological approach to enable free and authentic expression without any limitations or guidelines regarding the contents, in order to encourage the definition of priorities and recommendations.

Research workers<sup>2</sup> with experience in the use of workshop techniques and in working directly with children conducted the survey with the children. All the researchers had been trained in the use of the research methods and throughout their work they had the professional support of consultants. In addition, they took part in an evaluation meeting to examine the preliminary results of the survey.

A large number of schools, institutions of social care as well as non-governmental organisations (a total of 41) directly supported and co-operated in the survey.

<sup>2</sup> 34 research workers: psychologists, social workers, pedagogues, and teachers for children with special needs.

### Impressions and observations about the work with the children

All the children who took part in the research were informed in detail about the aims of the project and about their role in the whole process. They were given basic information about the World Summit in 1990, the aims of this year's Special Session, the Global Movement for Children and about preparations on the national level. It was impressed upon the children that their position in our endeavor to make it possible for their opinions to be heard and respected was based on Article 12 of the Convention on the Right of the Child.

This research context, in which the children played their part by contributing their views for the improvement of a situation whose benefits would be felt by future generations of children, awakened a series of different reactions.

The first reaction, essentially, was one of fascination with the very possibility, let alone being given the opportunity, of saying what they thought ("No one ever asked us anything like this!"). Later on, they expressed disbelief and even mistrust ("Oh, they're just taking us for a walk," "This is just another joke."). Suspicious, yet, at the same time, intrigued, they gradually familiarised themselves with the work, cautiously, at first, and then more and more openly and authentically. As problems, ideas and suggestions came to life in their group discussions, the belief strengthened that they were doing something meaningful that could bring about change.

The role they were being entrusted with in building a world for new generations also prompted the need to experience something in this domain, at once.

A brief presentation of the children's spontaneous reactions, in themselves, tell us a great deal:

- fascination with the possibility of being able to say what they want - is the reflection of living in a world in which they were never accepted as being true partners;
- mistrust and disbelief - is the result of experience in communicating with adults who

do not always keep their word, who are often inconsistent and do not inspire much confidence;

- enthusiasm and sincere espousal - is the immediate response to the realisation of one's own capabilities in relation to the adult who accepts this as valid and credible.

Looking back at the children's reactions, which were a very clear and striking signal, we can also accept one of the assessments uttered at the project team's evaluation meeting, as the conclusion to this chapter: "We have no more credit, lying to them".

### About the results and the manner of their presentation

The research results were presented in two blocks: the assessment of the state of child rights (The country in which we live - the FR Yugoslavia, 2001) and recommendations and priorities (What next and how?).

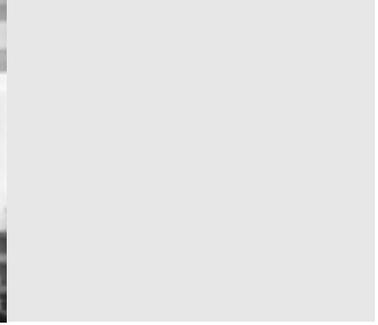
Given the wealth of information we collected in our work with the children, we decided to place emphasis on the most striking data, on those issues, which the children judged to be the problem. The reason for this was twofold. On the one hand, the quantity of the data called for a rational approach in order to produce a text that would not tire the reader with unnecessary facts. On the other hand, the focus on a vision for the future in the light of the need for improvement should, logically, rely on surmounting the chief difficulties.

All of the assessments given by the children reflect the views of the vast majority of the respondents. Only some statements were substantiated with numerical indices and this occurred in cases when it was estimated that the percentages themselves were the cause for alarm, or, a specific situation in the children's priorities was important.

We see this publication as a kind of 'beginner's handbook' for policy-makers, as a guide through the real world of children and young people and their capacity for partnership with adults.

These findings are not comprehensive enough from the aspect of the complexity of every individual domain. It would be unrealistic and unprofessional to expect this research to give the answers to all possible questions. Similarly, the whole idea would become a contradiction in terms if we expected children to know the answers to all the questions. Like adults, they, too, have their limitations. Therefore, this is a matter of mature and responsible reflection, permanent dialogue, analysis, comparison and planning.

# Results of the Research



### The country we live in: the FR Yugoslavia, 2001

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is situated in the southern part of Central Europe (the central northern part of the Balkan Peninsula) and it extends over 102,173 square kilometres. It is constituted as a federal state, made up of the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Montenegro. Within the Republic of Serbia are also two provinces: Vojvodina and Kosovo (which was placed under temporary UN administration in June 1999, according to Security Council Resolution 1244).

Today, the FR Yugoslavia has a population of approximately 10.5 million inhabitants of whom 18% (around 1.9 million) are children below the age of 18 years.

It is estimated that the number of children without parental care ranges from 5,000 to 9,000, depending on the source of information. According to the records of centres for social work, there are about 10,000 children with disabilities, who are listed as beneficiaries<sup>1</sup> of social protection. However, the real number of these children is estimated to be far greater. There is no precise data on children and young people in conflict with the law. According to the latest figures in institutions for the education of children and youth (including correctional institutions) there are about 400 juvenile delinquents, while the juvenile prison has about 40 inmates<sup>2</sup>. Annually, the City of Belgrade, alone, registers 4,000 juvenile delinquents for whom a court has pronounced measures of social protection, which accounts for a quarter of the total figure in the country. According to the 1996 census, there were over 160,000 child refugees, while another 82,000 internally displaced children were registered in the year 2000. As we write this text, the data from the

<sup>1</sup> This number does not include children with learning difficulties because they are not encompassed by this measure.

<sup>2</sup> "The Situation Of Children In Institutions Of Social Care In Serbia" Yugoslav Child Rights Centre, 2001.

latest count of refugees and displaced persons, conducted in March and April, is still unavailable.

Ten years of regional wars, international sanctions and isolation, as well as the NATO military intervention in 1999, have left a deep mark on many aspects of life in this country, the consequences of which will be felt for a long time to come. The systematic erosion of social systems such as health, education and social welfare began in the years when the priorities of the already impoverished state budget were only the army, the police and the state administration. From a society that once had a high standard of services in the domain of social care for children, we became a country whose children are in the highest risk category in Europe (UNICEF, "State of the Nation", 1999). For many children, poverty, war, violence, crime, refugee life, discrimination and insecurity are the only realities of childhood. The lasting crisis in society has had a severe impact on all the important functions of the family that is torn between the battle for survival and the complex needs of its children.

In short, we can describe the last ten years as a political, economic and social context that is by no means conducive to the development and implementation of the concept of child rights.

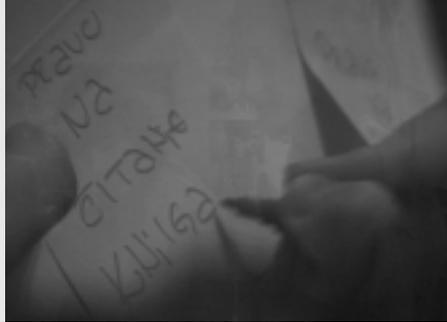
We started out in the year 2001 with far greater optimism and hope that we would be more successful in creating a better world for all the children in this country.



Map No. 5011 Rev. 1 000000 1:500,000  
March 1997 (Gobour)

Department of Public Information  
Cartographic Section

# Children's Views



# Assessment of the Situation



"Ladies and gentlemen, we  
now open the discussion!"

## Poverty



"It's not easy, but we manage somehow."

The way in which the interviewed children experience and describe the material conditions in which they live can primarily be assessed as the result of many years of progressive impoverishment and the gradual adjustment to poverty.

The strategy of survival, demonstrated in being prepared to sacrifice and put off certain things, in being modest in their expectations and reconciling themselves, in a manner of speaking, to the utmost hardship, is almost normal in the behaviour of children.

On the one hand, the readiness of parents to give precedence to the needs of their children over other needs, can partly explain why children in families (regardless of whether this applies to the general population or to particularly vulnerable groups) suffer less because of the consequences of impoverishment than children in institutions of social care and in collective shelters for refugees and displaced persons.

Nevertheless, what does "not having" mean, in concrete terms? What are the most striking findings and responses?

- A third of the interviewed children in families considered that they do not have enough clothing, footwear or hygiene items, and that their diet is unvaried;
- the percentage of children in institutions of social care, who complain about the lack of food, clothing and hygiene items, ranges from 40% to all of 80% (depending on the individual institution);

"If I were invisible, I'd go to the home's store house and take everything I need."

- likewise, where a significant proportion of refugee and displaced children in collective shelters are concerned, it is devastating that to the question - "What do you need the most?" - the response is a spontaneous enumeration of basic foodstuffs.

"More food ... but fresh!"

Not only do children and young people consider that the lack of money limits the opportunities for leisure, they also recognise poverty as one of the sources of discrimination.

- A third of the respondents believe that the material hardship of the family also limits the opportunities for education (the choice of school, the purchase of schoolbooks, school fares);
- a quarter of them believes that the material status of parents is the reason for the discriminatory behaviour of teachers towards pupils.

"Some want a leather football, some don't even have a rubber one!"

## Education



"I think that more should be invested in schools and university faculties, because a successful state is created by educated and wise people!"

School and education awakened a great deal of interest among the participants in the survey.

These findings reflect the critical thinking of pupils and is one of the explanations for the frequent observations referring to the declining level of success in school, the increasing absences from school and the general decline in motivation for learning and going to school.

The responses of the pupils indicate that from their point of view there are four groups of basic problems:

- the quality and contents of the teaching plans and educational programmes (including the method itself), and the technical equipment of the schools;
- poorly organised extra-curricular activities;
- insufficient respect for equal opportunity in education;
- the inability of pupils to participate in the educational system.

"Children should be allowed to realise that school exists for their benefit, not for their lives to become a nightmare!"

In more concrete terms, here is what it looks like:

- about a third of the respondents see their school as derelict and "lifeless". Teaching aids and other equipment in the classrooms, and particularly cabinets for holding practical and specialised lessons are not up to the required standards of technical equipment;
- 80% of the respondents said that they were mainly bored in school because:
  - the syllabus is too large and cluttered with unnecessary details (95%);
  - lessons in the majority of subjects are presented in a stereotype, uninteresting and out-dated manner (89%);
  - teaching is primarily based on the acquisition of theoretical knowledge to serve the purpose of continuing one's education in schools of higher learning (49%) rather than on acquiring practical skills and knowledge (61%);
- the existing extra-curricular activities do not suit the wishes or interests of the pupils, which can be seen in the fact that:
  - 89% of the respondents are not members of any school clubs, and
  - 34% of the respondents are interested in enrolling in particular school clubs but they do not exist in the school;
- teachers make unjustified distinctions among the pupils (90%), which can be seen not only in their behaviour but also when they give marks. Along with the already mentioned assessment, social status has an influence on the teacher's behaviour towards pupils. As the basis for awarding marks, demonstrated knowledge gives way to:
  - personal acquaintance (44%) and
  - psycho-physical characteristics (12%).

"What has it got to do with me if their wages are small, when they can't be bothered with my problem?"

In the opinion of pupils in our schools, the conditions for participation do not exist.

## Health care



"A health worker who works with children should: like children, understand a child's point of view, inspire confidence, spread optimism, do his/her job professionally, be unbiased regarding children, wear a colourful coat."

On the whole, the children's assessment of the situation in the domain of health care is the most striking in the area of services and prevention - in being informed. Meanwhile, this is the segment of health care that official statistics deal with the least often and yet, only together can they constitute an integral unit.

We begin our presentation of the results with the interviewed children and young people's assessment (76% of the respondents), which we can briefly formulate as being that society does not provide enough care for the health of children and young people in our country.

"The majority of people who hold managerial positions are preoccupied with their own personal interests and how to fill their own pockets."

Particularly conspicuous is the assessment given by children with sensory disabilities, who are permanently or temporarily placed in institutions. A third of the children with visual impairment, or two thirds of children, who are with impaired hearing, complain about the extent to which they realise their rights to health care.

"Not all children are equally healthy nor are they equally sensitive to illness or to a doctor."

The experience of children and young people in school dispensaries are confined to the following assessments:

- "School doctors are superficial in their work, they try to examine a patient as fast as they can," say 66% of the interviewed children, additionally illustrating this with the assessment that doctors do not pay enough attention to explaining the nature of illnesses and ways to prevent them (75%);

"The school doctor's job is to write out medical certificates to justify absences from school."

- not enough regard is paid to the right to privacy, which is especially evident during systematic medical check-ups. 46% of the respondents have experienced a situation in which the results of medical tests were collectively announced.

"A doctor should see the child in front of him before he sees the patient in the child."

The children assess the hygiene conditions in which health services are administered, in the following way:

- a third of the respondents say the surgeries are often dirty, and
- half of them say the toilets are completely unhygienic.

The majority of children and young children believe that in our country, the level of general hygiene and health culture is very low. They think this is due to the neglect of preventive measures, or being insufficiently informed.

Three quarters of the respondents in this survey consider that neither schools nor the media provide enough information about health care.

## Leisure, play and recreation



"No place to go out - why doesn't the school do something about helping us to use our spare time?"

It seems as though the children and young people who took part in this survey do not identify the notion of leisure in the same way. For this reason, the collected data requires additional interpretation.

72% of the respondents, in the part of the sample one could refer to as the general population, use their leisure, defined as the possibility to do things that are not directly connected with school work, in the following way:

- cinema - 44%, • parties with friends - 43%, • sports (actively) - 42%,
- sports (passively) - 36%, • church - 32%, • discos and cafes - 32%.

A fact one should not overlook is that 22% of the respondents have not once been to a library in the last two years, as well as that 45 to 81% are not interested in art or cultural events (the percentage varies depending on the type of event).

"They only show repeats, repeats... and have 24-hour live coverage from parliament!"

When we observe the quality and the way in which the children from especially vulnerable, i.e. deprived groups, spend their leisure, social, cultural and economic barriers become even more obvious.

Some of them do not even have a clearly defined notion of leisure:

- Roma children often see their leisure as activities through which they contribute to the family budget (collecting cardboard, working at waste dumps). This group also has the lowest degree of structuring and content in the organisation of their leisure;
- refugee and displaced children also often place their household duties in the category of leisure.

The lack of money is a particularly limiting factor in the selection of activities for refugee and displaced children, but also for children in institutions of social care. Institutionalised children are also partly constrained by strict rules, i.e. house regulations that define leisure as "time without duties". However, it is not unusual for the children to be required to engage in group activities in which the adults do not take part, but use this time to have a rest.

"We want to stay out longer, to be the same as other children."

However, it seems that children with disabilities, both at home and in institutions, have more limitations in organising and spending their leisure:

- slightly less than 50% of children with impaired hearing are unable to do what they like in their leisure and for this depend on the will of adults;
- almost 50% of the children with visual impairment point to material limitations, i.e. the lack of items that are suited to their capabilities;
- almost three-quarters of children with physical disabilities speak of physical and material barriers, which significantly reduce their choice of activities.

"Derelict areas in town! Why don't they make parks, playfields and sports facilities there?"



## Participation



"...That they decide with us, not about us!"

According to 48% of the participants in the survey, the ability to freely express one's opinion is limited for children and young people in our society. The real meaning of such a generalised opinion emerges only after it is analysed in the light of concrete situations, whether these are administratively regulated or not.

"The teachers do not even think about class meetings, some are not even interested in their pupils, let alone talking to them."

Class meetings, designed as an occasion for the active exchange of opinions and joint problem solving, are "a waste of time" according to 37% of the pupils. The fact that 58% of pupils have never attempted to initiate any activity confirms that this formal participation framework is not encouraging. Such behaviour is interpreted as habitual passivity, in other words, the consequence of an environment that does not stimulate expression nor, in particular, does it respect children's opinions. The same percentage of pupils also thinks that there is no mechanism to express their complaints in school, especially where this concerns the behaviour of teachers.

84% of the pupils believe that new models should be introduced, in which they will be included in the organisation and performance of activities in and outside of class.

The results of the survey consistently confirm that the family is a somewhat better framework for the expression of a child's opinion than institutions, although the domain of making "important family decisions" still remains unattainable for most children. Children in families have more freedom in choosing schools, in the way they spend their pocket money, choose friends, decide about their appearance, and it is they who more often say that adults are ready to hear their opinion.

"It is very important in a family for the parents to talk with their children. If that (contraception) is a taboo in a family, the parents should then be told that their children are growing."

However, one should not overlook the fact that subjects are still divided into those which are "for children" and those which are "not for children", so when adults are ready to hear their children out, it is strictly within this division, regardless of how vital a topic might be for the children. This particularly applies to the sense of fairness when awarding marks in school where, in order to preserve the "authority" of teachers (but also the bias mentioned earlier on), grading remains a taboo.

"...To say what I think and not be punished after!"

The children in the system of social care, regardless of whether they live with families or in institutions, are faced with a number of barriers in being able to express and have their opinions validated. These are not only embodied in rules and house regulations, but can sometimes bring into question the essential understanding of the nature of these measures:

- between 30 and 67% of the children have no influence on the frequency of contacts with parents;
- between 27 and 37% of the children have no influence on the choice of school;
- between 30 and as many as 70% of the children consider that they were not sufficiently informed, let alone consulted, when the institution was selected for them to be placed in.

Also important is the children's observation that the readiness of adults to hear and take their opinion into consideration very often appears as a reward and bonus for being "good" and "obedient".

## Non-discrimination



"Human rights - it's when a man is not ashamed of his name and surname."

The opinions of respondents in this survey show how complex (non-) discrimination is and the extent to which it is often hidden.

Children and young people are unanimous in the opinion that boys and girls are equal in our society. The tendency towards more traditional forms of behaviour, favouring the role of male family members, is found among Roma children and the displaced children from Kosovo and Metohija.

Discrimination on other bases seems to be a reality for many children, stemming from their social status, ethnic background, and bodily or mental impairment.

Children from especially vulnerable groups are exposed to behaviour and labelling, which they experience as discrimination, not only from their extended surroundings, but from their peers, as well.

The following groups of children have a feeling of being "branded" because of their origin or social status:

- children without parental care in foster families (44%) or in homes (66%);

"To grow up in a home still means to be 'an inmate!'"

- 90% of children in correctional institutions,

"Not only am I branded, but my family as well!"

- three quarters of refugee and displaced children,

"They ridicule me when I speak..."

- Roma children.

"It can be seen... other people show us..."

Between 13 and 40% of the respondents speak of the inability to exercise freedom of religious confession and customs.

Children with disabilities most often connect their being branded with their "handicap", whereas those who have been placed in an institution bear an additional stigma.

"My Roma friend wears a dirty T-shirt because no one has taught her not to, and then - there, she's a Roma girl - they label her immediately!"

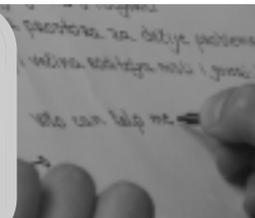
"To be branded", "to be different", "to be avoided" - is not only an experience that has been filtered through the subjective prism of marginalised children. This is confirmed by the answers of children from the general population:

• children with mental or physical disabilities and children without parental care do not have the same conditions for schooling and fitting into the community - the opinion of 87 to 93% of respondents.

When they described their behaviour, it emerged that children from the general population avoid socialising with:

- children of their age who have some physical disability (occasionally - 38%, often - 12%),
- Roma (occasionally - 35%, often - 13%)
- refugees (occasionally 25%, often - 4%).

## Protection from abuse, neglect, alcohol and drug abuse



"There should be a law for kiosks not to sell this (alcohol) to children in this country."

The commonly held view of the participants in this survey is that children and young people are not adequately protected from abuse, neglect, and alcohol or drug abuse. They also believe that children and young people are not sufficiently informed about the right to protection from violence, nor about whom they can go to for help.

"Why should I watch TV when I can only see ugly things on it!?"

87% of the respondents see the source of violence in the social and cultural environment that encourages violence and that the TV broadcasts programmes that encourage violence. They (70%) underline the inadequate punishment of people, who physically and sexually abuse children, as one of the causes for this phenomenon being so widespread.

In this instance, we devote special attention to the assessments of children from particularly vulnerable groups, such as the children in the system of social care. The concept of social care, which, in itself, implies protection from possible risks, apparently, is not effective enough in practice, which is indicated in the following findings:

- children living in homes/institutions much more often say that they experience the lack of protection from physical and sexual abuse, and alcohol and drug abuse, than children who live with families;
- 50 to 60% of the children in institutions of social care consider that they are not sufficiently protected from corporal punishment by adults while the percentage who say they lack protection from sexual abuse ranges between 15 and 40%;

"... To sleep alone in the room - and for no one to touch me."

- 30 to 70% of the children in institutions report about the experience of being unprotected from physical violence among their peers;
- children with learning disabilities, as well as juvenile offenders, for whom a court has prescribed open measures of protection, say they are exposed in a very great measure to alcohol and drug abuse.

"They only 'book' you, but you need to talk to someone, get advice.  
There's no one here to help us!"

More than a quarter of the children in the system of social care do not know who to ask for help. Even when they do know who can formally protect their interests, in principle, they do not express complete confidence in the willingness and ability of those persons to protect or help them.

The need for protection from all kinds of abuse is particularly dominant among Roma children. In rating the importance of particular rights, along with the right to non-discrimination, they attach the greatest importance to protection from drug abuse, sexual abuse, corporal punishment, neglect, the selling of humans, trafficking and the forcible transport of humans.

"We, young people, demand that protection be organised for us so that we can go out in our town and for no one to mistreat or abuse us!"

## Children with disabilities



"So I can come out of the shadows!"

Some of the assessments about the state of child rights given by children with disabilities have already been presented in the previous chapters, along with the views of children from the general population. Here, we underline the most significant conclusions that concern their individual, specific needs.

"I would like to finish school and work like a proper person!"

Regardless of whether they live with their families or in institutions, children with disabilities express a highly critical view in relation to:

- accessibility to education and its quality. In that sense their assessments are similar to those of children from the general population (insufficient practical teaching, criteria for awarding marks, etc.).

As a rule, they are aware of limitations in the choice of possible occupations but they believe that the titles or the wording on their certificates and diplomas visibly discriminate them (e.g. occupation - physiotherapist with impaired eyesight);

- the poorly developed services for support to children and parents (counseling centres, clubs).

"We are physically marked and we cannot escape that, but here, they repress us..."

The children in institutions particularly highlighted the difficulties and problems that are part of life in conditions of institutional accommodation:

- the inadequate preparation of a child when it comes to live in an institution, and support during the period of its adjustment;
- educational work that does not stimulate the child in mastering the skills that are necessary for an independent life after leaving the institution;
- the essential reduction of the child's ability to realise its right to privacy;
- difficulties in establishing better communication with the teachers.

"You cannot make a single telephone call without someone peeking over your shoulder."

In concluding that the general context in which they grow up does not encourage integration, the vast majority of these young people point to the elementary barriers that also arise from the immediate environment in which they live. We are obliged to say that this refers to a very strange but very frequent practice in institutions where house rules prohibit or essentially restrict visits by their peers (and in some institutions, by their relatives), and so the statements:

"We are literally hidden away," or  
"This is a ghetto",

become true in the most authentic sense.

## Children without parental care



"The basic need of children is love. Can that be the right?"

The views of children without parental care about the situation in child rights have all been mentioned in the earlier chapters.

We need only briefly say once again that whether they concern material status, discrimination, participation or protection from abuse, the assessments of children without parental care always indicated a very serious and sometimes even, alarming situation.

"As soon as they hear that you are from a home, they won't even look at you!"

Apart from all that, we cannot fail to point out another extremely important message these children conveyed to us in evaluating the conditions and circumstances in which they live:

- good communication with the 'responsible adult persons' (foster parents, teachers, professional workers) ranks very high on the list of basic needs.

"The teachers should talk a little more with children about their problems!"

"Everything else can be corrected in one way or another,  
but if that's not all wright then one has no luck!"

"They say - you should have friends, yet when someone comes to us  
who is not from our boarding home, they yell at us  
and that person is frightened and never comes again."

The very fact that children without parental care are emotionally deprived compels them to turn to substitutes who, they feel are not adequate.

Here, we speak of a need that no method can translate into a pointer, nor any law defines as a norm. Meanwhile, we are confronted with the serious judgement of these children that the system of social care, torn between what is possible and the given set of circumstances, fails to respond to an absolute need<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Regardless of the fact that this problem was particularly highlighted in the chapter about children without parental care, we underline that the majority of children in institutions conveyed similar messages.

## Children in conflict with the law



"To prevent minors from becoming informants!"

Although they share the same views as their peers in the assessment of the general situation regarding child rights, children in conflict with the law encounter some very specific problems that point to the very serious violation of certain rights.

Whether they have received an educational measure of increased supervision (in the family), or are in a correctional institution, juvenile offenders agree in their assessment that:

- they were not given fair investigatory procedure (in 42%, or 68% of the cases respectively);
- they were not given fair judicial procedure (in 32%, or 30% of the cases respectively).

"... So that the police will not arrest me for nothing and force me to confess to what I did not do and apply this to everyone."

The possibility of regularly contacting their families is one of the burning problems that children in correctional institution complain of. Although they agree that they have this right, they are extremely dissatisfied with the rule that allows them to make two telephone calls a month to their families.

Juvenile offenders tacitly accept the legally permitted use of truncheons by guards as a correctional measure, but they consider that the overstepping of official authority (in the number of blows) happens far more often than not.

"You go home, but we're here for 24 hours."

Also disturbing is the assessment of children in correctional institutions that the lack of protection from physical or sexual abuse by their peers, who are serving their sentences with them, is even greater than from their guards. If one considers the general picture connected with the situation in institutions (the poor material and hygiene conditions, difficulties in educational and rehabilitation work), as well as these specific indicators, then we can feel nothing but surprise that 93% of the respondents say that their stay in the institution helps them.

If this is really so, in the name of the children, we ask what the effects of the measures would be if they complied with standards.

"They're dignified people (judges). They couldn't care less about us. They sit there and say: you're on parole, you're under supervision, you're going to an institution, and then they hurry home to lunch."

## Refugee and displaced children



"The right to life? OK, but what kind of life?"

Most of the answers of refugee and displaced children in assessing the state of child rights, just like other high-risk groups, appear in earlier parts.

Here, we mention only data that is characteristic of the particular conditions in which they live.

The parents of the vast majority of refugee and displaced children are unemployed, and most of them have only elementary or secondary school qualifications.

Their dependence on humanitarian aid as their basic resort in order to survive is the fate of most of these families.

"Come and see the conditions in which we live!"

As for basic living and housing conditions, children in private accommodation are in a significantly better position, while the situation in collective shelters essentially limits:

- the right to privacy (common dormitories, communal bathrooms and toilets, kitchens and dining rooms);

"I live in a room with 30 people... I study at night, ... on the bed."

- the right to leisure, play and recreation. Nor do the prevailing conditions provide room or time for studying.

More than a third of the refugee and displaced children, respondents, declared that:

- the right to speak their dialect is limited, and that
- they are unable to carry on the customs of their native land.

Viewed on the whole, refugee children consider that their fundamental right to life has been realised but that their living conditions are hardly satisfactory.

Displaced children from Kosovo and Metohija consider that their most important rights, which are threatened, is the right to safety and their freedom of movement.

"Please could you explain to all displaced persons, and to me and my family, if it is possible for us to return to Kosovo?"

## Recommendations and Priorities

### - What next and how?



"Today will become yesterday, as well!"

The Priorities and Recommendations before you present a synthesis of the workshop products, and are accompanied by the most illustrative, genuine statements given by the children who participated in the project. The original wordings and messages have been grouped according to the areas they refer to, so three sub-groups have been formed, i.e. preconditions, general (common) priorities, and the specific priorities of particularly vulnerable groups.

We believe that the disproportion between the number of recommendations and their realisation directly reflects the capacity and ability of children of this age to become aware of a problem and contemplate ways to solve it. The more the area in question is related to immediate and everyday experience, and if this makes it easier to concretise, the richer the production of ideas. On the other hand, the ever present, powerful desire for peace, security and validation is so overwhelming that one cannot see the forest for the trees. Indeed, one can say that this applies to adults as well, who very often err while searching for solutions to reach a goal that is very clear, but remote.

The mentioned priorities cannot be ranked and are all equally important.

## Preconditions



### Peace

"How are children to understand adults, when they wage war?"

"Let there be peace in our country and may  
the state have honest people!"

"Let there never be a war, again!"

### Improving the standard of living

"It means that you eat, and you have beans, pancakes, frankfurters, salami, meat paste, fruit juice and biscuits; that you go out in the snow, put on a jumper, trousers, a T-shirt and underpants; that someone has a birthday party and gets presents, that children play; that you go to town; when you fall ill, that you go to hospital; that you are a proper person and you have something - that you have a house and money; that you live independently and have a wife and children, so you can go to the seaside together."

"That they have a nice bathroom, shampoo and a mirror, so they can see themselves when they comb their hair!"

"That all children can travel!"

### Recognition and understanding

"If they love and respect you, and you trust them,... learning is easier and you choose your own school if you can reach an agreement with them; you are free to enroll in the school clubs you want, have friends, eat well, look nice, you are always clean and healthy, no one beats you, and you wouldn't dream of taking alcohol, drugs or cigarettes."

"Parents, talk to your children!"

"For children to be respected, at least, nearly as much as  
politicians!"



# General/common priorities

## Education

"I have the right not to learn nonsense!"

### Suggestions:

- Introducing a system of optional subjects, i.e. optional education. This way the pupils would have an opportunity to opt for the subjects they are interested in, that fit in with their plans for further schooling and their future;
- teaching "based on dialogue" by encouraging workshop methods and working with tutors;
- improving the system of grading pupils and encouraging a uniform system of testing knowledge, in order to ensure impartiality;

"That marks do not depend on the teacher's mood!"

- better equipment in cabinets for vocational subjects, a better approach to the newest technologies and access to computers;
- the greater participation of parents and the local environment (companies, donors) in the procurement of school and workshop equipment;
- the revival of extra-curricular activities, adjusting them to the pupils' preferences - by holding polls among the pupils and informing them in detail about the content and the method for carrying out these activities;

"For school not to be boring!"

- better and more interestingly planned class meetings as the framework for the pupils' participation in addressing and solving the problems of the class, and as the source of initiatives and suggestions related to teaching and the organisation of school life;
- encouraging the pupils to participate in taking care of the appearance and arrangement of the school and keeping the classrooms clean and tidy;
- establishing pupils' assemblies, or assemblies consisting of teachers and pupils, to discuss the teachers' work and performance, address everyday problems, and make suggestions to modernise schooling and extra-curricular activities;
- introducing pillar-boxes in schools, to collect remarks, suggestions and proposals.

"For children to enjoy going to school."

## Nondiscrimination

"I don't belong here. It worries me - and that should change!"

### Suggestions:

- Higher budget spending for scholarships to pupils, and support for those who cannot afford the costs of schooling;
- equipping special classrooms for pupils, who do not have adequate conditions for learning at home, so that they can do their homework;
- resolving the problem of transport for schoolchildren by organising school buses for those who live far away, and for disabled children who cannot use public transportation;
- encouraging joint activities and contact between children from the general population children and children from marginalised groups;
- higher budget spending and special care for children with disabilities, children without parental care, and children from minority groups;
- greater understanding for the expected forms of marginalised children's needs for social integration (going downtown like other children, being dressed like other children, and suchlike).

"So that they do not get second-hand clothes that nobody wants to wear, or old ones from the warehouse!"

## Health

"To provide free medical care for everyone!"

### Suggestions:

- Opening First Aid stations and dental surgeries in every school;
- to make it possible for the health condition of each child to be monitored by one doctor only, especially in the case of chronic diseases;
- to create a friendlier atmosphere in dispensaries for child-patients - the doctor wearing a colourful coat, ready to chat, open to all kinds of questions, and patient;
- to respect privacy and discretion when informing the children about their test results and diagnoses;
- to pay more attention to learning about health and health culture, not only by engaging the health services but also through the media and schools:
  - attractive TV clips, leaflets, brochures and other advertising material with messages and information about safeguarding health,
  - organising panel discussions about various health topics, where individuals who have undergone specific experiences would take part, e.g. cured alcoholics, drug addicts etc.,
  - printing a school newspaper or publishing separate, thematic editions devoted to health,
  - introducing a separate subject called "health protection" dealing with topics like contagious diseases, sexual education, First Aid.

"To do something so that children are not ashamed or scared when they have a problem and have to go to a doctor or a psychologist!"



## Protection from all forms of mistreatment, abuse and neglect

"For children to be healthy and joyful in their home!"

### Suggestions:

- Fuller information to children about their right to protection from all forms of mistreatment, abuse and neglect, and about who they can turn to for help;
- to pass a special law, prohibiting all forms of the use of physical coercion (punishment) with children, and protection from insults and humiliation;
- broader authority to the police and centres for social work in cases of mistreatment and neglect;
- to ban films that contain violence and sexual abuse;
- greater support to families with problems, in order to prevent mistreatment;
- stricter laws for violent parents, alcoholics, drug addicts, and those who abandon their children;
- the establishment of a "children's court" that would deal exclusively with such cases;
- to found more organisations and SOS services to protect child rights.

"For children not to be thrown away like rotten pears while those who do not have them suffer!"



## Specific priorities of particularly vulnerable groups



### Children in institutions of social care

"For me to have somewhere to go when I leave the child home!"

#### A more certain future after leaving the system of social care

##### Suggestions:

- The greater commitment of centres for social work and cooperation with schools, so that children are given a wide choice of future occupations;
- encouraging independence, initiative, and mastering the skills necessary for an independent life (preparing food, household chores, developing the correct attitude towards money and earning a living, through practical situations, etc.);
- help in getting a job and finding accommodation.

"For them to have many teachers who like them!"

#### Improving the quality of communication with teachers and professional workers

##### Suggestions:

- To increase the number of teachers and professional workers so they can spend more time working directly with each child;
- more personal contact between the children and social workers, better information about rights and the possibilities for realising them;
- more joint activities with adults so that they can get to know each other better, such as excursions, celebrations, sports events, and also opportunities for speaking frankly;
- modifying the criteria for the employment of teachers, in order to emphasise the importance of their personal motives and their inclination for working with children.

### Refugee and displaced children

"If I had rights, I'd be at home, not here!"

#### The right to a NORMAL life

##### Suggestions:

- Finding a more efficient way of solving the citizenship problem for child refugees;
- providing more lasting and better accommodation for the displaced until they can return.



## Children in conflict with the law

"No forcing, no truncheons!"

### Fair police procedure

### Fair court procedure

#### Suggestions:

- Higher qualifications and the proper selection of judges for juveniles;
- mandatory presence of parents during investigatory procedure;
- recording all hearings;
- respect for regulations and "rules of the service" and shortening investigatory procedure;
- training of inspectors, policemen and judges in dealing with delinquents and child offenders;
- establishing an independent body to supervise the work of the police and the court;
- penalties for police brutality.

"For the judge not to treat us like thugs, but try to understand us!"

## Children with disabilities

"Only people who understand us can help."

### Rehabilitation - Integration

#### Suggestions:

- Support for parents in preparing children for an independent life, which should commence as early as possible;
- encourage those in charge to introduce more innovations in their work;
- better access to information, better equipment, aids, and tools for mastering skills;
- better access to programmes available to other children, organising sports events, competitions, get-togethers.

"I have one wish - for them to be like all other, normal children."

# Instead of a Conclusion





## Who is responsible?

"Adults..., but we (children) can also do something!"

"The state!"

"The whole of society!"

"The people in charge!"

"The people in Parliament!"

"Directors and managers!"

"Parents!"

"Teachers!"

"Social workers, centres for social work and the whole ministry!"

"Doctors!"

"The police!"

"Everybody! All of us have to be more responsible. Every individual can behave so as to contribute to solving the problem!"

"Well, ... UNICEF!"

"Humanitarian organisations!"

"The United Nations!"

"The powerful people of the world!"



1

## How can children participate?

"If children get together and organise a show with their parents, and buy what they need from the proceeds!"

"The children can also get together and go to the municipality, and convince the president that they need a hall so he then suggests this to some board!"

"It is a bit hard, but it is possible for a group of children to find a representative in Parliament and persuade him to propose a law against bars and cafes, and that they do not sell alcohol to children in shops!"

"We could write to the president of the state!"

"What we could do ourselves is to increase our experience and pass it on to the younger ones!"



2

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