



Living Child Rights

**Activities of Children and Youth in the Implementation
of the Rights of the Child**



Child Rights Centre



Save the Children



SWEDEN

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Publisher

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All terms in the text used in the grammatical masculine gender include the masculine and feminine gender of the persons concerned.



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Foreword

Cultural norms in which children are growing up for centuries make them out of influence on every decision that it is made about life in their community. Exclusion of children is not just about the absence of their voice when it comes to creating the practical policies in fields that are important in children's life, but also in their everyday relationship with adults. Both in the institutional settings (for example the relationship between student and the teacher), and in private life (for example their relationship with parents) dominates the attitude that parents are the ones that regardless the concrete situation and child's age, can see the situation most adequately so they should have power of decision making.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as the international treaty with most ratifications, efforts of the states to implement it, as well as the engagement of the international organisations and civil society organisations to implement the rights of the child are gradually changing dominant cultural patterns which shape attitude towards children.

In Serbia also, in a past few years there have been certain progress regarding the involvement of children in creating social processes. However, children still have a feeling that in Serbia there are not enough social content available for young people, which are in accordance with their needs and interests.

*It is great being young anywhere else,
but it is a bit boring being young in Serbia.*

Lazar, 17, Nis

Their experience is that adults do not have trust in their competences at social level.

Usually they do not listen to youth; we can't show our opinion anywhere.

Andjela, 16, Nis

Their experience is that adults do not have trust in their competences at social level.

When we organise something in school, first reaction of the teacher is: "What if something goes wrong, you are still young"

Ana, 16, Uzice

On the whole, perception of life in Serbia from the perspective of children and youth shows that they are still not included enough in decision-making about aspects of community life that concerns them. It should not be forgotten that the

lapse to perceive children as mature, capable, autonomous beings within their developmental capabilities, endangers not only the children, but also reduces the possibility of the community to fully develop their capacities.

If they consulted us which bands we would listen to, more audience would be present at the concerts.

Slobodan, 16, Vrbas

Therefore the Child Rights Centre's (hereinafter: the Centre) work promotes the realisation of child rights in the Republic of Serbia, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Part of that direction is a project of the Centre *Living Child Rights*, which has been implemented in cooperation with Save the Children. The intention of the project is to encourage greater participation of children in policy making related to the field of child rights, which includes:

- ▶ Raising the awareness of decision makers about the importance of involving children in the process of reporting on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- ▶ Creation of the Coalition for monitoring child rights, as well as
- ▶ Encouraging partnership of children and adults in activities to monitor the implementation of child rights and advocacy for their full implementation.

During the project implementation were realised numerous activities of children and youth groups gathered around civil society organisations. All of those reflect child participation and show what children can achieve in partnership with adults. This publication is created within the project, with the aim of presenting these good practices. We believe that the featured activities can not only be a starting point for establishing similar groups of children and young people, but also a valuable source of motivation. Actions rapidly transmit energy and enthusiasm of youth, who leave no scope for adults' opportunism.

The purpose of the project is promotion of the participative model of monitoring the implementation of the rights of the child that would be applied by involving and strengthening children and civil society for monitoring and advocacy for improving child rights in partnership of children and adults.

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Work Methodology

During the period 2005-2009, through the project **Child Rights Monitoring — Children's Voices** that was supported by Save the Children Norway and Save the Children Sweden, the Centre has developed the methodology of encouraging children's monitoring of the implementation of child rights and advocacy for their full implementation.

The project was developed in response to the need to systematic work to empower children for active and responsible attitude to their own environment, preparing them this way for constructive participation in community life. The basic framework of this is the policy of the rights of the child as well as a creation of opportunities to take concrete action. By adopting the basic concepts related to the organisation of social relations, youth learn about the distribution of roles and responsibilities including the importance of their own capacities. In this way, their sensitivity to the broader social environment is encouraged, capacities for improving social relations are strengthened, and skills of analysis, argumentative advocating and purposeful action are developed.

Since the implementation of the project methodology in schools had excellent results and was recommended by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia for further implementation, the Centre has this mode transposed to the field of social engagement of youth activist groups. In this way, new groups include children to spread the impact of young people in community life. Thus, the project **Living Child Rights** grew out of a previous project, building on its achieved results.

The project involves five groups of children and youth: Children's informative cultural service (DX), which operates within the Child Rights Centre from Belgrade, a group of children and youth gathered around Uzice Child Rights Centre, a young activists of the program of the Society for the development of children and youth — Open Club Nis, youth groups with an NGO Osmeh from Vrbas (which joined the project in 2012) and a group of children and youth from the Children's creative center — Maštalište from Zrenjanin (who also joined the project in 2012).

As already mentioned, the general idea of the project was that the groups of children and youth are empowered for an active attitude towards improving the situation of children and monitoring child rights through the development of partnership of children and adults in the advocacy process. For this purpose, during the three years of the project several kinds of activities were carried out.

One part of the groups' activities related to the design and implementation of advocacy actions. The members of the youth groups who have not had the opportunity to learn about child rights, youth participation and/or planning of actions of advocacy for implementation of rights, were gotten familiar with these topics through workshops led by group leaders. After training, they got directed to the identification of the problem that their peers face in the environment, choosing issues that they feel are relevant and possible to impact on and solving them, and then planned and performed the advocacy actions. Each year the groups realised 2 to 3 actions of this type.

Part of the advocacy actions was aimed at increasing the participation of children and youth in social and political life, with the intention to encourage them to think about their interests, needs and rights. So, children and youth were involved in the consultation process regarding the preliminary Draft Law on the Rights of the Child.

Since one of the project objectives was raising community awareness on children as rights-holders and distinct social actors, in the course of the project, as a special group of activities, each year the 20th November was marked, the date when in 1989 in the UN General Assembly the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted.

The third group of activities related to monitoring and reporting on the implementation of child rights in Serbia. The goal of these activities was to empower children to actively monitor the implementation of their rights and learn how to participate in the reporting procedures.

All these activities will be shown in more details in the following text. Taking into account the participation of children, the intention is that they are also presented from the perspective of young activists who immediately realised them. Therefore, when preparing the publication, interviews with all groups of children involved in the project was made. Interview included members of youth groups that have participated in the project activities in previous years, including those who have since become adults and stopped being active members of the groups.

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Children and Youth Activism — Groups Involved in the Project “Living Child Rights”

I want my voice heard in this society. It hurts me when I hear that young people want change, but do not want to be involved in decision-making. I wanted to show that young people are very much active.

Katja, 17, Uzice

I feel sorry for the situation where young people don't do anything, are not interested in anything and think that the state is to blame for everything. We think that we are the ones to make changes in the state and adjust it to our needs.

Petar, 18, Belgrade

In contrast to still the dominant attitude of the adults that children and youth are not mature enough for equal inclusion in community life or interested to join, a significant part of children and youth in Serbia wants to be a social actor, and not just an observer. Gathered

around civil society organisations, they critically observe the world around them and initiate the introduction of changes. Members of activist groups gathered as part of the **Living Child Rights** project are the good example of that.

I was in the school parliament, we could not implement anything without the resources that non-governmental organisations have.

That's why we think it is good to be in the non-governmental organisation. Through the project we have implemented we saw that there are funding opportunities, and thereby realising our ideas.

Aneta, 16, Vrbas

Here we learn how to say our ideas, how to shape them and implement them.

Luna, 16, Zrenjanin

In addition to providing opportunities to influence social reality, involvement in the work of civil society organisations provides them with acceptance and appreciation, as well

as the opportunity to learn new and interesting things with which they would not otherwise meet.

I like to come here because I feel comfortable. Whatever I say there will not be misunderstood or judged, they have taught us to respect differences. I do not feel this energy in most people on the street.

Milica, 16, Zrenjanin

The atmosphere here is pleasant; it is relaxing, in relaxing way we learn about different important things. I am able to express myself and learn about things I didn't know before, I can get new ideas...

Petar, 17, Nis

Activities they carry out within the groups make them sensible of what is happening around them and more ready to react.

We now see that the rights of others are violated and we react. For example, in gym class on one half of the hall the girls practice basketball, while at the other half of the hall boys play basketball. Girls always only practice basketball, but do not play. When we told the professor that is unequal treatment of girls, he just laughed.

Dunja, 15, Vrbas

Involvement in the DX changes my perception, I see things differently now. Since I'm here, I see many things that are not working. I was indoctrinated to perceive things related to diversity, respect for human rights...

Petar, 18, Belgrade

We have learned to use our right to participation.

Olga, 19, Belgrade

In addition, they come across variety reactions of adult.

*I think people started to shudder when hear about rights.
First thing they ask is: “Where are the obligations?”*

Olga, 19, Belgrade

*When I joined “Osmeh” I did not know anything about what
the rights of the child are. Now I implement them to daily life.
I say to my mom: “I have a right”. She asks, “Where did you
get that right?” And they learn with me.*

Slobodan, 16, Vrbas

*My mother is a teacher and now attends the violence-related
education. So she asks me: “Ana, come to see if I wrote it well!
What would you say?” You feel more respected in topics that
are not only family-related.*

Ana, 17, Uzice

Reactions of peers to their social engagement are also
different.

*I have often heard from my peers: “Do you really think
you can make a difference?”*

Olga, 19, Belgrade

Even some of our peers do not understand what we can do — why do you try, they say, it will all go down anyhow. Lots of the young people are passive; they have no desire to do something for themselves.

Milica, 16, Zrenjanin

We have the support of peers because they want a change, but not to get involved. It suits them that someone does things for them.

Nadja, 17, Uzice

Growing up with activist peer group greatly changes them, making them more mature, more independent, more confident and more willing to accept other people.

The Club will make a man of me, but the process is still in progress!

Milan, 18, Nis

Last year I started going to “Maštalište”. Earlier, when there are unknown people around me, I only listened to them from aside. This year, when I continued to go to the club, I realised that I can freely say what I think — what a powerful feeling!

Milica, 16, Zrenjanin

Despite the obstacles they face, the activities they carry out give them the strength to go on.

When it's all over, we see the change and know that we contributed to it and it will last for a while.

Ana, 17, Uzice

Here is who the young activists from our project are:

Group of children and youth with the Uzice Child Rights Centre

Uzice Child Rights Centre was established in 1998 with the aim to improve the position of children and youth in the society. As an organisation it have worked for many years in order to inform children, youth and parents about the rights of the child, involve them in decision-making in the overall social life and provide them with various forms of education.

Centre gathers a number of young activists, mostly high school students age 15 to 18 who involve themselves in realization of many activities with great enthusiasm. Young people participate in the workshops of educational and creative kind where the most common themes are — child rights, tolerance, non-discrimination, stereotypes, prejudices, inclusion, etc, but they can come up with the theme themselves, depending on their interests.

Children and youth are always welcome in the Uzice Child Rights Centre, where in positive atmosphere they learn many things that they later share with their peers. They realise many actions when in joint efforts trying to solve many problems existing in their community and wider. Thereby, to themselves and their surroundings they create better living conditions and education. Uzice Child Rights Centre is an organisation that is fully dedicated to children and young people, a place where you make new friends, complement the knowledge and gain self-confidence. There is no better way for young people to openly express their opinions, have fun, and at the same time learn many useful things and work on their personalities every day getting to know new people and different cultures.



Children's Informative Cultural Service DX, Bgrade

Children's Informative Cultural Service, better known as DX, was founded in 2002, as a club for children and youth at the Child Rights Centre. DX is engaged in peer education, youth media and organising research of the attitudes of children and youth. Initially, the club was involved in child rights, especially the right to information, so the members of DX prepared and issued newsletters and magazines for high school students, made youth radio shows and recorded a number of documentaries.

Over 10 years of its existence the DX dealt with a variety of other topics that were interesting to children and youth (such as interculturalism, participation, inclusion, sustainable development). Also, the DX has organised a series of cultural and artistic events for their peers. Since conducting research among children and youth is an important part of the activities of this group, DX annually conducts various researches starting from the fact that the youth problems can be solved only if we first determine exactly what the problem is. The members of DX were active in the process of reporting of children and adolescents to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and four members presented reports to the Committee.

All activities DX implements are based on the principle of equality and with full respect for the rights of all who participate in them.



Children and young activists of the program of the Association for Development of Children and Youth — OPEN CLUB, Nis

Youth network as a program of the Open Club was created in the project “Living Together.” Going beyond the framework of the project, a group of young activists with the support of their leaders, began to develop an independent program of activities which eventually became one of the most important programs of the organisation.

Youth network consists of fifty young activists who have completed some of the trainings organised in the organisation and gained knowledge from the areas of interculturalism, child rights, as well as basic skills of action planning, conducting workshops and debating. In meetings with young people initiated and planned are activities, prepared local actions, determined exchange programs, prepared applications for some of the programs of international exchange or training at the national level, proposed programs of the Network, prepared researches, shared experiences, etc. For members of the Network organised are also drama workshops, journalism workshops, forum theater, jewelery making workshops, workshops on leadership, mediation, and many others. Network members are an important resource of the organisation and are involved in every project of the Open Club.



Once — in response to the question how to organise a youth team — they responded they have a recipe

how to cook a youth team in 15 minutes.

In the ½ kg of good mood stir 200 g of tolerance, ½ litre of culture and a pinch of good behavior, and all spice with 100 g of love and companionship, pour into a bowl greased with laughter and simmer for as long as possible, so it lasts, at a very moderate and tolerant fire of community and understanding. If everyone around you is happy and content, the team is cooked.

Youth team of the Citizens Association — Osmeh, Vrbas

The Osmeh youth team works to encourage civic engagement by supporting youth initiatives through learning and practical experience to contribute to the creation of an adequate framework for the participation of citizens, especially youth, on issues of local politics and civil society development, and would like the youth in Vrbas to have full access to local resources and actively participate in the development of the environment based on democratic values.

The objectives of the youth team are: the creation of conditions for active participation of young people of different social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds to promote the values of democratic society; encouraging of initiatives and positive action among young people in promoting and establishing the values of civil society; expanding the idea of the values of civil society and the importance of establishing and preservation of democratic relations, dialogue and cooperation among young people.

Youth team is working with similar teams from Zrenjanin, Becej and Novi Becej, while in the local community they are cooperating with the Youth Office, primary and high schools, the Red Cross, and the Environmental Movement of Vrbas. The values on which the work of the youth team is based are: the activism, teamwork, respect of rights, commitment to planning and implementation of tasks, continuous learning and tolerance.



Group of children and youth at the Children and Youth Creative Centre MAŠTALIŠTE, Zrenjanin

In Zrenjanin, for 13 years now, exists a Children and Youth Creative Centre Maštalište (hereinafter: the Centre). The Centre is intended for all children from birth to the end of high school and everyone in it can find content of interest to them. The Centre has so far registered over 3000 children and youth.

The primary mission of the Centre is expressed in the sentence “equal rights for all”, starting from the fact that all children, regardless of social, ethnic, religious or any other group to which they belong have equal rights to stimulating childhood. Therefore, in the Centre today successfully work together children of different abilities, social opportunities and mother tongues. In the Centre different programs designed for children of all ages are continuously developing.

Here's how we Maštari describe our Maštalište:

“A place where everyone is equal, where everyone's opinion is respected and where everyone will be heard, a place of love, happiness, kindness, caring.” Whatever else to add, we'd be spinning around the same facts. I think anyone who had cared to learn about themselves and even others get to love Maštalište after several, if not after the first workshop.

—Milica Samac, II grade, Zrenjanin
Gymnasium



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Activities of Children and Youth Groups Involved in the Project “Living Child Rights”

Advocacy actions

Group of children and youth with the Uzice Child Rights Centre

During three years of involvement in the project Living Child Rights implementation, children and youth gathered around the Uzice Child Rights Centre have designed and realised several advocacy actions.

One of the problems that young activists recognised in their environment is insufficient awareness of children and youth about the problem of trafficking in women and children, child exploitation and forcing into prostitution, as well as the denial that this problem is present in their environment. Therefore, they developed a campaign that was aimed at raising awareness and awareness of children and youth about the problem of Child trafficking, exploitation of children and forcing into prostitution.

They listened with attention, soaking up all that talk. They were open for discussion, even shared with us the inconveniences of their lives. I did not expect that.

—Katja, 17, Uzice

With this intention, in four schools were organised forums in which the film Modern trade was broadcasted and presented was useful information about this social phenomenon and the ways that children and young people can be protected. Information panels were made and placed in schools. In high schools and at the public sessions around 700 copies of educational materials were distributed. The action was also covered by two local radio stations and one local TV station.

The second action dealt with the problem of violence against children and youth on the Internet. Young activists of Uzice Child Rights Centre considered that this is a problem that their peers are not well informed about, and often deny that the problem exists. They believe that a large number of children and adolescents are exposed to direct harassment through Facebook. Also, they mention that lately there are more and more groups on Facebook that make fun of a person, thereby subjecting them to high pressure. The situation is aggravated by the fact that most parents are not too familiar with the problem of violence on the Internet and do not know how to help their children to protect themselves. Therefore, through the action entitled *Violence against children and youth on the Internet* they organised a series of activities to raise awareness and inform children and youth and their parents about the problem:

- ▶ They have created and conducted a survey intended to peers on recognising violence on the Internet. Data obtained by the survey were included in the design of future activities;
- ▶ In five primary schools they have implemented workshops led by peer educators in order to introduce students to the problem and ways of protection. On this occasion 1,000 educational leaflets were distributed;
- ▶ Workshops are conducted by peer educators in high schools within their classes;

- ▶ 1,000 educational leaflets for parents on the topic of violence on the Internet, through the Council of parents of primary schools were distributed;
- ▶ Four special programs on local radio stations that dealt with the topic of violence against children and youth on the Internet which featured peer educators were implemented.



The third action dealt with the protection of the reproductive health of children and youth (*The content of the protection of reproductive health through regular curriculum*). The young activists believe that the lack of sex education in regular curriculum, through regular courses content, is a problem that leads to insufficient awareness of children and youth about the topic. In addition, they believe that their peers lack to apply the knowledge they have. Therefore, they organised activities with the aim of informing peers, teachers and the community about the importance and necessity of introducing the content of sex education in schools; empowerment of professors of biology, psychology, civic education, as well as class masters to integrate training on the reproductive health of children and young people in their classes; promoting awareness of children and youth about the importance of application of the acquired knowledge for the protection of reproductive health.

In order to achieve those aims, they have organised a number of activities:

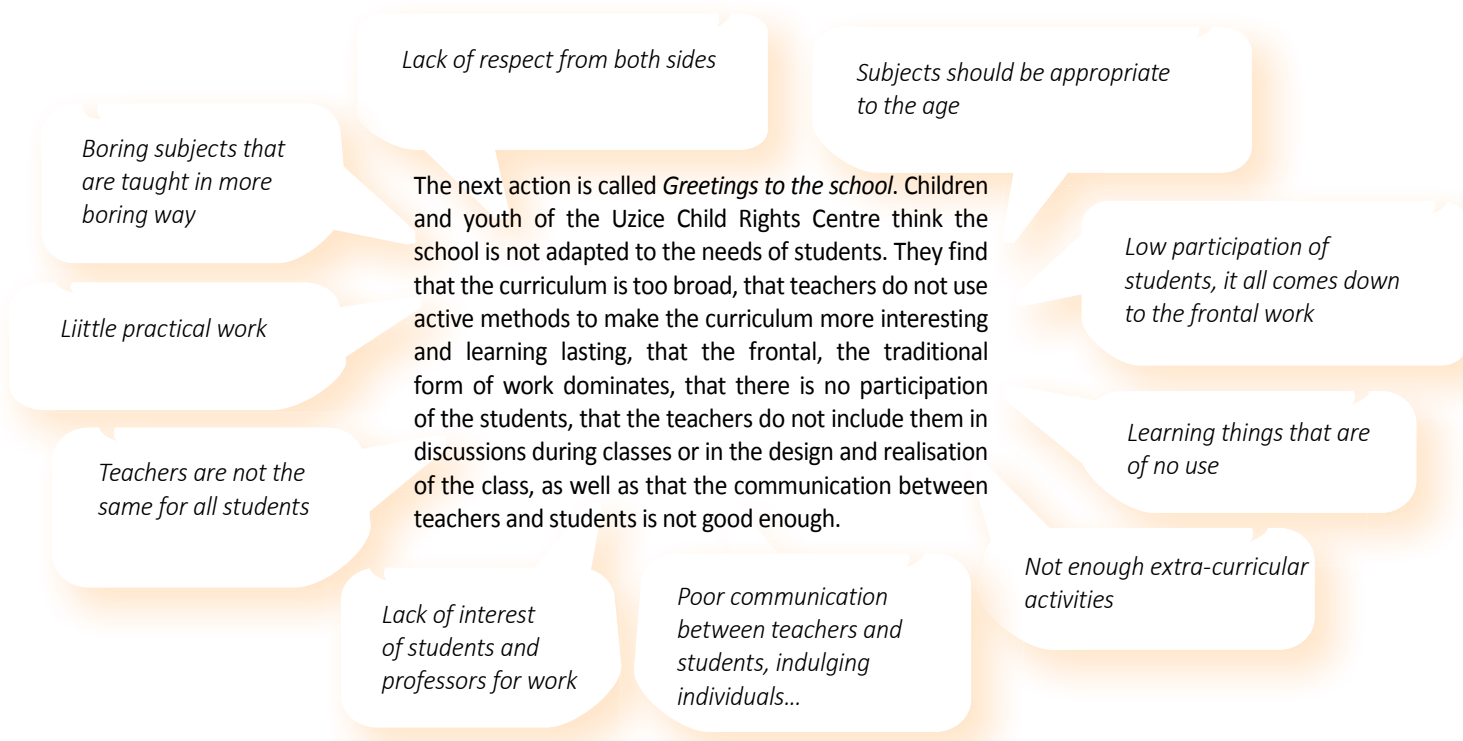
- ▶ Created and conducted a survey which analysed the attitudes of high school students on the introduction of sex education in the curricula of regular courses. The results of the questionnaire were used as arguments in media appearances, meetings with professors as well as during other planning activities;
- ▶ Created educational posters with a clear message of advocacy: **Introduce sex education in school subjects**;
- ▶ Organised meetings with professors with whom they have been lobbying for the introduction of this topic in the content of their lectures;

- ▶ Organised a meeting with representatives of the School Administration of Uzice where they presented ideas and informed educational advisors about the action. They received a support in terms of readiness of advisors to work with teachers to find a space in the curriculum for the implementation of these contents;
- ▶ Held 45 workshops on the theme of reproductive health in the regular classes of civic education, psychology, biology, and the classes of a class master in high schools;
- ▶ As a central activity in the street organised an action where distributed educational materials to their peers and answered their questions about the protection of reproductive health;
- ▶ Set the educational boards in all high schools in the city.

Covers and press releases about the activities held were broadcasted as news in programs of local radio stations in five regular terms of news, as well as in information programs of local TV stations.

My impression is that this is more taboo among teachers than among students. We are more open to talk about it.

—Katja, 17, Uzice



Children and young people wanted this action to send a message that they are willing to actively participate in the development of teaching and to contribute to a better climate in the classroom. To school as an institution, to teachers and peers they wanted to point out how — from each of their roles —they can contribute to the quality of classes as well as to improving relations between teachers and students.

For this purpose, the survey was conducted. Two hundred high school students from four schools in the city gave suggestions for improving teaching in schools, as well

for improving the relationship between teachers and students. Their teachers also gave answers on the same topics. During the street action that followed, on the white framed canvas written were messages from students and professors. Passersby joined the action by putting a palm print beside the message with which they agreed. After the action, the canvas is hung in a noticeable place in the educational institution as a reminder of the responsibility of children, teachers and the school management regarding the quality of teaching but also as a reminder of the ways in which we can build better relationships at school.



The local media announced the central action in their news programs. Two local radio stations and two local TV stations were covering the action as part of its regular program.





Teachers felt good as we invited them and involved them and not complaining that nothing is good with their classes. We presented our problems, listened to theirs and talked about how to overcome them together.

Nadja, 17, Uzice

Action that left the strongest impression on young activists in the action *Greetings to the City*.

We dealt with a subject that is locally actual, something that affects all young people, a lot of the young people were involved and it was creative.

Ana, 17, Uzice

It was a day to remember!

Katja, 17, Uzice



According to the assessment of children and youth gathered around this organisation, a manner of planning and organising the life of the city is not in accordance with their needs and

interests. They think that they have no opportunity to spend quality leisure time or the resources important for young people to develop their diverse potential.

The needs the local government believes that are our needs are outdated and generalised, so we try to make them closer to the real needs of youth.

Ana, 17, Uzice

As much as we try to advocate for change, it's hard to actually change things. There are a lot of things that we were deprived of. For example, we don't have a swimming pool in Uzice. There is no room for fun as we would like.

Ivana, 17, Uzice

Young people are accustomed not to have things. I grew up in a school with no playground. All my life I've been playing on the street.

Nadja, 17, Uzice

Children and youth wanted this action to send the message that they want to actively participate in the creation of the city life.

Identified problem: Young people are not sufficiently involved in the creation of the city life.

Objective: Encouraging local governments and entire local community to involve youth in the creation of the city life.

Before the realisation of the central advocacy action, a survey to gain insights into what children and youth think that the city needs was conducted. The study included 150 high school students.

The central activity was a street action. Most often mentioned among the messages received during the survey were written on a large framed canvas. Passersby were able to write new messages as well as to express their agreement with already written messages by putting their handprints beside them.

We knew that we were supported by a large number of our peers that wrote what they wish for; we represented our generation.

—Katja, 17, Uzice



During the action, around 450 young people wrote their suggestions on how to improve the situation of youth in the city. A large number of students came together with their teachers of civic education and thus supported the action.

Children and youth have delegated five representatives who formally handed the canvas to the Mayor and

representatives of local government, hoping that it will be a constant reminder and a guide on how Uzice to become a city fit for children and young people.

Action has ignited great interest in local radio and TV stations. Three radio stations and two TV stations reported on it in their regular broadcasts.

What we have achieved

Local government was informed about the dissatisfaction of children and youth with the organisation of life in the city, as well as possible ways to improve it from the viewpoint of the users.

We encouraged our peers to say what they wish for, so no one can say — you are passive, doing nothing. I find this change was essential.

—Katja, 17, Uzice

They finally started to build a swimming pool, it will be working soon. Things are improving; the question is what our role in this is. I hope they will take into account those who represent the voice of the majority, not those with influence.

—Nadja, 17, Uzice

What we learned

Adults do not change easily their stand on children and youth as equal social actors.

(in a meeting with local government representatives). For all we have said as a problem, they said that they are solving it, we just do not know about it. That the young people are badly informed. Finally I told them that then the problem is that the municipality does not have a good channel of informing young people.

—Jovana, 17, Uzice

Children and youth that we think are passive and not interested gladly respond to actions and are easily encouraged to think and take the initiative in areas that concern them.

This action will always be current. If the channel of communication would be opened so we can continually submit our suggestions and they responded to them, that would be good.

Nadja, 17, Uzice

Children's Informative Cultural Service DX, Bgrade

The first action of the Children's Informative Cultural Service dealt with the safe use of the Internet by children and youth. As a problem young activists noted under-developed safety culture of the Seventh Belgrade Gymnasium students in terms of behaviour on the Internet. Therefore, with the action Safe Internet Environment for Sevenths they wanted to increase the safety culture in the use of the Internet by this target group. With that purpose they created a workshop on the subject in which development the experts of the Centre for Research of Information Technologies of the Belgrade Open School participated. In order to check whether the workshop is tailored to the needs of students and set educational goal, realised was experimental workshop with members of the Students' Parliament of the Seventh Belgrade Gymnasium. Based on feedback from participants, the original workshop scenario was improved. With the aim an action to reach out to a large number of users and its effects to achieve a long term, the final agenda and supporting materials are submitted to the Expert Committee of the natural sciences, mathematics and computer science of the Seventh Belgrade Gymnasium, in order to include it in the curriculum of computer science.



It is apparently an indicator of intimacy to give your password!

—Petar, 18, Belgrade

Youth widely share passwords to their sites and accounts, it surprised us. If someone doesn't give their password they say — what, do you not trust me?!

—Olga, 19, Belgrade

Information about the action is delivered to broader public through adequate Internet sites.

The second action was aimed at encouraging the inclusion of children and youth with hearing impairment.

Analysing the problems in their communities, young activists took out the social marginalisation of children with sensory impairments. The discussion revealed that children with visual and hearing impairments are not visible enough in the school system or in everyday social life. DX Group members themselves have stated that they have no experience or information about this part of their peer population.

Thus the action Small Inclusive Quiz for Everybody (SIQE) was designed in order to encourage the inclusion of children with sensory impairments in recreational activities and leisure time with other children. The entertaining quiz in which the three mixed teams competed in the knowledge of content related to school knowledge and general culture was organised. The realisation of the quiz was helped by members of the Association of Interpreters for Persons with Hearing Impairments of Serbia (UTLOSS) and volunteers — students from the Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation (FASPER) from Belgrade. Members of mixed teams easily understood each other and enjoyed this event.

Action was covered by the Radio Belgrade.



I have not had experience with persons with impaired hearing before the action. Children read from the lips, we just had to talk clearly. We understood each other without any problems. For me it was a positive experience.

—Olga, 19, Belgrade

Action that members of the DX would single out is action *Better School — Better Students* which dealt with the problem of insufficient quality of education system.

It's the least explained. Internet security is a topic discussed a lot and parents are aware of this; inclusion is always somewhere there, it is talked about, but the education system is essential, all needs to pass through it in order to resolve inclusion and everything else. The education system is in the consciousness of young people, it should be changed most.

Vukan, 18, Belgrade

It is least talked about. The education system teaches you everything is fine, to be conformist and accept everything. It is the fundamental question of this society and least talked about, especially the young people do not talk about it.

Petar, 18, Belgrade

Young activists believe that the current education system is based on a completely outdated methodology. Evident is insufficient use of teaching materials, textbooks are inadequate, the class has no interactivity, theoretical knowledge is not linked to practices, curricula are not adapted to the individual needs and interests of

students, inclusion is not achieved sufficiently, etc.. The educational function of schools is reduced to a mechanical reproduction of knowledge, which is often not sufficiently applicable. Aspect of the problem that children and young people further highlight is that the students' participation in solving these problems is quite low.

The point is that almost every subject is learned in a wrong way, through mere reproduction. To study means to memorise. A school should prepare a person for any kind of experience. To analyse, to make an assessment what is right or wrong, what is valuable. A gymnasium should create a frame for well critical thinking.

Vukan, 18, Belgrade

The point is to go through the whole process and make a conclusion by ourselves, not only to get a fact served on a plate.

Petar, 18, Belgrade

Identified problem:

Inadequacy of the education system to the needs and interests of high school students and their exclusion from the programming of the teaching process.

Objectives:

- Encouraging the improvement of the quality of teaching in the First and Seventh Belgrade Gymnasiums by student parliaments;
- Establishing regular cooperation of student parliaments of the First and Seventh Belgrade Gymnasiums, in order to continue joint advocacy to improve the quality of education.

As a part of a series of several meetings between representatives of student parliaments of the First and Seventh Belgrade Gymnasiums were held in order to develop joint initiative to improve the quality of education in these two schools. As the main event, a meeting of the members of DX and

the representatives of parliaments was held, in which a plan for active communication with school authorities was prepared and a letter advocating greater participation of students in ensuring the quality of teaching composed. This letter was sent to the authorities in both schools.

Information about the action has been distributed on the Internet.

What we have achieved

We have moved our peers towards thinking about the quality of education and take the initiative to change it.

What we learned

There is no a model that we should look up at designing education system. For everything else we can say — look how it is in the west... but, for the educational system, there is no model.

—Vukan, 18, Belgrade

Children and young activists of the program of the Association for Development of Children and Youth — OPEN CLUB, Nis

The first advocacy action of young activists of the Open Club was in relation to the protection of children and youth from sexual violence. Since they believe that children and youth in Nis, aged 12 to 18, do not know enough about the various forms of sexual violence and the possible ways of protection, the initiative is designed with the aim of encouraging awareness of children and youth on the topic.

In order an action to be as much as possible customised to informing and opinions of children and youth to whom it is intended, first was conducted an online poll on the subject of recognising sexual violence and the possible ways of protection. On this occasion 300 respondents were surveyed. With the purpose to promote the survey, a Facebook Event called Poll for people between 12 and 18 years old from Nis was designed, and very well visited.

The main event was a street action called *Open the Door — React!* in the form of performance.



Children and youth acted different scenes of violence, presenting them in the form of still images. When a person approached (the actor) who “reported” violence over the phone, the actors from the still image would symbolically “unfreeze”. During the distribution of promotional materials action participants would also “freeze” when they opened the flyer and see the data inside it. They’d be standing there for a few minutes, until the person (actor) with the phone approached.

An additional influence on the public this action achieved by publishing an article in the local newspaper and broadcasting reports on a local TV station.

We thought that the majority of young people would report if they saw violence, but in the survey more than 50% responded that they would “maybe” report it. That’s why we think this is a problem which needs to be further addressed.

—Andjela, 16, Nis

The second advocacy action was called S.O.S. for SES (Call for help to the Serbian Education System).¹



The young members of the Open Club believe that current school does not offer the possibility of developing the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential, nor prepare a child for an active life

in society, as envisaged by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Therefore, the action would draw the citizens of Nis attention on outdated teaching methods and lack of practical training, which leads to inadequate professional and life training of children.

¹ A wordplay — in Serbian S.O.S. za SOS (translator's note).

They created a Facebook Event wanting to point to the existence of the problem to large numbers of peers, informing them on the following activities and motivate them to get involved.

In this action the central activity was a street action in the form of performance, which in an interesting way presented the problem and its consequences. Performance consisted of a simulation of the traditional classroom where the professor teaches and the students listen. Young people were costumed in various ways, symbolising the problems of modern education:

they wore coats and dresses made of definitions they do not understand; they were plastered with paper with information that young people do not feel are necessary for their professional direction; they had clouds over their heads that, as in the comics, show thoughts of students while learning the material they do not understand, etc. Over students' heads floated balloons with inscriptions *fully developed talent, child's personality developed, ability to solve problems, etc.*, symbolising the unattainability of these values. After a traditional school class of a period of 45 minutes, the students stood up and walked downtown.



The performance was followed by a petition signing for a better education system (less theoretical and more experiential learning). The event was covered by two local and one regional TV station.



The petition signing continued in the coming months. The final activity was another street action. Part of young activists was divided into two teams: team theory and

team theory + practice, which pulled the rope. Others were inviting passersby to choose side and join the selected team.



Passersby were joining, mostly elder people, always opting for theory + practice. We were equally parted, but people who joined made that part larger.

Andrija, 17, Nis

During this action there was also signing the petition. A total of 300 signatures was collected. The petition was sent to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia.

We have received word from the Ministry... They said it would be nice if the Minister could say "I have 1,000 children from Nis behind me!"

—Jelena, coordinator of youth programs of the Open Club



The following advocacy activity dealt with the issue of gender discrimination in the education system. Young activists felt that their peers and teachers are not sufficiently aware of the problem of gender discrimination in education, as well as that students are not well informed about the possible ways of protecting their rights. Children have chosen this topic because they believe that gender discrimination often occurs in the classroom, sometimes hidden, sometimes quite openly.

With the action named *But, Professor?!* they wanted to draw attention of the students and teachers to the existence of this problem, as well as to inform the Nis high school students about possible ways to protect their own rights.

To this end, they created a Forum Theatre play, which in an interesting, creative and interactive way presents a problem and encourages viewers' initiative to respond to the problem. The play was performed in front of students and teachers of two Nis high schools.



The biggest impression on children and youth in Nis Open Club left the action *Sacrifices Family*, which were part of the *Living Child Rights* project and implemented to mark the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

*As if everything we have done
so far was put together.*

Petar, 17, Nis

*A lot of child rights at risk in
Serbia are presented here.*

Sara, 18, Nis

Creating this advocacy action, they started from the problem of inadequate budgetary allocations for children and youth. As the budgetary allocations relate to different spheres of life of children and young people, they had to find the form through which they could have presented this comprehensive problem. Therefore, they decided to create a Forum Theatre play in which, through scenes from everyday life of a family in Serbia, they would show different aspects of the manifestation of this problem.



We have thought a lot about which problem we should address to, so many bad situations are there in Serbia related to budgetary allocations for children, so we have included all of them from the aspects of a family.

Petar, 17, Nis



Identified problem:

Distribution of funds from the budget of the city of Nis insufficiently adjusted to the needs of children and youth, as well as the low level of awareness of children, youth and all citizens about the right to participation which provides the opportunity to partake in making decisions on budget allocations

Objective:

Drawing the attention of decision-makers and citizens of Nis, especially children and youth to the problem identified

The play is designed to ensure that each member of the Sacrifices family brings into dramatic frame a problem that reflects the right that is threatened. Following the form of Forum Theatre, prepared play had a negative end of the main character, inviting the audience to get involved by suggesting interventions. On this occasion the interventions were in the form of a dialogue with the selected character (asking questions and making suggestions for changing of behaviour in order the story to get a positive ending). The play has inspired a lot of reaction. What happened was that the individuals in the audience have different opinions about which character should change behaviour and how, so this leads to a positive outcome for the family, which further fueled the discussion. In this way, attention is drawn to the existence of the problem of inadequate distribution of funds from the City of Nis budget when it comes to the needs of children and youth. At the same time, the audience was encouraged to get involved in solving problems, to take the initiative in their own rights implementation outside the Forum Theatre.

The play was performed on 20 November, the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As in that period a CSOs fair was held in Nis, the play was performed as a part of the fair program, in front of the representatives of civil society organisations of southeastern

Serbia and citizens of Nis. In this way, the show was seen by around 400 people. During the performance, the audience was provided with promotional material which had texts with specified rights of the child presented throughout the play.

Additional information to the citizens about the action and the problem addressed by it was ensured by the coverage of the local print media on the play held.

After the performance, on promotional flyers the young activists printed comments and the proposed measures related to the city budgetary allocations and greater involvement of children in making decisions on budget allocations in the area directly related to them, which also include proposals of the play audience. Shipment in the form of postcards with comments and signatures of children is addressed to the Mayor's office in Nis.

I saw the play and I was emotionally affected. It makes you think thoroughly about the state we live in and why nothing is going to change.

Vanja, 16, Nis

What we have achieved

The audience is inspired to think about problems presented and to react.

Mayor's of Nis attention was drawn to the problem of inadequate budget allocations to the needs of children and youth, as well as to the insufficient involvement of children in decisions about budget allocations in the area that directly concerns them.

What we learned

Interactive drama play is a creative way to present a problem, which motivates both children and youth and adults to think deeply and take steps towards solving a problem.

Youth team of the Citizens Association — OSMEH, Vrbas

OsmeH's youth club joined the project in April 2012. Since that period until today, they conducted two interrelated actions: *Involving children and youth in the creation of a model of informing at the local level and Improving awareness of youth at local level.*

Identified problem:

The inadequacy of existing models of informing children and youth about availability of local contents

Objective:

Improvement of a model of informing children and youth about possibilities and opportunities for children and youth at the local level

After successful workshops on child rights and the way of implementing advocacy actions for the realisation of child rights, as a significant problem in their community members of the youth team singled out the lack of

information for children and youth about the various opportunities and activities that are relevant to them: the latest developments in and around the town, the possibility of applying for a seasonal/weekend (part-time)

jobs for high school students, about the benefits for students (scholarships, loans, housing...), on realising the right to free transport, opportunities to attend seminars and study abroad, opportunities for travel, volunteering and stay abroad, possibilities to involve in actions to help groups of children and youth with mental and/or physical disabilities, etc.

Since as actors important to address to the identified problems, recognised are decision makers within local government (mayor, president of the Municipal Assembly, coordinator of the Youth Office), the first advocacy activity was carried out at *Open Day at the Children's Week*. On that day the municipal government organise a meeting with representatives of primary and secondary schools. Members of the youth team used this opportunity to inform the Mayor and the President of the Municipal Assembly that "Osmeh" implements action to promote the needs of children and youth to have adequate information at the local level, as well as to deliver a letter about the situation of informing young people in the municipality of Vrbas and the proposal how the existing situation can be improved. The local community was also informed about the action by reporting of local TV and radio stations.



In the continuation of the project, radio and TV show about the European Youth Information Charter were designed and recorded, with the aim to bring the right to information and its significance closer to children and youth. Also, the visit to the team of local Youth Office was organised. Members were informed about the possibilities and capacities of the office and suggested further cooperation. Since the common goals in initiating and establishing mechanisms to inform children

and youth at the local level is recognised, joint appearance before the Information Center² was proposed. On behalf of the “Osmeh” and the Youth Office a letter of the importance of establishing a youth radio program has been sent to the Information Centre. As the youth club of “Osmeh” had long-standing cooperation with the Information Center, an agreement was reached on cooperation in the development of the concept of the youth program.

All these activities were aimed to lobbying for establishing the Info-points: places that will be familiar to youth and where they will be able to obtain compiled information on all aspects of community life that are interesting and relevant to them. The idea of the “Osmeh’s” youth group was that it got established at the local Youth Office. Lobbying continues!

The Youth Office hasn't promoted its opening sufficiently — how do we ask for information if we don't even know that they exist?!

—Maja, 16, Vrbas

What we have achieved

Citizens and local governments have noticed our engagement. People who have decision-making power are brought to the attention to the problem of lack of information of youth in Vrbas. We believe that it's good enough basis for the actions that follow.

What we learned

During the implementation of this action we have learned to write an official letter, thus improving our skills of addressing the public and public articulation of opinions. In addition, we have learned that things do not change “overnight” and that we need to be patient.

The mayor is listening without much interest. There must be a lot of lobbying to reach our goal.

—Maja, 16, Vrbas

² Local broadcasting company.

Group of children and youth at the Children and Youth Creative Centre MAŠTALIŠTE, Zrenjanin

Youth club of the “Maštalište” has also joined the project in April 2012. Since then they have implemented two advocacy actions: *Differently Identical* and *The Sights of a Giraffe*.

Analysing the state of realisation of child rights in the local community, children and youth gathered around “Maštalište” came to the conclusion that in the city there is no possibility of free sports, which means that all children don't have equal access to participation in sports and recreational activities. Therefore, the action of *The Sights of a Giraffe* was designed with the aim of encouraging the authorities to provide better conditions for recreational sport activities of children and youth in Zrenjanin.

With this intention they organised a number of activities: meetings of club members with relevant institutions and organisations (such as the mayor, principals of high schools, etc.), promotional sports activities in the hall for physical education of Zrenjanin Gymnasium (basketball games, the competition in table tennis), action of landscaping Gymnasium courtyard (in which the students created a mosaic on one wall with the help of art professor, another wall of the building was painted in a way so a courtyard is dominated by a giraffe from the title of an action, etc.).



Similar activities were also organised a month later, but then they were, as a result of lobbying by young members of “Maštalište”, organised and implemented together with the students of Zrenjanin Gymnasium and representatives of relevant institutions. In the Zrenjanin Gymnasium a number of parallel events were organised. In the gym and schoolyard a promotional sports activities (table tennis tournament, tournament in three-point shots, basketball game) were held. At the same time the schoolyard decorating was happening (trash cans were placed, the yard was cleaned, the concrete surface was decorated).



In order the message of the advocacy action to be transferred to the widest public, activities were accompanied by the media campaign.

The second action implemented within the project — *Differently Identical* — for children and youth at “Maštalište” wasn’t just an activity contributing to solving the identified problem, but it also emotionally touched them.

For years now there is day care for children and youth with disabilities at “Maštalište”, in which volunteer therapists and psychologists help children become independent, acquire intellectual and social skills. At the same venue the members of the youth team gather in the evenings. Even though they know that the children and youth with disabilities are staying there, they have never met.

Considering the current problems of their peers in the community, members of the youth team of “Maštalište” estimated that children and youth with disabilities who are students of primary and secondary schools “9. maj” after the classes have no means of spending quality time and actively participate in the local community. Therefore, they felt it necessary to draw the attention of the community to this issue, as well as to existing resources: young volunteers of “Maštalište” can be a team to assist in the further implementation of ideas to encourage the inclusion of children and youth with disabilities, and Children’s Creative Centre “Maštalište” place where it will be realised.

Identified problem:

Unequal opportunities of children and youth with disabilities to actively spend spare time and get involved in community life

Objective:

Increasing the level of involvement of children and youth with disabilities in the community life

The intention was to lobby for the establishment of a common space in Zrenjanin for all young people regardless of their mental, national, social or any other difference.

As it is estimated that the actors important for the implementation of this idea are authorities in the municipality of Zrenjanin and primary and secondary schools “9. maj”, at the beginning of the advocacy action

youth team made a contact with them. At a meeting with the representatives of schools “9. maj” an agreement on cooperation in the further implementation of the action was reached. Public advocacy of the attitude about the importance of child rights to participation to the mayor of the city of Zrenjanin resulted in the signing of the Protocol on Cooperation between the Municipality of Zrenjanin, school “9. maj” and “Maštalište”.



As part of the action, the day-long joint creative and sports activities of students of the school “9. maj” and children and youth gathered around “Maštalište” were organised. Some of the activities were carried out at “Maštalište” venue and part of the activities that left the strongest impression was organised at the Carska Bara, picnic area near Zrenjanin. According to the coordinator of the youth team of “Maštalište”, Milica Velimirović, “they spent the day socialising and sharing experiences with children and youth who are different from them, but who have a lot to say and show.”





I've always wanted to see what it looks like to work with people and children with disabilities, and this is the first time I had the chance to experience it.

Honestly, in the beginning, when with my friends from "Maštalište" I was conceiving workshops that we would implement with them, I thought the work would be much more difficult. I expected them to be more reclusive and that it will take a lot of time, effort and patience till they felt comfortable enough in our company. But it was not like that at all. Most of them I met for the first time on Friday, when we were in the Municipality with the Mayor, and at first sight they were all in a very nice mood, ran up to hug me and to introduce themselves, and later we had a chance to talk a little bit more. The next day, when we met in "Maštalište", they were in even better mood to work, they were all delighted, and I knew that we would spend a wonderful day together. There were those who were a little shy and withdrawn, but with a nice approach we managed to persuade them to approach and socialise with others.

Zorana, 18, Zrenjanin

...As time went by, I noticed that they are different from us high school students, and the difference was unexpected... Initially we were more closed than them and more difficult to communicate with, so it turned out as they came to show us what it means to enjoy life and relax.

Bellona, 17, Zrenjanin

In my street lives a boy with Down syndrome who was included in our action. After the event he approached to me, he laughed and said hi. I think that was the best day of my life after the action.

Luna, 16, Zrenjanin

The press conference was organised within the action. To the issue of lack of involvement in the social life of youth with disabilities, attention was drawn to the local community by reporting of local print media, radio and TV stations.



What we have achieved

We encouraged those who have influence on decision-making to recognise the problem.

Direct product of this action is also a formed team of young volunteers who will continue to work to fight for equal rights for all children and youth.

What we learned

You must have a lot of patience, effort and initiative to accomplish something. An action should be well designed; there should be a good team, people who have the motivation and desire to persist.

—Milica, 16 godina, Zrenjanin

A reception at the Municipality was a significant experience. We went to see the Mayor's head of the cabinet, he nodded, and then — goodbye. They take us for granted, like most people in the city. They think — children are gathered, they have a lot of free time and playing a little.

—Zorana, 18, Zrenjanin

Consultative process with children on the preliminary Draft Law on the Rights of the Child

During the 2010 the working group of the Ombudsman to develop a Preliminary draft Law on the Rights of the Child was established. The Preliminary draft is presented to professionals and the general public, but the children so far have not been included in this process. Therefore, one advocacy action by the groups of children and youth from Belgrade, Nis and Uzice was devoted to the organisation of the consultation process with children. In this way, children were enabled to participate in the adoption of regulations that they are largely concerned.

Identified problem:	Children are not sufficiently involved in decision-making process on issues that directly affect them. Preliminary draft Law on the Rights of the Child is available to the public, public debates are organised, numerous comments were collected (by professionals, wider public, etc), but the children have not been included.
Objective:	Increase the level of involvement of children in process of decision-making on issues that directly affect them. The stated objective was realised through three types of activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Introducing a group of children with Preliminary draft Law on the Rights of the Child,- Collecting the views of children on particular solutions of the Preliminary draft Law on the Rights of the Child,- Collecting the recommendations of children for the improvement of particular legislative solutions.

The intention was that, by organising focus groups, the opinion of a large number of children was consulted. With this aim, the provisions of the Preliminary draft Law on the Rights of the Child are first introduced to the leaders of children groups by the representatives of the Ombudsman and members of the Working Group that drafted the Preliminary draft. Then the leaders informed children and youth, giving them the opportunity on this occasion to give their comments and suggestions. After that, at the level

of each group, prepared was a plan of activities based on which the initial groups organised meetings with peers in schools, other groups, organisations and institutions, informed them about the Preliminary draft Law on the Rights of the Child and collected opinions and suggestions to improve the legislative solutions. As the main method of work all groups were using focus groups. A total of 30 focus groups were held. A group of children and youth from Uzice, in addition to the focus groups, held 8 presentations

of the Preliminary draft Law during classes of civic education and classmaster's. The aforementioned children and youth group's plan of action included the associates of Uzice Child Rights Centre, Cacak, Kraljevo and Arilje, and 12 focus groups were held. This consultation process included 779 children and young people. Collected the views of children and their recommendations for improving particular solutions of the Preliminary draft Law on the Rights of the Child were submitted to the Working Group of the Ombudsman.

We have entered into commenting the law less than enthusiastic because you do not see immediate results, but to me it was interesting. I could not wait to hear what our peers think about that.

—Nadja, 17, Uzice

When we started the discussion, we could not finish — they are really interested in a change.

—Ana, 17, Uzice

Youth don't know their rights. When they hear from adults about their rights, they take it for granted. They do not know about Youth Law, what rights they have, what they can do.

—Andjela, 16, Nis

What we have achieved

Groups of children and youth had the opportunity to participate in creating the future Law on the Rights of the Child: they had a chance to have their say on the provisions of the Preliminary draft law and their opinions and suggestions were sent to the authorities.

What we learned

As a method, focus groups caused a lot of positive reactions. The focus groups' participants were very happy to be asked for their opinion as those whom the law mostly concerns. They liked the structure of the work by which they were first informed in detail, and then had the opportunity to present their comments. It is an undivided opinion that this is a very convenient form of collecting opinions of children and young people.

Through this action we had the opportunity to see what actually the attitude of adults towards children is. We motivated our young members to schedule their own focus groups in schools. It turned out that they could have not agreed on anything by themselves, because nobody takes them seriously. In the end it comes down to the fact that we send official papers, and adults are unsuccessful.

—Jelena, coordinator of the group of children and youth in Uzice Child Rights Centre

Marking 20 November — the date of the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

During the three years of the project realisation, all groups of children and youth have been conceiving and performing actions that celebrated the 20th November, the day when in 1989 the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the UN General Assembly. As groups of children and youth involved in the project work within civil society organisations which one of the objectives is the promotion of the child rights, marking the 20th November, in some cases, was an activity that was part of the organisation's activities in their other projects.

During year **2010** groups of children and youth have marked the Convention on the Rights of the Child anniversary by realising following activities:

Group of children and youth with the Uzice Child Rights Centre has marked this day through realisation of five workshops on child rights led by peer educators. Distribution of thematic brochures and leaflets and media appearances has also contributed to the promotion of child rights.

Representatives of Children's Informative Cultural Service DX, Belgrade contributed to the promotion of child rights by participating in the Conference on the Implementation of the Action Plan for the National Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence Safe Childhood, organised by the Ministry of Work, Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Serbia and the Council for Child Rights of the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

Members of the **Open Club, Nis** in order to promote child rights organised an action called Step to the child rights. To the gathered children certain rights of the child are presented in an interesting way, through the child rights caterpillar, part of members of the Open Club symbolically presented rights defined by the Convention. Holding on to the shoulders, they formed a child rights caterpillar, which passed through the park, animating children. Other members spoke to the gathered children, informing them about the importance of rights and answering their questions. In addition to sharing candy, balloons and promotional materials, children and youth activists drawn together on the sidewalk, presenting topics related to the child rights.

This action is implemented as part of the *Poverty Reduction — Civil Society and Accountable Government* project of the Association for Development of Children and Youth from Nis implemented in partnership with 7 organisations from Serbia, with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway.

Here are the ideas for the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child young activists conducted during **2011**:

Children and youth gathered around **Uzice Child Rights Centre**, with the help of adults designed and staged a play the Convention on the Rights of the Child through dramatic presentation. Articles of the Convention were presented through an interactive dramatic form. Young activists were acting certain articles and children in the audience were recognising them. Such an interesting and dynamic presentation encouraged children to engage, comment, reflect, thus learning about child rights.

Children's Informative Cultural Service DX from Belgrade on this occasion organised an action with the slogan It matters to us at the shopping mall Ušće. Through informational materials visitors of the shopping mall had the opportunity to learn about child rights and the recommendations for improvement of their implementation, as well as with the activities of the children in the monitoring of their rights implementation. Volunteers of the DX and children from the Drop-in centre who are involved in the life and work on the streets have painted 'portable' graffiti panels thematically related to the field of child rights, where they were joined by passers-by. Painted graffiti were donated to the Drop-in centre for children living and/or working on the street, shopping center Ušće, as well as to the passers-by who were involved in their creation.





Young activists of the **Open Club from Nis** realised an action entitled Wake up the child in you in the Cair Park. During the planning of the action they focused on the child right to quality leisure time, play and recreation. In order to encourage pre-school and lower primary school children to spend more time outdoors and less on the computer, with this action they introduced “forgotten games” — the games of earlier generations. They demonstrated the games (rope skipping, playing elastics, playing marbles, etc.), inviting children to join them. Besides the children the adults joined as well, enjoying along with volunteers of the Open Club.



First we had to learn how to play some games so we could show them to the children. For example, the marbles.

Andjela, 16, Nis



Children were watching all the games and approached us. They were asking “How do you play marbles?” Not a game they did know before.

Vanja, 16, Nis



During **2012** the young activists marked the 20th November with organised advocacy actions. In this sense, the goal of the actions was not only raising awareness and informing the public about the rights of the child, but also pointing out the problem identified in the community.

Within **Uzice Child Rights Centre**, children and youth have decided to deal with the problem of lack of child safety in traffic. According to their assessment the pedestrian crossings in Uzice are not sufficiently visible throughout the year. They are faded, rarely outlined, and in winter those surfaces are irregularly cleaned from the snow. Therefore, Uzice Centre's volunteers wanted to draw attention of the authorities to this issue and to the importance of children's safety in traffic.

Identified problem:	Insufficient safety of children in traffic caused by the lack of visible pedestrian crossings
Objectives:	Drawing attention of decision-makers to the problem and encouraging them to react. Drawing attention of citizens, especially of peers to the problem, as well as to the importance of involving children and youth in the process of solving this problem

With this aim, a meeting was held with representatives of the local government in which the problem and requests for pedestrian crossings in the city to be well marked and visible throughout the year was presented, as well as to carry out legal action of removing illegally parked vehicles that are barriers to the pavement, especially near schools. Meetings were also held with the local Directorate for Construction in charge of maintaining the pedestrian crossings. Meetings were also held with representatives of the traffic police.

Discussion was held on the topic of road safety with the participation of representatives of the traffic police. The panel discussion presented activity, the demands that are placed in front of decision makers and handed out to the

present representatives of local authorities and relevant institutions. Besides the problem of child safety in traffic, part of the panel discussion was devoted to the topic of child rights.

A street action was performed — two pedestrian crossings were painted in the form of animal zebra at frequent pedestrian crossings and crossings near the elementary school. A letter in which the problem was stated and street action announced with an invitation to join was sent to schools, so that the action was very well attended by children and youth. The activities have included the children who have passed by, at the same time receiving information about the purpose of the action.





A concert of high school bands from Uzice and the surroundings was organised. Each band had to perform a song with the theme of traffic safety.



All three events (panel discussion, street action and concert) covered the reporting of local radio and TV stations.

Lobbying for change in this field has continued by sending a letter to the Uzice Police Department, the city Directorate for Construction and the media.

What we have achieved

We drew the attention of decision-makers, the public and the peers to the problem of insufficient security of children in traffic in our city. We have shown that with our own initiative we can start solving the problem.

What we learned

With good teamwork and division of work, a lot can be achieved.

After the discussion about the problems in their environment, as a problem that they would like to deal with in the next action members of the **Children's Cultural Informative Service DX from Belgrade** recognised the lack of support for talented children from high schools of the Belgrade suburb Karaburma.



Identified problem:

Lack of support to the talented high school children of Karaburma.

Objective:

Providing additional support to the talented children of the Seventh Belgrade Gymnasium.

Therefore they organised an action with the intention of running the club for gifted students of the Seventh Belgrade Gymnasium, which will give more attention to their individual development. In addition, features that are not available to children in the regular school system will be used, as well as the expertise of non-governmental organisations that have experience working with gifted children and youth.

Meetings with the principal of the Seventh Belgrade Gymnasium were organised where the action plan and its purpose were presented. The principal's consent and willingness to join the DX in the future meetings with stakeholders relevant to achieve the objectives of the advocacy were obtained. This idea was also introduced to the school parliament members and their support was obtained. At the further meetings the Municipality of Zvezdara gave their support. After consultation with all relevant stakeholders, the presentation of the Club 7 idea to the interested students of the Seventh Belgrade Gymnasium was held. The intention to encourage the

development of young leaders in science, art and social engagement through club activities was presented. On 20th November a new event was organised, at which an Agreement on Cooperation between Seventh Belgrade Gymnasium, Municipality of Zvezdara and Club OPA (Youth Initiate the Action) was signed, which will contribute its expertise in the field of civic engagement of youth. With this the club is officially opened. Information about the club establishment and its mission have found their way to the large number of children and youth through presentations at appropriate websites.

In parallel with the action realised, on the same day members of DX, on the the occasion of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, organised an action under the slogan "It's important to me that you can hear me." Distribution of promotional material to participants of the event organised on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the DX and 15th anniversary of the Child Rights Centre, draw attention to the importance of the participation of children and youth.



What we have achieved

We have launched a club that will support young talents in the fields of sciences, arts and social engagement.

We united the representatives of schools, local authorities and civil society on the realisation of idea that create new opportunities for children and youth of Karaburma.

What we learned

Shortly before the start of the action, DX got a lot of new members. Joint design and realisation of the action is a great way new activists to meet each other, to learn about the way the organisation functions and to develop team spirit.

Young activists of the **Open Club from Nis** marked the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by performing an interactive play *Sacrifices Family*, which was presented in the previous section. The play was created and first performed as part of the Poverty Reduction: Civil Society and Accountable Government project, supported by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Serbia. Since it then provoked strong reactions from the audience, members of the Open Club decided to adapt it in line with the subject of the advocacy action (city budget allocations for children and youth) and perform it within this project.



In addition to implementing the activities related to advocacy action entitled *Improving Informing of Youth at the Local Level* (described in the previous section), members of the youth club at the **Osmeh** organisation on the occasion of the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child organised two panel discussions. The first panel was held on 20th November in Vrbas Gymnasium and was dedicated to the rights of the child. It gathered 80 students and around 10 teachers. The audience was very interested in the topic and asked questions after completing the official forums. The local community was informed about the event through local media coverage.

The second panel discussion was held on 10 December — Human Rights Day, under the title *The Gallery of Human Rights*. The panel was held at the Municipality of Vrbas premises. The intent of young volunteers of the Osmeh was that the subject of human rights and the rights of the child was brought closer to their peers from different marginalised groups. Therefore, the audience of the panel were children and youth users of the Vrbas Red Cross projects, primary schools for children with disabilities “*Bratstvo i jedinstvo*” and Roma children and youth. Information on this event had a wider range than the previous one since the discussion was not only covered by reporting of the local media, but also by a regional TV station.



Two panel discussions were organised by 15 students. They were hard-working and motivated students willing to share their knowledge with their peers. During the preparations, there was a working atmosphere, everyone was interested in the work and this has resulted in successful discussions.

Slavica, youth group coordinator



Within the advocacy action entitled *The Sights of a Giraffe* (described in the previous section) young activists of **Maštalište** organised series of activities aimed at marking the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

On 20th November in the lobby of Zrenjanin Gymnasium exhibition on the theme of a child was displayed. On that day, young activists have held several meetings with stakeholders relevant for the implementation of the action goal. They met with the principal of the Gymnasium and local government officials, with the aim of highlighting the problem of inadequate conditions for recreational sports and quality leisure time of children and youth in Zrenjanin, information about the operation and making an invitation to join it. Invitation for participation in the action was presented to: Head of Central Banat District, Mayor of the

City of Zrenjanin, a member of the City Council for Youth and Sports, the representative of the Association of Physical Education Teachers and principal of Zrenjanin Gymnasium.

In elementary and secondary schools in the city promotional leaflets are distributed. On that occasion, from the volunteers youth could obtain information about the operation and capabilities to join. Informing the public about the problem and action of children and youth from Maštalište was additionally encouraged by local media coverage.

If the youth is provided with adequate stimulus to independently advocate for their ideas with the local authorities and adequate institutions, and if they receive support from them (even just a declarative one), that will present a remarkable strength and motivation to take action, implement it successfully and get ideas for further activities.

Milica, youth group coordinator

Participation of children in reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child

By ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child the Republic of Serbia, among other, took over the obligation to report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter the Committee) as the supervisory body of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In order the Committee to get a comprehensive insight into the realisation of child rights, the ability to report to the Committee also have civil society organisations, the Ombudsman, international organisations, as well as the children themselves. The Committee particularly appreciates the reporting of children, believing that in this way one of the basic principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child — the child right to participation is achieved.

Starting from 2007 the Child Rights Centre has involved children in the process of reporting to the Committee. That year, in cooperation with members of the Children's Informative Cultural Service DX, Child Rights Centre has founded *Children's Coalition* which prepared the report on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Serbia: *Child Rights in Serbia — The Children's Perspective*. In February 2008 the report of the Children's Coalition on implementation of the Convention was presented to the Committee at the meeting particularly organised with the representatives of the Children's Coalition.

Tendency to support children in the process of reporting to the Committee, the Child Rights Centre has continued by initiating the reporting of the Children's Coalition on the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, which was implemented as part of the Living Child Rights project. When we talk about children's reporting on the implementation of the Optional Protocols, it is important to point out that children from Serbia were among the first in the world to have done so.

In both situations (reporting on the implementation of the Convention in 2008 and reporting on the implementation of the Optional Protocols to the Convention in 2010) the backbone of the Children's Coalition consisted of members of DX, with children and youth involved in the programs of other organisations, institutions, schools and the local community. Attention is paid to the fact that the representatives of vulnerable children and youth are involved in the process, so the coalition included the children who live and/or work on the streets, children with disabilities and children without parental care.



When reported on the Optional Protocols, Children's Coalition consisted of 12 members from Belgrade and surrounding areas, aged 12 to 18 years. Children's Coalition conducted a survey on the awareness of children and their views on topics that the Optional Protocols include, which was part of the Alternative/Shadow Reports. In order to strengthen this process, they were first informed about the rights and the basic concepts of the Protocol, as well as possible ways of testing attitudes. Based on the information obtained, the children supported by the project team of the Child Rights Centre defined what kind of data will be collected and how. The survey was conducted through six focus groups with children from primary schools in Belgrade, children with disabilities, children living and/or working on the streets, children without parental care and children and youth involved in the various programs of the Youth Office of the municipality of Palilula. Focus groups

involved a total of 53 children and adolescents between age 12 and 18, of which 20 boys and 33 girls.

In addition to the focus groups, in this research, the analysis of the inclusion of children and youth in Facebook groups that promote hatred against any particular group (other nation, other gender, homosexuals, people of other religions, etc.), the analysis of access to these groups, and analysis of the activities of youth in these groups (whether youth just comment or use Facebook to take specific actions, e.g. organise meetings, etc.) were performed.

At the end of 2009 the Alternative/Shadow report was delivered to the Committee. In February 2009 representatives of the Children's Coalition, together with the representatives of the Coalition for monitoring child rights in Serbia, presented the Alternative reports to the members of the Committee.

When we found out that we will present our report on the Optional Protocols to the Convention to the Committee in Geneva, we were very excited, but also scared. What helped us was that we had persons to help us find out more about the process of presenting reports, on how the members of the Committee would treat us and how we should behave. It was also a great help that we were given the opportunity to present the report on the two press conferences before we went to Geneva. In this way we could practice public performance and have gained initial confidence.³

³ The statement of a child taken from the publication: V. Marković, V. Begović, L. Marković, D. Begović, N. Vučković Šahović, M. Petrović, M. Golić: *Participation of Children in Reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child*; Child Rights Centre; Begrade; 2011.

Being a child and seeing people who are professionally involved in child rights, as well as in diplomacy, writing down what you are saying and showing interest in what you're speaking about, it really is wonderful and gives you a feeling that you're doing something really important about the issues you're dealing with.⁴

Upon the recommendation of the Committee, during forthcoming months the *Children's Coalition* presented Alternative reports to children who participated in the survey. On this occasion they jointly identified themes on which it is further possible to implement different types of actions at the local and national level. Alternative reports were presented to the general public as well, through various promotional activities (media appearances, participation in conferences and round tables, publication of reports on the Internet, etc.).



⁴ Ibid



In early 2012, members of the DX, Open Club Nis and children gathered around Uzice Child Rights Centre began work on the preparation of the Report on the implementation of child rights in the Republic of Serbia from the perspective of children and youth.

In order to the abovementioned groups of children and youth prepare for this process, they were first introduced with the previous report of children *Child Rights in Serbia – The Children Perspective* and the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

This time also, it was planned that the basis for creating the report are about attitudes of children and youth on the implementation of their rights.

At the level of all three groups, defined were six fields that children identified as priorities in the reporting process (health care, education, bullying, non-discrimination, culture of non-violence — a safe environment, child participation), bearing in mind the previous report of the Children’s Coalition and the Committee’s recommendations. Based on this, a questionnaire was developed which was applied during the survey. In preparing the questionnaire, the young activists have consulted other groups of children and youth, especially trying to involve children from vulnerable groups (Roma population, children living and/or working on the streets, children with disabilities, etc).



The study included 1,358 children and youth aged 12–18 years, from 10 cities (Belgrade, Nis, Uzice, Vrbas, Zrenjanin, Novi Sad, Kraljevo, Zajecar, Loznica, Prijepolje). Among them are children and youth from vulnerable groups: children and youth living in institutions for children without parental care, Roma children and youth, children and youth who live or work on the street, as well as children and youth with disabilities. Among them, 49% are male respondents and 51% female.

With the help of the group coordinator, young activists conducted data analysis and prepared the *Report on the implementation of child rights in Serbia from the perspective of children and youth*. During the process, they had the support of the Child Rights Centre, the Coalition for Monitoring Child Rights in Serbia, and Save the Children.

On 21 December 2012, at the meeting held at the Office for Human and Minority Rights of the Republic of Serbia representatives of the groups of children and youth presented the *Report on the Implementation on the Child Rights in the Republic of Serbia from the Perspective of Children and Youth*. In front of the Office for Human and Minority Rights of the Republic of Serbia guests were welcomed by Assistant Director Suzana Paunovic. Also, at the fifth regular meeting of the Board on the Rights of the Child of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia held on 18 December 2012, the president of the Child Rights Centre informed the members of the Parliament about the report prepared by children and youth. On this occasion, she was asked to submit a report to the Board on the Rights of the Child through the secretariat, which was done. Representatives of the Board on the Rights of the Child expressed their interest to children and youth themselves acquainted them with the report, and in this respect the Draft work plan of the Board on the Rights of the Child for the 2013 envisages a public hearing organised by the Board on the Rights of the Child at which the Draft State Report will be presented, as well as Report on the Implementation on the *Child Rights in the Republic of Serbia from the Perspective of Children and Youth* that will be presented by a group of children and youth.



A quick look at the results of the children and youth attitudes survey on the implementation of the rights of the child

In order to give the readers an opportunity to gain at least partial insight into the opinion of children and youth about the implementation of their rights in Serbia, we have selected some illustrative results of the research conducted.

As the young activists involved in the study said that they were surprised by the attitude of their peers on the quality of education in Serbia, we are giving some results in this area.

Realisation of child right to education

Some of the most important results:

- ▶ Most children and youth think that in schools they have the opportunity to progress in line with their capabilities. However, at the end of high school those who think like that cease to be a majority. Very similar happens with satisfaction of students about the applicability of the knowledge acquired in school — as children get older, they are less satisfied, and at the end of high school number of content drops below 50%.
- ▶ Satisfaction of students with teachers' work decreases from 70% in primary school to 40% in high school.
- ▶ Around half of the of children and youth declare that the school curriculum is close to their interests, but this percentage also decreases with age.

Parents' obligation to preserve the safety of the child and the various behaviours through which parents reach that, and which children often perceive as controlling, was a provocative subject in focus groups when commenting on Preliminary Draft Law on the Rights of the Child. For this reason, we present the data obtained in this study, which show what children and youth think about the respect of their privacy by the parents in their efforts to preserve the safety of the child.

Safety and privacy of children and youth in relationships with parents/guardians

The most significant results:

- ▶ Approximately 40% of parents/guardians punish their children by limiting going out, and 30% by beating.
- ▶ Around 17% of parents/guardians check their children's telephone communication, while only 7% express interest in their Internet communications.
- ▶ As children get older, their parents are less checking their phones and Facebook, but more often limit their going out.

Several groups of young activists during the project set aside the problem of the presence of violence, lack of its recognition by peers and not taking steps to prevent it. Therefore, we give what children and youth think in this area.

The feeling of security of the living environment of children and youth

The most significant results:

- ▶ Half of the tested children and youth experienced the embarrassment and harassment over the phone and around a third over the Internet.
- ▶ More than half of children and youth have experienced that someone intentionally damaged their belongings and property.
- ▶ Two fifths of children and youth have experienced to be hit in a public place (outside their homes).
- ▶ 1/5 of children and youth suffered a violent confiscation of money.
- ▶ Every ninth boy was the victim of an attack involving weapons.

Readiness of children and youth to report bullying experienced

The most significant results:

- ▶ When deciding whom to report physical, psychological or sexual violence by their peers, the majority of children and youth have the most confidence in the parents (3/4 of them), significantly less in the police, class masters, friends and school psychologists (30%), and there is some, although small, number of children and youth (around 5%) who would not report bullying to anyone.
- ▶ At older ages trust in school psychologists and class masters is dropping and the willingness of entrusting their parents reduces, while willingness to entrusting their peers is significantly increasing.

Last but certainly not least is the issue of participation. If we want to encourage greater involvement of children and youth in social and political life of the community through further actions, it is important to know what they think about that and what is important to them in this area. Therefore, we give the recommendations of children and youth to promote participation. We hope that they will be a useful guide in the development of new actions that will encourage children and youth to take the initiative and create a more humane world.

Recommendations of children and youth to promote participation

- ▶ Education of children from the earliest days (from kindergarten) about their rights, but also how to implement those rights to express their opinions.
- ▶ Education of parents, school staff and the general public about the importance of child rights to participation, the campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of this right (media, street events, promotional materials, brochures).
- ▶ Monitoring of governmental authorities in terms of openness to the participation of children and youth.
- ▶ The formation of a number of similar bodies such as the student parliament at the school, and outside of school something like the Council of Children that would participate in the cities' decision-making.
- ▶ Organisation of open classes or students' classes that would be devoted to students' issues and opinions.
- ▶ Boxes for suggestions and questions of students in schools.

- ▶ Reform of the education system in order to, among other things, provide to children the knowledge and skills that will enable them to participate.
- ▶ Inviting children and youth to round tables, meetings, conversations with them, or at least a question of opinion by questionnaire and survey.
- ▶ Creating a website or a Facebook group for children's questions, opinions and suggestions at the city level.
- ▶ Introducing the requirement that a certain number of class hours must be devoted to this subject, and that it doesn't come down only to the talking about participation, but that participation is actually applied.
- ▶ Active monitoring of the implementation of the Law on the Basis of Education; students' parliament is the only body at the school level that allows the participation of children and it is unacceptable that there isn't any or there is only formally.
- ▶ The introduction of rules on the transparency of parliament (the representatives of the classes should present at the class hour what was done in the meetings of parliament).
- ▶ Networking of parliaments from different schools for cooperation, joint actions and experience exchange.
- ▶ Informing teachers that parliament membership should be voluntary and independent of success in school.
- ▶ Creation of encouraging and accepting climate in the school that will allow that student parliament enables children to actually exercise their right to participation.