

## 78th Session – Montenegro

### Recommendations to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

Prepared by Child Helpline International and NGO Children First – July 2017

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Child Helplines base their work on the principles of the UNCRC, which spells out a child's fundamental right to be heard in Article 12. Child helplines are confidential help and support services for children and empower children by educating them about their rights. They can prevent children from being victimised, and offer counselling services by unbiased professionals, who children can confide in. Child helplines can take age appropriate steps to ensure children's safety and protection. Child helplines also serve as a link between child victims and various services such as shelters, legal protection, medical assistance or law enforcement, and are vital reporting mechanisms for severe problems such as violence and abuse.

#### **Background:**

Established in 2012, NGO Children First offered, in the period from 2012 to 2015, a free of cost child helpline service for children ("Confidential phone") who has to use the landline phone for contact, considering that providers of mobile phone services were not ready to support Children First in provision of free cost child helpline service through mobile networks. This lack of possibility for using the mobile phones has had the direct negative impact to number of received calls. Because of that, since 2015 children are able to contact the helpline only through the Facebook, internet and the organisation website, which showed as good solution. However, currently, the helpline is faced with the problems related to the sustainability, having in mind absence of support, both from the state and donors. The helpline is functioning on a voluntary basis for the years now.

We call on the government of Montenegro to support Children First and its Counselling child line "Confidential phone" specifically in making the service more accessible for children, more sustainable and data driven, and to enable them to answer every call, from every child.

#### **Recommendation 1 – Accessibility**

The government of Montenegro should ensure that child helpline services are *readily accessible*. The following criteria guarantees accessibility and the removal of barriers for those young people most at risk, such as marginalised children:

- Free of cost access: The government of Montenegro should support free of cost access: especially free of calling costs for children and child helplines (e.g. by regulation)
- Regionally harmonised phone number: The government of Montenegro should assign the regionally harmonised short code reserved for child helplines 116111 to Children

First. Regionally harmonised child helpline telephone numbers can be of particular importance to displaced and trafficked children.

- Availability: The government of Montenegro should support Children First to operate their service nation-wide and on a 24/7 basis.
- Means of communication: The government of Montenegro should support the expansion of “Confidential phone” into the following channels of communication - mobile phones networks
- Anonymity and Confidentiality: The government of Montenegro should support Children First in maintaining and strengthening their common principle of anonymity and confidentiality in regards to the identity of the children contacting the child helpline.

### **Recommendation 2 – Allocate Funding**

In 2016, children contacted NGO Children First helpline only through Facebook, internet and organization website. There were no calls, due to the above-mentioned reasons. Having that in mind, the government of Montenegro should support Children First and its Counselling child line “Confidential phone” financially to improve child helpline services. Well-resourced and functioning services guarantee that every call, from every child, can be answered, and that children get the best protection and care they need.

### **Recommendation 3 – Strengthen Referral Mechanisms**

Child helplines often are the main entry point for children into the national child protection system. In addition to providing important information and counselling to children, they also refer them to more specialised services available in the country. The government of Montenegro should support Children First in building a strong referral network and raise awareness amongst other crucial child protection services in Montenegro about the existence and work of “Confidential phone”. A strong and integrated referral and case management system demonstrates commitment towards the accountability of all sectors to vulnerable children at all levels; and offers a framework in which these systems can ensure that intervention has a positive impact on children.

**Recommendation 5** – In order to improve the work of the helpline and increase the number of children calls to the “Confidential phone”, regular public campaign, promotion of the line, raising awareness of children and parents, promotion of professional capacities of counsellors and volunteers through regular educational activities is very important. Accordingly, the state should support Children First in the realization of the mentioned activities.

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In 2014, CHI reviewed the impact of its [alternative reports](#) that have been sent to the CRC Committee since 2004. CHI has observed an increased likelihood of a child helpline service being established or improved when child helplines are mentioned in a concluding observation. For example, where child helplines were mentioned in a CRC Concluding Observation there was a 21% increased probability that an existing child helpline would scale-up, or a new one be established. The time taken to establish a child helpline when the requirement for one was mentioned within the concluding



observations was also reduced by over a year. The impact of these reports can be evidenced and should be considered when strengthening child protective systems. CHI will continue to monitor alternative reports and their impact on child helpline services.

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