



# CHILDREN'S REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

2013-2018

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# INTRODUCTION

## FOR OUR PEERS IN THE COUNTRY

Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations on 20 November 1989 as the first international legal instrument to specifically and comprehensively address the rights of the child. The Convention encompasses basic children's needs represented through rights and the obligations of states in ensuring the implementation of those rights.

Almost all countries around the world are signatories to the Convention, including our country. In addition to the obligation to align their laws with the Convention and ensure full implementation of children's rights, States parties are also obliged to submit regular reports to the United Nations on the state of the children's rights guaranteed by the Convention.

In addition to states, reports on the state of children's rights may also be submitted by

independent organizations – national non-governmental organizations, international organizations that are active in their states and independent institutions for human rights such as ombudsmen for children's rights. These reports are called alternative reports or shadow reports and are very important for getting a realistic picture of the status of children in the country.

The body responsible for examination of reports is called the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Committee is composed of 18 members from around the world who are experts in children's rights. The Committee meets in Geneva three times a year to examine the reports and give its recommendations to the States parties to the Convention.

After states/organizations submit their reports, the Committee organizes so called hearings to discuss matters with the representatives



of states and ask additional questions related to the life of children in the state. After the hearing, the Committee forwards to the States its recommendations for improvement of the situation that should, ideally, be implemented before the submission of the next report.

The state of Bosnia and Herzegovina has so far submitted three reports – in 2001, 2010 and 2017. Non-governmental organizations that are members of the network “Stronger Voice for Children” have also submitted three alternative reports (in 2005, 2011 and 2018).

The Committee especially appreciates children’s opinion.

It is recommended to include children’s opinions in the reports or preferably have children prepare a separate report to be submitted by non-governmental organizations together with the Alternative Report. Children may also have a separate session with the Committee in Geneva.

All previous alternative reports submitted to the Committee by the network of non-governmental organizations always included children’s opinions. However, now for the first time, we are submitting a separate, first Children’s Report on the Situation of Children’s Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina that you have in front of you. The Report is the result of a three-year long work of children’s groups functioning within the network “Stronger Voice for Children” and it was updated in 2018 to include new views and recommendations of children from eight cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

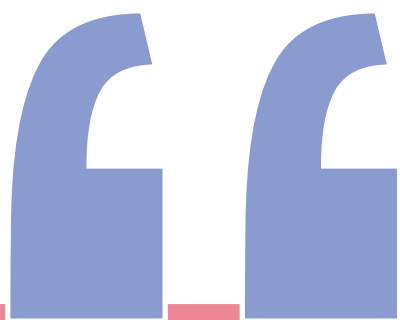
Steps we have taken in the course of the preparation of the first Children’s Report include:

- establishing children’s groups in local communities

- raising awareness about the rights of the child
- empowering children to implement actions aimed at improving the situation in local communities
- educating children on how to carry out surveys
- researching the application of general measures of CRC implementation at the local level
- summing up results and selecting four issues that children see as critical
- additional research of four selected issues
- research analysis and recommendations
- compiling results in the first Children’s Report on the Situation of Children’s Rights in BiH
- organizing additional children’s workshops and focus groups to update the report
- organizing Children’s Conference to formulate final findings and recommendations

Preparation of the first children’s report was supported by the European Commission in BiH, UNICEF BiH and Save the Children office in North-West Balkans. Report update, promotion and printing was supported by UNICEF BiH.

In addition to being submitted to the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child, we hope that this Report will reach as many as possible children and parents, teachers and care-takers, school principals and administrations, politicians and individuals in responsible positions who can contribute to making the next report on the situation of children’s rights more positive and eliminating the occurrence of violations of children’s rights.



## PARTICIPANTS IN THE FIRST CHILDREN'S REPORT CHILDREN ABOUT THEMSELVES 😊

We are children, representatives of children's groups of the network of non-governmental organizations from around Bosnia and Herzegovina "Stronger Voice for Children". The network was formed in 2009 and it includes 20 non-governmental organizations that work with children.

*In 2014, we conducted a survey and obtained results that are included in the first children's report on the situation of children's rights in our country. Ten children's groups worked on this task: "Fenix" Vogošća and "Glas djece" (Children's Voice) Novi grad Sarajevo from the organization "Naša djeca" (Our Children) Sarajevo, "Dječiji parlament" (Children's Parliament) from the organization "Naša djeca" (Our Children) Zenica, children's group "Budī mi drug" (Be My Friend) from the association "Sretni Romi" (Happy Roma) Tuzla, group "Telex" from the organization "Zemlja djece" (Land of Children) Tuzla, organization "Center for Children's Rights" Konjic, children's group "In spe" from the organization "Zdravo da ste" (Hi Neighbor) Banja Luka, "Sunčani most" (Sunny Bridge) from the organization "Sunce" (Sun) Mostar, "Association for support to mentally impaired persons" Banja Luka and children's group "Zauvijek prijatelji/Drugačiji pogled" (Friends Forever/Different View) from the organization "Svjetonik" (Lighthouse). The children's groups approximately had 15 to 20 members aged between 12 and 18 years old. In our local communities, we implement different educational activities related to children's rights, celebrate important days in a year such as Children's Week and the 20 November – Day of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We also organize various humanitarian actions and educational and entertainment workshops.*





## PARTICIPANTS IN THE UPDATE OF THE FIRST CHILDREN'S REPORT

Update of the first children's report involved children and young people from six associations member of the Network from all over BiH, specifically children, members of Children's Parliaments from the association "Naša djeca" (Our Children) Sarajevo and "Naša djeca" (Our Children) Zenica, children and young activists from the association "Zdravo da ste" (Hi Neighbor) Banja Luka, group of children from the organization "Budućnost" (Future) Modriča, wards of the Children's Home and children from the Roma community from the association "Zemlja djece u BiH" (Land of Children in BiH) Tuzla and wards of the Association for support to mentally impaired persons" Banja Luka, as well as children and young people participants in the Children's Conference from the following associations/organizations: Youth Centre "Vermont" Brčko, Association "Otaharin" Bijeljina, "SOS Children's Villages BiH", "Step by Step" Sarajevo, Children's Home Bjelave/Hope and Homes for Children BiH, "Sunce" (Sun) Mostar, and children and young people from several elementary and secondary schools in the Sarajevo Canton.

*"We are a team that creates, and you support all our rights!"*

*"Being different may be a fortune, but never a reason for anti-fraternity"*

*"Be cool, not a bully"*

*„TIME FOR CHANGE IS NEVER LATE THINK HOW FUTURE FOR US YOU WANT TO CREATE“*

# ABOUT THE RESEARCH

To capture the state of children's rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 2013, ten children's groups conducted a research in their local communities of the implementation of general measures of the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the local level. On that occasion, in the involved local communities, we researched the level of awareness of adults and children about children's rights, how much money municipalities invested in children's needs, how information on children was collected and shared among the stakeholders and cooperation with non-governmental organizations and the Institution of Ombudsman for Human Rights in children-related issues. Following the presentation of results at the conference of children's groups, children decided that the following four issues, which they considered critical, would be the subject of additional research and the first Children's Report:

1. Violence against children
2. Right to express views - right to participation of children
3. Awareness of child's rights
4. Right to quality education

The research was conducted between February and June 2014 and it included children from elementary and secondary schools in Banja Luka, Konjic, Mostar, Prijedor, Sarajevo, Tuzla, Vogošća and Zenica. The research included children of different age, origin and status, children with developmental difficulties, children without parental care, children from minority ethnic groups, children with the status of displaced persons, children from rural areas.

Two methods were used in data collection - focus groups (group discussions) and questionnaires. Each of the ten children's groups organized two focus groups with children and young people between 11 and 20 years of age. We collected a total of 904 questionnaires, out of which 425 boys and 479 girls. The age of children whose questionnaires we processed ranged between 12 and 20 years of age.

Participants in the research	Activities	F	M	Total
Children/young people aged between 11 and 20	Children members of the group	120	68	<b>188</b>
	Focus groups	138	96	<b>234</b>
	Respondents-questionnaire	469	413	<b>882</b>
Young people above 18 years of age	Young people members of the group	9	6	<b>15</b>
	Focus groups	13	8	<b>21</b>
	Respondents-questionnaire	10	12	<b>22</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>759</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>1362</b>

The subsequent research conducted in 2018 included 165 children (94 girls and 71 boys) from elementary and secondary schools from Banja Luka, Tuzla, Sarajevo, Brčko, Bijeljina, Zenica, Modriča and Mostar. Like the previous research, this research also included children of different age, origin and status, children with developmental difficulties, children without parental care, children from



minority ethnic groups, children with the status of displaced persons, children from rural areas and general population of children. Six children's groups each organized two workshops and a focus group with children and young people between 13 and 17 years of age. After that, we organized a three-day Children's Conference which gathered a total of 41 participants, out of which 27 were children.

# RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

After the completion of the research, each children's group analyzed the minutes from the workshops and focus groups and performed statistical analysis of the results obtained in questionnaires. This report contains a consolidated summary of the most important findings and recommendations.

01

## VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

The problem of violence against children, particularly peer violence, is very prominent in all communities included in our research. According to the children, the phenomenon of violence can have several causes: violent computer games that teach children such behavior, domestic violence, socializing with violent children, families that do not raise their children properly, as well as children's desire to be popular.

Children identified verbal, or mental, and physical violence as the most common forms of violence in their schools. They pointed out that verbal violence among students was more common and that it sometimes came from the teachers as well. Verbal violence is defined as abuse based on physical appearance and origin that later turns into physical violence. The respondents associated verbal violence with conflicts between students, students and teachers, organized fights, threatening messages, taking the belongings of others, blackmailing for money, Internet violence.



***“They learned this behavior from those characters in the movies. All you can see on TV is people killing each other, fighting with each other, and they see it and just copy it.” (student, elementary school)***



***“In my opinion, verbal violence affects the person more than physical violence. If someone hits you, this bruise can heal; but when someone verbally insults you, this stays in your brain and as time goes by, you start believing that what they say is true.”***



***“There is a lot of physical violence in our school; there are a few students who are always discussed at the council meetings. Verbal violence is also no less common than the physical violence.”***



***“It’s mainly senior grade students bullying younger students.”***



***“I don’t remember the last time when we did not have a fight, there’s a fight every day.”***

Most common causes for peer violence in elementary schools include physical appearance, social status, ethnicity, religion, standing out from the group in any way (style of dressing, success in school etc.). According to children, most common victims of violence are younger children, girls, weaker children and children with special needs. Although violence is commonly associated with male sex, violence among girls is becoming more and more common.



***“There is a child with special needs in my school and they constantly leave him out and often beat him after school. I think they see it as a joke, but he feels helpless”***



***“We had a peculiar case when two girls got into a fight in the school corridor, and it was over a boy. No one tried to break up the fight, everybody gathered around them and cheered until our English teacher came and broke up the fight.” (student, elementary school)***



***“Some students in our school even express hatred against other ethnicities, because only one ethnicity attends this school. When they attended a gathering with another school, one of the students brought a knife with him and attacked a student of different ethnicity. I think that is not normal”***



***“I have seen children fight and I didn't try to break up those fights because those were mainly boys fighting.”***



***“There is one girl and she is somewhat fat and all the boys tease her.”  
(student, elementary school)***

Apart from other forms of violence, increase of Internet violence is particularly concerning. Children stated they knew their peers who had been victims of virtual violence and normally no efficient measures were taken.



***“We had a case where a group of students blasted one girl on Facebook, more precisely they accessed her profile and were able to read everything. Those students were on her profile for months, and they go the same grade with her. The school didn't do anything to correct that, because the girl gave up, because she would also be reprimanded for logging into a social network on an IT class.”***



***“We had a competition in one subject where we talked about cyber bullying and it was only then that we realized how many children from our school had been victims of this form of violence.”***

Children said that there were cases of violence against teachers as well.



***“Mainly because of grades, and they behave like that because of their family upbringing, without any reason whatsoever, but I think that grades are the most common motive. They (students) yell at professors, they don't listen to professors, they display rebellion, they do what they want. They get reprimanded for that, but that's nothing. Most of the professors yield, because they don't want conflicts.”***

What is alarming is that, during the research, we also identified cases of violence coming from teachers against students and the fact that the school administration failed to respond to that adequately and most commonly such teachers remain employed at the same school.



***“If the violence is directed against teachers, the response is stronger. Sanctions in such cases are more severe.”***

Most of the children indicated that violence increasingly went unnoticed. Common reason why children continue to be violent is because they are not sanctioned and do not receive any psychological treatment. It is becoming common for children to push and hit each other during the recess:



***“It’s normal for us to push each other, five minutes during recess, to hit each other, but we don’t see that as violence” (elementary school student)***



***“In my class, one of my peers first threw a desk on another student and then two chairs. Of course, he wasn’t even reprimanded” (elementary school student)***



***“There are conflicts over stupid things, we have a quarrel, without trying to resolve it through normal communication and then there is a fight” (boy – 14 years)***

## PROFILE OF PERPETRATORS AND VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Elementary and secondary school children described a profile of a potential bully. Children say that they are typically senior students, in eight or ninth grade of elementary school. Bullies are mainly bad students, they skip classes and smoke. Bullies see themselves as “powerful, strong” and, according to respondents, they behave violently to be “cool”. According to some children, bullies engage in violence to vent their negative energy. Children believe that discriminated children can also become bullies because they want to fight back, they want to be popular.



***“On one occasion, boys from the ninth grade came to the football field and beat our friend on the school playground” (elementary school student).***



***“They boost their egos that way; they display their power and rage on those who are weaker than them” (girl, 14 years).***



***“Those persons want to dominate and this is the only way how to be in the center of attention” (girl, 14 years).***



***“Bullies are in a way forgotten and neglected and they behave violently only to attract attention and gain popularity among their peers” (boy, 13 years).***

Children victims of violence are usually younger children, sixth or seventh grade of elementary school. They are victims because of their physical differences (e.g. they are larger), shy, “those who pretend to be smart”, those who “are generous with their money” or children who are also violent, who “like to fight”. Children victims of violence feel discriminated, they do not cry because they are used to being humiliated, violence makes them introverted and they do not have good communication with others.



***“Victims of violence feel vulnerable, rejected.” (student of the school of mechanical engineering).***



***“No one stands by you” (boy, 13 years).***



***“Since victims of violence are frequently “shy” persons and do not express their opinion, they feel rejected – not accepted by their peers, which causes them to become more introverted (girl, 13 years).***

The fact that many students just watch violence and they often feel helpless to do anything is a big problem. Also, according to children, some of them just find it funny, some are afraid to react and report it because they could be the next victims, and a number of children do not feel obliged to report the problems of others. In most cases, violence occurs in front of an audience.



***“Those witness it are in a bad position, because they don’t know how to react in many cases.” (girl, 14 years).***



***“If it is a fight, I would try to help, but only to such extent where I wouldn’t get hurt” (girl, 15 years).***



***“I don’t want to help in such situations, because I don’t know whose fault it actually is”!***

## **RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT THE ISSUE OF VIOLENCE AND THE NEED FOR RESPONSE**

According to children, no one realizes the magnitude of the violence problem and this problem does not receive sufficient attention. Most of the children think that it is necessary to introduce stricter sanctions for bullies, dedicate more time to discussing these issues in class meetings, help bullies themselves by speaking with their families and psychologists, have a police officer on duty in front of the school or introduce self-defense classes. Children believe that they can protect themselves from violence by avoiding bullies and not reacting to verbal abuse coming from others.



***“Protecting yourself from violence is like protecting yourself from air, because they are always around us.” (girl, 12 years).***



***“I believe that reporting violence or any conflict to the class teacher is often not the right way that will lead to a solution of the problem, instead it can have an opposite effect.”***



What is obvious is that all schools lack sufficient activities directed at preventing or reducing violence.

Unlike the information we obtained in 2014, when children said violence is not extensively discussed in schools, we observed that situation in 2018 was much different. Children said that there were posters in schools explaining how to protect ourselves from bullies and so on and they also stated that sometimes discuss this issue or have lectures about it in class meetings and as part of projects implemented in schools by non-governmental organizations. Violence is also discussed at student council meetings.



***“We talked about this subject at our student council meetings in elementary school. For example, once a week. Police officers would also come and talk about this topic and we were able to discuss this with them.”***



***“I notice that reports of verbal violence are fewer than reports of physical violence, because many people feel it’s stupid to report that somebody said something to you. I think that no one at the school has ever heard of the protocol.”***



***“We in our elementary school did have publicly displayed posters saying that we never know who is behind a certain name and other similar topics which served as messages to us about how to protect ourselves.”***

In addressing the issue of violence, there is a lack of teacher-student or student-teacher cooperation. According to the children, teachers should adopt a better approach in their interaction with students in order for them to gain trust in them. Children indicate that the school administration is aware of the problem, but has not done anything about it. Majority of respondents think state authorities should improve prevention of violence.



***“Neither the school nor anyone else has a plan to combat violence. Only several non-governmental organizations did something, but systemic planning is required” (student, secondary school)***

We were particularly interested to see whether students knew if their schools had a protocol for response to violence and how much their peers knew about this protocol. Also, we asked if their schools had any violence-related programs, such as workshops, debates and so on.



***“I have never heard of a protocol in the school, things are normally being dealt with without the knowledge of school administration.”***



***“We have reported a teacher who literally yelled at students and did all sorts of things a million time, but he is still there working. Working, torturing future generations. And the administration tells us have patience for a little while.” (student, secondary school)***



***“Everyone is willing to talk about violence, but when help is needed, they are all quiet!” “Focus groups should be organized for victims of violence and bullies to talk with them”.***

## UPDATED DATA

The problem of violence against children is prominent in all communities included in our research. Like four years ago, when we discussed this issue with children, verbal violence is slightly more common compared to physical violence among peers. Children indicated that boys, more frequently than girls, were perpetrators of some forms of violence. In addition, we observed that respondents indicated existence of cyber violence among their peers in school, which we found rather alarming. It is known that cyber violence can have very negative consequences for adequate psychological, emotional and social development of children at this sensitive age. According to children, additionally alarming is that cyber violence issues are not efficiently addressed and students often do not receive any assistance. As regards activities implemented in schools aimed at preventing violence, we observed that the situation is changing for the better. Schools occasionally organize workshops and violence is more frequently discussed at council meetings and class meetings, which is a positive progress compared to the previous situation. This practice should be continued in all school, more precisely in all parts of the country without exception.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Include all relevant institutions, parents and children in efforts to address the problem of violence and ensure larger availability of professionals who would provide assistance to children***
- 2. Ensure training for children, parents, teachers and others who work with children about violence – to whom and how to report violence, methods of protection***
- 3. Define clear procedures for reporting violence or redefine the existing ones and make them more accessible to the public***
- 4. Dedicate more time to the problem of violence at student council meetings and create an action plan***
- 5. Bad students should be paired up with good students to have them try to follow their example***
- 6. Protect those who report violence, because those individuals are seen as “traitors” among their peers and are stigmatized***
- 7. Regular professional treatment of bullies in schools and work on empowering the victims of violence***
- 8. Adequate sanctioning of perpetrators of violence***
- 9. Introduce a police officer at school who would monitor any cases of violence***
- 10. Install surveillance cameras in all schools***
- 11. Discuss with children their leisure time, point out positive activities such as reading a book or walking.***
- 12. We children can advise our peers not to engage in violence***
- 13. Better monitoring of children’s behavior on Internet to prevent cyber bullying.***





## 02

RIGHT TO EXPRESS VIEWS – RIGHT  
TO PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN

According to the Convention, children have the right to express their views and have those views heard and respected whenever possible. Children have the right to participate in the life of their families, schools, local communities, within their abilities and capacities.

At first, children found it difficult to define what this concept meant: Children understand the term “the right to opinion” as freedom to express their views independently from the views of others and have those views heard and supported by someone.



***“We give them our opinion, but it is questionable if they will accept it, regardless of the fact that the decision affects us, one class or an entire generation.”***



***“I know I may participate, but I don't know how and nobody seeks my opinion”***

Children often feel that their parents do not really care about their opinions. Only things that are “not so important”, such as choosing clothes, summer vacations etc. are accepted, or deciding which secondary school to choose. Children feel they do not have sufficient experience and knowledge required for addressing some serious life problems.



***“I will graduate this year and they mainly ask me what I will do later. When it comes to my parents, I have their full support.” (student, school of economics)***



***“When a decision needs to be made, I say everything I need and then together with my parents I find an adequate solution.”***



***“I think our opinions should matter and should be acknowledged, parents have to accept that” (boy, 15 years).***

Difference between elementary school boys and girls is that boys express their views and needs more freely. Again, we have here the traditional pattern of behavior where girls are the ones who have to be polite, are more likely to obey orders while, on the other hand, domination of male sex is obvious.

Children in secondary schools do not express their opinion in all circumstances and spontaneously, but as they say:



***“I adapt my opinion and my words to the circumstances. I know I cannot say everything I would like to say and everything I think to a professor, because I will get a negative mark after that.” (student, secondary school).***

The safest environment in which all respondents freely express their opinion is among their friends. There are no taboos and no fear of what is being said with their peers.

## RESPECT OF THE RIGHT TO HAVE AN OPINION IN THE FAMILY

Our research indicated lack of communication in the family, children are not involved in serious topics and discussions. According to the children, parents are those who do favors by giving money to their children, not paying enough attention to them, buying them sneakers, mobile phones, and all children are expected to do in return is to go to school and not make any problems. Children are divided when it comes to respect of their opinions. Some of them believe that their opinion is sufficiently respected, while others think that this is rarely or almost never the case. What they indicated as important is for their parents to listen to them when they are talking, which is not always the case.



***“Parents ask me how school was, how my day was and if I need anything, and that’s it”. (student, elementary school).***



***“We discuss everything at home, whatever happens, we have a joint meeting and we arrange everything together”***



***“I think I’m too young for serious issues, when I’m older, I believe they will ask me” (student, elementary school).***





***“I am not involved in some cases, it doesn't matter if I have an opinion”  
(girl – 12 years).***

Most of the children do feel sufficiently free to express their opinion in their families.

A reason for concern is the fact that child/parent communication remains superficial and children understand respect of the right to opinion strictly as exchange of information concerning school and money. If the discussion does not concern one of these two topics, then it is related to a current problem. Children indicate that their parents are often preoccupied with the technology and do not listen or respond when children talk about an issue that affects them.

The situation with senior juveniles is somewhat different and it can be concluded that child's age directly affects their position and importance in the family.



***“When it comes to making some important family decisions, my opinion is sought, which was not the case before.” (student, secondary school).***

## RESPECT OF OPINION IN SCHOOL

Compared to family, respect of the right to opinion in school is even less present. Most of the children believe that teachers and school administration are not interested in hearing their opinions or the challenges they face. A small number of children stated that in school they were able to express their opinion only to a pedagogue or a psychologist, while others said they could share their opinion only with their class teacher and only when there is some problem.



***“I have feeling that nothing is done when we report a problem”,  
(student, elementary school).***

There is a lack of communication both at student-teacher level and teacher-student level. Children often do not have an opportunity to express their opinion about their grades if they feel they were not graded properly and in accordance with their knowledge.



***“Some students in our school let the air out of German teacher's tires, one student was expelled from school”. (student, elementary school)***



***“They yell at us and say we are not competent to say that.”***



***“They often kick us out of the class or examine us.”***



***“They say it’s their job and we have no say in it, we should study and they will decide how they will grade us.”***

Children think that measures such as lower grades for conduct, removal from class or school do not solve the problem, but rather create additional problems. They agreed that school management was not “strong” enough to address the problem and they find it easier to threaten students with this.



***“Poor conduct grades are not taken seriously in our school, because students know this will be fixed at the end of the year because these grades are recorded in pencil” (elementary school student).***

Small number of elementary school children mentioned cases of violence coming from teachers. This is exactly the reason why children are afraid to express their opinion. They see the inability to express their opinion as a form of violence against them and a form of humiliation.



***“The teacher takes a ruler or a compass and hits him with it. It hurts, it’s not funny” (student, elementary school).***



***“Our teacher used to rap us on the head when we were undisciplined, a normal rap on the head does not hurt, but he had many rings on his fingers and that was a problem” (student, elementary school)***

They stated that they had tried to change some things in their schools, but they had not achieved anything in the end. They see this as a form of violence against them and a form of humiliation.



***“We wanted them to install camera, to address violence. But they said that it cost a lot of money, that school was not able to do that and we gave up on this proposal. Later, there was a notice saying they decided to install cameras after all and that we should all bring 10 BAM each, including the ninth grade, although they were leaving that year, and the cameras would only be installed in September of the next school year. We are against that, but they still force us to pay this money.”***

Student council is envisaged as a body through which children will be able to express their opinions. However, in most of the schools this body exists only formally. In most of the schools, Student Council is not recognized as a body that could contribute to children's voice being heard in school.



***“Student council does nothing, they are helpless. Even when we do tell them something, this topic is not mentioned at the meeting” (student, elementary school)***



***“They don't have very regular meetings in our school, maybe only 2 times in a semester.” (student of the School of Economy).***



***“Some issues are raised by Council representatives and others are addressed by us in the class, without letting other classes and teachers know about them”. (boy – 13).***



***“We discussed our school trip at the Council meeting and nothing specific happened, although we say we would like to go on a school trip.” Boy, 15 years.***

## **RESPECT OF THE RIGHT TO OPINION IN LOCAL COMMUNITY**

Most of the children were surprised by fact that they could participate in decision-making at local community level. Also, most of them thought children's participation in the community was important, but there were also those who thought that most of them would be embarrassed to express their opinion.



***“I think half of the children would be embarrassed to say something, they would just be silent and watch.” (elementary school student).***



***“Who among the children would help build a playground? They would all rather have a “finished product”. (student, secondary school).***



***“Of course we would, only it’s not very likely that our opinion would be heard.”***

Local community is not seen as a friend and someone who should serve children, therefore their role is not very clear to respondents. Due to the fact that trust has not been built, all respondents believe that the best way for local communities to learn what children want is through anonymous questionnaires without direct contact.



***“This is the first time I hear that local community should hear children’s opinion. So far, they have done things their way, I don’t see why it would be different now...” (student, secondary school).***



***“Would those uncles in suits be ready to listen to us?” (student, elementary school).***



***“If I saw those people from authorities, I would get confused. I wouldn’t know what to say, but when I answer a questionnaire no one will know I said that and it will be easier for me to say what I and my peers need” (student, elementary school).***



***“We could prepare a project and present it to them to show that children can also do something useful for their community.” “We know that as individuals we do not have much chance to achieve our goals, but as a group, we can achieve more” (boy, 14 years).***



***“We had some questionnaires where we were supposed to give our opinion, what should be improved, what should be changed, but in the end nothing gets improved.” (elementary school student)***

Inconsistency is one of the major problems. Even when they do make promises to children, local authorities do not keep them, which additionally reduces children’s willingness to express their needs.



***“Why should I tell them what to do when they don’t do what they promise to do? They promised to reconstruct our school playground, and nothing happened...” (student, elementary school)***



## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. *Ensure awareness of children about the ways to express their opinions and places they can go to***
- 2. *Make efforts and create an environment to enable expression of opinion and decision-making starting from kindergarten (e.g. where in the school yard should we place the toboggan?)***
- 3. *Provide more opportunities for persons with developmental difficulties to express their opinions and needs***
- 4. *Involve children in decision-making at school level, empower the student council***
- 5. *Establish organizations in schools that would advocate for children's opinion and larger involvement of non-governmental organizations in schools.***
- 6. *Teachers should discuss with students the timing of tests, ask whether we understand the lesson we completed to facilitate our work.***
- 7. *Prepare an exact list of changes, each school and community should have its development plan that should be followed and implemented with joined forces. Cooperation between everyone is important, because that is the only way to succeed.***
- 8. *Install boxes in classes for children to write their thoughts***
- 9. *Children should be heard and taken more seriously.***
- 10. *Provide students with opportunities to express their opinions about the arrangement of school premises, such as classes and school yard***
- 11. *Parent council and student council can work together and make joint decisions that affect children***
- 12. *Local authorities must include children in decision-making related to matters that affect them.***
- 13. *Authorities must keep their promises***







## 03

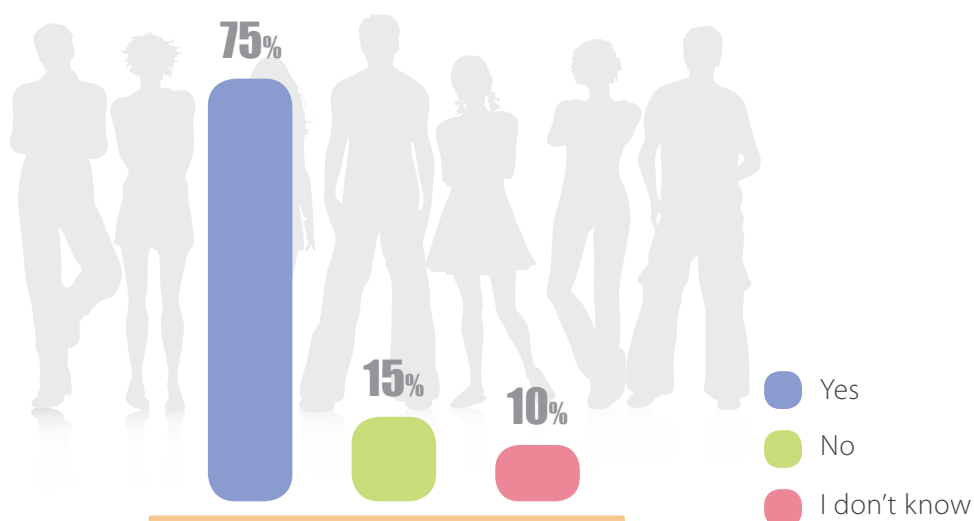
## AWARENESS ABOUT THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child have the obligation to inform children and adults about its obligations arising from the Convention. We researched this issue through questionnaires, open and closed questions. Each children's group collected approximately 100 questionnaires from rural and urban areas. Respondents belonged to different age groups (elementary and secondary school) and attention was paid to equal representation of boys and girls.

Awareness is the initial step in the implementation of children's rights. The fact that most of the respondents were not able to state their 10 rights is surprising. The average is five to six rights. Rights most frequently stated as most important are: the right to life, education, freedom, health care, opinion, family, to engage in play, safety, religion. Rights to life, freedom, education and family were most frequently cited as most important rights.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OUR PEERS**

1. ***We should raise our awareness about our rights to be able to advocate for them?***
2. ***We should fight more for our rights and express our opinions freely!***
3. ***We should not wait for help from others to have our opinions heard!***

**Would you like to know more about your rights?**

A certain number of children acquired knowledge about the rights of the child in elementary school, while secondary school students listed democracy classes as a form of awareness raising. The fact that a third of respondents learned about children’s rights only in secondary school is alarming.

Children stated teachers as the best way to learn about their rights which places new responsibilities on school which should include more training on children’s rights in their curricula. Also, educational programs, specifically media and non-governmental organizations are platforms where children can and should learn about their rights. Media should include in their program schemes ore programs for children which should address children’s rights, education and so on.

A large number of respondents indicated non-governmental organizations and informal education as the best way to learn more about their right. Non-governmental organizations are recognized as experts in the field of children’s rights.

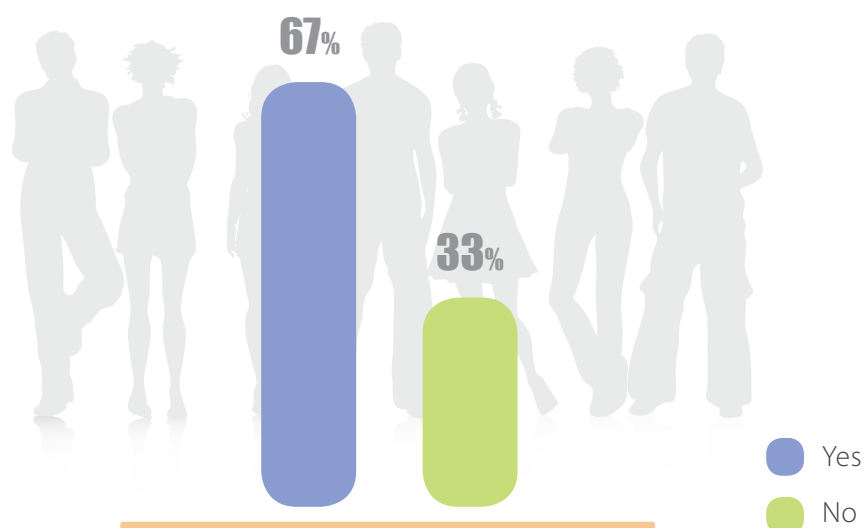
In addition to schools and non-governmental organizations, Internet was mentioned as the most common way of learning about children’s rights. In some situations, information from the Internet did not prove to be useful.

A small number of respondents stated that they had learned about their rights already in kindergarten, while some of them stated that they discussed this issue with their parents.

Institutions are not recognized as being friendly in terms of these issues, they did not feel any initiative coming from their part, and therefore they are not recognized as trustworthy.

As many as 75% of children stated they would like to know more about their rights. However, 10% of children stated they did not know enough about the rights of the child, while 15% does not want to more. The fact that 75% of children would like to teach their peers about children’s rights is reassuring. This information could also be interpreted as a recommendation for all stakeholders in the community to actively involve children in the education process to enable knowledge transfer among children and allow them to build their capacities in this field.

***Would you like to teach your peers about children’s rights?***

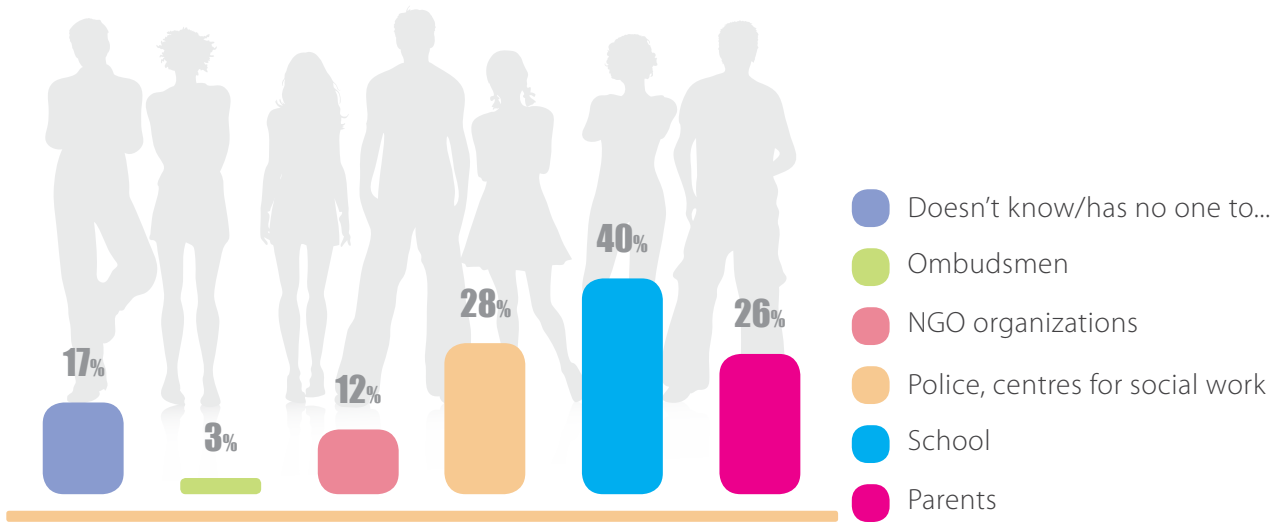


When it comes to children’s rights awareness among parents, 8.5% of children believe that their parents have no awareness, 16.5% that their parents have only heard of children’s rights, while as many as 75% of them said that their parents were sufficiently familiar with children’s rights.

Similar data were obtained regarding children's rights awareness among teachers - 8.5% said their teachers have no awareness, 21.5% that they have only heard of children's rights and 70% believe that their teachers are sufficiently familiar with children's rights.

According to children, 10% of their fellow citizens have no awareness about children's rights, 54% has only heard of those rights, while 36% are sufficiently familiar.

In case of violations of their rights, most of the children would first talk to their teachers or school staff (principal, pedagogue/psychologist). The smallest percentage of children would turn to the Institution of Ombudsman that actually has the mission to protect rights.



Unfortunately, 17% of children said they did not know who to turn to in case of children's rights violations or that they had no one to turn to. This information clearly indicates the need to educate children and inform them of different protection mechanisms and service providers in case of violation of children's rights.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Provide systemic education in schools about children's rights for both teachers and students; the education should also include informing children about institutions for the protection of children's rights*
- 2. Through performances and role play continue with the efforts to educate children with intellectual difficulties about children's rights*
- 3. Parents and other citizens should also be informed about this topic through promotional materials*
- 4. Create websites or applications where we could learn more about our rights*
- 5. Provide boxes in institutions for anonymous comments, suggestions, complaints etc.*



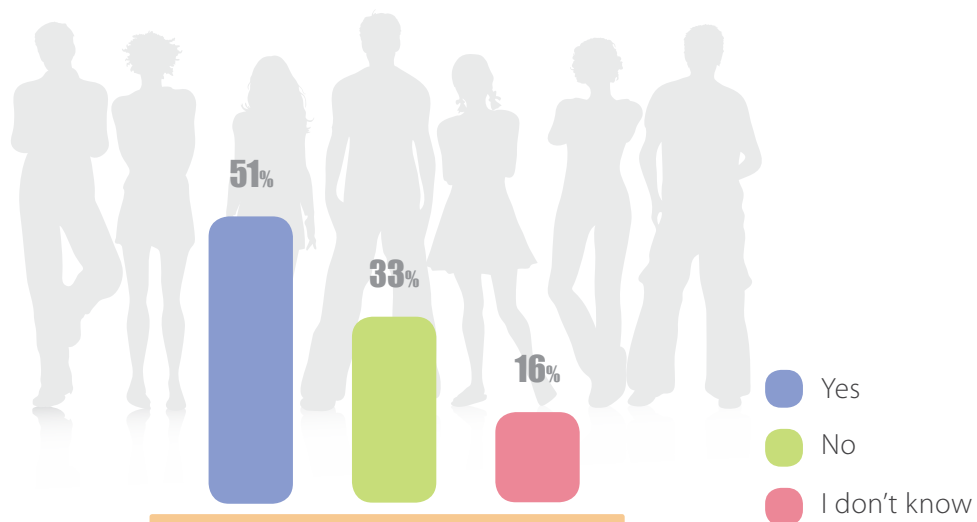
## 04

## RIGHT TO QUALITY EDUCATION

Education is a topic children are most willing to discuss and feel free to express their opinion. Most of the obtained recommendations for improvement were related to education. Children's views about this issue were also collected through questionnaires.

When asked whether their route to school was safe, 84% of children gave positive answers, while 16% of them said no. Almost all respondents - 90% said that there were students in their school who commute and 51% of respondents think that these children have organized transportation. However, 33% of children claim that there is no organized transportation for children who commute to school.

### ***Do children have organized transportation to school?***



UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a universal instrument that guarantees equal treatment of children with disabilities and children without disabilities in Article 23. Unfortunately, reality is much different. Most of the schools do not have access platforms for children in wheelchairs which additionally hinders their education, they do not feel included in the society which on the other hand causes numerous other problems. Treatment of these children differs, some treat them normally, some treat them badly. It could not be said that there is no discrimination on these grounds in schools, which is definitely one of the problems that should be additionally addressed.



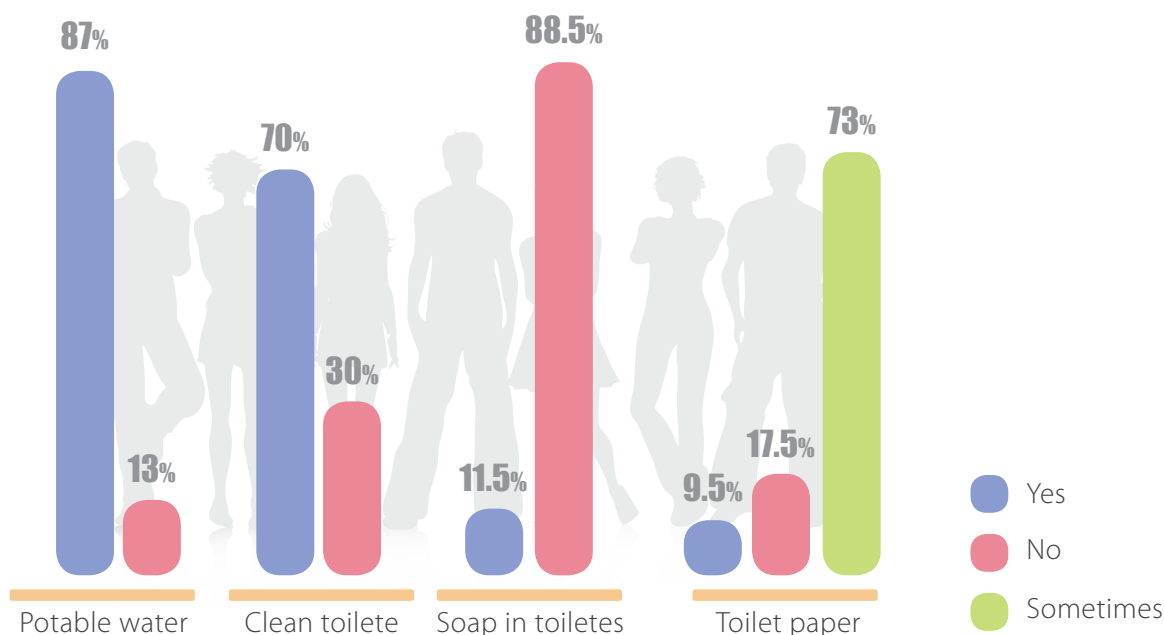
***“Children and young people with developmental difficulties are entitled to special support and improvement, as well as to active participation in social life”***



Most of the schools lack platforms required to facilitate access of students in wheelchairs to school. As many as 63% of children indicated that their schools did not have access platforms for wheelchairs. Also, 67% of children said they did not have students with developmental difficulties in their class.

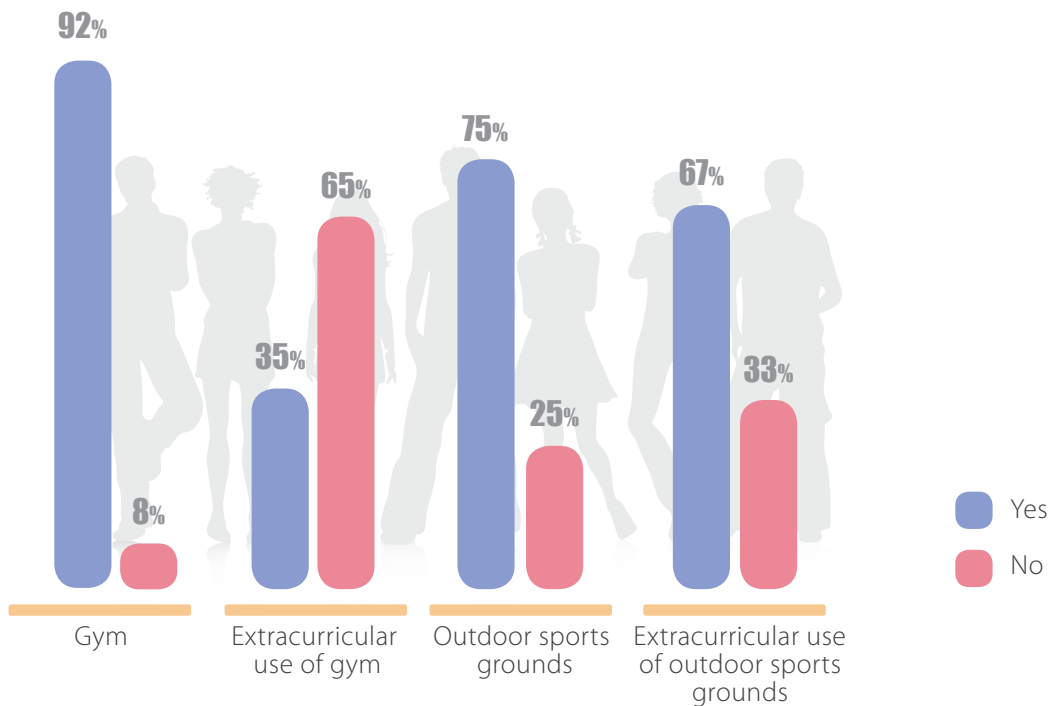
Biological needs are at the top of the pyramid of needs, therefore sanitary conditions (potable water, clean toilettes, availability of soap) should be provided in each school. It is common that children postpone going to the toilet which puts their health at risk. We cannot ascribe blame for this only to school management, but also to students who, unfortunately, do not take good care of school inventory. Members of school teaching staff who are in a position to monitor the sanitary conditions say that children very often use toilet paper and soap inappropriately and then those who do not deserve it suffer the consequences.

When it comes to sanitary conditions in schools, 87% of children said they had access to potable water in school, 30% of them said that toilets in their schools were always clean, while 70% of children said this was not the case. Mainly there is no soap in school toilets and 73 % of children indicated that there was no toilet paper in toilets. Four years later, the situation changed insignificantly, so the situation in schools is the same.

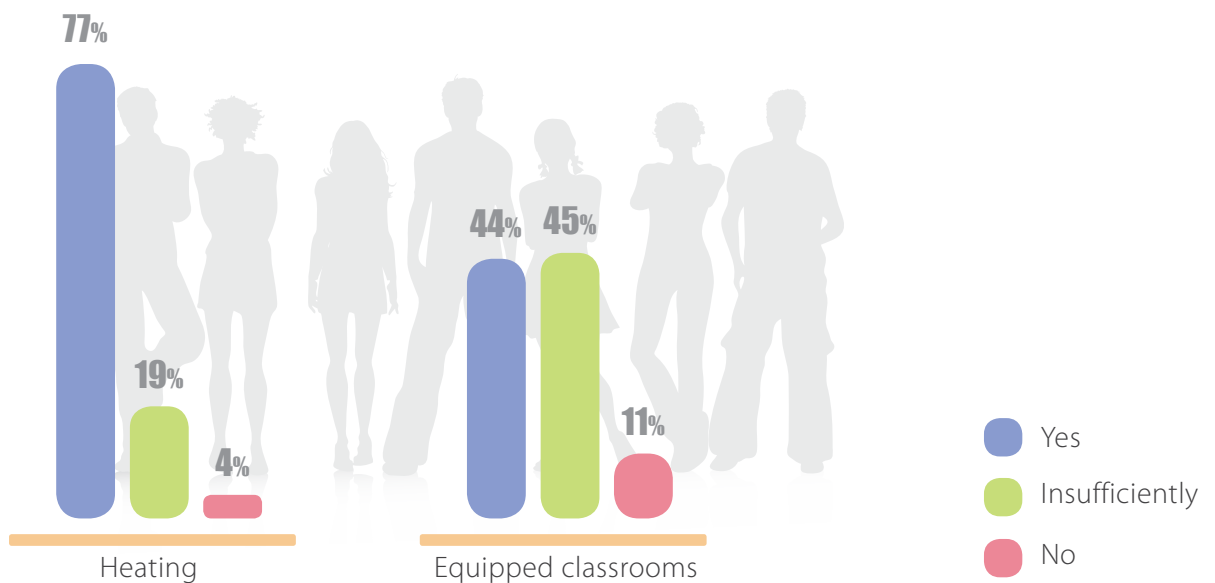


Exercise can be critical for children’s proper growth and development. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a gymnasium and a playground in all schools. It is also necessary to organize more physical training classes and motivate children to lead a more active life.

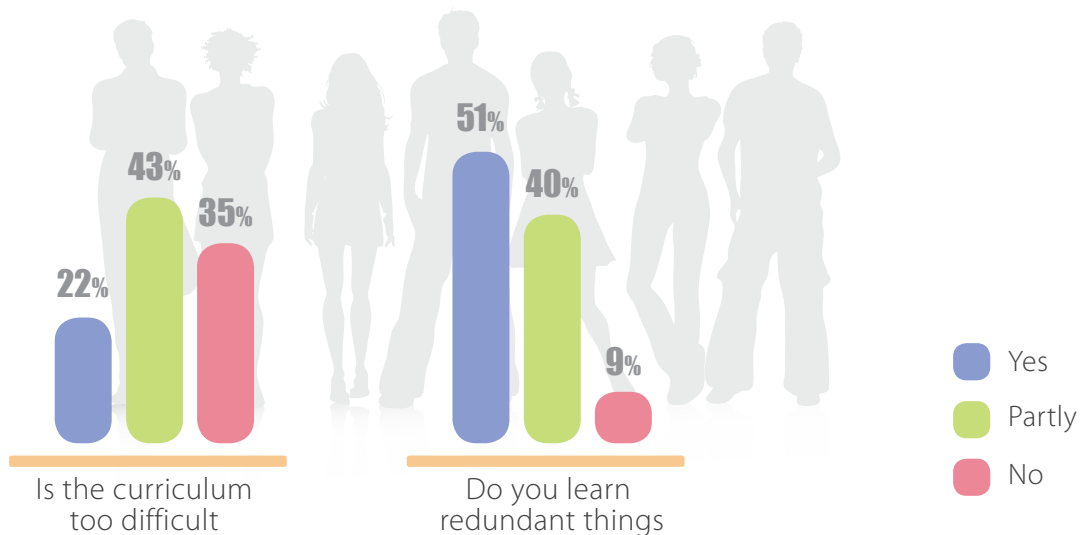
The chart below shows children's statements regarding availability of facilities for children's exercise.



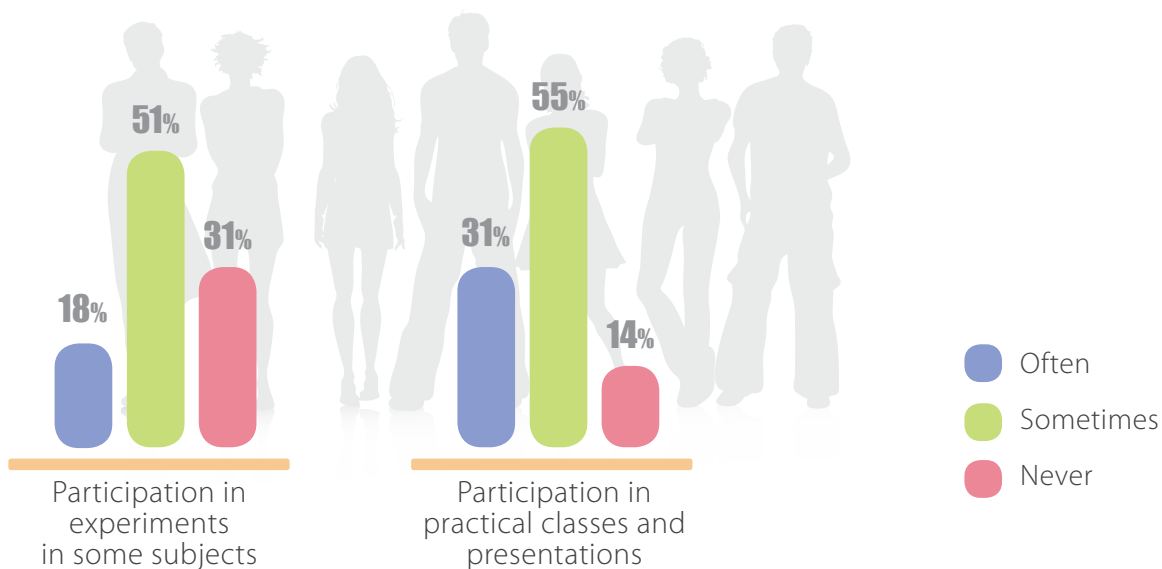
Inadequately equipped classrooms, inadequate heating in schools or bad doors and windows preventing adequate heating of classrooms, do not facilitate quality teaching. Although a larger percentage of children stated they had heating in schools, it is not adequate in wintertime. Due to lack of adequate heating, children get ill more often and miss classes. Classroom mainly lack adequate equipment (computers, overhead projectors, books, sports equipment, equipment for experiments). Due to insufficiently equipped classrooms and classes children do not find interesting, we have children who do not continue their education, find school boring and do not see learning through play.



Children are not fully satisfied with the type and volume of curriculum studied at school. 22% of them find school curriculum to difficult, 43% of children says it is partially difficult, while 35% says it is not difficult. More than half of children think that they are learning things that are redundant.



Practical classes are very important for creating interest in particular subjects and improving understanding of the curriculum. Still, 31% of children never participated in experiments in some subjects or it happens rarely. When it comes to using presentations in classes, 14% of them said they had never learned that way, 55% sometimes, while 31% children often participate in this type of practical classes.



Student-teacher communication is very important for the success of children in schools, however 48% of children are not satisfied with teachers' treatment of students. When it comes to students' treatment of teachers, 48% of them are satisfied with it, while 52% are not.



***“Students swear and treat teachers badly”,  
“They address them on first-name terms”,  
“They don't respect them”!***

On the other side, they also indicate examples of teachers not behaving adequately with respect to grades, treatment of certain students, maltreatment of students, abuse of their position.

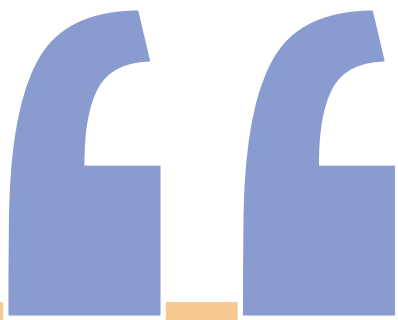


***“There is a teacher in my school who imitates students and their reactions and insults us by doing that”***



***“I think the problem is that, when they grade students, teachers take into consideration if they have textbooks or not, and this should not be done”***

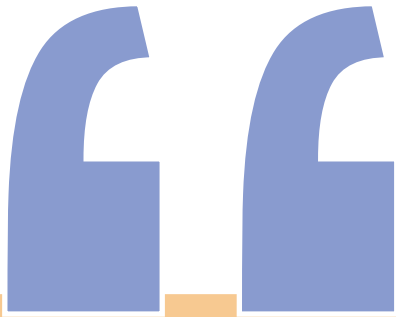
The fact that teachers still sometimes belittle students, discriminate them and that, according to respondents, teachers' mood largely affects grading and their behavior during class, is a reason for concern. Respect is lacking on both sides.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Introduce state-funded personal assistants for students with developmental difficulties***
- 2. Ensure access for children with mobility impairment (platforms)***
- 3. Provide transportation for children who live remote from their school and for children with mobility impairments, provide more frequent bus departures***
- 4. Ensure conditions for quality teaching: better technical capacities of classrooms, gymnasiums in all schools, improve teaching methods, practice interactive work, ensure more school trips for students, better libraries and***
- 5. Adjust the material in textbooks, focus on important information***
- 6. Involve children in planning of a part of curriculum***
- 7. Increase power of student councils, give them more freedom and space for creativity***
- 8. Ensure sanitary conditions in classrooms and toilets (which should also have soap, toilet paper)***
- 9. Adapt school yards and sports grounds to students for extracurricular use, install lighting, reconstruct basketball hoops and benches***
- 10. Install lockers for all students because school bags become increasingly heavy***
- 11. Introduce school cards to ensure that only students have access to school yards and introduce uniforms to reduce differences among children related to material status***
- 12. Improve school food or introduce a shop in school yard so that junior students would not have to go out to the street***





- 13. Provide lighting on school routes, sidewalks and police monitoring in critical areas**
- 14. Introduce stricter sanctions for children who destroy school property**
- 15. Improve awareness raising about children's rights among parents and teachers**
- 16. Increase involvement of non-governmental organizations active in the field of children's rights in schools**
- 17. Actively involve as many parents as possible in school work and problem solving**
- 18. Comply with the curriculum, in particular in terms of class meetings**
- 19. In elementary and secondary schools, organize more frequent mandatory visits to cultural institutions and some companies offering many learning opportunities**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OUR PEERS**

- 1. Join non-governmental organizations for your own benefit!**
- 2. Join debates and sports activities!**
- 3. Advocate for introduction of boxes for anonymous complaints in schools!**
- 4. Fight for a more prominent role of student councils in schools!**
- 5. Let's overcome discrimination against students with developmental difficulties and help them adapt!**

# TO SMO MI!

ERUN

(voli se družiti)

Faris - optimizam  
energijnost

Nina - voli se  
družiti sa  
mladi ma



Telena

AN - pozitivna  
ENERGIJA

Angelica (Svestana)

Gordana

ZEHRA  
(voli aktivnost  
sa prijateljima  
voli da se  
družiti)

Goran - želja za  
pomoc drugima

ADIS ambicioznost

Zlatan - dosadan  
pozitivnom smislu

Anwed - voli iznositi  
mišljenja

ADIN - KOMUNIKATIVNOST

ANA  
(voli djecu)

ELVIR - voli  
fudbal

Hena - komunikativnost

EMINA - Poz. RAZMISLJANJE

SNJEŽANA  
(organizovanost)

BRANKA

MILICA  
(je i puzanja)

DUŠAN - otvorenost

ADMIRA  
voli da čita

ANBERKO - SVE

Skender - uladost

Marija - tina

Kenan - konstruktivnost

Dobrija - ne boji se  
izneti mišljenja

AZEM

Vanesa - dobrotornost

Valeutina

SASA  
BOJAN  
(borben)

Timski igrač - Daco

DANKA - dinamizam

BERINA  
(biskopleta)

# CONCLUSION

The research conducted by children with the help of adults brings children's views about the respect of children's rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their wishes for the future. In addition to analyzing the state of rights from the point of view of children, the purpose of this report was also to include children in the reporting process. Through participation, children acquire knowledge and skills they need to promote their rights. Children's participation does not only mean their involvement in the initial identification of the problem, but includes their involvement in the process of monitoring and evaluation of progress.

Adults mainly fully support realization of children's right to protection, mostly with children's best interests at heart, while they give secondary priority to children's right to participation due to insufficient understanding of what children's participation actually means and how it can be implemented. Adults believe that children are not sufficiently competent and experienced, that involvement in a way represents denial of the right to childhood.

Therefore, action on advocacy for children's abilities is necessary to determine benefits of children's involvement in identification and implementation of programs aimed at implementation of children's rights. Adults should create a safe and supportive environment for children where they will have access to understandable information, where their opinion will be heard and respected and children will be encouraged and involved in addressing issues affecting their lives.

In the course of this research, children recognized the existence of initiatives and projects that promote the respect of children's rights, however, we need systemic changes for protection of children, better conditions for education, better parent-child-teacher communication, as well as other changes in all areas covered by this research. Children also fully justified their five-year work on the promotion of meaningful participation of children. Findings of this research can serve as guidelines for improvement of the state of children and as a starting point for development of policies that would correspond to actual children's needs.





