***REPORT BY GOLDEN ADVISORS TO THE PROTECTOR OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS OF MONTENEGRO***

***REGARDING***

***IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD***

***-Views and Opinions of Children about the Exercise of their Rights in Montenegro-***

***Podgorica, June 2017***

**Introduction**

The Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms (hereinafter referred to as: the Ombudsman) formed a Network of Golden Advisors in 2014 with a view to promoting children’ s right to participation. The Network includes 12 members aged 11 to 17 years. Members were selected on the basis of a public call which ensured representation of children from different cities in Montenegro. In the selection process, due regard was taken of gender representation and involvement of the representatives of children belonging to vulnerable groups.

Continuous communication between representatives of the Ombudsman and Golden Advisors takes place through implementation of various joint activities such as: participation and continuous communication, i.e. open debate within internal network about different rights of the child and position of children in the Montenegrin society, planning and holding conferences and public appearances, holding workshops and focus groups with Golden Advisors, holding training workshops. Golden Advisors participate in activities organised by the Ombudsman and contribute to their implementation with their views and engagement. We hereby emphasise the following activities:

* organising and holding the conference “Let Our Voice Be Also Heard!” which was devoted to the respect for children’ s right to participation, in which Golden Advisors drew attention of the Montenegrin public, policy creators and other stakeholders to the problems faced in the exercise of this guaranteed right.
* organising and holding the conference ”Say NO to Violence” which was devoted to the problem of violence against and among children, in which Golden Advisors shared their views and experiences in respect of violence endured by children in Montenegro (or violence they commit).
* Participation in media promotion of the importance of respect for the rights of the child in Montenegro and promotion of Ombudsman as a mechanism for protection of the rights of the child.

*Participation of Ombudsman’s Golden Advisors in the Reporting Process*

Golden Advisors believed it was important that children themselves heard about the rights of the child and they initiated preparation of a special Report on Implementation of Recommendations of the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child, which was accepted by the Ombudsman. International organisation “Save the Children” supported the process of report preparation.

The Ombudsman believed it was necessary to additionally empower Golden Advisors in order for them to conduct a quality survey in different cities across Montenegro and collect opinions and views of children regarding certain topics.

Empowerment of Golden Advisors included educational and training activities, the aim of which was to elaborate topics such as rights of the child and familiarisation with recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child which were given to Montenegro (2010). Golden Advisors also completed an intensive training in order to gain insight and master techniques and methods for collecting opinions of children/peers for the purposes of field research. Techniques for conducting individual and group interviews (focus groups) were elaborated, along with the method for collecting information by means of a questionnaire/survey. Moreover, they were familiarised with the statements contained in the second and third reports of Montenegro on implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child for the period 2010-2015.

After completion of educational and training activities, Golden Advisors decided that the subject of the Report should be overview of the respect for the ***rights to education, health care, social welfare and children’ s participation.***

During the four-month period, 12 Golden Advisors **interviewed 278 children,** of whom 145 were girls and 133 were boys, from central, northern and southern regions of Montenegro (Podgorica, Danilovgrad, Pljevlja, Žabljak, Kolašin, Kotor, Herceg Novi). **Focus groups** technique **included children from** **20 elementary schools and 7 high schools in Montenegro.** Following the non-discrimination principle**, the survey included 120 children,** of whom 58 were boys and 62 were girls**, belonging to vulnerable groups** (children with disabilities, children without parental care, children who violated the law, Roma children, children placed in institutions…).

After the field research had been finalised, Golden Advisors made a selection of the working material and prepared Draft Report by Ombudsman’ s Golden Advisors regarding Implementation of the Recommendations given by the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child. The children then presented their findings and report to the Ombudsman and their peers in the workshop and after accepting suggestions and comments the Golden Advisors drew up final text of the report.

Opinions collected in field research, presented in the text below, are original children’ s opinions, which were neither analysed nor processed and they represent authentic views of the children about the exercise of the rights of the child in Montenegro.

**RIGHT TO EDUCATION**

**60. The Committee recommends the State party:**

**(a) increase the quality of schools, in particular by introducing interactive teaching methods, better equipment of schools, increasing the teacher/pupil ratio, teacher training and in-service training and active involvement of teachers in reform processes;**

As for the quality of education, we emphasise there is a dissatisfaction with the scope of the teaching material, curriculum and the way in which teaching is organised. One of the problems which was mentioned was that pupils did not acquire practical knowledge to the sufficient extent, that they were “drowning” in theory which was in their view often inapplicable.

Many things they learn about are obsolete, which is also confirmed by the information which is easily accessible on the internet, which is why they believe there is no need for excessive teaching material, that is presented to them in a quite boring way. Teaching in schools should be based on practical examples so that it would be interesting for pupils. More creative ways of working at schools are individual examples of good practice and depend on sensibility of a number of teachers. We noticed dissatisfaction and insufficient motivation among teachers and that is reflected on teaching and children. Due to the lack of quality of teaching and high demands of the educational system, a number of citizens has to hire private teachers for additional lessons, which is a heavy burden to their families’ budget.

It has been observed, based on the collected material, that pupils are dissatisfied with technical equipment/lack of it at schools. There are still schools which lack proper conditions for laboratory teaching (physics, chemistry, biology), whereas many schools lack equipment for music lessons and physical education (gymnasium, balls, exercise equipment etc.). Classrooms are not adjusted to the teaching of certain subjects and the same or similar classrooms are used for several different fields.

Moreover, one of the problems mentioned by pupils (attending lower grades) is the weight of books, i.e. school bags. Children would like to have lockers for disposal of redundant books, accessories for physical education or accessories for art class.

**(b) ensure that education is also *de facto* free of charge;**

We concluded that education in Montenegro is free of charge only in principle, given the fact that families run huge expenditures as a result of paying for school accessories, school transportation, fees for extracurricular activities (which are mandatory and envisaged in school curriculum and plan) etc.

“Everything is expensive. Four pupils in our class did not have money for the field trip, and the other children collected it so that they could go together.“ (fourteen-year old girl, Bar)

This problem is more evident among families with two or more children, as well as in poor municipalities in the north of Montenegro.

Free textbooks are provided for the pupils/children whose families are beneficiaries of the financial family allowance. However, distribution of these textbooks is often delayed and pupils get them months after the school year has begun. There is an impression that many families are even not aware that they are entitled to free textbooks.

“There are three of us, books are first used by my brother, then by my sister and then by me. By the time I get them, a half of the pages is missing and everything is scribbled“ (thirteen-year old boy, Bijelo Polje)

Roma pupils shared the experience saying that in previous years they were entitled to the free textbooks only until the fourth grade of elementary school, which largely restricts and prevents them from continuing their education.

“Textbooks for elementary school should be free of charge for all children, in order for the school to be free of charge.“ (fifteen-year old boy, Danilovgrad)

“Art class is neglected and pupils are forced to acquire themselves the accessories needed for the class.“ (fifteen-year old boy, Pljevlja)

Children with disabilities who attend mainstream schools under the inclusive programme emphasised that their parents obtained, bought, printed Braille books and often hired an assistant at their own expense whom the pupils needed as a technical support during classes.

A number of respondents pointed to the problem with pupil transportation saying that there is no transportation organised exclusively for pupils and that timetable is not aligned with the beginning and end of classes.

“Sister and I walk 9 km to school.“ (twelve-year old boy, Podbišće-Mojkovac)

There is a problem with the lack of support to the talented children; institutions at the national and local levels do not invest in them, nor do they stimulate development of their talents.

“I take interest in chemistry, even though that is nerd-like, but my school does not have two test tubes, let alone something else. They send me to competitions and I have won two prizes until now, but I would like to have better conditions and win a few more.“ (fourteen-year old girl, Herceg Novi)

“New subjects should be introduced. For example, cinematography and robotics, as optional subjects.“ (twelve-year old boy, Bar)

**(c) undertake immediate measures to ensure that children are not denied access to education on any grounds;**

Children have observed that an increased number of children with disabilities have enrolled in schools. Schools do not have conditions to adapt space and human resources to the child with special educational needs. Many schools improvise and teachers manage in different ways to adapt lessons to the child with disability, but they are not always successful in that endeavour.

Children emphasise that a child with disability is often neglected in the classroom because teacher does not have time to give him/her special attention, or it is the other way around, i.e. the other children in the class are neglected because the lesson is adapted to one pupil. Teaching staff is often not educated on how to cope with a certain disability of a pupil, and in many schools there is no other specialised assistance and support. There is a lack of speech therapists and defectologists in Montenegro who are necessary assistance to the children attending school under inclusive curriculum.

“I’ d like to go back to the Resource Centre where I am equal to the classmates who also have disabilities. Over there, everyone is happy about any result, and here I don’ t know what my result is.“ (fourteen-year old girl, Berane)

“A classmate is in the wheelchair, so all lessons for our class are taught on the first floor.“ (twelve-year old girl, Herceg Novi)

“Milica has Down syndrome, we all hang out together. She likes hugging.“ (twelve-year old boy, Podgorica)

Children living in rural areas do not always have access to education or the access is inadequate. Schools are shut down due to the low population density of rural areas, they cannot be home-schooled, instead they have to change their place of residence in order to go to school. Also, the existing schools in rural areas lack proper conditions because no investments are made in equipping them due to a small number of pupils attending these schools, which calls into question equality and accessibility to the right to education.

“Director buys us notebooks, pencils etc…our families do not have enough money.“ (twelve-year old girl, Prošćenje, Mojkovac)

“We have dry clothes at school and we change over there when we are wet from rain and snow. We don’ t find that difficult, we come every day.“ (twelve-year old girl, Mojkovac)

“Physical education lessons are held in the classroom, and during summer – in front of the school.“ (thirteen-year old boy, Žabljak)

**(d) strengthen its efforts to integrate Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children into the general school system by enhanced teacher training, curriculum revisions and appropriate teaching and learning methods as well as intensified parental education and participation;**

Children have observed that Roma children often do not exercise their right to education, while nothing is being done to motivate them to go to school. These children often start school, but for some reasons they soon drop out. In focus group, a number of children emphasised that there were no Roma children in their class and they believed that Roma children either did not go to school or they went to school which was located close to their settlement. There is a prevailing opinion that not enough is being done with Roma children and that they do not make equal progress as the other pupils. In schools with dominant number of Roma children the situation is quite different, teachers are more committed and their achievements are more visible.

***“I would like to socialise with other children and do various sports, but we don’ t have money for that.” (twelve-year old boy, Podgorica)***

***“There is no one at home who could help me do my homework, because I have to help my parents.” (thirteen-year old girl, Podgorica)***

**(e) undertake measures to effectively address the comparatively higher drop-out rates among Roma children and ensure that Roma children are adequately prepared for higher education and vocational training;**

Respondents included in the survey believe that Roma children early drop out of school because of poverty, work on streets, early marriage, lack of adequate support in learning. They believe that the lack of language knowledge is one of the significant barriers. They have observed that Roma girls show more interest in school than boys.

“I like going to school, but I don’ t know how much time it will last. It takes a lot of money to go high school or university.“ (twelve-year old girl, Podgorica)

**(g) continue to implement prevention programmes in order to promote non-violent relations and to end violence in schools;**

Participants of focus groups believe there is a serious problem with violence among children and against children in schools. They agree that society should deal with the causes, and not only with the consequences of this problem. Experiences reveal that boys are more prone to physical violence, while girls are more prone to the emotional and verbal one and that they are ready for social inclusion. They also underscored an increasingly present problem involving violence on the internet.

As for the relationship between teachers and pupils, opinions differed and children spoke about different examples and experiences. According to the collected data, attitude of teachers towards pupils varies from one school to the other, from one teacher to the other, and there is a difference between attitudes of boys and girls. There are examples of good cooperation and excellent relationship with each pupil, while there are also examples of verbal violence, humiliation and even discriminatory conduct by teachers. Children agreed that pupils rarely sought help in resolving the relationship issue with an individual professor/teacher because they were afraid of consequences. Unpleasant experiences are mainly related to verbal unkindness such as insults, humiliation and non-pedagogical attitude of teachers, whereas physical punishment is also often experienced – such as pulling ear or hair, throwing a chalk, jerking by the hand or hitting by the teacher.

“I don’t know what the pedagogue does. You go to see the pedagogue if the teacher sends you there because you caused trouble or if you are a member of the hobby group.“ (thirteen-year old girl, Nikšić)

“Relationship with some teachers depends on who your mom and dad are.“ (seventeen-year old boy, Kotor)

“Teachers are different, but I don’ t think they are unfair, pupils must take responsibility for their behaviour.“ (fourteen-year old girl, Podgorica)

Based on all the observations mentioned above, children gave a number of recommendations:

* More funding is needed for education in order to provide children (primarily those in elementary schools), to the greatest extent possible, with free school accessories and other aides needed for a higher quality education;
* Improve school equipment and harmonise it with demands of the modern age;
* Further training of the teaching staff is needed in order for teaching to be more creative and to keep up with the times;
* Investments should be made in all schools, regardless of whether they are located in rural or urban areas, and ensure that education is provided under equal conditions for all children in Montenegro;
* Conditions for education of children with disabilities should be improved;
* All children who start school should be stimulated to finish it;
* Talented children should be given greater support and should be stimulated to work more on themselves and on their talents;
* Ensure that schools are safe places for the stay of children, schools should be violence-free;
* Continuously promote and respect rights of the child.

**RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION**

**31. The Committee recommends that the State party, by taking into consideration the Committee’s general comment No. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard:**

**(a) strengthen its efforts to ensure that children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and to have those views given due weight in schools and other educational institutions, as well as in the family, and reduce the disparities in the opportunities for the participation of students from different social backgrounds and various regions;**

Survey findings reveal that the degree of participation of children in decision-making and expression of their opinion has increased in all the areas compared to the earlier period (2010). Facts show that in some settings, participation is more formal than it is real. Children most often observe that adults (families, school) believe they need to be more mature in order to be involved in making important decisions.

“Mother asks us only Sundays what we would like to have for lunch.“ (sixteen-year old boy, Podgorica)

In focus groups and interviews respondents said that no sufficient room was left for the children and that teachers and school administrations impose their views.

“They just listen to our opinions, but they accept none of them.“ (thirteen-year old boy, Mojkovac)

Pupils‘ parliaments exist in schools, however they do not function properly and do not participate in making decisions concerned with activities and life at school.

Golden Advisors concluded that pupils did not exercise sufficiently their right to express opinion out of the fear from consequences, because they believed they would not change anything or they did not want to draw attention to themselves.

“School parliaments launched modest initiatives, since support by school administration is more of a declaratory nature.“ (fourteen-year old girl, Bar)

**(b) ensure that children are provided with the opportunity to be heard in any judicial, including civil and penal matter, and in administrative proceedings affecting them, and that due weight is given to those views in accordance with the age and maturity of the child;**

“I have been member of the pupils’ parliament for two years now and the only thing we managed to influence as a parliament is planning and holding performances/celebration on the day of the school“ (thirteen-year old girl, Nikšić)

“Young people wishing to make some changes should become more active and educate themselves. The state is not the only one to blame, we are passive.“ (seventeen-year old girl, Herceg Novi)

As for participation of children and their involvement in judicial proceedings, Golden Advisors/researchers have not managed to find out sufficient information from respondents because children had not had any experience with these kinds of problems. Respondents from the Centre for Children and Youth „Ljubović“[[1]](#footnote-1) did not have ant remarks in respect of the procedures they participated in, their opinion was sought at all phases of the procedures and they were informed about everything.

Children in institutionalised accommodation[[2]](#footnote-2) are partly satisfied with the respect for the right to participation. One of the remarks (of the focus group) was that children placed in institutions could not influence the menu, their going-out and pocket money (which they are entitled to under the law).

“There are rules and household rules we have to abide by, there is nothing we can do about it, nor does anyone consult us.“ (fifteen-year old boy, Bijela)

Children whose parents are in the process of marriage divorce are not always given the chance to participate in making a decision on which parent they want to live with. They emphasise that they are insufficiently informed about the procedure itself and insufficiently supported by the Social Welfare Centre, and when they do involve them there is an impression it is just a formality.

**(c) develop a systematic approach to increase public awareness of the rights of children to express views and be heard and encourage respect for the views of children within the family, school, care institutions and community;**

When it comes to local communities, children are not sufficiently involved, nor are their wishes and needs properly understood. The NGO Centre for Rights of the Child set up local pupils’ parliaments in four municipalities (Bar, Bijelo Polje, Cetinje and Podgorica) which functioned only during the period in which their work was supported by this organisation. Golden Advisors believe children should be involved to a greater extent in the development of the “child-friendly” local community and that they should be given the chance to participate in preparation of the strategic-planning documents which are focused on the needs of children in community. Children and youth are not sufficiently familiarised with which services, associations or organisations they can contact in order to get involved and influence on local community policies which concern children.

***“I know some children participate in events held in the town, but they are usually members of some school hobby groups: recitation, dance, drama etc. Sometimes they host the programme as well.“ (thirteen-year old boy, Bar)***

**(d) ensure the involvement of children in the preparation and implementation of major developmental plans and programmes in the country, such as national development plans, action plans, annual budgets and poverty reduction strategies.**

Children/respondents were quite surprised by both, the question and the possibility for them to be involved at the state level in making decisions about the matters that concern them. Organisation of the “Children’ s Session” at the Parliament of Montenegro[[3]](#footnote-3) for the last eight years has been the highest degree of children’ s participation. This model of children’ s participation ensured visibility and enabled voice of the children to be heard. Children got the impression that their problems and needs were not on the list of decision-makers’ priorities. In addition, the way of communication and quality of responses to the questions is not understandable to the children, and oftentimes these answers are formal and promises are of declaratory nature.

”My friends at school have been asking, for five years now, when the gymnasium would be built, and that issue has not been resolved yet, even though they made a promise.“ (fourteen-year old boy, Cetinje)

“We ’ve had enough of adults making decisions instead of us, it is important to ask us as well and take our opinion into account.” (sixteen-year old girl, Podgorica)

Based on all the observations mentioned above, children gave a number of recommendations:

* Children’s right to participation must be improved and children should be involved in all the processes that concern them (children are given the opportunity to express their opinions, but actually they are not involved, instead they are involved just formally and declaratively);
* Promote the right to participation;
* Make it possible for children to be more visible and let their voice be heard.

**RIGHT TO SOCIAL CARE**

**40. The Committee recommends that the State party:**

**(a) Increase support to families in carrying out their parental responsibilities, inter alia, by creating a social network of child protection at community level and strengthening the family structure;**

Children are aware that poor families receive financial support. However, they believe that the amount of such financial support is small and that it cannot meet even the most basic of needs. They also know that some families receive children’ s allowance, but they do not understand why all the children in Montenegro do not receive children’ s allowance. Free textbooks are provided to the children from poor families. In some municipalities, financial assistance is provided for the purchase of school accessories, but omissions are made due to incomplete records and insufficient information. As a result, financially disadvantaged families often do not know they are entitled to such support. Children respondents also underlined the fact that some of their friends took the opportunity to go the summer or winter holidays free of charge, which they praised as an example of good practice.

**(b) provide economic and social assistance programmes for families with special attention to most vulnerable families, such as Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian families, the families caring for children with disabilities and single-parent families;**

Children pointed to the problem of extreme poverty of Roma population. Some children barely have roofs over their heads and as a result they cannot exercise many rights.

In focus groups, none of the children said they were hungry, nor did they confess that they begged on the streets, but many children knew a peer who was poor and who worked on the street.

“Many children from our settlement and neighbourhood go out into the streets to beg. I don’ t.“ (thirteen-year old boy, Berane)

**(c) develop and financially support community-based and family-focused services;**

Children also emphasised that families needed more support by professionals and different services in order to function properly and provide their children with what they need.

**(d) strengthen social services providing family counselling and parenting education and train professionals, including social workers providing assistance to parents in the upbringing of their children and provide them with continuous, gender sensitive and targeted training.**

As for children with disabilities, social welfare envisages diverse forms of financial support for families, however there are no adequate support services in the form of counselling and psychological help to children and families who have children with disabilities. Children with disabilities need special attention and support. However, adequate assistance in the form of supporting aides, teaching assistants etc. which they need for unhindered development and personal advancement is not provided to them. Children who benefit from social services at the resource centres or day care centres are satisfied because treatment is provided to them in one place, however these services do not exist in every city in Montenegro which is why many children travel to the neighbouring municipality which is quite complicated for them; or they stay throughout the school year at the boarding-house at the resource centres, as a result of which they are separated from their family and their environment.

“I very much like the Resource Centre in Podgorica, all my friends and teachers are there, but I miss my family. I ’d like this institution to exist in the north of Montenegro, I could see my sisters more.“ (twelve-year old girl, Plav)

Children living in rural areas often do not have access to certain institutions which could provide them various forms of social services, which is why they have to travel to the larger (urban) centres to receive them. Oftentimes, they are insufficiently informed about what they do and what kind of services they are entitled to.

An issue was raised in focus groups regarding satisfaction with services provided by social welfare centres to the children of divorced parents. Children of divorced parents (a total of 60 of those interviewed) in the majority of cases are not completely satisfied with activities undertaken by social welfare centres when they contacted them regarding broken family relationships. Children were not consulted sufficiently when decision was made about which parent would get the custody. They say visits to the social worker was always like a “nightmare” to them or it was just a formality. However, there are some praiseworthy examples when children were not happy with the court decision at the end of their parents’ divorce which is why assistance was provided to them in cooperation with the Social Welfare Centre and such decision was corrected to serve best interest of the child.

"Parents’ divorce is hard enough, and moreover, one has to do with a social worker who makes you tell all those things that you wish to forget" (seventeen-year old girl, Podgorica)

During focus groups we gained the impression that children are not aware of the importance of social services, nor of the importance of the role of social welfare centres in the social and child care system. Children who are placed in childcare facilities were, by the very nature of things, the most familiar ones with these matters.

Children consider that many things have been improved compared to the past in respect to social services’ provision, but they mentioned an issue with regard to the payment of certain social security benefits, lack of or inaccessibility of different services, and an issue concerning social workers. All this greatly affects the provision and protection of guaranteed children's rights.

Foster care in Montenegro has come to life and it is being promoted, but not enough. Many children (from complete families) never heard of foster care until the media started talking about it (UNICEF's foster care promotion campaign in Montenegro). Children believe that the campaign should be stronger and more versatile in order for these services to really develop and come to life in Montenegro. The interviews showed that there are cases of children accommodated in foster families not satisfied with the conditions in which they live there, or with their relationship with the foster parents. They often return from such families to the Home for Children without Parental Care *Mladost* in Bijela. Such experiences are very difficult emotionally to the children who have had them. This shows that social welfare centres have often failed when choosing a family in which a child without parental care will live. Children were insufficiently asked about the kind of a foster family which would suit them. A boy who returned from a foster family to the institution twice said that he would have preferred not to have been placed in a foster family at all because he had hoped for a better life in vain.

Children without parental care depend a lot on the social workers who are their guardians. Children are essentially satisfied with their treatment; however, they feel that communication with the social worker they have been directly entrusted to could be much better. A common situation is that a child can not contact his social worker when he wants to, or when he needs to do something (for example, get a document, certificate, passport, etc.) or has to wait untimely long because his social worker is overburdened. In certain cases, children placed in the home would like to have more diversified food, more free time to spend more creatively, more pocket money[[4]](#footnote-4). They consider that educators and guardians are treating them properly and do not know about cases of physical punishment or any inappropriate behaviour.

Based on all of the above, the children made recommendations:

* **Children’s allowance for poor children (living on the verge of existence) needs to be increased so that they can really satisfy all their needs with those funds;**
* **It is necessary to inform children about all the social services they are entitled to, and whom to address in case they have a problem;**
* **Social welfare centres need to listen to the wishes and needs of the child to a greater degree so that in cases of divorce proceedings and similar disputes they can make decisions that are in their best interests;**
* **It is necessary to expand the network of foster care in Montenegro since we have found out during the research that there is not a single registered non-kinship foster family in our country;**
* **Although children who are placed in the institutions of the system are generally satisfied with the services provided to them there, it is nevertheless necessary to work on their improvement.**

**RIGHT TO HEALTH CARE**

**50. The Committee recommends that the state party:**

**(a) increase efforts to improve sanitation and quality of care in health care facilities;**

During conversations with children, Golden Advisorswere informed that sanitary conditions in health care institutions were not always at a satisfactory level, but a number of respondents said that toilets in health centres and city hospitals were refurbished. Health workers are generally responsible with regards to their work duties. They are sometimes nervous because of the big waiting lines and patients’ impatience. Respondents have mostly objected because when they want to find out basic information about the condition of a child, doctors and nurses mostly talk to the adult person who came with the child, not the child himself. It is also often stated that there are no necessary specialists and counselling centres in city hospitals and health centres.

"Toilets are somewhat tidy in hospitals. Those that are really tidy are locked up and only employees can enter them" (fourteen-year old boy, Podgorica).

"When I go to a doctor, the doctor asks my mother what the issue is, as if I can not say what is hurting me and in which way" (fourteen-year old girl, Nikšić).

**(b) address inequalities in access to health services by, inter alia, further developing primary health care and implementing a coordinated approach among all sectors of government, including better coordination between health care policies and those aimed at reducing poverty and social exclusion;**

The biggest issue identified by the children who took part in the research is certainly the accessibility of health care that is not equally provided in all towns of Montenegro. Respondents who participated in focus groups want hospitals and health centres to provide the most basic health care in less developed municipalities (especially in the north). There are almost no specialist examinations in these health care institutions. In cases of a more serious diagnostics being needed, one must go to Podgorica. This means more time needed for that purpose, higher travel expenses, and accommodation if the diagnostics does not get finished on the same day. Examinations with specialist doctors are scheduled and one sometimes has to wait for several months. All specialties (e.g., child psychiatrists, special dentists for children with disabilities) do not even exist. In rural areas, outpatient clinics, where they exist, work only on certain days, and doctors of certain specialties come there only occasionally.

Children stressed that due to hospital staff being overburdened and poor equipment in hospitals, parents are often forced to seek assistance for their children in private clinics that are better equipped, but the examinations are expensive. The experiences of children and their loved ones tell us that state hospitals and laboratories often lack the most basic means of treatment, so parents are forced to purchase them themselves. Hence, the question arises as to whether such health care is really accessible. Children have pointed out that it is not uncommon for them to have to bring their own bandages or to buy some medicine, because the hospital/health centre does not have any "at the moment".

"... you have a medical facility, you also have a number of medical staff, but they do not have the means to work" (sixteen-year old girl, Pljevlja).

**(c) develop a comprehensive program to improve the health of mothers and children, including through basic health care services for the most vulnerable children, especially for Roma children, children living in rural areas and refugee children;**

During the discussion with their peers on the matter of the right to health care, Golden Advisorsrecognized a number of issues. They stated that we do not have quality health care, emphasized lack of specialists in various fields, long waiting for scheduled examinations, inability to get early diagnostics and various medical treatments that children need, especially those from vulnerable groups[[5]](#footnote-5). Respondents cited as a common issue the impossibility of being reimbursed costs for going to diagnostics and treatment, as well as costs for purchased medicines.

Focus group participants pointed out that the issue was not only recognised at primary health care level, which is also confirmed by the fact that many treatments, examinations, procedures and rehabilitation can not be done in Montenegro, so children are sent to other countries. This state shows that children can not adequately receive care and protection that is necessary at all times and without exception. There were numerous examples of children requiring urgent medical intervention being sent abroad, thus losing time that is crucial in such situations. Montenegro provides medical treatment in other countries, but it entails a number of complications and difficulties (such as administrative ones/paperwork, escort arrangements, provision of travel, stay and treatment expenses, reimbursement of money spent). Also, children/respondents have testified that monetary funds for treating children abroad are collected through the media, mobile operators, humanitarian organizations, social networks, because the state can not provide the child with such kind of health care.

"Children are not born in Žabljak; all mothers go to Pljevlja because that is where the hospital is." (thirtheen-year old girl, Žabljak)

"We all have a selected doctor and that's good, it should reduce the crowd. But the selected doctor sends you to a specialist to a hospital and you have to wait there" (sixteen-year old girl, Kolašin)

"It took a month for my turn to come to do a CAT scan of my sinuses!" (fifteen-year old girl, Danilovgrad)

"Information level about reproductive health is poor. It comes down to panel discussions organised by the Red Cross, to which five students from each class are invited, and the rest remain uninformed." (girl, 16 years old, Podgorica)

"In our school we launched an AIDS prevention campaign, but our professors did not have any understanding for it." (sixteen-year old girl, Danilovgrad)

Based on all of the above, children made recommendations as follows:

* **It is necessary to work on the accessibility of health care for all children of Montenegro;**
* **It is necessary to open hospitals, health centres and doctor’s offices so that children can receive health care in the municipality in which they live;**
* **It is necessary to work on equipping hospitals so that children can get care free-of-charge in state hospitals, instead of seeking assistance in private doctor’s offices and abroad;**
* **Personnel should be trained to provide assistance to children in all areas of health care;**
* **Conduct regular programs for education of children and youth on reproductive health, AIDS and addiction diseases.**

***The research was conducted and the report was drawn up by the Golden Advisors of the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms.***

1. Facility providing institutional support to the children who violated law. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Public Institution Children’s Home "Mladost“– Bijela, facility providing institutional protection to the children without parental care. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. By the NGO Centre for the Rights of the Child of Montenegro, with support of the Parliament [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In those institutions where they are entitled to that – *Mladost* Home [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. To children with special needs, Roma, children from rural environments [↑](#footnote-ref-5)