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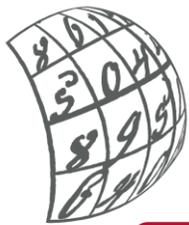


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STRENGTHENING PREVENTION AND RESPONSE TO ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

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Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Strengthening prevention and response to all forms of violence against children

- **INTRODUCTION**

- In the Convention on the Rights of the Child in article 19 is provided the following: “States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.” In both documents, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, countries committed to ending violence against children. The Sustainable Development Goals call for the end of abuse, exploitation, and all forms of violence against children by the year 2030. Also, article 74 of Montenegrin’s Constitution prescribes: “A child shall enjoy rights and freedoms appropriate to his age and maturity. A child shall be guaranteed special protection from psychological, physical, economic and exploitation or abuse.”

- Civil society, media, and governments through sectors, such as the education system, justice system, and other services should collaborate to gain one main goal – to respond to violence against children and to prevent it.
- This topic is one of the more important topics in every society, and to work on strengthening prevention of the violence against children, firstly, we should define all the forms of it. Violence against children can have many different forms, it can be physical, mental, emotional, sexual, cyberviolence, etc. Violence is happening in all countries, no matter if the country and its system are more developed or not. Usually, the violence is happening in surroundings that are familiar to a child, such as its home, school, and neighborhood and it comes from people whom children trust. But we should not forget that the most dangerous types of violence are often hidden from public view.

- **FORMS OF VIOLENCE**

- ***PHYSICAL VIOLENCE***

- Physical abuse is the most visible and most common type of violence against children. In many countries, violent discipline is socially accepted and common. It can be defined as attitude or behavior that includes physical force, it can also include the use of other means, and the consequence is an injury to the child. At the time when a child passes through physical violence, it also goes through emotional trauma. Physical abuse is when an abuser uses physical force against another child in a way that injures the child or puts them at risk of being injured. Physical abuse ranges from physical restraint to murder as the most difficult consequences. There are many physical consequences of this kind of violence, for example, bruises, bone fractures, and inside injuries, but, even though these physical injuries heal over time, the emotional consequences such as fear, anger, and sadness are permanent.

- ***EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE***

- Emotional or psychological violence is behavior in which a child is being neglected, verbally insulted, humiliated or its personality is underestimated, and that makes the child feel unworthy and not being loved enough. Emotional abuse can be verbal or nonverbal, and the actions or behaviors are less obvious than physical abuse. It is expressed in many ways: not giving emotional support and love to the child, making the child feel negative, isolating the child, being indifferent to the child's success, undermining the child's self-worth through constant criticism, blaming the child for the abuser's acts or feelings. Emotional violence leaves a stronger mark on children than physical abuse and makes them feel confused. The main goal of this kind of abuse is to develop anxiety in the child, making the child feel dependent on the abuser, and making the child feel responsible for everything that is happening to him/her. Physical violence, at first sight, may seem more dangerous than emotional, but in fact, both verbal and non-verbal violence can be more emotionally damaging for the child. Emotional violence is reflected in the child's further development and formation of personality.

- ***SEXUAL VIOLENCE***

- Sexual violence of the child is any form of exploitation of the child for purpose of sexual enjoyment of an adult person, prostitution, unlawful sexual practices, or exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.
- This kind of violence can happen anywhere, and in surroundings that are familiar to the child, and from persons who are familiar to the child.

- ***CYBERVIOLENCE***

- The Internet has brought many benefits to modern society, but also it has some flaws such as cyberviolence. On the Internet children have many opportunities to explore and expand their knowledge, but, at the same time, there is a risk to includes cyberbullying, online grooming, cybercrime, and online sexual violence. All these forms of online violence may have a detrimental impact on children's basic human rights.

- ***BULLYING***

- Bullying is a very characteristic form of violence among children. It is physical, psychological violence that comes from children's friends and their peers at school. It usually consists of mocking somebody, making fun of them because of their behavior, appearance, race or religion, or social status. This kind of violence can be verbal (teasing someone), physical (hurting targets physically, e.g. punching, hitting), and psychological (gossiping about the target, making the target feel unworthy). This type of abuse usually makes bullied children feel anxious, stressed, being in bad mood, with low energy, or the most dangerous consequences are suicidal thoughts.

- ***FAMILY (DOMESTIC) VIOLENCE***

- The problem of domestic violence is a very complex psycho-social problem. Domestic violence is any act that causes mental, physical, sexual, economic, or spiritual harm to a family member (especially the child). It covers a range of behaviors committed by a family member against another family member, who aims to control the victim through fear. The victim is in constant fear for his safety or the safety of another family member.

- *THE SITUATION IN THE WORLD COMPARED TO THE SITUATION IN OUR COUNTRY*

This report by the European Parliament, which talks about the prevalence of various types of violence against children throughout Europe, denies the common assumption that violence is a bigger problem in developing countries. Based on interregional consultations between Europe and Central Asia, the European Parliament concludes that "children in Europe are exposed to violence as children in any other region" (p. 7). Part of this report is also dedicated to breaking the prejudice that violence occurs only in the poorest areas. Recognizing the ubiquity of violence against children is a necessary step towards its final suppression.

- However, the report states that there is indeed a link between poverty and violence against children. The statistics published by the "Helpline for European Children" indicate a large increase in the number of calls received since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008. Numerous NGOs confirm that the austerity measures introduced since the beginning of the financial crisis have also contributed to the increase in violence against children. The denial of access to some basic services due to financial difficulties at the family level has led to an increase in violence against children in Europe.

- There are at least two aspects of the child protection system in Europe: one formal and the other informal. Internationally ratified agreements on the recognition of the rights of the child are a formal element of the system, and social attitudes, values, and norms are an informal aspect. It is clear from the report that the synthesis of these two aspects is a necessary precondition for combating violence against children in the European Union. Socio-economic and moral imperatives permeate the political goal of ending violence against children. Based on global statistics, the report estimates that as many as 18 million children in Europe experience sexual abuse each year. This means that every fifth child is a victim of sexual abuse, and in 70-85% of cases the perpetrator is a person the child knows. Nearly 44 million children experience physical violence and 55 million experience psychological abuse. Nearly 850 children in Europe die each year as a result of violence. It can be said that it is impossible to calculate the consequences of violence for the victims. However, the evidence points to the fact that the consequences of childhood violence can be so great as to include brain damage, cognitive deficits, and difficulties in development, behavior, and social integration. Exposure to childhood violence can mean reduced economic productivity in the long run. This can condemn victims to poverty, so it can be said that child victims of violence are damaged for life. Equally damaging can be the situation in which they are only witnesses of domestic violence.

- Growing up in an environment where violence is considered a "normal occurrence" brings with it physical, social, and psychological consequences. The problem is especially that abused children have a poor command of the language in most cases, and they are the ones who need to express themselves the most. Research shows that abused children are more likely to engage in violence than their peers who have not been victims of violence. This means that transgenerational "inheritance" of violence ("cycles of violence") works better in communities where some forms of violence are socially accepted. It is for this reason that the European Parliament insists that it is not enough to just punish individual perpetrators to prevent violence against children. European governments must ensure that the law is adequately enforced so that perpetrators can be tried more severely. However, more efforts must be made to improve economic, social, and cultural conditions that will reduce the number of cases of violence against children. Some groups of children (e.g., members of minorities, children with special needs, and the materially vulnerable) are more vulnerable to violence. There are also certain environments (e.g., care facilities and reception centers) where the risk of abuse is higher. For this reason, public authorities must ensure that children from more vulnerable groups are adequately protected.

- Transparency and accountability are necessary preconditions for combating violence against children in Europe. European legislation is already in line with that, so now political will and allocation of sufficient funds are necessary to react in the right way in the fight to eradicate violence against children.
- ***MONTENEGRO***
- Now we will pay additional attention to the presentation of data on violence against children in 2021, which the Institute for Social and Child Protection collected from the centers for social work through a specially created form for statistical reporting, where we will aim to illuminate certain aspects of violence against children from multiple perspectives and use data UNICEF for 2021.
- According to the 2011 census, there are 145,126 children under the age of 18 living in Montenegro. This population participates in the total population with 23.4%. Children who are registered as victims of violence in 2021 make up 0.4% of the said population of children in Montenegro.
- The share of children victims of violence in the population of children by region is the lowest in the central region. Expressed per 100,000 children, the number of child victims of violence ranges from 354 children in the central region to 492 children in the coastal region. There are 416 children victims of violence per 100,000 children in Montenegro.

- Interestingly, the structure of children registered in social work centers as victims of violence in 2019 is convincingly dominated by children who experienced violence in a family context, either directly or as witnesses (531 children or 87.9% of the total number of registered children). Significantly fewer children were registered by the centers related to violence experienced outside the family (73 children or 12.1%).
- Children witnessing violence are more than 1/2 of children in the subgroup of children victims of domestic violence, while their share in the subgroup of children victims of domestic violence is almost negligible, which is certainly related to the practice of registration and insufficiently defined role of social work centers in procedures. Protection of children victims of domestic violence, including children witnesses of domestic violence.
- Children aged 10 to 14 have the largest share of the structure children victims of violence, while children under the age of 6 are the least represented. If children are grouped according to school age, almost 2/3 of children victims of violence are children of primary school age (from 6 to 14 years).
- Children can also be exposed to violence via the Internet, both by known and unknown perpetrators, both by their peers and by adults. According to the data submitted by the centers for social work in the reporting format of the Institute for 2019, in the period from 01.01. to 31.01. In 2021, 13 children experienced violence via the Internet, of which 7 boys (53.8%) and 6 girls (46.2%). These children make up 2.2% of the total number of children victims of violence (a total of 604 children), and as many as 17.8% of children within the subgroup of children victims of violence outside the family (a total of 73 children).

- The gender structure of children victims of violence via the Internet indicates that boys were more exposed to this form of violence than girls, while when we look at the gender structure of most children victims of violence (see data in Table 11 and Graph 16) we see only a slight prevalence of boys, i.e. children of both sexes are approximately equally likely to be victims of violence in the wider structure of child victims. This emphasizes the need and importance of collecting gender-differentiated data on victims of violence in different contexts and related to different types, forms, and types of violence.
- Centers for Social Work (Montenegro) are services that play an important role in the process of protection against violence, which includes special activities of centers for social work and coordination of several different state bodies: police, judicial, health, and educational institutions, and civil society organizations. The role of the Center for Social Work is primarily based on the role of guardianship authorities and responsibilities in protecting the best interests of children, youth, adults, and the elderly who are victims of various forms of violence, as well as its competencies defined by the Law on Social and Child Protection, Family Law, The Law on Treatment of Juveniles in Criminal Proceedings, the Criminal Code, the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, the Protocol on Treatment, Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence, and the Protocol on Treatment, Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

- *SUMMARY*

- There are different understandings of the phenomenon and concept of violence against children and they result from different philosophical, scientific, methodological, and practical approaches. What makes it difficult to precisely define this phenomenon is the dynamic nature of its contents, forms, and causes, on the one hand, and the diversity of aspects of a valuable, ideological nature, on the other hand. Early intervention of violence is not common and therefore often children who are exposed to constant violence whether it is sexual, or physical. The problem is that children can grow up believing that they must have provoked or deserved violence, so working with children is very important. In working with abused children, his self-esteem needs to be built first. Children who have been abused will often feel worthless and think that it does not matter who abuses them because they do not deserve better.
- Such children have learned to live in the reality of recurring abuse and it takes a long time to recover from these effects. It takes a lot of effort to build a child's self-esteem, with praise for newly acquired knowledge and constant reassurance that it's great. Also, it is important to remember that working with children in this area should be well planned, sensitively guided, and financially secured.

- Family support is also very important. When child abuse is detected, it can have a devastating effect on other family members who have not been abused. Family members will experience shock, disbelief, and guilt because they did not protect the child.
- The conclusion is that preventing and protecting children from violence is the most important goal in the development of laws and strategies in one country.

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Thank you for your attention.