



FORUM 2023

Challenges and
Opportunities for
Children and Youth in
Society

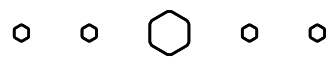
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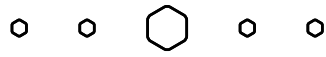


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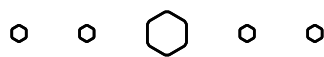
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SUMMARY

This report was developed following the Forum 2023: Challenges and Opportunities for Children and Youth in Society, organized by the NGO Domovik in North Mitrovica, on 29 and 30 November, 2023. Over 90 participants attended this activity during these two days. The forum consisted of four panels, which were divided according to the following topics: civic space, education, mental health and ecology, all with a focus on children and young people. Experts and activists from the aforementioned fields spoke at the panel discussions.

Miljan Stanišić, program coordinator at NGO Domovik, warmly greeted all those present on behalf of the organization and presented its work. Since 2009, NGO Domovik has been continuously working to improve the position of young peo-

ple and children, and the focus of the work is on the future challenges of young generations in their community.

The purpose of the Forum and its vision were emphasized. The first time that an event like this was organized was two years ago in Zubin Potok. The overall theme of the forum was similar to this year's - challenges and opportunities that youth and children are facing in their communities.

Forum 2023 brought together participants from different parts of the region, including both experts contributing locally and those coming from a wider regional context. This was an opportunity for them to present their views and to explore together the problems, challenges and opportunities related to children and young people.



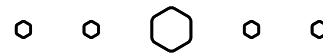
During the first panel, the opening speaker was Marjan Cvetković, a youth activist and former director of the Youth Umbrella Organization in Serbia, who emphasized the importance of activism directed at local communities and adapting changes to the needs of young people. He pointed out that the biggest problem of young people is lack of information and emphasized the need for advocacy initiatives aimed at the development of information centres that would provide young people with accurate information.

Svetlana Baldini, a psychologist representing Caritas Kosovo, spoke about working with Roma children, highlighting the problems they face, such as poor living conditions, unemployment, difficulties in education and lack of documentation. Her work is focused on providing support to Roma children and parents through educational workshops, immunization and assistance in education.

The next panelist, Aida Krasnić, a member of the UM youth group, shared her experience as an activist in the Roma community and talked about the film about early marriages among the Roma, which she shot together with other members of the community, who recognized the importance of activism. At the end of her presentation, she called on all young people to be the agents of change they want to see in their communities.

The concluding panelist was Kushtrim Gjoshaj, program manager at NGO Community Building Mitrovica (CBM). He spoke about the reconciliation of young Serbs and Albanians, emphasizing the importance of supporting young people, listening to their needs and acting together, in order to overcome the ethnic gap and promote inclusion.

All speakers agreed that it is crucial to support young people, develop inclusive programs and activities, and actively work to overcome the challenges that young people face.





During the second panel of the first day of the Forum, the attendees had the opportunity to hear about the importance of education from Prof. Dr. Tatjana Kompirović, who spoke about the history of the implementation of legal measures to create an inclusive environment. She explained the challenges that we face today, highlighting the difference between legal frameworks and the real situation, illustrating them with examples of affirmative measures at the Faculty of Philosophy in Mitrovica.

Ivana Milosavljević, head of UNICEF regional office in Mitrovica, a graduate teacher, emphasized the importance of systematic data collection and analysis. She particularly highlighted the challenges faced by those who have difficulties accessing education, especially in rural areas.

The last speaker, Miljana Bulatović, director of the non-governmental organization Art punkt Akvarijus, graduate painter and psychologist, spoke about the importance of non-formal and informal education. The focus of her presentation was on the development of critical thinking for children and young people, which is initiated through art and creative processes. She also pointed out that, although informal education has been intensively discussed in recent decades, it is often not adequately recognized as an important part of the educational system.

The first panel of the second day of the Forum 2023 was about mental health. Simona Đurović, psychologist and family psychotherapist, supervisor at the Centre for Social Work in Zubin Potok, emphasized the great importance of the mental health of children and young people, underlining the importance of promoting these topics through various communication channels, in order to encourage seeking help and support.

Another speaker, Prof. Dr. Jelena Minić, psychologist and systemic family psychotherapist, shared information about myths and prejudices related to mental problems in society, emphasizing the need for systematic support in order to improve the mental health of young people and children.

Isidora Jovanović, a student at the Faculty of Medicine and editor of the Leader online youth platform at NGO Domovik, shared her personal experience and the challenges that young people face when presenting mental challenges. In addition, she presented interesting data obtained from research on the mental health of young people, which was conducted by NGO Domovik.

The key recommendation from this panel was the need for education of all stakeholders within the support system, including parents, pedagogues, psychologists and kindergarten teachers, as agreed by the panellists. According to them, timely information and support to everyone within the system play a key role.



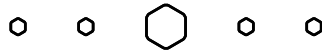
The last panel, the topic of which was ecology, began with a speech by Jelena Đokić, a professor at the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Mitrovica, who emphasized the key importance of studying environmental protection, presenting an extensive topic that includes her subject. It focused on critical elements such as air, water and land pollution, while emphasizing technological innovations for waste treatment. Professor Đokić emphasized the necessity of controlling and assessing risks to the environment, investigating the implications for human resources and material goods in situations of natural disasters. She particularly emphasized the need to raise awareness among citizens, calling for a real picture of the current state of pollution and for active efforts, stressing that it is necessary to point out the serious consequences that would follow, if urgent steps are not taken to preserve the environment. During his presentation, Master of Ecology, Nikola Grujić presented an ecological research aimed at analysing the state of the environment in the Mitrovica region. The focus of his research was on the middle part of Ibar River basin, and the results were presented in detail in his master's thesis entitled "Biological assessment of the quality of Ibar River middle course with reference to the

state of the environment in the Mitrovica region". He presented to the audience worrying conclusions about river and land pollution in this region.

Moreover, he pointed to insufficiently developed people's awareness of these problems and emphasized the need for increased efforts in the field of education and raising awareness on environmental challenges. He especially emphasized the importance of cooperation with the civil sector, stressing that he is pleased to see the involvement and knowledge of the youngest members of the community in this matter. Member of panel, Maja Kocić, advisor for project management in the town administration of Leskovac, during her presentation spoke in detail about the projects implemented in her municipality, and emphasized the need for intensifying environmental protection projects and that municipalities should allocate more funds for these activities, which are aimed to preserving the environment.

Maja shared an example of good practice, highlighting a situation where a group of citizens managed to stop the illegal construction of a building with their protests. This initiative contributed to the preservation of green areas in the community, which served as an inspiration and incentive for other citizens to become actively involved in environmental protection. Her work illustrates how joint engagement can have a positive impact on the local environment and points to the importance of active citizen participation in nature protection processes.





OBJECTIVES OF FORUM

The program of the Forum 2023 “Challenges and Opportunities for Children and Youth in Society” was intended at achieving the following goals:

○ **Awareness-raising:** Empowering Forum participants about the importance of active participation of young people in society, raising awareness of key issues related to children and young people.

○ **Exchange of experiences and knowledge:** Facilitating the exchange of ideas, experiences and best practices in the fields of activism, volunteerism, ecology, mental health, education and inclusion between experts, organizations and children and young people.

○ **Identification of challenges:** Identification of key challenges that children and youth face in today’s society, including environmental, mental health, educational and other social aspects.

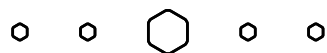
○ **Providing recommendations:** Formulating concrete recommendations and strategies to solve identified challenges and create opportunities to improve the living conditions of youth and children.

○ **Creating a platform for change:** Creating a platform for the active involvement of children and youth in the process of decision-making and shaping policies that concern their needs and interests.

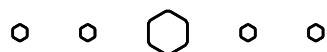
○ **Fostering inclusion:** Promoting inclusion, not only in the fields of education, but also in activism, civic engagement and all aspects of social life, to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute and be heard.

○ **Education and empowerment:** Education and empowerment of all forum participants on the importance of non-formal education, as well as inclusive practices that allow everyone to develop their abilities and skills.

These goals should support the process of understanding, action and changes aimed at creating a positive environment for youth and children in our region, considering a wide range of their needs and challenges in society.

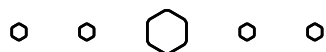


HIGHLIGHTS



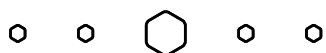
SPEAKERS OF PANEL ON EDUCATION

“The faculty does not have the most adequate conditions in terms of assistive technology or the training of teachers in working with such students, nor is it regulated by legal regulations and by-laws. Therefore, I emphasize that some initiative, perhaps even from the civil sector, could go in that direction to change such things in the future.”



Tatjana Kompirović – Associate Professor, Department of Pedagogy, Faculty of Philosophy

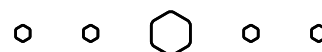
“The key issue for the community is the systematic collection of data, which could be found in one place, which would greatly facilitate the inclusion of marginalized children in the education system.”



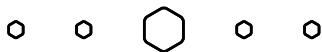
Ivana Milosavljević - head of the UNICEF regional office in Mitrovica, graduate pedagogist



“It is important to emphasize that discrimination, non-inclusivity, lack of understanding for the opinions and thoughts of children and young people, both on the part of parents and institutions, are something that will be a problem that we will solve for many years. Therefore, every day we face the facts that we have clearly defined discrimination in formal education, in school institutions, universities and all other educational programs.”



Miljana Bulatović - director of Art Point Akvarijus, graduate painter and psychologist



SPEAKERS OF PANEL ON CIVIC SPACE



“I personally believe that our work should be based on informing children and young people. A large number of young people are aware that they need information, but do not know where to look for it. Every local community should have something like an Information Centre and that info point should help the youth to continue on the right path. It often happens that young people, especially those who are not bold and courageous enough, are left without information or come across some superficial information or misinformation. This results in consequences such as insecurity, unemployment, etc. As a society, as a civil sector, as organizations, as individuals, we have to work much more in that field, in order to make information available to young people.”

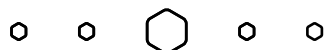
Marjan Cvetković - Youth activist, former director of Youth Umbrella Organization in Serbia

“Society, as an institution, should recognize the Roma community and provide them with better and quality support, not only on paper, but also in reality. Here I mean the employment rate, stimulation in social flows, inclusion, to be in mixed schools. They are not any different in relation to our children and in relation to us, in general. We should respect each other, understand and live together.”



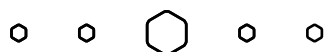
Tatjana Baldini - psychologist-counsellor in Caritas project

“It’s perfectly okay if you don’t know something, but it’s not okay if you don’t try to change it. We need to be a change to ourselves and then we can change the world. Be the best version of yourself and the best example to the people around you. We understand that success is not only measured by what you have achieved in life, but also by whether you have inspired others to do something.”

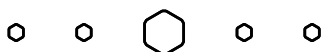


Aida Krasnići - 4th year student of the Medical School and member of the UM youth group

“We should provide support to young people, listen to them, open doors for them and in some way finance their activities. We must not lose the young. In the south, I saw a lack of hope among the youth. Many of them want to leave Kosovo. We don’t want to lose these young people, and we will lose them if we just tell them “Yes, we love you”. That is not enough, we must also support them and tell them that they are very important for this community.”



Kushtrim Gjoshaj - Program Development Manager at NGO CBM



SPEAKERS OF PANEL ON ECOLOGY

“My message to young people is to work on themselves, develop, unite and be consistent. In this way, they strengthen their voice in the public. Their life should be in their hands. The environment is not a matter of choice or prestige, but of the existence of the community, in whatever social order it may be. The environment is an issue beyond national and religious affiliation or economic power.

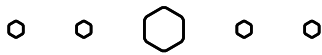
Be open with everyone who is on the same task, ask for help, ask for support! A lot more can depend on you than it seems now.

I wish you success in your mission for a healthy future!”

Maja Kocić - consultant for project management in the city administration of Lesko-



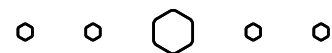
“My recommendation is that young people take matters into their own hands and educate themselves. They should study, get involved and don't look back to see if someone will stand behind, go alone, pave your own way, work hard because quality is always recognized, there is no way to help someone who doesn't have quality but also doesn't exist way to suppress one's quality, quality always comes out, work hard.”



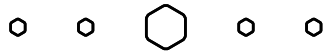
Jelena Đokić - professor at the Faculty of Technical Sciences in Mitrovica



“I would like to convey a message to young people to establish a connection with their environment. In order to develop a love for your river, forest, hill or town, the first step is to carefully explore and get to know them. When you really get to know your environment, an authentic connection will be made, inspiring you to preserve and improve environment.”



Nikola Grujić - master's degree in ecology



SPEAKERS OF PANEL ON MENTAL HEALTH

“We are sending a message to everyone listening that it’s perfectly fine to ask for psychological help, just as it’s normal to ask for it in any other condition when we need it. And that everyone can hear us from here today - that there is nothing wrong with going to a psychologist, if they cannot deal with something, that they have someone to talk to, that society will not condemn them. It’s clear that mental health should be a priority for all of us and that your problems are important, regardless of their cause.”

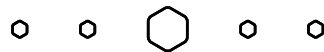


Simona Đurović – psychologist and family psychotherapist, supervisor at the Centre for Social Work in Zubin Potok.



“It is up to young people to find a way to deal with the challenges that ascend at every moment of the development period. To raise awareness about mental health, they should be committed to informing and creating a safe and secure environment that will motivate all those facing problems to speak freely and publicly about them. The increasing prevalence of technology and social media should be used to prevent and promote mental health.”

Isidora Jovanović – student at the Faculty of Medicine in Mitrovica, editor of the youth platform Leader online at the NGO Domovik.



“Mental health problems should be viewed in a wider context, family and systemic, according to the principle of the local community. The risks to mental health are huge. There have always been. I want to say that mental health, at least from my point of view, therapeutic practice and monitoring the results of the latest research, is threatened all over the planet. The good news is that people are more open to reaching out to psychologists and psychotherapists for help. There are countless prejudices and stereotypes about going to a psychotherapist. However, people forget that the greatest psychological help is in the prevention

of bigger problems. The importance of the mental health of small children in the earliest and early childhood should be emphasized. That “it will pass” costs a lot later, in the sense that crucial years for intervention are missed. That’s why we try to work on raising awareness among parents, so that they contact us on time and as soon as possible. Then it is necessary to intervene on some developmental difficulty that the child is facing. Very often, these developmental difficulties and problems are solved, if the parents are contacted in time. Time does nothing, but what we do during that time, or what we do with that time.”

Jelena Minić – psychologist and systemic family psychotherapist



RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhancing cooperation among regional stakeholders: Encouraging further cooperation between local and regional experts enables the sharing of best practices, resources and ideas to address more effectively the challenges that young people and children may face.

Partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations: Developing partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations can strengthen the support and resources needed to implement programs and projects that address activism, education, mental health and environmental issues. Collaboration between relevant actors, including educational institutions, government agencies, the non-governmental sector and the community, should be encouraged to ensure coordination and cooperation in improving access to education for marginalized children.

Supporting inclusive approaches: Promoting inclusiveness in education, society and diversity-enhancing activities to ensure that all young people, regardless of background, ability or socioeconomic status, have access to resources and opportunities.



Centralized database: Develop a centralized database containing information on marginalized children and their educational needs. This would allow a better understanding of their situations and easier identification of access to education.

Integrated approach: Ensure that this database is accessible to various relevant institutions, such as schools, kindergartens, social services and other organizations dealing with education and support for children.

Data standardization and monitoring: Develop standards for data collection on marginalized children to ensure consistency and reliability of information. It is also important to regularly update and monitor this data in order to identify changes and adjust support strategies.

Training and support for professionals: Provide training and support for professionals working with marginalized groups and children, to effectively use this information in practice and adapt their approaches and learning methods.

Improving conditions for inclusion: Improving conditions for inclusive education, especially for students with disabilities or other special needs. This includes ensuring adequate technology tools and training for teachers to support these students.



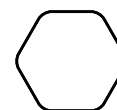
Initiatives for change: Supporting initiatives coming from the civil sector to improve conditions and practices in the education system for children from marginalized communities. This may include requests for changes to legislation and sub-legal acts.



Promotion of non-formal education: Promoting non-formal education as an important and continuous process that can have a positive impact on various groups, including the elderly, delinquents and those who have stopped attending formal education.



Overcoming prejudice: It is important to work to overcome prejudice and stigma related to mental health, in order to facilitate access to psychological support and promote the importance of social support.

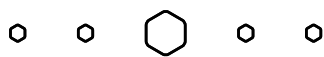


Raising citizens' awareness: Support campaigns aimed at raising citizens' awareness of the importance of mental health.



Environmental awareness: Emphasis on education and awareness of the importance of environmental health, particularly focusing on solving the problem of air pollution and its direct impact on health.





CONCLUSION



This two-day event was a key step in discussing the challenges and opportunities of children and young people in society. The forum was divided into four panels that covered the topics of civic space, education, mental health and ecology, focusing on children and youth.

Looking back on the first day of the Forum, the panellists emphasized the importance of informing young people and adapting changes to their needs. Examples of work with Roma children were shown, as well as examples of youth activism in the community. On the second day, the focus was on mental health and ecology. The speakers discussed the problem of lack of information on mental health of young people and the need for systematic support. Also, the importance of non-formal education and art in the development of critical thinking among children and young people was highlighted. In the discussions, the importance of educating all stakeholders in the support system, raising awareness among citizens, as well as joint engagement to solve community problems was often emphasized.

