

OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN  
OF REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA



OMBUDSMAN ZA DJECU  
REPUBLIKE SRPSKE

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# REPORT

## - CHILDREN ON THE INTERNET –

Banja Luka, 06.17.2011

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## I INTRODUCTION

The Ombudsman for Children of Republic of Srpska, acting ex officio and in accordance with the powers stipulated by the Law on Ombudsman for Children<sup>1</sup>, notes the need for submission of this Report which indicates the violation of fundamental rights and interests of children to protection from any form of violence, abuse, neglect and negligent treatment.

The Ombudsman for Children with this emphasizes the necessity of taking concrete systemic actions to achieve situations in which the basic rights and interests of children will be provided in accordance with the requirements and principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international documents that commit to undertaking a number of measures and actions for the protection of children.

## II POWERS OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN

By the Law on Ombudsman for Children jurisdiction and powers of the Institution are clearly defined.

The Law on Ombudsman for Children stipulates:

A child, in terms of this Law, is considered any person who is under 18 years of life<sup>2</sup>.

The Ombudsman for Children introduces children with the manner of exercise and protection of their rights and interests and advises them how to exercise and protect their rights and interests.

The Ombudsman for Children continually cooperates with children, encouraging them to express their opinions, initiates public actions aimed at improving the situation of the child and participates in these activities, and proposes measures to increase the impact of the child in society<sup>3</sup>.

In conducting affaires within its jurisdiction the Ombudsman for Children is empowered propose to government authorities, bodies or agencies of local self-government, as well as to other legal and natural persons performing duties in connection with a child, undertaking of measures to prevent harmful actions that threaten their rights and interests, to warn of irregularities, and to request to receive reports on the measures taken<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Law on Ombudsman for Children, "Official Gazette of Republic of Srpska" No. 103/08

<sup>2</sup> Law on Ombudsman for Children, Article 2.

<sup>3</sup> Law on Ombudsman for Children, Article 6.

<sup>4</sup> Law on Ombudsman for Children, Article 9.

### III THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Member states 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 it is in the care of parent, legal guardian or other person entrusted with the care for the child.

Such protective measures should include, as needed, effective procedures for the establishment of social programs for providing support necessary to the child and to those entrusted with the care of the child, as well as other forms of prevention, determining, reporting, forwarding, investigation, treatment and monitoring of cases of child abuse<sup>5</sup>.

No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his private or family life, home or personal correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honor and reputation. A child is entitled to the protection of the law against such interference or attack<sup>6</sup>.

### IV VIOLENCE ON THE INTERNET

Violence through the Internet and mobile phone today is more widespread.

The Internet offers great opportunities but carries risks that children do not know how to recognize and do not know how to react, that is why many of their rights mainly through the Internet can be violated.

Most often these are different forms of violence against children and violation of rights of the child to protection of their privacy.

Violence over the Internet most often refers to insults, harassment, sending of threatening and insulting messages, false representation, incitement to hatred and violence, etc, and it leads a victim to the disclosure of personal data, disclosure of family life, joining various groups whose goals can be very harmful and dangerous for the child.

What makes it different from other forms of violence is the fact that children can be exposed to the same there where up to now they were absolutely safe and that this violence, unlike the others, may last 24 hours and every day of the week. An unknown person - perpetrator of violence creates in children an additional sense of fear and insecurity.

The Internet is now here and we can not nor should prohibit it. But when children are concerned, its use must be under control.

To protect children we, first and foremost, must teach them how to safely and responsibly use

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<sup>5</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19.

<sup>6</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 16.

the Internet, how to exploit all the advantages that the Internet offers, and at the same time to avoid the situations in which they will be violated, that will make them feel bad, for which they will live with fear, humiliated and injured.

The educational system, in this part, must assume its obligation and responsibility, firstly by teaching children about responsible behavior in all situations, including those on the Internet, and by building relationships of trust with students that they, without fear of sanctions and shame because of the experienced, can report to teacher all disturbing content, and from him get the necessary help and support in all cases of violence at school and outside school.

Parents have the primary duty and responsibility to take care of their children's healthy growing up. However, when the Internet is concerned, parents are very often confused, primarily because of the increasingly louder warnings which speak about the dangers that come through the Internet.

At that, parents very often do not have enough information or knowledge how to control the child, how to recognize whether a child has a problem and how to protect him.

## V ACTIVITIES

1. The Ombudsman for Children in November 2010. has organized a round table with the topic "How to protect children on the Internet?". The meeting was attended by professors from universities, teachers and professors of computer science in primary and secondary schools, high school students, representatives of social welfare centers and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Family, Youth and Sports. A joint evaluation of all present is that this issue requires planned, continuous and multidisciplinary approach, which practically supported the initiative of the Institution to:

- establish a special web page - Children on the Internet,
- print the brochure - Children on the Internet,
- organize workshops for children on the benefits and risks of the Internet.

What is particularly important for the Institution is that the issue of child protection on the Internet is recognized and supported by:

- The Agency for Information Society of Republic of Srpska,
- Doc. Dr. Tatjana Tapavički - Duronjić, Faculty of Political Science, University of Banja Luka,
- Doc. Dr. Tamara Pribižev Beleslin, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Banja Luka and
- m-tel company.

It is also particularly important for the Institution that the issues and problems to which it indicates, are spoken about by experts, professors from faculties who by their attitude and approach to a particular issue should educate all who care about children. Their participation contributes to the quality analysis of the problem as a whole and therefore the search for better solutions to overcome them, not only in this area, but on all issues and problems that lead to

violations of the rights and interests of children. The contribution of socially responsible companies in the exercise and protection of the rights of children is especially important, as this shows that no matter what business they are dealing with, they recognize the rights and interests of children. M-tel company, by its participation has contributed to establishing a web site, printing the brochure and implementation of workshops, and it is especially important to highlight its identification of capabilities and expressing the need to contribute to the improvement of the status of children and their protection.

2. Every year, around the world, second day, of second week, of second month of the year is celebrated as the Safe Internet Day, aimed at promoting safe and responsible use of the Internet and mobile telephony, especially among children and youth. The Safe Internet Day is celebrated since 2004. and every year with a new theme. This year the Day is celebrated under the motto "It's more than a game, it's your life".

Precisely on the Safe Internet Day the website [www.djecanainternetu.org](http://www.djecanainternetu.org). was promoted. The content of the portal is set up so that a visitor quickly and easily comes to information that are adapted to the age categories of children (early, middle and late childhood), parents and school.

The page "Children on the Internet" is the first of its kind in B&H, because it speaks about the benefits and risks of the Internet, particularly on violence, is dedicated to children and parents and school, and besides the informative there are also so called communication contents "Brave mailbox" and "Survey".

Through the "Brave mailbox" every child, and adult, can completely anonymously contact the editorial office of the portal, request assistance, report the unpleasantness that they have experienced, propose activity.

The Survey will allow the collection of information on the use of the Internet, users habits, level of responsibility and security and all with the aim to promote the use of the same and using the advantages the Internet provides.

3. With creation of the web page an appropriate guide has also been printed "Children on the Internet" for children, parents and teaching personnel.

The main message that is sent to children is that when using the Internet, they should be careful because on the Internet, as well as in the world around them, they can meet people who do not have good intentions and that can hurt and endanger them.

The main message that is sent to parents is not to feel helpless and that it is very important that the relationship with children, from the earliest age, is built and developed on cooperation, open discussion, understanding, mutual respect and trust, to avoid situations that their children have secret agreements with "friends" on the Internet.

School has an obligation, in addition to teaching children about responsible behavior in all situations, including those on the Internet, to encourage children to report all forms of violence and provide them with appropriate assistance and protection.

The webpage and brochure - a guide are made with an intent of preventive and educational activities with call to all, that in the case of any doubts about that, to contact the relevant institutions.

4. One of the planned activities is also holding of educational workshops in elementary and secondary schools in Republic of Srpska.

The workshops were held in 18 schools, of which 5 secondary and 13 primary schools, in 11 municipalities, so that the education included children from all parts of Republic of Srpska.

The workshops were held between May 16 to June 10, 2011. according to the following schedule:

Ordinal number	Date	School	Location
1.	05.16.2011.	MS "Jovan Dučić"	Teslić
2.	05.17.2011.	ES „Borisav Stanković"	Banja Luka
3.	05.18.2011.	ES „Vuk Karadžić"	Doboj
4.	05.18.2011.	High School	Doboj
5.	05.19.2011.	ES "Holadija"	Slatina
6.	05.20.2011.	ES „Vojislav Ilić"	Krupa na Vrbasu
7.	05.23.2011.	High School „Apeiron"	Banja Luka
8.	05.24.2011.	HSC „Jovan Cvijić"	Modriča
9.	05.25.2011.	ES "Dositej Obradović"	Doboj
10.	05.25.2011.	ES „Sveti Sava"	Doboj
11.	05.26.2011.	ES "Branko Radičević"	Banja Luka
12.	05.27.2011.	ES „Novak Pivašević"	Stara Dubrava
13.	05.30.2011.	Mixed High School	Prnjavor
14.	06.01.2011.	ES „Georgius Papandreu"	Aleksandrovac
15.	06.02.2011.	ES "Sveti Sava"	Banja Luka
16.	06.09.2011.	ES „Sveti Sava"	Foča
17.	06.09.2011.	ES „Veselin Masleša"	Foča
18.	06.10.2011.	ES "Vasilije Ostroški"	Trebinje

The goal of workshops is:

- to educate children about the benefits and risks of the Internet,
- to recognize the elements of e-violence and response in these situations,
- responsible and ethical use of the Internet,
- introduction to the site [www.djecanainternetu.org](http://www.djecanainternetu.org)
- to encourage the discussion and reporting of all cases that disturb or violate them.

Visits to schools were carried out in a manner that in agreement with the school management the schedule was made in advance based on which the workshops would be held.

Holding of the workshops in schools was also an opportunity to talk with the school principal, pedagogue / psychologist / social worker with the aim to introduce the school administration with the Institution of Ombudsman for Children and its jurisdiction, the portal "Children on the Internet" and the reasons for the workshops.

The methods and stages of work on the workshop:

- a. Introductory part: presentation of the organizers of the workshop, highlighting the objectives of the workshop and introduction to the powers and competencies of the Institution of the Ombudsman for Children and distribution of the brochures "My rights until adulthood" and "Children on the Internet."
- b. Content: An interactive method of teaching with presentation of material of the workshop in power point. Presentation material of the workshop "Children and the Internet" was published on the website of the Ombudsman for Children and delivered to a number of schools,
- c. Evaluation: The students have exhibited their knowledge about the use of computers and the Internet and compared them with information received.
- d. The time for questions and further discussion.

The workshops were performed most frequently in the duration of one school class and in some schools of two school classes. They were held in classrooms, computer or multimedia classrooms depending on the equipment at the school. Almost all the schools we have visited in the computer classrooms have access to the Internet used by school students. However, this issue has not been addressed yet in one number of schools, which students especially emphasize as the lack of the school. Certainly there are differences from school to school according to students' access to the Internet, education of students about the Internet and motivation of school to provide access to the Internet for students.

The workshops were organized for students, especially members of Students' Councils so that they, as elected representatives, could transfer the acquired knowledge to the class.

In 18 schools in which the workshops were held about 600 students have participated and one number of teaching personnel, schools' professional associates as well as representatives of Parents Councils.

## VI ANALYSIS

Previous activities on the protection of children on the Internet show:

1) Web portal [www.djecanainternetu.org](http://www.djecanainternetu.org) was promoted on February 8. 2011. and up to the writing of this Report had over 4000 visitors.

The length of time spent on the site is about 4 minutes and 20 seconds.

There are about 67% of new visitors to the site.

Most interest on the site caused the sites that talk about early childhood and use of computers, middle childhood, violence on the Internet and electronic bon ton.

On the address of the "Brave mailbox" 11 questions were received that do not apply only to the Internet use.

The Survey, which was set up on the site, was filled up by 105 visitors of the portal.

2) The brochures were given to all students workshop participants with an invitation to show them to their peers and parents.

3) The workshops are adapted and organized for different ages of children in order to present to different ages of children benefits and risks of the Internet and refer children to important information about the use of the Internet and changing the mode of use of the Internet in accordance with the age of children.

4) The Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic of Srpska has informed the Institution that it has referred all schools to the website and brochure - Children on the Internet. In this way they will get the necessary information about the activities of the MIA RS and its involvement in the protection of children in this area and contact details for reporting of all the situations that threaten the rights of children.

#### a) Primary School

The atmosphere at the workshops in primary schools has confirmed that students are very interested in the subject, because they listened attentively and actively participated.

The workshops were adopted and held with students from 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade in schools with large differences in the number of students, in schools in urban areas and those that are not. Differences in knowledge of work on computers and the Internet use are noticed by age. Interest in this topic is noticeable from an early age of children. All children use computer, and most the Internet. In conversation with children the importance of consciousness of their use of computers and the Internet in the process of communication, learning and fun is noticeable. However, they put fun in first place. Children generally have computers at home which, according to their statements, are placed in children's rooms.

A high percentage of children have opened their profile on social networking site Facebook, and even those that are younger than 13, which is not permitted by the social network unless they do not present themselves as if they were of older age.

Parents of almost half of children use computers or the Internet. In children of younger ages the number of parents who use the Internet is greater and as the age of children increases the number of parents who use the Internet decreases.

Spending time in the use of computer generally does not exceed three hours, but the worrying fact is that in the largest number of children an agreement with parents on the use of computer



and spending time on computer is missing. However, very often, according to the statements of children, when they have a bad grade for example, parents use computer and the Internet as a punitive measure, or ban the use and control the use of the same trying in this way to influence the correction of a bad grade.

When they use the Internet children mostly know that this is not the space with unlimited freedom, but there are some rules about it. They are mostly very surprised by possibilities of abuse and false representation on the Internet. Through group discussion, related to violence on the Internet, questions and answers were analyzed together to develop awareness in children on the solutions, taken into account, which one have the advantage, what is feasible and what is not, and how to react in different situations.

Very often children in virtual world behave in a manner that they do not respect the rules that they use in real life. By not thinking they accept friends on social networks, and not even knowing them. The criterion for accepting a call for friendship is usually reduced to a visual experience to images that are available online. Number of friends in the virtual world is much higher than in the real world.

On social networks children leave information of a personal nature, as well as information about the family. Groups, which they join are usually not subjected to critical selection, they join the group most often simply because one of their friends already joined the group.

They know very little about ethical communication on the Internet, they did not encounter such thoughts. Children do not know the rules for fun, for abusive and foul language they leave on the profiles of others. Unknown to them is the fact that they can be easily detected if they engage in illegal activities, they are not aware what violence on the Internet is. These statements especially indicate the necessity of continuous work with children and learning about what is and what is not acceptable behaviour and what the consequences might be. If children on the Internet do not recognize certain behaviours as unacceptable or as violence it is unlikely to expect that in this world they protect themselves and respect the rights of others. The encouraging fact is that in situations when they come across a problem most of the students would approach their parents, and some have cited the head teacher or school associates. None of them knew that related to these problems they can turn to certain institutions that are obliged to help them.

The children presented positive examples of good cooperation with the head teacher thanks to whose involvement abuse and harassment on the Internet has stopped.

Some students have had the experience with messages of inappropriate content from unknown senders on mobile phone or the Internet. In such situations, they interrupted the communication, and did not talk about it with others.

## b) Secondary school

At the workshops in secondary schools the atmosphere was characteristic for mature users. The students showed great interest in the topic. They could follow the lecture on "high level" with the display of quality knowledge about computer technology and the Internet. The interaction was continuous and great, they expressed great associations, suggestions and examples. This topic was particularly interesting to them because they generally do not communicate with adults on the use of the Internet.

They learned about work on the Internet either by themselves or with the help of their friends. Very few of their parents, by their statements, use computers and the Internet.

Students use computers and the Internet for many years. Almost all have opened profiles on social networking sites, they use Facebook social network that serves them primarily to communicate with friends. Social networks occupy their attention on the Internet, and they rarely use other opportunities offered by the Internet. They point out to a trend among their peers to have as many friends, some of them claim to have over 900 friends. However, they are aware that they are not their friends, nor would they choose them for friends in real life. They did not think that virtual friends have access to their lives, to the information they put online, and that their data can be misused.

High school students usually use computers in their rooms. Parents do not control the time they spend on the Internet, but they state that the parents suggest that the use of computers is "waste of time," due to which they often have conflict situations with the parents. The reason for conflicts they see in the parents' lack of understanding of what they are doing and pointing that the parents generally do not care about the content they are visiting. A large percentage of children state that use of the Internet exceeds 4 hours a day, but it also increases on the weekends.

Students say that they know some rules of polite communication on the Internet but say that a large number of them seem unacceptable in this type of communication, although they would like that others behave towards them using those rules. They do not think about the consequences of their activities on the Internet and possibilities of protection. They had experiences with inappropriate contents which were sent to them by unknown persons over the Internet or mobile phone. Some have had bad experiences related to taking over - profile theft on a social network.

After the workshops were completed a number of students had a need to share some of their experiences with the workshop leaders, expecting answers to some problem situations that they had on the Internet. In doing so, they emphasized that they felt embarrassed to ask such questions in front of others. These facts indicate that due to ignorance of the rules of communication and failure to recognize situations that can hurt and affect them on the

Internet, children, even when faced with unpleasant things, see a problem in themselves, and therefore are embarrassed to talk about situations in which they find themselves.

## CONCLUSION

Computer and computer technology rapidly develop a new outlook on life. They are increasingly indispensable in communication, work and leisure time, for both adults and children.

Over 90% of children, according to data obtained from children who have attended the workshops, use computer and the Internet, that they usually use for communication and entertainment with their peers.

There are no differences in the use of computers in relation to sex of children.

Children point out that they have a much larger number of friends in the virtual world than in real.

They do not control the information related to the personal information and data about the family they leave on the network.

Children do not know the principles of ethical communication in virtual space, or rules of conduct from the real world do not transfer to the virtual world.

They are not taught about their rights and their responsibilities in the Internet communication.

They do not recognize situations that can hurt them, they talk very little on this subject to adults, the experiences they have largely share with peers.

Situations that they have had do not experience seriously and are usually surprised by the possibilities of abuse.

Working with children confirms the:

- Necessity of systemic education of children about the benefits and risks of the Internet and from the earliest age of children,

Therefore it is necessary that:

- nonviolent communication programs that are practiced in schools must include education about violence on the Internet as well,
- computer classes must include education about the responsible use of the Internet,
- for students who do not have computer classes (lower grades of primary school), that this topic is addressed in class teaching,
- the question of using the Internet is actualized at PTA meetings at the beginning of school year and that parents are referred to support and assistance of relevant institutions,
- schools, with appropriate programs, block the access to sites with inappropriate content.

Ombudsman for Children  
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