

TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

**Through support
for children and
young people at
risk of living and/
or working on the
street**



Novi Sad, 2022





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KORAK KA INKLUZIVNOM DRUŠTVU-KROZ PODRŠKU DECI I MLADIMA KOJI SU U RIZIKU DA BUDU UKLJUČENI U ŽIVOT I LIČNI RAD NA ULICI

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Support and a child's entrance are part of every project activity



Clarifying key terms

A child is any human being from birth up until they turn 18. The Draft Law on Children's Rights and the Children's Ombudsman lays down certain principles and basic provisions enshrining the right to a quality and carefree childhood. The provisions of this Draft Law encompass aspects relating to social security and welfare. This includes:

- (1) the right of the child to a certain standard of living
- (2) the right to social welfare and access to social welfare services
- (3) consideration of the opinions of the child within the social welfare system

Also of significance are the provisions of Section 8 of this Law laying down:

- (1) the right to education
- (2) the right to free time, play and rest
- (3) the right to participate in cultural activities

The Draft Law on Children's Rights and the Children's Ombudsman is available in its entirety in Serbian at the following link: [Draft Law on Children's Rights and the Children's Ombudsman](#). The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation has been pursuing its project activities in support of children in street situations in line with these principles. The term "children in street situations" is used to describe two contexts:

- (1) Children whose livelihood depends on working on the street. Alternatively, children who spend time working on the streets either alone or with their peers for the purpose of providing for their basic living needs.
- (2) Children who have formed strong connections with the street and whose sense of identity is closely tied to the street, with all of the risk factors this entails (General comment No. 21 on children in street situations, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child).

Young people are those aged between 15 and 30 years of age. In working with young people, the following basic principles must be adhered to:

- (1) the principle of support for young people
- (2) the principle of equality and the prohibition of discrimination
- (3) the principle of equal opportunities
- (4) the principle of reinforcement of awareness of the significance of young people and their societal role
- (5) the principle of active participation of young people
- (6) the principle of responsibility and solidarity among young people

The right to education is a fundamental right of the child, and entails creating the conditions for their unhindered access to education. In terms of the Law, the inclusion and development of the child needs to be in accordance with his or her needs. There is also a significant emphasis on providing for children's regular attendance of school and reducing the school drop-out rate.

The right to a carefree childhood – the Convention on the Rights of the Child signed at the UN General Assembly, 20th November 1989 (available in full here: [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)), under Article 27, recognises the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, which in turn contributes to the child's exercise of his or her right to a carefree childhood. On 9th September 2018, on their official Facebook page, UNICEF made a post asking people to complete the sentence: Every child has the right to _____. The most frequent response was "...a carefree and happy childhood".

A volunteer is somebody who voluntarily engages in activities of social significance (from the Law on Volunteering – the full text of the Law is available here in Serbian: [Law on Volunteering](#)).

Peer education / peer educator – an approach whereby a member of a particular group is given the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge to become a peer educator within the broader group with which they identify. For young people to become peer educators they need to gain the necessary competencies, knowledge and skills, which is achieved by inclusion in relevant training under the supervision of a mentor.

Intersectoral partnership – a contributing factor to the success of project activities, in terms of the sustainability of the results achieved, is the establishment of close cooperation between institutions and organisations in the civil sector.

Legislative framework for action:

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); General comment No. 7 (2002); General comment No. 21 (2017); Law on Volunteering (2010).



It's all about seeing the smile on a child's face as they learn

A quality childhood is one which is in accordance with the best interests of the child



The family is not just a natural relationship, it is also a social one. It represents a twofold bridge between the individual and society: firstly as a connection between the biological life of the species and the social dimension of life, and secondly as a connection between a given social system and the personalities of the upcoming generations. Both influences, and the processes which arise from them, comprise essential components in the formation of the personality; the first we may term the cultivation, or development of the primary abilities of individuals as human beings, enabling them to communicate with others; the second is socialisation, that is, the process whereby the specific personal dispositions of the individual are developed. The pedagogical process entails the intermingling of diverse elements both of the structure of the personality and the structure of the socio-cultural environment" (Grandić, 2007, p. 93-95)

Every modern society strives towards the goal of providing children with conditions for a carefree life. Thus the corpus of rights guaranteed to children under the Convention on the Rights of the Child include key economic, social, cultural, political and civil rights. If the family and institutions are unable to provide the necessary conditions for a productive childhood, projects providing additional resources – both material and human – are of great significance, and as such are vital for any society striving to achieve an inclusive context.



About the partners

The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation

The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (EHO) was established on 19th February 1993 in Novi Sad on the initiative of the World Council of Churches. The reason for its establishment at the time was the impetus to meet the needs of vulnerable people in Vojvodina in an organised and effective way, without regard for religious or ethnic background, and to provide them with appropriate humanitarian assistance. Over time, the organisation has grown and changed, and in doing so has continued to effectively meet new needs in the society. The focus was gradually shifted over to development programmes and projects, and EHO has evolved from an organisation distributing humanitarian aid to one providing comprehensive support to a variety of vulnerable groups in our society. EHO has frequently played a pioneering role in creating initiatives that contribute to addressing social problems and the empowerment of marginalised groups. EHO's programmes are divided into five categories:

- ▶ Civil society
- ▶ Social welfare
- ▶ Diaconia
- ▶ Interfaith and interethnic cooperation
- ▶ Humanitarian work

The project "Support for children and young people at risk of living and/or working on the street" is part of the civil society programme area. The objective of project activities is to contribute to the building of an inclusive society. The project is being implemented in the city of Novi Sad within three substandard settlements – those of Veliki Rit, Bangladeš and the substandard part of the Adice neighbourhood. The target group includes children, young people and their families, whose difficult social situation exposes them to the risks inherent in being of marginalised status in society. Support is provided by outreach volunteers, educational support volunteers and peer educators. Project activities proceed as follows:

- ▶ Directly, in the above-mentioned substandard settlements in the city of Novi Sad.
- ▶ Within the educational and pedagogical institutions attended by the children: primary schools Veljko Petrović in Begeč, Vuk Karadžić in Novi Sad and Jožef Atila in Novi Sad, and the Drop-In Centre for Children and Youth in Novi Sad.

Intersectoral partnership is ongoing with the following institutions and associations:

- ▶ the Drop-In Centre for Children and Youth, Novi Sad
- ▶ the City Administration for Social and Children's Welfare
- ▶ the Provincial Ombudsman
- ▶ the Novi Sad Schools Administration
- ▶ Jožef Atila Primary School, Novi Sad
- ▶ Vuk Karadžić Primary School, Novi Sad
- ▶ Veljko Petrović Primary School, Begeč
- ▶ the Dr Rodolphe Archibald Reiss Professional Police Association
- ▶ the University of Novi Sad Faculty of Philosophy
- ▶ the American Corner, Novi Sad
- ▶ Foundation 021, Novi Sad
- ▶ OpeNS – the European Youth Capital

Stepic CEE Charity

The Stepic CEE Charity was established in 2006 by Herbert Stepic, former CEO of Raiffeisen Bank International (RBI) and Former Chairman of the Executive Board of the RBI.

From its very beginning, the mission of the Charity has been focused on supporting children, young people and families who are on the margins of society due to their difficult living situation. Working with local and international partners, the Charity implements projects aimed at providing protection and support for children by helping to secure a safe social and family environment for them, whilst developing their capacities in such a way as to provide them with a new perspective for their lives. A significant part of this is seeking to include the target group in the educational and social system. Projects are conducted in Central and Eastern Europe. Through its activities the Stepic CEE Charity also provides urgent responses to crises affecting the world. For example, in 2016 the Charity supported the work with children and young people staying in Serbia in the reception centre in Subotica in the wake of the migration crisis. Support is also now being directed towards the crisis regions of Ukraine, in particular the east of the country, in response to recent developments there.

The partnership between the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation and the Stepic CEE Charity



¹ In 2009, the project comprised only an outreach component, and that was why for many years the project was referred to as outreach work. As of 2016, the educational component became part of the project. With the project developing in terms of partnerships established and the support now provided within schools in addition to the outreach work, the project team agreed on the new name of "Support for children and young people at risk of living and/or working on the street".

Cooperation between the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation and the Stepic CEE Charity on the project to support children in street situations was initiated in 2009. Initially, activities were aimed at identifying the needs of beneficiaries, with outreach volunteers visiting those parts of Novi Sad in which there were substandard settlements. As of 2010, when the Drop-In Centre for Children and Youth was established, additional work was directed towards informing parents and motivating the children and young people to visit the Drop-In Centre. The idea behind the Drop-In Centre was to provide a seven-days-a-week service. A team of professionals provided the children and young people with care not just in terms of their physical health and well-being, but also in terms of psychosocial support. A notable aspect of the way the Drop-In Centre was organised was that the rules by which it functioned were agreed on between the staff and the children and young people who visited the Centre. Up until 2015, the Drop-In Centre for Children and Youth was run by the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation and the Stepic CEE Charity. In 2015, the City of Novi Sad recognised the importance of the services provided by the Drop-In Centre and assimilated the Centre into the social welfare system. This is a source of great pride for EHO, and also of gratitude towards the City of Novi Sad. Pride, because EHO has initiated and developed a service which improves the quality of the lives of children and young people as they grow up, and gratitude that the City of Novi Sad has built on the foundations EHO laid down, and continued to provide children and youth with a safe refuge in which to grow.

The work of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation continued, supported by the Stepic CEE Charity, now with a focus on outreach work. The key role in all activities was played by the outreach volunteers. In order to ensure the support provided was comprehensive, in 2016 the educational component of the project was launched, titled, "Learning support for children". For the first three years, educational support volunteers provided individual support to children within school extended day programmes. During 2019, amidst the situation brought about by the COVID-19 virus, work with the target group met with significant challenges in relation to the enrolment of children in first grade. Initially, enrolment was possible only by online means. In order to provide comprehensive support, a model was developed for supporting children in their transition from the pre-school to the

school environment. The model entails five support phases:

- Phase I** – getting children into the school system (outreach and educational support volunteers visiting the families of children who are to begin first grade that year – April).
- Phase II** – monitoring the number of children enrolled, repeat visit if necessary (May)
- Phase III** – organising educational work with the children over the summer (June-August)
- Phase IV** – providing support in the form of school supplies, stationery and bags (August)
- Phase V** – providing support to children in their learning (helping them do their homework within the school extended day programme).

As of 2020, the scope of the cooperation with institutions was expanded. Partnership was established with Veljko Petrović Primary School in Begeč, which is attended by children from the Bangladeš substandard settlement. Cooperation was also established with the Vuk Karadžić Primary School in Novi Sad, attended by children from the Veliki Rit substandard settlement. A considerable number of children living in the Veliki Rit substandard settlement also attend Dušan Radović Primary School. However, since EHO supports work with this target group through other projects, assistance under this project to children attending Dušan Radović school is provided by educational support volunteers within the Drop-In Centre for Children and Youth in Novi Sad. Forging connections with the institutions attended by the children and young people from the three substandard settlements in the territory of Novi Sad ensures that comprehensive support is provided. In addition to the above, the project also involves organising workshops aimed at providing the target group with meaningful free-time activities. Organised in this way, project activities provide children, young people and their families with comprehensive support whereby they are able to develop their capacities and find their place in the social context. Besides the direct support provided by outreach and educational support volunteers, the role of peer educators is also very significant. Peer educators are young people who live in the substandard settlements. The idea behind bringing them on board is to promote the development of their capacities so that they can integrate into society at large. The role of peer educators also consists in creating connections with beneficiaries in substandard settlements by involving them in distributions of support planned for under the project.

How the volunteers see it – peer educators on the sports activities programme in Veliki Rit



Ready for a new beginning. 2020/2021 school year

Selvija Rustemi (aged 26):

"Between April and June, EHO organises sports workshops on Saturdays. I get the kids from our community together, tell them we're going over to the sports fields to play, explain to them what it's going to be like. After four years now, they all know what it's about and can hardly wait to go and have fun. When we get together on the field we have various competitions, mostly ball games, while the younger ones play with skipping-ropes, that kind of thing. We get thirty-something children there, sometimes more. We get given the equipment we need, too. I and the other volunteers make notes on what the children need: sneakers, tracksuits, balls etc. We pass that on to the EHO volunteers and they supply us with everything we need. It's a really nice thing and means a lot to our children."

Lazar Ristić (aged 27):

"I heard about this organisation from a friend five years ago. He told me that EHO were helping our kids with their schooling and in all kinds of other ways. I got involved in their activities and then became a peer educator too, as did my wife. We organise the children at weekends and spend this hour to an hour-and-a-half on the playing-fields, and all have a really fun time. Our own children, who are five and six years old now, are always asking me when we are going to sports because they really love going, and it's the same with all the kids from the neighbourhood."

Nenad Ristić (aged 22):

"We've been working together for a long time now, and it's always been very fair and professional. When I organise the sports sessions, a lot of children come and they really have a good time. By now they know the time and the place so my job is easier, I just have to let them know that the sports workshops are starting again. In the past I have explained to them why the workshops are important, encouraged them to come, and made lists. Then I would make arrangements with the people from EHO, let them know how many children were coming, what sports gear they needed and so on. Their help means a lot to me personally and I am glad to be volunteering for such a good organisation."

Arif Rizvani (aged 22):

"EHO helps a lot of people in our community. Ever since I can remember, I have known about the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation. I've been volunteering with them for eight or nine years now, getting them connected with people from our community, making any arrangements that need to be made. There are the workshops, for example, that's something the kids in our neighbourhood had never heard of before EHO came. Then there's the most important thing – I have the job of collecting documentation for ID cards and driving licences, which the people from EHO get done for us. Besides all that they supply our children with clothes, footwear, nappies, bags and everything else the children in the neighbourhood need. We immediately embraced all this – our people welcome anything they are given as they aren't able to buy things or get things done themselves. We have a good number of young people here because each family has as many as ten children, and that's why it's a priority to get everyone's personal documents in order so that they can exercise their rights. As a volunteer I have very good communication with the people in the organisation. They are very good people, they love to help anyone who needs it and we are really grateful for that."

The phenomenon of "children in street situations" – part of Novi Sad's reality



The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation conducted a survey between May and August 2016, as part of the activities of the Regional Network for Children Living and/or Working on the Street and in cooperation with Save the Children, with the following aims:

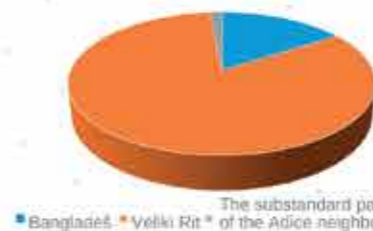
- Identifying the characteristics of families with children at risk of or already living and working on the street.
- Determining the status of children living and/or working on the street.
- Formulating recommendations at the local and national level with the aim of reducing the risk factors and improving the situation of children living and/or working on the street.

The research was conducted on a sample of 103 families. Of those, 55 families were from Veliki Rit, 18 were from the substandard part of the Adice neighbourhood, 16 from Banjaladeš and 14 from other parts of town in which families live in isolation.

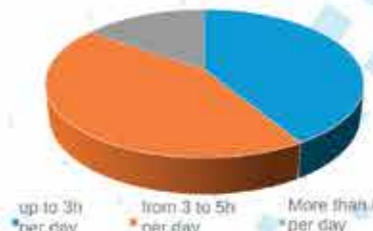


Survey results

Number of children working on the streets, by neighbourhood



Time spent on the streets by children and young people

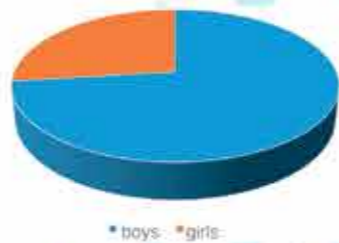


Schooling

Pre-school education



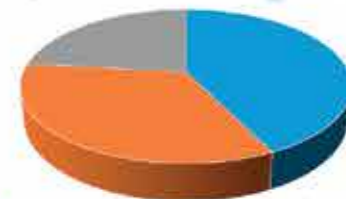
Number of children working on the streets, by gender



Most common forms of street work



Primary education



Unique characteristics of the work Working with children and young people also involves working with adults, their legal guardians. Thus under the project "Support for children and young people at risk of living and/or working on the street", whole families are involved in the activities and in the provision of support. Contacts are established by outreach volunteers and educational support volunteers, supervised by mentors. The key to success in this work is in open communication at all levels with stakeholders and beneficiaries of the project. Creating an atmosphere of trust and understanding is the foundation on which the project stands. Project activities include a variety of approaches, for both individual and group support.

Comprehensive support → volunteer support → in the field (during free time) → within educational institutions

Support in communities is provided through the distribution of the various forms of support planned for under the project, and through workshops. Workshops are organised on themes that accord with the identified needs of the target group. Art workshops have been held in the substandard part of the Adice neighbourhood, and sports workshops in the substandard settlement of Veliki Rit. The results of the workshops have also been presented to the broader community. For example, during 2020, an exhibition titled "Life from Our Perspective" was held in cooperation with the Novi Sad Children's Cultural Centre and its Mlin Cultural Station. The results and significance of the sports workshops were presented in a television report in 2021 as part of Children's Week. Participants and stakeholders got to share their thoughts on the project.

Support within educational institutions is provided with the objective of including children in the school system. Cooperation has been established with the primary schools attended by the children. Direct volunteer support is provided on an individual basis

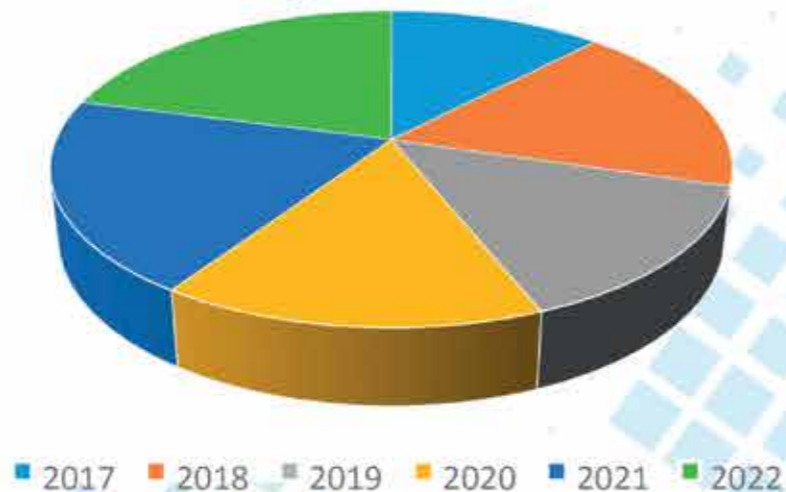
within schools' extended day programmes. The model of support in the transition from the pre-school to the school environment, mentioned earlier, was developed in 2020 as a response to the situation arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Volunteers as a significant resource

A significant aspect of the project is providing training and creating conditions for the personal and vocational development of future professionals. The contribution to building an inclusive society comes about through providing support to marginalised groups, keeping society informed and appreciative of the results achieved through the work, and through the professional training of young people whose future careers will contribute to the sustainability of an environment that is on the road to inclusivity.



Number of volunteers by year, for the period 2017-2022



Our volunteers – the strength behind the project

Jelena Krstić, Pedagogy Master student

"During my second year studying pedagogy I began volunteering with EHO. I have always been interested in marginalised people groups and felt that EHO would give me the best possible opportunity of directly interacting with beneficiaries who are on the margins in one way or another. The organisation gave me the opportunity to get to the very heart of things, understand their way of life, their problems, their needs and the difficulties they face.

Thanks to EHO I have had the chance to directly encounter migrant children, children in street situations, and all the children needing help and support within the extended day programmes of the schools we work with. This experience has brought me great personal and professional benefit, has helped me a great deal in my current job and, most importantly, I have come to appreciate that the basis for all of these relationships is UNDERSTANDING. The message I have for all future volunteers is: "To help them, we have to understand them!"



Ivana Bubnjević, student of the University of Novi Sad Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Pedagogy:

"I decided to volunteer with EHO because I am interested in working with marginalised groups, and especially with children belonging to this category. As a volunteer I work in a school, teaching pupils who need additional support in their education. I also do outreach work with children living and/or working on the street. We give out snacks to the children, talk to them and direct them to institutions that can provide them with the support they need, such as the Drop-In Centre for Children and Youth. My two years' volunteering with EHO has brought me significant benefits, both professional and personal. As a student of pedagogy it means a great deal to me to be able to experience working directly with pupils who need additional support in their education, to get to know their needs through this process and to think for myself about the most effective approaches to working with them. One of the great personal benefits for me is the feeling of knowing that I have been personally instrumental, even in a small way, in a child's development. Since our work is orientated towards supporting the education of pupils from poor and deprived communities, it means a great deal to me personally that I am playing a part in breaking down the prejudice surrounding these children that they are less able to make progress than others. It is my belief that with the right stimulus and conditions, every pupil can achieve his or her potential."

Dejana Gajić, student of the University of Novi Sad Faculty of Technical Sciences, Computer Graphics Department, studying Engineering Animation:

"I decided to get involved with EHO, where I have been volunteering for two years now, in order to gain experience in working with children and in working in a team with other volunteers. As a volunteer I work with the children both in school and out in the field - that's part of the work too. Over these two years I have managed to learn how to approach working with children so as to get the most out of them. Working with EHO has given me a better understanding both of children and adults, and developed my communication skills with both.

Ana Savić, Master of Pedagogy

"I heard about the opportunity to volunteer with EHO at my university – the lecturers encouraged us to get involved. I decided on EHO specifically as it meant working with children. I began volunteering in 2018 and have continued to do so right up until now. There are many benefits to volunteering with EHO: helping break down prejudices towards Roma children, understanding and getting to know their way of life, providing support and care to the children and their families and improving your own knowledge and communication skills. Another benefit is the better understanding it has given me for my subject area of pedagogy. The various types of training and education provided to volunteers are extremely useful. Another benefit is the opportunity for employment – many volunteers have proven their qualities and willingness to work in this field and have stayed at EHO, which is really great, and very important. Someone who was once a volunteer themselves will do a better job of training and motivating new volunteers. The volunteers are also appreciative of the small reimbursements given them after outreach visits as they don't have to pay for transport, water, hand wipes etc. out of their own pockets. Of all the benefits of volunteering, the most significant for me is the sense of happiness, satisfaction and love I often experience in working with children and meeting new people, the friends I volunteer with".

How beneficiaries of educational support see it



Zuhrija Hasani

Zuhrija, seventh-grade pupil at Jožef Atila Primary School:

"In the first and second grade I went to the extended day programme at Jožef Atila Primary School, that was six years ago. There we learn, do our homework, play, go out in the yard with our friends, that's how we spend our time until our parents come to get us. I met a lot of volunteers then who helped me learn, and it meant a lot to me. I always wanted to stay longer, I didn't want to go home. They were wonderful, we carried on spending time together and I took part in other activities outside school. My favourite was the art workshops where we drew and made all sorts of things. We also went on day-trips with the volunteers, and in school we had shows for New Year and got presents from Santa Claus. I'm really happy and I like it in school. My favourite subject is Home Economics because we learn lots of practical things. The teachers and my classmates are great. In the beginning I found it difficult to learn the material but I managed it with the help of the volunteers of EHO."

How partner schools see it



Novi Sad Schools Administration, Sonja Miladinović, pedagogue and independent education advisor

"The project 'Support for children and young people at risk of living and/or working on the street', conducted by the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation since 2009, is one of the numerous successful projects of this organisation, providing support to vulnerable and marginalised members of our community with the aim of social inclusion, providing effective and functional support to adults and children.

Unfortunately, a significant number of children grow up in an environment in which there are numerous obstacles to a safe, healthy and happy childhood. Children at risk of living and/or working on the street are particularly vulnerable to huge and numerous risks that are not at all conducive to a safe and dignified life. They are forgotten, and deprived of their rights to a happy and carefree childhood. The many obstacles these children face, with the accompanying stereotypes and prejudices, require consistency, continuity and cooperation and numerous activities between state institutions and the non-governmental sector.

Through its diverse activities and cooperation with institutions and its wonderful, dedicated, enthusiastic, competent volunteers with their broad-minded system of values, the project 'Support for children and young people at risk of living and/or working on the street' has succeeded in providing support to families and children in terms of bolstering their self-confidence and competencies, including them in community life and also broadening their educational horizons – which is the most powerful tool for escaping economic and social deprivation.

Indicators of the success of the project activities in schools and the local community are the smiles, happiness and joy on the faces of the children, their parents and the volunteers – proof-positive that empathy, acceptance, inclusion in the community and the promotion of knowledge and success are key to developing self-confidence and self-respect and bringing down stereotypes and prejudices.

Office for the Inclusion of Roma, Ljiljana Mihajlović, Director

"For some years now, this programme has facilitated support for children and their parents, and through a variety of activities and outreach work is contributing to the greater social inclusion of children from poor families. Ongoing activities, especially the work with parents from sensitive social groups, has contributed to a greater number of children being included in the education system, and to their parents being motivated

to become actively involved in the process of supporting the education of their children. By providing additional, individual support to school children who are at risk of social exclusion, and through active participation in the process of education, this programme is also contributing towards a positive climate in schools and a safe, unencumbered environment for growth and learning, which reduces the risks of children abandoning school."

Jožef Atila Primary School, Milena Stanojković, teacher, Assistant Director (between 2016 and 2019)

"The partnership between Jožef Atila Primary School in Novi Sad and the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation on the 'Support for children and young people at risk of living and/or working on the street' project has been ongoing since September 2016. Volunteers provided learning support to first- and second-grade children within the extended day programme, through individual and group work. The objective was to overcome learning difficulties and master the course content, which was of great importance for preventing drop-outs from the school system on the part of children from socially sensitive groups. The presence of the volunteers working under the project did not disrupt the school's normal operation and indeed hugely contributed to the quality of learning on the part of our pupils in higher grades, too, by preparing them for their final exams. This form of cooperation between the school and the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation also ensured the families of the children were supported in terms of building their self-confidence by including them in the life of the community through a variety of activities. It has been a pleasure to be part of this project, and we hope that there are many more activities to follow for the pupils of our school.

We are especially grateful to Vedrana Bjelajac from the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation and to the school pedagogue Gordana Đurovski, for their partnership."

Vuk Karadžić Primary School, Olivera Mihić, psychologist

"The partnership between Vuk Karadžić Primary School in Novi Sad and EHO on the 'Support for children and young people at risk of living and/or working on the street' project began in September 2020, and much to our delight, continues. The volunteers very quickly and easily got on board the work with our pupils, and their relationship with the tea-



Everyone together for the children and young people involved in the project, author Slobodan Sušnjević

chers, as well as amongst themselves, was very good and productive.

When they first started, and until they got to know the children better, the volunteers devoted additional attention to each of them, and made daily notes on what they had done with the pupils so that their colleagues would know where to pick things up the next day. The teachers were able to see the notes and give helpful suggestions to the volunteers.

The project was well thought-out: we would get an email for the coming week telling us which of the volunteers was coming to work with the pupils and at what time. We could then fit our plans in with those of the volunteers. As time went by and they got to know each other, the volunteers and pupils formed a real connection, and our pupils began going to their supplementary lessons with visible enthusiasm and smiles on their faces. We are very happy to say that in this period we have had no pupils from vulnerable categories drop out of school, all of them finished the school year and some also passed their final exam. The presence of the vol-

unteers working on the project has in no way disrupted the functioning of the school and has greatly contributed to the quality of our pupils' learning.

It has been a pleasure to be part of this project, and we hope for many more productive years working together."

Veljko Petrović Primary School, Milan Tatić, Principal

"Thanks to the partnership with the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation, and with its staff and volunteers in Veljko Petrović Primary School in Begeč during the 2021/2022 school year, a series of activities were organised which contributed to our pupils' learning and schoolwork. Activities were primarily conducted within the extended day programme, which is jointly attended by pupils from grades 1 to 4. In partnership with art instructor Danijela Vimić, a series of art workshops were held, which became an essential part of the children's activities within the extended day programme. The pupils mastered new techniques, encountered new topics, and achieved some commendable results, too (in art competitions, for example). Plays were put on by the Teatrio theatre company to help fill their free time in a quality way, bringing smiles and delight to their faces. For many of our pupils this was their first and only encounter with the dramatic arts. We hope that this partnership will continue in the school years to come."

Nikola Jovanović, Manager of the Novi Sad Drop-In Centre for Children and Youth

"For services within the social welfare system to operate successfully, you need, among other things, good cooperation with the non-governmental sector. For the Novi Sad Drop-In Centre for Children and Youth, successful cooperation with the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation is the key example of good practice. Firstly we would underline the excellent communication we have with the people working on the project. In addition to this our beneficiaries, thanks to EHO, have the opportunity to get support in getting personal ID cards issued, to get nappies for babies and, at the beginning of each year EHO secures a significant supply of school bags and school supplies for our beneficiaries. All of this is of immeasurable significance to all the children that make use of the services of the Drop-In Centre because they mostly come from extremely poor families. Every year, cooperation with the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation becomes closer and more successful."



How beneficiaries of services and participants the programmes of EHO see it

A beneficiary, Aranka (aged 38), shares her experience of EHO's ongoing support for families, and the successful outreach work with them over the recent years.

How did you find out about EHO and what was your communication with their volunteers like at the beginning?

In 2003 I got involved in the weaving workshops organised at the time by EHO. There were five or six of us women who were taught to use weaving looms, and we made patchwork rugs and sold them. Later they helped us get water and electricity connected to our house. In that moment, that was the most important thing for us – now we could do everything else we needed to and live a better life. Now, for example, I can do my children's and my whole family's laundry.

In 2009 EHO launched the project "Support for children and young people at risk of living and/or working on the street". How did that impact the life of your family, which has several generations living together under one roof?

The people from the organisation – the staff and volunteers – were always there for us. I have four grandchildren, and the people from EHO were always checking whether I had nappies and other things for the children, whether we were lacking anything. Our life has changed a lot, it's easier when we know we have someone supporting us.

What type of support means the most to you?

To be honest, it means the most to me that all of those people are so wonderful, and always ready to hear us out. Then there is the assistance EHO provides in the form of household items and hygiene products, the different types of training we've been given, the workshops at which they've shown their kindness and respect to all of us... Whenever we went to the EHO office, they would always give us a warm welcome, with smiles on their faces. It's hard to point to any one thing because it's all meant so much to us and I am truly grateful to them.



Aranka Đulinac with her son Aleksandar, Banqlades

Results of the project



The success of the project can best be seen in the fact that since it began, up until the end of 2021, 1,040 children (532 boys and 508 girls) have been supported, and there are other indicators too:

- ▶ 159 new contacts made in 2021 (83 boys, 76 girls)
- ▶ 1160 interventions with children and youth
- ▶ 340 contacts made with parents
- ▶ 596 outreach visits
- ▶ 12 outreach support volunteers involved
- ▶ 16 educational support volunteers involved
- ▶ 721 visits made to educational institutions
- ▶ 72 pupils (1st and 2nd grade) supported at Jožef Atila Primary School
- ▶ 50 pupils (1st and 2nd grade) supported at Vuk Karadžić Primary School
- ▶ 38 users of the Drop-In Centre for Children and Youth, Novi Sad (from Dušan Radović Primary School) supported
- ▶ 33 pupils (1st, 2nd and 3rd grade) supported at Veljko Petrović Primary School
- ▶ 52 beneficiaries helped to secure personal documents
- ▶ 4 peer educators

This data is updated every year. The cumulative figure for the number of all beneficiaries up until the first half of 2022 was 1129.

Informing the public through art:

The year 2020 was marked by activities presenting the significance of the project activities of children and young people and their families through the medium of art. An exhibition was held titled "Life from Our Perspective", and a documentary film produced called "Urban Wasteland".

Press release after the events

"The premiere of the film "Urban Wasteland", about children from vulnerable families living in substandard settlements in and around Novi Sad, was held in the Mlin Cultural Station of the Novi Sad Children's Cultural Centre.

The most important guests at the first showing of this unusual production by author Marko Vejinović, part of the project which was then called "Support for children and young people at risk of living and/or working on the street", organised by the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation from Novi Sad, were the children themselves who had taken part in its production. It was also attended by representatives of the Centre for Social Work, key partners from the Novi Sad primary schools, the Dr Rodolphe Archibald Reiss Professional Police Association, and many others who directly contributed towards this project becoming a reality".

An exhibition of children's drawing was also held, titled "Life from Our Perspective". Children of between 5 and 14 years of age got to express their creativity and their love for art through numerous creative workshops, and it is they who are most important, and most deserving of the visibility, since this is their story.

One child wrote on their artwork for the art workshop: "Thank you for everything. 2020 might have been a bad year because of the coronavirus, but you put a smile on our faces with these workshops. Someone got their wish to be filmed by a drone. Thank you very much for everything, for example the school supplies."

The value of different forms of art is in the fact that materials of particular significance to society can be displayed in one place, within a short space of time. Two years after the premiere of the film "Urban Wasteland", its author Marko Vejinović shared his experiences:

"I was brought up in a family in which justice was strongly upheld in every respect. Today's young people might find it a cliché, but all of us arrive at a point where we begin to realise what's truly important in life. I had no hesitation in accepting this invitation, which was also a great challenge for me. In that moment, I was fully prepared to embark on producing a short film about Roma people and the story of their lives – it's what I am all about. You could say everything fell into place. Many of the members of the film crew got graded for their Academy exams on their work on this film, but we also knew, even more importantly, that we wanted to film something that would be of great benefit for EHO's further projects. That's something worth mentioning – that all the mem-



Peer educator Nenad Ristić (in left side) | Arif Adeni (in right side), project associate Boban Pavlović (in middle)

bers of the film crew were at the time students of the Novi Sad Academy of Arts. That's why I say everything fell into place. For me, filming "Urban Wasteland" was a wonderful experience that I will remember for the rest of my life. I learned so much, came to understand so much, and the thought that has stayed with me is that we learned so much more from them than they did from us. I wish there were more discussion of these issues in society – of the marginalisation and destruction of ethnic minorities. Our film is just one brick in an unfinished house in which we are all to live together as equals, as human beings, seeing one another as such. In any event, I think that we have created something in film form that will stay with us all forever, and it will be really interesting to hear the further life stories of the people featured in our film."

The most challenging aspects, as seen by Boban Pavlović of the Dr Rodolphe Archibald Reiss Professional Police Association:

"The Association was founded by police officers of the Republic of Serbia and bears the name of Dr Rodolphe Archibald Reiss in honour of the famous Swiss forensics expert, publicist, doctor of chemistry, professor of the University of Lausanne and criminologist of world renown. In advocating for professionalism and expertise not just among the police forces but in a broader context, too, the Professional Police Association strives towards improving security in society in terms of ideology, morality and in the legislative sense.

On 13th February 2018, the Association signed a partnership agreement with the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation. Some of the objectives of this partnership were to be: reducing violence, improving the situation of young people, especially in sensitive groups, and promoting the ideas of tolerance and mutual respect amongst religious and ethnic groups in the Republic of Serbia.

Since 2019, together with the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation, the Professional Police Association has been taking part in the "Support for children and young people at risk of living and/or working on the street" project, now in its fourth year. In the beginning we would take the kids to the cinema, later we transitioned to organising sports activities for them, which are important for their physical and mental development. At these

workshops, through play, we hope that these young people will realise that spending time doing sports is better than spending it on the streets. So far, young people from substandard settlements in Novi Sad have shown great interest. The greatest challenge with this type of workshop is that the children are of a wide range of age groups. Also, all of them live in a situation in which they have learned certain habits which are neither appropriate to their age, nor good for their personal development. However, we have managed to overcome these challenges, all of us together, and every Saturday we see twenty-or-so excited kids. The staff of the Association and of EHO, through games and sports, try to show the children that they can grow healthy both in mind and body through sports, instead of spending time in high-risk street situations. The fun continues in autumn this year."

Danijela Vimić, Academy artist and arts lecturer

"It's a challenge creating a pleasant atmosphere in which children can relax and express themselves without worrying about how their work will turn out or whether others will like it. The focus is on the child enjoying him or herself whilst working. Art workshops are very beneficial activities and are the perfect way to promote creativity and social skills. Each child, with their abilities and needs, is given the fullest acknowledgement through an approach which is supportive, affirming and inspirational. At the workshops, in addition to promoting socialisation and developing skills and talents, the children are given respect, assistance in completing their work, and praise – which is key to development of their self-confidence. Through the work the children discover new painting techniques, they draw, they sculpt, they answer questions about art in specific areas but with no pressure of grades hanging over them, and at the same time develop their fine motor skills and aesthetic intelligence. There is also discussion of educational materials, the city's heritage, famous people and connections are also made with other school subject areas. The children also get the chance to take part in art competitions, which is a useful experience for them. A creative, competitive spirit is cultivated, the kids get involved in art events in town, and what we achieve is that they are made equals with others and accorded equal respect, because art is something that gives everybody a platform and an opportunity".



Favourite moments in the project

On one of our numerous community visits, we asked the children what their favourite thing had been in these 13 years, and these were some of the answers we got:



"I like it when you come and do school work with us. My favourite thing is the shows you put on for us." – S.B.

"Thank you for doing school work with us." – M.N.

"The most important thing for me – and for my parents, too – is the fact that you give us everything we need for school and that we always get nice school bags." – H.H.

"My favourite thing is when we go to shows, and when we get school bags and supplies." – B.K.

"Your support means a great deal to all of us – we always know you are there for us when we need any kind of help or support." – D.H.

"Thank-you" certificates for volunteers written by children

