

# THE FUTURE IS IN MY HANDS

Analysis of the correlation  
between gender stereotypes  
and gender-based violence

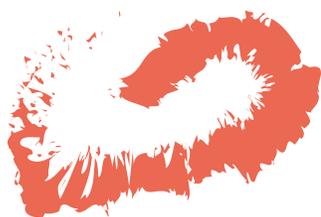




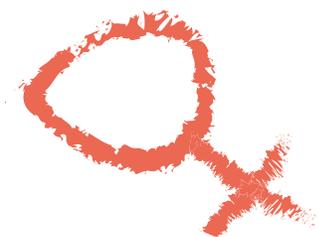




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and all forms of violence against women – **ATINA**

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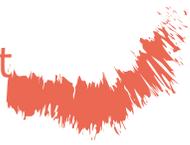
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# Content



<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Review of Up-To-Date Researches on Girls' Attitudes and Experiences .....	11
Normative Framework Referential for Gender Equality Issues .....	15
International Normative Framework .....	15
National Normative Framework .....	20
<b>Research Methodology</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Analysis of Results</b> .....	<b>31</b>
Good Sides of "Being a Girl" .....	35
Difficulties That Girls Face .....	37
Measures for Elimination of Difficulties Identified in Local Community .....	41
Girls` Experiences .....	44
Girls and Activism .....	49
Girls` Interests and Information .....	50
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	<b>59</b>
<b>Sources</b> .....	<b>62</b>
Normative framework documents: .....	64



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We also owe a great deal of gratitude to the secondary schools that participated in this research, their PRINCIPALS and other professional staff, as well as the activists gathered around the Youth Offices in Obrenovac, Kikinda, Novi Pazar, Jagodina and Vranje. You have made this whole venture easier, more joyful and more enthusiastic. Thank you for the wholehearted efforts and selfless enthusiasm you have given us, and thank you especially for the days ahead and the future that is and should be in your hands, the hands of young people!

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The development of this research was supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) office in Serbia, as well as by all the colleagues who work there and to whom we are grateful for their time, patience, and faith in us and in our work.

Team of Citizens Association Atina

# Preface



*“Do not ever tell her that she should or should not do something because she is a girl. ‘Because you are a girl’ is never a reason for anything. Ever.” Dear Ijeawe, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*

As a part of its efforts to permanently prevent situations in which girls are told to do or not to do something just because they are girls, “Atina” - Citizens association for combating trafficking in human beings and all forms of gender-based violence has launched the initiative “With and for Girls - Support to Local Youth Offices in Raising Awareness on Gender Equality”, which has produced the publication “The Future is in My Hands” that is before you. This publication presents the results of a survey conducted in the second half of 2018 in five municipalities and cities in Serbia - Obrenovac (Belgrade), Vranje, Novi Pazar, Jagodina and Kikinda, with girls of senior years of secondary schools, with a goal to examine their views and experiences about gender roles and gender-based violence. The idea of conducting such a research originated from the fact that no comprehensive social research has been conducted for many years in Serbia, especially not with a focus on girls aged 18 (age when they formally become independent and begin to consider their future more thoroughly), and which would look at their views on gender roles and their broader, social engagement.

Back in 2010, as part of the research conducted at the time, “Gender and LGBT Discrimination: It Exists and Thrives,” citizens association Atina considered an advancement of gender equality in society. As part of this research, 249 young men and women were interviewed and they listed a whole series of problems to be solved, highlighting three fields: work, violence against women, and decision-making. At that time, they suggested changes of the tradition that could be described as “women in aprons, men in suits”; in other words, they called for elimination of prejudice and stereotypes, in order to improve the position of women”, and “changes in opinions and actions of individuals “etc.<sup>1</sup> Citizens association Atina initiated the research precisely on these foundations, and later it resulted in the publication “The Future is in My Hands”.

It was also important for the insight into opinions on gender equality of girls from various parts of Serbia to be obtained right now, when the Republic of Serbia is explicitly committed to nurturing gender equality as one of its priority social values, and continuously promoting it in the political discourse. This is why opinions of these girls are of crucial importance, because they reflect the same commitment of the state of Serbia, in other words, they show how the state really cares for a deconstruction of gender stereotypes, for reduc-

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<sup>1</sup> Rodna i LGBT diskriminacija: Postoji i uspeva Osnovna studija o stavovima mladih o rodnoj i LGBT ravnopravnosti (Gender and LGBT Discrimination: It Exists and Thrives. Basic Study of Attitudes of Youth on Gender and LGBT Equality), Citizens Association Atina, p. 34, <http://www.atina.org.rs/sites/default/files/Osnovna%20studija%20o%20stavovima%20mladih%20o%20rodnoj%20i%20LGBT%20ravnopravnosti.pdf>

ing and eradicating violence and truly improves the position of women in society today.

The girls' responses, highlighted in this publication, are a mirror of the implemented policies and efforts of the state to address these problems seriously and solve them. In relation to this, the research has taught us that our society has a potential for change in terms of tolerance to partner violence, that a total of 95 percent of interviewed girls believe that women do not have to endure everything in order to preserve their marriage, but gender stereotypes that judge young people's behavior, thoughts and actions, and not just those of young people, remain deeply anchored in the society. As much as 76 percent of girls said that they encountered situations in which they were told that they were not good enough in something just because they were girls, while 42 percent of them still believe that a woman is fully accomplished only when she becomes a mother. And, one of the most common, deep-rooted stereotypes is that mother must sacrifice everything for her children - a total of 81 percent of the girls interviewed in the research believe in it. In relation to this, these findings could represent a framework for future state policies in this field, and a road-map for designing and implementing specific measures and activities by all state authorities, educational and other institutions that are focused on working with girls and with young people in general.

Finally, while reading this publication, we are not only gaining insight into the views of girls on gender equality, but also on the most important problems they face in their communities, that is, their personal experiences, and their views on how to overcome these problems. Moreover, the findings listed in the publication are substantiated by specific examples, which the girls mentioned in the survey, and their proposals for resolving the identified difficulties, and this is an additional gain for this publication in terms of contents. We are convinced that you will find useful information and inspiring conclusions in the text before you, and we would therefore like to invite you to join us in the fight for gender equality, for building a society without violence and discrimination, a society which respects diversity and provides foundations for development of our individual potentials. The girls clearly recognized the role of civil society organizations in this fight, but we should all participate, because only if we join forces we can expect to persist and win in this fight.

For Association Atina

Jelena Hrnjak, programme manager

January 2019.

# Introduction

The research we present in this report was conducted as part of the project *With and for Girls: Support to Local Youth Offices in Raising Awareness on Gender Equality*. The goal of the research was to map attitudes about gender equality and gender-based violence of eighteen-year-old girls, as well as their personal experiences of gender-based violence. The research intended to discover what are the most common problems and needs of young girls, and how the local community, i.e. relevant institutions and organizations for youth, can and should address those problems and needs. The data collection was conducted in secondary schools in five local communities in Serbia: Kikinda, Obrenovac, Novi Pazar, Jagodina and Vranje, based on a sample of 188 girls in the third and fourth grades of four-year secondary schools.

Four out of the five mentioned local communities are affected by the high poverty rate (Vranje 31.1%, Novi Pazar 49.4%, Kikinda 26% and Jagodina 31.7%)<sup>2</sup> which puts girls in these cities at particular risk of marginalization, and thus discrimination, and gender-based violence. Having in mind that the position of women in Serbia is characterized by a high degree of discrimination and violence, caused by various inequalities based on the systemic dominance of men over women, and that girls are particularly vulnerable in the late stage of adolescence when it comes to forming and accepting their own identity,<sup>3</sup> this research intended to provide girls with the space necessary to express their views on issues affecting them in the local community. In this regard, this action research will serve in the final stage of the project *An Integrated Response to Violence against Women and Girls in Serbia II* to carry out activities with local Youth Offices in order to improve support mechanisms for young girls and to strengthen their position as active carriers of social change, which will be done via continuous mentoring support programs.

Activities of the project *With and for Girls* were implemented as part of a wider project *An Integrated Response to Violence against Women and Girls in Serbia II*, carried out by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in

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<sup>2</sup> The poverty rate for the Belgrade region is 10.5% (although in this region the poverty range is between 4.8 and 27%, depending on the municipality) according to the data from survey *Poverty Map Of Serbia*, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and the World Bank (RZS and World Bank, *Poverty Map Of Serbia*, Belgrade: RZS, 2016: 21, available at: <http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Poverty-Map-of-Serbia-final.pdf> (accessed on August 31, 2019)

<sup>3</sup> Vranješević, J. et al. *Vršnjačka medijacija – priručnik za voditelje radionica iz oblasti obrazovanja za veštine medijacije (Peer Mediation – Manual for Trainers at Workshops in the Field of Education on Mediation Skills)*, Belgrade: Kinderberg and GTZ, 2003.

partnership with *The Government of the Republic of Serbia*, led by *The Gender Equality Coordination Body*, and with the support of the Government of Sweden.

## Review of Up-To-Date Researches on Girls' Attitudes and Experiences

Specific studies of attitudes and experiences of 18-year-old girls about gender issues and gender-based violence, which would cover different local communities in the Republic of Serbia, have not been conducted so far. This conclusion was drawn from an analysis of the available results of previous researches that addressed gender equality and violence, and gender-based violence as its specific form (Ćeriman et al., 2015; AWC, 2017; Popadić, Plut and Pavlović, 2014), i.e. an examination of young men's views on these issues (Hughson, 2018; Jakovljević and Arsenov, 2012), as well as the general position and opinions of young people aged 18 in Serbia (Stojanović, 2017; Youth Council Organization, 2018; Tomanović and Stanojević, 2015).

Starting from the mentioned dimensions, research papers were selected which results and concepts provided foundations for implementing the research presented in this report. One such research, conducted at the end of 2013, on a sample of 8,755 secondary school students of both sexes and 13,609 primary school students of both sexes, for the first time mapped attitudes toward gender-based violence, as well as experiences of gender-based violence among primary and secondary school students of both sexes in Serbia.<sup>4</sup> The results of this study showed that as many as 76% of secondary school girls were exposed to some form of gender-based violence,<sup>5</sup> with nearly 50% of girls identifying sexual objectification as the most common form of gender-based violence,<sup>6</sup> that is, commenting on looks and setting sex appeal as a "value-determining feature" of girls.<sup>7</sup> According to this research, other, especially common forms of gender-based violence that girls have been exposed to are: vulgar gestures (40%), gender prejudice (33%), and insults referring to appearance (22%), with almost all forms of gender-based violence against girls most often used by young men.<sup>8</sup> When it comes to attitudes about gender-based violence, almost one half of the girls of secondary school age attribute the responsibility for the sexual violence

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<sup>4</sup> Ćeriman, J. et al. *Istraživanje rodno zasnovanog nasilja u školama u Srbiji (Research of Gender-Based Violence in Schools in Serbia)*, Center for Studies of Gender and Politics, Faculty of Political Sciences, Belgrade, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

experienced to the victim,<sup>9</sup> but according to all the other attitudes researched in this survey, girls of secondary school age showed disagreement and were highlighted as “carriers of resistance” to imposed gender norms, when compared to boys of the same age and girls and boys in primary schools.<sup>10</sup>

Also, the research “*I am Able not to Want to*” about gender-based violence intended to examine more closely the views of young people, both girls and young men, on sexual violence as a particular form of gender-based violence.<sup>11</sup> Research results of “*I am Able not to Want to*” show that one in 25 girls believe that sexual harassment is acceptable as a joke and a part of growing up, that one in 10 girls believe that one slap is not violence, while one in 3 young persons think that a girl wearing a short skirt and tight shirt is to be blamed if someone attacks her. The latter information is significant for analysis as it is based on the responses of young people to one of the questions we also used in the questionnaire of this research.

In addition to the studies mentioned above, violence as a phenomenon among the school population was also addressed in a survey on school violence in Serbia. This research identified physical and verbal aggression, sexual and electronic violence as forms of violence, but it was not oriented toward examining a wider range of gender-based violence as a form of violence in schools.<sup>12</sup>

A research worth mentioning is also the one that was focused on determining the attitudes of exclusively boys of secondary school age toward gender equality, which showed that 24% of young men consider that the most important role of a woman is to take care of the house and children (33%), while the primary role of a man in the family is to make decisions, that is, to have the final say in the family (36%).<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, a survey on men and gender discourses in Serbia conducted in 2017 on a nationally representative sample of 1,060 men and 540 women aged between 18 and 60<sup>14</sup> showed that in the context of relationships in the primary family, the father plays

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Autonomous Women’s Center, *Mogu da neću: Istraživanje stavova mladih o seksualnom i rodno-zasnovanom nasilju (I Am Able Not To Want To: Research of the Attitudes of Youth on Sexual and Gender Based Violence)*, 2017, available at URL: <http://mogudanecu.rs/mog-danecu-strazivanje.html> (accessed on May 29). 11. 2018.)

<sup>12</sup> Popadic, D, Plut, D. and Pavlovic, Z, *Nasilje u školama Srbije: Analiza stanja od 2006. godine do 2013. godine (Violence in the Schools of Serbia: Analysis of Situation from 2006 to 2013)*, Institute of Psychology, Belgrade, 2014, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> James, I. and Arsenov, B, *Istraživanje koncepta rodno-zasnovanog nasilja, kao i stavova prema rodno-zasnovanom nasilju kod srednjoškolaca u Srbiji (Research of the Concept of Gender Based Violence and Attitudes on Gender Based Violence among Secondary School Pupils in Serbia)*, Center E8, Belgrade, 2012, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Hughson, M, *Men in Serbia: Changes, Resistance and Challenges – The Results of Research on Men and Gender Equality IMAGES Serbia*, Center E8, Belgrade, 2018.

a dominant role in growing up of both boys and girls,<sup>15</sup> which speaks in favor of the still dominant patriarchal model of the family in our society, in which family roles are clearly divided into the primary role of the father and the secondary role of the mother, according to which tasks of the parents in a household are also split. About 40% of men who took part in this survey believe that the primary role of a woman is caring for family, i.e. children. When it comes to partner violence, i.e. domestic violence, 82.2% of men think that a woman should not tolerate violence in order to keep the family together, but also that there are exceptional situations when a woman should be beaten (18.8% of respondents hold this opinion).<sup>16</sup> The fact that violence in partner relations does indeed exist and that it occurs in a variety of forms is evidenced by information that almost one third of men used insults and humiliation as forms of violence against their partners. Namely, approximately 26% of men stated that they offended their partners at some point and made them feel bad, while approximately 16% of men admitted having humiliated their partners in front of other people.<sup>17</sup> The survey also mapped out forms of violence common in partner relations, such as economic violence manifested as forbidding partner to have a job or by establishing other forms of economic dependence of women on men. According to the results of this research, the least prevalent form of partner violence is direct physical harm, and threat by weapons, with 93.2% of men responding that they never committed this type of violence against their partner.<sup>18</sup>

When it comes to research that included in their sample a specific age group of 18-year-olds, conducted surveys were directed at examining general needs, problems and daily life of young people in Serbia,<sup>19</sup> specific civic and political perceptions of young people, trust of young people in institutions in Serbia.<sup>20</sup> A survey on the position and needs of young people in Serbia by the National Youth Council showed that 45% of young people experienced some form of discrimination, with gender discrimination being the most represented.<sup>21</sup> The mentioned survey also showed that 47% of young people were at some point exposed to some form of physical or verbal violence,<sup>22</sup> and that as main causes they saw poor punitive policies against bullies,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>19</sup> Stojanovic, B, *Alternativni izveštaj o položaju i potrebama mladih u Republici Srbiji (Alternative Report on Position and Needs of Youth in the Republic of Serbia)*, National Youth Council, Belgrade, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> National Youth Council, *Poverenje mladih u institucije (Confidence of Youth in Institutions)*, Belgrade, 2018. available at: <http://koms.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Confidence-young-in-institutions.pdf> (accessed on November 25, 2018)

<sup>21</sup> Stojanović, B, *Alternativni izveštaj o položaju i potrebama mladih u Republici Srbiji (Alternative Report on Position and Needs of Youth in the Republic of Serbia)*, National Youth Council, Belgrade, 2017, p. 139

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 141

absence or decline of social values, as well as family relationships and social relations that promote violence.<sup>23</sup> As stated in this research, the most common problems of young people in Serbia are unemployment (89%), education system (77.9%), value system (76.4%) but also safety (18.4%),<sup>24</sup> and due to generally poor economic and general standard of living, approximately 70% of young people, according to this survey, are considering going abroad.<sup>25</sup> In terms of youth participation in decision-making processes at the local level, the data from this research show that young people tend to rate their role in these processes as “decorative” (29.9%), while only 1.7% of young people believe that they could some day become leaders.<sup>26</sup> These findings confirm the results of research about trust of young people in institutions, which showed that many young people do not trust the Youth Offices and Youth Councils, most often because they do not recognize the scope of work of these institutions. Survey findings indicate that four out of ten young people believe that there is no systemic concern for young people at the local level, while at the state level this ratio is somewhat different, six out of ten young people are of this opinion.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, while these studies provide significant insights into the current status of young women and men in Serbia in various fields and offer recommendations to improve their position in each area individually, they were not focused solely on examining the views of 18-year-old girls on the issues of gender equality and gender-based violence. Still, all the cited studies have shown that violence, especially gender-based violence, is widespread at the level of the entire population in Serbia, and that opinions about violence and gender stereotypes, as well as expressed forms of violence, are different when it comes to young women and young men. All the researches that mapped perceptions of the aforementioned issues based their analysis on the integrated data and opinions of both girls and boys of approximately the same age, from which it can be concluded that the presented conclusions about the opinions and needs of girls were established indirectly and were not sufficiently specified, and that it is necessary to conduct a research that will distinguish the opinions and voices of girls in a clear manner.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 144, Table 23. Respondents' average ratings of the causes of violence

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. Table 18. Major youth problems in response rates (%)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 125, Chart 36. Youth participation in local and national decision-making

<sup>27</sup> National Youth Council, *Poverenje mladih u institucije (Confidence of Youth in Institutions)*, Belgrade, 2018. URL: <http://koms.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Confidence-young-in-institutions.pdf> (accessed on November 25, 2018)

# Normative Framework Referential for Gender Equality Issues

Serbia does not have a unified, direct strategic document that refers exclusively to girls, that is, a document that would produce systemic solutions specifically aimed at improving the position of young girls. The analysis of some documents from the normative framework, which, among other things, aim to improve the position of girls, shows the inconsistency of a number of measures and activities with the accompanying action plans in the referential areas. The analysis of the strategic documents about youth, namely the National Youth Strategy for the period 2015 to 2025 and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Youth Strategy for the period 2015 to 2017, carried out in 2016, showed that, from gender perspectives, there are ten activities aimed at improving the position of young women in Serbia defined in the National Youth Strategy but which were not present in the Action Plan.<sup>28</sup> Conclusion of this analysis is worrisome, since it suggests that the inconsistency of these strategic documents produces obstacles that not only prevent the advancement of the position of girls in Serbia but act to maintain the vulnerability and multiple discrimination of girls as a specific social group.<sup>29</sup> Although there is no unified strategic framework for girls only, Serbia has significantly improved the normative framework for the protection of women's rights in many areas in recent years. The issues of achieving and promoting gender equality, (non)violence and (non)discrimination based on gender at the multisectoral level are regulated by national and international documents adopted by the state of Serbia, but in most cases, systemic solutions have been lacking here too.

## International Normative Framework

For the purpose of this research, the international normative framework included the most significant international instruments at the level of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union, aimed at establishing gender equality, and eliminating violence and discrimination against women. The importance of international documents lies in the fact that they represent international standards for the achievement and promotion of gender equality, elimination of violence and dis-

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<sup>28</sup> Center for Education and Counseling – Katalista, *Analysis of Strategic Documents on Youth for 2015-17*, Center for Education and Counseling - Katalista, Belgrade, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

crimination against women, and that, by adopting their provisions, Serbia has also taken on the obligation to introduce them into the national legislative system.

The Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at the 2015 Sustainable Development Summit, should be mentioned at the outset. The objectives and principles of the 2030 Agenda are also embedded in the principles of European Union development and are a necessary condition in the European integration process that should guide Serbia on its path to joining the European Union and which should be incorporated into its national legislation. Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls is not only one of the segments of the social inclusion dimension of Agenda 2030 presented in Objective 5 (which can be viewed on its own, with all its objectives and indicators), but also a necessary requirement that has to be met in the context of achieving and securing protection of basic human rights, as provided for in Chapter 23: Judiciary and Basic Rights.<sup>30</sup> Achieving the goals of the Agenda and meeting the criteria for EU membership contained in the Negotiating Chapters is possible only by engaging all social actors, inter-sectoral cooperation at all levels and transformation of inadequate policies into responsible ones.

Another significant document, ratified in 1981 by the SFRY,<sup>31</sup> is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979), and with it General Recommendation No. 19 of the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1992) and General Recommendation No. 35, which can be seen today as the most important international documents in the field of protection of women's rights, and a standard for achieving equality of women and men in our country. The Convention provides at the outset a definition of discrimination against women in the sense that "discrimination against women means any difference, exclusion or restriction based on sex, which has the consequence or objective to jeopardize or prevent recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women of human rights and basic freedoms (...) on the basis of equality between men and women".<sup>32</sup> By adopting the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, States Parties to the Convention have expressed their agreement to condemn all forms of discrimination against women and to implement a policy of eliminating discrimination by adopting appropriate legal and other measures prohibiting

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<sup>30</sup> EU Info Center in Belgrade, *Negotiating Chapters in 35 Steps*, p. 29, document available at <[https://euinfo.rs/files/Publikacije-srp/35\\_koraka\\_za\\_web.pdf](https://euinfo.rs/files/Publikacije-srp/35_koraka_za_web.pdf)> (This second, revised edition is available only in Serbian, but the first edition, not up-to-date and revised later on is available also in English at [https://euinfo.rs/files/Publications-eng/Negotiation\\_Chapters-35\\_Steps\\_Towards\\_the\\_EU.pdf](https://euinfo.rs/files/Publications-eng/Negotiation_Chapters-35_Steps_Towards_the_EU.pdf) - translator's note)

<sup>31</sup> Law on Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Official Gazette of the SFRY - International Treaties, No. 11/1981.

<sup>32</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in Law ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Official Gazette of SFRY - International Treaties, No. 11/1981, Art.1

all forms of discrimination against women.<sup>33</sup> By ratifying the Convention, States have pledged to incorporate the principle of equality between men and women into their national constitutions and laws, to that end, by taking appropriate measures to ensure the proper implementation of the principle of equality,<sup>34</sup> and abolish all internal legal acts that discriminate against women.<sup>35</sup> Of particular importance is the agreement expressed by States to take all appropriate measures to change the social and cultural customs of men and women to eliminate prejudice and any other practice based on the understanding of the inferiority or superiority of one or the other gender or the traditional role of men or women.<sup>36</sup> In the field of ensuring equal rights for women and men in education, States have agreed to work to eliminate traditional understandings of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education, particularly revising school textbooks and programs and adapting teaching methods.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, states have undertaken to reduce the dropout rate among girls,<sup>38</sup> creating equal conditions in terms of opportunities for learning and gaining degrees in educational settings in all categories, both in rural and urban areas, fostering career development and professional guidance,<sup>39</sup> as well as creating equal opportunities for active sports.<sup>40</sup> States are required to submit regular annual and periodic reports to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on their work on the implementation of the provisions of the Convention and on the progress made towards achieving gender equality at all levels. The consideration of the reports submitted is the responsibility of the Committee, which, in addition to the role of the oversight body over the implementation of the Convention, may, on the petition of the States, make proposals and general recommendations,<sup>41</sup> such as General Recommendation No. 19 and No. 35. Importance of General Recommendation No. 19 The Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women arises from the definition of gender-based violence that it defines as any violence “directed against or because it is a woman or disproportionately affecting women and includes acts that result in physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats by such acts, coercion and other forms of deprivation of liberty”.<sup>42</sup> In addition, General Recommendation

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, Art. 2, paragraph (b)

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, Art. 2, paragraph (a)

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, Art. 2, paragraph (g)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, Art. 5, paragraph (a)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, Art. 10, paragraph (c)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, Art. 10, paragraph (f)

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, Art. 10, paragraph (a)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, Art. 10, paragraph (g)

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, Art. 21, paragraph 1.

<sup>42</sup> General recommendation No. 19 Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the *General Recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, Belgrade Center for Human Rights, 2013, Art. 1. available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CEDAW/Pages/Recommendations.aspx> (accessed on August 31, 2019)

No. 19 also encompasses the inclusion of the concept of domestic violence in the Convention, with particular reference to traditional views on the role of women in the family, economic and other circumstances as factors that make women particularly vulnerable and at risk of violence.<sup>43</sup> Twenty-five years after the adoption of General Recommendation No. 19, in 2017, the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women adopted General Recommendation No. 35 as a supplement to General Recommendation No. 19 in the form of guidelines to accelerate the elimination of violence against women.<sup>44</sup> By this recommendation, States have committed themselves to following, within their systems, at all levels of government, by all appropriate means, and without delay, the policy of ending discrimination against women, including gender-based violence against women.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, albeit short in scope,<sup>46</sup> offered a meaningful definition of violence against women and recommendations for combating it. The Declaration defined violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results or may result in the physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering of women, including threats of such acts, restriction or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether arising from public or private life “,<sup>47</sup> further explaining forms of gender-based violence, emphasizing that the list of types and forms of gender-based violence is not exhausted. In addition to calling on States to condemn violence against women and take the necessary measures to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence,<sup>48</sup> the Declaration is also significant for its emphasis of the importance of the women’s movement and civil society organizations at local, national and regional levels<sup>49</sup> and their roles in raising awareness of, and eliminating, the problem of violence against women.

Further recommendations to States to “prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls”,<sup>50</sup> but also to promote and protect all human rights of girls

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, para. 23, comment on Article 16. and Article 5 of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

<sup>44</sup> General recommendation No. 35 of the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, paragraph 8. Document available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CEDAW/Pages/Recommendations.aspx> (accessed on August 31, 2019).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, paragraph. 21.

<sup>46</sup> Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly by resolution 48/104 dated December 20, 1993, it contains only six Articles.

<sup>47</sup> United Nations Declaration on Elimination of Violence Against Women, 1993, Art. 1, document available at URL: <<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>> (accessed on November 25, 2018).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, Art. 4

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, Art. 4, paragraph (p)

<sup>50</sup> Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing on September 15, 1995, . paragraph 29, the document is available at: <https://www.icsspe.org/system/files/Beijing%20Declaration%20and%20Platform%20for%20Action.pdf> (accessed on August 31, 2019).

and women,<sup>51</sup> were provided by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Of relevance for this analysis is the fact that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action focus particular attention to the position of girls and young women. In this respect, the Beijing Declaration specifically addresses discrimination of girls and young women with regard to their access to education and points out that discrimination against girls and young women is still present in many areas. The Declaration further identifies deep-rooted traditional views on the roles of girls based on gender bias as a cause of violence, with early marriage, pregnancy, sexual violence, restricted movement and access to resources as the most common forms of violence.<sup>52</sup> The Declaration and Platform for Action emphasize in particular the need to create an educational and social environment in which women and men, girls and boys will be treated equally and stimulated to reach their full potential while respecting their freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief.<sup>53</sup> In addition, these documents indicate that the teaching material continues to greatly promote the creation of a stereotypical image about men and women, and that science and education programs are particularly discriminatory with regard to gender, by textbooks non-addressing or non-recognizing women's daily experiences, and do not recognize for example, women scientists.<sup>54</sup> In this regard, the Declaration sets out in its strategic objectives the provision of equal access to education,<sup>55</sup> allocating funds for education reforms,<sup>56</sup> developing education without discrimination<sup>57</sup> and advancing women's access to vocational training, science and technology and lifelong learning.<sup>58</sup> Among other measures that the Declaration proposes in order to achieve set strategic goals in the field of education, which will operate within the framework of gender equality, are the curriculum reform and textbook revision in order to eliminate gender stereotypes, with cooperation of all institutions, schools, and textbook publishers.<sup>59</sup>

At the Council of Europe level, significant is the Council of Europe Convention on the prevention and combating of violence against women and domestic violence - the 2011 Istanbul Convention.<sup>60</sup> This Convention is the first and only European legally

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, paragraph 31

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, Platform for Action: IV-B. Women's Education and Training, paragraph 71, p.37

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, paragraph 72

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, paragraph 75, p. 38

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, Strategic Objective B.1, p. 39

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, Strategic Objective B.5, p. 43

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, Strategic Objective B.4, p. 41

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, Strategic Objective B.3, p. 40.

<sup>59</sup> Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: IV-B. Women's Education and Training, paragraph 83, p. 42.

<sup>60</sup> Law on Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Prevention and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, "RS Official Gazette - International Treaties", No. 012/2013

binding document in the field of combating violence against women<sup>61</sup> and domestic violence as gender-based violence, and in addition to its legally binding character it has one of the hallmarks of identifying the structural nature of violence against women as gender-based violence.<sup>62</sup> As such, this Convention recognizes the importance of systemic action to eliminate violence against women through mechanisms for preventing all forms of violence, protecting and supporting victims of violence through legislative measures, emergency protection measures, etc., prosecuting perpetrators and creating national policies that will act in accordance with the objective to eliminate violence against women. In addition, for the achievement of undertaken commitments and pursued objectives, the Convention lays down mandatory measures for the control of the implementation of provisions adopted by the Contracting States in the form of an expert group on combating violence against women and domestic violence,<sup>63</sup> as well as a mutual cooperation of the Contracting States internationally in accordance with the provisions of the Convention.<sup>64</sup>

## National Normative Framework

Serbia's normative framework rests on the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia as the highest legal act and the guarantee of rights from which all other legal acts derive their legal force, and by which "the state guarantees equality between women and men and develops an equal opportunity policy".<sup>65</sup> The Constitution explicitly prohibits "any discrimination, direct or indirect, on any grounds, including gender."<sup>66</sup> Further, in its basic provisions, the Law on Gender Equality stipulates "creating equal opportunities for exercising rights and obligations, taking special measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination based on sex and gender and the procedure of legal protection for persons exposed to discrimination".<sup>67</sup> Namely, in order to achieve equal opportunities and gender equality at the local level, in Article 39 the Law provided for the establishment of local mechanisms in the form of permanent working bodies or persons to be entrusted with performing tasks arising from the obligations

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<sup>61</sup> Brankovic, B, *News from the Future: the Istanbul Convention and Responsibility of the State for Combating Violence against Women; General Services – Operationalisation of Due Diligence Principle*. United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Belgrade 2013, p. 17.

<sup>62</sup> Law on Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Prevention and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, "RS Official Gazette - International Treaties", No. 012/2013, Preamble, para. 10.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 66, paragraph 1.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 62, paragraph 1.

<sup>65</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, "Official Gazette of Republic of Serbia", No. 98/06, Art. 15.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, Art. 21.

<sup>67</sup> The Law on Gender Equality, "Official Gazette of Republic of Serbia", No.104/2009, Art. 1

of this Law. Yet, the Law does not clearly define their position, i.e. it fails to determine measures that would be taken if the working bodies for performing tasks in the field of gender equality were not established at the local level.<sup>68</sup> When it comes to gender equality and education, the Law sees gender equality as an integral part of education “in order to overcome restrictive gender roles, and achieve liberation from gender-based stereotypes and prejudices.”<sup>69</sup> In addition, the Law clearly stipulates the obligation to implement the policy of equal opportunities for women and men within the curricula and “in establishing the textbook standards, teaching methods and norms of school premises and equipment”.<sup>70</sup>

The Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, in addition to introducing a definition of discrimination and recognizing multiple discrimination, defines “provoking and inciting inequality, hatred and intolerance on the basis of (...) gender, gender identity, sexual orientation” as serious forms of discrimination,<sup>71</sup> and does not fail to elaborate separately on each of the abovementioned forms of discrimination. In addition, the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination further elaborates on the issue of discrimination on the grounds of gender in terms of recognizing the grounds for discrimination in the sense that “discrimination exists if actions are against the principle of gender equality, i.e. against the principle of respect for equal rights and freedoms of women and men in political, economic, cultural, and other aspects of public, professional, private, and family life.”<sup>72</sup> Regarding the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex, the Law defines explicitly prohibited actions as any “physical and other violence, exploitation, expression of hatred, humiliation, blackmail and harassment pertaining to gender, as well as public advocacy, support and conduct in keeping with prejudices, customs and other social models of behavior based on the idea of gender inferiority or superiority, i.e., gender stereotyped roles”,<sup>73</sup> which will be of further relevance for this research.

In respect of the basic national strategic documents of Serbia aimed at promoting gender equality, the National Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2016-2020 was adopted in 2016, and with it the accompanying Action Plan for the period 2016-2018. The National Strategy for Gender Equality defines gender equality as “equal participation of all persons regardless of gender in all spheres of social and private life, as well as their equal position, equal opportunities for exercising their rights

<sup>68</sup> Specifically, according to data from the Analysis of the Status and Capacity of Local Governments in the Field of Gender Equality, 129 municipalities / cities in Serbia out of a total of 174 have established a mechanism (working body or person) in charge of gender issues, including five cities where our research was conducted ( data available at: URL: < <http://rr.skgo.org/> > (accessed on November 25, 2018).

<sup>69</sup> The Law on Gender Equality, “Official Gazette of Republic of Serbia”, No.104/2009, Art. 31.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> The Anti-Discrimination Law, “Official Gazette of Republic of Serbia”, No. 22/2009, Art. 13.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, Art. 20.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, Art. 20.

and equal benefit from the achieved results in keeping with the Constitution of the Republic Serbia, generally accepted rules of international law, confirmed by international treaties and laws”.<sup>74</sup> In relation to girls and young women, the Strategy draws attention to access to education, highlighting that “girls and boys, young women and young men (...) are guaranteed equal access to education at all levels” and that “there are no differences in schools and school subjects in terms of accessibility for girls and boys”.<sup>75</sup> Yet, the Strategy does identify difficulties in accessing education for particular categories of girls, i.e. for categories such as “poor, Roma, children with disabilities, and children in rural areas”<sup>76</sup> and in addition to this recognizes that the education system in Serbia is not gender sensitive, i.e., that gender stereotypes are deeply rooted among school population, and that it is necessary to implement reforms that would address the specific treatment of girls according to their specific needs, “elimination of gender stereotypes and prejudices and the inclusion of women’s contributions to science, culture and the arts in school curricula”.<sup>77</sup> In this regard, it can be said that the point in paragraph 1.4.1 of the Strategy is more of a goal to be achieved, than a representation of the real situation in national education. Also, worth mentioning is the Law on Education System Foundations, which, among other things, has set development and respect of gender equality, tolerance, and respect for diversity as goals of upbringing and education.<sup>78</sup> In terms of prohibition of discrimination, this Law explicitly stipulates that any direct or indirect discriminatory treatment based on sex and gender is prohibited,<sup>79</sup> i.e. that any form of violence is prohibited,<sup>80</sup> which the Law, however, does not address in the particular context of gender-based violence.

When it comes to the normative framework of the Republic of Serbia, which has a direct aim to regulate the position of young people, it is possible to single out the following essential documents: the Law on Youth of the Republic of Serbia,<sup>81</sup> The National Youth Strategy for the period 2015-2025<sup>82</sup> and with it the accompanying Ac-

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<sup>74</sup> National Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2020, “Official Gazette of RS” No. 4/2016, p. 4 The document is available at: <<https://www.rodnaravnopravnost.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2018-05/National%20strategy%20for%20gender%20equality%20%282016-2020%29%20with%20Action%20plan.pdf>> (accessed on August 31, 2019).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, paragraph 1.4.1

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, paragraph 1.4.3

<sup>78</sup> Law on the Basics of the Education System, “Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia”, No. 88/2017 and 27/2018, Art. 8, paragraph 15.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, Art. 110.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, Art. 111.

<sup>81</sup> Youth Act, “Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia”, No. 50/2011, Art. 1

<sup>82</sup> National Youth Strategy 2015-2025, “Official Gazette of RS”, No. 22/2015.

tion Plan for the period 2018-2020.<sup>83</sup> The Law on Youth of the Republic of Serbia aims to “create conditions for supporting young people in organizing, social actions, development and realization of potential for personal and social well-being”.<sup>84</sup> The Law is based on the principles of equal opportunities and prohibition of discrimination against young people, raising awareness of the importance and role of young people, as well as of their active participation in society, the principle of responsibility and solidarity of young people, and a systemic support for young people. Yet, although the Law on Youth highlights that “all terms used in this law are gender-neutral”<sup>85</sup> and that through the “principle of equality and non-discrimination” equality issues are established by proclaiming that “all young people are equal” and that “any discrimination or unequal treatment of young people is prohibited, directly or indirectly, on any grounds, and especially based on race, gender (...) language, social origin (...) gender identity, or other real or assumed personal property”,<sup>86</sup> this Law is not neutral in its text, since it neglects one group of young people by using exclusively masculine grammatical gender when referring to different positions, such as “beneficiaries of funds”, “program holder”, etc.<sup>87</sup>

As a response of the Government of the Republic of Serbia to the need for young people to be recognized in the society through their importance, position and role, and to encourage their active participation in society and involvement in youth policy development, the National Youth Strategy for 2015-2025 was passed, and along with it the accompanying Action Plan for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy for the period 2018-2020. In this regard, the Strategy has established the basic principles and directions of action, general and specific strategic goals, as well as the expected results of the activities of all youth policy subjects, and it has been offered as a key mechanism for achieving and improving youth policy in the period of ten years.<sup>88</sup> By analyzing the six basic principles of the Strategy, it has been noticed that through two general principles, the principle of respect for human and minority rights, equality and non-discrimination, as well as the principle of equal opportunities for all, the individual principle of gender equality is also applied, “All young people are equal and enjoy equal status and equal legal protection regardless of personal character-

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<sup>83</sup> The Action Plan for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy for the period from 2018 to 2020 was adopted at the session of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, held on 12.12. 2018. Document available at: URL: < <https://youthumans.net/good-stuff/national-youth-strategy-of-serbia-2015-2025/> > (accessed on August 31, 2019)

<sup>84</sup> Juvenile law. Art. 1

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, Art. 3

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, Art. 15,

<sup>87</sup> This is also the case with all other documents listed in the domestic regulatory framework except the National Gender Equality Strategy for the period 2016-2020 with an action plan for the period 2016-2018 that uses gender-sensitive names for positions, professions,, and the like.

<sup>88</sup> National Youth Strategy 2015-2025, Introductory Provisions, p. 1

istics. No distinction should be made or unequal treatment of young people, directly or indirectly, on any grounds, and especially not on the basis of: age, race, gender, nationality, religious belief, language, social origin, property status, membership in political, trade union and other organizations, mental or physical disability, health status, physical appearance, sexual orientation, gender identity and other real or assumed personal characteristic.”<sup>89</sup> It is further stated that “young people have the right to equal opportunities and participation in all areas of social life in accordance with their own choices and abilities. Personal and social development of young people is encouraged by providing respect for diversity, gender equality, rights, freedom and dignity.”<sup>90</sup> In addition to the basic principles of action, the Strategy also defined nine general and 34 specific strategic goals as the desired, attained status in relation to youth, in areas of interest to young people.<sup>91</sup> The Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Youth Strategy for the period 2018-2020 is a set of indicators and recommendations for achieving the goals of the National Youth Strategy, a set of individual activities aimed at achieving the goals in the period of three years, as well as a plan for their funding, which should ensure regular implementation of the envisaged measures in practice.

In addition to the National Action Plan for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy, Local Youth Action Plans are particularly important as local strategic documents that define priority areas for youth, and activities that respond to specific needs of young people in particular local environments, which contribute to the achievement of goals and priorities of the National Youth Strategy at the local level.<sup>92</sup> Although one of the recommendations of the Ministry of Youth and Sport is that each city / municipality develops its Local Youth Action Plan that would offer mechanisms for improving conditions and meeting real needs of young people at the local level, in practice this is not actually the case.

By checking databases on the web pages of city administrations of Jagodina, Kikinda, Novi Pazar and Vranje, as well as of Obrenovac municipality, the following was noticed: none of the searched databases provided information on the existence of current Local Youth Action Plans. According to the available data, the municipality of Kikinda had a Local Youth Action Plan for the period 2011-2015,<sup>93</sup> while for the cities of Jagodina, Novi Pazar, Vranje and the Belgrade municipality of Obrenovac, there were no publicly available information on Local Action Plans related to young people

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, paragraph 3.2. *Principles*, p. 6.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, para. 4. *Strategic goals*, p. 7

<sup>92</sup> Information available at: URL: < <https://www.mos.gov.rs/public/mladisuzakon/index.php/info/local-institutional-framework/local-action-plan-for-made> > (accessed on December 18, 2018)

<sup>93</sup> Document available at: URL: < [http://www.kikinda.org.rs/Images/UserFiles/File/projekti/LAP\\_mladi.pdf](http://www.kikinda.org.rs/Images/UserFiles/File/projekti/LAP_mladi.pdf) > (accessed on December 18, 2018)

on the pages of municipal administrations. By further search of the web sites of local Youth Offices of the mentioned cities, as well as via searches on the Internet, it was established that the City of Jagodina had a current and accessible Youth Action Plan for the period 2018-2021,<sup>94</sup> as did Obrenovac city municipality, where this research was conducted within the territory of the City of Belgrade,<sup>95</sup> and that the cities of Vranje and Novi Pazar had local youth action plans in the past, namely the city of Vranje for the period 2011-2015,<sup>96</sup> and the city of Novi Pazar for 2017.<sup>97</sup>

The lack of updated data about local action plans, the invisibility of girls in the national normative framework related to youth, and the low level of trust and insight of girls and young men in the work of local institutions, makes it difficult to consider the real needs of young girls by relevant institutions and calls into question their readiness to focus on assessing and advancing their own capacities to respond better to given needs. By an analysis of the results of previous researches and documents from the national normative framework related to gender equality and youth, it can be concluded that girls at the state level of Serbia are recognized as a particularly vulnerable youth group, with frequent experience of gender-based violence. However, it is necessary to consider more carefully the needs, experiences and attitudes of solely girls at the local level, in order to formulate particular measures and activities that will lead to their empowerment and active role in the local community.

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<sup>94</sup> Document available at: URL: < <http://kzmjagodina.rs/files/Lokalni-akcioni-plan-za-mlade.pdf> > (accessed on December 18, 2018)

<sup>95</sup> Document available at: URL: <https://obrenovac.rs/dokumenta/2015/localni%20akcioni%20plan%20za%20mlade%200%20pstine%20Obrenovac%202016%20-%20202021%20-%20-%20Project.pdf> (accessed on December 20, 2018)

<sup>96</sup> Document available at: < [http://www.nexusvranje.com/documents/en/3\\_16\\_13.\\_LAP\\_za\\_mlade\\_Vranje.pdf](http://www.nexusvranje.com/documents/en/3_16_13._LAP_za_mlade_Vranje.pdf) > (accessed on December 18, 2018). Although news is available that a working group was created in 2016 to develop a youth LAP for the years 2017 to 2021, the document is not publicly available on the local government website: <https://www.infovranjske.rs/info/vranje-dobija-localni-akioni-plan-za-mlade> (accessed December 18, 2018).

<sup>97</sup> Data available at URL: < <http://pazarce.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Plan-rada-2017.pdf> > (accessed December 18, 2018).

# Research Methodology

The main goal of the research is to gain insight into the attitudes and experiences of young girls, as well as their perception of the link between attitudes towards gender equality and gender-based violence in the five local communities surveyed. The research contains an action element as well, and based on its results recommendations for local Youth Offices were formulated on how to improve their work in the field of promotion of gender equality and prevention of gender-based violence.

Several specific objectives can be distinguished from the general goal of the research:

1. Examine attitudes of girls towards gender roles and gender-based violence, and their relation to the demographic and social and economic features of the family (taking into consideration self-assessed socio-economic status of the family, level of education of parents or foster parents, profession of parents or foster parents, marital status of parents or foster parents).
2. Examine the problems that girls face in given local communities, their perceptions of the causes of these problems and capabilities (capacities of local communities) to improve the current situation.
3. Examine how girls perceive the connection between attitudes towards gender equality and gender-based violence in local communities.

Preparations for the fieldwork of the research, i.e. the preparation of questionnaires, training of the researchers, and pilot research were conducted in the period August-October 2018, and the fieldwork of the research was carried out at the end of October and during the first week of November 2018. The research instrument was developed according to the requirement of efficiency and clarity of meaning and understanding of the survey for respondents, and also according to the need to collect the data necessary for further work and communication with target groups of both Citizens Association Atina and Youth Offices in the five local communities included in the sample. These requirements conditioned approach to control and revision of the original questionnaire, and both male and female members of Citizens Association Atina participated in this, by conducting syntactic and semiotic check of the survey, the time needed to complete it, and the comprehensibility of the questions in the pilot study by secondary school girls, in order to make the research language clear, understandable and accessible to the target group - young girls. Each of the testing stages was followed by minor and major changes to the survey form and contents.

The research was conducted on a sample of 188 girls attending senior years of secondary schools in five local communities previously determined by Citizens Association Atina: Belgrade, Obrenovac municipality (32 questionnaires), Jagodina (37 questionnaires), Kikinda (47 questionnaires), Novi Pazar (27 questionnaires), and Vranje

(45 questionnaires). Cities from different geographical regions of Serbia were selected: Belgrade (Obrenovac), Vojvodina (Kikinda), Šumadija (Jagodina), western Serbia (Novi Pazar), as well as southern Serbia (Vranje). Using random numbers method, schools in suburban and urban municipalities in the mentioned cities were selected from the list of schools. In selected schools, researchers randomly selected third and fourth grade classes to be included in the research. The surveys were completed by all 18-year-old girls from selected classes who attended lectures on that day and who gave their informed consent for participation in the survey. All the girls who participated in the research, being of legal age, gave their informed consent for participation on the spot to the researchers, i.e. associates of Citizens Association Atina trained to work with girls of that age.

The introductory instruction researchers gave to the girls prior to them filling out the survey contained: information on the research being conducted, i.e. on the facilitators (Citizens Association Atina), an explanation of the purpose of the survey (examining attitudes and experiences of girls in Serbia), information on estimated average duration of completing the questionnaire (up to 45 minutes), guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality of the data obtained, and use of the results solely for scientific and educational purposes. After giving their informed consent, girls would begin to complete the surveys (Annex 1). In addition to questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and their families, the survey also included questions about the most common problems and needs of young girls, as well as their assessments of possible activities through which various institutions and local Youth Offices could solve these problems and needs. The questions in the survey were phrased in a gender-sensitive language, but the first conclusion of the analysis was that girls did not answer using gender-sensitive language but mostly wrote about themselves and other girls in masculine grammatical terms, using expressions like: “Muslim”, “Bosniak” etc. (in determining one’s ethnicity), “programmer”, “geography professor “ (when stating their future professions), or “project coordinator “ (when listing current positions in youth organizations) – (all masculine forms in Serbian language – *translator’s note*).

The conditions in which the survey was conducted included a provision of the possibility to complete the survey independently, that is, to be free from influences when answering the questions, and a provision of data protection for the completed and submitted surveys. In order to provide this element, the researchers collected surveys from the girls in the selected classes and placed them in envelopes which they closed before them. Immediately after the survey was conducted, the researchers recorded impressions from the field in a form prepared in advance. Field notes were also a part of the research material, so we emphasize that researchers stated that the survey was completed without problems and that only one girl left before complet-

ing the survey, because she was in a hurry to catch a bus to go home, which makes the response rate extremely high, that is, the response rate was 99%. However, control over the entire sample of completed surveys, using the exclusionary method, required 75 surveys to be discarded due to incorrect completion (the most common mistake was marking multiple answers when only one was required; incorrectly filled surveys were excluded to avoid unrealistic idea of the frequency of individual responses). Data entry control did not require the exclusion of any surveys. An examination of research reports from the field reveals that the girls did not ask questions about ambiguities in the phrasing of the questions, over which certain surveys were discarded. This situation is not unusual and is typical for researches of young people, which shows that conformism is a common reason for failing to inform researchers about lack of understanding of proper ways to fill in questionnaires. The total number of discarded questionnaires per the cities is as follows: Obrenovac 11, Jagodina 14, Kikinda 21, Novi Pazar 24, and Vranje 5. Although the number of targeted surveys was 250, it was decided, due to the project deadlines, not to go to the field for additional sampling in Obrenovac, and therefore the total number of surveys analyzed in this report was N = 188.

The table below provides an overview of the sample for five categories: grade, place of residence in relation to the school they attend, ethnicity of respondents, highest completed education degree of parents or foster parents, as well as marital status of parents/foster parents and their employment. All the tables showing the structure of the sample include only real numbers, without percentages, in order to avoid incorrect conclusions regarding the size of individual segments of the sample, since the total number of girls participating in this study is N = 188.

Table 1. Sample structure (N = 188)	
<b>Grade</b>	
Third	16
Fourth	172
<b>Place of residence in relation to the school they attend</b>	
The same place where the school is	123
Another populated place (village) – different from the location of school	41
Another suburban neighborhood	14
Another city	9
No answer provided	1
<b>Ethnicity<sup>1</sup></b>	
Serbian	119
Orthodox	2

<sup>1</sup> Categories listed in the table are based on the terms girls themselves used when answering question number 6 in the questionnaire (see Annex 1 to this report). For the purpose of clarifying results, answers stating “Islam” are presented together with “Muslim”.

Bosniak	7
Muslim	12
Hungarian	3
Roma	1
Christian	3
No answer	41
<b>Marital status of parents</b>	
Married	156
Domestic partnership	4
Divorced	22
Widower	1
Widow	3
No answer	2
<b>Father's education</b>	
No school	0
Primary school	9
Completed secondary school	138
Completed college or faculty	36
I don't know / No answer	5
<b>Mother's education</b>	
No school	0
Primary school	14
Completed secondary school	118
Completed college or faculty	55
No answer provided	1
<b>Father's profession</b>	
Unemployed	12
Worker	87
Clerk	28
Freelance profession	6
Expert	11
Private (independent) entrepreneur	26
Farmer	2
Retired	6
I don't know / No answer	10
<b>Mother's profession</b>	
Unemployed / Housewife	41
Worker	79
Clerk	30
Freelance profession	1
Expert	13
Private (independent) entrepreneur	18
Farmer	2
Retired	2
I don't know / No answer	2

Table 2. Average household size	Number of households
Single households (for girls living alone or in students' homes)	9
2-member households	10
Medium size households (3-5 members)	135
Large households (6 or more members)	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>

The girls from the sample most often live in average sized families (3-5 members), but it is also significant that 23 girls live in six-member households, usually consisting of extended families (living together with relatives), and one girl lives in a family of eleven members.

Table 3. Self-assessment of socio-economic status of the family	Total
Low (we are pretty poor)	0
Mediocre (we have enough for the most basic needs only)	10
Average (we have enough to make a living)	135
A little above average (we live a little better than other families in our area)	39
High above average (we live much better than other families in our area)	3
No answer	1

Even though the survey was conducted on a sample that is not representative of the entire population of girls aged 18 in Serbia, we still believe that this survey gives us an insight into the potentials for change at the local level, which could potentially be initiated and realized by girls from our sample, and as such represents the basis for further in-depth, qualitative researches on this topic. Although the objective of this report is specific, there are some scarce overall possibilities for comparison with the data obtained from other local level researches. This report should, in fact, raise the issue of communicating the needs of young girls in local communities, examine the impact of gender on experiences of violence and discrimination at young age, as well as prevent further invisibility of girls in communities and hampering or hindering the development of their potentials, as opposed to nurturing values that they possess simply by being girls/women, which is something they testify about themselves at the following pages.

# Analysis of Results

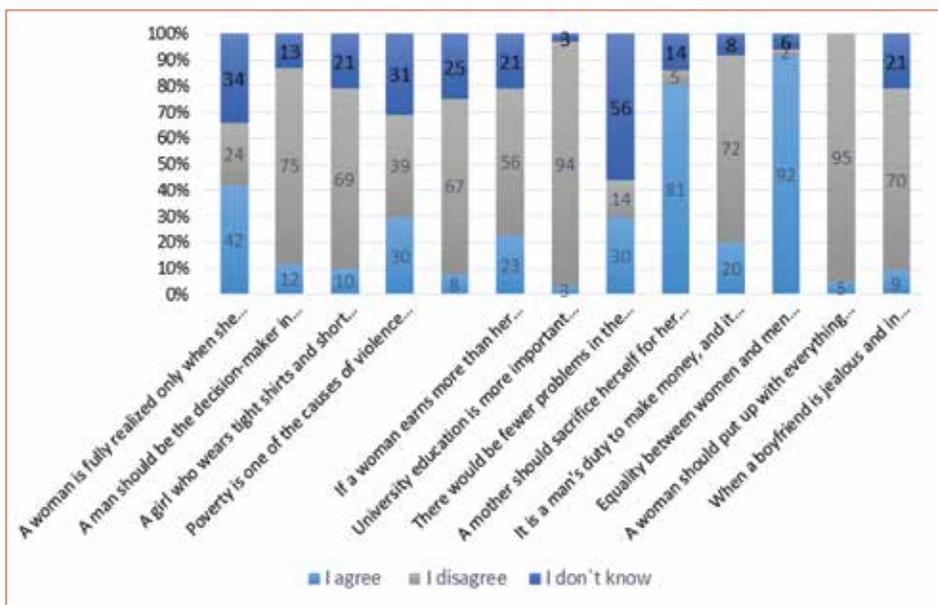
The first segment of the questionnaire consisted of a set of statements about the roles and positions of women and men in society, about which the respondents were supposed to give their opinions. All the girls surveyed (a total of 188 girls) expressed their attitudes toward statements offered in this segment.

Phrasing of the statements about which the girls expressed their opinions was as follows:

1. A woman is fully realized only when she becomes a mother.
2. A man should be the decision-maker in the family.
3. A girl who wears tight shirts and short skirts is to be blamed herself if she gets raped.
4. Poverty is one of the causes of violence against women in Serbia.
5. Men are better political leaders than women.
6. If a woman earns more than her husband, it will almost inevitably cause problems in their marriage.
7. University education is more important for young men than for young women.
8. There would be fewer problems in the world if there were more women in politics.
9. A mother should sacrifice herself for her children.
10. It is a man's duty to make money, and it is a woman's duty to take care of the household and family.
11. Equality between women and men should be one of the highest objectives of our society.
12. A woman should put up with everything in order to preserve her marriage.
13. When a boyfriend is jealous and in control of his girlfriend, it means that he loves her.

Chart 1 shows the frequency of all responses.

In the context of family relations and specifically the position of a woman in family, 42% of the girls surveyed said that a woman was fully realized only when she becomes a mother, while 81% of the girls agreed with the statement that a mother should sacrifice everything for her children. The attitude that a mother is supposed to make sacrifices for her children is prevailing both among girls whose parents are married or live in domestic partnerships, and girls whose parents are divorced, and is also prevailing regardless of the place of residence and economic status of the family. Cross-comparison of the data on level of education and employment of both parents with the stated view that a mother should make sacrifices for her children, resulted



**Chart 1: Attitudes towards gender roles and gender-based violence (expressed in %)**

in the conclusion that the level of education and employment of parents do not play a crucial role in defining girls' opinions on the primary role of women as mothers.

One in five girls (20%) thinks it is men's duty to earn money and women's duty to take care of the household and family, while one in four respondents thinks that if a woman earns more than her husband, it will almost inevitably cause problems in marriage. Girls from Novi Pazar generally agree the most that the primary role of a mother is to be a housewife and of a father to be a breadwinner, which shows that the patriarchal organization in this city is the dominant form of family organization. In other cities from the sample, the share of girls who agree with this statement is far lower.

Girls from Kikinda and Vranje expressed the highest level of disagreement with the claim that women's higher incomes could cause problems in marriage, as well as girls from families with average or slightly higher economic status.

The survey respondents expressed the least agreement with the claim that a woman should put up with everything in order to preserve her marriage. A total of 95% of respondents believe that a woman does not have to put up with everything in order to preserve her marriage, and this indicates an increase in young girls' awareness that suffering in a partner relationship is unhealthy and indicates that the relationship is dysfunctional.

A total of 75% of the girls surveyed do not think that a man should be the main decision-maker in the family, which is in line with the previously listed result. However,

the data show that only girls from Obrenovac, Kikinda, Jagodina, and Vranje take this position, while in Novi Pazar girls more often agree with the statement that a man should be the decision-maker in the family, and this confirms previously mentioned results for this city about opinions on distribution of gender roles. Data comparison of the economic status of family, the level of education and occupation of parents to the mentioned statement, does not indicate other significant findings, i.e. the listed dimensions did not prove to be variables relevant for the examined attitudes.

In terms of violence against women, most girls (70% in total) believe that control and jealousy in partner relationships are not expressions of love. Almost the same number of girls, or two-thirds of respondents, agree that a girl who wears tight shirts and short skirts should not be blamed if she were raped. Girls believe that violence should not be tolerated, and this can be considered a positive result of many years of work with young people, especially by women's NGOs, on raising awareness of the unacceptability of violence against girls and women.

When it comes to poverty as one of the causes of violence against women in Serbia, the opinions of respondents were divided and distributed similarly to two main answers. Only about 30% of girls see poverty as one of the main causes of violence against women, while a slightly higher percentage of girls (39%) take the opposite view and do not see poverty as the cause of violence against women. These findings are significant for further work on educating young girls about the causes of violence against women, as they point to the fact that girls recognize poverty as one of the causes of violence, but they are not entirely sure which social causative factors may be determining when it comes to violent behavior.

The highest level of agreement was reached with the statement that equality between women and men should be one of the highest goals in our society (92% of girls agree with this statement). Girls identify the inequality of women and men as one of the major difficulties they face in their daily lives, which will be discussed more in the following segments of this report. When it comes to education, a large proportion of girls, more precisely 94% of them, state that they disagree with the statement that university education is more important for young men than for young women. Such results indicate that girls are aware of the importance of education and that setting only one category as a priority, for example, young men, would constitute gender-based discrimination.

Still, the distribution of attitudes on participation in politics is interesting. Only one in three respondents accept the statement that there would be fewer problems in the world if there were more women in politics, while two thirds (67% of girls in total) believe that men are not better political leaders than women, more precisely, one in twelve girls believes that men are better political leaders. This is a very specific attitude toward politics. Girls mostly think that men are not better political leaders than

women, but they do not have a clear stance on women's contribution to politics, that is, 56% of responses indicate that they do not know what impact would increased participation of women have on directing contemporary political tendencies (see the percentage of answers "I don't know" in Graph 1). Yet, this manner of thinking of girls about the position of women and men in politics is not surprising, given that most of the girls surveyed pointed out that they almost never or rarely talk about socio-political topics (see the answers of girls in the segment *Girls' Interests and Information* of this report). Such data suggest that it is necessary to work on educating girls about the need and importance of their active participation in all areas of public life, if we want not only informed but also empowered female citizens, actors of future changes in our society.

It is also noticeable that girls do not take clear positions on certain claims, i.e., there is a number of claims where a significant share of girls has a reserved position. Besides claims concerning the participation of women and men in socio-political processes, girls are also unsure when it comes to the claim that a woman is realized only when she becomes a mother, i.e., almost every third girl does not know what position to take on this issue, and it is similar in case of determining poverty as one of the main causes of violence against women.

## Good Sides of “Being a Girl”

The next segment of the questionnaire included several open-ended questions designed to reveal girls’ opinions about the good aspects of being girls, as well as the difficulties girls face in their local communities on a daily basis.

The majority of girls answered that being a girl has its good aspects, while far less (12 in total) stated that there were no good aspects of being a girl. Even fewer girls (10 in total) find that there are no gender differences in terms of positive aspects, i.e. that both sexes have their advantages.

Based on the analysis of the specific characteristics of responses of the girls who believe that there are good sides to being girls, and the frequency of these responses, the following results were obtained:

The most common were responses related to **physiological and physical characteristics of girls** (70 responses). In this category, the majority of girls (28 answers in total) highlight the ability to “become a mother” as a good side. Some of these comments were as follows:

“We can become mothers; we are more beautiful and have a calmer character.”

“I have a possibility, i.e. a capability to be a mother, to be to my children what my mother is to me. I simply love being a girl and I would not change that, even if I could.”

The second most frequent response in this group of answers was related to the physical appearance of girls. To be precise, 26 respondents said that they considered physical appearance to be one of the good sides of being a girl, while 17 girls highlighted makeup and clothing as a particular advantage. The above-mentioned data point to the presence of aspirations for achieving certain standards of beauty among girls and the presence of the ideals of a beautiful woman that are imposed on girls almost on a daily basis by the media, but also in everyday life through commenting on their physical appearance.

Some of the girls surveyed write about the physical appearance as a good aspect of being a girl in the following manner:

“Good aspects are that girls can put on makeup and beautify themselves.”

“I like being a girl because I can wear makeup and adorn myself.”

One group of respondents (16 in total) share the opinion that being spared of various forms of manual labor or activities due to their physiological and physical qualities is one of the good aspects of girls’ lives.

In the category of **cognitive intelligence and physical fitness**, approximately 40 girls highlighted highly developed cognitive functions as good aspects and advantages of girls in comparison to boys. Most often, girls responded that they felt they were better at solving problems, that they were more responsible, resourceful, and skilful than boys, that they were better students and traffic participants, that they thought

better and draw conclusions better than boys, and that they were more successful in work and more creative. A typical response in this group is the following:

“I believe that we are more mature than men, that we think smarter and somehow have better goals in life.”

When it comes to **emotional intelligence**, in 20 responses, girls stated that their emotional abilities are what distinguishes them from men and what constitutes their good side. Speaking of their traits, they mostly used descriptive adjectives such as: gentle, sensitive, delicate, patient, empathic, sincere, stable, attentive, committed, caring, calm, not jealous, more mature / or getting mature faster.

Some of the typical answers in this category are:

“I believe that girls are more creative, more sensitive, and can consider problems better. They are also mainly interested in personal progress, sincere, strong, and more associative.”

“The good side is that, for the most part, we are more sensitive, full of understanding, more expressive of feelings than men.”

Within a broader context of **social interactions**, 23 girls provided answers based on which it can be concluded that the good aspects of girls are most often observed in relationships with other people. Respondents indicated that they felt some of the good aspects of being a girl included that they enjoyed protection from other people, understanding, kindness, and respect. In addition, girls said that they believed their personalities, as girls, were more valued in society, that they would sooner receive help when needed, and that their position as girls often justified them in various situations.

A typical answer in this category is the following:

“I am more protected in society and in the family. People are attentive to me. I don't have to do heavy manual labor, which is men's duty.”

Among the girls who expressed the view that being a girl had no good aspects, the following considerations stand out:

“I think it is much better to be male, because they are less judged. If girls do anything wrong, they will be greatly humiliated and criticized.”

“There are no good sides; I would prefer to be a man.”

“Being a girl does not make me different from boys, and I believe that there should be equality between guys and girls.”

The typical responses of girls show that they are actually aware of the difficulties they face on a daily basis and that this awareness also determines their attitude toward their own gender identity. Respondents highlight that it is necessary to work on advancing gender equality in our society, recognizing that it is easier for men in their environment, i.e. that compared to girls, they are less frequently criticized and humiliated.

# Difficulties That Girls Face

One of the key questions of this research is the question of difficulties that girls face in their local communities. In answering this question, girls had a possibility to list all the difficulties which they believe represent obstacles in their daily lives, but also to explain why they consider them to be the major difficulties of theirs. Based on the collected and analyzed data, the following groups of difficulties were established:

## **Difficulties resulting from social norms** – 58 responses

Most of the responses are in this group of difficulties. The girls most often pointed out the following experiences:

- 1) Judgment of the environment – Most often they are being judged based on physical appearance (clothing, makeup), interests that are considered atypical for girls, poor financial status, or religious beliefs. Girls pointed out that judgments are also based on their decision not to have children, then choice of emotional partner or the fact they had more than one partner in their lifetime, and not meeting traditional expectations of family or environment, or going to socially unacceptable places (for an example, where smoking or drinking alcohol is allowed).
- 2) Ridicule and humiliation - based on material status, origin (for example, if a girl is from a village);
- 3) Labeling, telling untruths and creating prejudice against girls (based on all the above-mentioned factors);
- 4) Direct requests to fit into moulds - involving direct demands to conform to the standards of environment in which they live, and to suppress their uniqueness and aspiration to emphasize their differences.

Some of the typical responses in this group are:

“Judgment is the biggest difficulty for girls and no one can handle it.”

“Too much judgment about the way you dress, speak, behave. If a girl changes more than one boyfriend, they call her nasty names.”

“The girls here are judged mainly because of the faith. A lot is forbidden, and this is why we are not entitled to many things. For example, if a girl had more than two boyfriends, she is no longer a good girl, while nobody cares if men do the same in our environment.”

## **Difficulties related to freedom of expression and decision-making** - 25 responses

One of the most common difficulties is not being able to express opinions and to participate in decision making. Many girls said in their responses that they had limited freedom of thought and independent decision-making in their environment, and thus had less access to resources than other people (young men and generally young peo-

ple from bigger cities). The girls point out that they often experience being told that they are incapable of deciding something on their own, which greatly affects their self-confidence. Girls also state that when they express their opinions they are often not taken seriously, i.e. they are discriminated against or underestimated because of their attitudes.

“It is most difficult for them (girls, author’s note) to express their wishes, opinions (if different), to defend themselves against any form of violence (physical, sexual abuse, defamation), to rise against traditional norms of their environment and against patriarchal rules that are considered as unrivalled.”

### **Difficulties related to security** - 19 responses

(In)security is also one of the most prominent difficulties according to the opinion of respondents - in the context of physical (in)security. A great number of respondents indicated that they did not feel safe in the environments in which they lived and that they felt afraid to move unaccompanied, especially in the evening. Most often they are afraid of sexual violence, and they find causes for this fear in the attacks on girls committed by migrants<sup>98</sup> and other men, but also in encounters with drug addicts, alcoholics, and the homeless.

Based on the phrasing of the girls’ answers, a reliable conclusion cannot be drawn whether they talk about these forms of difficulties based on personal experience and real threats they experienced, or perhaps based on the experiences of other girls in their environment, which they heard about, or based on attitudes adopted from others, that are based on stereotypes common in their local communities. However, it is important to note that most often the fear of migrants and the attacks of migrants were mentioned by girls from Belgrade, Obrenovac municipality, where the accommodation for adult migrant men who stay there without their families is located.

Typical responses in this group are the following statements:

“There is less and less security, girls are more and more often subjected to violence, and not just in the place where I live.”

“Migrants are the biggest problem in our town right now, because no girl feels safe during the day, and especially not at night.”

### **Difficulties related to inequality** - 18 responses

The girls speak about inequality of men and women in the context of a gender segregation of jobs, pointing out that they especially feel pressured by the environment’s norms about the primary role of a woman whose task is to care and sacrifice for the family.

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<sup>98</sup> Respondents used the term “migrants”, so the report also uses this term, and not the term “refugees”.

“The hardest part is that it is not always total gender equality. Mothers make more sacrifices than fathers. People still think that men just need to earn money and have no household responsibilities and that women should stay at home.”

“I think that in Serbia in general, not only in the place where I live, the problem remains that feminism still isn't so present, equality is still not fully implemented, and women are still supposed to stay at home and cook and men to work and make money. Women are blamed for 90% of problems in marriages, at work, in everyday situations.”

One part of the girls surveyed recognizes that the norm of a sacrificial role of a woman-mother stems from widespread patriarchal values in the communities in which they live. The girls underline that such values are directly related to gender-based violence because “women are blamed for 90% of problems in marriages.” In this group of responses, it is also possible to distinguish the voices of girls who clearly emphasize feminism as a strategy that stands against patriarchal values, thinking that it could be a strategy for solving problems in the entire society, not just a strategy that would allow them to personally step out of clearly limited gender roles.

### **Violence related difficulties** - 13 responses

When girls speak about violence, they most often refer to the perceptions prevailing in their environments that women are always guilty if violence occurs, and the fact that such violence is most often justified by the community. However, one group of girls finds particular causes of violence in popular culture products, such as *reality* shows that promote violence, but also in other violent content on social networks. It is also noticeable that girls tend to correlate the concept of violence with the concept of security, which is why it is difficult to make a clear distinction in the analysis to difficulties that relate exclusively to violence and those related to security. Certainly, the frequency of both difficulties and their causes testifies of the degree of relevance they have for girls and the necessity of actions that would lead to their prompt elimination.

Typical responses in this group are:

“Violence, because sometimes we cannot, we are not able to, defend ourselves. My town is quiet, but very often there is violence, mostly at night and on weekends.”

“The most difficult thing for girls is bullying by men (verbal, physical and sexual violence), as well as prejudice against girls based on their physical appearance.”

“One of the major difficulties today is the violence that has increased significantly due to the use of social networks. People should be better informed, children should learn from early age and be alerted.”

### Difficulties related to unemployment - 12 responses

Many of the respondents said that they considered unemployment to be one of the great difficulties they face in their communities. Most girls do not see the prospect of pursuing their profession in their place of residence after graduation, most often because of a lack of adequate jobs, but there are those who consider that their gender plays a crucial role in young women's unemployment.

Typical responses in this group are:

“Unemployment, because physical laborers are most wanted, and then educated girls have to go to other towns or countries to find a job.”

“Employers must not pay attention to gender, but to qualifications.”

### Difficulties related to access to education - 4 responses

One of the difficulties that girls also face in their daily lives is access to education. As reasons why they find it difficult to exercise their right to education, girls often pointed a poor financial situation, especially when it comes to continuing their education, i.e. gaining university education. Girls see causes for this type of difficulty in the fact that schools are often far away from their place of residence, but also in living in a patriarchal environment where it is believed that girls should not get educated but marry and have children. These experiences correspond with the opinion of 94% of girls who believe that university education is equally important for boys and girls, but that the most common barrier to education is in the deep-rooted gender stereotypes that often come from the family:

“I think that education is the hardest part, because this is a village. It is difficult to get a job and live a bit more freely.”

“Since our environment is patriarchal and, let's say, we live under the auspices of these old laws (moral principles), many families forbid girls to go to school; girls are born and raised only to get married, to become mothers, and this is their primary function in life.”

“My friend's father does not allow her to attend college. We need to talk to such families or draw public attention to these families.”

Through the experiences they cited when answering this question, the girls emphasized a clear perception of the link between gender-based violence and discrimination with the representation of patriarchal values in the environments examined. The research managed to capture a specific moment in the growing up of girls, i.e. they were caught in a sort of gap between the pressures they feel in their local communities and the still present resistance that can be noticed in their slightly different opinions, when compared to the environment that imposes clearly limited gender roles and identities on a daily basis.

## Measures for Elimination of Difficulties Identified in Local Community

In this part of the questionnaire, girls were asked to single out one difficulty they have already mentioned, which they believe represents a major obstacle in their daily lives, and to suggest activities that would eliminate it.

When it comes to difficulties resulting from social norms and inequalities, girls think it is necessary to work more from the earliest childhood on socialization of children (both boys and girls) so that they accept and develop attitudes based on equality of women and men, and build better family relations in the future. Girls also believe that early education on gender equality may play an important role in forming positive attitudes towards equality of women and men, and in preventing further difficulties related to it. They also believe that better position of women and girls in society could be significantly contributed to by gender sensitive programs, namely, introducing gender equality subjects into curriculums and programs, as well as by practical educational workshops, both those intended solely for girls and those for general population. Girls also suggest actions that would raise visibility of gender equality issues in their local communities, especially among young men (for instance, workshops on being in someone else's shoes), as well as informative discussions and lectures. Yet, regardless of all the suggestions, many of the girls doubt that the situation could be significantly changed, exactly because of the deep-rooted discrimination they have been seeing in their communities, but also because of the inadequate capacities of local stakeholders to work on the desired changes.

Some of the typical suggestions of girls in relation to these issues were:

“In order to decrease such behavior, both boys and girls should be taught from the earliest days that all of us have been born equal, and that the pressure of patriarchy in our society should subside.”

“We should not be taught in primary school what jobs are male and what female.”

“Girls aren't to blame for everything, they don't have to put up with ridicule and critiques. Talks as this one should be organized in schools for men too.”

Girls underline that boys and young men should also be included in all the suggested activities, since they believe that gender equality can only be reached by including everyone in our society and working jointly on changes.

In terms of difficulties related to security and violence, some of the measures respondents pointed out were increased police surveillance and security measures in local communities, particularly in the evening hours; also actions aiming to raise awareness of violence and measures to combat violence among youth; educational workshops on violence in partner relations; stricter penalties for perpetrators of vi-

olence; but also organizing self-defense courses for girls. But, one of the difficulties girls mentioned was also the fear of migrants and threats by them, and as a measure to eliminate it they suggested displacing the migrants.

“Violence could be prevented by raising awareness of the consequences among youth, and by adequate upbringing at home, which they lack nowadays. It would be good if they read something instead of watching reality shows crowded with violence and presenting bad role models.”

“Regarding physical abuse, there should be, first of all, educational workshops for men and girls (women), then awareness raising activities, and adopting harsher penalties for such acts.”

“As many educational workshops as possible on the right (of girls) to make their choices, the need to love themselves and not put up with any kind of violence.”

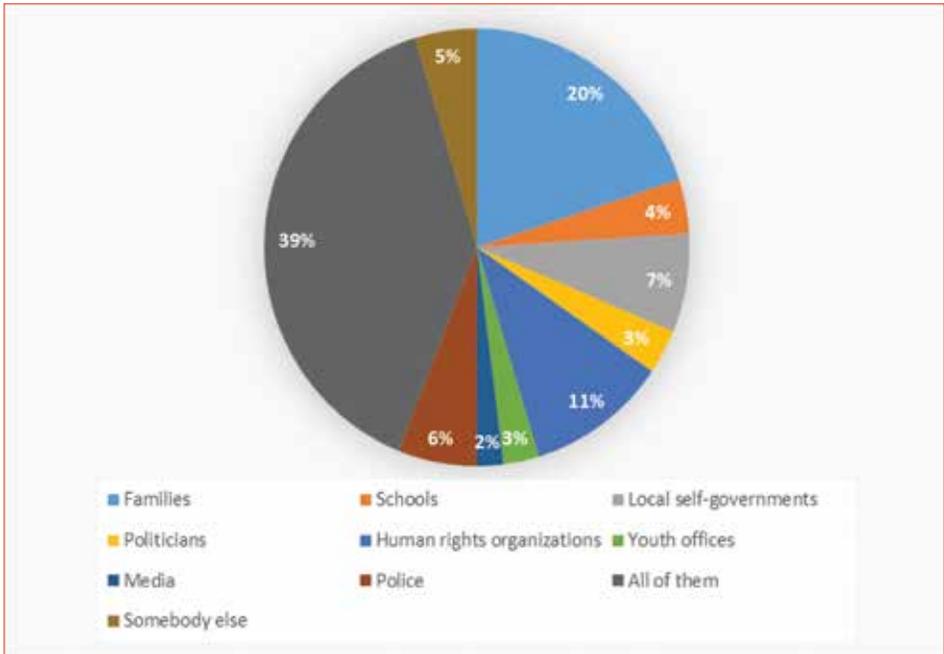
“The main difficulty is violence against women. Women should master some of the martial arts in order to defend themselves, since they are on their own in such situations and it is one of the ways to keep safe.”

Regarding difficulties related to access to education and unemployment rate, girls think it is necessary to implement measures that would provide better quality education for all, as well as measures of early promotion of high education in smaller communities. When it comes to unemployment, respondents stated more jobs need to be created for youth in local communities in order to stop their migrations.

“High education should be popularized in rural areas in primary schools already, but also later on, in order to provide some sort of support and guidance to girls.”

“There should be more jobs for young, well educated girls.”

Answer to the question whose job should it be to resolve the listed difficulties, i.e. whom do they find responsible for solving difficulties they underlined, was given by 150 girls, and 39% of them thought that the problem should be solved systemically so that all the mentioned actors take equal part in the solution, i.e. the whole community. Such attitude correlates with the vision of society as a sustainable community where everyone takes care of the wellbeing of each individual citizen, and it is prevailing among girls from all cities. Also, one in five girls emphasized family as a factor that should carry out changes, while one in ten girls believed that human rights organizations were responsible for solving these problems. These organizations were trusted most by girls from Kikinda, and least by ones from Jagodina, who predominantly trust families to eliminate difficulties. Among other actors in charge, girls mentioned local self-governments (7%) and police (6%), while only 3% said local youth offices should deal with it. Such low level of trust in local youth offices corresponds with findings of the already mentioned 2018 research of the National Youth Council of Serbia. But, it is no surprise if we bear in mind that most of the girls in the survey stated they were not familiar with the organization and activities offered by local youth associations,



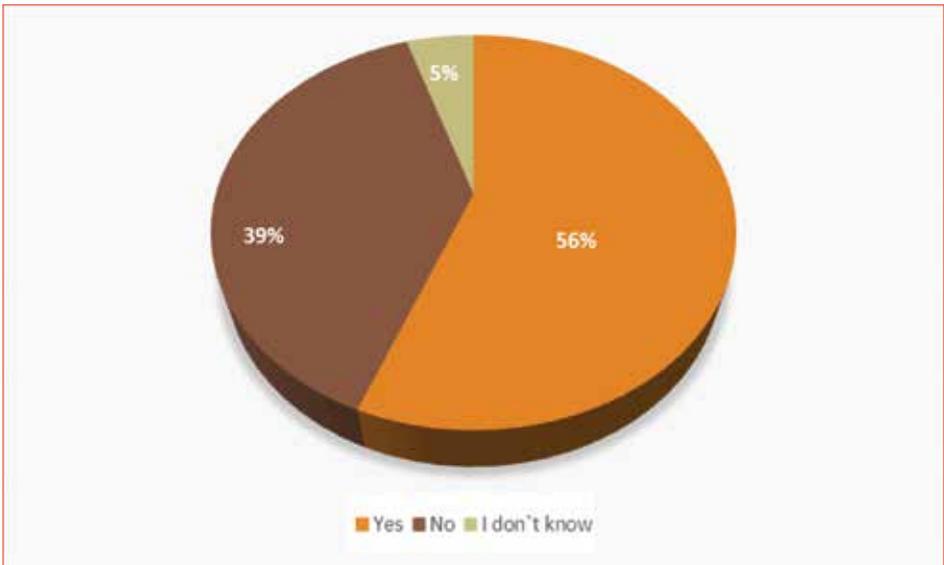
**Chart 2: Who should resolve difficulties in local community?**

and that they were lacking information on the scope of their work (see the section *Girls' Interests and Information* of this report).

## Girls` Experiences

Apart from mapping specific difficulties girls face in their environments, one of the research goals was also to see whether girls have experienced being told they weren't good enough in something, or that they shouldn't be doing something just because they were girls.

Total of 170 girls answered this question, and 56% of them stated they have never been told such things. Out of girls who did have such experiences, only 9% said they paid no attention to such comments.



**Chart 3: Have you ever experienced being told you weren't good enough in something or shouldn't be doing something just because you are a girl?**

Girls were not limited by the number of examples they could give, so based on the frequency of some specific answers we categorized them into the following groups of comments:

**Comments regarding sports** (21 responses)– Most of the respondents listed negative comments regarding their ability to play certain sports such as football, handball, water polo or basketball, that are traditionally considered rough and “masculine”. Girls said the comments they got regarding sports were mostly discouraging and accompanied by arguments that these sports “were not for girls” or that girls were not good enough for them. Typical responses were:

“They told me I should not play or train football, since I was a girl and football was a boys’ sport.”

“Yes, I was told I could not play water polo and chess, and I could not be a project coordinator because I was a girl.”

**Comments related to education, choice of profession and hobbies** (21 responses) –

Girls said they were discouraged about gaining higher education, choosing specific fields of education at secondary schools or faculties, choosing future profession and hobbies, but also gaining certain skills. Arguments given to support such comments do not differ much from the ones they heard when it comes to playing sports. Respondents said they were mostly told that a certain school, faculty, department or profession, musical instrument or hobby weren’t for them, that they weren’t good, capable, or smart enough, that they did not belong in certain industries, and that when choosing profession they need to bear in mind that they were to become mothers and wives one day, and need to make a balance between family and professional life.

These are the comments they have heard about education, choice of profession, and interests:

“Yes, when choosing secondary school. I considered becoming a journalist, flight attendant, pilot, politician or a scientist, but kept hearing – You are a girl, these jobs require frequent absences from home, how do you think you’ll manage that once you have a husband and children?”

“Mostly I did. I was told I wasn’t good enough for the job I wanted. Parents criticized me the most, since they wished me the best.”

“Yes. For instance, when I got enrolled to the military gymnasium, people around me used to tell me it wasn’t for me, because I was a girl and would not be physically able to endure it.”

“Yes, let’s take the example of my school orientation. A lot of other pupils and also many friends asked me questions like ‘You are not really going to do that, right?’ and I told them I would and I could. Everyone thinks I got enrolled in a ‘masculine’ department.”

“I have lived to be told that a girl should not study, because women should not be working, but just men.”

“I have always wanted to learn chess, but people commented that it wasn’t for girls. I also wanted to learn how to change a car tire or test the car engine, but comments were the same, so I gave up showing such interests.”

“Yes, I am into rock music and I play a guitar, and some people think that’s not appropriate for girls.”

**Comments on behavior and appearance of girls** (19 responses) – All the comments intended to mold girls` behavior toward conventional social norms were included in this group of comments. Girls said that they get told on a regular basis to take care of their physical appearance and clothes (to be tidy, not to “stick out” too much with their clothing, not to wear sweat suits but girly clothes), not to curse or use dirty words, not to consume alcohol, to abstain from sexual relations with men before marriage, and to take care of how they behave so that they do not give rise to gossip. Here are a few typical examples girls listed related to expectations and opinions of their surrounding:

“I must not get drunk, it is ugly when a woman drinks; I must not ride motorbikes, it’s not for girls; I must not be untidy, girls always have to be tidy; I must not stay out late.”

“Some people think a girl must pay attention to her behavior at every single moment, so that people do not comment on her.”

**Comments on physical capabilities** (18 responses) – Girls said people often commented on their physical abilities to do something. One of the respondents said:

“I was told several times I could not do something because I was a girl, and then I would do it better than all of them (who had commented).”

Physical strength is usually attributed to men and boys, while girls are characterized as sensitive, able to express emotions, above all emotions of support and care for their families.

**Comments on driving skills** (12 responses) – A part of responses was about comments on the ability of girls to drive. Some of the girls said they have often been told they should not drive (car, motorbike, tractor) because it wasn’t for girls, or because they were totally incapable of driving or simply bad drivers.

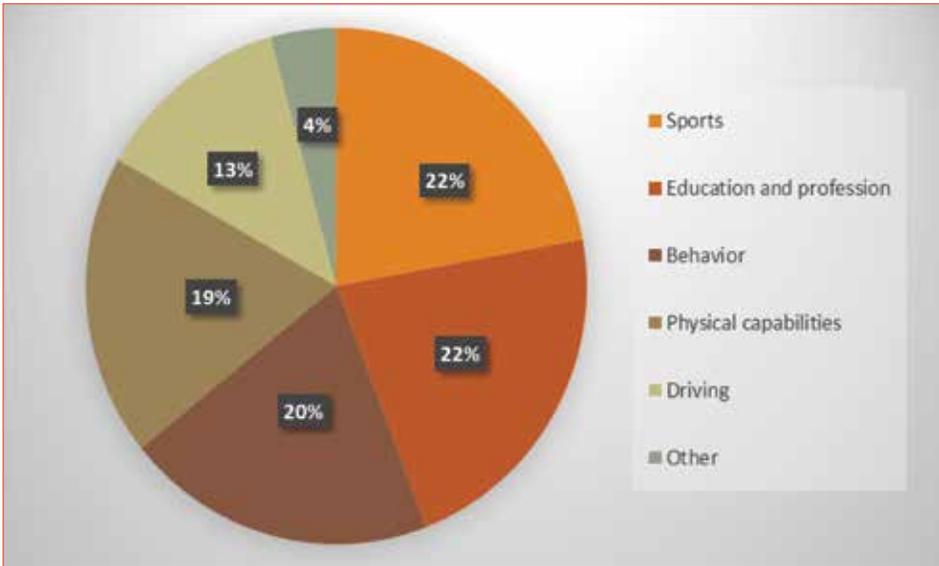
“Yes, mostly when it comes to driving a car – they say women are not good at driving.”

“Yes, I’ve faced something like that. Someone said women did not drive good and safe enough.”

We will give a few more illustrations of what girls were told they weren’t good at or should not do just because being girls:

“Yes, it has happened to me many times. When making any choice, my opinion would be depreciated. Often, I heard people say – she’s a woman, she can’t do it, she’s going to fail, she is not good enough. I did not take it personally, because I believe I can do things as well as others.”

“Yes, it happened to me, as a girl, not to be allowed to have my own, `normal`, opinion on something, and that’s what wasn’t `normal`. Or to be denied access to a good



**Chart 4: Most frequent comments by categories**

job, to success and career, wealth, just because of my gender, to be pushed toward being a housewife.”

Such attitudes and comments support stereotypical image of girls as “more sensitive”. Therefore, they should not research and explore the world of unknown, out of their tucked in environment where somebody else would take care of their desires and needs, within the limitations of the patriarchal rules. Discouraging girls in following their interests or expressing their individuality is often done under the motto of good intentions and benevolent advices to girls, frequently sent through subliminal messages (e.g. media messages), but most frequently it is done through direct prohibitions or imposing norms that could be easily linguistically detected, as one could see from responses of girls in this research. Norms are mostly expressed using verbs can, must, should, want... through imperatives phrased both positively and negatively. In the examples girls provided, one can notice expressions suggesting that a girl “must not”, “can’t” or “has to” do something. Permanent pressure to adjust to deep-rooted social norms and judgmental comments if they fail to adjust, particularly within familiar environment such as family, school and/or peers, can lead to young girls having really bad self-perception and perception of their abilities, and generally to low self-esteem and giving up their interests. Besides, giving up some interest contributes to growing gender segregation between young men and women to specific vocational groups, which is being supported by the fact that in higher edu-

cation women prevail in fields of social sciences and humanities, art and health<sup>99</sup> and in the labor market they are dominant among service providers<sup>100</sup> and assisting professionals. Gender segregation by professions inevitably implicate economic inequality, pay gap and unequal access to benefits, which eventually lead to exposing girls and women to higher risk of poverty. Of course, this is not a complete list of negative consequences of perpetuating gender stereotypes in a society, but it is important to emphasize how cyclic they tend to be.

It is also important to underline that most of the girls did not mention whom these comments came from. Still, girls who did mention sources of comments mostly listed family members, peers, acquaintances, and school teachers. This information is relevant, since 20% of girls believe that family can offer solution for difficulties, while around 4% of girls identify school as the main factor. Hence, girls state that the source of difficulties is at the same time a crucial factor of their elimination, so one could ask whether it's possible to appropriately address and eliminate difficulties from their very source, i.e. family and school. Even though girls recognize family and school environment as sources of some of the difficulties they deal with, they do not explicitly suggest what kind of actions and education targeting parents and teachers could be realized regarding gender inequality and gender-based violence. Therefore, we could ask ourselves how efficient these measures for elimination of difficulties they do suggest are, i.e. how efficient is the process of education on gender inequality and gender-based violence if it is not complete and comprehensive and if the segment of educating parents and teachers is missing.

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<sup>99</sup> Babović, M. Gender Equality Index for Serbia: Measuring gender equality in 2016, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2018, p. 37

<sup>100</sup> *Women and Men in the Republic of Serbia*, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2017, p. 67.

## Girls and Activism

When asked whether they used to be or currently are members of a group consisting solely of girls, only 5 percent, i.e. 9 girls, said Yes. Types of groups they belong/ed to were/are sport associations (4 responses), cultural-artistic associations (2 responses), Youth Office (1 response), SOS Corner for Girls (1 response), and informal school association (1 response). Activities these girls mostly did/do within these organized groups include/d traveling, competitions (sports, dancing, singing), organizing different workshops, joint school activities, informal gatherings, or humanitarian actions. What they especially underlined was that membership in these groups was a positive experience for them. For instance:

“Attending ballet classes was a very nice experience that marked my childhood. We travelled all the time; I gained many friends and enjoyed it.”

“I am a member of the Youth Office and 90% of members are girls, so I can say that all experiences with the Office have always been positive.”

“I am an educator in an SOS Corner for Girls, and it is a very positive experience for me, we organize workshops, tea parties, actions, solely for girls. We discuss all the women’s topics, with a special focus on violence. Girls talk more freely when boys are not around.”

From their experiences, we can draw the conclusion that their activism through membership in exclusively girls` groups has strongly influenced their educational, social and feminist development and empowerment. But, 95% of girls had no such experience. Only 16% of girls in this research said they have heard of an organization or association founded and led by women and/or girls, and organizations they were familiar with are the following: Corner for Girls, Association of Women, Women’s Corner, Atina, SOS Hotline, *Aktiv žena*. Still, 84% of respondents said they have never heard of such an organization.

## Girls` Interests and Information

In the concluding part of the questionnaire, girls answered questions regarding their interests and information they had about social and political issues. First, they were asked to choose interests from the list they found most important, and to assign the relevance index to these interests, i.e. to mark them with numbers 1, 2, or 3, depending on how relevant they consider each of the interests (1 meaning the most important interest in their referent system, 2 meaning second most important, and 3 third by its importance). It was also the most demanding question, since most of the questionnaires discarded in the preparation phase were dismissed exactly due to invalid responses to this question. Some respondents marked all of interests they have chosen with all three numbers, and it was therefore impossible to rank them by importance. We took into consideration only the questionnaires filled in according to the instructions, i.e. the ones that clearly indicated the level of significance ranging from third to first in the list of important interests.

Based on the data analysis of girls` interests, first 3 interests at their lists are: interest in their future profession, interest in entertainment, and intellectual interests. This result was as expected for the age and developmental features of the target group. Ranked as most important was their interest in their future profession. It is expected since the research included girls of third and fourth grade of secondary schools, who already think about further steps in choosing their future profession (getting enrolled in a faculty, finding employment, etc.). But, when we compare results from different cities, it is noticeable that the interest in desired future profession is the highest among girls from Vranje. Total of 29 girls from Vranje emphasized this interest as a primary one. Compared to this finding, we see that number of responses of girls from other cities emphasizing this interest as the most important is almost twice smaller. Thus, number of responses emphasizing this interest as the most important in Kikinda was 16, in Jagodina 15, in Obrenovac 12, and 8 in Novi Pazar.

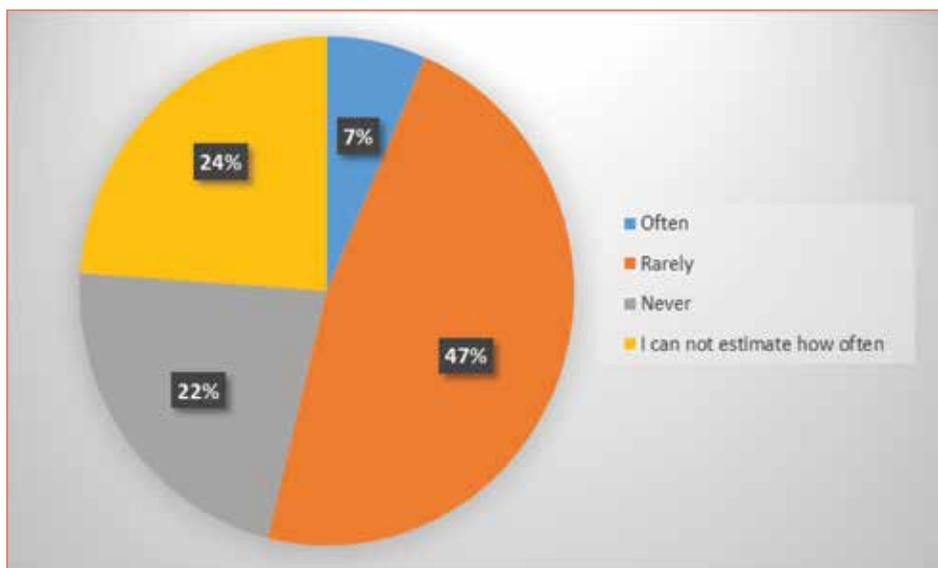
Interest in entertainment (leisure time, going out and meeting new people) was ranked as the second by importance, while the third place was reserved for intellectual interests, i.e. gaining new skills and knowledge, which is ranked as significantly less important by girls from Obrenovac than girls from other local communities in this research. Only one girl from Obrenovac considered it the most important interest of hers, while, for instance, 13 girls from Kikinda emphasized this interest as their top priority.

When it comes to interests ranked low at the list, we can single out two: interest in sports (second least important of all) and interest in current social and political situation in the country and the world (which is at the very end of the list). Here it is important to underline that only 10 girls from our sample included social and political

situation among three most important interests of theirs, while two of them said it was their most important interest, three that it was second important among their interests, and five that it was third in their list of important interests. If we compare this result with their answers to the question on how often they talked about social and political topics in school or with friends, we will find a significant correlation. Total of 65% of girls said that they almost never or rarely talked with their friends in their free time about social and political issues, while only 9% said they discussed these issues often or daily. Similar answers were given to the question on frequency of discussing social and political issues with teachers. Altogether 67% of girls from the sample stated they have never or rarely, within one or two school subjects, discussed these issues at classes with their teachers, while only 2% of girls said they often discussed these topics at school classes. A third of girls (31%) said that they have discussed these issues in school only from time to time. These answers do not differ among the cities girls come from, and it shows that girls in all communities included in the sample rarely or almost never discuss social and political issues, in school or private sphere.

Considering these results, we conclude that it is necessary to educate educators too, so that the education of youth could be supported in order to reach comprehensive and integrated systemic changes. Lack of conversations about social and political subjects among girls in secondary schools could mean lack of development of critical thinking, as well as supporting stereotypes stating that it is not a woman's job to think about, or deal with, politics, and that management and governing are not spheres accessible and/or intended for women.

Situation is rather similar when it comes to answers to the question how often girls learn in school about well-known women from Serbia who influenced development of various fields (such as science, culture, technology, business). Most of the girls in the sample (69%) said that they have rarely or almost never learned about famous women from Serbia, while only 7% of girls responded positively to the question, and most of them were from Jagodina (6 girls). The most famous women from Serbia they learned about or mentioned them at school classes were: Desanka Maksimović (22 responses), Nadežda Petrović (18 responses), Mileva Marić (13 responses), Milunka Savić (6 responses), Isidora Sekulić (4 responses), Katarina Ivanović (1 response). Six girls from our sample said they remembered learning about famous women from Serbia in school but could not recall who were the women mentioned. Only one girl said they talked about contemporary women and sportswomen (Ana Ivanović), while women from other fields, such as social sciences, humanities, or natural sciences, arts, politics, medicine, and other fields, were not mentioned at all.



**Chart 5: How often do you learn in school about famous women from Serbia?**

When it comes to girls' thoughts about their future professions, one of the questions in the survey was asking them whether there was a famous person whom they perceive as a professional role model. A total of 77% of girls answered this question (146 girls), and most of them said they knew what they wished to do in the future, i.e. that they have chosen some field of work or specific vocation. Out of all the girls who answered the question, 31% of them said they had role models. While 29 girls listed one or several women as their role models, 12 girls found their role models in different men.

Fields where many girls found their professional role models are fashion and modeling, art (music, acting), medicine, and sports. For most girls, role models are women who have influenced their raising, upbringing, and education (such as their mothers, nursery or school teachers, and professors). Beside this, girls underline that their role models are also all the women who do their jobs professionally, who are successful, brave, and reached high social and professional positions, as well as women doing humanitarian work.

When it comes to men, fields where girls see them as role models are art (music), sport, fashion (make up), psychology, natural sciences. Here, one can also see that girls mostly find their role models within their families (fathers, grandfathers), but some see historical figures as role models, too (Christopher Columbus).

Girls listed both persons from Serbia and from abroad as their role models.

Some of the names they mentioned in the field of fashion and modeling are Adriana Lima and Sofija Milošević, as well as fashion designer Donatella Versace. In the field of art, girls mostly find role models in singers such as Nina Simon and Demi Lovato, pianist Lola Astanova, musicians like Eric Clapton, Matt Corby, John Mayer and John Frusciante. In the sphere of acting, girls mostly consider Sandra Bullock and Eva Longoria their role models. In the field of sports, their role models are mostly tennis player Novak Đoković, long jumper Ivana Španović, handball players Kristina Neagu and Andrea Lekić, and volleyball player Stefana Veljković. They also mentioned Sigmund Freud, Stephen Hawking, Indira Gandhi and others.

When asked why they consider someone a role model, girls gave the following answers:

“They seem to be strong, autonomous and successful women.”

“Because these women prove that if you really want something and work on it, there are equal chances for all.”

“She is persistent, intelligent, well informed, calm, rational, and rather modest. These traits are what fascinates me and what I like about her.”

“She is hard working. At the same time, she is active and takes part in other organizations. She is dedicated to her work and satisfied with it. Her knowledge contributed to the development of her company, but also to her household.”

“Even though she was born in a traditional environment where women have subordinated position, she managed to stand for herself, get educated and become a prime-minister of India – and a very good prime-minister who introduced some changes.”

“They made great success by investing a lot of effort and work, as well as a lot of time. People will always listen to their songs, and I would like the same for me.”

Still, 58% of girls said they had no professional role models. Most often explanation they provided was that there were no experts in the field they wish to work in who could be their role models, or that they did not know about such persons. Some of the girls explained not having role models by the fact that their interests were so wide ranging that they could not single out just one or even few persons. Here is how they explained it:

“There is no specific person because I have too many interests in the fields of art, music, psychology and other spheres, so that anyone I get to learn about who turns out to have a good way of thinking could be my role model.”

“I could not pick one person, but I am fascinated by women who dare to publicly talk about position of women in Serbia.”

“I don’t know, I think that everyone should make the best of themselves.”

“I have no role model, but I would like to work as a programmer.”

To one of the previous questions concerning participation of girls in informal, exclusively female groups, i.e. groups led by girls or women, only 5% of girls in our sample answered that they were members of exclusively female groups, while 16% said they have heard of organizations founded or led by women and/or girls only. Their knowledge on the activities of Youth Offices in their local communities is better. Out of all the girls in our sample, 78% have heard of the Youth Office in their city, while only 10% said they took part in some of the activities organized by Youth Offices. They did not mention the way they got informed on the local Youth Offices.

Total of 13% of respondents have never heard of Youth Offices in their cities and know nothing about their work. The least informed on the existence and work of Youth Office were girls from Jagodina, while most of the girls who took part in some of the Youth Office activities were from Kikinda. This discrepancy clearly results from the fact that Kikinda sample was made of girls who had cooperated with the local Youth Office. Most of the girls from Obrenovac, Novi Pazar, and Vranje were informed on local Youth Offices, but mostly took no part in their activities.

Since the majority of girls have never participated in some of the local Youth Office activities or were not informed on the existence and work of these Offices, girls were given the opportunity to suggest possible improvements of the work of youth associations, so that they could meet their needs better. A total of 63% of girls gave their suggestions for advancement of the work of local youth associations, and here are some of them:

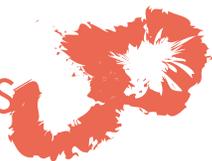
“I am not sure what the association offers, but what I would do is a promotion of the association via Internet (social networks) and inclusion of pupils of all schools. Association will not do much if there is neither much interest in its work, nor information on it.”

“I think they should engage more, since not enough people know about their activities, and I am sure they would be interested.”

“As much as possible in form of surveys, questionnaires, presentations and other measures for improving self-confidence of girls!”

“They should be a bit more active and try harder to learn about our needs.”

# Conclusions



Since the sample of this research was not representative for the population of 18-year-old girls in Serbia, which is its main limitation, major findings of the research cannot be generalized for the whole population but can only be used as indicators. Therefore, it is possible to apply the findings only at the level of five local communities covered by this sample, and we will underline the results relevant for the everyday life of girls in Novi Pazar, Jagodina, Vranje, Kikinda, and Obrenovac. Also, since the research collected data on attitudes based on the same or similar norms dominant in our society which were examined in some of the previous researches, it is possible to make some comparisons. To be specific, results of this research, first of all, confirm perseverance of familialist normative (Tomanović, 2017)<sup>101</sup> which states that the main role of women in our society is to be dedicated mothers and sacrifice for their children. Up to 81% of girls in our research agree with the statement that a mother should sacrifice everything for her children, while 42% of girls consider a woman fully realized only after becoming a mother. Girls from Novi Pazar agree more frequently than others with the statement that the primary role of mother is that of a housewife, and of a father to be a breadwinner, which is based on the idea of complementary roles of mother and father, built upon the old distinction between private and public, i.e. keeping women within the sphere of household, while men are work oriented, which has been very strongly rooted in this local community.

Results of a previously conducted research confirm that it is a case of certain contextual influences on the opinions of girls. In that research, which studied attitudes of young men in Novi Pazar (Jakovljević and Arsenov, 2012),<sup>102</sup> young men pointed out that they saw mothers as family pillars, i.e. persons who primarily care of raising children. If we would compare these findings with a broader social situation in our country, we could see that, within the public discourse, there is a prevalence of a parenthood normative where mothers play a primary role, while fathers only assists them, i.e. play a secondary parent role (Tomanović, 2017). Mothers bear most of the responsibility for raising children, while fathers are breadwinners, regardless of whether mothers are employed or not (Ibid.). It becomes clear that this is the result of normative pressures onto attitudes of girls from their statements that major pressures they face in their daily lives are exactly the comments judging how well

<sup>101</sup> Tomanović, S. „Roditeljstvo između familizma i individualizacije: Primer Srbije“ (“Parenthood Between Familialism and Individualization” in S. Ignjatović and Bošković, Individualizam (Individualism), Institute for Social Sciences, Belgrade, pp. 162-182.

<sup>102</sup> Jakovljević, I. i Arsenov, B. *Istraživanje koncepta rodno-zasnovanog nasilja, kao i stavova prema rodno-zasnovanom nasilju kod srednjoškolaca u Srbiji (Research of the Concept of Gender Based Violence and Attitudes on Gender Based Violence among Secondary School Pupils in Serbia)*, Centar E8, Belgrade, 2012, p. 12.

they fit in prescribed gender roles of wives and mothers. Such pressures, according to them, mostly result from the religious beliefs of members of their community or their families, which see moral as a very important element in female gender identity, that pervades all the standards of different roles of women within family.

Girls from our sample perceive that exactly these patriarchal attitudes lead to high rates of gender-based violence in their local communities. They point out that these traditional expectations by their families or local community, in case they do not obey imposed demands, make them mocked or humiliated and labeled, i.e. defamed, as well as expose them to even stronger demands to give in to the standards of their environment and suppress their individuality. It is supported by the statement of 76% of girls in our research who, in some moment of their lives, found themselves in a situation that someone considered them not good enough or unfit for something just because they were girls.

On the other hand, a total of 75% of girls in the survey do not agree that a man should have the leading role in a family. But, only girls from Obrenovac, Kikinda, Jagodina, and Vranje mostly think so, while in Novi Pazar higher percentage of girls believe that a man should have the main role in a family, which makes this local community specific in comparison to others by stronger patriarchal values regarding relations of power between women and men within private sphere.

Girls came closest to consensus when it comes to the statement that a woman should suffer whatever it takes in order to preserve her marriage. As many as 95% think that a woman should not suffer to preserve her marriage, which indicates raised awareness of young girls about unhealthy partnerships based on suffering, as well as that numerous educations, before all realized by women's feminist organizations, on violence in partner relations gave significant results regarding the change in attitudes and tolerance to violence. Most of the girls (a total of 70%) believe that control and jealousy in partner relations are not expressions of love. Almost the same percentage of girls, i.e. 2/3 of respondents disagree that a girl wearing tight shirts and short skirts is to be blamed if she were raped. If we compare these findings with those from the research conducted in 2013 using much larger sample, but with a similar formulation of blaming the victim (Ćeriman et al, 2015), we can see a progress toward rejection of violence, i.e. clear understanding that a perpetrator is the one to blame for violence, instead of a victim. In that 2013 research, only 49% of girls respondents disagreed with the attitude that "a girl wearing too short skirts and tight shirts is to be blamed if someone attacks her", while in our research 69% of girls disagreed with the attitude that "a girl wearing tight shirts and short skirts is to be blamed if someone raped her". Regardless of this positive change, it is still necessary to keep working on the education of young girls on this issue, bearing in mind that 31% of girls in the survey

remained irresolute regarding the quoted statement or even agreed with it (10% of girls in the survey).

When it comes to proclaimed values, girls in higher percentage agree with the statement that equality of women and men should be one of the ultimate goals of our society (92% of girls agree). Also, 94% of girls disagree with the statement that university level education is more important for young men than for young women. This finding indicates that girls are getting more and more open to the subject of gender equality, and it can be used for further work on adoption of the principle of gender equality and its implementation in everyday life.

Regarding difficulties resulting from social norms and inequality, girls deem it necessary to work more from the early childhood on raising children in accordance with contemporary norms concerning women and men and toward developing better family relations. Girls also think that early education may play an important role in formation of attitudes oriented toward gender equality. They also believe that advancement of the position of women and girls in society could be largely influenced by gender sensitive school curriculum, practical workshops, actions intended to raise awareness of gender equality among all citizens, particularly among young men (for instance, workshops showing how is it to be in someone else's shoes). But many believe that the situation cannot be changed a lot, since girls themselves see exactly those institutions that should offer solutions (family and school) as culprits for the issues. This data once again confirms the necessity of systemic and integrated action toward a decrease of gender inequality and actions that would include other actors from local community, not just girls. This way the target group of this research would get supported through the shift of local community from condemnation to support. Since the main objective of this research is to give voice to girls when it comes to issues relevant for them in their local communities, it is especially important to underline that despite the fact that girls clearly stated they agree with different social norms, these norms are exactly what made them feel insecure and humiliated in their daily lives. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to work on changing these norms. Finally, we also should not ignore the voices of others which we paid attention to in the results of this comprehensive research conducted in schools in Serbia, showing that teachers are also willing, and need, to improve their knowledge and expertise on gender equality, i.e. 75% of primary school employees who took part in the research, and 68% of secondary school employees included in the research, expressed their readiness to take part in trainings on gender-based violence and gender equality (Ćeriman et al, 2015: 9). Hence, the gender socialization process turns out to be a favorable ground for making impact and changes if we approach the issues through systemic and integrated actions directed toward advancing gender equality in our society.

The necessity of education of both teachers and young women, and even their families, is supported by the fact that 65% of girls in our survey almost never or rarely discuss social and political issues with friends in their free time, and that 67% never or rarely discussed these issues with their teachers within one or two school subjects. Most of the girls who took part in the research (a total of 69%) underlined that they almost never or rarely learned in school about the famous women from Serbia, while only 7% of girls said they did learn about famous women and among them were mostly girls from Jagodina (6 respondents).

In the situation of permanent discouragement to step out of the stereotypical gender identities and continual pressures toward fitting into prescribed gender roles, girls testify of the necessity to provide models of healthy authority that might offer examples of different practices, and open new horizons for building healthy young personalities. Since some girls also testified of positive effects of engagement within exclusively female groups, local communities should reconsider their options and allocate capacities for supporting this kind of mentorship that would nurture specific values of female friendship and solidarity.

When it comes to possible actors who could carry out changes in this field, this research, unfortunately, showed the lack of capacities of local communities, since many girls from our research stated that local youth associations and Youth Offices weren't visible enough, i.e. could not make a significant difference in the field. Only 3% of respondents think that Youth Office should solve some of the problems girls face. The main problem, according to the girls, is that youth is not informed on the existence and work of Youth Offices. The least informed were girls from Jagodina, while most of the girls who used to take part in some Youth Office activities were from Kikinda. Majority of girls from Obrenovac, Novi Pazar, and Vranje were informed on having local Youth Offices, but mostly took no part in their activities. But, at the same time, girls emphasize their interest in taking part in the work of Youth Offices, so there might be room for improvement of their mutual cooperation.

# Recommendations



Based on the research results, but also due to their broader social relevance, we singled out different actors as crucial for improvement of the position of girls in the field of education and youth policies, both at national and local level. At the national level, we identified actors creating policies in these fields, while most important at local level are actors implementing those policies in practical work with youth and particularly with young girls.

a) Therefore, recommendations of the research are mostly intended for Ministries in charge of the field: Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, and also Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Serbia.

Recommendations for the *Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia* are the following:

- Regional Centers for Professional Development of Employees in the Field of Education should be obliged to organize trainings and consultations for teachers and other professionals on gender equality and similar issues, while advisors – external consultants of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia should be obliged, in schools they are in charge of, to talk with the employees specifically about the issues of gender equality and support to young girls.
- It should be mandatory to present women successful in their careers within the secondary education curriculum at least once in a semester within different school subjects.
- Attending professional training programs on the subject of gender equality should be mandatory for secondary school teachers and should become one of the accredited trainings. These programs should be realized in continuity through series of lectures in several stages (beginners, advanced, and mentoring), and should oblige teachers attending them to use gender sensitive educational contents in their future work.
- Mandatory use of gender sensitive language in documents regulating and defining work of public educational institutions should be introduced, and it should be encouraged in practice.
- Activities in schools and local communities designed and realized by parents and teachers, focused on girls and women, i.e. advancement of their position in society, should be publicly, clearly and consistently supported.

Recommendations for the *Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Serbia* are as following:

- Promotion and giving priority to support of scientific research with intersectoral approach to gender issues, which results should be used in defining youth policies at local level, as well as for recommendations and measures in the fields researches deal with, while taking into consideration both practical experiences and reports of relevant institutions and organizations, in order to make it easier to practically implement new ideas on how to improve the current situation.
- Use every opportunity to advocate for the principles of gender equality and promote them both in the work of Ministry and in everyday life, as well as support initiatives aiming to reach zero tolerance to violence and realization of full potentials of all categories of youth in our society.

b) When it comes to recommendations for local communities, main actors we recognized were Regional Centers for Professional Development of Employees in the Field of Education, Youth Offices and schools.

Recommendations for *Regional Centers for Professional Development of Employees in the Field of Education* are:

- Support planning and realization of programs of gender sensitization which would be jointly attended by both employees in the field of education and parents/foster parents.
- Regularly encourage and realize researches at local level of the needs for professional development in the field of cooperation between school and family when it comes to gender equality.
- Centers for Professional Development of Employees in the Field of Education, as resource centers in local communities, could provide space for regular realization of respectable lectures on the subjects of gender equality, which would be attended by both parents/foster parents and members of the relevant institutions from local communities.

Recommendations of this research, in accordance with the objective we defined, are primarily oriented toward advancement of work of *Youth Offices* in the field of gender equality and prevention of gender-based violence, and in this section we will list the recommendations suggested by respondents themselves within the research.

- Main recommendation suggested by girls is about *raising visibility of activities of Youth Offices* through media and social network promotion in local community, as well as through frequent visits to schools and talking to young people, using movies as tools or realizing activities which planning would include youth.

- *Associations dealing with the issues concerning youth should find out the needs of young girls and organize more activities for them – As best mechanisms for associations to find out more about the needs of youth, girls mostly suggested surveys. As activities that would include more young girls in the work of these associations, respondents suggested educational activities (trainings, courses, lectures, workshops, seminars, discussions and debates, talks and counseling for youth on the issues of gender equality, violence against women and women`s rights). Apart from that, girls also suggested organizing cultural, artistic and other entertaining events such as exhibitions, music events, fairs, etc.*
- *Associations dealing with youth issues at local level should improve their cooperation with other local associations and associations from other local communities regarding their work on issues of gender equality and prevention of gender-based violence.*

Conclusions of this research opened the possibility to provide recommendations for other relevant organizations and institutions targeting girls, primarily for schools and other educational institutions. Results of the research suggest the conclusion that employees of secondary schools in Serbia included in this research have no competence needed for understanding the needs of young girls and prevention of gender-based violence girls face.

Therefore, crucial recommendations for schools are:

- Gender perspective and contents related to the prevention and responding to gender-based violence should be included into the existing school subjects. These contents should especially cover the examples of successful women in fields relevant for different subjects, and should also use gender sensitive language that would raise the visibility of women in communications and interpersonal relations.
- Annual school plans should include activities to be realized together with pupils that would contribute to the prevention of gender-based violence, empowerment of girls, encouragement of their solidarity with each other and motivation to activism.
- Parents and foster parents should be actively engaged in school work and take part in planning, proposing and realizing activities aimed to advance participation of girls in decision-making processes at local school level. Goal of such actions would be to gain skills of deliberative thinking, i.e. develop skills of formulating arguments, taking part in discussions and clearly expressing one`s needs and attitudes, which constitute the very foundation of active citizenship, and which will altogether lead to the raised visibility of girls in local communities.

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