



CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS

“Presenting the INSPIRE strategy in B&H – seven strategies to end violence against children”

Conference entitled “Presenting the INSPIRE strategy in B&H – seven strategies to end violence against children” took place via Zoom on October 27th and 28th, organized by the Association “Our Children” Sarajevo, Network “Stronger Voice for Children” and with support of the Regional Coalition for Child Protection “ChildPact”.

The conference aimed at B&H institutions and organizations that work with and for children and introduce the INSPIRE strategy and B&H strategy implementation analysis gained from a research conducted in the period of April-July 2019.

The INSPIRE strategy was developed by a team of experts comprised from ten international agencies and organizations lead by the World Health Organization (WHO), together with experts from the UNICEF, World Bank, USAID and others. INSPIRE envelops strategies related to: implementation and upholding of laws; norms and values; safe environment; support to parents and guardians; incomes and economic empowerment; services of response and support, as well as education and life skills.

Implementing the INSPIRE strategy does not entail defining a new program, but represents a way how to revitalize, focus and spread the existing multisector efforts to prevent and respond to violence against children. It is intended for all entities in the public, private and civil sector on the national and local level, that deal with preventing child and adolescent abuse.

The two-day conference where the strategy was presented included around 60 professionals from various institutions and organizations, including representatives of educational institutions, Centers for social work, civil society organizations, institutions of Children’s Ombudsman of RS, ministries, police, Prosecutor’s Office, APOSO, Agency for Gender Equality of B&H, as well as Centers for Mental Health from the entire country of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Successful programs and examples of good practice that influenced a reduction of violence against children and among them in our country were presented by both governmental and non-governmental organizations during the conference.

Violence against children is a burning issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina that leaves immeasurable and often permanent consequences on the life and development of a child. The Convention on the Rights of the Child



prescribes that the signatory countries must protect children from any form of physical or mental violence, abuse, neglect or disregard, harassment or exploitation. Accordingly, the signatory countries are required to undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures for protection of children from any form of violence while they live with their parents, legal guardians or any other person that looks after them.

The conference participants were particularly worried by the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects and consequences already visible on children and families. There is a need for urgent measures of protection and support, as well as work reorganization in numerous institutions and organizations to make them focused on urgent needs. An increase in the internet use and online schooling also increases the computer exposure for children and subsequent higher risks and online danger.

Based on all aforementioned, as well as on discussions from the two-day conference, the following conclusions were made:

- It is necessary to fully adopt a multidisciplinary and multisectoral approach to systematic solution to end violence against children in B&H, as well as assuming responsibility of all protagonists in the B&H society, including citizens, in order to protect children and adolescents.
- All across Bosnia and Herzegovina there are various programs and projects that aim at preventing violence against and among children, but effects of such partial solutions are not satisfactory. The Conference participants suggest establishing a common online platform with all resources developed thus far that have shown good results in practice are available. Until a systemic approach has been established, available programs and good practice examples can be replicated in the entire B&H and serve as a potential guide for creating a unified program.
- Topics related to peer violence, gender-based violence and violence against children in general, must be a part of a compulsory program in all higher education institutions that train future bearers and participants of educational process, as well as other practitioners who encounter potential victims or perpetrators of such forms of violence.
- The conference participants invite the Government of the Federation of B&H to apply immediate realization of the conclusion of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 19/02/2020, that, without any hesitation, sends for a proposal for amendment to the Criminal Law of the Federation of B&H harmonized with the Lanzarote convention - The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, and to have it carried out by the Parliament of the Federation of B&H in urgent procedure.



- It is necessary to perform an urgent analysis of consequences caused by the COVID-19 on children and youths and undertake immediate measures to come up with an adequate answer, especially regarding family environment violence, that stays hidden.

It is important to stress the importance of mental health of children and family, as well as strengthening parental skills so they could have a timely reaction and protect children from negative influence.

- Safety of children in a digital environment should be given more attention by everybody. It is especially alarming that not all professionals who work with children, including some parents, are not competent enough, have knowledge or resources that can help. It is imperative to include more promotion of educational content for parents, teachers and children, as well as organize educations at Centers for mental health.
- Developing and improving local reference mechanisms for acting in cases of violence against children should be a priority to the authorities, in terms of early identification of potential violence victims, their adequate care and complete support for their recovery.
- Counselling lines and hot lines, safe houses, shelters, as well as other services for children and family are guided mostly by NGOs in our country. Until systemic solution have been reached, it is necessary to provide a continuous and sufficient support to the organizations providing these services to the society, especially to children and woman, victims of violence.
- The conference participants call for the authorities in B&H to develop programs of economic strengthening of families as a preventive measure for fighting violence in family environment, as well as providing adequate support to foster families in B&H.
- The INSPIRE strategy needs to be integrated into strategic documents of relevant ministries on the levels of B&H, RS and FB&H related to strengthening child protection systems.
- It is important to introduce an explicit ban of corporal punishment of children in all environments. The right for protection from all forms of violence, neglect, abuse and disregard must become a part of a legal regulations, but also imperative to undertake necessary measures to uphold those norms.
- Promote positive, non-violent forms of child upbringing and conflict solutions, as well as training of future and present parents and other caregivers, teachers and the public.

#INSPIRE