



**THE VOICE  
OF YOUTH**

**VOL.2**

Edited by  
Faris Šehović

**BDF**  
BORIS DIVKOVIĆ  
FOUNDATION





## THE VOICE OF THE YOUTH VOL. 2

Edited by Faris Šehović

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## BORIS DIVKOVIĆ FOUNDATION (BDF)

The Boris Divković Foundation was established in 2013 with the aim of advancing political science and political practice in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region. Since then, the Foundation has promoted a responsible policy, which serves all citizens and operates on the principles of equality, coexistence and solidarity. The Boris Divković Foundation is marked by the desire to harmonize political activity with basic moral principles, which is the idea that Boris Divković advocated during his engagement. The widespread opinion that a combination of morality and politics is impossible is only a consequence of the decades-long rule of irresponsible politicians. The Boris Divkovic Foundation starts from the assumption that a combination of morality and politics is possible, but that it is necessary to carry out ideological decontamination of the notion of politics in public space, which would create conditions for including honest and responsible people in political processes in the Western Balkans.

## CONTENTS

<b>INTRO</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1</b> Biodiversity Dženan Rizvanović and Ivan Durgutov	<b>10</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2</b> Modern Bureaucracy Dina Abazović and Ilija Franeta	<b>20</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3</b> Mental health among youth in service sector: Rest as resistance Mina Međedović, Amina Imamović, Maja Mijović	<b>28</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4</b> Stop. Breathe. Listen. Respond. Mersiha Čomor	<b>38</b>

## Intro

It is a huge privilege to write this introduction for the publication of the Civic Platform for Young Liberal Activists modules and activities. This publication is not only an outcome of one project, but it is also an amazing intellectual product of the number of young activists who diligently worked together to promote their ideas and hard work.

Firstly, I would like to thank them on behalf of the BDF and CPLA for being part of this project and for producing this remarkable intellectual work. This publication offers readers a chance to see the real capacity of youth in political and social activism and their strength in creating new social values. They mobilise the process of establishing new, progressive and liberal values as a social reality in their countries and region.

Young activists who have participated in this project have demonstrated stimulating and motivating ethics of work. Investing their free time in studying few important social phenomena which are influencing our everydayness and in rethinking mechanisms of confrontation within them for the purpose of rerouting them with the help of liberal values and ideas must be highly appreciated. The liberal idea in the Western Balkan area is in the periphery of political palette, and values and outcomes of this ideology in the history of democracy are not publicly valued enough. These opinion pieces show not only a fine intellectual product, but the capacity for the recognition of liberal values and ideas, and acknowledgment of youth's ability to produce a better future for everyone in WB region.

The topics that these young liberals decided to work on and present reflect their intellectual hunger, a generational capacity and capital that they have. The importance of the selected topics for our collective present and future is outstanding! Their decision to work on topics of biodiversity and importance of the state intervention in the sphere of nature balance; to discuss on position of young

workers in the service industry in WB, their social position and mental health; to analyse empathy and its influence on building the society of tolerance and understanding the liberal society; and to think of modern bureaucracy and its digital revolution is truly refreshing and aspiring. These topics are not often discussed in our region, and it is important that the young people raise such issues, in this case young and smart liberals.

The modern society faces various challenges and, as a result, it is constantly changing. To ensure the successful fight with the changes, we need to analyse and work on them and to have constant debates on the importance of finding the best mechanisms and tools for overcoming the challenges. The youth is best in initiating those discussions, and they must express their perceptions on society and fast life evolution. With their help, the debates can produce amazing results. We need to think and talk about resolving various issues in the society, but firstly, we must read what youth is thinking about. Our debate starts with this amazing reading material. Enjoy as much as I did!



# Biodiversity

Dženan Rizvanović and Ivan Durgutov

# CHAPTER 1

# Chapter 1

# Biodiversity

**Dženan Rizvanović  
and Ivan Durgutov**

## Biodiversity is life. Save it.

With the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1992, the international community recognized the value of biodiversity, and thus committed itself to conserve, sustainably use and fairly and equally share the benefits of biodiversity. Furthermore, it was agreed to set the target of halting the current trends in its loss by 2010.

Biodiversity, the variety of life, is the visible and invisible basis for human existence. Nevertheless, the majority of the growing urban human population is unaware of the extent to which its material, social and cultural well-being is depends on the rich biodiversity of our planet.

In this context, the recent research indicates that the threat the species and ecosystems face has never been so great as it is today. According to the findings of the European Commission, the extinction of the species caused by human activities continues at an alarming rate, with species being lost at 100 to 1000 times the normal rate. In fact, more

than one third of the assessed species are threatened with extinction and it is worrying that an estimated 60 percent of the Earth's ecosystem services have been degraded in the last 50 years.

Whether the region's rich biodiversity of the Danube-Carpathian region, the Danube Delta, Carpathian Mountains is considered, the carnivores such as bears, wolves and lynx, are in danger of becoming extinct in the near future.

It is important to emphasize that the services that biodiversity provide are vital for the human well-being. Biodiversity ensures not only food, fibre, building materials and medicine, but it also regulates the good quality of air and water. It is also important for the climate as it protects the region from the natural hazards, erosion, and diseases, ensures waste recycle and crop pollination. Moreover, biodiversity supports essential processes such as soil formation. Last but not least, the beliefs of certain communities inextricably link the natural world and biological diversity with their cultural development.

Thus, biodiversity is key for the services provided by the complex ecosystems on which our life-support system and general well-being depends. Nonetheless, biodiversity is lost at an accelerating rate, and as a result, the habitat loss, climate change, prevalence of invasive species, over-exploitation and pollution are increasing. The most significant causes of

According to the findings of the European Commission, the extinction of the species caused by human activities continues at an alarming rate

this loss include poor governance, poor understanding of the importance of the biodiversity conservation for the society's well-being, and the lack of the long-term prosperity.

Furthermore, many current and anticipated challenges are linked to biodiversity. Although many problems must be addressed globally, individuals, small groups and communities can still make significant changes and achievements. The initial step starts with gaining the appreciation and respect for the biodiversity, which will later progress to taking concrete action. Children and young people are eager to shape a more positive future. They are creative, thoughtful and capable citizens whose enthusiasm, fresh approaches and boundless energy can fuel innovative solutions at local and international levels alike. Young people's eagerness for learning new technologies puts them in a position to act as convincing communicators and their involvement in biodiversity protection is crucial for finding sustainable solutions for the global biodiversity challenges.

*For illustration and for the purpose of this mini-project (the opinion piece) we will use the Biodiversity Challenge Badge book created by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations which is free for use for any project related to biodiversity. It is a useful tool for our workshop where we plan to work with a certain number of students, who will be divided in four groups, each covering a specific section. Each section is designed to have with very interesting activities and upon completion, the participants get a special Badge.*

- *Our Air (section A)*
- *Our Water (section B)*
- *Our Land (section C)*
- *Our World (section D)*

### What is the Badge about?

This biodiversity challenge badge is a tool which allows teachers and youth leaders to guide young people in learning about biodiversity

and development of the action-oriented projects.

The concepts of biodiversity are introduced across the age-appropriate activities and their exploration is stimulated through action-based learning. Thus, the participants are encouraged to study the natural world surrounding their community, to learn about the reasons why certain species and habitats struggle to survive, and to understand the links between biodiversity and the general well-being of the human kind. The badge activities help young people gain knowledge, skills and values necessary for the protection, preservation and improvement of biodiversity, locally and globally.

The aim of this project is to raise the awareness about the biodiversity loss in our region and its eventual meaning. Ultimately, we will pursue the development of this this project even after the ELF workshop is finalized.

### The biodiversity in the Western Balkans Region

Biodiversity is facing the biggest global crisis ever. However, the extinction rate can still be reduced, and the human act is the main tool for achieving this goal. Since the Balkans are estimated to have a disproportionately high degree of biodiversity, the previous research finds that 60% of North Macedonia's territory meets current EU requirements, and biologists state that it can be declared a protected area.

On the other hand, interventions of any kind can have negative effects in nature and cause food shortage for animals or misbalance their breeding conditions, which can very easily put certain species at serious risk of extinction. Studies show that the country, which covers only 0.26% of Europe, is a habitat for 64% of all bird species in Europe, 33.66% of tall plants, 20% of mammals, 25.2% of reptiles, 20.3% of amphibians and 14 species of freshwater fish. There are 668 endemic species of plants and animals which grow and live only in Macedonia.



Some of the experts, including those from the Macedonian Ecological Society (MES), said that the sixth mass extinction of organisms is underway. According to these scientists, the billions of populations of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians are rapidly declining.

The case of North Macedonia and its process of preparing so-called "red-lists" indicates that some international standards will be followed. The International Union for Conservation of Nature uses a tool called the "Red List of Species", and added to this, biologists also create regional red lists. There are two national red lists currently prepared in North Macedonia: one for selected plant species, and the second one for amphibians and reptiles.

Experts state that many endemic species of insects, mollusks and fish are naturally rare as they can be found in only one river or a small river basin. Human interventions in nature can very easily transfer the rare, endemic species to the category of endangered or critically endangered species and this, unfortunately, happens very often. For example, the Pelister trout, endemic animal which lives in the Kranska and Brajcinska Rivers, is endangered species according to the findings of the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Moreover, the population of Pelagonian trout and river shrimp is decreasing, and there are still no records about many species, including the Mavrovo trout, as they have not been evaluated yet. Moreover, the Egyptian vulture is a globally endangered bird, and its population is critically endangered even in North Macedonia.

It is stated that its number has decreased from 40 to 15 pairs in the past 15 years, whereas twenty years ago there were 140 pairs. This decline is partly result of the construction of the small hydropower plants, as the Egyptian vulture prefers steep gorges and its breeding success depends on accessibility within a radius of two kilometres.

The hydropower plants in our country and in the SEE region, in general, continue to be the most serious challenge that threatens the

biodiversity. On the other hand, there are some positive examples that are also worth sharing. The citizens showed huge interest for the activities organized under the campaign named 'Do not ignore! React!', which stands for a better environment.

Their target groups were mostly youngsters and children of school age, as the project aim is clear - raising public environmental awareness from an early age. In activities like this, the participants are closer to nature and wildlife that surrounds them. What is more, the participants learn to pay attention to their environment in the future and convey the positive environmental thought.

**Can we influence the public opinion and can we, as individuals, save the nature? - Of course!**

Even though it is hard to negate that the mankind is rapidly destroying the natural world on which its own prosperity depends, the positive changes are still possible. It may appear that there are no consequences for people in the short run, but destruction of the environment will unfavorably affect the quality of human life, and therefore - it is a time for action! This costs less than inactivity and apathy.

Thus, without a doubt, getting rid of harmful subsidies, promoting good practices and sustainable consumption, and recognizing the importance of careful management of nature is crucial for our future. The Western

**'Do not ignore!  
React!'**

Balkans region is not as powerless in this regard as it might appear. This issue does not concern only the preservation of the plants and animals regionally and globally, it is more about preserving a world that is becoming increasingly impossible for humans to live in.

To conclude, we propose several concrete environment-friendly steps. Out of the 18 measurable ways in which the nature helps humans, 14 are in decline, with the exception of food and energy production. Acknowledging and identifying the downward trends in nature's ability to produce clean air, water and rich soil, the developing countries, such as ours, must take an action. Industrial agriculture and intensive fishing are known as the main causes of species extinction and therefore, the legal changes in this sphere are necessary. The climate changes have to be addressed, too. Loss of natural resources leads to conflict in certain parts of the world. Saving the environment will save the life standards known today, especially of the less fortunate people, who particularly most depend on natural resources. Taking small initial steps will help see the bigger picture – changes that concern the public opinion, garbage disposal habits, food and energy production, and the climate changes.

Last, but not least, the concrete policy proposals for the environment protection are mandatory and government must take steps were necessary. This is why the Declaration of the Shar Mountain as national park is welcomed and appreciated by the citizens of North Macedonia. On 30 June 2021, the Law on the Proclamation of Shar Mountain as National Park was adopted in the National Assembly. Nonetheless, this and the other three national parks, Mavrovo, Galichica and Pelister, continue to be in the focus for the maintenance of their status and for saving and enhancing their biodiversity.

Moreover, amendments to the Criminal Code are expected to be adopted soon, where high sanctions for all the environmental crimes committed within the national parks will be clearly defined. This must be legally followed with the responsiveness of the state bodies and the prosecutors' office, in order to prevent the destruction of the

biodiversity and the goods of the parks. Along the same line, introducing legal changes, such as forbidding the use of single-use plastic items (e.g. extensive use of plastic shopping bags), will contribute in the raise of the environmental culture.

As Watson said *"individuals can help with simple changes in the way they eat and use energy"*, we must encourage people to rethink about their habits, consider balanced consumption of meat, vegetables and fruits, as well as to practice regular outdoor activities, such as hiking and cycling.

“Individuals can help with simple changes in the way they eat and use energy”



# Modern Bureaucracy

Dina Abazović and Ilija Franeta

# CHAPTER 2

## Chapter 2

# Modern Bureaucracy

Dina Abazović  
and Ilija Franeta

In various periods throughout history, the needs of people have changed depending on circumstances, from more progressive and innovative times to more conservative and isolated situations. In the last couple of hundred years, humankind has overcome many obstacles and became a highly developed species that explores the universe, cures highly contagious diseases, and transmits video chats from two opposite places on the Earth. This is why it is important to analyze what characteristics a person needs to have today in order to excel in this virtuous world without falling into the trap of the "brave new world" that Shakespeare talks about in *The Tempest*. Whether adaptability, flexibility, preparedness or tech-literacy is considered, the answer eventually narrows down to one – efficiency. Unfortunately, even though we live in the 21st century and in the age of digitalization, there is one main disincentive that prevents people from achieving the high levels of efficiency they seek, in public service or business, and that is bureaucracy.

Term bureaucracy comes from the French word *bureau*, meaning small desks, and Greek word *kratein*, meaning to rule. Max Weber, a German sociologist, first started using this term

to describe a rational way of organizing complex structures with a lot of people involved, such as businesses. Opinions on bureaucracy vary depending on the perspective or ideological reasons, some see it as the main villain of the modern society, while others find it is a rather a necessary tool important for maintaining transparent processes that serve society or an organization. However, structures such as government cannot function without a good line of work. In theory, administrative rules, regulations, and process descriptions towards a common goal are the bases on which robust and large-scale coordination of staff members can function. Proper bureaucracy demands discipline, abides by a particular hierarchy and lays on pure rationalization.

Even though there are undoubtedly many benefits of labour division, necessary regulation, efficiency, and accountability, they can also be reviewed as disadvantages since they are often not put in practice due to the unreliability of human nature. In addition, lack of flexibility, delays, corruption, nepotism, excessive paperwork and compartmentalization can also be added to the list of bureaucratic downsides.

According to the data from 2015, there was a total of 45,104 full-time employees in the general government in Montenegro. When this number is added to the employees in the state-owned public enterprises (which, according to available data, is 7,213), public enterprises at the local level (amounting to 6,172), and independent regulatory bodies (according to available data 527, where the CBM is included), there was 59,029 full-time employees in the public sector in Montenegro in 2015<sup>1</sup>. In the Western Balkans, the number of employees in general government (in relation to the total employment) is the highest in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 29.4%, whereas it is 26.1% in Montenegro.<sup>2</sup> These figures opened up the question of the need for this phenomenon, especially given that the population estimate for Montenegro in 2015 did not exceed 62,200 people.

Given these human resources, combined with the resources from various foreign partners (training, workshops, platforms), public administration should work better and cost less, but in reality, it only demonstrates lack of initiative and poor creativity.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Public Administration, Digital Society and Media of Montenegro, Montenegrin public administration optimization plan 2018-2020, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

This indicates only a surface of a much broader issue evident in the public sector, and it includes nepotism, corruption, and unjustified reallocation of funds dedicated to improving communities in various spheres. This goes along with a common belief that getting a good and secure job in public sector is an imperative, since governments rarely stay without any funding. The discussion whether this is a legacy of the former socialist system, or rather a psychological component of humans that leans towards less risky and more secure base, is indeed legit, and has good points for both sides. Nonetheless, the focus of this paper is solely on what needs to be done now to see the improvements in the future, leaving the political narrative and the root of this issue for another in-depth analysis.

Although bureaucracy has many flaws, it still exists in every single society and organization. It is very likely that bureaucracy is efficient to an extent, and then further upgrades are mandatory. With generation shifts, newly engaged public employees are more skilled and are provided with more opportunities and resources. In collaboration with the experts from the private sector, public administration can create practical tools and platforms that efficiently serve their citizens. COVID-19 pandemic has made the whole world look for the alternative ways of creating purposeful and useful government tools to serve ordinary people under the newly formed circumstances. State apparatus has created online services for schools, healthcare institutions, and tax directorates. These programs have been used by many citizens and this situation has proven that government and public administration can avoid long queues and inefficient clerks when done right.

COVID-19 reminded everyone about the advances of the new age technologies. Montenegrin government created several short-term solutions for the most vulnerable and imperative organizational categories (education, health). However, a number of flaws have been identified in these solutions, since they were not produced in a very flexible schedule, but in rather challenging times. For that reason, the given solutions cannot be looked through the same lenses as many other online platforms created before the pandemic. The tools used by the government in Montenegro in day-to-day activities before COVID-19

pandemic, provided one (small) step towards more accessible government. For example, there is an application e-zdravlje (e-health) where citizens can arrange a visit to their chosen doctor, order medicine for chronic diseases, and have access to all medical examination results from the state hospitals, then there is also e-dokumenta (e-documents) where citizens can order personal documents (such as statements on citizenship, residence, etc.), electronic enrollment of pupils in elementary and high schools, and recently students to state university as well, and many other available platforms for businesses and individuals on euprava.me website.

However, some institutions still lack speed in this digitalization processes or have online platforms that are not user-friendly. For example, although the website euprava.me has many useful tools, its design, lack of proper promotion, and unjustified delays have discouraged people from using the available online tools, and created general mistrust in digitalization processes.

According to the pre-pandemic report by the Institute Alternativa in Montenegro<sup>3</sup>, only dozens of advanced services were fully digitalized. In contrast, all others, or 89% of them, require some form of queue waiting and/or visiting various offices in order to finalize the process of obtaining necessary documents. Additionally, the Montenegrin public lacks confidence in using those services as only 31% of citizens are aware of electronic services offered by the government, and 42% claim they never use them. Hence, in some

COVID-19 reminded everyone about the advances of the new age technologies

<sup>3</sup> Percepcija javne uprave (2018.) Institut Alternativa

cases, the digitalization of public services can be seen as a product with no real purpose.

The global pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 highlighted the necessity of the digitalization of the public services and a more robust control of the use of public resources and data. The implementation of the e-government infrastructure would help as it improves transparency, accountability, and global competitiveness in the post-pandemic world, which is essential for maintaining economic, political, and individual liberties on a higher level. In addition, the implementation of e-government framework would offer citizens free public access to all information that concerns the governance of public resources. Thus, it allows taxpayers to monitor how their money is spent, which further leads to lower levels of corruption - especially in public procurement processes, the cornerstone of bribery in the Western Balkans region. To all fairness, Montenegro has adopted the Law on Free Access to Information that allows citizens to review certain documents upon request, but it also has certain limitations when it comes to the right to request information, as well as restrictions that have a particularly negative impact on the ability of the civil sector to overview government's work. This, of course, is in direct conflict with the standards of the international human rights and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. On the other hand, there are websites such as <https://lokalnefinansije.me>, created through the project "Strengthening Transparent and Accountable Public Finance Management in Montenegro", supported by the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, and implemented by the Ministry of Finance of Montenegro and UNDP, which cover a portion of public finances, but on a rather broad level. As a result, it does not maintain a sufficient level of transparency.

When talking about the benefits of a modern, purposeful public administration that exists to benefit the public, the Estonian case serves as an ideal example of how e-Government serves as a significant factor in economic development and global competitiveness.

To start with, it helps investors start a company in the prospective future EU member state, as Montenegro has been a country with the

most successful negotiation dynamic for many years. Thus, this then provides potential investors faster access to the EU market with almost 450 million citizens and allows their businesses to grow remotely. Secondly, it reduces bureaucracy for citizens by providing paperless services and digital solutions in public administration. Finally, it stimulates the growth of entrepreneurial activities as many new companies require involvement of numerous individuals and companies in providing different services, as is the case in Estonia. This can also be significant from the perspective of keeping young entrepreneurs who are now mostly opting for establishing their businesses in Estonia, due to the challenges and barriers they face in Montenegro.

It is important to mention that reform of public administration does not mean laying off a half of the previously mentioned 45,000 full-time employees from the general government in Montenegro. This should not be considered not only because of the labour market imbalances that would occur as a result of such action and affect the economy of a small country as Montenegro, but also because this decision would create a moral and social dilemma, along with the question of fairness, regardless of the political, ideological, or economic views. This challenge must be approached from an optimized point of view, with a focus on finding the solution that fits best both, citizens and government, and that includes participation of all parties involved.

Changes in the direction of digitalization require efforts from all parties and individuals interested in improving life standards and in making government officials and public servants more transparent and accountable in providing services. Optimistically, there is a huge potential for growth within Montenegrin public administration, and the fact that current shift of power brought a new wave of progressive ideas into the Ministry of Public Administration, digital society, media, and digital future are indeed possible. However, even with dedicated work, they are still years away.

# Mental health among youth in service sector: Rest as resistance

Mina Medjedović, Amina Imamović, Maja Mijović



## CHAPTER 3



## Chapter 3

# Mental health among youth in service sector: Rest as resistance

Mina Medjedović  
Amina Imamović  
Maja Mijović

### Introduction

The interest in the mental health of employees is increasing as it is acknowledged as a critical predictor of overall health and general well-being. Poor mental health of employees and job pressures can contribute to a variety of physical disorders such as hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular conditions, among others. Furthermore, poor mental health can lead to employee burnout, which significantly reflects and impacts their capacity for meaningful contribution in both personal and professional life.

According to results of studies from various countries throughout the world, mental health is a leading cause for why people are quitting their jobs. In fact, around 58% of work-related disabilities in the Netherlands are result of mental health challenges. In the United Kingdom, it is believed that 30–40% of sick days are due to mental illness. Although the leading world countries try to draw attention to the problems of mental

health issues related to the work environment, studies that deal with the mental health of workers in the Balkans are rare. The Balkan countries are in transition and, in this region, mental health treatments are often viewed as privilege that many people cannot afford. Moreover, work and the business environment are often taken for granted, where employees have to adapt to the working conditions set by the employer that cannot be questioned. Added to this, the service sector in the Balkans rarely respects labour rights.

### Western Balkans and Mental Health Among Youth

Mental health challenges are not poorly addressed only in the Western Balkans region. This topic has become increasingly important in the time of Covid19 pandemic, when the gaps and overlooks in many countries that are considered pioneers in protection of workers' rights became more evident.

Research on the position of women workers in shops during the Covid-19 pandemic conducted by Initiative for Economic and Social Rights finds that workers in trade facilities have low expectations and lack of motivation to turn to the competent inspections as they expect that every problem they report will be returned to their detriment for review. The research further indicates that this occurs when the inspectorates do not find

The service sector in the Balkans rarely respects labour rights



violations of rights important and neglect to improve of the working environment in a specific case.

According to the findings of this research, many countries have regulated mental health issues in a similar way. The governments find the physical health of the population important as it reflects on the general development of the country, whereas mental health in the workplace is something that is not stigmatized or addressed by either employers or employees. However, it is very important to have workplace wellness programs for mental health treatments among young people employed in the service sector.

The employees of the service sector in the Western Balkans have shared views on this matter in the interviews organized for the purpose of this research. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that mental wellbeing in workplace was not very often mentioned by media or relevant institutions before Covid19. For that reason, the aim this study is to raise the awareness of the significance of creating a workplace culture that values mental health.

## Montenegro

Montenegro is a transition country working on the establishment of democracy, development and economic growth. Even though the country puts efforts to change and improve many social aspects, mental health programs are still not on its agenda.

Citizens, especially young people, still consider the mental health challenges and professional counselling as a taboo and they generally avoid to share the experiences of this kind publicly.

This stereotype is a consequence of a perception that people who seek help in improving their mental health are labelled as people who suffer from mental disorders or deviant behaviour. As a result, a positive attitude towards counselling and a general level of awareness about the importance of mental health is continues to be very low.

Consequently, employers continue to neglect risk factors for mental

health in their workplace, and they rarely offer their workers support or organize workplace wellness programs. This is especially visible in the labour market that deals with services, where most employees are the young people.

Takin into account that youth is at the age when they are on the crossroad of their life and torn between university life and job seeking, it is not surprising that many young people choose to work in the service sector to start their careers. Here, the work hours are long and salary is low, and social benefits, such as health insurance or contribution to the pension fund, are rarely included in their employment contract. This kind of situation can impact the mental health of youth extensively, which makes the employer support imperative. Unfortunately, there is a mismatch between the level of support employers believe are responsible for and what the young employees get in Western Balkans.

For the purpose of this research, several young people working in the service sector during the first wave of the Covid19 pandemic were interviewed, and the general conclusions from their experiences are presented here.

Three young interviewees were employed as bartenders and waiters in very popular and successful restaurants for over 2 years. In the crucial months of the pandemic, all three of them lost their income, and received only governmental support. None of their employers asked about their physical nor mental health during these difficult times. During the pandemic, these individuals confessed that they struggled with depression and anxiousness, especially due to the uncertainty when the vaccines will be available. Apart from the health issues and the danger of contracting Covid19, their main concern was employment since many businesses went bankrupt and governmental support did cover the basic needs of the country's economy.

Added to this, there are cases when the situation was ever worsened since the employers could not afford to pay workers sick leave in cases they contracted covid19. For that reason, our interviewee stated that this caused more anxiousness and panic attacks, since

this made the employees consider to hide the symptoms or test-results in case they are covid19 positive.

All participants confirmed that their employers were not aware of any support systems or institutions for mental health and wellbeing, nor did they care to investigate this information to maintain a mentally healthy workplace. It is interesting to note that these three employees do not think that seeking help for mental health treatments is a taboo nor do they mind discussing this particular topic with their employer. This emphasizes yet another vital issue that Montenegrin society encounters, and that is apathy towards mental health struggles or the lack of information that employees have about their rights. Four other participants have been employed for a shorter period of time as salespeople in boutiques, electronic gadgets stores and bookshops. Similar to the interviewees who worked at the restaurants, they also did not receive any support when they faced challenges that concern the fear of unemployment, stability, regular salary or sufficient income to cover the basic needs. Besides this, the isolation from family, friends, and colleagues added to the burden and impacted their mental health. Nevertheless, employers did not show any initiative to help or provide information about possible counselling, even in cases when company has an internal support system as a part of their team building session.

The only exception during the interviews was noted with a young IT expert who confirmed that his company provided mental health counselling and support system during his remote work. This company follows an American model and works with foreign experts who have a different approach to this issue. It was highlighted during the interview that the company referred to the importance of mental health wellness even before the pandemic. In fact, it even organized several activities and adapted the work environment to ease the stress caused by this job. Also, the employer hired a counsellor within the HR department in case employers requested help. This approach is an exception in this survey and it is unfortunate to learn that this service was not used by the employees, even though was available, it. All these examples indicate that the youth receives the inadequate health care in the service sector. Apart from the rare exceptions, there

is no evidence of good practices in providing general support for the physical health, whereas mental health is completely neglected. Raising awareness and sharing information about health support systems that can help youth with mental health care, and this is crucial for progress of any society, especially when it comes to young people.

### Bosnia and Herzegovina

Most employees often relate stress with their work. Even some "easy days" at work still cause little dose of stress in the body and most people seem to be used to being exposed to stress now. *We live, we exist, we rest and we work.* But this happens under stress. Living in a society that has trauma in each of its segments has the consequence that many of its citizens suffer from the chronic stress.

A 19 years old tradesman reported that during the worst time of the pandemic COVID-19, he was isolated for months, and he dealt alone with the fear and uncertainty. He did not see his parents in months for fear of infecting them. He sometimes worked longer than 8 hours in a store, while trying to protect himself and others from the COVID-19. The interviewees reported that they would find helpful to have some alternative ways during their workhours to treat stress, including exercises, mindfulness and breathing exercises. Added to this, some of our speakers have indicated that they appreciate adequate

We live,  
we exist,  
we rest  
and  
we work

psychological help or counselling. Another participant confirmed that it would be of special significance to women who work in the commercial sector to have psychological help as cases of sexual harassment are not rare experiences. They also explained that employers do not pay attention to these situations and it is often left with employees to deal with their fears alone.

Stress causes physical changes within the body. It increases pulse and breathing, and muscles tense. The stress response has evolved to keep people safe, as they prepare the body for 'fight or flight' once the danger is sensed. Previous research also indicates that thinking skills improve as stress increases. Therefore, stress is often an honest feeling that can help steel against a sports match, employment interview or exam. Usually, after a stressful event, the body returns to its normal state.

The participants of this research indicated that their safe space and the positive relationship with the supervisors plays a role in interpersonal relations in the workplace, as well as for the general atmosphere at work. With affirmation, positive feedback, active listening to their needs, the workers can feel appreciated and satisfied.

On the other hand, mobbing at the workplace, abuse, extortion, gas-light, disrespect for labour rights, giving "guaranteed good" benefits while not regulating worker's paperwork legally still affect many workers. A 25 years old nurse stated during an interview that the help she receives from the colleagues is of great importance to her and that her colleagues play a role in staying at this workplace.

Although it is positive that workers are supportive of each other, it is negative that employers rely on this practice. All workers need formal, legal and psychological help and their rights must be respected. Workers do not need exploitation with minimum wages.

## Conclusion

Mental health issues affect businesses and poor psychological state and stress can negatively affect employees, mainly:

- Job performance and productivity.
- Engagement with one's work.
- Communication with co-workers.
- Physical capability and daily functioning.

Added to this, overwork can lead to increased levels of stress and anxiety, which are closely linked to the general happiness of the employee.

Research conducted by Oxford University's Saïd Business School, in collaboration with British multinational telecoms firm BT, has found a conclusive link between happiness and productivity.<sup>4</sup>

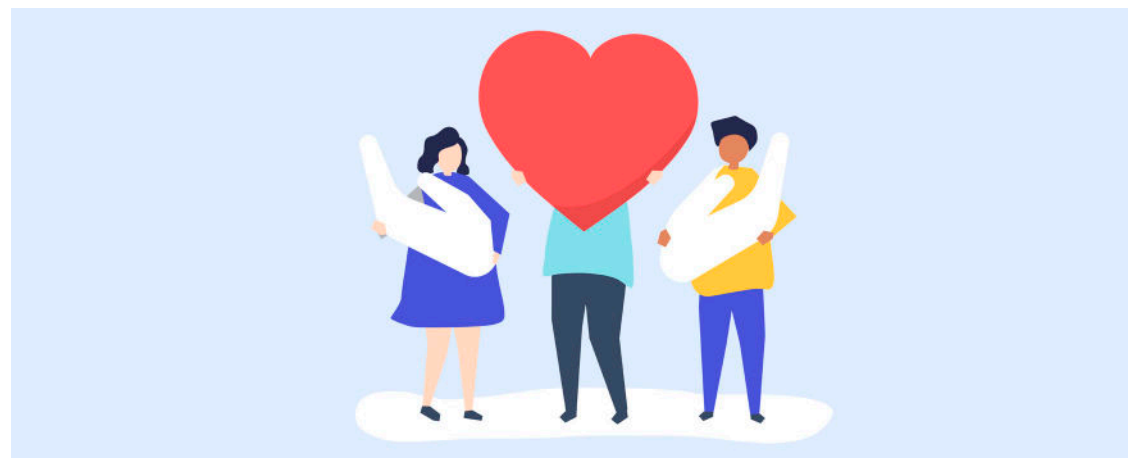
Young people need a positive and supportive environment to be the best versions of themselves. Career building should not be a thorny path filled with trauma and misfortune. It is fortunate that we live in 2021, an age when topics such as mental health and labour rights are publicly discussed and awareness of these issues is rising. However, the progress in this field depends on the willingness of workers to talk about their experiences and also on the system to protect the workers who are bravely speak up.

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<sup>4</sup> Bellet, Clement and De Neve, Jan-Emmanuel and Ward, George, Does Employee Happiness have an Impact on Productivity? (October 14, 2019). Saïd Business School WP 2019-13, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3470734> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3470734>

# Stop. Breathe. Listen. Respond.

Mersiha Čomor



# CHAPTER 4

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# Stop. Breathe. Listen. Respond.

Mersiha Čomor

### Introduction

Empathy is the ability to understand others, their feelings and perspectives. Having empathy means feeling other people's emotions. It is a skill which can be developed, but it can also disappear if it is not practiced.

*"Part of our formal education should be training in empathy. Imagine how different the world would be if, in fact, it were 'reading, writing, arithmetic, empathy.'"*

- Neil deGrasse Tyson (Waldorf Education, 2020.)

Numerous studies indicate the importance of developing empathy among children and how it affects their future development and general success. The authors of Emotional Intelligence 2.0, Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, find that people with high emotional intelligence and empathy, called EQ, made an average of \$29,000 more each year and they also attributed EQ to having 58% influence over job performance (Waldorf Education, 2020). In addition, numerous studies have

examined the success that the children achieve later in their lives. The primary goal of teaching empathy is the development of personality and numerous other traits that prepare them for life and potential achievements. Furthermore, Waldorf Education (2020) examined student behaviour in schools which focus on fostering empathetic school communities and found that students in high-community schools are more likely to become thoughtful, reflective and self-directing, and they also accept the authority, respect others, avoid courses of action that are harmful to themselves or others, and maintain higher standards of ethical conduct. Teaching children empathy helps young individuals create their future, and taking these small, but essential steps is important for the development of this world.

There are numerous ways how empathy can be learned and developed. Below are few examples of successful practices of states that successfully teach children about empathy.

### Examples from other countries

#### Austria

'Starting from the early age' curriculum of Emotions and Social Relationships is one of

*"Part of our formal education should be training in empathy. Imagine how different the world would be if, in fact, it were 'reading, writing, arithmetic, empathy.'"*

the main learning areas together with Ethics and Society, Aesthetics and Creativity, and Nature and Technology. Emotions and Social Relationships is intended to offer different impulses for learning which help children develop the ability to self-regulate (NASET II report; 76; 2018). For them, emotional learning is very important because children learn to act responsibly, think critically, accept rules and norms, help and care for others. Moreover, Austrian Centre for Personality Development and Social Learning was founded in Austria to promote and implement personal and social competences in all educational and training institutions. Another Austrian programme is the *Emotional Education for Early School Leaving Prevention project*, (EUMOSCHOOL) which is designed for children between 6 and 16 years old.

Development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential helps them evolve their identity and prepares them for life in society. Furthermore, understanding peace, tolerance and equality must be taught at all schools. In order to foster these competences, the schools can implement school-based life skills programs like *Lions Quest program*, intended for adolescents aged 10 to 14.

One of their first epidemiological studies based on mental health in Austria is the *Mental Health in Austrian Teenagers (MHAT) Study*. In a representative sample of 408 adolescents aged 10 to 18, the prevalence of mental health problems was 18.9% (Lions Quest program, 2017). Similar program is also implemented in Germany, *Erwachsen warden*, and it consists of 7 main and 2 additional units presented through more than 75 skill-building classroom lessons. Here, a wide range of additional material is provided for students, teachers and parents. The image below (Picture 1) shows an example of a school curriculum, as well as more details on units and covered titles.

**Table 1:** Overview of *Lions Quest* topics and exemplary unit goals (Wilms and Wilms, 2011; Lions Club International, 2016b, p. 4ff; Wilms et al., 2009)

Units	Exemplary unit goals
Unit 1: <i>My classroom</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to create a supportive classroom learning community</li> <li>to foster cooperation and communication skills</li> </ul>
Unit 2: <i>Building up self-confidence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to identify factors that strengthen self-confidence</li> <li>to practice listening and responding effectively</li> <li>to understand the importance of respecting yourself and others</li> <li>to learn a five-step approach for making positive decisions</li> </ul>
Unit 3: <i>Managing emotions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to become more aware of the range of emotions</li> <li>to learn how emotions, thoughts and actions are related</li> <li>to know coping strategies in stressful situations</li> </ul>
Unit 4: <i>Improving peer relationships</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to learn ways to establish and strengthen respectful friendships</li> <li>to identify different ways of responding to intimidation and bullying</li> <li>to describe steps for identifying and standing up to negative peer pressure</li> <li>to know strategies of conflict management</li> </ul>
Unit 5: <i>Strengthening family relationships</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to recognize the strengths and uniqueness of the own family</li> <li>to identify common family problems and describe positive ways to deal with them</li> <li>to learn about communication structures in the own family</li> <li>to focus on ways how family members can enjoy time together</li> </ul>
Unit 6: <i>Making health choices</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to develop self-management, problem-solving, stress reduction and assertiveness/refusal skills that help prevent drug use</li> <li>to explain the purpose of advertising</li> <li>to recognize that using substances is not the norm among young people and identify social pressures</li> </ul>
Unit 7: <i>Developing your potential and setting goals for healthy living</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to plan for future</li> <li>to learn and practice a five-step goal-setting process</li> <li>to plan a celebration of the project</li> <li>to distinguish between short-term and long-term goals</li> </ul>
Extra unit: <i>Energizer</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Lions Quest Energizer</i> are interactive activities that are offered during classroom sessions in frequent sequences. They can be used for purposes of refreshment and refocusing such as: meet &amp; greet, team &amp; trust builder, de-energizer, concentration, activation and coordination.</li> </ul>
Extra unit: <i>Drug prevention</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides information and material targeting specific drug prevention.</li> </ul>

Picture 1- The life-skills program *Lions Quest* in Austrian schools; 1026; 2017

## Ireland

Social and emotional aspects in primary and secondary schools of Ireland are observatory. They are part of program *Social, Personal and Health education (SPHE)* which include the following major areas: mental health, relationships and sexual education, bullying, substance use, gender studies, and physical activity and nutrition. They seek to enable students to develop competences like self-awareness, emotional expression, good relationships with others, conflict resolution, self-esteem, coping skills, responsible decision-making skills, critical thinking, and physical and mental health and well-being (NASET II report; 82; 2018). In fact, new curriculum for lower secondary school was established in 2012, putting more focus and emphasis on students and their social and emotional development.



This curriculum consisted of six 'key skills', namely: self-management, staying well, effective communication, creativity, working with others, and managing information and thinking (NASET II report; 82; 2018). Added to this, schools give teachers SPHE programs explained in more detail.

It is interesting to note that this subject consists of 3 topics: *Myself*, *Myself and others*, *Myself and the wider world* (Social, Personal and Health Education Curriculum; 37; 1999) . Here is an example of the overview of the third and fourth classes and the included topics:

- Topic *Myself*: self-identity, self-awareness, developing self-confidence, health and well-being, growing and changing, new life, feelings and emotions, safety and protection, making decisions.
- Topic *Myself and others*: myself and my family, my friends and other people, communicating, resolving conflict.
- Topic *Myself and the wider world*: developing citizenship, local and wider communities, environmental care, media education.

### Canada

Canada has a very famous program *Roots of Empathy* (ROE). This program is intended for children from 5 to 13 years of age and has proven to be very successful in reducing stress in children, raising social and emotional competencies as well as empathy.

This program started in 1996 and is now present in many other countries such as: New Zealand, the United States, the Republic of Ireland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands, Costa Rica, and South Korea. Research conducted by Roots of Empathy (2020) shows that children who go through this program exhibit:

- An increase in pro-social behavior (e.g. sharing, helping and including);
- A decrease in aggression. This is applied to all the children that will participate in Roots of Empathy, and it is expected that the program will reduce the number of children fights by approximately 50%;
- An increase in social and emotional understanding;
- An increase in knowledge of parenting;
- An increase in empathy.

Therefore, the research confirms how important it is to learn about empathy and that learning can prevent the emergence of the negative behaviors. The way this program is conducted is quite unique and it prescribes that that volunteers, i.e. parents, attend the class with children during one year. Hundred (2021) states that using an age-appropriate curriculum, a certified instructor of the programme teaches the students to observe the baby's intentions and to label the baby's feelings. This is how children learn that we share the same feelings and that our feelings are at the core of our humanity.

### Conclusion

It is extremely important to work on the development of children's personalities and their feelings. That includes the emotional intelligence that help children know how to behave when they grow up and how to react in certain circumstances. Also, the children need to learn how to deal with their emotions, and also, with others. They need to be ready to understand and accept the others. This is very important for the benefit of their future. Apart from the fact that only theoretical lectures with very little practical exercises are taught in

schools, children do know learn how to cope with the changes that happen to them during their development and growth. The school as an educational institution where the children spend a large part of their daily time and they need to be taught how to count on their feelings. This issue needs to be taken seriously and many steps need to be taken, but as a result, there will be a developed society where people are ready to understand each other.



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