



# DISASTER RESILIENCE IS BUILT THROUGH KNOWLEDGE



Save the Children

What do children think on how to reduce risk from natural and other disasters in educational institutions?

**“All schools must have basic equipment for response in emergency situations. Evacuation plans should be posted in all classrooms and on every wall. Additional literature should be provided for teachers, along with regular training for protection and rescue. Teachers should initiate extra-curricular activities with students tackling protection and rescue topics. Regular drills and workshops for students are required to teach them about risks and proper response in emergency situations...”**

These are the conclusions of primary school students from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) after the conference **“Building and integrating the natural and other disasters risk reduction system in BiH, focusing on children”** organized by Save the Children in cooperation with BiH Ministry of Security

in November 2017, discussing the role and importance of state and international organizations and other stakeholders in the protection and rescue system.

These students come from elementary schools that participated in disaster risk reduction project Resilience-building in Education and Local Communities (RELOC) implemented by Save the Children in the period 2015-2017 in Gradačac and Brčko District, areas hit by heavy floods in 2014.

These local administrations were included in capacity building activities for handling emergency situations together with **four schools** and **two kindergartens**, whereas about **2765 children** took part in workshops and practical drills. Also, **444 adults** went through a training course and project activities for improving disaster preparedness. All of the said activities were implemented in cooperation with the BiH Ministry of Security and relevant institutions of all governmental levels in BiH.





### Why?

Disaster preparedness of BiH institutions at all levels was virtually non-existent before severe floods hit the country in May 2014. Situation today is slowly improving. Faced with the aftermath of natural disaster that caused significant material damage and home loss, number of municipalities and schools expressed willingness to bring their preparedness to a higher level.

Following an active engagement in humanitarian response to 2014 floods and landslides, Save the Children has since focused on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programs at the local level, targeting municipalities of of Gradačac and Šamac and Brčko District with its project **Resilience-building in Education and Local Communities**.

### How?

The project was multi-dimensional and included capacity building of local institutions, including schools and kindergartens to increase preparedness to respond to natural and other disasters; facilitating the process of conducting Hazard, Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments and developing Plans of protection and rescue from natural and other disasters at municipal and school/preschool level and awareness raising among community members, children in particular. All project activities were implemented in cooperation with BiH Ministry of Security and relevant institutions at regional and local level.

The first step was to sign memorandums of cooperation with municipalities of Gradačac and Šamac and kindergartens and primary schools in Gradačac and Brčko District. This paved the road to three years of activities that significantly raised preparedness of these communities to respond to natural and other disasters.

*"It is especially important to raise the awareness of decision-makers and relevant institutions that have the obligation to pay particular attention to children, not only when a crisis strikes, but also at the stage of thinking and planning, wherein the already drafted action plans are of particular importance. The project also targets the parents, who have also raised their awareness of the need to build resilience to natural and other disasters. What we have seen from what has been done so far is the commitment of all actors to continue working in this area even after the completion of project activities,"* stressed Save the Children in North West Balkans Program Implementation Director **Ahmed Pjano**.

**444** adults - preschool/school teachers and staff members, representatives of municipalities, civil protection, fire fighters, health workers and local NGO's completed DRR trainings or participated in other project activities (simulation drills, workshops, awareness raising activities etc.)

Following the specialised training programs for representatives of municipalities and other relevant local institutions and organisations, e.g. civil protection units, firefighters, emergency services, police and local NGO's in Gradačac and Šamac, **Hazard, Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments** were conducted and **Plans of protection and rescue**



from natural and other disasters approved by the municipal authorities.

Same documents were developed and adopted by kindergartens and school boards following training programs for education professionals from Gradačac and Brčko District, resulting in clear guidelines and evacuation plans for every participating education institution.

In addition, school teachers were able to replicate adjusted training programs for their students, including practical drills. Third-grade teacher at the Tenth Elementary School from Bijela, **Ivana Kovačević**, says that during the drill held at the school the kids needed slightly more than a minute to go out of the school and gather at the previously designated meeting point without any panic and in full safety. She went on to say she was pleased with what was achieved, adding she too for the first time had the opportunity to operate a fire extinguisher.

*"Fire is something that may happen any time, and it is good that all of us in the school are ready and know what to do in such a situation. I am glad that during the drill I too had the opportunity to operate a fire extinguisher, so now it is easier for me to demonstrate to others how to use it. We were also trained in how to act in case of other disasters and emergencies, and will in any case be more ready to respond in case some of them should indeed strike,"* teacher Ivana said.

More than **1500** students, teachers and other staff members from schools in above-mentioned municipalities took part in such drills, as well as in quiz exercises organized in the aftermath of the drills to test students' theoretical knowledge. The children demonstrated what they had learned, and were without any panic or additional risk evacuated from the school as quickly as possible, with the help of their

*"We were not afraid, we knew what to do and where to go. We have learned not to panic. The drill was interesting, and what we liked most was putting out fire in a burning car. We heard the alarm sounding, we saw fire-fighters in the hallway and heard fire engine sirens, so in case of a fire we now know what to do,"*

**Lara and Sara**, Ivan Goran Kovačić primary school students from Gradačac, told us at the gathering point following the exercise.

teachers, while also "rescued" were school materials and equipment.

*"From the viewpoint of municipal Civil Protection service, this project's importance has multiple aspects. Various activities have brought together all actors, it has been clearly defined who goes where, activities have been synchronized, and one was able to see through these drills just how everything functions in a real situation. Following an analysis, it will be established which segments need to be improved and corrected in order to perfect preventive measures so in the future, in case of natural and other disasters, we could avoid human casualties and damage to materials and equipment,"* says **Isam Sendić**, Head of the Gradačac Municipal Civil Protection.

Project activities also included public campaigns carried out by Student Councils from the targeted schools, with the aim of raising awareness of the risks of natural and other disasters. Also, through the project implementation, the schools were donated equipment with which to additionally improve fire protection and protection in case of other disasters.



Last but not least, **Guidelines for realization of programmes in area of protection and rescue in primary schools** with a goal of integration of DRR from natural and other disasters in the curricular and extracurricular activities was developed and approved by BiH Ministry of Security. Furthermore, **Methodology for development of Plans for protection and rescue from natural disasters and catastrophes and Hazard, Vulnerability and Capacity assessment of educational institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina** was harmonized with the state methodology and is available for use in other locations. To define necessary steps and needs in order to have quality protection and rescue procedures in place in educational institutions, another document was developed - Minimum standards for resilience of educational institutions to natural disasters and catastrophes.

Following successful implementation of the RELOC project, Save the Children in North West Balkans is committed to continuing its work in this area in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



### Save the Children at NATO exercise

In September 2017, Save the Children in North West Balkans was invited to take part in the biggest **Consequence Management Exercise** held in BiH, organized by NATO and BiH Ministry of Security. This massive NATO included **34 participating states**, over **1200 rescue workers** and members of various civil protection organisations.



Exercise was conducted on several locations in north-eastern Bosnia and included simulations of floods, landslides, earthquakes, chemical incidents, etc.

Save the Children's team of **5 staff members** was joined by **8 employees and volunteers** from partner associations "Otaharin" from Bijeljina and "Vermont" from Brčko, all practicing early stages of Save the Children's Emergency Response Program. The purpose of this exercise was to demonstrate child protection and education interventions

in emergency situations through setting up and opening **Child Friendly Space** that was visited by approximately **50 primary school students** from nearby schools.

