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## MYWEB (Measuring Youth Well Being)

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### WP4: Direct engagement with children and young people (CYP)

#### Deliverable 4.1: Country level reports on interviews and focus groups from delivery partners (Croatia)

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## 1. Introduction

The main purpose of this report is to examine perspectives on the well-being of children and young people in Croatia. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms through which children and young people can flourish, it is necessary to examine the positive indicators of well-being in addition to the negative aspects of childhood and adolescence. In doing so, it is important to understand the meanings children and young people attach to well-being.

We conducted 10 semi-structured interviews and 2 focus groups with children (9-10 years old) and adolescents (13-15 years old) in 2 schools (different types with pupils from different backgrounds). We also conducted 11 semi-structured interviews and 2 focus groups with young people (16-19 years old) who are representative of different social groups with different levels of civic engagement. The entire research sample of this study was gender balanced. The study strictly followed all of the relevant ethical standards related to research involving children and young people. All of the children in schools who participated in this study received parental consent for their participation.

The results of this fieldwork study enabled us to gain better insight into how children and young people in Croatia understand and experience different aspects of well-being. It also explored what they think are the most relevant factors that determine their well-being. The interviews and focus groups provided an overview of children's and young people's global definitions of well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction. The study also revealed how children's and young people's family, friends, school, environment, health, leisure time as well as material issues determine their well-being. These findings can be used to tackle the challenges in investigating children's and young people's well-being.

## 2. Fieldwork characteristics

### 2.1. Fieldwork

#### Children in schools

Our study included 29 primary school children in total (10 children were interviewed; one focus group consisted of 10 children and the other focus group consisted of 9 children). The age of the respondents depended on the specifics of the Croatian educational system. Compulsory primary education in Croatia consists of eight grades and children begin school at the age of 6 or 7. Grades in primary schools are split into two stages:

**1st - 4th grade** (children aged from 6-7 to 9-10 years old) are taught by a class teacher. Subjects include Croatian, Mathematics, Art, Social studies, Physical education, Music, Religion and at least one foreign language. The younger group of school children included in our fieldwork

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were in their 4<sup>th</sup> grade of primary education.

**5<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade** (children aged from 10-11 to 14-15 years old) are taught by different teachers that teach different subjects. Additional subjects such as History, Geography, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Computing as well as English and/or other languages. The older group of children in schools included in this study were in their 8<sup>th</sup> grade of primary education.

By selecting respondents from these two categories we managed to include children in different, but comparable developmental stages, who come from a similar school setting. Currently, in Croatia, secondary education is optional, although most adolescents attend a secondary school<sup>1</sup>.

### **Type of schools**

Two primary schools (urban and rural) were selected in this study. The urban school is located in a city of average size for Croatia. For comparative purposes, we chose a school in a rural setting within the same county.

We organized and attended preliminary meetings at the schools, at which we provided relevant information about the content and goals of this project. Together with the school management we worked on including children that come from different backgrounds (i.e. single parent households, low-income families, children with physical disabilities, children with learning difficulties, children with different marks, and children from dysfunctional families). We would like to note that we did not manage to include different ethnic minorities. However, bearing in mind that less than 10% of Croatian citizens belong to ethnic minorities<sup>1</sup>, the ethnic structure of our sample can be considered adequate.

At the preliminary meeting, we also arranged all of the necessary technical aspects of conducting this study, including the distribution of parental consent forms. All parents signed consent forms for all of the children that participated in this study. In addition, we also communicated to the school management that all participating children (in focus groups and interviews) will receive a gift: 8GB USB stick. During the first preliminary meeting, both of the school principals expressed interest and willingness to participate further in this project.

### **Young people**

Fieldwork was carried out as expected. Our study included 22 young people in total; 11 young people were interviewed (5 organised/active young people, and 6 non-organised young people), and 11 participated in focus groups (5 organised/active young people, and 6 non-organised young people). To recruit young people, we contacted many NGOs, groups and organisations, including:

- Forum for Freedom in Education: [www.fso.hr](http://www.fso.hr)
- NGO Praktikum-Center for Children and Youth: [www.udruga-praktikum.hr](http://www.udruga-praktikum.hr)
- Volunteer Centre: [www.vcz.hr](http://www.vcz.hr)

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.dzs.hr/default\\_e.htm](http://www.dzs.hr/default_e.htm)

- Association of Our Children Societies: [www.savez-dnd.hr](http://www.savez-dnd.hr)
- Youth Network Croatia: [www.mmh.hr](http://www.mmh.hr)
- Centre for Peace Studies: [www.cms.hr](http://www.cms.hr)
- NGO Lijepa Naša: [www.lijepa-nasa.hr](http://www.lijepa-nasa.hr)
- Information Centre for Youth: [www.icm-zg.info](http://www.icm-zg.info)
- Youth Council of City of Zagreb: [www.skupstina.zagreb.hr/default.aspx?id=700](http://www.skupstina.zagreb.hr/default.aspx?id=700)
- NGO Imagine: [www.zamisli.hr](http://www.zamisli.hr)
- Croatian Association of youth NGOs and students with physical disabilities SUMSI: [www.savezsumsi.hr](http://www.savezsumsi.hr)
- NGO for Fostering Quality of Life Let: [www.udruga-let.hr](http://www.udruga-let.hr)
- Youth Council of the Ombudsman for Children: [www.dijete.hr](http://www.dijete.hr)

It is important to note that we encountered some difficulties during the recruitment process. Specifically, it was difficult to find young people aged between 16-18 who are organised/active in various civic activities. Most of the organisations we contacted stated that they have very little collaboration with young people from this age group. Following an intense search, we managed to find a sufficient number of participants.

We recruited young people from different backgrounds, including those with vulnerabilities. However, it was also difficult to find actively organised/active young people (up to 18 years old) with different types of disabilities because they often enrol into school later than children without disabilities. Thus, young people with disabilities typically become active in organisations at 20 (or when they are older). Interviews and focus groups with young people were conducted at the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar.

Total number of interviews and focus groups were 21 and 4 respectively. Before starting the interviews and focus groups, all of the respondents signed the consent form, and filled in the sociodemographic data sheet. All of the participants in the study received an 8GB USB stick.

**Table 1. Participants' characteristics – summary of socio-demographic characteristics**

**Pupils from primary school – interviews and focus schools**

<b>Primary school pupils</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Focus groups</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Age</b>	9	0	4	<b>4</b>
	10	5	6	<b>11</b>
	13	0	3	<b>3</b>
	14	4	6	<b>10</b>
	15	1	0	<b>1</b>

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<b>Gender</b>	Male	6	9	<b>15</b>
	Female	4	10	<b>14</b>
<b>Place of birth</b>	Croatia	10	18	<b>28</b>
	Abroad	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Croatian	10	19	<b>29</b>
<b>Disability</b>	Yes (type)	2 (1 dyslexia/disgraphia; 1 sight disability)	2 (1 cognitive - learning disability; 1 hearing disability)	<b>4</b>
	No	8	17	<b>25</b>
<b>Place of residence</b>	Urban	4	11	<b>15</b>
	Rural	6	8	<b>14</b>
<b>Residential status</b>	Lives in single parent family	1 (father died)	4 (1 father died)	<b>5</b>
	Lives with parents	9 (1 step-father)	15	<b>24</b>
	Lives with grandparents/ relatives	2	7	<b>9</b>
<b>Education</b>	Primary school pupils in full-time education	10	19	<b>29</b>

#### Young people - interviews and focus groups

Young people	Categories	Interviews	Focus groups	TOTAL
<b>Age</b>	16	2	5	<b>7</b>
	17	2	1	<b>3</b>
	18	4	4	<b>8</b>
	19	3	1	<b>4</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	6	6	<b>12</b>
	Female	5	5	<b>10</b>

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<b>Place of birth</b>	Croatia	11	11	<b>22</b>
	Abroad	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Croatian	11	11	<b>22</b>
<b>Disability</b>	No	11	11	<b>22</b>
	Yes	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Place of residence</b>	Urban	11	11	<b>22</b>
	Rural	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Level of education accomplished</b>	Primary school	6	9	<b>15</b>
	High school	5	2	<b>7</b>
<b>Education</b>	High school student	6 (5 in general secondary education; 1 vocational secondary education )	9 (8 in general secondary education; 1 vocational secondary education )	<b>17</b>
	Currently at university	5	2	<b>7</b>
<b>Employment</b>	in full-time education	11	11	<b>22</b>
	employed/unemployed	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Civic / organizational involvement</b>	Yes	5 (5 NGO)	5 (2 political organisations, 3 NGOs)	<b>10</b>
	No	6	6	<b>12</b>
<b>Residential status</b>	Lives in single parent family	1	0	<b>1</b>
	Lives with parents	10	10	<b>20</b>
	Lives with roommates	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Family status</b>	Single	10	11	<b>21</b>
	Partner / married	1	0	<b>1</b>

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## *2.2. Methodological differences among interviews and focus groups*

Research results revealed several important differences between focus groups and interviews that should be noted.

- In focus groups with children, the children often knew each other because they came from the same school environment, which might have affected how they responded to questions.
- In interviews, children and young people were more open and reported more details, namely, they shared more intimate, in-depth stories and experiences in interviews than in focus groups.
- The interaction of respondents in focus groups sometimes stimulated a richer response or raised new and valuable ideas. On the other hand, group/peer pressure inhibited some responses related to personal matters.
- Younger children required considerably more specific explanations, examples, and additional questions to understand the aspects and topics of well-being.
- We noted a specific type of bias that occurred in focus groups with children and young people (but not in interviews due to the nature of the setting). Specifically, when a person contributed something to a focus group discussion, others often mentioned the same topic. On the one hand, this could be attributed to conformism in groups, which is particularly emphasized in adolescence. Conversely, it could also be attributed to a memory bias with one participant's response triggering recall of similar events and experiences among other participants. Here are some examples:

Vera (focus group, female, 10 years old, primary school) stated: "I'm unhappy when we have a general clean-up of my room because then my mum throws everything in a pile and I have to clean it up." Other children mention similar stories. Luce (focus group, female, 9 years old, primary school): "I was unhappy too when I had to clean my room."

Teza (focus group, female, 13 years old, primary school): "I was happiest when my niece was born and the whole family gathered together, before that we were in a fight with our relatives." Poma (focus group, female, 13 years old, primary school): "There were also fights within my family, but now they are resolved and there is happiness."

### 3. Main empirical findings

#### 3.1. Understanding and measuring well-being among children

##### Global understanding/definition of well-being

Children aged 9-10 and 13-15 years old that participated in interviews and focus groups define well-being using specific terminology relating to their relationships with parents as well as friends and their school-related experiences. In these definitions, two main aspects of life emerged as the most important components: a) The quality of social relationships, including family relations, relations with friends, being a good person and being kind to others; and b) Engagement in interesting leisure activities.

For instance, Teza (focus group, female, 13 years old, primary school) considers friendship to be the most important thing: “My friendship is the most important thing, and if I am in a fight with my friend, I feel very sad.” Poma (focus group, female, 13 years old, primary school) thought that: “Love is happiness, but it can also be unhappiness. My friend changed a lot when she found a boyfriend, and I didn’t like it.” Eva (interview, female, 10 years old, primary school): “Well-being is when a child feels good, lives well, when a child has good parents, and when another person helps her to be happy.”

Pan (interview, male, 10 years old, primary school): “Well, everyone looks as if they are doing well. I’m always well when I see that somebody is happy. I didn’t notice that anyone is sad, and I like that because they are my friends.” Lora (interview, female, 10 years old, primary school): “I’m happy when I go to my cousin’s place or friend’s, when I sleep over at my friend’s place, and when I eat ice-cream.”

When asked about inequality in well-being among children, most children report differences, based on various factors, such as health-related difficulties, financial status, divorced parents, etc. For example, Ivanka (interview, 14 years old, female, primary school):

“The reason is health, happiness, attention, honesty. At school, we have two pupils who need help. One is in a wheelchair and can’t run, and the other doesn’t see well and has a problem with walking. Some pupils make fun of them. These two pupils seem strong in front of us, but I am sure they are hurt by it and that they have a difficult time when they get home.”

Samara (interview, female, 14 years old, primary school):

“We had a girl in our class, but she left; now she may come back again-because of her parents. They got divorced, I don’t know what happened, but it was difficult for her, now she is at her dad’s, but before she was at her grandparents’ place...some girls used to say that she was

spoiled, that she gets to do anything she likes behind her back ...I also have a cousin, his parents are also divorced, and he is also a bit...he gets to do anything he pleases, nobody ever tells him that he shouldn't do this or that.. He sees his dad only once or twice a week, so his dad lets him do everything."

## **Happiness**

Children tend to describe their happiness in concrete terms, that is, by using the activities and events that make them happy. This can be related to their developmental stages. As expected, children mostly (although not exclusively) focused on events and activities that happened recently and that reflected a) positive relations with close and significant people (family and friends), and b) achievements.

Luce (focus group, female, 9 years old, primary school): "I feel good when I help someone...and I was happy when I went to visit my grandmother in England last Christmas."-Mirko (focus group, male, 10 years old, primary school): "I feel good when I manage to go to a higher level in a computer game." Koko (focus group, male, 10 years old, primary school): "I like it best when I am spinning around in a circle with my cousins at my grandmother's place." Brajko (focus group, male, 9 years old, primary school): "I wrote a letter to Saint Nicholas, I helped my mum, I advanced in a computer game, cleaned my room, and then my mum took me to a café with her friends-that was a great day." Baba (focus group, male, 10 years old, primary school): "I was happiest at my dad's birthday party last Saturday, we went to a restaurant with my grandmothers and grandfathers."

Loza (focus group, female, 14 years old, primary school): "I was invited to play handball for a team, I was very happy that day and it was very special for me, and I was successful that day in everything." Rori (focus group, male, 14 years old, primary school): "I was happy when my brother found a girlfriend; he became nicer towards me."

Samara (interview, female, 14 years old, primary school):

"Childhood-that was the age of no concerns-no problems at all, no worries, no jobs. Our job was only to play. Now we have some important tasks, we have to take responsibility for ourselves and others. I'm looking forward to becoming older, to being able to take care of myself, but I also regret that I can't return to my childhood-that was very nice. All of our teachers tell us that now is the most beautiful time although all of us feel like it is horrible."

Children reported that they feel unhappy when something happened that was perceived as a loss, as something bad, scary, or uncomfortable for them.

Franjo (focus group, male, 10 years old, primary school): "I was unhappy when we were at the seaside, and I swam in cold water, I got sick and I couldn't swim anymore." Brajko (focus group, male, 9 years old, primary school): "For me, today is the unhappiest day because my mum will work until 19:00, so I'll be home alone all afternoon." Koko (focus group, male, 10 years old, primary school): "I'm unhappy when I can't go to my grandparents' place on weekends." Kola (focus group, male, 14 years old, primary school): "I was unhappy when I got bad grades." Jaca (focus group, female, 14 years old, primary school): "I was unhappy when I was in a fight with my best friend."

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Several children described their unhappiness in a more detailed way. For instance, Eva (interview, female, 10 years old, primary school):

"I feel bad when I am in a fight with someone. I often fight with my parents and then I feel bad...I am sad and I spend my weekends thinking about it... We most often fight about my brother, and we often fight very harshly, and then my parents are angry with us both, and then I somehow feel sad...I also feel sad when my parents are fighting, they yell at each other. This most often happens when my mum buys something and then my dad gets angry...We don't have a lot of money, we also have to move now and so the fighting starts. I get sad about this because they fight all day. My mum usually prepares lunch and stuff, and does everything, while dad sits behind a computer and tells her that she's lazy, and then they fight... and then over the weekend, there are happy times and bad times."

### **Life-satisfaction**

All of the children we interviewed and talked to in focus groups expressed that they are satisfied with their lives. Most of the younger children rated their life satisfaction as 4 or 5, while older children rated it as 3 or 4 on a scale 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). They all reported social relations and achievements in school or hobbies as the most important aspects of their life satisfaction, and reported different degrees of satisfaction with these aspects. However, when it came to their overall life satisfaction, all of the youngsters stated that they see themselves as satisfied or very satisfied.

For example, Mipu (focus group, male, 9 years old, primary school): "I'm satisfied when I make my family happy, but my brother makes fun of me and insults me, so I'll say 4." Vera (focus group, female, 10 years old, primary school): "I'd say 4 because I have a lot of obligations to do, and I don't have enough free time." Rori (focus group, male, 14 years old, primary school): "The most important reason why we are not more satisfied-why we do not rate it 5-are friends. There are kids in our class who have a lot of money and they keep to themselves and look down on us." Miro (focus group, male, 10 years old, primary school): "I'm satisfied because I'm good at computing and basketball." Duza (focus group, female, 9 years old, primary school): "I'm satisfied because I'm good in school and because I help my mum and dad."

Matija (interview, male, 14 years old, primary school):

"I would say 4. I'm satisfied with my life, 4 on a scale 1 to 5, but I'm not that satisfied with other people's lives...I'd say 2 or 3 for others because they don't do any sports, they smoke and drink... I'm more satisfied when I hear that my friends don't smoke, and less satisfied when I hear that they smoke and drink."

Teza (focus group, female, 13 years old, primary school): "Teachers sometimes make distinctions between pupils, and then we're not satisfied." Samara (interview, female, 14 years old, primary school): "I'm satisfied with my school achievements, I'm happy about this; I'm glad that I'm doing well at school."

### **Psychological well-being**

Both younger (9-10) and older children (13-15) describe psychological well-being in terms of

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school achievements, grades, and enrolling in the desired secondary school and finding the job they want. Kola (focus group, male, 14 years old, primary school) wants to be an electrician: "I want to be an electrician and for me it's most important to find a job of my choice." Brajko (focus group, male, 9 years old, primary school) said: "I'm happiest when somebody in my family succeeds in something, for example, when my mum gets a project or when I get good marks in school."

Ivan (interview, male, 10 years old, primary school):

"When I get older, my happiness will depend on whether or not I have a good wife, whether I am a good father, I mustn't be harsh, and that could also affect my future. I'll have to pay gas, electricity and water bills, I'll have to go to work... I'll be frustrated at work, so I think that when I am 30 years old, I will not be as happy as I am now but I think I'll be happy. The most important thing for me is to have a wife, job and children in the future. I hope that I'll have these things. It will be bad if I have enemies at work, if I have to compete all the time, if whoever proposes a better project wins."

Samara (interview, female, 14 years old, primary school):

"I think I will have benefits because I'm learning, I'll finish secondary school. Maybe, if I'm good, I'll go to college, and get a good job...It's also good that I have good relations with my brothers, that I don't fight, and that I am helping my parents, and not just rejecting them. They raised us, they've worked all of their lives for us, to makes things possible for us...and I've seen how other people reject their parents on TV."

### **Major domains**

Most of the children emphasized relations with family, friends, and school as the most important life domains. For example, Loza (focus group, female, 14 years old, primary school) stated: "Before, my family was most important to me, and then sports. And now school is in second place." In addition, Matija (interview, male, 14 years old, primary school) mentioned: "50% school, 50% family are the most important domains to me." Stjepan (interview, male, 15 years old, primary school) reported that: "It's important that your parents are not divorced, that everyone gets along well, and that we don't fight."

**Social relations.** Children mostly emphasized the role of **parents and grandparents** for their well-being. Pan (interview, male, 10 years old, primary school): "I get along with my parents very well-this is important to me-they don't make me do my homework. I do my homework by myself at my grandmother's and she checks it.

Some kids don't talk with their parents. Some kids in my class have lost their mum or dad; they died, or got divorced, or they have even lost a brother who went abroad to work. Those who are alone mostly talk to their mums. Among those who are not alone, boys mostly talk to their dads, and girls to their mums... Mum and dad always have something to do; less time is dedicated to me. When both parents are present, that's much better because they share these tasks, and they can do them other days if they have time."

Stjepan (interview, male, 15 years old, primary school): "Kids who have both parents are better off, while those whose parents are divorced are worse off, they experience trauma, especially girls. For boys it's easier, for girls it's harder; boys go to a bar and get drunk."

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It is important to note that children also mention issues of efficient and inefficient parental boundary settings, particularly in terms of making children do specific activities. Matija (interview, male, 14 years old, primary school):

“The family makes us kids go to church, to mass; they make us do sports, they want us to move away from the computer. I think they should listen to children more, but maybe not too much. For example, some kids want this Play station 5, the new one, and their parents can’t afford it, but they buy it anyway, and kids play on it for three hours and that’s it. His parents paid 300-400 Euros for this.”

Many children emphasized the role of their **relations with brothers and sisters** for their well-being. For instance, Lovro (interview, male, 10 years old, primary school): “I think that children who live alone with their parents are bored.”

**School.** Interviews and focus groups indicate that children typically perceive school as very important and they also think that good school achievements will enable them to succeed later in life. However, most of the participants consider school as something that has to be done; rather than seeing it as something that they could enjoy or be intrinsically interested in.

Pan (interview, male, 10 years old, primary school):

“I think playing is worthwhile; it helps me to be more cheerful, relaxed, so nobody is sad. And learning helps us to get a good job. If you’re not doing well in school, then you can’t earn enough money to buy food, and then it’s not good. If you can’t buy food, you can’t have a good house and other important things, and you’re worried all the time. My mum keeps on telling me that it is important to study so that I don’t get a lousy job.”

Children reported different experiences with teachers and expressed different attitudes in relation to the role of teachers for their well-being. Franjo (interview, male, 10 years old, primary school): “The teachers are OK because they teach us a lot of useful stuff, about minorities, to write, to calculate, all sorts of things.”

Some children mentioned discrepancies between what teachers say and teach them, and what teachers actually do. For example, Matija (interview, male, 14 years old, primary school): “I was at a bar and I saw my teacher smoking. So, she is saying one thing at school, and doing the opposite. That’s not very nice...I was bothered by this.”

Schools are of particular importance to children with special needs. For instance, Stjepan (interview, male, 15 years old, primary school):

The school helps out children who need help-kids who have some difficulties, like me, they have assistants in the classroom, assistants help us with learning... Schools sometimes reduce the amount of school work... Also, for example, I can’t see what’s on the blackboard, so they copy things on paper and give it to me to rewrite it.

**Health.** Children in our focus groups and interviews generally expressed that they value health highly and consider illness to be a problem. More specifically, they expressed concerns and sympathy for children who are sick. Duza (focus group, female, 9 years old, primary school):

“Health is the most important thing to me, if we are healthy and happy, our parents are happy

too." Lovro (interview, male, 10 years old, primary school): "Health is important, I don't like to be sick because everything hurts and I feel bad, I cannot do anything but just lie down and watch TV." Stjepan (interview, male, 15 years old, primary school)-boy with special needs-"I'm alive, that's what is most important to me. I can walk, I could have ended up in a wheelchair. Thank God, this catastrophe didn't happen."

One boy attributed health problems of the two girls in his class to the fact that they do not have their fathers. He also mentioned the difficulties that children who are ill have at school with keeping up with their friendships and explaining to other kids about being absent so often. Lovro (interview, male, 10 years old, primary school):

"I know kids who are sick all the time...I know two girls, their fathers aren't at home, they are with their mums all the time ... The fact that their dads aren't at home influences this, both of their dads work in a transport company, and they aren't home for days, and they're usually alone with their mums. They don't hang around with other kids that much... Other kids think that they'll get sick if they spend time with them, and they keep away from them, so they lose friends... but there are those who know that it's not dangerous and who are their best friends. And they explained this illness. Mia has some kind of...I don't know the name of this illness. Lorena has diabetes. Nobody knows much about Mia's illness. Some kids at school say that Mia is not at school because she doesn't feel like coming to school, that she doesn't want to do the exams... As for Lorena's illness, they more or less understand that it's not dangerous for others"

Some kids also emphasized smoking and drinking as problems, while others did not. Stjepan (interview, male, 15 years old, primary school): "Some are doing drugs, drinking, and smoking. They think that this is good, but they will die in the end. Some understand this, and some don't." Matija (interview, male, 14 years old, primary school): "This is the time when my peers start to smoke, drink a lot, fight with their parents. I swear sometimes, I sometimes drink a little bit, but I don't smoke."

**Leisure activities.** Throughout the interviews and focus groups it is evident that children highly value their leisure time. Many of them mention their interests, hobbies and activities in which they are intrinsically engaged in.

Lovro (interview, male, 10 years old, primary school):

"When I play football, it's not so much about the game for me, I'm a goalkeeper, I like to defend and throw myself on the ball, and it's great, regardless that others think that being a player is better. I think my team is awesome; they score a lot of goals, often funny goals, from the centre."

**Material conditions.** As an additional important domain, children often mentioned social and income inequalities. For example, Rori (focus group, male, 14 years old, primary school) said that: "The most important reason why I'm not satisfied is related to friends. There are kids in my classroom who have a lot of money, so they keep to themselves and look down on us." Samara (interview, female, 14 years old, primary school) mentioned the importance of external appearances: "Some kids are more withdrawn, they're different from those who like to spend time with others and talk, this can be, for example, because of the way they look."

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## 3.2. Understanding and measuring well-being among young people

### Global understandings/definitions of well-being

Teenagers and young people (TYP) who participated in interviews and focus groups understand well-being as positive and associate it with the joyful aspects of their lives. It is also related to being a good person, as well as pursuing and achieving interesting goals. For example, Marina (interview, female, 19 years old, 1st year student, organised/active) stated: "It's something we do to become happier and more satisfied and, at the same time, to connect with other people, friends. Helping and teaching other people is very important to me, and learning new things."

Two main aspects of life emerged as the most important components of well-being in definitions provided by young people:

- a) Social relationships, including family relations, relations with friends, being kind to others;
- b) Being engaged in intrinsically valued and meaningful activities.

It seems important to note that many teenagers and young people defined well-being in terms of what leads to higher levels of well-being, rather than defining what well-being is. Sana (focus group, female, 18 years old, secondary school, organised/active) said that "Well-being consists of social relationships, relationships with friends, and being organised/active in various NGOs." Jula (focus group, female, 18 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active) stated that "It's most important to be able to socialize and have opportunities in society, to volunteer and travel." And Juro (focus group, male, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized) said that "Well-being is a feeling that I'm able to achieve a balance between school and music, and at the same time to have a normal life. I hope I'll have time for all that in the future."

### Happiness

In line with the global definitions of well-being, many TYP describe their happiness in terms of specific activities, events, interactions, or situations they were organised/active in. TYP typically feel happiest when they are with their friends and when they achieve desired goals (e.g. good grades). Juro (focus group, male, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized) stated: "There are two types of people: one type search for happiness in careers and others search for it in relationships." Perdo (focus group, male, 16 years old, secondary school, organised/active) mentioned that: "I was happiest last week when I was at a birthday party, and I was the least happy when I found out that a girl from our school committed suicide. We were all very sad, and we still are." Dubravko (interview, male, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized) said: "I feel happiest during the summer holidays, nothing can make me feel sad. When I feel bad, it often depends on how things are at school, or it's just a bad day." And Ana (interview, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, non-organized): "I was very happy when my friend helped me with my homework, which I didn't expect... I was also happy when I was with my dog. He's always in a good mood, so he cheers me up when I'm down. I was happy because my mum talked with me more than usual."

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## **Life satisfaction**

All of the TYP we interviewed and talked to in focus groups expressed a very high level of life satisfaction. They all reported social relations and intrinsic goal pursuits as the most important aspects of their life satisfaction and reported different degrees of satisfaction with these aspects. However, when it came to their overall life satisfaction, all of them stated that they see themselves as highly satisfied. For example, Dubravko (interview, male, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized) reported:

“I’m really very satisfied with my life, I had a beautiful childhood and lots of friends. Now I’m in secondary school... I am really satisfied in 90% of things. It’s great that we are young and we have our whole life ahead of us, although sometimes it’s not so great to be young because we have to wait a couple of years to do some things, we have to finish secondary school and deal with teenage issues.”

Ana (interview, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, non-organized): “If I compare my life now with how it used to be, I would say-on a scale from 1 to 10-that my life satisfaction is 9.”

In a similar vein, Marta (interview, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active) stated:

“My life satisfaction is a genuine 9 on a scale from 1 to 10. I’m satisfied with my family, with the academic aspects of my life. My social life satisfaction would be 7 on a scale from 1 to 10, I meet a lot of new people, but I have to let go of old friendships because of my new way of life. I’m very satisfied with my leisure time, I’m rarely bored, which I think is good. My love life is OK; there have been better days, but also worse days.”

## **Psychological well-being**

TYP often mentioned opportunities for pursuing meaningful interests, achieving one’s desires and wishes as essential parts of well-being. Many of our participants, regardless of whether they are organised/active in groups or not, indicate the importance of having goals, and being engaged in personally valued activities. For instance, Marina (interview, female, 19 years old, 1st year student, organised/active) stated: “I think it is very important that all children can try out different activities, to see what they are really interested in and what they are good at, and then they can choose what is good for them... I’m very satisfied with my studies, my knowledge, and the opportunities I was given.”

Marta (interview, female, 19 years old, 1st year student, organised/active):

“Currently, I work on my family’s animal farm, I work there on weekends, I work with animals, and I really feel good working there. I’m very satisfied with the way we treat our animals. I study animal sciences, and I feel very good with the way I spend my leisure time. I also do a lot of sports; I manage to find a balance.”

Zoran (interview, male, 18 years old, secondary school, non-organized): “I always do what I want, I have a goal everyday and I do it. Sometimes I don’t manage to do this (if I’m very tired,

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and don't have enough time), but I make up for it the next day. I don't have any wasted days." Dubravko (interview, male, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized) said that well-being reflects the fulfilment of children's rights: "I would associate well-being with children's rights, that is, to what extent children have possibilities to have good lives and good opportunities. And if they don't have good conditions, to what extent are they getting their rights to education, health-care... Are they safe? This is important so that children are not sad."

TYP highly appreciate having autonomy to choose the types of activities they engage in, as well as having sufficient time and space to pursue these activities. Sana (focus group, female, 18 years old, secondary school, organised/active) said that "To have a fulfilling life, one has to have a hobby, regardless of whether this hobby is useful or not."

Some of the TYP mention that parents have difficulties in accepting the value of pursuing these intrinsic interests, mostly because of their concern for the material well-being of their children. Sana (focus group, female, 18 years old, secondary school, organised/active) expressed: "For me unhappiness is the fact that I'm interested in social sciences and the humanities, but, as it's difficult to find a job in this area, I think I will have to choose something else to study."

Jakov (focus group, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active) said: "It's important to choose a job that you'll like more than a job that can provide some benefits. My parents wanted me to study law, but I enrolled into the Faculty of Education and I'm very satisfied now. The problem is that parents put more emphasis on financial factors than on our wishes."

Ena (interview, female, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized): "Dance is very important to me, it fulfils me, when I'm having a bad day, it really helps... Some people think this is stupid, for example my grandfather. School is important, and you can't live from dancing, but dance and my social life fulfil me." Marina (interview, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active): "A family is important to support their children to choose various activities; a family should guide their kids... If a family doesn't see this as important, they can sometimes say to give it up, that these activities are irrelevant, no use, and then kids easily give up, become passive, and even envious of others who are organised/active in interesting activities."

## Major domains

**Social relationships.** Most of the TYP emphasized **relations with family and friends** as the most important life domains. For example, Ivana (interview, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student) emphasized the role of a family environment for well-being: "It's very important to feel good at home, to have a stable family life. People who have broken homes have more difficulties finding their safety."

Zoran (interview, male, 18 years old, secondary school, non-organized): "The family is important, that's for sure. But sometimes, young people don't see this, they even want to leave home and live alone, but they can't see that they need support from their family... The family is very important to guide you."

Tonka (interview, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active): "I'm very satisfied

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with my family, many kids don't have proper support from their families... Many kids have parents who are war veterans, and that has really affected them, this has left a mark. My parents support me and approve of all of my activities. If my schoolwork is fine, I can be engaged in anything I like."

Ena (interview, female, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized) emphasized the importance of close relationships for one's well-being: "To have a high level of well-being, it's very important to have good relationships with friends, to be able to tell them everything. It's also important to have good relationships with parents and sisters, and to be good in school. And also this depends on whether you're bullied in school. I recognize well-being by the feeling I get when I sense that my friend is a true friend. You can't be okay if you don't have good relationships."

Zoran (interview, male, 18 years old, secondary school, non-organized) stated that: "Happiness is very important and all the things that make us happy, as well as what can we offer others and do for others."

Jakov (focus group, male, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active) mentioned that "To me, fun is very important and being with my close friends."

Some of the TYP particularly emphasized the role of their **relations with brothers and sisters** for their well-being. For instance, Zoran (interview, male, 18 years old, secondary school, non-organized): "I'm always with my brother, we go to school together, we are even in the same class. If I don't get support elsewhere, I can always count on my brother, and he can count on me. He's very important to me."

Ena (interview, female, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized): "I think I'll always be close to my sisters. I find it very strange when somebody says that they had a fight with their sister and that they aren't talking now. It's important to me that we help each other, like my oldest sister helps us."

**Education.** Teenagers and young people reported the value of **school and education** to a greater extent, which is very well illustrated in Marta's statement (interview, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active): "Education is essential; I think that a person can't feel fulfilled if he or she doesn't have opportunities for education". Similarly, Tonka (interview, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active) directly expressed that she thinks that education is the most important aspect of young peoples' well-being: "Well-being means that kids have everything they need and that their rights are acknowledged and respected. Conditions of life are important, but education is the most important thing." Mario (interview, male, 18 years old, secondary school, non-organized) reported: "Knowledge is very important, it's very important to educate yourself, my priority is school, even though I'm not the best of pupils."

However, TYP also often criticized the education system in terms of a) its high work overload and pressure; b) their difficulties in finding meaning and value in some school activities, and c) the lack of opportunity to exercise their talents and work on their intrinsic goals. For example,

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Ante (focus group, male, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized) described how many young persons are not happy in school: “The main problem is that most people are not happy with the school they were enrolled in.” Furthermore, Mario (interview, male, 18 years old, secondary school, non-organized) stated:

“I think that young people are overburdened and pressured by school and don’t have enough time to express themselves, they are under stress. Perhaps, school is hindering us to a certain degree, it’s too broad, we can’t focus on our interests; rather, we have to learn about everything, which is a problem for me. I have a band and I’m a freelance programmer, and I don’t have time and space to do everything I’m interested and curious about.”

Juro (focus group, male, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized) had a similar experience and said that for him: “Unhappiness is when you only have time for studying and you don’t have time for other things.” Zoran (interview, male, 18 years old, secondary school, non-organized) reported that: “School’s not a problem, but the pressure coming from school is! I think they should definitely reduce the amount of work.”

TYP reported different experiences with teachers and expressed different attitudes on **the role of teachers** for their well-being. For example, Zoran (interview, male, 18 years old, secondary school, non-organized): “I think that teachers are not essential for my well-being. There are a lot of teachers who don’t work on well-being; rather, they want to resolve something that is troubling them in their private lives in school, and then they take it out on us. They invest minimum effort while expecting a lot from us.”

Overall, we noted that TYP value teachers when they support their autonomy and acknowledge their talents and wishes. TYP resent it when teachers do their jobs in a superficial manner and they are very sensitive to the unjust behaviour of teachers. Marina (interview, female, 19 years old, 1st year student, organised/active): “The way teachers relate to pupils-that is important. Can pupils come to them about other stuff, or do they only see pupils through grades? For instance, if a pupil can come to a teacher and say ‘I didn’t manage to do this homework because I’m dealing with this and that...’, and if a teacher can understand this and see that something is happening to a pupil-they are the good teachers.”

**Leisure time.** Throughout the interviews and focus groups it is evident that teenagers and young people highly value their leisure time, and many of them mention their interests, hobbies and activities in which they are intrinsically engaged, in a spontaneous way (without us asking them specific questions).

Pera (focus group, female, 18 years old, secondary school, organised/active): “To have a high level of well-being young people need to have a stable environment and to have good opportunities.”

Marina (interview, female, 19 years old, 1st year student, organised/active): “I think that is very important that kids have opportunities to try out different activities, to see what they like and what they are good at, and then they can choose what is good for them... Everyone can find something they like.”

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Mario (interview, male, 18 years old, secondary school, non-organized): “Playing music is my most important hobby, I want to express myself through music, I have a band, and we play melodic punk on teenage issues. People around us like us, we have a lot of fans who are about our age, we have even signed a record deal with Croatia Records, we also do charity work. My second hobby is programming, I like to do that... I’m an artistic person; I like to express myself through art.”

Marina (interview, female, 19 years old, 1st year student, organised/active): “I like to spend my time in different ways. I have been very active all my life, I went to music school, I learned languages, programming, I did sports, I went on summer and winter camps, I used to go ice skating, skiing, drama group... Now, through this NGO, I’m trying to make this possible for others too. I think it’s very important that kids have opportunities for this.”

**Health.** TYP generally consider illness to be a difficulty, which does not necessarily reduce quality of life, and that the most important thing is how a person deals with it.

Marta (interview, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active): “Health is important, but young people don’t take care of their health that much. Recently, I found out that I have Hashimoto’s thyroiditis, so I started to take better care of myself. I watch what I eat now. I think that the majority of youth don’t think about their health, but then in 5 or 10 years you’ll see the effects of this.”

Marina (interview, female, 19 years old, 1st year student, organised/active): “Health problems are very important, but essentially very limiting. There are people who deal with their health issues very well. I believe that this is the same with financial matters-somebody can have a little, but they focus on what they can do... I have a friend who is in a wheelchair, and she is great (although I would never say anything bad to a person in a wheelchair), and she is so positive that we even makes jokes about it.”

In addition, TYP emphasize the role of social support in dealing with health-issues.

Zoran (interview, male, 18 years old, secondary school, non-organized): “One of my friends has Crohn’s disease, but he has his brother, sister, mother and father on his side, and now it’s like he doesn’t have this disease at all, and everyone sees him that way. But there are other people who don’t get this kind of support from their families, and then they think they are terribly sick and incapable of doing things they might actually do. Support can help this.”

**Material conditions.** Most of the TYP consider material conditions to be highly important, which may be attributed to the ongoing economic recession and high unemployment rates in Croatia. However, TYP do not see material conditions as the most important prerequisites of a good life. Ante (focus group, male, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized): “I think that young people have more financial problems than family problems.” Jakov (focus group, male, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active): “Before, the most important things were fun, friends and computer games, but now material things like clothes and food are also important. I think that I’m more mature now.”

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Marina (interview, female, 19 years old, 1st year student, organised/active): “Material conditions are important because, without them, some people would not have the opportunities to have different things and experiences. However, everyone has some opportunity, some people have more, and some people less, but I think that everyone has a way to ‘get out’.”

Zoran (interview, male, 18 years old, secondary school, non-organized): “To be well, we need material things to satisfy us. This isn’t always necessary, but, nowadays, most of the time it is... Not only material things make me happy, there are also other things, of course, but I like to get material things. I don’t care how other people see me, whether my clothing is a brand or not, but I do care about whether I have something I need, such as a new computer or technology. I think it’s necessary that I have what’s new, so I can be up to date.”

Finally, Ana (interview, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, non-organized) pointed out: “Most people put money in the first place, but in fact today you can’t do without money. Some people say-you can’t live with money only-but you can’t buy bread if you don’t have any money. Many people look at everything through money. People don’t even choose friends according to who is nice, but who is more handsome, more attractive in the social scene. But, I cannot speak for everyone, everyone is different.”

### ***3.3. Remarks on the definition and operationalization of ‘wellbeing’ in the fieldwork***

Throughout the interviews and focus groups among children and young people in Croatia, the problem of terminology (for well-being) became evident. Specifically, the term ‘well-being’ is literally translated as *dobrobit* in Croatian and it is used more as a scientific term than as an everyday term by the general population. The difficulties in understanding what we understand as well-being were particularly emphasized among younger children. Most of the children and young people we interviewed understood it as “being a good person and/or doing something good”.

Marina (interview, female, 19 years old, 1st year student, organised/active): “Well-being comes out of one’s personal experience, but also from people around us. If we care about someone, for instance for a friend, and we see that he or she is having a bad time, we want to help him or her, even if we don’t know him or her well”.

Mario (interview, male, 18 years old, secondary school, non-organized) defined well-being as: “Doing something with good intentions, what we want to do well, and in aspects of life that we are interested in, where we want to be successful”.

Ana (interview, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, non-organized): “Well-being is, firstly, awareness about other people in general. You can’t be a good person if you are acting only to your own advantage... If you can help someone in any way-teach him/her something, help him/her in a direct way, or psychologically, in any way.”

Unfortunately, we could not find another single term that would be more appropriate, so we had to use phrases such as ‘good life’, ‘happy life’ and additional explanations to bring the well-being construct

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closer to children and young people. We assume that similar issues emerged in other languages as well and we think that this is a very important issue to consider. Using the words and/or phrases that capture the construct of well-being the best for a specific language and culture may be the optimal solution rather than using literal/scientific translations of well-being.

## 4. Differences on the understanding of well-being depending on certain factors

### Age

Younger children find their relationships with teachers more important than teenagers and young people. Lovro (interview, male, 10 years old, primary school): “My teacher is fun, and funny, and not too harsh on us”. Zoran (interview, male, 18 years old, secondary school) reported that: “We could even exclude teachers all together; especially for the subjects where they make us learn things off by heart: I could do it on my own from the book, I don’t need a teacher for that.”

### Rural vs. Urban

Children that live in rural areas provided narrower descriptions of well-being than children of the same age that live in urban areas. It is also evident that they use poorer vocabulary, give simpler descriptions of well-being, and use more concrete and less abstract terms in their statements during interviews and focus groups. Jula (focus group, female, 18 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active) reflected: “The City of Zagreb provides many opportunities for satisfaction, but the question is: what’s it like in other, smaller cities, how many opportunities do young people have there?”

We have noted that children and teenagers from rural environments (vs. those that live in urban environments) tend to focus more on the role of relatives and extended family members for their well-being than their urban peers as they seem to spend much more time with them. Another distinction between rural and urban environments relates to the way that children and young people perceive good living conditions. For instance, children from rural environments perceive good living conditions when a house has electricity and it’s not falling apart, while children from urban environments think that good living conditions are when everyone has enough space.

### The level of civic engagement

Teenagers and young people, who are actively organised/active in various NGOs and groups, define well-being more in terms of their goals and intrinsic values, while less active youngsters focus more on concrete aspects of life. Pera (focus group, female, 18 years old, secondary school, organised/active) said that “Young people are different in terms of their priorities, for me a feeling of fulfilment and not feeling useless are the most important factors for well-being, while for others material and going out with friends are important” Mapa (focus group, male, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized) “I’m satisfied when I have good relationships with friends and when I have good grades in Mathematics.”

### Material conditions

It seems that most of the TYP see the importance of material conditions as giving opportunities for

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enjoying life. However, it seems that some of them value the role of material conditions more than others. This may be, to a certain degree, related to their family SES status. For instance, if their parents have financial difficulties and often discuss them in front of their children, children may be burdened by this and subsequently think about the financial aspects of life more intensely.

### **Family situation**

Throughout the interviews and focus groups with children, we noted that children that live with both parents seem to emphasize the importance of having parents who are not divorced and seem to stigmatize children whose parents are divorced. Several children explicitly did not say that their parents were divorced, but vaguely mentioned it later in the interview. For example, Samara (interview, 14 years old, primary school): “We’re satisfied as a family. There are kids whose parents are divorced, but luckily, I haven’t experienced that.”

## **5. Having their voices heard and survey engagement**

Almost all of the children, teenagers and young people who participated in our interviews and focus groups stated that they do not feel acknowledged and heard in society, particularly within schools. Most of them expressed that they wish to have their voices heard more, and that they want to be asked more on their opinions and experiences in school, as well as in other domains. For instance, Eva (interview, 10 years old, primary school) said: “I think people don’t understand kids... for example, if some teachers are really too harsh, when kids say this to adults, they don’t understand them, they say it will go away, there are worse things and worse teachers than that.” Pera (focus group, female, 18 years old, secondary school, involved): “There are many organisations that deal with young people and that could have a lot of use out of these kinds of surveys, but the biggest problem is that nobody listens to these organisations.”

Ivan (focus group, 10 years old, primary school): “Listening to my opinion and others’ opinion is important to me. For example, when I’m telling a joke, I like to be listened to. I would like to express my opinions, but I can’t. In school, when we have our homeroom class, I want to say something, like others, but we don’t have enough time.”

Jula (focus group, female, 18 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active) stated: “Even when the policies for young people are the focus, nobody asks young people about that. You can imagine how it is with other matters.”

Marina (interview, female, 19 years old, 1st year student, organised/active): “People don’t realize that the young people they neglect now will lead this society one day, not all of them, but some of them. Then now young people will take care of them when they are retired. People neglect this fact-young people are interesting maybe when they turn 18 and they can vote, but they don’t care in general.”

Ena (interview, female, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized): “I’m not satisfied with the way young people’s voices are heard. We’re a passive society, there are no voices and even when there are voices, nobody hears them. In school, they explicitly say to us: ‘The teacher is always right’, so whatever we do, however we explain, the teachers will always have their way. “

Irja (focus group, female, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized): “There is an example when young people didn’t want to do the state graduation exam, and nobody acknowledged their opinions, and the state graduation exam went ahead even though young people did not want to have it.”

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And lastly, Perdo (focus group, male, 16 years old, secondary school, organised/active): "As a member of the Pupils' council I can say that we can express our opinions about everything, but I doubt that anyone will take anything into account."

### **Motivations for further involvement in a survey**

All of the participants are motivated to continue their involvement in this research project on a longitudinal basis. They mentioned several different motivational aspects for their further involvement in a survey:

- **Having an opportunity to express and talk about their experiences, wishes and interests.**

Tonka (interview, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active): "Young people don't have a place where they can express themselves and what they think about relations between young people and society, or they don't know how to express themselves, or they don't wish to express themselves... I think it is worthwhile to do these surveys as an opportunity to have our voices heard. It's necessary to ask young people about important issues."

Pako (interview, 14 years old, primary school): "It would be good to have a survey where you could write about what is troubling you and what is not troubling you."

Ena (interview, female, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized): "Following your well-being is valuable, you can then enhance your well-being if it is lower than it used to be, by bringing back what was good, or by focusing on something new... for example, if you and your friend become distant because you are no longer attending the activity the two of you used to do, you can do something else to spend time together. I would gladly participate in a survey. My sister used to do these surveys, I think it is interesting!"

- **Hoping that the expression of opinions and experiences and desires of young people will indeed help to have their voices heard and that this will foster positive changes.**

Duza (focus group, female, 9 years old, primary school): "Taking part in a survey-It would be fun, maybe something changes in the future when I answer questions in a survey."

Jula (focus group, female, 18 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active): "We should have systematic data on young people. These data could enable people identify the problems and develop strategies to solve these problems."

Juro (focus group, male, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized): "It would be interesting to follow young people by survey, but only if this would lead to some positive changes in society. I think that young people would be willing to participate in this kind of survey, and to get them interested, some direct benefits should be presented."

And Marta (interview, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active): "I would gladly be a part of a survey. I hope it would foster improvement and lead to positive changes in young people's lives, I think that we should strive to help young people feel better."

### **Places to be interviewed**

Regarding the places where they would feel comfortable to be interviewed, many children and TYP would like to take the survey in school. The school as a preferred assessment place was more

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emphasized by younger children. The first reason for this is that a school is monitored and a safe environment for children, and place where “serious and important things”, as the survey, should be conducted. An additional incentive is the opportunity to skip classes. Eva (interview, 10 years old, primary school): “School is a good place, so we can skip some classes, and it’s nice there, and teachers can help us.”

Some children also suggested taking the survey at home, through the internet, in some public institutions, or even in nature. It is important to emphasize that an internet survey was rarely mentioned as a preferred method even among the group of adolescents, and rarely mentioned as an option in the younger group.

Children and adolescents were aware of problems of attrition in a longitudinal survey and problems of following up young people through their transition processes. However, they reported willingness to participate in a longitudinal survey if they see and understand the purpose, implications and benefits of the survey. One young person expressed that he prefers talking to a person in-depth, such as in an interview, and that he would gladly participate in that kind of study, rather than a quantitative survey. Samara (interview, female, 14 years old, primary school): “I think that such a survey would be good for us, to gather these data from one year to the other, I don’t think this is boring; rather, I think it’s good... I think it would be easier for me if this was done in school.”

### **Incentives**

Regarding the use of incentives, almost all of the children and young people agree that some kind of reward would be appreciated; however, rewards are not crucial in motivating children and young people to participate in a survey.

Eva (interview, female, 10 years old, primary school): “You said we’ll get a USB stick, so that is nice... If there was no reward, I think that some children would participate, and that some would not.” Tonka (interview, female, 19 years old, 1<sup>st</sup> year student, organised/active): “I like talking about these things, group discussions are also OK, as well as incentives and the time frame of the survey.” Mapa (focus group, male, 16 years old, secondary school, non-organized): “Young people have a unique opinion about themselves, they think they are special so probably that is why they would like to participate in a survey because they think their opinion is important. That is why I think that an incentive is important, but not crucial for participation.”

Children and young people mention skipping school classes due to participating in a survey would be an incentive in itself.

## **6. Other recommendations informing MYWEB project**

The results of focus groups and interviews suggest several important recommendations for developing a survey on the well-being of children and young people:

- In line with the existing literature, in assessments it is important to take into account the developmental stages of the children’s age group in surveys. Younger children require more concrete, simple and straightforward types of questions on their well-being.
- Special attention should be made in translating the concept of well-being and bringing the construct of well-being closer to children and adolescents, as the meaning of the construct in

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scientific terms may be substantially different to the meaning children and young people attach to it.

- Within this context, it is important to note that many young people stated that they would prefer elaborating their opinions and experiences; rather than just filling in a quantitative survey. Therefore, we recommend that the survey includes open-ended questions to give young people opportunities to elaborate their responses in an in-depth manner, if they wish to do this.

We sum up with Ivan (interview, male, 10 years old, primary school):

“Yes, I would complete a survey more than once so that I can express my opinion...I would like this to be at home so that kids don’t get scared or at school so that kids can feel safe. I would like it if there is more talk on how happy children are, about kids in war; I hope politicians will acknowledge that. I’m satisfied that at least you are coming here to ask about children’s happiness. We need more institutions like that and more studies. Our opinions, kids’ opinions should be acknowledged more.”