

## Press Release

June 25, 2025

### **FINAL CONFERENCE: “GROWING TOGETHER: ACHIEVEMENTS, EXPERIENCES AND FUTURE STEPS” “**

Representatives of five municipalities – Kisela Voda, Veles, Vinica, Debar and Gostivar – together with children and young people, institutional representatives, civil society organizations, and international stakeholders, took part in the final conference of the project “Place to Grow – Child Friendly Municipalities”. The event was held on 25 June at the EU House in Skopje, from 09:00 to 14:00.

The conference, entitled “Growing Together: Achievements, Experiences and Future Steps”, was an opportunity for joint reflection and exchange of challenges, successes, and lessons learned from the process of developing local strategies to promote children’s rights. The event brought together municipalities, children and young people to share ideas and plans for their continued active involvement in shaping their place to grow.

The conference opened with welcoming remarks by Kristina Vasileska, Director of the Center for Family and Child Care – KMOP Skopje, and Isak Misini, Project Coordinator at the First Children’s Embassy in the World – Megjashi. Both highlighted the importance of the project and sent a message of continued cooperation and commitment to advancing children’s rights. Children were at the heart of the conference, which was moderated by students Jana Pljokova, 3rd year at “Kocho Racin” Gymnasium – Veles, and Jovana Cimbalevik, final-year student at “Vasil Antevski Dren” SEPUCS.

The first part of the event featured video testimonies from local government representatives, excerpts from children’s podcasts, and a short overview of project results.

The main panel discussion, entitled “Local Action for Children’s Rights: Why Does it Matter?”, was opened by Marcia Palotta, Task Manager and Representative of the Delegation of the

European Union, who underlined that investing in children's rights and strengthening local democracy are key prerequisites for building inclusive, responsible, and fair communities.

Children and young people took the lead in this panel, sharing what the project meant to them and how it amplified their voices. They conveyed their experiences, reflections, and messages to adults, including: Kristijan Martinov, 3rd year student at "Kocho Racin" Gymnasium – Veles; Matej Ristov, 9th grade student at "Krumе Kepeski" Primary School – Kisela Voda; Ana Arsova, final-year student at "Vancho Prke" Gymnasium – Vinica; and Edina Miftaroska, 2nd year student at "28 November" Gymnasium – Debar.

The panel dedicated to local commitments for promoting children's rights gathered municipal representatives: Verica Todorovska Daceva, Head of the Public Affairs Department, Municipality of Veles; Vesna Blazhevсka, Social Worker at Kindergarten "Veseli Cvetovi" – Kisela Voda; Aleksandar Jovanov, Municipal Councilor of Vinica; and Dzhevit Miftaroski, Teacher at "28 November" Gymnasium – Debar. They shared experiences, challenges, and concrete activities undertaken to create environments where children are heard and included. The panel enabled an exchange of good practices and encouraged inter-municipal cooperation.

The conference also featured remarks by Vesna Bozhevсka-Petrushevсka from the Ombudsman's Office, Department for the Protection of the Rights of Children and Persons with Disabilities, who highlighted the institution's continued efforts to promote and safeguard children's rights.

Vaska Bojadzi from KMOP Skopje presented the Children's Rights Monitoring Platform as a unique tool for advancing local policies, with a discussion on its integration and sustainability in regular planning.

Participants had the opportunity to visit the exhibition "Gallery from a Child's Perspective", composed of artworks by children of different ages, vividly depicting their wishes and visions of an ideal place to grow

The final conference represented an important moment to share the achievements and experiences of the "A Place to Grow" project, as well as to advance dialogue between local

governments, children, and young people. The event strengthened the commitment to creating inclusive environments where children's rights are respected and promoted, paving the way toward stronger and more sustainable commitments for the future.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

PLACE TO GROW aims to strengthen the efforts of local authorities to advance children's rights and promote their participation in local planning.

The 30-month project supports the municipalities of Vinica, Debar, Gostivar, Veles, and Kisela Voda in developing and operationalizing key strategic documents for promoting children's rights, based on the specific needs, perspectives, and expectations of children.

The project is funded by the European Union and implemented by the First Children's Embassy in the World – Megjashi and the Center for Family and Child Care – KMOP Skopje.

About Megjashi: Megjashi advocates and protects children's rights, promotes responsible parenting and respect for children's individuality, strengthens civic movements for children's rights and child participation, and works for institutional accountability in the best interest of the child.

About KMOP Skopje: The Center for Family and Child Care – KMOP Skopje, established as a local civil society organization in 2017, focuses on supporting vulnerable groups through the implementation of social initiatives, education, research, and the provision of social services.

Photos from the event.