



## MY PATH TO DESIRED CAREER PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION IN SERBIA





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## THE IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION FOR EDUCATION REFORM



Do young people in Serbia have a good enough understanding of their personal talents and abilities when it comes to making a decision on their future career? How well are they informed about how to become educated for their desired profession? Do they know how the job is done in reality and what opportunities they have to find a job quickly through that choice? Have they gained the capacities through the educational system to handle their career responsibly, without fear of change and to obtain new knowledge throughout their entire life?

These are just some of the questions relating to the importance of the professional orientation programme. This programme is support not only for the young people, but also for educational institutions and parents. It assists young people, through the active participation of the local community and companies, in making the decision that is of the utmost importance for their future. Therefore, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, in partnership with GIZ, has introduced the professional orientation programme systematically in all elementary schools in Serbia within the project "Professional orientation". GIZ implements this project on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Students have the opportunity to gain a real picture of their talents and abilities through the five phases of the programme and workshops with their peers. They get information about their desired career, about further education opportunities and the situation on the labour market. They thus gain the opportunity to try out the occupations they are interested in and on the basis of all this information come to a decision on what they really want to do, and accordingly, which school they would like to attend. In the final phase of the programme, the students will learn basic skills on how to manage their career, continue learning and adapt and change their plans in accordance with changes in life circumstances.

The project began in 2011, and so far has involved 95,000 students in all 1086 elementary schools in Serbia. Almost 3,000 teachers and expert associates were engaged. Approximately 20,000 young people were involved in peer informing in youth offices, while about 8,000 students had the opportunity to learn about the world of work by being in contact with employers and experts in professions of interest to them. In this period, 86 elementary schools acquired the status of Mentor School for the programme of professional orientation, which have teams with the capacities to support the further development of a school as a centre for professional orientation.

The programme has introduced significant innovations to the education system, beginning with the fact that it directly addresses students, by recognising and developing the personal abilities of each of them. Owing to the dynamic model and the modern and interactive methods applied, it has demonstrated huge potential in motivating teachers and expert associates to find creative solutions. These solutions were developed in cooperation with students and parents, representatives of the business and local community and thus they position the school as the key agent in the mobilisation of local capacities. Professional orientation pays special attention to addressing gender stereotypes in career selection, and also encourages students from vulnerable groups to continue their education and gain competences that will enable them to become independent.

Considering the demonstrated results and their importance for the realisation of the priority goals of education reform, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development intends to integrate the professional orientation programme into the educational system on all levels.

Dr Srđan Verbić  
Minister of Education, Science and Technological Development

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION FOR CAREER PLANNING



The knowledge and ability to enable young people to recognise their creative energy and various talents in time, to make right decisions in what they can excel in and learn how they can make it happen are essential for the future of society.

Research and analyses regarding the reasons for the high youth (15-24 year of age) unemployment rate, which was 49.7 percent according to the 2013 workforce in Serbia survey, show that besides the consequences of the economic crisis, insufficient awareness of their own abilities and information about which professions are in demand on the labour market influence their limited employment possibilities.

A large number of young people enrol into university, a small number of them graduate from university within the given time period, yet those high school students who obtained their diplomas at a vocational high school most often were not sufficiently aware of the possibilities they had in the technical and handcraft occupations: immediate employment due to the high demand for these profiles, earn significantly more than the national average, work in the most modern facilities and with the latest technologies, further improve themselves through work and continue their education if they want to.

The lack of appropriate information and support when making life decisions can be compensated by the systematic implementation of professional orientation in elementary and high schools, and youth offices. The Government of the Republic of Serbia, acting upon the proposal of the Ministry for Youth and Sport, and in cooperation with the ministries competent for education, labour and employment as well as with civil society organisations, adopted the Career Guidance and Counselling Strategy in 2010 as part of system regulations that should enable young people to participate actively in all spheres of social life.

The task of the strategy, amongst other things, is to inform and support young people in planning their career depending on their personal interests and abilities and to prepare them for the dynamic changes in the labour market and life long learning.

In order to achieve this goal, the Ministry for Youth and Sport is the partner of the German Organisation for International Cooperation GIZ, which, on behalf of the German government, has been implementing the project “Professional Orientation in Serbia” since 2011.

Vanja Udovičić  
Minister for Youth and Sport

## ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES FOR THE FUTURE PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Almost everyone who sees what is taking place in the seventh and eighth-grade classrooms of “Rada Miljkovic” Elementary School in Jagodina will be quite surprised. Students write CVs in the Serbian language class, prepare for an interview with entrepreneurs in the English class, make collages on the different types of professions in the art class, while in the computer science class they search the Internet and read blogs on choosing jobs and finding jobs. All these activities are an essential part of curriculum of these subjects.

Together with their teacher, a group of students is carefully preparing questions for the representatives of a nearby company whom they intend to visit. Boys and girls are holding a serious discussion about which issues are

“I want to become a biologist and work for a company or a research institute.”

especially important and what they would really like to learn from the company managers. The students definitely want to hear the workers tell them what their working day is like, what they do and most importantly, what level of education the job they do requires. Grammar school pupil Marija Dimitrijević had the opportunity to become familiar with the phases of professional orientation in her elementary school in Jagodina: “I am very happy that I participated in the workshops and attended the career choice preparations. Before, I had always wanted to become a doctor. However, after having looked into the job and visiting the General Hospital in Jagodina, it was clear to me that I wouldn’t derive any pleasure from it.” This young girl is now able to clearly define a goal that she would like to achieve: “I want to become a biologist and work for a company or a research institute.”





For the young people in Serbia the path to their final choice of career that is suited to their personal abilities is not an easy one. Jobs such as a doctor, lawyer or vet are at the top of the most attractive choices – both the young people and their parents. They frequently do not think about the chances of getting such a job and the employment criteria, their personal educational capacities let alone what their typical day at work would be like. Four years ago when GIZ was looking for schools that might be interested in implementing the pilot of the professional orientation programme, the head teacher of “Rada Miljković” Elementary School in Jagodina, Boban Marović, was delighted when he learned about the idea: “It is very important that the children get to know themselves better and learn about their own talents too, allowing them to make an informed decision on their future life path. Parents should not be deciding their children’s future career choice; it is something every student should do for himself or herself. And schools are the institution that should definitely be required

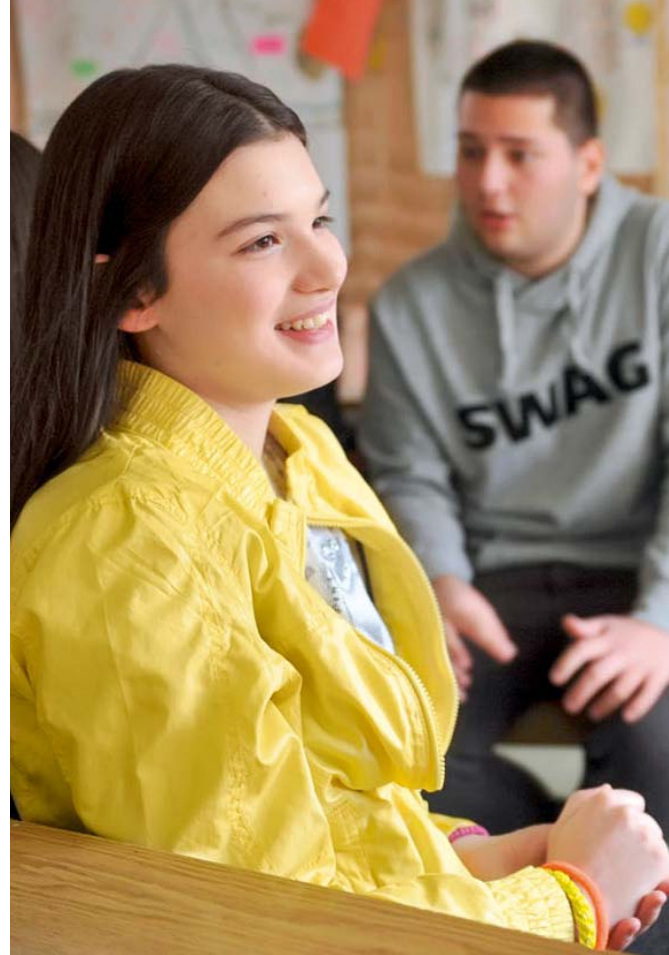
to help students in that decision, i.e. teachers who are competent in professional orientation.”

Boban Marović has thus himself become one of the members of the professional orientation team, which he has formed together with five other colleagues, and they have all attended the nine-day basic training in professional orientation organised by GIZ. Thanks to Marović’s agile personality and the convincing arguments that he has employed to advocate for the project before the parents’ council, the school board and local community, the professional orientation implementation project was unanimously accepted. “The parents’ attitude was the greatest challenge. They had to learn to step back and leave the children more room to make an independent decision. In the end, we noticed that even the very unyielding parents have changed. They still support their children, but without telling them what to do“, says Head Teacher Marović about his experience

“The parents’ attitude was the greatest challenge. They had to learn to step back and leave the children more room to make an independent decision.”







## WE ARE LOOKING FOR EXPERT PARENTS

“Every year I open the doors of our company for this type of visit, since it is important for the children to see what our workshop really looks like and what we actually do.”

All the seventh and eighth-grade teachers are approaching the professional orientation topic in their classes, using a comprehensive approach to curriculum content. Marović and his team have trained the entire staff; every teacher knows when and which element of the content he/she can integrate into their curriculum. At the beginning, the young people should talk about their senses, talents and abilities. Hearing, touching, and using fine and gross motor skills can be ideally tested at the art class. Then different types of job are focussed on. The pupils in groups search the Internet for the tasks and conditions of and possibilities for employment within one job, and then based on that develop mind maps or make PowerPoint presentations and present them to one another. They visit companies and talk to experts in the professional world.

For this type of activity the school can rely on people like Saša Stanojević, a father of four schoolchildren in Jagodina. Stanojević is also an executive in the company Erozimat. He came to the school and presented his company in class – a mechanical tool making workshop – to seventh grade students and patiently answered

their questions. A year later, the children visited his company: “Every year I open the doors of our company for this type of visit, since it is important for the children to see what our workshop really looks like and what we actually do.” All the students interested in the work of this company can come to visit us. In addition, a further two pupils from every class also visit the company and then inform the other pupils in their classes about the visit. Apart from Mr. Stanojević, the school has established cooperation with various other companies which also want to enable children to gain insight into the real world of work.







## SPREADING IDEAS

The idea of professional orientation can be spread to the entire community, in order to provide support to young people in appropriately selecting a school/career, only when many organisations, institutions, schools and companies start cooperating with one another. The solution is the team that Coordinator Snežana Vasiljević has met regularly, comprising of representatives from elementary and high schools, companies, youth offices and associates from National Employment Service in Jagodina. They exchange information and plan appropriate activities within the framework of professional orientation for children and young people. This is how a few years ago the education fairs were established, organised by the elementary school at its initiative.

Although there were open door days in high schools previously, this team has come up with a new concept. All high schools have a joint presentation in the form of a common event – an educational fair – in one of the elementary schools. At this event, the older students present what they have learned in high school and answer all the questions that the elementary

school pupils from the entire municipality may have. Slavica Jakovljević, who is in charge of professional orientation at “Nikola Tesla” Electrical Engineering and Civil Construction High School, which participates in the fair, explains further: “In our school we have a team which is tasked to represent the school, like a kind of a PR team. We train the students so they can show some practical exercises to the elementary school students at the fair and explain everything they are curious about in our school.” Besides this, Slavica Jakovljević informs the elementary school teachers about the times when the elementary school pupils can visit this school, about their opportunity to ask about anything that interests them about the school or to attend the high school students’ practice classes, so they can get a better understanding of electrical engineering and civil construction courses. Afterwards the students then pass that knowledge on to their peers and parents. Slavica Jakovljević says that she can already see the results: “We have more students enrolling in our school today who are really interested in these subjects, who have made a thoughtful and desired choice. Therefore, we see students getting better results, since they have chosen the subject themselves.”

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## YOUTH OFFICES AS RELIABLE SUPPORT

“Besides this, we have open doors every Friday, where young people can obtain career information and advice, and we are currently organising several big events.”

A carefully thought-out decision regarding further education after the eighth grade is the first step in a student's professional development. However, the process does not end here. After high school graduation young people face the important question of whether they should study at university and what they should study or whether it might be better to enter the world of work straight away. Professional orientation is of assistance not only to elementary and high school pupils but also to young people who are older than 14 as well as young people who are unemployed.

In order to reach out to these young people, GIZ is currently working with 119 youth offices. Career Info Corners (CIC) were set up in the youth offices, where young people can get all the information they need about the world of work and the world of education. The CIC is a place where young people can inform themselves about the future formal and non-formal education possibilities, about internships that are available or free work posts in some companies. All the dates of educational fairs, additional education or other informative events are contained in the CIC calendar of activities. Besides this, the youth offices organise visits to companies for young people and offer them the opportunity to learn about jobs in the real environment.

Ana Nikolić is in charge of the youth office in Niš and she has a precise overview for the entire

year. “Besides this, we have open doors every Friday, where young people can obtain career information and advice, and we are currently organising several big events. One of them is the occupations and job fair that should be held in one high school in Niš, and all young people can come and visit to get information about the jobs on offer.”

Ana has established cooperation with 15 companies which will present their employees at the fair. The employees will describe their jobs to the students and point out which qualifications they will need for particular jobs, and they will let the students know about any job vacancies in their companies. Those speaking to the students include entrepreneurs who have launched their own businesses, and they will tell the interested young people about the challenges they encounter in this type of work.





## FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS – FROM THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

One of the services that a number of youth offices provide is individual peer counselling. Since individual counselling cannot be offered to a large number of young people, the offices have offered workshops on professional orientation in high schools. In the desire to support offices in this idea, GIZ has offered the opportunity of professional internships to students of pedagogy, andragogy, psychology and social care. Through these internships students gain knowledge and skills in the area of professional orientation, so that they can help the offices implement the high school student workshops.

Student Ivana Adamović describes her internship with a high level of satisfaction: “We train the students in how to go actively job hunt; we develop their social skills such as team work and communication and motivate them to engage outside of the school too, work on self-improvement, volunteer in various companies and associations, and thus contribute to the development of society.” Apart from workshops, the youth offices in cooperation with schools organise visits to companies and invites experts to schools to talk about their jobs. GIZ has so far awarded 100 students professional internships, who have trained in excess of 5000 more high school students. Ana Nikolić from the youth office in Niš says: “Parents frequently call me to ask when the next professional orientation workshop is going to be held and

whether their child can participate in it. Parents have learned the importance of this programme and they even want their older children advised about career choice.” For these young people who no longer go to school and are looking for a job, the youth office also offers similar workshops in its premises.

High school student Nemanja Anastasijević gave us a clear answer to the question of how much the professional orientation workshops are useful for the pupils: “Now I definitely know that I will study international relations. I put to rest my final doubts concerning this at the workshop since I learned that I have skills required for public appearances, that I am capable of team work, and that I also have proficient rhetorical skills. It is also very important that in the workshop you have an opportunity to connect with other participants. There I met my peers who are in a similar situation to me, so we teamed up to help others to make best possible decision on their future career path. Students from 17 Belgrade high schools have united their interests and founded their own association. In this way, they participate in decision-making process and actively deal with youth-related issues so they can forward their requests and desires to schools and other youth care institutions. “In addition to this, the students from our schools come to us directly to ask about professional orientation workshops, so we can be involved in their organisation”, says Anastasijević who is pleased with the additional positive effect.

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## STRONG PARTNERS

### MENTORSHIP – KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER FROM SCHOOL TO SCHOOL

„Čegar“ Elementary School in Niš, it is noon: twenty students carefully follow the Internet conference on the big screen. One web designer is making a Skype call and enthusiastically talks about his job. Students are inundating him with questions, as they want to know what exactly he does, how much money he earns and who are his clients.

This is actually a common event for the children at this school. They regularly interview people about their jobs and what their day at work looks like. The students have had the chance to talk with a biologist from Bahamas, a librarian from Melbourne and many other professionals in companies in Serbia. This idea came from the English language teacher, Ana Živković, who teaches at “Čegar” Elementary School. “In this way, students get the opportunity to get an introduction to the work performed in many companies and various different jobs”, says teacher Ana. “Besides this, in conversation with people from abroad the students can improve their knowledge of English.”

In “Čegar” Elementary School professional orientation is implemented in all parts of the curriculum and has been so since 2011. First Goran

Dinić, the school’s head teacher, and five of his associates completed training in how to implement professional orientation that was organised by GIZ. Since then, every year new members of their staff are becoming involved in this programme after they have been trained by their colleagues who have already been trained in implementing professional orientation. Every seventh and eighth grade teacher looks on the topic of professional orientation in class, organises workshops, various events or practices writing CVs with the children, role plays particular jobs or composes questions for representatives of various companies and experts of specific profiles. As a mentor school, “Čegar” cooperates with colleagues from 60 elementary and 25 high schools in the Nišava and Toplica districts. Although this requires additional effort from Head Teacher Dinić and his team, they believe that these efforts will pay off for the students: “Very often children cannot find settle in their education and career choice, because it was actually their parents’ choice. Many of them fail a year or even drop out of school. Since we started implementing the professional orientation programme in our school, none of the students has dropped out.” This type of success is motivating the teachers at “Čegar” Elementary School to pass on their experiences to their colleagues in other schools.

“Very often children cannot find settle in their education and career choice, because it was actually their parents’ choice.”





## 21<sup>ST</sup>-CENTURY SCHOOLS

Maja Svetozarević, professional orientation expert network coordinator, has connected schools in the region with employment services, youth offices, the municipality, entrepreneurs, the school administration and parents. She knows the amount of effort the teachers from the mentor school are putting in: "They visit schools in the region and train their colleagues. They follow their development and discuss with them how they can implement professional orientation in their environment." It is actually about the manner this project can be applied within the school subjects or in the curriculum or how students should be prepared for the interviews with experts or with high school representatives. At the same time, at "Čegar" Elementary School the students are to a great extent using e-learning. The school has created its own Wiki Internet page where teachers and students note down their experience, the methods they use in implementing professional orientation and examples of best practice. One can find videos from visits to companies or recordings of Skype sessions with experts from all around the world; at the same time, children even post photos from the workshops or reports from educational fairs. Teacher Ana Živković self-confidently explains:

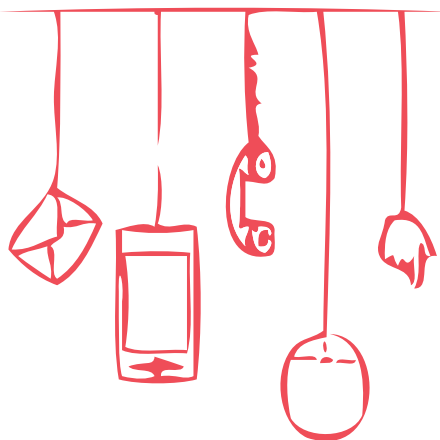
"We are a 21st-century school. You cannot avoid these methods any more. Besides, by this method all schools have access to information on our activities and can present their examples of best practice. Thus, everyone has the opportunity to learn from others." By using this instrument the mentor school is able to maintain contacts with all other mentor schools from other parts of Serbia and mutually exchange experience in this way. The expert network for professional orientation is getting larger every day.

"Teachers visit schools in the region and train their colleagues."

Apart from regularly visiting other schools, the teachers at "Čegar" Elementary School in Niš support their colleagues in the region through another activity. Teacher Ana Živković has already held three webinars offering online training in the evening or during the weekend. They always have between ten to twenty participants and they work on specific topics, says Ana Živković, who goes on to further explain: "At our last webinar the topic was how to use Wiki. I then explain them how to create one and practice using it with their colleagues. They can ask questions and try creating one themselves, so the webinar almost resembles a classic training session".



## "WE WOULD NOT COME THAT FAR"

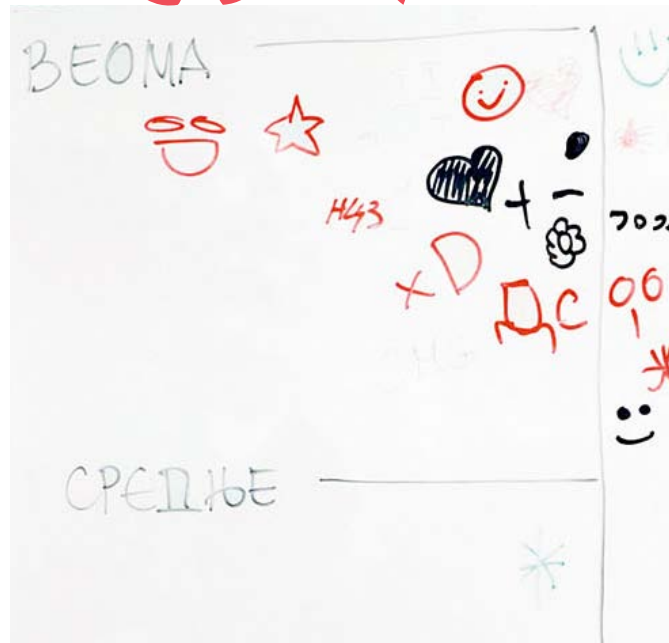


**L**jubica Jokić, a pedagogue from "Milan Mijalković" Elementary School in Jagodina only has words of praise for the activities of the mentor school "Rada Miljković" in Jagodina.

"Without the mentor school, we would have not come so far. They made us stronger and gave us a bunch of wonderful ideas. In cooperation with them and following their initiative, we have become a mentor school too. We participate in all activities organised at the "Rada Miljković" school. It was then that Ljubica Jokić gave the go ahead to implement the idea to set up the living library from mentor school. Parents who have various job occupations spent one day at school and talked about the jobs they do. Another time teachers and several students from the "Rada Miljković" school came for a visit. At that meeting, the peer teams discussed how to make a Facebook page for their school, what informational content they should publish and how they can use it. At the end the students presented their work to the teachers.

"As a head teacher of a school, I have a monthly salary of 560 euros. Children and parents believe that a chef, a waiter or a car mechanic earn a lot less and for that reason everybody wants to go to university. But the truth is that a good chef earns 500 EUR or more and that does not require many years of study at university."

The mutual support and cooperation between schools, local communities and companies is multifaceted and requires a high level of engagement. Despite this, Dinić is confident that professional orientation protects children from making a bad career choice and unemployment in the long run. "As a head teacher of a school, I have a monthly salary of 560 euros. Children and parents believe that a chef, a waiter or a car mechanic earn a lot less and for that reason everybody wants to go to university. But the truth is that a good chef earns 500 EUR or more and that does not require many years of study at university. These types of job offer a high probability for secure employment. That is something we want to pass on to children and parents."





## A LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN COMPANIES AND HIGH SCHOOLS

Discovering personal interests and abilities, collecting information on various occupations and learning on the spot what a particular job really involves – these are all the major steps young people take when choosing a career. However, for both children and young people, all this is purely theoretical until they personally make their own picture of a typical work day in a company. In order to help young people gain insight into the real world of work, GIZ, together with the professional orientation team, has been organising visits to companies and high schools as well as education fairs. In this way, young people can try doing the work themselves and gain a real impression of what a typical work day is really like. More and more high schools and companies are supporting this idea, and over 500 companies open their doors for visits by final grade elementary students every year.

Saša Stanojević, a manager at the company Erozimat in Jagodina, manufactures forming tools – for staving, cutting and injecting plastic, and also carries out eroding to order using EDM machines, operates CNC machines and constructs and designs models with CAD/CAM software. “I believe it is important that the children gain an impression about this company. Some students ask me lots of questions, and some of them are completely uninterested in the things I have to say. This is exactly what we want to discover. The students should learn themselves whether technical occupations interest them or not.”

Suzana Đorđević, a nurse, has also succeeded in persuading her boss to sometimes open Jagodina General Hospital to school pupils in addition to patients. “We take the young people through all areas of the health care centre. This allows someone to forget about medicine studies or discover with excitement that he or she wants to work in the medical field”, says Suzana with a smile, whose daughters, one in eighth grade and the other in high school, are the first generation attending this programme.

After elementary school children have to decide which high school they will attend to continue their education. They have to think about whether they want to become qualified for a technical, medical, or some other job in the fields of science or social science, as only then they can enrol in a specialised high school. That is often not a simple choice at all. This is where a peek behind the scenes of high school education would definitely help. The youth offices in cooperation with elementary schools organise educational fairs, where all high schools in administrative district present themselves together, allowing students to become familiar with education available. High school students perform smaller, practical tasks and are willing to answer the questions the younger students have. If there is already interest in a particular school, the elementary school pupils use the open door day to get a look at their future school with their own eyes.

“I believe it is important that the children gain an impression about this company. Some students ask me lots of questions, and some of them are completely uninterested in the things I have to say. This is exactly what we want to discover. The students should learn themselves whether technical occupations interest them or not.”



## FOR GIRLS ONLY

In the minds of girls and their parents there is still that classic division between male and female jobs. This way of thinking deprives young women of the possibility of being happy and successful in some of the technical jobs. Girls' Day should break this tradition – entrepreneurs invite girls from elementary schools so they can learn about jobs that are not typical for females.

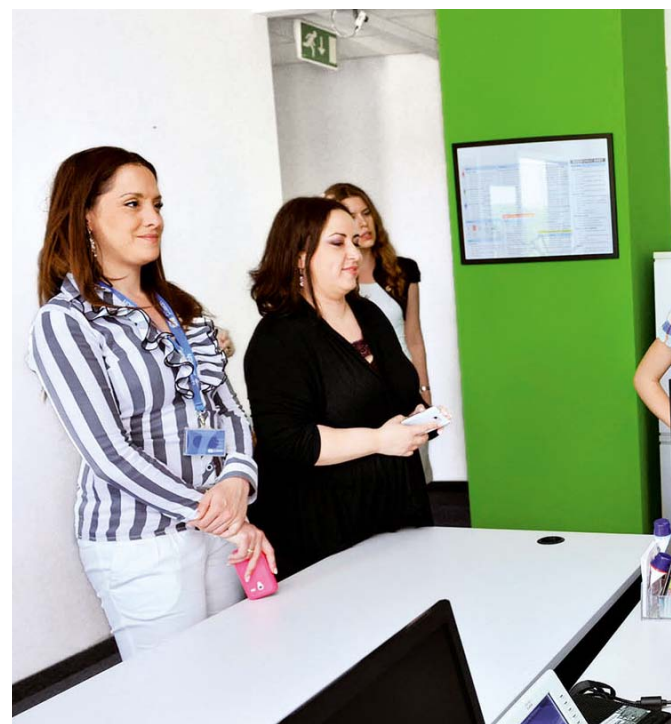
Olivera Popović is the Vice President of the Association of Business Women of Serbia and one of the founders of a large IT company. She joined this association at the very beginning, almost 16 years ago, and in the meantime it has developed so much that today it has 200 members. “The majority of women founded their private companies simply because they were forced to out of necessity, since they lost their jobs. We offer them support in what they do now.” Experienced female entrepreneurs from the association advise their young colleagues, help them develop a business, and assist them in book-keeping and marketing. Olivera Popović is convinced that many women have unimaginable abilities. That is why she immediately accepted the idea of Girls' Day and opened the doors of her company for it. Besides this, she has spread the idea about this project among the entrepreneurs in the association and other companies she has cooperated with and, together with GIZ, organised this event all over Serbia. In the first year, 60 companies from 23 cities had 500 girls as guests from 63 schools. In that way girls aged between 13 and 14 years had the opportunity

“The majority of women founded their private companies simply because they were forced to out of necessity, since they lost their jobs.”

to learn about jobs that they had known nothing about before. Sometimes one woman would be surrounded by three to four girls who would observe the women doing various computers science and engineering tasks, and they would get to see what the working day of a women who manages a company looks like, and even see female heating technicians or sanitary technicians at work, and come to conclusion that these jobs can also be very attractive.

Olivera Popović, who has an academic degree in mathematics, is very pleased with the first results: “The girls spend the day with the women who are very competent in technical jobs and who are successful at managing a company, and so in talking with them they can learn everything they want to know about those jobs. For our conservative educational system that is extremely important. Girls are often told that they need to find a simple job. These visits can help us to show them the opposite”.

Girls' Day is also a good opportunity for companies to introduce themselves and advertise which type of experts they need in their area of business. From the association's point of view one day is really not enough time, therefore, they want to enhance cooperation between companies and schools even more and organise new encounters. “Companies did not have any contact with schools before and they are very happy to have the opportunity to encourage interest among girls for technical occupations,” underscores Olivera Popović.

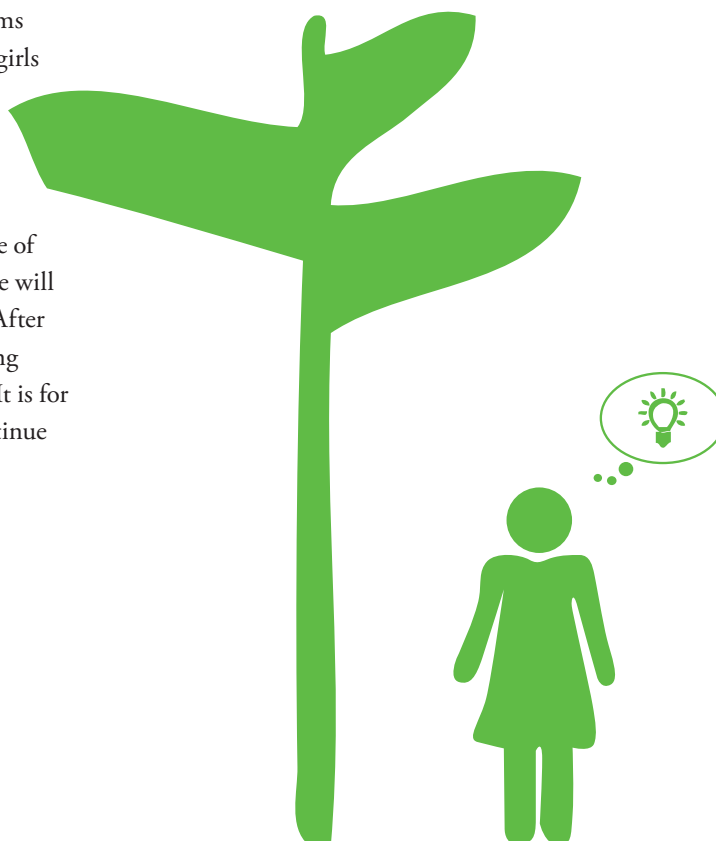




## WOMEN YOUTH

It is not only female entrepreneurs who open their doors for Girls' Day. Male managers also want to motivate young women train in unusual jobs. In addition to regularly welcoming students to his company, Saša Stanojević has been participating in Girls' Day since 2013. The opportunity to introduce girls to the jobs that are not typical for them and to inspire them to recognise their interest in the mechanical and electrical sciences piqued his interest in this venture. One of Stanojević female associates who performs a job that is typically done by males, took girls around the company and explained and demonstrated the various jobs in the company to them, from product design to manufacturing using machines. Stanojević was thrilled: "After the visit, one of the girls talked to me and said that now she will quite likely opt for electrical engineering. After that she enrolled in an electrical engineering high school and obtained the best grades. It is for these reasons and examples that I will continue to participate in Girls' Day in the future".

"After the visit, one of the girls talked to me and said that now she will quite likely opt for electrical engineering."



## SPECIFIC APPROACH – SPECIAL STUDENTS

### PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Light and clear classrooms beautifully decorated with plants, nice tables and chairs, colourful pictures, and a cordial atmosphere – this is the environment present in “Dušan Dugalić” Elementary School in the heart of Belgrade, perfect for children who are staying and studying in this specialised institution. This is a special school, just like the children who come here and its teachers. Goran Rojević, a special pedagogue, who has been working in this school for 17 years said: “The students who go to our school are students with learning difficulties. None of our teachers have studied at the Teacher Training Faculty, we are all special education and rehabilitation teachers”. At that moment sixteen year old Stefan, a student at the school, enters the room. Sašenka Mirković, Stefan’s teacher, asks him what kind of work his attention is focused on at the moment. “I am studying a little“, this big boy says shyly. Later on he adds, with much more self-confidence: “Actually, I want to work in the theatre”.

This insecure boy dreams of becoming an actor. Teacher Sašenka smiles kindly: “He will most

likely not become an actor, but he can help in the theatre, somewhere behind the scenes, setting things up, fetching props, cleaning and carry out similar tasks. Stefan is very skilled when it comes to craftsmanship and he is full of energy.” This boy’s dream to work in a theatre could come true if he were to have the opportunity to employ his craftsman skills in a place he likes.

The teachers at “Dušan Dugalić” school are advocating for these types of dream with all their hearts. They know their students well and what their limits are. It is really important, particularly for disabled children, that they discover their abilities through practical activities and learn about the jobs they could do. By carrying out practical exercises in improvised life situations the children get the chance to discover their personal abilities and learn about the jobs suited to the personal skills. Visits to workshops, the theatre or supermarket warehouses are very interesting and educational for children in general, and children with disabilities are even more enthusiastic.

“He will most likely not become an actor, but he can help in the theatre, somewhere behind the scenes, setting things up, fetching props, cleaning and carry out similar tasks.”





## INSIGHT AND UNDERSTANDING

This professional orientation programme cannot be implemented in the same way for all children with learning difficulties. “This is especially emphasised with the content that is of verbal nature, where feedback and discussion that require self-observation and self-evaluation is expected. That is almost impossible with our children, since they do not really talk and when they do it is often unintelligible”, explains Rojević. In implementing professional orientation programme special education teachers use strategies which they employ in their every day work with these children, and these are roles children play using pantomime, pictures and gestures. Thus experiencing a situation in a safe environment allows them to be self-aware and to self-evaluate. These elements are incorporated in the professional orientation programme. “Many children are really skilled when it comes to manual skills. To help them discover their gifts themselves, we guide them towards those jobs where their skills will be able to be used”, explains teacher Đorđe Živanović.

He is making candles with his students at school, allowing them to test their own abilities and enjoy what they have created. It is always about jobs that children can understand and master. Živanović adds: “The students need time to get used to new environments and new peoples. Only once they have fully mastered specific jobs in a field can they apply them in an unknown environment”.

As a result of this, special education teachers in their professional orientation workshops focus on content which reflects specific situations. Through role-play children act out tasks that need to be done within one job position. For many of them this is a Eureka moment. Through this type of play children realise that, for example, a doctor works with unknown people all day long and that he or she has to stand a lot on his or her feet, which is something they would not like at all. For Sašenka this is decisive for self-awareness: “It is not up to us to tell someone what he or she can or cannot do. A child should independently establish what he or she likes and what he or she does not like”.

“Many children are really skilled when it comes to manual skills. To help them discover their gifts themselves, we guide them towards those jobs where their skills will be able to be used.”





"We have only had positive experiences with people with disabilities."

The professional orientation programme thus becomes a link between school and the local community since it involves common activities of all participants to implement it. The school teachers visit companies and supermarkets in the neighbourhood and make arrangements with directors and managers for employees to invite students to visit and get to know them. In this way, special education teachers cooperate with one supermarket in the vicinity for a certain amount of time. Managers and employees who have visited the school several times now sell the candles that the children have made in their shops. Besides this, children with disabilities have been given permission to visit the supermarket and meet the employees regularly. Several former students are now employed in the supermarket stockroom. Sanja Jevđenijević is in charge of human resources and organisational development in the company Delhaize Serbia, which owns a chain of supermarkets. The company employs over 200 people with disabilities in total. They put products on shelves, help in the warehouse, clean or help buyers to pack groceries. Sanja Jevđenijević

has only words of praise for these workers: "We have only had positive experiences with people with disabilities. They are committed workers, hard-working and precise. They very much appreciate having been given the possibility to work and they reflect this with their level of engagement."







## SPECIAL PEDAGOGY FOR TEACHERS

Insight into and understanding of professional orientation for children with disabilities are not locked just within the walls of the “Dušan Dugalić” school since these children also attend regular schools. In regular schools, teachers are often overburdened with curricula and large groups of children and they do not know how to support children with disabilities. Special education teachers have therefore established a mobile team to provide support to teachers who teach children with disabilities in regular schools. Their task is to help teachers in regular schools if they encounter difficulties in working with children with disabilities. “We pay visits to those schools whenever necessary and together with subject teachers and school psychologists we make an individual work plan for that child who has trouble to fitting in; we monitor and advise the child and parents and the teachers too”, says Mr. Rojević as he describes the services of his school.

The guidelines for mentor support for teachers and professional associates in regular schools in

the implementation of the professional orientation programme for children with disabilities were designed based on the cooperation between the “Dušan Dugalić” school and the teams from the “Veselin Nikolić” special school in Kruševac and the “Radivoj Popović” special school in Sremska Mitrovica. The counselling guidelines were founded on the application of methodology and curriculum for children with disabilities and the design of individual educational plans for each child. “During the professional orientation workshop the teachers at regular schools have to approach the children with learning difficulties in a different way. These children have to visualise the jobs, while the rest of the group can use words. This requires a lot of practice,” says Rojević while explaining the principles of working with children who have learning difficulties. The special education teachers conduct training of and give advisory support to teachers from regular schools, thus allowing children with disabilities or children with learning difficulties to also participate in the professional orientation programme in regular schools.

“During the professional orientation workshop the teachers at regular schools have to approach the children with learning difficulties in a different way.”



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