

Final Report

“Case based Study on children in street situation at Tirana, Kavaja, Kruja and Shkoder - Impact Assessment of Interventions targeting children in street situation”

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**Save the Children in Albania
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List of Acronyms

DCM	Decision of the Council of Ministers
DiC	Drop -in Centres
ECRI	The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
EU	European Union
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
LGUs	Local Government Units
MBU	"Marin Barleti" University
NGOs	Non - Governmental Organizations
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SACRP	State Agency for Children Rights and Protection;
SC	Save the Children
UN	United Nations
UT	University of Tirana

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Executive Summary

This study was commissioned by the Save The Children Albania Country Office to provide a comprehensive situational analysis of street children in Albania. Its approach differs from previous situational analyses of the issue as it took a more follow up-oriented assessment with necessary information on the current situation of children in street situation and their families, mainly focusing the changes that have been occurred affecting the situation of street involved children. The follow up study aims to provide all the related national and local stakeholders, (both state and non-state actors) with the necessary information on the current situation of this group of children and their families, offering an opportunity to undertake some analysis on the approaches of work done so far and bringing the necessary adaptations and improvements in the next steps, developing comprehensive and sustainable interventions.

Four objectives were formulated for this study in order to improve the assess the street children phenomena:

- Update the quantitative and qualitative data in relation to children in Street situation to understand the changes in the numbers of children in street situation, the dynamics of the group, their situation, movement trends and push and pull factors.
- Understand the information and capacities of the existing CP mechanisms at local level to identify and provide protective services to children in street situation.
- To understand how the coordination has worked in all levels and related challenges. • To support the development of new, improved strategies to respond to protective needs facing children in street situation.
- To guide the advocacy work of Child Rights Organizations toward the GoA in establishing and empowering of a comprehensive and integrated child protection system, able to prevent and respond to multiple vulnerabilities and harmful experiences that children are subject to.

Apart from reviewing the existent literature, this study also used interviews with stakeholders from government, civil society and children in street situation target group to gather information on their views on the problem, possible solutions as well as assess the impact of the previous and current interventions supporting children in street situation.

A successful response to the situation of street children would be highly dependent on knowledge-based decision-making and three key conclusions are made in this regard. Firstly, there is a growing body of domestic and international literature describing the situation of street children, the shortcomings in the legislative framework, gaps in policies, and the need to align practice and theory with the requirements of the Child Rights Convention. Secondly, decision-making would be greatly enhanced by monitoring the situation of street children, therefore a set of indicator types are proposed in this regard. Thirdly, it is important to develop a research agenda that feeds into the strategic plan and informs decision-making. In this regard, particular attention should be paid to conducting research on “what works” as opposed to “what is wrong”.

The study confirmed in many regards what was already known and found by previous studies. The data that is available on children in street situation are only the ones collected from the social issues related institutions, including SACRP at national level and Department/Section of Social Services & CPU at local level. Data collected from these sources do reflect a non-coherent database system developed for children



in street situation at central and local government. There is a discrepancy on data collected from these two sources of information. Data collected from the SAPCR reports a number of 265 cases of children in street situation for 2019 – 2020, while the ones collected from the Directorate of Social Services at Municipal level report for a number of 444 children in street situation during 2019 - 2020 for 4 targeted Municipalities: Tirane, Shkoder, Kruja Kavaja. Tirana and Shkodra remains the highest number of children in street situation.

The majority of children visible on the streets are boys. According to the data collected from the Directorates of Social Services at Municipal level there are around 47 % females and 53 % males. In larger cities like Tirana, girls present a higher percentage (49%) compared to the proportion of girls. In smaller cities (46%) such as Kruja and Kavaja 58%) which is clearly an indication linked with age group of females involved in street activity.

This study confirms that the incidence of children in street situation from R&E community groups is too high). In Shkodra 95% of children identified in street situation belong Roma and Egyptian communities. In Tirana 84% of children identified in street situation belong Roma and Egyptian communities. In Kavaja 100 % of children identified in street situation belong Roma and Egyptian communities. In Kruja 100% of children identified in street situation belong to Roma and Egyptian communities.

Nevertheless, the present study noted that there is a changed tendency (increased number) from the latest report in regard to the significant number of children from the Albanian majority in street situation. From interviews in 4 locations scope of the study it is noted an increased trend of such proportion of non-Roma population versus Roma and Egyptian. This phenomenon is quite visible in bigger cities such as Tirana and Shkodra.

The study confirms the findings of the 2014 study that children in street situation are involved in different activities in other cities of their residence. The most in common activity is moving to touristic cities selling cigarettes, car fresheners, begging (mostly R&E), recycling plastic metals well as parking. Interviews with stakeholders and children themselves do evidence as well informal jobs such as loading and unloading goods trucks, working in agriculture (very few reported), cleaning at cemeteries, looking after sun beds on beaches (Shkodra), selling candles (those of Kruja in the religious places Laçi church).

The study reconfirms almost same root causes of the 2014(SC and UNICEF) study, including: the cycle of having parents who were once children in street situation and the consequences of their actions of parents, such as neglect, migration or just exposing their children to street activities; The state, or lack of a proper, working child care system; Physical, sexual or emotional abuse, lead children to run away from home; Peer pressure; Some children get involved in street activities on their own initiative primarily because they want to help their families, but some of the teens see it as a way to become independent; and Family migration and/or family dynamics (illness, death of one or both parents).

From the outreach work, on spot visits and interviews held it was re-confirmed the profile of children in street situation identified mainly as those who beg and work on the street by being exposed to a high risk of their physical and mental health, trafficking and exploitation, getting in contact and conflict with the law (4 cases were reported), low enrolment and completion rate of their education.

Trafficking and exploitation of children in street situation although is reported as present and a concern actually is very little addressed and there are not accurate data, researches to document its existence and consequences.

This study reconfirmed that education for children in street situation remains challenging. School drop out for Roma population is currently a challenge in the country. 60% of children interviewed abandoned school

in different years of schooling due to pressure from family and relative, lack of financial means, and above-mentioned reasons.

From the observation process, outreach work, interviews on the street the majority of children (90%), had no suitable clothes and were not cleaned. 82% of children interviewed (13 children out of 16) stated that they live in poor housing conditions, have very low level of health –related knowledge, and 60% of them (10 out of 16) didn't know where was their health care centres and could not mention if they were vaccinated or not. Although vaccination is mandatory and regulated in the country still this is not well evidenced due to lack of health books for majority of them.

A successful response to the problem needs to be inter-sectoral as government is not able to address the problem on its own. There are promising initiatives from both government and the NGO sector, but the impact of these could be increased through proper planning and co-ordination. Government, NGOs and the donor community can make significant contributions to the situation of street children if there is clarity on roles, supported by mutual accountability. It is evident that an inter-sectoral response is required to address policy and legislative concerns effectively with a view to improving the protection that children should enjoy and remove discriminatory and marginalising measures currently in place. To achieve an effective inter-sectoral response on policy and legislative reform, but also in respect of planning, service delivery and monitoring, there is a strong need for formalised inter-sectoral structures supported by the necessary skills and resources to enable effective functioning.

The report deals in a fair amount of detail with the extant literature in respect of “what works” with interventions aimed at street children. This is motivated by the fact that based on the fieldwork, there is not significant consensus among stakeholders on what is regarded as effective services or good practice and that it would be important to build consensus in this regard. Good practice guidelines and principles for effective service delivery are described based on relevant international literature, but service delivery agents would require assistance in interpreting these for local conditions. Following from this it is recommended that minimum standards for services to street children be developed to ensure that children's rights are protected and that they are guaranteed services of a minimum standard at least.

The concluding chapter aims to assess the impact of the previous and current intervention targeting the needs of children in street situation. Several good practices developed, are of NGOs, mainly related to the identification of cases and their referral to Child Protection (CP) Units at municipal level, which are responsible for case management; development of technical round tables with a multidisciplinary focus and direct contact with children. These practices, combined with enabling access to community centres located close to settlements, have resulted in increased awareness of families and children about the services to which they are entitled. Family awareness has been addressed during these years, which aimed at family strengthening, and counselling for handling difficult situations. In addition, advocacy and lobbying activities by representatives of both public institutions and CSOs have resulted in an increased level of awareness on the part of the government and general society, and subsequently in the expansion of interventions. All the identified practices provide a solid basis for establishing services but the level of such service provision varies from one location to the other. Budget allocated to such services is diverse in different locations. In Tirana the situation is better developed and there are 5 multidisciplinary centres for children and families in need. Only one centre has specialized services for children in street situation, a model piloted and developed by SC and handed over to Municipality after 8 years of its operation. Strengthen the family and its role in ensuring the welfare of the children remain crucial. Families, in whatever form, should be involved in the work to provide the needed base of support for the children in their communities in terms of accessing concrete services and in influencing local structures to set up mechanisms to appropriately address the children's needs.



This report should serve as a follow up report on the current situation of this group of children and their families, offering an opportunity to undertake some analysis on the approaches of work done so far and bringing the necessary adaptations and improvements in the next steps, developing comprehensive and sustainable interventions.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Country Context

According to children's life in Albania' analysis presented in "Children's world"- A national survey of children's wellbeing¹ carried out in 2018 with the support of Save the Children in Albania in cooperation with the Department of Social Work and Policy of UT, the Department of Social Sciences and Education of MBU, despite the fact that many children in Albania enjoy the advantages of economic growth, including access to educational, health and recreation facilities *many other children have been denied such basic services due to economic and gender inequalities, as well as differences between rural and urban areas. Ethnic minorities, and in particular, the Roma people, continue to be poor, and have benefitted the least from the economic growth.*

Albania has ratified all international conventions regarding children' work. Moreover, in 2015, there were moderate developments regarding efforts to eliminate the worst forms of children' work. The Albanian government raised the minimum age of children who can engage in light work and job training programmes to 15 years old. It also put forth detailed instructions for relevant actors of child protection, by highlighting each actor's role in child protection and the best practices to support the most vulnerable children. However, children in Albania engage in work, such as agricultural, as well as the worst forms of children's work, including forced begging. The implementation of children's work law remains a challenge.

The latest analysis on the *Child Rights Situation in Albania, 2012-2016* emphasizes that besides the positive response of the Albanian government, the overall situation remains inconsistent. *For most of the vulnerable groups—including children with disabilities, those in street situation and on the move - the basic protection levels, basic education opportunities, as well as primary health needs are lacking, ignored, and/or not well understood by responsible parties. Moreover, the ability of children and youth to directly change their quality of life and experiences, as well as influence the services they use, is also quite limited*²

In relation to studies and research analysis carried for children in street situation, the latest analysis are conducted through the "*National Study on children in street situation in Albania*", carried out in 2014 by UNICEF, Save the Children and Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth³. According to this study in Albania there are identified around 2.500 children in street situation (out of which 700 reside in Tirana). The majority of them are boys aged 10-17 years old. Around 75% of them belong to the Roma and Egyptian communities (only a quarter to the Albanian majority).

There has not been any other similar study to evidence and report the situation of this target group of children in the last 6 years in relation to quantitative and qualitative data.

A regional study conducted in 2016 "Regional research on prevalence of street children phenomenon in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia" highlighted that children in street situation face a number of challenges with respect to their living conditions and their opportunity to have their basic needs met. They lack access to formal education and health system and they suffer from discrimination and

¹<https://albania.savethechildren.net/sites/albania.savethechildren.net/files/library/Children%27s%20world%2C%20national%20survey%20of%20children%27s%20well-being.pdf>

²https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/documents/save_the_children_-_low_res.pdf

³ UNICEF, Save the Children, Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, ARSIS and GfK (2014). National Study on children in street situation in Albania.

exploitation. Such extreme marginalization affects their personality, their physical conditions, health, and their social behaviour.

Description of the profile and findings of the abovementioned reports remain still actual and represent the current status of children in street situation as below:

Children in street situation continue to belong to the families with low educational level and live on a very low monthly income. These families have weak access to health care services due mainly to lack of information about their rights, long distances to the nearest health care centre, lack of health booklets, discrimination. A large percentage of the families cannot afford all the medical examinations. Chronic diseases and disabilities are prevalent among these communities. The right to education, health and food for their children is not yet fulfilled. School and preschool attendance rates continue to be low due to financial difficulties, violence and discrimination children experienced at school, long distance from school, limited capacities for enrolment by educational institutions, lack of legal documents, lack of interest on the part of the family and/or children, and opportunity cost (time spent at school would mean less time for income generating activities). Their hygienically and nutritional conditions continue to be poor, which is linked to poverty and illiteracy but also to negligence of parents. A considerable number of street children continue to not be registered (birth registration). Among the main reasons, the lack of information on the needed documentation and procedures to be followed, lack of documents, internal movement throughout the country from one city to another(migration), early marriages, low income that does not allow these families to pay the registration fees.

Children continue to be involved in different street-related activities. The most common ones are selling different items, begging, less recycling plastic and metal, and informal jobs. Most of them work to support their families and some others are instead obliged by their parents and are often controlled by non-parental figures whose are turned over to beg. Spending time on the streets exposes children to several risks such as sexual and psychological violence, stigmatisation and exclusion. Their self-esteem is low and they usually struggle a lot in moving on from this experience by returning to the street during reintegration programmes offered by various actors.

Negative root causes of the phenomenon continuously linked to poverty, lack of actual and future employment opportunities for parents, violent or abusive home situations, discrimination, exploitation, lack of birth and civil registration), low education level, lack of access to schooling,

During Covid pandemic situation vulnerability of these children and their families is multiplied as result of difficulties encountered and less opportunities and alternatives offered.

Referring to the legal framework and strategies developed, there is progress evidenced such as: The National Action Plan "On identification and protection of children in street situation 2015- 2017 drafted by the State Agency for Children Rights and Protection -SACRP". Two annual reports were produced (the latest date year 2016,2017 by SACRP, as the responsible entity for coordination and organization of the integrated child protection system, in implementing national child protection policies).

According to the latest data from the SACRP reports of 2017⁴, 484 children were identified.

⁴ "Raporti i Punës së Agjencisë Shtetërore për të Drejtat dhe Mbrojtjen e Fëmijës dhe i strukturave të mbrojtjes së fëmijëve", year 2017

177 children in street situation were identified and referred to several services in 4 locations (scope of the study) during 2019.

88 children in street situation are evidenced in data base of each CPUs for 4 locations (scope of the study) during July – September 2020.

The 17/2018 law “On the rights and protection of the child”, for the first time set out the protection of children in street situations in the framework of protection guaranteed for children working and being exploited for work. Article 24 of this draft law stipulates the protection of the child from economic exploitation, as well as from any form of forced labour within the family, school, rehabilitation or detention institutions, or in cultural, artistic, sportive, modelling activities or for advertising purposes, that may be dangerous, hinder their education, damages their physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. Also, any practice through which the child is obliged to perform actions, whether or not rewarded, is prohibited regardless of the parents being aware of it. The practice created in implementation of the National Action Plan “On identification and protection of children in street situation 2015- 2017 drafted by the State Agency for Children Rights and Protection -SACRP” informs the procedures that are actually binding by law for the identification, protection and reintegration of these children. Article 62 sets out all the concrete actions that every child protection worker should undertake, from the moment of identification until the monitoring of the child after the removal from the street situation. This law assigned the responsible structures for children protection to undertake concrete actions, with the support of the State Police for the removal of children from the economic exploitation or street situation.

Guideline of procedures for the identification, immediate assistance and referral of children in street situations was developed with the support of the OSCE Presence in Albania, under the guidance of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (former Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth), in November 2015. This document is a practical guide of the procedures to be followed by professionals directly involved in the identification, referral and protection of children who are in a street situation in the territory of the Republic of Albania. The guide provides an institutional framework for actions that are in the best interests of the child, to Albanian legislation and other operational instruments, international treaties for the protection of children’s rights and especially those who are in need and at risk of violence and abuse of all forms. It contains principles of work, actions and examples of practical tools, already evaluated and accepted as suitable for identification, referral and addressing the needs of children in street situation. These principles and actions are applicable for cases of children in emergency situation too. (if not intervened on time, the child might end up in a street situation and street involved work).

Guideline of procedures for children in street situation is additional framework to the Manual for the Protection of Children or Standard Operating Procedures for identification and Referral of Victims/Potential Victims of Trafficking and action steps that professionals have an obligation to take on cases of identifying interventions, immediate assistance and referral of children in street situations.⁵

Globally, *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 21 (2017) on children in street situations as of 21st June 2017*, provides authoritative guidance to States on developing comprehensive, long-term national strategies on children in street situations using a holistic, child rights approach and

SACRP report 2017

⁵<http://femijet.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/UDH%C3%8BZUES-I-PROCEDURAVE-P%C3%8BR-IDENTIFIKIMIN-NDIHM%C3%8BN-E-MENJ%C3%8BHERSHME-DHE-REFERIMIN-E-F%C3%8BMIJ%C3%8BVE-N%C3%8B-SITUAT%C3%8B-RRUGE-2015.pdf>

addressing both prevention and response in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. While the Convention makes no explicit reference to them, all of its provisions are applicable to children in street situations, who experience violations of a large majority of the Convention's articles.

The Committee offers three objectives for General Comment:

(a) To clarify the obligations of States in applying a child rights approach to strategies and initiatives for children in street situations;

(b) To provide comprehensive and authoritative guidance to States on using a holistic, child rights approach to: prevent children experiencing rights violations and the lack of choices that results in them having to depend on the streets for their survival and development; and to promote and protect the rights of children already in street situations, ensuring a continuum of care and helping them to develop to their fullest potential;

(c) To identify the implications of particular articles of the Convention for children in street situations to enhance respect for them as rights holders and full citizens, and to enhance understanding of children's connections to the street.

The recent initiatives of SC in Albania:

- a) To develop standards of Drop-in Centres, DiC for children in street situation (Feb 2019)
- b) Document the model of Services for Children in Street Situation (March 2020)

are a good reference for replication of the model and the standards to be applied. The standards developed (in total 6) and the model established present best practices in this field based on the national and international principles of equality, the right to protection, dignity, security and social integration. Investment of SC and other actors in setting standards for the provision of services for children in street situation by daily care centres is very important to help improve the quality of social services and its monitoring.

At local level, the main role is played by the municipalities that are responsible for the establishment of the respective child protection structures in implementing standards, and, through these, an integrated system of protection of the child. Within every municipality, a child protection unit is mandatory to be established and be operational under the supervision of the municipality structure responsible for social services. This unit/department⁶ is in charge of the prevention, identification, assessment, protection and follows up of cases of children at risk and/or in need of protection and is supported by the inter-sectorial technical group (former Child Protection Working Group).

Despite the approved laws and established mechanisms, the results are so far unsatisfactory: *their adoption and implementation are not still effective or complete.*

Child Protection Units lack the needed infrastructure, human and financial resources to fully handle cases and emergency interventions. The system is not able to provide efficiently the expected services. Action

⁶Different municipalities are using different forms of this structure – big municipalities tend to have a dedicated department which is in charge for social services, while the small municipalities are having dedicated units.

plans and strategies are defined but the execution is poor. Workers of public institutions are not informed about the most recent legislative changes (due mainly to the high rate of staff turnover), and are not always ready to cooperate or in some cases neglect their duties. Staff of state institutions (including educational and health structures) are not equipped with enough capacity/skills to address children in street situation issues. Appropriate staff evaluation procedures and monitoring procedures, especially at local government level, are lacking. The inter-sectorial cooperation is not properly and fully in place.

Consequently, crucial services are mainly provided by NGOs that cannot ensure sustainability or long-term interventions. The result is that the assistance is not consistent and does not offer sustainable solutions for the children and their families.

Public spending on social inclusion programmes is modest and all too often the government structures fail to address adequately the needs of marginalised and vulnerable groups, since there is no mechanism for monitoring the situation of those who are vulnerable and/or excluded from society, including those affected by emigration. The practice of child marriage/union is still present in Albania, particularly in the Roma, Egyptian and rural communities. There is a lack of data and reporting on child poverty. Albania should increase efforts on the early identification of victims and potential victims; intensify cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries and international cooperation; and contribute to the successful reintegration of victims. It should pay particular attention to unaccompanied children and child victims of trafficking, and provide them with adequate protection

As stated in the EU progress report October 2020: According to Social Services data, social care coverage is critically low, with only about 10,000 users in 2019 (0.35% of the population). Increased investment in the development of new social care services and wider geographical coverage are urgently needed. Local government units (LGUs) are expected to assess needs in their territory and prepare local social care plans, but they lack human and financial resources. Only 24 municipalities approved and budgeted for social care plans outlining the needs of vulnerable communities and the services that need to be established in response. The work also involves assessing the costs for services and identifying the costs that can be supported by the municipality budget. Secondary legislation implementing the Law on social care services adopted in 2019 specifies that central government will have to resource the social fund with central budget allocating such budget to the approved local social care plans. In April 2019, the government set up the Social Fund Mechanism as a transitory measure to distribute funding from the state budget to municipalities. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection has started to operationalise the social fund by awarding 14 projects to support establishment of social care services at the local level. Application is open only to municipalities with an approved and budgeted social care plan underlining the need to increase the number of municipalities with an approved and budgeted plan.⁷

The new Administrative Reform has extended the roles and responsibilities of the local government structures; therefore, more efforts and concrete actions are expected from these structures in order to fully complete the overall goal and objectives of the new reform on Social Care System. Time has come to move towards a more advanced and effective social care system, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the responsible authorities in organizing an integrated model of social care system in Albania.

Although SWOT analysis regarding the social protection in local level conceives social protection policy documents and good practices/models, services remain rather inflexible, targeted to one particular group, and are not always optimal in terms of how user friendly or client centred they are, in terms of accessibility and nature of services provided. The limited funding opportunities to support the implementation of the Local Social Plan and the delivery of the minimum basket of services at local level, lack of comprehensive monitoring mechanisms of the delivery of the full basket of services, limited capacities and resources at

⁷EU progress report October 2020

local level to plan, deliver and monitor social service delivery; lack of human resources and institutional capacity to design and implement sectoral strategies, the lack of coordination among relevant institutions and absence of long – term strategy to fund transition for social care system integrating services on local level are also identified as key weaknesses in social protection at local level.

The National Action Plan for the Protection of Children from Economic Exploitation, including Children in Street Situations (2019–2021) has been developed, as has a decision to guide professionals in the management of such cases.

The National Agenda for the Rights of Children 2017–2020 was adopted by Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) no. 372, on 26.04.2017. It sets out three strategic pillars: *Good governance in promoting, respecting and protecting the rights of the child; Elimination of all forms of violence against children. Establishment of child and adolescent-friendly systems and services of development, education, justice, health, nutrition and social protection.* The mid-term evaluation conducted in May 2019⁸ states that a comprehensive review of the legal framework remains to be conducted in order to comply with the latest legal changes in the field of child protection. Progress is noted for establishing child protection structures at the local level, with an increase in the number of Child Protection Workers (CPWs), to 235 across the country. Nonetheless, this progress is far from effecting the establishment of all necessary, relevant structures in accordance with the legal provisions. Capacity building of all professionals involved, case management budgeting at the local level, supportive monitoring, and inspections based upon updated standards remain a challenge for CPWs, so that they to exercise their functions effectively.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the spread of the virus in Albania and the restrictive measures to contain it, like in most countries world-wide, has put a spotlight on the economic and social inequalities. While the country lockdown situation has created a lot of distress for the overall population, with people being isolated, elderly ones not able to move, children attending online schooling, and majority of parents trying to cope with this overloaded reality, such is showing it worst impact on the most deprived and vulnerable categories, including disruption of much needed services to children and their families, by critically and directly impacting their health, education, protection and access to food, hygiene and other basic needs. This is because many of these families usually work for a small daily wage, and this means they have no savings or emergency financial provisions. Being forced to stay in their house during lockdown, and the shutting down of the majority of income generating activities has created extreme hardship to these groups, particularly their ability to ensure they have enough food for their family on a day-by-day basis. Most affected are Roma, orphans, children with disabilities and their families, children and families living in absolute poverty with less than 2 \$ per day. According to the SC Rapid Need Assessment⁹ findings and conclusions for the situation created in Albanian communities as result of COVID 19 (May 2020)⁹ :

Vulnerable groups are experiencing a multidimensional exclusion due to the limited capacities to access health care, to ensure the basic needs for food as well as access public assistance programs. ✓ Children are at risk of multiple deprivation and possibly, exploitation, due to the limited access to social protection structures as well as the increased economic pressure on the families. Although Child Protection structures continue to exercise their crucial task of Case Management and Referral, by telephone in distance, they lack either information on children in need of protection or capacities to identify critical cases under the

⁸ The mid-term implementation report of the national agenda for the rights of children, 2017-2018

⁹<https://albania.savethechildren.net/sites/albania.savethechildren.net/files/library/Assessment%20Report%20on%20the%20effects%20of%20covid%2019%20to%20community.pdf>



lockdown situation. Despite the adoption of the guidelines by the MHSW with respect to Case Referral and Management during pandemic situation of COVID-19, it seems they have not reached their purpose.

In addition, Albania is still dealing with the effects of the 6.4 magnitude earthquake that hit the country on November 26, 2019, causing 51 fatalities, leaving 17,000 people displaced and ultimately affecting more than 200,000 people in 11 municipalities. According to IFRC, there are still a total of 10,000 persons (2,419 households) living in tents in Durrës, Tiranë, and Lezhë. The government led reconstruction of the households and buildings has been halted. The economic effect of this earthquake on Albania is an estimated 6.4% of GDP for around 1 billion Euros. Those consequences are particularly affecting the life of the most vulnerable people in the earthquake effected areas.

I.2 Study scope and objectives

The scope of the study aimed at conducting a follow up assessment with necessary information on the current situation of children in street situation and their families.

Scope of the study is focused in undertaking some analysis on the approaches of work done since the National Study on Children in Street Situation in Albania carried out during the period May 2013 – February 2014 which has provided quantitative and qualitative data on this group of children and their dynamics for the first time thus establishing a valuable baseline on this phenomenon.

The current study consultancy through its analysis and fact findings is aiming at following up on the changes that have been occurred affecting the situation of street involved children. The follow up study aims to provide all the related national and local stakeholders, (both state and non-state actors) with the necessary information on the current situation of this group of children and their families, offering an opportunity to undertake some analysis on the approaches of work done so far and bringing the necessary adaptations and improvements in the next steps, developing comprehensive and sustainable interventions.

The study was a case-based one, focused only in 4 (four) geographical areas of interventions: Tirana, Shkodra, Kavaja and Kruja.

Objectives of the study as per ToR agreed related with:

- Update the quantitative and qualitative data in relation to children in Street situation to understand the changes in the numbers of children in street situation, the dynamics of the group, their situation, movement trends and push and pull factors.
- Understand the information and capacities of the existing CP mechanisms at local level to identify and provide protective services to children in street situation.
- To understand how the coordination has worked in all levels and related challenges. • To support the development of new, improved strategies to respond to protective needs facing children in street situation.
- To guide the advocacy work of Child Rights Organizations toward the GoA in establishing and empowering of a comprehensive and integrated child protection system, able to prevent and respond to multiple vulnerabilities and harmful experiences that children are subject to.



Chapter 2. Study methodology

The main purpose of this chapter is to present and describe the process and methodological tools that stand at the core of the study process. In this chapter, special attention is paid to the detailing and concretization of components such as: population and sampling, data collection and analysis, ethical issues and limitations of the study.

Section 2.1 describes the design process and presents the time periods in which the phases of this research were extended.

Section 2.2 provides all the details related to targeted population and respective sampling indicators.

Section 2.3 explains data collection process, the instruments being used, the procedures to adapt and pilot these data collection tools.

Section 2.4 explains the procedures, techniques for processing and analysing data.

Finally, sections 2.5 and 2.6 provide a careful reflection on the ethical issues of the study and its limitations.

2. 1 Study design and phases

The study was conducted in 4 (four) targeted locations, respectively at: Tirana, Shkodra, Kavaja and Kruja, and aimed at gathering information from as many reliable sources as possible, to corroborate this data and to ensure ownership by various stakeholders.

The study was conducted during the period from August – December 2020, consisting on the following phases:

- ✓ *August 2020* – Preparation stage, including: drafting and finalization of the study outline, drafting of data collection working plan along with the list of stakeholders planned to be involved in the research process, and development/adaptation of the instruments to be used for data collection;
- ✓ *September – mid November 2020* – Data collection process through the research instruments, including: Key Informants interviews with local stakeholders; Interviews with children in street situation; Focus Groups with children in street situation (attached as annexes to the report document).
- ✓ *November - December 2020* – data analysis/interpretation and study report writing;

This study had two basic components:

- ✓ Update on the situation of children in street situation (update of quantitative data and profile of children in street situation): number of children in street situation, their profile, dynamics of the group, movement trends and vulnerability factors in the 4 (four) targeted locations: Tirana, Shkodra, Kavaja and Kruja,

- ✓ Assessment of coordinated actions undertaken at local level to identify, assess and respond to protection needs of children in street situation, including family strengthening interventions and related re-integration outcomes.

In terms of the methodology, the first component has followed almost same logic of the methodology designed and used in the first study on children in street situation¹⁰, Interviews with key stakeholders, at both national and local level, (incl. CPU workers, social services departments, etc), face to face interviews with children in street situation, and focus group discussion with children stand at the core of data collection process. Outreach work is being conducted from consultancy team (through data collectors from the local regions who were instructed on the study methodology) aiming at direct observation on the street, considered as on spot check. *The outreach work has been conducted after interviews held with local structures' key informants in order to validate the information received at quality level of interest and not counting cases identified on the street.*

In the second component, the focus was on the qualitative aspect: a case-based assessment of the capacities of the local structures to identify and respond to the protective needs of children in street situation. Desk review of the existing reports; assessments and plans, from CPUs, SAPCR, public and non-public service providers, together with in depth interviews with the same key actors, children and families, beneficiaries of the interventions was the main methodological approaches being used.

At the onset of this initiative, the research team and SC Child Protection team did discuss and consult periodically with each other to ensure provision of technical assistance and support throughout the research process. An initial planning meeting was held prior the research start process to develop/adapt and agree on specific instruments, sampling plan and management approach, study protocols and data collection/analysis plan.

2.2 Population, sampling indicators;

2.2.1 Key informant Interviews with stakeholders

Key informant interviews with stakeholders (9 interviews) targeted both national and local level authorities, directly dealing either at policy level or direct interventions in supporting children in street situation. A list of main stakeholders to be included in this research was agreed at the preparation stage with Save the Children responsible staff. The idea was to include all actors who are directly supporting children in street situation at local level. The involved parties, included: staff of the Social Services Directorate/Department/Unit at municipal level (including child protection workers), staff of the special structure for the identification of children in street situation (Tirana case), staff of Multi- Functional Centre at local level (both in Tirana and Shkodra) responsible for providing direct support services for children in street situation, former SC staff directly involved in the implementation of Drop -in Centre for Children in Street Situation.

¹⁰https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/8217/pdf/final_research_report_english.pdf

2.2.2 Face to face interviews with children

Face to face interviews targeted children in street situation (16 children). The majority of them were selected randomly from the outreach mobile unit of data collection while doing direct observation in the targeted areas (Shkodra, Kruja and Kavaja). While children involved in face-to-face interviews in Tirana, were selected randomly from the list of children frequenting the Daily Services for Children in Street situation, part of the Multi – Functional Centre nr. 9 in Tirana.

2.2.3 Focus Groups

Focus group targeted individuals were determined by the research team after reviewing preliminary findings of the initial interviews with children and KIIIs with local stakeholders. The goal of the focus groups was to expand findings from the interviews, as well as fill in the gaps for populations not well represented in the initial interviews or in the children in street situation related literature.

Programs serving this target group, respectively in Tirana and Shkodra, were identified by the research team. They were approached by the research team and/or Save the Children about their willingness to host a focus group.

Focus group participants were required to meet the same basic participation criteria as those completing the survey, as well as identifying as a member of the targeted population of that specific focus group.

Focus groups were planned for 8-10 children in street situation. Due to the pandemic situation, focus groups were organized with a maximum of 5 children, while the number of the focus group discussion was doubled with the intention to reach the planned number of children. Ultimately, out of two focus group discussions planned to be organized in the data collection working plan, four focus groups were organized in total, respectively two in Tirana and two in Shkodra, with 5 children each. Focus group participants were provided with an information sheet about the focus group and consent to participate ensured by them and their parents; they were not asked to provide their name and/or signature or to provide other personally identifying information.

Save the Children CP team were responsible for managing communication and study coordination with all involved parties, including national and local government authorities and CSOs and working directly with children in street situation. The SC relayed communication between the research team and involved parties.

It was originally planned that data collection would be a two months' period, but due to slower than anticipated return rates of the information from the local and national stakeholders, data collection was extended.

A total of 16 professionals representing national and local stakeholders working directly with children in street situation were involved in Key Informant Interviews. Stakeholders selected to participate in the key Informant Interviews were professionals being directly involved either at policy level or direct support for children in street situation.

A total of 16 children in street situation participated in the face-to-face interviews.

A total of 20 children in street situation participated in the FGDs.

Below are the indicators that were decided upon and shared with those conducting observation on the streets to identify children in a street situation, which are in fact the same used in the previous Study for Children in Street Situation (Unicef and SC 2014 study):

Physical characteristics:

- ✓ No shoes
- ✓ Dirty or torn clothes
- ✓ Inappropriate clothes due to size of the child or the time of year/season
- ✓ Dirty, unhealthy or injured appearance, e.g., scars, missing teeth, shaved head

Behaviour

- ✓ A child or group of children in an inappropriate place
- ✓ A child who is alone or with their parents and engaged in common activities for children in street situations, e.g., begging, selling objects, collecting recycling materials, engaged in physical labour such as washing cars etc or scavenging
- ✓ Playing games in inappropriate places
- ✓ Engaged in anti-social behaviour such as fighting, swearing, being assertive and annoying with strangers
- ✓ Sleeping on the street or other outdoor places
- ✓ A child showing signs of alcohol or substance abuse

Further to the stated approach for identifying children in street situation, the study team was able to adapt to new realities and issues arising while conducting the study, for example when a child or a group of children did not want to be included, or they refused to be included if their friends were not. It was necessary to modify the sampling according to the specific fieldwork experience.

2.3 Data collection

The data collection approach for the study included secondary data analysis and primary research. The research team reviewed the existing policy documents, legislation, reports/ study researches, need assessments in the area of child protection, with particular focus to children in street situation in Albania. This helped to identify current evidence-based gaps and provided an initial assessment for the current situation. The assessment was then tested and validated through primary research.

The methods used for the primary research were selected based on the consultations with Save the Children. This allowed for the most feasible and appropriate data collection methods for the target beneficiaries, keeping in mind operational challenges, such as the current COVID-19 outbreak and the necessary safety measures required to ensure the safety of both researchers and respondents.

Data collection was implemented from September to November 2020 and was conducted via the following methods:

- ✓ Face to face interviews with children;
- ✓ FGDs with children in street situation;
- ✓ Key Informant Interviews with stakeholders and Save the Children staff;
- ✓ Outreach team/field observation

2.3.1 Face to face interviews with children in street situation

In this study, face to face interviews with children in street situation was used for data collection as part of the primary data collection method.

A simple interview was conducted with children based on the initial interview template from the previous UNICEF and Save the Children Study. The research team was very careful and attentive to answer questions about the survey openly and in child-friendly language, following ethical guidelines. Throughout the whole process, children were approached taking into consideration Child Protection /Child Safeguarding Policies and procedures.

Face to face interviews administration procedure - Data were collected through a structured survey (Annex 1 – Initial Interview) by children, who at the time of the study had the status of children in street situation. This instrument was designed to be a face-to-face interviewing. Interviewed children were mostly illiterate and therefore unable to read and answer written questions; By using this method it was easier to explain to children the meaning of the interviews and explain any misunderstandings which may have developed; It was easier to control the whole process and the environment in which the questions were asked and answered, thus giving the children more space to be spontaneous. It was also possible to keep notes about the different reactions of children during the interview process. The order of the interview questions was important especially in comparison with a questionnaire and enables the building of a timeline for each child. Data collection used an observational profile criteria approach in sampling. For the study, a set of indicators was developed for the profiles of children in street situation and fieldwork conducted to observe and collect data of children that match with the established indicators.

The process of completing face-to-face interviews with children in street situation: Initially, the leaders of daily/multifunctional centres (in Tirana and Shkodra) and Child Protection Workers in municipalities in each of the selected cities were contacted, to identify children in street situation, who were involved in completing face to face interview, as well as to obtain their approval/consent for completing the survey. The identification of children in street situation was done by the local government authorities and/or service providers in the respective areas or the outreach mobile unit of the research team, taking into account the criteria that would be selected those children who were staying in the street at the time of completion of the survey. This process was preceded by detailed information of these persons regarding the purpose and objectives of conducting this study and the format of the questions.

Children were asked individually and separately if they were willing to be part of this interview. Each person involved in completing the interview was clearly informed on the nature of the study and the use of the interview, as well as the purpose of their participation in this research study, guaranteeing confidentiality regarding the information provided. The decision regarding their inclusion, role and completion of the survey was made voluntarily by each person. The interviews were conducted by communicating face to face with the children in street situation, the information received was recorded by the research team for each question addressed. Conducting each interview took an average of 45-60 minutes per each initial interview.

2.3.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Discussions were conducted with children in street situation in 2 (two) targeted cities, respectively in Tirana and Shkodra.

The focus groups targeted the population defined by the research team after reviewing the preliminary findings of the face-to-face interview with children in street situation and stakeholders. The purpose of the focus group discussions was to expand the findings from the interviews, as well as to fill in the gaps for the target population that were not well represented in the literature on children in street situation. The research team conducted 4 (four) focus groups with children in street situation, respectively 2 (two) in Tirana with

children in street situation, beneficiaries of Daily Centre for Children in Street Situation and 2 (two) with children in street situation in Shkodra, beneficiaries of Community Centre.

These focus groups were attended by 20 children in street situation, respectively 10 in Tirana and 10 in Shkodra. Focus group participants were asked to meet the same basic participation criteria as those who had completed the interview, as well as identifying as a member of the target population of that particular focus group. Focus group participants were provided with a focus group information and in no case, they were asked to provide their name and/or signature, or to provide any other personally identifiable information, given the sensitivity of the issues they carry.

2.3.3 Key informant Interviews with stakeholders

A total of 9 interviews with key stakeholders (including SC Staff) were conducted by the research team, including the following:

- Interview with State Agency for Children Rights and Protection;
- Interview with Directorate of Social Services in Tirana Municipality;
- Interview with Outreach Mobile Structure Team in Tirana Municipality;
- Interview with Sector of Social Services in Kruja Municipality
- Interview with Sector of Social Services in Fushe-Kruja Administrative Unit
- Interview with Directorate of Social Services in Shkodra Municipality
- Interview with NISMA/ARSIS
- Interview with Shkej
- Interview with SC CP team, including former SC staff directly involved in the management of the Drop-in centre for children in street situation

A total number of 16 professionals were involved in the above-mentioned interviews.

The process of conducting interviews with stakeholders: Initially, the selected stakeholders were contacted to get the approval for completing the interview. This process was accompanied by a detailed information of these persons regarding the purpose and objectives of this study and the format of the questions. Each person involved in completing the interview was clearly informed about the use of the interview, as well as the purpose of their participation in this research study. The decision regarding their inclusion, role and completion of the interview was made voluntarily by each entity. The interviews were completed mainly by the management staff. Technical staff were also part of the interviews.

Interviews conducted with stakeholders: Initially the individuals were informed about the purpose, objectives and ethical principles of the study. In the first meeting with the person, it was decided about the time of the interview, the questions on which the interview would take place and its duration. Attendance at the interview was free and confidential. The way of conducting the interview was face to face/online, with duration of 45-60 minutes, in their work environment. A Dictaphone/online recording was used to record the interview. The information gathered was analysed by processing the responses given by each interview.

2.3.4 Outreach team/field observation

A mobile outreach team (data collectors) was established at the onset of the study with the intention to do spot check in the targeted areas. *Differently from the previous research, the main goal of the outreach mobile team was not counting of children in street situation but getting more qualitative information regarding*

the profile of children, the challenges they were facing in their daily life, any new trend and typology of the cases, support given from the state and non-state authorities etc.

Training/instruction sessions were provided to data collectors (outreach team) from research team through an online webinar (including clear instructions on child safeguarding principles). The webinar were two hours in length, and they reviewed the foundation for this study, the study goals, all of the study forms and materials, guidelines for how to invite children in street situation to participate and how to get started. There was time at the end of training event for participants to ask question of the research team. Training materials included the power point slides presented during the webinar, a guide for outreach mobile unit detailing all of the study protocols, the guide for inviting children in street situation to complete face to face interview, and copies of the respective instruments.

2.4 Data Analysis

All findings presented in this study are informed by multiple, triangulated primary and secondary data sources. Face to face interviews with children in street situation and qualitative interviews with key stakeholders were transcribed, coded and analysed. Focus groups were transcribed and all transcripts were double checked to ensure accuracy. The transcripts were analysed and a brief summary was written for each focus group that includes group demographic information and contextual information on group setting. Moreover, the research team consulted and validated the findings with relevant stakeholders to ensure these are sensitive and appropriate. The findings from the desk review were triangulated and analysed in consultation with the data collected through interviews and focus groups.

2.4.1 Quantitative analysis

A template format was drafted and shared with relevant stakeholders at central and local level to collect data disaggregated by age, gender, ethnicity and age group. All these data challenges to be collected on time and disaggregated due to data management system of each local unit and central government which is not in coherence. Nevertheless, provided existing data are presented through tables and analysed too.

2.4.2 Qualitative analysis

The answers to the key informant interviews' questions were not formally codified, but analysed for the range of thematic answers and models. The audio/online files of the interviews were transcribed word by word and all transcripts were checked twice to ensure accuracy. The transcripts were analysed without the use of any special software. The analysis of the information obtained from the open-ended questions were analysed using identified topics, with open-ended coding of specific topics within each group.

This process continued with the analysis of the collected quantitative and qualitative data. The analysis of this data was done relatively quickly and without difficulty, as the research team had a suitable preparation and preliminary plan, which facilitated the process of analysing the volume of quantitative data. Data collected from face-to-face interviews with children in street situation and key informant/service providers were recorded separately from qualitative data. Initially, the raw quantitative data were organized to be easier to understand during their analysis. While the process of analysing qualitative data, started in advance with the collection and organization of all information gathered from in-depth interviews with policy-makers and focus groups with children in street situation (opinions, attitudes, etc.) being filed for the next process.

2.5 Study ethical issues

The team with maximum responsibility paid carefully attention for protecting the participants who agreed to be involved in this work from a potential harm by including obtaining consent and protecting their privacy. The most fundamental concern throughout the study was that no individual be harmed because of the participation in the study.

Initially, the participants who were involved in the study were informed about the purpose of the study, the duration of their involvement and the procedures that would be carried out for the purpose of the study. Participants in the research (children in street situation, service providers and policy makers) were informed on their right to refuse their participation. They were informed about the limits of confidentiality during the development of the survey, focus group and interview, but also about maintaining the confidentiality of information through coding and processing in computer programs for the study effect. All study materials are administered and kept by the research study team.

The verbal approval method was used for children in street situation, because the written approval was judged to put them at risk or in difficulty to participate in the survey. Approval ensured that each participant had a thorough understanding of the purpose, methods used, risks and requirements of the study. Consent from parents of children involved in focus group discussions was obtained from professionals of the two DiC in Tirana and Shkodra. Through this method, children in street situation were given the opportunity to receive and preserve the knowledge gained from being involved in the study; the information conveyed was served as comprehensibly as possible to each participant, as well as increased the ability of each participant to choose freely without forcibly interfering, through deception or lying, but voluntarily engaging in the study.

2.6 Limitations of the study

In preparing this study, the team was aware of the presence of some limitations that have been encountered during its implementation, as follows:

- ✓ *The study was designed to cover only 4 (four) cities* in the country thus its findings and facts do not represent a nationwide study for children in street situation and its comparative analysis with the latest study of 2014(SC and Unicef);
- ✓ *Covid 19 pandemic situation* - some difficulties were identified in setting up and defining the ways for field work accomplishment. However, the fieldwork was tailored based on the availability of field persons contacted. As a result, the limitation counted did not influence the quality of the research process.
- ✓ In some cities the researchers found it *hard to build a relationship of trust in a short timescale with the children*, especially if there was no service delivery for children in street situation in those places (like, Kruja and Kavaja). As a result, some children refused to be interviewed. The professionals involved overcame these challenges and were able to gather relevant data. They were able to freely invite the children and provide them with age-appropriate information, what the study was about, how it was to be disseminated, and how their data would be stored. From the field experience of service providers involved in the study, for many different reasons' children do not always answer truthfully in certain situations, particularly where a relationship of trust has not been established.



After several discussions the study team decided that only children physically on the street and who met the observational criteria, mentioned above, would be involved and interviewed in the study. Children who appeared to be working inside places such as bars, cafes, restaurants, or were inside their residential care institutions at the time of counting, would be excluded from the study because it was not possible to be sure if these children were in a street situation outside the moment of observation, ensuring this way total objectivity.

- ✓ The research team was *unable to interview all relevant key stakeholders* across the four principal targeted sites in the time available for data collection. To overcome this, the team undertook a prioritisation exercise to select key stakeholders with which to speak to within the available time.
- ✓ *Reluctance to talk about the real effectiveness of the service.* During the face-to-face interviews with children in street situation, there was sometimes a kind of reluctance on the part of children in street situation regarding the sharing of their opinion, their opinion regarding the effectiveness of services and the impact that these services have really had on the lives of them. Despite detailed prior information to the children, assurances regarding confidentiality, and conducting the interview without the presence of other persons, in some cases there was some reluctance on the part of the children to speak openly. At some point, when conducting the face-to-face interviews in these cases, the perception that this interview was intended to evaluate the work done by service providers, and any details given regarding the effectiveness and impact of the service would directly affect the relationship of the following children with the service provider was an obstacle, which in fact had to be overcome during the conduct of each face-to-face interview.
- ✓ *Reluctance on the part of state authorities to make an accurate assessment of their work.* As mentioned above regarding the face-to-face interviews conducted with children in street situation, in the case of the interview conducted with stakeholders there was a kind of reluctance to provide detailed information about the program, as in some cases the implementation of the interview was viewed as an assessment of the work done by them, especially in the cases of stakeholders providing direct support services to children.
- ✓ *Difficulties in approaching policy makers to conduct in-depth interviews;* Thanks to previous experiences of cooperation with actors at central and local level in the field of child protection, it was not very difficult for self-identification and access of specific individuals who play important decision-making roles in the field of social policies that address the needs of children in street situation. The difficulty laid in conducting the interviews on time according to the agreed plans, due to the very busy schedule of the persons involved in this study. The majority of them were fully engaged and committed in service provision and community security as part of the Covid 19 response programme. However, the involvement of more people at the local level could be an added value to this study and could bring other dimensions of thinking about the current difficulties in designing and implementing programs to help children in street situation.

Chapter 3. Study results

3.1 Profiles of children in street situation

3.1.1 Numbers

Local state and non - state authorities are still striving for inclusive data means not only collecting and using data disaggregated by (at a minimum) sex and age, but also ensuring that hidden population groups – such as children in street situation – are included in the data that inform policies at local and country level.

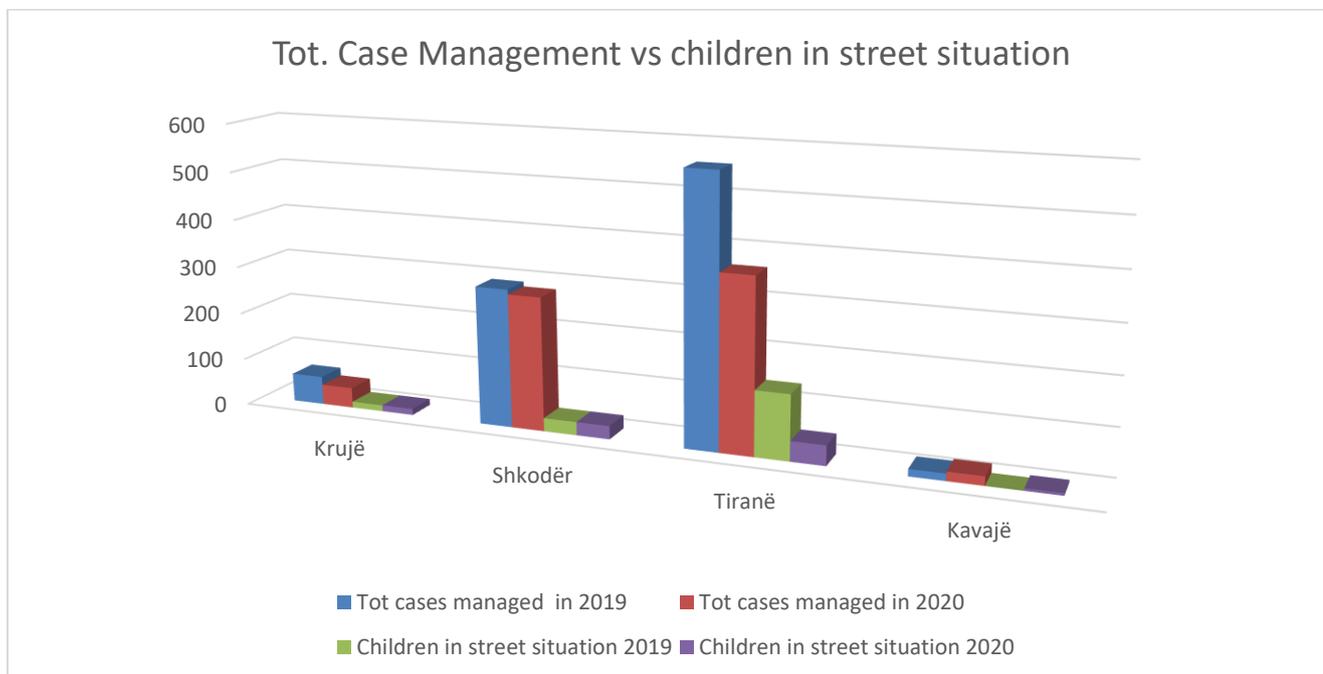
Street children are excluded from national statistics prepared from the National Institute of Data (INSTAT) because standard data collection methods such as household surveys are not adapted to the realities of their live. The data that is available on street children are only the ones collected from the social issues related institutions, including SACRP at national level and Department/Section of Social Services & CPU at local level.

Data collected from these sources do reflect a non-coherent database system developed for children in street situation at central and local government. There is a discrepancy on data collected from these two sources of information. Data base system developed is not unified and easy to be collected by indicated details on gender, age group, ethnicity etc. These data can be collected subject to specific requests from various stakeholders.

Table 1 Data collected from SACRP

Year 2019	Cases managed	Children in street situation
Krujë	60	13
Shkodër	290	28
Tiranë	558	136
Kavajë	15	0
Year 2020 (July – September)		
Krujë	43	13
Shkodër	280	28
Tiranë	362	42
Kavajë	19	5
Total 2019 - 2020	1627	265

Graph 1. Tot managed cases vs children in street situation in 2019 & 2020



3.1.2 Gender

The majority of children visible on the streets are boys. That is also confirmed from the observations conducted by the mobile outreach team of the research. Girls are fewer because, among other reasons, they are generally helping younger siblings. It is speculated that the male child is expected to do less work at home than the female child.

Table 2 Field data collected from Directorate of Social Services (Shkodra, Tirana, Kruja and Kavaja) for year 2019

Location	Total number /year 2019	Gender	Age group	Roma& Egyptian	Age group	Roma& Egyptian	Other
			Female	Male			
Shkodra	50	21	29	3-14	48	2	50
Tirana	158	56	102	3 mo-16 years old	134	24	158
Kruje	10	4	6	4 – 14 years old	10	0	10
Kavaja	27	11	16	3 mo-13 years old	27	0	27

Graph 2. Total no of children in street situation vs. gender in 2019

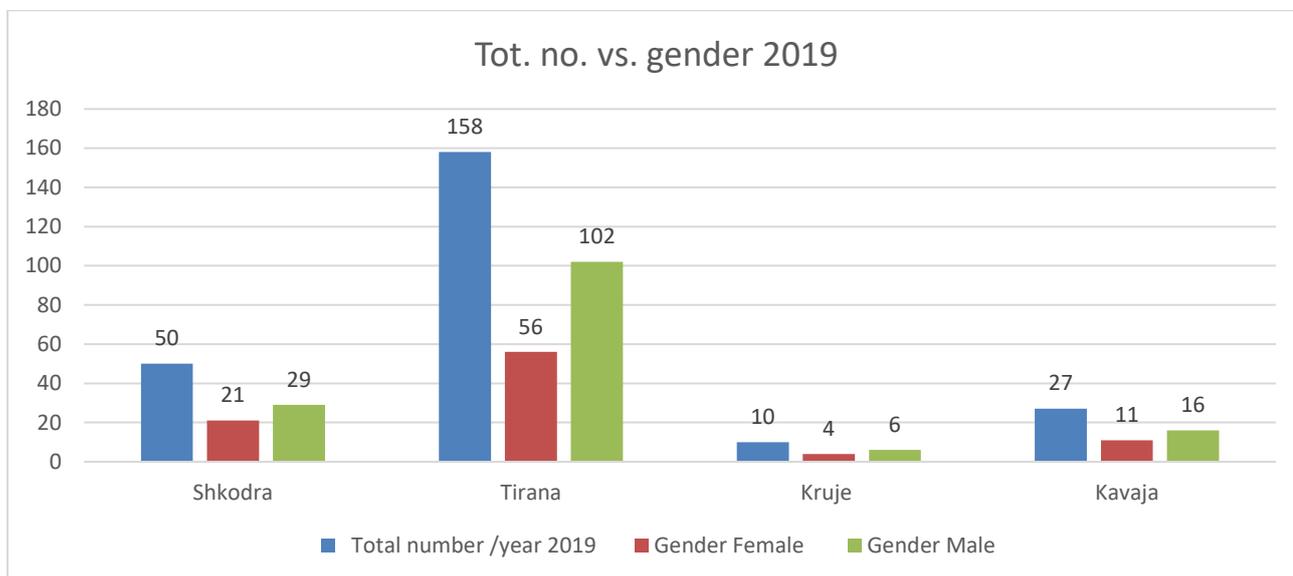
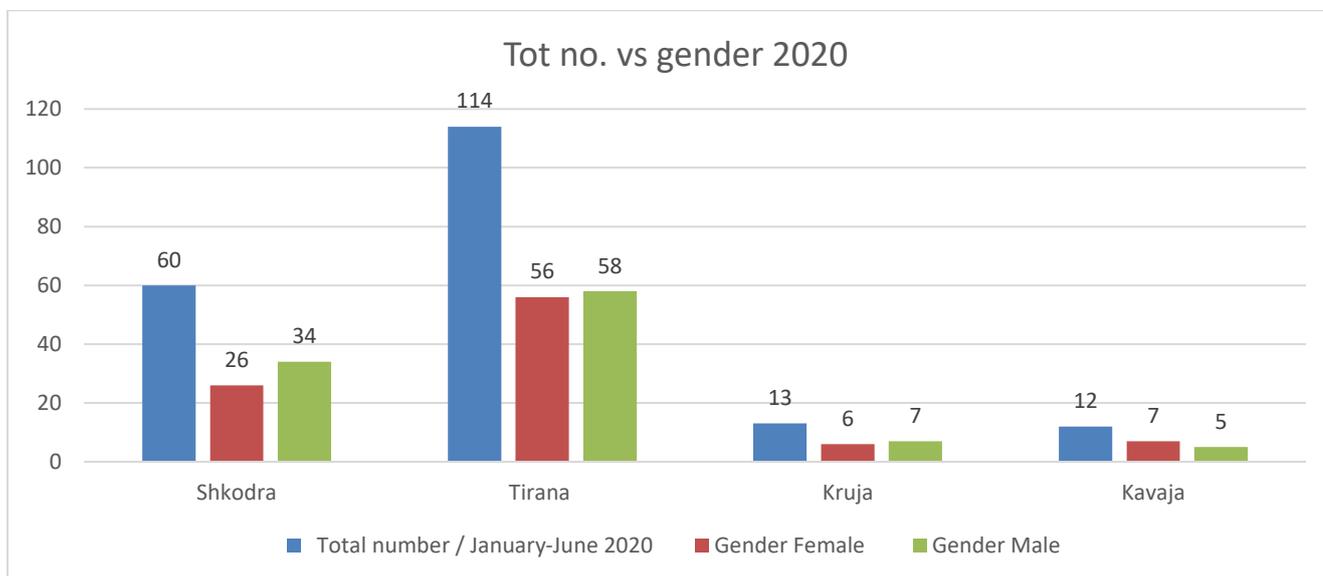


Table 3: Field data collected from CPU (Shkodra, Tirana, Kruja and Kavaja) for January-June 2020

Location	Total number / January-June 2020	Gender		AGE	Roma& Egyptian	Other
		Female	Male			
Shkodra	60	26	34	3-14	57	3
Tirana	114	56	58	3 mo-16 years old	96	18
Kruje	13	6	7	4-14 years old	13	0
Kavaja	12	7	5	3-12	12	0
TOTAL	199	95	104		178	21

Graph 3. Total no. of children in street situation vs. gender 2020



According to the above table 3 data: there are around 47 % females and 53 % males. In larger cities like Tirana, girls present a higher percentage (49%) compared to the proportion of girls. In smaller cities (46% such as Kruja and Kavaja 58%) which is clearly an indication linked with age group of females involved in street activity.

Interviews conducted during this study confirm the findings of previous researches that the number of girls in street situation decreases as they grow older (mostly girls belong to age range of 5-9 years). Their gender and situation on the streets render them more vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse/ exploitation than boys, who are better able to protect themselves. As a result, teen-age pregnancy (among girls aged 15-17) and sexually-transmitted diseases are common among street girls. This is information validated also from focus groups conducted. Other than the above, girl-children are also discriminated against in terms of getting an education, receiving proper nutrition, and being portrayed in the media. There are still gender stereotyped concepts that exist and reporting of cases involving girl children are often sensationalized. However, the study and data collected do confirm that in four locations boys are more prevalent in street situation throughout the country¹¹

¹¹ An explanation for this disparity, which was confirmed during the focus groups with children and community members, lies in the cultural differentiation between male and female roles in Albania. In such roles, girls are expected to engage in household duties more than boys, especially in female-headed homes. For boys, spending time outside of the home with their peers is not necessarily perceived as negative, while for girls it is not commonly accepted that they would spend long hours alone on the streets. There is a risk that girls are less likely to receive assistance, since they are less visible on the streets than boys, but likely to face similar adversities.

During the observation and outreach work there has been noted not frequent physical presence of children in street which is linked with COVID-19 lockdown and internal movement.¹²

3.1.3 Age groups

According to table 3 data : street children's ages range from 3 months to sixteen (16) years, but majority of them are from the eleven (11) to fourteen (14) year-old (this was confirmed from direct observation and interviews conducted with children and stakeholders).

According to above tables it is obvious the phenomenon of involvement of infant children starting from 3 months old accompanied with their parents or other adults in Tirana. As per interviews in the street and observation majority of them do start this experience along with their parents around early childhood. During outreach team observation and interviews there were identified 6 cases in Tirana, 2 in Shkodra and 1 in Kruja from this age group infants from 3 -6 months old that were in the streets accompanied by their mothers or siblings while begging.

3.1.4 Ethnicity

According to table 3 data in Shkodra 95% of children identified in street situation belong Roma and Egyptian communities. In Tirana 84% of children identified in street situation belong Roma and Egyptian communities. In Kavaja 100 % of children identified in street situation belong Roma and Egyptian communities. In Kruja 100% of children identified in street situation belong to Roma and Egyptian communities. This study confirms that the incidence of children in street situation from R&E community groups is too high).

Nevertheless, the present study noted that there is a changed tendency (increased number) from the latest report in regard to the significant number of children from the Albanian majority in street situation. From interviews in 4 locations scope of the study it is noted an increased trend of such proportion of non-Roma population versus Roma and Egyptian.

This phenomenon is quite visible in bigger cities such as Tirana and Shkodra.

Analysis of table 3 data for non-Roma street involvement trend versus R&E population is quite clear that there is non-Roma evidenced. Nevertheless, from interviews with stakeholders it was mentioned this trend of non-Roma population from very poor families and internally migrated families mostly involved in street activities such as selling cigarettes, clothespin, candles (in Kruja, Laç church), parking arrangements or begging at entrances of food markets.

4 children out of 16 children interviewed (25%) belonged to non-Roma community.

6 children out of 20 children participating in FGD (around 30 %) belonged to non-Roma community

¹² Interviews conducted with local stakeholders referred to movement in different locations as well as hidden cases of children that moved to peripheries of the cities.

3.2 Migration and Mobility

In Tirana is noted a decreased trend of reported identified number of children (year 2018-289 children; year 2019-158 children; year 2020- 114 children). Nevertheless, this is not an indication that the number of children in street situation is reduced rather than reduction because of internal migration¹³, COVID-19 lockdown, tendency to be settled in the touristic cities and seaside.

In addition, for Tirana is noted a decreased trend of number of cases managed from year to year (year 2018 - 51% of cased identified have been managed and referred; year 2019 - 45% of cased identified have been managed and referred; year 2020 - 36% of cased identified have been managed and referred).¹⁴

The study confirms the findings of the 2014 study that children in street situation are involved in different activities in other cities of their residence. The most in common activity is moving to touristic cities selling cigarettes, car fresheners, begging (mostly R&E), recycling plastic metals well as parking. Interviews with stakeholders and children themselves do evidence as well informal jobs such as loading and unloading goods trucks, working in agriculture (very few reported), cleaning at cemeteries, looking after sun beds on beaches (Shkodra), selling candles (those of Kruja in the religious places Laçi church).

" I help my family to survive with the money I earn through a parking service in Durres. We are 7 children at home and I am the older one...." (Boy, Age 13, Tirana)

"During special days I go to Laçi church to beg for money, people are sensitive and give money"-boy, age 12, Kavaja)

"This summer was the worst one... people did not travel too much in the seaside and cross border... very little money earned from car window washing and selling cigarettes in Velipoja and Shengjin"-boy 11 years old Shkodra.

3.3 Root causes

Socio-economic and political factors directly impinging on the physical, economic, and psychosocial dynamics and conditions within the family are all pervasive and constantly threaten the family's existence and survival.

Causes of the street children phenomenon can be categorized in the following:

Immediate Causes (Factors which have to do with the children and family):

- Poor and large families;
- Unemployed/underemployed parents/children;
- Irresponsible parents;
- Family values which are materialistic/consumerist;
- Family conflict;
- Family environment;

¹³Origin of children identified in Tirana is from Kamza, Durrës, Berat, Fier, Elbasan ,Korcë, Gjirokastër

¹⁴Source data collected from Municipality of Tirana, Department of Social Services

- Vices of parents;
- Lack of knowledge and parenting skills;
- Emerging social values conflict with traditional values;

Underlying Causes (Factors which have to do with the community):

- Ineffective access to basic services;
- Non-availability of adequate employment opportunities;
- Inequitable distribution of resources and opportunity in the community;
- Nature and conditions of work/employment: formal and informal sectors;
- Inadequate housing/poor housing facilities;
- Poor law enforcement/exploitation by law enforcers;

As confirmed from the focus group discussions and interviews with local structures and social workforce, among above mentioned causes the structural roots of poverty and underdevelopment remains one of the main root causes. Poverty at home, economic difficulties are the most dominant and obvious reasons according to children that they are involved in street activities. Their parents are mostly unemployed, and in majority of cases live in very poor conditions, with no proper housing, live in tents or barracks (lacking basic amenities and overcrowded dwellings). The majority of children interviewed and participating in focus groups stressed poverty, unemployment, lack of housing, debts or hunger, as most predominant problems identified. In some cases, their families encounter presence of social and domestic violence phenomena which in most of the cases pressures their involvement in street activities.

Children in street situation belong to large size number families of at least 6 (six) to 7 (seven) members. The majority of the children live with one or both of the parents. The divorce and separation of their parents affects many children who suffer from social family conflicts, domestic violence, living with partner of one of their parents in addition to poverty and very poor living conditions.

Children interviewed stated that most of them (80%) have both parents. Nevertheless, it was clearly mentioned that mothers are mostly caring for children. During focus group discussions it was noted a closed link of children with their families. Mostly boys stated that men are supposed to secure living in their families and women(girls) stay at home for householding.

Divorce, early marriages, large size of families, living with grandparents and relatives in small living spaces do impact directly the psychological, financial and emotional wellbeing of the children.

From the outreach work, on spot visits and interviews held it was re-confirmed the profile of children in street situation identified mainly as those who beg and work on the street by being exposed to a high risk of their physical and mental health, trafficking and exploitation, getting in contact and conflict with the law (4 cases were reported), low enrolment and completion rate of their education.

The study reconfirms almost same root causes of the 2014(SC and UNICEF) study:

- ✓ The cycle of having parents who were once children in street situation and the consequences of their actions of parents, such as neglect, migration or just exposing their children to street activities;
- ✓ The state, or lack of a proper, working child care system;
- ✓ Physical, sexual or emotional abuse, lead children to run away from home;
- ✓ Peer pressure;

- ✓ Some children get involved in street activities on their own initiative primarily because they want to help their families, but some of the teens see it as a way to become independent;
- ✓ Family migration and/or family dynamics (illness, death of one or both parents).

3.4 Physical and mental health

As observed during outreach activity, and confirmed during the interviews, children that are connected and involved in street work face various risks which affect directly their physical and mental health. Very often these children are subject of verbal and physical violence from different individuals while begging and selling activities. When talking to children this is not highlighted as a concern itself but as a fact happening which they are used to and cope with it.

3 children (age group 12-15) out of 16 interviewed, around 19 % did explicitly stated the real risk for getting different type of diseases because of their involvement in types of work that expose them to chemical and toxic materials substances. In addition, 50% of children interviews stated they never went to a doctor while the other half did mention the doctor (mainly the youngest ages that are accompanied by their caregivers and family relatives).

Abovementioned risks are present and obviously have consequences to children including loose of control, subject of conflicts while on the street struggling to survive and real physical, sexual, and psychological damages and abuse.

From the interviews was observed and confirmed the society neglect, stigma and abuse which negatively influence their development, trauma, self-esteem, integration and re-integration. 2 (two) cases (1 in Shkodra and 1 in Tirana) interviewed have been involved in social programs for re-integration and faced difficulties in adapting themselves due to abovementioned reasons which unfortunately led to return to the street activities.

3.5 Child Trafficking and Exploitation

This study confirms the risk of exploitation and trafficking from interviews with children, stakeholders as well as direct observation. When asked questions such as: “With whom they are accompanied when in the street”, “can you tell some risks, or any situation which put you to experience a negative and unsecure moment while on the street? –children 14 years old and older could mention risk of trafficking and exploitation especially at night. The younger age group did not clearly mentioned risks but indirectly stressing that they are with older relatives, siblings or parents which gives them security and protection.

When contacting their parents (6 parents out of 16 children interviewed) it was straight forward elaborated awareness and alert to such risks but not reporting any concrete case of child trafficking. Such risk is being mentioned by stakeholders as well as a present phenomenon in the country but no specific case was highlighted. It was mentioned that in most of the cases traffickers have family connections with the child’s family or they are close relatives.

The majority of stakeholders (95%) confirmed that both girls and boys are subject of potential trafficking because of their exposure and risks encountered.

From interviews with children, approximate 37% (6 out of 16) of children stated that they were on the street to help their families (indirectly meaning that were forced by their parents) though begging and 18 % (3 out of 16) reported (indirectly expressed) to be induced by adults (not relatives) and involved in street work and income generation activity) parking activity at Blloku area Tirana). During focus groups and individual interviews with children and stakeholders it was clearly elaborated than for attracting the society sensitivity

and mercy very often younger children were accompanying their parents.

When talking to service providers and stakeholders it was clearly mentioned that they work with cases of very young children that are forced to be in the street with their parents (mostly aged 0-1 years and 2-3) in a deep sleep due to substances (drugs or medicines). While other age groups of children 5-10 were subject of use of smoking (cigarettes, marijuana).

Direct observation did not encounter any case of use of substances or drugs to keep children asleep, although it was mentioned by stakeholders. This might have been caused by limits in exposure to the street during COVID-19 lockdown and presence of police in the locations.

Sexual exploitation was presented as a phenomenon only by stakeholders and service providers (CSOs) with reservations on concrete cases and evidences. Nevertheless, real cases have been managed especially those travelling from location to location as well as cross border to Shkodra.

“...having no other means to survive money, work, home and family it’s an easy way to earn money by involvement in sexual relationships (through payment from clients) with no implications with police”- statement from service providers from their experience

Trafficking and exploitation of children in street situation although is reported as present and a concern actually is very little addressed and there are not accurate data, researches to document its existence and consequences. This will help service providers, stakeholders to design programs and address it appropriately with concrete actions for protection of children and penal proceedings for exploiters.

3.6 Children in Contact with the Law

Children in contact with the law, in majority of cases tend to share certain common features with children in street situation: they are victims of multiple deprivations; most come from poor or dysfunctional families and had parents with lower levels of education¹⁵. Street experience and involvement for a long-time duration, without any control increases their chances to get engaged in offenses. There were 4 (four) children identified from the outreach mobile team as children in conflict with the law and in street situation. From the identified cases, 3 (three) of them have committed petty crimes - the other one was engaged in criminal behaviour, used or coerced by an adult. as confirmed from the focus group discussions with children as well as the in-depth interviews with service providers, too often, prejudice related to race, ethnicity or social and economic status may bring a child into conflict with the law even when no crime has been committed, or result in harsh treatment by law enforcement officials. Children who came in conflict with the law had a complete lack of information about their rights. Preventive measures, can improve children’s understanding of their responsibilities under the law and help them avoid conflict. 3 (three) of the children who had committed petty were arrested and sent to a detention centre (that happened 5 years ago). That is a specific example reconfirming the need for further strengthening of the capacities to enable community involvement in the process of restorative justice. Law enforcement officials should be familiar with constructive approaches that make it possible to avoid formal arrest and detention of children in conflict with the law. Capacity and knowledge of juvenile judges, magistrates, social workers and police need to be further strengthened and increased in the area of juvenile justice to avoid the repletion of such cases.

¹⁵ This does not mean, however, that deviant behaviour is the monopoly of children from lower-income groups. Evidence shows that children from middle- and high-income families also commit offences, but these tend to remain hidden in the data as most such cases are settled before they come to court.

3.7 Education and Children in street situation

18 % of children interviewed (3 children out of 16) were enrolled at school (2 in Tirana ,1 in Shkodra) by combination of schooling and street related activities involvement. Many barriers were presented and re-confirmed for access to education for children in street situation. Lack of financial means from their families to afford schooling, lack of official documentation (registration forms), mentality inherited from older generations in the family, need for earning income for survival predominating the fulfilment of the right to education were re-confirmed by interviewers. Most of identified children in street situation belong to Roma community which is the rationale of the abovementioned barriers.

School drop out for Roma population is currently a challenge in the country. 60% of children interviewed abandoned school in different years of schooling due to pressure from family and relative, lack of financial means, and above-mentioned reasons. This study reconfirmed that education for children in street situation remains challenging. With support from social integration programs children are pre-prepared in various community centres for school enrolment and succeed to enrol at school. Then it becomes more challenging keeping them in school and ensuring attendance and progress. It has been reported from service providers that these children are also supported with extra educational classes non formal, catch up classes but due to economic difficulty of their families they are forced to work during school hours. The group of children that combine schooling with street related activities becomes more difficult to success in school attendance and then it ends up in school dropout. In addition, girls especially from Roma community do abandon school for traditional reasons and mentality of early child marriages within the community (around 13 years old even younger ones). It still remains a challenge the welcoming environment for these children at school and outside school.

According to Action Plan 2017-2020 for development and integration of Roma community of Tirana Municipality school drop out for Tirana is less than 3% for the age 6-10 years old), and reached 30% 10-16 years old for boys and 44,6% for girls. At age of 1, 96% of girls and 68% of boys abandon school. During academic year 2016-2017, according to data from regional education authority 15.2% of R&E children drop out from school (24.2% Roma and 1.3% Egyptian). As it is reported this phenomenon is very much related with Roma community.

Interviews with service providers did confirm that yet it remains a challenge the discrimination towards these communities and especially their children.

“...A child in Kavaja said that during Covid he could not attend classes due to inability to have a smart equipment for attending online schooling... his mother said that even when he was present at school it was difficult to follow him, we are not educated to help him with homework and school dynamics.

Enrolment in preschool education is crucial to ensure a smooth transition to school enrolments and successful completion of it. Support programs for families and family strengthening should consider preschool education level which is often discriminating children in street situation; their attitude is important to support those children to continue in school.

When talking to children they all expressed that they wanted school but they brought in their language during interviews many obstacles that could not make that happening. In addition, those children interviewed that drop out have also mentioned discrimination atmosphere in school environment which makes very challenging familiarisation, adaptation with the school in comparison with street life and street activities

Case study: K. S belongs to a large size of a family with many members (7). He lives with his mom, his grandparents (parents of his mother) his younger sisters (2) and the youngest brother (with the new partner of his mom). His dad left them when he was 9. Being the oldest child in the family he was obliged to be exposed every day to the street, abandon gradually the school till a final drop-out for 2 years. His mother and the father-in-law are not employed and live in a barrack and don't benefit from any kind of support from the government. When approached by the professionals of the community centre in Shkodra he hesitated to return back to school due to economic difficulties of his family as well as gaps created in his academic knowledge. He benefited from non-formal education classes held in the centre in Shkodra and a welcoming environment of the professionals and other peers in the centre. His mother as well did cooperate with the professionals and thanks to referral was employed. After many efforts K.S did return back to school and continues to get support for additional extra hours of learning in the community centre. He likes going to school and the same wished to all his peers. Because of this support his sisters are registered at school while the youngest brother in kindergarten next to the area of leaving. (11-year-old boy, Shkodra)

3.8 Access to and use of Health Care Services

According to ECRI Report on Albania, June 2020 Roma and Egyptians continue to face obstacles in accessing healthcare on an equal basis. While official data on their health situation is still patchy, according to various community groups, progress appears to be limited. Many members of these communities do not have health insurance cards due to the fact that they are neither regularly employed nor registered as unemployed. This is automatically impacting children's health and wellbeing.

From the observation process, outreach work, interviews on the street the majority of children (90%), had no suitable clothes and were not cleaned. 82% of children interviewed (13 children out of 16) stated that they live in poor housing conditions, have very low level of health-related knowledge, and 60% of them (10 out of 16) didn't know where was their health care centres and could not mention if they were vaccinated or not. Although vaccination is mandatory and regulated in the country still this is not well evidenced due to lack of health books for majority of them. According to ECRI report on Albania, June 2020: outcome indicators, for example vaccination rates among children, are often lower for members of the Roma and Egyptian communities compared to the overall population.¹⁶

Informal employment of their parents as well as expensive bill to pay it independently are barriers for obtaining their health insurance which can enable access to free medical examination and support from hospitals. This group has also multiply suffered during COVID-19 lockdown and respecting of anti-COVID-19 protocol measurements including hygiene. Children interviewed stated that hygienic supplies have been provide to their families from international organisations. When talking to children they stated that they heard about COV-19 but are not afraid of it and cannot mention any risks of its infection and death.

3.9 Perceived experiences and expectations on the next future or children's aspirations

¹⁶ European Roma Rights Centre 2018:

The study describes their access to and utilization of services, and the children's perception and aspirations.

In Shkodra and Tirana existence of daily centres offering services for children in need (mostly community centres with integrated services for families in needs, Roma, children with disabilities etc run by Municipalities-Tirana and supported by CSOs-Shkodra) is highlighted from interviewed children and their parents. 30% of those interviewed did mention the services received (mostly highlighting the existence of the centre as a place they frequent without clearly elaborating typology of services).

Nevertheless, such services for children in street situation have not been able to make a significant difference for their overall life situation. Although it was mentioned by service providers that assistance to street children is considered as an integral part of the social protection system, yet there are many stereotypes and prejudices about children in street situation, there are not available social services targeting or designed for children in street situations. For example, in Kruja and Kavaja there is no such service offered. While talking to interviews children and their parents including stakeholders (especially in Kavaja) it is highly recommended the establishment of such services to ensure the proper case management and referral from LGUs. This recommendation came out even from interviews with stakeholders in Tirana and Shkodra highlighting that a percentage of children (around 15%) identified is from other cities (including Kruja and Kavaja).

Focus group and the interviews carried out did evidence that internal migration is a real opportunity for better living conditions for families of children in street situation. An increasing trend is noted in comparison of the 2014 study that Tirana is not the only attractive destination but Shkodra, Vlora, Kosovo, Saranda, Gjirokastra have become an interesting one¹⁷.

Children interviewed stated clearly that the life in the street is for survival, by being involved in various street related activities under the winter cold and hot summer days day and night. Majority of them expressed they want a better life and living as a child but unfortunately will follow the same lifestyle as their parents and have no hopes for their future.

Case study: *A.L from Tirana at the age of 14, lived with her grandmother since 1 year old because her parents migrated to Greece and divorced... She attended school till 11 years old and abandoned school when 12, because at that age she should be married (her grandmother said what Roma culture requires) ... at 13 she fall in love with a young boy living at the same settlement in Tirana and gave birth to her first child; She became a mother my being a child herself without being aware of all parenting responsibilities. The boy she married has a large family and many social and economic problems came immediately after giving birth to her child. Even they were in love, lack of income and independence led to a difficult relationship. Her husband very often was traveling to Vlora and Gjirokastra to beg and earn income which made her life too difficult living with her husband's parents, grandparents and relatives. She felt alone and not protected with no care and security. Thus, she left her daughter with her grandmother and started to travel in different cities (even abroad) with her husband to beg. She still continues to beg and work and doesn't see very often her daughter She needs to be close to her love and survive for earning money to grow and feed her baby..... all she wants is a house and a job to stay close to her husband with their daughter (the girl was met in Shkodra over weekend, Tirana).*

¹⁷This may explain also the reduction of number identified in Tirana. Might be interesting to see the trend of such numbers in the newly attractive destinations identified

Chapter 4 Impact. Assessment of Interventions/policies and strategies targeting children in street situation

4.1 Impact on beneficiary level

4.1.1 Impact on children in street situation and their families;

As mentioned in the section I of the study report here is evidenced a very good progress during the period 2014-2020 in regard to legislative framework and strategies, protocols and guidelines that filled the gap of policy level documents targeting children in street situation.

Nowadays, Albania clearly makes references to the significance of child rights and child protection in all the relevant laws and political agendas intending to employ more inclusive and well-designed child rights and protection systems as well as promote social protection and social inclusion at the country level. There is no concern in terms of the inclusiveness, social protection and child protection system at the theoretical level in Albania.

Several good practices developed, are of NGOs, mainly related to the identification of cases and their referral to Child Protection (CP) Units at municipal level, which are responsible for case management; development of technical round tables with a multidisciplinary focus and direct contact with children. These practices, combined with enabling access to community centres located close to settlements, have resulted in increased awareness of families and children about the services to which they are entitled. Family awareness has been addressed during these years, which aimed at family strengthening, and counselling for handling difficult situations. In addition, advocacy and lobbying activities by representatives of both public institutions and CSOs have resulted in an increased level of awareness on the part of the government and general society, and subsequently in the expansion of interventions.

Another example of good practice is mediation through community representatives, in order for children and families to build trust and be more accepting of representatives of relevant public and non-governmental services. Interviews carried out with children, stakeholders and focus groups with children emphasised the need for these good practices to become a general model of working with children in street situation and their families.

All abovementioned provide a solid basis for establishing services but the level of such service provision varies from one location to the other. Budget allocated to such services is diverse in different locations. In Tirana the situation is better developed and there are 5 multidisciplinary centres for children and families in need. Only one centre has specialized services for children in street situation, a model piloted and developed by SC and handed over to Municipality after 8 years of its operation.

In Kruja and Kavaja it was mentioned the lack of DiC models which can help in re-integration programs.

In contrary with the long list of documents, legal framework and strategies developed, the services for children in street situation, children at risk and their families are limited in their typology equipped with available human and financial resources and long-term prevention interventions. There is a lack of interventions at local level (mandated to be developed by local municipalities (Article 46 of the 17/18 Law on the rights and protection of the child) which focus on a case management, multidisciplinary and inter-sectorial approach of all relevant stakeholders.

Families of children in street situation have very low monthly income and high unemployment ratio. Most of the families relied on income from the collection of raw materials and social assistance. Living conditions are still inappropriate: the majority of these housing units is huts with many construction problems such as leaky roofs, mould, damp floors and so on. Social housing opportunities are very limited. Access to health care services was hindered by lack of health insurance which is the result of a lack of documentation, employment and information. On the other hand, chronic diseases and disabilities were very present among adults and children of the families. The right to education, health and food for these children has not been fulfilled. Children attended school or preschool at a low rate, due to the financial difficulties of their families, reportedly unfriendly school environment, limited capacities for enrolment by educational institutions (especially at preschool level), lack of legal documents and in some cases, lack of interest on the part of the family and/or children. A substantial proportion of the families could not afford medical examinations and medicines for their children, or to send them to school, and they lacked the means to provide them more than 1 or 2 meals per day, clothing or shoes. For some families it has become a destiny for their children to be raised on the street. Children in street situation of the participating families were encountering difficulties in getting food, spending 6 or more hours a day on the street and had a low school attendance rate. The participating parents also reported that their children had been at risk of becoming victims of trafficking or that they had developed physical and mental health problems due to their street involvement. Social assistance is very low and many families cannot benefit from it because of lack of documentation or difficulties in managing bureaucratic administrative procedures and related payments. There are only a few emergency services offered within existing drop-in centres (mainly in Tirana and Shkodra) with limited human and material capacities. Similarly, child protection units (state run) are understaffed and lack even emergency budgets. There is some overlapping of services in the same location, while other locations remain uncovered. State run services are mostly focused on immediate response, rather than long-term, preventive strategies and re-integration programs. Crucial services are provided by NGOs, therefore lacking sustainability.

Tirana and Shkodra have some good built practices in case management and culture mediation, but overall, there is still limited inter-sectorial cooperation, limited result oriented and successful use of multidisciplinary and family strengthening approach.

In addition, it is yet present the lack of an integrated database on case management.

Having said that, the sporadic initiative to “clean the streets” especially in Tirana, thus reducing the phenomenon of children in street situation has generated another problem for the families of children in street situation, movement to other hidden zones, other cities and minimized trust with police structures which were assigned to move them from the streets. Poverty level for the families has increased due to lack of alternatives of income and moreover no employment opportunities for the parents of these children. This vulnerability has been multiplied and more deepened during Covid-19 lockdown and overall restrictions.

4.1.2 Impact on child protection/social protection system at national and local level

Although the Government of Albania has been designing policies and making consecutive reforms in order to promote social protection and child protection within the country, still these systems are not at the desired level. The main problems behind designing well-functioning, effective, and inclusive social protection stem from the *lack of institutional capacity and human resources to implement* identified reforms by the Government of Albania in collaboration with international and national organizations. It is of great importance that practice comes to the forefront a to achieve the expected results which are identified in all related policy documents.



The designing of reforms and policies developed require proper implementation. Three important issues are evidenced as affecting their implementation, sustainability in this field such as (i) still weak mechanisms for horizontal planning and coordination in social protection, inclusive education (ii) mismatches between policy goals and objectives, financial allocations and the achievement of outcomes for services that affect similar groups of populations at risk of poverty and social exclusion and (iii) an excessive focus on funding single standalone activities, funded by international Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and development partners, rather than investing in systems building sustainable systems to deliver services.

Analysis of social protection and child protection in the country including related policy documents and sector strategies highlight the lack of human resources and institutional capacity to design and implement sectoral strategies, the lack of coordination among relevant institutions; absence of long – term approach to fund transition to new social care system; absence of long – term strategy to fund transition for social care system integrating services on local level are also identified as key weaknesses in social protection and child protection system.

Data collection from local municipalities is conducted for children in need generally with no specification as children in street situation as per profile and definition set in UNCRC and the Albanian context (national study research UNICEF SC 2014). Having said that the response and coordinated actions to tackle the phenomenon are fragmented and not well designed by applying the case management protocol actions and coordinated intersectoral approach case by case in a sustainable way at the best interest of the child.

At the current time the CP units, who should coordinate case management, lack the necessary infrastructure, human and financial resources to fully manage identified and referred cases. They lack budgets for emergency interventions and there is insufficient inter-sectorial cooperation when dealing with particular cases and generally in working on the issue. The intervention to help families and children in street situations initiated by MoHSP was a concrete initiative and applauded but did not succeed completely because it remained at identification level. No structured interventions are functional to strengthen families. Multidisciplinary groups for case management do not achieve the expected results because after the technical table meetings, participants follow up tasks sporadically and not systematically. All the responsibility after that goes to the CPU and the possibilities for effective management are low so the case management is continuing to be relying mostly on NGO resources.

Despite the fact that a 2018 inter-ministerial order on case management of child protection cases through a multidisciplinary and inter-sectorial approach defined all roles and responsibilities of relevant public and non-public actors, implementation is still insufficient. Many workers of public institutions are not informed about the most recent legislative changes, and display indifference when it comes to cooperation and identification of cases. Frequent staff turnover in public institutions, often related to the practice of recruitment procedures have influenced negatively the effective response to cases in need.

Monitoring structures for child protection workers in public institutions need to be better developed, especially in given additional responsibilities to units of local self-governance such as the Directorates of Social Care and Social Inclusion in municipalities. They also suggest that although several important legal and policy documents were produced by relevant institutions in the last year, and the fact that the issue of children in street situation has their attention, *there is a need for stronger involvement of experienced operative workers who also need to be supported by long-term action plans resulting in concrete preventive measures. Other challenges related to the quality of case management include the lack of an efficiently*

planned distribution of services, overlapping of the same and/or similar services in the same area, and lack of support for families whose members do not have personal documents, or information that would enable them to use certain services. There is evidenced a need for capacity building especially for staff of state institutions, and development of the supervision component of case management. Workers who work directly with children can experience the phenomenon of burnout. No supervision service is provided for these workers. It is obvious the need for an increased focus on interventions that use a family strengthening approach, through increasing financial aid and employment alternatives, which promote family empowerment and help to prevent involvement of children in a street situation. Awareness raising interventions were identified as necessary to draw the attention of institutions and society on the phenomenon of children in street situation.

Citizens are not yet well informed about children in street situation, they still give money to children on the street and do not realise that it does not help children. The existence of discrimination and social exclusion of children and their families by public institutions themselves, as they lack comprehensive policies and tend to set up settlements far from the locations of service delivery. Public institutions also tend to show indifference in case management. The state has built communities in areas where there are no services or amenities that would enable families to secure minimal living conditions. Institutions are less likely to intervene in the cases of children who come from marginalised communities.

Establishment and application of an integrated database for case management, is yet not realised. Thus, there is not a satisfactory level of inter-sectorial cooperation, and registration of cases.

4.1.3 Community impact

Several awareness raising campaigns have been initiated during the recent years aiming at raising the awareness of the general public on the promotion of rights of children, and change community attitudes, particularly related to begging phenomena in the streets.

Working at the community level has been one of the types of intervention in the frame of the supporting programme for children in street situation, mainly consisting of community development and referral of children in street situation cases for further assistance to social care, health care or other services. Interventions for street children have complimented other activities in the targeted community. The strategies implemented at this level included community action, providing services and ensuring that resources are available.

An important aspect of the work with community is related to sensitizing the community members about the supporting programme/project and the situation of the street children, involve them in activities and motivate them to participate actively on their own. As result of such supporting programmes at community level an increase in community involvement has been claimed by all actors. Communities results to be more aware that the problem of street children is a problem for the whole community. They have an increased understanding that problems of street children have multiple causes and need multiple responses.

Community involvement has given to community members that they 'own' responsibility for the problems of street children, and the future of their children. A system or structure for collective action is developed or activated within the community which leads to the improvement in the lives of street children. Some examples of ways in which community involvement benefits street children are given below: The stigma, discrimination, and human rights abuse that street children face is moderately reduced. Street children can have access to services (Tirana and Shkodra). Introduction of such services is facilitated, e.g. drug treatment facilities, school enrolment, referral to local governance support schemes.



Street children\network established composed by drop-in centres that offer services (with support and facilitation of SC) has also had positive impact on all the policy/respective intervention development for children in street situation. Several projects developed have found that the collective actions of as many groups as possible are needed to advocate successfully for particular issues related to the rights and entitlement of street children.

Such a network has responded swiftly to the needs and problems of children in street situation. It has had particular impact on:

- Having a positive influence on the community perception of street children;
- Helping street children to integrate into the community.;
- Bringing different groups of people and organizations together to collectively advocate for specific policies, attitudes and practices in support of the health and wellbeing of street children.
- Influencing policies and attitudes to a greater extent as compared to isolated efforts by individual organizations and people.

4.2 Impact on Gender and Environment

The study has identified through key informant interviews and professionals that gender is taken into account when planning and reporting with theoretical statements that there is not gender discrimination in their work. Nevertheless, within the community it is very obvious that mothers (or female relatives) are predominantly caring about the children. This was identified as a cultural issue as it is most likely that fathers will be at work, whilst mothers would most commonly look after their child. Engagement of parents (family members) on the issue of gender, in order to address the fact that girls are often disproportionately hidden from public view and kept out of school.

Analysing the existing interventions, especially the ones run from the NGOs, the children in street situation supported programmes are all needs led, based on beneficiaries and stakeholder's consultation. This has led to the design of each intervention maintaining relevance to the project/programme as a whole; empowering and transforming the lives of the children in street situation.

The existing interventions do not target gender equality as a priority objective, although they try to take into account the needs, abilities, and opportunities of girls, including gender equality considerations. and promoting girls and young women's empowerment. In addition, when talking to stakeholders(organisations) the projects/programmes did not take fully into account the impact the inclusion of boys and young men would have on the success of gender mainstreaming in their activities.

Data collected from the targeted local government authorities clearly show a larger population of street boys than girls. The outreach mobile team of the research has also found different distribution of gender in street children during research in all targeted cities.

This might be potentially caused by the different visibility of boys and girls. Street girls are not as visible as boys due to their different modes of work, which may therefore distort the statistics. The low numbers of street girls found during the research made it hard to locate them to gather information, and those found were reluctant to share personal information. Thus, the lower number of street girls, or their limited visibility at least, can also impact the level of information which can be obtained from street girls.

However, projects/programs could be improved by explicitly considering the gender dimensions of children in street situation. There is a need for analysis of the impact of children in street situation on social inclusion,

health, education, and specifically to the gender and sex-differentiated impacts. There is a need to address gender in intervention strategies for street children.

4.3 Unintended impact

As programs/project focused on children in street situation have been expanded and covered more ground, so should the capability of the people and organizations be managing these. The technical capabilities of people working for children in street situation, including social workforce from state and non –state authorities, counsellors, and program managers have been continuously increased.

As a result of lessons learned from initial experiences in managing programs among street children, policies and procedures are formulated based on experience by workers from NGOs and government agencies to guide program implementation. Guide policies are developed by NGOs members of the network for interventions such as: outreach, daily support services (daily centres), street education, temporary shelter and residential care, alternative education, working with families, provision of skills training and income-generating opportunities, etc.

The role of inter-agency/NGOs networks in mobilization of local and external resources to generate support for programs and services is continuously increased. This may be viewed as one of the results of the continuing advocacy being done among the different sectors and groups. The number of programs working among street children has increased continuously.

International networking has also been at the focus, mainly of the non – state authorities (CSOs working with children in street situation) aiming at establishing linkages with programs in other countries to provide a means of sharing individual and country experiences in working with street children. CSOs have been quite active in advocating for the rights of children through the establishment of networks and coalitions - at the national, regional, and local levels - which have for their main agenda, lobbying for legislation, advocacy, and technical assistance for the development and implementation of programs and services that uphold and protect the rights of children.

4.4 Wider system impact

The experience over the last 6 years has clearly defined the most important and effective programmes in Albania. Previous and current efforts in helping street children fall under three (3) broad types of programs/services that were developed in response to an analysis of three (3) major categories of street children and their specific needs and circumstances:

1. *Community-based Programs.* These programs target the children who maintain regular contacts with their families. Preventive in approach, community-based programs try to address the problem where it starts - the family and the community of the child. It addresses the problems in the family and community that, from the perspective of the residents, lead to the situations that force the children to go on the street. It is the goal of the community-based program to help communities identify their problems, mobilize their internal, as well as external resources, and involve themselves in their solutions. The community-based process focuses on the families of street children and other urban poor children and their community to enable them to make those changes within themselves that will lead to changes in opportunities for their children and to keep them off the streets. It has several main components: advocacy on child rights, protection and referral, community organization, livelihood development and social

credit, educational assistance including value clarification, and skills training. Peer counselling is also another important feature of this intervention. Volunteer peer counsellors among the youth in target communities are trained to enable them to conduct counselling sessions among identified abused and exploited children and/or their parents. Youth volunteers are usually trained on value clarification/education.

2. *Street-based programs.* The street-based program reaches out to children right on the street where they live and work, particularly to those children who are abandoned or have irregular contacts with their families. This strategy recognizes the child's need for survival, protection, and income, but ultimately, it aims to motivate and assist the child to be integrated. Street educators, field workers, and volunteers conduct informal dialogues and alternative education and value clarification sessions with the children, to know them and understand their situation or simply to offer protection, referral to temporary drop-in centers or residential care, and to humanize their environment. In Tirana is recently established an Outreach UNIT dedicated to all above mentioned tasks.
3. *Center-based Programs.* Drop-in centres do operate as a safe space, providing food, clothing, first aid/health examination, counselling, case work, work with families where possible, and a supportive and caring environment. There are various program categories that support street children and/or their families through non-formal and formal education, organization of parents and children, health services, counselling and case work with families, vocational and other skills training, paralegal training, social credit/loan assistance to parents.



Recommendations

- A national research and situation analysis should be programmed from public and non-public relevant responsible institutions (by including nationwide all targeted groups of children in need including children in street situation)
- More frequent awareness campaigns should be done to the society through the involved actors to change people's attitudes and mind sets toward child sensitive issues (by highlighting group of children in street situation). Better harmonisation of the work of all stakeholders and their levels of responsibility (such as government, NGOs, media, private business, religious groups, and individual citizens);
- Develop more initiatives that ensure child protection by mobilizing community structures at the local/ grassroots community level.
- Monitoring the implementation and outcome of the National Agenda for Child Rights is recommended to be conducted periodically and evidence based to ensure effective and complete implementation of laws Action plans and strategies developed.
- Data management system at local level should be disaggregated by sex, age, location, disability status, income, race, ethnicity, migratory status, and other relevant characteristics. Using such detailed data and evidence about street children can help in better understanding of street children's lives and how to tailor strategies to their specific needs.
- Enhance the map of existing services by establishing new services for children in need (including children in street situation) in locations such as Kruja and Kavaja to maximise the impact and ensure proper case management through referral to preventive and re-integration programs.
- Existing projects/programs could be improved by explicitly considering the gender dimensions of children in street situation. There is a need for analysis of the impact of children in street situation on social inclusion, health, education, and specifically to the gender and sex-differentiated impacts. There is a need to address gender in intervention strategies for street children.
- Better coordination among various actors and actions is recommended, through application of the approved case management protocol and coordinated inter-sectoral approach in a sustainable way at the best interest of the child.
- Support programs for families and family strengthening should consider preschool education level of children in street situation.
- Capacity and knowledge of professionals need to be further strengthened and increased in the area of child protection (including juvenile justice). *It is recommended stronger involvement of experienced operative workers who also need to be supported by long-term action plans resulting in concrete preventive measures.*



- Better addressing trafficking and exploitation of children in street situation through establishment of accurate data system, researches to document its existence and consequences for future program designs and concrete actions for protection of children and penal proceedings for exploiters.
- Advocacy work of Child Rights Organizations to be intensified toward the government in more investments and attention to preventive programs by addressing the root causes for the phenomenon of street involved children and supporting their families.



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