



Report on Children's Rights in Albania to the UN CRC Committee

We, 26 children gathered in Durrës on 15, 16 and 28, 29 October 2011, represent 14.534 children from Tirana, Vlora, Durres, Kucove, Elbasan, Peshkopi and Diber in Albania and are here to tell you the problems and concerns we encounter on daily basis.

We took over the task of presenting you with this report and would like to extend our appreciation to United for Child Care and Protection Coalition (BKTF), CRCA / ALO 116, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages, and World Vision for supporting our initiative. In order to draft this report we have conducted talks, interviews, questionnaires, workshops, trainings, and meetings with children of various ages and adults, which resulted in the following findings:

Poverty is a serious problem that makes life worse by leading to discrimination, violence, domestic conflicts, social exclusion, and children exploitation. Therefore, children go out begging on the streets; some of them forced by their own parents. The threat of lack of income forces some children to commit thefts; thus, even violate the law.

Particular emphasis should be placed on Roma and Egyptian children who are faced with difficult living circumstances, extreme poverty, and exclusion from social and community life. Along with our prejudices, we have taken away their confidence that they too may become somebody in life. When a Roma child said "I would like to become a police officer!" there were people who responded "This was unheard of; now gypsies want to become officers....!"

Albanian children are victims of discrimination and maltreatment. There is violence in different forms in families and schools. Children accept abuse by adults, be it their parents or teachers, because they consider it a form of education. "I saw a mother beating her son because he would not study," says one of the children we interviewed. But an even greater concern is the fear of many children to report the violence or abuse they suffer. In schools children feel unprotected in the face of abuse.

From interviews we conducted with children of our own age, we learned that the family is their safest place. On the other hand, in many Albanian families children are used for hard labor; they immigrate; or are excluded from important decisions on their life. There have been cases of arranged marriages for minor girls without their consent.

Children who lack parental care encounter many difficulties to fit in the society; they lack a safe shelter, food and security; they do not benefit from the health care system and many of them end up abandoning school. Orphan children are more vulnerable to psycho-social problems.

In Albania, there are children who live in isolation. Their life is not safe and they can not go to school; play with friends; or visit health centers.

An additional problem for us is teachers who lack professionalism, who are corrupt and threaten to give students lower grades in order to get them to pay for private lessons; teachers who fail to involve us in the teaching process. At schools there is discrimination due to acquaintances, a family's economic level, etc.

No one asks for OUR opinion at school when they make decisions on our rights. They don't even involve the students' government.

Furthermore, there are no labs or natural science classrooms at our schools. There are no conditions to meet the needs of children with special (limited) abilities in our schools.

Many children cannot attend high school even if they wanted to, because there are no such schools in the areas where they live. Some of the children are poor and other families prevent girls from going to school due to their old mentality.

Many children, parents, teachers, and employees of central and local institutions do not even know the children's rights according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Even those who do, fail to follow them.

We as children do not have any information on how much money the government spends to meet our needs.

Based on the problems referred to above we would like to present our recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase the financial assistance for families in need through food packages or other items that are indispensable for children.
- Establish a Children's Advocate Office.
- Provide parents and teachers with information on the consequences of violence on children and include programs that teach children how to protect themselves from violence as part of school curricula.
- Sanction teachers in schools for their lack of professionalism and abusive conduct with students, discrimination, etc.
- Improve conditions in schools and supply them with labs, gyms, etc.
- Strengthen the students' government in schools.

- Make high school education mandatory for all children.
- The government should take measures to assign an assistant teacher for children with special abilities.
- Support activities organized by children and youth of the Roma and Egyptian communities and recognize their potential.
- Stop placement of children in far-away refuges due to blood feud and guarantee their protection.
- Ensure a better future (life, economy, education, accommodation) for children who come out of children's homes.
- For children without parental care, raise the age limit for leaving social care institutions from 15 years to a minimum of 18 years of age.
- Institutions should respect and implement children's rights based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Ensure transparency of budgets for children and enable their increase at the local and national level.

¹ gypsy - pejorative term used to refer to Roma children