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The social reintegration of children living and/or working on the streets

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Summary:

Poverty, unemployment, family problems or abuse are among the diverse factors that lead children to live or work on the streets.

These children are at risk of exploitation, violence, sexual abuse, chemical addiction and numerous human rights violations. Sometimes they are at risk from the very authorities who are charged with protecting them.

While there are no accurate figures of the number of children concerned due to the lack of a systematic collection of data or statistics, it is clear that the scale of the phenomenon is both alarming and on the increase in Europe's cities.

The challenge facing decision-makers and authorities is multi-faceted: they should act as positive role models, changing the way citizens perceive street children and the way their staff interact with them, enforce the respect of their human rights, making sure they are not simply treated as delinquents or criminals, provide them with security and give them a future.

In this report the Congress calls for the issue of street children to be prioritised by using a double approach that addresses the reasons street children take to the streets while substantially improving the lives of those already there.

R : Chamber of Regions / L : Chamber of Local Authorities
ILDG : Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress
EPP/CD : Group European People's Party – Christian Democrats of the Congress
SOC : Socialist Group of the Congress
NR : Member not belonging to a Political Group of the Congress



INTRODUCTION

Every member state of the Council of Europe, with the sole exception of Moldova has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child but the rapid social, economic and political transition undergone by many countries - especially in Central and Eastern Europe has had a significant impact on large sections of the population and particularly on families and children. The impact on families of increasing levels of unemployment, poverty and the breakdown of social welfare and security systems put many children at risk. This report is concerned with one of the most strongly marginalized group of children at risk: street children or children in the streets.

The European Foundation for Street Children (EFSC) was assigned by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe the task of compiling a study on the situation of street children in different municipalities in Europe. The aim of the project is to illustrate successful examples of cooperation between NGOs and local authorities regarding the social reintegration of street children and to identify aspects of these experiences that are transferable to other local municipalities throughout Europe. The project was launched at the Congress Plenary Chamber's spring session of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 27 March 2007.

EFSC has supported the Council of Europe and the Congress through all the contacts at its disposal within its network. This support has taken the form of **case studies** from a number of EFSC member organizations, experts on street children and who have a strong and well-established experience in co-operating with local and regional authorities on concrete projects dealing with street children. Out of ten project descriptions presented to the Council of Europe, six have been selected as relevant initiatives. All the selected projects closely involved municipalities and work with children who are abandoned or excluded and who spend large parts of their lives on the streets (employing a broader definition of 'street children').

The selection of the initiatives has been based on the evaluation of the following key criteria:

- Innovative approach
- Municipality as key actor
- Transferability of the initiative
- Proven effectiveness

Each case study detailed in a very analytical manner the size and nature of the problem providing also some basic statistics, the root causes (socio-economic factors), the measures and actions undertaken to address the issues by the local authorities, such as preventive policies, reintegration/rehabilitation programmes, etc, the partners involved and the achievements obtained as well as inadequacies of the initiative deriving from the lessons learned.

The compilation of the case studies is the result of the field visits during which the EFSC expert met with relevant representatives from the municipal authorities, the social services, the police, judges for minors, teachers, street workers and sometimes children themselves.

This methodological approach proved to be extremely helpful in that it has allowed fruitful exchange and discussion, highlighting the positive and negative aspects of the phenomenon as well as addressing elements for improvement and proactive initiative.

The four EFSC member organisations who contributed their successful experiences of cooperation with local municipalities to the benefit of street children are:

- 1) *Association Jeunes Errants* (AJE) in Marseille (France)
- 2) *Istituto Don Calabria* in Verona (Italy)
- 3) *The Pupil Parent Partnership* (PPP) in London (United Kingdom)
- 4) *The Romanian Foundation for Children, Community and Family* (RFCCF) in Gherța Mică (Romania)

By presenting the experiences faced by street children in these pilot local contexts (Gherța Mică – Romania; London – UK; Marseille – France; Verona- Italy) this report aims at helping to highlight successful and innovative examples of co-operation with the local authorities regarding the social reintegration of street

children into society, in view of establishing European good practices on the issue which will be transferable and replicable in other European contexts.

This report aims to provide a comparative overview on European good practices regarding initiatives carried out by different municipalities in Europe to protect children living and working in the streets.

It illustrates the methodology applied to develop the case studies and highlights common trends and specificities examined at the local level. A central focus is placed on the positive and constructive role of the municipalities and the innovative actions put in place to reintegrate street children into society in co-operation with NGOs. The report also outlines a series of concrete and targeted recommendations for improvement and actions related to the re-integration of street children which are addressed to municipalities in Europe.

The situations encountered in the countries analysed present some common characteristics although there are differences from country to country which are worthy of comment.

DEFINITION OF 'STREET CHILDREN'

It is not obvious to categorise children simply as "street children" because often what brings them to the attention of the authorities are other aspects of their lives - crime, drug abuse, ill health etc.. Street children are but one group of children who may be said to be "at risk" or in "especially difficult circumstances". Nevertheless, the nature of their experience of living on or off the streets does differentiate them from other children at risk and merits specific attention being paid to their situation.

It is therefore difficult to agree on one general definition of street children commonly used by specialists working in this field. According to UNICEF a street child is: "*Any boy or girl for whom the street in the widest sense of the word has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults*". This is a helpful basis for a comparative approach to the problem.

"Street children are children under 18 who, for shorter or longer periods, live in a street milieu. They are children who live wandering from place to place and who have their peer groups and contacts in the street. Officially these children may have as their address their parents' homes or institution of social welfare. Most significantly they have very few or no contacts with those adults, parents, school, child welfare institutions, social services, with a duty towards them" (Council of Europe, 1994);

According to the Symposium on "*Street children and youth as a priority of the EU's social inclusion policy for the new Member States in Central and Eastern Europe*" organized by the European Foundation for Street Children Worldwide (EFSCW) in December 2004, street children are "*children, mostly younger than 18, who live and/or work on the streets, victims of extremely difficult conditions of life – such as abandonment, exploitation and sexual abuse – and who consequently are in need of specific protection*".

However, there are also specific definitions used by NGOs or authorities in different countries. At EFSCW Symposium, local experts from the field reported that there are a number of different definitions used in some of the countries most concerned with street children.

In *Poland* for example, according to the representative of Nobody's Children Foundation, Anna Ossowska, street children are those who spend most of their time on the street in peer groups.

The symposium also revealed that other ways of describing street children are according to the specific groups of children that NGOs work with, e.g. Roma children - this category is included in a narrow definition of street children "living and working" in the street; youth who are engaged in prostitution - these are boys and girls aged between 14 and 17, mostly coming from *transition countries*, as well as *Romania and Bulgaria*; children who run away from their family homes; children from dysfunctional families; children who run away from residential care institutions; children working in the street (most of them belong to one of the groups mentioned above, in contrast to other street children); children and youth who spend most of their time on the street.

Erki Korp from the Tallin Centre for Children at Risk reported at the Symposium about four categories being used by experts in Estonia: children who are without a home and family and who live in the streets; children who are constantly on the streets, but who have a home and a family; children who are in danger of falling into a situation where they would end up on the streets; and children who are evading the obligation to

attend school and children deprived of parental care. In all documents these categories of children are considered as children at risk. It must also be taken into consideration that most street children in Eastern Europe maintain some relations with their family and sometimes even with school.

These examples prove that a definition has not yet been invented to simultaneously describe the peculiarity of life on the street and the link to other risks (work exploitation, drug addiction...). In this sense the definition of street children can still be a good synthesis, even if not exhaustive.

THE SCALE OF THE PHENOMENON: BASIC STATISTICS AND ROOT CAUSES

This report is based on the main results and elements that have been examined in the field and more precisely in the local context of four European municipalities. For this reason the report has defined the category of "street children" according to the different types of children at risk encountered in the four realities. This clarification is important also in view of a proper understanding and reflection upon the successful strategies put in place by municipalities and tailored as a consequence to the local needs.

- **Municipality of Marseille**

The municipality of Marseille is confronted mainly with *unaccompanied foreign minors* arriving in France without a family and children belonging to the *Roma* community living in a street situation and who are very often victims of trafficking and prostitution.

About 500 minors are followed up every year by the municipality of Marseille in partnership with the Association Jeunes Errants, with approximately 150 new children in street situation found each year. Of these, 57% come from the Maghreb; 39% come from Romania. More than 30 nationalities are represented. Males are a very important majority (more than 90%). There are two explanations: among foreign minors, boys are more interested in a migration project. Secondly, girls are unfortunately less "visible", that is to say, they are often hidden, trapped by traffickers, or kept in slavery.

These children arrive in Marseille for different reasons: they may leave their families to escape alone, from poverty or domestic violence; they may join a member of their family illegally established in France; they may flee a situation of general violence or ethnic persecution in their country of origin; they may be begging or working in the streets with their families or because they are trafficked children. They are extremely vulnerable because they are minors and foreigners.

- **Municipality of Verona**

The Municipality of Verona is confronted mainly with two categories of children living in a street situation: *unaccompanied foreign minors* and *Italian vagrant children*. In 2006 – 2007 the number of minors who entered the territory of the Veneto region amounted to 700: 37% were unaccompanied foreign minors (25% male, 12% female) and 63% were Italian vagrant minors (26% male, 37% female).

According to the latest data available and collected by the Regional Immigration Observatory, in the territory of the Municipality of Verona alone the number of unaccompanied foreign minors amounted to approximately 22% of the entire population, while 38% was represented by Italian vagrant minors.

The minors present on the territory of the Province and Municipality of Verona and on the region of Veneto come mainly from Romania, Croatia, Italy, Serbia, Nigeria and Morocco and are aged mainly between 15 and 17 years. As in the case of Marseille, younger minors usually come from different experiences, not from the ordinary migratory process, but they are very often victims of prostitution, exploitation and child labour.

The most common socio-economic factors behind the phenomenon of unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy are identified as being mostly: a family environment characterised by extreme poverty, unemployed father, alcoholism problems, high number of children (often the case for children coming from Morocco or Nigeria for example); the denial of the right/duty to education; a high rate of unemployment in the country of origin. Also the political and economic situation of the countries of origin plays a major role: these children come from countries where the political and economic conditions are extremely unstable (the civil wars in Africa for example, or the territories of the former Yugoslavia where, after years of war, governments are engaged in the reconstruction of the community's economic and social fabric...). In addition, Romania is in a phase of transition from a Communist dictatorship to a democracy with all the problems that this entails. Its entry into

the EU in January 2007 has led to an increase of the Romanian population (adults and minors) present in Italy and other EU countries.

Therefore, it seems clear that the phenomenon of unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy, as in other European countries, is substantially due to the obstacles that prevent them from pursuing their own life-project in their country of origin.

- **City of London**

The City of London is confronted with disaffected and highly vulnerable young people including *minors of minority ethnic origin, unaccompanied refugees and asylum seekers (28%) and Traveller or Roma children*. These groups of vulnerable people have been identified by the local authorities as having consistently higher levels of criminal convictions, significantly lower school attendance, lower achievement and attainment, and higher levels of social exclusion.

According to the estimates provided by Pupil Parent Partnership on co-operation with local authorities, 70% of these young people are 15- 6 years old, 20% are 10-11 year olds, and 10% are 14-15 year olds.

Around 35% of people in the Boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow, Hammersmith & Fulham (West London) live in poverty, compared to 17% in England as a whole, 18% in London and an inner London average of 20%.

Around 65% of school-age children across the above-mentioned London Boroughs are classified as being of minority ethnic origin, compared to roughly 18% nationally. The most common minority ethnic groups are Asian or Asian British and Black and Black British, with the fastest growing groups being: Somali, Afghan, and Eastern European.

Just under half of school pupils do not speak English as their first language, compared to a national average of 13%. Over 120 different languages are spoken in this area.

Around 22% of pupils across these three boroughs are entitled to free school meals, as against a national average of 15%. However, not all take these up due to fears of stigmatisation.

Just under 1000 pupils are currently in the care of the local authorities, many of whom are unaccompanied refugees and asylum seekers. In addition, there are also a significant number of traveller children, who due to their exclusion from mainstream education, are essentially treated as if they were street children.

Just over 500 pupils representing only 6% are currently recorded on the Child Protection Register.

Also, the percentage of students identified as having Special Educational Needs is similar to the national average of 20%, although it is widely acknowledged that many more pupils have similarly high levels of need, but are unidentified. Around 250 pupils are permanently excluded from school per annum. In Ealing alone, 4000 school-age young people have been identified as being at serious risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training).

It is noticeable that the combination of socio-economic factors listed above (certified also by the relevant figures provided) has a profound effect on instances of youth offending, child and adolescent mental health, and anti-social behaviour.

- **Municipality of Gherța Mică**

The Municipality of Gherța Mică in the north of Romania is confronted with a new emerging phenomenon. Along with the problem of street children which still remains a high concern all over the country with the number of children begging or working on the street and living there on a daily basis amounting to more than 2,500, recent estimates show that in the last years the number of children who actually live on the street has dropped, while the number of minors who beg or work on the street and go back to their families at night has significantly risen.

Over the last few years Romania, and in particular the north part of Romania, has witnessed a new phenomenon: the phenomenon of children migrating to other European countries in search of a better future ending up instead as victims of trafficking and abuse.

More specifically, a great number of children from Oaş (a region in North Romania) were found abroad alone, in harsh conditions – homeless, street begging or shoplifting and, even worse, prostituting themselves. According to the latest estimates, at the beginning of 2006, 230 underage children were abroad. Moreover, 317 more children were found at risk of migration due to the influence of close relatives that were already abroad, of home poverty or school problems.

The official data collected in the Municipality of Gherța Mică indicated that 220 children had at least one of their parents working abroad, and 61 had both their parents abroad. Moreover, of the approximately 3,000 inhabitants, around 70% of the working population were actually holding jobs abroad. Among them, there were 89 children as well, mostly aged between 15 and 16 years old.

The causes of the phenomenon are quite complex and overlap the ancient tradition of migrating for work to other parts of Romania. The region in the North-western part of Romania is known for its tradition of migrating for better income. Even during the Communist era, the inhabitants of this region migrated to other parts of Romania for very difficult labour, that was better-paid (mining, forest work, building wooden houses or general wood work, etc).

After 1990, the economic crisis in Romania led to many changes. Labour was no longer that well paid, mining collapsed and mines were closed, with many miners becoming unemployed. The region of Oaş also had additional difficulties: high general unemployment figures, very bad infrastructure and low investment in the region, lack of running water and sewage and old-fashioned heating systems (tiled stoves with wood). All this led to the new phenomenon of migrating abroad for work, the main country for this being France (initially), but more recently also Italy, Spain and Great Britain.

The phenomenon and tradition of migration does not only make children think of migration very early in their childhood and act upon it by migrating for work as soon as possible, it also introduces a new type of abandonment in Romania, that of children left alone at home by parents working abroad. According to the latest estimates, some 170,000 children are left at home without at least one parent: 35,000 without both parents, 55,000 have their mother working abroad and 80,000 have their father working abroad. Left in the care of a family member, these children are in need of emotional, educational and vocational guidance, the most desperate results of the new type of abandonment being the suicide of several children over the past three months (March 2008).

Even though the problem of migrating children started in Oaş, in the North-western part of Romania, the phenomenon is now nationwide, with a higher number of children migrating from the East and from the South of the country, apparently linked to lower income of these regions. This phenomenon is generally the direct or indirect result of the social and economic problems of children's families. The best solution to stop the phenomenon from growing is to prevent it by offering social care and other necessary services to the children, their families and community, in a comprehensive, collaborative and participative way.

- **General overview on street children in Europe**

The phenomenon of street children in Europe in general, has in recent years become an issue of major significance in a number of countries and the general social and economic situation in which many countries (and in particular in Central and Eastern Europe) find themselves has created a situation where many children find themselves living and surviving on the streets.

The dramatic rise in the numbers in most countries involved in this analysis, is a reflection of the increase in the scale of the phenomenon in recent years. Furthermore, it is likely that official statistics actually understate the real numbers of children involved. It is a significant issue requiring urgent attention, associated as it is with the marginalisation and social exclusion of our children and young people.

As commented on in a number of the countries involved, the issue of street children in public consciousness has a rather negative image and there is the general perception that the children are themselves somehow to blame for the situation they find themselves in; or that their behaviour is seen to be more problematic for others than for themselves. What this attitude ignores is the major factors which propel children into a life on the streets - a life which very often puts them at serious risk of abuse, ill health and occasionally loss of life.

What is clear from a number of sources is that for many street children in certain countries in Europe there is a huge gap between what the UN Convention promotes in terms of their rights and the actual situation in which they find themselves. The cost of rapid social and economic transition is very high for these children. The long term consequences for them as individuals and for the societies which depend on their growth and

development for the future have negative implications. There are a number of indicators which show just how negative the effects are for many street children. These include, in rather general terms: extreme poverty, unemployment, divorce and separation, homelessness, increase in health related problems, increase in crime amongst the young, increasing victimisation of children in terms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

It is in this general context, that many children find themselves forced on to the streets either to assist in supporting their families or indeed to support and look after themselves. A greater understanding of the social, economic and political factors which propel children into living on the streets is an important element in the search for a means of both preventing children from living on the streets and in assisting them when they are in that situation.

It is difficult to separate social and economic factors from family-related factors in explaining the phenomenon of street children/children in the streets since the wider context of social decline and rapid social transition undoubtedly affect the experience of families. Thus, in the municipalities analysed, the effects of poverty and unemployment in terms of increasing family strain and conflict are seen to contribute directly to the break-up of families, to the divorce of parents, to alcohol and drug abuse, to the lack of adequate care for children, to the abuse and neglect of children by their families, to the need to beg and live off what might be called the "black economy".

The absence of an adequate system of social benefits and social assistance to this particularly excluded group merely serves to compound this state of affairs and indeed makes it worse for the children and families involved. Families are characterised as either having no adult in employment or as having both parents out working and still not earning enough to survive adequately. In such circumstances, on the basis of evidence from children themselves, children may be forced by parents to earn money or may simply be left to fend for themselves and be vulnerable to exploitation by other adults or indeed older children.

Many municipalities also reveal that schools - an important means of socialisation and caring for children - are so lacking in resources and qualified staff, that children are again marginalised from a significant mainstream form of child, family and indeed social support. Where families are unable for whatever reason to look after their children the state institutions charged with adopting that role may not be able to fulfil it - again in the light of a lack of resources and qualified staff. What has to be appreciated is that for many children, life on the streets, in comparison to their experiences at home or in state care, may be, despite the risks they expose themselves to, a much more attractive proposition.

What we do know is that children can be on the streets from any age, though, as the Council of Europe report stated, children are rarely actually born on the streets in Europe. Studies that have been done suggest that the majority of street children are boys though there is evidence of an increasing number of girls being involved.

The largest group of children on the streets is constituted by the 14-17 year olds, though there are also considerable numbers in younger age groups. In a number of countries a large proportion of the children on the streets are Roma .

There are many reasons as to why children find themselves on the streets, These reasons in part reflect wider economic, social and political issues both within and outside of their own countries. However, one thing is clear that by living and or working on the streets children of all ages put themselves at considerable risk.

What also has to be remembered is that though the majority of children covered in this report live on the streets many of them also return home at night - the streets providing an opportunity for them either to assist, voluntarily or because they are forced, in supporting their families through begging or working on the streets, or at the very least, a daily escape from their experiences at home.

Children on the streets are most commonly involved in begging, theft and organised crime, though many children also do earn money through selling goods on the streets. What is more worrying, is the group of children who resort or are forced into prostitution as a means of earning money either for themselves or for an adult.

Children away from home and in desperate need of money and food are very vulnerable to the inducements of others to become involved in the provision of sexual services. In terms of prostitution, what is very

worrying is that this is not simply restricted to young women or older girls but may well involve very young children.

A characteristic of life on the streets for children is that they do tend to congregate around railway stations, bus stations, squares, shopping centres and other areas which provide them with increased opportunities for selling goods, begging, stealing and so on. Comment has already been made on the fact that the attractiveness of life on the streets may well reflect poor home and family circumstances. When children are asked about their lives on the street what is remarkable is that many of them show a wish to adopt a more conventional life style in the sense that they wish for educational opportunities, better relationships with their families, and better employment opportunities.

As a general consideration, commenting on differences between the local contexts analysed is somewhat difficult and many of the issues relating to street children are common to all the countries examined. Nevertheless, a number of more specific comments can be made.

First, in those countries which had a tradition of institutional care of children, the phenomenon of street children and children on the streets is more significant. As institutions close and as resources and qualified staff for those which remain open have become more scarce, there is a trend which sees more and more children on the streets - either because they have run away from state institutional care, or because the state is no longer able to provide such care.

Secondly, there is a concentration of street children along ethnic lines. The high proportions of street children in the Southern European States for instance are predominantly from the Roma community.

Thirdly, it is clearly the case that street children / children on the streets have to be seen in reference to the state of the economic and political situation at any particular time. Thus, in those countries where the economic and political situation is worse, then the scale of the phenomenon of street children will tend to be more pronounced because of the impact in general on families and children of very negative life experiences.

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF STREET CHILDREN AT LOCAL LEVEL – MEASURES AND CONCRETE RESULTS

The measures undertaken by the four municipalities examined and carried out in close partnership with NGOs aim to provide concrete responses to the specific needs of the street children/children at high risk in an innovative and successful manner and include preventive policies, reintegration and rehabilitation programmes, etc.

The activities carried out provide support and direct intervention in order to promote child protection, the child's right to education and to work but also, depending on the individual situations, assistance and care for his/her basic needs. As a general remark, it can be affirmed that the long-term aim pursued by the municipalities is that of providing support to the minors in carrying on their own life project, which was denied in their home country.

It is interesting to note that the different initiatives put in place at the local level in Marseille, Verona, London and Gherța Mică all present innovative and successful elements, which make these initiatives somehow replicable in other similar European contexts, potentially with the same degree of success.

- ***Municipality of Marseille***

The Municipality of Marseille has a particular focus on prevention policies. Due to the fact that the municipality cannot deal with each individual case directly, but is in charge primarily of developing the strategic political framework of action at local level, it cooperates with the police and civil society organisations (in particular NGOs), who are responsible for the concrete implementation of the policies in the field (the so-called "*specialised prevention*").

Close partnership between the Association Jeunes Errants (AJE), which carries out the daily street work, and a variety of local institutional actors from the municipality and involved in the field of child protection, ensures that the most pressing needs of street minors are transmitted to and addressed by the relevant bodies. In particular, AJE the Mayor of Marseille, the Prefecture, the Social Services, the minors' police, the Minors' Tribunal of Marseille and the Juvenile Court, the *Aide Sociale à l'Enfance* (ASE), the *Protection Judiciaire de la Jeunesse* (PJJ), the NGO *Médecins du monde*, the *Association Départementale pour le Développement de l'Action de Prévention* (ADDAP), Schools, Hospitals, the *Police de l'Air et des Frontières* (PAF) and other

services for the protection of children of the different districts within the city of Marseille contribute to the implementation of policies and programmes in favour of street minors. The *Association Départementale pour le Développement de l'Action de Prévention (ADDAP)* cooperates with the AJE in carrying out the daily street work in the sensitive urban areas in that it assists the organisation in reporting to the Office of the Attorney General for Minors on cases of mistreatment of children or situations which could put the child's safety at risk; Shelter provision for young people living in a street situation is guaranteed by the cooperation of AJE with the *Aide Sociale à l'Enfance (ASE)*, a decentralized service of the State in charge of minors. The *Protection Judiciaire de la Jeunesse (PJJ)* collaborates with AJE when dealing with young people who have committed a crime and who have been assigned to the PJJ by the Juvenile Court.

In the *health* sector, many hospitals in Marseille provide basic necessary treatments to minors arriving in the municipal territory as well as general services to the minors taken in charge by the organisation. In this context, a great assistance is also provided by the activities carried out by the NGO *Médecins du Monde* and the Services for the protection of children of the different districts of Marseille;

In the field of *education*, several national schools and colleges organise specific classes and courses specifically established to assist unaccompanied foreign minors in their integration into the normal education system, as part of their preparation period for integration into French society as a whole. In this context, close co-operation is ensured between schools and the transitory structure put in place by AJE. This structure is called "*the little school project*" where daytime assistance is provided to children at risk in order to keep them away from the streets;

The minors' Prosecutor and the Minors' Judge, within the specific tasks falling under their responsibilities work in partnership with AJE. In order to guarantee the best interests of the minor when taking decisions and deciding on measures affecting the life of the minors, they give full consideration to the comprehensive assessments conducted by AJE, often undertaken with contributions from the partners working in the countries of origin of the concerned minors.

In terms of measurable concrete successes, it must be noted that about 72% of the minors who have been followed by the SAES programme (*Service d'Actions Educatives Spécialisées*), implemented by AJE in close cooperation with the different municipal actors are later on taken in charge by the SIOE (*Service d'Investigation et d'Orientation Educative*) with a long-term perspective and also in partnership with the municipality of Marseille.

About 88% of the families followed and assisted by the "little school project" live in "squats" (slums): 32% of children belonging to these families have been reintegrated into the national education system after having attended one cycle of the project.

However, there are still some inadequacies and unsuccessful records which should be improved. For instance, many children attending the "little school project" have major problems with access to health institutions due to the difficulties in obtaining their administrative regularisation which is a necessary prerequisite in order to obtain and receive health protection from the state. Only 56% have obtained a legally-fixed address and only 46% of children have been vaccinated.

- **Municipality of Verona**

The Municipality of Verona represents a particular and very successful reality in comparison to other municipalities in the Veneto Region. This is due mainly to the fact that the number of unaccompanied foreign minors is still limited allowing the municipality to invest in quality insertion of the minors and to establish an individual path for each of them. However, one of the main problems and difficulties encountered relates to the high costs that municipalities must sustain in order to support actions in favour of unaccompanied foreign minors. In other municipalities in Veneto such as Padoa or Venice, where the phenomenon is much more problematic, the municipality aims to encourage the job insertion of the minors as soon as possible, in order to reduce the costs.

Different local institutional actors from the municipality and involved in the field of child protection work in close partnership with the Istituto Don Calabria on the implementation of policies and programmes in favour of street minors and in particular: the Mayor of Verona, the Social Services, the Municipal Police, the ULSS (territorial sanitary agencies), the Association of Volunteer Doctors, the Office for Foreigners of the Municipality of Verona, the Committee for Foreign Minors, the Juvenile Court and the Office of the General Attorney of the Venice Minors Court, the Minors Penal Institute, embassies and consulates, employment agencies and associations, public and private institutes working in the educational field.

With such a structure, the project ensures the acquisition of a comprehensive knowledge of the extent of the phenomenon of unaccompanied foreign minors (through the Regional Observatory); the protection of the minors (through the Juvenile Court and the Public Tutor); the reception of the minors (through the Structures of the Municipality of Verona and Veneto's Region); the social and work integration of the minors.

The concrete structure established in Verona which sees the direct involvement of all above-mentioned partners is called "Shelter Point" and it aims to strengthen and increase the provision of first aid to unaccompanied foreign minors; to provide prompt responses to urgent requests of reception for the protection of minors in a state of neglect; to provide a safe place where minors are received upon their arrival.

The specific role and tasks assigned to the "Shelter Point" on the basis of the joint co-operation of all the partners involved, are in particular:

- the *identification of the minor*: this action aims to certify the precise age of the minor at the time of his arrival and insertion in the "Shelter Point" in order to facilitate the work carried out by the competent Social Services;
- the *first reception* of the minor at anytime during the day: food and clothes provision, accommodation, first interview with the minor, preliminary evaluation of the minor's will to stay;
- the *notification to the Social Services* of the insertion/placement of the minor in the "Shelter Point";
- the *medical examination*: this measure aims to certify the physical conditions of the minor and check against the presence of possible contagious diseases, in order to protect the minor himself and the group within the same habitat;
- the *research* of other territorial or extra-territorial *communities* which are receptive towards receiving the minor following the first phase of Prompt reception;
- the *ongoing monitoring* of the availability of places in the Communities able to provide Prompt Reception;
- the *draft* of the sheet indicating all the relevant information regarding the minor that will help in the work of the social services, the residential communities that will receive the minor and host him in the longer term, as well as useful for sanitary interventions;
- the *meeting with the competent social services* in order to establish the history of the minor with a view to deciding procedures on how to begin his path of insertion into the community;
- the *insertion* of the minor in the residential structure previously identified.

- **City of London**

It is extremely interesting to note that the Boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham (West London) within the City of London all have comprehensive Social Inclusion Policies, operate Pupil Referral Units for young people excluded from schools, have re-integration targets for younger students under the age of 14, operate Social Services, incorporating Youth Offending Services and Looked After Children's Services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Health Services, and other specialist services such as Traveller Support Teams and Careers Guidance Services.

Different local institutional actors from the city and involved in the field of child protection work in close partnership with the Pupil Parent Partnership on the implementation of policies and programmes in favour of street minors and in particular: the municipal Social Inclusion departments, the Social Services, the police, the Looked After Children's Team, Traveller Support Unit, Youth Offending Service, Youth Courts, local Schools and Pupil Referral Units, Sports Clubs, Sports Development Team, Immigration Services, Refugee Forum, Children's Society, National Nurture Group Network, Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Association, as well as a range of voluntary organisations.

The close co-operation and the clear division of tasks among the local institutional actors and the PPP has been highly successful at facilitating the re-integration of these vulnerable young people and supporting their progression onto further education, employment, and training.

The services panorama offered by the London local authorities is diversified and target-oriented. All local authorities have comprehensive social inclusion policies and operate Pupil Referral Units for young people excluded from schools; all have re-integration targets for younger students under the age of 14. All three local authorities operate social services, incorporating youth offending services and looked-after children's services, child and adolescent mental health services, health services, and other specialist services such as traveller support teams and careers guidance services. The London Borough of Ealing commissions a range of alternative education providers to provide services to excluded young people, many of which are IT-based.

It is the students and families who cannot benefit from the above services, due to extent of need or difficulties of engagement, that constitute the referrals to PPP. Young people are referred directly to PPP by local municipalities, which delegate their statutory obligations to PPP, which in turn monitors and reports back on a weekly basis to the local municipalities as to the ongoing effectiveness and achievements of the services provision. Ongoing monitoring and development of the services to be undertaken are ensured through regularly held (every half-term) development group meetings.

Also, the organisation is invited and sits on various forums which are organised by these local municipalities to combat social exclusion and ensure continuing dialogue, exchange and monitoring on the implementation of the projects.

In 2004-05, 56% of students referred by the local authorities to the PPP *Year 11 Supported Learning Programme* had over 70% previous School Attendance. On the programme, 39% of students had less than 70% attendance, a 17% improvement.

The vast majority of students referred were identified as being at serious risk of leaving school without any qualifications. However, 91% of students received some form of progression linked accreditation through the PPP.

The referred group was overwhelmingly identified as being possible pre-NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) at the start of the programme. However, 82% of student progressed directly onto appropriate further education, employment, or training.

In addition to the above, the partnership between the municipality and the PPP has been highly successful in raising levels of emotional literacy and the capacity of young people to form lasting relationships.

However, PPP has identified certain inadequacies which must be further improved. Most obviously, there is the 9% of students failing to achieve accreditation, and the 18% who do not progress directly onto appropriate further education, training, or work.

Of these young people, the average attendance was 21%, 71% were late referrals onto the Programme, 14% left the country prior to the end of the course, 50% have already progressed onto Further Education, Employment, or Training, and 36% are receiving intensive support with progression from the PPP Post-16 Team and London West Connexions Service. PPP has identified this as an area of major concern, and will actively target these groups for intensive support in order to reduce this number.

- **Municipality of Gherța Mică**

The Municipality of Gherța Mică, in partnership with the Romanian Foundation for Children, Community and Family, established a community centre called *Licuricii* (Fireflies) which aims to help out families with one or several members working abroad, to improve the school results of children and help them integrate into the society as almost 300 of them are taken care of by one parent, a remote relative or a stranger. In particular, the centre provides services and activities related to sustaining the school performances, spare time activities and psychological counselling.

The specific Romanian legislation for the protection of children's rights stipulates the decentralisation of the system, local authorities being in charge with all that concerns the specific prevention services, including day care centres. Most of the local authorities, especially in smaller localities have a very limited budget, most of them claiming that the lack of funds makes it impossible for them to hire specialized staff and run professional social services according to the legal norms and standards. The most difficult dilemma is the fact that the poorest communities would have the greatest need for social services, their local budget being on the other hand insufficient for the purpose.

It is therefore quite an achievement for the local authority to have contributed so substantially to the creation of the Gherța Mică day care centre. Many other communities did not show interest in the problem and did not want to be involved in this direction, spending the limited funds they had available on more visible investments: infrastructure, economic activities, etc.

The involvement of the partner institutions corresponds to their specific activities and in the framework of a partnership agreement signed with each of them. *The Major's office* in Gherța Mică made the building available for the activities of the centre, promotes the centre and its activities inside the community,

encouraging the children and parents to participate and co-organising some of the activities, also participating as active volunteers in running them.

It is the schools which selects the children in a difficult situation (at risk), monitors the school performances of these children and helps organise some of the activities for the children in the community centre.

The Hors la Rue Association invited members of the community to France to see the way such centres operate there and to see some of the children that migrated to France. They also contributed with personnel acting as monitors in the Gherta Community Centre, a function also accomplished by the association *Stea* from Satu Mare, another partner involved in the development of the educational guide.

The centre operates with an average number of 45 children a day. They were selected based on economic and educational criteria, since the number of those wanting to participate in activities was higher than the capacity of the centre (due to available space and number of staff). The children are divided in three groups, according to age and level of education and they run activities for four hours a day. After school, children are involved in activities to help them cope with school and spare time activities.

The concrete outcomes relate mainly to the school performances of the children. Twenty-one children had better school results in the second semester of the last school year compared to the first. Seventeen children had an overall performance better than the previous school year. Teachers declared that not only had the school performances improved, but so had the interest shown by children in the school itself, in their personal development and in school attendance. On the social side children have shown better confidence in themselves, have made new friends, have entered new groups and speak more often about migrating as adults rather than children after they learn a profession.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

A number of general conclusions about the phenomenon of street children/children on the street in Europe can be drawn from the experience gained by those organisations which work in co-operation with municipalities in order to support children in situations such as those described and that contributed to the development of the case studies. These observations would need to be taken into consideration in developing strategies and measures both to prevent more children from living on the streets and to assist those who are already living on and off the streets.

- life on the street puts children at serious risk of physical and sexual abuse; at risk of serious health problems and may well inhibit their long term growth into healthy adults. Services and support have to be provided which, as far as possible, will address the serious risks faced by these children;
- it should be understood that life on the streets is much more attractive for many children than the life they experienced at home or in state care. Services and support may well be required for families who have to cope with extreme poverty and the lack of appropriate welfare assistance and institutional care;
- there is a clear lack of material resources and qualified personnel to assist street children and to meet their educational, health and emotional needs. The lack of resources means both that there will be insufficient personnel available and that even those who do seek to help street/children in the streets may lack the appropriate qualifications and professional training;
- the phenomenon of street children cannot be addressed without a broad social policy strategy which tackles those social and family factors which put children at risk in general. In a sense, the problem of street children illustrates clearly the failure and breakdown of the safety net provided by social assistance and social care programmes;
- The case studies indicate clearly that any measures developed to assist those children living on the streets has to be based on a better understanding of the nature of the problem and in particular of the experiences of the children and young people themselves. There is a lack of systematic knowledge about both the scale and the nature of the street children/children on the streets phenomenon. The collection of information about the scale of the phenomenon and the nature of the experiences of street/children on the streets must be a priority;
- It is not the case that there are no organisations seeking to help children who find themselves living on and off the streets, quite the opposite. There is however a great need for some mechanism or

body to integrate and co-ordinate in a systematic way the activities of the many different agencies - both governmental and in the NGO sector. In this way more effective support can be provided to street children/children on the streets;

- there is a sort of fear in some countries that as the phenomenon of street children is more openly acknowledged then the response both by the public and the authorities may well be less tolerant and more repressive as their “problematic” behaviour becomes more visible. However, given what is known about the factors which lead children to live on and off the streets, repressive measures and strategies will do little to either prevent the phenomenon or to assist those children currently on the streets.

Though the emphasis in this report is on street children and children on the streets, any attempt to improve the conditions and living experiences of such children must be made in the context of the development of wide reaching strategies and policies seeking to address the circumstances of children at risk generally and that must be designed and carried out by local authorities in joint co-operation with NGOs and civil society organisations. That is the best way to prevent children living on the streets and to assist those already on the streets - just as it is the best way to prevent children from committing offences, to improve their health, to improve their educational attainment, to enhance their employment opportunities, and to improve their long term chances of healthy growth and development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **to local authorities**

1. Municipalities should promote and establish strong synergies between the national, regional and municipal levels. This seems to be essential if municipalities want to respond in a proper and effective manner to the phenomenon of street children and unaccompanied foreign minors and the problems it entails.
2. Municipalities should support the creation of platforms and networks operating at the local level to guarantee the maximum involvement of all the relevant actors in the field of child protection while ensuring constructive dialogue and co-ordination of actions through the adoption of direct and formal guidelines targeted in particular towards street children and unaccompanied foreign minors.
3. Municipalities having in place such networks should maintain, strengthen and further improve those already existing by promoting the active involvement of other institutional agencies and actors from the private sector as well as paying greater attention to small municipalities which often lack the necessary instruments and effective models of participation to face the phenomenon of street children and unaccompanied foreign minors in order to provide them with successful examples and guidance.
4. To be successful the platforms/networks should comprise representatives of all actors involved in child-related issues and in the field of child protection more generally (municipal authorities, social services, schools, police, NGOs, local judiciary, hospitals, other actors from the private sector); this will ensure more coordinated and effective action maximising the benefits for street children and unaccompanied foreign minors.
5. The system of consultation organised at the local level as well as the best practices developed through this system should be replicated and transferred at the national and European levels in order to define coherent and sustainable frameworks of action towards street children all over Europe.
6. It is crucial that municipalities directly intervene in order to solve one of the main difficulties which stems from the negative public perception towards children living in a street situation. Municipalities should invest in strong awareness-raising to avoid tackling the multifaceted phenomenon of street children and unaccompanied foreign minors in a one-dimensional way and exclusively viewing these minors as either victims or offenders.

7. At the same time it is essential that municipal authorities recognise the importance of ensuring and safeguarding the general interests of local residents in relation to subjects such as, for example, jobs, traffic, health, hygiene, environment, the desire for crime reduction, culture, sport, etc., and with that the changing and improving of the social and ecological living environment. Community-based official enlightenment, mobilisation, and participation of local residents in problem solving all play a central role in this task.
8. The process of decentralization of services at the community level in favour of marginalised and socially excluded children should be continued; the process should be accompanied and supported by the allocation of the funds necessary for its proper functioning.
9. The frequent lack of cohesion and of clear division of competences between the different public authorities involved in the field of child protection at the local level should be addressed as this may constitute a serious risk for the effective identification and implementation of targeted measures in favour of the most marginalised children.
10. There is no system in place for a comprehensive and coordinated collection of data regarding street children and unaccompanied foreign minors. It is an urgent need to establish a common and efficient system of collection at municipal level where all the relevant actors involved in the field of child protection become responsible for the collection and provision of up-to-date data and figures regarding the number of these children, the main factors behind their street situation and the successful results of their social reintegration in the community.
11. Municipalities should strengthen their direct involvement also in terms of providing direct financial support to projects, policies and activities in favour of street children as this would contribute substantially to guaranteeing their sustainability and would also attract more solid financial support from other key donors.
12. Municipalities where the number of street children and unaccompanied foreign minors is still limited should take all the necessary measures to invest in quality and ensure the insertion of the minor, accompanying the measures with the allocation of adequate financial resources.
13. Municipalities where the phenomenon of street children and unaccompanied foreign minors has a larger extension and as a consequence are forced to cope with very high costs to support positive actions in favour of these minors, should concentrate their efforts and financial resources on promoting and encouraging minors' job insertion.
14. It seems crucial to reinforce the close co-operation between the local authorities and private sector partners in order to facilitate the re-integration of these vulnerable young people and support their progression onto further education, employment, and training.
15. The staff working for the local authorities in the different departments involved in the field of child rights protection need to continue their training and to acquire the necessary abilities in a more planned manner and according to staff evaluations and appraisals.
16. It is within municipalities' responsibilities to ensure adequate professional training for the operators working for street children and more generally in the field of child protection (social workers, teachers, psychologists, police, etc).
17. When dealing with street children, unaccompanied foreign minors and minors belonging to the Roma community or other ethnic minorities, the municipal police should make use of inter-cultural operators taken from the public municipal lists; in this respect the most appropriate solution seems to be the creation of a specialised section within the municipal police that approaches and treats the minors adopting an inter-cultural approach including language cultural mediation.
18. Municipalities should provide increased funding support for programmes targeted to children of age 16-17 as for this age group less funding is provided.
19. Municipalities should support campaigns which convince young people to register or obtain identity documents, so that they do not deprive themselves of some principal rights, such as the right to education, to vote, to work, to social assistance, to due legal process.

20. Municipalities should support the increase in the number of day care centres and other structures used as neutral places for minors and created with the aim of providing assistance and shelter to abandoned children and other strongly marginalised and socially excluded children so that they do not choose to stay on the street when faced with various difficulties even in their family homes.

21. Initiatives related to the creation of emergency accommodation structures for children and youth in need should, moreover, not be exclusively dependant on the individual persons involved in the decision-making process in the municipality (which is very often the case and becomes subject to the vagaries of elections).

22. Also, municipalities should be more proactive and adopt the necessary actions as initiatives such as the day care centres are often confronted with the fact that they are not part of a more comprehensive intervention strategy regarding the eradication of poverty as well as measures for lowering the number of unemployed people.

23. Municipalities should improve and enhance the service provided by the housing department of the municipality.

24. Even though preventive social services are within the responsibilities of local authorities, legislation is not supported by the necessary funding, nor by the norms to make these measures compulsory. As a result, normally only local authorities in large municipalities, with large budgets, can create or sustain local preventive social services; it is therefore of crucial importance that more concrete support is given to small municipalities with the aim of establishing effective preventive social services.

25. Municipalities should support and assist NGOs and other community-based organisations in overcoming the ongoing difficulty of finding suitable premises. In particular, more support should be given to voluntary organisations taking on statutory work, as local authorities tend not to provide the necessary accommodations and locations. Also, since these premises tend to be specialist in nature, and therefore resale values would be low, the financial risk involved for voluntary organisations taking on statutory work can be at best significant, and at worst, prohibitive;

26. Local authorities should commit themselves to projects and initiatives targeted towards the social inclusion of the most disadvantaged children and young people: it is of great importance as it shows local authorities' willingness and capacities to find viable solutions to the community problems.

- **to regional authorities**

1. Regional authorities should support the organisation of specific trainings for institutional and private partners working directly with street children at the regional level (such as the police and staff from relevant departments/offices of the Regions) providing them with a significant methodological background and also with concrete and effective strategies to deal with street children in the most appropriate and sensitive manner; regional authorities should ask municipalities to translate the general guidelines for action developed at the regional level into concrete training tailored to the specific needs present at the local level.

2. Regional authorities should support the establishment of a comprehensive system for the collection of updated data and figures on the phenomenon of street children and its related issues which can contribute to the definition and development of a common database providing a clear and as far as possible complete picture of the numbers of street children in a given region.

3. Regions that have developed good practices on the successful reintegration of street children into society and therefore have established effective methods which can potentially be extended to other regional contexts should provide during relevant discussion fora and through the internet significant information on the successful integration strategies developed as well as on possible training these regions could offer to other interested regions where the phenomenon of street children is not yet alarming. This could lead to the timely adoption of crucial preparatory and preventive interventions and strategies;

4. Regional authorities should promote the dissemination of successful reintegration models developed in the regional context to the wider national and European levels in order to contribute to the definition and implementation of coherent strategies targeted towards street children which at the same time take into consideration the specificities linked to each single local context.

- **to the national authorities**

1. National governments and national-wide NGOs should approach child abandonment, street children phenomenon and school abandonment in a more comprehensive, collaborative and participative way, not neglecting the prevention measures.
2. In order to better increase the quality of service provision, national authorities should facilitate the liberalization of the market of social services allowing these services to be contracted by statutory services, NGOs, companies and accredited individuals, according to clear norms and procedures, in a fair and open competition.
3. The staff working for national government should continue their training in a more planned manner and according to staff evaluations and appraisals; it seems crucial that the central authorities stipulate the necessary legal provisions to make professional supervision compulsory for all those delivering social services.
4. National authorities in the relevant countries should tackle more systematically the phenomenon of parents working abroad which can lead to a new form of child neglect (or even abandonment), which again leads to school abandonment and to increasing the number of street children; national authorities should take urgent measures for employment of these parents (also in rural areas) and young adults.
5. Initiatives such as the creation of accommodation structures and other structures where children living in street situation spend the day (day care centres) are too often an isolated model, too dependant on the individual persons involved in the decision making process; national authorities should make it a priority in their social intervention programmes accompanying the legislation with adequate allocation of funds to sustain the envisaged measures.
6. National authorities should raise the awareness of their staff and the general public as to the rights and needs of street children/children in the streets and encourage all the relevant actors directly working with these children but also the public at large to better assume their responsibilities in this area.
7. National authorities should enact the necessary policies targeted towards street children at the national level, with clear distinctions of competences between the national, regional and municipal levels of intervention and with a strong emphasis on prevention.
8. National authorities should also co-ordinate the collection of objective and significant data on the phenomenon of street children collected by the relevant actors directly involved in this field at both the local and national levels; this could also lead to the development of indicators on the impact of national social policies on street children.
9. National authorities play a crucial role in finding a solution to the persistent discriminatory attitude that these extremely vulnerable children are often forced to deal with due largely to the fact that they are viewed in a one-dimensional way, as either victims or delinquents.
10. The adoption by national governments of a national policy towards children in street situation would be an important step forward. Or the inclusion of such a policy within existing Child Protection Action Plans.
11. National authorities should define and adopt effective inclusive social policies composed of a mixture of economic support measures to poor families and single parents who are most at risk and ad hoc measures to psychologically, emotionally and economically support street children. These children are either without a family or with parents who are neither able to secure their nutrition, clothing and housing nor protect their right to mental, moral and social development.
12. Poverty alone is not the main reason why children end up living on the street. Future welfare policies should be conceived in such a way that efficient social support systems exist along with high quality intervention strategies in order to be able to intervene in the worst cases.