

Giving new chances to children in the streets of Tirana

Many children in Albania do not go to school because they are helping generate income for their families, and many of them work – and live – on the street, begging, washing cars, selling cigarettes or collecting scrap. To counter the risks they face of exclusion, violence and disease, the EU has supported social and educational projects. The result is that hundreds of these children – and their families – have new confidence and skills, and better chances of integration.

COMBATING ILLITERACY AS A STEP TOWARDS AUTONOMY

In trying to widen the possibilities for these children, one of the focuses of the project is teaching them to read and write. Across the country more than half of these children are illiterate, with children from the Roma community figuring prominently, because even those who attend school often leave in the face of discrimination by teachers and peers. In Tirana the situation is even more acute. Recent outreach work by Save the Children contacted around 700 street children there, more than half belonging to the Roma community. Hardly any attended school, and nearly all were illiterate. Half of them had started work before they were ten, in a context where child labour legislation barely applies.

The project team of social workers – which included cultural mediators representing the Roma and Egyptian community – worked on the streets and in a custom-built support centre with vulnerable children and their families. They promoted school attendance by offering non-formal education and literacy classes in a friendly environment, routinely featuring games, music, art and handicrafts, and theatre. Parents and

children took part in discussions with community members on issues such as abuse and exploitation, HIV/AIDS, trafficking, drug abuse, and safe migration. And the project provided training to local child-care officials. Through working with local authorities and civil society organisations, access was eased to registration for education, health, and other services.

DROP-OUTS RETURNED TO SCHOOL

As a result, school attendees' academic performance has improved, drop-outs started to return to school, and children who had never been to school were enrolled. Some adolescents started taking evening classes in vocational subjects.

12-year-old Marsida, who lived under a bridge and begged until the centre helped her and her family four years ago, now goes to school. She said: "In the centre I learn, play, sing, draw, do drama, eat and watch children's movies. I have books and



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pencils to read and write. I do my homework. I also help my sister who will go to school next year.”

A parent in the Shkoza community, a Roma settlement in Tirana, said: “The staff are very proactive towards

the inclusion of Roma children. The daily follow-up done by Save the Children workers helps us send our children to school. All the books, notebooks and other school materials have been provided by the centre and all the community families are very grateful.”

PROJECT DETAILS –

Protection and Integration of Street Children in Tirana



Partners:

Save The Children Italia Onlus Associazione

Main beneficiary:

Street children in Tirana and its outskirts

Further beneficiaries:

Tirana Regional Education Authority, Municipality of Tirana, General Hospital Authority, Civil Registration Office

Total cost in €:

250,000

EU Contribution in €:

200,000 (80%)

Start date:

January 2011

End date:

January 2013

Results:

Contact with more than 700 children and informing them of their rights; higher school enrolment rates, improved literacy, new communication skills, better health and access to state services for more than 400 children; more than 400 parents benefitting from social services. Increased attention from authorities to solving problems faced by street children

Techniques:

Equipment for support centre, education and vocational training for young people, vaccination for children, training of public authorities