



Social exclusion and extreme poverty as major reasons for the life situation of street children in the Central and Eastern European Member States – National analyses, reports and strategic concepts to prepare the new National Strategies 2008 - 2011

or

What brings the EU membership to street children?

Workshop

Brussels, 5 - 6th May, 2008

EFSC Headquarters: Square Vergote 34 B - 1030 Brussels

Summary Report

Introduction

EFSC's workshop titled "Social exclusion and extreme poverty as major reasons for the life situation of street children in the Central and Eastern European Member States - National analyses, reports and strategic concepts to prepare the new National Strategies 2008 – 2011" was held in Brussels on the 5-6th of May 2008.

It was part of EFSC's PROGRESS-funded work programme 2008 and aimed at creating a platform for critical reasoning on the situation of street children in Europe and the policies and social intervention approaches of relevance to them to be considered in the formulation of the Member States National Strategic Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-2010 (NSR SPSI) to be issued in September 2008. The workshop was also aimed at fostering dialogue between the European, national and local levels, including the NGOs working in the field, at creating networking synergies between EFSC member organisations and at collecting relevant street children related information on the interested countries.

Representatives from national governments and locally active NGOs, mostly member organisations of EFSC, from Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia, Estonia and Hungary came together at the workshop. This enabled a systematic, country-by-country analysis of the national contexts of these countries mostly concerned by the phenomenon of street children as well as of the governmental strategies and different intervention methods adopted by NGOs. The NGO and Governmental representatives were asked to address the following questions:

- 1- What is the situation of street children in the country?
- 2- How has the situation changed after the EU enlargement?
- 3- To what extent have NGOs been involved in the elaboration of the NAPs?
- 4- In how far are street children a target group of NAPs or of social policies?

The contributions of experts and representatives of the European Commission and the European Parliament helped contextualising the discussion in the wider

perspective of the EU policies and legislation, the situation of the Roma children and the most relevant approaches to field work.

EFSC expects that the results and contributions of this workshop will impact and enrich the drafting of the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion, which Member States have been called upon to submit to the European Commission by September 15th, 2008.

The presence of Mrs. Margarida Barroso, who renewed her commitment to the improvement of the living situation of street children and the crucial actions taken by EFSC in view of this, gave an added value in the political resonance of the event. Ms. Annette Bosscher, Member of EFSC Executive Board, also contributed to the workshop with her ongoing commitment, support and expertise.

1. The context

Reinhold Müller, Director of EFSC, introduced the workshop and its aims through a systematic framework analysis on the issue of street children and its strategic and operative implications in the EU and UN policy contexts. The protection of children's rights is increasingly being prioritised by the EU in the Amsterdam Treaty, the Lisbon Treaty, in the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), particularly through the Progress programme. The 2006 Communication "Towards an EU strategy for the Rights of the Child" and the related EP report adopted on the 16.01.08 are significant steps forward in establishing a EU framework on the Rights of the Child, where street children are in particular the object of two paragraphs. The issue of street children has also been pointed out by the Deputy Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, Ms. De Boer-Buquicchio, Spring Session of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, held in Strasbourg on 27 March 2007. In this occasion she described street children as an escalating phenomenon on the global and European level stemming from preventable causes. She stressed that local authorities have an extremely important role to play in facilitating their access to education, healthcare and shelter, as well as in raising awareness on the living situation of street children among the citizens.

Mr. Müller highlighted that, in spite of the growing urgency and European dimension of the phenomenon of street children, **their needs and rights have been insufficiently addressed in the 2004-2006 and 2006-2008 National Action Plans** for social inclusion developed by Member States under the OMC. This is partly due to a lack of consultation with the relevant organisations working in the field. Mr. Müller stressed with satisfaction that the support by the European Commission under the Progress Programme in the framework of a three-years partnership agreement (2008-2010) enables EFSC as a European network to protect the rights of street children in a more efficient way and to continuously work for the improvement of their living conditions in close co-operation with its member organisations.

Christa Prets, Member of the European Parliament, pointed out that the increase in violence which street children are suffering from depends on insufficient political responses to the questions of migration and integration. The political response must take into account the multi-dimensional nature of poverty, to be considered not only as material deprivation but also as vulnerability to violence, abuses, and particularly trafficking. The organisations working in the field can contribute to make these

responses more effective by transmitting their priorities to the policy makers at the national and European level. The need for a holistic approach to the street children issue makes it necessary to have multi-disciplinary bodies dealing with it. Coherently, Ms. Prets expressed her personal commitment to **establishing an Intergroup on Street Children in the European Parliament**. She also informed about the written question that she submitted to the Commission on "EU measures concerning street children in Europe" on 31.03.08. In this question, which has been based on documentation provided by EFSC, she requires the European Union to apply itself "more intensively to this issue and to develop and implement concrete measures to combat child poverty and support street children".

Mr. Pirozzi, Policy Officer in the Social Inclusion Unit at the European Commission, presented the Commission's social inclusion policies and the **prioritisation of child poverty in the OMC**. The issue is prioritised in the 2008 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion; a Report on Child Poverty and Well-Being in the EU was developed in the course of 2007, appointed as a "light" (thematic) year on child poverty. Still, data on the most marginalised groups of children, including street children, are lacking and a review of the different sources of data available is required to better monitor their situation. Child poverty is also suggested as one of the priority areas in the Guidance Note for the elaboration of the next round of the NSR SPSI which Member States are asked to present before the 15th of September. Mr. Pirozzi stressed that EU networks like EFSC have an important contribution to give in the context of the OMC as they play a key role in representing, promoting and defending the rights and interests of their constituencies at EU level. They can promote the involvement of their member organisations and people experiencing poverty in the NAPs; and they can support the Commission's analysis, including through contacts with the independent social inclusion experts.

Hugh Frazer, Coordinator of the EU Network of independent experts on social inclusion, also stressed that child poverty is increasingly being prioritised by the EU. Mr. Frazer's argued that effective strategies for street children need to be set in the context of effective overall strategies to promote the social inclusion of all children. Thus, he suggested EFSC member organisations to lobby their governments for the **development of a comprehensive strategy on child poverty and social exclusion, and to include within this a specific sub-objective and set of actions on street children**. He explained the preconditions for these strategies to be effective, which are also advocacy areas around which the action of organisations promoting the rights of the child may engage. Furthermore, he stressed the three cross cutting themes to be supported: early intervention, a balance between universal and targeted policies, and a balance between prevention and alleviation.

Prof. Walther Specht, former EFSC Board member and President of ISMO, a founding member organisation of EFSC, presented the **Mobile Youth Work (MYW)** as a community-based approach to include street children and presented significant examples of its implementation in Central and Eastern European Countries. MYW takes both a social-area oriented approach, working in living quarters, and a target group-oriented one concentrated on action places of youngsters and gangs. It is carried out on the basis of five elements:

- social area analysis, aiming at getting data about the living situation of street children, in order to develop a social work strategy;

- street work/outreach work;
- case work, founded in the trust relationship between youth and the social worker;
- group work, as opposed to individualised counsel and therapeutic concepts, acknowledging the role of cliques and gangs as a compensation for the weak or missing family and capitalising on peer group learning;
- community work, aiming at the creation of social capital, supporting integration and preventing exclusion.

Ivan Ivanov, Executive Director of the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) illustrated the specific situation of street children of Roma origin, suffering from segregation, discrimination and the racist attitude of some authorities. Roma children present extremely high rates of school drop-outs which are linked to prejudices, lack of cultural mediation, difficult access to services and often even to school segregation (Roma children are 27 times more likely to be put in a “special schools” for mentally handicapped children than non-Roma children). Mr. Ivanov stressed that education may not be enough to overcome social exclusion when people live in segregation, and that integration should be a two-way process converging on the line between state responsibility and parental responsibility.

2. The situation of street children in Central and Eastern Europe

Table 1 below summarises the country-by-country analysis of the situation of street children in Europe and its evolution after the enlargement following the estimations of the NGOs and governments present.

One first important result of the country-by country analysis of the situation of street children in Central and Eastern Europe was the confirmation of the **need to make a joint European effort towards the collection of relevant and comparable data on street children**. As it is evident from the table, data on the total number of street children are available in only one country and in all other countries they are fractional and partially incomparable. Very often the available data are 4-5 years old. Furthermore, official statistics often underestimate the real numbers due to a restrictive definition of “street children” and the fact that street children often fall out of official registers, so that data are limited to those children who receive some kind of social assistance. This is why estimating the total number of street children in a country proved difficult to most participating countries and led in some cases to paradoxical results of NGOs working with street children in countries where there are officially none. In other cases, street children are classified as all children who receive social assistance by drop-in centres, such as in Poland, and the number seems to be overestimated. The difficulties in gathering reliable data on street children touch also delicate issues such as ethnic reporting of criminal offences and pathological phenomena.

A main reason for the difficulties in collecting comparable data is the **lack of a common definition of street children**. The country-by-country analysis showed a variety of definitions articulated around different criteria: some of them orient the definitions along the availability of a shelter, some on the central focus of activities being the street, some others on the lack of parental care, some others on the violence that street children are suffering from and being responsible for. The countries which could not provide a clear definition often implicitly take the fact that

children spend their whole days and nights in the streets as a criterion, which turns out to be too restrictive and not to correspond to the activities of the NGOs active in the field. Following their experiences the decisive criterion is not the quantity of time which children are spending in the street but essentially the fact that substantial parts of socialization, including emotional and affective care as well as the provision of continuous education, are not provided by the families (nor in a complementary way by institutions) so that children dislocate their search and the provision of such elements, of course in a very deficient way, to the street and largely to substitutive underground structures. The categories of street children, children in temporary homes and children at risk tend to overlap, and the term „children at risk“ seems to be preferred by the political sphere to indicate all those children who are at risk of living in the street but may be benefiting from social assistance and of permanence in temporary homes. This can be strongly misleading by neglecting that 'real' street children exist as a specific group which faces concrete and specific problems. In the same time it can lead to underestimating the perilous risks which street children are facing and thus to an ignorant attitude of governments especially in the mostly concerned countries regarding their responsibility to take efficient and sustainable measures to change this situation.

A definition which seems to be appropriate and flexible enough to cover the variety of forms that life on the streets can take is the one of the Council of Europe, which was reported by prof. Specht: “Street Children are children under 18 who, for shorter or longer periods, live in a street milieu. They have their peer groups and contacts in the street. Officially they may have as their address their parents' home or an 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” (1994). It largely coincides with the definition of UNICEF following which street children are: “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”. These definitions could be taken as reference points for converging on a common definition that can be used in different European environments.

The reported **profiles of street children** are, on the other hand, quite similar across countries although there could be significant variations in the children's origins, some of them being of Roma origin, and other being unaccompanied migrants from Eastern Europe and even Asia or Africa. They are mostly children living in poverty, coming from “broken homes”, lone-parent or numerous families with dysfunctional attitudes; they have sub-average educational attainments, are often affected by illnesses and by tendencies to self-harm, alcoholism, drug addiction and involvement in violent gangs. Cases of HIV/AIDS infection are on the rise. Street children tend to concentrate in the outskirts of the major urban areas of Central Eastern Europe, but in some countries are also found in the countryside (e.g. Poland).

3. How has the situation of street children changed after the enlargement?

From the internal point of view of EU Member States, many participants (governments and NGOs) reported in general a **reduction of the number** of children who literally spend their whole day in the street compared to that of the children who work in the streets, roam the streets. This is based on estimations, not on systematic

statistic research. Furthermore, most of the participants could report about increased access to children's homes and foster care, together with a growing policy tendency towards keeping the child with his own family as far as possible (Table 1). A strong call against extensive institutionalization of children in favour of a more integrated community approach was made by most participants.

Despite these positive developments, it was pointed out that the high number of children in care shows that not enough is done to act on the systemic causes for **abandonment** and avoid the need for them to enter the protection system: for example, in 2007 there were 25,114 children in residential care and 46,160 in family alternatives (foster care and family placements) in Romania, following the figures given by the state representative. Another growing issue is the neglect and abandonment by parents working far from home or abroad, which leaves children without parental care. In Romania, following official figures, more than 170,000 schoolchildren are left home while parents are working abroad. It was stressed that the trauma of abandonment leaves undeletable signs and should be avoided through preventive measures.

From a trans-national point of view, the analysis showed the **growing European dimension of the phenomenon**: The number of street children in some countries (Romania, Czech Republic, Bulgaria) seems to be declining in a kind of artificial way partly because of the **migration of those children to other "older" Member States**. At the same time, the "new" Member States are attracting more and more the immigration of unaccompanied minors from third countries. The strong difficulties linked to collecting data on this hidden migration seriously hamper the establishment of a reliable base of data and the possibilities of a European action to protect the rights of these vulnerable children. In addition, this deficiency puts into question the impact of the efforts carried out by the governments to tackle the problem. The Romanian government representative pointed out that a comprehensive European approach is required and called on the other member states to converge on one single European strategy.

Please introduce at any place where it is necessary the categories NGO and government

Table 1. The situation of street children in Europe and its evolution after the EU membership

| Country | Number of street children | Definition of street children | Profile of street children | Evolution after EU membership |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| <p>Romania</p> <p>Monalisa Cirstea, ANCPA</p> <p>Mihai Florin Rosca, FRCCF</p> | <p>Governmental representative</p> <p>Total official number of street children: 1443 (2007)</p> <p>NGO representative</p> <p>In 2006, FRCCF supported directly 1600 poor children and their families. Each year, FRCCF helps around 30 children who have dropped out school for working in the street.</p> | <p>Four categories of street children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -those who <i>live with their families</i> in the street; -those who live <i>without their families</i> in the streets; -those who are <i>occasionally sent</i> to the street; -those who are living with their families but are <i>working in the streets</i>. | <p>NGO representative</p> <p>12% of the FRCCF's beneficiaries have at least one parent working abroad. The adults in these families earn less than 100 € per month and most of the family members have health problems; the educational level of individuals is low (an average of 7.5 school years); 46% of the families are Romanian, 26% are Roma, 22% are Hungarian and 6% are of mixed ethnicity.</p> | <p>Governmental representative</p> <p>As a result of the enlargement and of the 2006 re-framing of the Action Plan for street children, the access to social services has improved for street children, and their number has dropped: in 2002, street children in Romania were following the figures of the government ca. 4000; in 2007, they were 1443. Of them, 635 are returning to their families.</p> <p>NGO representative</p> <p>Although the official number of street children has declined, a study of FRCCF and Terre des Hommes reports an increase in the unaccompanied street children who migrate to "old" member states.</p> |
| <p>Bulgaria</p> <p>Eva Golovinska, State Agency for Child Protection</p> <p>Maria Prohaska, Gavroche Foundation</p> | <p>Governmental representative</p> <p>No total number of street children available. 197 children passed through a shelter, 361 children were placed in day centers, and 147 in homes for temporary placement (2007).</p> <p>NGO representative</p> <p>Gavroche Foundation supported 1300 children at risk with a shelter since 1997.</p> | <p>Street children are identified as neglected and deprived of parental or other kind of care and control.</p> <p>Two types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Those <i>who live and work in the street</i>, either alone and/or informal groups. The <u>temporarily homeless</u>, mostly return home when circumstances change; The <u>permanently homeless</u>, are often unreachable by child protection departments. - Those <i>who reside on the street periodically</i> spend the day on the street, involved in different severe forms of child labour, but in the evening they return in an institution or their homes. | <p>Governmental representative</p> <p>Most of those children are of Roma origin, belong to big families, have convicted parents or parents living abroad. They come from socially vulnerable families and have a family history of begging. The basic forms of child labour in the street are beggary, small deals, theft; sexual exploitation.</p> | <p>Governmental representative</p> <p>No data are available for the period starting from 1st January 2007, but a tendency was reported on the reduction of the number of children passed through a shelter (from 531 in 2004 to 197 in 2007), as opposed to the increase in the number of children placed in day centres (from 107 in 2004 to 361 in 2007) and an increase in the number of children in Homes for temporary placement (from 95 in 2006 to 147 in 2007). Most significant variations are reported from 2004 to 2005.</p> |

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| Country | Number of street children | Definition of street children | Profile of street children | Evolution after EU membership |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| Czech Republic Veronika Andrtova, Min. Labour Jindric Exner, Proxima Sociale Janka Adameova, Silesian Diakonie | Governmental representative There are no street children, but children in children houses and institutionalized care (no data provided on this); 110-150 unaccompanied minors from China, Vietnam, Congo, Bulgaria, Ukraina, and Slovakia (2007). NGO representatives Proxima Sociale's drop-in centres are attended daily by an average of 35 teenagers, with 234 users a year. Outreach services are attended by ca. 25 teenagers a day, 398 per year. Silesian Diakonie runs 5 centers for street children. | No common definition of street children; <u>however, the NGOs that are members of the Czech Association of Streetwork strictly use a common definition on the issue of street children.</u> <u>The Act on Social Services provides definitions of street work/outreach work and youth drop-in service. An outreach worker is "a social worker whose office is natural environment of his clients – streets, parks, clubs, gambling rooms, railway stations etc. His task is to seek and contact people who need social help and are not willing or able to find the help themselves".</u> | NGO representatives The profile of children and youth at risks is one of 6-26 years of age, with difficult life circumstances, failing in schools and social interaction and experimenting with addictive substances. He/she has a tendency to self-harm and an inclination to extremist movements. Spends free time at high risk in the streets. Some of them are unaccompanied minors; about 50% of the children in care of Silesian Diakonie are Roma. | Governmental representative <u>Czech Republic benefits from the European Social Fund - Integration of specific group endangered of social exclusion, supporting the projects which integrate the plans of social services - but it is not strictly pointed to the problems of street children.</u> NGO representative <u>The EU membership did not increase the sensitivity of the local authorities on the issue of street children.</u> |
| Estonia Helmet Puhm, Min. Social Affairs, Welfare Dept. Erki Korp, Tallin Centre for Children at Risk | Governmental representative "There are no more strictly considered street children spending their whole time on the street", but there are "children at risk", spending a significant amount of their time in the streets, among which problems of alcohol, drug abuse and HIV are rising. Children without parental care in Estonia are 979. NGO representative Tallin Centre for Children at Risk works with a total of ca. 2600 "children at risk" | The term street children refers to <i>children for whom the street more than their family has become their real home</i> . It includes children who might not necessarily be homeless or without families, but who live in situations where there is no protection, supervision, or direction from responsible adults. | NGO representative Children at risk live in poverty, have high school drop-out rates, conflicts with the parents, often alcoholics or drug addicts. They themselves are often deprived of parental care and addicted to drugs. A lack of children psychiatrists hampers the quality of the mental health services for children, who often have self harm tendencies. Too many disabled children are placed in institutions and foster care is provided especially for non-estonian children | Governmental representative/NGO Overall, the number of children without parental care has been decreasing steadily since 2001(from 1288 to 979 in 2005), with a particularly significant variation in 2004 to be linked to the enlargement. The reported data show an increase in the number of child protection officials (from 118 in 2000 to 162 in 2006) and a parallel reduction in the number of children benefiting from their services (from 2596 in 2000 to 1596 in 2006). The number of children in institutions, shelters and foster care has decreased compared to the number of children being reunited to their biological family. Nevertheless, the problems of HIV/AIDS infection, drug abuse and alcoholism are rising. |
| Hungary | Governmental representative No children permanently in the streets, | No generally accepted and applied definition for 'street children'. They are | Governmental representative: The profile of the street children with addiction | No information |

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| Country | Number of street children | Definition of street children | Profile of street children | Evolution after EU membership |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| <p>Hüse Lajos, Child Welfare Center of Nyíregyháza</p> <p>Bernadette Gelsei, Megallo Group Foundation for Addicts</p> | <p>because of a good social safety net, except those who consume hard drugs. Ca. 130.000 endangered children are registered by the child welfare system in Hungary. Children in special child protection services (children's homes and foster care):17.000; in children's temporary home for children without any adult care: 1.400; children in temporary homes for families: 5.000.</p> <p>NGO representative 357 communities in Hu offer alternative day care centres, one of which is Megallo group.</p> | <p>classified into subcategories:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children or adolescents who are in places inappropriate for their age, such as the streets of places of gambling or entertainment for adults, <i>during school time</i>, in the evening or during night hours. 2. <i>Children with deviant behavior.</i> 3. <i>Runaway youth</i> 4. Children and adolescents who are <i>abused</i> 5. <i>Underage prostitutes.</i> 6. <i>Child beggars</i> 7. <i>Homeless or extremely poor youth.</i> | <p>problems is one of a socially underprivileged child, with development disturbances, special educational needs, raised in non-conventional (single-parent) families, with long and short term illnesses, and social or learning difficulties. Some of them are of Roma origin.</p> | |
| <p>Poland</p> <p>Eliza Konczyk, PermRep of Poland to the EU</p> <p>Mihal Smigielski, TPD</p> | <p>Governmental representative No official data on street children, just fractional ones for main urban areas. There are about 15.000 street children in Warsaw (KKWR estimate); 13% of Polish children are street children according to the estimates of Foundation for Poland. Virtually none of those children live homeless in the streets; most of them have a family but do not return to it. About 60.000 school children do not attend school.</p> <p>NGO representative In 2003-2006 TPD had over 300 Local Background Centers whereas the help and professional protection of children is supplied for over 13.000 children.</p> | <p>No common definition; „Socially handicapped children“ is used as a more general term.</p> | <p>NGO representative “Socially handicapped children” mostly come from families affected by poverty, low levels of education, illnesses and disabilities; often come from dysfunctional and pathological families in rural environments. The situation pushes children to seek fulfilling their emotional needs outside family homes, usually on the street. Many of those children have a syndrome of social maladjustment, and the tendency for negative behaviours is on the increase.</p> | <p>Governmental representative EU membership brought the possibility to address the issue of street children with the support of EU assistance programmes, such as the European Social Fund, the International Youth Exchange, Daphne III.</p> <p>NGO representative The EU membership did not increase the sensitivity of the local authorities on the issue of street children.</p> |

| Country | Number of street children | Definition of street children | Profile of street children | Evolution after EU membership |
|--|---|--|--|-------------------------------|
| Slovakia Eva Czuczorova, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of Slovak Republic | Governmental representative "There are no street children living in the streets without any care" because they are protected by the social and legal protection of children and social guardianship measures which respond rapidly to problems. | no clear definition, but street children are considered as children living in the streets in strict sense. | Governmental representative The main groups that are endangered by poverty and social exclusion are: incomplete families with children, the families with three and more children, children and youth under 17 years of age, the group of age between 18 - 24 years, unemployed – mainly long-term unemployed persons, people suffering from health impairments, homeless persons, persons released from prisons, drug and other addicts, and marginalised Roma communities. | No information |
| Slovenia Davor Dominkus, Min. Labour Alojz Stefan, Caritas Slovenia | Governmental representative no total number of street children is available; 482 children in crisis centres for youth and children. NGO representative Caritas Slovenia supports ca. 6275 children from low income families in their access to education | no clear definition. | Governmental representative/NGO: Unemployed households especially with children (59 %), single parent's (22 %) and couples with 3 and more dependent children (15 %) are at highest poverty risk. Most vulnerable children live in families with violence, addiction (alcoholism), have low participation in educational system. | No information |

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Another important element of the membership in the EU is the **access to EU funding**, also in consideration of the fact that it is reportedly difficult for Central and Eastern European Member States to fund NGOs. This makes NGOs very much dependent on EU funding, although the difficulties they face make them try to turn to private financing. They commented that EU funding is increasingly being related to training and educational projects, while the scope of their activities is much wider. It was commented that the growing tendency of the European Commission to fund projects run by local and regional authorities, themselves in charge of selecting the partners of their projects, generates envy and competition between governments and NGOs and constitutes a significant hindrance in the freedom of the organisations to express their views and priorities towards the relevant municipalities, as their funding will crucially depend on the positive relationships that they maintain. EFSC's Polish member organisation reported about the lack of sensitivity of local authorities about the issue of street children, stressing that leaving the responsibility for these issues to local authorities may not always be the best way to tackle them.

Our members furthermore expressed their need for more timely information about the funding opportunities available from the EU as well as for training in applying for project funding. Further concerns were expressed about the fact that in some cases the EU funding is only transferred after a considerable amount of time, which requires that the funded NGO is financially solid before asking for funding; the member organisations furthermore voiced the strong efforts that they have to undergo to pay the VAT which is not covered by the EU funding, and to bear the burden of finding co-financing to match the commission's contribution.

4. Involvement of the NGOs dealing with street children in the elaboration of the NAPS

Only two of the eight considered NGOs working with street children in the field, namely Caritas Slovenia and Silesian Diakonie, reportedly **have been officially consulted during the elaboration of the NAPS/incl** in spite of the quite regular contacts between the NGOs and the relevant public authorities and their expressed willingness to take part in the process (Table 2). EFSC's Estonian member organisation has been involved in the elaboration of the alternative report in collaboration with EAPN. EFSC's Romanian member organisation reported to have been consulted during the process of drafting the national law on street children; unfortunately there is no mentioning of this law in the NAP/incl 2006-2008 and therefore this consultation was not sufficiently reflected.

Without a proper consultation with NGOs working with street children in the field, their situation and the specific priorities arising from the local level will clearly not be enough addressed in the NAPS. This has been the case in the last NAPS (see next paragraph) and will be the case in the next rounds if the situation does not change. To this end, strong advocacy and lobbying actions are required to the NGOs working with street children in the field. EFSC offers its networking structures capacities in order to realize this purpose.

Caritas Slovenia expressed clearly the demand for continuity between the policies and for NGO's to take more active part not only in preparation of NSR but also in the monitoring and evaluation process. Silesian Diakonie in Czech Republic reported that

one of the priorities currently under discussion by the group of expertise is „strengthening the role of family, enhancement the awareness of its importance, promotion the children rights”. This can be seen as a way to set a framework for the protection of children’s rights which can be of relevance to the situation of street children, in a country where the official view is that there are no street children. Under this priority, the following actions are being suggested: create and promote services on families and children who are affected by poverty and social exclusion; enhance awareness of children rights; decrease the risks of pathological phenomena; develop the system of foster care. These early results of the involvement of expert NGOs in the elaboration of the NAPs reveal the potential of improvement that a serious consultation with the relevant actors entails.

5. Street children as a target group of the NAPs and social policies in Central and Eastern Europe

For the period 2006-2008, only Bulgaria, among the eight countries under scrutiny, had done explicit reference and foreseen specific measures for the reintegration of street children in its National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion. The other countries address the needs of street children as part of wider measures tackling child poverty and social exclusion, within health policies or integration measures targeted to the Roma people. As Mr. Frazer stressed, the specific needs of street children require a good combination of universal and targeted measures. Without a comprehensive policy addressing the specific needs of street children, the different measures impacting on the lives of street children risk lacking coherence or coordination, which might seriously hamper their effectiveness.

In order to assess in how far it is likely that street children rights will be protected through specific measures in the NAPs 2008-2010, the participants presented the national social inclusion strategies impacting on the situation of street children. The presentations are summarized in table 2. The priorities of these strategies are expected to feed in the NAPs/incl 2008-2010. It is worth highlighting that, also from this point of view, national measures specifically addressing the needs of street children are rare. While framework policies for the protection of child rights are often in place, targeted policies for street children are missing in most countries. Only one government of those which participated in the workshop, namely Romania, could report about a specific Action Plan for the Social Reintegration of Street Children established in 2001. The fact that this Plan did not feed in the 2006-2008 NAP/incl shades some doubts about the coordination of the actions between the NAPs and the national policies, as well as it may question the real prioritization of street children in social inclusion policies.

Overall, it is realistic to expect that, unless a strong advocacy pressure for mainstreaming street children’s rights is made towards the authorities in charge of developing the NAPs, street children will be prioritized in the NAPs of only two of the eight countries under analysis, namely Bulgaria and Romania. Other countries nevertheless have provisions of relevance to children at risk which can clearly have an impact on street children; this impact should be carefully assessed and a strong advocacy role is to be played by EFSC’s member organizations.

Table 2. Street children as a target group of the NAPs and social policies in Central and Eastern Europe

| Country | NGO involvement in the NAPs | Prioritisation of street children in the NAPs | Policies of relevance to the social inclusion of street children |
|--|---|--|---|
| Romania Monalisa Cirstea, National Authority of the Protection of Child's Rights Mihai Florin Rosca, FRCCF | FRCCF was not involved in spite of willingness | Governmental Representative Optimism about the prioritisation of street children in the coming round of the NAPs, although no mention was made of street children in the past NAPs. | National Action Plan for the Social Reintegration of Street Children, based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been first defined in 2001 and recently reframed in 2006 |
| Bulgaria Eva Golovinska, State Agency for Child Protection Maria Prohaska, Gavroche Foundation | Gavroche Foundation was not involved in spite of willingness | Governmental Representative: Street children are prioritized both in the 2006-2008 NAP/incl and in the work of the State Agency for Child Protection. | The legal framework for child protection is set in the Child Protection Act and the general policy framework is provided within the National Strategy for the Child 2008-2018. The work of Gavroche Foundation is organized according to the laws and recommendations of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy as well as to the Municipal strategies. |
| Czech Republic Veronika Andrtova, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Department for Family Policy Jindric Exner, Proxima Sociale Janka Adameova, Silesian Diakonie | Proxima Sociale was not involved in spite of willingness; Silesian Diakonie has been actively involved in the expert group | Governmental Representative: Coherently with the fact that governmental authorities believe that there are no street children in the country, street children are not mentioned in the NAP/incl 2006-2008, although children's rights are mainstreamed in the document and it is worth mentioning that social services and parental responsibilities are linked with health and pension policies. <u>Nevertheless the NAPs address integration in the labour market, education, prevention of social exclusion to specific groups, partnership in social integration - local and regional dimension.</u> NGO Representative: The needs of the most marginalised children seem to be addressed in the current debate on the 2008-2010 NAP/incl under Priority 3, "Strengthening the role of family, enhancement the awareness of its importance, promotion the children rights". | National Concept for Family Policy (adopted in 2004), supporting families through tax measures and the social security system; Conception of Roma Integration 2005, including a chapter on education; Conception of early care for children with socio-cultural disadvantaged backgrounds. The Act on Social Services provides for care for homeless families and youth and sets the framework for the work of our members, <u>in particular defining the specific types of social services provided and introducing definitions of street work/outreach work and youth drop-in service.</u> Proxima Sociale articulates its work in youth drop-in centres for children and teenagers and outreach work, legally approved as a social service. Silesian Diaconia runs 5 different centres dealing particularly with street children. |
| Estonia Helmet Puhm, Ministry of Social | Tallin Centre has been | Governmental Representative/NGO: Coherently with the fact that governmental authorities, following their definition of street children and their interpretation, believe that there | The legal and policy framework of the protection of children's rights is diversified and very much focuses, among other issues, on alleviating poverty among children. It combines a Strategy for |

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| <p>Affairs, Welfare Department</p> <p>Erki Korp, Tallin Centre for Children at Risk</p> | <p>involved in the alternative report dev.d by EAPN</p> | <p>are no street children anymore in the country, street children are not mentioned in the NAP/incl 2006-2008. Still, the NAP/incl priorities address issues of relevance to children at risk in Estonia in four of its priority areas: the provision of financial support and welfare services; the improvement of the living conditions; the creation of better development opportunities for children, in consideration of their special needs (including disabled children and those living in particular poverty); the prevention of children being removed from their families.</p> | <p>the Protection of Child Rights 2004-2008 with child rights mainstreaming in family, welfare and social policies. Under this framework, the Tallin centre for children at risk operates and established a partnership program with a number of other locally active actors.</p> |
| <p>Hungary</p> <p>Hüse Lajos, Child Welfare Center of Nyíregyháza,</p> <p>Bernadette Gelsei, Megallo Group Foundation for Addicts</p> | <p>Megallo Group has not been involved</p> | <p>Governmental Representative: Street children are not explicitly mentioned as a target group of the 2006-2008 NAPs; still, one of the priority areas of the Plan is "Strengthening Child Welfare and Child Protection Services".</p> | <p>Policy measures of relevance for street children in Hungary are the Strategic Plan developed by the government for the Roma Decade, and the National Strategy "Make Life Better for Children", aiming at reducing child poverty and social exclusion and at developing innovative institutional approaches to child protection. In the legal framework of the Act on Child Protection and Legal Guardianship, the reintegration of street children is structured through the establishment of child welfare centres and alternative care centers. Our member Megallo Group Foundation for Addicts operates under this framework.</p> |
| <p>Poland</p> <p>Eliza Konczyk, PermRep of Poland to the EU</p> <p>Mihal Smigielski, TPD</p> | <p>TPD has not been involved but is willing to engage</p> | <p>Governmental Representative: The 2006-2008 NAP/incl does not explicitly mention street children but it envisages the establishment of Voluntary Labor Corps which aim at creating the conditions of efficient social and professional development of the youth through support in the field of education, vocational training and job placement. The activities of the VLC include projects funded by the European Social Fund and the Youth in Action Programme.</p> | <p>Street children issues are coordinated in the country by the National Committee of the Rehabilitating Education. In this framework, EFSC's member organisation TPD runs a series of Local Development Centres, aiming at integrating socially disabled children with a multiple approach including preventive measures, coordination with the families, educational support, and leisure activities aiming at developing the child's talents and interests.</p> |
| <p>Slovakia</p> <p>Eva Czuczogova, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of Slovak Republic</p> | <p>--</p> | <p>Governmental Representative: The NAP/incl, coherently with the governmental opinion that there are no street children in the country, does not mention street children as a target group. Nevertheless, the NAPs address child poverty and social exclusion through support of family earnings, support of access to employment, education and integration in the labour market, support of income and development of human capital, and access to public services.</p> | <p>The most marginalised Roma children benefit from policy measures and strategies targeted to their communities or specifically to them.</p> <p><u>In general social policy is focused on ensuring well-being, education and general development of a child's best interest. From the legal point of view, Act 305/2005 contains complex measures which address each child's individual needs. (In practice, these measures are enacted as a means of prevention of crisis situations, development of the family, protection of life, health and favourable mental, physical and social development of the child, provision for alternative family environment, administration of measures in the facility, measures of a financial nature and reduction or elimination of any negative effects on the</u></p> |

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| Slovenia Davor Dominkus, Ministry of Labour, Family & Social Affairs Alojz Stefan, Caritas Slovenia | Caritas Slovenia has been involved and called for more NGO consultation | NGO: The Slovenian NSR/spsi 2006-2008 does not include child poverty as one of its priorities. Yet the issue is touched by the aim to create a more transparent benefit system and by measures for Roma children. | Children at risk problems are addressed through Crisis Centres for Youth and Children, intended for children of 6-18 years of age who find themselves in acute distress and therefore need to be urgently removed from the environment in which they live. These centres offer temporary accommodation and a variety of services aimed at the reintegration of those children, among which daily care, information interviews, counselling interviews and learning assistance, thematic workshops. |

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Some common tendencies could be outlined from the point of view of the content of the policies:

- In the countries where street children are not considered as a priority issue, Roma communities stand out as the most socially excluded groups and are often targeted by specific policies.
- The equality gap in the access to services, particularly education, is increasingly addressed through “preventive measures” targeted at the early years of the child, such as through special support in the pre-school education.
- Most participants highlighted the importance of avoiding institutionalization of children at risk and of keeping the child with his/her family as far as possible in consideration of the best interests of the child. Where this is not possible, foster care is promoted.
- In the intervention methods, the services provided by centers for temporary permanence (local background centers in Poland, Crisis Centers for Children and Youth in Slovenia, Youth Drop-in centres in Czech Republic) are increasingly combined with the outreach work in the streets.
- The definition of the national strategies for child protection entails more and more a public discussion of all major actors involved in child protection. This includes in many cases the creation of platforms and round tables at the local level which pursue active participation of the families and explore direct child participation; in terms of the implementation of the strategies, the participants reported a growing coordination of the activities between the various local actors.

Key conclusions

The tendencies in the intervention methods and coordination of the policies of relevance to street children must be welcomed as positive developments of the EU integration and of a growing sensitivity to child poverty at EU level. Still, national statistics are largely insufficient or too much out of date to monitor the situation of street children. The awareness on the situation of street children at policy-making level is limited and street children remain insufficiently addressed in national policies. Advocacy action is further needed to make the social inclusion of street children a true priority of social policies in Central and Eastern Europe.

In this context, some key conclusions emerged from the presentations and the discussions held during the workshop:

1. Poverty is certainly one of the major reasons for the life situation of street children; nevertheless, a variety of forms of social exclusion make them vulnerable to violence, abuses and trafficking and prevent their access to services such as education, healthcare and vocational training. Educational measures cannot be considered as a panacea for overcoming the social exclusion of street children and must be accompanied by targeted measures supporting children and their families in the social rehabilitation. The policy framework for the protection of the rights of the child may fail to have a positive impact on the life situation of street children if it is not accompanied by targeted and holistic measures. The special needs of street children in relevant areas overlap with those of the Roma children and the Roma issue should be mainstreamed in those policies. Nevertheless, identification of the street children phenomenon with the Roma children should be avoided.

2. A starting point for developing comprehensive and comparable policies is a shared definition of the street children phenomenon. Despite the existing definitions provided by intergovernmental organizations such as the Council of Europe and UNICEF, it was observed that those countries which consider that there are no street children on their territory adopt in practice a rather restrictive definition of street children which can be worded in terms of children spending their whole day and night in the streets. This definition seems not to adequately reflect the work of NGOs on the ground whose criteria for street children are in the same time more substantial (lack of provision of basic elements of socialization through families) and more flexible. It leads to paradoxical situations where the government reports that there are no street children in the country and the NGOs run several centers operating with this target group independent from differences in the wording. It would be very helpful that a shared European-wide working definition be agreed upon by all Member States and organizations operating on the ground.
3. The street children phenomenon is increasingly a European one which policies of national scope can only partially address. Transnational measures and agreements are needed and the coordinating role of the European institutions is crucial for responding to the phenomenon of unaccompanied minors both from an internal perspective (minors migrating within the European Union) and an external one (migrants coming from third countries), while avoiding any forms of discrimination and criminalization of those children. The European dimension of the phenomenon of street children in the countries should be highlighted within the NAPs/incl.
4. The involvement of all the specific and really relevant stakeholders for the street children problem, at all levels, in the elaboration of support policies for this target group is crucial for ensuring a real impact of the policies on the life situation of street children, and in particular for ensuring coherence between the policy making and the policy implementation, while taking into adequate account the priorities emerging at the local level. The NAPs process should be taken as an opportunity of national policy coordination based on a need-oriented analysis and approach through the NGOs in the field, also within the various ministries involved in child protection, and may be accompanied by the development of Local Action Plans to be jointly developed by NGOs, authorities and experts.
5. A positive exchange of best practices between Member States with similar problems may play an important role in improving the effectiveness of the policies tackling the situation of street children. The Open Method of Coordination provides an appropriate setting for this and devoting one of the next Peer Reviews under the OMC to strategies for the social reintegration of street children would be a useful way to exchange practices on this.

EFSC Strategic Recommendations

Taking into account the results of the workshop, EFSC appeals to the European institutions and national authorities involved in social inclusion and the protection of fundamental rights to enhance the following steps:

- Creation of a European Parliament InterGroup on Street Children as from 2009;
- Adoption of a Report on Street Children in Europe by the European Parliament including a shared definition of street children;

- Systematic consultation of the NGOs working with street children on a national level and of EFSC as their European umbrella organization in the process of establishing the NAPs/incl 2008-2010;
- Impact assessment of existing child protection policies on the situation of street children by the European Commission in close co-operation with EFSC and its member NGO's;
- Mainstreaming of the NAPs, and all national policies, assistance programmes and finance instruments of the Central and Eastern European Member States with minimum standards for the protection of the rights and the improvement of the living conditions of children at risk and street children;
- Mainstreaming of all funding instruments of the EU, particularly the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument and the European Social Fund in the fields of access to employment and social inclusion, education and training, and fighting discrimination with special provisions promoting the protection of street children and supporting NGOs working with them.
- More NGO-friendly drafting of the calls for proposals to EU assistance programmes, more direct opportunities for NGOs to apply and better targeted dissemination of information on them. This is a prerequisite for increasing the chances particularly for smaller NGOs to apply successfully for EU funding and for preserving their independency towards local authorities while at the same time alleviating the financial insecurity in which they operate.

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