

Child Protection in Albania



Developing a Child Protection Safety Net (CPSN)

PROMOTING MULTI-DISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION

Welcome to our special issue newsletter covering the Albanian regional launchings of the Working Protocol for the Child Protection Workers, a publication developed in collaboration with the Albanian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and UNICEF. The much-anticipated publication of the Working Protocol marks a significant achievement in the framework of both TACT and CPSN projects, as it provides valuable guidelines and a standardized approach for establishing a multi-disciplinary practice of child protection work in Albania. This practice and the model of the Child Protection Unit (CPU) elaborated in the Working Protocol are already being tested in 13 municipalities and 4 communes in Albania with considerable success, and the enthusiasm for expanding and strengthening the CPU model throughout the country is growing despite the many challenges still ahead. Moreover, it is expected that the recently approved Albanian Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child will significantly improve the child protection system in Albania by institutionalizing the CPUs as the apposite local level structures responsible for coordinating the provision of child protection services in collaboration with a number of multi-disciplinary actors.

ENLISTING SUPPORT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Working Protocol was first introduced nationally in Tirana on 29 June 2010, and this special edition newsletter is dedicated to the subsequent regional launching events that took place in several Albanian regions between September and October 2010, with kind support from UNICEF. Aside from promoting the child protection concepts, ideas and methodologies included in the Working Protocol, these events served as important fora that brought together a diverse and dynamic network of local actors involved in child protection issues in Albania. They were able to exchange experiences, discuss common challenges and share their future plans and commitments towards establishing an effective and fully functional child protection system in Albania.

STRENGTHENING CHILD PROTECTION UNITS

Attending all the events herself, the Tdh Albania Delegate Mrs. Sendrine Constant used these opportunities to emphasize in her speeches the need for close and strong cooperation between the various multi-disciplinary actors in order to ensure effective child protection according to the CPU model articulated in the Working Protocol. She also appealed to high level Qark and Municipality representatives to underwrite their commitment and support to the CPUs through the appropriate allocation of funds in their budgets in order to ensure the future sustainability of the CPSN in Albania.



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WHAT IS THE CPSN Project?

CPSN builds on TACT as response to change

Terre des hommes started implementing the TACT project in Albania in 2000 as a comprehensive response to the trafficking of Albanian children to Greece. This phenomenon saw a reduction over the last decade and despite the lack of solid data and research, it has become common knowledge that various forms of internal child trafficking and exploitation have taken its place and continue to persist in Albania. In light of this new situation and a year on since October 2009, Terre des hommes has been implementing the ambitious project of **DEVELOPING A CHILD PROTECTION SAFETY NET (CPSN)** in Albania. This project envisions a fully-functioning statutory child protection system and a local community committed to taking proactive child protection actions.

CPSN at central level

At the central level, the CPSN relies on a set of legislations, acts and policies that spell out the guiding principles, standards and tools for effective child protection in Albania. On 04 November 2010, the Albanian Parliament approved the [Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child](#), which lays down the institutional framework for the establishment of the appropriate protection mechanisms that will guarantee and ensure respect for the rights of all Albanian children by the individual, the family, the State and other third party entities. This law marks a significant achievement as it provides all the necessary measures for guaranteeing the survival, life and development of the child through a coordinated approach amongst various child rights and child protection stakeholders.

CPSN at local level

At the local grassroots level, the CPSN depends on the active role that local institutions and communities play in undertaking well-informed and appropriate child protection measures, be they from the municipal social services, schools, public health services, law enforcement agencies, community counseling groups, NGOs, social service providers, etc. It is anticipated that the recently approved Albanian law on child rights will significantly improve the child protection system in Albania by enabling the establishment of the appropriate institutional mechanisms with the Child Protection Units serving as the coordinating structures for the provision of comprehensive child protection services by a number of different multi-disciplinary actors.

SARANDA, 15 September 2010

The Saranda CPU led the way for the regional introduction of the Working Protocol by going first on 15th September 2010. The event was held within the premises of Saranda municipality, which is perhaps a small but significant indicator of the municipality support that the CPU enjoys there.

The Mayor Mr. Edmond Gjoka, a local politician who virtually knew and addressed every participant by their first name, is a man who believes that social policies must be at the heart of local politics. As it became clear in his speech held for the occasion, his support to the CPU, one of the newest structures within his municipality, is informed by his philosophy that good local communities are those communities that take care of the most vulnerable; that local politicians do not allow their political stripes dictate support for those who need it most; that just social policies are based on values of humanism.

Meanwhile in her conference presentation, the Director of Saranda Orphanage Mrs Elida Vogli highlighted some of the joint activities and excellent cooperation enjoyed between the local CPU worker and the residential institution she runs.



Saranda children speak to their Mayor during an activity organized by the CPU



Chatting informally to her during the cocktail reception, it became evident that Mrs. Vogli is a woman who takes pride in the work of the institution she directs. Saranda Orphanage has received an award in the past for being one of the best residential institutions in Albania. Yet her professional pride does not hinder her belief that a child's interest is best served by helping poor and vulnerable families take care of their own children. She argues that the amount of expenses incurred by residential institutions could very well be allocated to support such families who are often forced to abandon their children to an institution for no other reason but economic hardship.

Vogli wishes she had more support in advocating for the deinstitutionalization of vulnerable children in Albania, especially as some residential institutions may perceive that a declining numbers of children in residential institutions may jeopardize jobs for the residential institution staff. *"No residential institution, despite the good care, services and living conditions that it may offer, could ever be the substitute for a loving home and family environment."*

On the other hand, a kindergarten director raised the subject of violence against children through a specific case illustration in order to raise awareness amongst the participants about their duties and responsibilities in protecting children in their community. She emphasized that every actor should be vigilant and work together to share information in order to prevent and/or intervene on time in cases of children who are subjected to violence, be they in the kindergarten, the school environment, the family or the community.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE WORKING PROTOCOL?

The Protocol has been devised to assist all persons working in the field of child protection, particularly staff of local government administration departments, school psychologists, teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, police, border and anti-trafficking police, NGO employees and volunteers working with children and families, kindergarten and crèche staff, but primarily the Child Protection Workers employed in the Child Protection Units at the Municipality and Commune level.

The Protocol helps the Child Protection Worker to:

- ⇒ Understand What Child Protection is
- ⇒ Utilize a Standardized Approach in Child Protection Work
- ⇒ Introduce the Principle of the Best Interest of the Child
- ⇒ Establish the Practice of Child Protection Multi-Disciplinary Work
- ⇒ Implement the Case Management Process as a Means of Identifying and Reviewing Protective Interventions for Children
- ⇒ Provide Instructions on Reliable Data Collection and Management

(extract from the Working Protocol for Child Protection Workers)



GJIROKASTRA, 16 September 2010

The v/Mayor of Gjirokastra, Mrs. Vito Muço opened the event by announcing she was delighted that the Gjirokastra Municipality had now signed a cooperation agreement with Tdh which formalized the duties and the responsibilities of each of the parties in relation to their collaboration and support for the work of the Gjirokastra CPU.



WP Event, Gjirokastra, 16 September 2010

Her message for closer collaboration among all the local multi-disciplinary actors was also echoed by the Tdh Delegate who added that the Protocol could serve as a useful tool for streamlining the involvement and participation of each actor with the aim of protecting children to the best of their interest.

A specialist from the Gjirokastra Public Health Director, Mr. Llambi Bllani remarked he was happy to now be equipped with a good point of reference in the Protocol to guide his future work with children and expressed his commitment to use and promote this publication to other colleagues and partners in the

field. The Gjirokastra launch generated good case discussions among the participants who were in agreement that divisive local politics should not be an impediment to child protection in their community. In this regard, many of the participants duly noted the absence of the representatives the Gjirokastra Regional Education Directorate (RED).

Sharing some of the challenges encountered in her daily work, the local CPU worker Mrs. Mirianthi Bedjavo emphasized in her presentation that child protection actors in Gjirokastra must advance and strengthen their cooperation beyond political colors. A civil society representative emphasized that everyone in the local community and the institutions should do their best to ensure the social integration of vulnerable children, particularly those from the Roma and Egyptian community in Gjirokastra, by creating a non-discriminatory environment of real educational opportunities.

Some follow-up actions stemming from the Gjirokastra event will focus on: Giving support to school psychologists; Organizing more awareness raising activities; Establishing a Multi-disciplinary Group to manage more effectively cases of children referred to the CPU, Holding a round table with Roma and Egyptian community representatives in order to identify new ways of improving conditions and school attendance for vulnerable children.

What are the basic principles that guide the work of the Child Protection Worker?

- Ensure the Child's Best Interest
- Protect the Child's Privacy and Identity
- Respect and Promote a Child's Right to Protection
- Enable Easy Access to Child Protection Services
- Give Each Child Equal Opportunities and/or Treatment
- Ensure and Explain Eligibility for Child Protection Services
- Work in Partnership with other Multi-disciplinary Actors
- Promote and Ensure a Child's Independence, Social Integration and Participation in Community Life

(extract adapted from the Working Protocol for Child Protection Workers)

PESHKOPI, 22 September 2010



The Child Protection Unit in Peshkopia, which is assisted by Partnerë për Fëmijët - one of the Tdh partners in the implementation of the CPSN in Albania, introduced the Working Protocol in a small

workshop setting that was attended by 18 local participants whose work relates directly to issues of child rights and child protection.

Some of the key challenges that were identified by the participants were:

- Lack of Awareness on the part of Parents about child rights
- Lack of Coordination between different Stakeholders in child protection due to weak referral mechanisms
- Lack of Services for children and their families, particularly for children with disabilities due to shortages of funds and staff
- Absence of a shelter/centre for children in street situations



WP Event, Peshkopi, September 2010

The aim of the workshop was to encourage focus group discussion on the content of the Protocol and its accompanying brochure, as well as enable the participants to share and exchange experiences and challenges encountered in the course of their daily work.

Overall, the participants concluded that the child protection principles and methods included in the Protocol would be useful in facilitating the child case management process through the multi-disciplinary group model and expressed their commitment to strengthen the child referral process through greater cooperation and information sharing in the future.

POGRADEĆ, 24 September 2010

The Pogradec launching event brought together 75 participants representing a variety of 15 institutions and as a notable surprise, many high school children representing several of the Student School Senates in the city. The conference was moderated by the Head of the Municipality Social Services, Ms. Natasha Kanina, who used every opportunity to drum up excitement among the participants about the publication of the Working Protocol as a practical and useful collection of child protection principles and practices to be utilized by everyone with a stake and concern in the Pogradec community about the full and appropriate implementation of child rights.

The v/Mayor of Pogradec, Mr. Erion Vesho addressed the participants through a speech where he outlined the Municipality objectives and efforts made towards building a solid and effective local child protection system, supported by appropriate resource allocation.

His speech was followed by a short presentation by the local CPU worker, Mrs. Besa Xhani who exemplified the apparent child protection concerns of an enlightened community like Pogradec through the multi-

disciplinary efforts made in the case of baby J. who was found abandoned back in June 2010.



Tdh delegate Sendrine Constant discusses the issue of foster care, Pogradec, 24 September 2010

This case captured the local and national media headlines stirring interest, indignation and concern among the general Albanian public. Xhani discussed step-by step the gathering of the Pogradec Multi-Disciplinary Group to assess the immediate needs of the infant baby and come up with an appropriate Individual Child Protection Plan. Interestingly enough, the case of this baby, who is currently being sheltered in an orphanage pend-

ing final adoption procedures, has generated much public debate over the issue of foster care in Albania.

In relation to this case, it is worth noting that Terre des hommes has been actively advocating for the consideration of foster care as an alternative care option in the interest of baby J. while waiting her final adoption.

Citing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Guidelines on Alternative Care (2009), Attachement Theory and research studies demonstrating the benefits of alternative care over residential institutional care especially for small babies, Terre des hommes in consultation with the Center of Integrated Legal Services and Practices, addressed a letter to the Pogradec District Court urging the Court for a child-centred approach in its decision-making and arguing that the needs and interest of baby J. would best be served by placing her in the meantime in the foster care family environment. Below you will find an excerpt from the Terre des hommes letter addressed to the Court.

EXCERPT FROM TDH LETTER ADDRESSED TO POGRADEC DISTRICT COURT



... As a child protection organization, Terre des hommes would like to draw the attention of the Court to the importance of maintaining a child-centered approach based on the principle of the best interest of the child when taking a decision ... in the placement case of Baby J ... The preamble of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Albania by the law No.7531 date 11.12.1991, clearly recognizes that "...the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding." The

UN guidelines on Alternative Care for Children (2009) specify that that "decisions regarding children in alternative care, including those in informal care, should have due regard for the importance of ensuring children a stable home and of meeting their basic need for safe and continuous attachment to their caregivers, with permanency generally being a key goal." Also, the Albanian Family Code, Article 267 states that "If the parent who has custody of the child did not designate a guardian, the court must give priority for the selection among antecedents, the relatives of the minor, a foster family and, as a last alternative, a public or private institution."

... we would like to highlight that:

- It is known that secure attachment will contribute significantly to the development of protective factors during the early years of childhood, ... minimize the psychological harm already endured through early abandonment, and maximize the adaptive life adjustment for the child, both during childhood and into adulthood.
- Evidence and research confirm that it is critical for a young child to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver so that secure attachment to the caregiver will enable proper social and emotional development.

A residential institution is unlikely to be able to provide an environment similar to a family situation where a primary carer is present and available and is able to sensitively respond to the needs of the baby. This is due to the institutional setting, the staff turnover, and the emotional distance maintained between workers and the child. The UN Guidelines on Alternative Care also recognize "Short-term placements should aim at enabling an appropriate permanent solution to be arranged." Specific to this, research concludes that infants placed in foster homes with sensitive and nurturing foster carers are likely to form secure attachments to these caregivers, and more importantly that the establishment of these secure attachments in early life helps to ensure that when an appropriate long term plan for the child is identified the child is more likely able to settle within the permanent placement...

FIER, 28 September 2010



The Fier conference, by far the biggest one of the regional events, brought together close to 100 participants representing 55 different institutions and organizations and attracting the attention of 6 media and press outlets. Aside from promoting the Working Protocol to local public and non-public structures in the area, the priorities for the Fier launch focused mainly on encouraging neighboring local municipalities and communes at the Qarku (Regional) level to start making the necessary preparations for adopting the CPU model in line with the legal obligations that will now stem from the approval of the Albanian Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child.

Already, the municipalities of Lushnja and Patos, as well as some of the communes in Cakran, Fratar, Levan, Dermenas and Ura Mbrostar have expressed their interest and willingness to establish CPUs in their communities. The Head of Fier Qarku, Mr. Luan Muçaj was clearly supportive of the idea to expand the CPU model across the Fier region as in his speech he expressed his commitment to dedicate more Qarku financial resources to child protection issues in the future.

Similarly, the Director of the Regional Social Services, Mr. Astrit Hysi spoke about the role that the Regional Committees on Needs Assessment and Planning of Services to Community are playing in assessing the various child protection needs in the region and current efforts at coordinating the actions of various potential child protection partners in preparing the future Social Area Plan.

The Fier conference was also attended by the UNICEF Albania Representative, Mr. Detlef Palm who remarked in his speech that investing in early and preventative child protection measures is better and more cost-effective for a society/community than dealing with later effects of child abuse, delinquency, crime, unemployment, exploitation and trafficking. In this regards, Mr. Palm commended the support

and efforts of the various Fier local actors, including Fier Qarku and the Municipality for the special attention they have dedicated to child protection issues in the Fier communities.

Speaking about the positive experience of the Fier CPU to date, the vMayor of Fier, Mr. Florian Muçaj provided assurances that the Fier Municipality will continue to support and coordinate the work among various child protection and other relevant actors in order to establish a comprehensive package of social services.



Equally, he expressed the Municipality's commitment to work closer with Qarku in order to strengthen and expand the CPSN throughout Fier region. The importance of close collaboration between various multi-disciplinary child protection actors at all level was also echoed in the speech by the Tdh Delegate, who illustrated the advantages of cooperation through the discussion of specific example of case management.

On the topic of closer collaboration, the central government representative from the Ministry of Education (MOE), Mr. Fatmir Vejsiu stated that the school and the school psychologist can play an essential role in identifying and referring vulnerable children to the CPU, particularly those who drop out of school.

Emphasizing the central Government's zero-tolerance policy on school drop-outs, the Ministry representative assured that the MOE and Regional Education Directorates (RED) will intensify their efforts and collaboration in support of the further strengthening of the CPSN. Similarly, a representative from the Fier Office of Employment expressed his institution's readiness for cooperation and active participation in the CPSN in Fier.

Follow-up Actions Stemming from the Fier conference will focus on:

- Support Qarku-led trainings of commune social administrators on conducting needs assessments
- Establish a multi-functional community center in Fier
- Support Qarku and Municipality in mapping out the Social Area Plan
- Support Qarku-led assessments for establishing CPUs at commune levels
- Sign a Memorandum of Understanding between Qarku and Tdh
- Support Qarku-led trainings of local journalists on ethical reporting of child protection issues



ELBASAN, 29 September 2010

The Elbasan conference generated much interest as evident in number of participants (65) and the variety (37) of local institutions, organizations, interest groups and media they represented.



VPP Event, Elbasan, September 2010

Being one of the major cities where Tdh first started operating in Albanian back in 2000, Elbasan has benefited from Tdh knowledge, expertise and training from early on and as such it is often heralded, both locally and nationally, as a good working model of the CPU.

The Elbasan CPU also benefits from the valuable support of its Municipality and Qarku as demonstrated by the participation of high-level representatives from both of these local government structures who share recognition of their own duties and responsibilities for promoting and ensuring respect for child rights in their community. Acknowledging the successes of the Elbasan CPU to date, the v/ Mayor of Elbasan, Mr. Serafin Papa nonetheless emphasized the importance of collaboration between various institutional structures and multi-disciplinary actors involved in child

protection at the commune, municipality and Qark levels in order to share best practices, transfer knowledge and replicate the CPU model throughout the Elbasan Qark.

Many of the participants commented that the Working Protocol for the Child Protection Worker was a welcome development and a useful tool of standard procedures to be utilized not only by the CPW, but also teachers, educators, psychologists, police officers throughout the Elbasan municipality and region at large. In this vein, one of the follow-up actions to emerge from this event is that the Elbasan Qark is set and willing to organize a series of 5 training roundtables for social administrators at the commune level in order to promote the CPU model and share with them the good practical experience of the Elbasan CPU.

In this regard, the Spokesperson for the Municipality, Ms. Jonida Kucaj raised a question about the role that the local media can play in promoting the work of the CPU and raising awareness about child protection issues. The Tdh delegate responded that the media can be a powerful ally in focusing the much needed spotlight on child rights and child protection issues in Albania, whilst emphasizing the need to observe professional standards of ethical reporting in order to ensure respect for the dignity of children and protection of their privacy and identity. The Elbasan launch received respectable local media coverage with the event being reported in the evening news of three local TV stations.

Potential Indicators of High Risk Children and Families

- Social isolation/ Exclusion
- Poverty or other socio-economic disadvantages
- Physical or Mental Disability of the Child
- Substance/ Alcohol Abuse by Parents or Carer
- Young/ Single Parent or Carer
- Parents' Mental Health Illness and/or Depression
- Parents' Unemployment
- Parental History of Abuse
- High Levels of Violence in the Community

(extract adapted from the Working Protocol for Child Protection Workers)



VLORA, 30 September 2010

The Vlora workshop brought together around 45 participants representing 15 different local institutions from social services, kindergarten, education, law enforcement, and NGOs operating in the area. Similarly to Fier and Elbasan, the presence of both Municipality and Qark level officials at the launching event in Vlora clearly demonstrates that the strengthening and expansion of the CPSN is dependent on the close partnership that must be cultivated between these two key levels of local government.

Despite being one of the newest CPUs established only in January this year, Vlora is clearly moving in the right direction in terms of focusing its efforts on establishing an effective Multi-Disciplinary Group composed of a variety of key child protection stakeholders.



VPP Event, Vlora, September 2010

Indeed, the key message emphasized in the presentation made by the Director of Municipality Social Service, Ms. Irena Stasa was that the effective case management of children in need of protection in the Vlora community can not be accomplished without the active contribution of each member of the Multi Disciplinary Group, drawing special attention to the concept of coordination among various actors as outlined in the Protocol.

The v/Mayor of Vlora, Mr. Ilir Banushaj and many other participants commended the work and efforts of the Vlora CPU so far in managing cases of children that had been referred to it, expressing their active interest and commitment for closer cooperation in the future. The Deputy Director of Vlora Qarku, Mr. Akil Danushaj announced that a Children's Observatory will soon open at the Qarku level, suggesting that the Observatory and the CPU should become essential partners to one another given their shared concerns in child protection matters.

DURRËS, 8 October 2010

The Durrës conference took place within the premises of the Durrës municipality and was widely attended by 65 participants representing as many as 22 local institutions and organizations. The Mayor, Mr. Vangjush Dako addressed the participants with a short speech that highlighted the good cooperation enjoyed so far between the Municipality and Tdh, and praised the publication of the Protocol as an important tool to be utilized by all child protection actors.

A short presentation by the Head of the Municipality Social Services, Mrs. Meme Xhaferaj followed to outline current case management achievements by the Durrës CPU, various child protection-related activities organized by the municipality, and provided an implementation update on the Durrës Action Plan which focuses on tackling the issue of children in street situations.

Various participants raised a number of different challenges they had faced during the course of their work with vulnerable children, and concluded that sharing information in a timely manner and coming together to address common difficult cases was much better than attempting to find solutions separately. Another important point that was raised related to the fact that limited budgets should not affect the communication and collaboration process among the stakeholders involved in the child protection safety net.



VWP Event, Durrës Municipality, October 2010

Follow-up actions from the Durrës conference will focus on:

- Creating a round table between the CPU, school psychologists, the police and local NGOs on child protection issues
- Organizing child protection trainings for nurses and family doctors who pay family visits in order to identify children at risk
- Pursuing joint CPU and Police activities to raise public awareness about child trafficking and exploitation with a view to strengthening public confidence in the role of the police
- Conducting meetings with Qarku and follow-up on implementation of Action Plan
- Organizing round-table discussions to address issue of school drop-outs

KORÇA, 11 October 2010

The last, but by no means least, to launch the Protocol was Korça, a city which aspires to become child-friendly as a result of many projects, strategies and activities undertaken by the Municipality that aim to ensure every Korça child will enjoy their child rights.

The Mayor, Mr. Edmond Gjoka made a compelling point by suggesting that the success of the Multi-disciplinary Group depends on the willingness of the partners to make it work, and on that note, he made an appeal for genuine cooperation by laying aside institutional jealousies and political attitudes and working together to ensure appropriate protection and services for all children in need and their families.

His speech was followed by a presentation by the Head of the Municipal Social Services, Mrs. Klementina Gjeçka who outlined some of the achievements and challenges encountered, as well as the future projects for the municipality of Korça.

These projects will include the opening of a new youth community center with a library and internet centre; the opening of a shelter for child victims of abuse and trafficking; the establishment of Student Senates in all K-12 schools in Korça in order to enable children to exercise their right to participation in the framework of ensuring respect for child rights in the family, school and community; the establishment of a comprehensive database of children and families in need and the opening of a day centre for youth at risk.

Some of the key challenges identified by the Korça event participants are listed as follows:

- Lack of appropriate resources to ensure full child protection and

services

- Exchange of information among actors
- Lack of knowledge about availability of social services
- Local mentality
- Ambiguity over the specific mandates, roles and functions of various service provider structures
- Lack of preventative and social assistance services for families



Image of Poster promoting child rights developed by Korça municipality

In conclusion, the participants agreed to discuss the Working Protocol and strategies for strengthening cooperation in greater detail in future round tables meetings. The Municipality representatives also expressed their willingness to initiate discussions with and encourage Qarku to launch the Protocol at the commune level in Korça with a view to expanding the CPU model even further.

Terre des hommes Albania would like to thank all its donors, partners and staff members for their invaluable support and commitment towards child protection in Albania.



Image of Poster developed by Tdh Albania to promote the CPUs

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