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## POLICY BRIEF

# CHILDREN INFORMING THE EUROPEAN STRATEGY ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

#MyEuropeMyRights #EUchildrights

With the contribution of: Save the Children Albania, Terre des hommes Albania, World Vision in Albania and Kosovo, UNICEF Albania

## Problem statement:

Even though there has been a good progress in Albania in advancing the agenda of the rights of the child, there still remains more to be done. The awareness and education of children on child rights has become mandatory by law and supported from different programs and activities of national and international organizations working in the country. Anyway, this does not mean that all the adults from local to national institutions, fully understand, assimilate or adapt child rights-based approaches in working and communicating with children. With the scope of informing the priorities of the European Union's Child Rights Strategy, a large child consultation process was carried out and what resulted evident is that children can and do engage in actions that promote their rights when they are well-supported, but they face many challenges and barriers. There are multiple and correlated factors: social, cultural, economic, politic and institutional, which prevent children from fully enjoying their rights at all levels.

The society has done some progress on the way they consider and place children, even though some misleading attitudes and beliefs are strongly eradicated in the Albanian mentality as there are many others that champions empowering attitudes toward children and their rights. The education of children about United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) it is not evenly distributed. There is lack of meaningful and systematic approach to this.

Children are asked to find out through the internet about child rights without substantial guidance and facilitation by adults. The differences are evident from urban to rural areas as well between areas that have a presence of work of child rights organizations that have in their focus programs related to child right governance.

The education system and schools represent challenges as well. In rural areas, there is a lack of high schools, which humper the normal attendance of children due to transportation and security issues which leads to the children of these areas not attending secondary/higher education. There is lack of material and equipment and of a suitable and safe infrastructure needed for the teaching process as well as teaching methodologies still lack elements of inclusion and building competency-based skills in children and adolescents. There is a lack of running water, heating systems, sports areas, science laboratories, computer and internet connection. In terms of the infrastructure suitable for children with disabilities, there are no ramps or other support facilities.

Children experience physical and psychological abuse from their parents as a form of disciplining them and as an education tool. Emotional abuse is still present in schools under forms of insults, screaming and intimidation. Violence among peers remains a sensitive problem as children often choose violence as the easiest way of conflict resolution. Discrimination is one of the most cited violence of children's rights. All children involved in the consultations have experienced at least once discrimination at home, at school or among peers. The lack of basic minimum living conditions (food, housing, hygiene) leads to school dropout and consequently to the increase in discrimination against less fortunate children.

The right to participation is a notion that has been largely introduced in the policy and practice of work with children, but it seems to be away from a relevant, meaningful and ethical participation. There are many factors influencing in this such as: poor knowledge on the real meaning of child participation and its importance, lack of investment on education and training of professionals working with and for children on child rights and the right to participation and the lack of resources both human and financial to organize meaningful participatory processes. As result, generally children are not considered as an interest group that should be informed, consulted and taken into consideration during policy and decision making on the issues concerning and affecting them directly.

The above, is a summary of the issues emerged during a broad process of consultation (running from the 21 of September to 30 October 2020) with children of age groups between 8-18 years old from 11 municipalities of Albania, from urban and rural areas including ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, living in socio economic difficulties, children in street situation, repatriated children, etc.. The heist of those consultations was intended to inform the developing of the EU Strategy on Children's Rights.

By doing so, Save the Children Albania, Terre des hommes in Albania, World Vision Albania and Kosovo and UNICEF Albania would like to use the momentum, to bring again to the consideration of National and European institutions the violations of children's rights and call for action at all levels!

*“Nothing for us, without us”*

## To Albanian Government and public institutions

Albania has ratified the UNCRC which establishes that Governments are the main legal (or primary) duty-bearers in the UN CRC. To this extent, the Albanian Government has the responsibility to create the legal and policy framework, and provide resources, so that children's rights can be respected and fully enjoyed by children. The child rights organizations involved in this process in Albania<sup>1</sup>, are calling for action to:

- Prioritizing children's rights, online and offline, in a holistic and systematic approach in all sectors by introducing and applying the child rights principles, as well as by developing multi-sectoral programming to prevent, mitigate, respond to and end all forms of violence against girls and boys;
- Provision of necessary funding to build and implement evidence-based programming that fosters child rights approach in order to strengthen a supportive child-focused environment informed by gender analysis, domestic violence prevalence and discriminatory practices with special focus on vulnerable groups;

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF Albania, Save the Children Albania, Terre des hommes Albania, World Vision in Albania and Kosovo

- Promote and ensure children engagement on civic action toward changes of the local and national realities by creating a healthy child participation environment and providing specific and measurable indicators that measure progress, such as the use of Child Participation Assessment Tool.

## To the EU institutions

- Amplify the technical assistance towards Albanian government and institutions on strengthening and improving the legislation, policy and practices so that all the rights of all children are better respected, protected and fulfilled;
- Promote and support common European agendas for enhancing children's ability to participate in decision-making and processes in all matters affecting her or him, be that at local or national, in line with article 12 of the UNCRC and General Comment 12;
- Increase the monitoring role on non-member states on their efforts to guarantee the full application of children's rights and targeting burning issues on child rights violations;
- Leverage the Acquis instrument as an accountability tool toward candidate states in relation to planning and implementing child rights.

