

Listen and involve us more

“Participatory Assessment with children of the Child Protection Unit Services”





This **Participatory Assessment conducted with children**¹ aimed at collecting the perceptions and opinions of the children who are direct and indirect beneficiaries of the Child Protection Unit² about the services they received.

This assessment using mostly qualitative methods was conducted both through individual interviews with 38 children receiving direct services from the CPU and seven focus group discussions with a total of 56 children from 6 to 17 years old involved in activities organized by the CPU in eight urban areas: Durrës, Elbasan, Korça, Pogradec, Gjirokaster, Vlora, Kucova and Saranda. Due to the small and purposive sampling method, some bias may exist in the responses provided by the children who can be influenced to give the responses they think adults expect in order not to 'jeopardize' the relationship they have with the child protection worker, however these findings still provide some great insights into what the CPU is doing and what more could be done or differently.

Individual children were interviewed about the general work of the CPU and their overall evaluation of its services, about visits in the family or at the CPU premises, and about their assessment of the impact of the CPU assistance on the problems they face. Focus groups aimed at grasping children's understanding of violence; their knowledge of the work of the CPUs; who they can turn to for assistance; and how prevention activities can be improved.

In general, all children directly assisted by the CPU, assessed positively the quality of services they received (rating 4.7/5) and even expressed some improvement in their lives and in their relationships within the family following the CPU intervention.

Furthermore, children consulted through the focus group discussions demonstrated a good understanding of different forms of violence, even though this was not necessarily acquired through CPU preventive activities. However, they could identify the CPU and police as the main actors to which refer cases of violence against children and expressed their interest in being more pro-actively involved in promoting the CPU service and organizing activities to prevent all forms of abuses towards children.

1. This assessment was conducted in the framework of MARIO project, a joint effort of influential NGO players in the field of child protection, to enforce better protection of migrant children in Europe. Implemented by Save the Children and Terre des hommes in Albania, it targets professionals who deal with cases of abuse, exploitation and/or trafficking of children in Europe, who can bring positive changes in the lives of children.
2. The Child Protection Unit (Section) function as offices at the municipal level in charge of child protection as well as promotion of child rights. Child Protection Workers work to identify abused, neglected, exploited and trafficked children and children at risk. They provide protection through case management, offering direct services and coordinating actions with other public and non public actors in the highest interest of the child.

Major findings

- **Good knowledge of children about the CPU services**

Children are sensibly aware of the function and services provided by the CPU, even though they do not necessarily know the structure by name (CPU). At cases, CPU is seen as the office where children can go and talk about their concerns. The children interviewed would define its function as '[it] protects children's rights and makes them happy' and they were also aware of the targeted beneficiaries of the CPU.

"[CPU is] the center in the municipality ... that helps children in need, children who do not have parents, children who are poor and live in bad economic conditions, children who do not attend schools and disabled children."

The relationship with the child protection worker is quite personal and almost all the children know the CP worker by name and consider them as problem-solvers, but also as educators who speak to children and parents about violence, schooling and children's rights.

- **Irregular but appreciated meetings between the CP worker and the family at home or at the CPU premises**

Children had mixed memories about the number and regularity of visits the child protection worker conducted in their homes and some could not remember having seen or heard of a CPW visit in the family³. However, amongst the ones who did, **many children reported they felt good and happy when the CP worker visited their homes**. Only three reported to feel uncomfortable because it reminded them of problems at home, such as parental divorce, poverty or because the CP worker talked about important things needed but that the child did not like to talk about (such as school attendance...). "In fact I feel ashamed when the CPW comes at home as we don't have a proper home and we are very poor. I feel very bad when she talks with my mom there. I wish we could meet somewhere else"- said one of the girls interviewed.

The person who protects the children better than others.

Meetings at the CPU office were also reported sporadic but children often reported to experience these visits with positive emotions, hope and satisfaction.

One child from Kucova: [I felt] better. I felt relaxed when I talked to her at home, at school. When I talk to her, I feel good because I can say whatever I have inside me. She hugs me, kisses me and gives me courage.

One difficulty with organizing meetings at the CPU premises lays in the fact that some of the CPUs have great space limitations and their office facilities do not always allow for private conversations with parents and children. Another element mentioned is that during the visits, conversations were held mostly between the CP worker and the parents about the family problems while the child was seldom or not at all involved in discussions that directly concerned him or her, which may reflect the need for improving the practice of consulting directly with children about their problems and plans that can be developed.

One child in Elbasan: When I visit the CPU offices, I feel calm because the CPU representative helps my mom and she calms her down. My mom feels happy and she is full of hope when she leaves for home. She goes and does immediately what the CPU representative tells her.

3. Which may indicate a low number of family visits, but also could be explained by the visits conducted while children are not at home, etc.

