

## Poverty and Child Rights in Albania: Measuring Child Poverty and Social Exclusion

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Albania, a country in transition for more than 10 years, is undergoing all deep and round political, economic and social transformation. Side by side with its endeavors for social development and economic growth the Albanian society is facing acute phenomena such as poverty and unemployment, lack of access to labour market, exclusion from the social, education and health services, as well as massive emigration, which were unknown before.

Albania is the country with the youngest population in Europe. One third of Albania's population are children in the age group of 0-18 years. The prolonged and difficult transition to a market economy has generated poverty and inequalities for certain groups. Transition further exacerbated the economic status of vulnerable groups, in particular families with many children.

Citizens 0-18 years of age are considered minors in Albania. The number of children in Albania is 1,369,000. Out of a total population of 3,142,238<sup>1</sup>, 33% are under 15 years old, 40% are under 18 years of age and about half of the total population is under 25. Under the Albanian Constitution, a child enjoys equal rights before the law.

According to the World Bank, the percentage of population living below the poverty line declined from 25% in 2002 to 18.5% in 2005, lifting more than 230,000 people out of poverty<sup>2</sup>.

Although the number of poor in the last four years has been reduced by 27%, the reduction of poverty among children has not followed the same rate. A considerable number of children, about 1/4 of the total number (193,000 children) live below the line of absolute poverty.

Why should we be concerned about child poverty?

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<sup>1</sup> Social Research Centre, *Statistics on Children and Women in Albania Based on Millenium Development Goals*, INSTAT, Tirana, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, *Albania Urban Growth, Migration and Poverty Reduction: A Poverty Assessment Report*, No 40071-AL, 2007.

Children brought up in poverty are at risk of having problems at school, dropping out of school, using drugs or committing crimes, remaining unemployed when they grow up, having premature pregnancies and leading the kind of lives that recycle poverty and social exclusion into the coming generations<sup>3</sup>.

Given the long-term devastating effects that living in poverty creates for children, this situation requires immediate attention. Various studies by governmental and non-governmental organisations show that poverty is gaining alarming proportions. Poverty, unemployment, uncontrollable internal migration, the increasing rate of social problems and the high incidence of domestic conflicts are being reflected in the malnutrition and poor health of children, in the growing number of children who seek work and drop out of school, in the alarming increase of child abuse and child and adolescent delinquency.

There have been positive developments in Albania's progress towards the implementation of the rights-based approach. In the National Strategy on Development and Integration (NSDI), poverty reduction among children and their social inclusion takes into consideration the rights-based approach. In the present programme of the Albanian government, the component of development based on social planning and communications focuses largely on policy and advocacy of children's rights.

The social policy of Albanian government concerning children is drawn in full agreement with the Convention on Children's Rights adopted by the Albanian government in 1992. The Albanian government aiming at setting up a protective environment for the children has adopted the necessary changes in the legislation. The Constitution and the new Family Code foresee special provisions for the protection of the children.

The adoption of the National Strategy for Social Services creates the appropriate environment to develop policies as well as to offer contemporary services to certain social vulnerable groups in need for special protection. Finally, the National Strategy for Children (NSC) as well as the National Action Plan approved in July 2005 defines institutional responsibilities as well as the coordination of actions amongst the actors

<sup>3</sup> Source: The United Nations Children's Fund, *State of the World's Children 2000*, UNICEF, New York, 2000.

aiming at observing the application of legislation and the protection of children's rights.

However, data from studies and evaluations testify that the current social services for children in need for special protection are insufficient and inadequate so as to ensure their proper social integration.

## **1. Issues to Be Considered in Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion among Children**

### *The rights-based principle<sup>4</sup>*

The concept of child wellbeing according to the rights-based approach upholds the principle of meeting all *the basic human rights and freedoms*. According to this concept there is no hierarchy of rights; they are all of equal value. This implies that the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights should all be equally enjoyed and there is no group of rights with precedence over other groups. In addition to being universal, basic rights are undividable, interdependent and intertwined with one another. This means that the violation of one right hinders the realization of another right. However, states are faced with the task of setting priorities in allocating resources for programs and development organizations have to concentrate their efforts in the realization of specific rights. Prioritization of areas in order to allocate resources or orient programs does not imply that some rights are considered more important than the others.

### *Monitoring should be based on the assessment of children's wellbeing in accordance with the rights-based approach*

The United Nations Convention on Children's Rights contains 54 articles which cover almost every aspect of children's rights and wellbeing. 192 countries including Albania have accepted the Convention on Children's Rights.

This Convention points out that governments should «recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development». The article stipulates that parents and others responsible for the child «have the primary responsibility to secure [...] the conditions of living necessary for child's development»<sup>5</sup>. Governments must take appropriate measures to implement this right and shall in case of need «provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with

<sup>4</sup> Extracted from *A Human Right Approach - Peru Case Study*, UNICEF, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Article 27 of the Convention.

regard to nutrition, clothing and housing»<sup>6</sup>. To honor these rights the states must take every measure «to the maximum extent of their available resources»<sup>7</sup>.

The implementation of these principles in real life represents a challenge for the Albanian government. These principles are important not just to make the fight against child poverty and exclusion a goal of national policy, but also to include it among the major priorities of the country.

Child wellbeing and child poverty represent different sides of the medal. From the «perspective of the rights-based approach, wellbeing is defined as the realization of children's rights and the meeting of conditions enabling every child to develop in accordance with his/her natural potential. The extent of success in this direction is measured in terms of positive achievements, whereas the negative results of child achievement and/or deprivations indicate failure to provide for the realization of children's rights»<sup>8</sup>.

The resource base for the measurement of child poverty refers to those aspects of children's lives that are deemed capable of identifying whether a child is poor or not. The resource base can range from a unidimensional to a more multidimensional measure, basing the identification solely on the aspect of income or one other dimension or, in contrast, on multiple dimensions. Poverty approaches can be said to differ in their degree of dimensionality when setting the poverty line and separating the poor from the non-poor children.

To be able to measure poverty and social exclusion among Albanian children a range of issues related to the nature of indicators needs to be deliberated. Monetary indicators? Non-monetary indicators? Long-term poverty, etc.?

*In the case of monetary indicators, should emphasis be on income or on consumption?*

The study of child poverty in Albania should be based on consumption because poverty data collected by the World Bank's Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) are based on consumption levels.

*In measuring monetary poverty among children, which indicators come into play?*

Experts recommend using two indicators: the one of absolute

<sup>6</sup> Article 27 of the Convention.

<sup>7</sup> Article 4 of the Convention.

<sup>8</sup> J. Bradshaw, P. Hoelscher, D. Richardson, *An Index of Child Well-Being in the European Union*, Social Indicators Research, University of York, UK, 2008.

poverty and the indicator of food poverty line, which have been previously used in poverty surveys by the World Bank, agencies of the Albanian government and various other organisations. There are reasons for this choice. First, the indicator of food poverty line takes into consideration the daily intake of calories needed to survive and converts the calories into the monetary value equivalent to 3,047 lek (23.4 euro) per capita monthly. Whereas the indicator of absolute poverty is calculated on the basis of the methodology of *cost-basic needs*, which in addition to the *food poverty line*, takes into account the consumption/use of some indispensable non-food items. The level of absolute poverty measured in this way is equal to 4,891 lek (37.6 euro) per capita monthly.

The low Ginny coefficient does not allow for the use of poverty lines at the level of 50 or 60% of the average. The level of these lines is lower than the above indicators and as a consequence the number of the poor would be lower, too.

The above indicators provide information on the extent of poverty but do not show the depths of poverty. The use of the indicator of *poverty gap* is necessary not only to measure in monetary terms the deviation from the poverty level, but also to measure the movement of poor children within the various levels of poverty from one period to another.

In the concept of child wellbeing from the perspective of the rights-based approach, it is necessary to distinguish between transient poverty and persistent poverty. Persistent poverty or being poor for four years or longer is a more serious problem than transient poverty. The tendencies and characteristics of persistent or long-term poverty can be identified by building a data system of the panel type.

## **2. Which Categories of Children Are at Risk of Living in Persistent Poverty and What Information Is Available about These Categories?**

The first group and the largest in number is the one of poor children living in the poor rural and undeveloped areas. Besides the economic poverty, they share inadequate housing conditions, have poor access to drinking water, and live in poor hygiene and sanitary conditions. Poverty in these areas is the

result of the poor economic activity of the household based mainly on the small agricultural farm; the poor quality of the land; the lack of access to market and public services such as education, health, and social safety nets, including employment services. Living Standards Measurement Surveys carried out in different years<sup>9</sup> show that these factors persist and cause poverty in these areas.

The second group is the group of children living in single parent families and in households headed by women. Migration and the increase of divorce rate is affecting children ever more. This category of children is at risk of living in long-term poverty due to the low level of income made by mothers or the low amount of economic aid granted by the government. Children from these families are at risk of dropping out of compulsory education in order to search a job to survive.

The third group is the one of children from poor migrating families who live in the sub-urban parts of the towns in extra-legal settlements. From morning to evening, many children from these families roam the streets trying to sell cigarettes, prepaid telephone cards, etc. These children are vulnerable to physical abuse and many show signs of malnutrition. Yet another group of children from the migrating families who have settled in the territories of former chemical factories are exposed to toxic waste such as linden, dioxin, furan, etc. Children born in these families have a high incidence of birth malformations and are at high risk of suffering from chronic diseases.

The children of Roma and Gypsy families are the fourth category of children living in extreme poverty. They suffer from social discrimination, high levels of illiteracy, poor health, miserable housing conditions, and high mortality rates. Quite often Gypsy children work together with their parents on the streets of big towns begging or cleaning the windshields of cars at traffic lights. Roma and Gypsy children are very vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking.

Another category of poor children at risk of persistent poverty are the invisible children. These are the children who were not registered with the civil registrar offices at birth; they are the ones who are mostly trafficked or live outside Albania without their parents.

The massive internal migration has created communities of

<sup>9</sup> In 1996, 1998, 2002, 2004 and 2005: World Bank, INSTAT, *Albania: Qualitative Poverty Assessment in Three Districts*, World Bank, Tirana, 2003; The World Bank Group, INSTAT, *Living Standards Measurement Survey Wave 3 Panel*, World Bank, Tirana, 2005.

poor families who live in extralegal settlements. Many children born in these informal areas are not registered in the civil registrar books. As a consequence they do not enjoy the basic free public services such as health care and education and do not figure in the official statistics.

Trafficked children and children living outside Albania without their parents live in complete «anonymity». They work in conditions that damage their health or risk their lives. Quite a number of these children fall victim to sexual abuse, physical violence, and negligence. They are invisible because nobody knows who they are, where they come from and where they happen to be at a given moment.

### **3. Should Measurements of Child Poverty Look beyond Income Levels?**

Certainly yes. Poverty among children is not simply a matter of shortage of money and lack of income. Deprivations caused by poverty are measured by a number of non-monetary indicators.

Living in poverty and suffering from social exclusion entail negative consequences on the wellbeing of children. Is economic poverty the only problem facing the poor children? Certainly not. «Low income is not the only concern with long-term impact on the quality of life of children and the lessening of opportunities that enable their normal development. Low income and poverty cause malnutrition, stress, the absence of stimulating experiences during early childhood and various deprivations which prevent children from normal activity»<sup>10</sup>. Poverty deprives children from the right to commodities, services, and equal opportunities – thus depriving them from many of their basic rights.

Studies show that such basic needs as decent food, adequate housing, drinking water, hygiene, education, health care, social services, and adequate care in the family have only a low rate of enjoyment by poor children in Albania.

<sup>10</sup> H. Sutherland, D. Piachaud, *Changing Poverty Post 1997*, Center for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics, November 2002.

*Poverty affects the right to survival, health and sufficient food*

Poverty negatively affects the child's right to life, to be healthy, to grow up and develop in a normal environment. The

following indicators have been selected by Albanian experts to measure the deprivation of the right to survival, good health, and adequate nutrition due to poverty:

- child mortality;
- prevalence of respiratory and infectious diseases;
- number of children born under weight;
- number of children between 2-9 years with at least one reported disability;
- chronic malnutrition.

Despite some positive developments during these transition years, Albania still has a high level of child mortality: in 2005 Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and Under Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) were at the level of 18 and 19 deaths for 1,000 live births<sup>11</sup>. Incidences are higher in the poorer parts of Albania. Children born in the north-east of the country and in the rural areas in general are persistently exposed to the risk of death in the first years of their lives.

Records of chronic diseases show that children living in the poor parts of the country have a high incidence of disease from typical pathologies caused by poverty such as respiratory diseases, infections, under weight births, etc. Data from MICS 2005 show that underweight births account for 6.9% of the total births.

The quantity and quality of food consumed by poor children are reflected in the status of their nutrition. MICS 2005 shows that malnutrition<sup>12</sup> affects more the poor than non-poor children. According to this study, out of 10 poor children 3 manifest signs of moderate levels of chronic malnutrition, while 1 out of 10 children suffers from serious malnutrition. Chronic malnutrition is three times higher in poor children. It is now common knowledge that malnutrition during early childhood causes disabilities and delays the normal development of the brain which affects the ability of the child to absorb and use knowledge and experience, thus increasing the risk of remaining poor for the entire life.

According to MICS 2005, in Albania about 11.1% of the children from 2 to 9 years manifest at least one reported disability. These high levels of disability are caused by economic, health and social factors.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (2005), *Albania Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey: Monitoring the Situation of Children and Women*, UNICEF, INSTAT, Tirana, 2005, p. 48, preliminary data.

<sup>12</sup> Malnutrition is represented by the indicator of chronic malnutrition.



*Poverty obstructs the right to live in adequate conditions (adequate housing, access to drinking water, decent hygiene and sanitary conditions)*

The indicators of unfulfilled basic needs such as

- low access to drinking water,
  - toilets without excreta disposals,
  - inadequate living conditions or overpopulation of the space (<3 people/room),
  - electricity shuts for more than 6 hours a day,
- are indicative of life in poverty and are selected as indicators to measure housing deprivation.

There are no data available about children. In the study of poverty based on LSMS of 2005<sup>13</sup>, the unit of study is the household. According to the World Bank Report based on the LSMS of 2005, the poor families and families in the rural areas and as a consequence their children, too, are affected by unmet basic needs: 34% of the Albanian families had two or more of the basic needs unmet, whereas 12% of the households suffered from 3 or more unmet basic needs.

*Poverty affects the right of children to education*

Poor children have lower enrollment rates. The finding is more relevant for children in preschool and secondary education. The indicators of

- net enrollments (in preschool education, compulsory and secondary education),
  - school attendance (in preschool, compulsory and secondary education),
  - drop out of compulsory education,
- are a reflection of poverty.

Data from State of Albanian Children 2007 Report<sup>14</sup> show that poor children have less access to education than children from families with good economic standing (see Table 1).

Data from administrative records show that school drop out has a uniform geographical distribution with a higher concentration in the rural and suburban areas populated during the transition years. School drop out is linked not only with the poverty of households, but also with low access to quality education in the rural and suburban areas. Many poor children

<sup>13</sup> The World Bank Group, INSTAT, *Living Standards Measurement Survey Wave 3 Panel*, cit.

<sup>14</sup> INSTAT, *The State of the Albania Children 2007: Women and Children in Albania - Double Divided of Gender Equality*, Social Research Centre, Tirana, 2007, p. 47.

**Table 1. Access to Education According to Economic Status**

School attendance by children	Richest quintile	Poorest quintile
Preschool education	59.2	25.7
Compulsory education	97	94
Secondary education	78	35

Source: The State of Albanian Children 2007 Report.

do not attend compulsory education because their families cannot afford the expenses. Many of these children are even forced to work to contribute to the weak economy of the household. In the rural areas, long distances that the children have to walk everyday to the nearest school also cause children to drop out. A special category of children is isolated and unable to attend school because of blood vengeance. Their numbers are rising. The greatest number of children from families in blood feuds do not attend school. In the year 2000, the Association for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation reported more than 1,450 children living in isolation and deprived from the right to education.

*Poverty impacts the quality of child care in the family*

Under stress to ensure survival in poverty, poor parents tend to neglect caring for their children. Having to cope with the burden of poverty everyday, such parents may leave children in the care of older siblings or without care at all. They may also leave them without the basic necessities to ensure proper hygiene.

The following indicators of

- percentage of children in the cohort of 0-5 years left under the care of children below 10 or left without care at all,
- percentage of families with children 0-14 years using unsafe sources of drinking water,
- percentage of families with children from 0-14 *with sanitary means of excreta disposals*,
- percentage of mothers with children from 0-5 years applying hygienic measures during preparation of child food or child feeding,

show the level of hygiene and security for children, especially poor children.

Child development is interactive. Changes in the five development fields produce effects in the subsequent development stages. Psycho-social development is not linked solely with the fulfillment of physical needs such as sufficient food, but also with the fulfillment of emotional needs such as the need for affection and love and interactive play that encourage the child's cognitive abilities. Poor children have fewer opportunities to gain from actions that stimulate their psycho-social development and for this reason their development is neglected and left to spontaneity. To measure the degree of support to children to learn within the family, in accordance with the economic and education level of the mother and the economic level of the household, the following indicators should be used:

- percentage of children under 5 whose parents engage in four or more activities that promote learning and preparation for school;
- average number of activities carried out by parents to encourage learning and preparation for school;
- percentage of children under 5 living in households with materials encouraging children to learn.

According to MICS 2005, data regarding indicators of encouragement to learn and prepare for school are lower in poor children. Thus, the indicator of the number of poor children whose mothers are involved in four or more activities encouraging learning or preparation for school and the indicator of the number of activities taking place in households with poor children is respectively 1, 5 and 1.3 times lower than in children from families with good economic standing.

Another factor with influence on learning and preparation for school is attendance of preschool. The reduction of the number of public kindergartens has left a large number of poor children within the four walls of the home with no means to stimulate and encourage the development of their potentials.

*Domestic violence is more frequent in poor households*

Psychological stress caused by poverty often pushes parents into irresponsible, uncontrollable, and violent actions. The following indicators have been selected to measure behavior/forms with which poor and non-poor parents discipline their children when they disobey or commit mistakes:

- percentage of children from 2-14 years experiencing only

violent disciplining;

– percentage of children 2-14 years experiencing psychological violence;

– percentage of children 2-14 years experiencing mild forms of physical punishment;

– percentage of children 2-14 years experiencing harsh physical punishments.

Screaming and/or hitting of children by angry parents has a negative influence over children especially if this type of disciplining is repeated over long periods of time.

A recent study by the Center for Human Development (HDC) with a sample of 1,500 children showed that 1 in 2 Albanian children is physically abused. Disobedience to parents is the main cause for physical punishment in 1/3 of the cases; whereas 2 out of 10 punished children are subjected to persistent physical abuse. However, the study does not screen the economic status of the families.

Preliminary data of MICS 2005 confirm that 1 out of 2 children in the cohort of 2-14 years is subject to psychological or physical abuse by parents. Poor children suffer from an even higher level of psychological abuse of 15%, higher rate of mild physical punishment of 57% and higher rate of harsh physical punishment of 11%. For children of families with good economic standing the figures are respectively 1.7, 1.4 and 1.9 times lower.

*Poverty forces increasing numbers of children to work at young age*

Poverty deprives many Albanian children of the right to education. They drop out of school to work inside the house, or work in the family business to increase household income.

Percentage of children in the age of 5 to 14 years involved in

– paid or unpaid work outside the household,

– housework for 28 hours or more in a week,

– family businesses,

is indicative of the total number of working children.

In 2003, the Ministry of Labour reported that about 1,979 children had been recorded to work mainly as beggars, cleaners of windshields, small ambulatory sellers or collectors of cans in the landfills and places designated for garbage collection.

In 2004 another study carried out by the International Labour Programme's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC) and the Tirana Institute for Contemporary Studies confirmed that it is common practice for poor Albanian children to beg, clean car shields, sell on the streets or collect cans in garbage bins. The greatest number of working children is in the age cohort of 12-17 years old and 8 out of 10 working children are boys. Almost half of the children working on the street are from the poor migrating families living in the extralegal suburbs created in the transition years.

Data from MICS 2005 show that 12% of children aged 5-14 are engaged in work, of which 2% carry out paid or unpaid work outside the households; whereas 10% are involved in the family business. Data according to settlements and economic status of the families show that in the rural areas child labour is four times higher than in the urban areas; whereas in poor children child labour is 10 times higher than among children of families with good economic status.

Child labour does not only affect the right to education, but it also entails a number of actual risks. Laboring children are exposed to dangers that may threaten their life and their future. Scavenging garbage bins and landfills, begging and selling on the streets in the summer heat or in the winter freeze, standing for long periods amidst dust and toxic gasses at the crossroads and at traffic lights increase the incidence of diseases, while for some of these children involvement in stealth and/or juvenile delinquency is a gateway to the world of crime in the future.

*Poverty is linked with child trafficking and child exploitation*

Child trafficking represents a serious violation of their rights and is closely linked with extreme poverty. Due to the illegitimacy of the act, it is difficult to gather the true figures of trafficked children. Reports from the Ministry of the Interior show that over 1992-2002 about 4,000 children were trafficked for exploitation in the neighboring countries of Italy and Greece. On the other hand, reports from Italy and Greece give a larger number of children trafficked and exploited on the streets for begging, prostitution, stealing, etc., who are at risk of having their body organs removed and sold for transplants.

*What indicators could be used to monitor child trafficking?*

Number of children are trafficked in the country or abroad for the following purposes:

- exploitation, including through slavery and forced labour;
- sexual exploitation, including through prostitution and pornography;
- involvement in illegal activities such as begging, stealing or drug trafficking;
- trafficking of human organs.

Poverty has increased the rate of children abandonment, thus depriving them of the right to grow up in their biological families. Although the number of institutionalised children is still low, the number of children placed in institutions of social welfare has doubled in comparison with the year 1990. A UNICEF study of the year 2005<sup>15</sup> showed that about 1,200 children deprived of parental care are sheltered in public institutions or in institutions run by NGOs. About 80% of the children living in these institutions are social orphans: children abandoned at birth, children with parents in emigration, children of poor families with one parent, or children of large families. However, institutionalisation is not the best choice for these children. Besides the deprivation of living in families, children in the institutions suffer from the low quality of institutionalised care. Service in the Albanian care institutions is yet far below modern standards. The prevailing type of care is the one provided in residential centers which are overpopulated, underfunded and poorly managed.

Possible monitoring indicators of the process of de-institutionalisation and placing children in families or similar structures are:

- number of children living in the institutions of social care in accordance with the type of institution (residential institution, custody families, temporary custody);
- number of children entering yearly the formal system of care in accordance with the type of institutions (residential institutions, custody families, temporary custody);
- number of child deaths per age group in the institutions of social care per institution type (residential institutions, custody families, temporary custody);
- number and percentage of adoptions according to age group,

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF, *Assessment of Services and Institutions for Deprived from Parental Care*, National Centre of Social Services, Tirana, 2005, p. 34.

health status and destination (in-country adoptions and inter-country adoptions).

*Poverty inflicts the right of the child for play and leisure time, hence negatively impacting child development and his/her cognitive potential*

Opportunities for play and leisure time are very important in the life of a child. Play gives children necessary stimulating impulses and opportunities to build experiences based on «make believe» and «experiment» which are very necessary for their optimal development. Things/toys with which children play at home are very important indicators of their development. However, there are no data available about the kind of things/toys with which Albanian children play inside home. Nonetheless, a quick survey by UNICEF<sup>16</sup> in some of the rural and urban poor areas of the north-east of Albania shows that many of the poor children have little, if any, opportunity to play with toys or to be in places where there are toys suitable for their age. In the rural and poor areas children suffer from isolation. Long distances from their school or from the closest house keep them apart from each other. The saying «the child's business is to play» is not on the minds of parents and the plans of governmental structures.

*Poverty deprives children of the right to expression*

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises to children «the right to hold their own opinion and to freely express these opinions over issues that concern them»; hence the obligation of the adults to listen to and consider the opinions of children when designing strategies and indicators to monitor child poverty and exclusion. To honor this obligation, it is necessary to use efficient methodologies to collect children's views on poverty and measures necessary to combat it.

#### **4. A New Approach to Reach the Poor and Excluded Children**

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *Mid-term and Final Evaluation of the Project on Early Childhood in Some Communities North of Albania*, UNICEF, Tirana, 2005, p. 17.

*Declaration of the European Commission about combating poverty and social exclusion, October 2000*

There is an established complex relationship between monetary

poverty and social exclusion. This relationship can only be mitigated or reduced by comprehensive measures and policies. The declaration of the European Commission on the fight against poverty and social exclusion of October 2000, stated that «poverty and social exclusion resume multidimensional and complex forms which require complex strategies». Besides employment, social protection policies should play an important role while fulfilling other conditions such as housing, education, healthcare, information and communication, freedom of movement, justice and personal security, recreational and cultural activities.

The existing mechanism of sectoral social policy has a weak impact on the reduction of social exclusion, especially among vulnerable children, whose rights are neglected. Social services system provide cash support or services primarily for the «family» and only in specific circumstances for «children». The existing Albanian system of children's social services does not function based on the collaboration, coordination, and case referral with other public systems.

The lack of information about high risk categories is still considered as a crucial problem. On the other hand, the weak inter-institutional coordination creates barriers in the identification of the critical phenomena, its size, analysis of causes, and as a result, prevention and alleviation through effective interventions.

As far as the child's data system is concerned, the main critical issues were considered:

- there is insufficient quantitative and qualitative information regarding child poverty/exclusion and conditions exposing children to a wide range of risks related to poverty. Information is not updated, and often different methodologies make impossible the spatial or time line comparisons;
- there is a need for better policies and programmes interventions oriented to child rights at both national and local level;
- there is a need for information and analysis of impact and effectiveness of different government and non-government programme interventions.

The need to establish a system which regularly monitors and reports on the realisation of children's rights was considered of particular importance to increase the effectiveness of social



policies. It would also contribute to improve legislation and institutional mechanisms and to bring them closer to international standards of UN conventions and European charters, ratified by the Albania government.

Based on a thorough review of available experience, the Albanian experts resolved to adopt the British index of child poverty and social exclusion<sup>17</sup> as a guide to determining the Albanian criteria for monitoring child poverty. The 12 adopted criteria are described in the following.

*1. The index should be reflexive of the multiple nature of poverty and social exclusion.* Given poverty's multidimensional and multifaceted nature, the identified index, too, should be inclusive of both monetary and non-monetary aspects of poverty. Measurements of monetary poverty alone cover only partially issues of child wellbeing, since deprivation and social exclusion lie beyond the reach of the examination of monetary poverty.

Measurement of aspects of poverty such as health, survival and nutrition, school enrollment and learning achievements, living conditions, access to drinking water and sanitation facilities, quality of child care within and without home, child labour, child violence and trafficking are necessary to grasp the holistic nature of children's poverty. This comprehensive approach allows for assessing impact and tendencies as well as the success or failure of policies and programmes.

In order to achieve the fullest possible coverage of the multiple nature of poverty, 105 indicators have been identified and categorised in 36 fields and 8 clusters.

*2. Applying a combination of specific indicators and composite indexes.* In addition to the use of a number of specific indicators, it was considered appropriate to also use composite indexes based on the variability of a number of main indicators. The purpose of this approach is to draw the attention of the public and stimulate greater concern over poverty and exclusion. In the developed countries, the use of such indicators generates political support in the fight against poverty and allows comparisons on the basis of geographical areas, including those among various countries. Up until presently a number of six composite indicators have been identified. The definition of the various elements and specific

<sup>17</sup> J. Bradshaw, P. Hoelscher, D. Richardson, *An Index for Child Well-Being in European Union*, cit.

weight to be assigned to each of these elements will be the object of further consultations.

*3. Indicators should focus on outcomes, not on inputs or services rendered.* Indicators have been selected to represent outcomes. Indicators representative of inputs or services rendered have been avoided. According to this criteria, indicators have been divided into two categories: indicators focusing on aspects of poverty and social exclusion (e.g. child mortality, housing conditions, etc.) and indicators of factors that augment the risk of living in poverty and deprivation in subsequent periods such as the number of schooling years, living in single parent families or in low income families, etc.

*4. Indicators should capture all categories of poor and excluded children; they should also capture gender implications.* A lot of indicators may be used to measure poverty and social exclusion in children. A selection of the most adequate indicators must reflect the potential to represent Albania's social and economic situation while at the same time being capable of covering poor and marginalised children. Indicators of gender, location, economic level (per quintiles) or ethnicity provide for coverage of the categories of poor and marginalised children.

*5. Measuring poverty and social exclusion from the child's perspective.* Interviewing children helps to discover their opinion and the kind of priorities that they have made for themselves. The list of indicators that follow is not reflexive of these criteria. However, the option is open to adding new indicators of poverty and social exclusion in accordance with the perspective of Albanian children.

*6. Measuring the depth of poverty and its duration.* Children living in persistent poverty or caught in recurrent periods of poverty are faced with a number of problems and hardships compared to children who live in poverty for shorter periods of time. Using extra income indicators and indicators that measure the depth and duration of poverty allows to identify and quantify children living in multiple and persistent poverty. In addition, these indicators allow for the identification of the domains of poverty and the measurement of its progression.

*7. Indicators should be specific to the age group.* Children manifest different needs during their life cycle. Therefore, indicators of poverty and social exclusion must be defined in accordance with the characteristics of the age group and the purpose and goal of the information field. For example, information related to education must be differentiated in accordance with the following age groups:

- 1-2 years for nursery stage; 3-5 years for kindergarten children;
- 6-9 years for the lower cycle of compulsory education; 10-14 years for the upper cycle of compulsory nine year education;
- 15-18 years for secondary education.

*8. Indicators should be consistent over time horizons.* This criterion requires the full observation of the contents of the index for measuring poverty and social exclusion among children. *Special indicators and composite indexes* must have a long life, i.e. they must be useful for today (to measure what they were designed for) and also useful to trace progress over long periods of time. However, this particular criterion should not become an obstacle to improvements to the list of indicators (even to replacement of one indicator with another) or changes to periodicity of the collection of certain indicators. Nonetheless, changes must be substantiated by strong arguments and should carry the consensus of concerned actors.

*9. Indicators should be methodologically rigorous.* Description of indicators, methods of calculation and methods of data collection, must be done in accordance with statistical norms and instructions.

*10. Indicators should be decomposable.* Poverty and social exclusion affect various population groups. However, their depth and intensity varies and so does their geographical spread. Data on the selected indicators must be decomposable by groups (e.g. children under the line of absolute poverty, children of Roma and Gypsy families) as well as by geographical location of households (e.g. district, regions, urban/rural zones).

*11. Indicators should be cost-efficient.* Indicators should be based on existing data. However, this does not exclude the intro-

duction of new indicators which do not feature on the present system of data collection. Collection of the data which are efficient and cost effective is highly recommendable for this system of indicators, since their collection incurs expenditures to be covered by the government. Furthermore, the collection of these indicators should not only be done continuously, but they should also ensure continuity as they represent an important tool for building institutional and human resources.

*12. Indicators should be comparable with data from other countries.* The selected indicators should allow for comparisons with other countries. This will in turn make possible for Albania to appear on the reports of international organisations and will enable the country to measure the impact of its anti-poverty and inclusion policies as compared to those applied in other countries.

## **5. A Child Rights-Based Information Measurement System**

Development of child rights-based information measurement system is of utmost importance. Effective actions for children relies on current and accurate data. Different countries are developing interesting initiatives regarding child right-based information systems at both local and national level (for example: Ecuador has developed a local information system for monitoring children rights; Moscow has a local database on street children; and Ceará State in Brazil has a participatory monitoring system for child and adolescent-related policies).

In Albania there is insufficient quantitative and qualitative information regarding child poverty/exclusion and conditions exposing children to a wide range of risks related to poverty. Information is not periodical, and often different methodologies make impossible the spatial or time line comparisons.

Service providers and programme planners may often have a general idea of who the marginalised excluded people are (e.g. those living without road access, orphans, minority language groups, displaced people). Nevertheless, some quantitative assessments are usually required, not least to establish a baseline for assessing later progress. Routine data collection,

such as by the Health or Education Information Systems, register data from those who already use a service, and not from those who do not. However, by comparing available routine data with other demographic information, it might be possible to more clearly identify who is left out.

Collection and analysis of data can serve to prepare systematic monitoring reports. The production of annual reports at national, local and sectoral level (e.g. at the level of ministry) for instance on the «Status of the Implementation of Children's Rights» or on «Child Poverty and Social Exclusion» might input into the existing programmes and policies and can orient the launching of new initiatives.

Experts recommend that within 2009 the first National Report on Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Albania be published on the basis of the indicators mentioned above. This Report which will have the advantage of using data from two important surveys (LSMS 2005 and MICS 2005), should serve as the baseline report so that in the subsequent periods work may continue with (a) comparisons of data over time periods; and (b) measurements of the impact of the implementation of policies in favor of poor children.

The measurement of child poverty and social exclusion represents a process which will involve central government, local government units and structures, governmental and non-governmental agencies dealing with child policies in all stages of design, implementation, and monitoring. The main responsibility of establishing a monitoring system and leading the process rests with the central government. The system will involve the local government units which, in the conditions of the deepening of the decentralisation processes, should take on increased responsibilities towards the identification of child poverty and the launching of local initiatives and strategies to reduce it.

Presently, there is a by-law (decision of the Council of Ministers) which establishes the Inter Ministerial Committee on Children's Rights at political level. The membership of the Committee is made up of ministers whose ministries cover duties and responsibilities relating to children's rights. At the executive level, there is the Directorate for Equal Opportunities which presently operates at the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Equal Opportunities. One of the sectors of the

Directorate is dedicated to children's rights and is called Children's Rights Unit (CRU).

CRU is created to promote and advocate policies designed to benefit and protect children through (a) supplying information during the process of design and/or revisiting of policies; (b) providing constant input/feedback about improving the existing policies; (c) monitoring and reporting periodically about the implementation status of the rights of children.

In order for the Inter Ministerial Committee and the CRU to be able to implement the functions mentioned above it is necessary to establish a management information system for monitoring children's rights. The system should also be given the responsibility to monitor the implementation/honoring of children's rights with particular emphasis on poor and excluded children.

To take steps and effect improvements in the data and statistics concerning poor children two main directions should be followed:

1. Install a new approach in the design/upgrade/improvement of policies which protect/guarantee the rights of children and/or reduce child poverty and social exclusion based on information about the impact produced by policies/programmes.
2. Construct a new management system of monitoring and evaluation and create a new monitoring/evaluation system targeting the implementation of children's rights with particular focus on child poverty and social exclusion.

The monitoring of the implementation of children's rights requires the institutionalisation of the process through the establishment, within the existing public structures, of a system which enables the identification, collection, and reporting of information on the status of children's rights and child poverty and social exclusion. Given the responsibility of the state to make sure that all citizens are duly represented and their concerns addressed, it is necessary that this process be initiated and led by the state.

Also, in the same time it is necessary to design and wage an awareness campaign directed at policy-makers and high governmental authorities on the need to improve the quantity and quality of statistical data. The reason for this campaign is that many of the policy-makers and authorities have a limited

understanding of the importance of data and statistical indicators.

The New Data Management System on Children should be composed of one Coordinating Unit (Directory of Equal Opportunities at Ministry of Social Affairs) one Directing Unit for Monitoring Process (Social Research Center - INSTAT) and a number of coordinating units at Ministry/Region level would facilitate the process of data collection and periodically monitoring of the poverty and social exclusion of children.

Data Management System should especially include the international organisations such as (UNICEF, UNDP, ILO, and WB) and experienced Albanian NGOs with qualitative expertise in data gathering, analysis and publication of various issues affecting children such as poverty and social exclusion.

## **6. Conclusions**

Remarkable changes have taken place in Albania's living standards and poverty due to transition. Analysis of the scale, depth and profile of poverty indicate that children experience the highest risk and greatest depth of poverty. However, the problems of transition and those inherited from the past are reflected in the gaps in statistics and the quality of information in Albania.

Current data provided by Albanian institutions are not comparable to those provided elsewhere in the region. Moreover, data and information on the impact of poverty on children is missing. Fundamental to this task is the establishment of a system which regularly monitor and report the progress done in realisation of children's rights, which includes the development of a methodology of measurement, the identification of a list of indicators and the provision of their definition to improve the quality of data collection and analysis, thereby supporting the production of reliable conclusions and effective policies.

With over a fourth, or 193,000, of the children in Albania suffering from absolute poverty, i.e. two or more severe deprivations, the challenge is immense. Poverty is denying to Albanian children goods, services and opportunities, depriving from their basic rights.

Realising children's rights and providing for their basic needs will require grappling with legal, economic, political and cultural issues and institutions. As it scans the horizon for emerging trends in these disciplines, the insights from academia, civil society groups and government bodies, among others, are crucial to challenge old ideas, develop a balanced perspective and deepen the state of our knowledge – as this paper has done.

In sum, we have moved closer to developing a more pertinent and practicable measure of poverty. Different studies have enriched our conception of children in poverty and have also arisen new questions. But that is the goal of academic pursuit – to relentlessly explore the questions of our time.