

# THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF VULNERABLE CATEGORIES OF CHILDREN IN SHKODER MUNICIPALITY

**Kastriot Faci<sup>1</sup> Bujane Topalli<sup>2</sup>, Lene Loffenses<sup>3</sup>, Edit Lezha<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Manager of NGO “The Door”, Shkoder/Albania, kastriot@infothedoor.com

<sup>2</sup> Project Manager/NGO “The Door”, Shkoder/Albania, bujane@infothedoor.com

## **Abstract**

In the Municipality of Shkoder, during several years, NGO “The Door” works with vulnerable groups of children (disabled children, Roma/gypsy children and children from orphanage). The aim of “The Door” activities provides the social inclusion for children of mentioned categories, through the social, cultural and sport activities. The aim of this study was to view a general picture about the social inclusion situation of marginalized categories of children in Shkoder Municipality; to create a map of social services, cultural and sports activities and to analyze the positive development of the children involved in these activities. Also this study aimed to give a general information regarding the real capacity of NGO-s to provide social-cultural and sport activities. During the analysis of first phase data obtained through document analyses, it resulted that the main obstacle is the registration process data in NGO’s Databases. They give general information, but not well-specified in different categories of social, cultural and sport activities. During the second phase of the analyses that was based on the further literature review and semi-structured interviews with respondents of selected sample involved in the study, it became clear that the problem is the fact that different NGO-s use different form to register data about social-cultural and sport activities. Also is very important to create a database of vulnerable children that take social-cultural and sport services, based in categories of children that are identified as vulnerable children in the Local Strategie of Children in the district of Shkoder.

**Key words:** *Vulnerable children, social-cultural-sport activities, social inclusion.*

## 1. Introduction

The right of children to social protection is provided in the Basic Law on RA, the Constitution of Albania, where in Article 54 of the Constitution clearly provides the Protection of Children Rights, which stipulates: **"Every child has the right to be protected from violence, ill-treatment, exploitation and use for work, especially under the minimum age for child labor, which can harm the health, morals or endanger his life or his normal growth."** The demographic movements of the population, especially after 90s have impacted in the situation of children in the district of Shkodra. The number of immigrant families from highland areas and villages to the Municipality of Shkodra is quite considerable. Verification conducted by the socioeconomic situation of these families are missing out on key elements of family life, besides fulfilling other needs for education, health service etc.. Among the groups of children who are considered the "Regional Strategy" as marginalized groups are: children of immigrant families, orphans, children with disabilities, Roma/gypsy children, working children, isolated children, abused children.

### 1.1 Definition of key terms

**Social exclusion:** Social exclusion is a multidimensional and continuous process of social destruction, the de-attachment of individuals or groups from social relations and institutions, which prevents them from full participation in normal and predictable activities that occur in the environment society in which they live. The multiple deprivations restrain individuals and groups from full participation in the economic, social and political society in which they live.

**Social Inclusion:** The opposite of Social Exclusion is an affirmative action to change the circumstances and habits or patterns that lead (or have led) to social exclusion. Social inclusion is a strategy to combat social exclusion. It is a coordinated response to a complex system of problems known as social exclusion.

**Children at risk of social exclusion:** children categories defined by the Regional Strategy 2011-2013, as: children of immigrant families, orphans, children with different abilities, Roma/gypsy children, working children, isolated children, abused children.

### 1.2 Outline of the problem

The remarkable economic, political and social problems during the Albanian transition have directly affected the quality life of children. Lack of green spaces and playgrounds, lack of infrastructure in schools, lack of strong social policies that support childhood, have made children of the transition years to live and grow under very difficult conditions. The existence of these problems has affected in the creation of some categories of children at risk of social exclusion, who each one has his own particular characteristic.

**Children from migrated families:** This category of children faces a series of problems which begins from infrastructural deficiencies that are typical of suburban areas where they live together with their families. Road infrastructure in informal settlements and villages

characterized by unpaved roads, which get filled with water in bad weather. This situation urges the school non-attendance of children in these areas, with houses far away from school. But in addition to infrastructure problems, there are some other reasons that urge the social exclusion of children by migrated families such as: the economic side, mentality of families, etc., which often have led to high school non-attendance by many children especially those from villages.

For toddlers, beside the problems' structures, there are revealed other scarcities, such as the need for nurseries and kindergartens, the low level of service staff, etc. Also, there is reported the lack of space for entertainment, inability to take advantage of existing school facilities, lack of means of transport to remote areas, the economic difficulties of families to buy school objects etc..

**Orphan children:** Children orphaned by both biological parents at the regional level for 2009 was approximately 843, of whom 674 were in Shkodra district, 88 in Malesia E Madhe (highland) district and 81 in the district of Puka. Most of them live in extreme poverty. Some of them were accommodated in residential centers for orphans.

**Children with Disabilities:** For persons with disabilities, barriers highlighted not only in the architectural plan (Municipality of Shkodra has made many positive changes as respecting to this), as well as in the social plan because of the social constraints in which they live, but also in the civil rights plan, there is also a blocked access to opportunities for high school levels, so even in skilled occupations, according to what their physical and health condition allows.

**Children from Roma and Egyptian communities:** Among marginalized groups there are Roma and Egyptian minorities, where most of the children and their families beg in the streets. Education is a broad concept and it is one of the biggest problems of Roma and Egyptian communities, especially the school education.

**Working children:** A sensible social category are children working illegally. These children are mostly employed as undeclared and meanwhile it is said that they attend school regularly. Beside the known cases by the labor inspection office, young children who work in factories, for the rest of them who work informally as : alms begging, selling cigarettes or other products in roads and collecting cans, precise figures are not available to report clearly the extent of the phenomenon. Just for Shkodra district, according to the data of the area, for children working in 2009, are declared about 391.

**Isolated children:** Isolated children still remain the same problem in Shkodra district, but according to statistics, this phenomenon has declined recently. Unfortunately, these children are deprived of the living conditions because of fear for revenge. The right to education, to have an appropriate social care, to be represented, to pursue social and cultural activities for the age development in this category of children does not exist.

**Abused children:** With the approval of the Law "Punitive measure against violence", the phenomenon of violence has decreased, although paradoxically denunciations against family violence have increased in number.

Now more and more women and children are realizing that violence is not a normal occurrence, so that it should not be tolerated, but it must be denounced to the relevant structures and thanks to this very good work that NGO of Shkodra is doing, related to the problem of family violence.

Referring to these groups of children at risk of exclusion, one of the most critical issues that is evidenced by the Strategy and Plan of Action for Children in Shkodra district is: Building playgrounds and cultural, social and entertainment service according to the relevant age group affecting Infant phase to till 18 years old.

Also, among the objectives to be reached by Strategy and Action Plan for Children is the target number 15 which says:

15. Planning extracurricular activities for the education of children's rights, the development of regional and national competitions, organizing summer schools and camps.

Part of this study will be socio-cultural activities and sports offered in Shkodra Municipality for children at risk of social exclusion. In the center of the study will be some Civil Society organizations operating in Shkoder that provide services to children.

## **Purpose and Objectives of the study**

The purpose of this study is: To get acquainted more closely with the situation of social-cultural and sports service from NGO that provide services for children in Shkodra district. The objectives are:

- To highlight the types of sports and cultural social services provided by NGOs for children in the Shkodra Municipality.
- To become familiar with the categories of children at risk of exclusion (according to the Regional Strategy 2011-2013), who benefit from these services.
- To create a map of socio-cultural and sport services according to categories of children at risk of exclusion.

## **1.4 Importance of Study**

The importance of this study lies in the fact that for the first time we will be able to see a map with kinds of socio-cultural and sports activities offered for children at risk of marginalization, in the Municipality of Shkodra NGOs operating in this area.

## **2. Methodology**

The methodology used in this study is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. This is accomplished by focusing on two main lines: the first in the study of literature, while the second line of research is provided through semi-structured interviews conducted with service socio-cultural providers for children in NGOs involved in the study. In this study there were involved 5 NGO in the Municipality of Shkoder. The study is based on data from the last year of NGO work, in 2012.

## **3. Analysis of the main causes of social exclusion**

Many studies undertaken in the European Union, although acknowledge the multiple dimensions of social exclusion, highlight unemployment as one of the causes or at least one of the factors associated with social exclusion. This is because in modern societies, paid work is not the only source of income with which purchased services, but is also the source of individual identity and sense of self-estimation. Most social networks and sense of belonging in society for many people, are depended and related to work. Many of extreme social exclusion indicators, such as: poverty and homelessness, they are depended on monetary income that come as a result of relationships at work. Therefore, many social policies, which aim to address poverty, aim at creating jobs for poor people. Meanwhile there are many other factors that affect in creating conditions or a place where social exclusion can happen. Some of these factors are:

- **The impact of social stigma and discrimination against individuals or groups.** This stigma is associated with certain conditions perceived as "off-standard" or "normal" for a certain society. (eg the case of people with mental health problems or a particular ethnic group).

- **Lack of access to social networking and social activities.** This deficiency leads to feelings of great isolation and underestimation that contribute to social exclusion or self-exclusion (ex. Women in a patriarchal community, or children of a immigrant community or ethnic comers etc.)- **An ideology or set of moral values** which serve to shape behavior or attitudes of a particular group.

- **Age, sex, religion, country of origin** may constitute important factors to exclude certain groups such as: children, women, the elderly, a group of believers from another group, etc.)

Even in the Regional Strategy and Plan of Action for Children 2011-2013 of Shkodra district is listed a number of causes that have led to social exclusion of certain categories of children. Among the causes of social exclusion exist:

**1. Poverty:** Poverty and low income in households remain one of the main causes of the birth of a variety of psychosocial problems related to many families at the regional level, which severely impair the life quality of children.

**2. Financial resources (funding allocation):** It can't be spoken for social services or to be thought of achievement standards, without appreciating the low level of funding provided to improve social service territory.

**3. Access to the service** is often encountered considerable difficulties in relation to access to services that should be provided categories in need.

**4. Institutional capacities,** we can talk about a whole lack or ignorance on the part of various bodies of some new problems that have arisen and require specific services such as, for example, the treatment of autistic children etc.

### **Social Inclusion of Children**

Children are the most stable and most vulnerable part of society. State investment over this age category with appropriate educational, psychosocial, cultural and entertainment services, respecting the needs of their development according to each age group, only precedes the

creation of a society with strong fundamentals and healthy basis. Referring to Hall Donegal Area Plan, which ranks alongside some positive achievements of social problems in the Municipality of Shkoder, it is highlighted the lack of social and cultural activities for children. Such a problem is also reflected in one of the main voices of the municipal budget, which is the fund for arts, sports and culture. Shkodra Municipality has allocated these funds according to the following tables where children are one of the main beneficiaries.

Table no.38 Budget and Number of children in 2010, the institutions of art, culture and sports in the respective municipalities 000/lekë.

<i>Municipality</i>	<i>Nr. of children</i>	<i>Funds in art, culture and sport</i>	<i>Budget for children</i>
a	b	c	d=c/b
Shkodër	32428	430255	13,26

The data of the table make us understand that the budget that goes to artistic, cultural and sports activities for children in Shkodra Municipality, is insufficient in relation to the number of children. As it is noted above one of the conditions or factors that lead to social exclusion is the lack of funds and this fact becomes clear with the data of this table, by adding also the lack of social cultural and sports services for children, highlighted as a deficiency in the Social Area Plan of the Municipality of Shkodra, comprise two main factors to prove the existence of social exclusion of children in Shkodra Municipality. However, recently there have been made many efforts by local authorities to improve this situation. Evidence of these efforts is the Social Services Outsourcing Municipality of Shkodra in 2010. With the initiative of the Public Prosecutor's Office and thanks to a donation from the Italian region Emilia Romagna enabled tendering process for the provision of social services. Participants in this tender were local NGOs. In this experience is worth mentioning that the target group addressed by this bidding projects were children and one of the areas of competition was precisely: Providing social-cultural and sports services for children.

The tender was held for four areas and at the end of each project came out a winner. The projects were: Lot 1: Provision of day services for children 0-3 years old; Lot 2: Offering daily services for children 3-6 years old; Lot 3: Provision of residential services for orphan children; Lot 4: Provision of social services - juvenile culture of the Municipality of Shkodra and their integration in social - cultural life of the city.

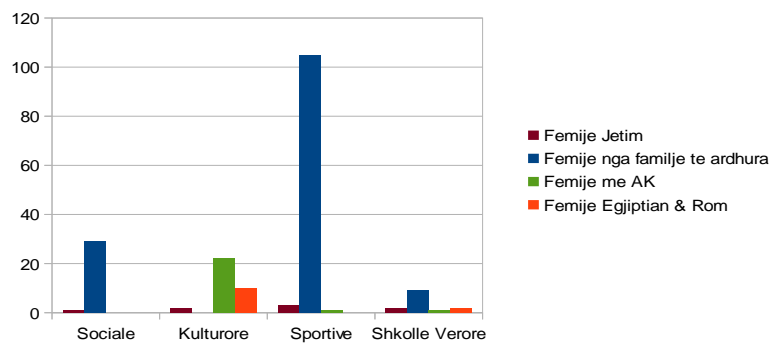
### **Map of socio-cultural services and sports for children at risk of social exclusion**

This session will analyze the data received from the NGOs involved in the study upon the number of children at risk of exclusion that they cover with social services and we will also get widely informed on the typology of services offered.

#### **NGO "The Door"**

Based on data recorded by the NGO "The Door" we observe a much broader involvement in socio-cultural and sports activities of children's category "Children of migrated families." There is also coverage of social cultural and sports services and the categories of "children with

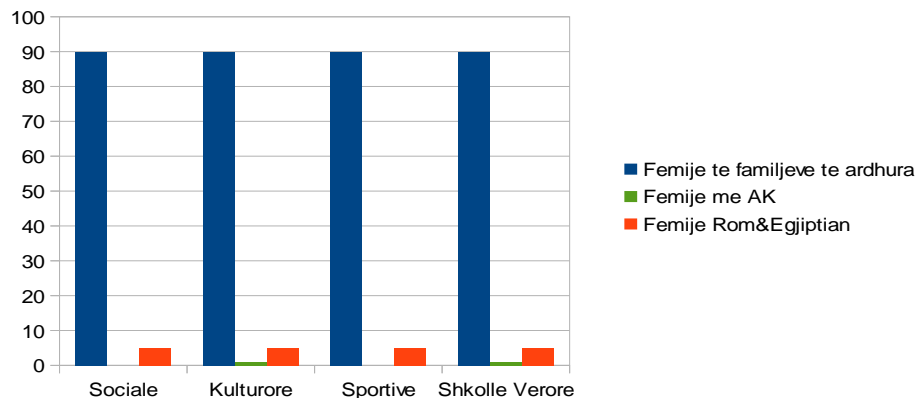
disabilities", "Children of Roma and Egyptian origin " and "orphans" from residential institutions public or private of Shkodra city. The age group of children supported by the services: is 3-18 years old. The Support of these four categories of social and cultural services is part of the daily activities of the NGO "The Door" which the focus of it is the social integration of children at risk of social exclusion, through the provision of social, culture and sports services. Thus for the category of children by migrated families it is offered sports services: boys and girls football courses. Of course, that part of the football course of girl are also the girls of residential institutions (orphanages or family homes). As for the category of children of Egyptian and Roma origin it is provided even the dance course. A very important part of the services provided by NGO "The Door" is the cultural service: Music Band for people with different abilities. This last one is a very special service, for the fact that there is no other like this one in the entire Balkan region. Some other social, cultural and sports services offered by the NGO "The Door" are: Children Kindergarten, organization of football championship - "Peace Cup" cultural-social activities "No child left out" and participation in national and international football championships for children, participation in the Music Troupe Festival for people with disabilities in Norway etc. During data collection by NGO "The Door" it is clear that the data received from the NGOs are divided by gender and it is also easily determined the data on categories of children at risk of exclusion to receive services, for the fact that for each of these categories of children with services that supports NGO "The Door", has created a service that is dedicated to only one such category. Group dance of the Roma or Egyptian children or musical troupe with people with different abilities. This organization form of services facilitates the data collection and it also allows a better assessment of the situation of children at risk of social exclusion.



## NGO SHIS

The data obtained from ShIS NGO which has worked for several years in Shkodra, there is a greater

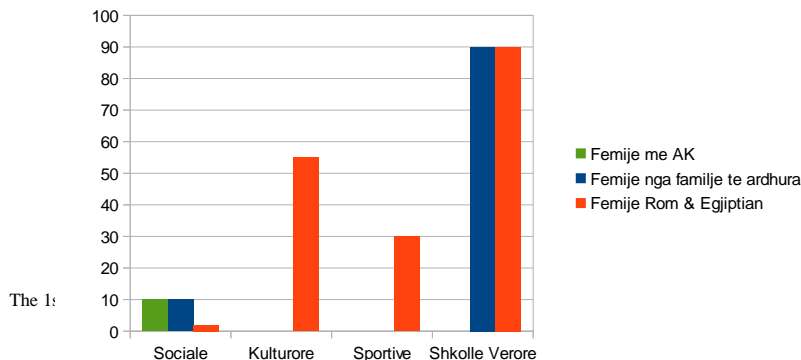
focus on social and cultural services covering both



categories at risk of social exclusion: children from immigrant families and children of Roma and Egyptian origin . Social cultural and sports services for children are offered under the project "Strengthening of 9-year education and increasing skills of the teaching staff of the primary education system." The Project is also extended to some schools in the district of Shkoder, , but in the schools of Shkodra city, were selected: "Ali Lace",and " Ndoc Mazi " school. These schools were selected because they contain the highest number of drop-physical school. Part of the project are students who have a low average to 6. Students receive instructional recovery classes in order to have improvements on the progress of their school. They also participate in the animation classes that are social, cultural, sports, entertainment. From each school there were selected 45 children with an average of no more than 6. Part of the activities of this project are: recovery classes for pupils of the project, animation classes for students of the project, psychological support, training of teachers' staff, etc.

**NGO Malteser**

NGO Malteser, offers social and cultural activities and sports for children for years, through the "Summer Camp" which takes place in the months of July - August in Velipojë beach. Participants in this activity are around 180 Roma children and remote areas as Boge, Bratosh, Sheldi, Gomsiqe and Tropoje. These children belong to families living in extreme poverty, they are abandoned or they do not go to school regularly. During this time the children are divided into three groups of ten days and activities run by volunteers trained by Malteser. Every day children are learning educational programs. The project aims to integrate Roma children and those who come from remote areas into the social life since these groups are all excluded, to increase the level of education and give them the opportunity to have summer vacation because they can nothave holidays with their families because of economic and social reasons. The project covers with social cultural service children of 3-13 years old. Some of social-cultural and sports services that are offered by the NGO Malteser are: kindergarden, speech therapy service.

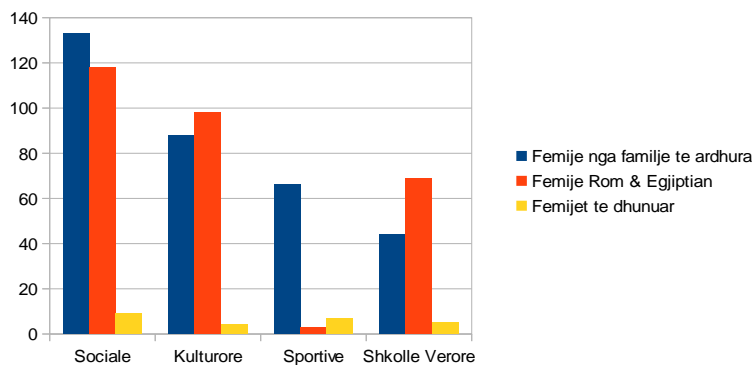


24-25 May 2013,



## **SOS Children's Villages**

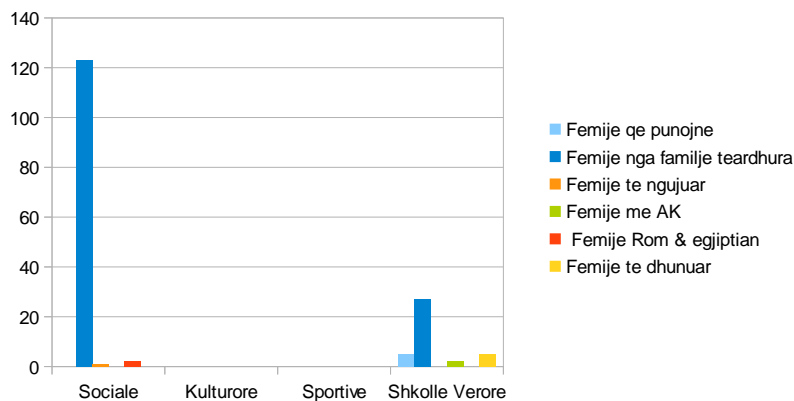
In gathering data, the NGO SOS cultural covers social services, mostly two categories of children at risk of social exclusion 'children from migrated families "and" children of Egyptian origin. "Age-group that supports with services from SOS Children's villages is 4-17 years old. The project through which are provided social services, culture and sport for children is: "Family Empowerment Project". This project operates in the South since May 2008. Based on a bilateral cooperation agreement with the Municipality of Shkodra, SOS Children's Villages implements this project in the area No. 4 and 5. Both regions have distinctive features in social characteristics, due to a combination of economic factors, social and cultural communities of the two regions. These two areas are inhabited mainly by migrated families coming from highlands and families of the Egyptian community. Some of the social and cultural services for children that the project offers are: school educational support, exhibition of environmental drawings, social and educational activities during the winter holidays, educational support after school, participation of children in psychosocial training, excursions, payment for participation in the football team, participation in sports games, etc.



## **Women's Center "Easy Steps"**

According to data gathering and their analysis show that the women's center "Easy Steps", provides coverage to social services, culture and sport, a greater number of categories of children identified to be at risk of social exclusion. However the category of children by migrated families dominates the list of a number of clients that benefit from the services offered by the center. Women's Center "Easy Steps" through two kindergartens in the neighborhood called Mark Lula and Meadows service covers with social and cultural service children from these two remote areas of Shkodra Municipality. Some social, sports and cultural services that offers the

women center "Easy Steps" are: in cooperation with SOS Children's Villages, Women's Center "Easy Steps" organizes Summer School for children.



#### 4. Conclusions:

-Recently, there have been many good efforts positive in terms of providing social services and sports culture, from NGOs to operate in the Municipality of Shkodra, towards the protection of the categories defined by the Regional Strategy 2011 -2013 as children at risk of social exclusion.

- The process of social services tendering, City Hall, conducted in 2010, where thematic projects addressing issues of young children, highlighted from the Social Plan of Shkodra, were a priority of this process, they have brought many improvements and have helped alleviate social exclusion of children, through the projects financing for this target group.

- Many of the NGOs involved in the study, provide social, cultural and sports services for children through 1 or 2 of their projects which have a wider focus than the child target group (eg children's services are provided under the project to provide services for families), except the NGO "The Door" where the projects offered by this NGO are dedicated specifically to social, cultural and sports services for children.

- The age-group of children at risk of social exclusion covered by social cultural and sports services by NGOs involved in the study, is 3-18 years old.

- Categories of children at risk of social exclusion: children from migrated families or children from Roma and Egyptian community have a greater coverage of social, cultural and sports services.

- Still, categories of children at risk of social exclusion as children with disabilities, isolated, raped or working children, result to be uncovered with social, sports and cultural services referring to the data from NGOs involved in the study.

#### Recommendation:

NGOs working with projects with children at risk of exclusion, should be more organized in the recording of data on their customers, divided into categories based on the children of the specified category at risk of exclusion from the Regional Strategy and Plan of Action for children 2011-2013 , and also separated according to gender. Creating a unified model of recording data on the characteristics of children who receive services and types of services, will create more ease in monitoring and evaluation of social cultural and sports services category for children, but it will also avoid duplication of services or their focus to only one category of target group children at risk of social exclusion.

## Reference

1. Allen Rubin and Earl R. Babbie, [Research Methods for Social Work](#), 2010
2. Dominic Abrams, Michales A. Hogg, Jose M. Marques, [The Social Psychology of Inclusion and Exclusion](#), 2010.
3. [The social Regional Plan of Shkodra Municipality](#), 2008.
4. Regional Strategy and Plan of Action for children, 2011-2013.
5. Tood F. Heatherton, Robert E.Kleck, Michele R. Hebl, Jay G. Hull, [The social psychology of stigma](#), 2010.