

Summary of the Regional Conference

"Street Involved Children in SEE – OUR Responsibility"

The regional conference, "Street Involved Children in SEE – OUR responsibility," convened in Belgrade, Serbia on June 7-8 June 2011 at the Palace of Srbija.

The conference was organized as a part of the regional Child Trafficking Response Program in South-eastern Europe (CTRP) of Save the Children Norway and the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia. Support to the conference was provided by differing actors, including the OAK Foundation; the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA); OSCE Mission to Serbia; Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) and Ministry of Justice, Republic of Serbia.

Representatives of national institutions in SEE, including relevant ministries, civil society and international organizations, as well as prominent experts from across Europe were invited. A total of 165 attendees from the following countries 16 were present: Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Switzerland.

The overall objective of the conference was to identify effective models of support and protection services to street involved children in order to prevent or reduce the risks of violence, exploitation and abuse, including minimizing the risks of unsafe child migrations and risks of trafficking.

Key messages and recommendations

The participants of the conference agreed that governments, intergovernmental agencies and civil society should:

- **Ensure that actions addressing street involved children are fully in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC),** which all states in SEE have signed and ratified.
- **In order to ensure a holistic approach to the protection and care of street involved boys and girls, a standardized definition is warranted.** Multiple factors and complexity of causes and issues affecting the lives of socially deprived families, result in children becoming street involved, thus all this should be taken into consideration when developing the definition for each respective country. When developing a definition, participation of children and civil society needs to be secured.
- **The best interest of the child must serve as a primary consideration in all actions seeking to uphold the rights of street involved children.** This aim of developing practical means to implement the best interests' principle is this principle run through all relevant activities proposed.

– Direct work with street involved children (services and interventions) should be standardized and based on a child centered approach which enables *ethical child participation, individual approach, avoidance of repression and timely response*.

➤ **Ensure that street involved children are visible in all relevant national and regional policy discussions.** The rights and needs of street involved children must be a key component and fully integrated in the development and implementation of national and regional (international) policies and programs on child protection.

– National Coordinators to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings are invited to provide political support for systematically addressing the issue of street involved children in their respective countries. One of the proposed models is to get *Parliamentarians* involved through the creation of a parliamentary group in each country, with the purpose of lobbying and monitoring the status of these children (legal and institutional framework).

– National Coordinators to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings are invited to support the acknowledgement of this group of children *in strategic documents and action plans*. This will provide the possibility for action in terms of programs for special prevention, identification and assistance (specialized shelters and programs, e.g. specific programs of supporting newborn children, babies and mothers involved in street).

➤ **Specific assistance should be built into broader national child protection systems.** Child protection systems are made up of a set of components that, when properly coordinated, work together to strengthen the protective environment around each child. These components include multisectoral coordination, child-friendly preventive and responsive services, a child protection workforce and oversight and regulation. Sustainability of programs and services should be ensured, rather than sporadic interventions.

– Experience and expertise of *civil society organizations* working with and for street involved children, parents and communities should be acknowledged and they should be invited to participate in policy development. Effectiveness and flexibility of CSO's work in reaching out to the target group should be recognized as a valuable resource. NGOs should be partners of the government in the development of policies, procedures and delivery of child friendly services.

– In order to enable essential recognition of street involved children as a specific group of children at risk, a systemic approach needs to be taken by the national Governments in the region. Procedures and protocols of intervention with street involved children with clearly defined roles and responsibilities should be developed and standardized at national level with the involvement of civil society. *A task force* directly in charge of street involved children should be formed at local level, involving representatives of relevant services and agencies (police, social services, health, education) and representatives of civil society organizations delivering services to these children.



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➤ **Further develop mechanisms for exchanging information and good practices that promote the best interest of street involved children at both national and regional levels.**

– *Cooperation and strategic partnerships* should be promoted and supported at the regional level, as well as between local authorities in areas where street involved children reside. Further develop regional exchange of information and best practices and the development of guidelines, with involvement of all relevant actors, including NGOs.

– *A unified identification, response and monitoring mechanism* for street involved children should be developed in order to better plan actions, services and resources at national levels. Clear procedures on protection of privacy should be defined.

– There is a need to *raise awareness* of citizens and challenge social norms and attitudes toward street involved children, by defining *common messages and recommendations* to the public on how to act when approached by a street involved child. The public should be informed about the existing services provided to street involved children.