



Empowering Vulnerable Local Communities of Albania

A ONE UN JOINT PROGRAMME

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Dear partners and friends,

We are delighted to bring to you the first edition of the *Empowering Vulnerable Local Communities of Albania* newsletter. Inside, you can read various news and stories related to the programme's work to improve the human security and access to socio-economic and civic rights for Roma and Egyptians in the regions of Tirana, Durres, Elbasan and Fier.

International Volunteer Day (IVD)

Main Events in Tirana

Sharing the best practice of women in the community

On commemoration of 5 December, International Volunteer Day, the Joint Programme joined United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and its partners at a two day Conference on Volunteering for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Tirana. Hatixhe Sula and Albana Veliu, two of the Programme's beneficiaries share with those in attendance their experience on vocational training course and their volunteer initiative to tailor school uniforms for vulnerable children in their neighbourhood. 'One day, the concern was brought up at one of our community based groups meetings. We heard that some Roma and Egyptian children did not attend school because their parents did not have any income and could not afford school uniforms. Four of us (Hatixhe Sula, Mira Cela, Dorina Azemi, and Valbona Veliu) worked together for three days and sewed 15 school uni-



Photo: Hatixhe and Albana, introducing their experience on the vocational training course and their volunteer initiative of tailoring school uniform

forms for the children We are so satisfied that our voluntary work improved somehow the living conditions of our community and promoted voluntarism as a powerful tool for community development'.

Drawing Competition

5 children from Isuf Ferra School in Nishtulla, Durres took part in a drawing competition on the MDGs as a part of activities on International Volunteer Day and received awards for their work. Kreshnik described his work for audience, 'I enjoy using different colours when I draw. Seeing



Photo: Children from Nishtulla explaining their art work on MDGs

my drawings hanged in the wall makes me feel very happy because my teachers, parents and friends can see what I have worked for'.

Regional events remarking Millennium Development Goals

Durres

MDG 1; Eradicate poverty and hunger

40 Roma and mainstream children living in the suburb of Durres met the mayor, Vangush Dako at the Municipal Council to discuss how to improve children's quality of life. Dajana Gallushi said 'This is my first experience joining this kind of activity, I felt excited that I was representing my friends and families from Nishitulla and identify the problems we face every day. Next time when we meet the Mayor, I hope my neighbourhood will have water so I can thank him'. On International Day of Persons with Disabilities, 120 children, who varying degrees of disability, and their parents at PLM School in Durres municipality participated in the art exhibition and enjoyed singing songs and verses together.

Elbasan

MDG 3; promote gender equality and empower women



Photo: Roma and Egyptian men and women partnering to learn gender equality and domestic violence

To mark International Volunteer Day, the joint programme held an activity against domestic violence. 80 Roma and Egyptians, both men and women from 4 communities of Elbasan region exchanged their opinions and freely ask the questions to a lawyer who joined the workshop. One of the community members from Cerrik said, 'Through the discussion with community members in different areas, I learned that not only that domestic violence is very destructive, but also it made me notice that we don't have to wait for others to change common problems. Instead, I think I can start helping others to improve my community.'

Fier

MDG 3; Promote gender equality and empower women

In collaboration with UNDP's Gender Equality and Domestic Violence project, 15 women in Levan learned about the basic concepts of domestic violence, its causes and consequences, and basic information on the law on domestic violence.



Photo: Women in Levan addressing their concerns and exchange their opinions on gender equality and domestic violence

One of the Roma women said, 'domestic violence is widely accepted among Roma communities. It is a widespread and common phenomenon and often women and children as the main victims simply accept it as a fact of life'. She said that this was the first time she had discussed the topic and through the UNDP supported activity, she was able to obtain useful information on the law and the services provided to victims.

Tirana

MDG 2; Achieve Universal Primary Education

"One lessons supportive day", Kamez and Tirane Municipalities on December 6th and 7th, 75 Roma/ Egyptian and mainstream children in Vallias kindergarten and in mini-municipality No. 8, took part in informal primary education activities to



Photo: Roma and Egyptian children learning their basic skills in drawing

learn basic drawing skills, how to sing and dance in a group in collaboration with SHKEJ NGO volunteer. The activities aimed to enhance children's creativity skill, logical thinking as well as to raise awareness of parents on their crucial role in helping children in their educational development.

The activity involved the mayor of Kamez and a local government official and helped them improve their understanding of the specific needs of Roma/ Egyptian pupils. Parents of these children appreciated their participation, 'we are almost all illiterate due to our poverty and social exclusion. We are happy that people from government came to our community and see the situation because it is important that are children become educated'.

Emergency Assistance to flood affected households in Durres



Photo: Roma and Egyptian Volunteer Committee supporter to help community recover from serious floods

After the flooding in Fushe Kruja due to heavy rain, the volunteer committee prepared the local institutions list of families affected by floods. It became a great help for 54 Roma and Egyptian households, who were supplied with hygienic materials and worked together restore their homes after the floods. Bujar Ustai, a member of the local Community Based Organization, said "It is great not to feel we are isolated. My family has been flooded twice in a month. We lost all our belongings. Being close to others that have faced the same challenge encourages me to move forward with positivity."

Essay Competition Ceremony

"The Role and Identity of Roma and Egyptians in an Albanian Intercultural Society"

The essay competition ceremony took place on 15th of December 2010 with the awarding of certificates and prizes to the five winning students. The awards were given to Anisa Proda in first place followed by Enerida Isuf, Semiha Arapi,



Photo: Essay competition awarding ceremony held in UNDP Country Office

Mirijona Taho and Xhekson Cela. The rest of applicants highlighted that the opportunity was useful to start thinking, writing, learning about social issues and the social inclusion of minority and vulnerable communities in Albania.

Anisa Proda, the student of the best essay stated "the more I learned about Roma and Egyptian communities, the more I felt appreciating and valuing their place in Albanian society. They should be respected as human beings. For them, the most valuable gift as people needs to be 'the development the fishing skills rather than the donation of the fish itself'.

Children ready for school, school ready for children



Photo: "Children ready for school, school ready for children" increasing access to quality preschool education for Roma children

In July 2010, two Community Centres of "Useful to Albanian Women" Association, "Today for Future" in Durres and "Today for the Future 2" in Elbasan began the implementation of the 2 years activity "Children ready for school, school ready for children", promoted by UNICEF, as part of the One UN Joint Programme, to increase access to quality preschool education

for Roma children who do not have access to early learning through activities that prepare children for school.

This target group is within Roma and Egyptian communities that are characterized by a high degree of social problems, a high level of poverty, a high unemployment rate, and a lack of education and services and as consequence lack of access to society through civil registration. In addition these communities are affected by high levels of illiteracy and school drop-out rate.

Awareness of Roma and Egyptian communities - The implementation of this initiative began with awareness raising campaigns in zones with a high density of Roma and Egyptian families, to explain to the parents the importance of schooling for their children. In the areas such as Ura e Dajlanit, Shkozet and Keneta in Durres 100 families were contacted, resulting in 25 children between the age of 5 – 8 years old (18 boys and 7 girls) been identified as potential beneficiaries. In Elbasan, awareness raising was focused in the suburbs of city and Rrapishta, where 35 children of age 5 – 8 years old (25 boys and 10 girls) were identified.

Preparatory courses – Immediately after the selection process, in July 2010, there were established and equipped the needed settings in both Community Centres of Durres and Elbasan to welcome these children to attend the prep-up courses. The Community Centres made possible the daily transportation of children to the communities accompanied by the respective social worker of each centre.



Photo: Children going to the first day of school after attending the preprimary classes

During the preparatory courses, 60 children learned daily the alphabet through learning animals' names, illustrated by pictures, writing and reading as well mathematics. The teachers and social workers combined the learning process with entertaining games in order to make children relaxed and engaged and to have an interest in attending school.

Enrolling in schools – After the successful completion of the preparatory courses, children were registered in their respective schools, depending on their place of residence. This process was difficult due to the documentation required for enrolment. The majority were not registered in the State Civil Status Offices. The agreement of cooperation with Directorates of Education, cooperation with Directorates of 9th grade schools, State Civil Status Offices and local municipalities made their registration possible. 25 children were enrolled in the 9th grade schools: "Hasan Koci", "14 Nentori", "Qemal Mici" and "E Re" in Durres, while 35 children were enrolled in the 9th grade schools: "H. Mullisi" and "Q. Haxhihasani" in Elbasan. Children were divided in respective classrooms and their attendance of school has been normal. Periodical meetings were organized with respective teachers to facilitate their integration in school in order to prevent non-attendance.

The respective psychologists and social workers of both Community Centres have organized and monitored meetings between teachers and parents to establish and reinforce the positive reports between both parties and to create a basis for the prevention of school abandonment. Different educational issues and behaviours were addressed during these meetings.

Besides the meetings, psychologists and social workers have regularly monitored child attendance and progress in schools. For example, of 35 children in Elbasan, the results were 1 child "excellent", 8 of them "very good", 12 of them "good", 9 of them "sufficient" and the other 5 children "insufficient".

The Community Centres of Durres and Elbasan, besides supporting children with the daily home-work, organize several activities with the other children, in order to enhance the social inclusion and behaviour through friendship, socialization and the development of self-confidence. The daily activities organized at both centres are different, entertaining, sportive and cultural activities and have positive effect on the children's development.

From 60 children enrolled in the education system, no one has left school. Special attention is dedicated to the relations with children's parents through meetings and discussions. The main topics were their irreplaceable role in the development and education of their children. Periodical meetings were organized with Roma and Egyptian parents to reinforce a good working relationship.

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