COUNTRY REPORT
CENTER AMALIPE

1. Background information/ Introduction.
   - Venue; organizers; participants; methodology used; how report was produced;

The focus group with the children in the so called “vulnerable group” took place at a venue that was specifically chosen to best suit the needs of the children, to provide them with good environment suitable for such kind of sessions. Abreast with that the venue was selected as a good place for the kids to play around and have fun in the same time. The organization of the process was carried out by Center Amalipe and its team. The participating students were of age 14-16 years old boys and girls of Roma background who live in rural areas.

   - Demographic data:

   - Number of children who participated.
The total number of children that participated in the focus group was 15.

   - Ages of the children who participated.
The participants were in age group 14-16 y.o.

   - Gender breakdown.
The gender balance was foreseen and both sexes were represented.

   - Geographical background (where do the children come from in your country, including information on rural or urban area)
All of the participating students come from rural areas (small towns or villages) such as Byala Slatina, Varshets, Peshtera, Snejina, Vodoley. All of the above towns and villages have relatively large Roma population.

   - Ethnicity breakdown
All of the participating kids are of Roma origin, representing different Roma groups.

   - Characteristics of their specific vulnerability (for example disability, living circumstances, etc)
The grounds on which we determined the children’s vulnerability are the fact they live in rural areas with limited access to information or quality education, the fact they belong to ethnic minority which is still largely discriminated and also the fact that some of their parents are unemployed which makes them face other difficulties related to resources.
- **Provide information on the selection process** and explain why you choose this specific group of ‘vulnerable’ children and/or school children; give explanations in case there is no gender balance or other specifics of the groups consulted.

The selection process was based on the methodological framework given. All of the children **have similar ages** for comparability reasons. The participants share common background – all of them are of Roma background and live in rural areas. Such selection was carried out considering the facts that all the children face or potentially will encounter the same problems such as drop out from school, early marriages, violence at school or at home. The gender balance was foreseen and the students worked in a mixed gender group. During the consultation process all children were given the opportunity to participate equally, taking into account the non-discrimination principle.

**Preparation of the children**

- How have children been prepared for the focus group consultations, did they receive information in writing beforehand or in another way, or have the children met before and are known to the facilitators and organisers?
- Has human rights or children’s rights education taken place at the school attended by the children?

The children, their parents and teachers were given precise and accurate information about the consultation process including information about the objectives of the consultation and how their work will fit into a larger process; description of the consultation process (including timescale); the venue and the date; the programme of the consultation day; the number of participants and their ages; the facilitators; logistics and support available.

As of the human rights or children’s rights education at school, most participants share they did not recall having such topic in class.

**Programme/Methodology**

- **Detailed Programme/Methodology** of the focus group meeting(s), should give a broad overview of the methods used, how children were supported to have their say on all the different issues, and how the information was collected, recorded and analysed.

During the consultation process all children were encouraged to have their say on the issues discussed. In the beginning some of them were shy to talk, but a little bit later they all felt comfortable and they could feel the support of the facilitator. The main method used in the consultation was the one of the discussion where everyone could share his or her opinion. The consultation was recorded and later on typed down and analyzed.

- **Location of the Focus group meeting(s)**, describe the environment in which the meeting took place.

The focus group consultation took place at a venue that was specifically chosen to best suit the needs of the children, to provide them with good environment suitable for such kind of sessions. Abreast with that the venue was selected as a good place for the kids to play around
and have fun in the same time. During the consultation process the children were seated in a circle so everyone could see the others.

2. Key Findings.

Analyzing the recorded material of the sessions, the following findings are evident.
- The children share that a lot of them or their peers have problems with attending all classes at school for various reasons. In the same time they speak of older students who wish to continue their education in university but are not able to cover the costs for it. Here they identify everyone’s right to education.
- As they were talking about school and some other difficulties they share that all children should have the right to afford school and books necessary for education.
- Another topic related to the school life was the relations between the students and between the students and the teachers. Here they share stories when some children were discriminated by the teachers. The boys conclude that they have the right to be treated equally and everyone involved in a school fight for instance should be punished.
- The children speak of some traditions in their community and they share the common practice of the early marriages. They explain how important is the girl to be virgin before the marriage. Here the girls share that they want to have the right to decide when to start their sex life and with who. The girls also say that for them is better if they are not virgin before the marriage.
- The participants also recalled some school activities that brought together children of different ethnicity and religion. They speak about it as a nice memory and they say they have the right to participate in more events organized in the school or in the specific village.
- Another issue that was brought up was the drugs at school. The boys shared a story when someone was selling marijuana at school and there were several students buying and smoking it, even some parents smoked some. Overall, the participants believe they have the right to live and study in a drug-free environment.
- The children spoke on some problems at home with their parents – about how and why the punish them. The students say that a lot of parents use physical punishment as a method of maintaining discipline. But the children say they have the right not to be physically punished and they want their parents to use a conversation as disciplinary method.
- Speaking of physical punishments, the participants shared some cases when a student was aggressive to a teacher. Everyone in the group believed that was not right and they say they have the right to live and study in an environment free of aggression.
- A student from the village of Varshets recalled a case when a Roma girl was raped two-three years ago and still a lot of parents are afraid that this might happen again. Here they say they have the right to study in a school free of sexual harassment.

3. Children’s Awareness of children’s rights.

Overall it does not seem that the children are particularly aware of the children’s rights, but all the findings above came up through an open conversation and evidently helped the children be more aware of their rights.
4. **Proposals for policies or actions for children’s rights.**

We definitely do not support the assumption that parental rights are more important than the child's rights and consider their opposition absurd. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was established to recognize the greater vulnerability of children and their relationship than adults. So children's rights are specific rights and they must be settled by a special law, as it dictates the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Our experience shows that families from different strata of society abuse their children or neglect caring for them. In these cases, the state must intervene in accordance with all regulations of national and international legislation. Comments about abuse of the rights of parents by the state were inappropriate. Every modern state has tools with which professionals can intervene when a family violates, neglects and abuses a child. Comments on any unlawful interference by public institutions are not based on practice and statements of this kind are much less important than that to create conditions to prevent any violence and abuse against children by parents. In this context and procedures for anonymous warnings on suspicion of violence, create conditions for the security of incoming signal, which, as practice shows, is often close to the perpetrators and victims, because over 85% of cases of violence against children are carried out exactly within families.

We welcome efforts to create a draft law on child, which covers almost all aspects of implementing child rights. As organization and experts working with children and families, we recognize the need to collect much of the legislation concerning the various rights of children in one place and namely that is why we support this draft law. The state must, however, continue to create policies and services to support families to build their capacity to undertake the challenges of providing environment for their children. That is why we are making efforts to promote "positive parenting" which teaches parents behavior, encouraging the development of children.

5. **Evaluation of the focus group meeting(s).**

The consultation process seems highly valued by the children and their positive reaction to it makes us believe that children experience a great need to talk about their rights, they need to Speak Up! about their rights.