

CHILD LABOUR IN ALBANIA

Report on the current situation and guidelines for action by Albanian trade unions

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Brussels, October 2004

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INTRODUCTION

Until 1990 Albania functioned as one of the most closed regimes and worst dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe. The shift to a market economy has produced to worst excesses, in particular the construction of “pyramid” investment schemes which have destroyed real investment, and the collapse of which led to an acute social crisis, an incipient civil war and the collapse of political institutions (1997). Since then the political situation has stabilised a little. The economic situation remains though highly fragile, making Albania one of the countries suffering the most economic difficulties in Europe.

According to a study in 2002 by the Statistics Institute quoted on the Economist Intelligence Unit’s latest report on Albania, 25% of the Albanian population lives below the poverty threshold (under USD 2 a day) and 5% in extreme poverty (under USD 1 a day), unable to afford even basic food. The social structures from the totalitarian period no longer exist, and the current social security system is far too light to relieve current poverty.

Rising poverty has directly affected the living conditions of Albanian children, who make up a large part of the population: of Albania’s 3.1 million inhabitants, some 33% are under 15 and 40% under 18, according to data published in 2001 by the National Committee on Women and Families. Despite Albanians’ historical and cultural tradition of placing children at the centre of family concerns, some parents are increasingly no longer giving priority to their children’s schooling and preferring to see them working to contribute to family income. Apart from insufficient action by the authorities, a whole series of socio-economic factors exist to explain this situation: economic decline, lack of schools and teachers in certain regions, family breakdown, lack of consciousness of the importance of schooling, vendettas, discrimination against ethnic minorities, etc.

Right now there are no reliable statistics on child labour across Albania. Non-governmental agencies have carried out surveys of specific regions, but not at national level. This number is difficult to assess with any accuracy given that the large majority of these children work in the informal economy. School dropout statistics and observation on the ground suggest, however, the number of Albanian children at work runs into tens of thousands, if we include those visiting school for time to time. According to the Statistics Institute, 32% of children aged 6 to 17 works (some go to school while others do not). A minority of them can be found in the worst forms of child labour: begging, building, refuse recycling, etc.

Combating child labour is one of the priorities of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the world's largest trade union organisation. The ICFTU represents 148 million workers in 234 trade union organisations in 152 countries and territories. The ICFTU has two affiliated organisations in Albania: the BSPSH (Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Albania) and the KSSH (Albanian Trade Union Confederation).

The preparation and publishing of the present report is part of the ICFTU’s campaign against child labour. This campaign seeks in particular to sensitise its affiliated organisations to this question and the support them in any activity undertaken by them

to combat child labour. The present report will serve as a preparatory document for a Conference followed by a round table organised by the ICFTU in Tirana on 11 and 12 October 2004. This event is intended to raise Albanian trade unions' awareness of the child labour and to examine with them policies or actions they could possibly introduce in this field.

This report is the fruit of two weeks' research undertaken in September across Albania in the form of interviews with resource persons (trade unionists, employers, Labour Ministry police, NGOs, ILO-IPEC, UNICEF, etc.) working children and their families, as well as observations on the ground and analysis of other reports on the subject. Given the limited time available for researching and writing it, this report has no pretensions to being either complete or scientific. It should rather be seen as a brief summary of the question, presented from a trade union viewpoint, document which, we hope, will contribute to pointing the way forward for future trade union activity to combat child labour in Albania.

Our particular thanks go to Mr Stavril Liko, Federal Secretary of the Albanian Federation of Teaching and Scientific Trade Unions (affiliated to the KSSH), and to Miss Edla Dylgjeri, the BSPSH's International Relations Manager, for all the help they gave us in preparing and undertaking our research in Albania.

DEFINITIONS

Throughout this report, the expression "child labour" will be used with reference to its definition by the International Labour Organization (1). This is work that is likely to:

- to harm children's health and physical, mental, moral or social development;
- compromise their education:
 - . by depriving them of any schooling;
 - . by forcing them to leave school early; or
 - . forcing them to undertake schooling and professional activities simultaneously, the latter being too long and heavy for them.

As the ILO stresses, it is important to define also the forms of work which are not included in the category of child labour: "the participation of children or adolescents in work that is not harmful to their health and their physical development and which does not interfere with their schooling is generally viewed as a positive experience. Excluded here are household and family activities, those undertaken in family enterprises and activities undertaken outside school hours and during vacation time in order to earn pocket money. Such work contributes to children's development and to their families' well-being, enabling them to acquire skills, habits and experience which will improve their future profitability and productivity as adults." (2)

The expression "worst forms of child labour" is defined as a function of ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour:

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- all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
- the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
- work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

(1) "Eradicating the worst forms of child labour: Guide to the implementation of ILO Convention 182"

(2) Ibid., page 15

ALBANIAN LEGISLATION ON CHILD LABOUR AND COMPULSORY SCHOOLING

Albania has ratified most of the United Nations and Council of Europe conventions, in particular ILO convention no. 138 on minimum working age and ILO convention no. 182 on the worst forms of child labour. It has taken measures to incorporate these conventions into its own legislation, even if gaps remain.

The Albanian constitution contains specific provisions on child protection. Article 54 upholds the right of every child to protection against violence, bad treatment, exploitation and work that can impair its health or morality and endanger its life or normal development.

Albanian legislation defines the age from which a child is allowed to work. This is 16, with an exception for children aged 14 to 16 during school holidays. This must be light work. From age 16 onwards, there are no restrictions on a child working other than a ban on dangerous work until age 18, and a requirement to have received authorisation from the labour inspectorate.

The Council of Minister defined in 2002 what it means by difficult and by dangerous work. Its definition does not, however, extend to all forms of work included in convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour.

Until recently Albanian legislation required children to have completed their eighth year of primary education (equivalent to the second year of secondary school in Western European countries). A child starting primary school at age 6 will reach this level at age 14 if he or she do not have to repeat a class. An amendment to this law took effect at the start of the 2004-2005 academic year: a child now has to successfully complete nine years instead of eight. This new limit affects only children beginning their first year of primary school this year; its practical effects will therefore be felt only eight years from now.

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN ALBANIA

In Albania as elsewhere, the longer a child goes to school the less he or she is likely to have to work. That is why we need to start by looking at the school system.

Government statistics show that the percentage of children of compulsory school age not attending school has fallen to 2% at present, whilst a few years ago it was still as high as 6-7%. However, some of the people we have spoken to question these statistics, pointing out that there is a difference between children who are officially registered in schools and those who regularly attend! This would appear to be particularly pertinent in rural areas where the data supplied by UNICEF further reveal that one quarter of children registered in the first year do not complete their primary education.

Internal migration

There is general agreement that the quality of schooling varies widely in Albania. The phenomenon of internal migration is partly to blame: since the fall of the dictatorship, thousands of families have left the country areas and come to settle in the towns in search of work. This migration has had various consequences for education:

- 1) In the country areas abandoned by families who have left for urban areas, there are sometimes no longer enough children for a school to be maintained. Thus some schools have closed, while others survive in abnormal conditions, e.g. with only one or two pupils or just one teacher for the whole school. Sometimes it is the teachers themselves who have left rural areas in order to try to earn a better living in urban areas, abandoning schools which then have great difficulty in recruiting new teachers.

The problem is even greater for secondary schools in rural areas: they are of course less numerous, and this sometimes means that pupils have to spend many hours a week travelling back and forth from home to school. The distances they have to cover are not so great, but in mountainous areas the roads are often very poor.

- 2) In urban areas that have recently been settled by thousands of families from remote regions, the number of schools or the capacity of existing schools have not increased apace with the growth of the local population. As a result classes are often overcrowded in the towns, which clearly has a negative impact on the quality of the education provided. Classes of over 40 pupils are frequent in urban areas, and there are often classes of 50 pupils in Tirana. Such conditions mean it is hard to expect teachers to pay special attention to problem pupils, although these are the ones most likely to leave school and start working. Private schools do exist and offer better conditions, but their cost is beyond the reach of most Albanians.

Registering migrant families with the local authorities is sometimes problematic too. Certain children are not known to the local authorities, which will consequently not take measures against their parents if they do not send

them to school (it should be noted that local authorities generally do not take action in such circumstances, even if the children are registered).

Little motivation to teach in remote regions

It is often difficult to motivate properly qualified teachers to go and teach in remote villages, where the schools are often poorly equipped, though there has been a little progress. According to UNICEF, 30% of rural schools have no toilets, and this often discourages girls from continuing going to school once they reach adolescence. Lengthy travel, unattractive local life and the small number of children are additional reasons for qualified teachers to stay in the towns, let alone the fact that the prospect of pay rises in these remote regions are negligible. Thus schools in rural areas are often obliged to employ teachers without the diplomas usually required for teaching at the respective levels. That applies to 20 to 25% of Albanian teachers.

The “brain drain” is partly to blame for the shortage of teachers. The annual report on Albania for 2004 by “The Economist Intelligence Unit” states that about 40% of newly qualified Albanians left the country during the 1990s, and that most Albanian students studying in Western universities do not return to Albania when they finish their studies.

Discouraging pay

Teachers are poorly paid in Albania, although the government has improved their pay to a greater extent than that of most other public sector employees in order to persuade them to stay in their profession: a primary school teacher is paid about 150 euros a month. *“It is not possible to live decently on so little in Albania”*, explains Bajram Kruka, chairman of SPASH (Independent Trade Union of Albanian Teachers, affiliated to BSPSH). *“Certain teachers consequently have another job after school, or urge their pupils to ask them for private lessons. In Tirana, for instance, private mathematics lessons cost about 7 euros an hour.”* The poorest families cannot afford such expense, and this can discourage their children from attending school. The brightest pupils do not need these private lessons and they pass their examinations even if their teacher is not very motivated during the normal lessons.

Insufficiently child-centred education

Teaching methods in Albania have changed little in recent years. Teaching is generally provided in a mechanical fashion with no real attempt being made to motivate children and develop their potential or to adapt lessons for children with learning difficulties. Some teachers’ behaviour towards the children is inappropriate: *“Corporal punishment is still sometimes administered in Albania”*, explains Altin Hazizaj, the director of CRCA (Children’s Human Rights Centre of Albania). *“Children are frequently humiliated and subjected to degrading language. This clearly has a negative impact on learning, since the victims of such behaviour are terrified at the idea of going to school and being humiliated verbally in front of the other pupils”*. Such practices were already common during the dictatorship.

The cost of schooling

One year ago, the Albanian government introduced the practice of providing school books in the form of an interest-free loan. That initiative has reduced the cost of schooling for children, though the families we met told us that the annual budget required for primary schooling still varies between 20 and 30 euros per child per year. That sum covers school supplies and some clothes. Such an amount of money is very hard to find for tens of thousands of Albanian families: as we stated in the introduction, 25% of the population has to survive on an income of under two euros a day, and 5% on less than one euro a day.

Procedure in the event of failure to comply with obligatory school attendance

Normally, when a child is absent from school for a lengthy period, the school informs the local authorities, which are supposed to contact the parents and, if necessary, impose a fine if the child does not come back to school. This procedure was applied during the dictatorship, but it has become practically obsolete nowadays, certainly as regards any sanctions against parents. Sometimes head teachers or other teachers contact parents who are not sending their children to school, but this is not done systematically and does not really involve the authorities much.

THE MAIN AREAS IN WHICH CHILDREN WORK

Below we will list the main areas in which child labour is practised. We would emphasize that this list is not necessarily complete and that the areas are not listed based on the number of children involved, since such statistics are generally unknown. The list is based on observations made during the ICFTU's research in Albania, on what was said to us by people we met and on existing reports on these matters.

A) Farming

Shortly after the fall of the dictatorship farming land, which had been state property, was distributed to families in country areas. Since Albania is mostly mountainous, there was not that much farmland available, so families got a couple of acres each at best, which are not enough to make a living. *"Few farmers' families can meet their needs in Albania from farming alone"*, states Alfred Xhomo, of the farming union FSBUTSH (Federtata E Sindikatave Të Bujqësisë Ushqimit Dhe Tregtisë Të Shqipërisë, affiliated to KSSH), a union which claims to have 13,000 members. *"Consequently some members of the family leave for the town to find work and others go abroad. The money sent home by these migrants has enabled some farmers' families to invest in a minimum number of tools and thereby increase their crop yields, some of which can be sold, though this is not enough to earn a decent living."* Nevertheless, agriculture remains the main sector in the Albanian economy, representing about 50% of the gross national product in 2002. It is the source of income of half the Albanian population.

Child labour in farming can be explained in part by the fact that adult family members have gone abroad or to towns to try to earn more money. If, for example, the father, the elder brother or the uncle is away from the fields, they are replaced by one or more children from the same family, especially during harvesting. Children occupied in farming activities will increasingly be absent from school and will sometimes stop going altogether. The absence of major NGOs in remote regions exacerbates the phenomenon of interrupted and abandoned schooling.

The difficulties of the school system in certain country areas (see pages 7-8) and the lack of motivation of certain farmers' families to send their children to school are other causes explaining why child labour is widespread in the Albanian countryside. One of the people we talked to explained that he had talked to a shepherd who questioned the point of sending his children to school, since he reckoned that their only prospect for the future was to herd sheep like him.

While all the people we talked to agreed that farming is one of the sectors in which most child labour is to be found in Albania, they also stress that in almost all cases the work is done in the company of relatives or family friends who are expected to make sure the children do not do the most dangerous jobs.

B) Hawking small goods on the street or at markets

The Albanian section of UNICEF estimates, on its website, that about 8,000 children work on the streets during school hours. However, the people we talked to said most children who sell goods on the street or at markets do the work outside school hours. They go to school the rest of the time, but it is easy to imagine how tired they must be when they reach school after several hours of work on the streets that morning or the previous evening.

Because of the limited time available for our research, we were able to interview only ten children selling goods on the streets. They all assured us that they went to school the rest of the time, except one Roma boy aged 14 who runs a little stall at the Korca market, where he sells mobile phone accessories, cigarette-lighters and other small goods. He explained his story as follows: *“I left school after five years because although I had good marks I didn’t like going there. I didn’t have any friends there. For a time, I hung around doing nothing, and then someone who knows my family asked if I could help him sell these goods at the market. He has a son aged 11 who goes to school. I earn 3 dollars a day and I give it all to my family. I work seven days a week, from 6.30 a.m. to 3 p.m. I want to go and work in Greece. My half-brother is there already. The only problem is finding a way of getting there. Then I could send money back to my family”*.

C) Making shoes and clothes

Clothing and shoes represent two-thirds of Albania’s exports for 2002. The sector developed into its present form after the fall of the dictatorship partly thanks to foreign investment (most of the undertakings existing before 1991 have closed since they were not competitive). Many undertakings in this sector are subcontractors of firms based in the European Union, particularly in Italy. Most of them receive raw materials imported from abroad and they make them into clothes or shoes, most or all of which are then exported.

This sector is concentrated along the Albanian coast, especially around the ports of Durrës and Vlora, and also in some large towns such as Tirana and Shkodra. It employs about 40,000 people at the present time. Salaries vary depending on what is produced and the work is generally organised as a production line. The lowest salaries are about 100 euros a month in this sector, and the highest are generally no more than 200 euros a month (except for highly qualified workers).

Trade unions are often persecuted in the factories of this sector. The trade union federation representing the sector, which is affiliated to the KSSH, claims to have 5,000 members amongst the 40,000 workers in this sector, whilst the federation affiliated to the BSPSH claims the same number of members. The trade unions generally try to strike up a relationship of trust with an employer before starting to organise the workforce since many workers interested in the trade union movement have been dismissed when their employer has discovered their interest. In other cases, employers spread false information about trade unions among their employees, arguing that unionization would lead to job losses.

1) Child labour on the premises

In both the clothing and shoe industries factories employ minors aged under 18 and sometimes under 16. Most of the people we talked to said it was the parents of these children, or even the children themselves who are forced by poverty into pleading with the factories for jobs. The young people – most of whom are girls - even go as far as to forge their identity papers, so as to claim they are 18 years old, which prevents problems and helps them get employment.

The Berttoni shoe factory employs 850 workers, making it the largest employer in the town of Shkodra. Its shoes are produced for well-known brands such as Klondike, Sergio, Woodstone and Landrover. Its customers are mostly Italians and its labour force is mostly female. The manager of this business, Paulin Radovanni, comes up against the problem of forged papers. *“I am not interested in employing girls under 18”,* he explains. *“They produce less and I run the risk of problems with the factory inspectorate or my customers, who require all workers to be aged over 18 years. Nevertheless, certain women whom I employ beg me to employ their daughter as well, even if she is under age. They say they do not want to leave their daughter alone at home, that it is too dangerous, or else that their family is so poor that they must have their daughter working. I tell them it is impossible, but a few weeks later they come back with identity papers showing that their daughter is 18 years old or more! So I think there must be some girls aged 16-17 years or maybe even younger among my staff. It is so easy to forge papers here!”*

The manager of Berttoni says he wants a dialogue with the trade union organisations. He says he would like to be able to offer better salaries to his workers, but that the prices that he is forced to accept do not leave him much room for manoeuvre: *“I know that my workers are not satisfied with the wages I give them.... But I am not happy with the prices I get for my goods, either. They supply me with the raw materials and then pay me 1.90 or 2.00 euros for a pair of finished shoes. The same pair would cost them 4.6 euros in Romania. How could I pay my workers better with such low prices? I have to cover all my costs, including the electricity generators, since lengthy power cuts are a regular occurrence in Shkodra.”*

In this paradoxical situation where major international buyers are allowed to impose their prices on their suppliers, it is clearly no easy matter for an employer in a country like Albania to offer a decent salary to his workers, who would then no longer need to forge their children's papers to try to get them employed as well.

However, sometimes exploitation of workers goes beyond pay. For instance, Gëzim Kalaya, the chairman of BSPSH, reports that he received a visit from a delegation of six women employed by the Filanto shoe factory at Durrës at the beginning of September. Two of them were only 18 years old: *“They explained that a large number of employees were working without contracts and so without insurance and employers' social security contributions being paid. They said they were only paid for eight hours of work though they worked overtime, sometimes up to 14 hours a day. They complained of sexual harassment by a foreign manager. They said that many girls aged 16 and 17 are employed by Filanto, and some are aged only 15, and that when the factory inspectorate visits the factory, a female manager gives them*

forewarning and tells them to go and hide in a depot during the visit. So far, there is no trade union at Filanto.”

Of course, the accusations made by these young women need to be checked before we can be sure of the facts, however all the trade unionists we met confirmed that this firm has strongly anti-union practices. Serious problems involving the use of chemical products have also been alleged with regard to Filanto, especially in its factory in Tirana.

2) Child labour in the home

In the shoe industry home work is commonly used for the simpler tasks, such as sewing various leather components by hand, in order to make the outline of a shoe, or sewing on certain decorations by hand. The more complex stages in the process, such as sticking soles, need to be done in the factory with the correct equipment. We have not yet come across a sufficiently detailed study covering the whole of Albania enabling us to calculate the number of businesses using home work. Some of the people we talked to thought the number was declining, but they were unable to back up their opinion.

When work is done in the home, children may well be involved, particularly since it is the poorest families that do this kind of work. In Shkodra, for example, the families of people working at home for the firm Berttonni describe what amounts to very serious exploitation (though the manager of Berttonni states that he does not use home work): *“My daughter, Aurora (author’s note: the name has been changed), is employed at Berttonni during the daytime for a salary of about 100 dollars a month”,* explains a lady from Shkodra. *“She works from 6.30 a.m. to 3 p.m., with a 30 minute break. With five children at home, it is not possible to survive on this salary. So she tries to get Berttonni to give her the parts of the shoes that she can sew by hand at home after her working day. She is paid between 1.5 and 2 dollars for sewing 20 pairs of shoes. It is very little, but the worst thing about it is the time within which she must complete this work: very often, she has only 24 or 48 hours in which to finish it. All the family helps her to finish the work in time, including her 8-year-old daughter. Berttonni does not receive enough orders from his customers to be able to supply us with shoes every day. We receive some about once a week. I know we are not paid properly for our labour, but we have no other choice.”*

A woman who is the neighbour of this woman employed by Berttonni explains: *“Sometimes she works half way through the night on these shoes, after already working all day in the factory, but she realizes by 3 or 4 in the morning that despite all her efforts and the help of her relatives and children she will not manage to finish all the shoes in time, so she comes to us, her neighbours, and wakes us up, and we help her, because we help each other out a lot. If the 24 hour deadline is not observed, only ten pairs of shoes will be paid by the woman from Berttonni, even if we have finished nineteen. And even worse: if you don’t finish your work on time just once, they won’t give you any more shoes to sew at home for a long time. But we need them to feed our families. That is why we ask our children to help us.”*

The children of the families of people working at home whom we met all go to school, but sometimes they miss some days when they have to help their parents to sew shoes at home. Unless they are careful, these few days may become a regular occurrence and lead to poor performances at school, or even dropping out of school in the longer term. *“We appreciate the importance of going to school”,* explains Aurora. *“Nevertheless, many children in our part of town stay away regularly to help their parents with sewing shoes at home. We don’t really have the choice; if we did you can be sure that we would love our children to have full opportunities to study.”*

It would be easy to blame Bertoni for the exploitation of the workers, for which the firm is indeed responsible. However, shouldn't we really be looking higher up for those who are truly responsible for these mediaeval working conditions? The guilty parties are surely the big buyers in Italy or elsewhere, who are forcing Albanian firms to accept prices as indecent as 1.9 euros for a pair of shoes that will be retailed for at least 40 or 50 euros in shops just a few hours away, on the other side of the Adriatic Sea?

A broader investigation in factories producing clothing and shoes and a large number of visits to the homes of the workers would be necessary in order to get a clear idea of the extent of child labour in this important sector of the Albanian economy.

D) Car wash establishments

Car washing is an activity in which numerous young people under the age of 18 can be found in Albania. Many car wash outfits are situated somewhere between the informal economy and officially registered activities. They generally employ only one or two people. These small dimensions keep away the factory inspectors, who generally concentrate on bigger businesses. At Korca, we met several children who have completely given up going to school and are working full time in this sector. *“A car owner pays 3 dollars to have his car washed”,* declares Leonard, a young Roma aged 16 years. *“I earn about 5 dollars a day, working 9 to 19 hours, and I give it all to my family (my parents don’t have a steady job, they sell small goods on the streets). I have two younger brothers who go to school. I would have liked to continue attending school, but I went only for four years, under a project for pupils who were behind in their schooling set up by an NGO. I didn’t want to go to a state school after that because the children at my level would have been much younger than me. And then my family needs my salary to survive.”* Marenglen, Leonard’s older brother, is working in another car wash establishment in Korca. He is 19 years old and left school at the age of 10. *“Leonard’s salary and mine are practically all our family has to live on. I did well at school, but I had no friends, and the others often picked fights with me. Economic problems also made me decide to stop going to school.”*

Whereas Leonard and Marenglen left school after a few years, one of their cousins has never been to school at all. He is 16 years old now, and has been working as a car washer for six years. *“I never went to school because my parents couldn’t afford to buy what I needed for the lessons – clothes, exercise books and so on. There are ten of us in the family, living in one room, and I am the only one who brings home a regular income. Sometimes I am very ashamed of being illiterate. Then I sit down with a newspaper and pretend I am reading it, so as not to be too ridiculous.”*

E) Sorting through rubbish in the streets or at the tips

In the large towns of Albania, children, alone or accompanied by their parents, sort through rubbish at the municipal tip to recuperate things they can then re-sell. This is one of the most degrading of all forms of labour, and it is often done by the Roma, under the pressure of extreme poverty.

Sometimes a little help from outside is enough to dissuade parents from asking their children to do this work and to send them to a school. This has happened in Korca, where the NGO “Ndihmë për Fëmjet” (NPF – “Help the children”), supported by the ILO’s IPEC programme, has managed to convince numerous Roma families to send their children to school (see the explanation about this kind of project on page 27). The material aid provided by the NGO in the form of clothes for the children and extra food has made it possible for certain families to give up sending their children to work, at least during school hours.

Maxim is 38 years old and the father of two boys aged 11 and 12. He is one of the Roma parents who have decided to give their children the opportunity of a happier future thanks to the NPF initiative. He tells us all about it: *“Every day I go to the rubbish tips at 5 a.m. and I stay there until 4 p.m., in order to collect beer cans. I get one dollar per kilo and on good days I can collect two. I always wanted my children to go to school because I don’t want them to end up like me when they are adults, with reading and writing problems. I made the mistake of stopping going to school after two years when I was a child, partly because I got in with the wrong crowd. The problem is that I had no money to pay for decent clothes for my children to go to school in. Now they can go, and they no longer come with me to the rubbish tips except during the school holidays, though not when NPF organises recreational activities for them, like the circus course this summer.”*

Maxim and his children are not yet out of the quagmire, however. Their improved economic situation depends entirely on continued support from NPF, and their home is very makeshift. The room they live in has no heating. It has been set up in old warehouses, and they share washing facilities with four other families in a similar state of poverty. Hanne, 34, is one of Maxim’s neighbours. She lives with her husband and an adopted child in another little room. She can embroider but cannot find any work now, since the man who used to buy her embroidery to sell in nearby Greece no longer visits her (he used to pay her about 10 dollars for three days of work). She roams the streets in search of beer cans to recycle. *“I’ve been doing it with my son for several years, since I couldn’t leave him at home. He is 8. Now he will be able to go to a school thanks to the help from NPF, so I will no longer need to take him with me. It’s very hard work and there are more and more people doing it, leading to more competition between collectors, and I now have to leave in the middle of the night if I want the chance to collect beer cans, because if I arrive at 5 in the morning, others have been there before me and there is practically nothing left.”*

F) Begging

Children are forced by their relatives to go begging, either on their own or with adults, in the streets of the major cities. In downtown Tirana, for example, children of at times no more than three or four years are placed alone on the pavements to draw the pity of passers-by, watched at a distance by adults who regularly come to collect the coins thrown to them. These adults are often the children's relatives or parents, but some of the children have been "hired" from their parents by family acquaintances who organise begging networks. The large majority of these children forced to beg are of Roma extraction. According to the municipality of Tirana, at least 150 such children have been identified by social workers in certain parts of the capital, but their number could rise to several hundred for Tirana as a whole, and more for the country as a whole. The majority of them are under 10 years old and have never been to school.

Nothing particular is done at the moment to assist these children. The police do not know what to do since there is virtually nowhere to refer these children. A children's rights protection unit has recently been set up in Tirana, which aims to create a centre to which children found begging in the city could be brought, and where they could receive medical treatment and basic schooling, though not a long-term reception centre. The municipality's aim appears rather to be to remind parents of their responsibility and duty to send their children to school, and not to force their children to beg etc. The idea is that the children should return to their families after a time and that only in extreme cases (being caught begging again, total absence of parental responsibility, etc.) should they be entrusted long-term to specialist institutions (orphanages).

At Shkodra, "Every Child", an IPEC programme partner NGO, has already succeeded in convincing parents who go begging not to take their children with them. Thanks to a little food provision and sensitisation to the importance of schooling (see description of the IPEC project on page 27), a Roma mother of four has decided that her two youngest daughters, aged 10 and 12, would no longer go out begging with her but would attend school. The two older daughters, aged 16 and 18, are too old to go to school, and the family prefers them not to work outside the apartment in order to preserve their reputation with a view to marriage...

G) Building work

Building work is a rapidly expanding sector in Albania. Almost everyone we spoke to stressed that child labour is an exception in this sector: employers prefer adult men, who are stronger and available in large numbers on the labour market. Sheriff Bulky, chairman of the Construction Workers' Trade Union (a BSPSH member), nonetheless believes that no less than 20% of construction workers are under 16. *"A very large number of construction workers are employed without any employment contract",* he explains, *"which is why minors can be hired. Employers pay them less. Work inspections are not efficient: sometimes an entire building is put up with just a few correctly-employed workers, with the rest employed unofficially by the construction company. The work inspectors are well aware of this, but do not take any action."*

His KSSH opposite number Riza Bengazi, chairman of the trade union Federation of Albanian construction, woodworking and public service workers, has a different opinion when it comes to child labour in this sector: in his view the only children working in construction in Albania do so in order to help their parents build their own homes, and there is almost no child labour in registered construction companies.

The accidents that are reported from time to time in the Albanian media reveal in any event that children are indeed employed in the construction industry in Albania, though it difficult to gain a precise idea of the size of the problem without more detailed investigation. For example Albanian newspapers reported in early September 2004 the death of a 14 year-old boy who fell from scaffolding whilst working as a painter on a building site at Cërrik, not far from Elbasan. When tragic events like these occur, the newspapers make mention of other mortal accidents on construction sites involving children, pointing out the extent to which these children are exploited by being paid less than adults working on the same sites.

H) Mining

According to Gëzim Kalaya, President of the BSPSH (Albanian Confederation of Free Trade Unions) and himself a former mine worker, young people aged under 18 are employed in various mines across the country without labour contracts or adequate safety equipment. Gani Lama, President of the BSPSH's Tirana branch, and himself a former miner, confirms that: *“These are 16 or 17 year-old adolescents, working particularly in chromium mines, at Bater, Bulqiza, Borje, Klos and elsewhere, and earning just 55 euros a month.”*

Further investigation would be necessary to confirm whether, and to what extent, workers under the age of 18 can be found in the mining sector.

I) Car window cleaning at street crossroads

This activity exists in particular at Tirana, organised into networks in which, some of our interviewees told us, members of the working children's families are involved.

J) Other informal economy activities

Some of the types of work mentioned above are already part of the informal economy. It is these that were most frequently cited by those I spoke with. However, child labour runs right through the informal economy. There are children odd-jobbing as waiters or dish-washers in cafés and restaurants, loading and unloading trucks and stacking warehouses, producing craft objects, helping mechanics in back-street garages, shoe-shine boys, child ticket sellers in trains and buses, carrying luggage at the airport, etc.

We met Ahmed, a 14 year old Roma boy from Shkodra, who had never attended school until his family received help from the IPEC programme partner ONG "Every Child". He helps his father when the latter has work loading trucks for a small

company in Shkodra. *“Ten other children work from time to time in this company”, he explains. “I began helping my father when I was ten. The work is hard and a little dangerous because you have to move fast, at times I get my fingers crushed between the crates we load on and offer the trucks. I’m paid between four and eight euros a day. I go to the company on mornings between 5 and 11, then I rest a little and follow the courses organised by “Every Child” from 3 to 5 in the afternoon.”*

Ahmed's father, aged 48, explains that with a wife and four children at home (two others have left for Tirana), he was unable to pay for his children's schooling before the food aid from "Every Child". *“We do really need Ahmed's earnings to buy enough to eat”, he explains. “I am happy that he can now go to school a bit, but without the food help it would not have been possible, as there are the clothes and school things that a child needs in order to go to school. I’m a fighter and am ready to do the most degrading work if necessary, but there is no regular work for people like me from the Roma community. We are discriminated against. Almost everything I earn goes on food and on medicine for my 18-year old daughter, who has blood circulation problems. I hope that my children will have more opportunities than me in life. Ahmed will at least be able to read and write, and that will certainly help him.”*

K) Trafficking

This is of course not a job as such, but in addition to the tens of thousands of Albanian children at work, we should remember that thousands of others have been victims of trafficking to foreign countries (total number put variously at between 5,000 and 15,000). Greece and Italy have been the first port of call, but certain of these children have then been taken to other western European countries. In most cases the networks organising this trafficking force the children into begging, prostitution or small-scale street selling. Cases of disappearing children have also been reported across Albania, and disgraceful cases of trafficking in human organs have been publicly disclosed.

Given that this report is focused on the situation of children working in Albania, we will not go into the details of this trafficking. Recent publications by the ILO-IPEC Programme, “Terre des Hommes” and the CHRCA (Children's Human Rights Centre of Albania) have produced detailed studies of the trafficking of Albanian children to other European countries. The extent of this trafficking appears to have decreased somewhat in recent months, partly due to action by the Albanian authorities (in particular tightening anti-trafficking legislation and penalties), cooperation between the Albanian and Italian police forces (for example in the fight against the “speedboats” carrying numerous trafficking victims to Italy), to prevention campaigns by NGOs (some with IPEC support) in the highest risk areas and a growing awareness in part of the population of the dangers involved in leaving the country to seek one's fortune abroad. However, the profits to be made (an Albanian child begging in the streets of Athens picks up 30 euros a day on average) remain attractive enough for some families to hand over their children to traffickers, or for young people living in problem families to try their luck abroad.

MAIN REASONS FOR CHILD LABOUR IN ALBANIA

Various socio-economic factors come together to explain the existence of child labour in Albania. When we speak of “socio-economic” factors, often it is the economic aspects that are presented as the main causes. “Social” reasons are, however, at least as important: there are very poor Albanian families fighting with all their might to find the wherewithal to send their children to school, whilst others, sometimes less poor, do not send them.

Child labour, or a child dropping out of, or having never attended school, does not generally depend on a single one of the factors listed below, but on a combination of several of them. That is why we have not attempted to rank them by order of magnitude.

1) The economic situation

Unemployment

According to the Albanian trade unions, lack of work is the single most important factor explaining family poverty, and hence the recourse to child labour. Official statistics talk of 15% unemployment, but trade unions give figures of 35% or more in certain cities. Trade unions also deplore the fact that over 65% of these are long-term unemployed, i.e. out of work for over one year. The unemployment benefit of around EUR 30 a month, is totally insufficient to cover a family’s basic needs. By way of comparison, kitting out a child for school costs around EUR 30 a year.

Wage levels

Albanian wages are some of the lowest in Europe, whilst the cost of living has risen constantly in recent years. *“The minimum wage is currently EUR 80 a month in Albania, with average salaries of EUR 160 a month”*, explains Kastriot Muco. *“But the cost of goods has risen, to levels which are no longer well below those found in western Europe. According to a tripartite study carried out two years ago, a 4-person family needs 300 euros a month to live decently. A large part of the Albanian population is below this level. Upgrading wages would certainly end up improving the situation of children in Albania.*

Internal migration

The lack of opportunities for earning a living in the remoter regions of Albania has led, and continues to lead thousands of families to move to the urban centres. This internal migration, very limited during the period of dictatorship, has given rise to major suburbs around the main cities, with anarchically-constructed buildings, and no planning. However, the number of jobs available in these urban regions is still far lower than the number of immigrants. To meet their families' basic food needs many parents feel forced to ask their children to work. One of the most frequent small-time jobs undertaken by these children of migrant families consists of selling small goods (cigarettes, fruit, chewing gum, mobile phone accessories etc.) in the city centres.

The case of Rifat, the 36-year old father of five children living for the past five months in Kanza (north of Tirana), clearly illustrates the difficulties encountered by migrant families in making ends meet. Three of his children are under six years old, which means that they don't yet go to school. The oldest is aged 10 and goes to school, but the second is seven and Rifat is wondering how he is going to be able to pay for school. *"The books are free, but we have to find at least EUR 30 per child in school to pay for supplies and a few clothes. This is very difficult for a family like ours: we left the village of Lukan in the north of the country, to come close to Tirana in order to live less poorly, but jobs are scarce here. I am a building worker, but I find work just one day a week. For it I receive 8 euros, maximum 10 a day, and I find work around 10 days a month. On top of this I receive 20 euros a month in unemployment benefit. But the fact is that, in order to live decently, a seven-person family (five children, my wife and I) needs 300 to 400 euros a month. We could survive on 180 euros a month, but we have to add to this the cost of healthcare in winter; we don't have heating and the children are often sick. I would like all my children to complete primary school, but I do not see how I will be able to pay for their schooling"*.

Migrating families within Albania also have administrative consequences: certain families fail to complete registration formalities in their new municipalities, making it that much more difficult to check whether children are in school when they should be. Certain migrant families have also kept their homes in their region of origin and shuttle between their old and new homes. These frequent changes obviously upset the children's schooling.

B) Shortage or absence of schools or teachers in certain remote regions

The shortage or absence of schools and/or teachers in certain remote areas of Albania is due in part to the phenomenon of internal migrations described above. This lack of schooling opportunities in certain remote regions can also affect school absenteeism in urban regions too: children aged 9 or 10 who have never attended school (or very little) before accompanying their families to urban areas, feel too old to enter the lower primary classes alongside 6- or 7-year olds.

C) Dysfunctional families

The number of single-parent or recomposed families is rising fast in Albania. Divorces and parents leaving to go abroad are some of the causes of this development. The growing economic problems are also producing more chronic sickness leading to the death of one parent or the need for major efforts to keep him or her alive. Economic deterioration has pushed thousands of Albanian families into situations of despair, and at times into alcoholism. *"One index of this despair is the sharp rise in the number of suicides in recent years. These were rare under the totalitarian system,"* Kastriot Muco explains. *"We also observe mounting family tensions, in particular a rise in crimes between spouses."* Conjugal violence is widespread: according to UNICEF data, around 59% of Albanian children say they have witnessed forms of domestic violence.

Dysfunctional family situations inevitably hurt the children. For torn-apart families, a child's schooling is not generally the number one priority, and even if the child does attend school, s/he will be less well supervised by parents or relatives in crisis families.

D) Lack of awareness in certain families of the importance of schooling

There is probably no one family in Albania who would say that schooling has no use. On the other hand it is certain that for many families with difficulties, offering normal schooling to their children is not a priority. As mentioned above, 25% of the Albanian population lives on under two dollars a day. For them, the first priority is to earn enough money to feed the family every day, pay for medicines when they are sick (which occurs more frequently among economically disadvantaged groups) and buy clothing to survive the winter in unheated slums.

Having said that, even in the most desperate economic situations parents who are genuinely convinced of the vital importance of schooling find the wherewithal to send their children to school. This is where the shoe pinches for some families with difficulties: the lack of job prospects for some, the absence of family traditions of sending children to school for others (in particular among many Romas), or a combination of these and other reasons, lead many Albanian families to neglect the importance of schooling.

Some schools are doing everything possible to convince parents of the importance of schooling. One example is in Kamza, a town to the north of Tirana, which is home to one of Albania's largest primary schools, with 2,600 pupils. Its statistics show that the number of pupils dropping out of school over the years has fallen from 80 in 1999-2000 to 15 in 2003-2004. In this region where the large majority of inhabitants are migrants from the north of the country, the school's head, Zyber Sinani, explains that teacher support for parents, the school management and other parents have contributed to reducing the dropout rate. *"Both the school management and the parents' committees have sought to encourage teachers to visit families of children who are no longer turning up for lessons. Teachers can exercise strong powers of persuasion on parents, and get them to understand the vital importance of schooling. Once a month we organise meetings of all parents, class by class. Parents of children who are doing well as school can in this way share their experience with those whose children are finding it more difficult. We try to do our best to advise these parents. Where the results do not improve, again we encourage the teachers to visit the pupils' homes to try and find solutions."*

E) Poor application of legislation on the minimum working age and compulsory school attendance

Only rarely are people punished for employing minors under the legal age. Labour inspectors, even where specifically trained in child labour questions, are often powerless to tackle the problem: they are too few in number, too poorly equipped, confronted with forged papers presented by certain workers and unsure how to set about pursuing employers in the informal economy, which is by far the largest. *"I know that the stallholders are employing children in the market,"* a woman labour inspector in Skhodra admits, *"but these stalls are not registered, so how can we prosecute them?"* *Apart from reporting them to the tax authorities, I don't see what I can do. And then, if we put the employer out of work, what happens to the child? Won't his situation be worse if he's without a job?"*

As explained above, the Albanian authorities have all but given up prosecuting violations of the legislation on compulsory schooling. No one is therefore surprised to see this legislation made a mockery of.

F) Vendettas

Crimes of vengeance are a centuries-old tradition in certain regions of Albania, in particular in the North and North-East of the country. Vengeance can be directed by one family against another following an offence, another crime, a dispute on the distribution of land, etc. *"Vendettas were vigorously repressed by the Albanian authorities during the dictatorship,"* explains Kastriot Muco, President of the KSSH confederation, *"but have reappeared since. One aggravating factor is that today, the vengeance is sometimes directed also at the women and children of the targeted family, a practice forbidden by the old vendetta rules."*

Several NGOs have set out to try and reconcile families involved in vendettas, but do not always succeed in achieving peaceable settlements. Given the clandestine and illegal nature of this phenomenon, it is impossible to cite any precise figures on the number of vendettas right now in Albania, but hundreds of families are known to be involved. Children from these families are forced to remain indoors, and not attend school, because their parents are afraid they will be killed.

"To remedy the interruption of the schooling of children of families caught up in vendettas, the trade unions have helped bring pressure for teachers to be relieved of part of their usual teaching hours in order to visit the homes and give private lessons to the children of the families concerned. In this way they combat the major risk of children giving up school at the end of the vendetta period, and very likely starting work." Trade unions are however very conscious that opinions are divided as to whether it is a good thing to offer these lessons at home, which tends to ratify the existence of the vendetta, rather than fight against such endless trails of vengeance.

Given the shortage of teachers in certain regions and these differences of opinion, it would seem that not all children under threat of vendetta receive regular teacher visits at home.

G) Attitudes towards certain minorities

In Albania, as in many other countries, Roma communities are held in low esteem by part of the population, which sees Roma as no more than beggars. Several Roma children told us that they do not feel at ease in school, that they were often at the back of the classroom, at times disregarded by teachers or the butt of jokes and attacks from other pupils. The serious economic difficulties faced by many Roma generally mean that they are unable to buy their children new clothes, thereby strengthening their negative image with part of the population.

Given the limited time available for our research, it is difficult for us to assess the extent and intensity of this discriminatory attitude in schools. Further investigation would be necessary to state with certainty how far the discrimination goes, but the problem certainly exists. Those people we spoke to outside the Roma community (trade unions, NGOs, teachers, etc.) stated that discrimination is rare in schools. A trade unionist in the teaching sector gave his opinion that Roma children have a hard time remaining concentrated through an entire half-day of school. He pointed out that their lack of motivation is due to the fact that when a job comes up, on equal qualifications, it is the young Roma who will be passed over for the job.

Physically handicapped children are another minority which come in for discrimination in schooling. According to UNICEF statistics, lack of properly adapted school facilities keeps 94% of Albania's handicapped children away from school.

H) Disappointment at teaching conditions

Overcrowded classrooms in the city and the lack of training and de-motivation of certain teachers can discourage the poorest parents from making the sacrifices needed to send their children to school (buying school materials, "correct" clothing, etc.). *"Things have changed a lot since I myself was at school,"* explains this Roma father of eight from Shkodra. *"There are too many pupils per class, certain teachers have become de-motivated and don't make the effort to help children with difficulties, particularly not Roma children. In these conditions I ask myself why I should send my children to school. It's perhaps better for them to get their vocational training 'on the job'."*

ATTITUDE OF ALBANIAN PUBLIC OPINION TOWARDS CHILD LABOUR

Our many conversations with people from every section of the population showed that Albanian public opinion is particularly shocked when child labour takes extreme and high-visibility forms (begging, picking over dustbins, etc.) and by child trafficking. On the other hand the population makes light of children selling small goods in the streets, and does not get upset at the fact of children dropping out of school before compulsory school-leaving age. In many cases it fails to link, for example, a child dropping out of school with the danger of his being involved in the worst forms of child labour or trafficking.

Like almost everywhere in the world, people think it's a good thing for an adolescent to do light work during the school holidays (beneficial for their training, self-discipline, contribution to family income, etc.) It would seem, however, that some Albanians confuse these positive aspects with the situation of children working full time and dropping out of education. This is particularly so in the countryside, where children leaving school early to help their parents on the land scarcely shocks much of the population.

The same applies in the districts neighbouring on shoe factories, where few inhabitants are really offended to see 14 or 15 year-old girls counterfeit papers in order to be employed in these factories. Children's training and the need to contribute to the family's economic survival serve as excuses for many Albanians not remain unperturbed by these situations. Everyone would prefer the children to continue in school, but given the circumstances, they tend to close their eyes on child labour so long as it does not take extreme forms.

Certain of the people we talked to stressed that many Albanians are still unaware of the dangers associated, particularly for children, with leaving the country. In the north and north-east of the country especially, the practice of marrying girls very young appears still fairly widespread. In certain cases this leads to a situation in which the husband or his relations arrange for a departure abroad (Italy, Greece, Kosovo), where the girl can be forced into prostitution. Whilst cases like this make headlines in the Albanian media, a lot of sensitisation work has still to be done before all families have heard of these risks.

EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE ACTION BY ALBANIAN TRADE UNIONISTS

It is obvious that an improvement in living conditions, and in particular a substantial lowering of the unemployment rate, would go a long way towards reducing the extent of child labour in Albania. Albanian trade unions are putting pressure on the government and employers here. However, the deterioration of the Albanian economy is not the only factor to blame for child labour. As we have seen above, many poor Albanian families manage to send their children to school because they fight doggedly to do so, because they consider education a priority. Trade unions, as key players in a democratic society, can exert all their influence to get action on the non-economic factors behind child labour. They can do this either alone or in cooperation with several other groups: government and local authorities, non-governmental organisations, employers, international organisations, etc.

That being said, for Albanian trade unions to commit themselves to fighting child labour, they need themselves to be made fully aware of the issue. Not all of them are right now. The teacher trade unions of the two main confederations (BSPSH and KSSH) appear very conscious of the problem and of the need to tackle it. But consciousness of this among other sector-based trade unions varies widely. Not all Albanian trade union leaders are aware of the international definitions of child labour, many do not consider the battle against child labour a priority.

An Albanian trade union told us last September that in his opinion, *“child hawkers are typical of poor countries, like children working in the fields with their parents instead of going to school. This is not really exploitation. That is not to say that something should not be done about this situation. But it is not a trade union priority. We lack the tools to act at this level.”*

Before listing some areas in which Albanian trade unions could be involved in the fight against child labour, we would like the point to an initiative by the Albanian government and IPEC in which the trade union movement is involved. This is the National Steering Committee on Child Labour and the Child Labour Unit.

Working under the baton of the Ministry of Labour, the National Steering Committee on Child Labour consists in particular of representatives of the Ministries of Education and Justice, of NGOs, the Presidency, and employers' and workers' organisations. Trade unions are represented on the committee by the President of the Albanian Trade Union Federation of Teachers and Scientists (FSASH), Xhafer Dobrushî. This committee coordinates the work of the various units involved with child labour, analyses Albanian legislation, proposes amendments to this legislation, and undertakes research into child labour.

A Child Labour Unit to combat child labour has also been set up at the Ministry of Labour. Right now it has one full-time and two part-time employees. This unit serves as the executive arm of the National Steering Committee on Child Labour, promoting regular cooperation between all entities concerned by the problem (ministries, NGOs, police, school inspectors, trade unions, etc.). A specific ambition is to carry out a qualitative and quantitative study into child labour in Albania.

This unit also organises a range of practical activities, like poster campaigns and training of labour inspectors. The latter receive special training in dealing with child labour: identifying it, interviewing children, where to refer cases to, cooperating with other agents (police, inspectors, NGOs etc.), relevant legislation etc. So far, 27% of all Albanian labour inspectors have received this type of training.

Let us now review some examples of possible action by Albanian trade unions to combat child labour. These examples stem from interviews with the people we talked with, and from initiatives taken by trade unions in other countries to tackle child labour. This list is in no way exhaustive. Every trade union, federation and confederation has a duty to combat child labour, and can think up its own practical initiatives or policies. These proposals for action will be discussed at the round table which will follow the Conference organised by the ICFTU at Tirana on 11 and 12 October 2004.

1) TEACHING UNIONS

We have observed positive developments amongst Albanian teaching trade unions, which have been extending their agenda of protecting teachers so as to cover the whole school system, including teaching quality, school infrastructure and ensuring that all children attend school. Teaching unions are trying to put across the idea that children are not just objects of education, but its subjects. They explain that too little attention has been paid up till now to children who fail to turn up to school any more. They want everyone to understand that this is a first step towards child labour and possibly towards trafficking.

The aim should therefore be to get teachers to pay greater attention to problem children: those with poor results, those who are marginalised, and those who are starting to be absent frequently or no longer attending school whatsoever. Teachers can be the first to notice these problems. They are the first to notice when children are increasingly missing school. They can intervene before the situation turns for the worst, and act together with local communities and administrations, parents and possibly also NGOs. Trade unions would like to be able to train teachers better, to show them the first signs of children dropping out of school, to motivate them and to teach them to react as quickly as possible.

Sensitising all trade union delegates

The SFASH trade union has already taken initiatives to sensitise its delegates to the question of child labour. *“Two years ago around twenty of our delegates took part in an IPEC seminar on child labour”*, explains Xhafer Dobrush, President of the Albanian Federation of Teachers and Scientists (SFASH - Federata E Sindikatave te Asrimit dhe Shkences), an affiliate of the KSSH with 22,000 members. *“The seminar mentioned international conventions, Albanian legislation, the consequences of school drop-out, appropriate reactions when children lose interest in school etc. This was followed by other regional seminars. In all 70 delegates took part from our trade union. Child labour is becoming a major issue for SFASH. It will also be the subject of a resolution at our upcoming congress in November 2004. We would like to use the*

SFASH teacher network to mobilise public opinion against child labour. We are also trying to attract other trade union federations' interest in this issue.

Increasing the number of teaching union delegates at seminars to raise awareness of the question of child labour is important as we want to broadcast the message right through the country, and even into the farthest parts. Trade union media can also play a useful role here. Trade unions can use their magazines to publish articles on this issue, publish posters in Albanian to highlight the fact of child labour etc. More generally they can push to have the issue featured on radio and television in order to reach a wider band of the Albanian population.

Pressure on the authorities

Teaching unions are also well placed to bring pressure to bear at national level on the government to ensure that laws on mandatory schooling and child labour are respected, and at local level to keep tabs on families whose children do not attend or have stopped attending school.

Trafficking of children

Having teachers bring up the question of trafficking with their pupils is another initiative that trade unions could undertake. Some young Albanians have already heard of the dangers of going abroad. But as in all countries facing major economic problems, they often tend to think that this will not happen to them, or in any event that things cannot be worse abroad. Regular teacher-pupil dialogue on this subject, with the presentation of cases where the adventure went very wrong for the Albanian child, could help focus attention on this subject. NGOs are actively disseminating these messages, but lack the firepower of teaching unions, which have members right across the country.

It should also be noted that the Albanian government is cooperating with NGOs, IPEC and other programmes and organisations to reintegrate as best they can those victims of trafficking who find their way back to Albania. Teaching union members could possibly be involved in these programmes, in cooperation with the other players, by keeping in touch with minors who have returned to their families, helping them with their schooling, etc.

IPEC action with NGOs

One avenue for possible initiatives by teaching unions to help children who have dropped out of school could be what NGOs are already doing in four Albanian towns (Shkodra, Elbasan, Berat and Korca) with IPEC support. Initially, the NGO employees track down children who are at work in their city, proposing that they come to school for a few hours in the afternoon in special catch-up classes. The aim is to bring them up to a level where they can find their way back into formal education, or – for the older ones - to give them at least the basic literacy, numeracy and other skills with which to follow vocational training courses.

It is vital that these courses take place in special classes, in particular because the children involved are much older than other pupils of the same educational level.

These classes take place in public school buildings. This is so that the children taking them do not feel excessively discriminated against and to facilitate their reintegration into the formal educational network. The vocational training courses also take place in existing training centres, with NGOs guiding students towards those professions for which market demand is greatest. A future step will be to cooperate with potential employers who could take on the children completing this IPEC project.

A key element of this project is the way NGO employees follow up the children and their families. *"After locating the families most at risk, they visit the parents and talk with them openly and in a non-aggressive way, being careful to avoid any strong criticism of the fact that their child is not attending school",* explains Snezhi Bedalli, manager of the IPEC programmes in Albania. *They advise parents on finding jobs and obtaining social assistance. They talk about their daily life, coming gradually step by step to the question of the child or children's schooling. One of the answers most often given by the parents is that the child or children's earnings are vital to the survival of their family. Our partner NGOs then propose an alternative: a regular food basket (financed by the World Food Programme or IPEC, depending on the region) if their child attends school regularly and passes his exams. Help with buying school clothing is also available in certain cases. Once a relationship of trust has been built up, the NGOs go on to explain to the parents the dangers of the worst forms of child labour, trafficking, etc."*

Employees from IPEC's NGO partners describe the food basket as a major incentive for parents, as is the possibility for the children to go on and take vocational training. For the time being this programme is limited to four towns in Albania. Maybe teaching unions could consider becoming involved or running the project themselves in other parts of the country? IPEC Albania is very open to that idea. The NGOs we met would also like to see trade unions involved in this work. The police directorate also believes that local police officers could work together with teachers when children stop attending school before the end of compulsory education.

It should be noted that IPEC does not only work with NGOs but also with the government, the local authorities and the social partners. We have chosen to highlight this particular project with NGOs since it seemed the most suitable for possible future involvement by trade unions.

2) FOOTWEAR AND GARMENT UNIONS

Trade unions in this sector lack a precise idea of the extent of child labour. A main reason is the anti-union environment that many bosses have created. One initial initiative by trade unions could be a detailed study of the prevalence of child labour in home working, in order to estimate how widespread the situation described by the Berttoni worker (see page 13) actually is. This would require a large number of home visits to workers, and establishing relationships of trust with them.

Once Albanian trade unions have identified precise cases of child labour in certain undertakings, they can then alert the authorities and employers concerned. It would also be helpful if they passed on this information to the ICFTU, the ITGLWF (International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation), the ILO and trade

unions of countries importing these products, with a view to finding a jointly-acceptable solution to the problem.

3) FARMING UNIONS

Certain farming families have difficulty in understanding the usefulness of schooling for their children, particularly as the only future they see for them is in farming. Trade unions could raise their awareness of this question, show the advantages their children can gain from attending school (improved farm management skills, possibilities of finding work elsewhere, the child's personal development, etc.) This calls for better communication between trade union leaders and grass-roots members, given the difficulty of such communication in rural environments. By collaborating with teaching unions, farm trade union delegates could also help identify children at risk of dropping out of education, and together set up initiatives to combat this (see the IPEC project).

4) MEDIA UNIONS

As explained above, a certain portion of Albanian families do not, or no longer understand the importance of sending their children to school, or in any event do not consider it a priority. Many make light of child labour, except where children are involved in the worst forms of it. This may reflect the Albanian media's coverage of child labour. It is interested in trafficking and other extreme cases. But according to the people interviewed, there is no ongoing interest in the question of child labour in general, not any detailed investigation of the whys and wherefores.

More and better coverage of the question of child labour in the Albanian media is important if we wish to change mentalities. Journalist training seminars could be held, with practical examples of what is done in other countries where child labour is no longer shrugged off and is becoming a public opinion priority.

We can note here that the Independent Union of Artists, Journalists and Sportspeople, a BSPSH member, has a "youth" department which has already sought to raise members' awareness of the question of child labour. This trade union, which has 480 journalist members in all Albanian media, is planning to organise a seminar on this subject in the coming weeks. Taking part will be government, family and children's representatives, and delegates from both BSPSH and KSSH affiliated unions.

5) MINING UNIONS

Certain trade unionists have denounced cases of adolescent labour in Albanian mines. Detailed research into the existence and extent of this phenomenon is essential for going any further here. Mining is of course one of the worst forms of child labour, one which needs to be eradicated as soon as possible.

Mining unions ought to denounce cases known to them to enable measures to be taken by the authorities, particularly against employers. Vocational training could possibly

be laid on for ex-child miners, for example with IPEC's NGO partners, recognised vocational training organisations (such as Don Bosco), and in cooperation with teaching unions. Sensitisation of local mining communities to the problems of child labour is another possible area for trade union action in this sector.

6) TRANSPORT WORKERS' UNIONS

Though on the decrease, the trafficking of children to other countries has not disappeared. Sensitising transport sector workers to this question could encourage some of them to report suspicious cases to the authorities (e.g. children travelling unaccompanied or with a suspicious person, etc.)

7) ALL TRADE UNIONS

Combating child labour ought to be a priority of the trade union movement right across the world. Every Albanian trade union ought to be able to raise awareness of this issue amongst its members at union meetings, in seminars and in trade union publications.

Under normal circumstances, every Albanian trade union should be able to act as a reliable source of information on the existence and extent of child labour in its sector. Not all Albanian trade unions are in a position to do so right now. This is partly due to lack of resources and the fact that many children work in the informal economy. But it also reflects the low priority accorded by certain of them to combating child labour.

Revealing the existence of child labour in one's own sector, coupled in many cases with other human rights violations, and admitting the existence of the problem, opens the way to finding solutions together with first-line partners, such as the public authorities, NGOs, ILO programmes, foreign trade unions, etc. Trade unions could also seek to cooperate with the ILO's IPEC programme.

Another possibility would be for trade unions that have good relations with certain employers to use them to promote the recruitment of young adults graduating from rehabilitation programmes for children with difficulties. The latter may be former victims of trafficking, ex-child workers, children without schooling, etc. Several programmes have been set up to provide vocational training to these young people, and seeing them get a job would encourage others to participate. Some of these programmes are managed by NGOs, others by the authorities.

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