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Centre for excellence
for looked after children in Scotland

EVALUATION REPORT

Moving forward on alternative care

Assessment of the Foster Care Pilot Project in Albania

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September - October 2013

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

CELCIS was contracted by UNICEF Albania in August, 2013, to carry out an evaluation of the pilot foster care project (FCPP). UNICEF had contributed to funding for a foster care project which operated in Tirana and Shkodra. The operational aspects of the projects were run by two non-governmental organisations (NGOs) called Bethany Social Services (BSS) and Every Child Albania (EC).

The consultants carried out a brief literature review and a desk review of relevant documentation. They also undertook a period of fieldwork in Albania, interviewing key stakeholders and carrying out observational visits. The findings of the evaluation were that the FCPP had made a positive start to establishing foster care services in Albania. Training, procedures and support systems for 80 families had been provided. The project was successful in identifying and supporting families where a child was already living in the family, and in supporting kinship foster care. It was less successful in placing children out of institutions and into non-related foster care, where kinship care was not an option. The weakness in the FCPP was that when funding ran out for one part of the project and the cases were handed to the municipality, no further support was given to these families.

Albania has resources, policy platforms and legislation to establish a viable foster care system. However, some systemic problems exist which are currently working against the establishment of such a system. There is a lack of capacity at a number of levels to the provision of an operational state-based foster care system. The consultants pointed out that ad hoc change without functional shifts is unlikely to lead to any consistent long term improvements. In addition, a degree of cultural shift is required to move the focus from a preference for institutional care to sustainable foster care services and from issue-driven development of services to needs-driven priorities.

Some general challenges identified for the Albanian social services system are:-

- Improving service planning and monitoring, which includes making municipalities accountable for service provision;
- Increasing capacity at local level to ensure that foster care is properly instituted;
- Addressing the over-reliance on institutions to provide alternative care for children. Institutions are currently regarded as the first option for alternative care;
- Addressing its responsibilities to children and young people who need to remain in institutional care and continuing support for them when the time comes for them to leave and become independent.

A number of recommendations are made on the basis of the evaluation. Some of the recommendations move outside the remit of the original Terms of Reference, but they are important to consider nonetheless.

Recommendations

The recommendations have been grouped into broad categories to indicate where changes may have to be addressed in order to create a viable and sustainable foster care service in Albania. The recommendations are numbered according to where they are sited in the report.

National policy and legislation

Recommendation 1: Dissemination of the good practice of the FCPP and how this can be developed should be considered. The dissemination should form the basis of awareness-raising and recruitment campaigns, funded by the Government.

Recommendation 2: National awareness-raising and recruitment campaigns for non-related foster carers need to be put into place. This cannot simply be a 'one time only' campaign. It needs to run regularly and be supported by local information giving sessions, which may be supported by a dedicated foster care social worker.

Recommendation 3: the criteria for foster carers as laid down in the Foster Care Strategy should be re-examined to ensure that they do not discriminate against any groups, as this will severely restrict the number of foster families who will be able to be recruited.

Recommendation 4: Consideration should be given to making foster care placements an administrative process at local level, with the attendant changes to the Family Code (particularly Arts. 266 and 267) that are required.

Recommendation 5: The Family Code should also be changed to allow for economic assistance to be available as soon as the child is placed with a family. It should be by order of the municipality and not dependent on a court order.

Organisation of social services

Recommendation 6: The structure of local offices should be examined to ensure that the appropriate persons are receiving the case file of the foster child to ensure that support and monitoring can be continued.

Recommendation 7: In future, only people with a degree in social work should be employed as social workers. In addition, to build a sustainable foster care service run by the municipalities, there should be a dedicated foster care social worker whose sole remit it is to carry out the foster care service functions.

Recommendation 8: Consideration should be given to the immediate establishment of a small technically competent foster care committee in each municipality, separate from the larger all-purpose multi-disciplinary team, in line with the Albanian Foster Care Strategy.

Foster care of babies and young children under six years old

Recommendation 9: One key priority for the foster care programme is the identification of a range of non-related foster families who are trained to take newborn babies and young children so that Albania can end the practice of this group of children going into any kind of institutional care

Recommendation 10: There should be a facility to keep mothers and newborn babies together. The 'shepherding' programme at BSS is a good example of how this might be done. As a first step toward taking the lead in this area, consideration should be given by the Ministry to a re-structuring of the existing Hana dhe Rozafa Sauk orphanage to provide a mother and baby unit and a foster care resource unit, as a demonstration project.

Recommendation 11: Crisis foster families should be recruited and trained.

Recommendation 12: Following the establishment and evaluation of a demonstration project at Hana dhe Rozafa Sauk, the Ministry should consider facilitating the re-structuring of the other two state institutions for 0-6 year-old children and reallocate the money to developing a preventive service to support newborns to stay with their mothers, and to develop foster care. This makes sense both from a 'best interests of the child' perspective and from an economic perspective. If this money is reallocated to municipalities, some simple performance targets should be set to ensure that the policies of the government are being followed.

The future development of residential child care and support for care-leavers

Recommendation 13: Existing institutional care should be diversified along therapeutic lines to provide for the complex needs of older children who may not be able to be sustained in foster care. These children are likely to be more traumatised and are likely to be experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties relating to abuse, poor attachment and separation/loss. Existing residential staff in these diversified units

should be trained to meet the needs of this complex group of children and young people.

Recommendation 14: Urgent action needs to be taken to meet the needs of young people who are leaving institutions. Throughcare and aftercare programmes need to be established and supported. The Government should consider a throughcare and aftercare strategy and examine working in partnerships with local NGOs to develop this.

Monitoring and inspection

Recommendation 15: The State Social Services should examine ways of creating a more active monitoring system and building accountability into the foster care service delivery. Allocation of funding should depend on meeting performance targets and having evidence of meeting the foster care standards.

Recommendation 16: The State Social Services may wish to consider the establishment of a State Foster Care Inspector who can select a number of municipalities to inspect against the standards each year. The methodology for inspection already exists at the State Inspectorate and could easily be adjusted to apply to municipalities or NGOs offering fostering services.

The Structure of the Evaluation

Outline of terms of reference and description of methodology and timescale

2.1 In August 2013, CELCIS was contracted by UNICEF Albania to carry out an evaluation of the Foster Care Pilot Project. The Terms of Reference identified the key aim of the evaluation as ‘providing the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MOLSAEO) and UNICEF with an independent assessment of the main achievements and challenges of the pilot’.¹ The Terms of Reference also identified the following objectives:

- Identify the good practice and challenges with the pilot;
- In particular, review the protocols so far developed in the foster care implementation to highlight the best practice and identify loopholes and obstacles in providing effective timely family placement services for children at risk;
- Assess the overall validity of the actual regulatory framework for foster care services to scale up this initiative (including making recommendations on further needed legislative or policy changes);
- Make recommendations on how to improve foster care services for children at risk, their biological families, foster families, stakeholders, and partners in the process (including District Courts, Municipal Foster Care Committees and child protection case workers)

The purpose of the assessment was to:

- Learn about the feasibility of scaling up foster care services in Albania;
- Provide recommendations for next steps and roles to move in that direction, including recommendations for District Courts, Municipal Foster Care Committees and child protection case workers; and including any necessary regulatory changes in for example legislation and policy.

The three consultants from CELCIS who were identified for this work were Dr Ian Milligan, Dr Irene Stevens and Dr Graham Connelly. In discussion with Ms Floriana Hima, project officer with UNICEF Albania, an inception paper was presented outlining the methodology and approach to the evaluation. The agreed research questions were:

- What are the main good practices which have emerged from the foster care pilot and why?
- To what extent has the foster care pilot influenced the government to adopt a family and community-based approach to child protection?
- Has the project contributed to the prevention of institutionalisation, reducing the number of children already in public care? If so, in what ways?
- Has the project contributed to system change in the direction of the establishment of a functioning child protection system? If so, in what ways?
- Is the project reaching the intended beneficiaries? If so, how and what is their perception of the service?
- What have been the main constraints and challenges in terms of introducing foster care services in the country?

¹ UNICEF(2013)TERMS OF REFERENCE for Assessment of foster care project in Albania, Page 2.

- What systems are in place to monitor the implementation of a foster care policy and services, and to ensure quality control, and how can these be improved?
- Are the foster families adequately trained to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for children?
- How adequate is the current regulatory framework for foster care services in Albania and what gaps exist?
- For each of the gaps or inconsistencies identified, what needs to be done in terms of policy and practice to address them and by whom?
- What are the immediate, medium-term and long-term steps that need to be taken (and by whom) in order to make foster care services more sustainable in Albania?

Methodology and Timescale

- 2.2 The full methodology was outlined in the inception paper for this project.² In summary, a range of investigative tools were used for the evaluation, including individual interviews, literature review, documentary analysis and visits to the residential institutions and families. The desk review took place throughout September, 2013. A list of the documents used for the desk review is given in Appendix One.
- 2.3 In October, 2013, Dr Graham Connelly and Dr Irene Stevens visited Albania for five days (1st-5th Oct.). They met with Ms Hima and followed an agreed agenda of visits and interviews. The programme of interviews and observational visits is given in Appendix Two.
- 2.4 In addition, a preliminary telephone interview was carried out with Prof. Milika Dhamo (Bethany Social Services) on 27th September in order to gain some information about the content of the training for families and professionals, as these training manuals were too extensive for translation.
- 2.5 Within the time available, it was possible to meet the objectives of the evaluation. In addition, the consultants made some additional observations and these will be included in the body of the report.
- 2.6 A final meeting with UNICEF will be held on 28th October, 2013.

² CELCIS: Moving forward on alternative care: Inception paper for the evaluation of the Foster Care Pilot in Albania. (Sept., 2013)

The Foster Care Pilot Project

Background

3.1 Foster care is a relatively new concept in Albania. There is no word for fostering in the Albanian language. The concept is easily confused with adoption.³ Foster care is where another family takes over the care of a child without assuming parental rights. It is often referred to as a temporary placement, although in reality it may become long term or even be undertaken with a view to adoption. Laklija (2011) identified eight different types of foster care⁴:

a) Kinship foster care

Kinship foster care refers to a situation where childcare is assumed by the adult relatives of the child. As this is the oldest form of care for children without adequate parental care, many societies have a tradition by which caring for such children is assumed by the child's extended family, or another family with which the child has a close relationship (friends, neighbours), or the child's godparents.

b) Traditional non-related foster care

Traditional non-related foster care provides care to a child without adequate parental care whose psycho-social development does not deviate significantly from the developmental pathway of children of the same age in biological families.

c) Specialised foster care

Specialised/treatment or therapeutic foster care implies specifically trained foster carers who use different therapeutic methods in their daily interactions and work with the fostered child. This type of foster care is used for children with serious emotional and mental difficulties, as well as physical disabilities and behavioural problems.

d) Professional foster care

Professional foster care can be provided as an independent professional activity. For this type of foster care, foster carers are expected to meet specific requirements, such as being an expert in one of the 'welfare' fields (social work, social pedagogy, psychology, speech pathology, medicine, etc.), a professional worker in social care and/or trained to provide additional specialised care services.

e) Crisis foster care

Crisis foster care provides temporary care for a child during a crisis, i.e. until the end and/or recovery from a crisis and until the establishment of the family system control, when the child returns to his or her biological family.

³ Interview with Milika Dharmo (Programme director BSS) 27.9.13

⁴ Laklija, M. (2011) Foster Care Models in Europe. Forum for quality foster care/Joint efforts toward the realisation of children rights in Croatia [Supported by the Netherlands Foundation for Central and Eastern Europe] Accessed on 7th October, 2013 at <http://www.udomiteljizadjecu.hr/admin/fckeditor/File/publikacije/Foster%20care%20models%20in%20Europe%20-%20results%20of%20a%20conducted%20survey%20-%20Maja%20Laklija.pdf>

f) Respite foster care

This type of foster care is usually used for short stays (e.g. weekend) of children with disabilities in order to relieve their biological families of their challenging everyday psychological and physical care tasks for a short period of time.

g) Back-up families

Families that provide social support (informational, emotional, instrumental, etc.) to a child's biological family in difficult circumstances or at a time of need that might temporarily threaten the functioning of the family and child's well-being.

g) "Private" foster care

This type of foster care allows biological parents themselves to find a foster family for the placement of their child, independently of the social welfare system, with the proviso that in some countries, depending on the duration of such placement, they might be required to notify the statutory social care authorities.

3.2 In 2005, the Albanian social services system development identified a new approach to social service provision, with five fundamental principles that impact on the care of children⁵. These are:

- Decentralisation of social services to local government
- Deinstitutionalisation of clients, especially children;
- Establishment of new community social services;
- Establishment of a financial mechanism to guarantee sustainability
- Establishment of a new model of custody service for children in need (fostering).

3.3 In 2008, it was reported that there were 1029 children in institutions (state and NGO) in Albania.⁶ There was recognition that this was unacceptably high and that alternatives to institutional care had to be developed. As part of the strategy, the development of a foster care pilot project in Tirana and Shkodra was proposed.

3.4 Following on from this, in 2008, The Council of Ministers set out a Foster Care Strategy, outlining the intention to establish foster care in Albania. In 2010, the Foster Care Implementation Standards Framework came into force. This provided the legal and policy basis for foster care in Albania.⁷

3.5 The Foster Care Pilot Project (FCPP) became operational in 2010. The leading actors in the FCPP were Bethany Social Services (BSS) and Every Child Albania (EC).

⁵ Law No. 9355, dated 10 March 2005,

⁶ Official Bulletin of the Republic of Albania, No. 132. Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 1104 (30th July, 2008)

⁷ Quality Foster Care Implementation Standards Framework VKM 752 (8th Sept, 2010) and Establishment of Criteria, Documentation and procedure of Foster care Service DCM 89 (26th Jan., 2012)

These NGOs worked in cooperation with UNICEF, MOLSAEO, and the Municipalities of Tirana and Shkodra.

- 3.6 BSS was contracted to provide training for foster carers and professionals within the two municipalities. BSS was also contracted to develop support manuals for foster carers and professionals in the municipalities, and to develop operational procedures for professionals that mirrored the vision of the Foster Care Strategy.
- 3.7 BSS and EC were contracted to provide assessment and placement support for 80 foster families and children.

Training

- 3.8 The FCPP provided training for 75 professionals in Tirana and Shkodra. In the first course in 2010, 25 professionals undertook the training, which consisted of two separate days. In 2012, a further 50 professionals from Tirana and Shkodra received the two-day training. The professionals consisted of social administrators, social workers, judges and lawyers.⁸ One of the professionals interviewed for the evaluation had experienced the training and had found it valuable. However, following the local elections in 2011, key staff were removed from their posts. This drained away the capacity on the knowledge and practice of foster care which had been built up in the municipality.⁹
- 3.9 Support manuals for professionals were developed. In addition, clear and precise operational procedures addressing the technical aspects of foster care like assessing, placing, monitoring and reviewing of placements were devised. Also, written protocols on what to do in situations where the professionals have no-one to help them have been developed. This is important in the political context of Albania, where changes of government can result in widespread changes to existing systems and structures.¹⁰ It was reported that a ready-made fostering assessment template had been sent to the municipality social work office in Shkodra to encourage assessment to be taken on at the local level, but that this was returned to BSS. So there is evidence that some of the work done in terms of developing operational procedures is not being taken on board at the municipality level.
- 3.10 The FCPP offered training to 42 foster families, provided by BSS. Initially, more families were trained than had children placed with them. The carers had 14 training sessions. The first six were informative input on the topics and were done in the large group. Topics included child development, abuse, alternative family

⁸ Interview with staff from BSS and EC (1st Oct., 2013). Agim Xhumari, BSS Executive Director Milika Dhamo, BSS Program Director (0682029919), Bob Watanabee, BSS Program Consultant, Migena Leksani, EC former staff member.

⁹ Interview with Alketa Kosta, former EC social worker (5th Oct, 2013) and Blerta Spahiu, Program officer, TDH (5th Oct., 2013)

¹⁰ Interview with Milika Dhamo, BSS Program Director (27th Sept., 2013)

care, preparing foster parents for placement, family dynamics, behaviour management, family reunion, placement issues and monitoring. The following eight sessions were small group sessions which were tailored to the needs of two to three families, in tandem with the child placement. These sessions took place over a year and were held once a month. This on-going support model is seen as an important aspect of helping the foster carers.¹¹ The families who were interviewed reported that the training was very helpful.¹² In Tirana, BSS continues to run four foster carer support groups, facilitated by a social worker/counsellor. BSS also provides 'respite' by caring for the children when the groups are running. This support is based on a peer support model but if any carer needs individual input, then individual counselling can be arranged for them. The training was supported by a 35-minute DVD which helped both professionals and families to understand the differences between fostering and adoption. This was experienced as very helpful by the families.

Number of beneficiaries

- 3.11 BSS currently supports 30 foster families who are caring for 45 foster children. The children are aged from 0- 16. There are 17 kinship families and 13 non-related foster families. Twenty of the children are from a Roma/Egyptian background and the others are of white Albanian background. Only 17 of the children have official 'orphan' status (i.e. eligible for financial support for the child in the form of the foster fee). Thirty-five children came from referrals in the community and 10 children were previously in an institution before going into a foster family. Four of the 10 children from institutions were placed in kinship care families, with the other six being placed in non-related foster families.¹³ BSS continues to provide an ongoing support and monitoring service to these families, as outlined in para 3.10.
- 3.12 BSS continues to operate; however, the EC social workers were made redundant in September 2012. In the last six months of their employment, they had lost their premises and had to work from home and keep all of the documentation on their cases in their own houses. They also had to provide their own stationery and use their own phones without recompense. All of their cases were transferred to the municipalities of Shkodra and Tirana in September 2012. The two EC social workers reported that they have had occasional voluntary contact with families since then. The families with a court order are receiving financial support only. The other families are receiving no support from local social services. There is no ongoing support, monitoring or review for the foster children or their carers.
- 3.13 EC supported 25 foster children in Shkodra and 24 foster children in Tirana. Children were placed in sibling groups and were between the ages of 0-16. Only one

¹¹ Ibid. (footnote 7)

¹² See section 4 of this report for more details of the family interviews

¹³ Interview with Milika Dharmo (27th Sept., 2013) and email with statistical breakdown of figures received from Milika (9th Oct., 2013)

child had come from an institution to be placed in a foster family in Shkodra. The other 48 children were living in vulnerable kinship families already in the community.¹⁴ There appeared to be resistance to the idea of foster care from the institution in Shkodra. This may, perhaps, have been related to a fear that staff in the institution would lose their jobs as a result of the foster care programme. Twelve of the children were from a Roma/Egyptian background and only 22 of the children had official 'orphan' status (i.e. were eligible for financial support from the state in the form of the foster fee).

- 3.14 The FCPP developed a full case management service for foster families and children. They employed qualified social workers who provided individual and group support to families and children. They provided a complete and comprehensive assessment, placement support, monitoring and review process. They also provided financial support to families to help them meet the expenses of maintaining a foster child/children in their families. This has included paying for some of the court related processes. A complete case management service is needed for a foster child/children within a family to ensure that the child is protected, that the placement continues to meet the best needs of the child, to assist the foster carers in their role and to work toward family re-unification if this is appropriate. The EC cases which have been transferred to the municipalities receive no case management service or even basic monitoring. Those without a court order get no support and those with a court order receive the foster fee only. This is problematic not only from the case management perspective but because of the risk of financial abuse. For example, one of the EC social workers told us of a family situation where the child is now living with another set of relatives but the foster fee is still being paid to the original relatives with whom the child had been placed initially.
- 3.15 As previously stated, only one child out of its group of foster children had been moved out of an institution into a foster family by the EC part of the project. The rest of the children in the project who were referred for support were living with a family prior to the project. The picture is slightly different as BSS is part of a wider organisation, with its close links to the state institution in Tirana and its 'shepherding' programme. However, a similar picture emerged from the families interviewed who had been supported by BSS for the project. Three families had been looking after children themselves before they were 'found' by BSS and one family was part of the 'shepherding' programme, where a young mother and her child were being supported by a host family. The work done by the FCPP in supporting vulnerable families, maintaining placements, helping traumatised children and assisting them to obtain the court order which allows them access to financial assistance is conducive to the continuing positive development of children in these situations.

¹⁴ Interviews with Alma: EC social worker in Shkodra (4th Oct., 2013) and Alketa Kosta: EC social worker in Tirana (5th Oct, 2013) and email of statistical breakdown of figures from UNICEF (28th Oct., 2013)

3.16 The process of obtaining court orders is time consuming, stressful and costly. Everyone interviewed for the evaluation reported this to be a major issue. To date only 17 of the 30 families with whom BSS are working have court orders. Only 16 families engaged with EC staff obtained court orders. This has an impact on the financial viability of supporting a foster child as the foster fee is only paid once a court order has been received.

Case Studies for foster families in Albania

Six families were interviewed during the course of the evaluation - four during home visits and two as part of a meeting at the orphanage. There follows a brief description of their situations and their views of some of the issues which arise for foster families.¹⁵ These issues will be drawn into the analysis later in the report.

Pen picture of Family A

In family A, the 10 year old child [child A] was living in a kinship care with her grandmother. The child had lived with her grandmother since she was three years old. The child's mother was living elsewhere. The birth mother had mental health problems and was unable to undertake the care of the child. It was believed that the child's father was now dead, although the grandmother was unsure. He abandoned the family when child A was three years old. The grandmother was referred to BSS having heard about the fostering project through her work as a crèche teacher. The family started receiving support from BSS in 2010.

Narrative report from Grandmother

I have three children, two sons and one daughter (child A's mum) and I love A more than I love my daughter. Everything I do is related to her benefit. She is very productive. Her father abandoned her when she was three years old. When her mum is able, she provides support. We had difficult conditions when we started out but we have been supported by BSS. Thanks to BSS we got books and a bag for school. We have suffered under the court system.

Comments on the court process

I am taking care of her because I want to. At first I didn't have any benefits. When I went to court, I was told I had to pay the equivalent of one month's salary just for a psychological report. I started to cry because I could not afford this. BSS supported me with the court payments. I don't want pity.

Comments on support from BSS

They provided food, meals, financial support. They provided training and also support to take part in festive activities like Christmas. They invite us to these. Mira [BSS social worker] is excellent. They gave us training in groups and DVD tools. There is a follow up process. Once a month I meet Mira but if I need it we meet more than this.

Comments on support in general

¹⁵ Interviews with family members on 1st, 3rd and 4th October, 2013

The only support is from BSS. From the government, no support. No other structures. The local mini-municipality provides money only. 9000 leke a month. Also my son has Down's Syndrome. I get absolutely no support for him. To support a child you have to do it from the bottom of your heart. The Government should establish laws that allow foster children to get everything for free....there is a directive for orphans to get everything free but not for a child in A's situation. More economic support as well.

(This grandmother went to the orphanage and she offered to take another child, as a non-related foster carer. However, the process was too long and complicated.)

Views of the child

We spoke to 'A' but she was quite shy. She looked happy and content. She was doing homework and read us some parts of homework she was completing on 'What is dialogue?' She was obviously well cared for and comfortable in the company of her grandmother and her uncle who has Down's Syndrome.

Pen Picture of Carer B

In this case, an experienced carer has provided ‘shepherding’ assistance to a young woman who was pregnant, who had experienced violence from her partner and was abandoned, and had also been rejected by her birth family. Carer B provided support for the young woman and subsequently her child. Effectively she took the young woman into her home and has been supporting the young mother and her daughter for three years.

Narrative report from carer

I am happy to do it from a human point of view. I would like to provide assistance because otherwise they do not have anyone to care for them. I have had previous experience of taking care of a child. I looked after a nine year-old girl whose mother had a mental illness and whose father had contacted Bethany for help. After four months the father removed the child from me because he was using the child for begging. The child was well behind in schooling but had made progress while staying with me. Unfortunately it was inevitable that her education would stop after the return to live with the father. Because the foster care arrangement was informal, it was not possible to intervene. Mira (BSS social worker) tried without success to find out what happened to the child, reported her to social services as a child at risk of exploitation but there was apparently no intervention.

Comments on support from BSS

I have a monthly meeting with Mira (BSS social worker). Mira and I have learned from each other. BSS also provided respite so that I can have some leisure time. I received 1,000 Leke monthly from BSS initially, and then that went down to 700 Leke. Now I don’t receive any money. But I continue to support L (the young mother) and her daughter because I now regard them as my family.

Comments about support from the state

The state does not provide support to me because L (the child’s mother) is here with her. Even if I wanted to foster the child, I could not afford the court costs. I would be willing to take another child but I’m not able to do that without financial assistance. I am already working in two jobs to support the family. L has a disability but she has been told that if she gets financial support for that disability, she will not get any support for her child.

Views of the child and young mother

The child has been living with the carer and her young mother since she was born three years ago. The child was too young to give her views but she looked happy

and was playing around her mother and the foster carer. She often went to both the foster carer and the mother, holding onto them. The young mother was very quiet. She appeared to have a very good relationship with the carer. It looked like a typical mother/daughter/grand-daughter type of situation. The young mother was clearly comfortable in the house.

Pen picture of Family C

In family C, the mother of the young person being fostered had a mental health problem and is now dead. The young person's father is the brother of the foster carer. The young person's parents got divorced and the young person's aunt has been involved with the young person since she was born. The young person is now 19 years old. The young person's early years were affected by the illness of her mother. However, the aunt was a constant feature in the young person's life. The young person went into an orphanage between the ages of nine and 14. The young person eventually came to stay with her aunt permanently and she still stays there.

Narrative report from the aunt

At first when she was in the orphanage, I took her for two to three days a week as this was all the institution would allow. I also took her for family celebrations like weddings or birthdays and for summer holidays. After the death of her mother, we got together as a family to discuss C's future. We decided that she should be live with her extended family. One brother who is quite wealthy offered to take her but C did not want to go there. She wanted to come here due to contact over the years. This was agreed in the family and then I started the court process.

Comments on support from EC

They provided financial support to my family, training and also support from a psychologist. In the training, we gathered together in a group and some training was given on what your attitude should be to the child, how to take care of her, and different activities that could be done. The group also acted as a support as we met at the office. Now the office is closed and the project is ended. But they also helped me to get financial assistance from the government (foster fee).

Comments on what the Government should do

We are not used to begging. The only way we have been supported is by EC and now for the last year by the municipality with financial support. This should be easier so you don't feel like you are begging. It would be nice to have support, especially social support for my niece to find a job. Then I would feel more settled about her future. But we don't get this.

Views of the young person

We asked the young person what she enjoyed. She said she liked music, fashion and going out with friends. Although she is doing a dressmaking course, she would love to be an elementary teacher. She was clearly happy and at ease in the house of her aunt, which she shares with her aunt's two daughters and their husbands and her aunt's two grandchildren (eight people in this small apartment).

‘I like being here. I have many family members here and it is a warm, loving place to stay. I was in a dorm in the orphanage and I didn’t like it. But my aunt was always coming round and kept in touch so it wasn’t bad for me. I would suggest that the government creates the possibility that different families are identified to take children from institutions. Having the love of a family is the best thing. In the orphanage you get food and somewhere to sleep but it is not the warmth and love of a family.’

Pen Picture of Family D

Family D live in a community of illegal constructions in Shkodra. The house is large and well kept. The two children who are being cared for came to live with their aunt when their mother was murdered by their father. The children are X (an eight year-old girl) and Y (a 10 year-old boy). They have been staying for three years. The aunt also has three other children and her mother. Her husband is the only wage earner.

Narrative report from the aunt

My sister died three years ago. She was murdered by her husband. He stabbed her to death and the children were in the house when it happened. He is in prison now and gave his consent for me to look after the children. When they first came here, X was very hard to deal with. She was crying and very angry and upset. But her brother is strong. He is very quiet and says nothing about it.

Comments on support from EC

EC have been so good. Alma (EC social worker) is like my sister. I could talk to her about how things were here. I got help with G (female child) because I wasn't sure what to do. She wouldn't go to school and I didn't know what to do. I still have to work hard to get her to go to school.

Comments on the court process

I also got help from EC to go to court. The court process takes time, documentation and money to pay court fees and other costs. EC provided support and a lawyer was hired. He did not do a good job and in the end, I completed the legal process myself. The process took one year. It is too long.

Comments on what is needed from the government

Since Alma left, there is no support. I get financial assistance but it is not much. I can't work because I have to look after five children and my mother. My husband's wage is not much. They have lost so much. I am paying for the children to be educated at private school because they were being bullied by other children because of the circumstances of their mother's murder. But I get no help with this. The government should give more economic assistance.

Views of the child

The children were at school when we arrived but X came in towards the end of the visit. She sat down but didn't want to talk to us. She was very well dressed, clean and content, if somewhat distracted.

As researchers who were previously in practice as a social worker and a psychologist, we were concerned about the lack of emotional and practical support for this family now that EC is no longer operating. The young boy is 'strong and silent' which suggests unresolved bereavement issues. The young girl is struggling, acting out and is not finding it easy to engage with education. The family is also struggling financially and is highly vulnerable. This needs case management.

Pen picture of family E

This male carer (35 years old) explained that he had married a woman who was already caring for her two younger siblings. Her parents had been shot dead and it became her task to take care of her siblings. When he met his wife, he took on the responsibility of his wife's family. They now have two children of their own as well as the two siblings of his wife. The siblings are now 15 and 16.

Narrative from carer

My wife was in a very tragic situation before we met. Her parents had been killed and she was looking after the whole family. Then we met and you fall in love. So now I have a big family! They are my children and I want them to have the best from the heart. For as long as my foster children remain in education they need support. My foster daughter is likely to progress to university. I have not promised to support the fees but I have said that I will do my very best. The court procedures are not people-friendly in Albania; there is a cost too.

Comments on support from BSS

I had some helpful training, for example, about getting into the world of teenagers. I learned how to respect children's rights. We also have group meetings. At one meeting I discussed my daughter and how we can allow her freedom as a young woman. She says she should be allowed to have her freedom and associate with friends. He heard from other parents about how you do this. So I said it is not good if you want to go to parties out of your school group, but if you stay in your school group that's OK. BSS supported with financial assistance too. They have good counselling and activities. We have never had support from the state. BSS has been great. We have felt respected.

Comments on what the state should do

We get the help we need from Bethany. They have been very good. We have felt so supported. It is good to have this especially if you have problems. The teenage children become more expensive as the time goes on. When I get paid, my daughter says, 'I need new shoes, a new dress!' We get the foster fee but this is not enough. Only 9000 Leke a month for teenagers! The state needs to provide better economic assistance to help us make sure we give the best to our children.

Pen picture of Family F

This male carer is an elderly man who has his grandson as a foster son. He has been caring for him since he was four months old. His son and his wife divorced, and the wife left. The son said he would place the child in the orphanage, but the grandfather insisted that he would keep him. Later, his son died of cancer. His grandson is now 14 years old.

Narrative from the grandfather

His mother returned when my grandson was five years old and said 'Come to mother.' I said that this would confuse him, but she was allowed to have access. But she did not keep up visits. She married again, and had two children, but I hear she got divorced and that her two children are now in an orphanage in Shkodra. My grandson has epilepsy but has received medication. He's keen on sport, thin but energetic. He's older now and he has started hanging out with friends I don't like. He's not doing as well at school. He passed sixth grade but I had to push him. I've contacted the head teacher and maths teacher and asked for more help.

Comments about support from BSS

Bethany found us and arranged the court procedures. Every month we go shopping with a member of staff to get whatever he needs: books and bags. The foster fee from the state is 9,000 Leke, plus an extra 1,000 Leke per month as he has a disability. I attend the Bethany clinic with my grandson once per month. The counsellor helps us to discuss options available.

Comments on what the state could do to support foster care

People over the world do a lot to support foster carers. If 50% of the rights the children have as orphans were respected we would be very happy. For example there is no discount for medication at the drugstore. There should be free education and medication. The fee should be increased from 9000 to 150,000 Leke per month.

Analysis of data in relation to the research questions

In this section, each of the research questions will be explored and the findings of the thematic analysis outlined. For each of the questions, gaps or inconsistencies will be identified, and recommendations for changes in policy and practice to address them will be given.

1. What are the main good practices which have emerged from the foster care pilot and why?

There were several aspects of the FCPP which were impressive. The pilot mirrored the Albanian Foster Care Strategy.¹⁶ The main good practices have been that the FCPP has developed good preliminary mechanisms for practice, e.g. training, procedures, and a model for support, monitoring and review of children in foster families. The FCPP has also worked within the Albanian tradition of assisting families to look after their own children, and to strengthen ties which already existed. This is positive because the process begins where Albanian society is now. The FCPP has been able to draw upon the practical experience of the two NGOs and this has been excellent in setting up the necessary structures for foster care to be implemented. The NGO sector is clearly important in Albania's growing social services development and partnerships such as these provide excellent capacity building for the growth of a foster care service.

The FCPP has partnerships, on paper, with a variety of actors within the state (for example, local municipality social workers, the local Foster Committee, MOLSAEO). In practice, however, the partnerships at local level are not active partnerships. The two NGOs have been doing all of the work and there does not appear to be ownership or a working partnership in this work at the municipality level. This is not the fault of the FCPP. There are a number of policy and systemic issues which contribute to this and they will be highlighted later in this section of the report.

It was reported that the FCPP seemed 'closed' to some others in the wider NGO arena. There was a lack of knowledge about what was going on within the project. This raised a question about how practice has been disseminated and how other actors have been involved (or not) in the work of the project.

Recommendation: Dissemination of the good practice of the FCPP and how this can be developed should be considered. The dissemination should form the basis of awareness-raising and recruitment campaigns, funded by the Government.

2. To what extent has the foster care pilot influenced the government to adopt a family and community-based approach to child protection?

The FCPP has good support from government at the Ministry and the State Social Services (SSS) level. Both of these offices of government understand and support the project. They have been advocates in the process. However, there is little real understanding of the

¹⁶ Official Bulletin of the Republic of Albania, No. 132. Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 1104 (30th July, 2008)

process at local level. This is despite the training offered by the FPCC. One of the reasons for this is the current lack of capacity at local level. The municipality social service offices are split into two sections:

<p>SOCIAL ADMINISTRATORS</p> <p>Responsible for giving out economic assistance, including the foster care fee.</p>	<p>‘SOCIAL WORKERS’</p> <p>Work with five priority areas</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gender and domestic violence 2. Child Protection Unit (CPU) 3. Disability 4. Elderly 5. Roma/Gypsy
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The split between social work and social administration is problematic. Social administrators are the first line in terms of identifying vulnerable people and families. They can act as a referral system, either to NGOs or to social workers, but they can do little more than this. Indeed this referral role seems to be informal, based on the social administrator’s local knowledge. Also, social administrators are the staff who are the final recipients of the foster child’s case file when a court order has been granted, not the ‘social worker’. This raises a question about whether the term ‘social services’ has been adequately defined in Albanian law and policy. One recent report also raised this question and recommended that a ‘definition of the term “social service” (“noncash social services”)’ should be introduced into legislation.¹⁷

The ‘social workers’ employed by municipalities act as referral points on to other services or NGOs. One person described it as ‘being like call centre workers’ who do not leave the office. Another person said that the social workers needed to “put on flat shoes”. She explained this further by saying that social workers needed to be out doing visits and monitoring actively. This echoed the previous view. Social workers currently do not visit families or provide any continuing support, monitoring or review. This is not surprising as the staff who have the job title ‘social worker’ are not, in fact, trained social workers. We understand that this is the structure all over Albania. This is a major capacity issue which will be discussed later in the report. The passing of the case file to a social administrator is not conducive to the case being followed through and children being supported and protected. The lack of support from municipalities was a recurrent theme among the foster families interviewed.

Recommendation: The structure of local offices should be examined to build capacity and to ensure that the appropriate persons (i.e. trained social workers) are receiving the case file of the foster child to ensure that support and monitoring can be continued.

¹⁷ Review of financial regulations and financial information systems of the Government of Albania for the management of social protection budgets. Page 33 of a report commissioned for UNICEF, Aug 2013.

3. Has the project contributed to the prevention of institutionalisation, reducing the number of children already in public care? If so, in what ways?

The FCPP is in its early stages. One of its remits was to reduce the number of children in institutions. At the time of this evaluation, there continues to be a large number of children in institutions. The SSS reported that there are currently 595 children in state institutions or NGOs. They also said that there are 66 children receiving the foster care payment¹⁸. There were, however, some concerns about these figures. The figures are different from the figures provided by the FCPP. Staff in the SSS and other government agencies reported that they can be moved from their current posts in the wake of a new government coming to power. There can also be 'political appointments' which can quickly reduce any capacity building that has happened. This issue falls outside the remit of the evaluation but we note that this is yet another challenge for the consistent development of foster care services in Albania which the government needs to address.

BSS works in partnership with the state child care institution in Tirana. One of these is the campus at the Hana dhe Rozafa Sauk orphanage. This facility is a 0-6 years-old unit with 40 children. Every year, 25-30 children leave to be reunited with biological families, to live in kinship care, or to be adopted, either in Albania or abroad. This means that between 10-15 children remain in institutional care. Children beyond the age of six years are then moved to an institution for older children. The FCPP has focussed on supporting kinship care and family reunification. It has been successful in receiving referrals where the child is already in the family. However, the FPCC is not yet as successful at placing those children for whom kinship care has not been identified. The identification, recruitment and training of a pool of non-related foster families able to take children for whom there are no kinship carers or for older children has not yet developed.

The only remaining option for children is an enforced move to another institution when they are older. Research shows that older children are harder to place with foster families. However, this is not an impossible task. It does, however, require the correct types and numbers of families to be recruited, and the correct type of support to be provided.

It must also be acknowledged that many older children have complex psychological needs which may not be best met within a family. There are no therapeutic residential services available from the state for those young people who cannot be sustained in families or for whom a family placement simply cannot be found. We also heard that there are no services for young people who leave care at 16 years old. If they are not in education, they effectively become homeless. If they are in education they can live in dormitories until their education ends.¹⁹

The FPCC is not yet contributing effectively to preventing children from entering institutional care in the first place. This is a crucial role for foster care. The institutions are still full and this is because there are no viable alternatives to early reception into care. There is no dedicated mother and baby support unit, which would act to prevent babies from being abandoned in the first instance. There are no specialist foster families trained to work with newborns in the event that a mother cannot be supported to keep her child. An

¹⁸ Interview at State Social Services with Gezim Tushi, Head of social services section, Arkida Hysenaj, Director of Social Services Directory, Ermelinda Spaho, Head of Children's section

¹⁹ The CRC Alternative report. BTKF (2011)

unintended consequence of the existence of facilities such as the Abandoned Babies unit in Tirana's maternity hospital is that those responsible for dealing with abandoned babies in the first instance are under no pressure to consider alternatives to institutional care. It is understood that this unit is funded by an American NGO (The Organisation for the Support of Albania's Abandoned Babies). As such, it may be difficult to enter into discussions about how the resources of this unit could be deployed differently. (Possible alternative uses include: an intensive counselling service for mothers who are at risk of abandoning their baby; or a referral service to a mother and baby unit or to the foster care service, in conjunction with a practical advice and support service for foster families looking after newborns.)

Capacity exists for the establishment of a mother and baby unit and a foster care resource centre, if the Hana dhe Rozafa Sauk 0-6 years institution was restructured. Existing child care staff working there could be retrained to provide support and advice to mothers and their babies to help them stay together, form attachments, support the mother in any moves to be re-integrated into their family of origin, or to be helped to find a job, accommodation or other emotional or psychological support to sustain the mother-child bond. Examples of this type of facility have existed in other countries that were in the process of developing a viable foster care service. Indeed such facilities currently exist in other CEE countries²⁰

Recommendation: One key priority for the foster care programme is the identification of a pool of non-related foster families who are trained to take newborn babies and young children so that there is immediate prevention of children going into any kind of institutional care

Recommendation: Existing state institutional care should be diversified along therapeutic lines to provide for the complex needs of older children who may not be able to be sustained in foster care. These children are likely to be more traumatised and are likely to be living with emotional and behavioural difficulties relating to abuse, poor attachment and separation/loss. Existing residential staff in these diversified units should be trained to meet the needs of this complex group of children and young people.

Recommendation: Urgent action needs to be taken to meet the needs of young people who are leaving institutions. Throughcare and aftercare programmes need to be established and supported. The Government should consider a throughcare and aftercare strategy and examine the possibility of working in partnerships with local NGOs to develop this.

Recommendation: There should be a facility to keep mothers and newborn babies together. The 'shepherding' programme at BSS is a good example of this. As a first step toward taking the lead in this area, consideration should be given by the Ministry to a re-structuring of the existing Hana dhe Rozafa Sauk orphanage to provide a mother and baby unit and a foster care resource unit, as a demonstration project.

4. Has the project contributed to system change in the direction of the establishment of a functioning child protection system? If so, in what ways?

²⁰ Piecing together the jigsaw: Creating a prevention of abandonment and institutionalisation network in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria(2006-2009). Accessed on 10th October 2013 at http://www.arkonline.org/media/56185/Piecing_together_the_jigsaw.pdf

A well-functioning and responsive foster care service is vital to the overall system of child protection in Albania. Indeed this has been recognised by the *United for Child Care and Protection Coalition* (BKTF) in their latest situation analysis for Albania. The FPCC has contributed to system change by providing a model for the training of foster families and a model for effective case management of foster children. The project has demonstrated how useful these processes are in supporting vulnerable families. Legislation and policies are largely in place to support a functioning foster care service. However, due to capacity issues, these policies are not being carried out at local level. The pilot project areas of Tirana and Shkodra have benefitted from the work of the two NGOs involved. However, the fragility of this means of service delivery was illustrated when EC lost its funding and the workers were made redundant. Families which should continue to be monitored and reviewed are no longer being supported by the municipalities in spite of their cases being passed to them.

In terms of child protection issues, if a child needs to be taken away from an abusive situation quickly, there is no pre-monitored safe place to put the child except into an institution. If the child is taken to an extended part of the family or community on an emergency basis, there is no time to assess whether their safety can be guaranteed. The issue is complicated also by the fact that local ‘social workers’ have a large number number of tasks for which they are responsible and putting a child into an institution is often the easiest option. There are no ‘crisis’ foster families, as identified by Laklija (See para 3.1).

Recommendation: Crisis foster families should be recruited and trained.

5. Is the project reaching the intended beneficiaries? If so, how and what is their perception of the service?

The FCPP has reached some of the intended beneficiaries. Vulnerable families in the community who have been struggling to sustain a foster child /children within their family have been helped and supported. Traumatized children who enter into the foster care case management process with the NGO social workers have been helped. The families who have been in contact with the FPCC have reported excellent experiences. They have felt more able to support their foster children. They have received financial assistance which has helped the families to feed and clothe their foster children. Some have been supported to obtain court orders and thereby access financial support from the state in the form of the foster fee. The training and the operational procedures developed by the project mirror the intentions of the Foster Care Strategy for Albania and facilitate a good casework approach. However, the FCPP is not yet making as big an impact on the numbers of children in institutions, particularly those from 0-6 years old. This includes the abandoned babies unit in the maternity hospital in Tirana. The Foster Care Action Plan is clearly aimed at moving children out of institutions and the focus needs to shift urgently to developing the capacity in this area.

6. What have been the main constraints and challenges in terms of introducing foster care services in the country?

A number of challenges were identified during the evaluation. These will be discussed in turn.

- a. The ready availability of institutional care. Prior to the establishment of the FCPP, Albania had only one state sanctioned alternative to family care and this was in an institution. As a result, Albania has eight national institutions and 20 smaller local institutions. Three of the national institutions and six of the smaller institutions are for children 0-6 years old. In addition there are facilities such as the Abandoned Babies Unit at the maternity hospital in Tirana which has a capacity for eight newborn babies. Worryingly, on our visit to the abandoned baby unit, two of the children had been living in this converted hospital ward for six months. The ready availability of institutional care, the attitude that it is acceptable for a young child to be placed in an institution, the absence of practical preventive services and strategies, and the ease with which an overworked local 'social worker' can place a child in an institution, are the factors which work against foster care being seen as a viable alternative. Institutional care, particularly for babies and young children, can be severely damaging for future development.²¹ This is the main reason why it should be avoided for these age groups.

Also, institutional care is more expensive than care within foster families. The current cost of keeping a child in institutional care is 73,230 leke a month²²(See table 1). The current foster fee is 9,000 a month. While additional money would be needed to employ foster care social workers and to implement appropriate monitoring systems, there is still enough money in the existing system which can be redeployed to community-based alternatives to institutional care.

Table 1: Summary of monthly service costs per each beneficiary

Description of Service	Monthly Cost per beneficiary	Financing Resource	
		LGU	MIN.of LABOR
Residential Service for Elderly	43.76	14.81	28.95
Daily Service for Elderly	21.95	6.27	15.69
Residential Service for Persons with Disabilities (PwD)	67.02	17.43	49.60
Daily Service for PwD	65.61	19.79	45.82
Residential Service for Babies	73.23	21.58	51.65
Residential Service for Children of 6-14 y.o	78.30	25.38	52.91

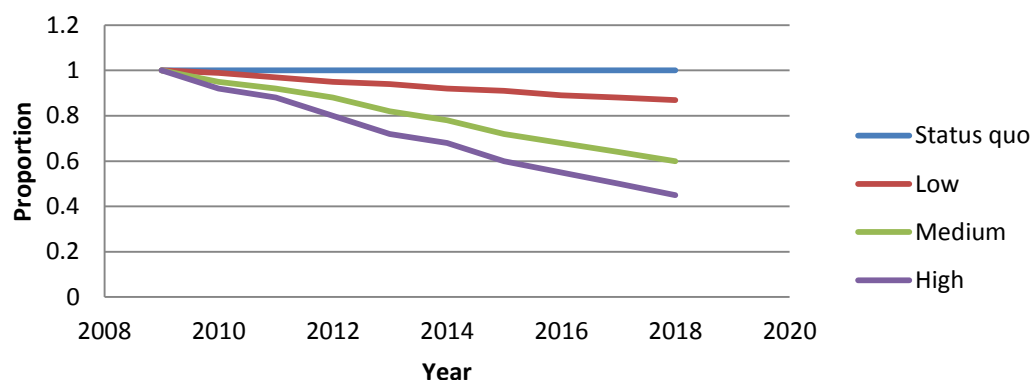
The following analysis was given by Evans (2011).²³ The cost of a policy with a high transfer of institutional care to foster care is 60% less expensive.

²¹ The literature on this area is extensive. A good resume was given in the UNICEF paper 'Why reform social services in Albania' pg.3.

²² Cost analysis of residential care in Albania (2013)

²³ Why reform social services in Albania. UNICEF (2011)

Respective costs of foster care policy as a proportion of current institutional care policy



The money exists within the existing budget to finance a viable and sustainable foster care service. If this money were redeployed, the outcomes for children would be more positive.

Recommendation: Following the establishment and evaluation of a demonstration project at Hana dhe Rozafa Sauk, the Ministry should consider facilitating the restructuring of the other two state institutions for 0-6 year old children and reallocate the money to developing a preventative service to support newborns to stay with their mothers, and to develop foster care. This makes sense both from a 'best interests of the child' perspective and from an economic perspective. If this money is reallocated to municipalities, some simple performance targets should be set to ensure that the policies of the government are being followed.

- b. Decentralisation without proactive monitoring. One of the five principles behind the development of social services in Albania has been the decentralisation of government functions from the central to the local level. In general, this is a positive development as it means that the local services can be much more responsive to local problems. However, decentralisation has been problematic for the development of foster care, as it appears that local municipalities decide how to meet their own priorities. This means that policy from the Government in relation to foster care is not being properly implemented. Both the desk review and discussions with local officials demonstrated this. For example, the local social service office is divided into two sections. One section administers the economic assistance to families and the other coordinates the five key areas of social service which are Gender and Domestic Violence, Child Protection Unit (CPU), Disability, Elderly and Roma/Gypsy. (We note that the development of the social services seems to have been 'issue-driven' as opposed to 'needs-driven'.) In Shkodra, to deal with all five of these areas of work, there are only two 'social workers'. So while the municipality may appear to be

covering the five key areas identified in policy, they have provided the capacity for this to be met adequately.

It is the job of the State Social Services to monitor the work of the municipalities. However, the monitoring is passive with little in the way of mechanisms to assure quality of service delivery. This combination of decentralisation with no proactive monitoring and no mechanisms for quality assurance from the SSS level means that when foster care is handed over to the municipalities, there can be no real accountability for the quality of this service. As we saw in the EC cases, case management stopped and the only state supported service which continued was economic assistance for those families who had been awarded a court decree.

Recommendation: The State Social Services should examine ways of creating a more active monitoring system and building accountability into the foster care service delivery. Allocation of funding should depend on meeting performance targets and having evidence of meeting the foster care standards.

- c. Lack of social work competence at local level. As previously mentioned, Albania has employed people who have the title of 'social worker' but who are not in fact trained social workers. Five different officials were interviewed across municipalities who had the title of 'social worker'. One had a degree in social science, one had a degree in psychology, one had a degree in economics and two had been teachers. In fact the only trained social workers interviewed were the FCPP staff and the Director of the Inspection Service at the state inspection unit. This is a major problem for establishing and sustaining a foster care service which will be eventually driven by the state. We understand that there is legislation in place which will lead to the licensing of social workers. This is to be welcomed, as only a trained social worker has the full set of competences in how to assess, place, monitor and review children in foster families.

The work done by the NGOs for the FCPP was very good as a starting point for a new foster care service. However, the fragility of work with time limited funding and which has no true local ownership by the municipalities is problematic. The existence of a centrally funded foster care social worker based within each of the municipalities would help to anchor the service locally. This would not take away from the ability of the municipality to raise its own funds and enter into local negotiations with NGOs to look at local needs. It would, however, be one way that the policy intentions of the Ministry are carried out at local level with regards to de-institutionalisation and the alternative care of children.

Recommendation: In future, only people with a degree in social work should be employed as social workers. In addition, to build a sustainable locally based foster care service, there should be a foster care social worker in each municipality whose sole remit it is to carry out the foster care service functions.

- d. Lack of non-related foster care families. An awareness campaign about foster care was supposed to be part of the Albanian Foster Care Strategy. However, several

interviewees told us that there was still no general awareness of foster care, either what it is or the understanding that people can come forward to be recruited. The EC staff told us that foster care family recruitment was ad hoc, based on local knowledge. There was no consistent and continuing awareness-raising and recruitment campaign. It appears that families in Albania are comfortable with kinship care and some of the more informal family care that can grow up in communities where a family or children is known to be in need. However, the idea of non-related foster care is not well understood or considered. This is a major problem if a pool of non-related foster carers is to be put in place for Albania. In order for babies and children to avoid being placed in institutional care, there needs to exist an alternative to the institution. Kinship or informal care, properly assessed, is one option. However, this option is not available for everyone. In those cases, children still have the right to live a family life. This is where non-related fostering comes in. If a pool of non-related foster families were available, then children would not need to go into institutions. This is particularly the case for the Abandoned Babies unit. These babies are the most vulnerable to long term damage by not being placed in a family.

The process of assessment of foster families should be thorough and robust. The criteria, however, should not discriminate against certain groups who may provide excellent temporary care for a child. For example, the stipulation that there should be ‘continuous and sufficient income’, discriminates against poor people. In Albania, there are 103,000 families on economic support²⁴. These families should not be debarred from providing care for a foster child, simply on the basis of wealth or income. If they are motivated and are assessed as being suitable in all other ways they should not be discriminated against just for being poor. Presumably there are children who thrive and do well even when born to poor families. Similarly, the age criterion, especially the upper age limit, discriminates against older people who have a wealth of love and experience to offer as child. There are so many different types of situations in which a child will need foster care, from a few days to many years. To respond to this there should be many different types of foster families in all areas of Albania.

Recommendation: Consistent national awareness-raising and recruitment campaigns for non-related foster carers need to be put into place and funded by the Government. This cannot simply be a ‘one time only’ campaign. Campaigns need to run regularly and be supported by local information giving sessions, which may be supported by a dedicated foster care social worker.

Recommendation: The criteria for foster carers as laid down in the Foster Care Strategy should be re-examined to ensure that they do not discriminate against any groups, as this will severely restrict the number of foster families who will be able to be recruited.

- e. Foster care as a judicial process. In Albania, foster care is a judicial process. Yet in the majority of countries in Europe, it is an administrative process. In a recent report

²⁴ Interview with Gezim Tushi, State Social Services (2nd Oct., 2013)

on fostering in Europe, it was reported that only one country had fostering as a judicial process.²⁵ The court process is costly, slow moving and stressful for families in Albania. Families and staff from the FCPP reported delays of over a year before a court order was granted. In the meantime, families could not get any economic assistance for the child as this is dependent on the court order. Interviews with the families revealed that they need economic assistance to be able to provide the best care for their foster children.

Judicial processes are detrimental to a responsive foster care case management service and the establishment of timely economic support. Judges also ask for additional assessments (e.g. psychologist's report which is identified in the Family Code, Art. 267) which have to be paid for by the family applying to foster the child. Judges also appear to have limited faith in the opinion of social services, even though social services are identified to provide opinions on the family (Family Code, Art. 267) At the moment, they have good reason for this lack of faith as the majority of social workers do not have a social work degree. In other European countries, the social worker would be the person to provide the assessment of the family. If further in-depth assessments were needed, the social worker would make that judgement based on their training and ensure that these were sourced before going to court. In general, there should be no need to have a psychologist's report as the social worker should provide all of this.

One option would be for the whole fostering process to be administrative and kept at local level. However, for this to happen, a well-functioning foster placement committee would have to be in place. The foster placement committee would have to comprise professionals who understand child development and who can properly interrogate the report of the social worker when the social worker presents the case to them. The order for the child to remain in temporary foster care should be granted locally and any decision for the child to return to its parents should be taken by the fostering committee. Only when the child is to be adopted should the process become a judicial process. For this to happen capacity would need to be built at local level and some changes to the Family Code (particularly Arts. 266 and 267) would be required to allow the decision on temporary care to be taken at a local level, and for the foster fee payment to be made on the basis of the local decision.

Recommendation: Consideration should be given to making foster care placements an administrative process at local level, with the attendant changes to the Family Code (particularly Arts. 266 and 267) that are required.

Recommendation: The Family Code should also be changed to allow for economic assistance to be available as soon as the child is placed with a family. It should be by order of the municipality and not dependent on a court order.

²⁵ Laklija, M. (2011) Foster Care Models in Europe. Forum for quality foster care/Joint efforts toward the realisation of children rights in Croatia [Supported by the Netherlands Foundation for Central and Eastern Europe] Accessed on 7th October, 2013 at <http://www.udomiteljizadjecu.hr/admin/fckeditor/File/publikacije/Foster%20care%20models%20in%20Europe%20-%20results%20of%20a%20conducted%20survey%20-%20Maja%20Laklija.pdf>

- f. No operational foster care committee. At local level, there exists a committee system, which is sometimes also called the multi-disciplinary team. This is a group of people, some of whom are technical people but some of whom are not experienced in any way. This multi-disciplinary team deals with ALL the issues for the locality. The multi-disciplinary team is not dealing with foster care currently in either Tirana or Shkodra. It was also reported that the multi-disciplinary team can consist of local elected officials like the mayor, who may have no knowledge of the complex issues involved in child placement. Given their lack of capacity in terms of time available and competence, they will be unlikely to be able to sit as a foster placement committee. Capacity needs to be built at this level before a foster care programme is rolled out all over the country. If the process became a responsive and fast acting administrative process supported by a local foster care social worker, this would give the foster care committee a clear role and would put the necessary components in place for foster care to be supported in the community. It should also be staffed only by technical people. Such a model is already outlined in the Foster Care Strategy²⁶

Recommendation: Consideration should be given to the immediate establishment of a small technically competent foster care committee in each municipality, separate from the larger all-purpose multi-disciplinary tea, in line with the Albanian Foster Care Strategy

7. What systems are in place to monitor the implementation of a foster care policy and services, and to ensure quality control, and how can these be improved?

As previously stated, there are no effective systems in place to monitor the implementation of foster care policy and services. There is a state inspection service. However, the Director reported that there are only four inspectors and himself to cover the whole country and also that the inspectorate only look at institutions. There are over 200 institutions in Albania. There is no inspection of other aspects of social service. In the absence of active state monitoring of services against the foster care standards, there can be no assurances that the foster care service is operating, or is providing a high quality service. The only statistics the SSS had in relation to fostering were the numbers of families receiving the foster care fee. The state inspection service provides monitoring against standards for all institutions but has no remit to provide inspection against the standards for any other social services. The State Social Services have a monitoring function for all social service areas. Monitoring, as we previously noted, is not active. It consists of obtaining figures and reports from local municipalities. There are no mechanisms to ensure that sound monitoring of foster care against the Albanian National Standards is taking place.

Recommendation: The State Social Services may wish to consider the establishment of a State Foster Care Inspector who can select a number of municipalities to inspect against the standards each year. The methodology for inspection already

²⁶ Official Bulletin of the Republic of Albania, No. 132. Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 1104 (30th July, 2008)

exists at the State Inspectorate and could easily be adjusted to apply to municipalities or NGOs offering fostering services.

8. *How adequate is the current regulatory framework for foster care services in Albania and what gaps exist?*

As discussed in the previous section, there are no adequate regulatory frameworks for foster care in Albania. Minimum standards and a model of regulation already exist in relation to institutions. This could be examined and adjusted for foster care in line with Recommendation Fifteen.

9. *Are foster families adequately trained to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for children?*

The training and support for foster families was impressive. The input covered issues such as separation, loss, abuse and trauma, and also looked at practical matters in relation to the fostering process. The aspect that was most valued by families was the continuing support, both through peer group sessions and individual family support for carers and children if required. The training and support are such that carers are being provided with the knowledge, skills and support to provide positive environments for children.

10. *What are the immediate, medium-term and long-term steps that need to be taken (and by whom) in order to make foster care services more sustainable in Albania?*

The FCPP has built a good foundation for the establishment of a foster care service. The momentum it has generated should be continued. We have outlined what we feel is needed in the immediate, medium and long term to make foster care more sustainable and viable in Albania. Within our suggestions we have identified the possibility of setting up a small demonstration project building on the work already done.

Immediate

The Family Code (particularly Arts. 266 and 267) should be changed on the recommendation of MOLSAEO to ensure that foster care is an administrative process run at local level, and that the foster fee follows the municipality decision-making process and not a court order.

The criteria for the selection of foster carers should be re-examined by MOLSEAO to ensure that no-one is being unjustly discriminated against.

The State Social Services should identify performance targets for municipalities in relation to foster care, with financial support from Central Government being dependent on meeting these targets.

The State Social Services should also ensure that appropriate inspection staff are in place for the implementation of monitoring of foster care against the standards and targets within the municipalities. This inspector will also be responsible for monitoring that foster children placed in families are being case managed properly.

A series of national awareness raising and recruitment campaigns on foster care should be put in place and centrally funded by the Government. The campaigns should run at least annually, as the number of non-related foster carers will need to increase each year as more children find themselves in need of alternative care. The good practice already generated by the FCPP could be used as a basis for some of this awareness-raising.

The non-related foster families should be selected, assessed as suitable, trained and placements should be case managed. Until the capacity at local level is built up, this should continue to be carried out by BSS. BSS's involvement should be on the understanding that there is a clear commitment to develop local capacity and that there is a plan for transferring responsibility to the municipality social services, where it belongs.

A separate local foster care committee should be constituted and operational in each municipality. The State Social Services should monitor that the committee members are identified, that they meet the correct technical specification for committee members and that they have a working set of operational procedures and protocols for meeting and making decisions.

A strategy on throughcare and aftercare of young people leaving institutions should be developed urgently, and appropriate NGOs engaged to explore how to provide a service to this group of highly vulnerable young people.

Medium term

MOLSAEO, in conjunction with BSS, should draw up a job description for the foster care social worker.

The State Social Services should monitor that the correct people are appointed to the foster care post. These workers must all have a degree in social work, they must be able to case manage the fostering process and they must be able to contribute to the support of fostering in their locality (e.g. by running local information sessions on how to become a foster carer).

DEMONSTRATION PROJECT: Once the pool of foster families (including non-related foster families and those who have been specially prepared to work with newborns) have been identified and the foster care social worker appointed, the first priority will be to place all of the children out of the 0-6 institution Hana dhe Rozafa Sauk into foster families and also to place any new referrals into a foster family. This could free up the building and staff at Hana dhe Rozafa to provide a new service which may comprise a residential mother and baby unit and a foster care resource centre. The staff at Hana dhe Rozafa could be retrained to provide support to help the mothers and their babies for the first 6 months. It is suggested that this re-structuring happens initially as a partnership between the state and BSS, in order to maintain the capacity and the momentum of the project.

The foster care resource centre will become a recruitment, training and support facility for foster carers and serve as a base for the foster care social workers in Tirana.

Negotiations should take place between MOLSAEO and the Abandoned Baby unit donors on how they may realign their services to continue to support the aim that any baby abandoned in Albania is helped into a family.

Long term

All employees with the title of social worker should be trained and licensed as social workers.

The other state institutions for 0-6 year-old children should be closed to new admissions and consideration given to a re-structure of the facilities along the lines of Hana dhe Rozafa.

Existing state institutions should be diversified along therapeutic lines to support those children and young people who cannot be sustained in a family. The staff in the new residential units should be trained and supported to provide the more therapeutically orientated service.

Therapeutic foster families should be recruited and trained to support older children with emotional and behavioural difficulties as a result of abuse, trauma and separation, who may otherwise remain in institutional care.

Contribution of the FCPP to the implementation of the Guidelines for Alternative Care for Children

- Focus area two: Placement of children aged 0-3 in family settings. *The FCPP has made a good start in the implementation of this guideline. However, the situation still remains poor with the existence of many institutions for children under three years old.*
- Focus area three: Strategies for de-institutionalising care systems. *The FCPP has followed the action plan for the establishment of foster care in Albania and has shown that it is starting to produce results. However, the acceptance of institutional care as a first resort instead of a last resort is problematic for the full implementation of this guideline. A cultural shift and a change of mind-set in relation to the children in need of alternative care is needed.*
- Focus area eight: Gatekeeping. *The FCPP has developed good procedures and processes to support foster care in Albania, in line with its foster care strategy. However, the process to authorise placement at the legal level and could benefit from being turned into an administrative process. There is also a capacity issue at municipality level and this should be addressed.*
- Focus area eleven: Developing family based alternative care systems. *The FCPP has made a good start at this, by supporting kinship care and family reunification. However, there is a need for other types of foster care to now be prioritised and developed, in particular crisis care and non-related foster care.*
- Focus area thirteen: Financing care. *Albania now has a foster fee for families. However, this is dependent on a court order which can over a year to put in place. Money is available in the system if it could be diverted from institutional care to foster care and this should be considered urgently.*
- Focus area fourteen: Developing reliable and accountable licensing and inspection systems. *Albania does not have an effective inspection system to ensure that the foster care standards are being met. Also they do not have people with a social work degree acting as social workers, as social workers are not licensed. The licensing of social workers is currently being addressed but the issue of inspection and robust evidence based monitoring of foster care needs to be addressed.*

Conclusion

The FCPP has made a very good start to the establishment of a viable foster care system in Albania. All of the jigsaw pieces are in place. The country has capacity in terms of its social work training system and its excellent relationships with NGOs. It has the money to support a foster care system as long as it is diverted away from expensive institutional care. It has the policy and legislative platforms upon which to build a sustainable system.

The challenges that have faced Albania in the past 20 years have been considerable. The development of a diverse system of alternative care for vulnerable children and young people takes time, as the history of any European country will reveal. Attitudes to vulnerable groups have changed and will continue to change. This will lead to changes in the social welfare system over time. The challenges of de-centralisation will have to be addressed through accountability and monitoring at the state level. These challenges, however, are not insurmountable. We were impressed by the openness and honesty of all the participants in this evaluation and also with their willingness to consider new ways of working. We were also impressed by the deep care and concern shown by the families to whom we spoke.

Our main concern for the project is the support it needs from localities. By strengthening the monitoring systems, by making localities accountable for their services and by supporting localities to build their capacity in relation to children and young people, it is hoped that this issue will be resolved and that Albania develops the alternative care systems that it needs to support its most vulnerable children.

APPENDIX ONE: list of documents surveyed

1. Application for capacity building for children at risk in Albania; Bethany Social Services
2. Application for implementing foster services in Albania: Every Child Albania (2009?)
3. Application for piloting foster/kinship care: Bethany Social Services(2010-2011)
4. Application for implementing foster care (2nd yr)
5. Application for initial stages of setting up fostering project (2008)
6. Progress reports (Bethany and Every Child)
7. Why reform social services in Albania? P. Evans, UNICEF (2011)
8. Foster care standards in Albania
9. Encouraging social service reform in Albania. P. Evans, UNICEF (2011)
10. Thematic study on the capacity of child care and social protection systems to provide adequate support to the most vulnerable children and their families and prevent family separation in three CEE/CIS countries. Oxford Policy Management (2011)
11. Social care decentralisation framework and action plan for Albania. P. Evans, UNICEF (2012)
12. Social Protection Sector Strategy 2007-2013. Albanian Government.
13. Assessment of the child care services and the institutions for children without parental care(2005)
14. Child care system reform: Albania country assessment (2007)
15. Law concerning the protection of the rights of the child (2010)
16. Situation analysis of child protection in Albania. BTFK (2011)
17. The CRC alternative report (2011)
18. Foster family care service as a form of alternative care. UNICEF (2010)
19. Media release by UNICEF : National Conference in Albania on Alternative Care for Children highlights that the best environment for a child's optimum development is within their own families (2011)
20. Child care system reform in South East Europe: A sub-regional analysis based on country assessments in Albania, Bulgaria, FYR Macedonia, Serbia (UNICEF CEE/CIS, 2007)
21. Official Bulletin of the Republic of Albania, No. 132. Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) No. 1104 (30th July, 2008)
22. Quality Foster Care Implementation Standards Framework VKM 752 (8th Sept, 2010)
23. Establishment of Criteria, Documentation and Procedure of Foster care Service DCM 89 (26th Jan., 2012)

24. Piecing together the jigsaw: Creating a prevention of abandonment and institutionalisation network in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria (2006-2009)
http://www.arkonline.org/media/56185/Piecing_together_the_jigsaw.pdf
25. Review of financial regulations and financial information systems of the Government of Albania for the management of social protection budgets, (2013)
Report for UNICEF.
26. Financial information on different types of care (UNICEF, 2013)
27. Family Code of Albania

APPENDIX TWO: List of participants interviewed

Bethany Social Services

Agim Xhumari, Bethany Social Services, Albania, Executive Director

Milika Dhamo, Bethany Social Services Albania, Program Director

Bob Watanabee, Bethany Social Services Program Consultant

Every Child Albania

Migena Leksani, former administrator

Alketa Kosta former social worker (Tirana)

Alma former social worker (Shkodra)

State Social Services, Tirana

Gezim Tushi, Head of social services section

Arkida Hysenaj, Director of Social Services Directory

Ermelinda Spaho, Head of Children's section

State Inspectorate of Social Affairs

Gazmend Zita, Director

Directory of Social Services Standards Inspection, Labor and Social Affairs
Inspectorate

State Adoption Committee

Marieta Zace, Head of Adoption Committee

Genci Terpo, Lawyer for Adoption Committee

Municipality of Tirana

Jolanda Shahaj, Social Administrator unit no 4, Tirana

Anila Leksani, Social Worker Tirana Municipality

Municipality of Shkodra

Social worker....need to get name

MOLSAEO (Now Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth)

Denada Seferi, Director of Social Services and Policies Department

Matilda Nonaj, Chief of sector, Social Services

Etleva Zeqo, Specialist of budgeting of Social Services

Kela Loperi, adviser to the minister (child rights, state social services, social protection and inclusion)

Abandoned Baby Unit, Maternity Hospital *Nena Geraldine*

Mira Ajazi, social worker

Court of Tirana

Brunilda Kasmi, Judge at Court of Tirana

Terre Des Hommes

Blerta Spahiu, Program manager