

EUROPEAN FORUM ON STREET CHILDREN 2009 – BUDAPEST, SEPTEMBER 24-25 2009

“MIGRATION OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN: THE INCREASING CHALLENGE TO A SOCIAL EU. THE ORIGIN COUNTRIES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AFTER THE FIRST YEARS OF EU MEMBERSHIPS”

Panel: “Cooperation of EU, International and National Authorities: The Impact of the Enlargement on the Living Conditions of Marginalized Children in Eastern Europe”

It is my pleasure to be here today and to represent UNICEF and particularly the Innocenti Research Centre. I would like to thank the organizers for the invitation.

In summer 2009, the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre published the “Innocenti Social Monitor 2009”¹, a review of child well-being in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. The report revealed that throughout the two decades of transition, the CEE/CIS countries have experienced an overall increased economic growth and an improvement in child well-being indicators. Nevertheless, despite this progress, inequalities and disparities have increased and there is still a great need for social policies to include children that have been left aside. Many policy challenges (which vary between countries) still remain and include the domains of: child survival; extreme poverty; low quality of education and limited access to non compulsory education; inadequate housing; and scarce access to social infrastructure. In higher income countries of the region, socialization, protection and marginalization remain significant gaps.

According to the same study, three groups of children are particularly at risk of being invisible in data collection and consequently in policies and programmes. These are: Roma children; children of migrant workers who are left behind when families or a parent migrate; and young people, who are transitioning into adulthood. Little seems to be done to offer education and employment opportunities and to create spaces for civic participation to this age group.

With the current economic crisis that the world is facing - which is not sparing the region-, disparities may become starker and progress may be off-set, considering that policies and resources are in danger of being redirected to tackle the short-term economic dimension leaving social investment aside. Poverty and exclusion may also lead to increased rates of migration of families including children, with implications for the receiving countries to ensure effective inclusion. Furthermore, the increased vulnerability may also push excluded children to seek better opportunities and to migrate as unaccompanied children with the potential risks that may incur while children on the move and at destination – e.g. trafficking, exploitation.

Policies and political will are key ingredients to overcome exclusion and to ensure a continuous improvement in the realization of children’s rights. Those countries that have or will join the EU will surely count on the support of other EU member States to maintain political will and find financial means to invest in social policies and meet the needs of children, particularly excluded ones.

UNICEF’s mandate is to work with Governments to ensure policies and programmes are put into action for the realization of children’s rights. UNICEF provides technical assistance and support to Governments for them to fulfil their obligations enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the

¹ Innocenti Social Monitor 2009 : Child well-being at a crossroad. Evolving challenges in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

Child (CRC), to guarantee the right to: survival, the highest attainable standard of health, education, leisure, protection from abuse and exploitation, participation and generally to holistic development.

To this respect, UNICEF, together with other partners, advocates for and sustains the promotion and mainstreaming of child-sensitive social protection. This is "an evidence-based approach that aims to maximize opportunities and developmental outcomes for children by considering different dimensions of child well-being"². In practice, this means promoting actions that address poverty, vulnerability and exclusion through a range of possible interventions such as social transfers, social insurance, social services and policies, legislation and regulations. The role of research is key to understand the trends and situation of children so that policies are targeted to best suit children's needs and priorities, through disaggregated analysis, but always in line with the principle of non-discrimination.

With regard to the vulnerability excluded children may face, from the protection dimension, UNICEF has promoted the protective environment approach which calls for the interaction of different dimensions and stakeholders. According to this concept, effective protection of children depends on: governmental commitment, legislation and enforcement, promotion of attitudes and cultures fostering protection, enhancing a discussion on child rights with different social and political actors, capacity building of stakeholders, provision of services, participation and empowerment of children and monitoring and assessment. Lately, the emphasis has shifted to building and strengthening protection systems as a whole rather than as separate actors or institutions.

These approaches are not only encouraged and promoted at the national level; there is instead an increasing interest and concern within UNICEF that the implementation of the UN CRC must be brought down to the local level. According to the UNICEF Medium Term Strategic Plan (2006-2013), local authorities are recognised as key partners in the provision of a systematic response to children. At the same time, the outcome document of the UN Special Session on Children (May 2002) stresses that "local governments and authorities can ensure that children are at the centre of agendas for development. By building on ongoing initiatives, such as child-friendly communities and cities without slums, mayors and local leaders can significantly improve the lives of children."³

In response to a worldwide concern about increasing rates of urbanisation and in parallel to a political trend of decentralisation, Governments of cities of different sizes started promoting activities and projects to meet children's needs and to strengthen the implementation of the UN CRC. Many of these experiences emerged within the Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI). Launched by UNICEF and UN Habitat in 2006, the Initiative has turned into a world-wide partnership gathering a diversity of stakeholders (local governments, NGOs, children's and community-based organisations, the private sector, academia and UN Agencies and others) and became an important driving force to advocate for the realization of children's rights at the sub-national level.

To support and guide the CFC initiative, the CFCI Secretariat was established at the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre to serve as a common point of reference and interaction and as a source of technical assistance to CFC activities in different countries. Among other things, the Secretariat has facilitated the development of a common vision and a Framework for Action for child friendly cities, developed through the analysis of a wide variety of experiences and initiatives. The framework is firmly grounded on the comprehensive promotion of child rights and represents the global consensus on CFC.

² Advancing Child-Sensitive Social Protection, June 2009, Joint Statement (DFID, HelpAge International, Hope and Homes for Children, Institute of Development Studies, International Labour Organization, Overseas Development Institute, Save the Children UK, UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank).

³ A World Fit for Children, United Nations General Assembly, S-27/2, 11 October 2002

The Child Friendly City (CFC) approach promotes local development by accelerating progress with regard to the realization of UN CRC and the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals. Its key principles are inspired by the CRC and include: non-discrimination; best interests of the child; every child's right to life, survival and development; listening to children's views. In a CFC children's rights are reflected in policies, laws, programmes and budgets. In a child friendly city, children are active agents; their voices and opinions are taken into consideration and influence decision making processes.

Applying the approach entails that local authorities commit to develop and implement a children's action plan or strategy which includes clear objectives and targets to deliver services and opportunities. The policy should have an inter-sectorial approach and should rely on a coordination mechanism or unit for its implementation. Its development should be highly inclusive and involve all citizens, among them children.

In addition to a strategy and a coordinating unit overseeing implementation, the CFC approach also envisions that local governments ensure a policy assessment is conducted and that disaggregated and qualitative data are collected to guarantee that all children, even the excluded ones, are visible and that their needs are effectively attended to by policies and programmes. A State of the Children's Report should also be produced, disseminated and widely discussed with the community to guide future actions, to inform citizens about children's needs and for reasons of accountability and transparency.

A CFC also foresees that budgetary provisions are taken to guarantee that policies are well resourced, with a special focus on excluded and marginalized children, who may require tailored actions. Citizens, including children, should participate in the budget revisions exercise as part of a process fostering democracy. Finally, institutional capacity building and awareness raising on children's rights should be promoted to ensure the strengthening of a culture safeguarding the principles enshrined in the UN CRC.

The participation of children is an essential cross-cutting element in the CFC approach. It is important that in all matters children, even the most excluded ones, are brought in. Children should be seen as agents of change; they should be valued as assets and as part of the solution and not the problem.

Many are the examples from around the world that illustrate how CFCs have promoted the realization of the rights of all children, including marginalized ones, and how the latter have been given a voice in many instances. The Brazilian initiative has provided evidence on the reduction in malnutrition rates and improvements in pre-school attendance in the cities engaged in the process of becoming child friendly. At the same time, a key component is mobilization of children and adolescents. The Filipino experience shows how child friendly cities and communities are providing better attention to excluded children and families compared to non child friendly towns. The city of Amman established an Executive Agency for a Child Friendly City which oversees the implementation of programmes for children and ensures inter-sectorial coordination at the local level. The Agency promoted the drafting of a policy document- "Policy and Priorities for Children" – which aims to enhance the quality of life for children, with a special focus on excluded ones, by including actions in the areas of health, protection and safety, culture, informal education/school drop outs, and child-built environments. In this case, even the participation of marginalized children has been fostered through a broad election process of municipal councils.

European CFC initiatives are giving special attention to marginalized children, including migrants. The Spanish experience for instance, assesses the efforts promoted by cities with regard to the reduction

of poverty and exclusion by acknowledging progress through a "child friendly" label. In the assessment, actions for the inclusion of migrant children are also taken into account. In addition, both the French and Spanish initiative value cooperation and development actions in favour of children in other countries, which may also imply cooperation with Eastern and Central European countries.

All these examples – and many others - indicate that the development and implementation of policies and interventions at the local level is a key way to ensure poverty and exclusion are reduced and child well-being is fostered. In the central and eastern European countries examples of CFC initiatives are starting to emerge such as in Estonia, Ukraine and Russia, where criteria based on the CFC Framework have been defined and cities have been appointed as child friendly based on these requirements. These are just the starting point. An increasing number of cities can take up the challenge and are interested to do so. Cooperation at all levels (EU, UN agencies, bilateral between governments and between local authorities) should therefore also aim to strengthen local authorities to effectively realize children's rights.

As far as UNICEF IRC is concerned, the Centre undertakes research to increase the understanding of barriers to the realization of children's rights and advancing child wellbeing through in-depth analysis of the many deprivations faced by children living in poverty and exclusion. In addition to the study mentioned at the beginning, current areas of research include children migrating with families and/or alone (an upcoming publication on immigrant children in 8 affluent countries and one on movements of children, legal and practice related dimensions). The upcoming study on immigrant children in affluent countries⁴ holds implications for countries in Eastern Europe. While a number of the children in richer countries may come from Eastern Europe, in the future with economic growth and development through EU enlargement, the situation in Eastern European countries may look like that in the current most affluent societies as regards the number, role and situation of children of immigrants (e.g. higher poverty rates for children in immigrant; overcrowded housing; disadvantaged education opportunities).

Other areas of research at IRC deal with the assessment of child well being, and on monitoring and assessment of child friendly cities. This research initiative aims to generate knowledge on the mechanisms used by cities to create awareness and action for child rights, to locate the children in greatest need and identify their unmet needs and rights and to assess progress in fulfilling these. Concretely, it will produce a universal toolkit that can be adapted for the assessment and monitoring of cities and communities in all countries.

To conclude, I would like to thank you for inviting us to this event and we look forward to continue collaborating with the Forum to further increase understanding of excluded children.

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⁴ UNICEF IRC. Children in Immigrant Families in Eight Affluent Countries: Their Family, National and International Context. Upcoming