A photograph of two children, a girl and a boy, jumping joyfully in a park. The girl is on the left, wearing a red t-shirt and patterned shorts, with her arms raised and one leg kicked up. The boy is on the right, wearing a green polo shirt, grey shorts, a blue baseball cap with a cartoon character, and sandals, also with his arms raised and one leg kicked up. In the background, other people are visible, including a woman in a red and white striped shirt and blue jeans, and a child in a yellow dress. The scene is set outdoors with trees and a clear blue sky.

Realising Children's Rights through Social Policy in Europe and Central Asia

A Compendium of UNICEF's
Contributions (2014—2020)

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OVERVIEW

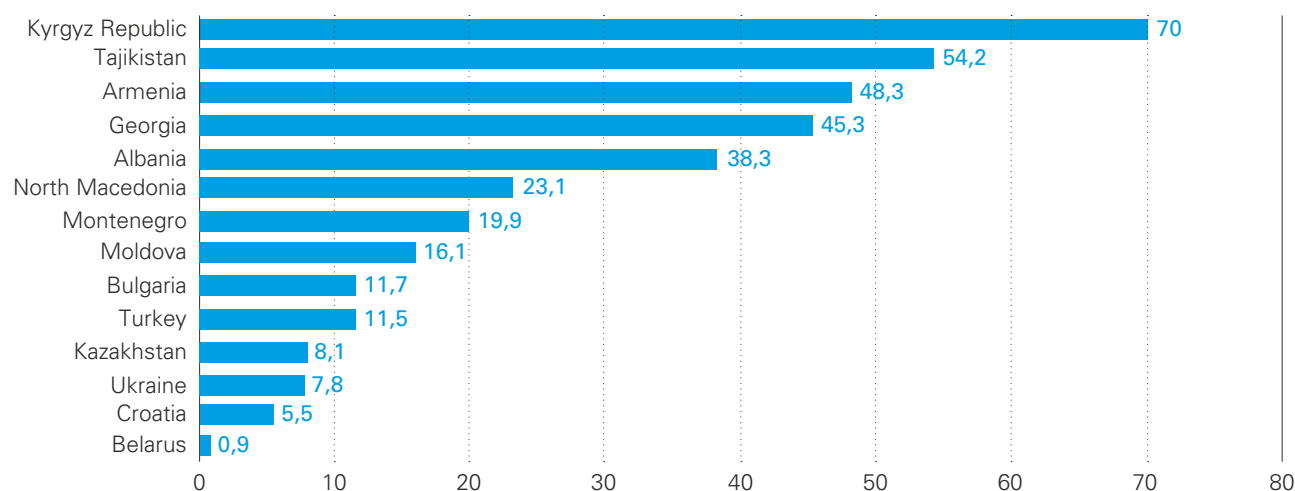
UNICEF's Europe and Central Asia Region (ECAR)¹ is diverse and dynamic, comprising 22 countries which range from low- to high-income, contain among the world's largest and smallest populations, and are in various stages of the demographic transition. Children, adolescents, and youths in the region face unique challenges that have the potential to derail their opportunities, including exposure to man-made and natural disasters, risks of poverty and deprivation, discrimination and marginalisation, lack of opportunities to attain appropriate skills and employment, and inadequate access to core social services that impact child well-being. There is a strong tradition of social and public policies aimed at reducing poverty and deprivation in the region, and these have an important role to play in addressing the vulnerabilities associated with childhood and adolescence.

Globally, UNICEF has significantly increased its engagement in Social Policy over the past decade, and in particular following the launch of its Social Protection Strategic Framework in 2012,¹ recently updated in 2019,² and the roll-out of Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) beginning in 2012.³ These helped to shape the social inclusion and social protection commitments in the 2014-2017 UNICEF Strategic Plan.⁴ Recent years have seen the continuation of this work, with the 2017 launch of a framework on Public Finance for Children (PF4C),⁵ increasing work on decentralisation and local governance approaches to programming,⁶ and strong references to social policy within the 2018-21 UNICEF Strategic Plan.⁷ In the ECA

region, UNICEF has expanded its work across all areas of social policy, including significant upstream engagements with national and subnational governments, civil society, and development partners.

Children continue to face challenges across the region, especially in terms of monetary and multidimensional poverty, and some are affected by conflict or humanitarian crises. Obtaining comparable monetary poverty data across the region poses some challenges. The World Bank's extreme poverty line of USD1.90 (PPP) is not particularly applicable to the extent and nature of poverty in ECA. The latest data from 2017 provides data for only six of the countries in this compendium. The available data indicates that 0% of the population in Belarus and Kazakhstan live below this line, with Georgia having the highest poverty headcount at 5%. However, a more meaningful poverty picture can be observed if we consider the World Bank's USD5.50 poverty line, the upper-middle-income country poverty line, which is more apt for the ECA region. Data from 2015, the last time reasonably comparable data was available for fourteen² of the fifteen countries in the compendium, shows significant variation among countries. The Kyrgyz Republic had the highest poverty headcount of 70% and Belarus the lowest at 0.9%.⁸ Owing to a lack of disaggregated data (i.e. by household composition and age), World Bank figures for child poverty are not available for this measure. This suggests the need for improved efforts going forward to disaggregate data, which is something cited as a challenge in many of the countries in the compendium.

Figure 1 2015 Poverty Headcount Ratio at USD5.50 per day (2011 PPP) in selected ECA countries



¹ <https://www.unicef.org/eca/>

² No 2015 data was available for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

UNICEF's recent report on *Child Poverty in Europe and Central Asia Region*⁹ also confirms a similar picture, with significant variation in the numbers of people, including children, reported to be experiencing poverty in the region. The poverty context of each country is discussed extensively throughout this compendium. The general trend has been towards progress on poverty reduction, with some cases of backsliding. However, owing to different methodologies and time sets for the poverty data employed in each country's own measurements, an aggregated summary of data is not possible. Nevertheless, each profile usually outlines its monetary and multidimensional poverty status. Both monetary and multidimensional poverty and deprivation remain a very real challenge in the ECA region and certain vulnerable groups (e.g. large families, households with adults or children with a disability) experience significantly higher poverty than the rest of the population.

Social protection has historically been a significant focus of UNICEF's social policy portfolio in the region, as reflected by the 12 case studies in this policy stream in the compendium.

While many countries have a mature social protection system anchored in law, significant challenges exist with regard to effective coverage and benefit adequacy, both in terms of benefit amounts and the range of appropriate benefits to cover the various needs of families with children. In some countries, the trend remains towards universal provision, while more poverty-targeted approaches and cash transfer programmes that do not specifically target children are pursued in others. This partly reflects national priorities and fiscal space along with issues of information systems capable of identifying children, and persistent concerns centring on dependency and misuse of benefits, despite significant evidence dispelling these myths. In the ECA region, UNICEF has also made a very important contribution through its country-level efforts to support SDG Goal 1.3 on realising universal social protection. For example, as a region, ECA has been at the epicentre of activity with regard to child and family benefit reform, by making the case for a more universalistic provision through evidence and advocacy, or supporting progressive modifications for coverage or adequacy through legislative change. While some countries have made significant strides forward, others have encountered setbacks too. Improved complementarity between social services and the provision of social protection entitlements to maximise outcomes for children is an issue that features prominently in this compendium. Other recurrent issues include the challenge of extending social protection coverage to children who may be undocumented and therefore experience legal exclusion and do not enjoy the same rights as children with the status of citizen or legal resident.

Figures for the ILO indicate that the total social protection expenditure (excluding health-related expenditure) in the region is, on average, higher than in other regions, estimated at around 16.5% of GDP allocated to social

protection.¹⁰ However, this figure factors in the expenditure on social protection of richer OECD European countries too, which distorts the average expenditures. The variation between countries featured in the compendium,³ and for which there is data, is significant. Total social protection expenditure in Ukraine is 16.2% of GDP, whereas the average for the countries in the compendium for which there is data is 10.5%. The lowest expenditure is in Armenia and Kazakhstan, with a respective 6.8% and 5.1% of their GDP allocated to social protection.

According to a joint ILO-UNICEF report on social protection for children,¹¹ increases in social protection spending over the last two decades reflect, mainly, the introduction and expansion of social assistance cash transfer programmes.¹² In lower-income countries and middle-income countries, the share is largest in ECA, where cash transfers account for 76% of social assistance spending.¹³ Globally, social spending on social protection for children has grown steadily over the last decade, as has the number of programmes specifically designed to reach children or households with children. The most recent estimate of the global provision of social protection for children – 1.1% of global GDP for the most recent year¹⁴ – reflects a nearly three-fold increase over the 0.4% figure reported for 2010/11.¹⁵

Despite these trends, average global population coverage for child and family benefits remains comparatively low: at around 35% according to recent estimates, whereas around 87% per cent of children in Europe and Central Asia are covered.¹⁶ However, it is important to keep in mind that richer OECD countries skew these figures, and effective (as opposed to statutory) coverage is far off this figure in many countries in ECA, as documented in this compendium. For example, Europe covers more than 85% of children with child and family benefits, whereas this figure is only 43.9% in Central Asia.¹⁷

ECA is still a region that requires further investment to ensure adequate coverage and benefit provision for children, and it is also home to examples of where there are ineffective social protection systems in place. For example, some anti-poverty benefits are targeted at the household level without taking into account the household composition, which can mean large families with several dependent children or households containing children with disabilities do not receive the support they need. This indicates that vulnerable households are poorly served by generic provision. As articulated through the Leave No One Behind Agenda, there remains a need to focus on the most vulnerable segments of the population who will need additional support to sustainably move out of poverty. Moreover, effective provision of social protection is hampered by a lack of (disaggregated) data on child poverty, an absence of evidence-based policymaking dialogue, and

³ No data was available for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Tajikistan.

a number of countries' systems need to evolve so as to become more shock-responsive and capable of coping with new risks. Adequacy of child-focussed benefits in the region is generally low, undermining the effectiveness of social assistance as a tool for poverty alleviation and support to human capital development.

UNICEF's Public Finance for Children (PF4C) efforts recognise that many of the obstacles to improving the well-being of children relate to the adequacy, efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and transparency of public finances. Obstacles to improving the child-friendliness of national budgets may include: a lack of budget data, weak budget planning, lack of information on expenditure on children, low budget execution, and insufficient or inequitable allocations for education, health, and social services that ultimately imperil the well-being of children and limit their chances of realising their innate potential.¹⁸ Consequently, in recent years UNICEF has increasingly focussed its efforts on improving PF4C and has striven to tackle PFM challenges to achieve strategic results across all areas of programming. UNICEF's PF4C work operates in four main areas: engaging in the budget process to influence and support allocation decisions and improve spending performance; supporting domestic resource mobilisation to expand domestic financing of services and programmes; supporting data and evidence generation to make the case for greater and better public investments in children; and by empowering citizens, including children's communities and civil society organisations (CSOs) to track spending and participate in national/local budget processes to advocate for children.¹⁹ Nearly all country offices engage in some aspects of this work. This compendium features the recent PF4C work of Armenia and Belarus to improve national PFM outcomes for children. In

Armenia, UNICEF's PF4C work was able to leverage additional resource allocation for children through public finance advocacy and evidence generation. This will support efforts to reduce child poverty and deprivation. UNICEF Belarus has been active in developing a Child-focussed Public Expenditure measurement as a public finance analytical tool and a Multidimensional Child Poverty measure (MDCP). The ultimate goal of this work is to capture the countries' untapped demographic dividend by investing in the current and future generation of children and adolescents to achieve this.

In the ECA region, UNICEF supports countries in measuring monetary and multidimensional child poverty and addressing it through policies, programmes, and budgets. This effort includes allocating more public funds for the poorest children and using those funds more effectively, expanding social protection systems for children and making them more sensitive to children's needs, as well as linking social protection and basic services for children. UNICEF's child poverty work comprises four broad domains, which are often undertaken in sequence. These include: national measurement of child poverty in all its dimensions; advocacy using child poverty measurement, where data exist but are underused; policy analysis and engagement to influence and resource policies and programmes, where child poverty is recognised but not addressed; and integrating policies and programmes by developing national action plans equipped with resources to put them into practice, to achieve the SDG on child poverty, where interventions are limited or fragmented. In many country case studies in this compendium, it is possible to see that UNICEF's work on poverty was utilised to advance significant policy reform particularly in the area of social protection provision for children.



Decentralisation is the final core pillar of UNICEF's social policy portfolio and this compendium details this work in three ECA countries. UNICEF has recognised that, while engaging with the national government is critical, so too is working with local governments that are at the frontline of service delivery for children. Whether in urban or rural settings, they help connect girls and boys to nutritious food, safe water, quality education, sanitation, and other services that reduce the burden of poverty.²⁰ However, ineffective local governance for children remains a challenge and local governments are often not fully equipped to meet children's needs. Supporting local governments to overcome limited information regarding child wellbeing and enhance resource allocation is paramount to ensure all children can be reached with the quality social services they require. As part of this effort to improve local governance, UNICEF and UN Habitat launched the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) in 1996, with the expressed goal of making cities liveable places for all children. In conclusion, the goals of the CFCI are to ensure every child and youth is valued, has their voice heard and needs taken into account, has access to quality essential social services, can live in a safe, secure, and clean environment and has opportunities to enjoy family life, playtime, and leisure.²¹ UNICEF Albania, Turkey, and Ukraine have been very dynamic in pursuing this initiative as their respective case studies in this compendium show. UNICEF Albania has designed and rolled out a more integrated social care services system at the local level. UNICEF Turkey has utilised the global CFCI work at the local level by increasing a

child-friendly budget at the local level, for instance. UNICEF Ukraine has demonstrated that even without direct UNICEF investment, it is possible to boost public spending on children, establish effective cooperation with municipalities, and ensure meaningful local CRC implementation.

This Compendium documents UNICEF's social policy interventions in Europe and Central Asia from 2014-2020 and includes 18 case studies from 15 different countries. The timeframe selected represents work undertaken during two of UNICEF's global Strategic Plans (2014-2017 and 2018-2021), which have included four discreet areas of social policy focus. Where possible, documented evidence for impacts that have emerged more recently in 2019-early 2020 have also been included, though this Compendium notably excludes specific efforts to address COVID-19. Information for the Compendium has been sourced from UNICEF Country Office Annual Reports (COAR) and UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey,²² internal reporting,²³ or has otherwise been documented in a published study or report by UNICEF or other sources. Several rounds of consultation were undertaken with ECA country offices through email and/or online interviews to ensure high-quality and accurate content. Quality case studies also presupposed supplementary evidence drawn from publications and data from other UN agencies or national institutions. Careful efforts were undertaken to source and extensively reference the information for the case studies through publicly available documents or online sources.

The Compendium details UNICEF's contributions in the ECA region across the following four Action Areas:

1. **Extending Social Protection adequacy and coverage** by developing evidence and advocacy, policies and systems, shock-responsive social protection, cash plus/linkages, cash transfer programming, expanding coverage, cash plus social services, and social protection financing.
2. **Improving Public Finance for Children** by focussing on increasing transparency and accountability, improving equity, increasing value for money/impact of spending, promoting budget adequacy, and improving decentralised public spending.
3. **Reducing Child Poverty** through improved measurement, linking measurement to policy and programmes, reducing poverty.
4. **Supporting Decentralisation and Local Governance** to ensure other critical social policy areas are delivered and implemented at the local level with optimal impact.

A summary of the case studies in the compendium is as follows:

ACTION AREA 1 //

Social Protection

Numerous countries have taken steps to expand and improve the design and implementation of cash transfers for children, including through social protection systems which strengthen and link this provision better with other social services. This represents the bulk of UNICEF's social policy work featured in this compendium. In **Armenia**, a broad-spectrum effort to strengthen the social protection system has been undertaken. This included a new draft social protection strategy, reform of its Integrated Social Services system, and changes to existing social assistance programmes. In the Republika Srpska Entity in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, UNICEF supported the government in the improvement of the adequacy and coverage of child cash benefits and introduced a range of quasi-universal benefits, especially for children with disabilities. In **Bulgaria**, UNICEF worked closely with the Agency of Social Assistance to pilot and scale up a new social service – the Family Consultative Centres – to support the needs of families and children. In **Croatia**, UNICEF worked with local partners to ensure children and pregnant women received essential health and psychological care and encouraged the government to reform legal provision to cover forcibly displaced persons and migrants with more comprehensive health provision. In **Kazakhstan**, UNICEF provided technical support to the government to reform its social assistance system, to ensure it was child-sensitive, which resulted in a four-fold increase in the coverage of the main family benefit. In the **Kyrgyz Republic**, UNICEF experienced oscillating fortunes whereby it worked with the

government to implement a quasi-universal child benefit for children aged 0-3, only for this to be suspended owing to a complex social policy environment. In **Moldova**, UNICEF conducted an analysis and microsimulation of the main social assistance programme, the *Ajutor Social*, to advocate and build the evidence for increasing its coverage for three vulnerable households (i.e. households with three or more children, households with a disabled child or adult, and single-parent households). In **Montenegro**, efforts were made to promote the inclusion of children from minority groups by assisting them when accessing and obtaining their social protection benefits and other social services. In **North Macedonia**, UNICEF supported the government's sweeping reforms of the social protection system by helping to progressively reconfigure cash benefits for children and attempting to improve social workers' effectiveness through integrated case management. UNICEF **Tajikistan** recognised the need for its social protection systems to be reconfigured so as to be more shock-responsive, given the shocks that annually occur in the country. The country office has been building policy options that help the government design more shock-responsive social protection. Given **Turkey's** role as a safe-haven country for many forcibly displaced persons, UNICEF Turkey played a significant role in supporting these families through a national cash transfer programme that also promoted refugee children's access to education. In **Ukraine**, UNICEF worked closely with the government in the introduction of a universal Baby Box to support all new parents to raise their children and support effective parenting. This has been an enormously popular programme.



ACTION AREA 2 //

Public Finance for Children

While public finance work features in many of these compendium cases, UNICEF Armenia and Belarus' work embodies and explicitly focusses on this theme. In **Armenia**, PF4C advocacy efforts made a direct contribution to the development of a 2019 programme and performance budgets (PPBs) for the education, health, social protection, and justice sectors, thereby generating policy impacts that will help combat child poverty and deprivations. UNICEF **Belarus** has been supporting the government to help capture its demographic dividend by developing a Child-focussed Public Expenditure Measurement (C-PEM) as a public finance analytical tool and a Multidimensional Child Poverty measure to analyse social expenditure on children and ensure optimum investment continues to occur.

ACTION AREA 3 //

Child Poverty

In **Georgia**, UNICEF's child poverty analysis and alternative policy simulation came together with policy advocacy and partnership building to result in the introduction of a remarkable child benefit programme component to the Targeted Social Assistance programme. These efforts meant that approximately 136,000 children are now able to have access to this benefit.

ACTION AREA 4 //

Decentralisation and Local Governance

UNICEF Albania, Turkey, and Ukraine have made important strides forward with their CFCI work. UNICEF **Albania** has made progress on improving the integrated nature of social care services by helping to streamline the activities of local government units delivering social care services; improving the financing structure and human resource capabilities of social care staff, and the Management Information System for delivering cash and social care. UNICEF **Turkey** has managed to redress some of the inequities posed by urban living and has supported the development of both evidence generation and programming for children at the local level. Its CFCI work has helped realise child rights at the local level and the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child too. In **Ukraine**, UNICEF's CFCI results demonstrate that with the right mix of incentives, recognition, and technical support, and even without direct investment, UNICEF can boost public spending on children, establish effective cooperation with municipalities, and ensure meaningful implementation of the CRC at the local level. UNICEF Ukraine's CFCI work represents tremendous value for money, as for every USD1 UNICEF spent on the CFCI, USD253 was leveraged for children at the local level.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	02
Overview	03

ACTION AREA 1 // Social Protection

10

Armenia. Full Spectrum Strengthening of the National Social Protection System	11
Bosnia and Herzegovina. Extending Social Protection Coverage for Children with Disabilities at the Level of the Republika Srpska Entity	15
Bulgaria. Engaging the Agency for Social Assistance to Adopt, Implement, and Scale Up Enhanced Child and Family Support Service Provision	19
Croatia. Extending Essential Health Care to Forcibly Displaced and Migrant Children and Pregnant Women	23
Kazakhstan. Improving Access to Social Protection and Cash Plus Services for Low-income Families with Children	26
Kyrgyz Republic. Expanding Universal Social Protection for Children in a Volatile Social Policy Context	29



Moldova. Conducting Analysis and Microsimulation to Increase Coverage of the 'Ajutor Social' Programme	32
Montenegro. Advocacy and Awareness Raising for Increased Social Inclusion of Children from Minority Groups	36
North Macedonia. Reforming the Social Protection System through the Introduction of a new Child Benefits System and Integrated Case Management Approach	40
Tajikistan. Adapting the Social Protection System to be Shock-Responsive	44
Turkey. Extending the National Cash Transfer Programme to Promote Refugee Children's Access to Education	48
Ukraine. Supporting Parenting through Evidence-based Policies and a Universal Baby Box	51

ACTION AREA 2 // Public Finance for Children

55

Armenia. Leveraging Funds through Public Finance Advocacy and Evidence Generation to Combat Child Poverty and Deprivation	56
Belarus. Investing in Future Generations to Seize a 'Demographic Dividend'	60

ACTION AREA 3 // Child Poverty

64

Georgia. Transforming the Social Protection System for Children through Poverty Analysis	65
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----



ACTION AREA 4 // Decentralisation and Local Governance

68

Albania. Designing an Integrated Social Care Service System at the Decentralised Level	69
Turkey. Harnessing UNICEF's Global Child-Friendly City Initiative to Produce Positive Results for Children at the Local Level	72
Ukraine. Generating Results for Children at the Local Level through UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities Initiative	76





ACTION AREA 1 //

Social Protection





ARMENIA //

Full Spectrum Strengthening of the National Social Protection System





Issue

Armenia has a population of 3 million, 23% of whom are children. It had a GDP per capita of \$4,212 in 2018.²⁴ The last decade has seen Armenia's economy and society go through two economic shocks, leading to a big contraction in GDP of 14.1% in 2009. Inequality has also increased: the Gini coefficient rose from 0.339 in 2008 to 0.36 in 2018.²⁵ Poverty is a major challenge too. 2018 figures indicate that 23.5% of the population lives under the national poverty line.²⁶ While poverty rates are declining, they remain one of the highest in the region. Moreover, for every three Armenians who moved out of poverty between 2010-2015, one fell back into poverty.²⁷

Other challenges include high urban-rural disparities, falling fertility rates, population ageing, and large-scale outward migration. These all place pressures on growth and expenditure on health, pensions, and social services. In particular, low female labour force participation and a wide gender wage gap further hinder growth prospects. Spending on social protection is relatively high (6.59% of GDP) compared to education (2%) or health (1.3%), but low compared to OECD averages. Most expenditure is on pensions and other types of cash benefits, while social services are underfunded.

Approximately a third of all children experience poverty. The extreme child-poverty rate is 1.5%.²⁸ There has been no substantive reduction in child poverty in the last decade. The risk of being poor increases significantly for families with three or more children. Multidimensional poverty experienced by children in Armenia shows that 61.6% of children experience deprivation in two or more dimensions, especially in utilities, housing, and leisure.²⁹

Monetary and multidimensional child poverty reduction have not been explicitly included in any policy documents, and no national social protection strategy existed prior to the Velvet Revolution of 2018 and UNICEF's recent advocacy efforts. Moreover, the family benefit (FB) system is viewed as ineffective and there are different levels of understanding of social protection among cooperation partners. Proxy means-tested benefits aimed at enhancing family living standards in poor and vulnerable households (comprising a family benefit, social benefit, and quarterly emergency assistance) are the primary anti-poverty social assistance benefits. The FB is the only poverty benefit for families with children, while vulnerable households without children are entitled to a Social Benefit.

Social transfers have a significant poverty reducing effect. However, not all recipients are lifted out of poverty through monetary assistance, as significant challenges

with targeting efficacy exist. The FB programme is most relevant to families with children who experience poverty. In 2018, the FB's coverage was 12.1% of the eligible population (lower than in 2015, where it was 13.6%). The FBs experience 'leakage' where benefits are distributed to recipients in the top two consumption quintiles. For example, 12.2% of the beneficiaries receive transfers despite not being vulnerable, receiving a total of 11.2% of the total FB transfers. Clearly, the targeting methodology has resulted in inclusion/exclusion errors, and therefore requires reform. FBs make a difference in reducing child poverty, especially extreme child poverty. Some 23.9% of all children live in households receiving the FB.³⁰ If FBs were deducted from the total household expenditure, the extreme child poverty rate would increase from 1.5% to 7%, whereas the total child poverty rate would go up by 4.5 percentage points, from 29.2% to 33.7%.³¹ Thus, FB income is very significant for poor households. However, the FB's design does not account for multidimensional poverty, and it is inadequate in enabling the full use of important services and goods. Moreover, its adequacy diminishes over time, as it is not adjusted to inflation and, in this sense, can be regressive. Other benefits (e.g. disability and childcare allowance) are not poverty-targeted and hardly make any difference to the poverty status of children and families.³² More targeted and needs-based services are needed, intertwined with cash interventions, for more effective alleviation of child poverty.

Armenia has embarked on the reform of its integrated social services (ISS) since 2010, with the support of UNICEF and the World Bank. The ISS reform entails the provision of comprehensive social services through a 'one window' approach, meaning that all main social service offices are under one roof, thereby improving access to and administration of social services. Under this concept, the territorial Integrated Social Service Centres are being gradually established, hosting territorial offices of social services, territorial divisions of the Social Security Administration, State Employment Agency, and regional commissions of the Medical-Social Examination Agency. 48 such centres are planned in the country by the end of the reform. By September 2019, 28 ISSC were operating nationwide. However, challenges remain in the systemic capacity development and quality of social/case management work, availability and quality of community-based services, financing of social protection, and professional cooperation among social service providers in addressing the multiple vulnerabilities of families and children. Cash and care services are neither meaningfully linked nor interlinked with active labour market programmes (ALMPs).



Actions

In 2018, UNICEF Armenia, in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), the World Bank, and the Armenian Association of Social Workers, initiated a dialogue through a three-day conference.

The conference hosted over 350 participants from the government, civil society, the private sector, international associations of social workers, international development actors, academia, and youths on the *Role of Social Protection in the Sustainable Development Agenda within the notion of leaving no one behind (LNOB)*. The goal was to make a clear case for the important role that pursuing a life cycle approach to social protection has played in including the most vulnerable population. UNICEF Armenia, in cooperation with its partners, convened the conference to revalorise social protection as an important tool for poverty reduction, human capital formation, sustainable development, and other progressive social outcomes. An integrated approach was also posited, emphasising complementarity (i.e. social work should cohere logically with labour market activation policies).

A call to action was developed through the conference. The call stressed the importance of addressing (child) poverty through adequate social protection, including cash and services, as well as human capital development. The Minister read out the call as a commitment for advancement in the social protection sector. The Conference recommendations included: 1) integrating economic and social development strategies and policies to achieve the SDGs and the LNOB agenda; 2) cash transfers for families and children must contribute to reducing poverty and deprivations and serve wellbeing; 3) cash transfers should be integrated and coordinated through interagency collaboration and linked with social care and support services and ALM policies; 4) human-centred social protection systems offer the optimal opportunity for obtaining human development outcomes across the lifecycle; 5) accountability and professionalisation of social services and its workforce are essential for SDG implementation and social policies; 6) adequate financial resources should be allocated to social protection as an investment in human capital; 7) the Government and its partners should encourage a culture of social protection that articulates it as an investment rather than a cost to address detractive stigma and promote social solidarity.

Furthermore, in 2018, UNICEF Armenia launched a comprehensive and comparative assessment on the implementation process of the ISS reform with MoLSA and the World Bank. The intention was to review, analyse, and assess the legal framework that covers the ISS system implementation and operation, quality of service delivery, effectiveness, obstacles, and directions of financial spending. The following features were analysed: joint reception,

integrated MIS, social case management, inter-agency cooperation and social support network, and development of territorial/local social plans. Integrated and non-integrated social centres were compared. A series of recommendations were provided for the advancement of the reform with a focus on the legal framework, workforce capacities, service provision, M&E and information systems, financing, and public awareness. The results were presented and discussed with key stakeholders in the reform process.

UNICEF, MoLSA, and the World Bank conducted a landmark diagnostic of the social protection system and programmes using the ISPA Core Diagnostic Instrument (CODI) tool. This primarily focussed on those programmes that had poverty reduction objectives; those which were directed at particularly vulnerable groups of the population (e.g. children) and labour market programmes. Over 115 social protection programmes were identified across various line Ministries, a matrix of lifecycle coverage of various population groups per social protection schemes was prepared, and an in-depth assessment of 15 selected social protection programmes was conducted.

UNICEF supported an assessment of functional effectiveness of 19 departments and separated divisions within MoLSA using innovative functional assessment tools. Moreover, a strategic planning workshop was supported by UNICEF for 35 key ministerial managerial staff to discuss priorities and a course of action for social protection. The assessment provided recommendations for the functional and structural reorganisation of MoLSA and its adjacent bodies, including for the more effective and efficient realisation of child rights, the avoidance of duplication, encouraging cooperation and organisational effectiveness of the Ministry to deliver its mandate.

UNICEF continued to work on the strengthening of the social protection system at the sub-national level too. UNICEF, World Vision, and Yerevan municipality initiated a review of the child and social protection system in the community that hosts more than one-third of Armenia's population. The review included an assessment of the legal framework for social service delivery, functions of various units and entities within the municipality responsible for social protection, human resource management, social work, and local social planning. Long-term planning and budgeting for child and social protection in the community were assessed too. Key recommendations emerging from this included setting national and local social protection priorities, having a network of dedicated social workers in administrative units, mechanisms and guidelines for the allocation of funds to local social projects and giving social assistance to families and children, and better clarification of divisional roles.



Impact

UNICEF's conference, its evidence generation and analytical work, and technical support, resulted in a number of changes being introduced by the Government. These included a new draft social protection strategy, reform of the ISS, and changes to existing social assistance programmes.

The draft CODI analysis and the 2018 call to action fed into the development of the draft 2019-2023 Labour and Social Protection Sector Development Strategy, which was the first such standalone strategy in the social protection sector. This outlined five priority areas: 1) social guarantees and security, 2) protection of labour rights, 3) improving the demographic situation, 4) gender equality, prevention of human trafficking and exploitation, and violence, 5) social service delivery: key issues of children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly. Crucially, for the first time, the draft contained a comprehensive analysis of child monetary and multidimensional poverty, as well as introducing a life cycle costing approach following initial CODI findings.

UNICEF's support to the comprehensive assessment of the ISS reform was extensively discussed with MoLSA leadership and the working group on ISS implementation, leading to concrete steps in the revision of the ISS system. This was based on the conclusions and recommendations of the report and focussed on operation of the joint reception, integrated databases,

accessibility of services, and case management. It also formed the basis for the revision of the World Bank's Social Protection Administration Project II, as well as informed linkages (of the reform) with the International Classification of Functions (i.e. disability assessment reform) reform and corresponding functional assessment of persons and children with disabilities.

UNICEF's direct support to the analysis in the Yerevan municipality served as the basis for the holistic review of the social protection chapter of the 2019-2023 Yerevan Development Strategy and 2020 Action Plan. Both documents were approved by the Municipal Council in December 2019, paving the way for a comprehensive reform of the social protection sector which should improve outcomes for children.

While the national social protection strategy has not yet been approved (expected in 2020), many policy reforms have already been undertaken in the field of social protection, with a focus on children. Going forward, UNICEF is supporting MoLSA in the review of the vulnerability assessment methodology, development of a cash transfer package (e.g. the concept of a Family Sustainable Income Generation Fund), advancement of the ISS reform (i.e. case management database, capacity building of social workers) and increasing the shock-responsiveness of the social protection system.





BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA //

**Extending Social Protection Coverage for
Children with Disabilities at the Level of
the Republika Srpska Entity**





Issue

While approximately 4% of GDP is allocated to social assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), only about 25% of this total GDP allocation goes to the poor and socially excluded. The other 75% of this is allocated to status-based war-veteran-related benefits. Moreover, given BiH's devolved composition, there are considerable administrative costs, geographical disparities, and inequalities in social protection coverage. For example, according to the BiH Constitution, the responsibilities for the provision of social protection are devolved to the level of Entities (Republika Srpska and Federation of BiH), District Brcko and 10 Cantons, which results in the different coverage and adequacy of social protection throughout the country.

In the Republika Srpska (RS) entity, social protection coverage of families with children is still limited, with low adequacy and high eligibility thresholds. Invariably, this leaves many vulnerable children uncovered. In 1996, the RS Government established a Child Protection Fund which was entrusted with the administration of all child cash benefits and financed through a 1.5% income tax revenue. While improvements in the adequacy and coverage of cash benefits over time have been observed, attaining universal coverage, as the ultimate goal, is still some distance away.

There have been several types of child cash benefits available, statutorily at least, in the RS. Each has differed in terms of eligibility criteria and adequacy. For example, children aged 0-15 are eligible for cash benefits. However, children with disabilities (CwD) aged 0-18 are eligible, as are those enrolled in post-compulsory education up to age 26 and 30, in certain circumstances. Children without parental care are also eligible to receive a benefit up to the age of 18. However, many children do not benefit from effective coverage and this leaves many of the 188,345 children without access to social protection.³³ For example, for specific groups, there are very pronounced coverage gaps still to be closed. Children aged 15-18 are still ineligible for any social protection benefits.

However, while statutory provision stipulates CwD are eligible for social protection, they rarely benefit from their legal entitlements, as adequate (i.e. benefit generosity and breadth of benefits) and effective coverage is lacking. This is a significant concern, as CwDs are among the most vulnerable in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is estimated that 6.5% of children aged 2-9-years old have some form of disability, and they are the most marginalised and excluded group in

society.³⁴ Moreover, children in female-headed households and children in large families with two or more children are significantly more likely to be poor. These are key problems that UNICEF has sought to address. Given these gaps in adequacy and coverage, the social protection system has been in need of reform, especially for CwD.

Children with disabilities are effectively unable to access their rights to healthcare, education, and social protection. Most families with CwD live in impoverished financial circumstances.³⁵ There is little, or no public advocacy advancing their rights, and existing legislation is often inherently discriminatory, as their rights are not clearly outlined or enforced. In essence, this renders these children legally invisible to society and vulnerable to abuse and neglect. In BiH, there are three categories of people with disabilities: war veterans, civilian victims of war, and civilian persons with disabilities not caused by war; children are included in this latter category. While all three categories share similar needs, the rights and benefits regarding the different disability categories differ drastically. This is because priority is given to war-related disabilities, whereas all other civilian groups with disabilities, including children, are left without adequate coverage. Though CwD have a statutorily stipulated right to social protection, they tend to not receive any benefits, or those received are substantially lower. This reflects a common challenge in social protection: effective coverage often does not match legal coverage in terms of horizontal (i.e. the number of CwD covered) and vertical coverage (i.e. benefit adequacy and the range of benefits provided). This deficit in rights is further compounded by the fact that CwD miss out on other social care service provision too. For example, social services often fail to swiftly identify and treat the developmental delays that affect CwD. In short, there is an absence of adequate social care services, referrals, and financial support for both the child and the family.

An improvement in the adequacy and coverage of cash benefits for children and their families in the RS entity was required to achieve rights-realisation and increase social protection coverage for CwD. Recognising the need for action and the improvement of the status and quality of life for CwD in particular, the government has committed, with UNICEF's technical and financial support, to a '*Strategy for Improving Social Status of the Persons with Disabilities in Republika Srpska 2017-2026*' and to the '*Republika Srpska Early Childhood Development Programme 2016-2020*'.



Actions

UNICEF supported the RS government in the improvement of the adequacy and coverage of social protection for children. In 2016, the RS entity started reforming the social protection system for children and families, with UNICEF supporting a number of those initiatives. UNICEF helped the social protection reform process in the RS by partnering with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the RS Children's Fund. While the Ministry lead the reforms, the Children's Fund was mainly in charge of administering the cash benefits and played an important role in shaping policy dialogue. UNICEF provided reform-related technical assistance to these partners and advice on expanding child-related cash benefits, strengthening of the monitoring and evaluation system, and improving the assessment and referral of children and youth with disabilities.

UNICEF also supported the development of a by-law regulating the data collection and monitoring requirements and protocols between the RS Children's Fund and local Centres of Social Work, as well as staff capacity building. At the same time, the RS Government

also invested funds in software and hardware procurement to upgrade the MIS. This element of UNICEF's engagement strove to improve the government's MIS. The RS Children's Fund's MIS needed to be improved, both in terms of hardware and software, as well as in terms of legal provisions (i.e. the by-laws), which defined the mutual responsibilities regarding data collection and monitoring and reporting between the local centres for social work and the RS Children's Fund. Furthermore, a strengthened MIS was required to better identify coverage gaps, monitoring and reporting on child cash benefits, as well as improve coordination between the Children's Fund and local Centres for Social Work. This partnership engagement was important if the MIS was to be improved and its provision of social services and social protection enhanced for all children, especially the most vulnerable. In addition, two other important by-laws which regulate the rights of parents of a child with a disability (with a specific emphasis on children 0-3 years of age) to work on a half-time basis, so as to allow for more time for care and support, were developed and adopted. These two by-laws contributed to the overall disability policy reform in RS.





Impact

UNICEF's partnership with the government, supporting its reforms through policy dialogue, contributed to a government increase in income tax revenue from 1.5 to 1.7%. This increase was earmarked for social protection for children in the RS. While UNICEF was not directly involved in the income tax reform, this achievement can be considered as an indirect result of UNICEF's activities, given all the actions taken to improve the system, as well as UNICEF's overall advocacy in line with the Ministry to invest more in the social protection of children.

The Government ensured funding for the improved adequacy and coverage of child cash benefits, both means-tested (maternity benefits and child allowances), and introduced a range of quasi-universal benefits for certain groups of children. For example, the government increased the benefit adequacy of the child allowance by approximately 10%, from 35 BAM (USD20) to 40.5 BAM (USD23) for the second child; and it increased maternity benefits for unemployed mothers of children aged 0-1 by more than 500% from 70 BAM (USD40) to 405 BAM (USD231). Moreover, new cash benefits related to child disability were also introduced. These included a personal disability allowance amounting to 100BAM (USD57) for children assessed with a specific disability, and a non-means tested allowances for all CwD, amounting to 103.5 BAM (USD59) for all CwD. Parents caring for a CwD are now paid a benefit to support the special care needs of their children.⁴ Some 5,437 CwD have so far benefited from these new cash benefits. Cash benefits for the third and fourth child in large families were also introduced. These new benefits and increased adequacy of pre-existing benefits represent significant progress in the horizontal (i.e. coverage) and vertical (i.e. benefit adequacy) extension of social protection in the RS. The reform underpinning these benefits was legislated into law and introduced three new by-laws, the latter being directly supported by UNICEF.

UNICEF devoted special attention to early childhood development by placing focus on the early identification of children with developmental delays and disabilities through enhanced multisectoral cooperation, which was supported by related cash benefits provided by the social protection system. This approach contributed to the overall disability policy reform which has been ongoing with UNICEF's assistance⁵ and has already brought significant improvements in bringing child disability assessment and referral procedures more in line with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health methodology. For example, instead of categorising a child's disabilities by using a purely medical approach, as was previously the case, an improved assessment process now performs an assessment of the child's needs and functional limitations and then prepares an individualised plan of interventions more tailored to individual needs.

UNICEF plans to continue its effective policy dialogue with the RS Government to address the remaining gaps in cash benefits for children, with aspirations to further increase coverage and adequacy, including for children aged 15-18, with an ultimate goal of universal coverage. As per the adage, every challenge is an opportunity, and this also holds true for the RS. Its challenging demographic landscape of declining birth rates and high outward youth migration have received a lot of public attention and concern. Arguably, this has opened a window of opportunity for further progressive reform of social protection for children. UNICEF intends to use this momentum, coupled with the SDGs agenda, to make the case for investment in children and youth in BiH as a fundamental condition to achieving inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development. Upcoming, country-wide social protection reforms will be additionally supported through fiscal space and social sector budget analysis so as to ensure evidence for high-level policy dialogue on investment in children, as well as within sector efficiency savings.

⁴ The actual amounts depend on the pro-rated salary levels.

⁵ UNICEF supported the development of *The Strategy for Improving the Social Status of Persons with Disabilities in Republika Srpska 2017-2026* and is committed to supporting the Government to implement relevant goals and actions related to social and child protection, health, and education.



BULGARIA //

Engaging the Agency for Social Assistance to Adopt, Implement, and Scale Up Enhanced Child and Family Support Service Provision





Issue

Bulgaria faces significant child wellbeing challenges, especially regarding abandoned children and those living in care. Eurostat states that 41.6% of children are living at risk of poverty and social exclusion.³⁶ One particular area of concern is the continuing occurrence of child abandonment, neglect, and inappropriate care of these children. While the deinstitutionalisation process in the country, which includes the closing down of the outdated institutions for children, is widely recognised as a success, some 2,000 children continue to be separated annually from their families and approximately 11,000 children are in public care, away from their birth families.³⁷ The main reasons for this are the weak prevention mechanisms and insufficient family support services, the limited quality of care, and the capacity of the workforce. Teenage pregnancies and child marriages in some Roma communities also account for this, as well as discrimination towards Roma families who are more likely to be identified as 'neglectful' than non-Roma. Moreover, children from marginalised communities and those with disabilities face the highest risk of separation from their families.³⁸

While Bulgaria has developed a comprehensive system of essential services and social benefits to improve the wellbeing of the population, the system is overregulated and highly fragmented. The system's shortcomings are further compounded by a management approach lacking incentives for coordination or integration. There are substantial adequacy and quality gaps in social services and benefit coverage. Many families and children are not able to access the services and benefits that are available, or the support they are offered is not necessarily adequate for their needs. About 16% of households do not receive any social benefit and 14% of households from the poorest quintile do not receive any cash allowance, in spite of being entitled to this allowance.³⁹ Considerable deficits in accessing health services and education also characterise the lives of children in marginalised communities and remote areas.



Actions

To address family support and childcare deficits, UNICEF in partnership with the national Government, local authorities, NGOs, and local communities supported the development and testing of a new social service – the Family Consultative Centre (FCC) – in a pilot district. This was intended to assist children and families in the most vulnerable and marginalised communities. In 2016, and building on earlier work, two FCCs were set up in the towns of Montana and Berkovitsa,⁶ with one branch in Varshets. The eleven staff working in the FCCs consisted of social workers, social assistants, nurses, and psychologists.

The FCCs established by UNICEF and its partners offered an integrated package of programmes and social services tailored to the specific needs of the communities and families. The FCCs identified vulnerable families and conducted a family needs assessment to detect all the risks related to childcare and protection, unemployment, homelessness, disability, access to education, et cetera. They provided personalised support to families through individual counselling, information, and support regarding how to access relevant services and on the social benefits to which the family was entitled. The

FCCs also monitored the situation of the family through regular home visits and by providing follow-up, when needed, in close interaction with other local services.

To address the prevailing childcare risks in marginalised communities, the FCCs provided training and support for parental skills development for caregivers of young children – feeding, nurturing care, stimulation, and education. Awareness-raising activities on preventing early marriages and teenage pregnancies were conducted to change community norms and to identify girls at risk. This was coupled with the provision of knowledge and information, mediation, and support for family planning, and the development of knowledge and skills for sexual and reproductive health. Motivational activities to improve education and health outcomes were delivered to increase knowledge on the benefits of staying in education longer and to underscore the harmful effects of child marriage and teenage pregnancies. Relatedly, motivation, assistance, and support for enrolling in education services were delivered in conjunction with focussing on preventing school dropout, and options for facilitating a return to the education system. Activities on the prevention and identification of violence against children and women were also conducted.

⁶ This was built on work done earlier in 2011, when 3 FCCs were set up in the Shumen District – in the towns of Shumen, Novi Pazar, and Veliki Preslav, together with three branches in Kaolinovo, Venets, and Varbitsa.

Critically, UNICEF worked with the Agency for Social Assistance (ASA) and other key partners to adopt the FCC model to increase their prevalence. UNICEF provided technical assistance to the ASA to revise the national guidelines and methodology for the provision of social services. The new guidelines include the outreach-based approach, advanced by UNICEF, and a stronger

focus on prevention through intersectoral programmes for family support to the most vulnerable families and children, especially those in isolated ethnic communities. Supporting the integration of benefit provision and wider social service through the ASA is important as it increases the likelihood of a more positive impact on the wellbeing of children.



Impact

Through the work of all five FCCs,⁷ supported by UNICEF, 11,300 people have benefitted from support programmes and services, 5,500 of whom were children.⁸ The FCC teams have mapped more than 4,300 families since the initiative began, in the Montana District and through earlier 2011-work in the Shumen District, and have been providing services in 18 municipalities and 171 settlements, which equates to 70% of all municipalities/settlements in the two districts.

The FCC services also provide tailored support to children and families to address their specific needs and prevent family separation. Support has been provided to over 4,600 vulnerable and poor families for parenting skills development to help raise young children. This development of skills focusses on nutrition, hygiene, child development, education, and upbringing. The FCCs have accounted for the prevention of 724 potential cases of children being neglected or separated from their families. Moreover, UNICEF estimates that roughly 390 children benefit from improved access to education on an annual basis. Approximately 4,300 children have received individual counselling and participated in different support programmes which have improved their chances for social inclusion. Furthermore, efforts to improve gender outcomes include a total of 800 women being covered by family planning services and 275 young girls from targeted Roma communities being covered by programmes for the prevention of child marriages and early childbearing. On average, 1,000 families are involved annually in programmes for the prevention of social exclusion; from these families, 550 were referred to the FCCs by the child protection system and received more intensive support to address identified risks related to childcare and protection.⁴⁰

UNICEF and its partners, such as the Agency for Social Assistance, ensured the FCCs were successful and delivered results by designing an approach that differed from the existing social services in Bulgaria in several distinct ways: One, it is proactive in tracking and reaching out to vulnerable families and communities – utilising on-going mapping, provision of field services, and work in remote villages and municipalities. Two, it works with the entire families and their environment rather than with an individual child from the family. Based on needs assessments of the whole family, FCC teams prepare and implement support plans with activities targeted to the whole family as well as its individual members. Three, it offers a solution for a range of problems in vulnerable communities related to long-term poverty and social exclusion. Four, it promotes change within the community and addresses community-specific rules and practices that pose a risk to children. Five, it works in partnership with and actively engages local communities – the FCC teams always include representatives of the ethnic communities who help build trust between the service and the excluded communities. FCCs are located very close to the marginalised communities and they maintain direct contact with the children and families thus they can provide on the spot timely support when needed. Six, the FCC work preventively and in partnership with the remaining services and institutions operating in the district – health, education, social services, employment services, and housing. This ensures complementarity and synergy and prevents duplication of efforts and activities. Children and families at risk are referred to child protection departments.

⁷ Here, we combined recent FCC work with FCC work in three other districts (see previous footnote) to give a sense of the totality of the project's impact.

⁸ Data from the annual reports of the Family Consultative Centres for the period 2011 – 2018.

Looking towards the future, UNICEF's long-term objective is to support the rollout and scale up the established FCC work model among the support services for children and families throughout Bulgaria. Currently, the FCCs' experience and practice are being used to inform national policies and programmes for preventing family separation and improving childcare in marginalised communities. The FCC approach has already been introduced in the national guidelines for social services, which will support its nationwide scale-up.

UNICEF-supported FCCs have been gradually transformed into official State delegated services with an updated profile

since 2018. The FCCs' methodology and approach are in line with the provisions of the new Social Services Act, adopted in 2019. The new Act, which was developed with technical support from UNICEF, is expected to change the landscape of social services in Bulgaria in terms of their definition, planning, accessibility, quality, and funding. It introduces a significant shift towards prevention of family separation and social exclusion and provides a basis for the provision of integrated support, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable children and families. UNICEF is currently supporting the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Agency for Social Assistance with the development of the bylaws, which will ensure the effective implementation of the Act.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD //

Bulgaria — Family Consultative Centre

"It is the first time in my life that I have felt appreciated for who I am", says 12-year old Filka, with tears of joy in her eyes, after winning a traditional dance competition in the Roma community of Novi Pazar, a small town in the North-Eastern part of Bulgaria.

There were people cheering, clapping their hands, smiling, applauding the little girl who only months before had been completely isolated and ridiculed by the people in her own community. And this is because Filka and her 7 siblings belong to a sub-group of the Roma community – an ethnic minority within the minority. Her family is extremely poor and they suffer from social exclusion and discrimination, both due to their social status and their ethnic background.

"No one, absolutely no one, wanted to lend a helping hand or to even speak to Filka and her family", remembers Maria Nikolova, director of the Family-Consultative Centre in Novi Pazar, which is supported by UNICEF in Bulgaria. "No institution, no community member, no child protection, or educational institution has made the slightest effort to reach out to these vulnerable children and their parents. There were cases when they were deliberately rejected, and they had no one but themselves to rely on. This attitude of the community and the professionals had turned them into scared people, with very low self-esteem, no motivation to study or work, completely abandoned. Until we arrived..."

The UNICEF-supported Family Centre started working with Filka and her family over a year ago. "The first steps were difficult; we had to build trust in those people and to convince them to start attending the family centre activities." Filka and her siblings had a lot to catch up on. They had not been exposed to any learning opportunities before, and the family centre was their first chance to start developing their skills. "I have learned how to draw pictures, how to write letters. I received toys for the first time in my life. I made new friends and I also started having fun", says Filka.

"If it wasn't for us, these young boys would be doing hard physical work in the woods and these young girls would have probably ended up in child marriages or sexual exploitation", explains Maria Nikolova. The UNICEF-supported family centre continues working with Filka and her family, and with many other families, too. They are part of a team of professionals in various regions of Bulgaria who support the inclusion of Roma children and families, as well as their access to health, education, and social protection services as a means to break up the circle of poverty, exclusion, and deprivation, in addition to challenging community stereotypes and prejudices around Roma. "The best is yet to come, for Filka and for so many other children", Maria Nikolova concludes.

By Ivaylo Spasov, UNICEF Bulgaria.



CROATIA //

**Extending Essential Health Care to
Forcibly Displaced and Migrant Children
and Pregnant Women**





Issue

Croatia, like many European countries, is part of the 'displacement pathway', along which the unprecedented refugee movement of 2015 transited. By the end of 2015, more than 500,000 forcibly displaced⁹ and migrant (FD-M) persons passed through Croatia, 100,000 of whom were children. UNICEF Croatia provided support to approximately 35,000 children on the move.⁴¹ The flow of FD-M persons through Croatia has decreased significantly, but has not stopped.⁴² 132,529 FD-Ms arrived in Croatia between 2015-2019,⁴³ with only 7,327 persons having requested international protection. Of those seeking international protection, 564 were unaccompanied and separated children; protection was granted to 310 children.⁴⁴

While Croatia is predominantly a transit country, FD-Ms still require access to health care. However, the legal framework in Croatia stipulated that only emergency medical services were available to FD-Ms under the Croatian Health Insurance System. Full-spectrum health services were only available to citizens and permanent residents. According to the 2015 Law on International and Temporary Protection, applicants for international protection have free-of-charge access only to 'emergency medical assistance and necessary treatment of illnesses and serious mental disorders'. This means that highly vulnerable groups, especially FD-M children and pregnant women, for example, must forego important health care.

Given their perilous journey and the difficulties experienced, FD-Ms arrive in Croatia in a poor physical and mental state, exhibiting a high overall level of mental distress and physical exhaustion. 13,821 consultations with FD-Ms were conducted between August 2016 - December 2019 by the general practitioners of UNICEF Croatia's partners *Médecins du Monde Belgique* (MdM-BE). FD-Ms experienced respiratory (16.4%), digestive (13%), and skin (12.3%) symptoms/diseases. Children suffered from respiratory (35.4%) and skin (17.4%) symptoms/diseases.

They also had scratches, lacerations, fractures, burns/scalds, sprains, and strains. As a result of trauma prior and during migration, women frequently experienced psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches, anxiety, insomnia, loss of appetite, and abdominal and back pain. An absence of, or irregular, menstruation has also been diagnosed, largely among women and girls (aged 15 to early 20s). Food and nutritional deficiencies manifested in teeth and gum complications, and pregnant women were often anaemic.

The migration experience also determined the prevalence of specific mental health problems of the FD-Ms. Mental health difficulties stemmed from post-migration sources of stress (i.e. a lengthy, complex, and unpredictable process of request for international protection), separation from family members, financial difficulties, inadequate living conditions, language barriers, social and cultural differences.⁴⁵ A 2016 survey conducted in an asylum seekers (AS) facility in Zagreb indicated that 80.3% of FD-Ms surveyed were at risk of developing mental health problems.⁴⁶ MdM-BE observed children with mental health-related symptoms such as bedwetting, loss of age-appropriate verbal skills, sleep problems, loss of appetite, anxiety, a startle response to sudden noise, fear, anger and aggressive responses to peers and/or family members, and increased withdrawal and concentration problems for adolescents.⁴⁷

Providing FD-M persons with access to health is crucial given their heightened vulnerability. Thus, the best interests of the child, and pregnant women are a primary consideration for the Member States regarding transfer procedures under the Dublin III Regulation.¹⁰ MdM-BE and UNICEF Croatia have argued that the health needs of FD-M persons represent invisible emergencies that can easily be treated before they escalate into irreversible complications. Granting FD-Ms early access to basic primary care and on-site treatment is also cost-efficient in the long-term, as it offsets later costs as physical and mental health deteriorates.⁴⁸

⁹ Refers to both refugees and asylum seekers.

¹⁰ The Dublin Regulation (Regulation No. 604/2013), often referred as the Dublin III Regulation, is an EU law that determines which EU Member State is responsible for the examination of an application for asylum, submitted by persons seeking international protection under the Geneva Convention and the EU Qualification Directive.



Actions

To address the health care deficits faced by FD-M persons, UNICEF Croatia partnered with MdM-BE, to ensure children and pregnant women in particular, could benefit from access to health services in two asylum reception facilities throughout 2017 and the first half of 2018.⁴⁹ UNICEF Croatia signed an agreement with MdM-BE to execute this health extension project. The total value of UNICEF's contribution was USD186,000. All actions were agreed with the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Health.

Launched in April 2017, the main goal of this project was to further ensure primary health and mental health care for FD-Ms in two AS facilities. With a team of two general practitioners, one nurse, and two interpreters, MdM-BE carried out daily consultations in the AS facilities. The team conducted an official initial medical screening of newly arrived FD-Ms. MdM-BE's psychologist carried out mental health assessments and individual psychosocial/psychotherapy consultations. To ensure the provision of all-inclusive assistance and integrated care, MdM-BE's community worker offered information, guidance, and practical support to enable FD-Ms to access their rights (i.e. accompanying

patients to healthcare institutions). Within the framework of the joint UNICEF-MdM-BE project, specialised health services were introduced to the AS facility in Zagreb: a gynaecologist, paediatrician, psychiatrist, and physiotherapist visited the facility once or twice a month. Through workshops or individual counselling, MdM-BE's medical team provided information on the prevention of infectious diseases, hygiene, access to healthcare, and family planning.

UNICEF Croatia was a part of the multisectoral working group and supported the development of inter-sectoral Protocol for Unaccompanied Children to ensure its alignment with international standards and support efficient intersectoral cooperation. The new Protocol provides an operational framework and clarifies the roles and tasks of various actors in fulfilling their responsibilities for protecting the rights and best interests of unaccompanied children. This includes the identification and initial assessment, alternative care accommodation, age assessment if deemed necessary, requests for asylum, the identification of durable solutions, integration, access to health services, and an educational programme.



Impact

UNICEF Croatia and *Médecins du Monde-Belgique* ensured primary health and mental health care was provided to FD-Ms in AS reception centres, including healthcare consultations as well as psychotherapy and counselling sessions. Some 20.2% of the total number of consultations were conducted with children and 26.7% with women. As a result, all pregnant women benefitted from medical services and approximately three to five pregnant women a month were seen. Furthermore, MdM-BE led the coordination of the vaccination of preschool/school children accommodated in the asylum facility and conducted a pre-school/school medical examination as a condition for enrolment in preschool/school (in total, 93 children were examined). Importantly, to promote FD-Ms' access to health care, MdM-BE produced a multilingual leaflet in English, Farsi, Arabic, and French to indicate where in the EU free healthcare would be provided, given the fact that many of these people would soon transit onwards. While progress was made in providing access to essential health care, the mental health of FD-Ms still remains a big challenge.

To ensure the sustainability of the support to FD-M children and women after the joint UNICEF-MdM-BE project finished in June 2018, UNICEF advocated strongly for the project to fall under government responsibility. To assist in the transfer of this project, UNICEF initially

funded it while the government implemented the project during the handover. UNICEF's actions contributed to the Ministry of the Interior ensuring financial resources were made available through the EU Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund to finance the provision of medical/mental healthcare services to FD-Ms. Thus, from July 2018 onwards, a total of 4,563 GP consultations were conducted for 1,837 patients. This is a crucial outcome as it means that, going forward, FD-M persons arriving in Croatia can benefit from access to essential health care.

More recently, UNICEF Croatia has been advocating for minimum health standards and services to be provided by the Government to guarantee better health coverage for non-citizens. UNICEF has provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Health (MoH) as part of this endeavour. For example, in 2019, the MoH prepared the Ordinance on standards of health care for the seekers of international protection. This is currently awaiting adoption by the Government and represents an important piece of legislation, as it contains a stipulation regarding the protection of vulnerable groups and access for FD-M children and pregnant women to enjoy full-spectrum health services, as per Croatian citizens. If adopted, this would mark an important step in the extension of social protection for FD-M families and children.



KAZAKHSTAN //

**Improving Access to Social Protection
and Cash Plus Services for Low-income
Families with Children**





Issue

Despite an impressive reduction in poverty from 47% in 2001 to 2.7% in 2017, the most disadvantaged children in Kazakhstan continue to experience poverty and persistent vulnerabilities. This is especially true of children in rural areas, in single-headed households, in households experiencing unemployment, and large households containing many children, or where a family member has a disability.⁵⁰

Kazakhstan has a mature social protection system that supports its low-income population through social assistance and other services. However, its effectiveness remains a concern due to limited effective coverage, benefit adequacy, and awareness of entitlements, and a lack of a robust M&E framework. Prior to a 2018 reform, there were three main poverty-targeted social assistance benefits to support low-income families with children: the targeted social assistance (TSA), the special child allowance (SCA), and a benefit for large families (with 4 or more children) (4+B). The take-up of these benefits by eligible persons was low by the standards of upper-middle-income countries. In particular, TSA exclusion errors were estimated to reach 80%.⁵¹

Efforts to improve the social protection system's effectiveness are hindered by an absence of a national

poverty reduction strategy, no appropriate poverty monitoring, and methodological limitations in the national poverty measurement. UNICEF studies have highlighted administrative and policy bottlenecks that restrict access to social assistance and social services.⁵² The low social assistance coverage relates to the low income-eligibility threshold and restrictive administrative rules. Administrative complexity in the benefit application process has resulted in confusion over eligibility and therefore benefit take-up failure and exclusion of prospective beneficiaries. On-demand application procedures often resulted in exclusion not only by design – i.e. not conforming to eligibility criteria – but also because of poor outreach and service delivery practices that did not actively seek out the most marginalised population to extend coverage.

Social services remain fragmented and are undermined by a lack of skilled social service workforce (including social workers and case managers), who could play an active role in the implementation of targeted initiatives that integrate services for vulnerable families at the service delivery level. Recognising that both the social assistance system and social services needed to be revised, the government embarked on a reform process for 2018.



Actions

UNICEF provided technical support to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection's (MLSP) major 2018 reform of its social assistance system to ensure it was child-sensitive. The Government primarily wished to reform the TSA and discarded the SCA and 4+B programmes. It substantially increased the importance of the TSA by raising the eligibility threshold to maintain support for some of the existing beneficiaries of the SCA and 4+B beneficiaries. This ambitious reform aimed not only to change the eligibility rules for social assistance, but also to transform the way access to benefits, and their administration, was implemented.

Since the benefits affected by the TSA reform were primarily received by households with children, UNICEF made children the central focus of social assistance reform. Prior to the reform, UNICEF provided technical support to the MLSP to better understand the role of the TSA on children. UNICEF developed simulations on the likely impact of the reform by assessing the revised design of the TSA and reviewing how its administration could also enhance access to social services. Findings of the 2017 assessment highlighted a heightened risk of exclusion for many poor children posed by the intended

reforms.⁵³ Using these findings, UNICEF outlined three major policy recommendations to modify the proposed reform to ensure poor and low-income children would benefit.

UNICEF recommended improving the eligibility criteria for social assistance, increasing the effectiveness of the TSA benefit and introducing a 'cash plus' approach to complement the TSA.⁵⁴ More specifically, these recommendations emphasised the importance of increasing the poverty line by 20% of the Government's subsistence minimum level (SML), revising the means test, reviewing and simplifying the benefit application process, improving outreach and social work activities. UNICEF argued a Cash Plus approach was needed to adjust the TSA programme design to better address the multidimensional nature of child poverty.

The 2018 TSA reform implemented by the government did not achieve its stated policy objectives of increasing coverage for families with children. By the end of 2018, the number of children benefiting from social assistance programmes declined radically from 562,300 to 363,200 TSA beneficiaries.⁵⁵ The reform implementation

confirmed design flaws previously identified by UNICEF. It failed to include beneficiaries discarded from the SCA and 4+B programmes as planned, additionally failing to extend coverage to those previously excluded from the TSA. The reform largely affected families with children,

particularly with four or more children due to halting further enrolment onto the 4+B programme. However, a change of government and further social sector reforms announced laid out a pathway to adjust the ongoing TSA reform back in a direction that is more favourable to children.

Impact



Based on UNICEF's pre-reform recommendations, several important adjustments to the TSA were implemented by the new government in April 2019. Some of the UNICEF policy 'wins' included expanding coverage by increasing the SML poverty threshold from 40% in 2018 to 70% in 2019 and strengthening focus on children's needs. For example, all children in families below the 70% SML poverty threshold are eligible for the monthly cash benefit of 20,800 KZT (USD55) per child. Furthermore, a revised means test which limits the definition of a household to direct relatives (i.e. parents/ caregivers and grandparents) was attained too, representing a more equitable method for computing household income and therefore entitlements. UNICEF was also able to eliminate the benefit-tested component from the means test. This prevented the TSA from excluding households with members that also received a child disability benefit or student benefit for example and therefore protected especially vulnerable households. The recommendations assisted the simplification of administrative rules, resulting in increased TSA take-up by households with poor children.

By the end of 2019, the TSA programme coverage had increased more than four times (approximately 1.6 million) since 2018. A total of 2,120,000 beneficiaries, including 1,292,000 children, are now covered. While the reform resulted in a significant expansion of social assistance coverage for low income and vulnerable children, it has also drastically increased demand for child-focussed cash transfers. In 2019, the national and local government faced major financing and implementation constraints.

Consequently, a new wave of reforms was announced to adjust the social benefits system for children. Given

that 56% of beneficiary children live in families with four children or more, the Government decided to reintroduce a categorical benefit for families with four or more children, which are among the most vulnerable groups. In addition, the TSA programme will continue to target those children living in families below 70% SML with social assistance benefits and a guaranteed package of services for pre-school and school children (nutrition, school feeding, school supplies, transport subsidies). The full effect of the policy revision and design improvements on exclusion errors and targeting effectiveness of means-tested social assistance will be measured in 2020.

Going forward, UNICEF is striving to better reform the TSA and has agreed, along with the MLSP, on a roadmap for piloting the 'cash plus' model to enhance reforms. UNICEF aims to further improve the targeting effectiveness of the TSA programme by increasing the poverty threshold to 100% MSL, improve cash administration, consolidate budgeting and improve redistribution of programme funding, and invest in outreach and community mobilisation. The proposed 'cash plus' model also aims to address poverty in a multidimensional way. UNICEF is piloting a cash plus model to enhance the TSA's impact on child poverty and strengthen the role of the newly established community-based social service workforce to promote social inclusion. The pilot aims to set up a family support system and safety nets for families with children who are ineligible for the TSA, but still face risks and vulnerabilities due to low incomes (families with incomes between 70% - 100% MSL). Caseworkers and case management will be key components of the cash plus pilot and will act as a key integration point at service delivery.



KYRGYZ REPUBLIC //

**Expanding Universal Social
Protection for Children in a Volatile
Social Policy Context**





Issue

The Kyrgyz Republic is one of the poorest countries in Europe and Central Asia, with a poverty level of 22.4% and child poverty of 28.3% in 2018. Currently, 36.6% of children under the age of 3 live in a household below the poverty line.⁵⁶ Moreover, it has a young demographic structure and high fertility rate, with almost a third of the population aged under 15 as of 2017.⁵⁷ While Kyrgyzstan's government spends 10.6% of GDP on social protection, only 0.6% is spent on social assistance for children. The pre-existing antipoverty benefit – the *Monthly Benefit for Poor Families* (MBPF) was the only scheme providing income support to poor households with children. However, the MBPF suffered from limited coverage, issues of fraud, low benefit value, maladministration, and high targeting errors (60% of eligible children were excluded).⁵⁸ Consequently, the Government wanted to reform the MBPF.

In June 2017, the Government legislated to reform its child benefits system, bringing in a universal birth grant, a quasi-universal child benefit (UCB) for children aged

0-3, and a grant for large families.¹¹ Funds for the reform were allocated to the Government budget for 2018. This represented a major achievement for all agencies involved.

However, the reform was suspended prior to being implemented, owing to political volatility, an absence of evidence-based policymaking, and detracting debates on the 'deserving' versus 'undeserving' poor. Consequently, reform advocates were unable to convince decision-makers of the merits of a universalistic approach. A further blow was delivered in 2017 when the IMF and the World Bank (WB) expressed concerns about fiscal sustainability and requested that the Government reconsider the reform. The IMF subsequently stressed the importance of "restoring targeted social benefits." The reform's implementation was deferred, and in February 2018, the Government issued a new draft Law that omitted any quasi-UCB element and maintained the means-tested MBPF.¹² The amended reform became effective as of 1st April 2018.⁵⁹



Actions

Pre-2017 reform: UNICEF continuously assessed the performance of the MBPF, demonstrating it was unfit-for-purpose, and thereby built the case for much-needed reform. UNICEF also argued that the demographic structure represented a unique opportunity to influence long-term development by reducing child poverty and investing in children and adults-to-be.

UNICEF analysis and research shaped policy advocacy arguments and communication messages which later contributed to the adopted reform. UNICEF was also part of the consultation forums led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Development (MLSD), which aimed to develop by-laws and implementation guidelines. This collaboration resulted in the MLSD, the Ministry of Finance, and the Governmental/Prime Minister's Office taking a lead in costing and budgeting for the proposed reform.

Post-2017 reform deferral: while UNICEF's pre-reform actions remain valid approaches, UNICEF has renewed its efforts to advance the case for the quasi-UCB and firmly put it back on the policy agenda through (1) *knowledge generation*, (2) *enhancing partnerships*, and (3) *policy advocacy*.

1. **UNICEF is redoubling its knowledge generation efforts and developing several analytical 'products' to drive policy advocacy arguments to reform social protection for children in the direction of universalistic provision.** These efforts include *poverty analysis* to document child poverty annually, incorporating a multidimensional-poverty measurement into the national statistical system by collaborating with other UN agencies. UNICEF is continuously assessing the performance of the MBPF, and the analysis will highlight bottlenecks in programmatic enrolment and administration. These activities will be reinforced by further modelling of reform scenarios to demonstrate alternative pro-children policy options. UNICEF has been in partnership with the parliament since 2017, with more systematic work starting in 2018. UNICEF partnered with the Kyrgyz Parliament to strengthen its knowledge base and ensure that new reforms to state child benefits are based on robust evidence and analysis. For example, UNICEF secured the support of several MPs, led by the Vice Speaker, and local NGOs to monitor the performance of the MBPF.

¹¹ The law proposed to introduce a universal birth grant for each child; a universal categorical monthly benefit for all children aged 0-3, a monthly large family grant for the third and subsequent children in families with three or more children aged 3-16.

¹² For an extended account of the suspended reform, see ILO-UNICEF, 2019. *Towards Universal Social Protection for Children: Achieving SDG 1.3 - ILO-UNICEF Joint Report on Social Protection for Children*. Accessible at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_protect/-soc_sec/documents/publication/wcms_669336.pdf

In parallel, UNICEF has been working with the Vice Speaker, MPs, and the President's Office, preparing a draft Law on the State Benefit to introduce a quasi-universal 0-18-month child benefit. The proposed benefit will be a combination of a proxy means test and affluence-test to filter out wealthier families and so address equity concerns. Political economy played a big part in the derailing of the 2017 reform. Consequently, UNICEF recognised the importance of modifying the degree of universality to be more politically palatable.

2. UNICEF has enhanced partnerships since the derailed reform by attempting to deliver consistent cross-agency 'one-voice-policy-advice' to the government. To achieve this, UNICEF has held regular technical exchanges with the WB, ILO, and EU. UNICEF and the ILO have tried to align the activities of the UN agencies and Development Partners' framework to achieve SDG 1 (1.2. and 1.3), and the ILO's Social Protection Floors Recommendation #202, to the goal of reviving a quasi-UCB. Relatedly, UNICEF is working with the WB to ensure the MBPF is child-sensitive by developing a more inclusive targeting methodology so as to reduce adverse impacts while still advocating for the

0-18-month quasi-UCB. Furthermore, UNICEF has been working with Maastricht University and UNU-MERIT to establish a common understanding on social protection and social spending analysis with the IMF in the Kyrgyz Republic. This has shown promise in establishing a shared position with IFIs, which could support UNICEF's quasi-UCB goal.

3. UNICEF has tried to develop a 'culture of social protection' through public and policy advocacy to promote a greater understanding of its impacts and societal value. This will cultivate a more receptive attitude towards inclusive social protection, which secures political buy-in and the sustainability of future reforms. Lessons learnt from previous experiences show that managing political economy dynamics and effective strategic communication is paramount. Advocacy work is thus emphasising human capability development and how timely investment in comprehensive ECD through social protection achieves a 'triple bottom line'⁶⁰ which delivers for children, business, and the economy. The analytical products developed through the knowledge generation drive will support attitudinal shifts which are more favourable to inclusive social protection.

Impact



UNICEF played a pivotal role in mobilising the case for the 2017 reform process to such an extent that the country was on the brink of introducing universal provision for children aged 0-3. While the reform's deferral was a setback, it nevertheless is a powerful testimony to how UNICEF helped reconfigure the policy discourse in the country in a direction more favourable to the well-being of children.

UNICEF continues to generate evidence on the performance of the existing social assistance scheme for children, the options for policy reform and analysis of

fiscal space, and to engage in policy debates through advocacy and effective partnerships. UNICEF remains committed to developing a way forward towards a new adequate child benefit system that is more equitable and inclusive and responds to the multidimensional vulnerabilities that Kyrgyz children and their families face. The new draft law for a 0-18-month quasi-UCB is likely to be revisited after the October 2020 general election.



MOLDOVA //

**Conducting Analysis and
Microsimulation to Increase Coverage
of the 'Ajutor Social' Programme**





Issue

Moldova faces a range of challenges that adversely impact the wellbeing of children. These include a weak economy, a polarised society, and a volatile political environment. Although Moldova's human capital index increased slightly in recent years (0.58 for 2018), at its current 0.63, the country still lags behind the regional average. GDP growth has averaged around 4.5% since 2010 and is forecast to maintain at that rate. While unemployment remained low, at just 3%, the country has a large informal economy (approximately one-third of the workforce), which negatively impacts fiscal revenue and financing of social services. Within such an environment, poverty among children of 11.5% continues to be higher than the general poverty rate of 9.6%. Children in Moldova continue to remain disproportionately poor, with pronounced rural-urban inequalities. Moreover, the poverty rate for households with three or more children was 23% in 2015, compared to 7.5% for families with one child.⁶¹ Around 18% of children in rural areas live below the poverty line, compared to only 2% in urban areas.⁶²

Moldova's social assistance system has faced continuing challenges in the prevention and elimination of vulnerabilities. Although spending on social assistance programmes is generous compared to countries with similar levels of development, the overall effectiveness of the social assistance system is weak and characterised by fragmentation into several low-performing programmes. In 2018, the Government of Moldova spent 35% of its public expenditures, or 11% of GDP, on social protection programmes.⁶³ The country's main poverty-focussed social assistance programme, the '*Ajutor Social*' (AS), is a national means-tested social assistance cash transfer programme, covering approximately 7% of the population. Introduced in December 2008, the AS aims to reduce poverty (both the number of poor people and the depth of poverty) and to improve opportunities for disadvantaged households so as to reduce overall inequality of opportunities. Providing cash benefits of AS to low-income households improved the situation of those with tight budget constraints, thereby supporting their consumption levels. This helps them maintain a minimum living standard (i.e. adequate nutrition, children's access to services, education, and health). The AS also attempts to promote labour market

participation for people able to work. Together with seasonal grants of Winter Support, the AS programme cost 0.6% of GDP in 2016.⁶⁴ However, coverage for the most vulnerable population groups by the AS was limited, and low benefit levels – disconnected from minimum national subsistence levels – fuelled persistent poverty. The share of families with children receiving the AS programme declined from 52% in 2014 to 41% in 2017.⁶⁵

Since its inception, the *Ajutor Social* has been the subject of continued research, monitoring, and evaluation commissioned by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Social Protection (MHLSP). A review of the Proxy Means Test was done in 2012 to increase coverage and effectiveness.⁶⁶ The monitoring and evaluation of evidence culminated in a 2017 formal independent evaluation which found that the AS was much better targeted at poor populations than the earlier system of 'Nominative Compensations' and child allowances.⁶⁷ This targeting efficiency meant that poverty reduction achieved an estimated 30% reduction in headcount and poverty gaps and up to 5% reduction in poverty severity. Consequently, recipients in poor households were substantially better off compared to non-recipients from the lowest decile group. These general findings were substantiated by subjective measures that showed beneficiaries considered their life had improved through AS.⁶⁸

While the AS evaluation presented clear evidence that the policy fulfilled its objectives of poverty reduction, giving guarantees to certain disadvantaged households, the limitations of the AS design have also come under more recent scrutiny. Analysis of the coverage of children and child poverty by the Moldovan social protection system indicated poor coverage for two types of households with children that had a higher risk of poverty: *those with three or more children and households in which there were people (children or adults) with disabilities*. Similar concerns were corroborated by The Committee of the Rights of the Child report on Moldova. This pointed to the vulnerability of children in single-parent, rural, and Roma households (CRC 2017). The AS thus needed further reform to build on existing progress and ensure these two specific households were better served.



Actions

Building on recommendations from an earlier study on cash-based social protection for children in Moldova, UNICEF partnered with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) to provide technical support to the MHLSP to analyse costing models of social protection measures for vulnerable children. This culminated in an analytical report⁶⁹ to explore AS reform options; how better coverage and outcomes could be achieved for three 'vulnerable' households (i.e. households with three or more children, households with a child or adult with a disability, and single-parent households). Together these households are the 'priority households' which are the subject of UNICEF recent evidence building and advocacy efforts. This analysis also attempted to estimate the costs of AS reform, and what costing model would demonstrate this. The results of this exercise will enable the government to achieve improved coverage for three priority groups, should it wish to pursue further reform and fine-tune the AS.

The UNICEF-commissioned report used analysis of the Moldova Household Budget Survey (MHBS) for 2017 to consider the current coverage of the three identified priority households: their entitlement and AS take-up; potential reform options best suited to improve coverage and outcomes for these priority households. These reform options are simulated by giving different AS design options; different qualifying conditions and parameters for entitlement calculation so that a simulated set of reforms can show improved coverage and outcomes. Moreover, these reform options can be costed and the tool allows for the exploration of potential reform using 'micro-simulation'.

UNICEF ran two simulation scenarios for a possible reform of the *Ajutor Social* programme to explore concrete options. The first scenario changed the way income is considered - also referred to as 'income disregards'. In this group, four different scenarios considered disregards of universal benefits for the three 'priority households' or changes to earnings disregards for all households. The second scenario changed the calculation of the GMI. Thus, in this group, four different scenarios considered changes across all households with dependent children, in the weighting given to children in the GMI and other more specific changes to the weighting given for people living in the priority households. If improving coverage is the primary aim of the AS reform, the results from the simulations are that the scenarios that increase the coverage the most are the ones that disregard social benefits for priority households. However, this work also needs to be complemented by further analysis of the relationship of the AS with other social benefits (e.g. other universal and contributory parts of the social protection system), the constraints inherent in the Social Assistance Automatic Information System and the operational MIS, to develop concrete policy options.

The micro-simulation used the micro-data from the 2017 MHBS; the last year of that survey that contained a special module on claiming and receiving AS. The 2017 MHBS data was used to construct a micro-simulation model that replicated the rules for entitlement and AS entitlement(s) and allowed simulations of alternative rules of entitlement based on policy reform scenarios. The MHBS data allowed for the profiling of the priority households and some diagnostic analysis on their characteristics and on their AS claiming and receipt.





Impact

UNICEF and the ODI concluded the micro-simulation exercise with the MHLSP to show them a range of options for increasing coverage of the AS for the three priority households. These simulations have tremendous heuristic and analytical value as they help promote understanding of how the AS functions for children and especially the three vulnerable groups. Moreover, it indicates where there might be possibilities for reconfiguring the AS. The simulations have generated a deeper understanding and clearer picture of how the AS functions and, importantly, where knowledge gaps still exist; how the AS might need to be linked with other benefits, as well as highlighting MIS gaps. Without such an endeavour potential progressive reform would be unlikely.

UNICEF presented the results to the MHLSP in 2019, as well as to development partners. One of the main recommendations to the Government was to consider other changes to the AS that can be implemented alongside any changes in the way entitlement is calculated. These changes would reflect the constraints inherent in the Social Assistance Automatic Information System (SIAAS) and the operational MIS. More informed simulations will be required to build on this preliminary work.

UNICEF articulated the report outcomes, based on the microsimulations, to the government as three carefully nuanced and caveated recommendations. The simulation tool is now available for the Ministry to use and adapt, and training is in place on how to use it. Thus, UNICEF's first recommendation was to use the simulator tool to explore a range of policy reform options that flow from UNICEF's preliminary scenarios developed by the micro-simulation exercise. Using evidence and creating tools through which government can easily test their policy assumptions is an important part of the policy reform process.

UNICEF's second recommendation stressed the importance of considering other changes to the AS that can be implemented alongside possible changes in the way that entitlement is calculated. These changes would reflect the constraints inherent in the SIAAS, an operational MIS that was identified by USAID. Some of these issues include those previously identified: longer periods of awards for those who have unpredictable earnings to help smooth income fluctuations and counter 'risk aversion' that may result from onerous requirements to revalidate claims; building periodic adjustment to AS amounts to reflect price and earnings inflation; more detailed examination of

financial incentives to earn and seek work. The use of the SIAAS to assist in future reform analysis is important, and its information should help inform reform scenarios and help interpret the simulation results on revised AS eligibility. However, UNICEF cautioned against over-reliance on the SIAAS to consider AS reform that seeks to expand coverage. A limitation of the SIAAS database is that it only contains records of previous AS claimants, and will not be able to consider data representing those who are newly entitled under any reform, but have never claimed before.

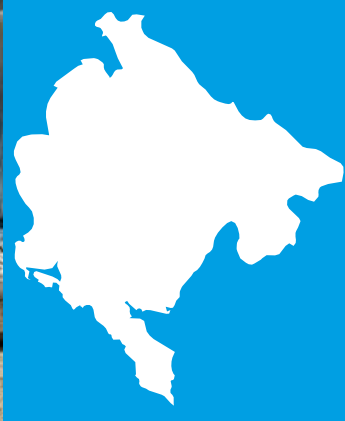
The third UNICEF recommendation centred on the need to widen the appreciation of the problem of higher poverty risk for priority households and reflect this by changing entitlement rules to increase the AS adequacy for these households. Higher transfer levels are necessary, but not sufficient in themselves to solve the problem of low-income households vulnerable to poverty. This requires considering the AS's relationship to other parts of the social protection system; the promotion of employment and improved productivity for low-skilled workers; addressing the barriers to work for parents with young children and people with disabilities. These are both supply and demand-driven and may reflect discrimination that requires specific legislative reform; and investments in administrative capacity – both in systems and people – to provide a mix of cash transfers and appropriate services. However, these investments rely in part on the successful implementation of decentralised services and clearer roles in raising revenue locally to fund them.

The policy reform options generated by UNICEF's report and microsimulation are currently providing a useful discursive context in which possible AS reform options can be considered. The objective of UNICEF's research was to explore policy reform options in the rules for the calculation of AS entitlement and to produce a costing model that can capture the resulting demands on public expenditure. UNICEF has demonstrated what a micro-simulation approach can do and the costings it can produce. In the medium term, our recommendations for next steps by the MHLSP should be to consider the results further, in a context whereby the underlying AS reform options match the specific objectives for improving coverage of priority households, and the wider set of choices and constraints set by the social protection system and its financing and operation. Over the longer term, we recommend that more comprehensive micro-simulation approaches be developed to consider AS as part of the overall tax-benefit system.



MONTENEGRO //

**Advocacy and Awareness Raising
for the Increased Social Inclusion of
Children from Minority Groups**





Issue

Montenegro is home to approximately 8,300 Roma and Egyptian people, of whom 4,689 are children, representing 1.34% of the national population.⁷⁰ This group of children comprises a mixture of Roma and Egyptians who are legally domiciled and undocumented children from neighbouring countries. Low economic power, limited education, unemployment, inadequate housing conditions, social exclusion together with ethnic prejudices, and cultural norms make the Roma and Egyptian populations vulnerable to poverty and economic shocks. Consequently, there is a significant gap in health, education, and other development indicators between these children and their peers in the general population.

Roma and Egyptian children are affected by poverty, and they fare much worse than other children do across many social and wellbeing indicators. Some 150,000 people (24% of the total population) in Montenegro are at risk of poverty. Child poverty is a concern, with 32% of children living in income-poor households, 8 percentage points higher than the national relative poverty rate.⁷¹ **National poverty figures are not disaggregated by ethnicity.** However, according to the Montenegrin Red Cross (MRC), Roma and Egyptian children are an especially marginalised group and it suggests that they experience a much higher incidence of extreme poverty than the rest of the population.⁷²

Roma and Egyptian children experience multiple deprivations that are significantly higher than the rest of the population. The 2018 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) indicates that 91% of children in Roma settlements are materially deprived, whereas for the general population the figure is 37%.⁷³ Disparities in early childhood development (ECD) and educational deprivations remain a challenge too: 16% of children aged 36-59 months in Roma Settlements are attending an early childhood education programme compared to 53% in the rest of the population; for children aged 3-4 years developmentally on track, the figures were 77% in contrast to 90%. Furthermore, children aged 0-5 months in Roma Settlements were less likely to be breastfed, at 14% compared to 20% for the rest of the population. Significant disparities can be seen in the attendance and non-completion of compulsory education too. For example, some 77% of Roma children of primary school age go to school, compared to 96% for the general population. Moreover, primary school completion rates are 56% for Roma compared to 96% for the general population, and 22% of Roma children of primary school age are out of

school compared to just 3% from the general population, respectively. Secondary school completion and attendance rates for Roma children are only 3% and 7% respectively (compared to 86% and 88% for the general population).⁷⁴

Multiple intrahousehold deprivations adversely affect these children. According to the MICS, child marriage in Roma Settlements remains a significant challenge, whereby 23% of women aged 20-24 years married before the age of 15, compared to 6% of men. The consequences of child marriages can be far-reaching and long-lasting, with school drop-out being one of them. This contrasts sharply with the general population, the figures showing 2% for women and 0% for men.⁷⁵ A 2017 study on preventing child marriage in Montenegro suggested obstacles to the change included a lack of a clear definition and limited data on child marriage; insufficient inter-sectoral coordination, and a lack of community-based initiatives to address social norms.⁷⁶ In terms of household violence where children were subjected to severe physical punishment, 11% of Roma aged 1-14 experienced this compared to 4% of the national population.⁷⁷

While the social protection system is well funded, figures for 2013 indicate that 1.8% of GDP is spent on social assistance,⁷⁸ which accounts for a reduction in poverty by a modest 7 percentage points. There are 14 social protection benefits pertinent to families, but the main tax-financed benefits for families are: one, a means-tested child allowance which is paid for children aged 0-18 if attending school or registered as an unemployed person (for children aged 15-18). This is paid at different rates depending on a household's circumstances.¹³ Two, a means-tested minimum income guarantee (MIG) 'Family Allowance' benefit, which is paid to low-income households with and without children.¹⁴ In 2018, 15,152 children received the child allowance and 31,287 family members received the MIG. Although nearly every third child experiences poverty, only 10% of children receive the child allowance. This means that up to 100,000 people vulnerable to poverty are not covered by the means-tested assistance programmes.⁷⁹ All citizens, non-citizen legal residents, and certain categories of asylum seekers are eligible for these benefits if they pass the means test.⁸⁰ However, the law excludes those groups whose legal status is undetermined. This affects some Roma and Egyptian children who are undocumented or are legally resident but encounter problems accessing their entitlements.

¹³ A monthly child allowance of 24.11 is paid for each eligible child for up to three children; 40.28 is paid for a child with a disability; 40.28 is paid for a child without parental care. A means-tested birth grant of 112.43 is also paid to each newborn child.

¹⁴ Depending on household composition, a monthly benefit ranging from 67.89 to 129.06 is paid for the minimum income guarantee.

According to the MRC, the main problem in improving the Roma and Egyptian population's position is a lack of information and the challenge of obtaining a status of permanent legal residence that would allow them to access available social services and benefits and have access to the labour market. While the birth registration rate in Roma settlements is high at 96.2%,⁸¹ some families still have undocumented status. Some families have lost their status and do not have documents from any country, while others have limited information on their entitlements and are

not reached effectively by social services. Research done by the MRC in 2015 shows that a significant number of these families are not applying for means-tested benefits due to a lack of required legal documents, despite being eligible. MRC figures indicate that the take-up rate for child benefits by eligible Roma and Egyptian families is low at 28.38%, and 11.55% for the universal childbirth grant. Awareness and documentational challenges are barriers to benefit take-up.⁸² Thus, in 2015-2016 UNICEF and the MRC sought to address this challenge.



Actions

Given the multiple challenges facing Roma and Egyptian children, in 2016-2017 UNICEF Montenegro, in partnership with the Montenegrin Red Cross, embarked on an effort to improve the social inclusion of 2,500 Roma and Egyptians in five municipalities. The intervention aimed to increase their access to and awareness of social protection cash transfers, the child protection system and other social services. The MRC was an important partner as it has field presence with local branches and staff members who are trusted by the Roma and Egyptian community.

UNICEF Montenegro organised a one-day course to build MRC staff capacity to have the latest knowledge on social protection rights in the country, and therefore enable MRC staff to disseminate this information further and hopefully increase entitlement take-up. Later, local MRC branch staff organised workshops to provide information about the Montenegrin social protection system

and the rights of the Roma and Egyptian population. To support entitlement take-up, local MRC staff created 3,000 multilingual informative leaflets containing basic information on social protection entitlements and distributed them to Roma and Egyptian communities. The MRC also conducted two series of participative workshops on child and social protection services and benefits with the community, and 172 informational workshops for 895 Roma and Egyptians were held. Forty-four workshops were organised on obtaining proper and valid information about the right to apply for social protection benefits.

UNICEF Montenegro also endeavoured to sensitise the social service workforce to work with Roma and Egyptian communities in a culturally sensitive way. For example, three regional training workshops for social workers and other key partners were conducted to encourage a human-centred and human-rights approach and therefore improve outreach and quality service delivery.



As an important backdrop to these efforts, in 2017, UNICEF Montenegro strove to enhance the child allowance by conducting a review of means-tested social assistance transfers with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. This had potentially positive repercussions for Roma and Egyptian children too. Based on the analysis presented, growing scientific evidence on the importance of ECD investments and comparative evidence in relation

to economic growth and human capital formation, different scenarios for the potential introduction of targeted benefits for children aged 0-3 and 0-6 were developed. This was an attempt to advocate for universal social protection provision for children. UNICEF fostered a partnership with the Faculty of Economics, the University of Montenegro in conducting this study.⁸³

Impact



UNICEF Montenegro achieved an important policy impact that made a significant contribution to improving child outcomes for all children, including eligible Roma and Egyptian children, which was an increase in the child allowance amount by 24% in 2017, therefore increasing its adequacy.⁸⁴ This was achieved through UNICEF's evidence generation and advocacy efforts.

UNICEF Montenegro and the MRC contributed to better social inclusion for Roma and Egyptian children and their families and connected them with services and benefits.

Results showed that Roma and Egyptian participants expressed a great level of interest in the workshops in which they participated, and the training unlocked a willingness to learn more about their rights and entitlements. Modest improvements were seen in their conditions, whereby some families exercised their right to claim benefits. As the intervention evolved, 98.8% of participants claimed that they improved their knowledge of their rights to services and benefits, during the workshops and individual visits. Despite increased awareness, benefit take-up was hampered at first because many families still needed to obtain the necessary documentation first. However, by the end of the project, 111 Roma had obtained child allowances, which was more than expected. Moreover, it was evident that MRC branches enjoyed good cooperation with Roma and Egyptians, and trust and receptiveness towards MRC staff increased.⁸⁵ Improving the inclusion of these children is a UN-wide priority and UNICEF-MRC's activities contributed to cross-sectoral efforts in this direction.

As reported in UNICEF Montenegro's Annual Reports, the cultural sensitisation of social workers regarding the Roma and Egyptian communities produced results too. The capacities of the social service workforce to cooperate with this population in a more culturally sensitive way were improved. Social workers now approach their beneficiaries with a human rights-based manner. Moreover, this has complemented the interventions on increased demand for social protection services.

Social inclusion of Roma and Egyptian families, especially those with children, remains a priority for UNICEF Montenegro and this requires a holistic approach. Going forward, UNICEF will continue to advocate for and implement wide-ranging activities to ensure children and adolescents, especially those from Roma and Egyptian families, can access basic services. UNICEF is working to ensure that these children attend quality preschool education through a) awareness-raising activities for parents on the importance of early childhood education (ECE), and b) making sure that preschool professionals can provide quality education to all children, including Roma. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF is investing in information systems to prevent school dropout and detect pernicious problems, such as violence. At the same time, UNICEF is supporting central educational institutions in their efforts to ensure that children benefit from quality education.



NORTH MACEDONIA //

**Reforming the Social Protection System
through the Introduction of a new Child
Benefits System and Integrated Case
Management Approach**





Issue

North Macedonia has recently made moderate gains in economic growth development. However, this progress has not been evenly distributed. The at-risk-of-poverty rate and the combined risk of poverty or social exclusion rate among children are very high: 28.6% and 46.1% respectively.⁸⁶ A 2018 Gini coefficient of 31.9⁸⁷ implies high inequality in wealth distribution. Moreover, it is the only Western Balkan country that has shown a growth in infant mortality between 2013 and 2017. It also experiences high rates of family violence, low pre-school enrolment, and poor primary and secondary school outcomes.⁸⁸ Those key aspects of the social protection system capable of reducing these challenges – the cash benefit and social care system – required much-needed reform.

Before the 2019 reform, the EU stated⁸⁹ that the social protection system did not cover many of those who were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and its cash benefits had almost no impact on alleviating poverty. The system did not provide an adequate living standard for children and often failed to reach the most marginalised children. Cash benefits for children were too low to reduce child poverty. For example, the monthly child allowance provided 740 MKD (USD13) per child up to age 15 and 1,175 MKD (USD21) for children aged 15-18, with a maximum limit of 1,870 MKD (USD33) in total. The 1,870 MKD benefit cap often worked against large families, which tend to be poorer in general, and they were worse off as a result compared to other poor households with fewer dependent children. On the other hand, they were more likely to qualify given the *per capita* threshold approach, which did not take into account the economies of size.

The pre-reform child benefits system faced both design and implementation challenges that undermined its performance. These design issues limited the targeting efficiency and contributed to issues with both the child benefit and the parental allowance (a non-means tested programme aimed at promoting demographic growth), rendering the latter very expensive. The legislation regulating child benefits is very complex, tending to create duplications and inconsistencies. The child allowance had an unusual targeting methodology for an income-based programme. Only 20% of the beneficiaries were among the poorest decile, a percentage that doubles for the second decile. Thus, the child allowance had substantially better targeting of families in the second decile than in the first one, thereby defeating poverty reduction efforts. Moreover, estimates showed that almost 14,000 households with children who were in the poorest decile were eligible for Social Financial Assistance, but not for child allowance.⁹⁰ Low benefit take-up also occurred because of a lack of entitlement awareness and discrimination. Invariably, social protection benefits were not linked with

other social care services, which generated duplications in coverage and money, and wasted time. Widespread lack of (disaggregated) data and analysis of the impact of social protection on children made implementation and impact monitoring difficult.

North Macedonia has a long history of providing social services for families. The two main providers are the Centres for Social Work (CSWs) and the Employment Service Agencies (ESAs). The 30 CSWs are the country's main social protection hubs, administering all cash benefits and delivering social support and care services, including psycho-social support. CSWs are also responsible for the administration of foster care.

However, since independence, CSWs have been over-stretched and work with obsolete methods. The administration of cash benefits has consumed much of their time, at the expense of delivering other critical social services. Frequent personnel and management changes, as well as the complexity of many programmes, have contributed to a perception that the Centres themselves act as bottlenecks. Administering benefits compromises the Centres' other responsibilities, and social workers cannot pursue preventive social work. The use of highly qualified personnel in the routine administration of cash benefits is profligate. Moreover, before the reform, CSW staff operated with outdated procedures and were overburdened with administrative demands which allowed for very limited outreach work. Mechanisms for monitoring the quality of social services for children remain weak, therefore leaving vulnerable children at risk of poverty and deprivation. Moreover, CSWs are undermined by insufficiently qualified employees to cover the population's needs. Social workers have been assessed as feeling unmotivated and unhappy, which in turn affects performance.⁹¹ While employee numbers increased from 739 in 2006 to 1,057 in 2013, 78% of the 318 newly employed staff members were administrative/non-professional and did not qualify for social outreach work.

Given these challenges, in November 2017, the government amended three laws which contributed to social protection system reform. This reform was initiated through the simultaneous adoption of a package of amended laws: the 2019 law on social protection; the 2019 amendments to the child protection law; and the 2019 law on social security for senior citizens. The amendments were intended to focus benefits on households in the lower-income quintiles, adhere to principles of unconditionality and improve the integration of a series of social services, reconfigure the child allowance, and introduce an education allowance and a transformed parental allowance.



Actions

UNICEF worked closely with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), the World Bank, and UNDP on the comprehensive social protection system reform. UNICEF's reform engagement was two-fold comprising: 1) the reconfiguration of the child benefits system and 2) the introduction of an integrated case management (ICM) approach into social work. Given that these two policy areas are closely connected, UNICEF's engagement was therefore mutually reinforcing in terms of generating positive outcomes for children. To support the full operationalisation of the new social protection system, UNICEF collaborated with the Government to develop and adopt protocols for the implementation of cash benefits for children and to implement ICM in the CSWs.

The 2019 child benefit reform partially transpired from earlier UNICEF efforts to generate evidence and advocacy in 2013. UNICEF's 2013 study on *'Strengthening the System of Social Protection for Children'*,⁹² carried out with the MLSP, was crucial in generating information on weaknesses in the system of social protection for children, particularly for vulnerable children. This was the first step towards a more comprehensive social protection reform. It showed that only a fifth of the poorest children benefited from the child allowance and that the amount was insufficient to ensure adequate living standards. The findings were leveraged by UNICEF to partner with the World Bank in supporting the Government's overall social protection reforms.⁹³

Furthermore, in 2018, UNICEF, the MLSP, and UNDP commissioned Columbia University (CU) experts from its School of Social Work to develop a detailed ICM handbook.⁹⁴ This introduced a customised ICM system and was intended to improve the case management capacity of CSW and ESA staff. The handbook was developed on local specifics and circumstances, but based upon international standards and best practices. It guides staff on practical ways to promote an effective ICM system; providing clarification on the monitoring tools to be used to ensure implementation of proposed measures for improvement. Moreover, systematisation documents for the CSWs were updated to include ICM principles. The objective was to enable social workers to better coordinate multiple services and facilitate children's or family members' increased functioning and well-being.

In 2018, UNICEF worked with the Government and civil society to ensure that all CSW staff were trained and equipped to effectively manage cases involving children at risk. Based on the ICM model developed by CU experts, UNICEF helped create a pool of local ICM experts who were tasked with imparting the model to other professionals. In 2018, these experts trained all the CSW professionals and 30% of ESA staff on the basics of ICM through a series of five-day training events implemented countrywide.



In 2019, UNICEF partnered with the National Association of Social Workers and jointly developed a comprehensive package of protocols and step-by-step guidance on ICM. These were disseminated to all CSW professionals nationwide through a set of advanced ICM training sessions. In 2020, UNICEF will roll-out an ICM mentorship programme to further assist professionals in the implementation of this approach.

As part of the overall reform, and given the low morale of CSW and ESA social workers, UNICEF commissioned an

assessment by a private firm - Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) - to identify solutions for improving staff motivation and performance using behavioural insights. The assessment identified several sectorial-relevant motivational barriers: a heavy administrative burden, invisibility of social outcomes, low salaries, limited career-progression prospects, inadequate working conditions, and lack of discretion in decision-making due to a rule-bound culture. Specific recommendations were then provided for review and incorporation by the Government.



Impact

UNICEF has played an important role in the country's reform aspirations. Since the new 2019 legislation was introduced, there has been the roll-out of a new child benefits system and introduction of an ICM system for social workers. The new child benefits system adopted a unified income-assessment approach for determining eligibility; use of the same equivalence scale to determine the benefit level of different entitlements; expansion of child allowance provisions by removing those barriers that prevent recipients receiving social financial assistance and the non-registered unemployed from accessing this entitlement, and a new educational allowance for primary and secondary education was introduced. Estimates suggest that these changes will increase the number of households receiving the child and educational allowance by a significant number of additional children, ranging from 51,500 to 63,000 (depending on whether tapering is introduced); an increase of 23.6%-28.6%.⁹⁵ The EU's projected impacts on income poverty estimate 'an 8% reduction of the at-risk-of-poverty rate (from 20.3% in 2016 to 18.7% in 2019) and a 43% reduction of the 'intensity' of income poverty, as measured by the median poverty risk gap (from 5.2% in 2016 to 3.0% in 2019)'.⁹⁶

Through the ICM manual and training of social workers, UNICEF and Colombia University (CU) have managed to disseminate ICM methodology countrywide and sensitise and skill workers regarding its principles. While this work is ongoing, UNICEF nonetheless anticipates that through ICM, vulnerable children will be better linked to appropriate local support services. Case managers are already reporting an improved and more integrated delivery of cash benefits and support services to beneficiaries.

Going forward, UNICEF remains committed to creating a more efficient social protection system that addresses poverty and promotes inclusion for all children. UNICEF will work towards strengthening the country's social protection system and ensure that it is well connected with all sectoral work. Continuous support is critical for improving child benefits, and the assessment model used identifies the support needed by children with disabilities and guarantees social workers have the capacity to provide quality services for all.



TAJIKISTAN //

Adapting the Social Protection System to be Shock-Responsive





Issue

Tajikistan has a population of 9.1 million people, of whom approximately 40% are children.⁹⁷ 2016 figures indicate that about one million Tajik children (34%) are poor.⁹⁸ Some 30% of young people aged 15-24 are not in education, training, or employment, and this applies to 89% of girls. Moreover, 40% of Tajiks who seek work outside the country are younger than 30.⁹⁹ Households whose members have migrated are subject to multiple deprivations: 78% do not have adequate income to cover the cost of living, and 93% experience pronounced food deficiencies.¹⁰⁰ Tajikistan's GDP growth was 7.2% in 2019, similar to growth rates in the last two years. The country's risk of debt distress is high given the elevated levels of publicly guaranteed debt – 53% of GDP in 2018.¹⁰¹ Due to a limited state budget, increased resource allocation for social sector needs is unlikely in the short to medium term. Thus, labour migrant remittances remain a vital economic lifeline, representing approximately 30% of GDP.¹⁰²

Tajikistan is prone to diverse types of disasters and is among the top ten countries in the world in terms of average annual percentage losses of relative to GDP owing to the adverse impacts of natural disasters.¹⁰³ Tajikistan's terrain and geological and hydrological features make it vulnerable to natural hazards, such as floods, earthquakes, landslides, mudflows, avalanches, droughts, and heavy snowfalls. Moreover, climate change is expected to increase the occurrence of events dependent on hydrometeorological conditions. Future rainfall patterns are projected to be irregular in terms of intensity, duration, volume, and geographical distribution.¹⁰⁴ More than 60% of the country's inhabitants live in areas of high seismic risk. In 2018, for example, Tajikistan experienced 169 emergencies. The economic losses stemming from these disasters totalled an amount equivalent to USD3.6 million.¹⁰⁵ From 1997 to 2018, disasters cost Tajikistan just over USD589 million according to official damage assessment reports.¹⁰⁶ The capacity to respond to shocks is limited. The Government still relies more on external financing, which further exposes the economy to external shocks.

The Tajik social protection system provides both cash assistance and social services to the most vulnerable population. The social protection system is well established with social protection units operational in every district of the country within local government

bodies. Social insurance schemes and pensions are managed by the Agency on Social Insurance and Pensions (ASIP), whereas other social benefits such as the Targeted Social Assistance or the social allowance for children living with HIV remain the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population (MOHSPP) and its subordinate institution – the State Agency on Social Protection of the Population (SASPP). The TSA covers only 14% of the population in 40 of the 68 districts of Tajikistan. The TSA transfer value is very modest and amounts to a mere USD40 a year. Other entitlements motivate poor people to apply for TSA, as the poverty certificate that accompanies the TSA allows them to receive additional entitlements and discounts for basic public services. The World Bank has also initiated a TSA assessment to address the issues of adequacy and coverage.

The role of the social protection system of Tajikistan in emergency preparedness and response is currently very limited. Social protection authorities are not actively involved in the emergency response platforms/groups organised at the national and local levels. There are no support mechanisms in place for social protection to provide cash and social services to those population groups affected by frequent natural disasters. At present, cash support is managed by emergency authorities and delivered in the form of one-time grants or concessional loans to the affected households. Most importantly, affected households are targeted and based on selection criteria that prioritise physical damage to houses and the loss of household members. The criteria have major limitations as they do not cover social well-being indicators, such as households with many children, households with children with disabilities or orphans, women-headed households, or poor households, for example.

Given these limitations, UNICEF recognised there was a need to reform the social protection system to increase its shock-responsiveness. Likewise, the government had agreed to test cash in an emergency through the national social protection system. To achieve the above, UNICEF decided to convene all stakeholders around the development and testing of the new model for a Humanitarian Cash Transfer Programme (HCTP) to be implemented through the national social protection system, and transform it into a Shock-Responsive Social Protection (SRSP) system.



Actions

UNICEF generated evidence to kick start the process of increasing the shock-responsiveness of the country's social protection system. UNICEF commissioned an independent consultant to design and implement a basic assessment tool for determining the feasibility, or 'readiness', of the country's social protection system to implement preparedness and mitigation strategies to support the use of cash transfer programmes in emergencies. Through this analysis, opportunities were identified for implementing cash-based interventions through the national social protection system and other humanitarian channels, and concrete recommendations were made to the country and regional offices to implement preparedness and mitigation strategies.

The feasibility assessment focussed on systems strengthening and the introduction of a new HCTP – later named the 'Tajikistan Social Protection Emergency Programme' (TESPP) – through the existing social protection system. The main aspects analysed by the assessment were the institutions responsible for social protection provision and emergency response and their capacity to coordinate work to respond to emergencies; the readiness of the social protection system, including the legal framework and beneficiary target groups. As Tajikistan's social protection system is relatively well developed, the use of the existing TSA administrative system to test a HCTP was proposed.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, to raise awareness and enhance capacity development, UNICEF organised two workshops with key Government counterparts. These included the President's

Office, Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP), State Agency on Social Protection, Agency on Social Insurance and Pensions, Committee on Emergencies and Civil Defence, and State Savings' Bank 'Amonatbank'. These workshops were also conducted with development partners (i.e. the Red Crescent Society, WPF, and UNDP) to capacitate participants on SRSP and cash-based transfers in emergencies. UNICEF Tajikistan also used different consultation platforms such as Rapid Emergency Assessment and Coordination Team Meetings and the National Emergency platform meetings to present the HCTP concept.

To further awareness and understanding of the SRSP, a study tour to Nepal was organised for a Government delegation representing both the national and local levels and in conjunction with an Armenia government delegation. A trilateral information and experience-sharing process helped the delegations understand the Nepalese experience and how its social protection response addressed the needs of vulnerable people affected by the 2015 earthquake. Key lessons learned from this visit to the country were that existing cash transfers programmes can be leveraged to link humanitarian cash assistance to the existing social protection architecture and this reduces the chances of creating a profligate parallel system; it allows for quicker delivery of assistance, and achieves both impact at scale and economies of scale. It can also improve the coordination of cash transfer delivery within the existing delivery system and bolster the institutional capacity of governments.



UNICEF faced some initial reticence from government institutions to discuss the SRSP and test the HCTP through the national social protection system. However, this was overcome through continuous communication and consultation. Awareness-raising also helped all stakeholders to agree on testing the case and to establish a concrete policy framework. Moreover, the MHSP and the Committee on Emergencies and Civil Defence were also open to testing the case. Furthermore, by working together with all relevant stakeholders, UNICEF developed Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) for the

TESPP.¹⁰⁸ The SoPs outlined the steps; the process and different roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder during different phases of testing. As a result, and to establish a policy and partnership framework for testing the TESPP, a Letter of Agreement was signed by the MHSP, Committee on Emergencies and Civil Defence, State Savings' Bank 'Amonatbank', the Red Crescent Society, and UNICEF. In parallel to these activities, UNICEF Tajikistan continued its advocacy and provided its technical support in the development of the new national social protection strategy.

Impact



Through UNICEF Tajikistan's evidence generation, awareness-raising, advocacy, and partnership-building, the concept and relevance of the SRSP have been successfully introduced into the national policy discourse. Tajikistan is now ready to test the TESPP in 2020 when an emergency of a pre-defined scale occurs. The TESPP will be tested with approximately 100-250 households. The testing will employ existing systems and business procedures of the TSA. The rationale behind this is to introduce the logic of the SRSP and thereby strengthen the role of social protection in emergency response situations. This will demonstrate the TSA's capacity to provide cash to the most vulnerable, and therefore indicate ways this system can be improved. For the first time, when social protection system beneficiaries are affected by emergencies, they will be able to receive cash to purchase the necessary commodities required for addressing their basic needs. The version of the TESPP to be tested is a small-scale intervention. It is a one-time cash transfer to a) poor people who are already TSA recipients for whom it will be a top-up and b) the non-poor affected by an emergency. The TESPP value is about USD40 per household. UNICEF has suggested the amount be adjusted to take into account the number of children in the household (e.g. to provide USD60 to households with more than five children and USD30 to those with less than two children). However, this is still under discussion and a final

decision will be made in UNICEF's final workshop in March 2020 before testing. UNICEF is also trying to advance a flexible TESPP model so that other vulnerable groups can be added in the future and the amount of the transfer can be adjusted accordingly.

The results of the testing exercise will open a new advocacy avenue for UNICEF Tajikistan and its partners. UNICEF is therefore optimistic that the tested TESPP model will be successful, and the incorporation of the model into the national emergency preparedness and response process will be recommended to the government. Once introduced, the monitoring and review are key components of the tested approach to build an evidence base for the TESPP. When agreed, UNICEF may take further actions with the Government, such as conducting a budget review and costing for emergency response programmes. The current volume of funding and operating procedures has to be reconsidered to make the social protection system responsive to shocks. Looking to the longer term, when all the necessary policy and programmatic adjustments have been completed, UNICEF will continue its support to improve the effectiveness of the emergency response over time by targeting the most vulnerable people. Given the well-grounded concerns centring on targeting, its effectiveness will be one of the dimensions reviewed in this tested case.



TURKEY //
**Extending the National Cash
Transfer Programme to Promote
Refugee Children's Access
to Education**





Issue

Turkey is now home to the largest refugee population in the world, with 4 million (3.6 million are Syrians)¹⁰⁹ displaced persons living under temporary and international protection, comprising more than 1.7 million children.¹¹⁰ Refugees in Turkey find themselves in a protracted situation of displacement, leading to socio-economic, physical, and mental vulnerability. As families run low on assets and barriers to livelihoods and social support systems remain, vulnerability increases. Needs are especially acute in education, child protection, and social protection. In 2017, it was found that over 82% of refugees in Turkey are below the poverty line, with 24% experiencing extreme poverty.¹¹¹

At the same time, additional and immediate efforts were required to improve access to vital services, especially education for children. In December 2016, nearly 500,000 Syrian and other refugee children were enrolled in formal education across the country, while nearly 400,000 children remained out of school, hence, the strong need for a social assistance programme to increase school enrolment and retention of refugee children. The majority of another 800,000 refugee children are not of school-going age and therefore are mostly under homecare.



Actions

The legal framework in Turkey provided a unique opportunity to extend national social protection and access to education to refugees in Turkey, namely: the national Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE). For instance, the 1986 Turkish National Social Assistance Law allows for the provision of social assistance to non-citizens legally residing in Turkey. This law, in conjunction with the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection also permits service provision to those under protection. The CCTE is one of the flagship social assistance programmes implemented by the Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Services (MoFLSS) since 2003 for Turkish citizens.

In 2016, UNICEF and other partners organised a series of discussions with the MoFLSS, the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) Society, and ECHO. The discussion led to the consensus that the national CCTE should be extended to Syrian families and other refugee families to help them overcome financial barriers to education.¹⁵ Similarly, the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) Programme – a multipurpose cash assistance scheme for refugees – was launched in November 2016 to respond to the needs of refugees.¹¹²

With more than EUR150 million provided by the primary donor (ECHO) for the extension of the programme, the CCTE is among the largest interventions to support access to education in an emergency context. The programme is also supported by the Governments of Norway and the US State Department's Bureau of Population and Migration. Aligned with the national CCTE, refugee CCTE beneficiaries receive a monthly cash benefit of 35-60 TL (USD6-10) for each child that

attends school regularly. The benefit is paid on a bimonthly basis. An additional cash benefit of 100-250 TL (USD17-44) is provided twice a year in order to help families cover the extra expenses occurring at the beginning of school terms.

Given that refugee families face multiple barriers to regular school attendance, UNICEF advocated for a 'Cash Plus' approach and incorporated a child protection component into the CCTE to further enhance the programme's impact. Thus, when a beneficiary student stops attending school regularly, their families receive a visit from the child protection outreach teams of the TRC. The visit entails a child protection assessment of children in the household, and referrals to specialised services if needed. The 'Cash Plus' component provides a means to mitigate those child protection risks and violations most closely intertwined with economic vulnerabilities, such as child labour, early marriage, physical and emotional violence, and family separation.

UNICEF also undertook additional activities to improve the CCTE. To ensure rapid roll-out and efficient implementation and harmonisation of cash disbursements to refugees; UNICEF established partnerships with the ESSN and adopted common application and payment platforms. Moreover, UNICEF advocated for the extension of the CCTE to children enrolled in the Accelerated Learning Programme, a certified non-formal education programme which provides a pathway to formal education for those missing several years of schooling. For the first time in Turkey, those enrolled in non-formal education have become eligible for cash-transfers.

¹⁵ Eligibility is determined by income-regularity, receipt of other social protection benefits (i.e. benefit-tested) and assets. Children must be enrolled in school and maintain 80% attendance in each month.



Impact

Over 650,000 refugee children have received cash support through the CCTE programme since mid-2017, and almost 70,000 refugee children have benefited from the child protection component. The programme is widely appreciated by the refugee community, as well as humanitarian/developmental stakeholders. It has also generated interest in integrated social protection in contexts of forced displacement to realise a range of children's rights. The MoFLSS has expressed an interest in the 'cash plus child protection' model and is engaged in policy dialogue about introducing a similar component into the national CCTE, thereby illustrating how UNICEF's work for refugee children may have the potential to also enhance the quality of social protection provision for Turkish children. Moreover, the CCTE provided an opportunity to introduce Public Finance for Children work in Turkey. A CCTE Costing and Financing Study calculating the total cost of implementing the programme and exploring how fiscal space can be

expanded to ensure sustainability is currently being pursued in partnership with the MoFLSS and the Strategy and Budget Presidency of Turkey.

The expansion of the CCTE scheme to include refugee children represents an important moment globally for realising the right to social protection and education for displaced populations. Rather exceptionally, a national programme has been extended to refugee children in Turkey. In doing so, a coordinated response led by UNICEF to address the needs of refugees has been undertaken. This response is characterised by (i) *complementarity* (i.e. disbursing cash for basic needs through the ESSN and for education through the CCTE); (ii) *integrated* (cash plus) design, as well as common operational modalities (i.e. application points, beneficiary payment modalities, and feedback mechanisms for both the ESSN and CCTE).

STORIES FROM THE FIELD //

Turkey — Conditional Cash Transfer for Education increases school attendance of Syrian and refugee children

"When we first arrived in Turkey, the very first thing I did was to look for a school for my children", says Leyla Reshid, a mother of three girls and one boy. The Reshid family fled Syria to Turkey in 2012, eventually settling in Istanbul. Leyla says that despite the challenges associated with their new life, as parents they want to provide their children with a brighter future. "We need to pay the rent and pay the bills. My husband and I even thought about Ahmad becoming another breadwinner", she says, referring to her 13-year-old son. "But for God's sake, he is still a child. He belongs in school. He needs to continue his education." Ahmad has benefitted from the extension of the CCTE programme since May 2017. "We need money to send all four of them to school", Leyla says, explaining that all her children have been supported by the CCTE since July 2017. "They love their school and do not want to miss a day. I feel very proud every morning when they leave for school and I feel more hopeful every evening when they come back home", she adds. Leyla remembers the increasingly harsh conditions they lived

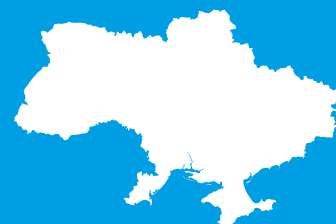
under in Syria. "We suffered bombings; our home was hit and destroyed. Thank God none of us were hurt. With no water and no electricity, no home" the family embarked on their escape to Turkey. "The journey was physically and emotionally very hard on all of us. The atrocities we witnessed still has psychological effects on us. Especially on my twins, Melek and Zeynep. When they hear a loud noise they still jolt in terror. We are slowly recovering from the trauma of war." Trying to leave those terrible days behind, Leyla says that she wakes up every day thinking about a hopeful future. "My happiest moment of the day is when I send my children off to school. I pray for them and watch them from the window of our house as they walk to school. My hope for them is to build their own lives. Proper education will provide them with an opportunity for a better future. I want them to have much better lives than us. They will be educated, and they will get a good job when the time comes. I could only make it to the 9th grade in school and my biggest dream is to see my children go to university", she concludes.

Adapted from: <https://www.unicef.org/turkey/en/stories/conditional-cash-transfer-education-increases-school-attendance-syrian-and-refugee-children>



UKRAINE //

Supporting Parenting through Evidence-based Policies and a Universal Baby Box





Issue

From 2013-2015, Ukraine experienced a significant deterioration of its economy, with an 18% GDP contraction, resulting in a twofold increase in poverty.¹¹³ However, in 2016 the situation stabilised, and poverty declined. Nevertheless, currently, every third child lives in poverty, and 14% in extreme poverty. Rural poverty is almost twice as high as in urban areas (39% compared to 18.3%).¹¹⁴ Tens of thousands of families cannot meet their children's need through their earned income alone and require income support. Moreover, the risk of poverty increases significantly with the birth of a second child, from 47% for families with one child to 72.2% with a second child, and in large families, poverty exceeds 80%.¹¹⁵

Significant challenges exist with Ukraine's system of social protection, especially regarding the efficacy of targeting the most vulnerable groups. Reform of this system has been paramount. Ukraine has a combination of welfare programmes inherited from the Soviet Union and a large number of benefits, introduced post-independence. This created a complex system, comprising over 130 distinct benefit categories, which is fragmented and poorly adapted to current needs. Despite relatively high government expenditure on social assistance (4.9% of GDP), its performance in reducing poverty is limited. Children in Ukraine account for 18% of the population. However, they account for 45.3% of the poor.¹⁶ Up until 2014, overall maternity and child benefits were dominated by a Universal Child Birth Grant (UCBG), which absorbed the largest share of social assistance expenditures. The UCBG was introduced in 1993 and has received increased financing over time, reaching 1.25% of GDP in 2014. While a crucial programme, this has left limited fiscal space for additional benefits for families.

Child immunization coverage in Ukraine is improving, yet it is still lower than the recommended WHO level

(95%).¹¹⁶ In 2019, the DTP3 coverage (i.e. diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus) was 80.5% (compared to 67.5% in 2018), Hepatitis B3 was 77% (compared to 65.2% in 2018), and Polio3 – 78.4% (compared to 69.2% in 2018). The trust level in vaccinations among caregivers has also been improving. Positive attitudes towards vaccination among parents in Ukraine has grown from 28% in 2008 to 46% in 2012, to 72% in 2014, and up to 75% in 2017. According to a 2019 UNICEF survey,¹¹⁷ 88% of parents stated that they vaccinate (or intend to vaccinate) their children according to the national vaccination schedule. This is an improvement on 2017 figures, where only 84% of parents expressed such intentions, and in 2014 where the figures were as low as 63%. Key factors contributing to these positive trends related to improved access to vaccines due to changes in the state procurement system, as well as comprehensive efforts to build the capacities of health workers and build the knowledge of parents. Meanwhile, the results of another national survey Health Index, conducted in December 2018, demonstrate a decrease in barriers towards vaccination and a decrease in parental hesitancy towards vaccinations in general. Among those parents who refused to vaccinate, 8% fewer parents said they have refused vaccination due to the fear of side effects or complications from vaccines compared to 2017; 8% less due to distrusting vaccine manufacturers; and 5% less due to a belief that vaccination was unnecessary.

Breastfeeding practises in Ukraine are also a reason for concern. Survey data shows that only 19.7% of children under six months are exclusively breastfed.¹¹⁸ Children born to mothers in households in the poorest quintile are less likely (62.1%) to start breastfeeding as first-time parents, compared to children born to mothers representing the richest quintile (73.5%).



Actions

To address the challenges outlined, and as part of the development of an action plan for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in consultation with UNICEF, the Government of Ukraine proposed several new initiatives. Inspired by the successful Finnish model of 'baby boxes', the Government decided to introduce their own baby box programme. The overarching goal of the programme was to enhance positive parenting practices.

From September 2018, every Ukrainian new-born (approximately 310,000 per year) would, as a statutory right, receive a 'Baby Box'. It contains a layette of essential hygiene items and clothes for new-borns, as well as a comprehensive set of educational materials on responsible parenting, vaccinations, and other elements critical for ensuring early childhood development (ECD). The Government budgeted approximately USD180 for each box. The first box was procured at a value of USD100, while

¹⁶ Absolute poverty below actual subsistence minimum (UAH 2,941 per person, 2017).

the latest (fourth iteration) is worth around USD180. The savings were returned to the budget of the programme. One of the aims of the project is to promote good parenting for all, regardless of their socioeconomic background, as it is a universal benefit. Having all the materials provided to care for a child reduces the stress of preparing for a new-born. By providing parents with the necessary tools and equipment, the Government hoped to encourage behavioural change that positively impacted on wellbeing outcomes for the child. Awareness-raising and capacity building of young parents' ECD skills and promoting new-borns' health care were additional objectives. UNICEF also produced two small booklets on vaccinations and breastfeeding that were included in the Baby Box.

UNICEF helped introduce this reform action through collaborative partnerships. An MoU was signed in June 2018 between the Government and the United Nations Office for Project Services and UNICEF. The MoU's purpose was to ensure that social protection supported effective and responsible parenthood. Within the MoU framework, it was agreed that UNICEF would provide technical support to the programme, including through ECD materials and overseeing the monitoring of the project implementation. The goal of the monitoring was to provide recommendations to the Government on how to progressively improve the programme.

UNICEF was responsible for very specific evidenced-based monitoring of the Baby Box roll out. These included 1) *delivery of the Baby Box to parents*, to provide information on its receipt, and generate information on delivery constraints and the bottlenecks experienced; 2) *Baby Box satisfaction and usage*, to gauge parents' satisfaction and to provide feedback on those items to be included/excluded in future iterations; 3) *observing before and after changes in parents' knowledge and behaviour*,

by identifying informational knowledge gaps and practices on some aspects of inclusive ECD; 4) *communication*, to understand how and when parents should be informed about the Box, and how communication could encourage proper use and how parents-to-be can be made aware of their entitlements; 5) *societal reception*, to identify potential risks regarding programme perceptions and expectations; 6) *extent of young parents' social engagement*, to understand how they interact and counsel each other – through social networks (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and YouTube) – that allow them to share experiences and tips on effective parenting, vaccinations, breastfeeding, etc. This also enabled effective communication with national and regional opinion-makers (i.e. bloggers, journalists). This helped to valorise the importance of new parents' participation and perform data collection and analysis through regular thematic polls; 7) *media and social media reaction to the programme*, to ascertain the reaction of civil society. This included trends on positive and negative reaction alerts on the concerns of civil society.

To ensure a strong evidence-based understanding of the programme's performance, UNICEF designed the Baby Box monitoring to involve a process of quarterly data collection, analysis, and reporting of information. This monitoring involved a sample survey of Baby Box recipients through a face-to-face interview method just after childbirth; and a telephone interview survey of recipients three-to-four weeks after childbirth. UNICEF also conducted a qualitative survey (focus group discussions and in-depth interviews) of recipients, representatives of social protection and health authorities, and the public, to understand programme perceptions. The rationale for the careful monitoring of the programme was to enable its progressive modification in its subsequent iterations to ensure it optimally serves soon-to-be or new parents.





Impact

Between September 2018 and October 2019, over 390,000 families received the box and benefited from its content.

UNICEF conducted four waves of monitoring during this period. The results and subsequent recommendations for programme enhancement were sent to the Ministry of Social Policy (MoSP). Most of the recommendations were accepted by the MoSP, which lead to an overall improvement in Baby Boxes. To date, its content has evolved and undergone four editions, with each new edition being influenced by the monitoring results. For example, since its inception, the number of items in the kit has increased from 30 to more than 70.

The evidenced-based monitoring allowed for the progressive modification of the programme over time through each new iteration, resulting in enhanced impact results. For example, the following results were found over one year (first edition in December 2018 to fourth edition December 2019): national awareness of the programme increased from 61% to 67%; programme coverage increased from 3.4% to 6.9% of the total population; and a positive national attitudinal shift towards the programme was observed, increasing from 74% to 93%. Today, the approval rate among direct recipients is very high, sitting at 98%. Monitoring also improved the timeliness of delivery: in the latest disbursement, 99% of parents received the Box within one week of the birth, an improvement from the first disbursement wave where 91% of parents received it within the first week. Furthermore, the recipient's perceived utility of the box improved over time. By the fourth kit edition, recipients gave it a 4.8 score as opposed to 4.05 for the first edition, with 5 being the maximum positive response and 0 the minimum. The improvement in on-time delivery and content led to an increased demand to receive a kit: in the

first edition, 35% of would-be parents wished to receive the Box, whereas 68% expressed this preference by the fourth wave. A preference shift was also observed with regard to cash versus the in-kind Baby Box too, with a decline from 52% to 20% for the former by the fourth disbursement. Positive changes to household budgets occurred too: 49% of parents noted significant savings in the purchasing of baby-related goods in the first month post-partum.

Very significantly, 54% of recipients evidenced a deepening of their childhood vaccinations knowledge and parents with previously negative attitudes to vaccinations exhibited a significant change in their attitude. Some 3% of parents¹⁷ demonstrated a negative-to-positive attitude change towards vaccinations as a result of the information provided in the Baby Boxes. The change in parents' attitudes is likely to have translated into many more additional vaccinated children in one year; potentially as many as 9,000 more children. This has wide-ranging positive public health implications for all children and brings Ukraine close to the WHO recommended minimum vaccination coverage of 95%.

Going forward, UNICEF plans to scale up its role and involve the private sector in the project. One aspiration is to include a comprehensive book on ECD, produced by UNICEF and sponsored by the corporate sector. Moreover, UNICEF is considering adding more products/certificates to the box according to parents' suggestions gleaned from the monitoring process (e.g. a discount certificate for an online baby product store for clothes, toys, etc.). In addition, UNICEF plans to continue comprehensive monitoring to improve the project and to track the ultimate programmatic goals (i.e. poverty reduction, vaccination, breastfeeding, etc.).

¹⁷ Three percent represents the parents of 9,000 newborn children. Approximately 300,000 children are born in Ukraine annually.

A young girl with brown hair, wearing a brown hooded jacket, is smiling and holding onto a thick rope. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting. A large blue square with a white number '2' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

2

ACTION AREA 2 //

Public Finance for Children



ARMENIA //

Leveraging Funds through Public Finance Advocacy and Evidence Generation to Combat Child Poverty and Deprivation





Issue

Despite a recent decline in child poverty, a third of all children experience poverty and multiple deprivations. This situation required action to reduce the deprivations and pernicious lifelong impacts of poverty on children. Currently, 29.2% of children experience poverty and 1.5% extreme poverty, as compared to 23.5% and 1% respectively for the general population.¹¹⁹ Children experience significant multidimensional poverty¹⁸ too: 61.6% are deprived in two or more dimensions. The rural-urban contrast is stark, with multidimensional poverty figures of 74.9% and 52% respectively.¹²⁰

Reducing child poverty and deprivation presupposed marshalling adequate financial resources to support transformative social policy. The 2013 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Concluding Observations for Armenia emphasised several challenges and recommendations regarding public finance for children. It identified a significant decrease in budget allocations for social sectors, and a lack of a child rights-based perspective in the budgeting process. The 2018 Ombudsman's report on the CRC implementation noted that none of those recommendations were implemented by the Government.

In recent years, there has been insufficient and declining government spending on social protection, health, and education, which directly concerns child wellbeing.

Furthermore, budgetary data is not disaggregated, which limits the possibility of equity analysis. This stems from both low staff capacities in the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and sectoral departments. Moreover, the demand for disaggregated data by line Ministries has been low since evidence-based policymaking is limited. This means reforms which directly affect children are often neither costed, coupled with proper financial analysis, nor are spending efficiencies assessed. Combined, this results in wasted resources.

Limited information on national spending on children and adolescents hampered the possibility to logically link budget and policy design. Consequently, the government pursued programme-based budgeting (PPB) reform to establish a better linkage between budget and policy objectives and outputs. The reform aimed to improve the accountability, transparency, and efficiency of public spending. Armenia transitioned to PPB in 2019, however, there was little guidance and capacity development provided, particularly for non-finance staff. This was problematic for many Government departments, as they had to devise budgetary submissions with little prior financial knowledge.

UNICEF Armenia recognised these problems and how to respond. Addressing the various challenges was necessary if progress was to be made on improving the use and availability of domestic resources for services of importance to children.



Actions

To influence government spending, UNICEF Armenia conducted and launched a Child-focussed Public Expenditure Measurement study report (C-PEM),¹²¹ which measured the state budget's direct and indirect expenditure on children. This was the first such study to be conducted in Armenia and the region. Its aim was five-fold: engender a sustainable increase in spending on children, make children a budget priority, render spending on children more effective and efficient, ensure spending is equitable and improve the transparency and accountability of the public budget. The study revealed that the increase in overall public spending since 2012 had not benefited children proportionately. Expenditure on children rose more slowly

than overall expenditures, even though the proportion of children in the overall population had not changed.

The bulk of child-focussed expenditure, more than half, (direct and indirect) has rested within the traditional sectors – education, health, social protection. Further disaggregation by child rights showed that most spending on children went to fulfilling the rights for survival (nearly a third), development (more than a third), and protection (about 18%), with the right for participation receiving only about 1%. Distribution of child-focussed expenditure among different age groups revealed underinvestment in early childhood, especially children aged 1-5.

¹⁸ Child poverty is multidimensional, and deprivations are often mutually reinforcing: poor health, malnutrition, low access to or quality of education, and poor housing conditions, including a lack of water and sanitation, define children's experience of poverty more accurately than measures of income.

UNICEF made recommendations, based on the study, to the Government and specifically to the MoF on how to integrate child-focussed public expenditure measurement into the budget process. In addition to the C-PEM, several costing, capacity development, and evidence generation initiatives on child budgeting for children were produced. This is expected to contribute to improving the effectiveness, efficiency, equity, sustainability, transparency, and accountability of child-related policies and budget allocations.

To support policy change, UNICEF Armenia organised knowledge-exchanges to institutionalise the C-PEM findings into the government's PPB reforms. Various PF4C awareness-raising activities were pursued to achieve this. A South-South learning exchange was organised between UNICEF Armenia and Argentina. This involved organising a five-day study visit to Armenia for officials from the Argentine MoF, the National Council for Coordination of Social Policies, and UNICEF Argentina. The exchange capitalised on Argentina's strong experience in measuring public expenditure on children, and, in turn, learn from Armenia's experience of institutionalising a child poverty measurement. Meetings were held with the MoF, Standing Committee on Health and Social Affairs of the National Assembly of Armenia, European Union, GIZ, and experts working on public finance issues in Armenia. This meeting discussed C-PEM institutionalisation in the context of the PPB reform, including the practical sharing of budget templates and guidelines.

Moreover, a high-level official presentation of Armenia's C-PEM results was conducted with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UNICEF, Argentine Delegation, Embassy

of Argentina in Armenia, and several governmental, NGO, and donor representatives. The workshop¹²² consisted of a presentation of Argentina's experience of measuring social investment in children, and the validation of Armenia's C-PEM findings, followed by a discussion on measuring investments in children.

At the 2018 World Children's Day celebrations, organised by UNICEF, the issue of investing in children was voiced by an adolescent at a meeting with the President and several Ministers.¹²³ This was part of UNICEF's advocacy efforts to sensitise both government counterparts and adolescents on the need to measure and track investments in children. Furthermore, UNICEF Armenia converted its C-PEM study, with the input of children, into a child-friendly booklet.¹²⁴ This outlined Armenia's child-friendly budgeting for adolescents and was shared widely at this country's CRC 30 celebrations, which was attended by over 170 adolescents.

Following the South-South learning exchange, UNICEF built the capacity of 35 staff from four line Ministries involved in the country's overall transition process to a finalised PPB in 2019. After this, UNICEF provided technical assistance in the development of child-related budget programme submissions to the State budget. Education, social protection, and child-protection budget briefs were also prepared to help present and analyse complex budget information, easily intelligible to different stakeholders. The briefs conveyed key recommendations to influence the public financial decision-making processes, with the goal of leveraging domestic resources for children.





Impact

The evidence generated by the C-PEM, and the costing and analytical exercises, has been increasingly used by the Government, for the advancement of various reforms, and reporting on CRC implementation by the Human Rights Defender's Office. For instance, the C-PEM and an education budget brief revealed issues with early childhood education. Ultimately, the C-PEM raised the importance of PF4C considerations in the government's PPB activities. However, work on the C-PEM halted because of the 2018 revolution, but there is now renewed momentum to put it back on the social policy agenda again.

Critical to progressively modifying PF4C considerations in Armenia, was UNICEF's effort to draw on the skills and knowledge of other countries and development partners with strong PFM experience. The knowledge exchange with Argentina enabled a change of perception in measuring child public expenditure. The C-PEM exercise mobilised other partners with more experience than UNICEF in PFM activities (i.e. EU, GIZ, and the World Bank). This resulted in aligned advocacy on the budgeting process. Having the Argentine MoF share their expertise with their Armenian MoF

counterparts was transformative. It cultivated a paradigm shift in understanding and attitudes on the importance of measuring expenditure on children. This helped broach wider discussions with the Armenian MoF on changing methodological and reporting guidelines for integrating the C-PEM into the budgeting process.

UNICEF's PF4C advocacy efforts made a direct contribution to the development of 2019 PPBs for education, health, social protection, and justice sectors, thereby generating policy impacts that will help combat child poverty and deprivations. For example, public allocations (USD138,000 for the 2019 budget) were provided for the expansion of alternative preschool education services in 60 communities, and a school safety enhancement budget programme was introduced for the first time (approx. USD20,000) with a possible further expansion in 2020-2021. Support from the EU was leveraged for the scale-up of the alternative preschool model in 35 settlements in 2020-2022. Moreover, as part of the PPB reform, child-focussed non-financial indicators were added to the programme budget format.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD //

Armenia — Leveraging Funds for Children

On November 20, 2018, the world celebrated World Children's Day. This is also the day when the UN Convention on Child Rights was adopted! In 2018, to mark World Children's Day in Armenia, a special discussion was held in the Tumo Creative Center, where children voiced the issues they are concerned about. Children were joined by the President of Armenia, Sarkissian, UNICEF Representative, Tanja Radocaj, VivaCell-MTS General Manager, Yirikian, Director of Synopsys Armenia, Musayelyan, Acting Minister of Education and Science, Harutyunyan, and many other guests to discuss possible solutions to their problems. The call for investing in children was voiced by an adolescent called Hayk, at a meeting with the President and several Ministers. This was part of

UNICEF's advocacy efforts to sensitise both government counterparts and adolescents on the need to measure and track investments in children. Hayk talked about the lack of investment in children's development in Armenia and what needs to be done. His speech's key message centred on being savvy with public finance, saying that "I do understand that our economy does not always allow us to allocate needed funding. But it is always possible to find a way by spending the available resources more effectively, or involving other partners, like the private sector." He stressed that "If the government provides adequate financing for the children's education, this can be a turning point for the country's economy in several areas."

Original source and video: Link to video on its hosted site. UNICEF Armenia. 2018. Without Strong Social Protection Services, it will be Difficult to Overcome this Situation: Hayk's talk on World Children's Day. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/armenia/en/stories/without-strong-social-protection-services-it-will-be-difficult-overcome-situation>



BELARUS //

Investing in Future Generations to Seize a 'Demographic Dividend'





Issue

Belarus has made great progress in achieving its SDG indicators related to children and adolescents early. Nevertheless, one concern requiring rapid strategic attention is the exigency of seizing the country's 'demographic dividend'. After a two-year recession, Belarus' economic situation improved in 2017 and child poverty decreased to 10.4% in 2018. This represented an improvement on recent years, although the historical low remains the 9.2% achieved in 2014.¹²⁵ However, in 2019 the country again faced an economic slowdown. In the midterm, the World Bank (WB) projects GDP growth of around 1%, below what is needed to raise living standards.

With strategic attention, the country has a chance of seizing its 'demographic dividend' that could spur growth. Attaining this dividend requires appropriate investments in adolescents and youth so that they go on to be productive adults. This is important, as when the working-age population grows larger than the dependent population, there is a potential for a demographic dividend. When this population is actively employed, standards of living increase. This improves public financing, permitting greater investment in human capital, which supports more sustainable and equitable growth. However, the demographic dividend is not guaranteed. Policymakers face a time-bound challenge: to invest now in young people or miss an unprecedented opportunity to improve lives and economies. The growth generated by a demographic dividend is significant. The dividends of Ireland, South Korea, and China accounted for over half of the actual GDP growth at one point.¹²⁶

While Belarus enjoys a relatively low 'dependency ratio', a decline in its young population since around 2000, coupled with adolescent vulnerabilities, may negatively impact future economic growth. Belarus experienced a short growth spurt in its fertility rate from 2011-2017, which levelled off and sharply declined thereafter. Twenty-one per cent fewer children were born in 2018 than in 2015. As of 2019, Belarus has a relatively large working-age population and lower numbers of children. According to the WB, the ratio of dependent population (children aged 0-14 and elderly

aged 65 and older) per working-age adults aged 15-65 years is 0.46.¹²⁷ Thus, Belarus has a relatively low dependency ratio and therefore wise investments in fewer dependents now could effectively enable the next generation of workers to pay pension contributions and to look after a larger dependent population. Together, 19% or 138,000 adolescents experience vulnerabilities¹²⁸ (i.e. substance use, conflicts with the law, violence, mental health challenges, disability, and living without family care or in poverty etc.).¹²⁹ If not addressed promptly, those vulnerabilities, especially multidimensional ones, will have adverse impacts on their quality and longevity of life and prospects as adults. If ignored, adolescent vulnerabilities continue into the third decade of life. For example, a lack of adolescent safe behaviour leads to non-communicable diseases which contribute to a mortality rate in men three times higher than women aged 20-29. Overall, this results in a pronounced gender gap in life expectancy at birth of more than 10 years as of 2018.¹³⁰ This is a significant concern in Belarus given the current very narrow cohort of girls and boys in their second decade.

However, harnessing the potential benefits from a demographic dividend is neither automatic nor guaranteed. Obtaining this dividend is challenging; inadequate or wrong policy choices and investments risk failing to attain it. The high-stakes nature of dividend-attainment is brought into sharp relief by the notion of a potential 'triple dividend'. For example, an ideal investment scenario is, firstly, one that benefits the current cohort of children; secondly, when children reach adulthood this dividend yields benefits for both themselves as adults and the society they support; thirdly, it carries over to their children, as investments are transmitted across generations.

Given that Belarus is a late-dividend country, the 'window of opportunity' for capturing dividend gains is finite and is only predicted to be available for another 15-20 years. This requires swift and appropriate policy action, as seizing this opportunity presupposes the right implementation of policies in education, health, governance, social protection, and taxation among other things.



Actions

To help capture the demographic dividend, which also presupposes reducing adolescent vulnerabilities, UNICEF Belarus is developing a Child-focussed Public Expenditure Measurement (C-PEM) as a public finance analytical tool and a Multidimensional Child Poverty measure (MDCP) to analyse social expenditure on children and ensure optimum investment continues to occur. These tools form

part of UNICEF's wider Commitment to Equity for Children (CEQ4C) framework. Evidence from the Lancet Commission¹³¹ indicates that investments in adolescent health and wellbeing are some of the best options possible for attaining future productive adults, resulting in a 10-fold increase in the benefit-to-cost ratio, and are essential for accelerating SDG progress and harnessing demographic dividends.

In partnership with the National Child Rights Commission, UNICEF commissioned an independent evaluation which used this tool to generate evidence on achievements and lessons learnt from the UNICEF and government 2011-2017 interventions for adolescents.⁴ The evaluation discovered that adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, are inadequately supported. The cost of inaction is high, as adolescents will soon become adults, and the support they receive will affect the extent to which they contribute to Belarus' economic and social development.

To help ensure optimum investment occurs, an additional analysis on estimating a demographic dividend contribution to GDP was initiated by UNICEF Belarus.

Using a USAID Demographic Dividend model, it was shown that a range of economic, education, and health policy interventions (i.e. reducing noncommunicable diseases, enhancing adolescent skills), which promote labour market participation of young parents, would result in significant improvement in the Human Development Index for Belarus, from the current 0.77 to 0.90. Overall, simulations show that by 2030, all demographic dividend-related policy interventions could contribute to over two-fifths of the projected GDP per capita growth envisioned in the 2030 target of 4% aggregate growth (SDG 8.1.1).

UNICEF built consensus around the logic of investing more resources in adolescents to realise the demographic dividend, achieve the SDGs, and ensure the principle of 'leaving no one behind'. To achieve this, and in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy, the first SDG baseline report on child-related SDG indicators with a dedicated section for the new National Strategy of Sustainable Development 2035 was developed. Moreover, UNICEF, together with the Economic Research Institute and WB, employed the CEQ4C framework to generate evidence on public spending and its links to child outcomes to improve budget expenditures for children. This framework integrates PF4C, MDCP, and fiscal incidence analysis. The CEQ4C-results analysis¹³² suggested that while child benefits provide almost universal coverage of children aged 0-2 and reduce child poverty by half, nonetheless, there are important coverage gaps for other age groups. Some 6% of children face either monetary or multidimensional poverty and are not covered by social assistance. The first estimate of MDCP produced by the CEQ4C will be used to support *Belstat*, the national statistics agency, to develop an official methodology of the corresponding SDG indicator. CEQ4C policy simulations have been helpful in suggesting progressive policy, such as introducing categorical benefits to vulnerable households (i.e. large families etc.), which will be administratively and cost-efficient in reducing child poverty.





Impact

UNICEF's advocacy, based on C-PEM and other analytical tools, contributed to the increase of the budget allocation for children in alignment with Belarus' Public Finance Management Strategy introducing performance-based budgeting.

Cumulatively, the generated evidence has sensitised policymakers to the criticality of ensuring an optimal investment in children to capture the demographic dividend. In 2019, the Ministry of Finance estimated a Child Budget following the C-PEM methodology and presented it jointly with UNICEF. Consequently, the child budget represented 7.6% of GDP in 2018, to be increased by 0.5% points (equating to USD330 million), reaching 8.1% GDP in 2020 despite a sharp childbirth reduction. Thus, UNICEF's advocacy contributed to increasing government expenditure on children.

UNICEF's tools have supported government efforts to capture the demographic dividend, which contributes to wider UN efforts on this front too, and represent effective coherent ONE-UN activity to push for SDG realisation. For instance, based on UNICEF expertise, the

UN and the government have identified '*Future generation orientation: adolescence and youth*' as a key facet of an SDG-acceleration approach. This future focus builds on Belarus' substantial success in development outcomes during the first decade of life (e.g. reduced child mortality rates, universal primary education, and health), and aims to ensure the same success is accomplished during the second and third decades (i.e. adolescence and youth). UNICEF's analysis demonstrates the potentially alarming intergenerational consequences of postponed actions in addressing adolescent vulnerabilities. This has led to acceptance of the need to focus on adolescents and youth as a priority area for the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

The use of the C-PEM and MDCP as public finance tools represents a highly promising social policy practice. They are one of the first steps to realise the potential of the demographic dividend and place it firmly on the Belarus social policy agenda. They will likely assist Belarus in yielding the positive societal impacts inherent to a demographic dividend.



3

ACTION AREA 3 //

Child Poverty



GEORGIA //

Transforming the Social Protection System for Children through Poverty Analysis





Issue

Children in Georgia face significantly higher rates of poverty than any other age group, regardless of the poverty threshold applied. According to the current official absolute poverty rates published by the National Statistics Office, today, 25.5 per cent of children live in poverty, compared to 20.1 per cent of the rest of the population.¹³³ This challenge is compounded by the fact that existing social protection programmes have failed to properly identify these children, even though the systems were intended to be pro-poor.¹³⁴

The Targeted Social Assistance (TSA) programme – the flagship social protection programme in Georgia – only covers around 11 per cent of households.¹³⁵ The TSA has experienced some problems, as for many years it had no specific child benefits and it did not accurately identify households with children. At the same time, the Government of Georgia has had concerns about the performance of the system in terms of the TSA's exclusion and inclusion errors and the highly subjective assessment of household wealth status by programme staff.



Actions

In recent years, UNICEF Georgia made a concerted effort to promote wider social inclusion in the country. This effort comprised: one, conducting a thorough analysis of the existing social protection system. This analysis focussed on the social assistance architecture in particular and strove to better understand the inequities generated by different programmes; two, engaging in advocacy activities to promote a revision of Georgia's social assistance system, to remove key barriers and bottlenecks that prevented children accessing these programmes; and three, supporting the Government's reform of the social protection system to limit inequities for children experiencing poverty. This was a crucial undertaking to ensure that the best interests of children in Georgia were served.¹³⁶ Combined, these actions successfully triggered upstream policy changes for children living in extreme poverty.

To establish a clear understanding of the coverage and impact of Georgia's existing social assistance system, UNICEF utilised its biennial panel household survey, the Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS),¹³⁷ and performed an additional analysis on options for reducing child poverty in the country. This full-spectrum analysis examined the TSA programme, old-age pensions, disability, and other benefits, to understand the situation of children living in poverty. The analysis also covered the trends in monetary poverty by age group, rural-urban differences in child poverty, and poverty rates by the number of children in households. Crucially, the analysis of the poverty rate by age group showed that child poverty was higher than the population's poverty rate, regardless of the poverty thresholds applied (i.e. extreme poverty, general poverty, or relative poverty). It also highlighted the particularly high rate of extreme poverty for children aged 5–14.¹³⁸

Besides the several rounds of the WMS, further assessment of the TSA programme was also pursued. This analysis revealed that the TSA had higher coverage of households without children than households with

children. This difference was particularly pronounced for the lower consumption deciles. For example, households with children had only half the coverage rate of those households without children in the second to fourth consumption decile. Thus, many households with children missed out on receiving the benefit. Moreover, the survey facilitated simulations of various alternative policy options.¹³⁹ For example, it modelled the impact on child poverty if a child benefit component were to be introduced to the TSA and the existing policies were reformed. This analysis contributed to an eventual change in the social protection system in Georgia.

The analysis also helped solidify effective collaboration with government and development partners as the survey and analysis were undertaken in close consultation with both entities. In addition to the child poverty analysis and policy option simulations, UNICEF advocated for reform of the TSA and the need for an additional/alternative benefit. Furthermore, UNICEF extensively engaged in discussions with governmental, non-governmental, and international stakeholders on the issue of child poverty. This partnership mobilisation assumed the form of workshops, conferences, media engagement, and individual meetings with high-level officials, including the Prime Minister. Ultimately, these activities helped put child poverty high on the national agenda.

A partnership with the World Bank also emerged and resulted in a joint statement on a vision and principles for a fiscally sustainable and progressive social protection system.¹⁴⁰ This statement emphasizes the need for a social protection system that protects the chronically poor, especially children, prevents poverty *ex ante*, and provides opportunities for better livelihoods. This partnership translated into both organisations advocating for TSA reform – a commitment so strong that a subsequent World Bank loan to Georgia was made, on the condition that the country implemented a reform of the TSA. The government of Georgia agreed and implemented the reform.¹⁴¹



Impact

UNICEF's child poverty analysis and alternative policy simulation, combined with policy advocacy and partnership building, resulted in the introduction of a remarkable child benefit programme in May 2015 to the Targeted Social Assistance programme.¹⁴² The new means-tested (PMT) child benefit component of the TSA covers around 16% of all children in the country – approximately 136,000, at present. The pre-existing TSA benefit has a lower eligibility threshold to qualify, whereas the eligibility threshold for the child benefit component is higher. It therefore promotes higher coverage of households with children.¹⁹ From 2015 to 2018, an additional USD5 was paid to a family with children. Related to this overall drive to improve the social protection system for children, and to tackle the demographic challenges faced by the country, the government introduced a geographically targeted age-restricted (e.g. 0-2) quasi-universal child benefit (qUCB) to families in areas with low birth rates. Combined, the new means-tested child benefit added to the TSA programme and geographically targeted qUCB, marked an important step towards making the Georgian social protection system more child sensitive.

UNICEF has continued to perform a biennial (WMS) survey since 2009, as well as in-depth assessments

to improve the performance of social protection programmes. For instance, five survey rounds occurred between 2009-2017. More recently, one of the outcomes of continued discussions with the Government was the announcement in December 2018 of a five-fold increase in the means-tested child benefits amount, as well as the introduction of a food voucher component from January 2019, also resulting in an increase of over USD25 million in state budget allocation.

Georgia's evidence-based advocacy and alternative policy simulation approach may be a successful strategy for replication elsewhere for engaging with government partners and generating important policy reform. A large impact evaluation of the TSA and means-tested child benefits programmes, which should also assess which modality of child benefits (cash or cash combined with food vouchers) works better for children in Georgia, is currently underway. At the same time, the original poverty analysis and policy simulations continue to support the implementation of the benefit and maximise the impact of these interventions for the most disadvantaged children.

¹⁹ Based on the PMT score, the threshold for the main TSA and child benefit component is 65,000 points and 100,000 points, respectively.





ACTION AREA 4 //

Decentralisation and Local Governance



ALBANIA //

Designing a Decentralised Integrated Social Care Service System





Issue

Despite economic progress and improved living standards, Albania's wealth distribution remains unequal, and vulnerable groups continue to be underserved in the areas of health, education, social care, and child protection.¹⁴³ Albania is among the poorest countries in Europe, with children disproportionately affected by poverty. Regular national poverty measuring and reporting, including child poverty, still remains an issue in Albania. UNICEF analysis¹⁴⁴ indicates that 19.2% of households with children live in absolute poverty,²⁰ and 24.9% of households with children aged 0-5 years old experience absolute poverty.

Albania has a relatively well-established social protection system in place, but this faces challenges regarding effectiveness and adequacy. While the state's financial allocations for the social sector make up the largest share of public expenditure as a percentage of GDP, they are not comparable to international standards for an upper-middle-income country. They provide inadequate human, technical, and financial resources needed for improved services for children. According to government data, the budget allocated for social protection is approximately 9% of GDP. However, 80% of this is assigned to contributory social insurance

programmes. The rest is allocated for child and family allowance, including cash transfers for persons or children with a disability.¹⁴⁵ Arguably, social protection allocations should be comparable with other countries in the region, where the average social protection investment in ECA equates to 16% of GDP.¹⁴⁶ Fiscal space is a challenge and the country is struggling to reduce public debt and nominal budgetary increase seem difficult. Therefore, using existing resources more effectively and strengthening coordination and integration between social protection entitlements might be required.

Given these challenges, the government is leading three major reforms in the domain of social protection as outlined in the National Social Protection Strategy 2015 – 2022 and its national action plan. The strategy outlines three policy reforms under the vision and commitment for an integrated social protection system. These attempt to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the poverty-targeted cash assistance, improve the situation of persons with disability, and establish an integrated system of social care services at the decentralised level. Importantly, this policy intent has been accompanied by adequate and effective budgetary estimations.



Actions

In 2012, the Government recognised the need for the reform of a wide range of services related to the social protection and better inclusion of vulnerable individuals/groups. The reform of the Social Care Service (SCS) has had two main phases. During phase 1, 2012-2016, UNICEF was mandated by the Government to support the design of an integrated SCS system at the decentralised level. At the government's behest, UNICEF conducted an in-depth situation analysis to facilitate this. As part of this analysis, a compendium of analytical reports was produced on various aspects of the SCS reform. The reports provided a common point of reference for national policymakers and technical experts on the major reform 'building blocks' such as delivery and monitoring; HR gaps and training needs; and public finance mechanisms at the central and local level. This analysis established a need to reconfigure the SCS infrastructure at the local level owing to critical shortcomings. These shortcomings included a lack of understanding of what social services are; and the absence of clear policy guidance from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MSWY) on what constitutes effective social protection. Moreover, appropriate legal statutory provision was required for a full-spectrum social

protection system, instead of the pre-existing legislation that regulated only cash assistance. A lack of clear accountability and weak monitoring and inspection and a lack of financial mechanisms to fund SCS were also a problem. These composite challenges meant there was a lack of integration and decentralisation which hampered SCSs. Following such analysis, the government recognised the need to undertake a thorough reform of the social protection system and SCS. Finally, to support this reform, UNICEF managed to raise about USD4.2 million from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and UNICEF itself contributed additional funding of USD1.1 million, to support a four-year programme aiming to establish a national comprehensive normative policy framework to start the SCS reform.

During Phase 2, 2017-present, the revamped SCS system had a more decentralised focus and began to be piloted at the municipality level from 2017. In the second phase, UNICEF is using approximately USD700,000 to support the implementation of the SCS policies and strategies at the local level to enable all children to benefit from the equitable quality services to which they are entitled.

²⁰ Absolute poverty is defined as real per capita monthly consumption below 4,891 ALL (in 2002 prices).



Impact

Phase 1 of UNICEF Albania's SCS reform engagement contributed to numerous important impacts:

1) *Streamlining of the institutional set-up*: the accountabilities and roles of the newly formed Local Government Units (LGUs) were rationalised down from 337 municipalities/communes to 61. Additionally, the SCS planning was clearly articulated and integrated into the 2015-2020 National Inter-sectoral Decentralisation Strategy and a new 2015 Law on Local Self-Government.¹⁴⁷ Two other new laws - *the Order of Social Workers*¹⁴⁸ and *Law on the Order of Psychologists*¹⁴⁹ - were developed and approved in 2014 and 2016, respectively. These laid the foundation for the institutionalisation of the 'social work' profession. Needs assessment and referral units were also introduced to enable prompt needs assessment and referral of cases. 2) *Financial mechanisms*: the new Law on Social Care Services¹⁵⁰ includes a chapter on SCS financing. It envisages a combination of funding sources from the central State Budget, the local government budget, the locally generated income for municipalities, and fees that can be introduced for some social services. The Law allows municipalities to establish a dedicated 'social fund' budget line, ring-fenced explicitly for activities relating to SCS. 3) *Increased human resource capacities*: UNICEF helped develop municipalities' budget tools to finance and manage the SCS delivery. 4) *The data supply for service planning and monitoring*: technical recommendations on establishing a comprehensive MIS encompassing cash assistance and SCS were developed and costed for 2016 and presented to the MSWY. 5) *Learning from service modelling*.

UNICEF also supported the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP) to complete, validate with national stakeholders, and approve a national legal framework which enables planning and financing of SCS at the decentralised municipalities level by completing 14 SCS by-laws approved in 2016. Furthermore, ensuring sustainable financing for the proposed SCS at the municipality level was a key bottleneck to overcome. It was reasoned that this could be reached through the establishment of a separate dedicated budgetary line of a 'social fund' at the local level, which would be resourced by central, local, and donor aid funds. Following the work with secondary legislation, UNICEF facilitated technical assistance to the Ministry of Finance and Economy and the MHSP to agree upon the approach and implementation modalities of resourcing the social fund from the central budget.

The Action Plan of the National Social Protection Strategy 2015 – 2020 has been updated and expanded to 2022, showing the government is now actively pursuing the SCS reform. UNICEF provided support, and facilitated a participatory process to review and update SCS policy objectives and actions to ensure adequate coverage and costing of quality SCS for all vulnerable children. Workflows and standard MIS operating procedures for SCSs have been developed, and approximately 300 municipal staff in 19 municipalities have been trained to use the system. Eleven municipalities have a three-year social care plan in place, fully costed and with clear targets to reach at least 60% of all vulnerable children in poverty in every municipality. The social care plans for eight municipalities have been approved, while the plans for three others have been finalised and validated, but are awaiting municipal council approval. Five of the eleven now have 2020 central budget funds to establish SCS. UNICEF has also supported all 11 municipalities in the finalisation of important documents to guide the outsourcing and procurement of goods and services in their efforts to implement the SCS plan.

UNICEF expects the SCS reform to have positive impacts on the 'Leave no one behind' agenda. It is envisaged that, by 2021, the vulnerable population will be covered and receiving adequate social services from local authorities, municipalities will effectively manage the provision of SCS, and national institutions will implement the relevant social policy framework.

UNICEF Albania has learned critical lessons from the SCS reform. For the reform to start producing results for vulnerable children, it is important to ensure LGUs have the necessary structures in place, such as social care plans and appropriate finances and capacity to deliver the services. UNICEF strove to strengthen the capacities of selected municipalities to make sure that SCS decentralisation and LGU structures work for children and increased local and central resource allocation occurred. Tailored training for LGUs on SCS was needed; active engagement with LGU decision-makers was crucial during the development of SCS plans. Moreover, it is important to underscore the role played by civil society organisations (CSOs), as they deliver up to 80% of all the SCS in the country and provide crucial field presence.



TURKEY //
**Harnessing UNICEF's Global
Child-Friendly City Initiative to
Produce Positive Results for
Children at the Local Level**





Issue

Turkey has a large population consisting of 82 million people, including 23 million children. Turkey has rapidly urbanised over the past decades, which presents multiple challenges for urban infrastructure and services and child wellbeing. Thirty metropolitan provinces of Turkey now account for 60 million citizens, 18 million of whom are children. Turkey also hosts more than 4 million refugees, of whom 1.7 million are children. They too reside predominantly in metropolitan provinces.

Although cities are a major source of economic growth and social development, they are also a source of vulnerability and inequity, since urbanisation does not automatically generate positive results for all citizens, including children. The quality of urban settings, where now most children grow up, has a strong impact on children's development. Many children in Turkey benefit from the opportunities an urban life presents, such as access to educational, health, and various other

social services and leisure opportunities. However, a considerable number of families and children unevenly benefit from such opportunities. Income inequality in Istanbul, for example, is higher than the national average and other provinces. The National Gini coefficient is 0.40, whereas it is 0.44 for Istanbul. Similarly, the wealthiest quintile of the Turkish population has 7.8 times more income than the poorest quintile, whereas the figure for Istanbul is 8.6. Thus, given these uneven human development indicators throughout Turkey, there was a need to address aspects of the quality of urban and rural life for children. At the same time, rural poverty in Turkey has been historically higher than urban poverty. A new analysis of multi-dimensional poverty (MDP) in Turkey finds that while the Urban MDP is 40%, rural MDP is 51%.¹⁵¹ The effects of rural poverty also show up in the high incidence of child labour in agriculture. According to the 2012 TURKSTAT Survey, nearly 45% of child labour cases in Turkey occur in agriculture.¹⁵²



Actions

Drawing on the global Child-Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) Framework, UNICEF Turkey has been working to address some of the inequities posed by urban living. It has supported both evidence generation and programming for children at the local level. This was pursued in partnership with individual municipalities as well as the national association of municipalities. From 2016 onwards, UNICEF Turkey has intensified its efforts in using the CFCI framework as an instrument to improve local governance in favour of children. Through the community-based assessments conducted by youth volunteers trained by UNICEF in CFCI principles and the consultation sessions with municipal staff, the following five thematic areas were identified as priorities: child participation, child labour, child marriage, child rights programming, and child-friendly planning. UNICEF provided training to 288 specialists (190 women, 98 men) from 100 municipalities to increase their capacities to be able to address these thematic issues in their jurisdictions.

UNICEF also developed thematic guidelines to strengthen the capacity of municipality personnel on specific child rights issues through training sessions, network meetings, and online platforms. Building on lessons drawn from the training sessions, UNICEF produced municipal guidelines on the five thematic areas. Furthermore, given that Turkey's municipal police have a role in identifying/

referring child labour cases, particularly children working on the street, child labour training modules for municipal police were developed to increase capacity on child rights and working with vulnerable children. UNICEF provided 'Training of Trainers' to twelve Union of Municipalities of Turkey (UMT)¹⁵³ experts to build CFCI capacity sustainably at the UMT and leverage its wide coverage to all municipalities in Turkey. Additionally, UNICEF and the UMT provided training to 200 municipal police staff. UNICEF used the UMT's online platform to ensure the availability of materials to a wide range of municipalities countrywide. UNICEF also organised a series of CFCI Network meetings to enable municipalities to exchange their knowledge and experiences in child-sensitive programming.

UNICEF supported municipalities to increase their child-sensitive strategic planning and budgeting after the 2019 local elections. In Turkey, upon local elections, all municipalities must develop new five-year plans. Utilising the March 2019 local elections as an opportunity, UNICEF and the UMT provided Child-Friendly Budget and Strategy-Development Training to 120 staff from 29 municipalities. Additionally, 20 municipalities benefited from follow-up technical assistance and a preliminary analysis of their past budgets from a child-sensitive perspective. These efforts aimed to increase municipal capacity in child-focussed budgeting, design, implementation, monitoring, and reporting.

UNICEF provided technical and financial support to targeted municipalities through multi-sectoral work plans addressing thematic child rights issues, such as child labour, child protection, child marriage, and early childhood education. As a result of this engagement with municipalities through training and knowledge-sharing meetings, certain municipalities displayed an interest in working with UNICEF to further increase their capacity to address child rights issues and improve their child-friendliness. In Yüreğir, which is a highly populated district hosting a large number of Turkish and refugee seasonal agricultural workers including child labourers, social inclusion was identified as a key priority. Municipality community centres' staff and teachers received training on child rights, child participation, child labour, and working with vulnerable children. A child-friendly mobile vehicle was procured to facilitate outreach and used to provide psycho-social support services to children and families living in agricultural areas in Yüreğir. This was important, as seasonal workers have very limited access to education services and developmental and recreational opportunities. There were also efforts to increase community and home-based early childhood education

services and to conduct school and community-based activities with Syrian and Turkish parents to increase their school/community participation and promote social cohesion among different communities.

In İzmit, which is an industrialised district, UNICEF, the İzmit Municipality, and Local Directorate of the Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Services (MoFLSS) focussed on children engaged in or at risk of child labour, particularly those working on the streets. In 2018, a 'My House' Child Support Centre was opened with UNICEF's support. The centre functions as a platform providing psychosocial support services for children at risk of child labour. It also offers referral pathways, for these children and their families, to the relevant local services provided by different ministries to facilitate their withdrawal from labour. In Kilis, which remains home to the most refugees per capita of any province in Turkey (approximately half the total population), UNICEF focussed on promoting social cohesion activities and multi-sectoral services (e.g. child protection, education, adolescent development, and participation) for children.





Impact

Youth-volunteer training, community-based assessments, and consultation meetings generated positive CFCI results. They empowered people, established a network of child rights advocates at the provincial level, and engaged young people to identify problems and be part of the solution. Youth volunteers came from various backgrounds, such as local NGO volunteers and university students. The CFCI functioned as a useful platform for them to connect and come together in a structured manner. To that end, 189 youth volunteers, aged 15 to 29, received training on child rights and child-friendly cities objectives and then conducted a community-based assessment in 10 municipal areas. Based on the assessments undertaken by youths, local child action plans were developed to improve the quality of cities for children.

UNICEF's CFCI drive helped realise the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the local level. As a result of UNICEF's support, cultural acceptance of the idea of children's rights was developed and nurtured among municipality representatives. Local government authorities' sensitivity to child rights also increased. Nearly 250 specialists from 77 municipalities attended UNICEF meetings, meaning that awareness of CFCI had increased. Many municipalities continue to contact UNICEF and request technical assistance on child-focussed programming, therefore illustrating not only interest in the CFCI-initiative, but also a recognition of its importance and relevance. At the same time, working with associative bodies, such as the UMT, helped to increase the number of beneficiary municipalities as well the number of those developing an interest in UNICEF's work to improve children's rights. The UMT functions as a platform for long-term accessibility of capacity-development tools developed under the CFCI and for exchange of knowledge/experience among municipalities. This underscores the importance of leveraging local partnerships in all UNICEF activities.

UNICEF Turkey's CFCI work demonstrated that the success of local programming increases when municipal services are linked to those provided by central ministries' local offices, as showcased in the İzmit case. Child

labourers identified by municipal teams benefited from a range of services provided by the MoFLSS at the 'My House' Centre. For example, between 2018 and 2019, some 700 Turkish and refugee children were identified by municipal teams, and more than 350 children referred to specialised child protection and social protection services provided by the MoFLSS. Currently, approximately 50 children are also regularly benefiting from the services provided at the centre. In Kilis, UNICEF's community-based approach included the establishment of youth and women committees to accelerate outreach, benefitting 9,191 children and adults in 2019. Under the UNICEF partnership, a Social Cohesion Coordination Platform was established for coordinating social cohesion activities in the province.

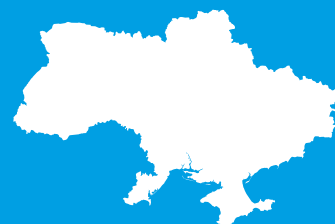
UNICEF developed and fostered strategic partnerships to enable the effective implementation of CFCI goals. UNICEF's collaboration with individual municipalities and associative bodies representing all municipalities, such as the UMT, is an effort to leverage the mandate and capacities of municipalities at scale for the benefit of children. This focussed on developing the capacities of municipalities to design policies and programmes to promote children's rights (by benefiting from CFCI building blocks); creating platforms for knowledge sharing among municipalities, and empowering young people to be agents of change for the realisation of child rights at the local level.

Steps towards increased fiscal space and investment for children were also made at the local level. A child-friendly budget and strategy-development training increased municipalities' capacity in child-focussed design, implementation, monitoring, and reporting. Furthermore, this engagement helped municipalities to design their 2021-2025 Development Plans with a stronger vision in favour of children. UNICEF also compared each municipality's pre-training (2018) expenditure and post-training (allocated for 2020) expenditure for children's issues. The preliminary analysis demonstrates that there is, on average, a 66% increase from 2018 to 2020. The analysis also shows that children have become more visible in the new 5-year plans as a result of UNICEF's CFCI engagement.



UKRAINE //

**Generating Results for Children at
the Local Level through UNICEF's
Child-Friendly Cities Initiative**





Issue

Ukraine initiated a 2015 decentralisation reform to increase government accountability, and ensure people's needs and rights are fulfilled. To increase accountability, power was passed to newly formed local authorities. They were given greater responsibilities for service delivery and, often, higher budgets too. As of November 2019, 1,002 new municipalities had been created, covering 11.2 million people (31.9% of Ukraine's population). The process of decentralisation is ongoing.¹⁵⁴

However, decentralisation has brought numerous challenges and conflicting priorities. For example, local authorities tended to prioritise economic affairs (i.e. roads and

utilities) over social services. Recognising this tendency, many local governments conducted assessments of community needs and capacities. This reassessment of policy priorities created an opportunity to raise children's issues and ensure that adequate investment in children occurs at the local level. This is important, as every third child lives in poverty, and 14% in extreme poverty. Rural poverty is almost twice as high as in urban areas (39% compared to 18.3%).¹⁵⁵ Moreover, multidimensional deprivation analysis demonstrates that many children in rural areas lack access to basic services and experience limited access to urban centres with better infrastructure, while children in larger cities suffer from pollution, limited living space, and access to green spaces.



Actions

Given the opportunity presented by decentralisation, UNICEF Ukraine deployed UNICEF's global Child-Friendly City Initiative (CFCI),¹⁵⁶ as a tool to realise children's rights through local commitment and investment. UNICEF partnered with the UNFPA, Ministry of Social Policy, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Regional Development, Association of cities, Association of Amalgamated Communities, the Child Ombudsmen and the National Youth Council, and officially launched the Initiative in spring 2018 by signing an MoU with the Government. More than 170 municipalities expressed their willingness to sign up. In this first phase, 32 received UNICEF technical support, 17 of which have developed and approved Action Plans. Broad and strong partnerships were instrumental in ensuring support and sustainability for the CFCI.

Municipalities joined the CFCI by signing MoUs with UNICEF, which officially recognised their intention for cooperation. UNICEF signed MoUs during high-level visits to municipalities, increasing the CFCI's visibility, momentum, and support. Subsequently, municipalities performed a Situation Analysis with UNICEF technical support, using UNICEF's Global CFCI methodology which was adapted to be Ukraine-specific. This provided a rigorous tool to analyse how children's rights can be realised at the local level. Based on this analysis, municipalities developed result-oriented 2-3-year Action Plans with corresponding budgets. Those municipalities whose Action Plans were approved – 17

to date – have been granted intermediate candidate status of being a Child-Friendly City. To earn full status, municipalities have to satisfy three international CFCI criteria: successfully implemented Action Plans, meaningful child participation, and non-discrimination.

UNICEF also conducted successful high-level advocacy and secured support from the Prime Minister, which elevated the Initiative's status. In May 2018, a joint Cabinet meeting, chaired by the Prime Minister and with the participation of children, was organised by the Cabinet of Ministers and UNICEF. The meeting embodied the CFCI's principles by enabling child participation in policy discussions and decisions that directly concern them.

UNICEF partnered with an NGO to provide methodological support to 32 municipalities. Using the Global CFCI Handbook,¹⁵⁷ UNICEF Ukraine developed a Ukraine-specific Manual with its own Results Framework. Capacity-building activities were critically important for advancing the CFCI. With its partners, UNICEF has delivered multiple training on CFCI objectives and methodology to local administrators, youth and CSO representatives. Furthermore, face-to-face support was provided by the NGO partner 'Eurostrategy', which travelled at least twice to each municipality to support the development of Situational Analysis and Action Plans.

UNICEF instigated inter-sectoral collaboration by linking the CFCI to other country office programmatic work. This increased the likelihood that UNICEF priorities would be reflected in the municipalities' Action Plans. While the CFCI methodology is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), UNICEF's Social Policy section, leading the initiative, worked closely with colleagues from Education, Health, and Child Protection. These colleagues were involved as trainers and ensured that relevant sectoral indicators were incorporated into the Results framework.

UNICEF adopted a comprehensive external and internal communications strategy. The production of a CFCI brand book for municipalities helped to ensure the correct use of CFCI branding. A quarterly newsletter was published too. This featured success stories from municipalities and programmatic opportunities from UNICEF and partners. Two approaches in social media proved to be effective: a Facebook page, and a Telegram channel for youth. The highlight of 2019 was a CRC 30-day celebration, with 25 CFCI municipalities inviting children to run the mayors' offices and city councils for one day, fulfilling CFCI's child participation criteria.



Impact

The CFCI results demonstrate that with the right mix of incentives, recognition, and technical support, and even without direct investment, UNICEF can boost public spending on children, establish effective cooperation with municipalities, and ensure meaningful implementation of the CRC at the local level. In 2019, those 17 municipalities with approved Action Plans have already budgeted UAH963 million (USD38 million) for children in the CFCI framework. Arguably, without UNICEF's CFCI, it is unlikely that these funds would have been mobilised for future child-related expenditure. Moreover, it is doubtful that coherent Action Plans would have been created to streamline previously misaligned intersectoral activities and deliver results for children.

The CFCI has received wide support from the national Government, including a proposal to provide additional financing earmarked for children to CFCI-accredited municipalities from the state budget. In March 2019, the

Government approved a Decree proposing changes to the Law on 'Child protection' and a budget code stipulating additional funds be disbursed to CFCI-accredited municipalities. However, due to the change of Government in August 2019, the proposal will have to be resubmitted to *Verhovna Rada*, the parliament, and reviewed by legislators. While promising, it remains to be seen whether the proposal will receive enough support for additional financing to be approved for the next budget.

The initiative has promoted healthy competition among municipalities in their efforts to close equity gaps and place children at the forefront of their agendas. The recognition and motivation delivered by the CFCI proved to be important for mayors too. The 2019 'Global CFCI Inspire Award' held in Cologne attracted 24 applicants from Ukraine. Vinnytsia, a CFCI-candidate city won the prize. Its 'Budget for School Projects' was recognised as the best practice in the category of 'meaningful child participation'.



The CFCI has positively boosted cooperation within municipalities too. Situational Analysis and Action Plans were the results of the joint work of specialists from different sectoral departments, and often represented the first time they systematically considered their level of child-friendliness. Consequently, the CFCI engendered an important child-sensitive mindset change in local government.

The CFCI's principal strength is that it can be self-financing and therefore *self-propelling*. It can operate without UNICEF's direct financing, as all Action Plans are funded predominately by local governments, ensuring local ownership and sustainability. Action Plans, while shaped by CFCI global methodology, are context-sensitive and primarily reflect local priorities.

This CFCI represented tremendous value for money, providing an effective way to raise children's issues and mobilise local investments with low administration costs. For example, UNICEF Ukraine's annual CFCI budget was approximately USD150,000, which resulted in local government mobilising and committing to spending USD38 million on child-wellbeing activities. Thus, for every USD1 UNICEF spent on the CFCI, USD253 was leveraged for children. Countries that have experienced a similar devolution to Ukraine may find the CFCI approach relevant to their circumstances.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD //

Ukraine — A Boy who Changed the Transport System for the Entire City

Vinnitsia, a city in west-central Ukraine. A population of 372,300, of whom 70,000 are children. Vinnitsa joined the UNICEF Child and Youth Friendly Community Initiative, becoming one of the first cities in Ukraine that set the goal of creating a friendly environment for children, as well as ensuring their participation in local-level decision making. To achieve this goal, the city administration developed a Child Ombudsmen programme that is still running today. Mustafa Evtimur, who is now 23 years old, became one of the first Child Ombudsmen in 2012 when he was in Grade 10 at school. Today, Mustafa has Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Vinnitsia and Kyiv Universities, respectively. He works as an assistant lawyer and an assistant to a Vinnitsia city councillor. When he recalls his two years as Child Ombudsman, Mustafa's eyes shine with enthusiasm.

Children who participated in the Child Ombudsmen programme undertook special training from lawyers, sociologists, and psychologists to learn how to communicate with other children about their problems. This training and new knowledge proved to be very useful when the city administration decided to reform Vinnitsia's transport system. The reform, which is currently well-known all over Ukraine, was intended to renovate and increase the use of public transport. Without any hesitation, the

Child Ombudsmen decided to actively participate in this initiative. Reviewing the newly developed public transportation routes, Mustafa and his peers checked if they had been designed to ensure easy access to all the schools in Vinnitsia. "Our goal was to make sure that all children can easily get to their schools from any location in the city. We also launched a campaign to inform children about the reform and to explain the advantages of the new system", said Mustafa. Mustafa and his team noticed that two new bus routes were inconvenient for children seeking to access several schools. The Ombudsmen submitted a proposal to the city administration to change the routes, and this was immediately supported by the city administration. All the children in Vinnitsia can now easily get to school using public transportation. Vinnitsia is the most convenient city in Ukraine to live in, according to a national poll, and particularly thanks to the transportation reforms that took place there. In conclusion, Mustafa recalls that "The Vinnitsia mayor, Volodymyr Hroysman, who is an ex-Prime Minister of Ukraine, used to tell us that Child Ombudsmen are a bridge that connects children and the municipality. We had regular meetings with the city administration where we could talk openly about challenges children face in Vinnitsia."

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