

PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGO: 10:00 GMT, 29 NOVEMBER 2001

Launch of the MONEE REPORT no. 8

"A Decade of Transition"

Child poverty is widespread in the Commonwealth of Independent States, and Central and Eastern Europe, despite growing economies throughout the region. Rising numbers of children are ending up in institutions or being put up for adoption as families strain to cope, according to a UNICEF report, the first comprehensive review of the social side of a decade of transition.

**ALMOST 18 MILLION CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN
POVERTY IN THE REGION, ON LESS THAN \$2.15 A DAY.**

Geneva, 29 November – Child poverty is widespread in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), despite growing economies in the region, says a UNICEF report released today. Almost 18 million young people are living in poverty and rising numbers of children are ending up in institutions or being put up for adoption as families strain to cope.

The report, “**A Decade of Transition**”, published by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy, looks at the standard of living of the over 400 million people who live in the CIS/CEE region. It examines incomes and child poverty, health, education, demographic changes, and children in public care. The report finds huge disparities in the situation of children across the 27 countries in the region and calls for renewed efforts to grant a better future for all.

“Thanks to a decade of strenuous efforts, child mortality rates have fallen in many countries. However, millions of children continue to suffer from poverty, ill health and marginalization,” said Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF.

“Fundamental freedoms have been recognized in most countries – the right to vote, to express an opinion, to use one’s own initiative and enterprise. This is undeniably a source of satisfaction and bodes well for the future. But we must not forget the original goals of the transition – to raise the standard of living for everyone and to develop humane and democratic societies. These goals need to be re-affirmed,” said Bellamy.

The report notes that over the last decade the number of children in poor families has increased sharply as real incomes have fallen, and inequality has widened. At the end of the 1990s it is estimated that there were nearly 18 million children from 0 to 17 years of age living on less than \$2.15 a day, a World Bank yardstick for poverty. This represents around 17 per cent of that population age group. The majority of these poor children – 16 million – were in the CIS, but a further two million were in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Baltic states and the countries of the former Yugoslavia. In Moldova, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the majority of children were poor by the \$2.15 yardstick.

The UNICEF report also quotes a higher threshold of poverty – living under \$4.30 a day. Using this figure, the number of poor children and young people in the region rises to just under 60 million, well over half the total in this age group of 108 million.

“A Decade of Transition” points to a growing gap in the health status of populations in poorer and richer parts of the region. In Ukraine, Russia and Armenia, one in seven children is malnourished. In Albania, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the figure is one in three.

In parts of the region, the report finds alarming levels of school dropout, repetition, and late entry. Secondary school attendance in Central Asian countries has fallen from two-thirds in 1989 to less than half of 15 – 18 year-olds in 1998. Central Europe finished the 1990s with higher rates. The report notes a recovery or growth in pre-school enrolment rates over the 1990s in Central Europe, former Yugoslavia and the Baltic states. Tertiary education has expanded in all countries but Armenia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

FACTS AND FIGURES FROM THE REGION:

- The birth of many of the 22 new states has been peaceful, but ethnic conflict and war have occurred in more than a third of the region’s countries. At the end of 2000, 2.2 million people were registered as internally displaced within their own countries, and almost a million as refugees elsewhere.

- There have been huge demographic shifts. The total number of children in the region – 108 million – is about 13 per cent fewer than in 1989. The number of children aged under 5 fell by over a third, from 36 million to 23 million. This was due to a sharp drop in births. Marriage rates also fell by a third on average, and the average share of non-marital births doubled, from 11 per cent to 22 per cent.
- Many countries have made substantial progress in economic reform. By 2000 more than half of the region’s output was being produced in the private sector. The great majority of economies were growing. However, at the end of the 1990s the national income per head of only three countries had surpassed its 1989 level; on average, it was still 30 per cent down.
- Eight out of 20 key social indicators show progress between 1989 and 1999 in the majority of countries: infant mortality, adolescent birth, reduction in abortion, higher education enrolment, maternal mortality, youth mortality and life expectancy for both men and women. But in 17 of the 27 countries the majority of indicators ended the 1990s registering setbacks. Upper secondary enrolment rates rose in only eight countries, and the percentage of 0-3 year-olds in infant homes fell in only six.
- There were 3.2 million “excess” deaths in the period 1990-99 in the transition countries, deaths that would not have occurred had mortality rates stayed at their 1989 levels. These deaths occurred mostly among adult males. Of the 22 countries for which data for 1989 and 1999 are available, 15 show an improvement in life expectancy over the 10 years. Central European countries registered the biggest rises. By contrast, life expectancy fell over the decade in the Western CIS and Central Asia. Russia registered a renewed fall in 1999 and 2000 following a partial recovery from the 1994 low.
- Cases of HIV/AIDS have skyrocketed in Russia and the Ukraine. About 90 per cent of the 700,000 people estimated to have HIV/AIDS in the transition countries at the end of 2000 were in these two countries. NB. Latest UNAIDS figures are expected to be considerably higher and show evidence that the disease has spread in the mainstream population.
- Tuberculosis has returned to the region with 50 per cent increases in incidence registered in poorer countries. Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Romania are the most affected. Estonia had the highest incidence of drug-resistant tuberculosis in a worldwide study of over 50 countries in the late 1990s.

CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONS

“I have never seen my mother. I’d like to see her once at least, but I don’t know where to find her.” (Sebastian, 18, Romanian). Quote from the report.

“A Decade of Transition” finds that, over ten years after the start of the reforms, even

higher numbers of children are living in public care. The higher rates of children in out-of-home care reflect the greater risks faced by children: weaker family ties, lower household income, poorer access to health and education, higher rates of adult mortality.

There were 1.5 million children in out-of-home care at the end of the 1990s, about 150,000 more than at the start of the decade. A rise has occurred in most parts of the region (the Caucasus and former Yugoslavia are exceptions), with the sharpest increase in the Baltic states. Central Europe has high rates too, in marked contrast to other social indicators on which this part of the region often performs the best. The increase in numbers of children in public care comes despite a fall in the numbers of young children by over one-third since 1989.

The UNICEF report notes that, contrary to expectations that adoption should reduce the number of children in institutions, rises in adoption and institutionalization have often gone hand in hand. In Belarus, for example, the rate of adoption rose by 160 per cent over 1989-99, and the proportion of young children aged 0-3 in infant homes rose by 170 per cent. In some countries, most spectacularly in Russia, increases in international adoptions have paralleled decreases in national adoptions.

Radical reforms of child protection systems in the region are no less urgently needed now than they were a decade ago, says the report, which urges stronger preventive and better targeted policies to help keep children and their families together.

THE REPORT'S RECOMMENDATIONS:

On child poverty, the UNICEF report calls for a sustained attack to address poverty among children including: (a) moving child poverty centre-stage in national policy debate, (b) tackling long-term problems that perpetuates child poverty (educational disadvantage, teenage pregnancy, ill health) and (c) supporting family incomes through both economic policy and tax and transfer systems. The 1990s saw a marked reduction in the generosity of family allowance in many countries in terms of both coverage and benefit levels.

On the problem of children in institutions, UNICEF calls for regular and independent reporting on the quality of institutional care as well as strengthening the role of the state as regulator and guarantor of quality rather than the main provider of out-of-home care. Family support services should be beefed up, and family-based care solutions should be encouraged. The report notes that the introduction or raising of fees for boarding facilities would reduce demand.

On education, the report notes the current low levels of public investment in several countries in the region, especially in the southern parts. Educational budgets could be used more efficiently by reducing the number of teachers, paying them more and on time. The involvement of parents and employers in a managerial (not only advisory) role would help ensure the relevance

of schools to the needs of society.

On health, “**A Decade of Transition**” says that a stronger focus is needed on preventative health care, health education and on public health programmes. It says that informal payment systems penalize the poor and recommends that health policies concentrate on adequate financing, efficiency and equity.

.....

For more information, please contact

Patrick McCormick, IRC Communication Officer. Tel: 0039 055 2033354 e:mail: pmccormick@unicef.org or

Patrizia Faustini, IRC Communication Assistant, tel. 00 39 055 2033253 e:mail pfaustini@unicef.org or

Robert Cohen, CEE/CIS/Baltics Regional Office, tel. 00 41 22 909 5631 e:mail: rcohen@unicef.org

–