

BACKGROUND: Innocenti Social Monitor 2004

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Eastern Europe & Central Asia: Innocenti Social Monitor 2004

KEY FINDINGS

- Most countries in the region have recently enjoyed economic growth. However, the child population is expanding most rapidly in the poorest countries in the region.
- In nine countries across the region for which recent information is available, 14 out of 44 million (or a third of) children are living below national poverty lines.
- In some countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and in South Eastern Europe, including Albania, Armenia and Tajikistan, public expenditure on health care and education is about 4 per cent of GDP or Less — very low by regional standards.
- In both richer countries (now EU members) and poorer countries, differences in unemployment rates and poverty rates between regions within countries are often large.
- Across the CEE/CIS, differences in infant mortality rates among regions within countries mirror differences in unemployment rates—where unemployment rates are high, infant mortality rates also tend to be high.
- Russia has become a migration magnet within the CIS, with a net inflow of 3.7 million migrants between 1989 and 2002.
- Much of the migration taking place within the CEE/CIS region, and between CEE/CIS countries and the West is irregular. This has potentially important implications for how the rights of children can be realized.
- The marketing and consumption of all types of drugs, including alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs expanded greatly in the 1990s.
- In Russia, over 2 per cent of adults are estimated to have used opiates (for example, heroin) in 2000/01. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, over 2 per cent of the working age population is estimated to inject drugs a far greater percentage than in any Western European country. Many are likely to be young people.
- A significant proportion of young people's deaths in the region results from drug use, particularly alcohol and injecting drug use. In some countries, up to one-third of all deaths of 15-29 year old males have been associated with alcohol consumption (directly, or as a result of accidents and injuries following alcohol consumption).

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ALSO IN THE INNOCENTI SOCIAL MONITOR 2004

Poverty is a common thread running through the report which goes behind positive trends in the region's economies to analyse what these trends actually mean for children. Through a series of essays - ranging from child poverty and the challenge of measurement to unemployment, migration, and young people and substance abuse - the Innocenti Social Monitor 2004 considers the implications for economists and policy-makers and suggests what needs to be done.

Economic growth and children and the challenge of measurement

Only the eight countries of Central Europe and the Baltic States that joined the EU in 2004 have experienced significant growth in per capita income since 1990. Several countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States still have an average GDP per capita lower than at the start of transition.

The benefits of economic growth, therefore, have been highly uneven. Further, the poorest countries - those of the Caucasus and Central Asia - have high numbers of children living in poverty and the fastest growing child population. In these countries, social sector public expenditure as a percentage of GDP is very low and has not increased with recent economic growth. The report argues that the poverty line needs constant updating and that, as well as income poverty, the societal and material dimensions of poverty should be taken into account.

Implications:

- ✓ Economic growth in itself is not enough. Governments need to ensure that its benefits are distributed widely, both geographically, and among all groups.
- ✓ In several of the poorest countries, recent economic growth should allow governments to mobilize resources to increase public expenditure on health care and education from their current very low levels.
- ✓ Governments should not allow decentralization of public services to result in poorer service levels in poorer areas.
- ✓ Well-defined and regularly updated poverty lines are required to capture changes in poverty, including poverty among children. Timely information on poverty is important not only for policy design, but also for keeping poverty as a key issue on national agendas.
- ✓ While low income is an important dimension of deprivation and poverty, it is important to understand poverty in all its dimensions, for example in terms of health, access to education, and exclusion from things that are considered normal in society.
- ✓ And while raising incomes and reducing income poverty are important, these need to be reinforced by improved access among poor people to key public and social services.

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Unemployment:

Employment has not risen in most countries in the region, despite economic growth, and continues to fall in Lithuania, Poland and Serbia and Montenegro. The children of the unemployed face poverty and loss of future prospects. The report finds that families with children are less mobile than those without, making it hard to leave areas of high unemployment in search of work. Those who take the risk must find housing for their families, schools for their children, and new social networks. The report calls for unemployment statistics that focus on children living in households where nobody is employed and for incentives to make it easier for people to relocate to areas with high employment. It recommends national standards for public services, and for social allowances such as unemployment benefits.

Implications:

- ✓ Unemployment statistics should pay attention to children living in 'work-poor households', that is, households where nobody is employed, or employed at very low wage levels.
- ✓ National Employment Services can help mobility through providing information about employment opportunities in different regions. However, many people (particularly families with children) may find it difficult to move in search of work. Therefore, countries also need to develop mechanisms for attracting or redirecting investment into the poorest regions.
- ✓ National standards for public services and social allowances, and some measure of revenue equalization/sharing among decentralized administrative levels are needed to ensure equal access to health care, education, social safety nets and unemployment benefits.

Migration

Migration has risen across the region since the 1980s and much of it is "irregular", with migrants – and their children – unregistered and undocumented. Many migrants are dependent children or independent young people. Children left behind may benefit from money sent home by migrant parents, but lose out on parental care. Many migrants come from countries such as Albania, Armenia, Georgia and Tajikistan, with Russia and Western Europe as their main destinations. Albania and Armenia have lost over 25% of their populations to migration since 1989. The report calls on governments to do better in managing migration, ease regular migration and ensure that migrants have information on rights and job opportunities.

Implications:

- ✓ Governments in both originating and destination countries need to better manage migration and increase avenues for regular migration across the region, including with information on opportunities and rights.

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√ An assessment of children of migrants in East Asia, underway for UNICEF, suggests that legalized/organized short-term migration by one parent may in many cases be the best form of economic migration from a child's point of view, especially compared to irregular/undocumented migration of the entire family where risks of limited access to services is high, as is the risk of exploitation.

Young people, alcohol and drugs

Alcohol is linked to up to one-third of young male deaths in some countries in the region, while injecting drug users have a high risk of death through overdose, suicide and infections such as HIV and hepatitis. In some Central Asian countries, the proportion of the population injecting drugs is thought to be up to ten times that found in many Western European countries. The report calls for stronger measures to protect children from the marketing of alcohol, combined with education about drugs alongside programmes aimed at the general population to promote better health.

Implications:

√ It is important to minimise exposure of children to alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs, including through restrictions in marketing, promotion of behavioural change, including modeling behaviours by parents, and environmental policies.

√ Strategies need to focus on social inclusion, communication and mental health promotion in environments in which children are exposed, for example, in the home, in the community and at school. And a combination of developmental and emergency responses is needed, including reduction in supply and extension of services, education and information. Many of these services need to be particularly targeted at young people.

√ It needs to be recognized that drug use (in particular the most risky forms of drug consumption) often represents a response to difficult or stressful living conditions, including lack of opportunity, social inequality, poverty, and sometimes abuse or exploitation. These are the root causes of risk-taking behaviour with drugs. If the number of deaths among young people in CEE/CIS countries is to be reduced, these root causes of risk-taking drug use will have to be addressed.

NOTE TO EDITORS

The *Innocenti Social Monitor 2004* is produced by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy. The *Social Monitor* is an annual regional report examining the well-being of children in the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. It includes a statistical annex covering a broad range of indicators for the years 1989 to 2002, and statistical profiles on each country in the region.

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Embargoed media materials, including copies of the report in English, Russian and Italian are available from the Centre's Newsroom:

<http://www.unicef-icdc.org/presscentre/indexNewsroom.html>

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