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Innocenti Social Monitor 2006 Understanding Child Poverty in South-Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

KEY MESSAGES

- **Poverty strongly compromises the enjoyment of human rights of people in general, and of children in particular. With the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in force in all countries of the SEE/CIS region, States recognize “the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development”**
- **The Innocenti Social Monitor 2006 explores the extent to which the human rights principles of *universality*, *accountability* and *monitoring the progress in the realization of children’s rights* have been duly taken into account by governments in the SEE/CIS region in their effort to reduce poverty. The report focuses on the children being left behind in this period of growth, and the actions needed to safeguard their right to an adequate standard of living. Evidence of stark disparities in child well-being within countries suggests that insufficient consideration is being given to the human rights principle of *universality*.**
- **The report argues that poverty can and does affect children in different ways from adults, and for this reason children need more attention and visibility in the poverty debate. Poverty affects children not only in the immediate present but also in the longer term, and can have a cumulative impact on their evolving capacities. Children are particularly dependent on public policies to provide the conditions and services they need to develop and grow out of poverty. Confronting child poverty calls for well-targeted and child sensitive policy measures.**

KEY FINDINGS

- The overall number of children under 15 living in extreme income poverty (PPP \$2.15) has decreased from 32 million to 18 million. Yet, One in four children under 15 is still living in extreme income poverty in South-Eastern Europe, despite the economic upturn in the region.
- The share of children under 15 living in extreme poverty ranges from 5 per cent in some SEE countries rising to 80 per cent in the poorest Central Asian countries
- There are stark disparities in child well-being and opportunities:
 - within and between countries of the region;
 - between rural and urban areas

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- and between households of different sizes and structures – children living in large and/or non-nuclear families have a higher probability of being poor, particularly when there are more than two children, and will have benefited less from economic growth
- However, the factors associated with poverty – place of residence, larger families, non-nuclear families, the employment status of the parents and the age of the child - are similar across all countries and the more factors present, the higher the risk of child income poverty.
- These associations are stronger for the countries with lower poverty rates, where concentrations of child poverty and deprivation are becoming more evident.
- Child income poverty is higher in countries with younger demographic structures: countries with aging populations, for example, Russia or Bulgaria, have significantly lower child poverty rates than countries such as Uzbekistan or Tajikistan where children represent far larger shares of the total population.
- Due to the size of its population, Russia is home of about one fifth of all poor children. One fourth of one region's poor children live in Uzbekistan.
- Child income poverty has declined since 1998. However, non-income indicators of child well-being, in particular those related to health, education and housing, show slower rates of improvement, or no progress, during the same period.
- Child deprivation in health, education and housing tends to be associated with the same factors as income poverty, reflecting the continuing differentials particularly in the quality of public social services and infrastructure in urban and rural areas,
- Overall levels of public expenditures on health and education remain low and for many countries have not increased, even in the recent period of economic recovery. The low levels of public expenditure, coupled with the growth in private, out-of-pocket and informal expenditures, have exacerbated the disparities in children's access to social services.
- Direct income support in the form of state transfers for households with children are widespread in the region much occurring in the form of pensions. However, income support targeted on children is often of too low value to have a significant impact on poverty reduction
- The region, in particular the Western CIS countries, Bulgaria and Romania, is reporting high numbers of children living in institutions. Material poverty at the household level is one of the main reasons cited for placing children in institutions. Measures income and other types of support to families in crisis are needed to prevent institutionalization.

THE INNOCENTI SOCIAL MONITOR 2006 CALLS FOR

- More visibility for children in setting policy priorities and poverty reduction strategies. It requires timely collection, analysis and dissemination of data and research on the situation of children;

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- More and better public spending on social services (health, education and social infrastructure); reforms of the budget allocation principles to ensure adequately resources targeted in those regions and population groups most in need;
- Better targeting and higher levels of social transfers to families with young children in order to provide effective protection from poverty and discourage institutionalization;
- A policy shift away from the widespread practice of placing children in institutions in some countries of the region, as well as a firm statement of intent to devote more policy efforts and resources to provide social support for families in crisis

NOTE to the EDITORS

The *Innocenti Social Monitor 2006* is produced by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy. The *Social Monitor* is a series of regional reports 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 2004/05.

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

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

NOTE TO BROADCASTERS

Video material is available, featuring child poverty and deprivation in Moldova, Romania, Georgia and Tajikistan.

<http://www.thenewsmarket.com>

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