

## MEDIA RELEASE

Launch of the  
Innocenti Social Monitor 2004  
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### Eastern Europe & Central Asia: Millions of Children Bypassed by Economic Progress

**MOSCOW/GENEVA/FLORENCE, 13 October 2004** – A UNICEF report released today finds that millions of children in Eastern Europe and Central Asia still live in poverty despite economic progress in every country, indicating that economic growth alone does not necessarily improve the lives of children.

According to UNICEF's Innocenti Social Monitor 2004, of the 44 million children living in nine countries with available data, 14 million were living in poverty in 2001 as measured by national standards.

"Children are being bypassed by economic progress in this region and poverty is distorting their childhood," said UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy at the launch of the report in Moscow. "Poverty means poor nutrition and sick children. It means children unable to go to school because they cannot afford books, uniforms or bus fares. At worst, poverty means violence and desperation, with more children in institutions and soaring drug and alcohol abuse among the young. Poverty is shredding the social fabric of these new societies."

The report shows that economic growth in the region has rarely been accompanied by initiatives to tackle the serious social disparities affecting children.

"This raises two key questions. First, what is economic growth for if it does not benefit children?" Bellamy said. "And second, why are so many countries failing to measure child poverty? It's a critical indicator of the success or failure of their social and economic policies, as well as their prospects for the future."

The Innocenti Social Monitor highlights the gaps between rich and poor within the 27 countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States<sup>i</sup>, as well as between the more prosperous countries of Central Europe and the poorer countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia. It examines how unemployment affects children: in some countries, including Bulgaria and Poland, large numbers of children are growing up in families where neither parent is employed.

Employment statistics should focus on children living in households where nobody is employed, or where earnings are low, the report suggests. Incentives are needed to ensure access to social services to make it easier for families to relocate to areas with high employment.

## MEDIA RELEASE

“We have to find ways to measure the consequences of poverty,” Bellamy said, “the exclusion from society, the lack of respect for human rights, the lack of choice and the scale and impact of discrimination. We need well-defined and regularly updated poverty lines that capture the constant changes in child poverty. It is not enough to measure income poverty alone.”

The report also finds that across the region, the poor often pay for health and education services that are meant to be free, while unemployment benefits and family allowances fail to keep pace with their needs. Recent data show that in Uzbekistan, fewer than 7 in 10 poor children attend basic schooling.

Governments often measure poverty against a national subsistence minimum – the amount of money a household is estimated to need to buy a minimum ‘basket’ of goods and services. The report argues that such ‘baskets’ reflect the judgement of policy-makers. A recent study in Kazakhstan found that housing could not be met by the agreed minimum. In Georgia, the national minimum does not reflect seasonal variations in food prices, so even those living at or above the national poverty level may be malnourished.

UNICEF works with families and communities in the region to tackle the fallout of poverty: the institutionalisation of children, the trafficking, and the consequences of alcohol and drug abuse, especially HIV. But systemic change - policy and legislative reform to protect all children and all their rights - is the cornerstone of UNICEF’s programme with governments and the surest route to achieving the Millennium Development Goals in each country.

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### 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. Embargoed media materials: copies of the report in English, Russian and Italian, background notes on Key Findings and UNICEF in the region are available from the Centre’s Newsroom:

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

### NOTE TO BROADCASTERS

B-roll material is available, featuring images from Romania, Russian Federation and Ukraine, and interviews with Marta Santos Pais, Director of the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, and Maria Calivis, UNICEF Regional Director for CEE/CIS and Baltics. Please contact us for more details.

## MEDIA RELEASE

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<sup>i</sup> The 27 countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltics are: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.