

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Launch of the Innocenti Social Monitor 2006

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### Disparities affecting children cloud economic good news story UNICEF Report on SEE/CIS countries goes behind the averages concealing stark disparities in child well-being

**Helsinki/Florence, 18 October 2006** Despite widespread economic upturn in South-Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (SEE/CIS) since the late '90s, one in four children under 15 is still living in extreme income poverty according to a UNICEF report released today

The Innocenti Social Monitor 2006: Understanding Child Poverty in South-Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States finds that while the number of children under 15 living in extreme poverty has decreased from 32 million to 18 million, stark disparities in child well-being and opportunities exist: the share of children now living in extreme poverty ranges from 5 per cent in some SEE countries to a startling 80 per cent in the poorest Central Asia countries.

Analysis of data from rural and urban settings, from households of different sizes and structures, throws up disparities within countries that particularly affect children in families where there are more than two siblings.

"Income poverty and deprivation have a distinct impact on children. They affect their immediate present and compromise their long term development," said Marta Santos Pais, Director of the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, at the launch of the report in the Finnish capital, Helsinki. "To tackle poverty and inequalities among children, policies and resources must be urgently directed towards children."

Progress in improving other aspects of child well being - such as child mortality rates, pre-school attendance and access to safe water - has been sluggish and many governments in the region have not fully capitalized on the economic upswing to benefit children. Overall levels of public expenditure on health and education remain low in many countries and have not increased since 1998 despite economic recovery.

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

"Child poverty should be the number one concern of governments in the region," said Maria Calvis, UNICEF Regional Director for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS). "Children continue to be placed in institutions, the numbers are not decreasing, and this despite a sharp decline in the birth rate. The future of the region is inextricably bound to the well-being of children. If the true potential of all these countries is to be achieved, there must be adequate investment in services for children," she added.

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The report argues that the future of the region depends on a healthy and educated generation, which will require a better use of resources and more generous support from the international community.

To address the challenges posed by the persistence of child poverty in the region, the report calls on governments to work towards:

- 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;
- 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

UNICEF works with families and communities in the region to mitigate the fallout of poverty. Policy and legislative reforms to protect all children and all their rights are the cornerstone of UNICEF's programme with governments to support the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and achieve the Millennium Development Goals in each country.

### 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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