Regional Conference on
Strengthening Child Protection Systems
To Protect Children from Neglect, Abuse, Violence and Exploitation

Minsk, Belarus, 12 – 13 November 2014

Concept Note

The Government of the Republic of Belarus and UNICEF are co-organizing a Regional Conference on “Strengthening Child Protection Systems to Protect Children from Neglect, Abuse, Violence and Exploitation” to be held in Minsk, the Republic of Belarus, on 12 and 13 November 2014. This conference is a contribution to the global campaign on violence against children called “Making the Invisible Visible” that was launched in July 2013 by UNICEF.

Background

Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.”

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, established in accordance with the Convention as a monitoring body of its progressive implementation, stresses that social measures should reflect governmental commitment to fulfilling child protection rights and provide for basic and targeted services that can be initiated and implemented by both state and civil society actors under the responsibility of the state. Such measures include social policy measures to reduce risk and prevent violence against children and social programmes to support the child individually and to support the child’s family and other caregivers to provide optimal positive childrearing.

In Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS), all governments have been engaged over the last years in reforming their child protection systems in order to put into place an integrated, cohesive, interdisciplinary system with the capacity to address all types of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children with the best interest of the child as a primary consideration. Important progress has been achieved in setting-up the key pillars of national child protection systems. Standards of care
and protection have been developed; delegation of services to NGOs and other actors have been established; coordination mechanisms have been established under different forms and at different levels; independent monitoring mechanisms have been put into place such as offices of ombudsperson for children and inter—parliamentary commissions. Efforts have been made as well for creating stronger synergy with social protection, education, health and justice policies.

Despite these efforts, gaps still remain in many CEE/CIS countries in the development of child protection systems, particularly in terms of policies being based on data and evidence, the development of community-based services, unrestricted access for independent monitoring mechanisms, the involvement of civil society in the development of appropriate policies; and coordination of the different actors to ensure that children and their parents are provided with appropriate and comprehensive support. In addition, there is still little evidence that national child protection systems are equipped to identify and support most vulnerable children at a time where the vulnerability of children is further exacerbated by the challenging economic and financial situation in many countries of the region. Child protection systems - as structures, functions and capacities that are assembled - to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children have as well an important role to play in implementing children’s rights, promoting equity and social inclusion in order to ensure that all children have an opportunity to survive, develop, and reach their full potential without discrimination and bias.

**Purpose of the Conference**

The overall purpose of Regional Conference is to provide a space for dialogue among governments in the region and civil society partners contributing to the care and protection of children. The Conference will contribute to fostering greater political commitment towards the development and strengthening of national child protection systems in the context of regional social development challenges and priorities.

**Objectives of the Conference**

1. Take stock of governments’ efforts in the region to put into place effective national child protection systems, including the mandatory role of governments in developing and enforcing laws and standards, defining national policies and allocating appropriate resources
2. Identify the remaining gaps and challenges in establishing policies, programmes, monitoring and oversight systems required to protect all children from all forms of neglect, abuse, violence and exploitation.
3. Assess how child protection systems are equipped to identify, reach and address the protection needs of most vulnerable children and their families.
4. Share regional lessons learned on effective civil society – state partnership in developing and reinforcing child protection systems.
5. Share governments’ experience and promising practices to put into place effective child rights monitoring mechanisms, including national commissions and ombudsperson’s offices, and their role in the overall protection of children in line with national priorities and international commitments.
6. Share lessons learned and promising national practices in improving and strengthening integrated national child protection systems in the CEE/CIS countries.

**Issues to be addressed during the conference**

- Data, evidence and knowledge for improved child protection systems
- Development of child protection policies, standards of care, professional accountability
✓ Governance and coordination of child protection systems
✓ Development of child protection systems at local level
✓ Independent monitoring of situation of children and quality of response
✓ Capacity to identify and address the situation of most vulnerable children and families.

**Format**

The duration of the Conference will be 1.5 days. It will consists of plenary presentations and discussions involving international experts, government, parliamentarians, and civil society representatives who will present achievements, challenges and lessons learned captured at country level. If compatible with the participants’ travel arrangements, UNICEF Country Office in Belarus will consider organizing in addition a half-day field trip to one of the child-friendly cities to present the Belarussian experience on this topic.

**Partners/Participants**

The Conference will bring together participants from the CEE/CIS region that share similar experiences and challenges in the development of integrated national child protection systems.

Country delegations should include representatives from government ministries involved in developing comprehensive child protection systems (child welfare, social protection, health, education, police and justice; composition will vary according to national contexts), representatives from coordination mechanisms for child protection systems (concerned ministries, Prime Minister’s office, etc.), the parliament, and independent monitoring mechanisms and civil society and professional representatives that are active on the issue in these countries.

International experts will be invited to present relevant experiences (CRC Committee, Ombudspersons’ offices, etc.).

Confirmed participants will receive the detailed Conference Agenda and Logistics Note.

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For further details on the Regional Conference, please contact UNICEF Country Office in your respective country, or UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS via email: ifavero@unicef.org, or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus via email: hr.ugs@mfa.gov.by

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