

UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina

Building Child-Friendly Schools and Communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Background and problem to be addressed

12 years after the end of conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the status of some 700,000 children aged 0-18 in BiH remains precarious and is characterised by the following:

Slow economic growth and inadequate investment in social protection leaves a number of children and adolescents living under or just on the poverty line. The data from the BiH Medium-Term Development Strategy (MTDS) 2004-2007 indicated that out of the 680,000 families living under the poverty line, close to half receive some form of social welfare benefits. Young people, returnees and families with more than two children represent the households at greatest risk of poverty in BiH.

The level of risk amongst children and adolescents is high due to the post-war context, slow rate of economic development, high levels of poverty and unemployment, corruption, mobility and both human and drug trafficking. All of these factors generate structural conditions that could lead to increases in HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), substance abuse, violence, exploitation (including sexual), discrimination based on gender, as well as discrimination and hatred based on minority status, which gets translated into intolerance towards differences prevalent amongst adolescents. Within the last 4 years, violence rates increased by 40% for younger age groups of children and more than 4 times for children 15 to 18 years old. The number of juvenile offenders is increasing, as is violence amongst children.

Ethnic divisions and discrimination in the country are high and increased by post-war politics. Cultural and ethnic isolation is built into the education system as much as into social life and broadens existing divisions. The most blatant emanation of ethnic division and the segregation of children is the phenomenon of “divided schools” or “two-schools under one roof”, where children are segregated and often physically divided from each other based on their ethnicity or nationality in mixed cantons and areas of BiH. The whole education system in the country is divided based on ethnic grounds with three separate curricula created for each of three constituent peoples – Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks - affecting children’s ability to grow up and prosper together.

The system of social services is inadequate and unable to meet the rights or needs of the poor to gain access to social welfare. Health services are not child- or youth-friendly and are unable to address the particular health risks of adolescents and young people. Local governance systems are not equipped to provide transparent and participatory governance that would allow citizens - including children – to participate in decision-making at the community level. The **education system** in BiH is teacher-focused and does not provide a participatory environment for children and adolescents. Peace and tolerance-building programmes are not recognised as important by the education system. Educational needs for life skills and life-long learning that will support economic and social prospects are unmet. An estimated 6% of children who are not enrolled into elementary school as well as those adolescents who drop out of the education system after the elementary school represent especially vulnerable groups. The education sector is the most politicized social sector in BiH and falls victim of ethnic and national interest.

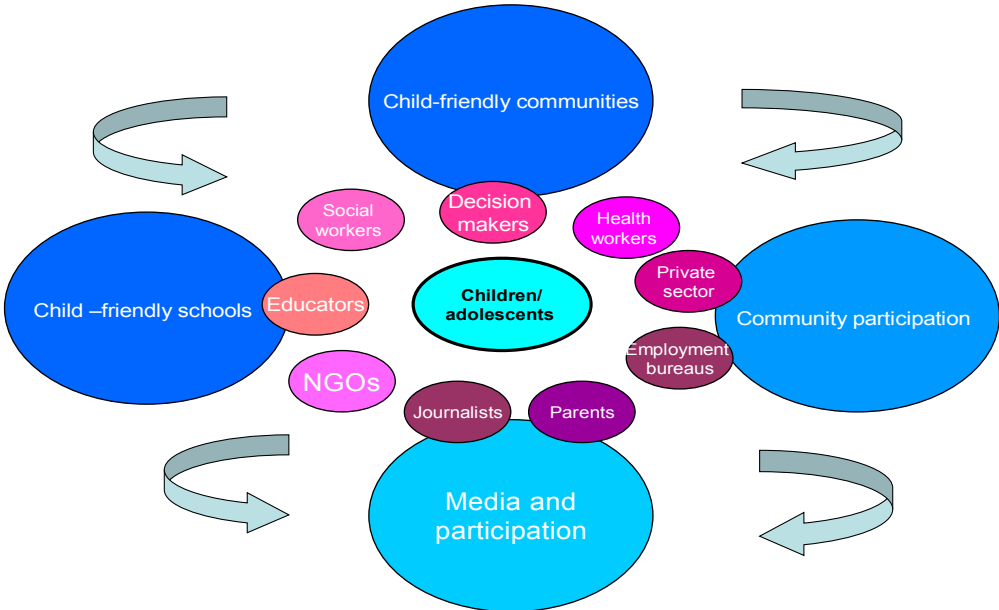
Having summarised the bleak reality of children and adolescents in BiH, it has to be emphasised that the socio-economic reform in BiH is ongoing and that there are a number of policies, programmes and strategies that are being implemented at various levels of government in support of children and adolescents. These interventions are, however, often neither uniform nor fully owned by social services, primarily schools, communities and decision makers.

UNICEF recognises that building respect, promoting social unity and strengthening protective and inclusive environments for children cannot be achieved by focusing solely on the provision of services to children or specific groups of adults. It is essential to address the attitudes, knowledge and skills of children, service providers, parents and political decision makers in order for results to be achieved.

Full implementation of activities focusing on the reduction of social risks, social exclusion and the promotion of social unity of especially discriminated groups of children requires the concerted action of all members of the communities. Excluded children and families have to be supported with education, increased skills and offered increased information on social values, such as justice, respect for human dignity and diversity of cultures.

Proposed activities:

This project builds on activities supported by UNICEF in the past number of years to reduce the risk and vulnerability of children, as well as to increase social unity among children and adolescents in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) by promoting access to education that is acceptable to all children from the point of view of its contents and in the quality of its presentation. This project will ensure a special focus on the participation of children, adolescents and community members, including parents, in working on the provision of knowledge and skills to reduce social risks and in promoting social inclusion through education, as well as through healthy life styles. Special attention will be given to the participation of children and adolescents in school and community-based activities. At the same time, the project will build on the knowledge and capacities of professionals in social sectors, such as teachers, social workers, health workers, police and municipal officials, on risk reduction and on conflict resolution. The project will focus on access to education and capacity building activities - more specifically, delivering training and enhancing capacity of children, adolescents, teachers, parents, social workers and municipal representatives to participate actively in their communities for the well-being of vulnerable categories of children. A social inclusion approach will be adopted in order to create and foster sustainable interaction between schools, municipalities and social workers as illustrated by the following diagram:



During the first year, the Project will be implemented in 20 communities in BiH – all of which have been selected due to their particular vulnerability to socio-economic exclusion and ethnic divisions. The Project will build on key results from previous UNICEF-supported initiatives and make efforts to expand the coverage and increased cost-effectiveness of activities by ensuring transfer of knowledge and lessons learned through community and school networking. It is planned that the activities designed and implemented in 2008 will be scaled-up in 2009-2012 to reach a total of 150 communities facing critical socio-economic exclusion and ethnic divisions in BiH.

Activities:

1. Mobilisation of parents and mobilisation of community support to ensure school-enrolment of children, with particular focus on marginalised groups of children, such as Roma, other ethnic minorities and children living in poverty;
2. Training of teachers in selected communities to reduce drop-out and increase the involvement of children;
3. Strengthening life skills programmes in schools using peer education and active learning methodologies;
4. Creation of community outreach school programmes implemented by schools in cooperation with children and adolescents;
5. Creation of participatory action groups of children that will ensure that the views, needs and rights of all children in schools and communities are respected;
6. Creation of community programmes to ensure that adults and children receive knowledge and skills that will enable them to promote tolerance, respect diversity and protect children that are at risk of exclusion and social risks;
7. Training and support to vulnerable parents to improve the development of their young children, enhance school enrolment and prevent drop-outs;
8. Establishment of networks of social services leaders and municipal representatives that will ensure that vulnerable categories will be included;
9. Training municipal representatives to ensure increased participation of children, parents and community members in community decision making; and,
10. Organisation of media workshops and campaigns in selected communities to enhance life skills and model risk reducing behaviour

These activities have been designed in a modular manner to complement and create synergies with each other. Taken separately, they would achieve only limited project results.

Expected Results for 2008

A. Direct results

Four inter-related activity modules will be implemented, based on the lessons learned from previous implementation and pilot projects. They are as follows:

1. Social unity and social protection of children is promoted by Child-friendly schools

- Child-friendly schools in 20 communities will promote social unity and social protection of children within schools and by outreach activities in 20 communities
- All teachers in grades 1-9 in 20 communities will be trained on basic child-centred and active learning methodologies

- 10 teams will benefit from 20 training sessions on “School Improvement” activities
- Child-friendly schools in 20 communities will develop action plans and implement 60 activities. For example, they will establish and/or strengthen Student and Parent Councils, develop material packages on violence, abuse, risky behaviours, small arms, exploitation, abuse and train 3,500 children
- Child-friendly schools in 20 communities will implement:
 - 8 sports programmes and provide sports equipment
 - 8 cultural exchange activities for children of different ethnic groups
 - Special support programmes for children who dropped out and are returning to schools benefiting some 200 children.
 - Training sessions for 35 teachers and 3,500 students on anti-bias and cultural diversity as educational activities aiming at promoting of cultural diversity and social unity
 - Cooperation with centres for social work, health institutions, police and judiciary to assist children at social risk
 - Activities enhancing the school safety and preventing risky behaviour in all schools for approximately 6,000 children.

2. Children, adolescent and families, with particular focus on discriminated categories are included and actively participate in implementation of the community programmes

- Community workers and NGOs in 20 communities will develop a community outreach programmes for adolescents and for service providers
- 100 adolescents will benefit from 5 training sessions for action groups of adolescents and important adults in the communities.
- 100 social sector professionals and community level will benefit from training and sensitisation sessions about special vulnerabilities of adolescents.
- 1,000 sets of education /info materials will be designed and printed
- 600 adolescents activists will benefit from training sessions on vulnerability, conflict resolution, peer education, debating, lobbying and action planning
- A network of PAR groups will be created and regional meeting to strengthen the activism of children and to develop action plans.
- 20 Action Plans will be implemented by adolescent in schools and in the 20 communities, reaching approximate number of 30,000 children:
 - 100 workshops for peers on social exclusion, risk prevention and conflict resolution will be held
 - 30 meetings with relevant adults in social services and in municipal governance will be held to promote solutions for risk reduction and conflict resolutions
 - 5 media campaigns on risk reduction and conflict resolution at community level will be organised
 - 5 community-based activities aimed at resolving issues such as safe public spaces for adolescents, sports activities, exchange and meetings with other ethnic groups, as selected by participation groups in consultation with their peers in the community will be implemented

- 90 school teachers, school parents' councils and local government representatives will be trained to work on awareness raising that will enable children to develop and practice life skills, risk reduction and participation in their communities trained

3. Child-friendly municipalities created and support social unity and social protection of children

- 20 child-friendly communities will be created
- 50 municipal official will benefit from training on social protection, cultural diversity promotion and child rights
- Needs in children's protection, the status of ethnic and cultural tolerance and the status of social protection institutions in municipality will be assessed by communities
- 500 specially vulnerable children will benefit from action plans focusing on enrolment and access to education, that will be developed in selected communities, involving children, parents, social institutions and NGOs
- 20 coordination meetings with schools, centres for social work, parents and NGOs will be organised
- 5 programmes to promote social and specifically educational inclusion for marginalised community groups with focus on Roma, minority return population and children living in extreme poverty will be supported
- 5 initiatives will be planned by children to address violence, exploitation and to increase social cohesion in communities

4. Vulnerable children and adolescents work with local and national media to produce media programmes promoting social unity and tolerance

- 300 children will participate in media workshops in selected communities to enhance life skills and model risk reducing behaviour
- A publicity campaign will be conducted with children's inputs, in partnership with public and commercial media

B. Indirect results

- Tolerance of diversity, healthy lifestyles and social cohesion amongst children, adolescents and important adults will be promoted
- Involvement of parents, social services and municipal officials in school life will be increased
- Life skills and knowledge of risk prevention in schools will be increased
- Risk reduction, healthy lifestyles and peace in selected communities will be enhanced
- Active participation and inclusion of discriminated categories of children in communities will be promoted
- Child-friendly communities will be created
- Social protection of children and adolescents will be improved