

PRESS RELEASE

UNICEF and the Ministry of Health close the breastfeeding week in Kosovo

The breastfeeding week in Kosovo from 1 -7 October 2008



The Minister of Health, Mr. Gashi speaking at the closing event on breastfeeding week in Kosovo

Prishtinë/Pristina, 8 October 2008 – The UNICEF Office in Kosovo in cooperation with the Ministry of Health (MoH) held a workshop to close the breastfeeding week in Kosovo with a slogan **'Join the Breastfeeding Week to reduce child mortality and offer the best start in life for every child in Kosovo!'** The one week campaign started on 1 October and lasted until 7 October 2008.

'Breastfeeding is the best source of nutrition and growth for infants' said Robert Fuderich, UNICEF Head of Office. "Breastfeeding protects children's lives and reduces maternal illnesses. It also boosts children's immune systems and helps build the mother and child bond.'

Recent scientific studies have found that education and support for mothers significantly extends the number of months that mothers breastfeed, and is especially helpful in promoting exclusive breastfeeding. Other studies have shown that counseling and support in health facilities have led to increases in the number of mothers who initiate breastfeeding within the first hour of birth.

Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life reduces infant mortality linked to common childhood illnesses and under nutrition.

Breastfeeding can reduce the number of deaths caused by acute respiratory infection and diarrhea - two major causes of infant mortality in Kosovo- as well as from other infectious diseases.

In Kosovo according to the Micronutrient Status Survey 2001, the rate of exclusive breastfeeding is only 12 % while the infant mortality rates are considered the highest in the region with estimated 44 out of 1000 live births per year (Demographic Health Survey 2003).

The Minister of Health Mr. Alush Gashi, congratulated UNICEF and health workers for their engagement in promoting breastfeeding. Mr. Gashi also talked about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and made an appeal to all families to support mothers who chose to breastfeed.

This year, the one week campaign called policy makers, health workers, family members and communities to ensure adequate conditions for mothers to be able to start breastfeeding within the

first hour after birth. The aim of the campaign was to sensitise the public and increase awareness on the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for child survival.

UNICEF's Health and Nutrition Officer, Dr. Agron Gashi reiterated the role of the Baby Friendly Initiative in Kosovo – the goal of the initiative is to empower every woman to make healthy-based decisions concerning infant feeding, and, if breastfeeding is her choice, to support her in breastfeeding her children exclusively for six months.

On the closing date, the 7th of October, UNICEF, in collaboration with MoH and the implementing partner Kosova Health Foundation organised a joint meeting to mark the breastfeeding week and discuss progress on Baby Friendly Initiative. In addition, UNICEF supported the Red Cross of Kosovo to organise sessions in the communities on the importance of breastfeeding. During the breastfeeding week there was a public service announcement in all Kosovo TV station

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