



The Convention on the Rights of the Child turns 20

Prishtine/Pristina 20 November – Today is the 20th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The entire world celebrates a historic moment that gave birth to the most important United Nations legal instrument for children. It took the international community a decade to come to an agreement and adopt the CRC on the 20th of November 1989. Two decades after, the treaty has become the most widely accepted human rights instrument in the world. It has inspired changes in laws to better protect children, it has become a framework for different duties that all actors bear to respond to the rights of the child, and it has set ethical and moral guidance building upon core values which are common to the human family.

In every region of the world, there are numerous examples of the CRC's impact on law and practice. However, the wide acceptance of the CRC does not mean that children's rights are protected in the best possible way everywhere.

That the world fails to respect the rights of its children – even to deny that children have rights – is clear in the alarming numbers of children who die of preventable causes. Only in 2007, an estimated 9.2 million children worldwide under the age of 5 died from largely preventable causes. There are children who do not attend school or attend a school that cannot offer them a decent education, recent global estimates show that around 115 million children of primary school age, the majority of them girls, do not attend school. Children are left abandoned when their parents succumb to AIDS, or who are subjected to violence, exploitation and abuse against which they are unable to protect themselves. Too many children are considered to be the property of adults, and are subjected to various forms of abuse and exploitation.

In Kosovo, significant progress has been reached in the last decade to rebuild the infrastructure and set up child friendly services for children – results attributable to the Kosovo institutions, the civil society, the international community and donors.

Kosovo has integrated the CRC in its Constitution and reforms are underway in the justice, education, health and social services sectors. There are children's rights units at municipal and central level, and an Ombudsperson Institution to provide protection of children's rights. Many of the key legal instruments have been

updated. The commitment of the Kosovo Government towards the wellbeing of children was reaffirmed with the recent endorsement of the Strategy and Action Plan on children's rights. However implementation of legal frameworks and policies at central and decentralised levels remains a challenge.

Despite the progress reached, Kosovo still notes one of the highest infant mortality rates in Europe, with an estimated one out of every 23 children who die before their first birthday, while one out of fourteen children die before their fifth birthday. Very few children attend any form of pre-primary education, and not all children especially girls from Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian communities have the chance to finish compulsory education. Children with disabilities remain with a very limited access to education and social services.

Poverty increases the vulnerability of families in Kosovo, it creates social and ethnic disparities, and very often children are most affected, with every second child living in absolute poverty and one out of six children in extreme poverty. The figures are even more alarming for Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian children where two out of three children are poor and every third child extremely poor. The social assistance while quite well targeted does not reach enough children and families in poverty and it is estimated that only every fourth poor child lives in a family that receives social assistance.

Mr. Johannes Wedenig, UNICEF's Head of Office says 'We have a reason to celebrate progress. At the same time we have to recognise the challenges ahead. We all know that half of the population of Kosovo is below the age of 18. Kosovo thus has a huge potential to contribute to the Europe of today and tomorrow. But we have to invest in our children. We have to put them at the center of the economic and political agenda and promote the inclusion of the most vulnerable children of the society. Children are a common responsibility across party lines and different backgrounds. Let's make child rights a reality for every child in Kosovo.'

Mr Kjartan Björnsson, EC Liaison Office Charge d'Affaires a.i. said 'With the new EU financial instruments, children's rights have become an important political priority. Kosovo has one of the youngest populations in Europe. Promoting children's rights in education is one of our main priorities in Kosovo. We work closely with the Ministry of Education as well as civil society partners to ensure that the right of each child is ensured in the education system.'

Kosovo society aspires towards European integration, and children should be at the heart of this process. The Government should continue to build on the reform agenda, including reduction of poverty among children and social inclusion of vulnerable children. The reform should be supported with appropriate budgets and should reflect tangible outcomes for every child.

UNICEF and the European Commission Liaison Office in Kosovo are committed to support Kosovo institutions to ensure that every young Kosovan benefits from the European core values and standards for children's wellbeing.

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