

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Alyssa Milano, calls for action to alleviate child poverty in Kosovo**

*Prishtine/Pristina, 01 June 2010 – While nearly half of Kosovo's children aged 0-19 live in poverty, 1 in 5 children live in extreme poverty, said UNICEF's 'Child Poverty in Kosovo' report launched at a High Level Forum today.*

The 'Child Poverty in Kosovo' report launched today by UNICEF Kosovo shows clearly that children are at significantly greater risk of poverty in Kosovo compared to the general population. The report showed that the highest risks of poverty are faced by children who live in households with three or more children; children aged 0-14; children of unemployed parents; children in households receiving social assistance; and children in households with low levels of education. Whilst the risk of poverty is lower for children where at least one family member is employed, children in wage-earning households make up 36 percent of all children in poverty in Kosovo. Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians, 3.4 percent of Kosovo's children are arguably the most marginalised group with higher rates of poverty estimated at 60.5 percent.

In her address to the High Level Panel organized by UNICEF and the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society bringing together senior decision makers, civil society and academia, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Ms Alyssa Milano said 'Children represent the future of Kosovo. Development in Kosovo is not likely to happen unless we invest in the younger generation now. Kosovo continues to receive a lot of donor support and attention, in this context putting children at the heart of the decision making is of utmost importance.'

Kosovo's social assistance scheme is the main mechanism for providing cash assistance to poor households. According to the last household and budget survey, the existing social assistance scheme has limited coverage on only 23 percent of children live in households receiving cash assistance. The currently low coverage implies that around 695,000 poor people in Kosovo do not receive social assistance benefit. Kosovo has no unemployment benefits scheme, no maternity allowance, and no child benefit scheme. Families who live in poverty but who have no child under 5 are not eligible for the assistance scheme. During 2009, 2,951 poor households lost their entire benefit because their youngest child turned 6 years of age.

The lesson has been learnt that, to have an optimal impact social assistance has to be combined with holistic child and family policies to reduce child poverty significantly. A sustainable combination of political will and technical capacity is also required. Moreover, investing in children is not only morally the right thing to do, it is also a sound economic investment, with high rates of return.

The report was developed by Mr Paul Stubbs and Mr Danijel Nestić from the Institute of Economics, Zagreb, Croatia, who have drafted the policy options paper and synthesis report using data from two UNICEF Kosovo

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commissioned studies completed in 2008 by the University of York UK, and in 2009 by the Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, the Netherlands.

The experts who have developed the report recommend that in the medium- or long-term, Kosovo should consider, as most of its neighbours in the region, the introduction of a child benefit scheme. Whilst a universal child benefit scheme of €25 per child per month is estimated to halve child poverty rates in Kosovo, universal benefits at a level of around €10 per month, for all children could still reduce child poverty by one fifth.

The partnership initiated by UNICEF today, with the participation of Mr Peter Feith the EU Representative in Kosovo, and the Deputy Prime Minister Mr Hajredin Kuqi among others aspires to place the issue of child poverty in the focus of the Kosovo Government development agenda and to galvanize all partners in supporting the reduction of child poverty in Kosovo.

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