

MEDIA RELEASE

Children with special needs receive more education opportunities in Kosovo

Prishtine/Pristina 11 May 2010 - At the occasion of marking the Education Week for Children with special needs in Kosovo, UNICEF and partners launched a study 'Justice denied – the State of Education of Children with Special Needs in post-conflict Kosovo'

While many children with special needs grow up in institutions and are denied the family warm environment, the social norms in Kosovan families have traditionally been very supportive and protective, keeping their children within the family setting. However, the study shows that the participation of children with special needs in any form of social life and their inclusion in the education system, though progressively increasing, remains comparatively low.

"Although children with special needs have become more visible since the beginning of transition in Kosovo, and attitudes towards them and their families are changing, many of them remain hidden at home simply excluded from any education, play, sport, cultural or social activities' said Mr. Luciano Calestini, Deputy Head of Office, Officer in Charge for UNICEF Kosovo.

Kosovo has made some progress in protecting the rights of children with special needs. There are signs that attitudes towards disability are changing, and there is a rapid increase in demand by parents to enroll their children in schools. The Ministry of Education Science and Technology has adopted inclusiveness as a key principle of the education system, and more children are being integrated into mainstream schools. Despite the progress, only around 10 percent of children with special needs in Kosovo have access to any form of education. Children such as those from Roma, Ashkalia and Egyptian communities and children living in remote areas often face multiple discrimination.

Today, there are in total seven special schools and 70 attached classes all over Kosovo. Until now, three special schools have been transformed into resource centres, which offer multiple services for children with special needs, and the plan is to transform all special schools.

This is a great progress, however as the study published today shows, there are many challenges remaining: teachers need to be equipped with teaching skills and materials. Individual education plans are needed to meet various learning demands of children, as without those plans, children often drop out or do not learn anything. All school staff and administrators should be sensitized and trained to eliminate stigma. More investments are needed to accommodate children with various special needs not only physically but also pedagogically.

UNICEF has worked with community-based organizations to train teachers, parents and policy makers. UNICEF also supports the NGO TEMA to transform the remaining special schools into resource centres.

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More remains to be done to ensure political commitment and partnerships between government institutions, donor community and civil society, so that no child is left out of the education system in Kosovo.

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