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Report of the field visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia by members of the Bureau of the Executive Board of UNICEF, 15 to 20 April 2013**I. Introduction**

1. Members of the Bureau of the UNICEF Executive Board — H.E. Mr. Jarmo Viinanen, Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations; H.E. Mr. Ferit Hoxha, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Albania to the United Nations; H.E. Mr. George Wilfred Talbot, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Guyana to the United Nations; Mr. Hossein Gharibi, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations; Mr. John Mosoti, Technical Advisor, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kenya to the United Nations; and Mr. Nicolas Pron, Secretary of the Executive Board of UNICEF — visited Bosnia and Herzegovina from 15 to 17 April 2013, and Serbia from 17 to 20 April 2013.

2. The field visit allowed the Bureau to gain a first-hand understanding of UNICEF work at the country level. More specifically, the visit aimed at demonstrating concrete examples of UNICEF cooperation with the Governments and with other partners, including the other members of the United Nations country teams. Furthermore, the visit provided an opportunity for the members of the Bureau to better understand the issues and challenges facing children and women in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

3. The members of the Bureau, led by the President of the Executive Board, and members of the UNICEF country offices for both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia met with high-ranking Government officials. During the interactive meetings the issues discussed included:

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(a) The cooperation between UNICEF and the Government on issues relating to children;

(b) Further enhancement of programmatic presence in areas where UNICEF has comparative advantage;

(c) Further sharpening of UNICEF engagement with the Government on pertinent areas focusing on children.

4. The delegation would like to express its gratitude to the Governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia for their warm welcome, for constant engagement, facilitation and providing opportunities for substantive dialogue with senior members of their Governments on a wide range of issues relating to children.

5. The delegation would like to thank the UNICEF country teams in Sarajevo and Belgrade for the very carefully prepared and well-organized visits, and for staff being readily available throughout the visit to provide support to the delegation to better understand the work and engagement of UNICEF and its partners. The excellent relations between the Governments and UNICEF teams are instrumental in the big strides made in relation to children.

6. The Bureau was particularly impressed by the commitment and dedication of government officials at every level and the UNICEF staff in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

7. The programme of the visit consisted of two main components:

(a) From 14 to 17 April: Meetings in Sarajevo with the UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina country office, senior-level government counterparts, members of the United Nations country team, as well as key donors. Field visits took place to Kiseljak, Zenica-Doboj Canton (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), Drventa (Republika Srpska), District Brcko and Tuzla;

(b) From 17 to 20 April: Meetings in Belgrade with the UNICEF Serbia country office, senior government counterparts, and members of the UN Country Team. The delegation made field visits to Southern Serbia in Vladicin Han Municipality, Nis and Knjazevac.

8. In both countries, the delegation had the opportunity to meet with local government representatives; civil society organizations; users of health facilities; health workers; teachers; school administrators; students and parents; children beneficiaries of various programmes; members of local communities; development partners and UNICEF staff.

9. The present report summarizes the briefings received by the Bureau members and activities undertaken and concludes with the delegation's own observations on the various issues related to the visit and UNICEF work.

II. Key issues facing children and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina

10. Following the Dayton Peace Agreement, which ended the 1992-1995 war, a highly complex political and administrative structure was established. Most government responsibilities were delegated to and are carried out by two entities: by

Republika Srpska and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and by the District of Brcko. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is further decentralized with important responsibilities such as education delegated to 10 cantons. As a whole, the country is organized around 13 administrative units and over 150 ministries. With responsibilities having been delegated, central power is therefore very limited at state level.

11. The country has been going through several political crises which have made an impact on the pace of reforms. The general elections of October 2010 resulted in 16 months of political stalemate that lasted until the formation of a state level government at the beginning of 2012. The political situation notwithstanding, the country is firmly united around the promotion and protection of children.

12. The country of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a “potential candidate” for European Union membership. Though a Stabilization and Association Agreement was ratified, it has not yet entered into force. Road maps have been established but progress has been hampered by the perceived little progress in complying with European Court’s human rights judgement on discrimination against part of the country’s citizenry on the ground of ethnicity.

13. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework, which covers the period 2010-2014, supports the obligation of Bosnia and Herzegovina towards implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international conventions, and its quest to join the European Union.

14. UNICEF engages with the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina to address three key development issues that have profound impact on children: poverty, social exclusion and gaps in the governance and administrative system, which impact negatively on children. The primary objective of country programming is to strengthen social inclusion and cohesion with a view to reducing discrimination and inequities among children and increase children’s potential for development of their human and social potential.

15. The country programme addressed the institutional capacity gaps for policy design, implementation and planning at various levels of government. It supports social sector reforms and seeks to strengthen policy frameworks and systems in line with international standards.

16. The country programme is organized along two major programme areas: (a) social policies and child rights monitoring, and (b) integrated and inclusive systems for children in the areas of health/early childhood development (ECD), inclusive education and child protection.

17. Bosnia and Herzegovina has made substantive improvements in under-five and infant mortality rates, the latter having decreased to 8 deaths per 1,000 live births. The rates among the Roma community, however, are disproportionately high, at 27 and 24 deaths per 1,000 live births for both under-five and infant mortality, respectively. Additionally, stunting affects 9 per cent of children under five years of age but is significantly higher (21 per cent) for Roma children. Immunization has increased but still stands at 68 per cent for children under 29 months of age, while it stands at a stunningly low 4 per cent for Roma children.

18. In the context of the above situation, the delegation was informed of the collaboration between UNICEF and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where UNICEF has

been playing a significant role over the past several years informing a policy framework for early childhood development. This has been carried out by putting in place ECD policies and having strategies, action plans and budgets aligned in different sectors with the involvement of health, education and social welfare actors.

19. Noting the lack of appropriate services for children and young people, the entity and cantonal Ministries of Health, with support from UNICEF and partners, are mainstreaming early childhood development through regular health services. They have also strengthened the ability to detect and address developmental delays and disabilities at an early stage, particularly for the hard-to-reach population groups. Promotion of the importance of and benefits of immunization is carried out by relevant Ministries in collaboration with UNICEF and the World Health Organization.

Social protection

20. Social exclusion and poverty are some of the most challenging issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly for children. The rate of poverty is 18 per cent, while the proportion of the population that is socially excluded is almost 50 per cent. Unemployment is high, at 28 per cent nationally. For the youngest population 15-24 years of age, the rate stands at 63.1 per cent.

21. Among the most vulnerable in the ongoing economic crises are persons with disabilities, displaced persons, Roma, families with more than two children, the elderly, unemployed and low-skilled youth. Bosnia and Herzegovina is among the moderate spenders on social protection, with levels similar to those of the other countries of the region (e.g., Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia). Unfortunately, the cash transfers are not well targeted to the poorest and most vulnerable. Many poor families are excluded from the social protection system. In fact, only 5 per cent of the poorest 20 per cent of the population receives some kind of cash assistance.

22. In accordance with the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the competencies pertaining to social protection rest with the Entities of Republika Srpska, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Brcko District. The Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees at the state level have a coordination role and the responsibility to report on human rights treaties and obligations. The social protection systems in the two entities and Brcko District are independent from each other. In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the responsibility is further decentralized to the 10 cantonal levels. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina provides only framework policies and legislation, while the Cantons are in charge of developing, financing and implementing their own legislation. In total, 13 different levels of social protection governance provide social services and cash benefits in the country. Due to the fragmented and non-harmonized nature of the systems, these services and allowances vary depending on where the children live. Indeed, five cantons do not provide any child allowances.

23. In order to advance social protection, UNICEF is working with the Government to effect structural changes at the policy, legislative and budgeting levels. UNICEF also makes direct interventions at local level in order to achieve concrete results for children. At the policy level, it supports the reform of the social protection system in order to address and harmonize realization of children's rights

and benefits across the country. This has been done in collaboration with the European Union and the World Bank.

24. Further collaboration and cooperation have been witnessed among the health, education and social welfare sectors. This has resulted in the adoption of protocols for referral of cases related to child protection, ECD and disability, and in enhanced inter-sectoral cooperation. This also gave rise to the establishment of institutional “commissions for social protection and inclusion of children” and increased budgets for social protection and inclusion in 17 municipalities.

Child protection

25. Violence against children is a challenge. It is underreported and considered a “family matter” by the general public. In some areas, corporal punishment within the household is not criminalized to any degree. A recent study indicated that 72.5 per cent of children have experienced physical violence, 67.7 per cent have experienced psychological violence and 18.6 per cent have experienced sexual harassment.

26. The rates of juvenile offending and cases of violence among children have increased in the recent past. There has also been an increase in the number of juvenile victims of and witnesses to crimes. The situation is made more serious by the presence of illegally obtained weapons, which increases the potential for violence and criminality. As such, there is need to enhance juvenile justice, an area not previously accorded enough attention. This can only be done through targeted interventions aimed specifically at children and adolescents.

27. Adequate response to juvenile offending and violence is, however, hampered by limited data, unavailability of resources for programmes, and resistance to improvements, diversion and alternative measures of prevention as opposed to detention and the disharmony among different laws within the same entity. An assessment of juvenile justice conducted in 2011 identified a tendency by government service providers and the general public favouring a punitive approach rather than a focus on prevention and reintegration of offenders.

28. UNICEF is playing a leadership role in the implementation of a broader justice reform agenda. Working with the High Judicial Prosecutor Council and partners such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe, UNICEF is supporting the institutionalization of training programmes for judges, prosecutors and other professionals involved in the juvenile justice system. The Bureau visited a child-friendly room in a police station and a disciplinary/reintegration centre in Tuzla, supported by the Government, civil society and the communities. UNICEF is also providing technical expertise and developing capacity in this regard.

29. In addition, UNICEF support has been instrumental in strengthening model programmes already rolled out in 10 municipalities that emphasize prevention of offending and re-offending. With the support of UNICEF and other partners such as the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, who have shown strong commitment, these model programmes will be replicated in other municipalities in order to reach more juveniles with the hope that they will be expanded throughout the country. The ongoing reform of the childcare policy framework and strong support to family-

based care and effective prevention mechanisms are expected to pay dividends in the form of fewer juvenile offences and fewer cases of violence involving children and youth. This is a clear indication of the fragility of internal systems and the need to find a balance between inputs and positive outcomes.

Social inclusion and cohesion

30. There exist significant socioeconomic disparities among groups, regions and areas. Nearly a quarter of all municipalities fall into the “most disadvantaged” category, with their gross domestic product per capita below 50 per cent of the national average.

31. These disparities both contribute to, and are the result of, discrimination. Bosnia and Herzegovina is dealing with the more obvious manifestation of discrimination in the form of the division of education by ethnicity. This takes the form of “mono-ethnic” schools and “two schools under one roof”. In the latter case, children from the Croat and Bosniak communities attend classes in the same school building, but at different times, with different teachers, different class curricula and different school principals. Most importantly, the growing phenomenon of mono-ethnic schools is of particular concern. Various political efforts, including enacting legislation to move towards integration, have not been as successful as expected.

32. The Bureau visited Bilalovac Village in Kiseljak municipality in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where UNICEF is supporting the implementation of a programme aimed at “Creating Safe Environments in Divided Schools”. In the school, the Bureau observed a workshop conducted by children on communication, inter-cultural and peace education for children from different ethnic groups, aimed at promoting inclusion, reconciliation and cohesion. The Bureau, after engaging with students and the community, had the sense that the intercultural and peace education programme has had a positive impact at school and community level. The Bureau also engaged in discussion at various stages of the visit with national and local authorities, with school management and with different representatives of the international community on the impact of divided schools on the ongoing reconciliation efforts. Although there seems to be a widely shared opinion among various political actors, as well all representatives of the international community in the country, that an integrated education system is in the best interest of children and the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, resistance to the process is still strong and progress very slow. The Bureau also visited a school in Prutace, in Brcko District, where the Roma community is particularly vulnerable. With UNICEF support, the education department and school staff have been promoting quality inclusive education for Roma girls and boys.

The role of UNICEF in Bosnia and Herzegovina

33. Since Bosnia and Herzegovina is a middle-income country, the country programme of cooperation operates at both upstream and local levels. UNICEF supports the different levels of government to develop or revise legislation, policies, strategies and actions so that they are in line with the national constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international conventions and standards. This also encourages the harmonization of efforts among the various actors. At the local level, UNICEF works with 65 municipalities jointly with the Government and civil society and non-governmental organizations.

34. UNICEF engagement at the upstream policy level, supported by research, data and policy analysis, has led to a greater focus on children in national development planning and implementation, to greater poverty reduction and to more social protection programmes.

35. UNICEF provides technical advice, technical assistance and capacity-building so that the institutions of governance and those dealing directly with children are adequately empowered to promote the well-being of children and to help them access quality services. In this regard, UNICEF supports the Government in leveraging resources so that available resources are utilized optimally to achieve the greatest impacts for children.

36. UNICEF work relating to good governance has been exemplary. It has made contributions to both policy development and capacity development, encouraging participation and local ownership and stimulating multi-sectoral collaboration and engagement at all levels of government. All those actions have had profound impact on the lives of children in the context of monitoring child rights. UNICEF supports the country at different levels to improve data collection and analysis in order to identify equity gaps and assist in evidence-based policymaking. Good governance also entails giving children and adolescents a “voice” and thus encourages children to be given space to participate. This has been key in triggering positive changes in children’s behaviour and attitudes.

37. Facilitation of national dialogue towards child-friendly social norms is integral in ensuring that children remain a top priority. The bringing together of government, civil society, the private sector and other actors to discuss children’s issues is one of the most important aspects of the work of UNICEF. When working towards common objectives it becomes much easier for all actors to discuss issues affecting children in a more collaborative environment. The delegation held dialogues with the United Nations country team and partners such as the European Union to understand their various contributions to enhancing child rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

38. The Bureau members noted the strategic role UNICEF has played in developing norms and standards and in supporting policy formulation through the piloting of ground-breaking approaches. UNICEF continues to have a significant impact by leveraging resources for children through strategic partnerships with government bodies at the upstream policy level.

III. Key issues facing children and women in Serbia

39. Serbia is a young but stable democracy, which has been experiencing a steady decline in population over the last 10 years as a result of negative birth rates and emigration. The country has one of the oldest populations in Europe, with children under 18 years of age representing only 17.6 per cent of the total population.

40. Prior to 2008, when the global economic crisis began, the economy of Serbia steadily grew. Since 2009, however, the economy has been in recession. The cost of the crisis has been considerable, with a profound impact on social and economic development. Unemployment hovers at around 23 per cent, and the number of those receiving social assistance has almost doubled in the last six years. It is still higher than that of most of the neighbouring countries. Children are disproportionately impacted by the economic crisis and cutbacks in services and budgets. Between

2008 and 2010, the rate of poverty for children up to the age of 13 almost doubled, from 7.3 to 13.7. There are significant disparities between various groups and regions, but the most vulnerable are the Roma. The northern part of the country is more developed than the southern parts. Urban areas fare better than the rural areas.

41. The Government of Serbia has made significant strides in establishing a legislative and policy framework to protect children and other vulnerable groups. The Office of the Ombudsman and the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality have key roles to play in protecting and promoting the rights of vulnerable children. The establishment in 2012 of the National Assembly's Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors national implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, has elevated issues affecting children to the top of the national agenda. Independent human rights institutions also play key roles in protecting and promoting the rights of vulnerable children. The 2009 Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination is a major step towards promoting equality and protection.

42. A number of legislative and policy measures have been instrumental in defining the protection of children. Serbia is party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols in force (the third optional protocol, on a communications procedure for violations of children's rights, has been signed but not ratified by Serbia). The 2006 Constitution of Serbia makes specific references to the protection of children's rights, and this has helped to spawn a number of broadly applicable laws. A framework for child rights, including implementation and policy coordination, is contained in the National Plan of Action for children 2004-2015.

43. The current Serbia-UNICEF country programme of cooperation (2011-2015) aims to support national efforts towards social inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized families and children. The country programme is organized around two components, namely, system strengthening for social inclusion and social accountability for child rights.

44. Upon engagement with government officials, with the UNICEF team in Serbia, and with local community and partners, the delegation established that UNICEF work was instrumental in facilitating the generation of knowledge about disparities among children. This same knowledge is used for evidence-based policymaking, helping to enhance regulatory frameworks that promote inclusion laws, modelling and innovating in the field to demonstrate the application of the new laws and standards, enabling national dialogue towards social norms friendly to children, strengthening monitoring of accountability and facilitating creation of strategic alliances and partnerships to promote rights of children, especially those most vulnerable.

Early Childhood Development for the most vulnerable children

45. The delegation commends the Government's partnerships with UNICEF in developing initiatives for early childhood development (ECD) and for creating initiatives for engaging the community and government officials and other stakeholders to uphold the importance of early childhood development.

46. There exist several challenges relating to variations in access and quality of services. These have often led to inequitable outcomes. Thus, there is need to provide access to, and strengthen human resources capacity to provide access to, quality healthcare for all people, especially the vulnerable and hard-to-reach

populations. While the rates of attendance in early childhood programmes are increasing, and currently stand at 44 per cent nationally, the rate is 22 per cent among the poorest families, 29 per cent for children in rural areas and only 8 per cent for Roma children.

47. The delegation was informed that there was a knowledge gap relating to the importance of early childhood development of children among some parents. The delegation commends the Government's partnerships with UNICEF in developing initiatives for early childhood development and for creating initiatives for engaging the community and government officials and other stakeholders to uphold the importance of ECD.

48. UNICEF has been working with the Government and other parties to ensure that newborn and early childhood services are available particularly to excluded groups, notably children with disabilities and Roma. To this end UNICEF collaborates with the Ministry of Health to use data, evidence and knowledge in the development of norms and standards and in strengthening data collection systems.

49. Regarding Roma children and their families, the Ministry of Health, with the support of UNICEF, has put in place an effective outreach mechanism by engaging Roma health mediators. These mediators serve as a bridge between local health services and the Roma community. The delegation was privileged to meet with some of the mediators in Vladicin Han, a small municipality in South Serbia. The mediators explained that they give support to Roma mothers, from the prenatal to postnatal periods, providing information on breastfeeding, birth registration and immunization as well as on the importance of children's participating in early learning.

50. The mediators have also been instrumental in identifying out-of-school children and facilitating their entry into the school system and assisting their families to access their personal documentation and social welfare benefits. In their engagement with the mediators, the Bureau members were impressed by the innovative initiative and the results that are directly attributable to the intervention by mediators.

51. The Bureau members were informed of and witnessed interventions regarding strengthening of services for early detection of developmental risks.

Maternal and child health

52. The Ministry of Health is responsible for the overall health system's development, including pressing for health-related legislation, organizing the network of health services country-wide, quality assurance and the promotion of public health in all communities.

53. Healthcare services in Serbia are universal and guaranteed by the Constitution to all. As a consequence, over the years, Serbia has made significant achievements in health. These advancements relate to policy definition and formulation and also implementation and evaluation. Service delivery is also key. A notable achievement in 2009 was the establishment of a healthcare programme specifically helping women, children and adolescents. This programme specifically targeted the most vulnerable populations in the society.

54. Notwithstanding these advances, there are major challenges relating to accessibility of healthcare by the most vulnerable children and women, the Roma, persons with disabilities and persons placed in institutions. Roma women and children are particularly at a disadvantage. The under-five mortality rates among the Roma are more than twice the national average. The same applies to nutrition and other development indicators. There is need to specifically target the Roma population in order to reduce these rates.

55. The health system in Serbia has a well-developed network of public healthcare centres. Currently, reforms are being carried out in the health sector in order to make them more accountable and provide quality services to all. The reforms need to focus more on the specific needs of the more vulnerable children and their families, who often do not enjoy the same level of quality of healthcare as the rest of the population. The Bureau members were impressed by the work carried out by the health system in general, and supported by UNICEF, in relation to early identification and referral of children with disabilities and other at-risk children.

56. UNICEF has been supporting the Ministry of Health in the reform process by assisting in the development of health policies and programmes for children and women based on data analysis and evidence. Additionally, UNICEF work has given impetus to improving access and quality of healthcare for the most vulnerable populations by building the capacities of healthcare professionals, and this has created a positive impact. The Government has collaborated with UNICEF to further strengthen the role and the capacity of the health system, especially as relates to improving maternal health and paediatric and patronage services within primary healthcare. This has led to increased early identification of and response to psychosocial and development risks, including early intervention, referral and the provision of timely, professional assistance to children with disabilities and their families. These activities have helped to prevent many children from being institutionalized or separated from their families. UNICEF has also contributed to the increase of awareness, knowledge and skills of parents and prospective parents on perinatal care, early childhood stimulation and positive parenting, breastfeeding and health nutrition practices through health promotion and education programmes.

Education

57. The Government of Serbia has made considerable efforts in providing education to all children. There are, however, disparities in attendance and completion by various groups.

58. There is marked improvement in attendance in the compulsory preparatory preschool programmes, at 97.2 per cent, but only 78 per cent for the Roma children. This disparity is more glaring as children continue with education. The timely completion rate for primary-school children is 92 nationally; the figure is 72 per cent for the poorest quintile and 35 per cent for Roma children. In secondary school, participation by Roma children stands at only 19 per cent. It is important to reduce the large number of Roma children attending schools intended for children with learning and other disabilities.

59. In general, children with moderate to severe disabilities are not included in mainstream schooling. However, thanks partly to inclusive legislation, there is marked improvement in the number of children with disabilities who are attending

regular schools. It is important to support measures to reduce the numbers of children with disabilities.

60. Providing a safe school environment also needs improving. For example, an estimated 65 per cent of students have reported that they are affected by violence or bullying in school.

61. The Bureau members' interaction with government officials and other stakeholders was candid about the plight of children, particularly those in the poorest quintile and the Roma. The Government informed the delegation that it is currently undertaking reforms in the education system based on inclusive principles. These initiatives have been piloted in several schools. The delegation had a chance to interact with some of the children in these schools.

62. The education sector still faces myriad challenges such as inadequate preschool distribution and lack of preschool capacities and early learning programmes adaptable to children of different backgrounds.

63. The insufficiency of knowledge on the importance of early learning, together with the lack of an education-information system, hampers monitoring of progress of students enrolled. There is inadequate follow-up of monitoring of children who have dropped out of school or have experienced violence in the school environment. It is, therefore, often difficult to identify these children and encourage them to return to school.

64. Similarly, there is limited inter-sectoral cooperation to provide additional support for inclusive education, which is key to integrating children with disabilities and those with learning difficulties into the mainstream of education. There is also need for improved teacher competencies and teaching methods in order to enhance the quality of teaching.

65. The adoption of child-friendly schools encouraging an inclusive education system is a concrete outcome of UNICEF cooperation. UNICEF further collaborates with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development to increase school readiness, advance inclusive education and encourage schools to become safe and supportive to children's needs. Further support is rendered in terms of improving evidence-based policymaking, with emphasis given to reforms benefiting the most vulnerable children.

66. The delegation visited the model school, "Dusko Radovic", located in Sremcica, a suburb of Belgrade. Its 750 students include children with disabilities and Roma children, all of whom attend regular classes. Bureau members interacted and exchanged views with children, parents and government officials. They saw how the school provides individual education plans to those who need them and valuable lessons in violence prevention.

67. UNICEF work with partners in the education system includes advancing knowledge, policy and practice in the areas of inclusive education and violence prevention. UNICEF partners with the nationwide Network for Support of Inclusive Education, which over the past two years has enabled over 700 teachers to learn from model schools such as Dusko Radovic.

Child protection

68. The delegation met with high-level officials of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy, led by the State Secretary. The State Secretary explained that the Ministry is committed to reforming and strengthening social welfare services, including those related to residential institutions (for children and adults), foster care services, community services for vulnerable groups and the protection of women and children from violence.

69. UNICEF has been collaborating with the Ministry in developing the legal framework, such as the 2011 Social Welfare Law, and in further developing guidelines and other standards that facilitate the full implementation of the law. The social welfare law bans institutionalization of children under 3, secures national financing for community services to less-developed areas, brings non-formal service providers into the formal system and strengthens accountability of service providers. The modelling of community-based services for vulnerable groups, including daycare centres, home-help for families with children with disabilities, and respite care, has been very successful. Several measures have also particularly helped to reduce the number of children placed in large-scale institutions (rather than family- or community-based settings). The delegation visited Lepenica village just outside Vladicin Han, where quality integrated services are provided to children and youth.

70. In Serbia, there are an estimated 7,500 children and youth separated from their parents and placed in state care. Among them, an estimated 80 per cent are placed in foster care, while 20 per cent are in residential institutions. Children with disabilities and Roma children are overrepresented in institutional care.

71. The emphasis on de-institutionalization of children from large-scale institutions and encouraging a fostering system that allows for children to be placed in substitute family care is working very well in areas where such models have been established. This is supported in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and United Nations guidelines on alternative care. The efforts are complemented by designing and piloting family preservation and reunification services. These aim to strengthen coping skills of families at risk of separation and the capacities of centres of social work, including case managers and coordinators of multi-sectoral responses.

72. Reform of the child-care system in Serbia has led to concrete results: the total number of children in institutional care has been reduced by 58 per cent over the past 10 years. Over the same period, the number of children in foster-care has tripled. At the same time, there is a growth in the number of community services for children and youth with disability, now available in 70 per cent of municipalities.

73. The delegation had the opportunity to visit a respite care service in Knjazevac, where families can leave their children with severe disability for short periods of time. This allows parents, who are the sole caregivers to these children, to tend to other pressing matters, and enables the children to socialize and interact with peers.

IV. Observations

74. The Bureau members were very appreciative of the opportunity of seeing first-hand the activities that UNICEF is undertaking on the ground and engaging with a

broad range of actors on issues relating to the promotion and protection of the rights of children.

75. Throughout the visit, government officials were very welcoming of the delegation and shared with them the details relating to the efforts and interventions that the respective government offices were making in order to deliver results for children. It was observed that despite the circumstances or situations, the various levels of government were united on the cause of children and worked towards improving their lives.

76. The Bureau observed with satisfaction the cooperation of UNICEF with relevant government authorities and upstream engagement in middle-income countries to influence policy formulation, legislative enactment and advocacy in order to achieve results for children.

77. The Bureau members appreciated the need for UNICEF to continue its programming in middle-income countries. They also appreciated the partnership with the Government to advance work relating to accountability and the equity approach to including the hard-to-reach children in the benefits of progress.

78. In this regard, while the delegation was impressed by the work of UNICEF in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia in mobilizing resources from partners, members of the delegation noted the importance of maintaining a sufficient level of core programme resources in order to sustain UNICEF capacity to provide high-level technical advice and to influence policies.

79. The Bureau members appreciated the work of UNICEF in the area of inclusive education, participatory early childhood development, social protection, social inclusion and child protection, including juvenile justice.

80. UNICEF works well in the various sectors mentioned above. An important part of the programme takes place at the subnational level and in the municipalities, where UNICEF presence and contribution is felt the most.

81. UNICEF engagement with partners, civil society and communities, as well as the private sector, were good examples of the convening power of UNICEF to bring together different actors to work for children.

82. In the two countries, the delegation met with the United Nations country teams. The Bureau members noted the excellent partnership that exists among the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and their ability to build on the synergies to achieve more and better results in a cost-effective manner. The Bureau members appreciated similar efforts by members of the United Nations country team in Serbia, but had the impression that more needs to be done in this respect. The delegation noted that in both countries the synergies and the complementarities that accrue as a result of working coherently and in a collaborative spirit were evident in the joint programming and work on cross-cutting issues.

83. The Bureau members noted with satisfaction the excellent cooperation between UNICEF and the various government institutions in both countries in advancing the rights of children. The Bureau members were impressed by the sharp focus of UNICEF on its comparative advantage: providing strategic policy advice to national programmes on how best to achieve results for children.

84. The delegation appreciated the clear focus of UNICEF on the most vulnerable population groups and the most disadvantaged geographical areas and on emphasizing the equity approach to programming.

85. The Bureau members welcomed, as an important strategy for achieving results for children, UNICEF efforts as a convening power, to influence policies, legislation and public spending towards benefiting the most disadvantaged children and women in the society.

86. The Bureau members welcomed the strong emphasis by UNICEF on national ownership in both countries, which was evident throughout the visit. It was also clear that the countries have taken over leadership of programmes and interventions relating to children in their respective countries.

87. UNICEF engagement with partners, civil society, communities and faith-based organizations, as well as the private sector, were good examples of the added value and the multiplier effect UNICEF can bring by acting as a catalyst to pull various partners together to achieve common objectives.

88. The members of the Bureau appreciated the critical role UNICEF plays in support of the two Governments in achieving Millennium Development Goals and in advancing the rights of children. The delegation observed that the respective Governments were open to ideas and ready and willing to commit resources to advance the cause of children. UNICEF credibility would play the catalytic role in the implementation of programmes and projects.

89. Despite the fact that both countries are middle-income, there is a greater need for UNICEF to continue its programmatic presence to provide advice on policy and legislative formulation and support programmes that will bridge the disparities that exist among children. Income status or level of development alone cannot be the criterion for determining UNICEF programming presence or level of intervention.

Annex

Summary of the programme of the field visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Monday, 15 April

- Introductory briefing at the UNICEF office.
- Visit to Primary School with H.E. Mr. Jozo Jurina, Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports; and Mr. Mladen Misuric-Ramljak, Mayor of Kiseljak.
- Meeting with H.E. Mr. Damir Ljubic, Minister for Human Rights and Refugees.
- Meeting with H.E. Mr. Peter Sorensen, European Union Special Representative and Head of the EU Delegation to Bosnia.
- Meeting with H.E. Mr. Vjekoslav Camber, Federal Minister of Labour and Social Policy.
- Meeting with the United Nations Resident Coordinator (by phone) and other United Nations country team Heads of Agencies.

Tuesday, 16 April

- Visit to the preschool in Zepce with H.E. Mr. Mirko Trifunovic, Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Zenica-Doboj Canton; and Mr. Mato Zovko, Mayor of Zepce.
- Working lunch with Mr. Ljubo Lepir, Assistant Minister for Health and Social Welfare of Republika Srpska; and Mr. Milorad Simic, Mayor of Derвента and the Members of the Social Protection and Inclusion Commission.
- Visit to a daycare centre for children with disabilities.
- One-Minute Junior Workshops at the Disciplinary Centre in Tuzla with H.E. Mr. Alen Taletovic, Minister of Justice of Tuzla Canton; and Mr. Mirza Dzevdetbegovic, Director of the Disciplinary Centre.
- Visit to a Child-Friendly Room at the Police Station of Tuzla with H.E. Mr. Amir Husic, Minister of Interior of the Tuzla Canton.

Wednesday, 17 April

- Visit of Early Childhood Development Services with H.E. Prof. Dr. Nada Pavlovic Calic, Minister of Health of the Tuzla Canton; Dr. Goran Cerkez, Assistant Minister for Federal Ministry of Health; and Mr. Jasmin Imamovic, Mayor of Tuzla.
- Visit to Prutace School with Dr. Anto Domic, Mayor of Brcko District.

Serbia

Wednesday, 17 April

- Introductory briefing with UNICEF Staff.

Thursday, 18 April

- Meeting with Ms. Roksanda Nincic, Assistant Minister for Multilateral Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Visit to Belgrade, Primary School “Dusko Radovic” together with Mr. Zarko Obradovic, Minister of Education, Science and Technological Development.
- Meeting with Ms. Slavica Djukic Dejanovic, Minister of Health.
- Meeting over lunch with United Nations country team members.
- Meeting with Mr. Nebojsa Stefanovic, Speaker of the National Assembly and President of the Parliamentary Committee on Child Rights.
- Meeting with Ms. Brankica Jankovic, State Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy (responsible for the Sector for Family and Social Protection).
- Meeting with Mr. Vincent Degert, Ambassador, Head of Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia.

Friday, April 19

- Field visit to the Municipality of Vladicin Han. A meeting with Mr. Goran Mladenovic, Mayor, and municipal authorities.
- Visit to Vladicin Han Roma settlement with Ms. Olivera Ristic, Roma health mediator.
- Visit to Lepenica village, Municipality of Vladicin Han. Presentation on Roma Health Mediators’ work, and the work of the Community Centre in Vladicin Han.
- Roundtable with civil society partners, City of Nis.

Saturday, 20 April

- Visit to Knjazevac community-based service for families of children with disability.
- De-brief with UNICEF Staff.