ALL RIGHTS FOR ALL CHILDREN

UNICEF in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

For every child
Health, Education, Equality, Protection
ADVANCE HUMANITY
UNICEF works for children in 20 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States:

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Armenia  
Azerbaijan  
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Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Bulgaria  
Croatia  
former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia  
Georgia  
Kazakhstan  
Kyrgyzstan  
Moldova  
Romania  
Russian Federation  
Serbia and Montenegro  
Tajikistan  
Turkey  
Turkmenistan  
Ukraine  
Uzbekistan
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ALL CHILDREN ARE BORN WITH RIGHTS

All children have the right to survive, to be educated, to be healthy, to have a name and nationality. All children have the right to participate in decisions that affect them. And all children have the right to be protected from harm. UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund, speaks out for the rights of all children in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The region faces unique challenges. No other region has been through so dramatic a transformation in so short a time and the scale of the changes has had a serious impact on children. Rising poverty and unemployment and falling social spending have excluded vast numbers of children from the economic progress that has been made in recent years. Millions of families are under pressure: the systems that once guided their lives have vanished and they must find their way in a new and unfamiliar landscape, confronting new dangers such as HIV/AIDS and the trafficking of drugs and human beings.

Perhaps the greatest challenge confronting this region is exclusion. The girl who does not go to school because she is a girl. The boy growing up in an institution because his parents have no money. Time and again, we see the same children being denied their most basic rights: the poor, those from ethnic minorities, those with disabilities, refugees or internally displaced, those affected by HIV/AIDS and, very often, girls.
But this region has tremendous assets that, if mobilised, could build a protective environment around each and every child – an environment that would ensure all rights for all children. Above all, it has its people. This region is home to one of the most literate populations on earth, people who value education and culture. Its young people, shaking off the legacy of the past, are dynamic and resourceful. It has legions of trained health workers and teachers. It has a growing and increasingly vocal civil society that is gaining strength across the region through the Regional Network for Children. We mobilise these human assets around seven child rights issues:

- A protective environment for all children
- Fighting HIV/AIDS
- A voice for young people
- The best start in life for every child
- Education
- Reaching every child with life-saving vaccines
- Tackling Iodine Deficiency

Our work would be impossible without the support of donors. Governments, UNICEF National Committees in the developed world and thousands of generous individuals – all provide the funds to power our work for children. No single organisation working in isolation can hope to guarantee all rights for all children. That is why we work to build strong partnerships across the region, with governments, with NGOs, with sister agencies, with children and young people, with anyone who can make a difference. We hope that you will join this partnership to help us build a region – and a world – fit for children.

Maria Calivis, UNICEF Regional Director
A PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL CHILDREN

The issue
Hundreds of thousands of children in CEE/CIS suffer exploitation, abuse, violence and neglect. Almost 1.2 million children are deprived of parental care – about half of them growing up in institutions, isolated from family and community and at risk of abuse.
Children are trafficked abroad, lured into the commercial sex industry, and work as labourers in the streets or fields or as domestic servants. Many are uprooted from their homes by war. More than two million people, most of them women and children, are refugees or internally displaced. Those born to HIV positive mothers are often abandoned to grow up in hospitals.

The results of failing to create an environment that protects all children are grim. At worst, they die. More often, their childhood fails to prepare them for adult life. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, governments are obliged to protect all children and are accountable for failure to do so. But a gulf remains between the standard and its implementation. A society that fails to protect children denies them the chance to reach their potential and undermines its own chance to develop.

The Challenges

- **Institutional solutions.** Hundreds of thousands children live in residential institutions across the region. The dominant response to family troubles or juvenile delinquency remains institutionalisation of children, with little preventive help for families in difficulties, such as inclusive education or family-based solutions for children with disabilities. The number of children convicted and sentenced has increased, and many are deprived of liberty after conviction, often facing heavy sentences for petty crimes.
• **Outdated protection for children.** The results are seen in the numbers of children living and working on the streets. Often members of ethnic minorities, refugee or displaced children, orphans or victims of domestic abuse, all face discrimination, poor health, illiteracy, violence. All are vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

• **Poor control of Intercountry Adoption.** The region accounts for one third of global intercountry adoptions.

• **Child trafficking.** There are no reliable figures on the numbers of children who are trafficked each year, but we know that children are trafficked across borders to work in the sex industry or beg on the streets. Exploited and abused, they face appalling dangers, from violence to disease and loss of hope.

• **Discrimination and stigma.** Some children face discrimination exacerbated by outdated welfare systems and practices. Roma, for example, face poverty rates that are up to 10 times higher than for non-Roma in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania. And they account for a disproportionate number of children in care in South-eastern Europe.

• **Violence against children.** This is largely hidden and there are few systems in place to detect or address it. Violence against children is found at home, at school and on the streets. Corporal punishment is common. A youth opinion poll has found that about 60% of children in the region – 56 million children – see violence at home.

• **Displacement.** Since 1989, armed conflict has broken out in one third of the countries in the region. Thousands of children are growing up as displaced or refugees, often excluded from mainstream social services.
UNICEF in Action

Protection of children against violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, trafficking and deprivation of parental care is essential for every aspect of their survival, growth and development. We support programmes to prevent such violations, and to identify and help their victims. But we go further, working with governments, civil society, individuals and the private sector to build a protective environment around every child. A protective environment shields all children from harm in the same way that good nutrition and health care shield them from disease. This concept is the basis of our child protection strategy. UNICEF programmes across the region aim to strengthen different aspects of the protective environment, helping Governments fulfil their obligations on child protection. We urge them to develop national child protection policies and have helped to bring national children protection legislation into line with international human rights standards in 11 countries in the region.
The three pillars of a protective environment:
- **Parents/others caring for children:** The ability, knowledge and practice of those immediately responsible for a child’s care and protection;
- **Community/Society:** the norms, practices, values and support of the community and society in which the child lives;
- **Governance system:** the legal and policy framework, the standards that guide basic social services and the capacity, knowledge and behaviour of the professionals who come in to contact with children.

Supporting juvenile justice reform in Kyrgyz Republic. UNICEF has helped to create a training centre on juvenile justice reform at the Militia Academy of the Ministry of Interior. Police officers from the Scottish Police Training Academy – a pioneer in child-friendly law enforcement – train local enforcement officials on communication skills related to juvenile justice.

Prevention of child trafficking in Albania. UNICEF has helped establish new cross-border cooperation for repatriation of Albanian children trafficked to Greece and Italy. Partnerships have been established with NGOs in Greece to carry out street investigations on trafficked children. Back in Albania, UNICEF works with the NGO Terre des Hommes, to mobilize local communities in two of the worst-affected districts, Korca and Elbasan, to protect their own children from trafficking. As a result of successful advocacy, the government of Albania now sees trafficking as a top priority and a new anti-trafficking police force has been created.
The Issue

Our region is seeing one of the steepest increases in the spread of HIV/AIDS worldwide. In 2004 there were an estimated 1.4 million people living with HIV across the region – a 40% increase since 2002.
The epidemic is fuelled by risky behaviour – mainly drug use and unsafe sex – particularly among marginalised groups such as intravenous drug users (IDUs), sex workers, men who have sex with men and populations on the move. Increasingly, infection is spreading from these groups through their partners to more young people. Even within these groups, HIV has a young face. More than 80% of those in the region with HIV have not yet turned 30.

Across the region, young people face poverty, unemployment levels that are three times higher than among adults, trafficking in drugs and humans, economic migration and violence. Youth poverty, unemployment and lack of hope feed the trades in people and drugs that feed the HIV epidemic. While they are the most vulnerable, young people are the least likely to know the risks or how to avoid them, least likely to have access to the services that they need and least likely to be adequately protected by policies and laws.

The share of female infections is rising, leading to more HIV infection among pregnant women and their infants. More children in the region are being abandoned by vulnerable young mothers who are HIV positive and injecting drugs. Evidence of rising sexual transmission raises fears that the region is heading for a more generalised epidemic.
The Challenges

- **Earlier sexual activity** has not been matched by increased awareness about the dangers of HIV.

- **The commercial sex trade.** The region is seeing growing numbers of vulnerable girls and women exploited in the commercial sex industry, often facing violence and abuse, with the inevitable risk of HIV infection.

- **Punitive policies,** including criminalization of drug use, sex work and homosexuality, drive those at risk away from the help they need.

- **Children abandoned by HIV+ mothers.** Some live in hospitals. Those in institutions are isolated from other children and from their families.

- **Children orphaned by HIV/AIDS** will probably grow up in institutions. Few, if any, are fostered or adopted by local families.

- **The lack of support for those who need it.** WHO Euro estimates that only 11% of those who need antiretrovirals across the region are currently being treated.

- **A chronic lack of data,** particularly data on the behaviour of young people and data disaggregated by gender or age.
UNICEF in Action

Children and young people are at the heart of the fight against HIV/AIDS. They are the solution – not the problem – and their participation in programmes is crucial. We work with young people to help governments and communities tackle the gravest health crisis facing them today. We aim to ensure that by 2010 at least 95% of those aged 10-18 have access to the information, education and services they need to protect themselves against HIV. We provide information, but realise that this is not enough to change behaviour. So we support life-skills based education to give young people skills such as critical thinking that can protect them against infection. We support youth-friendly services, including access to voluntary counselling and testing. We focus on the young people at greatest risk who have least access to services. And we work with young people on the design and management of programmes.

We aim to contribute to the elimination of infant HIV in the region by 2010. We support programmes for the children and young people most directly affected by HIV/AIDS to ensure that they have access to quality care. And we advocate for policies that protect them from stigma and discrimination.
Promoting Youth-Friendly health services (YFS). UNICEF has mapped out services for young people in 17 countries in collaboration with the UN Interagency Group on Youth-Friendly Services. We urge governments to act on the findings of these Mapping Reports and increase access to YFS, particularly for the most vulnerable young people.

Training health care providers in Ukraine. UNICEF works with the Government on prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT). The percentage of HIV+ pregnant women reached with preventive measures, such as antiretrovirals, has risen from 9% to 77% since 1999. UNICEF has helped to develop the national programme and training course for health care providers and works with the Government on an action plan for virtual elimination of mother to child transmission.

A regional strategy on HIV/AIDS: Our regional HIV/AIDS strategy centres on three key areas: prevention of infection among young people; prevention of mother to child transmission and care; and support and protection for children and parents living with HIV. The strategy aims to ensure that those aged 10-18 have the information, education and services necessary to reduce their vulnerability to HIV infection. UNICEF works with governments, civil society and other partners to ensure that each country has a comprehensive national HIV/AIDS response, clearly defining the crucial role to be played by all partners, including civil society and young people, in HIV prevention.
The Issue
Young people have the right to be involved in the decisions that affect them. The more they participate in decisions, the more they develop confidence, skills and aspirations. And the more they are involved in development programmes, the more effective these programmes become.
Young people in our region are putting the reforms of the 1990s to the test as the first generation to be educated, to search for work, to vote and express their opinions in a new landscape. The changes of recent years have opened up new opportunities for them, but they also face new risks. They must contend with poverty, unemployment levels that are three times higher than among the adult population and the trafficking of drugs and human beings. Many of their problems are the problems that face the entire region.

At the same time, they are the region’s most valuable asset. Dynamic and creative, they are forging ahead in business, in political life, in NGOs and in the media and are the driving force of regional economic and social progress. Their full participation in decision-making is essential.

The challenges

• The participation of citizens in decision-making is a relatively new concept in the region. The participation of young people even more so.
• The brain-drain. A UNICEF-supported survey published in 2001 found that 23% of those aged 9-17 in the region wanted to emigrate when they grew up, mainly to Western Europe or North America. They need to feel that they have a stake in the future of their nations.
UNICEF in Action

UNICEF supports a range of programmes to give young people a voice in the region. There are Youth Parliaments and Forums in a number of countries, including Albania, Georgia and Turkey, giving young elected delegates the chance to debate issues and draw up civic and social plans of action.

There are young people taking an active part in UNICEF programmes, particularly in HIV/AIDS, where the most successful prevention initiatives are designed and implemented by young people themselves, with UNICEF offering support and guidance.
There is the Young People’s Media Network (YPMN), which aims to create a network of young people across the region who will be tomorrow’s journalists and, very importantly, opinion-makers. YPMN links hundreds of young people’s media projects with NGOs, media organizations and regional or international agencies that support such projects. It supports the production of One-Minute Juniors – 60-second videos on child rights themes created by young people, and the MAGIC website – a showcase for youth media ideas.

And UNICEF supports the participation of children and young people in the development of National Plans of Action (NPAs) and their implementation. There is growing evidence that this improves the impact of NPAs while encouraging the young to take responsibility for their lives and communities.
**Child Reference Group (CRG) in Tajikistan.** In 2003, UNICEF and Save the Children UK established a Child Reference Group in Tajikistan, training young participants in leadership skills, basic journalism, peer-to-peer methods and networking. Today, the CRG is the main link between the children of Tajikistan and government officials, NGOs and media. The CRG organised a national meeting of media and 200 children, including street children, children from institutions and children with disabilities to discuss the NPA for Children and 70% of the children’s proposals were incorporated. As one Government official commented: “It took time for us to learn that adults and children are citizens of the same country and need to work together to find solutions.”

**Young People at European HIV/AIDS Conference.** In February 2004, 10 young people from eastern and western Europe took part in the Irish EU Presidency Conference on HIV/AIDS in Europe and Central Asia in Dublin. The 10 – all seasoned campaigners on HIV/AIDS – were selected by peers at a meeting organised by UNICEF, Development Cooperation Ireland, WHO, UNAIDS and the European Youth Forum. In Dublin they spoke alongside Ministers and shared their views on the outcomes. Wrapping up the Conference Sergiy Goncharuk of Ukraine spoke on behalf of the 10, saying: “There are five girls and five guys in front of you. Half of us are from the East, and half from the West. We are not only making statements, we are taking action. We are open and energetic, and we can be a big support. Honorable ministers, some time later we will come to your office with concrete projects and ideas. Please keep your door open for us.”

**“Troc!” in Albania.** “The only goal we have,” says 16-year-old Troc! reporter Ebi Spahiu, “is to bring out the truth so that things can improve.” Troc!, which means “tell it like it is” is a groundbreaking TV programme on youth and social issues made by young people in Albania. It tackles issues that other programmes avoid, and its stories have led to the dismissal of the head of a poorly-run children’s institution and the arrival of textbooks that were urgently needed for exams. UNICEF supports 11 Troc! bureaus around the country, while national TV station TVSH supplies a studio, producer and editor, and two hours of air-time every week. Research has found that around 90% of those aged 11-20 are regular viewers, and that more than two thirds of teenagers discuss the issues raised by Troc! with their friends.
The Issue
The first three years of life are crucial – the years of greatest growth and of greatest risk. A good start in life increases a child’s chances of a safe and healthy journey to adulthood. A poor start makes that journey much more difficult. If every child had the best possible start in life, it would be possible to save the 250,000 children aged 0-3 in our region who die each year as a result of preventable disease and malnutrition. Millions more would be protected from physical or mental disability.
Good health, proper nutrition and education would help to protect every child from such threats as poverty, HIV/AIDS and iodine deficiency. Investment in the early years yields high returns, improving school performance, productivity and income. The costs are negligible when compared to the enormous benefits.

**The Challenges**

- **An infant death rate** in the Caucasus and Central Asia that is 12 times greater than in western industrialised countries.
- **Disability.** At least 10% of children in the region have some kind of disability, often caused by poor care and nutrition in their earliest days.
- **Poor nutrition.** The region has the lowest exclusive breastfeeding rates worldwide. Only 14% of infants are exclusively breastfed for the first six months.
- **The collapse of pre-schooling.** Around 58,000 pre-schools closed in CIS countries in the 1990s.
- **Institutionalisation.** A growing proportion of infants are in institutions.
- **Birth registration.** About 10% of births in poor parts of the region go unregistered each year – most of them in the Caucasus and Central Asia.
- **Child care and rearing skills.** Many childhood illnesses and deaths can be averted if parents have the right information and skills to care for their children. Something as simple as loving interaction with infants and young children can give them the foundations for emotional security, social skills and the desire to learn.
UNICEF in Action

UNICEF supports the survival, growth and development of children, and the empowerment of families to provide the best possible care. We support programmes to tackle infant and child mortality and disability, including immunization, breastfeeding, and effective care for mothers and babies. We push for an integrated approach to the early years—the only way to ensure the best start in life for a child. This approach looks at the “whole” child, from protection against violence and discrimination to the development of self-esteem and the desire to learn. It focuses on health care and nutrition for children and mothers, as well as the creation of a clean and safe environment for them. It strengthens bonds between parents and children and evaluates institutions and services for young children. We urge all governments to develop national policies on integrated early childhood approaches.
Phone counselling for new parents in Serbia and Montenegro. A UNICEF-backed phone counselling project in Belgrade reached 95% of families with newborns in its first two years, receiving 110,000 calls and solving 88% of the questions asked. The project reduced the number of visits to primary health centres by up to 7%, connected parents with local health services and boosted the number of home visits by nurses from 70% to 95% of all newborns. The project is now expanding to reach other parts of the country, and the priority is to establish contact and follow-up with the families whose babies are thought to be particularly vulnerable.

Developing innovative models for ECD in Belarus. A UNICEF-supported survey of parents and professionals in Belarus in 2003 revealed that more than 60% of parents have problems educating their young children. More than 73% think that corporal punishment can be applied to children in certain circumstances and over 40% believe that obedience is more important than initiative. UNICEF is backing a variety of new approaches to ECD in Belarus, including better parenting initiatives to help parents raise their children in a nurturing environment that stimulates their development. More than 500 pre-school children in Belarus benefited from new-style pre-schools centred on communities in six areas in 2003. UNICEF supports the open model of pre-school, which aims to establish pre-schools as centres for the entire community, including parents. This project has now been underway in the selected regions for one year, and studies already show positive changes in parenting practices.

Keeping mothers and babies together in Georgia: The Prevention of Infant Abandonment and De-institutionalisation (PIAD) project in Georgia aims to prevent infant institutionalisation. PIAD’s Mother and Children Centre in Tbilisi houses new mothers who need support to bond with their babies and prepare for a future together. The Project has had success in getting infants out of institutions and into families, but these infants are quickly replaced by new arrivals. So PIAD goes further, pushing for family-based child welfare and protection policies, backed by effective adoption legislation, to prevent institutionalisation. PIAD is backed by UNICEF, the Ministries of Health, Education and Labour, UNFPA, Worldvision, Everychild and the IMF.
The Issue
With crumbling schools, deteriorating quality of education and falling enrolment among girls in some areas, education is a top priority for UNICEF in CEE/CIS.
Education in the poorest countries in the region is being undermined by lack of resources for such basics as textbooks, heating and school maintenance and by the exodus of demoralised teachers. Education quality is falling in many countries and outdated methods raise concerns that children are not being prepared for life in a post-Soviet climate. The traditional approach known as “factology” still dominates, with pupils more likely to learn by repetition than EU pupils and less able to apply their knowledge to real life.

And there are concerns about a “hidden crisis” in girls’ education. While rates for girls’ enrolment and attendance remain high, there are reports of more girls dropping out of school. In the poorest parts of Turkey, for example, less than half of the girls aged 7-15 are in school. Those girls who miss out are often the most disadvantaged. In Serbia and Montenegro, girls who suffer discrimination due to poverty or ethnic origin, such as Roma, have drop out rates that are 80% higher than for boys in the same situation. Equality in enrolment does not, however, mean equal education. In Azerbaijan, a survey of children leaving primary school in 2002 found that only 52% of girls passed the literacy and numeracy tests, compared to 100% of boys.
The Challenges

- **Falls in education spending.** Education spending fell by one-third in the Russian Federation in the 1990s, and by at least three-quarters in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia and the Kyrgyz Republic.

- **Poverty.** Children from poorer backgrounds are less likely to go to school, or complete their education.

- **Crumbling schools.** In Armenia, lack of heating means that classrooms are often colder than the playgrounds. Three quarters of the schools in rural Uzbekistan do not have functioning toilets.

- **Lack of equipment and textbooks.** In Moldova, there are no funds for teaching materials, and only 3% of schools have access to the Internet. In parts of Tajikistan, up to 10 students have to share a single textbook.

- **Girls’ education.** There are concerns about falling female enrolment. In Turkey, one quarter of girls never enrol. Among those who do, 40% do not complete primary school.

- **Undervalued teachers.** In Tajikistan, a cleaner or driver for an NGO can earn as much in one month as a teacher in one year. In Uzbekistan, a teacher earns the equivalent of around US$6 per month.

- **Malnutrition.** Deficiencies in iodine and iron, in particular, hamper mental ability. As a result, many children are unable to learn effectively.
UNICEF in Action
Across the region, UNICEF works to maintain and enhance standards in education. We advocate for greater investment in education. The poorest countries must prioritise education to make economic progress. Teachers must be properly rewarded, buildings must be maintained, and more resources are needed for basics, such as textbooks.

The time is ripe for education reform, with falling numbers of school-aged children, signs of lasting economic growth and the region’s “cultural capital” – in the Russian Federation, 90% of students have classical literature at home, compared to 60% in the EU. Parental involvement in schools is greater in the region than in the EU, and parents are more likely to help children with their homework. Such parental support provides a foundation for the preservation of what was good in the education systems of the old regimes – particularly universal coverage – and for reforms to adapt education to a rapidly changing world. We urge policy makers to match parental enthusiasm and prioritise education as a bulwark against poverty, ignorance and disease.
Turkey and ‘25 by 2005’. UNICEF and its partners worldwide aim to maximise enrolment of girls in the 25 countries where their enrolment is lowest by 2005. With one quarter of girls out of basic education, rising to more than half in some provinces, Turkey is the only country in the region taking part in 25 by 2005. UNICEF is intensifying its activities to reach the girls who are not in the classrooms. The goal for 2005 is to provide quality basic education for all girls in the 30 Turkish provinces with the lowest enrolment.

Promoting Child-Friendly schools. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNICEF supports the Child-Friendly Schools Initiative. The country needs quality education to prevent the migration of young families and to help displaced families come home. The project aims to improve the educational quality by focusing on those most vulnerable to school drop-out, changing old-fashioned approaches to teaching, boosting children’s capacity to learn and giving families and communities a greater role within schools. The project is based on the reality of children’s lives and aims to give an equal chance to all children, including Roma.
REACHING EVERY CHILD WITH LIFE-SAVING VACCINES

The Issue
Immunization, one of the most cost-effective public health interventions available today, has made immense strides in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. In 2002, the region was certified polio-free, and the implementation of the polio post-certification strategy has gathered speed. Reported immunization rates are high relative to other parts of the world. New vaccines, such as hepatitis B, are being introduced, and cases of vaccine preventable disease are falling.
Increased financial support, through the Global Alliance of Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI), has made it possible to introduce new safety and quality standards in 11 of the region’s poorest countries. But despite all this progress, some children – those in remote areas, the urban poor, minorities and children in conflict situations – do not receive basic vaccination. They suffer from diseases that could have been prevented by inexpensive vaccines, making immunization a continuing priority for UNICEF in the region.

The Challenges

• **The globalization of disease.** With epidemics spreading faster and further, it is vital to sustain high immunization rates, but this requires large-scale, long-term commitment.

• **Children falling through the net.** Some children from hard-to-reach populations are never immunized – those in remote rural areas, the urban poor, minorities and children in conflict zones.

• **Damage to public trust.** Inaccurate reporting on occasional incidents related to vaccine quality and safety can undermine trust in immunization programmes. Rumours, perpetuated by ill-informed media, can cross borders, putting children at risk in any country.

• **Injection safety.** Vaccination with substandard injection safety in some countries can do more harm than good. Unsafe disposal of used needles and syringes can expose children to a host of health hazards.

• **Child survival.** Low immunization coverage and growing poverty and malnutrition in parts of the region, coupled with cuts in health spending, increase the risk of disease outbreak and child deaths.
UNICEF in Action

UNICEF is a global leader in vaccine supply, reaching 40% of the world’s children. One quarter of UNICEF’s global budget – over $300 million in 2003 – is spent on vaccines and immunization. We devote these resources to immunization because of the devastating consequences of not vaccinating: preventable child deaths; the immense social costs of disease; the re-emergence of infectious diseases that were once under control; and the spread of diseases to countries and continents where they had been eliminated.
In 2003, UNICEF shipped vaccines worth US$3.7 million to 14 countries in the region to protect children against disease. The value of the vaccines ranged from just over US$6,000 in Kazakhstan, to almost US$700,000 in Uzbekistan. We work with national governments, WHO, NGOs, the World Bank, Gates Foundation, and the vaccine industry to tackle challenges in vaccine research, production, supply, immunization programme funding and delivery.

UNICEF advocates for the maintenance of immunization during the reform of cash-strapped health systems. We help governments to develop national immunization plans. We enhance immunization programmes by distributing Vitamin A capsules and iron supplements and promoting breastfeeding during immunization campaigns. And we encourage and support governments in their efforts to assume responsibility for the sustainable financing of their national immunization services.
Introducing new vaccines in 11 countries. Through the GAVI partnership, UNICEF has helped Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan introduce Hepatitis B and Hib vaccines and upgrade their immunization systems. The GAVI partnership is providing support worth more than US$16 million over five years.

Vaccines for the Pankisi Gorge. In April 2004, UNICEF, USAID and UNHCR rushed measles vaccines and a mobile immunization team to the Pankisi Gorge, Georgia to immunize 2,500 Chechen refugee and Georgian children after an outbreak of the killer disease. The Gorge has a reputation for lawlessness that has undermined routine immunization. “We found children who had fallen through the immunization net” said UNICEF Representative in Georgia, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, “and the children who were missing out on immunization were missing out on other basic services, other basic rights. This campaign gave us vital information about the children living in the Gorge that will guide our work to reach all children with all services.”

Building public trust. We work to generate well-informed media coverage of immunization in the region to stimulate public trust. In Georgia, an investigation into a reported adverse reaction to immunization was followed by intensive communication work, including setting up a hot-line service for parents and training sessions to improve the communication skills of immunization workers. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a workshop for journalists gave UNICEF and partners the chance to present facts about immunization and promote the role of the media in public trust. Another highly successful workshop preceded the launch of the mass measles immunization campaign in Turkey in late 2003.
The Issue

All humans need iodine in their diet for proper intellectual development. Iodine can be found in food that is grown or raised on iodine-rich soil. But in areas where the soil lacks iodine – the case in a significant proportion of our region – adding iodine to salt is the answer. It is a safe, easy and effective way to make sure that we get enough iodine. At the end of the 1990s, our region had the world’s lowest levels of iodised salt consumption.
Only 26% of people consumed iodised salt, and around 80% of the babies born each year had no protection against iodine deficiency (ID). Goitre is the most common and visible sign of ID. But far more damaging is the invisible loss of up to 15% of intellectual capacity. This undermines a child’s chances of becoming a productive and creative citizen, and undermines their country’s chances of development.

In a region that needs every citizen to perform at peak capacity if it is to make lasting progress, iodine deficiency is a serious barrier to development. Yet it costs only a few cents per person per year to iodise salt – a small price to pay compared to the cost of lost potential. The only way to ensure that everyone has enough iodine in their diet is universal salt iodisation (USI). UNICEF backs the goal of eliminating ID through USI in the region by 2005.

As a result of advocacy by UNICEF and others, this region has made more progress than any other on iodine deficiency. The percentage of households using iodised salt rose to 48% in 2004. Seven countries have eliminated ID: the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro and Turkmenistan. Five are on track for elimination of ID in 2005: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Lithuania and Romania, plus the UN Administered Province of Kosovo.
The Challenges

- **Lack of information.** Many people do not know the importance of iodine.
- **Myths.** Many people believe that iodised salt will taste different or inferior. Some believe that it is harmful.
- **Concerns on the Russian Federation and Ukraine.** Neither country is likely to eliminate ID by 2005, and these two countries account for 50% of the region’s newborns each year. It is estimated that the Russian Federation will lose productivity worth 44 billion roubles (around 1.3 billion Euro) because of the iodine deficiency of children born in the next five years alone. In Ukraine, only 30% of households consume iodised salt.
- **Lack of political commitment and weak enforcement of legislation.** Legislation is not enough. It is vital to reform and strengthen regulatory bodies to see that laws are carried out.
- **Forging partnerships with salt producers and consumer groups.** Without their full involvement, efforts to tackle ID will not be sustainable.
- **The need for constant maintenance.** Achieving salt iodisation is only half the battle. Sustainability is everything. Once the USI target is reached, it must continue to be reached every day, forever.
UNICEF in Action

UNICEF advocates at the highest level to generate political will for the fight against ID. UNICEF is a key player in the Regional ID elimination strategy. We inform the public, salt producers and decision-makers about the importance of USI, providing information on the national cost of inaction. We advocate for mandatory legislation, enforcement of legislation, and continuous monitoring.

UNICEF Regional Goodwill Ambassador, world champion chess player Anatoly Karpov, takes a deep interest in ID and its impact on intellectual development. He meets with leaders in our region, urging them to support universal salt iodisation, with good results to date in Kazakhstan and a promising outlook in the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

We assess progress, to see how far we have come towards the USI goal, and how far we still have to go. We have worked with the Johns Hopkins University on a review of ID communication activities in nine countries to see if the message is getting through. And in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan we provide iodised salt test kits for schools.
**Tackling ID in Ukraine.** ID is a major issue in Ukraine, where soil lacks iodine and only 30% of people consume iodised salt. In 2002, UNICEF and its partners launched a campaign to stimulate demand for iodised salt. Highlights included a meeting between UNICEF Regional Goodwill Ambassador Anatoly Karpov and the President of Ukraine, resulting in a personal commitment from the President in favour of USI. The campaign also featured a National Opinion Poll on ID awareness and iodised salt consumption and a media contest generating 500 stories on ID. As a result of UNICEF training sessions, school lessons and parents meetings in one oblast, Kharkiv, sales of iodised salt have risen from 5% of salt sales in 2002 to almost 25% today. Meanwhile, Ukraine is still waiting for its decree on salt iodisation.

**Six million tests in one day.** Six million children in Uzbekistan tested their household salt for iodine on 16 December 2003, using kits provided by UNICEF. Children aged 10-17 brought salt from their homes to school and were shown how to use the iodine test kits: put a drop of special fluid on the salt. If the salt contains iodine, the drop turns dark blue. The event provided vital national information on salt iodisation. Teachers monitored how many samples contained iodine and how many did not. The results, collected and collated by the Ministry of Public Education, varied from oblast to oblast: from 33% to Navoi to 88% in Surkhandarya, rising to 97% in the capital, Tashkent. The results showed a national average of 55% -- good progress since 2000 when the average was 19%. With 45% of salt still lacking iodine, Uzbekistan now knows how far it must go to reach USI.
HELPING TO BUILD CIVIL SOCIETY

The influence of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is increasing as they grow in numbers and in strength across the region. UNICEF aims to speed that process by supporting a region-wide network of NGOs that focuses on child rights: the Regional Network for Children (RNC). The RNC is a recognition that NGOs will have more influence if they work together, rather than in isolation.

Created in Sarajevo in 2002, the RNC aims to ensure that children’s NGOs have a seat at the table when crucial policy decisions are being made. By building national NGO networks in each country, the RNC gives NGOs a united voice that can be clearly heard by policy makers, media and others.

The Network is part of the Global Movement for Children, an international alliance of individuals and organisations committed to building a World Fit for Children. It’s first public awareness campaign, called “Leave No Child Out” builds on this vision, promoting societies where diversity is respected; where the rights of every child are upheld; where no child is excluded. The campaign looks at the factors that exclude children from regional progress and calls for protective environments to safeguard every child.
The Governments of the region have pledged to defend all rights for all children. All have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and most have ratified its Optional Protocols on children in armed conflict, and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

In 2000, world leaders adopted the Millennium Development Goals to tackle the key challenges to human development. In 2001, government delegations at the 1st Intergovernmental Conference on Children in Europe and Central Asia adopted the Berlin Declaration, pledging to address the obstacles to the fulfilment of child rights. In May 2002, the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children, attended by governments, pledged to build a World Fit for Children. And in May 2004, the governments of Europe and Central Asia met in Sarajevo for the 2nd Intergovernmental Conference on Building a Europe and Central Asia Fit for Children.

But child rights are not only a matter for governments. They are everybody’s business. In 2001, civil society organisations met in Bucharest, Romania, and pledged to build a Region Fit for Children – a region where no child is left out. Young people met in Budapest and drafted the Budapest Open Letter to governments, setting out their vision of a region fit for children. Child rights are OUR business and we demonstrate that every day, in 20 countries across the region.
UNICEF programs for children are a contribution to the Millennium Development Goals:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development
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