



MAYORS FOR CHILDREN

'Going local' to accelerate results for the most vulnerable children and youth



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Report of the 'Mayors for Children' meeting
Athens, Greece, 11-12 November 2019

Building a better life for children and young people means 'going local', starting with local governments that put the most vulnerable children front and centre.

This is the level of government that delivers the services that children need to survive and thrive, from health and education to the creation of child-friendly urban environments. It is local governments that are best placed to listen, to understand and respond to the voices of those they serve, including children.

In November 2019, around 40 representatives of urban local governments from 18 countries across Europe

and Central Asia Region took part in the "Mayors for Children" meeting, hosted by the City of Athens, Greece. At the first-ever meeting of Mayors in the region that focused especially on programming results for the most excluded children and young people, participants learned more about the critical importance of urban local governments' targeted programming for the youngest residents in their communities, particularly the most vulnerable.



Photo caption: All the participants of the Mayors for Children Meeting standing on the 1st floor of the townhall in Athens, Greece.
Photo credit: UNICEF/Greece2019/Prokopis

The Athens meeting had three main achievements:

- **the launch of a new network of urban local governments** – a group of cities and towns that will work with UNICEF to help each other improve the lives of their children and young people
- **the signing of the Athens Pledge** by all participants, confirming their commitment to children and young people (see page 18 declaration)

- **The showcasing of success stories** from cities and towns that have taken a lead for children and young people; the challenges they have faced, the partnerships they have used, and the benefits their communities are now starting to enjoy.

This report presents the rationale for 'going local', as well as six of the success stories shared with participants at the Athens meeting (see pages 7 to 17).

Why does 'going local' matter?

Because local programming support for children and young people matters for cities and towns.

Children and young people are not simply 'the future'. They are the present and need support today, where they are right now, in their own communities. This matters, in particular, for communities with ageing populations, which need to hang on to the energy, enthusiasm and innovation of their young people. This means that young people must feel valued, feel at home, and want to stay.

Because in a Region of middle- and high-income countries, it is possible to ensure that every child is thriving, learning, protected and participating and that the Sustainable Development Goals are achieved. But, this will only be possible if the most vulnerable children and youth have access to services and opportunities to have their voices heard at the local level.

This includes improving newborn survival, increasing investments in early childhood development and strengthening immunization systems to ensure children are **SURVIVING** and **THRIVING**. Social protection systems and social service workforces need to be strengthened to ensure children are **PROTECTED** from being separated from their families. Every child must be **LEARNING** through inclusive and quality education, including the most vulnerable. And every young person, families and communities must have meaningful opportunities to **PARTICIPATE** and engage in local decision making.

Because local support for children and young people matters for the Europe and Central Asia region

The UNICEF Europe and Central Asia region spans 21 countries and territories, from Croatia to Kazakhstan, and from Belarus to Turkey. This is a region that has experienced tremendous change since the collapse of the Soviet Union three decades ago. Since 1989, its countries and territories have seen the rapid transformation of their economies, their social structures, societies, infrastructure and their borders.

Most of the region's economies have grown in recent years, but 2019 saw declines in real economic growth – some of them small, but some significant. The fact is, however, that not everyone has benefited equally from the economic growth seen in the best years. Inequalities are deepening and, in many places, the most vulnerable citizens – including children and young people – often find themselves excluded from the progress experienced by others.

The region needs generations of young people who are healthy, well-educated, productive and innovative, and who are equipped to take on the many challenges facing a region still going through changes. And the nurture of these generations begins at local level.



Photo credit: UNICEF/Greece2019/Prokopis
Photo caption: Five panelists from Romania, Belarus, Kosovo, Georgia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (left to right) are presenting their cases on the session "Cities' work to strengthen child health and wellbeing" at the Mayors for Children meeting held in the NJV Athens Plaza Hotel. November, 2019, Athens, Greece.

Because local governments face common challenges that need common solutions

Urban local governments worldwide – and particularly in the Europe and Central Asia region – face common challenges, and are looking for answers to common questions.

- How can they make the planning and budgeting processes more responsive to children and youth?
- How can they support large numbers of **children on the move** and **left behind by migration**?
- How can they finance necessary services while having **limited capacity to generate revenue**?
- How can they adapt to ongoing national processes of **decentralization**?
- How can they fulfil their **decentralized responsibilities for the delivery of a wide range of vital services**, given that **central funding is often unclear, irregular and insufficient**?

- How can local governments reach everyone who is eligible for support, given their **lack of funds**?
- How can they obtain **enough of the right kind of disaggregated data** on children and young people and their needs?
- How can they reach **marginalized people who live in the most difficult situations** (such as migrants, the poorest people, or Roma communities) with all the help to which they are entitled?
- How can they ensure better community-based care for large numbers of **children who are still growing up in institutions**?
- How can they prepare for, and prevent, **new and emerging threats** to child health (such as the double threat of obesity and undernutrition)?
- How can they stem the **emigration of so many young, productive people**, who are leaving behind them rapidly ageing populations?



Photo caption: Members of Adolescents Parliament of Novopolotsk participate in the discussion.

Photo credits: UNICEF/Belarus/M.Videvich

Why have a network of Mayors for Children?

This new network aims to help cities and towns address the most Region's pressing issues for children and youth by offering inspiration and mutual support. Sharing experiences with each other, members will be able to draw on specific advice on how best to implement initiatives that have had success, what problems to expect, and where and how to get support.

This targeted approach connects mayors from cities

with strong child-focused programming with mayors from cities and towns where performance indicators in terms of access to essential services for the most vulnerable are low and where child rights deprivations are high. Such programming partnership is intended to promote collaboration and horizontal exchange and additional support to local governments with limited capacity to accelerate results for children and youth.

Why does UNICEF want to 'go local' by partnering with local governments?

UNICEF's offices in the Europe and Central Asia Region already have decades-long partnerships with central governments. They are now reaching out to local governments as the crucial last mile in ensuring that cities are fit for children.

UNICEF specializes in systems strengthening and the development of national and regional strategies, and is ready to put that expertise to good use at local level. UNICEF already works closely with some governments on local development planning, budgeting and coordination and could expand this to include, for example, technical support to local governments on funding applications or data management.

This growing focus on local government reflects the global push to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- UNICEF and its partners are all committed to achieving the SDGs. In all, 35 of the 169 SDG targets can *only* be achieved through the efforts of local actors. SDG 11, for example, demands urban environments that are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable which means that they *must* be fit for children.
 - Meeting the SDGs means that UNICEF itself must 'go local': most of the sectors where UNICEF has expertise and a mandate for action – child protection, education, social protection, health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) are all delivered at local level.
 - The SDGs cannot be achieved through 'top down' interventions alone: they require unprecedented levels of participation across entire societies, including the active participation of children and young people. UNICEF already has a strong track
- **Data:** Collecting and using more **disaggregated data and evidence** on the most vulnerable and marginalized children, and the neighbourhoods in which they live, to better inform local policies and action.
 - **Inclusive local services: removing barriers** that deny vulnerable children and young people the chance to access local services and **monitoring and overseeing the provision of these services** for children, young people and their families, with a focus on those who are the most marginalized and vulnerable.
 - **Planning and budgeting:** developing **strategic and innovative local plans and budgets** to enhance the wellbeing of children, young people and their families.
 - **Participation and community engagement:** building and strengthening the participation of local communities – particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable people – in decision-making, and in the development and implementation of policies. This includes the **meaningful participation of children, young people and their families** in local decision-making.

record in promoting and supporting community engagement and the participation of young citizens in local decisions across the Europe and Central Asia region.

UNICEF is well-placed to help local governments can prioritize four key areas to position children, young people and their families at the very heart of local agendas.

Cities and towns showcase their success stories

Many success stories were shared at the Athens meeting. This section outlines just six that highlight not only good practices in improving the lives of children and young people, but also some common challenges.

They capture five key strategies for children that all relate to system strengthening at local level:

1. strengthening local financing, and planning local services for children and families
2. strengthening local education
3. strengthening local child protection
4. strengthening local child health (including early childhood development and improving the environment)
5. strengthening participation, to ensure that young people can participate in local decision-making processes in a meaningful way.



Strengthening local financing and planning

GEORGIA: municipal sharing for the better planning and financing of services for children

With local governments at the forefront of service provision for children, they must find their own practical ways to comply with decentralization and often rapid changes in regulations. At the same time, however, their resources are often very limited. As a result, municipal employees often feel over-stretched, or left alone to tackle an apparently insurmountable workload. In February 2018, UNICEF Georgia proposed a way to address this kind of isolation.

All 66 local governments in the country were invited to a national meeting on how best to implement policies for children. All relevant national ministries were also invited, to reinforce the need for planning that spans all sectors.

The meeting informed local governments about new guidelines and regulations to improve children’s lives, and provided specific technical trainings to the employees who would put them into practice. In particular, social work professionals were trained on new referral mechanisms for cases of possible violence against children.

Municipal staff members were also invited to share their expertise and best practices on social policing and

budgeting. Representatives from Kutaisi, for example, showcased the municipality’s campaign to raise funds and develop private partnership to co-fund programmes for children. Participants also discussed the potential for future cooperation and collaboration across local governments and were invited to pose practical questions to the relevant Ministries.

This meeting was so successful that it was followed by two others in 2018, along similar lines.

The Georgia example tells us that local governments benefit from sharing experiences on financing and planning, which are crucial first steps for the implementation of social policies for children. UNICEF aims to help local governments improve their capacities to plan and allocate resources, and monitor the impact of their social programmes, with the full participation of local communities. UNICEF also supports coordination and cooperation across all the difference levels of government, from national to regional to local, and across all sectors that are crucial for child wellbeing.



Photo caption: The doctor equipped with tablet is visiting a child to monitor his growth and development. The child growth and development monitoring system for children aged 0-6 was launched in Adjara as a result of cooperation between UNICEF and the Ministry of Health and Social Issues of Adjara. March 2019, Batumi, Georgia. Photo credit: UNICEF/GEO-2019/Tsetskhladze

Strengthening local protection

ROMANIA: identifying and supporting vulnerable families in Bacău

Bacău is one of the poorest counties of Romania, and many of its 600,000 people need social services and assistance. In most cases, children who need social services face many different types of deprivation: poverty, violence, early pregnancy, preventable diseases, school drop-out – and a lack of access to cash benefits.

Their situation raises many questions. How to make the best use of the limited resources available? How to make sure that the most socially vulnerable households with children ('the invisibles') are properly identified? And how to ensure a tailored approach that will really help them?

Bacău County is applying potential answers to these pressing questions across 38 local governments, with UNICEF support. The solution lies in a proactive, preventive approach that integrates services very closely together, and that is built around a Minimum Package of Services (MPS). One key component in the initiative is the Aurora software developed by UNICEF and the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, in the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, which covers social assistance, education and health.

Taking a comprehensive look at the many challenges faced by the most vulnerable children, their families and their communities allows local services to step in at an early stage to prevent emerging problems, as well as address them.

The initiative is based on the presence of at least one social worker, one community nurse and one school counsellor in every single community. In the poorest communities, including those with many Roma citizens, it may also include also a school and/or Roma health mediator.

These frontline workers make regular visits to households and map out their situation and their problems. Thanks to the Aurora software, there is no need for all three professionals to go to every household, every time. Answers to standardized questions that are asked during each household visit are recorded on mobile phones or tablets, enabling the whole team to identify and support the most vulnerable households.

Aurora provides four tools in one package:

- a **data-collection tool** that allows outreach workers (any member of the community team) to record all the data they collect in the field
- a **tool to quickly identify the most vulnerable households** and connect them to the basic minimum services they need
- a **monitoring tool** that records interventions and their results
- a **tool that analyses trends**, as well as the geographical distribution of poverty and other challenges for children.

Once they are back at base, service providers do not need to spend their limited time writing reports or filling out lengthy referral forms. Aurora can inform the three services immediately about the interventions that are required from each of them. Team members can then take appropriate action – from providing families with ID documents and helping them to apply for monetary support, ensuring that their children are vaccinated and in school and record it all in Aurora. Each operator can see at a glance how the case is progressing, and all the actions taken by their colleagues. And Aurora's built-in GPS system makes it simple to find the household each time.

Through the municipal website, heads of services, local governments and citizens can find live data in an aggregated and anonymous form. The data include the numbers of field visits, the vulnerabilities identified, and the services provided. The vulnerability profile of each household factors in issues such as poor housing conditions, whether one or both parents live away from the home (often because they are working abroad), and any signs that children may be at risk of violence, abuse and neglect.

One outstanding result was a massive fall in the percentage of children living in a household affected by income poverty within the first nine months of the intervention: from 17 per cent to 0.4 per cent. This was an exceptional result for an initiative that did not provide cash transfers, and confirms the impact of effective referrals and working with beneficiaries in person to make sure they receive the benefits to which they are entitled.

Following the excellent results in Bacău, the challenge now is to scale up this initiative across Romania.



Photo credit: UNICEF/Romania/R. Sandovici

Photo caption: Mariana Patrici, a social assistant in the village of Motoseni, Bacău county, in eastern Romania, uses the Aurora software and online platform to help vulnerable children and their families, by providing a Minimum Package of Services (MPS).

The Romania example tells us that a successful approach is one that:

- strengthens collaboration and accountability across different local government departments
- is proactive, with field visits to identify 'the invisibles'
- is comprehensive and people-centred, looking not only at individual children, but also at the family and community environment around them
- delivers a minimum package of interventions
- coordinates the work of different agencies while making it easy to monitor individual cases
- eliminates most of the paper-work, allowing social workers to concentrate on real-life tasks
- gives policy makers and citizens live access to aggregated data on the vulnerabilities of households and interventions to support them.

Strengthening local health

ALBANIA: Joint preventive interventions for mother and child health in Durres and Shijak

The parents¹ of four-year-old Albina have come to the Durres municipal Health Care Centre (HCC) to thank Mr. Meta, the Director. Only a couple of months ago, Albina was so skinny, and she was always sick. But then a nurse from the Centre visited the family to let them know that Albina had missed a vaccination. From that moment, everything changed. The nurse noticed that the girl was underweight and had some other worrying symptoms. She referred Albina to the local social worker and to the hospital, where she received all the care she needed.

Mr. Meta is delighted. The process put in place by his staff had done its job, thanks to improvements in preventive services for the health of mothers and children.

Putting these improvements into practice had not been so easy. But now, he tells visitors from UNICEF, “finally the day has come when you don’t have to worry whether or not you know someone personally at the municipality to get your problems solved. With the new forms, delivered via the proper channels, the solutions to problems are easier and faster.”

Revised referral forms, protocols and regulations were adopted at the national level in November 2015. Then UNICEF and the Ministry of Health made a proposal to the cities of Durres and Shijak: given their large Roma communities, and the success of previous collaborations, would they be the first to develop all the steps necessary to put the revised approaches into practice at local level? The answer was yes, and a programme was launched involving the HCC, the

Regional Health Centre of the Ministry of Health (RHC) and other stakeholders.

Vital support was provided by a local civil society organisation that coordinated and led implementation alongside the RHC. Activities included the introduction of universal home visits – like the one that brought a nurse to Albina’s house – and the use of the child growth charts that identified her problem. UNICEF supported the successful introduction, testing and implementation of the new cooperation mechanisms.

This intervention, which was completed in December 2016, proved very successful in Durres and Shijak in improving the professional capacities of healthcare and other frontline workers. It also increased accountability and strengthened enforcement mechanisms for the MCH regulatory framework, as well as intersectoral cooperation mechanisms. As a result, has been rolled out in four other regions (Tirana, Vlora, Korca and Elbasan) since January 2019.

The Albania example tells us that it is possible to produce a sound and fully revised regulatory framework for preventive mother and child health care.

In addition, this legal framework can be supported by revisions to the tools for data collection and exchange. The example also confirms the value of having third parties – in this case UNICEF and civil society organizations – initiate intersectoral cooperation at local level.

¹ This example has been compiled from a number of real-life stories.



Photo caption: Mother and child visits health center in Durres.
Photo credit: UNICEF/Albania/ G. Pirozzi

Strengthening local education

CROATIA: Improving the attendance of Roma children in pre-school education in Slavonski Brod

The city of Slavonski Brod in Croatia is home to a Roma community of more than 1,000 people, many of whom face severe disadvantages, including limited participation in pre-primary education (PPE). In the school year 2016-17, only around 10 per cent of the city's Roma children completed PPE, even though, under Croatian law, local governments must ensure that all children attend a full year of PPE before they start primary school.

The city's Mayor Mirko Duspara and his team joined forces with the director of the kindergarten Zorana Butorac and the director of primary school Irena Čuguća Čerić, seeing low PPE attendance rates not just as a problem, but also as an opportunity. They knew that if Roma children attended PPE they would stay longer in education, improve their language skills and have better life chances, and that this would, in turn, help to break the cycle of exclusion affecting Roma communities. But how to increase PPE attendance?

The city, the kindergarten and school were joined by UNICEF and the Public Open University "Step by Step" to design a comprehensive intervention for the 2017/2018 school year. This aimed to address cultural barriers to PPE (within Roma as well as non-Roma populations) as well as practical problems, such as transport and training.

In 2017, the first activity engaged teachers in training to change attitudes about diversity. Many teachers said that this helped them to understand and value educational inclusion in a completely different way. This was vital, as many people in the area have deeply entrenched views that make it harder for marginalized children to get the right support at school. For the first time, kindergarten and school teachers visited a Roma settlement to talk to parents and encourage them to attend PPE.

This was followed by:

- training for all kindergarten teachers on the child-centred approach and how to teach Croatian as a secondary language
- the engagement of two Roma-community coordinators to advise families on supportive parenting

- logistical support that went beyond the transport and hot meals required by law to the refurbishment of PPE premises, which created a new setting that was more suitable for smaller children and informal learning
- the hiring of a Roma coordinator to ensure a continuous communication between parents and the kindergarten and to oversee the whole project.

Within the space of one year, this initiative helped to ensure that around 50 children attended PPE regularly, and that not one child dropped out. This meant that every child who should be in PPE in the catchment area did, in fact, attend.

The kindergarten also secured support from the European Social Fund to cover transport, meals and additional teachers for an additional school year (2018/2019). More recently, the City of Slavonski Brod continued to provide financing to cover the 2019/2020 school year from the City budget, and plans are underway to continue financing for the foreseeable future.

UNICEF has developed a booklet on model programmes for educational inclusion, drawing on this and other examples, which has been distributed to all Local Governmental Units (cities and local governments) across Croatia: [<https://www.unicef.org/croatia/izvjesca/kako-su-dva-grad-rasla-sa-svojim-najmla%C4%91ima>]. This is also available in English [<https://www.unicef.org/croatia/en/publications>].

The Croatia example tells us that the most vulnerable children in each country often belong to ethnic minorities and do not enjoy equitable access to vital services. These children often live in areas where there are few kindergartens and preschools. Left unaddressed, this fuels an inter-generational cycle of poverty and inequity.

The PPE initiative in Croatia represents, therefore, a promising way to help the most vulnerable and excluded children in a country. It shows that cultural sensitization helps teachers to better understand the situation of their students, and is a way to tackle discrimination and exclusion in cities and towns.



Photo caption: Boy of the Roma national minority playing in a pre-primary education programme in the City of Slavonski Brod in Croatia. Photo credits: UNICEF/Croatia/M. Ilej



Photo caption: A group of pre-primary age children posing with their teacher in a kindergarten in the City of Sisak in Croatia. Photo credits: UNICEF/Croatia/M. Ilej

Strengthening local participation

BELARUS: Child- and Adolescent-Friendly City Platform: Novopolotsk, Belarus

“What it is like to grow up in your city?”

In 2011, the city of Novopolotsk, Belarus, decided to find out what its younger citizens thought about growing up in the city and learn about their views for improving their own lives. Almost a decade later, the impact of that decision can be seen in cities across Belarus that aim to become truly fit for children.

The city applied to join the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative promoted by UNICEF and appointed a Local Coordination Council (LCC), headed by the Deputy Mayor, which listened to parents, representatives of civil society associations and, most importantly, to children. After hearing their views, the LCC drafted an Action Plan to make the city friendlier for children and adolescents.

The **Children and Youth Parliament** played a vital role in this Action Plan. Its 21 members, from 14 to 18 years old, were elected by their schools and colleges, and included two adolescents with disabilities, who contributed a special point of view on children’s needs.

Several of the proposals made by the Children and Youth Parliament were included in the Action Plan, and were carried out with local government budget funds.

The young people explained, for example, that they had to wake up very early to catch ordinary buses to school during the rush hour, which were already packed with adults; and then they had to hang around at school because they arrived too early. As a result, the city of Novopolotsk established a dedicated bus line, called ‘Pupil’, with a timetable that would take children to school and back at the right times. The city also created new cycle lanes, and bicycle racks were put close to schools. A new and safe (fenced) playground for children was created.

The members of the Children and Youth Parliament have continued their monitoring activities, pointing out that even new buildings are not fully fit for people with disabilities. Inclusion now ranks high on the city’s agenda: with city buses now accessible for persons with disabilities and a wheelchair lift installed in Novopolotsk’s School No 8. The adaptation of public spaces for people with disabilities means that they are no longer ‘invisible’. Novopolotsk’s Deputy Mayor, Mr.

Odinochkin, noted that “every year on City Day on June 8, a lot of people in wheelchairs turned up. This is a sign that they are not embarrassed about their disability any more, and that they belong.

As a result of such activities, in June, 2013, Novopolotsk became the first city in Belarus to be awarded the title ‘Child Friendly City’. To date, 443 other cities from all regions across Belarus, accounting for around 65 per cent of the children in the country, have applied for this title. In all, 25 have been declared Child Friendly – a title that must be renewed every three years.

In 2019, a study followed up on the views of Novopolotsk’s teens, which debunked the myth that young people are only interested in their smartphones and their online appearance. Many dedicate their free time to their city and contribute to its growth, development and its vision of its future. “It is absolutely incredible when adults listen to you and when you are treated like an equal,” said Alina Kukhleuskaya, a 16-year-old member of the Youth Parliament. “When you realise that you may influence your city’s future, it is exciting and scary in equal measure.”

Her colleague Pavel Flanchev, 17, echoed this view: “if you know that your parents listen to what you have to say, and if the city governments listen to you, you get the feeling that you can do anything.”

Building on initiatives like those in Novopolotsk, and the key role played by its Children and Adolescent Parliament, the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative is now evolving into a Child-and Adolescent-Friendly City Platform (CAFPC). Cities have to ensure that their policies are aligned with a concrete Action Plan and provide designated budget lines. Representatives of local Youth Parliaments will also be included in the National Coordination Council.

Working with adolescents and responding to their needs may seem challenging but is incredibly rewarding. “After a hard day’s work, when I talk to those young people I feel really energized, you get so many positive emotions from them. Seeing young people leading the change is really powerful,” says Mr. Odinochkin. “When we decided to join the Initiative in 2011, we did not know we were embarking on such a wonderful journey.”

The Belarus example tells us that children and young people can influence the way their city is shaped.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) is all about making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, and highlights the value of local solutions and a

bottom-up approach. The story of Novopolotsk shows how important cities are for sustainable development and how the SDGs can and should be localized.

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative also demonstrates UNICEF’s global commitment to engaging communities and young people in local decision-making.



Photo caption: Meeting of Adolescents Parliament of Novopolotsk in the Regional Center on Youth Empowerment “Stupeni”.
Photo credits: UNICEF/Belarus/M.Videvich.

KYRGYZSTAN: Empowering young people to propose and implement solutions: Kyrgyzstan

The Youth and Children Friendly Local Government (YCFLG) initiative was launched by UNICEF Kyrgyzstan in 2017. It aims to fill gaps in services for children and young people, through their participation in the planning and delivery of these services.

Local governments are encouraged to ask for – and listen to – the opinions of children and young people when making decisions on issues that matter to them. A YCFLG working group has been established in each municipality to ensure that the issues of concern for children and youth are included in local planning priorities. These coordination mechanisms bring together a whole range of local government sectors and institutions.

In the programme's 'two-way street' approach, children and young people develop their priority plans, which reflect their own understanding and vision of a child-friendly city or community. At the same time, local governments go through the same process. Then the two parties come together to develop a joint action plan.

UNICEF has supported this process by providing training for local governments and school councils on participatory planning with children and youth, as well as training on evidence-based planning and child-and youth-focused budgeting for local government representatives.

The UPSHIFT approach was used to empower children and youth to drive social change. This approach

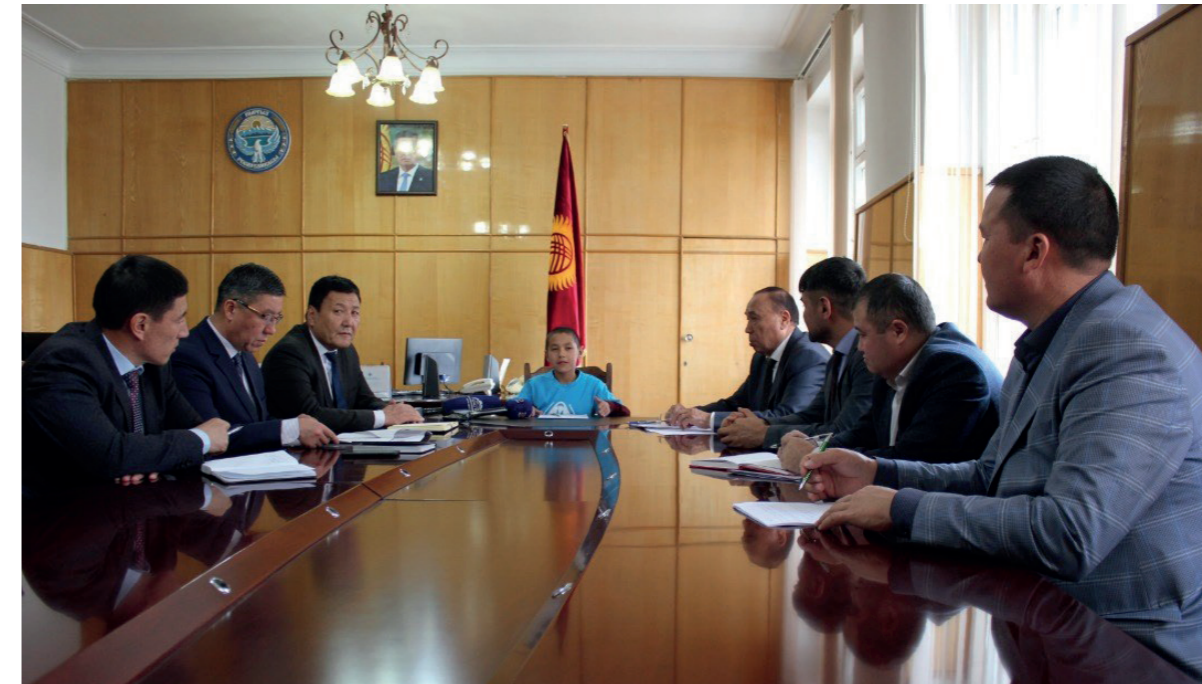
was first developed by the UNICEF Kosovo Innovation Lab in 2014 and has been spreading across the world ever since. Professional mentors guide children and youth through all phases of evidence-based policy making, starting with the identification and analysis of the most urgent challenges affecting their local communities. They then design and test solutions to these challenges. Creative thinking and entrepreneurial approach are encouraged, together with effective communication skills, which are essential to gain the buy-in they will need if they are to turn their proposals into concrete action.

Building on this initiative, in 2019, the Government of Kyrgyzstan launched a nationwide contest among 18 cities for the title of best youth and child friendly city.

The Kyrgyzstan example tells us that the participation of children and young people goes beyond their involvement in the implementation of initiatives: they should also be involved in their planning.

It demonstrates that it is practical to involve children and young people in both planning and implementing initiatives, even where budgets are limited.

UNICEF Kyrgyzstan is well-placed to identify examples of good practice in child and youth participation and share them across the Europe and Central Asia Region and worldwide.



All heads of departments of the office of the Plenipotentiary Representative of the government in the Osh region listened to Ruslan's instructions and promised to fulfill. At the end of the meeting, Ruslan shared his wishes: "I want Kyrgyzstan to move forward, and people did not get sick. For UNICEF to continue to support the country and the local authorities work well." November 2019. Photo credit: UNICEF/Kyrgyzstan 2019/Bektur Zhenibekov



Photo caption: Workshops of social projects are a series of practical workshops and field studies where during the week of the team of young people from Osh discussed, analyzed and identified solutions on a wide range of issues, including access to school education, violence, road safety and much more. During practical exercises, young people created and demonstrated prototypes or visual models of solutions. The most creative solutions of social change received funding for implementation. Photo by : UNICEF/Kyrgyzstan 2019

Declaration “Making our cities fit for children” signed in Athens, 12 November 2019 by Mayors and city leaders from 23 cities

As Mayors and city leaders from the Europe and Central Asia Region, we have gathered here in Athens, Greece, to share experiences and explore solutions to the challenges facing children and young people. Our meeting is happening when the world marks the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In November 1989, world leaders made a promise to uphold and protect the rights of every child when they adopted the Convention – still the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history – and we promise renewed support for its implementation.

Children’s lives are shaped by decisions taken at local level, with local governments playing a key role in promoting, protecting and ensuring their rights to access services, to be protected from shocks and stresses, and to participate in decisions that affect them. Local governments translate national policies for children into action and solutions across communities that can transform lives. The best are those that embrace innovation, and support the poorest and most vulnerable children, adolescents and their families.

Cities and towns that are fit for children are vital for the realization of both the Convention and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We recognize that the Convention and the SDGs are interlinked, and that neither can be realized until both are implemented in full.

We support the development of cities fit for children

We, Mayors from Europe and Central Asia, support the development of sustainable cities that are fit for children, and recognize that such cities are crucial for the implementation of the Convention and the SDGs. This will require the following:

- More disaggregated data and evidence on the most vulnerable and marginalized children, and the neighbourhoods in which they live, to better inform local policies and action.

- Strategies to remove the barriers to vulnerable children and young people accessing local services.
- The development of tools and capacities, and the mobilization of resources to engage with all local actors and foster effective solutions to local problems.
- Strategic and innovative local plans and budgets to advance the wellbeing of children, young people and their families.
- The monitoring and oversight of local service provision for children, young people and their families.
- The full participation of children and young people in decision-making to ensure that they are at the very heart of local agendas.

We recognize that cities fit for children:

- Demonstrate concrete, sustainable and measurable results for children and young people;
- Advance meaningful and inclusive participation of children and young people;
- Eliminate discrimination against children and young people in policies and actions.

A call for partnership

We are ready to support the development of cities and communities that are truly child-friendly. We call on all stakeholders that have an impact on the lives of children and young people to respect and support their rights and well-being. We stand ready to work with UNICEF and other partners – including children and young people themselves – to make every city fit for its youngest residents.

12 November 2019, Athens, Greece



Photo credit: UNICEF/Greece 2019/Prokopis

Photo caption: The Deputy Mayors is signing the pledge of the Mayors for Children Meeting in Athens, Greece



Photo credit: UNICEF/Greece 2019/Prokopis

Photo caption: The signed pledge by Mayors and Local Representatives of the Mayors for Children Meeting in Athens, Greece

Participant list				
#	First Name	Last Name	Office	Position
7	Afshan	Khan	ECARO ²	Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia; Special Co-ordinator for the Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe
1	Philippe	Cori	ECARO	Deputy Director of the Re-gional Office
2	Nina	Ferencic	ECARO	Senior Regional Adviser on Adolescent Health, Develop-ment and Participation and on HIV/AIDS, Unicef Regional Of-ice for Europe and Central Asia
3	Basil	Rodriques	ECARO	Regional Adviser Health Sys-tems & Policy
4	Pamela	Dale	ECARO	Regional Adviser Social Policy
5	Parmosivea	Soobrayan	ECARO	Regional Adviser Education
6	Aaron	Greenberg	ECARO	Regional Advisor Child Protec-tion
7	Afshan	Khan	ECARO	Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia; Special Co-ordinator for the Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe
8	Mario	Mosquera	ECARO	Regional Adviser Communica-tion for Development (Social Change)
9	Ekaterina	Zimianina	ECARO	Communication Associate
10	Sajani	Patel	ECARO	Communication for Social Change Officer
11	Stephen	Powell	ECARO	Report writing consultant
12	Lucio Va-lerio	Sarandrea	Kyrgyzstan CO ³	UNICEF Kyrgyzstan, Chief Child Protection
13	Mamyrzhan	Rakhimov (Mr)	Kyrgyzstan	Mayor of Batken town
14	Ainura	Dzhunushalieva (Ms)	Kyrgyzstan	Programme Coordinator at Development Policy Institute, Kyrgyzstan
15	Hrvoje	Andric	Croatia	Deputy Mayor of the City of Slavonski Brod, Croatia
16	Djurdjica	Ivkovic (Ms)	Croatia	UNICEF ECD Specialist
18	Ardian	Gjini	Kosovo*	Mayor of Gjakova
19	Lutfi	Haziri	Kosovo	Mayor of Gjilan
20	Rozafa	Ukimeraj	Kosovo	General Secretary of the Min-istry of Local Government Administration

² UNICEF's Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO)

³ UNICEF Country Office (CO)

* All references to Kosovo should be understood in reference to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

Participant list				
#	First Name	Last Name	Office	Position
21	Dren	Rexha	Kosovo Pro-gramme	UNICEF Social Policy Specialist
22	Irina	Kulenovic	Bosnia and Herze-govina CO	UNICEF Social Policy Officer
23	Milenko	Dakovic	Bosnia and Herze-govin	Mayor of Prijedor
24	Tihomir	Kvesic	Bosnia and Herze-govin	Chairman of the City Council, Ljubuski, Bosnia and Herze-govina
25	Rajka	Zdjelar	Bosnia and Herze-govin	the Chair of Social Protection and Inclusion (SPI) Commis-sion in Prijedor, Bosnia and Herzegovina
26	Ervin	Demo	Albania	Mayor of Berat
27	Meme	Xhaferraj	Albania	General Director of the Social Care Services Directory- Mu-nicipality of Durres
28	Anisa	Ruseti	Albania	Deputy Mayor of Tirana
29	Maya	Kurtsikidze	Georgia CO	Communication Officer
30	Nino	Tvaltvadze	Georgia	Deputy Mayor of Kutaisi Mu-nicipality, Georgia
31	Lela	Surmanidze	Georgia	Vice Mayor of the city of Ba-tumi, Georgia
32	Nino	Nizharadze	Georgia	Deputy Minister of Health of Adjara Autonomus Republic, Georgia
33	Carmen Georgeta	Fifirig	Romania	Head of Service, Municipal Directorate of Social Assis-tance, Bacau, Romania
34	Dilek	Karagöz Küpeli	Turkey CO	UNICEF Social Policy
35	Görkem	Güner	Turkey CO	UNICEF Social Policy
36	Murat	Kodaz	Turkey	Foreign Relations Depart-ment, Union of Municipalities of Turkey
37	Mehmet	Berk	Turkey	Deputy Mayor of Gaziantep Municipality, Turkey
38	Ümit Çağlayan	Arslan	Turkey	Translator, Turkey
39	Desislava	Encheva-Ivanova	Bulgaria CO	UNICEF Local Services Officer
40	Maria	Aleksandrova	Bulgaria	Young person with disabilities

Participant list				
#	First Name	Last Name	Office	Position
41	Zornica	Bosilkova	Bulgaria	Maria's mother
42	Tihomir	Antonov	Bulgaria	Deputy Mayor, Montana Mu-nicipality
43	Rositsa	Dimitrova	Bulgaria	Director of "Social Activities and Healthcare" Directorate
44	Tsveta	Genkova-Petrova	Bulgaria	Chairperson of "Association for Development of Active Com-munity"
45	Armenuhi	Hovakimyan	Armenia CO	UNICEF Social Protection Of-ficer
46	Lusine	Hovhannisyan	Armenia	Deputy Head of Social Assis-tance Department, Yerevan City/municipality
47	Jemma	Harutyunyan	Armenia	Head of Amasia community
48	Hrachya	Sargsyan	Armenia	First Deputy Mayor of Yerevan municipality
49	Ayna	Mollazade	Azerbaijan CO	UNICEF Communication and Partnership Officer
50	Aleksandar	Lazovski	North Macedonia CO	UNICEF North Macedonia So-cial Protection Specialist
51	Stefan	Begoev	North Macedonia	Mayor of Karposh Municipality
52	Ace	Kocevski	North Macedonia	Mayor of Veles
53	Rania	Elessawi	UNICEF NYHQs	Communication for Develop-ment Specialist, NYHQ
54	Alexandr	Petrov	Moldova CO	UNICEF Moldova, Youth and Adolescent Officer
55	Tatiana	Badan	Moldova	President of the Association of Mayors
56	Nicolae	Dandis	Moldova	Mayor of Cahul
57	Igor	Golubovic	Montenegro	Mayor of Pljevlja, Montenegro
58	Milosav Bata	Bulatovic	Montenegro	Mayor of Kolasin
59	Artur	Ayvazov	Ukraine CO	Chief Social Policy
60	Liliya	Lyubomudrova	Ukraine CO	Adolescent development of-ficer, UNICEF Ukraine

Participant list				
#	First Name	Last Name	Office	Position
61	Oleksandr	Slobozhan	Ukraine	Executive Director of the As-sociation of Ukrainian Cities
62	Serhii	Moruhov	Ukraine	Mayor of Vinnytsia
63	Thomas	George	NYHQs	Senior AdviserOff of Director-Prog Div, UNICEF NYHQ
64	Yaroslav	Kvitkov	Uzbekistan	Representative from National Human Rights Center
65	Odiljon	Tadjiev	Uzbekistan	Deputy Mayor, Tashkent re-gion
66	Ana	Prodanovic	Serbia CO	Child Rights Monitoring Spe-cialist
67	Sava	Kostic	Serbia	Manager of the Department for non-commercial activities, town of Pirot, Serbia
68	Victoria	Lozuyk	Belarus CO	HIV/AIDS Specialist, UNICEF Belarus
69	Rashed Mus-tafa	Sarwar	Belarus CO	UNICEF Representative
70	Dmitri	Lazar	Belarus	Head of the Mother and Child Department of the Minsk Ob-last Health Committee, Bela-rus
71	Iryna	Petrusevich	Belarus	Deputy Mayor of Kostuko-vichy, Belarus
72	Uladzimir	Bialevich	Belarus	Head of Council of Deputies of Vitebsk city
73	Giuseppe	Mattina	Italy	Vice Mayor of Social Affairs of Palermo, Italy
74	Lucio	Melandri	Greece CO	Country Coordinator, Greece
75	Olga	Siokou-Siova	Greece CO	Communication Specialist, Greece
76	Alexandro	Makrygiannis	Greece CO	Consultant
77	Aikaterini	Olympiou	Greece CO	Administrative Associate, Greece
78	Kostas	Bakoyannis	Greece	Mayor of Athens
79	Charis	Aidonopoulos	Greece	Deputy Mayor Social Policy, Municipality of Thessaloniki
80	Vasiliki	Kapsali	Greece	Director Social Service, REACT, Municipality of Thessaloniki
81	Dimitra Ines	Angeli-Lykoudi	Greece	Executive Counselor on Child and Family Issues, City of Ath-ens
82	Pavel	Branda	Czech Rep.	Vice-Mayor of Rádlo Munici-pality (Czech Republic), COR-LEAP Bureau Political Observer

About UNICEF

UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere.

This project is an initiative of the Europe and Central Asia Region.

For more information about UNICEF and its work for children, visit www.unicef.org/eca

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for every child

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