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ACTION AREA 2 //
**Public Finance
for Children**



ARMENIA //
**Leveraging Funds through Public
Finance Advocacy and Evidence
Generation to Combat Child Poverty
and Deprivation**





Issue

Despite a recent decline in child poverty, a third of all children experience poverty and multiple deprivations. This situation required action to reduce the deprivations and pernicious lifelong impacts of poverty on children. Currently, 29.2% of children experience poverty and 1.5% extreme poverty, as compared to 23.5% and 1% respectively for the general population.¹¹⁹ Children experience significant multidimensional poverty¹⁸ too: 61.6% are deprived in two or more dimensions. The rural-urban contrast is stark, with multidimensional poverty figures of 74.9% and 52% respectively.¹²⁰

Reducing child poverty and deprivation presupposed marshalling adequate financial resources to support transformative social policy. The 2013 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Concluding Observations for Armenia emphasised several challenges and recommendations regarding public finance for children. It identified a significant decrease in budget allocations for social sectors, and a lack of a child rights-based perspective in the budgeting process. The 2018 Ombudsman's report on the CRC implementation noted that none of those recommendations were implemented by the Government.

In recent years, there has been insufficient and declining government spending on social protection, health, and education, which directly concerns child wellbeing.

Furthermore, budgetary data is not disaggregated, which limits the possibility of equity analysis. This stems from both low staff capacities in the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and sectoral departments. Moreover, the demand for disaggregated data by line Ministries has been low since evidence-based policymaking is limited. This means reforms which directly affect children are often neither costed, coupled with proper financial analysis, nor are spending efficiencies assessed. Combined, this results in wasted resources.

Limited information on national spending on children and adolescents hampered the possibility to logically link budget and policy design. Consequently, the government pursued programme-based budgeting (PPB) reform to establish a better linkage between budget and policy objectives and outputs. The reform aimed to improve the accountability, transparency, and efficiency of public spending. Armenia transitioned to PPB in 2019, however, there was little guidance and capacity development provided, particularly for non-finance staff. This was problematic for many Government departments, as they had to devise budgetary submissions with little prior financial knowledge.

UNICEF Armenia recognised these problems and how to respond. Addressing the various challenges was necessary if progress was to be made on improving the use and availability of domestic resources for services of importance to children.

Actions



To influence government spending, UNICEF Armenia conducted and launched a Child-focussed Public Expenditure Measurement study report (C-PEM),¹²¹ which measured the state budget's direct and indirect expenditure on children. This was the first such study to be conducted in Armenia and the region. Its aim was five-fold: engender a sustainable increase in spending on children, make children a budget priority, render spending on children more effective and efficient, ensure spending is equitable and improve the transparency and accountability of the public budget. The study revealed that the increase in overall public spending since 2012 had not benefited children proportionately. Expenditure on children rose more slowly

than overall expenditures, even though the proportion of children in the overall population had not changed.

The bulk of child-focussed expenditure, more than half, (direct and indirect) has rested within the traditional sectors – education, health, social protection. Further disaggregation by child rights showed that most spending on children went to fulfilling the rights for survival (nearly a third), development (more than a third), and protection (about 18%), with the right for participation receiving only about 1%. Distribution of child-focussed expenditure among different age groups revealed underinvestment in early childhood, especially children aged 1-5.

¹⁸ Child poverty is multidimensional, and deprivations are often mutually reinforcing: poor health, malnutrition, low access to or quality of education, and poor housing conditions, including a lack of water and sanitation, define children's experience of poverty more accurately than measures of income.

UNICEF made recommendations, based on the study, to the Government and specifically to the MoF on how to integrate child-focussed public expenditure measurement into the budget process. In addition to the C-PEM, several costing, capacity development, and evidence generation initiatives on child budgeting for children were produced. This is expected to contribute to improving the effectiveness, efficiency, equity, sustainability, transparency, and accountability of child-related policies and budget allocations.

To support policy change, UNICEF Armenia organised knowledge-exchanges to institutionalise the C-PEM findings into the government's PPB reforms. Various PF4C awareness-raising activities were pursued to achieve this. A South-South learning exchange was organised between UNICEF Armenia and Argentina. This involved organising a five-day study visit to Armenia for officials from the Argentine MoF, the National Council for Coordination of Social Policies, and UNICEF Argentina. The exchange capitalised on Argentina's strong experience in measuring public expenditure on children, and, in turn, learn from Armenia's experience of institutionalising a child poverty measurement. Meetings were held with the MoF, Standing Committee on Health and Social Affairs of the National Assembly of Armenia, European Union, GIZ, and experts working on public finance issues in Armenia. This meeting discussed C-PEM institutionalisation in the context of the PPB reform, including the practical sharing of budget templates and guidelines.

Moreover, a high-level official presentation of Armenia's C-PEM results was conducted with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UNICEF, Argentine Delegation, Embassy

of Argentina in Armenia, and several governmental, NGO, and donor representatives. The workshop¹²² consisted of a presentation of Argentina's experience of measuring social investment in children, and the validation of Armenia's C-PEM findings, followed by a discussion on measuring investments in children.

At the 2018 World Children's Day celebrations, organised by UNICEF, the issue of investing in children was voiced by an adolescent at a meeting with the President and several Ministers.¹²³ This was part of UNICEF's advocacy efforts to sensitise both government counterparts and adolescents on the need to measure and track investments in children. Furthermore, UNICEF Armenia converted its C-PEM study, with the input of children, into a child-friendly booklet.¹²⁴ This outlined Armenia's child-friendly budgeting for adolescents and was shared widely at this country's CRC 30 celebrations, which was attended by over 170 adolescents.

Following the South-South learning exchange, UNICEF built the capacity of 35 staff from four line Ministries involved in the country's overall transition process to a finalised PPB in 2019. After this, UNICEF provided technical assistance in the development of child-related budget programme submissions to the State budget. Education, social protection, and child-protection budget briefs were also prepared to help present and analyse complex budget information, easily intelligible to different stakeholders. The briefs conveyed key recommendations to influence the public financial decision-making processes, with the goal of leveraging domestic resources for children.





Impact

The evidence generated by the C-PEM, and the costing and analytical exercises, has been increasingly used by the Government, for the advancement of various reforms, and reporting on CRC implementation by the Human Rights Defender's Office. For instance, the C-PEM and an education budget brief revealed issues with early childhood education. Ultimately, the C-PEM raised the importance of PF4C considerations in the government's PPB activities. However, work on the C-PEM halted because of the 2018 revolution, but there is now renewed momentum to put it back on the social policy agenda again.

Critical to progressively modifying PF4C considerations in Armenia, was UNICEF's effort to draw on the skills and knowledge of other countries and development partners with strong PFM experience. The knowledge exchange with Argentina enabled a change of perception in measuring child public expenditure. The C-PEM exercise mobilised other partners with more experience than UNICEF in PFM activities (i.e. EU, GIZ, and the World Bank). This resulted in aligned advocacy on the budgeting process. Having the Argentine MoF share their expertise with their Armenian MoF

counterparts was transformative. It cultivated a paradigm shift in understanding and attitudes on the importance of measuring expenditure on children. This helped broach wider discussions with the Armenian MoF on changing methodological and reporting guidelines for integrating the C-PEM into the budgeting process.

UNICEF's PF4C advocacy efforts made a direct contribution to the development of 2019 PPBs for education, health, social protection, and justice sectors, thereby generating policy impacts that will help combat child poverty and deprivations. For example, public allocations (USD138,000 for the 2019 budget) were provided for the expansion of alternative preschool education services in 60 communities, and a school safety enhancement budget programme was introduced for the first time (approx. USD20,000) with a possible further expansion in 2020-2021. Support from the EU was leveraged for the scale-up of the alternative preschool model in 35 settlements in 2020-2022. Moreover, as part of the PPB reform, child-focussed non-financial indicators were added to the programme budget format.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD // Armenia — Leveraging Funds for Children

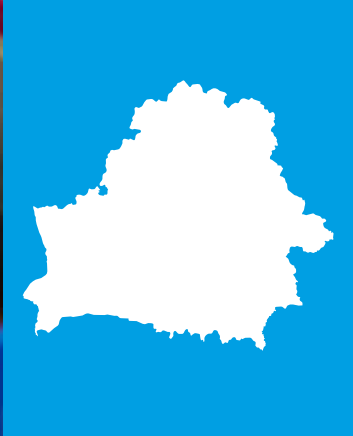
On November 20, 2018, the world celebrated World Children's Day. This is also the day when the UN Convention on Child Rights was adopted! In 2018, to mark World Children's Day in Armenia, a special discussion was held in the Tumo Creative Center, where children voiced the issues they are concerned about. Children were joined by the President of Armenia, Sarkissian, UNICEF Representative, Tanja Radocaj, VivaCell-MTS General Manager, Yirikian, Director of Synopsys Armenia, Musayelyan, Acting Minister of Education and Science, Harutyunyan, and many other guests to discuss possible solutions to their problems. The call for investing in children was voiced by an adolescent called Hayk, at a meeting with the President and several Ministers. This was part of

UNICEF's advocacy efforts to sensitise both government counterparts and adolescents on the need to measure and track investments in children. Hayk talked about the lack of investment in children's development in Armenia and what needs to be done. His speech's key message centred on being savvy with public finance, saying that "I do understand that our economy does not always allow us to allocate needed funding. But it is always possible to find a way by spending the available resources more effectively, or involving other partners, like the private sector." He stressed that "If the government provides adequate financing for the children's education, this can be a turning point for the country's economy in several areas."

Original source and video: Link to video on its hosted site. UNICEF Armenia. 2018. Without Strong Social Protection Services, it will be Difficult to Overcome this Situation: Hayk's talk on World Children's Day. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/armenia/en/stories/without-strong-social-protection-services-it-will-be-difficult-overcome-situation>



BELARUS //
Investing in Future Generations to
Seize a 'Demographic Dividend'





Issue

Belarus has made great progress in achieving its SDG indicators related to children and adolescents early. Nevertheless, one concern requiring rapid strategic attention is the exigency of seizing the country's 'demographic dividend'. After a two-year recession, Belarus' economic situation improved in 2017 and child poverty decreased to 10.4% in 2018. This represented an improvement on recent years, although the historical low remains the 9.2% achieved in 2014.¹²⁵ However, in 2019 the country again faced an economic slowdown. In the midterm, the World Bank (WB) projects GDP growth of around 1%, below what is needed to raise living standards.

With strategic attention, the country has a chance of seizing its 'demographic dividend' that could spur growth.

Attaining this dividend requires appropriate investments in adolescents and youth so that they go on to be productive adults. This is important, as when the working-age population grows larger than the dependent population, there is a potential for a demographic dividend. When this population is actively employed, standards of living increase. This improves public financing, permitting greater investment in human capital, which supports more sustainable and equitable growth. However, the demographic dividend is not guaranteed. Policymakers face a time-bound challenge: to invest now in young people or miss an unprecedented opportunity to improve lives and economies. The growth generated by a demographic dividend is significant. The dividends of Ireland, South Korea, and China accounted for over half of the actual GDP growth at one point.¹²⁶

While Belarus enjoys a relatively low 'dependency ratio', a decline in its young population since around 2000, coupled with adolescent vulnerabilities, may negatively impact future economic growth. Belarus experienced a short growth spurt in its fertility rate from 2011-2017, which levelled off and sharply declined thereafter. Twenty-one per cent fewer children were born in 2018 than in 2015. As of 2019, Belarus has a relatively large working-age population and lower numbers of children. According to the WB, the ratio of dependent population (children aged 0-14 and elderly

aged 65 and older) per working-age adults aged 15-65 years is 0.46.¹²⁷ Thus, Belarus has a relatively low dependency ratio and therefore wise investments in fewer dependents now could effectively enable the next generation of workers to pay pension contributions and to look after a larger dependent population. Together, 19% or 138,000 adolescents experience vulnerabilities¹²⁸ (i.e. substance use, conflicts with the law, violence, mental health challenges, disability, and living without family care or in poverty etc.).¹²⁹ If not addressed promptly, those vulnerabilities, especially multidimensional ones, will have adverse impacts on their quality and longevity of life and prospects as adults. If ignored, adolescent vulnerabilities continue into the third decade of life. For example, a lack of adolescent safe behaviour leads to non-communicable diseases which contribute to a mortality rate in men three times higher than women aged 20-29. Overall, this results in a pronounced gender gap in life expectancy at birth of more than 10 years as of 2018.¹³⁰ This is a significant concern in Belarus given the current very narrow cohort of girls and boys in their second decade.

However, harnessing the potential benefits from a demographic dividend is neither automatic nor guaranteed. Obtaining this dividend is challenging; inadequate or wrong policy choices and investments risk failing to attain it. The high-stakes nature of dividend-attainment is brought into sharp relief by the notion of a potential 'triple dividend'. For example, an ideal investment scenario is, firstly, one that benefits the current cohort of children; secondly, when children reach adulthood this dividend yields benefits for both themselves as adults and the society they support; thirdly, it carries over to their children, as investments are transmitted across generations.

Given that Belarus is a late-dividend country, the 'window of opportunity' for capturing dividend gains is finite and is only predicted to be available for another 15-20 years. This requires swift and appropriate policy action, as seizing this opportunity presupposes the right implementation of policies in education, health, governance, social protection, and taxation among other things.

Actions

To help capture the demographic dividend, which also presupposes reducing adolescent vulnerabilities, UNICEF Belarus is developing a Child-focussed Public Expenditure Measurement (C-PEM) as a public finance analytical tool and a Multidimensional Child Poverty measure (MDCP) to analyse social expenditure on children and ensure optimum investment continues to occur. These tools form

part of UNICEF's wider Commitment to Equity for Children (CEQ4C) framework. Evidence from the Lancet Commission¹³¹ indicates that investments in adolescent health and wellbeing are some of the best options possible for attaining future productive adults, resulting in a 10-fold increase in the benefit-to-cost ratio, and are essential for accelerating SDG progress and harnessing demographic dividends.



In partnership with the National Child Rights Commission, UNICEF commissioned an independent evaluation which used this tool to generate evidence on achievements and lessons learnt from the UNICEF and government 2011-2017 interventions for adolescents.⁴ The evaluation discovered that adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, are inadequately supported. The cost of inaction is high, as adolescents will soon become adults, and the support they receive will affect the extent to which they contribute to Belarus' economic and social development.

To help ensure optimum investment occurs, an additional analysis on estimating a demographic dividend contribution to GDP was initiated by UNICEF Belarus.

Using a USAID Demographic Dividend model, it was shown that a range of economic, education, and health policy interventions (i.e. reducing noncommunicable diseases, enhancing adolescent skills), which promote labour market participation of young parents, would result in significant improvement in the Human Development Index for Belarus, from the current 0.77 to 0.90. Overall, simulations show that by 2030, all demographic dividend-related policy interventions could contribute to over two-fifths of the projected GDP per capita growth envisioned in the 2030 target of 4% aggregate growth (SDG 8.1.1).

UNICEF built consensus around the logic of investing more resources in adolescents to realise the demographic dividend, achieve the SDGs, and ensure the principle of 'leaving no one behind'. To achieve this, and in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy, the first SDG baseline report on child-related SDG indicators with a dedicated section for the new National Strategy of Sustainable Development 2035 was developed. Moreover, UNICEF, together with the Economic Research Institute and WB, employed the CEQ4C framework to generate evidence on public spending and its links to child outcomes to improve budget expenditures for children. This framework integrates PF4C, MDCP, and fiscal incidence analysis. The CEQ4C-results analysis¹³² suggested that while child benefits provide almost universal coverage of children aged 0-2 and reduce child poverty by half, nonetheless, there are important coverage gaps for other age groups. Some 6% of children face either monetary or multidimensional poverty and are not covered by social assistance. The first estimate of MDCP produced by the CEQ4C will be used to support *Belstat*, the national statistics agency, to develop an official methodology of the corresponding SDG indicator. CEQ4C policy simulations have been helpful in suggesting progressive policy, such as introducing categorical benefits to vulnerable households (i.e. large families etc.), which will be administratively and cost-efficient in reducing child poverty.





Impact

UNICEF's advocacy, based on C-PEM and other analytical tools, contributed to the increase of the budget allocation for children in alignment with Belarus' Public Finance Management Strategy introducing performance-based budgeting.

Cumulatively, the generated evidence has sensitised policymakers to the criticality of ensuring an optimal investment in children to capture the demographic dividend. In 2019, the Ministry of Finance estimated a Child Budget following the C-PEM methodology and presented it jointly with UNICEF. Consequently, the child budget represented 7.6% of GDP in 2018, to be increased by 0.5% points (equating to USD330 million), reaching 8.1% GDP in 2020 despite a sharp childbirth reduction. Thus, UNICEF's advocacy contributed to increasing government expenditure on children.

UNICEF's tools have supported government efforts to capture the demographic dividend, which contributes to wider UN efforts on this front too, and represent effective coherent ONE-UN activity to push for SDG realisation. For instance, based on UNICEF expertise, the

UN and the government have identified '*Future generation orientation: adolescence and youth*' as a key facet of an SDG-acceleration approach. This future focus builds on Belarus' substantial success in development outcomes during the first decade of life (e.g. reduced child mortality rates, universal primary education, and health), and aims to ensure the same success is accomplished during the second and third decades (i.e. adolescence and youth). UNICEF's analysis demonstrates the potentially alarming intergenerational consequences of postponed actions in addressing adolescent vulnerabilities. This has led to acceptance of the need to focus on adolescents and youth as a priority area for the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

The use of the C-PEM and MDCP as public finance tools represents a highly promising social policy practice. They are one of the first steps to realise the potential of the demographic dividend and place it firmly on the Belarus social policy agenda. They will likely assist Belarus in yielding the positive societal impacts inherent to a demographic dividend.



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Europe and Central Asia Regional Office

Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland