



# 4

## ACTION AREA 4 // **Decentralisation and Local Governance**



ALBANIA //  
**Designing a Decentralised Integrated  
Social Care Service System**





## Issue

Despite economic progress and improved living standards, Albania's wealth distribution remains unequal, and vulnerable groups continue to be underserved in the areas of health, education, social care, and child protection.<sup>143</sup> Albania is among the poorest countries in Europe, with children disproportionately affected by poverty. Regular national poverty measuring and reporting, including child poverty, still remains an issue in Albania. UNICEF analysis<sup>144</sup> indicates that 19.2% of households with children live in absolute poverty,<sup>20</sup> and 24.9% of households with children aged 0-5 years old experience absolute poverty.

Albania has a relatively well-established social protection system in place, but this faces challenges regarding effectiveness and adequacy. While the state's financial allocations for the social sector make up the largest share of public expenditure as a percentage of GDP, they are not comparable to international standards for an upper-middle-income country. They provide inadequate human, technical, and financial resources needed for improved services for children. According to government data, the budget allocated for social protection is approximately 9% of GDP. However, 80% of this is assigned to contributory social insurance

programmes. The rest is allocated for child and family allowance, including cash transfers for persons or children with a disability.<sup>145</sup> Arguably, social protection allocations should be comparable with other countries in the region, where the average social protection investment in ECA equates to 16% of GDP.<sup>146</sup> Fiscal space is a challenge and the country is struggling to reduce public debt and nominal budgetary increase seem difficult. Therefore, using existing resources more effectively and strengthening coordination and integration between social protection entitlements might be required.

Given these challenges, the government is leading three major reforms in the domain of social protection as outlined in the National Social Protection Strategy 2015 – 2022 and its national action plan. The strategy outlines three policy reforms under the vision and commitment for an integrated social protection system. These attempt to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the poverty-targeted cash assistance, improve the situation of persons with disability, and establish an integrated system of social care services at the decentralised level. Importantly, this policy intent has been accompanied by adequate and effective budgetary estimations.

## Actions



In 2012, the Government recognised the need for the reform of a wide range of services related to the social protection and better inclusion of vulnerable individuals/groups. The reform of the Social Care Service (SCS) has had two main phases. During phase 1, 2012-2016, UNICEF was mandated by the Government to support the design of an integrated SCS system at the decentralised level. At the government's behest, UNICEF conducted an in-depth situation analysis to facilitate this. As part of this analysis, a compendium of analytical reports was produced on various aspects of the SCS reform. The reports provided a common point of reference for national policymakers and technical experts on the major reform 'building blocks' such as delivery and monitoring; HR gaps and training needs; and public finance mechanisms at the central and local level. This analysis established a need to reconfigure the SCS infrastructure at the local level owing to critical shortcomings. These shortcomings included a lack of understanding of what social services are; and the absence of clear policy guidance from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MSWY) on what constitutes effective social protection. Moreover, appropriate legal statutory provision was required for a full-spectrum social

protection system, instead of the pre-existing legislation that regulated only cash assistance. A lack of clear accountability and weak monitoring and inspection and a lack of financial mechanisms to fund SCS were also a problem. These composite challenges meant there was a lack of integration and decentralisation which hampered SCSs. Following such analysis, the government recognised the need to undertake a thorough reform of the social protection system and SCS. Finally, to support this reform, UNICEF managed to raise about USD4.2 million from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and UNICEF itself contributed additional funding of USD1.1 million, to support a four-year programme aiming to establish a national comprehensive normative policy framework to start the SCS reform.

During Phase 2, 2017-present, the revamped SCS system had a more decentralised focus and began to be piloted at the municipality level from 2017. In the second phase, UNICEF is using approximately USD700,000 to support the implementation of the SCS policies and strategies at the local level to enable all children to benefit from the equitable quality services to which they are entitled.

<sup>20</sup> Absolute poverty is defined as real per capita monthly consumption below 4,891 ALL (in 2002 prices).



## Impact

Phase 1 of UNICEF Albania's SCS reform engagement contributed to numerous important impacts:

1) *Streamlining of the institutional set-up*: the accountabilities and roles of the newly formed Local Government Units (LGUs) were rationalised down from 337 municipalities/communes to 61. Additionally, the SCS planning was clearly articulated and integrated into the 2015-2020 National Inter-sectoral Decentralisation Strategy and a new 2015 Law on Local Self-Government.<sup>147</sup> Two other new laws - *the Order of Social Workers*<sup>148</sup> and *Law on the Order of Psychologists*<sup>149</sup> - were developed and approved in 2014 and 2016, respectively. These laid the foundation for the institutionalisation of the 'social work' profession. Needs assessment and referral units were also introduced to enable prompt needs assessment and referral of cases. 2) *Financial mechanisms*: the new Law on Social Care Services<sup>150</sup> includes a chapter on SCS financing. It envisages a combination of funding sources from the central State Budget, the local government budget, the locally generated income for municipalities, and fees that can be introduced for some social services. The Law allows municipalities to establish a dedicated 'social fund' budget line, ring-fenced explicitly for activities relating to SCS. 3) *Increased human resource capacities*: UNICEF helped develop municipalities' budget tools to finance and manage the SCS delivery. 4) *The data supply for service planning and monitoring*: technical recommendations on establishing a comprehensive MIS encompassing cash assistance and SCS were developed and costed for 2016 and presented to the MSWY. 5) *Learning from service modelling*.

UNICEF also supported the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP) to complete, validate with national stakeholders, and approve a national legal framework which enables planning and financing of SCS at the decentralised municipalities level by completing 14 SCS by-laws approved in 2016. Furthermore, ensuring sustainable financing for the proposed SCS at the municipality level was a key bottleneck to overcome. It was reasoned that this could be reached through the establishment of a separate dedicated budgetary line of a 'social fund' at the local level, which would be resourced by central, local, and donor aid funds. Following the work with secondary legislation, UNICEF facilitated technical assistance to the Ministry of Finance and Economy and the MHSP to agree upon the approach and implementation modalities of resourcing the social fund from the central budget.

The Action Plan of the National Social Protection Strategy 2015 – 2020 has been updated and expanded to 2022, showing the government is now actively pursuing the SCS reform. UNICEF provided support, and facilitated a participatory process to review and update SCS policy objectives and actions to ensure adequate coverage and costing of quality SCS for all vulnerable children. Workflows and standard MIS operating procedures for SCSs have been developed, and approximately 300 municipal staff in 19 municipalities have been trained to use the system. Eleven municipalities have a three-year social care plan in place, fully costed and with clear targets to reach at least 60% of all vulnerable children in poverty in every municipality. The social care plans for eight municipalities have been approved, while the plans for three others have been finalised and validated, but are awaiting municipal council approval. Five of the eleven now have 2020 central budget funds to establish SCS. UNICEF has also supported all 11 municipalities in the finalisation of important documents to guide the outsourcing and procurement of goods and services in their efforts to implement the SCS plan.

UNICEF expects the SCS reform to have positive impacts on the 'Leave no one behind' agenda. It is envisaged that, by 2021, the vulnerable population will be covered and receiving adequate social services from local authorities, municipalities will effectively manage the provision of SCS, and national institutions will implement the relevant social policy framework.

UNICEF Albania has learned critical lessons from the SCS reform. For the reform to start producing results for vulnerable children, it is important to ensure LGUs have the necessary structures in place, such as social care plans and appropriate finances and capacity to deliver the services. UNICEF strove to strengthen the capacities of selected municipalities to make sure that SCS decentralisation and LGU structures work for children and increased local and central resource allocation occurred. Tailored training for LGUs on SCS was needed; active engagement with LGU decision-makers was crucial during the development of SCS plans. Moreover, it is important to underscore the role played by civil society organisations (CSOs), as they deliver up to 80% of all the SCS in the country and provide crucial field presence.



**TURKEY //**  
**Harnessing UNICEF's Global  
Child-Friendly City Initiative to  
Produce Positive Results for  
Children at the Local Level**





## Issue

Turkey has a large population consisting of 82 million people, including 23 million children. Turkey has rapidly urbanised over the past decades, which presents multiple challenges for urban infrastructure and services and child wellbeing. Thirty metropolitan provinces of Turkey now account for 60 million citizens, 18 million of whom are children. Turkey also hosts more than 4 million refugees, of whom 1.7 million are children. They too reside predominantly in metropolitan provinces.

Although cities are a major source of economic growth and social development, they are also a source of vulnerability and inequity, since urbanisation does not automatically generate positive results for all citizens, including children. The quality of urban settings, where now most children grow up, has a strong impact on children's development. Many children in Turkey benefit from the opportunities an urban life presents, such as access to educational, health, and various other

social services and leisure opportunities. However, a considerable number of families and children unevenly benefit from such opportunities. Income inequality in Istanbul, for example, is higher than the national average and other provinces. The National Gini coefficient is 0.40, whereas it is 0.44 for Istanbul. Similarly, the wealthiest quintile of the Turkish population has 7.8 times more income than the poorest quintile, whereas the figure for Istanbul is 8.6. Thus, given these uneven human development indicators throughout Turkey, there was a need to address aspects of the quality of urban and rural life for children. At the same time, rural poverty in Turkey has been historically higher than urban poverty. A new analysis of multi-dimensional poverty (MDP) in Turkey finds that while the Urban MDP is 40%, rural MDP is 51%.<sup>151</sup> The effects of rural poverty also show up in the high incidence of child labour in agriculture. According to the 2012 TURKSTAT Survey, nearly 45% of child labour cases in Turkey occur in agriculture.<sup>152</sup>

## Actions



Drawing on the global Child-Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) Framework, UNICEF Turkey has been working to address some of the inequities posed by urban living. It has supported both evidence generation and programming for children at the local level. This was pursued in partnership with individual municipalities as well as the national association of municipalities. From 2016 onwards, UNICEF Turkey has intensified its efforts in using the CFCI framework as an instrument to improve local governance in favour of children. Through the community-based assessments conducted by youth volunteers trained by UNICEF in CFCI principles and the consultation sessions with municipal staff, the following five thematic areas were identified as priorities: child participation, child labour, child marriage, child rights programming, and child-friendly planning. UNICEF provided training to 288 specialists (190 women, 98 men) from 100 municipalities to increase their capacities to be able to address these thematic issues in their jurisdictions.

UNICEF also developed thematic guidelines to strengthen the capacity of municipality personnel on specific child rights issues through training sessions, network meetings, and online platforms. Building on lessons drawn from the training sessions, UNICEF produced municipal guidelines on the five thematic areas. Furthermore, given that Turkey's municipal police have a role in identifying/

referring child labour cases, particularly children working on the street, child labour training modules for municipal police were developed to increase capacity on child rights and working with vulnerable children. UNICEF provided 'Training of Trainers' to twelve Union of Municipalities of Turkey (UMT)<sup>153</sup> experts to build CFCI capacity sustainably at the UMT and leverage its wide coverage to all municipalities in Turkey. Additionally, UNICEF and the UMT provided training to 200 municipal police staff. UNICEF used the UMT's online platform to ensure the availability of materials to a wide range of municipalities countrywide. UNICEF also organised a series of CFCI Network meetings to enable municipalities to exchange their knowledge and experiences in child-sensitive programming.

**UNICEF supported municipalities to increase their child-sensitive strategic planning and budgeting after the 2019 local elections.** In Turkey, upon local elections, all municipalities must develop new five-year plans. Utilising the March 2019 local elections as an opportunity, UNICEF and the UMT provided Child-Friendly Budget and Strategy-Development Training to 120 staff from 29 municipalities. Additionally, 20 municipalities benefited from follow-up technical assistance and a preliminary analysis of their past budgets from a child-sensitive perspective. These efforts aimed to increase municipal capacity in child-focused budgeting, design, implementation, monitoring, and reporting.

UNICEF provided technical and financial support to targeted municipalities through multi-sectoral work plans addressing thematic child rights issues, such as child labour, child protection, child marriage, and early childhood education. As a result of this engagement with municipalities through training and knowledge-sharing meetings, certain municipalities displayed an interest in working with UNICEF to further increase their capacity to address child rights issues and improve their child-friendliness. In Yüreğir, which is a highly populated district hosting a large number of Turkish and refugee seasonal agricultural workers including child labourers, social inclusion was identified as a key priority. Municipality community centres' staff and teachers received training on child rights, child participation, child labour, and working with vulnerable children. A child-friendly mobile vehicle was procured to facilitate outreach and used to provide psycho-social support services to children and families living in agricultural areas in Yüreğir. This was important, as seasonal workers have very limited access to education services and developmental and recreational opportunities. There were also efforts to increase community and home-based early childhood education

services and to conduct school and community-based activities with Syrian and Turkish parents to increase their school/community participation and promote social cohesion among different communities.

In İzmit, which is an industrialised district, UNICEF, the İzmit Municipality, and Local Directorate of the Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Services (MoFLSS) focussed on children engaged in or at risk of child labour, particularly those working on the streets. In 2018, a 'My House' Child Support Centre was opened with UNICEF's support. The centre functions as a platform providing psychosocial support services for children at risk of child labour. It also offers referral pathways, for these children and their families, to the relevant local services provided by different ministries to facilitate their withdrawal from labour. In Kilis, which remains home to the most refugees per capita of any province in Turkey (approximately half the total population), UNICEF focussed on promoting social cohesion activities and multi-sectoral services (e.g. child protection, education, adolescent development, and participation) for children.





## Impact

**Youth-volunteer training, community-based assessments, and consultation meetings generated positive CFCI results.** They empowered people, established a network of child rights advocates at the provincial level, and engaged young people to identify problems and be part of the solution. Youth volunteers came from various backgrounds, such as local NGO volunteers and university students. The CFCI functioned as a useful platform for them to connect and come together in a structured manner. To that end, 189 youth volunteers, aged 15 to 29, received training on child rights and child-friendly cities objectives and then conducted a community-based assessment in 10 municipal areas. Based on the assessments undertaken by youths, local child action plans were developed to improve the quality of cities for children.

**UNICEF's CFCI drive helped realise the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the local level.** As a result of UNICEF's support, cultural acceptance of the idea of children's rights was developed and nurtured among municipality representatives. Local government authorities' sensitivity to child rights also increased. Nearly 250 specialists from 77 municipalities attended UNICEF meetings, meaning that awareness of CFCI had increased. Many municipalities continue to contact UNICEF and request technical assistance on child-focussed programming, therefore illustrating not only interest in the CFCI-initiative, but also a recognition of its importance and relevance. At the same time, working with associative bodies, such as the UMT, helped to increase the number of beneficiary municipalities as well the number of those developing an interest in UNICEF's work to improve children's rights. The UMT functions as a platform for long-term accessibility of capacity-development tools developed under the CFCI and for exchange of knowledge/experience among municipalities. This underscores the importance of leveraging local partnerships in all UNICEF activities.

**UNICEF Turkey's CFCI work demonstrated that the success of local programming increases when municipal services are linked to those provided by central ministries' local offices, as showcased in the İzmit case.** Child

labourers identified by municipal teams benefited from a range of services provided by the MoFLSS at the 'My House' Centre. For example, between 2018 and 2019, some 700 Turkish and refugee children were identified by municipal teams, and more than 350 children referred to specialised child protection and social protection services provided by the MoFLSS. Currently, approximately 50 children are also regularly benefiting from the services provided at the centre. In Kilis, UNICEF's community-based approach included the establishment of youth and women committees to accelerate outreach, benefitting 9,191 children and adults in 2019. Under the UNICEF partnership, a Social Cohesion Coordination Platform was established for coordinating social cohesion activities in the province.

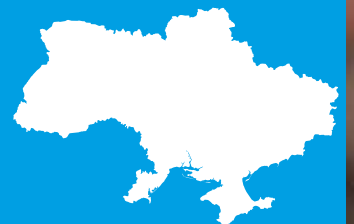
**UNICEF developed and fostered strategic partnerships to enable the effective implementation of CFCI goals.** UNICEF's collaboration with individual municipalities and associative bodies representing all municipalities, such as the UMT, is an effort to leverage the mandate and capacities of municipalities at scale for the benefit of children. This focussed on developing the capacities of municipalities to design policies and programmes to promote children's rights (by benefiting from CFCI building blocks); creating platforms for knowledge sharing among municipalities, and empowering young people to be agents of change for the realisation of child rights at the local level.

**Steps towards increased fiscal space and investment for children were also made at the local level. A child-friendly budget and strategy-development training increased municipalities' capacity in child-focussed design, implementation, monitoring, and reporting.** Furthermore, this engagement helped municipalities to design their 2021-2025 Development Plans with a stronger vision in favour of children. UNICEF also compared each municipality's pre-training (2018) expenditure and post-training (allocated for 2020) expenditure for children's issues. The preliminary analysis demonstrates that there is, on average, a 66% increase from 2018 to 2020. The analysis also shows that children have become more visible in the new 5-year plans as a result of UNICEF's CFCI engagement.





UKRAINE //  
**Generating Results for Children at  
the Local Level through UNICEF's  
Child-Friendly Cities Initiative**





## Issue

Ukraine initiated a 2015 decentralisation reform to increase government accountability, and ensure people's needs and rights are fulfilled. To increase accountability, power was passed to newly formed local authorities. They were given greater responsibilities for service delivery and, often, higher budgets too. As of November 2019, 1,002 new municipalities had been created, covering 11.2 million people (31.9% of Ukraine's population). The process of decentralisation is ongoing.<sup>154</sup>

However, decentralisation has brought numerous challenges and conflicting priorities. For example, local authorities tended to prioritise economic affairs (i.e. roads and

utilities) over social services. Recognising this tendency, many local governments conducted assessments of community needs and capacities. This reassessment of policy priorities created an opportunity to raise children's issues and ensure that adequate investment in children occurs at the local level. This is important, as every third child lives in poverty, and 14% in extreme poverty. Rural poverty is almost twice as high as in urban areas (39% compared to 18.3%).<sup>155</sup> Moreover, multidimensional deprivation analysis demonstrates that many children in rural areas lack access to basic services and experience limited access to urban centres with better infrastructure, while children in larger cities suffer from pollution, limited living space, and access to green spaces.

## Actions



Given the opportunity presented by decentralisation, UNICEF Ukraine deployed UNICEF's global Child-Friendly City Initiative (CFCI),<sup>156</sup> as a tool to realise children's rights through local commitment and investment. UNICEF partnered with the UNFPA, Ministry of Social Policy, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Regional Development, Association of cities, Association of Amalgamated Communities, the Child Ombudsmen and the National Youth Council, and officially launched the Initiative in spring 2018 by signing an MoU with the Government. More than 170 municipalities expressed their willingness to sign up. In this first phase, 32 received UNICEF technical support, 17 of which have developed and approved Action Plans. Broad and strong partnerships were instrumental in ensuring support and sustainability for the CFCI.

Municipalities joined the CFCI by signing MoUs with UNICEF, which officially recognised their intention for cooperation. UNICEF signed MoUs during high-level visits to municipalities, increasing the CFCI's visibility, momentum, and support. Subsequently, municipalities performed a Situation Analysis with UNICEF technical support, using UNICEF's Global CFCI methodology which was adapted to be Ukraine-specific. This provided a rigorous tool to analyse how children's rights can be realised at the local level. Based on this analysis, municipalities developed result-oriented 2-3-year Action Plans with corresponding budgets. Those municipalities whose Action Plans were approved – 17

to date – have been granted intermediate candidate status of being a Child-Friendly City. To earn full status, municipalities have to satisfy three international CFCI criteria: successfully implemented Action Plans, meaningful child participation, and non-discrimination.

UNICEF also conducted successful high-level advocacy and secured support from the Prime Minister, which elevated the Initiative's status. In May 2018, a joint Cabinet meeting, chaired by the Prime Minister and with the participation of children, was organised by the Cabinet of Ministers and UNICEF. The meeting embodied the CFCI's principles by enabling child participation in policy discussions and decisions that directly concern them.

UNICEF partnered with an NGO to provide methodological support to 32 municipalities. Using the Global CFCI Handbook,<sup>157</sup> UNICEF Ukraine developed a Ukraine-specific Manual with its own Results Framework. Capacity-building activities were critically important for advancing the CFCI. With its partners, UNICEF has delivered multiple training on CFCI objectives and methodology to local administrators, youth and CSO representatives. Furthermore, face-to-face support was provided by the NGO partner 'Eurostrategy', which travelled at least twice to each municipality to support the development of Situational Analysis and Action Plans.

UNICEF instigated inter-sectoral collaboration by linking the CFCI to other country office programmatic work. This increased the likelihood that UNICEF priorities would be reflected in the municipalities' Action Plans. While the CFCI methodology is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), UNICEF's Social Policy section, leading the initiative, worked closely with colleagues from Education, Health, and Child Protection. These colleagues were involved as trainers and ensured that relevant sectoral indicators were incorporated into the Results framework.

UNICEF adopted a comprehensive external and internal communications strategy. The production of a CFCI brand book for municipalities helped to ensure the correct use of CFCI branding. A quarterly newsletter was published too. This featured success stories from municipalities and programmatic opportunities from UNICEF and partners. Two approaches in social media proved to be effective: a Facebook page, and a Telegram channel for youth. The highlight of 2019 was a CRC 30-day celebration, with 25 CFCI municipalities inviting children to run the mayors' offices and city councils for one day, fulfilling CFCI's child participation criteria.

## Impact



The CFCI results demonstrate that with the right mix of incentives, recognition, and technical support, and even without direct investment, UNICEF can boost public spending on children, establish effective cooperation with municipalities, and ensure meaningful implementation of the CRC at the local level. In 2019, those 17 municipalities with approved Action Plans have already budgeted UAH963 million (USD38 million) for children in the CFCI framework. Arguably, without UNICEF's CFCI, it is unlikely that these funds would have been mobilised for future child-related expenditure. Moreover, it is doubtful that coherent Action Plans would have been created to streamline previously misaligned intersectoral activities and deliver results for children.

The CFCI has received wide support from the national Government, including a proposal to provide additional financing earmarked for children to CFCI-accredited municipalities from the state budget. In March 2019, the

Government approved a Decree proposing changes to the Law on 'Child protection' and a budget code stipulating additional funds be disbursed to CFCI-accredited municipalities. However, due to the change of Government in August 2019, the proposal will have to be resubmitted to *Verhovna Rada*, the parliament, and reviewed by legislators. While promising, it remains to be seen whether the proposal will receive enough support for additional financing to be approved for the next budget.

The initiative has promoted healthy competition among municipalities in their efforts to close equity gaps and place children at the forefront of their agendas. The recognition and motivation delivered by the CFCI proved to be important for mayors too. The 2019 'Global CFCI Inspire Award' held in Cologne attracted 24 applicants from Ukraine. Vinnytsia, a CFCI-candidate city won the prize. Its 'Budget for School Projects' was recognised as the best practice in the category of 'meaningful child participation'.



The CFCI has positively boosted cooperation within municipalities too. Situational Analysis and Action Plans were the results of the joint work of specialists from different sectoral departments, and often represented the first time they systematically considered their level of child-friendliness. Consequently, the CFCI engendered an important child-sensitive mindset change in local government.

The CFCI's principal strength is that it can be self-financing and therefore *self-propelling*. It can operate without UNICEF's direct financing, as all Action Plans are funded predominately by local governments, ensuring local ownership and sustainability. Action Plans, while shaped by CFCI global methodology, are context-sensitive and primarily reflect local priorities.

This CFCI represented tremendous value for money, providing an effective way to raise children's issues and mobilise local investments with low administration costs. For example, UNICEF Ukraine's annual CFCI budget was approximately USD150,000, which resulted in local government mobilising and committing to spending USD38 million on child-wellbeing activities. Thus, for every USD1 UNICEF spent on the CFCI, USD253 was leveraged for children. Countries that have experienced a similar devolution to Ukraine may find the CFCI approach relevant to their circumstances.

## STORIES FROM THE FIELD //

# Ukraine — A Boy who Changed the Transport System for the Entire City

Vinnitsa, a city in west-central Ukraine. A population of 372,300, of whom 70,000 are children. Vinnitsa joined the UNICEF Child and Youth Friendly Community Initiative, becoming one of the first cities in Ukraine that set the goal of creating a friendly environment for children, as well as ensuring their participation in local-level decision making. To achieve this goal, the city administration developed a Child Ombudsmen programme that is still running today. Mustafa Evtimur, who is now 23 years old, became one of the first Child Ombudsmen in 2012 when he was in Grade 10 at school. Today, Mustafa has Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Vinnitsa and Kyiv Universities, respectively. He works as an assistant lawyer and an assistant to a Vinnitsa city councillor. When he recalls his two years as Child Ombudsman, Mustafa's eyes shine with enthusiasm.

Children who participated in the Child Ombudsmen programme undertook special training from lawyers, sociologists, and psychologists to learn how to communicate with other children about their problems. This training and new knowledge proved to be very useful when the city administration decided to reform Vinnitsa's transport system. The reform, which is currently well-known all over Ukraine, was intended to renovate and increase the use of public transport. Without any hesitation, the

Child Ombudsmen decided to actively participate in this initiative. Reviewing the newly developed public transportation routes, Mustafa and his peers checked if they had been designed to ensure easy access to all the schools in Vinnitsa. "Our goal was to make sure that all children can easily get to their schools from any location in the city. We also launched a campaign to inform children about the reform and to explain the advantages of the new system", said Mustafa. Mustafa and his team noticed that two new bus routes were inconvenient for children seeking to access several schools. The Ombudsmen submitted a proposal to the city administration to change the routes, and this was immediately supported by the city administration. All the children in Vinnitsa can now easily get to school using public transportation. Vinnitsa is the most convenient city in Ukraine to live in, according to a national poll, and particularly thanks to the transportation reforms that took place there. In conclusion, Mustafa recalls that "The Vinnitsa mayor, Volodymyr Hroysman, who is an ex-Prime Minister of Ukraine, used to tell us that Child Ombudsmen are a bridge that connects children and the municipality. We had regular meetings with the city administration where we could talk openly about challenges children face in Vinnitsa."

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