



UKRAINE //
**Supporting Parenting through
Evidence-based Policies and a
Universal Baby Box**





Issue

From 2013-2015, Ukraine experienced a significant deterioration of its economy, with an 18% GDP contraction, resulting in a twofold increase in poverty.¹¹³ However, in 2016 the situation stabilised, and poverty declined. Nevertheless, currently, 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%).¹¹⁴ Tens of thousands of families cannot meet their children's need through their earned income alone and require income support. Moreover, the risk of poverty increases significantly with the birth of a second child, from 47% for families with one child to 72.2% with a second child, and in large families, poverty exceeds 80%.¹¹⁵

Significant challenges exist with Ukraine's system of social protection, especially regarding the efficacy of targeting the most vulnerable groups. Reform of this system has been paramount. Ukraine has a combination of welfare programmes inherited from the Soviet Union and a large number of benefits, introduced post-independence. This created a complex system, comprising over 130 distinct benefit categories, which is fragmented and poorly adapted to current needs. Despite relatively high government expenditure on social assistance (4.9% of GDP), its performance in reducing poverty is limited. Children in Ukraine account for 18% of the population. However, they account for 45.3% of the poor.¹⁶ Up until 2014, overall maternity and child benefits were dominated by a Universal Child Birth Grant (UCBG), which absorbed the largest share of social assistance expenditures. The UCBG was introduced in 1993 and has received increased financing over time, reaching 1.25% of GDP in 2014. While a crucial programme, this has left limited fiscal space for additional benefits for families.

Child immunization coverage in Ukraine is improving, yet it is still lower than the recommended WHO level

(95%).¹¹⁶ In 2019, the DTP3 coverage (i.e. diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus) was 80.5% (compared to 67.5% in 2018), Hepatitis B3 was 77% (compared to 65.2% in 2018), and Polio3 – 78.4% (compared to 69.2% in 2018). The trust level in vaccinations among caregivers has also been improving. Positive attitudes towards vaccination among parents in Ukraine has grown from 28% in 2008 to 46% in 2012, to 72% in 2014, and up to 75% in 2017. According to a 2019 UNICEF survey,¹¹⁷ 88% of parents stated that they vaccinate (or intend to vaccinate) their children according to the national vaccination schedule. This is an improvement on 2017 figures, where only 84% of parents expressed such intentions, and in 2014 where the figures were as low as 63%. Key factors contributing to these positive trends related to improved access to vaccines due to changes in the state procurement system, as well as comprehensive efforts to build the capacities of health workers and build the knowledge of parents. Meanwhile, the results of another national survey Health Index, conducted in December 2018, demonstrate a decrease in barriers towards vaccination and a decrease in parental hesitancy towards vaccinations in general. Among those parents who refused to vaccinate, 8% fewer parents said they have refused vaccination due to the fear of side effects or complications from vaccines compared to 2017; 8% less due to distrusting vaccine manufacturers; and 5% less due to a belief that vaccination was unnecessary.

Breastfeeding practises in Ukraine are also a reason for concern. Survey data shows that only 19.7% of children under six months are exclusively breastfed.¹¹⁸ Children born to mothers in households in the poorest quintile are less likely (62.1%) to start breastfeeding as first-time parents, compared to children born to mothers representing the richest quintile (73.5%).

Actions



To address the challenges outlined, and as part of the development of an action plan for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in consultation with UNICEF, the Government of Ukraine proposed several new initiatives. Inspired by the successful Finnish model of 'baby boxes', the Government decided to introduce their own baby box programme. The overarching goal of the programme was to enhance positive parenting practices.

From September 2018, every Ukrainian new-born (approximately 310,000 per year) would, as a statutory right, receive a 'Baby Box'. It contains a layette of essential hygiene items and clothes for new-borns, as well as a comprehensive set of educational materials on responsible parenting, vaccinations, and other elements critical for ensuring early childhood development (ECD). The Government budgeted approximately USD180 for each box. The first box was procured at a value of USD100, while

¹⁶ Absolute poverty below actual subsistence minimum (UAH 2,941 per person, 2017).

the latest (fourth iteration) is worth around USD180. The savings were returned to the budget of the programme. One of the aims of the project is to promote good parenting for all, regardless of their socioeconomic background, as it is a universal benefit. Having all the materials provided to care for a child reduces the stress of preparing for a new-born. By providing parents with the necessary tools and equipment, the Government hoped to encourage behavioural change that positively impacted on wellbeing outcomes for the child. Awareness-raising and capacity building of young parents' ECD skills and promoting new-borns' health care were additional objectives. UNICEF also produced two small booklets on vaccinations and breastfeeding that were included in the Baby Box.

UNICEF helped introduce this reform action through collaborative partnerships. An MoU was signed in June 2018 between the Government and the United Nations Office for Project Services and UNICEF. The MoU's purpose was to ensure that social protection supported effective and responsible parenthood. Within the MoU framework, it was agreed that UNICEF would provide technical support to the programme, including through ECD materials and overseeing the monitoring of the project implementation. The goal of the monitoring was to provide recommendations to the Government on how to progressively improve the programme.

UNICEF was responsible for very specific evidenced-based monitoring of the Baby Box roll out. These included 1) *delivery of the Baby Box to parents*, to provide information on its receipt, and generate information on delivery constraints and the bottlenecks experienced; 2) *Baby Box satisfaction and usage*, to gauge parents' satisfaction and to provide feedback on those items to be included/excluded in future iterations; 3) *observing before and after changes in parents' knowledge and behaviour*,

by identifying informational knowledge gaps and practices on some aspects of inclusive ECD; 4) *communication*, to understand how and when parents should be informed about the Box, and how communication could encourage proper use and how parents-to-be can be made aware of their entitlements; 5) *societal reception*, to identify potential risks regarding programme perceptions and expectations; 6) *extent of young parents' social engagement*, to understand how they interact and counsel each other – through social networks (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and YouTube) – that allow them to share experiences and tips on effective parenting, vaccinations, breastfeeding, etc. This also enabled effective communication with national and regional opinion-makers (i.e. bloggers, journalists). This helped to valorise the importance of new parents' participation and perform data collection and analysis through regular thematic polls; 7) *media and social media reaction to the programme*, to ascertain the reaction of civil society. This included trends on positive and negative reaction alerts on the concerns of civil society.

To ensure a strong evidence-based understanding of the programme's performance, UNICEF designed the Baby Box monitoring to involve a process of quarterly data collection, analysis, and reporting of information. This monitoring involved a sample survey of Baby Box recipients through a face-to-face interview method just after childbirth; and a telephone interview survey of recipients three-to-four weeks after childbirth. UNICEF also conducted a qualitative survey (focus group discussions and in-depth interviews) of recipients, representatives of social protection and health authorities, and the public, to understand programme perceptions. The rationale for the careful monitoring of the programme was to enable its progressive modification in its subsequent iterations to ensure it optimally serves soon-to-be or new parents.



Impact

Between September 2018 and October 2019, over 390,000 families received the box and benefited from its content.

UNICEF conducted four waves of monitoring during this period. The results and subsequent recommendations for programme enhancement were sent to the Ministry of Social Policy (MoSP). Most of the recommendations were accepted by the MoSP, which lead to an overall improvement in Baby Boxes. To date, its content has evolved and undergone four editions, with each new edition being influenced by the monitoring results. For example, since its inception, the number of items in the kit has increased from 30 to more than 70.

The evidenced-based monitoring allowed for the progressive modification of the programme over time through each new iteration, resulting in enhanced impact results. For example, the following results were found over one year (first edition in December 2018 to fourth edition December 2019): national awareness of the programme increased from 61% to 67%; programme coverage increased from 3.4% to 6.9% of the total population; and a positive national attitudinal shift towards the programme was observed, increasing from 74% to 93%. Today, the approval rate among direct recipients is very high, sitting at 98%. Monitoring also improved the timeliness of delivery: in the latest disbursement, 99% of parents received the Box within one week of the birth, an improvement from the first disbursement wave where 91% of parents received it within the first week. Furthermore, the recipient's perceived utility of the box improved over time. By the fourth kit edition, recipients gave it a 4.8 score as opposed to 4.05 for the first edition, with 5 being the maximum positive response and 0 the minimum. The improvement in on-time delivery and content led to an increased demand to receive a kit: in the

first edition, 35% of would-be parents wished to receive the Box, whereas 68% expressed this preference by the fourth wave. A preference shift was also observed with regard to cash versus the in-kind Baby Box too, with a decline from 52% to 20% for the former by the fourth disbursement. Positive changes to household budgets occurred too: 49% of parents noted significant savings in the purchasing of baby-related goods in the first month post-partum.

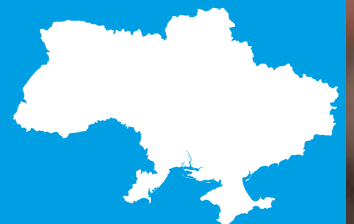
Very significantly, 54% of recipients evidenced a deepening of their childhood vaccinations knowledge and parents with previously negative attitudes to vaccinations exhibited a significant change in their attitude. Some 3% of parents¹⁷ demonstrated a negative-to-positive attitude change towards vaccinations as a result of the information provided in the Baby Boxes. The change in parents' attitudes is likely to have translated into many more additional vaccinated children in one year; potentially as many as 9,000 more children. This has wide-ranging positive public health implications for all children and brings Ukraine close to the WHO recommended minimum vaccination coverage of 95%.

Going forward, UNICEF plans to scale up its role and involve the private sector in the project. One aspiration is to include a comprehensive book on ECD, produced by UNICEF and sponsored by the corporate sector. Moreover, UNICEF is considering adding more products/certificates to the box according to parents' suggestions gleaned from the monitoring process (e.g. a discount certificate for an online baby product store for clothes, toys, etc.). In addition, UNICEF plans to continue comprehensive monitoring to improve the project and to track the ultimate programmatic goals (i.e. poverty reduction, vaccination, breastfeeding, etc.).

¹⁷ Three percent represents the parents of 9,000 newborn children. Approximately 300,000 children are born in Ukraine annually.



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.¹⁵⁴

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%).¹⁵⁵ 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),¹⁵⁶ 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,¹⁵⁷ 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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