
Statement by Mrs. Afshan Khan, UNICEF Regional Director, Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States, at the launch of "OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Romania"

03 May 2017, Victoria Palace

Mr. Prime Minister,
Excellences,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here with you today, at such a high level gathering, to share the findings and recommendations of this joint review of the learning assessment and evaluation system in Romania and discuss the way forward for this important and innovative partnership between the Ministry of Education, the OECD and UNICEF.

Learning is at the center of UNICEF's global and regional agendas. This is in line with the Sustainable Development Goal # 4, which aims to "*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all*", and with the 2020 EU Strategic Framework for Education and Training.

Indeed, UNICEF Strategic Plan for the period 2018 - 2021 seeks to ensure that every child learns, regardless of wealth, location, gender, disability, and language or minority status. Globally, we are committed to equity and we focus on the most disadvantaged children. We believe that, for every child to learn, all children should access quality education. Moreover, education should lead to learning, and help children achieve their full potential and develop relevant skills for a fulfilling life. The overall education goal of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, "*Every Child Learns*" is supported by 3 key results:

Firstly, more children and adolescents attend early learning, primary and lower secondary education, including children with disabilities and children from ethnic and linguistic minorities. Secondly, more children and adolescents acquire minimum learning competencies. Finally, more children and adolescents develop the skills necessary for a productive and fulfilling life and a full participation in society.

Let me now take a regional perspective.

Education systems in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia are characterized by poor learning outcomes. A few years ago, UNICEF analysed the results of countries in the region that participated in PISA. This exercise highlighted that many students leave school without mastering the basic skills and knowledge needed to engage productively in their countries' workforce and society. The analysis revealed large equity gaps in learning outcomes between students from disadvantaged social groups and their wealthier peers. The decreasing relevance of curricula, outdated teaching and learning methods, under-qualification of many teachers, lack of measures to prevent dropout... among other factors ... all contribute to low learning achievements.

In order to address these challenges, the UNICEF regional education strategy aims at '*including all children in quality learning*'. The focus is on improving equity in participation and timely completion of a basic education cycle. Our Strategy also concentrates on enhancing the quality and relevance of education as a way to reduce equity gaps in learning. Supporting participation of all children in early learning remains a priority. Last but not least, we focus on improving the governance of education systems.

The good news is that, as a result of reforms over the past two decades, the provision and quality of education are improving in many countries. For instance, a number of governments have invested in early childhood education and made compulsory one year of pre-primary education. Countries in the region have also been strengthening teacher education and curricula. As a result, out of 11 countries which participated in the 2015 PISA, six countries - including Romania- showed that they had improved their learning achievement over the years.

It is in this regional context that UNICEF initiated a new partnership with the Ministry of Education of Romania and the OECD.

The review looks into the issues of student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation, and system evaluation. However, its findings and recommendations cover a broader range of issues that affect the education system in general. This tripartite initiative has been more than a review, it has also been a peer learning exercise for all parties involved. The Ministry of Education was a leading partner of the review process. A broad range of stakeholders in the education sector have been consulted and involved, including the Institute of Educational Sciences, the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education, the National Center for Assessment and Evaluation, the Education Department of the Presidential Administration in addition to academia, civil society, trade unions, and the National Student Council.

The Review provides a number of valuable findings that can inform policy development in the education sector for the coming years. It is now essential that the Government, especially the Ministry of Education, the Presidency and all stakeholders continue this policy dialogue and translate these recommendations into a concrete national plan of action.

The partnership between OECD and UNICEF in this joint review, the first ever in the area of education, is a successful example of the complementarity and programmatic synergy between our two organizations. It brings UNICEF's field experience and presence, its capacity to work closely with governments and partners to improve the education systems together with OECD's experience and expertise in conducting and analysing international assessments of learning outcomes.

Mr. Prime Minister, excellences, dear colleagues,

Too often, countries participating in international assessments are mainly concerned with their ranking and do not really make use of the results and their analysis. UNICEF is confident that Romania will use this joint review to strengthen the policy dialogue and accelerate the reform of its education system.

Another intention of this initiative is to encourage horizontal cooperation. Romania is encouraged to share its experience and expertise, as well as the methodology used for this review, with other countries in the region.

UNICEF stands ready to work with the Government, the Presidency, the Parliament and other partners to translate this review into an Action Plan that improve the education system for all children. We understand that Romania is about to develop a new Education Law. Hopefully, the recommendations of this review and the future Action Plan will make a useful contribution to this effort.

Thank you.