

**Presentation to International Steering Group
Budapest by Gordon Alexander Feb 2008**

Roma Children and Young People in the Decade

For every child
Health, Education, Equality, Protection
ADVANCE HUMANITY



Key message: It's political

- We need good policies for all children plus additional support for marginalised children.
- Change has to start with the youngest
- There are effective interventions – we need to find ways to scale these up
- The role of data – especially in monitoring progress
- We are running out of time

Overview of Presentation

- Where are we now under the Decade with respect to children?
- What are the critical issues?
- What has been shown to work?
- What can be UNICEF's contribution?

Why are children an issue?

Decade Action Plans:

Children feature in Education and Health

Yes, these are critical

- We need de-segregation in kindergartens and schools
- We need to stop the labelling of Roma children as 'disabled'
- We need access to healthcare for all children

But this is not enough.....

Child well-being is multi-dimensional, and inter-connected

- Children's life chances – powerfully influenced by access to and quality of services
- Importance of children's perspectives
- Children's experiences at home, with friends and in neighbourhood
- Children's experiences of discrimination

The Decade Plans do not reflect this multi-dimensionality

Progress at the top...

Committee on Rights of the Child Concluding Observations 2003-2007

Almost all countries show progress in:

- Legislation
- Institutional mechanisms
- Projects and initiatives for Roma children

...but not at the bottom

Problems, common to most states, continue:

- lack of implementation with adequate human and financial resources
- persisting discrimination in day-to-day life
- persisting stereotyping and stigmatisation in media
- Roma children remain the most marginalised

Calls for very different form of response

Critical areas of intervention:

Poverty reduction

- ▶ Integrated and comprehensive child poverty reduction strategies
- ▶ cutting across different sectors
- ▶ ‘mainstreaming’ of children

Education: De-segregation but with conditions

- ▶ abandoning biased systematic testing of children;
 - ▶ availability of teaching assistants,
 - ▶ transport and textbooks;
 - ▶ school management creating supportive environment,...
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- ▶ linked to education reform & institutional change at local level

Segregation does not work...

European Court of Human Rights ruling 2007

Segregation of Roma children in education violates European Convention Human Rights

New evidence from 2006 PISA :

`those schools that divided students by ability for all subjects had lower student performance on average`

Critical areas of intervention II

Early Child Development

- ▶ First 2-3 years of childhood of critical importance for cognitive and psycho-social development.
- ▶ Children who miss out cannot easily catch up, with disadvantages cumulating at school, & later life

Reform of childcare system

- ▶ Roma children still significantly over-represented in institutions,
- ▶ length of years in institutions leaving young people ill-prepared for later life
- ▶ De-institutionalisation and family-based care for Roma children

4 Guiding Principles from CRC to shape response

- 'the best interests of the child'
- non-discrimination
- participation
- resources 'to the fullest extent possible'

Young people as agents of change

- Completion of secondary education
- Transition into – mainstream – employment
- Political participation
- Beyond that, participation in community development, & media

How do we measure what is happening to & for children?

4 indicators that will drive change

- % of Roma children completing mainstream schooling
- ECD coverage and attendance
- Number of young people finishing secondary education
- Subjective quality of life of Roma children

UNICEF's contribution

- 'System' issues: 'good policies for all children'
- Comprehensive strategies
- Special contribution ECD
- Identifying best practices & assisting scale up 'what works'
- Fostering partnerships
- National level data

Need for a sense of urgency

- Progress not fast enough: Time is running out
- The Decade as a unique opportunity
- Specific suggestions/ proposals
 - ⇒ A Children and Young People perspective across Decade
 - ⇒ Champion countries 'leading the way' - all elements of strategy
 - ⇒ A forum for assessing progress regularly
 - ⇒ Active 'voice' of young Roma in Decade

