

Regional Conference on International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)

Item 7, Third thematic session: Inequalities, social inclusion and rights

Friday 20 October

Excellencies, distinguished colleagues and guests,

I am honoured to represent UNICEF in this very rich discussion on how we can collectively contribute to addressing inequalities and ensure the most vulnerable groups - including children – can fully realise their rights.

Allow me to add a few important points from UNICEF's perspective:

- Let us ensure **children are part of the equity equation**: the events over the past two years - including the global COVID-19 pandemic, the escalation of the war in Ukraine and the global economic downturn - have had a devastating impact on children and their families. Interventions to support children at risk of poverty and social exclusion are not only in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child but also a critical investment in the future of communities and of a country's economy.
- **Children with disabilities, children on the move** – including unaccompanied and separate children - **and children from Roma communities** are particularly vulnerable and exposed to multiple risks, including exclusion, poverty, violence, exploitation and abuse. Governments must put in place inclusive social protection systems that guarantee equitable access to support and benefits for *all* children, without discrimination and based on need alone.

- I would also like to emphasize the importance of **timely and disaggregated data** to understand and act upon the patterns of exclusion and inequalities in realizing the rights of girls and women. In this regard, I appreciate UNICEF's combined efforts with UNFPA to help countries collect invaluable disaggregated data through UNICEF-supported multiple indicator cluster surveys.
- Allow me to also highlight the strategic importance of tools such as the **European Child Guarantee** and their potential to reduce inequalities, increase social inclusion and realize children's rights in EU countries. UNICEF implemented Phase III of the Preparatory Action for a European Child Guarantee and supported seven countries - Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Spain - in designing Child Guarantee National Action Plans.
- Member States should seize this unique opportunity to implement, monitor and evaluate integrated national action plans in close collaboration with key partners - including children themselves - and use existing instruments and support mechanisms to close implementation and data gaps regarding children left behind.
- UNICEF remains committed with partnering with governments and provide technical assistance to ensure the best interest of every child is put first at all times. If we invest in services that meet the specific needs of children, we help build more resilient, inclusive communities and create a better future for all.