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Serbian survey highlights poverty gaps

New data confirms the need for policies to reach the poorest and most excluded children

BELGRADE, Serbia, 13 June 2007 – New figures show that many poor and Roma children in Serbia are excluded from education, health and protection services.

The figures come from the first national household survey in Serbia to include specific assessments of the poorest 20 per cent of the population and Roma living in Roma settlements. The results of the survey, carried out in 2005, show that while Serbia's economic and social development policies have resulted in significant improvements for many, disparities that are often related to poverty and ethnicity are still large and need to be urgently addressed.

"These data clearly show that inclusive policies that specifically target the poorest and excluded children are urgently required and that resources must be widely distributed and targeted to benefit all children in the country," said UNICEF Acting Representative for Serbia, Maria-Luisa Fornara.

- **Child mortality:** Among Roma children the probability of dying under the age of 5 is almost three times higher (around 28 per thousand live births) than the national average
- **Immunization:** Ethnicity is strongly related to immunization coverage. While 87 per cent of Serbian children have been immunized against measles, mumps and rubella, this falls to 63 per cent for Roma children.
- **Nutritional status:** Under-nutrition prevalence among Roma children is several times higher than the national average, with 12 per cent of Roma children underweight and 20 per cent stunted.
- **Pre-school education:** Only 33 per cent of Serbia's children attend pre-school institutions, but this falls to 7 per cent among the poorest quintile and to 4 per cent among Roma children.
- **Primary Education:** As in most countries in the region, primary education is almost universal. However, dramatic disparities arise in secondary education. Net attendance is 84 per cent national, and only 10 per cent for Roma.
- **HIV prevention:** Less than 50 per cent of Serbian youth have comprehensive knowledge about HIV prevention. Among the poorest, only 25 per cent of youth have that knowledge. Among Roma, this falls to 7 per cent.

The new data was gathered through a "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey" (MICS). With 10,000 households surveyed, it is the largest single source of data for monitoring the status of children and women in the country.

The results have for the first time confirmed existing disparities in the country and will significantly contribute to evidence-based policy making. The MICS also includes new indicators targeting areas that had gaps in information, such as children with disabilities or attitudes towards violence. This new

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initial baseline will be vital to the Government when deciding on priority actions and targeted budget allocations.

About the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)

The MICS in Serbia was carried out by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) and Strategic Marketing Research Agency (SMMRI). Financial and technical support was provided by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The survey was conducted as part of a series being carried out around the world in close to 60 countries. MICS data enables the monitoring of progress towards international goals including the Millennium Development Goals.

The Serbia MICS figures will also play a crucial role in the achievement of important national goals established by the Serbian Poverty Reduction Strategy and the National Plan of Action for Children.

Additional information on the global MICS project can be found on the website:

<http://www.childinfo.org>.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

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To download a copy of the MICS survey, visit UNICEF Serbia country website:

<http://www.unicef.org/serbia>