

Conference on Child Poverty in the Middle East and North Africa: from measurement to policy action

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Final Communiqué

RABAT, 17 May 2017 – The Conference on 'Child Poverty in the Middle East and North Africa: from measurement to policy action' concluded today. The conference aimed to take stock of efforts in the MENA region and beyond to measure, analyse and address child poverty. It facilitated the exchange of experience between countries, in the areas of evidence production and the translation of research findings into effective policy action to combat child poverty. The conference was jointly organised by the Moroccan National Observatory for Human Development (ONDH) and UNICEF (Morocco Country Office and Regional Office for Middle East and North Africa), in collaboration with the Ministry of Family, Solidarity, Equality and Social Development (MFSEDS) and the National Observatory of Child Rights (ONDE). The conference brought together over 150 participants representing governments, UNICEF offices, academic and research institutions and development partners from MENA countries, as well as other regions. The conference reached the following conclusions:

- 1. The aim of child poverty measurement is to inform policies and programmes to reduce child poverty. This requires a national, multi-sectoral, integrated policy response.** To meet the ambitious targets of SDG 1, mere measurement of poverty does not suffice. Evidence on child poverty needs to receive specific attention in policy making. More needs to be done in terms of the analysis of policy alternatives in the fight against child poverty, such as, for example, analyzing the equity of public expenditure on children; the links between public investment and child poverty; or the simulation of the potential impact of policy reforms on children's wellbeing. Addressing child poverty requires an integrated, multi-sectoral approach in measuring child poverty, analyzing policy options, and implementing the most effective and efficient policies. Children need holistic solutions that are fine-tuned to their specific realities. This requires Government Ministries and Departments to create platforms and working groups for joint reflection and analysis, as well as for the formulation of coordinated policy responses for children, including for early child development. Child poverty cannot be seen in isolation from poverty at the household level, as shown in the draft Arab Poverty Report. Thus, social policy and social protection programmes should consider the interrelation between household dimensions and deprivation experienced by the individual child.
- 2. Child poverty is a reality in the MENA region and it is multidimensional in nature.** This was made abundantly clear in the national child poverty studies presented at the conference and in the draft Regional Child Poverty Report. Twelve of the twenty countries in the Middle East and North Africa have either completed or are in the process of conducting child poverty studies.
- 3. To accelerate progress towards SDG1, we need to move from ad hoc to routine and nationally owned data collection, which would allow for regular monetary and multidimensional child poverty measurement. This will inform the drawing of**

national SDG baselines and reporting for Target 1.2 on child poverty. The conference was a powerful advocacy forum for the participating countries to start routine measurement of child poverty in all its dimensions, including monetary poverty.

4. **Many countries have used a national MODA methodology to assess childhood poverty. While this method has demonstrated many strengths, further improvements are required both in the application of the methodology and in the underlying survey instruments.** In particular, national MODA exercises should always be guided by full involvement of stakeholders in defining dimensions, indicators and thresholds that are relevant for the country context. In terms of data sources on which N-MODAs are generally applied in the region, participants noted that they often do not capture deprivations experienced by older children well. Specific data for children over age 5 tends to be scarce in existing data sources. This means that the MODA approach does not come to its full right for older children. The emerging application of the MODA approach to panel data sets provides the opportunity to better understand child poverty dynamics and effectiveness of policy measures.
5. **The monetary aspect of poverty matters greatly also for children.** Countries are encouraged to ensure that they routinely generate estimates of the proportion of children who live in monetary poor households, whenever a household income and expenditure survey is conducted. This will help to inform the SDG1 baseline, target setting and reporting. Monetary poverty thresholds should be set at a level that reflects the reality of the country. The way in which adult equivalence scales are used in the region varies greatly, which complicates international comparison of monetary poverty estimates.
6. **Innovative ways to measure child poverty are needed in conflict-affected and humanitarian settings.** The MENA region is affected by a multitude of conflicts, shocks and stresses, often leading to large-scale emergencies requiring humanitarian assistance. Collectively, we need to push the methodological boundaries to come up with new ways to assess child poverty in these humanitarian situations, including the impact of safety and security challenges. The conference considered various initiatives that deserve to be explored further, including the use of lighter surveys (e.g. the SWIFT survey), the use of 'big data' (including mobile phone data) and remote sensing (satellite imagery). These methods, and their combination with current instruments, such as MICS, can also be considered in more favorable settings in the region.
7. **The conference demonstrated the strength of South-South collaboration** when it comes to identifying global good practice on child poverty measurement and policy measures. Countries in the MENA region showed that they are increasingly generating evidence, identifying common challenges and examples of policy measures that deserve to be shared within and outside the region. International organisations can and should continue to play a central role in facilitating this collaboration.