

**UPR Portugal
Portuguese Committee for UNICEF**

4th April 2019

Thank you, Mr. President,

distinguished delegates, your excellencies and colleagues,

The Portuguese Committee for UNICEF, a NGO that works in the country for 40 years, is honoured to join you here today.

I. We welcome the Portuguese government's acceptance of the UPR recommendations regarding **child poverty and social exclusion.**

We recognize the effort made to reduce child poverty, but children continue to be the most affected by poverty in Portugal.

Despite a decrease from the previous year, 19% of children are still at risk of poverty.

Households with children are at higher risk than those without children. This means that the **presence of children increases families' risk of poverty.**

Monetary poverty alone cannot fully capture what it means for a child to be poor as:

- Portugal has one of the highest housing poverty rates, largely due to multiple housing problems.
- Children from the age of 3 are less likely to attend preschool if they live in the lowest-income households
- The circumstances in which children grow up influence how well they do at school - children of non-professional parents score lower in reading tests.

Inequality is also a problem of particular relevance.

Social transfers are not effectively reducing income gaps among children. Portugal has one of highest levels of bottom-end inequality in the EU and OECD countries.

Minority groups, like Roma, feel inequality more severely, and Roma children become even more vulnerable. For this Roma children, enrolment rates are still too low. The number of children that remain beyond primary school, particularly through to secondary school, is of great concern. This must be addressed. The possibility of marriage at the age of 16, with parent consent, makes Roma girls twice as vulnerable. Marriage before the age of 18 is a fundamental violation of human rights; children can experience isolation, violence, abuse and exploitation, and evidence shows the links between child marriage and school drop-out.

A multidimensional approach to child poverty and social exclusion is therefore an essential complement to standard monetary poverty measures.

The Portuguese Government has not made an explicit commitment to end child poverty nor adopted a national strategy to end poverty addressing its structural causes.

A strategy to eradicate poverty requires cross-cutting measures. Countries that implement multidimensionality child poverty policies are more likely to succeed in advancing children's rights and well-being rather than countries with fragmented strategies.

Recommendation:

The State must be urged to act on child poverty.

We call on Portuguese Government to adopt a multidimensional rights-based strategy and annual action plans to end child poverty, assessing the impact of social transfers and investing in public services, as in housing, education and health.

II. As for the protection of children

UNICEF Portugal remains **concerned for the implementation** of Timor-Leste, recommendation 127.78, that called on the Government to **protect the rights of neglected and abused children:**

- **Corporal punishment** is still permissible and there is lack of information and awareness on alternative methods of discipline.
- There is a **lack of data** and systemic view of the processes to assess and monitor the interventions in the Child Protection System – cultural values and social contexts continue to play a role in people’s understanding of child abuse.
- There isn’t a strategic action plan to ensure quality and more effective responses to **children’s deprived of a family environment** - in foster families and in residential care.

Portuguese law considers institutional placement as a measure of last resort. However, only 3% of all children in care are placed in foster families. The Government has recently stated that “foster care programme is suspended”. The mismatch between the timeframes of a child’s life and those of the Government’s decision undermine children’s development and protection – permanently.

In the case of children with disabilities,

There is a lack of precise data regarding the number of children with disabilities and type of disability. Also, the new Law for Inclusive Education, requires that the provision of support exist for all students – regardless of the disability. Nevertheless, there is a lack of resources for children with severe or multiple disabilities.

Bullying and mental health issues must be looked through. The major educational and school reforms over the past few years have not effectively addressed the social and emotional learning factors. Almost half (45%) of children have been exposed to bullying. Mental health disorders among children are increasing.

Protection of children’s rights require coordinated, systematic and integrated action.

The Portuguese Government’s announcement of a national Strategy for the Rights of the Child, is yet to be realized. It was first recommended in 2009, under the UPR process.

The National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and Protection of Children and Youth, arguably responsible for this strategy, does not have the scope, reach and resources to implement it. This Commission depends directly from the Secretary of State of Inclusion of People with Disabilities. Their DNA is that of protection of children at risk.

Children’s rights and multidimensional problems – like poverty – are an example of the need of diversified action and policies, that cannot be tackled by a sectorial body - alone.

UNICEF Portugal recommends the State to:

Reinforce the legal system and intensify efforts to end all forms of violence against children.

Continue to invest in training and support for professionals and ensure adequate resources needed to respond to the needs of all children.

Adopt a comprehensive National Strategy and create a national entity that will be the keeper of children's rights, coordinating the implementation of this strategy and assessing its impact on children.

We thank the opportunity, and stand ready to continue working with the Portuguese government to ensure the rights of every child.