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EDITORIAL

Unaccompanied minors are also children without parental care 

As part of a joint UNICEF-ISS project, the Monthly Review will include a series of articles on the protection of the best interests and the rights of unaccompanied children.

In June 2006, ISS's General Secretariat initiated a joint project with UNICEF's Geneva-based Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS). A major part of this project related to an assessment of the current status and efforts to reform the childcare systems in Armenia, Albania, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria and Moldova, with the subsequent development of a set of policies and recommendations for the governments to accelerate the reforms in these countries. In addition, it has become apparent to both organisations that child displacement across borders in the region as well as across continents raises a number of child-rights issues, which require additional assessment and promotion. Thus, this series of articles is intended to promote the rights and the effective protection of unaccompanied children in countries of origin and in countries of reception through focused policy, legal, social and practical articles.

Children without parental care include unaccompanied children

The situation of unaccompanied children in relation to their family environment and development is directly linked to their particular vulnerability, the potential trauma of their displacement, and their personal background. Whilst some aspects of their care and protection will raise similar issues to that of other children

without parental care, others will be very specific to their individual situation and background. Thus, this project intends to emphasise the particularities and characteristics of the situation, rights, care, support, and protection of unaccompanied children.

Main issues of the protection of unaccompanied children

The above-mentioned articles, which will be published in every Monthly Review until December 2007, will address the following aspects : (a) a general overview of the situation of unaccompanied children, presented in this Review (page 6) ; (b) an introduction to the legal and policy documents – regional and international – designed to protect the rights and best interests of unaccompanied children ; (c) the protection of unaccompanied children upon arrival in the receiving country (assessment of the situation, rights, care...) ; (d) the evaluation of the child's best interests (current situation in the family and the country of origin vs. current situation of the child in the country of reception) ; (e) the assessment of measures, which are required in the country of origin, in cases of return to and reintegration into the family and country of origin (support, preparation of the child and parents, cooperation with community services...) ; and (f) the responsibility of the receiving State, should it be decided to fully integrate the child into the receiving country (care, protection, support, services...).

Advocacy through policy, legal and practical inputs

Each article will be designed to include a general approach to each aspect of the protection of unaccompanied minors, whilst also incorporating additional practical information and specific examples, which will be based on the expertise, casework, programmes and collaboration of the ISS network worldwide, and on those of other organisations and initiatives in this area. This should enable ISS and UNICEF to promote a child-rights perspective in matters of child migration, to offer positive practical

approaches to ensuring the best interests of the unaccompanied child, and to support existing advocacy initiatives in this area. It is hoped that an important number of partners will share their experiences and expertise and will contribute to the development of this advocacy tool, in particular in informing the network and the readers of the profile of unaccompanied children, the successes and failures of the systems concerned, the problematic aspects of the protection of these children, and of any good practices in this context.

The ISS/IRC Team