




## **Social protection systems in Georgia should better address the needs of the most vulnerable groups, UNICEF and World Bank say**

Social protection systems in Georgia should better address the needs of the most vulnerable groups, UNICEF and World Bank say. The existing gaps in poverty reduction and the relevant strategies were discussed at a workshop on "Supporting Shared Prosperity with Strong Social Protection System" that was jointly hosted by UNICEF and the World Bank on 1 December, 2014. "Georgia has increased social benefits, yet the share of children below the national poverty line has increased," said Sascha Graumann, UNICEF Representative in Georgia. "Therefore, UNICEF has been supporting the Government in reforming the social protection system including the introduction of benefits for vulnerable children." "In Georgia poverty is a long term experience for some unfortunate families while for others it can be a temporary, yet difficult situation because of a job loss or an illness of the main income earner. The social protection system must be responsive to the needs of both types of families," said Henry Kerali, World Bank Regional Director for the South Caucasus. It was stated at the workshop, that UNICEF and the World Bank will continue supporting the Government of Georgia and other stakeholders to establish social protection systems that are fiscally sustainable. This could be achieved through the following measures: Protecting the chronic poor, as well as children who live in poverty. The social protection system is geared towards effectively reaching those in chronic poverty. The recent efforts to improve targeting methodology and expand benefits are welcome. Yet, the share of children living in poor families is higher than the share of the overall population living below the poverty line. The current social protection system is limited in its ability to reach them. Therefore, additional and well-designed benefits are needed to help those children escape poverty. Preventing a slide into poverty for families that face a shock. While the Targeted Social Assistance is geared toward reaching the chronic poor, it does not provide effective safety nets to more than a half of the entire population that could be vulnerable. Therefore, it needs to be ensured that vulnerable families are reached with the safety nets to cope with shocks, such as unemployment or illness, in a timely manner. A group that is particularly vulnerable is youth who not only make the transition to the labor market but also start establishing their own families. This group faces high unemployment rates at a time when they are also having children and this could make them vulnerable to falling into poverty. Promoting independence by enabling vulnerable families to invest in their future and thereby improve their livelihoods. In addition to protection and prevention, social protection system must also support poor and vulnerable families by providing opportunities to seek better livelihood. This also means that social protection system should be designed so that they promote a successful transition to employment as well as other avenues to economic independence. The participants of the workshop were represented by the government, international organizations, and research institutes that work on the critical issues of poverty reduction and social protection of the most vulnerable part of the population in Georgia. Media Contacts In UNICEF Maia Kurtsikidze Tel : (995 599) 53 30 71 mkurtsikidze@unicef.org In The World Bank World Bank Tel : (995 32) 291 30 96 ipaichadze@worldbank.org 

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