

*New York, Jun 29 2011* - Two United Nations entities have urged governments in Europe and Central Asia to immediately end the practice of placing young children in State-run homes for infants because of the risk of neglect and abuse.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) yesterday <"[http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_59030.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_59030.html)">launched a campaign against sending children to State-managed homes after two new reports documented abuses of children in such institutions.

The reports showed that across Europe and Central Asia, including in States that are members of the European Union (EU), more than a million children and adults are living in long-term residential care, where they languish, often for a lifetime.

Hundreds of thousands of babies with disabilities are routinely placed in State-run homes, severely hampering their development, with many suffering in appalling conditions, according to the reports.

The report by OHCHR, entitled <i>Forgotten Europeans – Forgotten Rights</i>, outlines international and European human rights standards relevant to the situation of people in institutions.

The UNICEF document, entitled <i>At Home or in a Home – Formal care and adoption of children in Eastern Europe and Central Asia</i>, provides an overview of the major trends and concerns about children in formal care and institutions, as well as adoption in 21 countries and one entity in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

At a meeting in the European Parliament hosted by Irish legislator Mairead McGuinness, the two UN entities urged governments across the region to make the needs and rights of the youngest children a priority in policy-making, budget allocation and services development, while following international and European standards.

The call to action includes restricting placement of children in institutions to short-term emergency measures or a planned stay not exceeding six months – and only when it is absolutely necessary and in the best interests of the child.

"Children belong where their best interests are met – in loving, caring homes, not in institutions where we know they all too often receive substandard care," said Anthony Lake, the UNICEF Executive Director.

"We need to support initiatives that help families stay together by increasing their access to social services – and governments need to invest in building stronger social protection systems that reach the most vulnerable families and most disadvantaged communities."

Jan Jarab, OHCHR's regional representative for Europe, said: "Many Central and Eastern

European countries have largely maintained the system of large-scale residential institutions for children of all ages.

“Placement of children into institutions – including those under three years of age – is still the society’s main response to disability, poverty or perceived lack of parental skills, rather than a measure of protection from individual abuse, from which these societies often fail to protect children.”

Source: [UN News](#)