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UNICEF-backed conference seeks to ensure inclusion of children with disabilities



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Government leaders and experts today discussed ways to improve education, health care and social services for millions of children with disabilities during a conference co-organized by the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) in Azerbaijan.

During the one-day conference, which was held in the capital, Baku, about 200 participants from 12 countries shared experiences of efforts to reduce the stigma against children with disabilities and ensure their physical and social inclusion into society, according to a [press release](#) issued by UNICEF.

The conference was part of a wider campaign to reduce the stigmatization of children with disabilities, which the agency noted is still prevalent in parts of Central and Eastern Europe and the countries that form the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

“Children with disabilities and in need of special care live by our side. Incredible as it may seem, but in the most of the cases it is them who understand best what it means not to be accepted by society. International institutions, national governments, financial institutions, people with goodwill, people who are not indifferent to the fate of children should pool their efforts,” said Mehriban Aliyev, the first lady of Azerbaijan and President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, which co-organized the event along with the Azerbaijani Government.

Both the conference and the campaign place special emphasis on the need for policy reforms and a change in societal attitudes to guarantee the physical and social inclusion of children with disabilities into society.

Four members of the Berliner Philharmoniker, which serves as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, performed with the Azerbaijan National Symphonic Orchestra tonight, and will be taking part in various activities with children with disabilities throughout this week to raise awareness of the campaign.

“We are happy to contribute our music so we can help build a more inclusive society, where children with and without disabilities are free to express themselves through music or other means. Every child deserves a chance to participate actively as an equal member of society according to his or her potential,” said Stanley Dodds, a board member of the Berliner Philharmoniker.

Inclusion into society has not been the general approach for children with disabilities in the region. However, extensive research shows that children in institutions will not develop as in the same way as those who live with their families.

According to a report issued today by the UN peacekeeping mission in Timor-Leste ([UNMIT](#)), women, children and persons with mental disabilities are the most vulnerable to discrimination on a daily basis, making the reduction of stigmatization an important factor for the successful inclusion of persons with disabilities into society.

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