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REPORT*

**“SOCIAL PROTECTION AND BENEFITS FOR THE YOUNG FAMILIES
IN THE BSEC MEMBER STATES”**

Rapporteur: Mr. Zoltan PEK, Vice-Chairman of the Committee (Serbia)

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. *The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, and it is entitled to protection by society and the State* (art. 16.3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948). It is necessary also to protect the individual rights of all family members. The recognition of each person's dignity requires social inclusion and the implementation of all the existing international human rights instruments, including the regional instruments and the relevant international conventions.

2. The focus on the problems of the young families is vital since the economic crisis is profoundly impacting children, youth and their families. Family policy is a comprehensive family support for bringing up children in a safe family environment. One of the main aim of the society is to prepare youth for future but not future for youth. Hence, the problems of youth and particularly young families are important for the society.

3. The social protection policies play a critical role in achieving the human right to social security, reducing poverty and inequality, and supporting inclusive growth. While the need for social protection is widely recognized, the fundamental human right to social security remains unfulfilled for the large majority of the world's population. Only 27 per cent of the global population enjoy access to comprehensive social security systems, whereas 73 per cent are covered partially.

4. The lack of access to social protection constitutes a major obstacle to the economic and social development. Inadequate or absent social protection coverage is associated with high and persistent levels of poverty and economic insecurity, growing levels of inequality and insufficient investments in the human capital. Despite the large expansion of various schemes, existing social protection policies in the world do not sufficiently address the income security needs of the young families and the children. Worldwide, about 18,000 children die every day, mainly from preventable causes: many of these deaths could be averted through adequate social protection. According to the World Bank Development Indicators, the average neonatal mortality rate in the Black Sea Region is around 7.3 per 1000 live births.

5. Although child mortality rates have dropped, a majority of countries are not taking the necessary policy measures to provide care and education to children. Today, education remains an inaccessible right for millions of children around the world. More than 72 million children of primary education age are not in school and 759 million adults are illiterate and do not have the opportunity to improve both their living conditions and those of their children. Early childhood care and education programmes generally do not reach the poorest families and their children.

6. The social protection has also a key role in preventing child labour by reducing economic vulnerability of families, enabling children to go to school and protecting them from exploitation. More efforts are needed to strengthen the measures to ensure income security for young families with children. Many children do not receive the essential financial support that could make a real difference, in terms of nutrition, health, education and care services regarding their chances of achieving their full potential.

7. According to the United Nation`s World Social Protection Report, the specific family and child benefit programmes existing in 108 countries, often cover only small groups of the population. In 75 countries, no such programmes are available at all. On average,

governments allocate 0.4 per cent of GDP to family and child benefits, ranging from 2.2 per cent in Western Europe, to 0.2 per cent in Africa, in Asia and the Pacific.

8. The United Nations General Assembly recently celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family (2014), where focus was put on the family-oriented policies and strategies aiming mainly at tackling the family poverty; ensuring work-family balance and advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity.

9. Since its establishment, the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation has set as a fundamental objective, the transformation of the Black Sea into an area of peace, stability and prosperity. Along with the economic integration of the BSEC Region, the social well-being of its peoples was acknowledged as a main factor of development towards the achievement of this vision. The “BSEC Economic Agenda: Towards an Enhanced BSEC Partnership”, which has been adopted in Istanbul in June 2012, explicitly refers to the promotion of the social well-being as a major BSEC priority.

10. At its previous Meeting, the Cultural, Educational and Social Affairs Committee discussed the issue of “Sustainable Healthcare Systems in the BSEC Member States” (rec. 157/2017), which has been one of the central goals of the BSEC Member States for the last decade. Going further into embracing the aspects of the social relations and the most vulnerable groups of the society, the Committee decided to focus on a topic which regards the “Social protection and benefits for the young families in the Black Sea Region”. Contributions to the Report were received from the National Delegations of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Turkey. The necessary additional reference material has been obtained by the PABSEC International Secretariat, through the related internet resources and publications.

II. THE INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK AND EXPERIENCE

Global level

11. Social security and protection, as a basic human right, is enshrined in major international instruments such as: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); The Declaration of Philadelphia (1944) and Conclusions concerning social security (adopted by the International Labour Conference, 89th session, 2001).

United Nations

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

12. *The Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)*. The adoption of the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) at the 101st Session of International Labour Conference, in June 2012, constitutes an important milestone for the International Labour Organization (ILO). Since its creation in 1919, the ILO has actively promoted policies and provided assistance to countries in order to supply adequate levels of social protection to all members of society guided by international social security standards, entitled Minimum standards of social security, 1952 (No. 102). Among the BSEC Member States, Convention No.102 has been ratified by Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

13. *The ILO Decent Work Team and Country Offices (DWT/CO)* provide advisory services and technical assistance to the governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations, as well as social security institutions, by providing policy advices for restructuring national

social security systems, in accordance with the international labour standards such as the above-mentioned Convention and recommendation in order to ensure basic social protection for all. The ILO DWT/CO for Eastern Europe and Central Asia has been functioning in Moscow since 1959. The Office coordinates the ILO activities in the following BSEC Member States: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and the Russian Federation. The DWT/CO–Budapest deals with the transfer of know-how from the EU member countries to the South-East Europe, Moldova and Ukraine, in the framework of Decent Work Country Programmes.

14. Drawn up on the model of Convention No. 102, several other Conventions offer a higher level of protection, both in terms of the covered population and of the level of benefits, namely: *The Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)*, which sets the global minimum standards for all the nine branches of social security; *The Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (No. 118)*; *The Maintenance of Social Security Rights Convention, 1982 (No. 157)* and the *Maintenance of Social Security Rights Recommendation, 1983 (No. 167)*; *The Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment Convention, 1988 (No. 168)* and the *Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment Recommendation, 1988 (No. 176)*; *The Maternity Protection Convention, 2000, (No. 183)* and the *Maternity Protection Recommendation, 2000 (No. 191)*.

15. UNICEF

UNICEF has become an influential actor in social protection worldwide. It supports governments to develop and strengthen their social protection programmes and policies, and advocates for child and gender-sensitive social protection. UNICEF's approach and vision on social protection are presented in its first-ever global *Social Protection Strategic Framework*. This document makes the case for child-sensitive social protection and argues for the expansion of inclusive, integrated social protection systems as an effective approach for achieving greater equity for children and their families.

Regional level

Council of Europe

16. *The European Social Charter*, ratified by all the BSEC Member States, is a Council of Europe treaty which guarantees the social and economic human rights, including the right to social security, social welfare and social services. The treaty system of the European Social Charter is an integrated set of international standards concerning the social rights and a mechanism for monitoring their implementation within the concerned States. This treaty system: guarantees a broad range of human rights with respect to everyday essential needs related to employment and working conditions, housing, education, health, medical assistance and social protection; lays specific emphasis on the protection of vulnerable persons, such as elderly people, children, people with disabilities and migrants.

17. Furthermore, the Council of Europe has defined common *European social security standards* through international standard-setting conventions, namely the European Code of Social Security, its Protocol and the European Code of Social Security (revised). These legal instruments provide orientation in the reform process going on in many countries of the Council of Europe, by setting standards in the social security field, on the basis of minimum harmonisation of the level of social security. These standard-setting instruments set out the underlying principles of what is referred to, as the European social security model. Among the BSEC Member States: Greece, Moldova, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine have signed the above-mentioned treaties.

European Union

18. *The Europe 2020 Strategy* provides a policy framework from which, several relevant European Commission (EC) Communications impacting on the social inclusion agenda, are derived. There are three key targets within the Strategy that have the potential to reduce social (and therefore health) inequalities: to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty or exclusion; to reduce EU average rate of early school leaving below ten per cent; to raise employment rate of the population aged 20-64, to at least 75 per cent.

19. The EU Communication '*Renewed social agenda: Opportunities, access and solidarity in 21st century Europe*' is mainly focused on the family, children and youth, the fight against poverty and social exclusion, especially inclusion of the elderly, as some of the priority areas for action. It also stresses that poor health can put a strain on the sustainability of healthcare systems, and highlights that new Commission initiatives should address the need to protect children's and family's rights and reduce poverty rates in the EU, especially the child poverty.

The BSEC

20. *The BSEC Economic Agenda: "Towards an Enhanced BSEC Partnership"* is a roadmap that defines the framework for joint actions necessary to give a new impetus to economic growth in the region and emphasizes the importance of sustaining development. This document puts forth the following objectives: Ensuring the sustainable development of human resources with due consideration to the prevailing demographic trends in the region and their impact on employment, education and training, health and social services, gender equality, child protection, migration and social inclusion; Recommending continuation of adopting the principles and practice of sustainable development into the national legislation, public policies and institutional mechanisms of the Member States as long-term objectives.

III. SOCIAL PROTECTION AND FAMILY POLICIES. THE SITUATION WORLDWIDE

21. It is generally agreed, that families deserve to be the focus of policymaking, owing to the critical contributions they make to society. Families bear the primary responsibility for the socialization of their children and the development of their social skills, which are vital skills in all aspects of the economic, social, public and personal development. Research suggests that parenting plays a significant role in children's success in school, hence contributing to the development of a society's human capital. The economic crisis and the financial burden are profoundly impacting children, youth and their families. The young people which are on the first step of the family life are the most vulnerable groups in these situations.

22. Despite their obvious social and economic contribution to society, families are rarely the focus of major policy initiatives. Often, such policies target women and children separately, and not the family unit. Although some regional and national efforts in developing family-oriented policies have been made, they have not been the subject of much research or documentation, particularly in the developing countries. Research on both the way in which family policy priorities are set, and how families are affected by such policies, has been limited.

23. In the context of the family policy, there are direct family policy aspects, where social protection policies are designed specifically either for families, such as assistance to families

with children, or in direct relation to family, such as policies to protect children from family-based child abuse. There are also other social protection policies, such as unemployment benefits and pension systems, that are not specifically designed for families in the context of the family policymaking, but that nonetheless, directly affect families.

24. In the interest of family well-being, it is beneficial to analyse some definitions. One of the principal aims of social protection is to provide at least minimum standards of well-being to people in dire circumstances, enabling them to live with dignity. Since most people continue to live in the context of a family with other family members, the relationship between this aspect of social protection and family policy is quite direct.

25. The process of formulating and implementing social protection systems and long-term development plans should fully consider the family relations, and social protection policies should be aligned with family policy in all areas and aspects, including education, housing and food security. It is necessary to define and stress on the family policies which beneficiaries are the young families, since they are the most vulnerable unit of the society in terms of economic and social aspects.

Definitions

26. The social protection is a powerful tool to ensure minimum living standards, combat causes and effects of poverty, and facilitate smooth income redistribution from working years to retirement. All successful societies and economies have developed strategies where social security systems play an important role to alleviate poverty and provide economic security that helps people to cope with life's major risks or the need to quickly adapt to changing economic, political, demographic and societal circumstances.

27. More specifically, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the social protection is “*the set of public measures that a society provides for its members to protect them against economic and social distress that would be caused by the absence or substantial reduction of income from work as a result of various contingencies (sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age);*” and includes the provision of healthcare (although healthcare is often listed as an additional category to social protection schemes), and the provision of ***cash and non-cash benefits for families and children***. This definition is consistent with that used by the EU, the OECD, and the World Bank.

Dimensions

28. The cash and non-cash benefits include the child-conditioned family and child allowances. The definition of child conditioned social protection (social protection affecting children) encompasses the social assistance and the economic support directed at the family or at the individual child and the social services including family support and alternative care.

29. In addition to the traditional social insurance benefits mentioned above, most OECD and EU countries provide many of the following types: • Social assistance – cash benefits, government provided minimum income programs that are targeted on the poor • Housing allowances – cash benefits that subsidize the costs of housing, usually for young families with children • Family benefits and services - cash or tax benefits, such as family or child allowances, provided to families with children, based on the number, age of the child; and family services – information, advice, counselling, residential and supportive services, especially for families with children.

30. Social protection is characterized by the ILO, as one of the most significant social achievements of the 20th century. The systems are highly developed in the EU and the OECD countries, largely as entitlements, not discretionary benefits. There are ongoing debates and criticisms regarding costs, financial burden, and work disincentives and the range of schemes vary greatly worldwide, but almost every country recognizes the importance of providing some sort of social protection scheme in reducing the vulnerability of its citizens and in maintaining stability.

Public spending on family benefits

31. The public spending on family benefits includes the financial support that is exclusively for families and their children. Broadly speaking, public spending on the family can be categorised into three types: 1) Child-related cash transfers to families with children, which includes child allowances, public income support payments during periods of parental leave, and, in some countries, income support for single parent families. 2) Public spending on services for families with children, which includes the direct financing of childcare and early childhood education facilities, childcare support through earmarked payments to parents, spending on assistance for young people and residential facilities. 3) Financial support for families provided through the tax system.

32. The global financial and economic crisis has forcefully underlined the importance of social security as a human right, and as an economic and social necessity, as set out in the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation (2012), No. 202. In the first phase of the crisis (2008–09), social protection played a strong role in the expansionary response. At least 48 high- and middle-income countries announced fiscal stimulus packages totalling US\$2.4 trillion, of which approximately a quarter was invested in social protection measures.

33. In the second phase of the crisis (2010 onwards), governments embarked on fiscal consolidation and premature contraction of expenditure, despite an urgent need of public support among vulnerable populations. In accordance with the OECD Social Expenditure, around 21 per cent of the GDP is allocated for social protection expenditures, and 2.43 per cent from them are family-related expenditures (2016).

Situation worldwide

34. Many countries in the world focus on family benefits, with a high-light on the young families, aiming at reversing low fertility trends. Surveys in Europe indicate that, while the desired number of children per family is two, families are unable to fulfil this desire, due to the financial insecurity and the lack of a work-family balance. To remedy this situation, the Governments have adopted measures that promote a work-family balance, including parental leave, flexible working arrangements and childcare services.

35. One important element of an effective family policy includes addressing and promoting child well-being, including education, healthcare, quality childhood care and the promotion of responsible parenting. Another one is respecting gender equality, including being fully aware and mindful of the different potential effects of policies on men and women and how this affects the status of women in the family and in the society.

36. The effective maternity protection ensures income security for pregnant women and mothers of new-born children and their families, and also effective access to quality maternal health care. It also promotes equality in employment. Worldwide, less than 40 per cent of women in employment are protected by law under mandatory maternity cash benefit schemes. The absence of income security forces many women to return to work prematurely.

37. An increasing number of countries are using non-contributory maternity cash benefits as a means to improve income security and access to maternal and child health care for pregnant women and new mothers, particularly for women living in poverty. However, significant gaps remain. Ensuring effective access to quality maternal healthcare is of particular importance, especially in countries where the informal economy accounts for a large proportion of employment.

38. Systematic research on families remains largely limited to the developed countries. Besides the scarcity of financial resources, many Governments face challenges in the design and implementation of family policies, owing to the lack of national expertise and capacity. As an additional challenge, a growing number of societies are experiencing fast changing family forms, functions and size.

39. The continuing negative consequences of the economic and social crisis raise numerous challenges for the young families. In the developing and developed countries alike, falling family incomes force parents to make cuts in health and education expenditures for their children. Once taken out of schools, children are unlikely to return and their education, productivity and future income prospects are greatly diminished.

40. Research has shown that when given the appropriate tools for positive parenting, prevention of child abuse and neglect, and the fostering of resilience, children, youth and families can effectively cope with the stress that the economic downturn has produced. Psychologists are encouraged to participate in educational efforts in schools and community forums such as parent teacher association meetings against these stressors.

41. During the last decade, the family policy across the Black Sea region has been expanding, as spending on family benefits is increasing. However, there is no clear trend in the use of cash and non-cash support, and their extent remains very different across countries. The evidence does suggest, however, that there has been a slight shift in the spending in many countries.

42. For instance, in over half of the OECD countries, the cash benefits do not depend on the family income and are paid as universal benefits. Universal family cash benefits may vary depending on the household's work situation. Countries where benefits are income-tested, are usually paid only when the family income is below a specified level and the child benefits are reduced as the family income increases. In these countries, the family tax credits are income-tested.

43. Most countries also have an upper age limit of children for the eligibility of family cash benefits, which is often higher for children in education. However, families may not be eligible to family cash benefits if children have income of their own, are married or do not live with their parents. Payment rates can be uniform, but more often they vary by age and/or number of children.

44. Countries have generally placed different emphasis on family support measures such as child tax credits, child allowances, parental leave benefits and/or formal childcare. Families are an integral part of society, and so work policies that affect family life are crucial. According to the OECD, some governments require employers to offer almost 50 hours of paid time off for parental leave for new mothers and fathers. Family leave is one of many issues human resource professionals must face.

IV. SOCIAL PROTECTION AND BENEFITS FOR THE YOUNG FAMILIES OF THE BSEC MEMBER STATES

45. All over the BSEC region, the demographic, economic and social environments, within which the national social security systems are operating, are continuously changing – and these changes obviously raise challenges for the societies and their social transfer systems. The comprehensive family policy includes tax measures, family benefits, measures to encourage equality at work between women and men, care and support services for children and other dependents, parental leave and the option to part-time working hours.

46. Such policies exist in all the BSEC Member States, although the focus may differ from one country to another and they may be regarded as social rather than family policies. Since countries have different traditions and social - or even philosophical – approaches, and since families, too, have different needs, this diversity is not surprising.

47. The motivation behind the policies also varies, ranging from moral and civic concerns in some cases, to political and economic ones or an emphasis on raising the birth-rate in others. Whatever its origin, children's moral, health and educational well-being is a vital component, as it is enabling parents to bring up the number of children they desire and balance their family responsibilities on the one hand, and their work and social lives, on the other.

48. All Member States have developed social policies which, together, form a family policy, whether or not it is explicitly named as such. The various policies aim at different objectives: reducing poverty and maintaining family incomes; supporting early childhood and children's well-being and development; helping balance work and family life; meeting the requirement for gender equality; enabling parents or would-be parents to decide on the number and spacing of their children, thereby increasing the birth rate.

49. In the recent years, the BSEC Member States have embarked upon large-scale social welfare reforms either by developing and extending existing schemes or by introducing new ones. As it is shown below, numerous measures have been taken by all countries in order to face urgent social needs created by the economic crisis. During this process, long-standing problems affecting the adequacy of social protection systems came to light, creating thus an opportunity to proceed to deeper, long-term reforms of the social protection systems.

50. In the BSEC framework, many of the deeper forms of integration which incorporate policies and institutions focusing on social goals such as employment, labour standards, human rights, gender equality and social protection still tend to be a secondary issue, well behind economic and political aims. However, the current economic and social circumstances call for intensive efforts, among which the regional cooperation in the field of social policies could be of great value.

51. The family social support issues in *the Republic of Armenia* are stipulated by the "Law on social assistance" and the "Law on State benefits", as well as other legal instruments that facilitate the implementation of these laws. One of the basic principles of the "Law on social assistance" is to provide benefits primarily to children. The Republic of Armenia has adopted a system of lump-sum payment for the birth of a child, whose beneficiaries are mostly young families. These families receive from the state cash-benefits, which depends on the number of the children, born in the family.

52. Given that, the unemployment rate among young people is at a relatively high level, when planning employment programs, one of the main targets being the involvement of the young people in these programs, which helps to increase the level of the youth employment. According to the legal aspect on employment, unemployment and competitiveness in the labour market, people have the right to participate in the governmental employment programs in many directions. Due to the fact that a great importance is attached to the provision of access to vocational training for the women with young children, numerous programmes are foreseen for the year 2018.

53. Issues related to the protection of the rights of the children are governed by the Family Code of the Republic of Armenia, the Laws "on social protection of children without parental care", "children's rights" and other legal acts providing for the implementation of these laws. With a view to ensure the child's well-being in the family, a new body is planned to be designed that will provide professional services to children and families in difficult circumstances, in accordance with the anticipated needs, including support for children with disabilities and their families, as well as victims of domestic violence and their families.

54. *In the Republic of Azerbaijan*, since 2006 a State Social Assistance Programme has been adopted to meet the minimum material needs of the low-income families, as a measure of passive social assistance. This programme also covers the young families in need. Currently, along with the social assistance with a specific term for families being at the poverty level, the government is examining mechanisms for recovering of their situation.

55. To this end, the transition from passive welfare to active social assistance programmes, especially for the low-income, the unemployed and job-seeking young families, social rehabilitation programmes have been conducted. They foresee the recovering of that group of society through the creation of private institutions relevant to their potential or through the development of activities aiming at their individual labour employment.

56. In *the Republic of Bulgaria*, the family policy is a cross-sectoral policy that is implemented not only by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy but also by other ministries and institutions, including the local and the regional authorities. The principle of family support is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, according to which bringing up children and educating them until the child reaches the age of majority, is the right and obligation of the parents and is supported by the state.

57. Family allowances are lump-sum allowances and monthly allowances and they are provided in cash and/or in kind. Of these, only four types are income-tested: lump-sum allowance for pregnancy; lump-sum allowance for pupils enrolled in the first grade; monthly allowances for raising a child under the age of one and monthly allowances for raising a child until graduation from high school, but not after the age of 20. No income-testing is required for the provision of the following types of allowances: single-payment birth allowance; lump-sum adoption allowance; lump-sum allowance for bringing up twins.

58. It is important to bear in mind that family allowances for children are financed only from the state budget. Taking into account the importance of this type of support, more than half of the overall amount of the estimated budget appropriation in the budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for 2017, is earmarked for the payment of all types of family allowances for children, amounting to more than a quarter billion EUR.

59. Another key priority in Bulgaria's social policy is the introduction of innovative integrated services for the early childhood development. Efforts are made in order to introduce an entirely new and integrated approach to childcare aiming at early childhood risk prevention, early intervention, and providing each child with a family or a family environment. UNICEF envisages to support this process by providing assistance to the country in regulating and ensuring the equal access to quality early childhood development services for all the children.

60. In *Greece*, the family institution is protected under the Constitution, in accordance with article 21 paragraph 1, which sets out the state's obligation to carry out institutional interventions and to provide benefits. The main objectives of the family policy are the protection of the family, along with the promotion of the principles of democracy and individual rights, gender equality and social justice.

61. The relevant authority with regard with the social protection and young families support in Greece, is the General Directorate of Welfare of the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity, which promotes non-material and material assistance. Under the jurisdiction of the Municipal Enterprises and Legal persons, governed by private law of profit or non-profit nature, Activity Day-care Centers units are operating with the purpose to facilitate the working parents.

62. There are taken cares for children aged 5-12, for a limited period of the day after school hours, through creative leisure activities, such as individual or group organized activities. Also, the municipalities are developing a state camping program in 31 Children's Camps, in order to accommodate children aged 6-16, families, the elderly and people with disabilities, with low family income.

63. The aim of the Action – plan “Reconciling family and work life” program, which is operating in Greece, is to provide substantial support to vulnerable groups so as to ensure equal access of their children to early childhood centers, nurseries, Child Daycare Centers and Children's Creative Activity Centers. This action is co-funded by national resources and the European Social Fund, under the Operational Program "Human Resource Development, Education and Lifelong Learning" and the Regional Operational Programs of the 13 Regions.

64. With regard to the family allowances for families with three or more dependent children, a special allowance of five hundred (500) euro is paid for each child per year, provided that the total family income is up to forty-five thousand (45,000) euro for families with three children. The family income ceiling is increased by three thousand (3,000) euros for families with four children and by four thousand (4,000) euros for each additional child for families with more than four children. A single child support benefit introduced in 2012 is granted to families, taking into account the number of dependent children, the equivalency scale, the equivalent income and the income scale.

65. The development of a coherent and single system of family support in the *Republic of Moldova* constitutes one of the primary goals of social protection, being, as well, ubiquitous in the provisions of the Association Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union. The national system of social protection of families and children is made up of two fundamental components: monetary allowances and social services. The Law on social services no.123 of 18.06.2010 constitutes the general framework for the creation and functioning of the integrated social services system.

66. It determines the tasks and the responsibilities of the central and local public administration authorities and other natural and legal persons empowered to ensure and provide social services and it also ensures the protection of the rights of social services beneficiaries. Through the 2014 – 2020 Child Protection Strategy, the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family launched a broad reform process in the field of child protection, whose goal is to develop and make efficient the system of protection of families with children at risk and of children in difficult situations.

67. Since 2016, the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family in collaboration with the Public Association „Partnerships for each child” and the territorial social assistance structures have been implementing the Mellow Parenting Parental Education Programme, meant to support parents in developing parental competences at various development stages of the child, starting with the prenatal stage until the preschool age.

68. The family support service in the Republic of Moldova is provided in 2 ways: primary family support and secondary family support. The primary family support includes various flexible activities oriented towards consolidating the family environment and the protection factors within the family: developing the capacity to get over difficult situations, creating the social network of the family and its capacity to offer support in difficult times, developing skills necessary for nursing and educating a child, developing the social and emotional abilities of the child, identifying the factors that could lead to the occurrence of the risk of neglect and abuse.

69. Under the Secondary family support, families with children can benefit from financial aid, which is established according to the needs of the family, the number of children in the family, the living conditions, as well as the family’s income obtained from salaries, social payments and other income sources, declared under the responsibility of the family. The family benefiting from social support is entitled to access the financial aid. The beneficiaries of the Secondary family support are families with children in risk situation and/or families whose children are in process of reintegration. During 2016, the social service supporting families with children was developed in 19 administrative-territorial units and was provided for 6687 families.

70. For the period 2017-2020 the Government of **Romania** envisaged several measures for the support of poor families and their children by increasing the financial support for children, developing a national system of social inclusion indicators, promoting support mechanisms for the parents and for reconciliation of work and family life, encouraging work from long distance and flexible work time, building kindergartens and afterschool units, reducing the retirement age for the mothers who have more than three children.

71. In 2016, it was adopted the Law on the minimum income of inclusion, which establishes the minimum income of inclusion as a new social assistance benefit granted to the families in difficult situations in view to prevent poverty and the risks of social exclusion. The new regulations encourage parents to send children to school, stimulate the employment of persons on the labour market, increase the amount of the aid granted and ensures meeting the objective of Romania, to diminish the number of poor persons.

72. Family support allowance is a form of support for families with low incomes who raise and look after children aged up to 18. This allowance is paid to increase the family income in order to guarantee better conditions in which to raise, look after and bring up children, and to encourage the attendance of a form of education by children. In addition to

the measures targeting families with small children or those with children with disabilities, the state provides support to families with disabled children, in the form of family allowance, as well as kindergarten tickets for the children coming from poor families as a support to continue to attend the kindergarten activity.

73. The most common type of social support for children are the state benefits, ranging from the universal right of state allowance to different types of means-tested or needs-based social benefits for families with children. The state child allowance is a universal benefit for all children up to 18 years old, regardless of the financial status of the family; it is also received by young people above 18 years old who continue high school/vocational education. Also, in Romania the maternity leave is granted for 2 years and respectively 3 years in case of a disabled child.

74. The Law on the Financial Assistance to Families with Children of the *Republic of Serbia* lays down the rights aimed at assisting families with children by balancing work and parenting, promoting birth and social care. These rights may be exercised by the employees with legal and physical entities and by those who are engaged in self-employed activity for the period of 365 days, for the first and second child.

75. The right to maternity benefit is a social measure and this right is exercised by a mother for her first four children by the order of their birth. The right to child-care allowance may be exercised by one of the parents or a guardian, a caregiver who is a Serbian citizen, has residence within the territory of the Republic of Serbia and a health insurance within the National Health Insurance Fund.

76. The right to reimbursement for public preschool costs for children without parental care is defined as an additional measure of protection of pre-school children deprived of parental care, who are particularly vulnerable subgroup of highly developmentally vulnerable group of children without parental care. The right to reimbursement for public preschool costs for children with disabilities is an additional measure aimed at the protection of a especially vulnerable group of children. It promotes inclusion of children with disabilities into regular pre-school programmes and organisation of work in special groups, when necessary.

77. With a view to support the young couples in *the Republic of Turkey*, Dowry Assistance is offered in line with the “Regulation on the Dowry Account and Government Subsidies” published in the Official Gazette dated 16.12.2015. The subsidy for the residence purchases is extended within the framework of the “Regulation on Residence Account and Government Subsidy” dated 26.2.2016. The government subsidy is paid for the first and only residence, and subject to the limits of 20% of the savings of the residence acquisition.

78. The Ministry of Family and Social Policies implements the social relief and project-based programs, with a focus on the households. The relief provided to families in poverty is executed with reference to the composition of the household, and with specific priority attached to the education and health of the children in families with children. The factor of education plays a crucial role in developing an effective social relief program and achieving success in the fight against poverty.

79. At the beginning of each school year, the Social Welfare and Solidarity Foundation covers the basic school needs of poor families. The Ministry of Education provides the

textbooks of all children in elementary schools, free of charge. The Free Transportation Services to enable access to schools, by students who need special education, are still in place. Social relief programs to prevent forced marriages at an early age, and to ensure continued education of children are implemented. In this context, “Conditional Cash Transfers” program entails affirmative action elements to ensure the continuous education of the girls.

80. With a view to ensure the application of the protective and supportive injunctions extended under the Children Protection Law № 5395, and to achieve cooperation and coordination between the relevant agencies, the “Coordination Strategy Document for Child Protection Services” covering the period between 2014-2019 is drawn up. The monitoring and review of the implementation of the document is carried out by the Central Coordination Board chaired by the Undersecretary to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. The “International Standards of Child Care” are adopted by Turkey, and put into practice as alternative care providers, namely the “Minimum Standards Regarding Children Lacking Parental Care”.

81. Today *Ukraine* has a well-developed system of social payments and spends significant funds to help people in need. The social assistance system aims to support vulnerable groups, in particular pensioners, disabled, families who are in the condition where their social needs are not fully met, women in the period of pregnancy, natality, or child-bearing, as well as children who for some reason are deprived of parental care and are raised by guardians or tutors, or in adopted families or family-type children’s homes. Measures to ensure decent living conditions for families in which minors are raised are carried out by the state through the provision of material assistance, in particular: assistance to the families with children; social assistance to the low-income families; assistance to the children with disabilities and disabled from childhood.

82. Social protection of low-income families, including the families with children, is provided through the state social assistance, taking into account the income and property status of the family. At the same time, for the purpose of social support for the children who are raised in low-income families, an additional payment is envisaged for the children aged from birth to 13 years in the amount of 250 UAH and for the children from 13 to 18 years - 500 UAH.

83. In conformity with the Article 13 of the Law of Ukraine “On Protection of Childhood” (with amendments and additions), the following privileges are granted to the families with many children: the 50% discount for the use of housing (rent) within the limits established by the current legislation (21 square meters of the total area of housing for each member of the family permanently residing in a residential installation (house) and an additional 10.5 square meters per family); the 50% discount on the bills for using communal services and the cost of gas tubes for household utilisation, within the limits prescribed by the law; the 50% discount on the cost of fuel, including liquid fuel, within the limits prescribed by the law, in case when the respective housing do not have central heating; installation of stationary telephones without waiting list. Subscription fee for using stationary telephones is determined as the 50 percent of the approved tariffs.

84. Children from the families with many children are granted the following benefits in accordance with the respective article of the Law: free medication according to the prescription of the doctors; annual medical examination and check-ups in state and municipal health care establishments by respective specialists, as well as compensation of expenses for dental prosthetics; priority services in health-care establishments, pharmacies and hospitals; free travel in all types of urban passenger transport (except taxi); free health improvement and recreation services in conformity with the Law of Ukraine “On Health Improvement and Recreation of Children”.

V. CONCLUSIONS

85. During economic crises, the social protection systems perform an important role as social and economic stabilizers and help prevent deterioration of the human and the social capital. While the impact of social protection programmes varies according to their design and level of implementation, evidence from across the world, including from high-income countries, shows its potential in order to reduce poverty and inequality and stimulate economic growth.

86. In the area of poverty eradication, family-focused programmes have been found to be effective in reducing overall rates of poverty, and should be continued and expanded. Poverty requires a clear recognition of the fact that adequate and sustainable family support programmes are indispensable tools for promoting children’s development, reducing family poverty and preventing intergenerational transfers of poverty. Anti-poverty strategies, such as cash transfers, tax benefits, the provision of basic services and other measures, should take into account both the diversity of needs of family members and the respect for gender equality.

87. Special assistance is needed for the young couples starting families, through tax breaks, preferential loans and housing assistance. In the light of the persistent negative effects of the economic and financial crisis, special measures are needed to protect the most vulnerable families. Ensuring work-family balance rests on providing incentives and removing existing regulatory obstacles that prevent the business sector from establishing parental leave; introducing flexible working arrangements and part-time job opportunities; and finding other creative ways to increase work flexibility and productivity.

88. Quality childcare is indispensable to optimal work-family balance. Parents should have a variety of options at their disposal, including public or employer provided childcare, stay-at-home care, extended family support or other arrangements according to their children’s individual needs. While subsidies are often provided for external childcare services, only very rarely are financial incentives offered to family caregivers. Parental choices should be supported and financial subsidies offered for different forms of childcare, according to parental preference.

89. Cooperation at regional level could envisage exchange of information and good practices, training programmes for experts, social partners and NGOs. Moreover, constant interaction on social issues in the BSEC framework could be a means of deepening the existing cooperation and of contributing to building confidence among the peoples of the region. An increased feeling of belonging through sharing concerns and experience on sensitive social issues would help smoothen the tensions and enhance the common interests of the BSEC Member States.