

## Targeted policies-access to support-societal impact

Dragana Radovanovic  
Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

The Republic of Serbia has been extremely interested to participate in all kinds of debates on social policy issues at European level.

As a country hoping to gain the status of a candidate for the EU membership, we have been particularly interested in the topics such as: gender equality policy and reconciliation of family responsibilities (extremely current in Serbia), concept and mechanisms of functioning of one independent institution such as German Foundation Mother and Child, as well as the systems of all types and forms of family benefits – this subjects is more than of particular interest and exceptionally current given the obligation of the Republic of Serbia to harmonise its legislation with the relevant EU Directives in the area of social policy.

Also, support for pregnant women/mothers in early phases of their pregnancy, particularly lone parents, is the topic that bears great interest for Serbia.

Given the fact that Serbia is at the onset of radical changes in the field of social policy, herewith please find enclosed summary of relevant solutions in the Republic of Serbia that **are to be topic on the agenda of the following meeting.**

In Serbia, for many decades childbearing has been far below the population replacement level. There are as few as 70.000 newly born babies annually, which is for 30% less than needed to maintain existing scope of population.

The phenomenon of insufficient natality is process that not a single developed society has managed to avoid. However it is not a reality only in developed counties and western civilization as today, 61 country face childbirth rate below the needed population replacement level. Serbia is among ten oldest countries in the world and every sixth citizen of Serbia is over 65.

Today, the main purpose of sustainable demographic development of the Republic of Serbia is stationary population, population in which the next generation will be of the same size as the existing ones.

Two main financial support targeted at families with children have been undertaken with the population effect. These are:

### Direct financial family assistance

1. Parent's cash benefit (family benefit) as the support for family to which mother is entitled after the birth of the first, second, third and fourth child. This allowance varies according to the rank of the child, for second, third and fourth child. It is disbursed in 24 montly instalments, which substantilly diminishes the effect of the measure, whild ethe amount is indexed with cost of living.

2. Wage compensation during the maternity leave, leave from work for the care of the child and leave from work for special care of the child. This measure seeks to facilitate reconciliation of working life and parenting for employed mothers. It is equal to the wage and does not depend upon the rank of a child.

Provision of the financial family support is one of the strategic orientations towards resolution of the problem of low childbearing. The goal is to decrease the cost of parenting and narrow the gaps among different living standards of families with and without children.

#### Support Measures, Activities and Mechanisms

1. Raise the amount of parent's (family) cash benefit
2. One-off payment of parent's cash benefit on the birth of the second, third and fourth child with disbursement of the benefit for the third and fourth child in the amount two times the amount for the second child.
3. Wage compensation up to full amount from the budget in line with the law, in cases of temporary prevention or incapacity for work.
4. Free schoolbooks for pre-school, elementary and secondary education levels for third and fourth child respectively.
5. Provision for favorable housing loans for young couples up to 35 years of age, with decrease in the amount of loan debt with increase with the number of children.

Expected impact of the above mentioned measures is to alleviate financial situation of the families with children in comparison to those without children.

#### Reconciliation of working life and parenting in the sphere of labour

Today in the Republic of Serbia there is a great number of unemployed young persons. It has been one of the reasons for intensification of the process of postponement of childbearing with all the consequences of the decision at micro and macro levels. On the other hand, there is a strong tendency among employers to avoid employment of pregnant women and women with small children. Simultaneously, there is a lack of information and understanding among employers and workers on current legal solutions addressed at reconciliation of work and parenting.

#### Support Measures, Activities and Mechanisms

1. To encourage employment of the young unemployed parents within the scope of active labour market measures.
2. To reinforce control by inspection services to prevent employers to be indirectly discriminatory of women wishing to have children in the near future and mothers with small children and to seriously sanction legal provisions.

3. To promote among employers current legal situation and options for improved reconciliation of work and parenting with high emphasis on their importance for alleviation of the phenomenon of insufficient childbearing.
4. To promote among potential and current parents legal solutions in effect related to better balancing of working life and parenting.

### Reduction in psychological cost of parenting

Children 'cost', that they cannot be reared if there is no financial backup. But they need a lot more – time, energy, effort, patient, sacrifice; they mean unslept nights and absence from work. Because of children, parents abandon their plans, deprive themselves from minor and major satisfactions, forsake free time, their aspirations, and chances for career development. Almost all of this could be translated into economic indicators, such as, for example, absence for work, reduced productivity or poorer quality of work owing to parental focus and devotion to children. Many of these elements are categories that cannot be represented in economic terms and will remain subjective perception of investment, or deprivation, frustration, sacrifice and known as subjective, psychological cost of child.

Psychological cost of child is a subjective experience of costs, investments, lost gains, perception of lost chances due to responsibilities assumed in the process of childbearing.

Although parents are not willing to admit there is another side of the coin of parenthood, it is real and exists in parallel with joys and satisfactions of parenting. These two opposite ends of parenting continuum largely explain the reasons for almost universal parenting, but also the easy decision to have just one child. This statement can be supported with the data showing that the ideal number of children for women in Serbian conditions is higher than the actual. Women would be willing to have more children if the economic and other conditions were more favourable. Hence, one of the strategies to encourage couples to have more children is to reduce the psychological cost of child, in other words creation of the climate conducive to positive decision on childbearing.

Gender equality is focused to positive development goal: toward exercise of universal women's right to pursue career outside household, but unfortunately, it has not been targeted at development of a new model and role for a man in the family. Women's role has been only partially changed: she assumed new role apart from those she had assumed centuries before as her main roles of a housewife and mother. Why is this model so resistant to change and difficult to eliminate? It is because of long time adherence to traditionally defined gender roles supported by generations of parents that force children in the process of socialization to adhere to the same models of labour distribution, division of male and female roles in the family. This type of social integration is inadequate as it leads to twofold setback in development: it does not enable and support women to adapt more easily to economic and social roles and to pursue her aspirations, or men to prepare themselves better for the role of parent. Therefore, it is necessary that men be involved in parenthood equally with women both from the aspect of set of values and practice through the promotion of new relations between men and women in contemporary culture.

Parenting is exceptionally responsible and complex task in the life of every individual. However, there is no system of preparation of young people to effectively play these roles. To be a good

parentis a requirement and obligation. The consequences of maladaptation to parental role are very serious for child but also for an adult. An unsuccessful parent remains deprived from the satisfaction of effective parenthood, but also burdened with feeling of failure, guilt, overwhelmed with self-accusation and blame for society and community and conditions s/he lives in. Assistance and support for young people to acquire high level of parental competences prior to the birth of their first child and then in the course of childrearing could diminish stress experienced during parenting and facilitate the decision to have second and third child.

Today in the Republic of Serbia large percentage of women is either employed or, if not, wishes and counts on the chance to have a job. In addition to obvious economic gains of the employment career and vocational fulfilment are strong motives and goals for women, but particularly those belonging to younger generations. The problems of balancing work with parental are the most forceful source of rising psychological costs of motherhood.