

OPEN LETTER

To:

Victor Tvircun, BSEC Secretary General
Kyrylo Tretiak, PBSEC Secretary General
David Usupashvili, PABSEC President
Zefi Dimadama, ICBSS Executive Director
Ministers of Foreign Affairs of BSEC Member States
Ministers of social affairs (in charge of children issues) in the BSEC Members States

From: ChildPact, The Regional Coalition for Child Protection in the Wider Black Sea Area

Re:

Why Create a Working Group for Children in the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)? Economic gains from investing in children.

Starting from a common ground: the belief in the values of regional cooperation

BSEC is the only treaty-based inter-governmental organisation in the wider Black Sea area that has a clear mandate for promoting regional cooperation. This is a valuable asset for such a diverse region like ours.

Similarly to BSEC within the civil society sphere, ChildPact (www.childpact.org) is the only entity with a clear objective¹ for promoting stronger regional cooperation. ChildPact is a regional coalition that brings together more than *600 NGOs working with more than 500.000 vulnerable children*.

We at ChildPact believe that societies should invest in children not only as a moral duty, but also for economic reasons. Economists show that a growing and skilled labour force is fundamental for economic development in the long-term. The children of today are not only consumers (benefiting from services

and goods through their parents or care-takers), but they are the future labour force, the future taxpayers and the future economic trend-setters. *BSEC's interest to promote economic growth is fundamentally linked in the long term with the situation of today's children*. ChildPact is striving to ensure that our societies provide children the living conditions, opportunities and education needed to make them future contributors to our region socio-economic development.

Building on PABSEC's Recommendation 127/2012²

Taking in account the above-mentioned Recommendation, ChildPact advocates for the creation of a BSEC–ChildPact Working Group for children. Such a working group should be designed based on previous good practices from other regions of the world (such as the children units at the Council for Baltic Sea States and the South Asian Regional Association for Regional Cooperation following conventions for cooperation in the field of child protection).

¹ This objective states: 'ChildPact will advocate for regional cooperation at inter-governmental and civil society level, in order to identify best practices and solutions to common threats to children's well-being'. More information about ChildPact's objectives is available at: <http://www.childpact.org/about-us/what-we-do>.

² Calls on the Member States to strengthen regional cooperation in child protection and build a regional trust fund for children.

The BSEC–ChildPact Working Group for children should focus on improving the child protection systems, structures and legislation needed for improving children’s lives. It should: **1.** Facilitate experience exchange; **2.** Pilot and implement innovative programs and scale-up successful programs; **3.** Create joint research actions on regional child protection issues; **4.** Create peer-review programs; **5.** Develop bi- and multi-lateral cooperation projects.

Arguments for creating a BSEC Working Group for children

1. Child abuse equates significant economic losses

Research has shown that children who are abandoned, abused or severely neglected can face significant life risks that are costly to society, including lower earnings, poorer education achievement, higher consumption of health services through old age and greater risk of incarceration³. Investments, particularly in early childhood lead to significant reductions in infant and child mortality, future criminal activity, drug use/abuse, and costs of social services⁴. In the US, the direct and indirect costs of child maltreatment were calculated at \$94 billion a year, or one percent of the country’s GDP – including \$3 billion in hospitalization, \$425

³ Currie, J., & Widom, C. S. (2010). Long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect on adult economic well-being. *Child Maltreatment*, 15, 111–120.; Fang, X., Brown, D. S., Florence, C. S., & Mercy, J. A. (2012). The economic burden of child maltreatment in the United States and implications for prevention. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 36, 156–165; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau. (2011). *Child maltreatment 2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm10/cm10.pdf>

⁴ Engle, P., Black, M. M., Behrman, J. R., Cabral de Mello, M., Gertler, P. J., Kapiriri, L., Martorell, R., & Eming Young, M. (2007). Strategies to avoid the loss of developmental potential in more than 200 million children in the developing world. *Lancet*, 369, 229–242.

million on mental health treatment and \$14.4 billion on child welfare costs alone⁵

2. Child labour reduces productivity in the long-term

Millions of children in our region are involved in child labour. Experts proved this has major negative effects on children’s access to basic education and skills development. It also reduces their productivity and marketability in long term. Child laborers tend to earn less income later in life, while their children will also work at a young age, repeating the poverty cycle⁶.

3. Failing to invest in child health severely impacts health care budgets

Child abuse, violence and neglect has a particularly negative impact on children’s health and nutrition⁷. Ongoing lifetime treatment of chronic diseases linked to early-stage malnutrition impacts negatively the healthcare budgets over longer periods⁸. Healthcare expenditures linked to stunting,

⁵ Fromm, S. (2001) *Total estimated cost of child abuse and neglect in the United States: statistical evidence*. Chicago, IL: Prevent Child Abuse America

⁶ Rosati, F. and Rossi, M. (2003) Children’s working hours and school enrolment: evidence from Pakistan and Nicaragua. *World Bank Economic Review*, 17(2), p.283-295; Gunnarson, V., Orazem, P.F. and Sánchez, M.A. (2006) Child labor and school achievement in Latin America. *World Bank Economic Review*, 20(1), p.31-54; Emerson, P. and Portela Souza, A. (2006) Is child labor harmful? The impact of working earlier in life on adult earnings. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 59(2), p.345-385.

⁷ Kaplan J. and Dr. N. Jones. (2013) *Protect my future: The links between child protection employment and growth in the Post 2015 Development Agenda*. Retrieval at: <http://www.familyforeverychild.org/knowledge-centre/links-between-child-protection-and-employment-and-growth>

⁸ Eckhardt, C. (2006) Micronutrient malnutrition, obesity, and chronic disease in countries undergoing the nutrition transition: Potential links and program/policy implications. Food Consumption and Nutrition Division discussion paper 213. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute.; World Bank (2006) *Repositioning nutrition as central to development: A strategy for large-scale action*. Washington, DC: The World Bank

iodine deficiency, and iron deficiency are estimated to account for roughly two percent of China's annual GDP and three percent of India's⁹.

4. School drop-out leads to weak human capital

Too many children in our region abandon school due to poverty and other factors. Discrepancies in educational quality are particularly problematic from an employment perspective. The widening gap between the lack of basic education and the increasing demand for workers with post-primary education and specific technical skills is a very serious issue. Too often in our region school fails to equip students with basic numeracy and literacy skills, which means they will subsequently struggle to provide the specialized knowledge demanded by the worldwide knowledge economy¹⁰.

5. Marginalised adolescents can contribute to raising security concerns

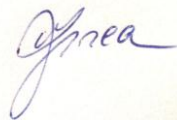
Marginalised adolescents are more likely to engage in domestic violence and risky behaviors such as illicit drug-taking, crime and gang participation¹¹. Large populations of frustrated teenagers ('youth bulge') represent a growing domestic security concern: out of 119 countries examined, 40 percent reported significant increases in

social unrest since 2010¹². Giving older children and youth a better chance of employment not only helps them realize their potential, but also helps to ensure that national economies receive the needed skills for continued growth.

CONCLUSION: A BSEC WORKING GROUP FOR CHILDREN NEEDS TO BE CREATED

ChildPact urges BSEC and its Members States to acknowledge the importance of regional cooperation for child protection as emphasized by PABSEC Recommendation 127/2012 and create a Working Group for children. In this endeavour ChildPact is ready to work along BSEC to identify the best ways for building such a working group, based on models that exist in other regions of the world.

Sincerely,



Mirela Oprea, PhD

ChildPact Secretary General

On behalf of ChildPact and **1290 child protection experts and supporters who signed ChildPact's petition** for a regional cooperation mechanism for child protection¹³.

⁹ World Bank (2008) Stimulating economic growth through improved nutrition. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

¹⁰ World Bank (2003) Closing the gap in education and technology. Washington, DC: The World Bank; World Bank (2007) World development report 2007: Development and the next generation. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

¹¹ O'Donoghue, T. and Rabin, M. (2001) Risky behaviour among youths: Some issues from behavioural economics. In Gruber, J. (ed.) Risky behavior among youths: An economic analysis. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press for the National Bureau of Economic Research.

To react to this letter please contact:

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¹² Stavropoulou, M. and Jones, N. (2013) Off the balance sheet: The impact of the economic crisis on young girls and women. London: Overseas Development Institute and Plan International; ILO (2011b) Social protection floor for a fair and inclusive globalization. Geneva: International Labour Office.

¹³ <http://www.childpact.org/sign-our-petition/>