

April 10, 2015

Nicola Bertolini
Head of Sector for Civil Society and Social and Territorial Cooperation
DG NEAR, European Commission
Rue de la Loi 15, 1049 Bruxelles, Belgium

RE: Public consultation with CSOs and CSO Networks in the Western Balkans and Turkey on the IPA 2014 Call for Proposals "Support to regional thematic networks of Civil Society Organisations"

Dear Mr. Bertolini,

we write this letter as a reaction to the general outline of the Guidelines for Applicants for the above mentioned CfP, as disseminated through the TACSO network.

ChildPact and its members from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia welcome the objectives and the priorities envisaged by the next IPA Civil Society Facility "Support to regional thematic networks of Civil Society Organisations", as we believe that CSOs play a key role in fostering functional democratic governance. In particular, ChildPact believes that child-focused CSO networks play a crucial role in promoting social reforms and donors should invest in them as they encourage innovation, regional cooperation and adherence to European values¹.

However, we are saddened to note that children's rights are not explicitly mentioned among the priorities and objectives of the call. The EU has already acknowledged the importance of investing in children through the EC Recommendation "Investing in Children – Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage"² and the European Council Conclusion on Preventing and Tackling Child Poverty and Social Exclusion and Promoting Children's Well-being³. We believe that **child rights should be an explicitly mentioned as an objective / priority for the following reasons:**

1. By investing in children, the EU can reduce the long-term risks of poverty and social exclusion in the IPA countries.

Recent reports and empirical evidence show that in the IPA countries the number of children is increasing while their number in the general population has decreased sharply in the past 20 years⁴. We are confronted with a demographic crisis. Moreover, children are the most vulnerable category

¹ Why Networks Encourage Innovation and Why Donors Should Invest in Them, ChildPact Briefing Paper, available at: <http://www.childpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Invest.pdf>.

² Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/c_2013_778_en.pdf.

³ Available at: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?!=EN&f=ST%2014437%202012%20INIT>

⁴ European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Unit E2, Social Protection and Social Inclusion in the Western Balkans. Summary of the synthesis report, Manuscript completed in January 2009, page iv.

of citizens. In **Serbia**, 60,000 - 120,000 Roma children⁵ have little access to mainstream education, health care and social protection due to deprivations and discriminations⁶. In **Albania**, 54,000 children aged 5 – 17 (7,7% of all children) are involved into hard work⁷, do not attend school and perpetuate a vicious circle of exploitation. In **Kosovo** 48.6% of children are affected by poverty⁸. 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 incarceration⁹. Investments, particularly in early childhood lead to significant reductions in infant and child mortality, future criminal activity, drug use/abuse, and costs of social services¹⁰.

2. By supporting child rights the EU can boost democracy, regional integration and inter-ethnic dialogue.

USAID, one of the most important donors in the region, along with the EU, has shown that child welfare programs are among the single most important democracy-building programs that they have ever put in place¹¹. Child rights are a non-sensitive issue. Any leader in the region can easily agree that children should be protected and cared for. Every country in the region has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We believe that regional cooperation in the field of child protection will open the door to new relationships and trust between governments. Opportunities to pursue development, peace and greater security in the region should start with children.

3. Protection of the rights of the children is one of the most powerful EU Enlargement success stories.

The EU had a huge success in contributing to reform the child protection systems in other EU candidate countries like Romania. The story of the Romanian orphans is an example of what can be achieved when EU's political will is harnessed to solving issues that citizens are deeply concerned with¹². This success can and should be replicated in the current Enlargement and Neighbourhood countries. There is a wealth of best practices and a great number of lessons learnt. It is obvious that together the countries in this region hold the knowledge to implement the needed reforms for the vulnerable children. But such best practices and lessons learned should be shared and the EU could have a crucial role in encouraging the countries to learn from each other and from its own Member States with relevant experience (such as Romania and Bulgaria), to share their transition experience in this field.

⁵ Strategy for Improvement of the Status of Roma in the Republic of Serbia, p. 11.

⁶ Roma children are twice as likely to be underweight at birth and are three times more likely to die before their fifth birthday than the general population - http://www.romachildren.com/?page_id=705

⁷ Data of the ILO-IPEC and INSTAT survey 2010, National Child Labour Survey, p. 24

⁸ UNICEF Transmonee database: <http://www.transmonee.org/>

⁹ 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>

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ The job that remains: an overview of USAID child welfare reform efforts in Europe and Eurasia, page 11, available at: http://www.eldis.org/go/home&id=57332&type=Document#.VSPg_vmUcWI

¹² Welcoming Europe's Youngest. How the EU Accession Process Transformed Child Protection in Romania & Lessons for the Current Enlargement and Neighborhood Countries to Increase the Child Protection Reform in the Region, World Vision International, available at: <http://www.wvi.org/europe/publication/welcoming-europes-youngest>

ChildPact, the Regional Coalition for Child Protection¹³, is a network of 10 child-focused national networks from 10 different countries: Armenia, Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, Romania and Serbia. Bringing together 600 NGOs, our members work with more than 500.000 vulnerable children from the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus areas. ChildPact's four objectives are: **1.** Monitor and influence child-related policies at regional and European levels; **2.** Strengthen the capacity of its members by actively supporting their expertise development, visibility and credibility; **3.** Advocate for regional cooperation at inter-governmental and civil society level; **4.** Raise public awareness of child rights and protection issues.

Thank you for considering our input.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light yellow background. The signature is cursive and reads "Oprea".

Mirela Oprea,
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¹³ Find more information about ChildPact at: www.childpact.org