



State support programs for the improvement of the demographic situation and childcare

National Assembly – CSO Cooperation platform meeting

On February 26, 2020, a National Assembly – CSO cooperation platform meeting took place aimed at collecting expert recommendations on state support programs for the improvement of the demographic situation and childcare.

The meeting took place in the framework of the Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia Project, which is implemented jointly by UNDP Armenia, National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, OxYGen Foundation, Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), International Center for Human Development (ICHD) with support from the UK Good Governance Fund (GGF) and the Swedish Government.

Decisions made during the meeting:

- In addition to the platform meeting summary, prepare a document stating a clear position on policies,
- Prepare and submit to MPs and Government recommendations to the relevant Law revisions.
- Topics for the next meeting of the platform: (a) issues related to the amendments of legislation on criminal issues and criminal proceedings with regard to individuals subjected to violence; (b) presentation of monitoring results of employment programs: recommendations will be presented by the young members of the UNDP “I am the Community” club.

Recommendations from Participants

- Make amendments to the relevant legal act¹ of the Draft Decision on “Increasing the one-time allowance for the birth of a child and benefits for the care of children up to the age of 2” and make it possible for parents residing in a rural area for more than 5 years and having children below the age of 2 to also benefit from this decision. It should also be calculated as to how much additional funding would be required from the state budget as a result of this decision.
- The efficiency of the benefit given to the first child should be monitored within the context of improvement of the demographic situation. Experts recommend getting rid of the practice of giving benefits to the first children and instead of directing those funds to other measures.
- Suggest the revisions to the Labour Code for introduction of the paid paternity leave.

¹ The legal act foresees the following: starting from July 1, 2020, before a child turns two years of age, a childcare benefit will be made available to the parent de facto living with the child and registered by the State Register of Population at the same address with the child in a rural area if by the time of the child's birth the parent has been registered and actually living for year at the noted rural address. **It is also worth noting that the aforementioned regulation will only affect cases where the child was born on July 1, 2020 and after.** The childcare benefit for the unemployed parent residing in a rural area will be 26,500 AMD starting from July 1, 2020.

- Develop mechanisms for the establishment of the institution of childcare so that the amount of the benefit will serve its purpose and will be used for addressing the child's needs:
 - ✓ Civil society organizations working with individuals subjected to domestic violence state that the benefits are often appropriated by the abuser and are not directed towards caring for the children's needs. Certain mechanisms need to be put in place to oversee the administration of the money. This can be through reviewing the international practice, i.e. in Russia there is the concept of the "mother capital," according to which a bank account is set up on the woman's name and she is the solely managing the money. There's another example from the US where vouchers are used or instead of the money, people receive items needed for the care of children as a partial compensation for the lost income.
 - ✓ Having children often becomes a source of income, which more often than not leads to cases of abandonment when parents leave their children with childcare facilities.
- Active mechanisms should be developed for mingling work with family: the institution of nursemaids and a more flexible work schedule for breastfeeding mothers. Experts note that benefits will not be the solution to the problem.
- The issue of women getting pregnant is often exploited by the employer, thus making women vulnerable in the labor market.
 - ✓ Very few women return to work and end up having serious issues with their careers.
 - ✓ Employers often do not hire women considering the financial obligations they would face in case of pregnancies.
- Encourage employers to keep mothers at work: establish taxation privileges, i.e. reduction of income tax.
- Assign financial penalties to employers that would question women about their marital status and plans of having babies even during the job interview.
- State support programs aimed at the improvement of apartment conditions, which is an issue not only urban but also rural residents. Experts note that families often do not plan children due to insufficient apartment conditions.
- Create an alternative model of kindergartens and transition to the person – service concept.
- Establish a system of licensing nursemaids.
- The program set forth by the government lacks sufficient justifications, i.e. specific target groups, number of beneficiaries, how the outcome will be measured, which makes it difficult to provide any expert opinion on it.