



GAMCON

GAGAUZIAN MODERNIZATION CONVENTION

Report from Working Group on Social Infrastructure, Session 3

Basic facts and figures: a cross-country comparison

Session 3 of the Working Group on Social Infrastructure focused on family policy generally and parenting support more specifically. The first part of the presentation examined demographic developments in Gagauzia and provided a comparison between Gagauzia, Slovakia and the EU.

Data indicates that population of Gagauzia is slightly younger than in the rest of Moldova (MD), Slovakia (SK) and the EU. In Gagauzia 18 % of population are aged between 20 and 29, compared to 17 % in MD, 13 % in SK and 11 % in the EU28. Many more Gagauzians are currently in the parenting age. Focusing on improvements in family policy and child support is therefore crucial.

Despite younger population the total fertility rate (TFR) is lower. In 2016 the TFR reached 1.4 in Gagauzia, 1.5 in SK and 1.6 in the EU28. More analysis would be needed to examine determinants of this development. One of the reasons might be the postponement of childbearing, but the mean age of women at childbirth in Gagauzia is by 1.5 (3.3) years lower in comparison with SK (the EU). High frequencies of marriages and divorces in Gagauzia have been going down, but 48.2 % of marriages still break up in MD, compared to 31.1 % in SK. However, high proportion of births takes place within marriages. Family behaviour is generally converging to SK and EU28 values.

Specific trait of MD economy is a high level of remittances. In 2016, remittances made up 21.7 % of GDP — among top 10 highest shares worldwide¹. Households where one or both partners work abroad face particular difficulty in balancing work and family life. **More detailed analysis of such households and their family behaviour is needed to deliver a proper policy response. Policy analysis may examine whether households with family members working abroad get equal rights and access to benefits and in-kind services as households with members working in the home country.**

Tools of Family Policy

Tools of family policy can be grouped in the following classes: direct and indirect subsidies for parents (e.g. family allowances, childcare benefits, vouchers, tax benefits and deductions), parental leave policies (e.g. maternity, paternity, parental and child-raising leave); and early childhood care and education services (e.g. nurseries, kindergartens, parenting support).

¹ https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?year_high_desc=true

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According to ESSPROS methodology, social protection benefits for families and children in Slovakia in 2015 reached 1.6 % of GDP. The corresponding EU average is not yet available for 2015 but one year ago it reached 2.4 %. Most of family policy spending in Slovakia is dedicated to benefits, particularly parental allowance and child benefits (paid from state budget) and maternity leave (paid from Social Insurance Agency). **Corresponding figures for Gagauzia should be identified to determine potential gaps in funding of family policy.**

Institutional support such as social care services and support for work-life balance (nurseries, children's corners etc.) should be an integral part of family policy mix. These institutions and services are crucial for granting equal chances on the labour market and increasing the employment rate of women. In Slovakia the share of children in formal childcare or education clearly lags behind older EU members in both age groups under as well as above 3 years. In the age group under 3 years of age formal childcare is close to zero, although data only covers formal childcare and it is possible that some proportion of children receive informal childcare while both parents work. **Family policy analysis in Gagauzia may benefit from gathering evidence and data on the use and coverage of childcare facilities. Research should also focus on how many females work (by age group), how much time they spend on parental leave and what motivates them to return to the labour market.**

Parenting Support

Parenting support is a relatively new and useful tool of family policy. It focuses on the empowerment of parents, strengthening their parental competencies by providing special support in their individual parental choices, decisions and learning paths, with a focus on the uniqueness of each family. Parenting support contains all activities that seek to offer guidance to parents in solving all kinds of problems regarding social, health or educational issues, in a formal or informal setting².

Providers of parenting support activities range from national to local authorities, NGOs, private parties, schools and the church.

Activities of parenting support comprise information provision, support, education, training, counselling and other measures or services that focus on influencing how parents understand and carry out their parenting role. Several successful best-practices have been developed so far including programmes such as Marte Meo (NL), Incredible Years (US), 3P - Positive Parenting Programme (AU), PEKiP (DE), HIPPY (IL) etc.

Public funding of parental support is beneficial in many ways. Research shows that good parenting skills have a highly positive impact on the physical, emotional and intellectual development of children. Parenting support programmes should be provided in early age since

² Molinuevo, D. (2013). Parenting support in Europe. Eurofound.

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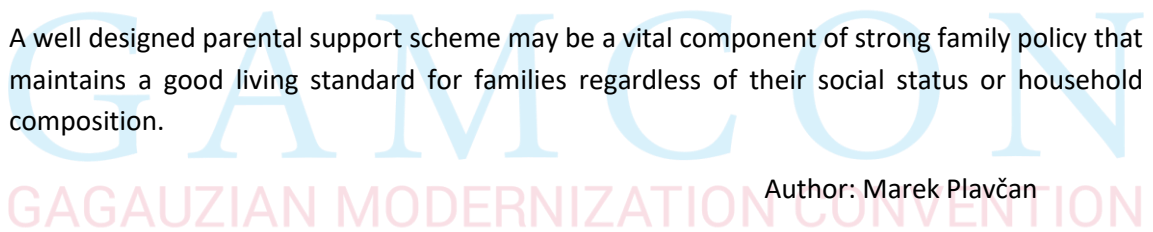
early interventions have the biggest impact on future well-being. However, poorly designed parental support programmes may fall behind expected benefits or even cause harm. The main caveats of providing parental support are preconceptions, reluctance, stigmatising, and low take-up rate especially by fathers. Proper evaluation and quality control is a challenge on the part of providers. **To avoid potential drawbacks, research and international organisations recommend to use standardised evidence-based parenting-support programmes.**

UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) strongly recommends practitioners, clinicians and others working in the area of prevention to use evidence-based programmes rather than start developing their own from scratch. There are two main reasons for this: firstly, while efforts in the area of prevention to help and support others are undoubtedly founded on good intentions, research has shown that good intentions can sometimes cause unintended harm. Evidence-based programmes are based on a vast body of scientific research that has undergone peer review to ensure that the results are safe and beneficial to those targeted by such programmes. Secondly, that research not only shows that evidence-based programmes are effective and have a positive impact but also indicates how those results are achieved.”³

A well designed parental support scheme may be a vital component of strong family policy that maintains a good living standard for families regardless of their social status or household composition.

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³ <https://www.unodc.org/documents/prevention/family-guidelines-E.pdf>
<https://www.unodc.org/documents/prevention/family-compilation.pdf>

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