



Regional Cooperation in the Wider Black Sea Region: Why Successful Child Protection Demands a Regional Response

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ChildPact is the regional coalition for child protection in the wider Black Sea region representing over 600 NGOs that serve over 500,000 children.



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Acknowledgments

The idea of regional cooperation for child protection was inspired by a regional body: PABSEC (Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation). In 2012 ChildPact contributed to PABSEC Recommendation 127/2012 on *Child Protection in the BSEC Member States* and as an acknowledgement of that contribution, ChildPact's Secretary General was invited to several PABSEC events, including the November PABSEC General Assembly in Baku. Recommendation 127/2012 calls on governments to strengthen their cooperation in the field of child protection and, more than that, to create a regional trust for children to make such cooperation viable and tangible. In October 2012 at the Black Sea NGO Forum in Bucharest, ChildPact organised a special panel to explore ways for the implementation of this Recommendation. BSEC Deputy Secretary General Traian Chebeleu and four PABSEC members from four different BSEC Member States attended the panel and debated solutions for creating a 'Black Sea Fund for Children' to support a regional cooperation mechanism for child protection.

In writing this paper we also benefited enormously from conversations with various Black Sea area experts, in particular those gathered around the Black Sea Young Reformers Program. These experts not only encouraged us at very early stages, but also provided very useful comments that helped shape our arguments.

More specifically, ChildPact is thankful to the following individuals: Traian Chebeleu, BSEC Deputy Secretary General for your graceful support; PABSEC members Zhalya Aliyeva (Azerbaijan), Namik Dokle (Albania), Aram Manukyan (Armenia), Elvira Kovacs (Serbia) for brainstorming with us about the Black Sea Fund for Children; the PABSEC Secretariat, in particular Evgenia Strati for her valuable advice; Dimitris Triantaphyllou, Franz-Lothar Altman, Anitta Hiper and others in the Black Sea Young Reformers Program for early encouragement; Octavian Milewski for in-depth feed-back. The sole responsibility for any fault within the document however is that of the author.

Executive Summary

Millions of children within the wider Black Sea region are in situations of hunger, violence, labor, trafficking, unaccompanied living, life on the street and institutional care. Governments and their partners have worked to build systems of care and protection for the most vulnerable children, but more must be done to ensure protection of the next generation. This brief argues that regional cooperation as a means to tap innovation and pool resources is an asset that should be used to achieve greater impact for children protection.

In the past, states have narrowed the use of regional cooperation to issues such as economic integration, trade negotiation, and security that demand international engagement for success. More recently states have used regional cooperation to solve for social policy-related matters when geographic borders have not isolated problems (i.e. health and food safety standards). This brief argues to extend regional cooperation to the field of child protection reform, given both the vital and pressing need to protect the region's children and secondly, given the strategic benefit and potential impact from such cooperation.

Strategic benefit and potential impact can be harnessed through regional cooperation in the following ways:

1. The very elements of regional cooperation, including reflection, dialogue and joint engagement are the elements necessary for innovation and complex problem solving; different sectors, actors, expertise and various levels of stakeholders coming together are often necessary precursors to manipulate ideas, build potential solutions and avoid needless duplication of effort.



2. Regional cooperation provides a platform to share scarce resources and for small states to access capacity and expertise unavailable at the local level.
3. Together, there is a comparative advantage in pooling expertise and resources; the ability to create effective strategies to respond to region-wide issues that face children is an essential asset for impact.
4. Regional cooperation offers another important pressure point; diplomatic engagement and focus on child protection will provide another outlet to delicately name and shame stagnant stakeholders. Together, the region could bring along "slower" reformers.
5. As a non-sensitive issue, regional cooperation on child protection opens the door to new relationships and trust between governments. Opportunities to pursue peace and greater security in the region should start with children.

ChildPact believes that if employed correctly, regional cooperation can manifestly change the lives of millions of the most vulnerable children across the wider Black Sea region. Together, this region holds the knowledge, resources, capacity and ambition necessary to change the story for our most cherished and yet most vulnerable class of citizens: children.

Children across the Wider Black Sea Region

Children remain among the most socially and economically vulnerable groups within the wider Black Sea region. Crime, poverty, conflict and discrimination are the seeds of destruction in the lives of families and their children. Such forces continue to diminish the natural bonds of community and family that ensure care, protection and development for children. As a result, children find themselves in situations of increasing vulnerability.

There are millions of children involved in labor; children with disabilities in situations of harm; children subject to domestic violence; children in institutional care; children hungry at bed time; and children without adult supervision.

The safety nets - families and communities – need help. Governments in the region and their partners have responded to child vulnerability, focusing on a variety of short term and long term solutions. Although governments can name tangible advancements such as increased foster care programs, social workers, welfare payments, and warning mechanisms that prevent serious harms against children, the expanse of these services are limited and often, offer only isolated responses to nationwide need.



In response, child protection and welfare experts can name many of the complications that obstruct nationwide social protection coverage – a combination of capacity, resources, political opportunity, and bureaucratic organization is needed to bridge the gap between current protection programs and essential protection plans.

Coming of Age: A New Landscape for Reform

Given the complexity of interventions needed for real child protection and welfare reform, every government in the region faces the same challenge; to derive the right cocktail of intervention.

In the past, the prescribed combination of intervention was a recipe from the international development community; consultants and experts from Western Europe and the United States provided key capacities and methodologies unknown within the post-Soviet landscape. Fueled by donor funding, these experts brought needed perspectives and a holistic understanding of protection systems not yet created within the region.

Today, the landscape of child protection reform is very different.

Governments and aligned stakeholders have made significant progress to build legal frameworks and policies that protect the human rights of children. Emerging laws attest to the shift from highly centralized welfare institutions (orphanages) that removed children from families to decentralized community based models (day care, foster care, respite care) that protect children within families as much as possible. In correspondence to the legal shift, NGOs, donors and governments have tested different varieties and ideas for community based services to help protect and care for children of all kinds of vulnerability. Best practices within the

region are known and continue to improve based on context, experience and need.

The landscape now verifies the existence of local approaches and solutions to child protection and welfare harvested from experience within the region itself. Local approaches and solutions are the result of the effort and experience of this region's social workers, policy makers and government bureaucrats. Testing ideas in collaboration with donors and over years of effort, these stakeholders are now the experts. New leaders have emerged to continue child protection reform in this region.



This region is now entering a new paradigm for child protection and welfare reform – no longer the responsibility of the international donor community and their experts, the reform process is moving towards the sphere of domestic public policy; funding, expertise, and innovative responses to grave problems are the responsibility of this region's leaders. At the same time, not one nation alone can solve or significantly impact the lives of vulnerable children. Progressive and innovative policy and programming tools are needed to break through the impasse. Such action demands a pooling of great minds, leadership and resources.

Together, this region shares great minds, leadership and resources.

Given similar contexts, experiences and need throughout the region, there is an opportunity to cooperatively work towards greater impact to address the needs of vulnerable children. Due to the communist legacy of the post-World War Two, many countries in the region have similar cultural, social, and political pasts and their reform processes, including child welfare and protection reform, are comparable. Given this common platform, this is a call for regional cooperation.

Regional Cooperation on Social Policy

In the past, states have narrowed the use of regional cooperation to issues such as economic integration, trade negotiation, and security that demand international engagement for success; these issues go beyond the scope of national policy because they involve more than one state. In this way, regional cooperation occurs out of necessity; that nation-states will not survive without economic integration, trade and security. At the same time, states often view social policy deep within its own boundaries of sovereignty; that social redistribution, regulation and the promulgation of rights remain soundly within the state's sole responsibility and obligation to its citizens. It is only when states fail to protect such rights that regional or international forces may have a voice within the domestic sphere (i.e. International Criminal Court, European Court of Human Rights, Inter-American Court of Human Rights). Although an important mandate to confirm the human rights of citizens, regional cooperation as a means to police nation-states is a separate discussion.

Today, however, the case for regional cooperation on various elements of social policy is also grounded in necessity and provides a progressive and innovative tool to address challenges that no one nation can solve on its own. Obvious examples

include food and health regulations to prevent the spread of disease, joint capacity building programs to enable cross-border responses to natural and man-made disasters, and similar migration policies to disperse moving populations appropriately and viably. In essence, demands for contemporary globalization do not limit the need for national policies, but instead also admit the need for transnational policies. And the driver of self-interest, necessity, still guides the process and extent of such engagement.

Regional Cooperation for Child Protection

In the past, necessity or self interest in the field of regional cooperation concerned state survival; states cooperated with each other for their own sake. And examples of social policy cooperation often concern attempts to limit emergency situations or potential chaos; still a survival response. Yet, in the context of widespread poverty and inequalities between nations and within regions, there is a new urgency to use regional cooperation as a means towards progressive and innovative tools to address the challenges that no one nation can solve on its own.



In this regard, ChildPact argues that the *survival* of the state should not be the one and only criteria for regional cooperation. Instead, the criteria for regional cooperation should be the *survival* of its people.

More specifically, ChildPact believes that if employed correctly, regional cooperation can manifestly change the lives of millions of the most vulnerable children across the wider Black Sea region. Because the combination of knowledge, resources, capacity and ambition necessary to significantly help the most vulnerable children in our region are not found within one state, a cooperative approach could change the story for our most cherished and yet most vulnerable class of citizens.

5 Reasons for Regional Cooperation

Regional Cooperation Encourages Innovation

We must apply a stricter scrutiny to the care and attention we provide children: our responsibility to protect children vulnerable to discrimination, poverty, violence, and exploitation demands new and innovative efforts and responses. As such, the very elements of regional cooperation, including reflection, dialogue and joint engagement are the elements necessary for innovation and complex problem solving; different sectors, actors, expertise and levels of stakeholders coming together are often necessary precursors to manipulate ideas, build potential solutions and avoid reinventing the wheel each time.

Regional Cooperation Takes Advantage of Economies of Scale

Regional cooperation for child protection takes advantage of economies of scale. Regional cooperation provides a platform to share scarce resources and for small states to access capacity and expertise unavailable at the local level. Given

the pressing needs, similar situations and limited resources for child protection, regional think tanks and training centres could provide high value for countries not able to fund or establish such centres on their own. The opportunity to leverage our assets and resources through regional cooperation should not be wasted in a time of economic hardship and growing need.

Regional Cooperation Increases Comparative Advantage

Together, there is a comparative advantage in pooling expertise and resources; the ability to create effective strategies to respond to region-wide issues that face children is an essential asset for impact. At the same time, each country possesses a comparative advantage on the way it responds to child vulnerability; its political system, infrastructure, capacity, resources or even progress-to-date all impact and individualize a government's current response to child protection. These advantages can be replicated regionally.



Regional Cooperation Creates Political Will

Although all countries express the political will to care for their children, emergencies and other priorities often overtake political intentions. Civil society is present to increase pressure and bring attention to the needs of children, however, governments respond to various pressure points. Regional cooperation offers another important pressure point; diplomatic engagement and focus on child protection will provide another outlet to

delicately name and shame stagnant stakeholders. Together, the region could bring along “slower” reformers.

Regional Cooperation on Child Protection Builds Trust for Greater Engagement

Every government in the region has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; child rights and protection is the most uncontroversial issue in the region. As a non-sensitive issue, regional cooperation on child protection opens the door to new relationships and trust between governments. Opportunities to pursue peace and greater security in the region should start with children.

Recommendations for Regional Stakeholders

National Governments in the wider Black Sea area (BSEC Member States):

1. Acknowledge the importance of regional cooperation for child protection as emphasized by PABSEC Recommendation 127/2012 and contribute to the creation of a Regional Cooperation Mechanism for Child Protection;
2. Agree to equip the Regional Cooperation Mechanism for Child Protection with symbolic and financial value in the form of the Black Sea Fund for Children.
3. Jointly establish and replenish the Black Sea Fund for Children.

The Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)

1. Organise a donors' conference to assess options to establish a social dimension to regional cooperation and, in particular, a way to develop the Black Sea Fund for Children;
2. Use the intellectual power of the International Centre for Black Sea Studies and other think tanks to develop scientifically-sound and

feasible proposals for regional cooperation in social areas, in particular child protection.

3. Learn from other regions of the world which are more advanced in social cooperation.
4. Create a senior position to oversee the design and implementation of BSEC's social dimension;
5. Acknowledge the positive role that civil society organisations have in society and encourage their participation in BSEC and its related bodies. Revise the BSEC Charter to allow access and cooperation with national and regional NGO networks in shaping and implementing the new social dimension of the organisation.
6. Encourage the creation of a BSEC NGO Forum only if this can be a representative body of all NGOs interested to contribute to regional debates and projects. Build on the experience of the Black Sea NGO Forum and cooperate with this initiative to avoid duplication of efforts in engaging civil society organisations from the region.
7. Give due consideration to PABSEC Recommendation 127/2012 and consider BSEC's potential role in establishing a Black Sea Fund for Children.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC)

1. Contribute to building a social dimension of regional integration, by strengthening the *modus operandi* of the Cultural, Educational and Social Affairs Committee.
2. Send a strong signal to governments, civil society and other stakeholders regarding the need to build social dimensions to regional cooperation; attaching more symbolic and practical importance to the implementation of the Recommendations issued by the Cultural, Educational and Social Affairs Committee. Start with Recommendation 127/2012 on Child Protection in the BSEC Member States and support ChildPact's efforts in creating a

Regional Cooperation Mechanism for Child Protection and a Black Sea Fund for Children.

3. Create incentives for members of the Cultural, Educational and Social Affairs Committee to participate actively in national and regional initiatives that promote regional social issues and initiatives.

The European Union (EU)

1. As a preeminent regional body focused on both social and economic dimensions, develop a systematic and coherent program aimed at sharing the EU experience with the Black Sea Region.
2. Encourage 'new' Members (EU12) to lead this program as part of their re-emerging donor roles, in acknowledgement of the fact that most of these new EU donors have set priority development cooperation relationships with countries in the wider Black Sea area.



Conclusion

Regional cooperation for child protection is the next logical step for real impact; there is both discursive consensus among all of the region's key political and social stakeholders regarding the need to protect future generations and such cooperation will take advantage of and pool this region's assets to achieve great strides forward. Cooperation can make child protection a success story like no other in this region's history.