

Commission on Population and Development 42nd Session

The contribution of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development to the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by Mrs. Vesna Vuković, Head of the UN Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration at the 42nd session of the Commission on Population and Development

(Agenda item 4: General Debate: National Experiences on Population Matters)
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Madam Chair,

At the outset I would like to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your election and to thank you for the efforts put into organizing the 42nd Session of the Commission.

My statement will focus on Chapter VI of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action – “Population Growth and Structure” and Chapter V – “The Family, its Roles, Rights, Composition and Structure”, and in particular on socio-economic support to the family. However, in order to address the population issue thoroughly it is necessary to consider all of its aspects, including sustainable development, gender equality, reproductive health, migration, to name only a few – all of which are inextricably linked, as is the global effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Recognizing the importance of the work on population issues within the UN system, Croatia regularly allocates contributions to the UN Population Fund and to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] for the Western Sahara Voluntary Fund.

On the national level, Croatia is one of the countries concerned about its low rate of population growth. In 2007 its population growth was negative – minus 2.4. Taking into consideration the observed demographic tendencies in Croatia, the obligation to avert these negative trends has become one of our priorities over the past decade. Population policy has been directed towards development and recovery of the population number, giving us prospects for stopping the negative demographic trends.

In 2004, the government and the other relevant stakeholders consisting of experts in the field of demography, health and social care, representatives of trade unions and employers, as well as, representatives of associations that promote parental care and children’s welfare, established the National Council for Population Policy. The Council meets at least once a year to discuss the implementation of measures set out in the document National Population Policy (adopted in 2006).

The principles of the Policy are balanced between the recognition of individual human rights and the right to development of the nation, being thus related to the objectives of the Programme of Action of the ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo 1994), to which Croatia affirms its support and commitment. The Programme of Action also envisages that countries should contribute fully to the evaluation of the implementation of the Cairo Agenda targets.

Madam Chair,

Like some other European countries, Croatia is facing the problem of slow population growth. Therefore, the main objective of the National population policy has been focused on the growth and increase in the number of young people of the entire Croatian population. This goal – the higher rate of natural growth – can be reached by keeping the birth rate 15 % above the mortality rate for a longer period of time.

The national population policy envisages many measures to help families. These measures include ensuring tax benefits for families with young children, more flexibility working hours, harmonization of occupational and private life, health care for mothers and children, and rising public awareness on the importance of demographic issues.

The recently held session of the above mentioned National Council for Population Policy reviewed the implementation of policy measures in the biennium 2007/2008. Allow me here to mention the most important ones.

As of 2007, the lowest maternity allowances were raised to 50% of the basic budget rate. After 12 years of its commencement, the one-time allowance for newborn babies increased to 70% of the basic budget rate and a pronatality support for each third and fourth child as monthly allowances for certain beneficiaries. All elementary school pupils as well as high-school first-graders received textbooks for free, as well as free transportation and accommodation in dormitories.

In 2008 several laws that marked further improvement entered into force – the maternity allowance amount was delimited making it equal to a woman's income before taking maternity leave. A very important step was also made in the direction of gender equality as the new law enabled fathers to participate more actively in childcare by allowing fathers to be more flexible in using parental leave, which can be simultaneous, alternating, or partial.

Madam Chair,

As in many other countries around the world, the majority of the population in Croatia (around 60%) reside in urban areas. Although population density is 79 people per square kilometre, the population is not evenly dispersed. Almost one quarter of Croatians live in the capital city of Zagreb and its suburbs, while many other areas are sparsely populated and often mostly by elder inhabitants. We are well aware that the concentration of population in urban centres cannot be stopped or prevented in any society of the world. Still, by using measures that support smaller urban settlements as surroundings where, according to researchers, the rate of natural growth is higher than in urban centres, local authorities are encouraged to manage urban development and to respond to the specific needs of the citizens. They are encouraged to implement short-time measures, such as financial support to arriving

newborn-babies, provide for sufficient numbers of child-care centres and basic educational institutions, as well as, to provide for good access to work for the parents.

Priorities in the area of reproductive health care through the primary health-care system have remained unchanged during the last decade. Amongst them there are prenatal mortality rate reduction, diagnosis of risky pregnancies and the promotion of breast feeding. Special attention has also been given to delivery options and post-natal care of babies and their mothers. Presently more than 30 maternity hospitals in Croatia are working towards becoming child-friendly, while 5 have already been awarded with the UNICEF official recognition "Baby Friendly Hospital".

Let me conclude by stating that the observed negative demographic trends in Croatia, according to the opinions of leading domestic and foreign experts, have already done harm. But keeping in mind that action taken today will show results in twenty or thirty years time, it is of paramount importance to address demographic developments as both an emergency and long-term issue. This concern has to stay high on the economic and social priorities, requiring our permanent attention.

Thank you, Madam. Chair