Introduction speech by Margareta Madjeric, State Secretary to the first meeting of the National Steering Committee Meeting for the Implementation of the Phase III: Testing the Child Guarantee Programme

Dear colleagues,

I am pleased to welcome you on behalf of the Minister of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy and mine personal following your appointment to the National Steering Committee of the program “Phase III: Testing the Child Guarantee in Croatia”, which is implemented as the third phase of the wider European initiative "Child Guarantee", as your closest associates.

This Programme is part of a two-year initiative, funded by the European Commission and implemented with the technical support of UNICEF CO, started on July 29, 2020, with the aim of testing interventions to address child poverty and social exclusion and creating the necessary conditions for Croatia's access to EU funds.

The National Steering Committee plays a significant role in the governance structure of this Programme in modelling innovative approaches, developing national action plans for interventions to fight child poverty and social exclusion.

The best models of services and practices will be shared with other member states in order to provide new services and best practices for children and their families.

The activities of the project are carried out in accordance with the earlier agreements in Medjimurje County, given the large number of children of the Roma national minority who are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, while lacking services related to child protection and family support and early intervention services. In cooperation with the competent department in the Ministry and employees of Social Welfare Centre Čakovec, and representatives of the county, priorities have been developed.

The main aim of the Programme is for children from Medjimurje county to have access to integrated multidisciplinary, adequately funded community services, related to family support, pre-school education and early childhood intervention.

The Programme focuses on three components: access to child protection services and family support, access to preschool education and access to early intervention services.

Moreover, one of the activities under the proposed Programme by the UNICEF Regional Office is the meta-analysis of the situation in all EU Member States, but also an in-depth analysis of the situation related to poverty and social exclusion of children in the countries included in the Programme (Croatia, Italy, Greece and Bulgaria), and in Germany, Lithuania and Spain. This will be the base to create and develop action plans in these areas, but also national action plans aimed at reducing child poverty and developing new services and best practices for children and their families across Europe.

At this initial meeting of the Committee we will discuss the components of the Programme, the objectives and experiences of the implementation of the Programme so far, as well as the key challenges and opportunities for Croatia.

I believe that by working together, through an interdepartmental approach, we will ensure quality implementation of the Programme and will successfully work together for the benefit of the youngest to provide them with the conditions for proper growth and development and a safe childhood.