



Ludwig Boltzmann Institute  
of Human Rights

# Decentralization of the Social Protection in the Republic of Macedonia – Factual Situation, Challenges and Opportunities at Local Level



April, 2012

Austrian  
 Development Cooperation



## **Publisher**

Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights – BIM-FV Skopje  
The preparation and the printing of this publication is supported by  
The Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC)

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The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of  
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## Preface

In the last three years the “Ludwig Boltzmann” Institute of Human Rights has, through a series of activities, directly supported the efforts of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to implement the process of decentralization of the social protection in Macedonia. In this process, the Institute has been dedicated to the promotion of the human rights'-based approach. In line with the efforts made on a national, and especially on a local level, the main commitment of the Institute is to provide support for the process of decentralization of the social protection in the country. For this purpose, a round table discussion was organized on 30th of March 2012, in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy organized a round table discussion entitled “Decentralization of the system of social protection and social inclusion in the Republic of Macedonia - Factual situation, challenges and opportunities on a local level.”

The result of this event is the publication containing the substantive issues that were discussed by the representatives of the central government, local government, civil society and international organizations. The basic findings from BIM-FV studies (which) constitute the basis for the overall process, i.e. the data for the institutional set up of the protection system, i.e. the actual situation with the poor and vulnerable groups, as well as the existing challenges in this field are also an integral part of this publication. The presentations, i.e. the introductory speeches of Mr. Ibrahim Ibrahim, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Ms. Petranka Delova Miladinova, Project Manager at BIM-FV Skopje and Ms. Mila Carovska, President of the Macedonian Platform for Fight against Poverty have been incorporated in the initial part of this publication as an introduction in the following section.

## ***Welcoming speech delivered by the Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Macedonia, Mr. Ibrahim Ibrahim***

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

If cohesion is the route to the ideal, social inclusion is the tool needed to reach the welfare that should be enjoyed by every citizen of this country. The Government of the Republic of Macedonia and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in a resolute and energetic manner are walking along this route, taking action to combat poverty and social exclusion. Providing better living conditions for the citizens is an imperative for the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, but also for the municipalities, as well. The decentralization of social protection itself enables us to jointly create conditions for an inclusive and cohesive society. Poverty and social exclusion of vulnerable groups is nothing new; however we have not ignore these problems, on the contrary we are actively working on finding solutions. Therefore, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia has adopted the National Strategy for Alleviation of Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010-2020 which reflects the intention of the Republic of Macedonia to unify the degree of inclusion and well-being of all layers of society.

The main strategic goal of alleviating poverty and social exclusion in the Republic of Macedonia can be defined in the following way: To alleviate poverty and social exclusion in the Republic of Macedonia through better use of the available human and material resources, improvement of the living, work and social conditions of all citizens, system and institutional co-action aimed at faster development, higher living standard and greater quality of life.

Allow me to use this opportunity to emphasize that in addition to the existing financial assistance programs, this year the Government has adopted special programs for provision of additional support for most vulnerable families, as follows: the Program for Social Protection, the Program for Alleviation of Energy-related Poverty for Subsidizing Energy Consumption Costs and the Program for Conditioned Monetary Compensation for Regular Attendance of Secondary School for Children from Families Beneficiaries of SMA , which in our view will influence on the intergenerational passing -on of poverty.

The building of a cohesive society in which the fight against poverty and social exclusion will mean existence of unconditional „equal chances and opportunities for all“ joint action of everyone is needed .... when I say everyone, I have in mind the ministries, the local self-government, the Macedonian Platform for fight against poverty and social exclusion, the non-governmental organizations as well as each individual.

The principles of participation, coordination and transparency should undoubtedly be the fundamental prerequisites also in the development of the local strategies and their linking to the national policy in place. With the assistance of the Austrian Development Agency and the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights we have opened this process in the following eight (8) municipalities throughout the country: Lipkovo, Studenicani, Pehcevo, Berovo, Negotino, Radovis, Konce and Caska. The most relevant stakeholders on a local level have united and developed local strategies for social protection and social inclusion on the basis of the detected actual needs of marginalized groups. Currently, micro-projects are being implemented which provide financing for non-governmental organizations that represent the interests of vulnerable groups on a local level.

The decentralization of social protection offers opportunities and numerous challenges within which municipalities can play an even more active role in the improvement of the quality of life for all citizens, and especially of the most vulnerable ones. This concerns not only municipalities, but also the NGO sector. Finally, allow me to underline once again the importance of joint action since by taking specific actions we will greatly contribute to the prevention, assistance and protection of the socially vulnerable families. There is definitely room for improvement and I am convinced that together we will create unconditionally „equal chances and opportunities for all“.

## ***Welcoming speech by Ms. Petranka Delova-Miladinova, Head of BIM-FV Skopje***

*Dear Mr. Deputy Minister Ibrahimi*

*Dear mayors,*

*Project partners, guests,*

On behalf of the Institute of Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights allow me to wish you welcome at today's discussion entitled Decentralization of the Social Protection on a Local Level, i.e. Challenges Addressed by the Municipalities in the Provision of Social Services to Their Beneficiaries.

The discussion is organized within the Social Inclusion and Human Rights in Macedonia Project, implemented by BIM-FV Skopje. It is a three-year project, funded by the Austrian Development Agency; within this project we cooperate with a lot of NGOs, members of the Macedonian Platform for Fight against Poverty and eight municipalities (Lipkovo, Studenicani, Caska, Negotino, Radovis, Konce, Berovo and Pehcevo), whose representatives are present here today.

The cooperation on a local level included the process of development of local strategies for social inclusion, social protection and alleviation of poverty as well as implementation of pilot projects concerning the priority areas contained in the strategy of each municipality.

In the process we conducted several analyzes and studies to determine the status of the most vulnerable categories of citizens and implemented a series of trainings to strengthen the local capacities in the area of human rights, social inclusion and alleviation of poverty.

In the many workshops and meetings we had with various representatives of your municipalities, we often came across different opinions of the social protection and social inclusion on a local level. On one hand, we came across beneficiaries of social services who are more or less dissatisfied with what is happening in this area on a local level, and on the other, we heard excuses or justifications for it from the employees in the municipalities; namely, they claimed that the social protection and social issues have not yet been decentralized.

We were, thus, encouraged to organize today's discussion, which we expect



to be the forum gathering the opinions of all stakeholders in this area, primarily aimed at indicating the stage of development of the process of social protection decentralization and the further steps to be taken in order to improve the lives of beneficiaries.

We expect a fruitful discussion that will result in recommendations for the improvement of the situation on a local level.



## ***Welcoming speech by Mrs. Mila Carovska, President of the Macedonian Platform for Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion (MPFAP)***

*Dear Deputy Minister Ibrahim,*

*Dear Mayor, Mr. Lazarev,*

*Dear representatives of local self-governments,  
representatives of civil associations,*


As announced, I am the President of the Macedonian Platform for Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion, established in 2010 with the objective of uniting the NGO sector in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, but also with the objective of representing the citizens' interest in the creation of all national and local policies. Over 40 organizations are already members of the Macedonian Platform, and an additional ten are candidate members for the next assembly. This shows that the uniting of NGOs can indeed contribute to making their voice heard in the state institutions.

I would like to mention some of the activities that are conducted over a period of almost two years, i.e. from 2010 until today. We shall mention only the more relevant ones here since mentioning all of them would certainly be too time-consuming. In 2010 through the Macedonian platform, supported by the Austrian Development Agency through the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights were created campaign for Macedonia to join the European campaign to combat poverty and social exclusion and to become a member of a group of states marked year of poverty and social exclusion. In fact, I think you are all familiar with the campaign „Every third Macedonian barely makes ends meet.“ The reactions to the campaign have been both positive and negative. Some people agreed, others didn't. We wanted to encourage a debate that will show that not every third citizen, but every single one barely makes ends meet if we are consider the quality of life, and not the minimum living conditions that are somehow measured in Macedonia. Also, the next thing was done in 2011 is the first conference for the poor and excluded people who are organized in Bitola, which was attended by over 120 vulnerable groups. Those same people prepared declaration of poor and socially excluded

people, which he handed to the Minister Spiro Ristovski, who received five of the socially excluded and vulnerable groups and heard their requests. He certainly gave a political response that will consider requests, but will see what will happen in the future and how to proceed in respect of the same. Implement, and also march of poor and socially excluded and prepare a report for the poor and socially excluded people in 2010.

The Macedonian platform is member of the European Platform Against Poverty, which really gives a great opportunity to affect both the national and European policies and correspondence course of European politics on a national level. Macedonian platform against poverty will continue to monitor the creation of The National and local policies, but also not only creating, but implementing them, and would monitor and budget their spending. Because we think it is very important, because the reallocation of funds provided for social care quite often going to be abused, and I believe that all associations of citizens, the funds envisaged for social protection, have over interests to remain in national budget for that purpose.

What is the attitude of the NGO sector in terms of its role in the decentralization or social protection. Primarily, the NGO sector in this moment, according to the law, has the possibility of offering social services. But there are almost no such positive practices in reality. Why? Because adequate mechanisms for organizations are not adopted, how shall they join, in which ways shall they be paid. This cannot be achieved through a grant scheme. Here quality assessment is needed, the payment shall be per NGO-offered service, the monopoly of social protection that the state currently holds should be destroyed. And in order to do that, a whole network of NGOs, state institutions and other stakeholders in the state are needed that should develop the whole system, not just in terms of decentralization but also in terms of the allocation of social protection , taking into consideration the the role of social services of the other social partners in the country. I believe that if we manage to do it on a national level, it would be possible to do it on a local level, as well. Currently, a part of the local government that cooperates with NGOs has the capacity or shows interest to take part of the social and health care competences, but there are others that do not have this capacity. I think that this will be a subject of today's discussion on how do we assess the capacity of the local governments to take over social protection functions.



As NGOs, we believe that decentralization will improve quality. A smaller, more focused group of mayors and social protection / health care teams will make an assessment of the needs of the citizens in the populated areas and will direct their activities towards specific target groups on a local level. There is no need of creating similar structures on a national level and then replicating them on a local level.

In terms of social protection, I would also like to emphasize that Macedonia shall pay attention to the new EU Strategy for Active Involvement, the implementation of which is obligatory for all candidate countries. Macedonia has to adopt a minimal welfare amount, an issue that we have not yet tackled. We are still talking about a decent minimal wage, which is one of the components of the Strategy for Active Involvement. The second component is the quality of the services that need to be offered on a national and local level, and the third is minimal welfare. I would like to touch upon this issue, in the future we will have to open new debates and discussions in reference to this strategy and the requirements. I would like to put these issues on the table, and if you have any additional questions, I remain at your full disposal.

## List of abbreviations

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>BIM-FV</b> | Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights                         |
| <b>EU</b>     | European Union   |
| <b>ZELS</b>   | Association of Local Self Government Units                         |
| <b>IPA</b>    | Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance                            |
| <b>LPG</b>    | Local Partnership Groups   |
| <b>MPFAP</b>  | Macedonian Platform for Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion |
| <b>MLSP</b>   | Ministry of Labour and Social Policy                               |
| <b>NGO</b>    | Non-governmental organizations                                     |
| <b>POW</b>    | Pehcevo Organization of Women                                      |
| <b>HRBA</b>   | Human rights' based approach                                       |
| <b>RM</b>     | Republic of Macedonia  |
| <b>NCSPID</b> | National Center for Support of People with Intellectual Disability |
| <b>UNDP</b>   | United Nations Development Program                                 |
| <b>UNICEF</b> | United Nations Children`s Fund                                     |

## INTRODUCTION

The Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights has been actively working in recent years on the promotion of the human rights-based approach (HRBA) within the efforts that our country has made to alleviate poverty and social exclusion. Actually, the main objective of the project Human Rights and Social Inclusion in Macedonia has been the application of HRBA in the decision making processes on a national and local level. An integral part of the support provided by the Institute in this area is the strengthening of the capacities of the relevant institutions, bodies and organizations, which as holders of obligations should assume an active role in the realization of the rights of the poor and vulnerable population groups. At the same time, the capacities of the holders of rights are being strengthened, taking into consideration that their involvement is necessary and essentially important for the achievement of the desired changes in our society and for the improvement of the situation in the field of human rights, social protection and social inclusion. On a national level, BIM-FV has been actively supporting the Macedonian Platform for Fight against Poverty (MPFAP)<sup>1</sup> in its efforts to affirm and promote the EU and Macedonian policies for fight against poverty, social exclusion and discrimination.

On a local level, 8 municipalities<sup>2</sup> in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy supported the development and adoption of the local strategies for social protection, social inclusion and alleviation of poverty 2011-2015. The basis for the development of the strategic documents was the detected factual situation in the conducted studies on poverty and social exclusion. The specific project objectives on a local level are the following:

- ✓ To include the previously collected data from the Study on Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Republic of Macedonia in the process of elaboration of

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1 MPFP is an alliance of about 30 voluntary, non-party, civil organizations, informal associations of citizens, self-help groups, unions, and individuals working in various fields, which have joined their efforts to point out the problems that are faced by citizens and that are in their common interest, for the purpose of promoting social equality and justice, participative democracy, and civil solidarity, as well as to ensure responsibility and accountability of competent public institutions and government agencies in terms of respect for the international obligations and responsibilities undertaken. The alliance contributes to combating poverty and social exclusion through the prism of the right of various vulnerable groups they represent to exercise their human rights.

2 Negotino, Lipkovo, Berovo, Pehchevo, Studenichani, Chashka, Radovish, and Konche.

strategic documents on poverty, social protection and social exclusion in each of the selected partner municipalities;

- ✓ To support the Local Partnership Groups (LPG) in the process of identification of vulnerable social groups who are most marginalized and are facing multiple discrimination;
- ✓ To support the LPG in their efforts to identify the priority problems of the vulnerable and poor people and find solutions for their integration;
- ✓ To promote the participatory model in the process of local development planning;
- ✓ To incorporate the gender perspective in the whole process of strategic and action planning, especially taking into account the poverty and social exclusion of women as well as the power relations in the decision making processes on a local level;
- ✓ To incorporate the aspect of environmental protection in the whole process of strategic and action-planning.

The involvement in this initiative has enabled local self-government units to start making improvements in the area of social protection and social inclusion on a local level. The level of awareness was raised on the situation of the poor and vulnerable groups in the community. The adoption of the HRBA meant taking into account the local needs and problems of the population, establishing priorities in line with the factual situation and implementing specific measures and activities aimed at bridging the identified gaps. It is, therefore, expected that the positive practices arising from this initiative, which were discussed at the roundtable, shall form the basis for the repetition of such a comprehensive and coordinated process in the other municipalities in the country.

## Challenges addressed by the key stakeholders in the system of social protection in the decentralization process

After gaining independence in 1991, Macedonia has experienced a high degree of centralization, which has had a negative impact on the local development and has imposed the need for immediate start of the decentralization process. This process, in particular, the fiscal decentralization in Macedonia began in the course of 2004 with the adoption of the Law on the Financing of the Local Self Government Units, whose implementation began on July 1, 2005.

Since 2004 municipalities were given the opportunity and responsibility to develop social functions on a local level, i.e. to create programs addressing the needs of the groups at social risk. In the law there was an opportunity for municipalities to develop non-institutional forms of protection through the establishment and organization of day care centers and centers for temporary sheltering of citizens, depending on their needs, and to organize and provide social protection for the citizens from their own area by adopting their own development programs in line with the specific needs. The Law on Social Protection from 2009 introduced an obligation for the municipality to render its development programs compliant with the strategic programs of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. „The decentralization process in the field of social protection was basically aimed at giving municipalities a sense of ownership and making them assume the role of entities in charge of solving the social problems of the vulnerable groups on their territory. In other words, the amendments to the regulations were basically directed towards the active involvement of the municipalities in the decentralization process ... But, one should not consider the decentralization of the social protection system to be successful only after the transfer of institutional competences from the central to the local level, resulting in a situation in which the Director of an institution will no longer be appointed by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, but by the mayor. This is not decentralization. „(Spasovka, Assistant Head of Sector for Social Protection, MLSP).



The implementation of the decentralization process in the local self-government units has imposed challenges, mainly arising from the mismatch between the size of the municipality and the scope of its competences<sup>3</sup>, on one hand, and the financial, human and other available resources for planning and implementation of competences, on the other, as well as from the vast differences between the degree of development of the urban and the rural parts within a given municipality.

In an attempt to identify the potentials of the local self government units to implement the decentralization in the social area, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, within the „Social Inclusion and Human Rights in Macedonia“ Project, conducted two separate pieces of research<sup>4</sup>. The aim was to assess the local conditions and to identify challenges faced by the key stakeholders in the social protection system in the process of decentralization. And the conclusion was that the fundamental problem of the municipalities arises from the insufficiently and improperly developed institutional network<sup>5</sup>. It was found that the existing network of centers for institutional and non-institutional protection cannot adequately address the identified needs of the citizens. For the primary vulnerable

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3 The 2002 Law on Local Self-Government defines the competencies of municipalities. Thus, under the Law, the municipalities, in addition to being in charge of urban planning, environment and nature protection, economic development, public utilities, education, culture, sports and recreation, are also entrusted with competence in the area of social protection and protection of children (kindergartens) and homes for the elderly – ownership, financing, investments, and maintenance, social car for persons with disabilities and orphans, children with special needs, as well as other duties in the social sphere, as postulated in the Law. In addition to the direct competencies stated, the Law also defines delegated ones, authorizing the state administration agencies to delegate the performance of certain duties of the mayors pursuant to the Law

4 “Analysis of the current situation in the areas of social protection and social inclusion, conducted in six municipalities (Shtip, Prilep, Kichevo, Saraj, Chashka, and Radovish)” and “Study on Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Republic of Macedonia, conducted in eight municipalities (Radovish, Konche, Chashka, Negotino, Pehchevo, Berovo, Lipkovo, and Studenichani)”

5 Although the situation regarding the Institutional Protection in the Area of Healthcare is not the central issue of this publication, we believe that the situation found in this domain is also to be noted. Namely, similarly to the issue of social protection, findings concerning healthcare indicate that there is unequal distribution of services in the urban and rural areas or the rural areas within the municipalities. The health institutions network in the urban municipalities is satisfactory, while that in the rural ones is poorly developed. In the majority of the rural areas, there are no pharmacies, specialized medical services, emergency units, and the small number of outpatient units are not accessible for the citizens at night and during weekends. Accessibility of healthcare institutions is most difficult for citizens living in rural mountain settlements. “Special problems arise in the area of culture. In places that used to have established centers of culture in the past, the state took over the responsibility, while in those where there are no such centers, there is a sort of selectivity.” (Lazarev, Mayor of the municipality of Konche.

population groups, such as children and the elderly, there is an insufficient number of kindergartens and homes for the elderly, i.e. the existing facilities do not meet the needs of the local population.

According to the mayor of Konce municipality, „the kindergartens in rural areas are totally neglected, i.e. for a long time the approach has been selective. But, decentralization will only deepen this problem, and where there are no kindergartens, there will not be any pre-school facilities for the children in the rural communities „The citizens from the rural municipalities have limited access to centers for social work because there are regional offices of the these centers around the country, and mostly limited in terms of access to the centers are the citizens from the mountainous areas. Also, no infrastructural investments in the area of social protection have been made.

In terms of the human resource capacities in the municipalities included in the research, it has been found that in many of them there is insufficient staffing of the public activity departments, taking into consideration the needs in the area of health care, social protection, child protection and the protection of the other vulnerable groups. In addition, nobody is responsible for social protection issues. But the migration phenomenon affects the municipal capacity for provision of services to citizens; this is a process that has particularly affected smaller municipalities, and has thus endangers the decentralization process.

Encouraging multisectoral cooperation is one of the necessary conditions for intensifying the decentralization process. But, research shows that in most municipalities there is no multisectoral approach of the relevant stakeholders - municipalities, centers for social work, pre-school institutions, schools, health care facilities and other state bodies, legal entities and physical persons and citizens' associations - to social prevention. The cooperation among municipalities, the Center for Social Work and the NGO sector is assessed as insufficient. Although there are a lot of registered civil society organizations, it is concerning to see only a small number of them are actually active. The civil society often participates in adoption of action plans and submission of projects, but does not sufficiently participate in monitoring and evaluation activities.

According to the representative of the National Office of the Center for

Support of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities Poraka, Mr. Krstevski, the capacities do not depend so much on the fiscal implications but on the stakeholders themselves, i.e. on the representatives of the NGOs and the local self government. It is up to the non-governmental organizations to impose their demands, and it is up to the representatives of local government to work in a dedicated manner with the NGOs, striving to satisfy some of their demands or needs. „But, there is a problem in the process of obtaining funds from the local self-government. All NGOs from all possible areas - including sports associations, associations of beekeepers, environmental associations, associations of persons with disabilities, associations of the elderly, etc.- apply for funding upon a call for applications from the municipality. A neat distinction should be made in this process; in this context we are not underestimating beekeepers and environmentalists, but there should be a different perception of organizations that work in the field of social protection or human rights, especially if those organizations are providers of a particular social service. A total number of 50 organizations apply upon a call of the municipality for allocation of funding in the amount of 500,000 denars, and a real problem arises if, among them there is an organization covering the work of a day care center whose costs are in the scope of 2 to 3 million denars. In such a situation, it is clear at the very beginning that the expected support cannot be received. There is a big gap between what is put in the legislation and promised by the institutions and what can be realistically achieved. The Law on Social Protection gives municipalities competences, but the law says “may/can” and not “must”; in addition, it does not provide the necessary mechanisms for implementing it on a local level (Krstevski, Poraka National Office).

The representative of the Association of People with Cerebral Paralysis from Caska has underlined the insufficient municipal funding for ensuring the sustainability of the NGO project activities. „Very often the support is only declarative, a very small part of the municipal budgets is allocated for the activities of the nongovernmental organizations. They survive thanks to foreign donations and assistance, but they need to be recognized by local authorities, as well. If a foreign entity has provided funding for a local activity, than the local government needs to recognize that initiative, as well, and provide funding for it in the future. This is the

only way of ensuring sustainability of activities. Foreign actors seek sustainability. Although nongovernmental organizations in their project proposals count on the support and involvement of the local government, this rarely or never happens. If we want to have decentralization of the social protection we would certainly have to work strongly on networking, ensuring mutual respect among institutions, NGOs and the local self-government, since all of these stakeholders exist for the citizens living in the municipalities. However, in order to achieve specific results, we have to work jointly and in an organized manner (Zlateva, President of the Association of People with Cerebral Paralysis, Caska).

For the representative of Pehcevo municipality, the multisectoral cooperation is more of an exception than a rule. This still means that the local government has turned for cooperation to the institutions of central government and there is an improvement in this regard. Joint programs are being implemented and progress is being achieved each year, but it is obvious that this cooperation does not take place on a daily level. When community work program or active labour market measure program are implemented as jointly between the local and the central government, then the cooperation is much better. This cooperation shall be further encouraged through other programs, as well. In this case, Pehcevo municipality is in a specific position of sharing common services with Berovo municipality. That sometimes leads to unpleasant situations, especially when there is no official information flow. For example, this includes cases when the Employment Service Agency or the Ministry implement some activities on the territory of the municipality Pehcevo, especially in the area of social protection.

The representatives of the NGO sector have underlined that the intersectoral cooperation between the NGO sector and the local self-government has deteriorated due to the mismatch in terms of available facilities of the two sectors. Namely, „there is a gap between the NGO sector and local government. On one hand, civil society is getting stronger and educated, and on the other, local governments have been reduced to work in committees or to one committee member working in the field of social protection or members of committees who have to make decisions, and perhaps know little about social protection, so it can be said that this cooperation between the NGO sector and the local self-government is at the very

beginning. Moreover, decentralization cannot be achieved without the involvement of more stakeholders both on a local and national level. Adopted local action plans have been implemented by the NGO sector, but when it comes to providing NGO funding, then the municipalities withdraw and say they have little funds for which a numerous organizations are applying. We should not allow action plans to be implemented only by the NGO sector, all stakeholders should be involved in their implementation (Trajkovski, President of the Center for Assistance of People with Mental Disabilities Poraka, Negotino).

One of the key challenges addressed by municipalities is the need for proactive cooperation with the business sector. Namely, it is important to attract the interest of the business community not only in order for them to invest in the social sphere but also to get actively involved in the administration of assistance and support of activities in this domain. Municipalities should encourage fund-raising initiatives in order to improve the living conditions of the poor and vulnerable groups.

A particular challenge for the municipalities is the application for obtaining social protection and social inclusion grants from European funds and other international financial institutions.

## **Identified problems in the action-taking on the part of the institutions on a local level**

Some of the largest problems identified in the action-taking on part the institutions at local level are linked to the relatively poorly developed: institutional mechanisms; mechanisms for identification and inclusion of poor and vulnerable groups; awareness for the need of strategic planning in the domain of social protection; capacities for applying wider measures of assistance and support for vulnerable categories of population; awareness of the expert staff and of experts on working with vulnerable groups.

- Poorly developed institutional social protection mechanisms

In some of the municipalities surveyed, problems were identified in the period of the research arising out the insufficient number of staff in charge of issues

in the area of social protection or inadequate staffing of the public activities units of municipalities, as opposed to the needs in the areas of social, health care, children, and vulnerable groups protection. More specifically, poorly developed functions of social protection were identified, as well as lack of special social protection units and lack of social workers.

- No mechanism for identification and inclusion of poor and vulnerable groups  
The survey found that there is no formally established and standardized mechanism for identification and inclusion of poor and vulnerable groups. In most of the cases, the municipalities have no data base of social protection-related issues, created in line with the target group, and no criteria for the beneficiaries and so on, while problems of vulnerable groups are usually learnt when citizens file applications or from the urban/local communities.
- No awareness of the need to do strategic planning in the domain of social protection

In the period of the research, no strategic planning was identified in the domain of social protection; following the survey conducted in all eight partner-municipalities, however, Local Social Protection, Social Inclusion and Poverty Alleviation Strategies were developed, along with action plans. According to Ms Spasovska, Assistant Head of the Sector for Social Protection at the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, a small number of municipalities initially responded to the written invitations of the Ministry to become included in the process of creating strategies and action plans, and even today, in spite of the fact that this is a legally binding obligations, not all municipalities are active in the process of development of action plans as yet. According to her, “local strategies and action plans are not to be understood as documents to be adopted merely formally, to meet the requirements of the law. On the contrary, the municipalities are expected to become aware and recognize the needs of their citizens, to identify the vulnerabilities, to recognize the possible manners of providing the social services for its citizens in the place of their residence and in the easiest possible way. This is the basic definition of local government decentralization. In this process, the Ministry is willing and transparent in its intention to assist the municipalities, to cooperate, contact, provide guidance, help the municipalities to develop actions plans that will not only

be sheer declarations, but to lead primarily towards networking of all stakeholders at local level and then to undertaking specific social measures.”

- Poorly developed capacities for applying wider measures of assistance and support for vulnerable categories of the population

There is a trend of development of social protection programs and strategic plans for employment. The social protection programs generally focus on financial aid and fail to meet the basic method and methodological criteria. In most of the cases, the funds set aside are in the form of single financial aid. There is no separate social protection item in the municipal budgets and the funds earmarked for social protection are minimal or – on average – less than 1% of the budget. The local self-government units have no developed forms of social protection for the vulnerable groups of the population. “The capacities of the local self-government to implement the decentralization process in terms of social protection are sufficient in the domain of financial grants, i.e. in the non-expert aspects of the activity, while we believe that the aspects requiring expertise need to remain in the domain of the social work centers for a longer period of time. The local self-government assists in the area of financial aid and does so in both informal and formal ways, but without any special funds” (Lazarev, Mayor of the municipality of Konce). According to the Assistant Head of the Sector for Social Protection at the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Ms Spasovska, however, “the financial aid is not the fundamental key of decentralization. Such aid is in fact creation of policy at a national level and aims at satisfying the basic living needs of citizens. The level of this aid is very low, but it depends on many criteria, on the context and possibilities of a country, on the additional programs undertaken to mobilize the beneficiaries and – instead of the latter being passive social aid beneficiaries – include them in the other systems and make them equivalent and equal with the rest of the citizens. The Ministry expects the municipalities to slowly build their capacities, to become involved and to develop their social services at the local level.” It may be concluded from the survey, however, that there are no systemic measures and activities adjusted to their needs. In a much smaller number of cases, the municipalities apply active measures aimed at overcoming these problems. The

municipalities have no continuous activities intended to engage those capable of working in works of public interest. The measure comes down to financial means from the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and is not consistent; this is why almost no public works were done in 2010. In some municipalities, this measure is seen as degrading and its realization is, therefore, regarded as having adverse effect on the level of popularity of the local authorities.

- Systemic shortcomings in the exercise of social protection rights

There are systemic flaws preventing the poor and vulnerable group from exercising certain rights. A portion of the vulnerable categories of citizens do not make use of their social protection rights due to ignorance, failure to meet the requirements, refusal, and embarrassment.

- Lack of sensitivity among experts about working with vulnerable groups

In line with the existing set up of the social protection system, the Social Work Centers are in charge of the identification of and administration of direct aid and support for vulnerable categories of citizens at local levels. Yet, based on the surveys conducted, it may be concluded that they are faced with a lack of appropriate expert and technical personnel, as well as with problems related to lack of adequate technical equipment, vehicles for field operations, and computer equipment, such that would enable the provision of expert and appropriate aid. They also lack conditions for proper admittance and work with clients, as well as detached social workers who would perform the function of a field unit of the centers in the rural areas. These identified shortcomings are coupled with the lack of capacities and skills of the staff specializing in working with vulnerable groups. This is why an emphasis needs to be laid on the development of programs for education of the expert personnel, so that the latter would be able to better feel the pulse of the population they work with. Such education would strengthen their



skills and techniques of working with and mobilizing the population, thus increasing the level of cooperation of the population with the institutions.

## **Identified social problems and needs of the poor and vulnerable population groups in the community and capacity of the municipalities to overcome them**

Poverty and unemployment<sup>6</sup> are the most dominant social problems in all municipalities and their levels in the municipalities surveyed usually reflects the national average, but poverty in the rural areas is less visible in terms of satisfying the basic existential needs as compared with the urban ones. Thence, the municipalities, just like the Social Work Centers, primarily focus on satisfying the financial needs of the categories of citizens at social risk and with no financial income.

As a result of the long-standing presence of poverty and unemployment, rising problems related to family dysfunctions and deviations are noted in the municipalities. Alcoholism is on the rise, as well as drug addictions, domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, and – in a smaller number of municipalities – higher rates of underage marriages.

In addition to the poor and unemployed, as the most general vulnerable categories, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and social aid beneficiaries are also identified as belonging to this category in the municipalities surveyed. In some of the municipalities, members of certain ethnic communities, such as those coming from the Turkish and Roma communities are often met in the category of socially vulnerable citizens. The needs of individual vulnerable groups of citizens, such as drug users, are insufficiently, if at all, recognized.

There are an insufficient number of initiatives in the municipalities in terms of providing social services for the vulnerable and marginalized groups, particularly when it comes to people living in the rural places within the municipalities. The lack of initiative is especially reflected in the fact that “not all social services are too

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<sup>6</sup> Unemployment is much more present among the female population and the individuals with low qualifications, who have been waiting for employment for eight or more years. The age structure of the unemployed is unfavorable, due to the large percentage of young population at the age of 15-24, as well as of middle-age workforce. The Roma population has a high rate of participation in the category of unemployed.

expensive and impossible to implement; rather they depend on the inventiveness of the municipalities, their commitment and the inclusion of all at the local level” (Spasovska, Assistant Head of the Sector for Social Protection at the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy).

The lack of adequate information, as noted previously, is a general problem that prevents people from realizing their rights, particularly in reference to the right to social welfare. In order to increase the level of awareness of the social protection rights, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, through its partner NGOs has provided additional support for the implementation of informative and educational activities. The activities supported in this way are an integral part of local strategies for social protection, social inclusion and alleviation of poverty.

It is a general view that the social welfare funds allocated by the centers for social work for the population with legal capacity that cannot financially sustain itself, are not sufficient to meet basic living needs of the beneficiaries and their families. These citizens in 2010 could not realize their right to one-off financial assistance, funds which they usually used to cover the health care costs. Community kitchens and electricity subsidies are implemented as project activities. Although in many municipalities there are community kitchens, they have limited capacity and cannot meet the demands of all those who need their services.

## **Transfer of good practices**

Primarily, one has to stress the interest of the municipalities to get involved in the process managed by BIM- FV. Namely, the municipalities have expressed a high degree of readiness not only to participate in the conducted research and trainings, but they have also consciously accepted the challenge to allocate their own resources to implement the adopted action plans. It is a positive step indicating that they have assumed a proactive role in the improvement of the social protection and social inclusion on a local level, which is essentially a type of support of the upcoming process of decentralization in the area of social protection.

The positive practices of decentralization aimed at bridging the gaps noted in the abovementioned research concerning the local situation will be presented on

a local level and in front of the NGO sector together with the activities undertaken in the cooperation of these two sectors.

- Activities that are implemented by local self government units

In particular, Konce municipality, which has a rather small budget, each year provides a small amount of direct funding for social assistance. In particular last year a total of 200,000 denars were planned and 209,000 spent for direct assistance. So, these funds were directly with a Council decision transferred to the citizens. The transfer has been made upon application for assistance or on various other grounds. Often it is an application for assistance on grounds of poverty, usually to cover the costs of a medical treatment; there are however, many other methods for providing assistance. The municipality has established a regular activity that is undertaken before each new year, within which an assessment of the needs of citizens from the whole municipality is made and certain funding or assets are awarded in the so-called social packages. The municipality is directly involved in the project community kitchen. This is perhaps a difficult task, but thus, food is being distributed in all populated areas and it is the only way possible of serving those that need it most, taking into consideration the distance of the populated areas. The food is taken from Radovis, more specifically, from the kindergarten where it is prepared.

One month, a public works project was also organized. The goal was to help people, but also to make improvements in the environment. This project is not very expensive, somewhere around 100,000 denars. This year, there will be another public works project. Also, within the possibilities, a number of other activities have been undertaken.

The UNICEF-funded project covered the costs, but in order to ensure a continuation, a decision was made by the Municipality of Konce to allocate 160,000 denars for the provision of a trainer.

The Municipality of Pehcevo public works are continuously implemented as is the community kitchen project.

- Activities that are implemented by the civil sector

Poraka from Negotino is an NGO to which the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has delegated the competence to implement the process of

deinstitutionalization. The deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities has been implemented in the past three years, encompassing a total number of 63 people, who now they live in individual homes as any other citizen. The Centre for Support of People with Mental Disabilities „Poraka“ from Negotino employs 40 people, in other words 40 families earn their living from the provision of services within this organization. The organization has been more widely recognized outside the municipality than in the municipality itself. All information is available in the municipalities both to the mayors and the counselors, but something is missing: training that will improve the cooperation between the NGOs and the local government, but also with the business sector. Poraka from Negotino has good cooperation with and is supported by the Ministry, and by organizations, such as the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, which support and accelerate the processes of deinstitutionalization and decentralization, thus launching the initiative to transfer the relevant competences to the NGO sector (Trajkovski, President of the civil organization Poraka from Negotino).

- Activities that have been implemented in cooperation between the local self-government units and the NGO sector

Positive examples to be quoted here come from the Poraka organizations from Kumanovo and Struga, where it can be said that upon the request of the Central Office, pressure has been exercised on the local self government resulting in a conclusion of a contract on realization of works of public interest and of local importance. This Agreement has been concluded in line with Article 24 of the Law on Local Self Government, which enables direct partnership between NGOs and the local self-government. On the basis of the abovementioned article and this mechanism, full funding for a day care center for people with disabilities has been provided in these two local government units. This is also the case in Skopje, where the City of Skopje covers 70% of the costs for day care center, as well as in the City of Ohrid, where the municipality has allowed its own facility to be used which has previously completely refurbished. Poraka, with the support of the Ministry and the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute, but also with the overwhelming support of Radovis municipality, is working on the refurbishment of a grand facility that will become a day care center for people with disabilities. In the specific example for this purpose,

the Municipality of Radovis has allocated a million denars from its modest budget. The willingness, the need and genuinely open hearts for the necessary support –this is a recipe for partnership and recipe for success. We are not drawing conclusions, but giving guidelines which thinking to adopt, the capacities depend on ourselves and yourselves, on everybody involved in the work. Decentralization is word containing the prefix –de, which indicates loss of power of the central government, but whether that power is transferred to you in terms of funding, that is another issue to be discussed at a different level. (Krstevski, National Office Poraka).

A positive example of multisectoral cooperation is the cooperation which has been developing in the past several years among Pehcevo municipality, the Ministry and the Roma Education Fund regarding the pre-school education for Roma children. The municipality is in cooperation with these two partners realizing a project for the construction of a kindergarten in Crnik. In Pehcevo there is also active cooperation between the municipality and the Organization of Women of Pehcevo. This cooperation is primarily driven by the support that the Institute of Human Rights has given to the NGO for participation in a municipal project. According to the representative of the nongovernmental organization, the municipality has supported the organization in the past as well, but more of a logistical rather than financial support. Although the organization has been in existence in the Municipality of Pehcevo for some time now, it is not sufficiently active in using budgetary funds. Most often, they have sent their requests after the adoption of the municipal budget. Practically, the received assistance has not been previously envisaged in the budget, but has been collected from some other budget entries, of which only minimal amount can be drawn.

## **Benefits from the application of the human rights' based approach in the processes of development of local Strategies for Social Protection, Social Inclusion and Alleviation of Poverty in eight municipalities**

As emphasized at the beginning, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human

Rights conducted two pieces of research with the objective of developing applicative strategies and action plans, and implementing pilot projects in the priority areas identified by the municipalities. It is worth mentioning that in this research the human rights' based approach has been used in order to alleviate poverty and reduce social exclusion on a national and local level, which includes identification of vulnerable groups, their direct involvement in the decision making affecting their lives, and the establishment of a system for monitoring and accountability of holders of obligations.

All eight municipalities have been actively involved in the development of local strategies for social protection, social inclusion and alleviation of poverty. But in this particular part, we will more specifically elaborate the application of the human rights' based principle in the process of development of the Local Strategy of Social Protection, Social Inclusion and Alleviation of Poverty in Konce municipality. It is one of the first municipalities that has adopted the Strategy and is in the process of implementing the Action Plan and in the process of implementation and realization of some of the measures. Despite the awareness and sensibility of the importance of these issues for the development of Konce municipality, it was the first strategic document in the field of social protection. Earlier Communal Activity Commission established within the Council of Konce municipality each year developed a Public Works Program which included a part on social protection. The program contained only material benefits, one-off financial assistance. In 2011 the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy conducted an evaluation of the municipal program implemented in 2010. It was concluded that instead of proposing active labour market measures to socially disadvantaged citizens, the municipality has awarded them monetary allowances. A proposal was launched to the municipality to work harder on finding measures and forms through which socially disadvantaged citizens will be involved in various programs and projects.

The new municipal program has been developed in accordance with the basics of modern social protection. The program was preceded by a detailed analysis of the situation in the municipality in terms of social inclusion and poverty. The study provides an insight into the riskiest categories of citizens who can be provided assistance through systematic measures. The Action Plan puts greater emphasis

on the realization of some of the measures envisaged in the Strategy. Some of the measures from the Strategy are directly included in the Program and are expected, through practical activities, to be implemented this year. Taking into account the local situation, the activities are not many in number and they are expected to be implemented with utmost local efforts. It is believed that systematic knowledge of social problems and citizens' needs will lead to the successful overcoming of many more problematic social situations. It is important to emphasize that the funding for the activities has been approved by the Council, but they are considered to be insufficient. It is expected that additional funds for the implementation of activities will be obtained from the Ministry, donations and external funding. The Local Strategy envisages also an evaluation of activities which will be implemented in the period from 2012 to 2015. It is expected that the Strategy will contribute to the improvement of social conditions in Konce municipality.

We also believe that it is important to point out the need for sustainability of the activities envisaged in the local strategies and the need for participation in them. Mrs. Pljakova, Associate for Local Economic Development from Caska municipality, said that municipalities have experience in developing strategic plans, but they are facing difficulties in their implementation. In a way, the guarantee of success of the specific strategies arises from the support that the local self-governments units receive from the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, which has provided assistance not only for the development of the strategy on a local level in all eight municipalities, in the raising of funds for the implementation of the made plans. The gathering of assets and resources is a guarantee for the implementation of planned activities, or more specifically, for the implementation of the eight micro projects. However, difficulties will follow in the future as well, that's why it is necessary to ensure sustainability of projects, and in order to achieve sustainability it is necessary to establish cooperation with ZELS. Also, networking of all stakeholders is needed, regardless whether these are institutions on a national level or local level, civil society, settlements, local communities, businesses or individuals. The direct stakeholders should establish closer cooperation, work on the development of new

skills<sup>7</sup> to identify local level needs, reach out to citizens' needs, and thus, contribute to the increase of the local benefit.

According to Ms. Todorovska, Head of the Sector for Social Inclusion at the MLSP, local partnership groups lack a sense of ownership of local strategies. „More specifically, the municipalities, the NGO sector and the business sector all lack this feeling. Local strategies belong exclusively to the local community, to all relevant stakeholders who work on a local level to promote the social services. Although the predominant view is that the Institute has developed the Strategy, we find that everyone should in their own way recognize themselves in its practical implementation. In these eight pilot municipalities results have been achieved in terms of the strengthening of their capacities. The Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights helped local partnership groups to get involved, find their direction and develop their own policies with the objective of promoting citizens' rights on a local level.“

## **Benefits from the active involvement of the poor and vulnerable groups in the decision making on a local level**

In order to develop appropriate and more precise action plans cooperation at all levels - national, regional and local – is necessary. In addition to the cooperation with the existing institutions and the NGO sector on a local level, municipalities have the need and obligation to engage actively and more bravely the poor and vulnerable groups in the process of identification of their needs. In order to maximize the benefits of the human rights'- based implementation process, active participation of rights holders is necessary. The inclusion of the vulnerable categories of citizens should go on in all stages of the process, including needs analysis, definition of priority issues, program planning and implementation of specific activities to overcome identified problems. Only through such a comprehensive approach can municipalities adopt a more responsible approach to the planning of packages of social services and plan and direct those at specific vulnerable groups. This is

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<sup>7</sup> The issue of developing skills of working with the local population was pointed out in the recommendations and conclusions part and was elaborated by professor Maria Donevska from the Institute for Social Work and Social Policy.



illustrated with the example of Pehcevo municipality, where for the purposes of the strategic and action planning and priority setting of the municipality, focus groups were established in order to check whether the planned activities are in line with the actual needs of the citizens. Also, through participation, the parents of children with special needs suggested development of informative booklets on their rights. The proposal has been integrated in the current Local Strategy.

Pehcevo municipality Pehcevo is also a partner in the funding of a multisectoral project, encompassing a mobile assistance team and care and treatment of debilitated and elderly people in home conditions. In fact, the realization of the project involves meeting of part of the needs of two vulnerable categories of citizens. Namely, on one hand, the project targets the elderly and debilitated people, and on the other, helps in the reduction of the number of long-term unemployed women in Pehcevo municipality. So, an attempt to identify and involve the elderly and debilitated people was made, and at the same time, the long-term unemployed women were identified and assisted, two vulnerable categories that were identified in the developed study for Pehcevo municipality. Furthermore, the project bridges the gap in the institutional protection of the elderly and sick people, whereby the assistance is administered in a natural environment, at home of the people in need. The project has been designed in a way that so that the Regional Pehcevo Office from the Berovo Center for Social Work has been tasked with detection of the elderly who need home care. The Employment Center of Berovo municipality helped in the identification of unemployed women<sup>8</sup>. The unemployed women demonstrated great interest to get involved in the project; namely, 45 women applied at the first meeting, which caused difficulty in the selection of the participants in the project. Pehcevo is a small municipality with 6000 inhabitants, a micro region, where everybody knows everybody, so it was difficult to single out potential beneficiaries of the assistance and women in charge of implementing the activities. However, the project has triggered interest, a encouraging a higher level of activism among women, an intensified movement; it actually was a realization of a beautiful idea. The final goal is to turn this kind of service into a program activity of the NGOs, which then become service centers. Regular funding is needed for

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8 The Organization of Women from Pehcevo is the main project implementing entity.

this, both from the municipality and from other institutions in this area. This project has indeed raised the quality of life of the elderly people. Taking into consideration their number, one cannot speak of their institutionalization since even the richest countries lack such capacity. Persons assisted and cared for by other persons were chosen as beneficiaries of the services offered. With the help of the general physicians, information was obtained about the people who lack this kind of care and assistance, and thus, need help.

The project is in progress, a review of the needs was made in terms of the equipment that can be provided, such as wheelchairs or toilet wheelchairs. The quality of life of elderly people changes in just a few hours' visit of the women to their homes(Simovska, Pehcevo Organization of Women, POW).

Negotino municipality, however, directly supports the participation of the vulnerable groups in the process of implementation of activities within the micro project „Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Community.“ The project aims to achieve social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities through their active and continuous work engagement. The project involved 10 people with mental disabilities, who were trained and hired to collect paper and plastic in adequate containers, located in the town of Negotino. In order to raise the awareness of the public to use the adequate containers, and in order to actively involve it in the project activities, a media campaign was organized and promotional material prepared. The project promotes the concept of sustainable local development through the integration of persons with mental disabilities in the local community, their work engagement which is aimed at generating income, but also at protecting and preserving the environment on a local level. The project also promotes the concept of partnership among the civil society organizations, the local self-government and the business sector in order to address important social issues on a local level and provide sustainable local development.

## **Next steps in the process of social protection decentralization**

On a national level the Ministry of Labour and Social policy has been

independently or in cooperation with other international financial and development agencies actively working on making improvements in the decentralization process. The activities undertaken by the Ministry of Labour and Social policy in the field of decentralization of social services are numerous. These include projects that are being implemented or will be implemented in the very near future by the Ministry and activities that will probably help us to address the challenges we will face in the future in the process of decentralization.

In reference to the decentralization, the Programme for Development of Social Protection 2011-2021 is also being implemented, which is an important document, focused on the improvement of the social protection system as well as all on all other policies implemented simultaneously by the Ministry, such as the process of deinstitutionalization , social inclusion, alleviation of poverty, etc. The coordinative body within this Program has in 2011 developed a report on the implemented activities and submitted it to the Government. The Ministry is, in collaboration with UNDP, in 2012 conducting an in-depth analysis of the capacities of the local self-government to undertake the provision of the social services. Although similar activities have been carried out within the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights-funded project, and within some other projects, an in-depth analysis has not been conducted so far. All previous projects touch upon the issue from their own perspective, analyzing the capacities, the vulnerability, even the intermunicipal cooperation. But the in-depth analysis is based on several important components aimed at assessing the capacity of all local stakeholders, centers for social work, municipalities, the NGO sector, schools, the health sector, the private sector, etc. This will help the municipalities to identify the vulnerable groups on a local level through focus group work and will contribute to the establishment of certain models that will be prepared in the form of a manual. That will give opportunity to the community, from manual to define models for developing social services and as a final result will organize a proper education. This is a pilot project and it is important initially to be set appropriately, as it should, so it can further be applied to other municipalities.

The National Development Program is focused on the implementation of all activities and envisages a model of taking away of the monetary allowances from

the centers for social work and their management by a separate agency by means of which they would be linked to the employment system and more proactive work models would be therefore offered for the beneficiaries themselves in terms of their greater involvement on the labor market and division of social services and the so-called services in the centers for social work and their close connection with the municipalities and all stakeholders on a municipal level. In order to implement this process, the strategy itself envisages the establishment of three councils as a short-term measure. First council to be established would be the Prevention Council, which would include all relevant stakeholders on a local level as members; the second would be for Council for Social Services, which would deal with the further development of the social services; and the third would be the Employment Council. Therefore, these councils depend on the successful management of the process of separation of the monetary allowances from the social services.

Currently, two IPA funded (Component 4) projects are under way. The first project is focused on the strengthening of the capacities of municipalities and NGOs so that they acquire the necessary skills for preparation of projects and independent submission of applications for IPA funded projects. The second project is directed towards inclusion of vulnerable groups in the labor market and it provides technical assistance for training of all stakeholders who can get involved in this process on a local level, including the centers for social work, the NGOs, the municipal administration, etc. The implementation of these projects is expected to open the door for the process of further preparation of specific projects in which the Ministry will not be a key stakeholder. Greater commitment is expected on the part of the municipalities and the NGO sector, i.e. it is expected that they establish a common network on a local level.

In terms of the capacities of the centers for social work several processes are under way; the process of selection of a consulting company that will perform a functional analysis of the staff in the centers for social work is under way with the objective of offering a new model of organization of the centers and helping them properly deliver social services, but also enabling implementation of all strategic policies of the Ministry. The licensing process, which should bring continuity in the plan-based training of professionals, is also under way.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has normatively regulated the cooperation with the NGO sector.

The NGO representatives actively participate in all coordinative bodies as well as in the policy creation and implementation; however, this process should certainly be upgraded and the existing cooperation deepened.

A specific example of this would be the UNDP-funded project (first of its kind) for intermunicipal cooperation in the development of social services, within which adequate action plans were developed. Therefore, in addition to the environmental concept supported by UNDP and the social services were put on the agenda. One can say that after the implementation of this project, the developed plans were very good in terms of involving the municipality into taking specific and feasible measures on a local level. We find that we shall thus build the decentralization process in the social inclusion of the municipalities.

Social services, as new forms of services, have already been established in the country. The Ministry tailors them on the basis of an analysis of the citizens' needs. This is how the system for providing assistance for independent living of the disabled people has been established. New rights have been established, such as the right to mobility for visual impaired people, the amount of the benefit has been increased, the law on sign language has been adopted, people with hearing impairment have been included in all social trends, small group homes have been established, etc. But it is important to mention that the Ministry is responsive to citizens' needs and its activities are largely dependent on its possibilities to provide assistance. (Spasovska, Assistant Head of the Sector for Social Protection at the MLSP).

Mrs. Todorovska, the Head of the Sector for Social Inclusion within the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has emphasized the importance of the implementation of the Program for Patrol Social Work, which has had outstanding results on a local level in three pilot Skopje municipalities: Centar, Gazi Baba and Gorce Petrov. The program provides direct assistance to vulnerable categories of people on the street. Social workers are getting out of the bureaucracy stereotype; on the contrary, within this program they are helping the vulnerable categories of people enter the social protection system. The program, thus, enables prevention

attained through a multidimensional approach in which, the vertical coordination is used to achieve a horizontal one.

UNDP and the Ministry are jointly working on the creation of active employment measures through community work; it is a pilot program to be implemented this year. Within this program, a small number of jobs will be created for people who will deliver services to vulnerable categories. If it proves to be successful, it will create opportunities for greater funding of similar programs (Ramadani, Representative of UNDP).

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

The elaborate discussion which took place within the wider round-table discussion on „Decentralization of the Social Protection in the Republic of Macedonia: Factual Situation, Challenges and Opportunities on a Local Level,“ as well as the assessment studies of the local situation, resulted in issuing adequate recommendations and drawing specific conclusions.

The multisectoral cooperation has emerged as a central topic in the process of social protection decentralization. It is considered that it is necessary to do networking and encourage all stakeholders on a local level. According to the previous experiences, the social services and their decentralization depend on the system set-up. (Spasovska, Assistant Head of the Sector for Social Protection, MLSP). Decentralization cannot be achieved without inclusion of all stakeholders both on a local self- government level and national level. There are unutilized capacities, not only in the NGO sector, but also within individuals who are available to the units of the local self government. The municipal administration sees them as a competition that threatens its positions, but they should be seen as people with experience in the field of social protection (Trajkovski, President of NGO „Poraka“ from Negotino).

It is estimated that the situation with the municipal capacities varies greatly from one municipality to another and they condition the whole process of decentralization of the social protection. Realistically, there are various municipalities with a varying level of development. There are extremely poor municipalities

whose accounts have been blocked and there are very rich municipalities. The infrastructure in the municipalities is poor and no funds have been allocated for this purpose. It is, therefore, necessary to find a budgetary mechanism for compulsory allocation of funds for social protection (Jankulov, Municipality of Konce). Social protection should not be reduced only to material allowances, but should also include other aspects in the field of social inclusion. But small communities will with great difficulty meet their social needs, not only due to deficiency of material means, but also due to deficiency of human resources because young professionals are leaving these areas. Therefore, people should be further encouraged to be able to develop greater cooperation with the objective of meeting the needs of citizens.”( A representative of Pehcevo municipality).

It shall be emphasized that the decentralization does not depend so much on the fiscal implications as it depend on the different stakeholders. This also includes representatives of civil organizations and local self government. It is up to the NGO sector to impose its demands and it is up to the representatives of the local self-government to try to solve some of the NGO demands or meet some of the NGO needs in a dedicated manner. A special problem arises when the municipality announces a call for support of nongovernmental organizations. Nongovernmental organizations include also sports associations, associations of beekeepers, environmental associations, associations of persons with special needs and the associations of the elderly. Primarily, a distinction has to be made between organizations such as associations of beekeepers and environmentalists, on one hand, and organizations working in the field of social protection or human rights, on the other. The latter should be perceived in a different way, especially if these organizations provide specific social services (Krstevski, National Office of Poraka). The need for keeping decentralized social services sustainable shall also be underlined. Serious consideration is needed upon the adoption of municipal budgets; the process shall also be transparent. There is a need for public debates on allocated budgetary funds for the civil society. The complaints should be submitted to the Budget Committee and this should be a practice in all municipalities. More people should be involved in the creation of the budget since the budgetary funds come from the citizens and the budget should be tailored according to their needs.

An appeal is hereby launched to the NGO sector to observe the budget adoption with greater vigilance, so that a part of it can be allocated for the implementation of their program activities. But, an appeal is also launched to the local self-government, the mayors, the counselors that will vote for the budget to support financing of priority issues, necessary for the municipality (Zlateva, President of the Association for Support of People with Cerebral Paralysis, Day Care Center for Persons with Disabilities, Caska).

It is considered that the success of the process of decentralization of the social protection depends on whether or not the services are being developed in accordance with the needs of citizens. „Social protection on a local level, i.e. the needs of the citizens, are not necessarily expensive. We are not talking of an institution here, we are talking of support and assistance to citizens. Social protection depends on how they live and what they need. We are, therefore, placing the focus on the action plans. It must be known in the municipality what are the groups at risk, whether there are in the populated and remote areas elderly people who hardly anyone sees, whether there are disabled people who have not been involved in the ongoing processes, even whether there are children without parents who need any kind of assistance. The services of institutions such as homes for the elderly and kindergartens are not always required, etc. This is not a process, the state no longer does this, now this is a municipal function. Active participation and cooperation is required and all of that should be done in the interest and wellbeing of the citizens (Spasovska, Assistant Head of the Sector for Social Protection, MLSP). „

One of the key recommendations regarding the decentralization process envisages active participation of citizens in the implementation of activities in the field of social protection, as well as evaluation and investment in the building of human capital and use of social forces. In this context, Professor Marija Donevska from the Institute of Social Work and Social Policy, emphasizes the importance of Plato's maxim „To know does not imply to know how to do it“ in the process of decentralization of social services. Moreover, she underlines that „we can develop and prepare a hundred strategies on a local level, but if we do not know the pulse of the population with which we are working, if we do not know how and with which skills we should encourage the citizens to begin to cooperate with us, if we



do not know the secrets regarding the specific techniques of cooperation with the population, if we do not know that results are achieved only through inclusion of people living in the local community, we will not achieve anything. „Therefore,“ she finds, „when training people who represent the so- called social forces, which include NGOs, the focus shall be placed on learning the skills of working with the local population. We should be aware of the fact that the local population has certain knowledge of the processes that we want to change in the local development of the community. We must know that the people in our local community have their own social activity priorities in the local community.

We must also take into account the social driving forces; these are not always counselors or activists of certain institutions, it may be an elderly person who has a good reputation in the community. We need all this when we work in the local community. We recommend focusing more on developing skills and on the practical aspects of the work. We can do very little without following this approach. Some things look nice on paper, but it is the practice that counts. This is the secret of our profession. „

The participation of the business sector is a burning problem in this process since the general impression is that it lacks a sense of social responsibility. This sector might still find itself in a transitional period, not yet ready to think above the sheer profit and leave a part of it for the citizens. But, in order to change this situation, the NGO sector has to do a lot more to encourage the private sector to participate and help business people to think in a socially responsible manner, sharing the conviction that they can also make a contribution. If thinking in terms of different milieu, the business sector is not so bad, but we need to approach them and communicate with them adequately in order for them to make permanent financial contributions to the budget on a municipal level. This is possible, but it is necessary to raise the awareness of the business community. I think we should work more on the realization of that plan (Simovska, Pehcevo Organization of Women).

Finally, we would like to point out that social protection does not necessarily

imply high costs. We often forget the basic available facilities in the municipality that are not used for protection purposes or for satisfying the basic needs of the citizens. Sometimes, it is enough to encourage a group of volunteers to provide assistance in meeting the basic living needs of a particular vulnerable group.

### **List of participants at the round table discussion – Decentralization of the social protection in the Republic of Macedonia, held on March 30, 2012**

|     | <b>Name and last name</b> | <b>Organization/institution</b>                                 |
|-----|---------------------------|---|
| 1.  | Petranka D. Miladinova    | Manager of BIM – FV Skopje                                      |
| 2.  | Ibrahim Ibrahimi          | Deputy Minister for Labour and Social Policy (MLSP)             |
| 3.  | Irena Todoroska           | Head of the Unit for Social Inclusion, MLSP                     |
| 4.  | Svetlana Trbojevik        | Moderator, Institute of Social Work and Social Policy           |
| 5.  | Mila Carovska             | President, Macedonian Platform for Fight against Poverty, MPFAP |
| 6.  | Sofija Spasovska          | Deputy Head of the Sector for Social Protection, MLSP           |
| 7.  | Milica Konevska           | Unit for Social Inclusion, MLSP                                 |
| 8.  | Katerina Savovska         | MCSW Skopje   |
| 9.  | Robert Sarlamanov         | Austrian Development Agency                                     |
| 10. | Meri Terzieva             | Macedonian Platform for Fight against Poverty, MPFAP            |
| 11. | Ivana Stojanovska         | Macedonian Platform for Fight against Poverty, MPFAP            |
| 12. | Stojan Lazarev            | Mayor of Konce municipality                                     |
| 13. | Zlatko Jankulov           | Local Self Government Unit Konce                                |
| 14. | Havva Abduramanova        | Local Self Government Unit Konce                                |
| 15. | Slobodanka Krteva         | Local Self Government Unit Negotino                             |
| 16. | Slavko Kolev              | Center for Social Work Negotino                                 |
| 17. | Ljupco Karakasovski       | Local Self Government Unit Pehcevo                              |
| 18. | Lidija Pljakova           | Local Self Government Unit Caska                                |

|     |                    |  |
|-----|--------------------|--|
| 19. | Sali Latifov       | Local Self Government Unit Caska   |
| 20. | Olivera Doldurova  | Local Self Government Unit Radovis   |
| 21. | Violeta Temelkova  | MCSW Radovis   |
| 22. | Zorica Stefanova   | Association of Women of Konce municipality                                       |
| 23. | Gordana Trajkovska | PORAKA, Negotino   |
| 24. | Valentina Taseva   | PORAKA, Negotino   |
| 25. | Nada Simovska      | Association of Women of Pehcevo municipality                                     |
| 26. | Daliborka Zlateva  | Association of People with Cerebral Paralysis Veles                              |
| 27. | Vlado Krstovski    | National Center for People with Intellectual Disabilities PORAKA                 |
| 28. | Ibadetka Cupeska   | SASTIPE Zdravje Association  |
| 29. | Elena Nesovska     | Sumnal Association   |
| 30. | Marija Gelevska    | Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women of Macedonia, ESE |
| 31. | Teodora Dilberova  | Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women of Macedonia, ESE |
| 32. | Jana Popovska      | Humanost Association   |
| 33. | Divna Zmejkovik    | Union of Independent Autonomous Labour Unions of Macedonia                       |
| 34. | Maria Doneska      | Faculty of Philosophy  |
| 35. | Filip Babamov      | SOS Children's Village COC Детско Село   |
| 36. | Nehat Ramadani     | UNDP   |
| 37. | Nafi Sarafini      | EU Delegation  |
| 38. | Biljana Tanevska   | Macedonian Radio   |
| 39. | Natasa Jancik      | Macedonian Television  |

|     |                     |               |
|-----|---------------------|---------------|
| 40. | Ninoslav Mladenovik | BIM-FV Skopje |
| 41. | Jagoda Iljov        | BIM-FV Skopje |
| 42. | Stojan Misev        | BIM-FV Skopje |

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CIP - Каталогизација во публикација

Национална и универзитетска библиотека „Св. Климент Охридски“, Скопје

342.25(497.7)

DECENTRALIZATION of the social protection in the Republic of Macedonia : factual situation, challenges and opportunities on a local level / [translated from Macedonian into English Svetlana Spasovska]. - Skopje : Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of human rights, 2012. - 38 стр. ; 21 см

Превод на делото: Децентрализација на социјалната заштита во Република Македонија. - Публикацијата е во рамките на проектот: „Social inclusion and human rights in Macedonia“. - Фусноти кон текстот. - Библиографија: стр. 37

ISBN 978-608-65321-4-7

а) Децентрализација - Македонија

COBISS.MK-ID 91651082

ISBN







ISBN



9 786086 532147