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**ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE  
FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR THE  
PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES**

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## **Fifth Report submitted by Serbia**

**Pursuant to Article 25, paragraph 2 of the Framework  
Convention for the Protection of National Minorities –  
received on 1 September 2022**

# **Republic of Serbia**

## **FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES**

**Fifth Periodic Report  
submitted to the Secretary-General of the  
Council of Europe  
in accordance with Article 25 of the Framework  
Convention**

**Belgrade, August 2022**

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## **I Introduction**

In accordance with Article 25 of the Framework Convention, the Republic of Serbia hereby submits its Fifth Interim Report on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, for the period from 2017 to 2021, developed on the basis of the State Report Framework, which is to be submitted in the fifth monitoring cycle, adopted by the Advisory Committee at its 64th plenary session in March 2019.

The Fifth Report on the implementation of the Framework Convention was prepared by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, and the following state authorities participated in its development: Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, Ministry of Culture and Information, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health, Ministry of European Integration, Administration for Cooperation with Churches and Religious Communities within the Ministry of Justice, Government of Serbia Coordination Body for the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja - CB's Office, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, General Secretariat of the National Assembly, Human Resource Management Service, Central Registry of Compulsory Social Security, National Employment Service, and bodies and organisations of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina: Expert Service of the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Provincial Secretariat for Culture, Public Information and Relations with Religious Communities, Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities/National Communities, and Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy, Demography and Gender Equality.

The following independent state bodies and organisations also gave their contribution to the development of the Fifth Report on the implementation of the Framework Convention: Protector of Citizens, Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, and Development Agency of Serbia.

Amounts of the financial contribution of public authorities on all levels which were used in tables of this Report are expressed in dinars, unless otherwise stated.

All the terms in this report which are used in masculine grammatical gender cover both masculine and feminine gender of the persons they refer to.

## II. Practical arrangements made at the national level for raising awareness on the results of the fourth monitoring cycle and the Framework Convention

- a. *Steps undertaken for publishing the results of the fourth monitoring cycle (Opinion, comments by the state, Resolution): Publication, distribution and translation in the official language(s) and minority languages as appropriate.*

Development of state reports on the implementation of the Framework Convention, which serve as the basis for monitoring, as well as answers to further questions of the Advisory Committee and comments to the opinions of the Advisory Committee, shall be fully based on the principle of transparency. That commitment is reflected in the publication of all documents relating to the implementation of the Framework Convention.

The Fourth Report on the implementation of the Framework Convention was published on the website of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue and is available to the public on the following website: <https://www.minljmpdd.gov.rs/multilateralni-ugovori.php>. The same website published the results of the fourth monitoring cycle: Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee, Comments of the Republic of Serbia to that Opinion, and Committee of Ministers Resolution of the Council of Europe on the implementation of the Framework Convention in the Republic of Serbia. The findings of the Advisory Committee and the Committee of Ministers Resolution have been translated to Serbian:

Also available on the website re all documents from the previous reporting cycles, as well as thematic comments of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention, translated to Serbian.

- b. *All the accompanying activities organised at the national, regional and local levels, including activities organised together with the Council of Europe, such as discussions, seminars, evaluations, impact assessments, studies etc., as well as the results of these events.*

The follow-up seminar on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe was held on 16 June 2021 in Belgrade. The seminar was held as a part of an inclusive process. In addition to the representatives of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention and relevant state authorities, attendees included representatives of national councils of national minorities and civil society organisations. The goal of the seminar was to provide a platform for the dialogue between the Advisory Committee and relevant stakeholders in the Republic of Serbia, in order to discuss recommendations and establish the most efficient ways of their practical application. As a part of the seminar, appropriate materials were distributed to all participants.

Representatives of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention presented recommendations from the fourth monitoring cycle which the Council of Europe had given to Serbia relating to the implementation of the Framework Convention, while representatives of relevant state authorities presented activities which had been undertaken for the purpose of fulfilling the recommendations.

At the seminar, it was concluded that the recommendations of the Advisory Committee for the Republic of Serbia were the foundation for undertaking activities for improving human and minority rights, as well as for the EU accession process, and that the European Union and the Council of Europe remained committed partners to the authorities of the Republic of Serbia in this process.

In accordance with the conclusions from the seminar, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, after collecting data from the competent authorities, officially informed the Advisory Committee on activities undertaken for the purpose of fulfilling the recommendations, which will be further discussed in the appropriate parts of this report.

In addition to the above, it is important to note that the Republic of Serbia participates in the project *Promotion of Diversity and Equality in Serbia*, which is a part of the joint programme of the European Union/Council of Europe “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022” (phase 2). The objective of the project is strengthening the capacities of national and local actors for the purpose of better resolution of matters relating to combating discrimination, hate speech and protection of the rights of national minorities and LGBTI persons, in accordance with the standards and recommendations established by the Council of Europe, particularly those from the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, European Charter of the Council of Europe for Regional or Minority Languages. and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. The project is also aimed at supporting Serbia in negotiations on the European Union accession as regards fundamental rights. The project included realisation of certain activities aimed at creating conditions for fulfilment of recommendations by competent authorities of the Council of Europe in the process of monitoring the Framework Convention and the European Charter of the Council of Europe for Regional or Minority Languages.

It is especially important to note that this project provides support to the Republic of Serbia for the development of a new Action Plan for the Exercise of the Rights of National Minorities, which will, *inter alia*, be based on the Progress Report in the Serbia’s EU accession process, as well as the recommendations from the Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The Special Working Group for the preparation of the text of the Draft Action Plan for the Exercise of the Rights of National Minorities is comprised of representatives of competent authorities, national councils of national minorities and civil society organisations, and its work is managed by the Minister of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue. As appropriate and upon request of the Special Working Group, representatives of other institutions shall also participate in its work, as well as experts, advisors and consultants who possess knowledge relevant for the development of this document. By following-up on all relevant recommendations for the preparation of this document, the Republic of Serbia strives to prepare a new Action Plan, which will be better, more effective and efficient, with the objective to improve efficient exercise of the rights of national minorities in the Republic of Serbia.

- c. *Participation of minority organisations and other non-governmental organisations in the implementation and monitoring of the Framework Convention by the authorities and their participation in the preparation of the fifth report.*

The Action Plan for the exercise of the rights of national minorities, which was adopted in 2016, was based on findings and recommendations of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention from the third monitoring cycle. National councils of national minorities were included in the process of development and reporting, and in all phases of the process of monitoring and implementation of the Action Plan. Reports, with its accompanying statistical annexes, as well as overviews of comments by national councils on reports and answers by competent institutions are available at the website of the Ministry, and were also discussed in sessions of the Government Council for National Minorities, which were entrusted with monitoring of these activities, and whose members were members and presidents of all national councils.

As previously mentioned, representatives of national councils and civil society organisations are a part of a Special Working Group for the preparation of the text of the Draft Action Plan for the Exercise of the Rights of National Minorities. Upon a proposal of the Coordination of National Councils of National Minorities, six representatives of national councils of national minorities were appointed to the Special Working Group. In addition to the appointed representatives, the Special Working Group also includes, at an invitation of the Ministry, representatives of national councils appointed by the Coordination of National Councils for each of the four areas where national councils exercise their powers (culture, information, official use of language and script, and education). A public invitation to civil society organisations for membership in the Special Working Group was published on the website of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue. Five organisations which, *inter alia*, deal with the issues of minority rights, have applied for the participation in the development of the Action Plan. Upon a proposal of the Commission for the selection of civil society organisations, representatives of all organisations that applied were appointed into the Working Group.

An invitation for participation in the development of the Fifth Report on the implementation of the Framework Convention was sent to all national councils of national minorities and to the Federation of Jewish Communities of Serbia, as well as to the following citizens associations which include members of national minorities or which protect the rights of national minorities. Committee for Human Rights, Bujanovac; Albanian Cultural Society “Perspektiva”, Bujanovac; Civil Society Resource Centre - Bujanovac; Cultural Centre DamaD, Novi Pazar; Sandžak Committee for Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms, Novi Pazar; Cultural Information Centre of the Bulgarian National Minority, Bosilegrad; Association “*Matica Bugara* in Serbia”, Bosilegrad; Bulgarian Cultural Association “Trandafer”, Belo Blato; *Bunjevačka matica*, Subotica; Association of citizens “Bunjevačko kolo”, Sombor; Forum of Vlachs, Bor; Association “Gergina”, Negotin; Movement of Vlach Unification, Petrovac-na-Mlavi; Foundation “László Szekeres”, Subotica; Novi Sad Hungarian Culture and Art Centre, Novi Sad; Linguistic Association for the Hungarian Language “Gabor Szarvas”, Ada; Association of Hungarian Journalists of Vojvodina, Novi Sad; Vojvodina Centre for Methodology, Subotica; Citizens Association of the Macedonian national community in Jabuka “Ilinden-Jabuka”, Jabuka; Citizens Association of the Macedonian national community of the Nišava District “Vardar”, Niš; Macedonian Cultural Centre “Blaže Koneski”, Pančevo; German National Council, Subotica; German Cultural

Society “Donaubrücke Neusatz”, Novi Sad; Roma Information Centre of Yugoslavia, Kragujevac; Association of Coordinators for Roma issues, Valjevo; Association of Pedagogical Assistants of Serbia, Kragujevac; Citizens Association Roma Women Center “BIBIJA”, Belgrade; Citizens Association Roma Production Roma World, Niš; Romanian Centre for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Novi Sad; Society for Romanian language of Vojvodina - Republic of Serbia, Vršac; Romanian Society for Ethnography and Folklore, Torak; Folklore Society “Tibiskus”, Uzdin; *Matica rusinska*, Ruski Krstur; Society for Ruthenian Language, Literature and Culture, Novi Sad; “Association of Slovakian Pedagogues”, Bački Petrovac; Association of Slovakian Journalists, Novi Sad; Association of Slovakian Local Media, Bački Petrovac; *Matica slovačka* in Serbia, Bački Petrovac; Slovenian society in Belgrade - “Sava” society, Belgrade; Association of Slovenians “Kredarica”, Novi Sad; Society for Ukrainian, Literature and Culture “Prosveta”, Novi Sad; “Croatian Academic Society”, Subotica; Croatian Educational Society “Bela Gabrić”, Subotica; *Matica hrvatska*, Subotica; “Češka beseda”, Bela Crkva; *Matica češka*, Bela Crkva; Association of Greeks and friends of Greece “Eleftherios Venizelos,” Novi Sad; “Jewish Centre for Culture and Arts Programmes”, Belgrade; Association of Citizens of Montenegrin Nationality “Montenegro”, Belgrade; Association of Montenegrins of Serbia “Krstaš”, Lovćevac; “Banatski Poljaci”, Ostojićevo; Citizens Association “Ruski talas”, Zemun; Russian Cultural Centre, Novi Sad.

The invitation to participate in the development of the Fifth Report on the implementation of the Framework Convention was answered only by the National Council of the Bosniak National Minority, even though invitations had been sent to all national councils. The following associations also answered the invitation: Society for Ruthenian Language, Literature and Culture, Novi Sad; Association “Gergina”, Negotin; Citizens Association Roma Production Roma World, Niš and Committee for Human Rights, Bujanovac. Their main observations on certain matters relating to the status of national minorities are presented within the framework of the implementation of certain provisions contained in the Fifth Report on the implementation of the Framework Convention. Views and observations of the national councils and associations do not necessarily reflect the opinions and findings of state authorities.

- d. *All other measures undertaken to promote the knowledge of the Framework Convention among national minorities, civil servants and the public.*

The 2016 Action Plan for exercise of the rights of national minorities provided for approximately 80 different developers, including ministries and other competent authorities, national councils of national minorities, provincial institutions, tertiary education establishments, regulatory bodies etc. Reporting in 2017 included 76 multi-ethnic local self-government units and 53 councils for inter-ethnic relations, which have been established at the level of self-government units. After local self-government units and councils for inter-ethnic relations had been included in the reporting, the then Office for Human and Minority Rights, which was preparing reports on the implementation of the Action Plan, with a view to improving the quality of reporting on the implemented activities, strengthening the capacities of employees in local self-governments and, most of all, learning about the Conventions of the

Council of Europe and recommendations of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, held the following trainings in 2017:

- on 25 September in Niš, for representatives of 12 local self-governments from South Serbia,
- on 27 September in Novi Sad, for representatives of 40 local self-governments from the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

The Office for Human and Minority Rights, in collaboration with the Council of Europe Office in Belgrade, within the framework of the project *Strengthening the protection of national minorities in Serbia*, which was a part of the joint programme of the European Union/Council of Europe “Horizontal Facility for Western Balkans and Turkey” (phase 1), organised a presentation of results relating to the implementation of the Action Plan for the Exercise of the Rights of National Minorities.

Within this project, an Analysis of the Report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the Exercise of the Rights of National Minorities has been developed, containing recommendations for further improvements in accordance with the standards of the Council of Europe and the European Union. The analysis was prepared by experts on the basis of interim reports on the implementation of the Action Plan and on the basis of conversations with persons in charge of preparing reports in certain authorities and bodies, in view of the European standards in this field, primarily the provisions of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe.

This presentation was attended by representatives of state authorities, international organisations, independent state authorities and national councils of national minorities. They agreed that, since the adoption of the Action Plan, considerable progress had been made in terms of improvement of legal solutions and their more consistent application, as well as enhancing human and material capacities in certain areas of social life where the rights of national minorities are exercised, as clearly shown in reports.

Also, significant measures were undertaken for promotion of awareness on the Framework Convention, as provided for in the Rulebook establishing a general programme of professional development for civil servants in state administration bodies and Government agencies.<sup>1</sup> Within the framework of the Programme of Professional Development for Civil Servants, the programme area Protection of human rights and data confidentiality was established, together with accompanying thematic areas such as Protection from discrimination, Discrimination before state authorities, Personal data protection, Data confidentiality protection, Rights of persons belonging to national minorities, Mechanisms for monitoring the state of human rights in the Republic of Serbia with an emphasis of particularly vulnerable groups, and Enforcement of the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights. The objective of the thematic area Rights of persons belonging to national minorities is for the attendees to be informed on the rights of persons belonging to national minorities which have been defined in applicable regulations and international standards, informed about the method and procedure for exercise and protection of the rights of national minorities, as well as competent authorities for matters from this area, to gain knowledge on national councils of national minorities, be informed about the obligations of the Republic of Serbia in the process

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<sup>1</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 6/2017.

of European integration as regards the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. The target group in trainings which are organised within this thematic area are all civil servants, and the anticipated outcome is improvement and gaining new knowledge, as well as raising awareness of civil servants on the rights of national minorities on the method and procedure of exercise and protection of human rights. The trainings are continuously implemented.

### **III Measures undertaken to resolve key issues**

*1. Raise awareness of persons belonging to the Roma minority living in informal settlements as well as relevant community workers about the legislative standards and the remedies available to victims of discrimination; continue and intensify resolutely addressing structural discrimination faced by Roma with regard to their citizenship status, as well as housing, healthcare, education and employment, including by taking the necessary affirmative measures to address the root causes of the discrimination they face; eliminate all forms of segregation of Roma children and include them in mainstream education; redouble efforts to combat school absenteeism and early dropouts among Roma children, including by expanding and developing the long-term use of pedagogical assistants; step up efforts to improve participation of Roma in the economic and social life, by designing policy measures based on disaggregated data, setting up clear indicators, monitoring them in close co-operation with representatives of the Roma, with a view to adapting and strengthening them on a periodical basis.*

The Republic of Serbia implements a series of activities aimed at improving the status of persons belonging to the Roma minority, including measures for resolving the causes of the discrimination they are facing and raising awareness of the persons belonging to the Roma minority who live in informal settlements, as well as relevant community workers, about the legislative standards and the remedies available to victims of discrimination.

*Activities for raising awareness about the legislative standards and the remedies available to victims of discrimination*

The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, as an independent, autonomous and specialised state authority competent for preventing all types, forms and cases of discrimination, protection of equality, as well as improvement of the exercise and protection of equality, has prepared and published a number of expert publications on the status and protection from discrimination, which are available to the broad community, including persons belonging to the Roma minority who live in informal settlements. *Inter alia*, brochures on the main terms and methods of protection from discrimination, as well as the form of appeal to the Commissioner, have been developed and issued in minority languages, including the Romani language. The publication “Recognise and report discrimination” in the Romani and Serbian language, primarily intended for persons belonging to the Roma community, which contains an explanation of various forms of discrimination, mechanisms for protection against discrimination, with relevant examples from everyday life, as well as an integrated form of appeal in order to facilitate access to protection from discrimination, as well as the procedure

of submitting an appeal, to persons belonging to the Roma community, as well as civil society organisations protecting the rights of Roma. Leaflets such as “Who is the Commissioner?”, printed in Romani and other minority languages, explain the term “discrimination” in a simple manner, as well as the mechanisms for protection against discrimination, affirmative measures, and the method of submitting an appeal to the Commissioner, with an integrated form of appeal. For the purpose of ensuring higher availability of mechanisms for protection against discrimination, the Commissioner has, in collaboration with the Roma Platform of the Roma Association of Zaječar and the Association of Roma students from Novi Sad, enabled the availability of the form for reporting discrimination at the website romskaplatforma.rs, which features examples of cases of discrimination, as well as other topics relating to the status of Roma.

In addition to the above, the Commissioner, for the purpose of preventing all types, forms and cases of discrimination and improving the exercise and protection of equality, continuously implements trainings relating to the anti-discrimination law, trainings on the recognition and response to discrimination, as well as mechanisms for protection against discrimination intended to various professional groups and the general public, aimed at, *inter alia*, resolving the matter of discrimination that persons belonging to the Roma national minority face in various social spheres.. In the period which covers the Fifth Interim Report, the Commissioner implemented the following trainings:

- between 2016 and 2021, trainings of police officers were implemented on the definitions and forms of discrimination, particularly that of hate crime. Over 600 members of the Ministry of Interior from various area police administrations;

- in 2017, 10 regional seminars were held for community workers, with the title “Protection against discrimination - recognition and prevention of cases of discrimination in the local self-government”. The training programme included over 300 employees from 75 local self-government units.

- in 2017 and 2018, a total of 11 seminars were organised on the application of antidiscrimination regulations, which included all labour inspectors in the Republic of Serbia (242 in total);

- within the curriculum of the Judicial Academy, in 2018, four seminars were held for judges of civil departments of higher courts in the Republic of Serbia, on the topic of “Judicial Civil Legal Protection Against Discrimination”, and the programme covered 86 judges from all four appellate courts. In addition, a workshop for judges of appellate courts and higher courts was organised on the topic of strategic disputes relating to protection against discrimination;

- in 2018, seminars were held for media representatives on the topic of reporting on the issues of discrimination, equality and observance of fundamental human rights, as well as trainings for representatives of 16 civil society organisations whose aim was raising capacities for implementing situational testing of cases of discrimination;

- in 2018, within the framework of the programme “Support to Roma Inclusion – Strengthening local communities towards Roma inclusion” of the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, mechanisms for protection against discrimination, as well as the role and significance of the Commissioner, were presented to representatives of local self-

governments, social welfare centres and civil society organisations. Trainings were held in four cities, for over 100 participants;

- in 2019, pilot training was held for 25 advisors from the National Employment Service, intended for gaining theoretical and practical knowledge on the definition and forms of discrimination, as well as the Commissioner's purview and practice in the field of employment and labour. These trainings continued in 2021. Over 60 employees in the National Employment Service were included in this programme:

- in 2019, within the framework of the project "Social services for vulnerable groups", three trainings were held (in Sombor, Niš and Belgrade) for providers of social services at the local level in the field of the application of anti-discrimination regulations;

- trainings titled "Right to equality and non-discrimination in the field of tourism" during 2019 and 2021 covered over 50 tourism workers;

- during the execution of the project "Strengthening of local anti-discrimination and institutional capacities", the Commissioner implemented multiple trainings on the topic "How to recognise work discrimination", with over 30 representatives from 15 local self-governments in Serbia;

- in 2021, for trainees of the Judicial Academy, judges and public prosecutors, a comprehensive online training course on the protection against discrimination, which will be available at the platform of the Judicial Academy, was recorded. Online training was also created on the topics of anti-discrimination, gender-based violence and strategic disputes, which will become an obligatory part of education for future generations of trainees. This training is available to the public on the Commissioner's website;

- in 2020, for representatives of national councils of national minorities, training was held on the definition and forms of discrimination and mechanisms for protection. In 2021, two trainings were held for over 30 activists of Roma organisations. The same year, over 20 media representatives were trained to recognise discrimination, with an emphasis on hate speech towards minority communities.

In addition to the above, the Commissioner regularly implements education for civil servants employed in state administration, within the framework of the training by the National Academy for Public Administration. The training programme *Protection from Discrimination* is aimed at improving civil servants' knowledge relating to the legal and institutional framework for protection against discrimination, as well as the definition and forms of discrimination, and role and competences of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality.

The Commissioner's regular activities for the improvement of the situation in terms of equality also include organising and participating in meetings of experts, as well as direct contact with citizens in the Commissioner's reception office, and time in the field (visits to local self-governments, informal settlements) with the objective of higher accessibility of the institution to citizens and providing effective protection against discrimination. In addition, the Commissioner shall warn the public about the most frequent, typical and severe cases of discrimination, as well as the frequent inappropriate discriminatory speech and hate speech in public spaces, thus raising public awareness about the consequences of such negative occurrences.

The Commissioner is a partner in the project “Inclusion of Roma and other marginalised groups in Serbia”, which, *inter alia*, included the campaign “Inform yourself and don't judge”, aimed at raising awareness about the discrimination of Roma and promoting adequate response and prevention thereof. This campaign also included debates at the Public Broadcasting Service of Vojvodina (RTV), as well as conferences and round tables in a number in cities, which included persons belonging to the Roma national minority.

*Activities relating to the issuance of personal documents*

As stated in the Fourth State Report, the Republic of Serbia, in the process of execution of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, the Protector of Citizens and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – Office in Serbia, provided mechanisms for prevention of the risk of statelessness through a number of activities. The right to birth registration, as a precondition for exercising other rights, and thus also eliminating the risk of statelessness, is enabled by the improvement of the legal framework, media campaign and invigoration of particularly vulnerable population groups – primarily the Roma population. This comprehensive action considerably reduced the number of persons who are not entered in the birth registry, to the point that such cases now occur only as an exception.

After monitoring the status in this area, for the purpose of resolving situations which occur as individual cases, it was agreed to continue cooperation,. On 3 October 2019, the new Memorandum of Understanding was signed for the purpose of discussing any problems of persons belonging to the Roma national minority in the exercise of the rights to birth registration, as well as other rights as regards personal status, with an emphasis on new born children, for the purpose of preventing the risk of statelessness.

The Ministry of Interior, within its purview, decides on requests for acquisition and termination of citizenship of the Republic of Serbia, enforcing the Citizenship Law of the Republic of Serbia.<sup>2</sup> Observing the general principles of international law, primarily the provisions of the European Convention on Nationality, the Law is particularly focused on principles aimed at prevention and reduction of statelessness, through the possibility of acquiring the citizenship of the Republic of Serbia on various legal grounds (birth, origin, immigrants, foreigners, etc.). Applications for citizenship of the Republic of Serbia for persons belonging to the Roma national minority are considered urgent and resolved as a priority in accordance with the new law.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – Office in Serbia has so far implemented three surveys on the risk of statelessness in the Republic of Serbia, in 2010, 2015 and 2020. The third survey “Persons at risk of statelessness in Serbia: Review of the current situation and recommendations for the future”,<sup>3</sup> with the primary objective of collecting representative data on the spread of statelessness among the population of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians who live in informal settlements in Serbia, was implemented by CeSID for the

<sup>2</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 135/2004, 90 /2007 and 24/2018

<sup>3</sup> [www.unhcr.org/rs/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/2021/04/01-Lica-u-riziku-od-apatridije-u-Srbiji-CeSid-UNHCR-2020-SRB.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/rs/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/2021/04/01-Lica-u-riziku-od-apatridije-u-Srbiji-CeSid-UNHCR-2020-SRB.pdf)

purposes of the UNHCR in October 2020. This is an example of an independent survey which may provide a basis for public policy making by the authorities of the Republic of Serbia.

The survey was implemented using the quantitative method, and the face-to-face technique, on a representative sample of interviewees living in informal settlements in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The survey included 56 municipalities/towns in Serbia where, according to the findings of the 2011 census, the registered number of Roma was higher than the national average. In these municipalities, 117 informal settlements were sampled, of which 1,807 households were chosen through the random selection method.

The conclusion of the survey was that the execution of the Memorandum of Understanding, which was signed by UNHCR in 2012 with the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government and the Protector of Citizens, had resulted in a considerable improvement of the enforcement of some of the legal solutions, as well as harmonisation of the practice by state authorities, which had resulted in a reduction of the number of persons under risk of statelessness within this population living in informal settlements, by a little over 1,100 people, which was a big increase - of 42% compared - to 2015. A total of 45 persons, or 0.49% of the sample, do not have the citizenship, from which it may be concluded that persons in danger of statelessness who are not registered in citizenship records make up 0.49% of persons belonging to the Roma, Ashkali or Egyptians national minority in informal settlements.

Activities planned for the upcoming period should make it possible to regulate the remaining problems of persons under risk of statelessness. The progress indicates that Serbia, together with the UNHCR and civil society organisations which deal with human rights, are paying considerable attention to this problem. Nevertheless, the number of persons who still do not own personal documents, and who are often on the margins of society and not easy to access, leaves enough space for further efforts which would improve the status of the community and reduce the potential for an increase of the number of persons under risk of statelessness in Serbia.

In view of the progress achieved so far, UNHCR indicates that the Republic of Serbia is one of the countries which could fully eliminate statelessness by 2024, or even earlier.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Activities relating to housing*

The Republic of Serbia implements a large number of projects with the support of the international community, whose objective is to improve the housing conditions for persons of the Roma national minority. Through the IPA 2013 agreement “Durable housing solutions and physical infrastructure improvements in Roma settlements” - Grant Scheme, planned activities in terms of construction/reconstruction/social housing and construction of road and utility infrastructure were implemented between 2017 and 2019. The planned works were successfully executed through 9 projects in 11 local self-government units (LSGUs). The agreement was executed in parallel with the technical assistance agreement “Technical support for improving the living conditions and housing conditions of the Roma population currently residing in informal settlements”, which provided expert support for the implementation of the

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/rs/iskorenjivanje-apatridije>

grant scheme. The agreement was officially completed in September 2019, and the final works in the city of Prokuplje were completed in Q3 2020. A total of 114 housing units were constructed in houses and 12 apartments, and 59 houses were reconstructed. The total number of persons belonging to the Roma population who have resolved their housing issue through this project is over 750.

Through the IPA 2014 Programme, the project “EU Support to Improvement of Living Conditions of Roma” was executed between 2019 and 2021, which included the implementation of activities in 35 local self-government units. In that period, 24 sets of planning documentation and 82 sets of technical documentation were created for addressing housing needs for over 340 Roma households for 115 settlements, and due to the prepared documentation, six local self-government units provided financial means for construction of apartments from the IPA 2018 programme. This project provided support for activities of 15 mobile teams for the purposes of developing operational plans and action plans for Roma inclusion, and updating of a database on substandard Roma settlements.

Within the framework of the IPA 2016 Programme, which expired in late March 2022, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities implemented the project “Strengthening local communities towards Roma inclusion”. By the end of 2021, 11 urban plans and 12 sets of technical documentation were completed (social housing, road and utility infrastructure), the situation as regards legalisation of substandard Roma settlements was analysed in 23 local self-government units, and a methodology was created for improving the situation in this field. In addition to the above, the Report on the situation as regards the legalisation of Roma community buildings was created, with recommendations for an improvement of the process,<sup>5</sup> 10 mobile teams were created for support to Roma inclusion, 2,153 requests for legalisation were submitted (individually or through municipal/city administration) and legal assistance for resolving property rights issues for 247 Roma households for the purposes of legalisation was provided.

The IPA 2018 Programme, which includes the execution of the Project “European Union Support to Social Housing and Active Inclusion”, is to ensure resolution of housing problems for 500 families/approximately 1,500 individuals belonging to vulnerable social groups, most of them Roma, in over 15 local self-government units, in the next two years.

Between March and September 2020, the team for social inclusion and reduction of poverty, in collaboration with the UN Human Rights Team, implemented the project “Mapping of Substandard Roma Settlements according to Risks and Access to Rights in the Republic of Serbia, with Special Reference to the COVID 19 Epidemic”.<sup>6</sup> The mapping covers a total of 702 substandard Roma settlements which are located in the territory of 94 local self-government units, with 167,975 inhabitants. Collected data include access to clean water and sewage, health risks in the epidemiological context, performance of activities with increased health risks, and access to electricity and sustainable sources of income. The data were obtained from established institutional mechanisms for the inclusion of Roma men and women at the level of local self-government units, and representatives of civil society organisations. According to the mapping results, 159 substandard settlements with no access or irregular

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.yucom.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/1645107722\\_Analiza-ozakonjenja-17022022-WEB.pdf](https://www.yucom.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/1645107722_Analiza-ozakonjenja-17022022-WEB.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/rs/objavljeno-mapiranje-podstandardnih-romskih-naselja-prema-rizicima-i-pristupu-pravima-u-republici-srbiji-sa-narocitim-osvrtom-na-covid-19-epidemiju/>

access to clean water are located in the territories of 51 LSGUs; 64 substandard settlements with no access or irregular access to electricity are located in the territories of 35 LSGUs; 457 substandard settlements with no access or irregular access to sewage are located in the territories of 82 LSGUs; 44 substandard settlements with no access or irregular access to clean drinking water, electricity and sewage are located in the territories of 13 LSGUs.

The team for social inclusion and poverty reduction subsequently initiated the development of the “Analysis of sustainable models for ensuring access to clean water, sewage and electricity to inhabitants of substandard Roma settlements in the Republic of Serbia”,<sup>7</sup> which was prepared in late 2021. The objective of the analysis to show sustainable models and methods of providing access to clean water, sewage and electricity which will be based on the existing legal and strategic (national and local) framework, as well as propose their amendments and supplements for the purpose of improving the access to fundamental rights and services.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia is executing the project “Reducing Additional Vulnerability of Roma Men and Women and other Marginalised Groups, Caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic in 18 Local Self-Governments”. The project is aimed at overcoming challenges resulting from the epidemic in the fields of education, improvement of the access to water, information and promotion of immunisation against COVID-19, as well as technical support to competent local institutions for the purposes of monitoring the course of the epidemic. In the field of education, support is provided to students of elementary schools with learning, as well as to parents so they could help children in school. In addition, technical equipment is also assigned, as a precondition for distance learning and achieving school assignments. As regards information, prevention and promotion of immunisation against COVID-19, Roma families are given advice on preventive measures and provided with information on the importance of the process. Improvement of the access to water will be ensured by finding permanent solutions for 545 marginalised families who live in 11 substandard settlements in the municipalities of Stara Pazova, Zrenjanin, Smederevska Palanka, Topola, Valjevo, Kanjiža and Alibunar, through the construction and upgrade of water supply networks, or provision of individual connections to the water supply network. Project beneficiaries are, primarily, Roma men and women, returnees who live in 18 self-government units, as well as persons belonging to other marginalised groups.

#### *Activities in the field of health protection*

Significant results were achieved in the reporting period relating to the activities in the field of health protection of Roma. The Republic of Serbia has achieved practically full coverage of expertly assisted births, in view of the fact that 100% of children were born in a health institution, and 99% of children in Roma settlements were born with expert assistance, in health institutions. Infant mortality in Roma settlements, according to the MICS survey data<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <https://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/rs/objavljena-analiza-odrzivih-modela-za-obebedjivanje-pristupa-cistoj-pijacoi-vodi-kanalizaciji-i-elektricnoj-energiji-stanovnicima-i-stanovnicama-podstandardnih-romskih-naselja-u-republici-srbiji/>

<sup>8</sup> MICS is a global research programme developed by the UNICEF in consultations with other United Nations agencies. MICS was conceived in such a manner to ensure statistically reliable and internationally comparable data for key social indicators, and to target the most vulnerable part of the population: women, children and vulnerable and marginalised population groups.

referring to 2019, was 8 per mille, and is higher than the national average, but is reduced by almost 5 per mille compared to the previous MICS survey from 2014. According to the Report of the Government of the Republic of Serbia with respect to the results of the programmes and projects of the Ministry of Health - improvement of the availability of health care to Roma population, it was stated that 8,250 vaccinations and systemic examinations of Roma children were performed in 2020, and 2.150 documents were created (health cards, personal documents, certifications of health cards). In addition, 10,500 children attended workshops and planned conversations from various fields of health education.

Children aged up to 5 in Serbia are insured in 99% cases, while children of the same age in Roma settlements are insured in 96% of cases. Children aged 5 to 17 in Serbia are insured in 99% of cases, and the percentage of children of the same age in Roma settlements who are insured is 97%. Women in the reproductive period (age 15-19) are insured (mandatory health insurance) in 97% cases according to the MICS survey data for 2019. At least 97% of women in Serbia have undergone prenatal tests at least four times, while 80% of women were checked 8 or more times. In Roma settlements, 95% of women who gave birth in the last two years had prenatal tests more than once, 83% at least four times, and 43% eight or more times. In Serbia, 94% of women who had given birth had a health visitor during the week after birth (average number of visits was 3.8 times), while that percentage in Roma settlements was 90% (average number of visits to a baby was 3.6 times).

The Ministry of Health pays particular attention to improving the availability of health care to persons belonging to the Roma national minority. Every year, the Ministry announces an open competition titled “Improvement of availability of health care of the Roma population”, where the priority of the competition are defined in accordance with the Health Care Development Plan<sup>9</sup> and the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women. The objectives of the open competition are: 1) improvement of the availability of health care, and 2) improvement of the quality of the provision of health care services to the Roma population.

As regards the improvement of the availability of health care, priority areas of the open competition are, *inter alia*, about reducing all forms of discrimination, prevention of chronic diseases, reproductive health, health of children, young and old people, addictions, mental health, prevention of domestic violence, and as a priority in the recent years, mitigation of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Improvement of the quality of the provision of health care services to the Roma population is implemented through educational programmes for health care workers on combating discrimination, stereotypes and prejudice on the health status and needs of the Roma population and protection of the rights of Roma as patients. In addition, educational programmes for health mediators, as regards the protection of health of women, reproductive health and family planning, vaccination of children, prevention of domestic violence, reduction of all forms of discrimination, as well as development of educational materials and materials for health mediators, are also financed. The table below shows the amounts of allocated funds in this open competition by years.

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Multiple Indicator Survey on the status of women and children in the Republic of Serbia, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF - MICS Multiple Indicator Survey 2019: <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-latn/istrzivanja/mics/>

<sup>9</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 88/2010.

Year	Policy area	Amount
2018	Improvement of the availability of health care to the Roma population	5,499,100.00
2019	Improvement of the availability of health care	5,499,600.00
	Improvement of the quality of the provision of health care services	3,197,000.00
2020	Improvement of the availability of health care	5,888,759.00
	Improvement of the quality of the provision of health care services	3,500,000.00
2021	Improvement of the availability of health care	6,498,600.00
	Improvement of the quality of the provision of health care services	3,500,000.00
2022	Improvement of the availability of health care	6,460,450.00
	Improvement of the quality of the provision of health care services	3,500,000.00

Multi-year activity of health mediators has also considerably contributed to the improvement of the situation in terms of exercising the right to health care and social protection and education of persons belonging to the Roma national minority, primarily those living in informal settlements. The number of health mediators is continuously increasing. At the moment, there are 85 recruited health mediators. The table below provides data recorded by health mediators between 2017 and 2021 as regards access to health care for persons belonging to the Roma national minority.

Number of households	58,837
Number of persons	146,763
<b>Men</b>	<b>43,774</b>
<b>Women</b>	<b>47,261</b>
Pregnant women	9,756
Risky pregnancies	743
Puerperal women	4,880
Generative period	32,910
post-generative period	14,430
<i>Physician</i>	
Chosen doctor	39,555
No chosen doctor	16,340
<i>Gynaecologist control</i>	
Systemic examination	19,867
Control examination	5,250
Mammogram	1,255
<i>Gynaecologist control for pregnant women</i>	
Examination completed	5,408
Does not contact the physician	4,348
<b>Children</b>	<b>55,728</b>
Babies	10,433
<i>Physician</i>	
Chosen doctor	5,452
No chosen doctor	5,590

<i>Vaccination</i>	
Complete	5,951
Incomplete	7,262
No vaccines	1,013
1-5 years	17,076
6-9 years	12,792
10-18 years	14,825
<i>Physician</i>	
Chosen doctor	35,593
No chosen doctor	9,100
<i>Vaccination</i>	
Complete	29,803
Incomplete	14,625
No vaccines	1,009
<i>Child benefit</i>	
Realised	31,362
Not realised	11,619

In many local self-government units, workshops are organised, and implemented by mediators in collaboration with civil society organisations, particularly workshops on the topics of reproductive health and prevention of early marriages and underage pregnancies. In health care centres, various activities and education are periodically implemented, relating to immunisation and reproductive and sexual health, protection from infectious diseases, etc.

After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with UNICEF and the Association of Health Mediators, initiated the joint project “Health for all - improvement and support of the activity of health mediators with sensitive and vulnerable groups in Roma settlements in emergencies - COVID-19 pandemic”. During the implementation of the project in 2020, health mediators paid over 14,000 visits to Roma families, and, in collaboration with the Red Cross, distributed packages of games for children and printed materials with explanations of the method of prevention and handling the COVID-19 pandemic. They contacted 1,108 pregnant women, 1,577 children were vaccinated, and over 800 persons were sent to COVID clinics. In 2021, health mediators participated in the vaccination against COVID-19 of the Roma population in substandard settlements. For that purpose, vehicles were provided for transport of elderly people with decreased mobility.

During the pandemic, representatives of the Expert Service of the Protector of Citizens organised visits to Roma settlements.<sup>10</sup> The objective of the visit was primarily to ascertain, through field work, the hygienic conditions in settlements, particularly during the pandemic, access to water and electricity supply, as well as needs of inhabitants for additional assistance measures in the form of packages and social allowances. On the basis of data collected through field work, a Special Report of the Protector of Citizens was developed, with recommendations,

<sup>10</sup> Visits were organised in April and May 2020 in the following local self-government units: Belgrade, City Municipality of Čukarica, Kovin, Pančevo, Požarevac and Kostolac. In these five towns and municipalities, visits were organised in a total of ten Roma settlements (Čukarička šuma, Cigan mala, Mali rit 1, Mali rit 2, Sutjeska, Kanal, Stari Kostolac, Hotel Kostolac, Uzun Mirkova and Đurđeve rupe)

titled “Conditions in Roma settlements in an emergency situation and protection measures undertaken due to the Coronavirus pandemic”.<sup>11</sup>

### *Activities relating to education*

With a view to preventing discrimination and violence in education, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development has, since 2011, had an SOS telephone for reporting school violence (80 telephone advisors have been trained), to which, in addition to violence, cases of discrimination in education shall also be reported. During the school year 2016/17, 750 cases of discrimination and violence in educational and pedagogical institutions were reported, in the school year 2017/18 it was 820, in the school year 2018/19 - 890, and in the school year 2019/20 – 950 such cases. At the quarterly level, there were 150 reports on average, 10% of which were about cases of discrimination. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this SOS telephone started to provide psychological and social support to students and parents.

Two by-laws were also adopted: Rulebook on detailed criteria on identifying forms of discrimination by employees, children, students or third parties in educational institutions<sup>12</sup> and the Rulebook on the conduct of institutions in cases of suspected or identified discriminatory behaviour and insult to the reputation, honour or personal dignity.<sup>13</sup>

For the purpose of professional development of employees in the education system for the application of the Rulebook on the conduct of institutions in cases of suspected or identified discriminatory behaviour, trainings were held for 30 education inspectors and advisors and online trainings for 300 teachers and expert associates, education advisors and education inspectors. Since the entry into force of the Rulebook on the conduct of institutions, 30 cases of discriminatory behaviour have been reported in total. Reports by parents are mostly reports which do not entail an assumed or real personal characteristic which is crucial while ascertaining discriminatory behaviour. Institutions mostly report when parents associate for the purpose of excluding students who need additional educational support from the school. Some of the reports (up to 25%) concern the personal characteristic of national affiliation.

In addition, a rulebook/brochure was developed for parents about the prevention, protection and handling cases of discrimination in education<sup>14</sup> and the Guide through the prevention and response to the discrimination for employees in education institutions.<sup>15</sup>

In 2017, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality published the handbook “Prevention of segregation, development of inclusive enrolment policies and desegregation of schools and classes: international experiences and proposals for the improvement of practice in Serbia”<sup>16</sup> with a view to enabling the recognition of the problem of segregation, as well as provide an overview of prevention measures, primarily through the development of inclusive education. The handbook contains, *inter alia*, a comparative overview of the desegregation

<sup>11</sup> <https://ombudsman.rs/index.php/2011-12-25-10-17-15/2011-12-26-10-05-05/6607-l-1ni-s-upr-v-upuc-n-p-s-b-n-izv-sh-s-pr-p-ru-usl-vi-u-r-s-i-n-s-lji-u-si-u-ci-i-v-nr-dn-g-s-nj-i-pri-n-r-z-sh-i-usl-d-p-nd-i-r-n-virus>.

<sup>12</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 22/2016.

<sup>13</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 65/2018.

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Brosura\\_CIPv05-final-za-roditeljeB.pdf](http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Brosura_CIPv05-final-za-roditeljeB.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Brosura\\_CIP\\_-05-final-za-zaposleneB-1.pdf](http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Brosura_CIP_-05-final-za-zaposleneB-1.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/prevenicija-segregacije-razvoj-inkluzivnih-upisnih-politika/>

model in certain European countries, as well as concrete proposal for improving the practice in Serbia.

The project “Partnerships for Fair Quality Education”, executed by the Ministry of Justice in collaboration with the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy and the Pestalozzi Foundation (2020-2022) includes efforts for recognising the risk of segregation in 10 elementary schools. Activities are also aimed at strengthening cooperation at the local level, developing an enrolment policy, and enhancing the capacities of local governments and schools, as well as improving the quality of education. Financial and technical support was provided to schools and students for the implementation of distance learning (with an emphasis on students from vulnerable groups) and training for employees, educational video materials for parents were developed, and grants were provided for the execution of joint activities which included schools that were under risk of segregation and partner schools. Three local self-governments started the process of developing action plans for the development of enrolment policies for the purpose of prevention of segregation. The Guide to the implementation of the Rulebook on the conduct of institutions in cases of suspected or identified discriminatory behaviour and insult to the reputation, honour or personal dignity, with an emphasis on the Articles of the Rulebook which concern segregation, is in development. In this context, it is particularly important to note that amendments and supplements to the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination<sup>17</sup> of 20 May 2021 introduced the concept of segregation into the legal text, which will be further elaborated in the appropriate parts of this report.

Some of the examples of good practice of activities at the local level were applied within this project by establishing local project teams and signing a Memorandum of Cooperation. Direct trainings and work meetings were implemented for the purpose of exchanging experience. An important step towards the elimination of segregation are developed action plans for fair enrolment policies. Additional support has been provided for students from vulnerable groups for learning by organising additional compensation classes and learning assistance. Through obtained financial grants, schools plan and execute a series of joint activities which include students, teachers and parents. In addition to employees in schools who work on strengthening their competences, support is also provided to parents of Roma students through panel discussions on the rights of children to education, recognition and handling of discrimination cases. Three promotional films have been made in order to present focus schools. This has significantly contributed to the promotion of schools and increased interested of parents in enrolment of children in the first grade. Project activities have been promoted on social networks and in local media. In the school year 2021/22, 10% more students were enrolled in the first grade in three focus schools compared to the previous school year.

For combating school absenteeism and early dropouts among Roma children, including by expanding and developing the long-term use of pedagogical assistants, adoption of the Rulebook on Pedagogical and Andragogical Assistants is of particular importance.<sup>18</sup> This Rulebook defines hiring pedagogical assistants for providing assistance and additional support to Roma children and students in preschool institutions and schools. Pedagogical assistants also

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<sup>17</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 22/2009 and 52/2021

<sup>18</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 87/2019.

provide support to teachers, pedagogues and expert associates and parents. A school may hire a pedagogical assistant when it has at least 20 students in need of additional support in education. The full working hours are implemented with 35 students belonging to the Roma national minority. In the school year 2020/21, a total of 260 pedagogical assistants were hired, of which 219 were financed from the budget of the Republic of Serbia, while 41 assistants were financed by the local self-government. In the school year 2021/22, the network of pedagogical assistants kept expanding. From the state budget, 232 pedagogical assistants are financed, while an additional number of assistants are hired by the local self-government.

Measures for preventing education dispersal are provided for in laws and by-laws and are an integral part of the practice of educational institutions. Each elementary and secondary school is obliged to adopt and execute a plan for the prevention of student dispersal. A methodology was developed for early identification of students under risk of dispersal, while students under risk of dispersal were recognised as a vulnerable group which may exercise its right to an individual education plan (IEP). An integral part of an IEP is an individualised plan for early dropout prevention. Priority enrolment of children from vulnerable social groups into pre-school educational institutions has been prescribed, as well as subsidies of expenses of staying in kindergarten for certain categories of children, and mandatory and free preparatory pre-school programme. Free transport was ensured for students of pre-school institutions and elementary schools, free textbooks were provided for students from vulnerable social groups (from families which are recipients of social assistance, students who are educated according to the IEP and the third child in a family who is in the education system). In the last three years, 43 programmes were accredited and 309 trainings implemented for enhancing of capacities for approximately 8,000 education system employees and activities for inclusion and participation of all children and students through education. Also, 123 trainings from the list of trainings of public interest were implemented, and were attended by 3,030 participants.

The result of these measures is an improvement of the coverage of children and students by the education system, increase of the number of students from vulnerable groups at higher levels of education, increase of students who are educated according to the IEP in regular schools for students with disabilities and developmental disabilities. In 2019, over 7,500 applications with an assessment of needs for additional support were sent to inter-sectoral commissions (there were 1,300 applications in 2011). By the end of 2021, 260 pedagogical assistants were hired, as well as 1,000 personal assistants, while over 2,000 students were educated according to the IEP and receiving support from employees of schools for students with developmental disabilities.

In 2021, 37 external advisors were hired to work on the inclusion in education. They cooperate with school administrations and provide direct support to pre-school institutions and schools for improving the quality of education of children and students from vulnerable social groups and sustainable inclusion of Roma children/students in the education system, as well as children/students with disabilities and developmental disabilities.

The New Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia by 2030<sup>19</sup> and its Action Plan provide for a continuation of activities for the improvement of support measures relating to the prevention of student dispersal. One of the specific objectives of the Action Plan 2021-

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/SROVRS-2030-1.pdf>

23 concerns the improvement of availability, fairness and responsibility of the pre-university education.

A particularly important role in the prevention of early dropping out is the establishment of the Unified Information System of Education (JISP), which unifies education data. JISP introduces the new Unique Learner Number (ULN), which accompanies its holder through all levels of formal and informal education and is the key for connecting all data on a child, student, university student, as well as an adult, trainee or candidate.

Effects of support measures for improvement of education of Roma students may be discussed on the basis of data obtained through the new 2019 MICS 6 survey. According to these data, 7.4% of the total number of children aged up to 5 who attend pre-school institutions belong to the Roma national minority (51% boys, 49% girls). Of the total number of Roma children aged 5.5 to 6.5, 80% attend a preparatory pre-school programme (52% boys, 48% girls), which is an increase by 20% compared to the previous survey. According to the same survey, 85.4% of the total number of Roma children are enrolled in the elementary school (49% boys, 51% girls), which is an increase by 15%. The gross rate of finishing elementary school is 64%, which means that the dropout rate has been reduced by 7%. The rate of transition to secondary school is 52.6% for Roma students, while the rate of finishing the secondary school is 61%, which is an increase of 20%. It is particularly important to highlight the data from the same survey that the number of Roma girls in secondary school has increased by 12%.

A considerable contribution to the described improvement was due to the project of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development “EU support to Roma students for continuation of secondary education”, which is oriented towards enhancement of capacities of the education system for the purpose of development and implementation of an efficient provision of scholarship and mentor support to Roma secondary school students. The provisions of scholarship to students is one of the motivating factors for regular attendance of classes and making efforts to maintain or improve school performance. Within the framework of this project, the Instruction for early dropout prevention was created, with recommendations and proposals of measures for preventing dispersal, prepared by the Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation. The instruction was preceded by a qualitative analysis of effects of measures undertaken so far for support to Roma students as regards dropout prevention and a higher percentage of finishing elementary and secondary school. An overview of the number of students with scholarships and the percentage of secondary school dropout by school year in the reporting period is given in the table below.

<b>School year</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>
Percentage of secondary school dropouts	2.4%	3.5	2.3%
Number of students with scholarships	500	312	503

The data above indicate that the percentage of secondary school dropout is declining, and that systemic measures of support in education have yielded results due to the fact that students with scholarships are more motivated to work, learn and go to school, and have a stronger desire to continue their education. In view of that, the number of granted/approved

scholarships in the school years 2020/21 and 2021/22 was considerably increased (1,213 in 2020/21, and 1,114 in 2021/22). The monthly scholarship amount is 5,400,00 RSD (46 EUR), which is paid in 10 equal monthly instalments.

Other than providing scholarships, other support measures were continued in the reporting period, such as affirmative enrolment in pre-school institutions, possibility of enrolment in elementary schools without documents, as well as affirmation action measures of enrolment in secondary schools. The table below contains data on the number and gender structure of Roma students enrolled in secondary schools through affirmative measures.

School year	Number of enrolled students	% of girls
2016/17	1,713	52%
2017/18	1,696	52%
2018/19	2,220	56%
2019/20	2,209	57%
2020/21	1,894	56%

Special measures for the benefit of Roma students were undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic, when distance learning was practiced. Through the project “Bridging the digital gap for the most vulnerable children”, executed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and UNICEF with financial support of the EU, over 2,000 IT devices were provided for 30 most vulnerable schools attended by Roma students, 250 laptops were donated for all Roma pedagogical assistants in Serbia, and grants were provided for schools to establish learning clubs where conditions were created for online learning for students who lacked such conditions at home. The total number of students covered by such activities is 3,111, i.e., 15% of the total number of students for 30 schools covered by the project. Of the total number of students identified as students in most severe need of additional learning support through a learning club, over half are Roma students. A total of 490 students received tablet computers for home use. In this context, note also a survey implemented during the state of emergency titled “Monitoring of the method of participation and learning process of students from vulnerable groups during the implementation of educational and pedagogical activities through distance learning”.<sup>20</sup>

A number of projects were implemented in the reporting period, with the aim, *inter alia*, of reducing the dropout rate of Roma children. From June 2017 to June 2019, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Affairs was a beneficiary institution of the IPA 2013 grant scheme “Development of Effective Community Services in the Area of Education and Social Welfare at the Local Level”, under which 30 grant beneficiaries were implementing projects in certain municipalities. One of the lots of this grant scheme concerned the prevention of early dropout and education system dispersal, which would include four projects, of which two had Roma as the target group.

The project “Inter-sectoral mechanism for prevention and reduction of early dropout in the Municipality of Zvezdara” was implemented by the City Municipality of Zvezdara, with the help of the National Council of the Roma National Minority. Realised project activities

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.mpn.gov.rs/izvestaj-o-ukljucenosti-ucenika-iz-osetljivih-grupa-u-obrazovno-vaspitni-rad-tokom-nastave-na-daljini/>

which affected the improvement of the quality of life of the Roma population, in particular school age children in the municipality in question, concerned the establishment of the Inter-sectoral Team for development and monitoring of support measures for Roma school age children, parents and the Roma community, organising individual supplementary classes for Roma children who had dropped out of school and those who were under risk of early dropout (an individual support plan was developed for 62 Roma children), organising economic support measures for parents of Roma children who had dropped out of school and those who are under risk of early dropout and organising trainings on responsible parenthood, organising trainings for raising awareness on the importance of education for parents in Roma settlements in the Municipality of Zvezdara (34 parents received school materials for children, 15 parents attended handicraft trainings, 41 parents attended trainings on responsible parenthood), development and application of software for an early recognition and prevention system for students under risk of early dropout, and training for employees in elementary schools in the Municipality of Zvezdara, equipping the school for adult education in the Orlovsko settlement. The total value of the project was 137,620.00 EUR, of which 10% was from the budget of the Republic of Serbia on the basis of national co-financing.

The project “Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Function of Preventing Dropout and Increase of Education Attainment of Roma Children in Novi Sad” was implemented in partnership with the Centre for Production of Knowledge and Skills, the Centre for Social Work of the City of Novi Sad and the pre-school institution “Radosno detinjstvo” from Novi Sad. Implemented project activities which contributed to the reduction of inequalities and reinforced the educational and social inclusion of Roma, primarily in Novi Sad, were: field work which included 988 visits to families and 269 workshops with children, financial and other support to children and families (118 parents were included in workshops for reinforcing parent skills and competences), enrolment of children in pre-school institutions (15 children were enrolled within the framework of this project - 7 girls and 8 boys), creation of school teams for dropout prevention, development of school action plans, implementation of support measures in schools, financial support to student families, inclusion of inter-sectoral measures in local policies, for the purpose of raising the quality of life of persons belonging to the Roma national minority. The total value of the project was 167,818.80 EUR, of which 10% was from the budget of the Republic of Serbia on the basis of national co-financing.

#### *Activities relating to employment*

In accordance with the Labour Law<sup>21</sup>, putting a person in a less favourable position compared to someone else as regards a personal characteristic (sex, birth, language, race, skin colour, age, pregnancy etc.), or a characteristic which is not relevant for performing a certain task, shall be considered labour discrimination.

On 1 April 2021, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Roma Entrepreneurship Development Promotion Programme. The objective of the Programme is promotion of the development of the entrepreneurship of Roma men and women with a view

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<sup>21</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 24/2005, 61/2005, 54/2009, 32/2013, 75/2014, 13/2017 - CC decision, 113/2017 and 95/2018 - authentic interpretation

to improving conditions for creating employment and improving the economic status of Roma men and women. Financial means for the execution of the Programme are provided in the budget of the Republic of Serbia in the amount of 120,000,000.00 RSD and are intended for providing guarantees for loans approved by the partner bank, which will, for the purpose of loan collection, use certain security instruments for collection of receivables. The Programme is being implemented by the Serbian Export Credit and Insurance Agency. Development of Roma population entrepreneurship, by establishing new economic operators, supporting already existing businesses and stores, as well as encouraging individuals to legalise an already existing economic activity they are performing as a part of the so-called grey economy, are a way to improve the socio-economic status of persons belonging to the Roma national minority. Potential beneficiaries of the programme will, in addition to all other available modes of information, have an opportunity to get to know the content of the programme through their chosen bank, which will use its experience in working with beginners in business and social entrepreneurship, as well as through the Association of Roma Entrepreneurs, which will present them with available possibilities of the programme and enable an easier inclusion in its implementation.

The National Employment Service, as the principal body of employment activity, implements its activities in accordance with the Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurance,<sup>22</sup> which is based on the principles of anti-discrimination and affirmative action targeting unemployed persons who are difficult to employ. One of the tasks of the employment policy is planning systemic preconditions for the policy of equal opportunities for labour market access. The Employment Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2021–2026<sup>23</sup> defines general and specific objectives, as well as measures for the achievement of objectives and established directions of the development of the employment policy in the upcoming six year period. The Action Plan 2021-2023 for the implementation of this strategy is a public policy document which was adopted for the purpose of operationalisation and achievement of general and specific objectives of the Strategy.

Measures of active employment policy implemented by the National Employment Service are created on the basis of envisioned needs and labour market developments, as well as the situation as regards the records about job seekers. The measures are aimed at promoting employment of persons from the category of less employable persons who are prioritised in terms of being covered by the measures. Individual approach is used in the process of working with job seekers. Measures or programmes that the persons will be included in primarily depend on their needs for providing assistance by the National Employment Service in job seeking and labour market needs, and will be established in the Individual Employment Plan.

In cooperation with employers, activities are undertaken relating to expert assistance in the selection of persons in accordance with the requested personnel needs of employers, as well as financial support measures aimed at promoting the employment of persons primarily from the category of less employable persons.

Persons belonging to the Roma national minority are recognised as a category of less employable persons, in view of the fact they are facing lower employability and labour market

<sup>22</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 36/2009, 88/2010, 38/2015, 113/2017 and 113/2017 – as amended and 49/2021

<sup>23</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 18/2021 and 36/2021 – corr.

access for multiple reasons, of which the key ones are: unfavourable educational structure, lack of work experience, knowledge and skills, frequently low motivation for inclusion in the formal labour market, discrimination and stereotypes as regards their employment. Strategic documents concerning employment establish activities and measures for improving the status of unemployed Roma men and women on the labour market through coordinated activity in order to ultimately improve their unfavourable socio-economic position, as well as implementation of appropriate activities relating to the lower employability due to various factors.

The unfavourable educational structure of Roma men and women directly reflects on the reduced accessibility on the labour market and on employment opportunities. The National Employment Service has recognised this problem, as one of obstacles that Roma men and women face in terms of employment, and is acting, by active employment measures, for the purpose of mitigating the current situation. Inclusion into functional elementary programmes and training programmes for gaining practical knowledge for performing concrete tasks considerably contributed to the improvement of their employability. In view of the fact that job seeking requires readiness and motivation to undertake job seeking activities, one of the directions to take entails inclusion into trainings for active job seeking and workshops for strengthening of motivation and confidence in that respect. Activities of the National Employment Service are also oriented towards this segment of the support in working with Roma men and women by including them in various trainings and workshops, in order to mitigate obstacles on the road of their integration on the labour market and in terms of employment. The National Employment Service, through financial incentives to employers in the form of subsidies, promotes the employment of persons belonging to the Roma national minority. In order to promote self-employment of Roma men and women, the National Employment Service provides funds in the form of subsidies, as well as a training for the development of entrepreneurship, where persons are informed and gain knowledge they need to conduct their own business.

The National Employment Service also keeps records about unemployed persons - persons from the age of 15 to the age of meeting retirement eligibility requirements, or no more than 65 years of age, who are capable and immediately ready to work, who have not established an employment relationship or exercised their right to work in some other way, and who are entered in the unemployment records and are actively looking for employment.

Registration with the National Employment Service, i.e. the manner of keeping records and data content on persons are defined by the Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurance and the Rulebook on the Content of Data and Methodology of Keeping Registries in the Field of Education..<sup>24</sup> Nationality or ethnicity is just one of the personal data provided for in Article 5 of the Rulebook. Data is recorded based on the statement of a person, i.e. the statement is not required, bearing in mind the statutory provision relating to the prohibition of discrimination of persons in seeking the employment.

As of 31 December 2021, the unemployment records of the National Employment Service included 28,041 persons (14,258 women) who stated they belonged to the Roma national minority, which makes up 5.87% of the total registered unemployment.

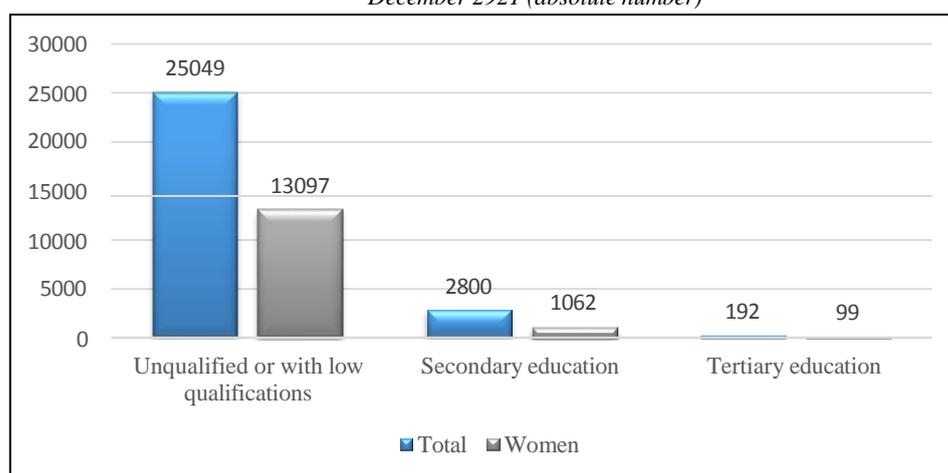
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<sup>24</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 15/2010.

In terms of age, young people up to the age of 30 make up 27.38% of the total registered unemployment of Roma men/women, while people aged over 50 make up 24.89%, which is a better number in terms of the characteristics of the total registered unemployment.

In view of the level of education, unqualified persons or persons with a low level of education make up 89.33% of the total registered unemployment of Roma men/women, persons with secondary education make up 9.99%, while Roma men/women with tertiary education constitute 0.68%. A very unfavourable educational structure of unemployed Roma men/women affects their access to the active employment policy measures from the system of additional education and training through which additional knowledge, skills and competences are acquired (particularly as regards measures which have completed elementary education as the starting point), as well as the interest of employers in employing persons from this category and the type of tasks for which they are hired. For the above reasons, unemployed Roma men/women have the priority or more favourable conditions for inclusion into the measures of the system of additional education and training, as well as measures relating to the support to employment or self-employment.

*Educational structure of the registered unemployment of Roma men and women  
December 2021 (absolute number)*



*Source: National Employment Service*

In terms of the length of time of job seeking, long-term unemployed persons (persons seeking jobs for longer than 12 months) make up 68.01% of the total registered unemployment of Roma men and women.

In accordance with the Action Plan 2021-2023 for the implementation of the Employment Strategy, the services/measures from the active job seeking system (job fairs, job seeking clubs, active job seeking training, self-efficiency training, workshop for overcoming the stress of a job loss, and educational services in the Business Centre) were used by 3.436 unemployed Roma men (1,597 Roma women) between January and December 2021.

Also, information and advisory services in the Business Centre were used by 823 Roma men (328 Roma women), while information and advice on the opportunities for the development of career and selection included 399 Roma (238 Roma women).

ACTIVE EMPLOYMENT POLICY MEASURES	Number of unemployed Roma men and women included in the measures of the Temporary Employment Agency in 2021	
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Women</i>
<i>Active job search measures</i>	<b>3,436</b>	<b>1,597</b>
<i>Training for active job search</i>	2,291	1,114
<i>Self-efficiency training</i>	58	33
<i>Job search club</i>	75	36
<i>Employment fair</i>	333	152
<i>Workshop for overcoming the stress of a job loss</i>	6	3
<i>Training for development of entrepreneurship</i>	673	259
<b>Additional education and training</b>	<b>812</b>	<b>491</b>
Internship	8	5
Internship for young people with tertiary education	39	21
Internship for unemployed people with secondary education	47	26
Acquiring practical knowledge	20	9
Labour market training	14	5
Trainings at the request of the employer – for unemployed persons	13	8
Functional Basic Education of Adults	635	395
<i>“My first salary”</i>	<b>36</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Incentives to employees for employment</b>	<b>880</b>	<b>360</b>
Self-employment subsidies	435	178
Subsidy for employment of unemployed persons from the category of less employable persons	440	179
Subsidy for wages of persons with disabilities with no work experience	5	3
<b>Public works</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,574</b>	<b>2,641</b>

Financial measures of active employment policy included 2,138 Roma men (1,044 Roma women), making the total coverage of unemployed Roma men/women by the measures from the active employment policy system in 2021 5,574 Roma men (2,641 Roma women).

Through the execution of local planning documents relating to employment, which were executed in 2021 according to the technical support modality, measures of active employment policy included 136 Roma men (57 Roma women).

#### *Activities in the field of social protection*

In the field of social protection, legal acts also ensure the prohibition of discrimination, and thus the Law on Social Protection <sup>25</sup> ensures the prohibition of discrimination of social protection beneficiaries on the basis of national affiliation and language, while social protection services are organised in a manner which ensure their physical, geographical and economic availability, together with respect for cultural and other diversity.

<sup>25</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 24/2011.

The Rulebook on the organisation, norms and operational standards of a social welfare centre<sup>26</sup> prescribes the observance of human rights and dignity of the beneficiary and protection from discrimination. Namely, the social welfare centre is obliged to represent the interests and rights of beneficiaries and ensure equal access to services for which it is competent, to all citizens, regardless of ethnic, cultural, religious, gender or socio-economic differences.

Persons employed in social protection are obliged to consistently enforce the above regulations, thus ensuring protection from discrimination in this field. Conduct in contravention of the above regulations would result in losing the operating licence. In accordance with the Law on Social Welfare, a beneficiary who is not satisfied with a provided service, act or conduct by the provider of a service may submit an appeal to the competent authority, and a complaint against discrimination may be submitted to the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality.

In accordance with the above regulations, centres are obliged to inform the public in the territory of the local self-government unit about their legal obligations and mandate, as well as available services and programmes, through media, public lectures, presentations and other appropriate channels. The same Rulebook specifies that availability of services of the centres shall be ensured through: a) coordination of activities with other public authorities, humanitarian organisations, civil associations and other organisations in the local community, b) provision of information to the public on programmes and services provided by the centre, as well as other rights and obligations in accordance with the law through the media, public lectures, presentations, brochures and in other ways, c) placing the contact address and telephone number of the centre at the appropriate public places and institutions in the community, d) establishing area offices in distant places, e) other appropriate ways.

Social welfare centres, within their regular activities, promote social welfare services and rights in the local community. Promotion of the access to social rights and services is also executed through trainings of experts of social welfare centres, in such a manner to raise the awareness of the experts and improve their competences.

Trainings of experts employed in social welfare institutions are implemented continuously through accredited training programmes. A certain number of training programmes has content oriented towards working with the Roma population. The Republic Institute for Social Protection accredited the training programme titled “Support to the Improvement of the status of Roma women”, which, *inter alia*, deals with specificities in the access to services, problems of beneficiaries in the access to services, problems of experts in the contact with beneficiaries and ways to overcome them. The programme was intended for experts and associates in social welfare institutions, judiciary, prosecutor’s office, educational and health institutions, local self-government and civil society organisations which provide social services to women and multiply marginalised groups. Ultimate beneficiaries of the training programme are Roma women who are beneficiaries of social welfare.

Social welfare system is dedicated to an active training of its personnel in terms of gaining knowledge on the recognition of discrimination and measures that experts in social welfare institutions may undertake in cases of discrimination of beneficiaries on various

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<sup>26</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 59/2008, 37/2010, 39/2011 - as amended, 1/2012 - as amended, 51/2019 and 12/2020

grounds. So far, multiple training programmes have been accredited which are focused on the observance of human rights, anti-discrimination as well as abuse and neglect, and which educates experts to recognise and respond in such situations. This is a way to raise awareness of experts on the occurrence of discrimination and violence in society and improve their competences for implementation of activities and measures which are available to them for protection of beneficiaries.

It is important to note that, in late 2021, the Law on the rights of recipients of services of temporary accommodation in social welfare,<sup>27</sup> which prescribes that exercise of the rights of beneficiaries is enabled without any discrimination, *inter alia*, on the basis of race, skin colour, ancestry, national affiliation or ethnic origin. The Law ensures that accommodation services are provided in accordance with the will and desire of the beneficiary, while observing their life cycle, ethnic and cultural origin, living habits, developmental and other needs.

In early 2022, the Strategy for deinstitutionalization and development of social welfare services in the community between 2022 and 2026.<sup>28</sup> The Strategy defines further development directions in this area, objectives, measures and activities which will be undertaken in order to improve the entire process and prevent further pressure on the accommodation into social welfare institutions.

In exercising a higher level of inclusion of the Roma population, an important role belongs to case managers in social welfare centres. The mechanism for handling a case, and in particular the practice of case conference, ensures a proactive approach of the most important actors in the community in their support to an excluded family or individual. This role of social welfare centres is particularly important and is a good way to improve cooperation with the National Employment Service and other actors who may improve the status of Roma men and women on the labour market. The obligation of experts to provide support to parents in order for their children to regularly attend school and exercise the recognised rights (child benefit, transportation to the school, etc.) is of particular importance.

In the newly adopted revised Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma Men and Women in the Republic of Serbia 2022-2030,<sup>29</sup> one of the defined specific objectives is improvement of the access to social protection services, availability and effectiveness of financial allowances for poverty reduction and increase of social inclusion of Roma men and women in the local community. Three measures are provided for the exercise of this specific objective:

- Strengthening of the role and capacities of the public sector for the development and application of social policies, rights and services which meet the needs of individuals and families;
- Increasing the level of information of Roma men and women on the possibilities of exercising social welfare rights and services, and exercising rights and services;
- Improving the system of reintegration and social inclusions of returnees, including a large number of Roma men and women, in accordance with the Readmission Agreement.

As regards the access to social protection measures, according to the data from the 2009 Multiple Indicator Survey on the status of women and children in the Republic of Serbia (MICS 6), all households in Roma settlements had heard of at least one financial allowance, and 84%

<sup>27</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 126/2021.

<sup>28</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 12/2022.

<sup>29</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 23/2022.

of them had used some of them. This coverage of endangered Roma populations by financial social assistance is considerable. In 2019, in Roma settlements, every second household was receiving financial social assistance, 61% were receiving child benefits, and 6% had received one-off financial assistance. Over half of household members aged 5–24 who attend elementary school or higher levels of education received a subsidy for kindergarten, scholarship, student loan or another form of financial assistance for education during the school year 2019/2020.

#### *Other activities for the inclusion of Roma*

The new Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma Men and Women in the Republic of Serbia 2022-2030, was adopted on 3 February 2022. Public debate on the Draft Action Plan 2022–2024 was held between 20 May and 15 June 2022.

As one of the contributions to the monitoring of implementation of the previous Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma Men and Women, the Team for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction, in collaboration with the Children's Rights Council of the Government of the Republic of Serbia created the Analysis of the accessibility of support services and measures for Roma children at the local level.<sup>30</sup>

The National Academy of Public Administration developed the Programme for the Professional Development of Roma for 2021, with the overall objective of improving the status of persons belonging to the Roma community in the Republic of Serbia. Specific objectives of this Programme are development and improvement of professional competences of highly educated persons belonging to the Roma community, as a precondition for their higher employability in the public administration. The Programme has been developed in collaboration with the civic movement Opre Roma Serbia and the Roma Initiatives Office of the Open Society Foundation Serbia. The National Academy implemented the Programme for the Professional Development of Roma for the first generation of trainees, and the second generation of trainees of the Programme is being selected.

In addition to the above Programme for the Professional Development of Roma, which is intended for highly educated persons belonging to the Roma national minority, the Sectoral Agreement on continuing professional development of employees in local self-government units provides for two trainings intended for employees in local self-government units who should contribute to the social inclusion of Roma:

- Development, implementation and monitoring of measures for social inclusion of Roma at the local level, and
- Social inclusion of Roma at the local level – online training.

The IPA 2020 Programme finances the allocation of grants (direct grant) to the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, in the amount of 6,500,000 EUR. One of the key results in this project entails support to the implementation and improvement of local measures and mechanisms for Roma inclusion, which includes the planning of following activities: providing support to the existing local coordination bodies (new mechanism - body comprised

<sup>30</sup>[https://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Dostupnost\\_usluga\\_i\\_mera\\_podske\\_za\\_decu\\_romske\\_nacionalnosti\\_na\\_lokalnom\\_nivou.pdf](https://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Dostupnost_usluga_i_mera_podske_za_decu_romske_nacionalnosti_na_lokalnom_nivou.pdf)

of the representatives of key local institutions), mobile team created within IPA 2016 and co-financing of operational plans of mobile teams: development of local action plans for social inclusion of Roma men and women; exchange of best practices through the operations of the Network of Standing Conferences for Roma matters and advisory support to local self-governments. The intervention will also be intended towards building and piloting intermunicipal cooperation, developing an opportunity to establish a mobile team for Roma inclusion, which has so far functioned as a result of project support, without being fully integrated into the institutional system, as an innovative and integrated social service at the local level (with possible expansion of the scope). This intervention will also include building capacities of the existing joint mobile units for Roma social inclusion. The project execution starts in 2022.

The inclusion of Roma is continuously monitored through an online database for monitoring of measures for the inclusion of Roma men and women. Reports in the database for monitoring of the measures for the inclusion of Roma men and women for 2020 were submitted by 116 local self-government units in total. On the basis of obtained data, the Team for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction created the “Overview of data about towns and municipalities on measures for the social inclusion of Roma men and women in 2020”.<sup>31</sup> According to the data from the survey above, of 116 local self-government units which filled out the questionnaire, 49 towns and municipalities adopted a local action plan for the social inclusion of Roma men and women, while 45 local self-government units allocated funds for the improvement of the status of Roma.

Certain measures of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia also contribute to the monitoring of the inclusion and improvement of the status of Roma: Namely, at its session held on 4 March 2021, the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality of the National Assembly adopted the Decision establishing the Subcommittee for Roma Affairs. The Subcommittee has the task to monitor and implement the law or another general act and discuss other matters concerning the improvement of the status of Roma in the Republic of Serbia, and in particular to analyse the adequacy of the application of international documents concerning Roma affairs, to discuss and promote measures and activities for the development and improvement of the status of Roma, discuss and propose how to handle initiatives, petitions, complaints and proposals submitted to the Committee which concern the status of Roma.

Within the framework of the programme of the German Cooperation Office “Inclusion of Roma and other marginalized groups in Serbia”, whose objective was to improve the institutional structure for inter-sectoral cooperation and implementation of the Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma Men and Women at the local level, one of the main objectives is creating opportunities for the employment of Roma men and women and returnees in accordance with the Readmission Agreement and other persons belonging to marginalised and less employable groups in Serbia. Within the framework of the programme, which is implemented in the partnership with the Ministry of Human and Minority and Social Dialogue, the publication Promotion of Employment<sup>32</sup>, which presented employment models which had yielded good

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.inkluzijaroma.stat.gov.rs> and <http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.ukljucise.org/publikacije>

results in the employment of Roma men and women and other marginalised groups, was published in 2021. According to the data from the publication above, expert trainings for employment with known employers were organised in over 20 companies for 300 trainees in 12 operational areas. Expert trainings for 15 profiles sought after on the labour market included over 450 trainees. Over 300 entrepreneurs received support for launching their own or development of an existing business. Career guidance and counselling, as well as mentor support in employment, were provided for over 800 beneficiaries, of which over 500 women.

Similarly, open competitions are continuously implemented at various levels of government, with the objective to promote positive treatment of persons belonging to the Roma population by the society, for the purpose of preventing discrimination, particularly of multiply discriminated Roma men and women; improvement of the status of Roma men and women by ensuring the exercise of the right to education, employment, health care; improvement of the access to the social welfare for the purpose of poverty reduction and increase of the social inclusion of Roma men and women into the local community, creating and promoting integral local services/programmes etc.

The following tables provide an overview of available data on the announced competitions and allocated grants.

Office for Human and Minority Rights	
Public competition	Amount
Improvement of the status of Roma men and women in the Republic of Serbia for 2017	15,388,125.00
Improvement of the status of Roma men and women in the Republic of Serbia for 2018	13,948,028.00
Improvement of the status of Roma men and women in the Republic of Serbia for 2019	15,994,792.00
Improvement of the status of Roma men and women in the Republic of Serbia for 2020	6,988,947.00

Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue	
Public competition	Amount
Implementation of the policies of social inclusion of Roma men and women in the Republic of Serbia for 2021	12,000,000.00

Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy, Demography and Gender Equality		
Year	Public competition	Amount
2017	Public competition for allocation of grants to towns and municipalities from the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for financing the hiring of coordinators for Roma matters	1,200,000.00
	Public competition for allocation of grants to towns and municipalities from the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for co-financing the execution of local action plans for the improvement of the status of Roma in terms of housing	3,000,000.00
	Public competition for allocation of grants to associations of citizens for financing of projects concerning the improvement of the status of Roma men and women	4,000,000.00

2018	Public competition for allocation of grants to towns and municipalities from the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for financing the recruitment of coordinators for Roma matters	1,200,000.00
	Public competition for allocation of grants to towns and municipalities from the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for financing the development of local action plans for the improvement of the housing status of Roma	3,000,000.00
	Public competition for allocation of grants to associations of citizens for financing of projects concerning the improvement of the status of Roma men and women	4,000,000.00
2019	Public competition for allocation of grants to towns and municipalities from the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for co-financing the development of local action plans for the improvement of the housing status of Roma and execution of local action plan for the improvement of the housing status of Roma	2,200,000.00
	Competition for allocation of grants to social welfare centres from the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for financing the hiring of coordinators for Roma matters	2,000,000.00
	Public competition for allocation of grants to associations of citizens for financing of projects concerning the improvement of the status of Roma men and women	4,000,000.00
2020	Public competition for allocation of grants to towns and municipalities from the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for co-financing the development of local action plans for the improvement of the housing status of Roma and execution of local action plan for the improvement of the housing status of Roma	2,200,000.00
	Competition for allocation of grants to social welfare centres from the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for financing the recruitment of coordinators for Roma matters	2,000,000.00
	Public competition for allocation of grants to associations of citizens for financing of projects concerning the improvement of the status of Roma men and women	4,000,000.00
2021	Public competition for allocation of grants to towns and municipalities from the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for co-financing the development of local action plans for the improvement of the housing status of Roma and execution of local action plan for the improvement of the housing status of Roma	2,200,000.00
	Competition for allocation of grants to social welfare centres from the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for financing the recruitment of coordinators for Roma matters	2,000,000.00
	Public competition for allocation of grants to associations of citizens for financing of projects concerning the improvement of the status of Roma men and women	4,000,000.00

Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations Administration and National Minorities - National Communities	
Public competition	Amount
Co-financing of projects aimed at undertaking affirmative measures and processes for the integration of Roma for the continuation of the “Decade of Roma Inclusion” in 2017	1,900,000.00

Co-financing of projects aimed at implementing affirmative measures and processes for the integration of Roma for the continuation of the “Decade of Roma Inclusion” in 2018	1,900,000.00
Co-financing of programmes and projects aimed at implementing affirmative measures for the improvement of the status of persons belonging to the Roma national minority in 2019	2,000,000.00

The competition for co-financing projects aimed at the execution of affirmative measures and processes for the integration of Roma for the continuation of the “Decade of Roma Inclusion” was announced in 2019 for the last time, and since 2020, funds were allocated to the Public Competition for co-financing of programmes and projects aimed at the improvement of the rights of national minorities with respect to the funds allocated for the Roma national minority.

Competitions in local self-government units and city municipalities in 2020			
Policy area	Number of self-government units	Number of supported projects	Total amount of funds
Social inclusion	22	45	12,187,000.00
Education	8	11	4,838,000.00
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>17,025,000.00</b>

In a written contribution for the development of this report, the Citizens Association Roma Production Roma World states that, since 2018, it has executed a number of projects, including the projects “Roma Community is a part of the Serbian society”, “State and local measures for a better life of the Roma community”, “Roma Focus” and “Roma Community and its inclusion in Serbia”, which were also supported from the budget of the Republic of Serbia. All the projects were executed in Niš, Prokuplje and Leskovac, with the general objective to improve the existing action plans for Roma, identify any shortcomings, and adopt and provide the budget for new action plans, with the inclusion of persons belonging to the Roma community. During the execution of the projects, roundtables were held with representatives of the Roma community and decision makers from local self-governments. As stated in the written contribution for the report, a result of these projects is a high placement of the priorities of the Roma community among the agendas in such local self-government units and resolution of the problems of the Roma community. Due to the existing local action plans, Roma secondary school students and university students receive scholarships at the local level, Roma settlements receive the necessary documentation for the planning of settlements, and infrastructure problems are resolved. During the execution of projects, a large number of video materials was prepared, and they are available on the society’s website.<sup>33</sup>

In 2021, the Office for the Roma inclusion of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina granted scholarships in the amount of 1,200,000.00 RSD to students belonging to the Roma national minority who were enrolled in the Study Programme of the School of Higher Specialized Studies for the education of pedagogues “Mihailo Palov” in Vršac: pedagogue of pre-school age children who attend training in the Romani language, In addition, a large number of local self-government units grants scholarships to school and university students

<sup>33</sup> <https://romaworld.rs/>

from vulnerable social groups, and certain municipalities grant scholarships in particular to school and university students belonging to the Roma national minority. The table below provides, according to the available data, an overview of allocated scholarships at the competitions of local self-government units for school and university students belonging to the Roma national minority in 2021.

Local self-government unit	Number of students	Amount of monthly allocated funds
Bačka Palanka	15	57,000.00
Valjevo	67	294,500.00
Niš	60	450,000.00
Smederevo	44	220,000.00

Particularly important measures for the social inclusion of Roma may be entrusted to health mediators at the national level, and to coordinators for Roma matters and mobile teams at the local levels.

Pursuant to the Law on Health Care,<sup>34</sup> within the framework of the improvement of health and health care of population groups which are exposed to an increase risk of disease in 2008. The Ministry of Health supported the project of introducing health mediators in the health care system of the Republic of Serbia. The role of health mediators is to keep records on the health status of persons belonging to the Roma national minority, work with them on raising awareness on the necessity to vaccinate children, as well as the importance of regular diet and hygienic habits. Health mediators provide a better insight of health institutions into the health status of inhabitants of Roma settlements, and point out the importance of timely contacting the doctor to the citizens. The Ministry of Health, when choosing health mediators, gave an advantage to Roma women who were mothers and lived in a Roma settlement. Since the introduction of health mediators into the health care system of Serbia, health mediators are a part of the health visiting practice of the health centre, where they cooperate with the Social Welfare Centre, a branch office of the Health Fund of the Republic of Serbia and the local self-government. In view of the fact that they are in everyday communication with the Roma community, they are giving a considerable contribution to the activity of the mobile team for the inclusion of Roma. A total of 85 mediators work in 70 municipalities in the Republic of Serbia. One of the objectives defined in the Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma Men and Women in the Republic of Serbia is the improvement of their health and better accessibility of health protection. Through measures which are concretized in the Action Plan, obligations are assumed which require the mobilisation of the overall primary health care and further improvement of the capacities of health medicators, increase of their number, as well as resolution of the equal status and their recognition in the code list of professions.

The local policy of the inclusion of Roma men and women entails a multi-sectoral approach and participation of multiple institutions at the local level, with an active participation and coordination of local mechanisms for the inclusion of the Roma community. The Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma Men and Women recognises that one of the local mechanisms which contributes the most to the implementation of strategic measures at the local level as regards

<sup>34</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 25/2019.

the inclusion of the Roma community, is the employment of local coordinators for Roma matters in towns and municipalities. By introducing the job of coordinators for Roma matters, the local self-government creates an opportunity to be in regular and direct communication with the Roma community and to implement national policies at the local level in a more efficient manner, respecting the characteristics of the local environment. The role of a coordinator for Roma matters is to provide technical support to the local self-government in the development and implementation of the existing and new policies and programmes of the inclusion of Roma men and women in accordance with the national and local strategic framework; to collect and analyse data on socio-economic needs as the basis for development and monitoring of local strategic documents relating to the inclusion of Roma men and women; to communicate and mediate between the Roma community and the local administration. Of 77 coordinators for Roma matters in local self-government units which have entered their data into the Database for monitoring the measures for the inclusion of Roma men and women for 2020, 46 coordinators had a systematised position.

Mobile teams for the inclusion of Roma are working bodies of the National Assembly or the city/municipality council created for the purpose of strengthening cooperation between officers in respective local institutions. Members of the mobile teams organise joint field visits to Roma settlements and provide joint and coordinated support and assistance to individuals and families. Members of the mobile team are: the coordinator for Roma matters employed in the municipal/city administration, pedagogical assistant, health mediator, representative of the social welfare centre, and representative of the branch office of the National Employment Service. By creating mobile teams, a more rational utilisation of local institutional resources is ensured, as well as a coordinated approach to the provision of services, and better and faster accessibility of services to beneficiaries. Mobile teams act on the basis of semi-annual operational plans. Mobile teams for the inclusion of Roma men and women were founded in 50 towns and municipalities in the Republic of Serbia with the support of the EU funds (IPA12, IPA13, IPA16). A mobile team carries out the following tasks: provides joint and coordinated support and assistance to individuals and families; examines the needs of the Roma community in the municipality/town, particularly in the field of education, housing, employment, health care and social protection; promotes and helps the inclusion of Roma men and women in the social life of the community; proposes activities with the objective of improving the status of Roma men and women in the municipality/town and other competent authorities and organisations; promotes interculturalism and contributes to the majority population's familiarity with the Roma community.

*2. Set up and operate, as soon as possible and at the latest by the due date of the fifth State Report, a sustainable and human rights-based data collection framework on issues pertaining to the access to rights of persons belonging to national minorities as well as promote complementary qualitative and quantitative research in order to assess the situation of persons belonging to national minorities; on the basis of such data and research, set up, implement, monitor and periodically review minority policies with the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities.*

Within the framework of the project “Promotion of diversity and equality in Serbia”, which is a part of the joint programme of the European Union/Council of Europe “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022”, at an initiative of the then Office for Human and Minority Rights of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the following documents were prepared: “Mapping and legal analysis of the recommendations of contracting bodies of the Council of Europe in the field of minority rights”, as well as “National criteria for the monitoring of the exercise of minority rights”. The Council of Europe hired a domestic expert to prepare these documents.

The subject of mapping and analysis were the recommendations of the relevant bodies of the Council of Europe - Committee of Ministers, Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe and the Committee of Experts of the European Charter of the Council of Europe for Regional or Minority Languages.<sup>35</sup> The objective of mapping and legal analysis of the recommendations is to establish a national institutional mechanism for fulfilling the recommendations of the relevant bodies of the Council of Europe and monitoring the implementation of conventions in general, and, through national criteria for monitoring the implementation of minority rights which have also been developed and proposed. Namely, within the framework of the project, specific national criteria were to be developed for the monitoring of the application of relevant thematic clusters of minority rights, which will be used for permanent data collection for the purpose of a review of the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter of the Council of Europe for Regional or Minority Languages and preparation of national reports on their implementation, with an emphasis on the collection of data on the basis of ethnicity. For each of the criteria, appropriate data are to be collected which, as a logically connected set, would provide relevant information on the exercise of minority rights and which would refer to quantitative and qualitative aspects of the exercise of minority rights.

With a view to establishing this mechanism, the Republic of Serbia proposed that the third phase of the joint programme of the European Union/Council of Europe “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey” shall include support to the development of a portal/application in which the competent institution should enter all relevant data of importance for the monitoring of the exercise of the rights of national minorities, according to the developed criteria and data. This would enable the establishment of a sustainable human rights-based framework for data collection relating to the matters of approach to the rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

The above documents are also of importance for the preparation of a new strategic document dedicated to the exercise of the rights of national minorities. Namely, the applicable Action Plan for exercise of the rights of national minorities of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, as a medium-term strategic document without an established timeline of the validity period of the document. As most of the activities in the Action Plan were planned to be executed no later than 2018, as a part of the revision of the Action Plan for Chapter 23 by the European

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<sup>35</sup> The recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on the implementation of the European Charter of the Council of Europe for Regional or Minority Languages, adopted on 4 April 2019, the Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, adopted on 26 June 2019, and the Fourth Report of the Committee of Experts relating to Serbia, adopted on 28 November 2018.

Commission and the Government of Serbia, a need was identified for a comprehensive impact analysis of the Action Plan, which would serve as the basis for further development of the strategic framework in the field of the rights of national minorities. In that regard, the project “Promotion of diversity and equality in Serbia” recruited experts, who prepared the “*Ex-post* impact analysis of the implementation of the Action Plan for exercise of the rights of national minorities”. This analysis provides guidelines for the methodology of the development of a new action plan, which would be based on the Progress Report in the Serbia’s EU accession process, as well as the recommendations from the Fourth Report of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, while the development of a new strategic document is coordinated by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue. After the adoption of a new action plan, reports on its implementation will allow the collection of data relating to the matter of access to the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, which will be in accordance with the above criteria of monitoring the exercise of the minority rights.

*3. Implement the recommendations of the Protector of Citizens of the Republic of Serbia listed in its Special Report on Councils for Inter-Ethnic Relations and commission an independent qualitative study, as soon as possible and at the latest by the due date of the fifth State report, in order to assess the functionality of the Councils for Inter-Ethnic Relations; strongly support the development of independent qualitative and quantitative research showing the level and nature of inter-ethnic relations, including relations between persons belonging to national minorities and persons belonging to the majority; taking into account such research, set up, implement, monitor and periodically review a comprehensive strategy aimed at revitalising inter-ethnic relations, in consultation with persons belonging to national minorities and local self-government units, taking into account the need to involve the majority in the integration and inclusion of national minorities in Serbian society.*

#### *Councils for inter-ethnic relations*

In view of the given recommendation of the Advisory Committee, as well as the recommendations of the Protector of Citizens, the Law on Local Self-Government was amended in 2018.<sup>36</sup> The Law prescribes the obligation of a local self-government unit in whose area a national minority language is used, to in the process of changing the names of streets, squares, urban neighbourhoods, hamlets and other parts of settlements, also obtain an opinion of the council for inter-ethnic relations, which is simultaneously a way to ensure that the obligations of such local self-government units to create the above bodies are fulfilled, particularly in view of the fact that the previous law did not provide for measures which would ensure their establishment. Also, amendments to the Law have established that a member of the assembly of a local self-government unit may not be elected member of a councils for inter-ethnic relations, and specified that representatives of Serbian people shall be nominated by a

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<sup>36</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 129/2007, 83/2014 - as amended, 101/2016 - as amended, 47/2018 и 111/2021 - as amended

permanent working body of an assembly of a local self-government unit which performs tasks relating to personnel matters, which also resolves these outstanding issues.

As regards this recommendation, it is important to note that the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, as a part of monitoring the enforcement of the Law through its obligation to give opinions to draft statutes of local self-government units, particularly emphasise the need to list, among the provisions of the statutes, the articles/provisions concerning the following: selection and composition of the council, decision-making method of the council, submission of reports of the councils to the assembly of a local self-government unit, protection of the rights of persons belonging to the Serbian people and to national minorities, Rules of Procedure of the council, and operational funds of the council. All local self-government units which were legally obliged to create this body have done it within the legally defined timeline. In addition, two times a year, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Governments requires all local self-government units which are legally obliged to establish a councils for inter-ethnic relations to submit relevant data concerning the establishment and activity of such councils.

According to the 2021 data, 63 local self-government units established the councils for inter-ethnic relations, 8 local self-government units informed the Ministry that they had not established the Council but were in the process of establishing the Council, and two local self-government units did not submit the data. In 10 local self-government units, sessions of this body were held during 2021. The first collection of data for 2021 is underway, and after an analysis of the collected data, it will be possible to ascertain if any progress had been made compared to the previously collected data.

As regards the part of the recommendation relating to the creation of independent qualitative studies, it should be noted that a survey was done in 2020, and the publication *Impact assessment of the European integration to the local-self-government in Serbia – protection of fundamental rights*,<sup>37</sup> including the status of national minorities, was subsequently published. This publication originated from the cooperation between the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, with the objective of enhancing the capacities of municipalities and towns in Serbia for responding to their obligations which occurred in the European Union accession process.

The questionnaire which was used in the survey was sent to the addresses of 16 local self-government units (LSGUs). The following criteria were used in the selection of towns and municipalities: demographical composition (the sample comprised of LSGUs traditionally populated by national minorities, i.e., only nationally diverse LSGUs were taken into account), status and size (municipalities and towns of various sizes in terms of population were chosen), geographical location (LSGUs from each of the four statistical regions in Serbia), level of development (proportional representation of LSGUs from each of the four categories of development) and representation of various national minorities (the sample covers LSGUs populated by persons belonging to various national minorities).

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.skgo.org/publications/download/506>

The following LSGUs were selected: Apatin, Bela Palanka, Bujanovac, Vranje, Dimitrovgrad, Zrenjanin, Kučevo, Lajkovac, Negotin, Novi Pazar, Novi Sad, Pančevo, Požarevac, Priboj, Sombor and Subotica.

The questionnaire for the selected LSGUs relating to the exercise of the rights of national minorities included questions relating to councils for inter-ethnic relations, as one of the local mechanisms whose importance was particularly recognised in the negotiations, progress reports, and the Action Plan for Chapter 23. Among the above municipalities and towns, 4 LSGUs did not send their answers, so the final sample for analysis included 12 LSGUs.

The conclusions of the analysis indicate that one of the LSGUs from the sample had a fully functional council, two had a fully active one, and two LSGUs had a relatively active one. The overall impression is that the capacities of the council were still weak, as was the initiative of the members of these bodies to affect the decisions of the local authorities. The overall evaluation of the harmonisation of the statute and decisions of LSGUs with the Law on Local Self-Government is relatively good, but there is still room for improvement:

In addition to the above, it is important to note that trainings for enhancement of capacities of the council for inter-ethnic relations were planned for the project “Promotion of Diversity and Equality in Serbia”, which is a part of the joint programme of the European Union/Council of Europe “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022”. It was initially planned that this activity be implemented during 2020, but its implementation was made more difficult by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue and the Protector of Citizens, in collaboration with the Council of Europe, implemented activities for the preparation of these trainings. The implementation of trainings was subject to the epidemiological situation, and the conditions for them to begin were met in March 2022. In March and April 2022, trainings were held in Bujanovac, Bačka Palanka, Vrbas, Beočin, Novi Pazar, Petrovac na Mlavi, Sombor, Subotica, Babušnica and Bosilegrad. By organising such seminars and trainings for representatives of local self-government units and members of councils for inter-ethnic relations, their capacities will be enhanced, their work improved, and their method of functioning will be considered, together with any outstanding issues they face in their work.

### *Surveys*

Implementation of independent surveys is a legal obligation of independent authorities and bodies in the legal system of the Republic of Serbia. Thus, Article 33, paragraph 11 of the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination prescribes that the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality shall organise and implement independent surveys concerning the improvement of equality and protection from discrimination. Acting within the framework of this legal solution, the Commissioner implemented a total of ten surveys in the previous five-year period, which polled the views of both the public and certain social and vocational/professional groups towards discrimination.<sup>38</sup> Results of these surveys are a relevant source of data and, together with other sources, may be used to consider the status of national minorities in Serbia, i.e., the

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<sup>38</sup> All of the Commissioner’s surveys are available at the official website: [www.ravnopravnost.gov.rs](http://www.ravnopravnost.gov.rs).

level and nature of inter-ethnic relations, including relations between persons belonging to national minorities and persons belonging to the majority population.

Thus, the survey of public opinions on discrimination “Citizens’ Attitudes on Discrimination in Serbia”, *inter alia*, discusses the level of ethnic and social distance that citizens hold towards certain social groups. This survey is conducted by the Commissioner periodically (every three years) according to the same sampling methodology which enables a better insight into the changes of the public’s attitude towards discrimination in a certain period (the latest survey was implemented in 2019). Results of this survey also indicate public opinions on which social groups are most frequently exposed to discrimination (e.g., In 2019, 51% of interviewees listed the Roma community as the first they thought of), as well as the attitude of citizens towards special affirmative measures for improving the status of certain social groups (e.g., 2019 results indicate that, compared to 2016, there is stronger support for citizens to introduce such measures in the field of employment - growth by 5.8 percentage points and education - growth of 2.4 percentage points).

“Survey on the attitude of the representatives of public authorities towards discrimination in Serbia” is also implemented periodically. In addition to the perception on the frequency of discrimination towards certain social groups, this survey also discusses views of decision-makers on hate speech and its recognition (e.g., 2018 results indicate that, compared to the previous survey from 2013, a higher percentage of representatives of public authorities recognise hate speech).

In addition to the above, during 2020, the Commissioner conducted the survey “Perception of discrimination in the Roma community”, which considers the views of Roma on their status in the society and the presence of discrimination. The survey methodology included two survey techniques – a survey which also included representatives of informal settlements and focus groups which were realised with representatives of the National Council of the Roma National Minority, representatives of civil society organisations, students, representatives of local mechanisms for the inclusion of Roma and other persons handling matters of improving the status of Roma. The survey allows a more comprehensive discussion about potential solutions from the perspective of this social group and policy making which results in the reduction of prejudice and discrimination and sustainable inclusion of Roma into the society, as well as highlighting the empowerment of persons belonging to the Roma national minority so they could recognise discrimination and protect themselves, i.e., use the established legislative and institutional framework independently or in collaboration with civil society organisations and other organisations.

In addition to the above, the Commissioner also implemented other surveys in the reporting period. Thus, particular attention was paid to combating age-based discrimination, and thus multiple surveys were implemented in this field (“Aging in cities – challenges of the contemporary society” 2017, “Status of elderly women in Serbia” 2017, “Status of elderly people in Serbia – social context, overview of data and results of the survey” 2020). In addition, in 2017, the Commissioner created the analysis “Gender equality in positions of decision-making in local self-government units –overview of the situation as regards the implementation of recommended measures to local self-government units for the purpose of exercising gender equality”. In late 2019, local self-government units were sent a Questionnaire on the participation of young people in the decision-making process at the local level, and the results

of the analysis of the questionnaire, were published in the 2019 Regular Annual Report of the Commissioner.

As the role of the media is particularly important for preventive conduct and promotion of the observance of the principle of equality, in 2018, the Commissioner implemented the second “Survey on views of representatives of the media towards discrimination”. Also, in accordance with the Commissioner’s Special Report on Discrimination in Labour and Employment, a survey was conducted in 2019 “Discrimination on the labour market in Serbia”. According to the results of this survey, 63% of interviewed employers and 50% of employees believe that Roma are in an unequal position and discriminated in labour and employment. In 2021, the survey “Gender Equality and Work-life Balance” was implemented.

In addition to the Commissioner’s survey, surveys in Serbia are also implemented by relevant international bodies which are referenced in appropriate places of this Report (MICS).

State authorities, both during the development of the report, and during the implementation of concrete measures and activities, shall take into account the results of relevant independent surveys implemented by scientific organisations, well as civil society organisations. In that regard, it should be particularly noted that, in 2020, a survey was implemented by the Centre for research of ethnicity “Social relations between ethnic communities in Serbia”, whose results will also be indicated at appropriate places in this document.

*4. Promote a multicultural and intercultural perspective in education, including by developing exchange programmes between communities, at every level of education; ensure, as soon as possible and at the latest by the due date of the fifth State Report, that through a process including effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities, history curricula and teaching materials promote respect for all groups in society and provide broad knowledge on minorities as forming an integral part of Serbian society; ensure that multiple perspectives are encouraged in historical and contemporary research; promote, in consultation with representatives of the national minorities concerned, possible models for bilingual or multilingual education;*

#### *Promotion of a multicultural and intercultural perspective in education*

Teaching and learning programmes for all subjects, particularly social sciences and humanities, as well as elective programmes such as Civic Education, contain elements of democratic culture, multiculturalism and interculturality, both in terms of content and in objectives and outcomes.

Introducing a new educational paradigm by launching an education reform in 2018, a national education framework is being built, as the basis for the development of all teaching and learning programmes which include objectives, standards, competences, outcomes, the mission and vision of education. The curriculum is outcome-oriented and should ensure the development of inter-subject competences, of which one was Responsible participation in the democratic society - in outcomes relating to the observance of human rights and freedoms. New elective programmes for grammar school (Individual, group and society, Language, media and culture, Education for sustainable development, Art and design, Basics of

Geopolitics, Religion and civilisation), of which some are important for the improvement of the multicultural perspective in education. Particularly important in this context is the elective subject Civic education.

Civic education, aka Education for democracy and civic society, was introduced into the education system of the Republic of Serbia in the school year 2001/2002 for the first grade of the elementary school and the first grade of the secondary school as an elective subject. Subsequently, Civic education was included in all grades of the elementary and secondary school as a mandatory facultative subject. Civic education encourages the development of children and young people in the spirit of respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, peace, tolerance, gender equality, understanding and friendship between peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups, and thus also multiculturalism and interculturalism. The basis for introduction and further development of Civic Education in Serbia was the recommendation of the Council of Europe on education for an active participation in a democratic society. Handbooks for all three education cycles were developed with the objective of improving the competences of teachers who teach Civic Education. Tolerance and respect for diversity and equality are present in such programmes for all three education cycles and are a part of these handbooks.

With the objective of multicultural and intercultural perspective in education, a series of projects were implemented in the Republic of Serbia, covering appropriate education and conferences.

Within the framework of the Joint Initiative of the Council of Europe and the European Union “Horizontal Facility for Western Balkans and Turkey”, through the project *Promotion of democratic culture in schools*, a framework of 20 competences was prepared based on the Model of Competences as regards a group of values, group of views, group of skills and group of knowledge and critical understanding. Schools have organised a large number of very different activities, with pedagogical approaches suitable for the development of competences for democratic culture and creation of a more pleasant, more interesting and safer school environment, simultaneously empowering their capacities for elimination of violent, discriminatory and antidemocratic structures in school and school environment, improving the ethos in school and providing support to participants. Examples of content used to reach democratic competences are in the publication “How to achieve a Democratic Culture in Schools”.<sup>39</sup>

Within the framework of this project, a handbook was created for parents on the application of competences for a democratic culture, as well as a handbook for the application of competences for a democratic culture in the curricula of certain subjects. Training was programmed for the application of competences for a democratic culture, which is a part of the educational platform of the Institute for the Improvement of Education, and an invitation was sent to schools for participation.

The continuation of this project of the Council of Europe, titled “Quality Education for All” (2019-2022), establishes the objective of promoting quality education by supporting schools, local communities and education institutions in the fight against discrimination by applying the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. The execution of

<sup>39</sup> <https://mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/prirucnik-primer-a-dobre-prakseDemokratska-kultura-u-skolama.pdf>

project activities included 60 schools, with teachers, students, parents and the local community as actors. Of 60 included schools, classes are realised in one of the languages of national minorities (Hungarian, Ruthenian, Croatian, Bosnian, Romanian, Slovak) in 14 schools. In addition, the elective programme Mother Tongue/Speech with Elements of National Culture is realised in most included schools. Activities of this project have contributed to establishing an active intercultural dialogue between teachers/parents from different ethnic and minority communities.

In 2021, the Pedagogical Institute of Vojvodina organised the seventh international conference Interculturality in Education. The objective of the conference is comprehensive elaboration and discussion of interculturality, with an emphasis on the application of intercultural principles in education, teaching, language, media and other segments of the intercultural life. The conference is attended by scholars and researchers of interculturality from the neighbouring countries, as well as countries where languages of national minorities who live in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina are spoken. Working languages of the conference are Serbian, Hungarian, Romanian, Ruthenian, Slovak and Croatian - languages which are in official use in the authorities of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. After the conference, the Institute publishes a collection of presented works which are distributed to educational institutions.

Also, the Pedagogical Institute of Vojvodina, since it was founded, has been conducting the project Development of mother tongue and non-mother tongue and interculturality with children in Vojvodina. The objective of the project is support to educational institutions in the process of development and fostering of the mother tongue and non-mother tongue and interculturality. Through its activities, the project preserves the language and culture of national minorities, and ensures the adoption of a foreign language, as a precondition for getting to know other cultures and traditions. In addition, the project entails an expansion of the competences of pedagogues, teachers and expert associates in the field of education in a non-mother tongue. The specific objective of the project is to develop and foster additive bilingualism as well as communicative skills in a non-mother tongue, i.e., develop positive attitudes towards Serbia as a non-mother tongue and Hungarian as the language of the social environment for the purpose of developing tolerance and a feeling of belonging to a multilingual and multicultural community. The programme is being implemented in kindergartens in Senta, Gornji Breg, Tornjoš, Bogaraš and Kevi.

The project “Strengthening intercultural practices in culturally diverse schools” includes five schools which implement activities with a view to strengthening cooperation, understanding and tolerance among students of different nationalities. Within the framework of the project, two accredited trainings were implemented, for approximately 150 teachers, on interculturality and antidiscrimination, as well as a series of curricular and extracurricular activities with intercultural content.

The project “Young people in a multicultural community” gathered young people of various nationalities from Novi Pazar, Sjenica, Tutin, Prijepolje, Priboj and Nova Varoš, as well as their parents and teachers, for the purpose of the implementation of various intercultural contents and skills.

The project “Our Town, Our Schools” is being implemented by the Government of Serbia Coordination Body for the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja - CB's

Office, with a view to improving cooperation among elementary and secondary schools in the territory of the municipality of Bujanovac, where classes are conducted in Serbian and Albanian, as well as creating opportunities for interaction and cooperation between students and teachers. Multiple joint activities were implemented, three three-day trainings for teachers and seven two-days workshops for students. The topics covered by this programme were: intercultural education, understanding of diversity, rights of the child, topics about stereotypes and prejudice. “The Guide to Bujanovac”, through the eyes of young people, was created during the workshops.

The project “Our Story” was implemented by the Government of Serbia Coordination Body for the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja - CB's Office, with two elementary schools from Preševo. A series of workshops were implemented with the objective of creating a platform for overcoming segregation in educational institutions and contribution to affirmation of interculturality in a multicultural environment.

### *Curricula providing knowledge on minorities*

The regulatory framework in the Republic of Serbia entails a good foundation for curricula to provide knowledge on national minorities as an integral part of the Serbian society.

The Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System<sup>40</sup> stipulates that teaching and learning plans and programmes for elementary and secondary education contain the manner of adaptation of the programmes for persons belonging to national minorities in all teaching and learning programmes.

Within the framework of the Council of Europe and the European Union Horizontal Facility (HF 33) - *Strengthening the protection of national minorities in Serbia*, an analysis of selected curricula, respective competences and educational standards was created. The results of this analysis indicate a heterogeneous situation as regards the presence and attitude towards national minorities in the educational framework in the Republic of Serbia. The analysis emphasises that official documents concerning education, i.e., standards and curricula (particularly tasks and teaching units) for certain school subjects (Nature and Society and Musical Culture in the first cycle; Serbian Language and Literature and Geography in the second cycle, Social Sciences and Constitution and Civic Rights in the third cycle) directly deal with the issue of national minorities or their cultural heritage, and are positive trends or examples. There is a commitment to include national minorities as an integral part of these documents. National minorities are mostly mentioned in elementary school curricula relating to music (with an exception of the subject Nature and Society and partially Geography), and, in general, a limited number of minorities are mentioned (the list of those mentioned within the subject Musical Culture is longer). Information on national minorities relating to music are not necessarily a shortcoming, but the report recommends that this tendency to mostly represent national minorities through folklore should be avoided. In addition, teachers are left to decide if they are going to teach classes on certain subjects important for the national identity with the objective that classes should develop intercultural competences of students and familiarise

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<sup>40</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 88/2017, 27/2018 - as amended, 10/2019, 27/2018 - as amended, 6/2020 and 129/2021

them with persons belonging to various ethnic national groups. History is recognised as one of the most important subjects for strengthening awareness of various views of the past, including the status and perspective of national minorities. An analysis of the curricula indicates that insufficient attention is paid to the national minorities living in Serbia during the entire schooling, from the first to the end of the third cycle, within the subjects Nature and Society, History, and, to an extent, Geography. This kind of conclusion is a consequence of the fact that teachers teach content referencing the cultural and historical heritage of the minorities for the subject History within the defined annual number of classes. Namely, classes are planned and implemented in such a way that such content is not viewed and treated as isolated, but is linked and integrated with the other contents of the curriculum, thus reinforcing the student's feeling of belonging to their national minority. At the same time, the curricula of the subject History contains topics (content) concerning the common and specific historical and cultural heritage, periods of coexistence of various peoples/ethnic communities in the region and Europe, with an emphasis on the periods of peace and common challenges in various situations. Such a curriculum, although it may not be paying sufficient attention to each of the national minorities separately, still reinforces the multicultural environment for learning and promotes the respect of all groups in the society, indicates a joint contribution to its development and ensures a broad and deep knowledge on the minorities as an integral part of the Serbian society, while students are encouraged to learn more and research various perspectives.

With a view to improving the representation of minorities in the educational process, Guidelines for appropriate representation of national minorities in educational contents were prepared within the framework of the Joint Initiative of the Council of Europe and the European Union.<sup>41</sup> This document originates from the Report on the representation of national minorities in the curricula and educational standards of the Republic of Serbia and the Report on the representation and presentation of national minorities in the school textbooks in the Republic of Serbia, as well as their accompanying recommendations. In addition to general guidelines, the document also proposes concrete guidelines containing examples and instructions on how to appropriately transpose the recommendations into the educational content. It also contains a set of adopted guidelines concerning the institutions within whose purview is the adoption, harmonisation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of curricula. The last set of proposed guidelines concerns the contents of textbooks and possible ways to include the content on national minorities. The recommendations are defined as a form of support to institutions, participants and stakeholders in the education system in the development of awareness (particularly of the student population and persons employed in the education and culture) on the need to understand the rights, status and participation of national minorities, acceptance of cultural diversity, development of tolerance, fostering coexistence and comprehensive social inclusion in the Republic of Serbia. The recommendations are aimed at institutions which are competent for education and concern curricula for elementary and secondary school, improvement of the democratic culture in schools, and gender equality. A special set of recommendations concern the improvement of the quality of the textbook content (visual and textual) which should reflect the observance of minority rights, as well as a set of recommendation for improving the quality of initial education of teachers who are

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HF-33-Smernice-SRB-FINAL.pdf>

implementing the classes in some of the languages of a national minority. A result of this project is the incorporation of Guidelines, opinions and recommendations into the curricula for the second grade of the grammar school, with clearly marked elements of the democratic culture, i.e., contents supporting and promoting the observance of diversity, active implementation of tolerance, and protection from discrimination within the education system.

*Promoting models for bilingual or multilingual education in consultations with representatives of the law*

The regulatory framework and strategic documents in the Republic of Serbia provide a broad foundation for using minority languages in education and for the participation of persons belonging to national minorities in the adoption of relevant decisions relating to the use of minority languages in the education process. In that regard, the authorities of the Republic of Serbia note that the Law on the Foundations of the Education System prescribes that the line minister shall adopt an elementary and secondary education programme for persons belonging to national minorities, upon a proposal of the national council of a national minority and an obtained opinion of the National Education Council, which includes representatives of national councils. Moreover, on the basis of the powers of the national councils in education, it is clear that such bodies as persons belonging to minorities in this field of social life may suggest, advocate and promote appropriate models of education which do not include education in minority languages, as shown in the example of the National Council of the Bulgarian National Minority, and the introduction of a model of bilingual Serbian-Bulgarian education in Bosilegrad, starting with the school year 2018/2019.

The Education Development Strategy emphasises the need to develop models of bilingual teaching in the elementary and secondary education for the national minorities who want that. As an important step, meetings, i.e., consultations and round tables will be held in the upcoming period with representatives of interested national councils of national minorities, for the purpose of promoting possible models of bilingual and multilingual education and the methods of their implementation.

The Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of Education 2021-2023 contains the measure called Development and Improvement of the existing Qualification Standards and Achievement Standards, curricula in pre-university education which provides for activities relating to the development of new curricula and improvement of all existing curricula in the elementary and secondary education in all subjects, among which curricula in languages and scripts of national minorities by cycles (the first and second cycle of the elementary school, general secondary and general education aspect of the vocational secondary education), as well as the programme Mother Tongue/Speech with Elements of National Culture.

With a view to informing the parents/legal representatives, as well as to promote education in languages of national minorities, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, within the framework of the project *Strengthening the protection of national minorities in Serbia* of the Council of Europe and the European Union, created a brochure on the opportunities for education in languages of national minorities in the Republic of Serbia, which has been translated in the languages of national minorities (Albanian, Bosnian,

Bulgarian, Bunjevac, Vlach, Hungarian, Macedonian, German, Roma, Romanian, Ruthenian, Slovak, Slovenian, Ukrainian, Croatian and Czech).

*5. Set up and operate, as soon as possible and at the latest by the due date of the fifth State Report, a sustainable and human rights-based data collection framework within the public administration and, on the basis of such data, set up, implement, monitor and review on a periodical basis concrete and effective measures aimed at producing long-term and measurable progress on the representation of national minorities in the public administration, in particular those living in remote areas and the most marginalised.*

As regards the establishment and putting into service of a sustainable framework for data collection based on human rights within the public administration, we highlight the fact that, within the framework of the project Promotion of Diversity and Equality in Serbia, which is a part of the joint programme of the European Union/Council of Europe “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022”, the “National criteria for the monitoring of the exercise of minority rights” which, *inter alia*, concern the data collection within the public administration. Further information thereof are provided in the answer to the recommendation 2 of the Committee of Ministers.

Effective measures aimed at creating progress in terms of the representation of national minorities in the public administration are provided for in a series of laws which were adopted in the reporting period. The amendments and supplements to the Civil Servants Law<sup>42</sup>, which have applied since 1 January 2019, elaborate Article 9 of this Law, which prescribes that, when employing persons for State authorities, it should be ensured that the national composition, *inter alia*, reflects the population structure as much as possible. Namely, amendments to Article 55 of the Law prescribes that, if a job vacancy is to be filled where a special requirement is knowledge of the national minority language and script, the job advertisement shall specifically list this requirement, as well as any written verification of its fulfilment. In addition, Article 57 prescribes that, in case of equally qualified candidates, the advantage in the selection of a candidate from the list will be given to a candidate who is a person belonging to a national minority. Namely, an executive is obliged to, within 15 days from the date of receipt of the list of candidates, employ the candidate who has fulfilled the selection criteria with the best result (paragraph 2 of this Article), while paragraph 3 of this Article prescribes that the executive of an authority, when adopting the decision referred to in paragraph 2 of this Article, shall give an advantage a candidate who is a person belonging to a national minority.

For the purpose of the implementation of this Law, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Regulation on the implementation of the Internal and Open Application Procedure in State Bodies,<sup>43</sup> which further regulates the method of giving an advantage to persons belonging to national minorities in the open competition procedure in all State authorities. Namely, this Regulation prescribes that, if there is a need for employing persons belonging to a national minority which is insufficiently represented among the employees, the advertised competition particularly indicates that persons belonging to that national minority

<sup>42</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 79/2005, 81/2005 - corr., 83/2005 - corr., 64/2007, 67/2007 - corr., 116/2008, 104/2009, 99/2014, 94/2017, 95/2018 and 157/2020

<sup>43</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 2/2019 and 67/2021

shall have an advantage on the list of candidates compared to other candidates who have achieved the same result in the open competition procedure. The need to employ persons belonging to a certain national minority results from the ratio of the number of employees who have identified themselves as persons belonging to a certain national minority in accordance with the data from the employee register in the public administration in accordance with the law and their representation in the population in the territory of the local self-government unit where the seat of a State authority, or area unit of the State authority where the job position is to be filled according to the results of the latest census, is located, under the condition that 30% of the employees in the public administration/area unit of the State authority have stated their national affiliation.

Also, this Regulation prescribes that, in case that the advertisement on the open competition states that there is a need to employ persons belonging to national minorities which are insufficiently represented among the employees, the first additional criterion for ranking candidates with the same score on the list for the selection shall be whether they belong to a national minority, which entails that the candidate has voluntarily stated that they belong to a national minority in their application. If there are multiple candidates with the same score who belong to a national minority, the advantage in ranking them against other candidates who have been evaluated in the same way shall be given to a candidate who has received better scores for behavioural competences (the second additional criterion). In case that they have received the same score for behavioural competences, the advantage shall be given to a candidate who has received better scores in the interview with the commission (third additional criterion). In case that they receive equal scores for the interview with the commission, the advantage shall be given to a candidate with better scores for special functional competences (fourth additional criterion).

The Public Agencies Act<sup>44</sup> also prescribes affirmative measures for employing persons belonging to national minorities; i.e., it prescribes that, if a job position is being filled for which the rulebook on internal organisation and systematisation of job positions states the knowledge of the language and script of a national minority as a special requirements, the advertisement about the public competition shall particularly state this requirement, as well as any written examinations of its fulfilment. It is also prescribed that the selection procedure will give an advantage to an equally qualified candidate who belongs to a national minority which is not sufficiently represented, who has fulfilled the selection criteria with a result which is the best and equal with another candidate, and, with a view to achieving full equality between persons belonging to a national minority and citizens who belong to the majority, if preconditions for giving an advantage to the candidate are provided for in this Act.

Article 10, paragraph 3 of the Law on Public Service Employees<sup>45</sup> prescribes that, with a view to achieving an adequate representation of persons belonging to national minorities, the advantage in employment in public services will primarily be given to equally qualified candidates who belong to national minorities. This provision was first elaborated in the decision from Article 52, according to which the advertisement about the open competition specifically states that a person belonging to a national minority has an advantage in the

<sup>44</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 18/2005, 81/2005 - corr. and 47/2018

<sup>45</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 113/2017, 95/2018, 86/2019, 157/2020 and 123/2021

selection process in case of equal evaluation of qualified candidates, if persons belonging to the national minority are insufficiently represented among the employees. The same Article defines that the representation of persons belonging to a national minority among employees is deemed to be insufficient if it is not proportional to their percentage in the population in the territory of the local self-government unit where the public service or its organisation unit is located, in line with the results of the latest census, provided that at least 30% of employees in the seat of the public service or its organisation unit have declared their national affiliation, according to the data from the Registry of Public Administration Employees, in accordance with the law. Adopting the decision on the selection of a candidate, the Selection Panel shall give advantage to equally qualified candidates who are persons belonging to national minorities, with a view to achieving an adequate representation of persons belonging to national minorities and full equality between persons belonging to national minorities and citizens belonging to the majority population. Other provisions of importance to the employment of persons belonging to national minorities in public services are provisions of the Law which concern the knowledge of the languages and scripts of national minorities which are in official use. Namely, pursuant to Article 30 of the Law, the rulebook on the organisation and systematisation of job positions in the public service, *inter alia*, determines the job positions for which a special requirement is knowledge of the language and script of a national minority which is in official use in the territory of the local self-government unit where the seat of the public service/its organisational unit is located. Also, such job positions may only be filled with persons who know the language and script of the national minority which is in official use. If the advertisement of a vacant job position is published by a public service located in the territory of the local self-government unit in which a national minority language is also in official use, the job advertisement shall also be published in one local or intermunicipal newspaper published in that language.

In order to establish data on the representation of national minorities in the public administration, it is important to note that the appropriate legal amendments have created conditions for their collection. Namely, the Law on the Central Registry of Compulsory Social Insurance<sup>46</sup> prescribes that the Central Registry of Compulsory Social Insurance shall assume the tasks of keeping the Register of Employed, Selected, Appointed and Recruited Persons at the beneficiaries of public funds which, in accordance with the applicable regulations, *inter alia*, the data on the national affiliation and the language in which the elementary education was completed shall be entered, in accordance with the principle of voluntary declaration as prescribed in the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia. The amendments and supplements of the Law on Civil Servants which have applied since 1 January 2019 prescribe that the Central Personnel Registry shall, according to the principle of voluntary declaration, keep data on the national affiliation, as well as the language in which the elementary, secondary and tertiary education was completed. Namely, Article 159 of the Law on Civil Servants prescribes that the Central Personnel Registry is used for human resource management and other purposes concerning labour relations, and that the Central Personnel Registry on civil servants and persons employed in all State bodies shall be maintained by the Human Resource Management Service. Article 160 of this Law prescribes that data on civil servants and persons employed in

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<sup>46</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 95/2018 and 91/2019

all State bodies shall be entered, concerning, inter alia, national affiliation, if the civil servant or person employed in a State body declares their national affiliation, as well as the language in which they have completed their elementary, secondary and tertiary education. Article 161, paragraph 6 prescribes that the Human Resource Management Service may process the data entered in to the Central Personnel Registry for the purpose of performing tasks from its purview and in accordance with the law governing the protection of personal data.

In early 2021, the Register of employed, elected, appointed and recruited persons within public funds beneficiaries was established in the information system CROSO. Data on the national affiliation, language of the completed elementary education and language of the completed secondary education shall be processed in accordance with the law governing personal data protection. As such data are a special type of personal data, entering such data is optional, and they shall be entered in accordance with a special procedure, and public fund beneficiaries shall submit such data on the facultative basis. The person who is authorised by a public fund beneficiary to enter data into the Register must have a signed explicit consent of the employee for processing such data. When entering data into the Register a person must confirm that they own a signed consent. A signed consent must be kept in the personnel file of the employee.

The Human Resource Management Service maintains the Central Personnel Registry which includes data relating to civil servants and public service employees. One of the data that the Human Resource Management Service keeps on civil servants is about their national affiliation, but only if the civil servant/employee in a State body has voluntarily declared their national affiliation. In December 2019, the Human Resource Management Service, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government and the Office for Information Technology and e-Government, with the support of the EU project “Design and implementation of HRMIS for civil servants”, started the development of a new Human Resource Information System in State bodies and bodies of the autonomous provinces and local self-government units, which will contain data on the national affiliation, if the employee voluntarily declares it, as well as the data on the language of that completed elementary, secondary and tertiary education. Activities are currently implemented for the purpose of finalisation of the establishment of the Information System, which may become operational only when it is fully adapted and aligned with the legislative framework, becomes fully secure and when the competent authorities decide that it is fully safe for public use. The Human Resource Information System may be expected to become operational only after 2022.

In view of the fact that, on the one hand, according to the existing data, a relatively small number of employees of the public administration at the State level of its organisation has declared their national affiliation, which is largely a consequence of the fact that such declaration is voluntary and that it may result in wrong conclusions on the representation of persons belonging to national minorities, and that, on the other hand, the Action Plan for the exercise of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, prescribes the development of an Analysis of the situation with a view to defining the criteria for prescribing the appropriate representation of national minorities in certain parts of the public sector, a special project titled “Support to affirmative measures for the employment of national minorities in the public sector” was executed. The project was executed with the resources from the IPA funds, where the beneficiary of the resources was the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-

Government. The project implementor was GFA Consulting Group GmbH, and its partners were the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development. The period of the execution of the project was from November 2018 to November 2019. The project value was 300,000 EUR.

The results of the project which will be implemented in the upcoming period are:

- Analysis of the best practice in five selected EU countries in terms of the employment of persons belonging to national minorities and implementation of affirmative measures for their employment
- Analysis of the legal framework in the Republic of Serbia which regulates employment and the legal status of employees who belong to the national minorities in the public sector;
- Development of a methodology for the implementation of a situation analysis as regards the number of employed persons belonging to national minorities in the State administration bodies;
- Proposed criteria and standards which define the adequate representation of persons belonging to national minorities in State administration bodies;
- Recommendations for the improvement of the existing legal framework.

As regards the collection of data on the representation of persons belonging to national minorities at the provincial level of the public administration organisation, it should be noted, first and foremost, that the amendments and supplements to the Law on Employees in the Autonomous Provinces and Local Self-government Units,<sup>47</sup> which have applied since 1 January 2019, prescribe that bodies of the autonomous provinces and LSGUs will use the Central Personnel Registry of State authorities to maintain the personnel registry of their employees, as well as that the Human Resource Management Service, upon a request of the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, will be able to process these data. Namely, Article 190 paragraphs 8 and 9 of this Law prescribe that bodies of the autonomous province, i.e., local self-government units, shall use the Central Personnel Registry of state authorities as an information system for keeping a personnel registry of its employees, in accordance with the law. The Human Resource Management Service, upon a proposal of the ministry in charge of the local self-government affairs, may process the data entered into the personnel registry of local self-government units for the purpose of performing tasks within the purview of the ministry, and in accordance with the law governing personal data protection.

Percentual data on the national structure of the employees in provincial bodies and expert services of the provincial government of the AP Vojvodina, as of 31 March 2022, are provided in the table below.

National affiliation	Percentage according to the 2011 status	Aggregate percentage for all authorities and expert services
Serbs	66.76	73.40
Albanians	0.12	0.00
Bosniaks	0.04	0.00
Bulgarians	0.08	0.00

<sup>47</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 21/2016, 113/2017, 95/2018 and 113/2017 - as amended

Bunjevci	0.85	0.20
Vlachs	0.85	0.00
Hungarians	13.00	4.87
Macedonians	0.54	0.20
Germans	0.17	0.10
Roma	2.19	0.51
Romanians	1.32	0.91
Russians	0.06	0.00
Rusyns	0.72	1.42
Slovaks	2.60	1.62
Slovenians	0.09	0.00
Ukrainians	0.22	0.20
Croats	2.43	2.13
Montenegrins	1.15	1.62
undeclared	4.19	12.18

For the purpose of finding the best solutions concerning higher representation of persons belonging to the Albanian national minority in State authorities, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, in collaboration with the Government of Serbia Coordination Body for the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja - CB's Office. Organised a social dialogue in Bujanovac on 11 March 2022, on the topic of the integration of the representation of persons belonging to the Albanian national minority in State institutions at the local level. As a result of the social dialogue which had been held between the representatives of state authorities and the National Council of the Albanian National Minority, a Working Group was created in order to develop a plan with short-term, medium-term and long-term objectives with a view to achieving higher integration of persons belonging to the Albanian national minority into State institutions at the local level. Participants in the activity of the Working Group include representatives of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Affairs, Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, National Council of the Albanian National Minority, Government of Serbia Coordination Body for the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja - CB's Office. Representatives of the OSCE Mission in Serbia attend meetings of the Working Group as observers. The contents of the first strategic document concerning the systemic monitoring of the integration of persons belonging to the Albanian national minority into State institutions at the local level will be aligned with the defined measures and objectives in the Action Plan for the exercise of the rights of national minorities.

The Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, in accordance with the obligation stipulated in the Action Plan for Chapter 23, developed an Impact Assessment of the application of by-laws adopted on the basis of the Law on the Employees in Autonomous Provinces and Local Self-Government Units (LSGUs). The objective of this assessment is to determine if provisions of the Law on the Employees in Autonomous Provinces and Local Self-Government Units, as well as by-laws adopted for the purpose of the implementation of this Law, are directly applied. For the purposes of the implementation of this assessment, the Ministry sent a letter to all local self-government units (145), of which 100 LSGUs (68.96%) sent their answers. Of the total number of LGSUs, one of the languages and scripts of national minorities was introduced in official use, either throughout its territory or in a part of it, in 43

LSGUs, of which 40 LSGs sent their answers, which makes up 93.02%, a satisfactory result for assessment.

An analysis of data obtained from the answers to the questionnaire may lead to the conclusion that local self-government units, as a rule, apply by-laws adopted for the purpose of the implementation of these regulations which prescribe affirmative measures aimed at contributing to a more adequate representation of persons belonging to national minorities among the employees in the bodies of autonomous provinces and LSGUs.

The analysis showed that in 28 LSGUs, of 40 LSGUs which had sent their answers to the questionnaire, and in which the language and script of a national minority is in official use, the rulebook on the organisation and systematisation of job positions determines the job position(s) for which the knowledge of the language and script of a national minority which is in official use, is a special requirement (70%), which is a considerable percentage, particularly because only 3 LSGUs (6.98%) which have the language and script of a national minority in the official use in its territory did not send their answers to the questionnaire.

As regards the analysis of the application of the Regulation on the implementation of the internal and public competition for filling job vacancies in autonomous provinces and local self-government units, the conclusion may be drawn that the provisions of this Regulation directly apply in the implementation of affirmative measures in the LSGUs which establish the need for adequate representation. Namely, the analysis showed that, of 36 LSGUs which sent their answer to the question above, 16 LSGUs gave an affirmative answer (44.44%), while 20 LSGUs gave a negative answer (55.56%).

The analysis shows that reasons for an incomplete application of this Regulation are, first and foremost, the prohibition of employment in the public sector, which has been introduced by the Law on the Method of Determining the Maximum Number of Public Sector Employees, which has ceased to apply on 31 December 2019, and continued with the limitation prescribed by the law governing the budget system, as it is necessary to obtain an approval of the Committee for granting approvals for new employment and additional work engagements for each new employment.

In addition, a number of LSGUs has an adequate representation of persons belonging to national minorities in the bodies of LSGUs, and, in that regard, there is no need to apply affirmative measures prescribed in the regulations. Also, one of the major reasons why LSGUs fail to undertake prescribed affirmative measures is an insufficient percentage of employees who have declared their national affiliation (it is necessary that at least 30% of the total number of employees declare their national affiliation), which is a precondition for a proper application of the above regulations which prescribe affirmative measures for the employment of persons belonging to national minorities. The analysis also resulted in recommendations to LSGUs to improve the application of the above regulations.

#### **IV Further measures which have been undertaken for improvement of the implementation of the Framework Convention**

##### **a) Measures undertaken for the implementation of the recommendations contained in Part 2 — Further Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers Resolution**

*6. Launch an information campaign well ahead of the next census, targeting specifically persons belonging to national minorities, raising their awareness about their interests in participating in the census, including on multiple affiliation, and about the advantages of participating in the census, about multiple affiliation, and about their respective rights, with a view to successfully combining the protection and promotion of minority rights with the collection of reliable information about the ethnic composition of the population.*

The population, households and housing censuses in the Republic of Serbia have been, due to the unfavourable epidemiological situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, postponed for October 2022. This has resulted in a postponement of a considerable number of preparatory activities, including activities relating to the media campaign.

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, from financial resources allocated for the Census, hired a specialised agency to prepare and implement the media campaign. The campaign for the 2022 Census will, similarly to the previous census, be uniform and in Serbian at the national level, while promotional materials for use at the local level (billboards, flyers etc.) will be translated to languages of national minorities. One of the promotional channels is the specialised website of the Census, which will contain all relevant information on the importance of the census, method of collection and use of census data, protection of census data, content of census questionnaire, opportunities for participation in the census, etc. The complete contents of the census website will be available in Serbian (in Cyrillic and Latin scripts) and in English, while methodological explanations, census questionnaires, public calls and other materials of importance for national minorities will be also available in languages of national minorities. In addition, the promotion of the census and raising awareness of citizens on the importance of collecting census data is to also be implemented through public statements of relevant persons from various social spheres, through printed and electronic media or through lectures, forums etc., which may be an opportunity for persons belonging to national minorities to address their target groups and emphasise the importance of census data for exercising the rights of national minorities. Also, national councils will organise special gatherings for the purpose of promotion of the census, and the Institute is open for helping everyone by delegating their representatives.

The promotion of the census and the campaign for informing persons belonging to national minorities on all relevant aspects of the implementation of the census, possibilities of participating in the data collection, importance of the action and the rights and freedoms of persons belonging to national minorities, was launched by the Institute considerably before the start of the official media campaign - during Q4 2021. In collaboration with OSCE, three workshops were implemented, where parents of children who use the services of a shelter, primarily persons belonging to the Roma national minority, learned about the fundamental characteristics and importance of the census. In addition, a meeting was held in Novi Pazar, organised by the National Council of the Bosniak National Minority, where talks were conducted with persons belonging to the Bosniak national minority from multiple local self-government units, about the importance of the census, method of collecting census data, and other matters of importance for the implementation of the census. All national councils have been informed on the fact that representatives of the Institute are available to participate in all

workshops, forums and meetings organised by the national councils for the purpose of informing persons belonging to national minorities in the best possible manner.

The official media promotion of the census will start in May 2022, when the Institute will launch the implementation of a single national campaign intended for persons belonging to national minorities. The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue is expected to prepare special information campaign in languages and scripts of national minorities in accordance with the operational plan of the Institute's media campaign.

*7. Ensure effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in the design of the census methodology and in the organisation and operation of such processes, including as enumerators; make all information on the census methodology and the aim of data collection available in the languages of national minorities.*

The census methodology for the 2022 Census is fully in accordance with the international recommendations jointly prepared by UNECE and Eurostat, and adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians,<sup>48</sup> as well as with the Regulations of the European Commission. Framework Regulation (EC)763/2008, Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2017/543, Commission Regulation (EU) 2017/712, Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2017/881 etc.).

All information on the 2022 Census which are of special importance for the national minorities, including methodological explanations, census questionnaires and information on the importance of the census, method and objective of data collection, method of use and protection of census data, etc., will be available on the census website and in the languages of national minorities. The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia organised and financed the translation of census questionnaires in 13 languages of national minorities (Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Bunjevac, Vlach, Hungarian, Macedonian, Roma, Romanian, Ruthenian, Slovak, Croatian and Montenegrin). The selected languages of minorities were those meeting the following criteria: that there are at least 10,000 persons belonging to the national minority, according to the 2011 Census data, that it has an established national council, and that the language and script are standardised. The process of translation was organised in such a manner that the Institute, after the ques had been translated by translators chosen by the national councils, placed the translation in the form of a questionnaire, which was verified by the national councils, which was followed by the Institute printing the Multilingual Collection of Questionnaires, which, in addition to the above languages, also contains questionnaires in Serbian (Cyrillic and Latin script) and English. Census-takers shall carry this Collection on site, in order for interviewees to read the questions which they have to answer in their mother tongue. In addition, the Institute, in collaboration with OSCE, organised the translation in seven more languages of national minorities (Greek, German, Polish, Russian, Slovenian, Ukrainian and Czech), which will result in census questionnaires being available at the census website in 20 languages of national minorities. Also, the competition will be translated to languages of national minorities.

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<sup>48</sup> [https://unece.org/DAM/stats/publications/2015/ECECES41\\_EN.pdf](https://unece.org/DAM/stats/publications/2015/ECECES41_EN.pdf)

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia has, for many years, been closely cooperating with representatives of national minorities and State authorities and organisation handling the affairs of national minorities, during the preparations and implementation of the census.

During 2019, consultations were held with various EU experts with the objective of a more efficient preparation and implementation of the census and assessment of its conformity with the European statistical standards. During the mission of a communication expert, meetings were also attended by representatives of national councils of national minorities and non-governmental organisations which handle Roma affairs.

In February 2020, representatives of the Coordination of National Councils of National Minorities participated in the consultations “Towards the Census”, organised by the Institute, where the Law on Census was presented,<sup>49</sup> together with the contents of census questionnaires. In 2020, multiple meetings were held with representatives of the National Council of the Roma National Minority for the purpose of reaching an agreement on the organisation and method of implementing the census of the Roma population living in informal and substandard settlements. Also, at the meeting with representatives of the National Council of the Bosniak National Minority, there was a conversation about the conditions for applying to work on the census and the method of selection of candidates for instructors and census-takers.

The Institute creates a census committee in every municipality and recruits instructors and census-takers to implement the census at the local level. Candidates who will work on the census are selected on the basis of pre-defined, uniform and publicly available criteria and procedures. All participants are recruited from the local population. Thus, representation of persons belonging to national minorities is ensured in multi-ethnic environments. At the specialised website of the Census in languages of national minorities, there are also notifications on the method and deadlines for candidates to apply. For implementing the census in substandard Roma settlements, Roma people who live in those settlements are recruited as additional assistants. In addition, it is planned that, similarly to the previous census, in certain municipalities with multi-ethnic populations, the census committees, which implement organisational and logistical tasks at the local level, should also include a representative of the Coordination of National Councils of National Minorities.

For the purpose of more effective inclusion of persons belonging to national minorities into the preparation and organisation of the population, household and housing census, in March 2021, in collaboration with the Coordination of National Councils of National Minorities, the Working Group for coordination of census activities relating to matters of importance for national minorities was created. The Working Group consists of, in addition to four representatives of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, three representatives of the Coordination (from three national councils) and one representative of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue.

The main duties of the Working Group are as follows:

- defining the areas of cooperation with national councils of national minorities as regards census activities, at the national and level locals;

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<sup>49</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 9/2020 and 35/2021

- recognising potential challenges and defining activities which may reduce the risk impact on the implementation of census activities;
- organising activities relating to the translation of census materials to languages of national minorities;
- defining the method of promotion of the importance of the census for persons belonging to national minorities;
- coordination of activities for the promotion of the census and activities of translation and distribution of promotional materials;
- other activities of importance for a proper implementation of the census.

In line with the positive experience from the previous census, the Working Group agreed that 88 representatives of the Coordination of National Councils of National Minorities shall be included in the census committees in local self-government units with a nationally diverse population (74 census committees).

In addition, assistant census-takers are to be recruited for support during with the census in substandard settlements, in collaboration with the National Council of the Roma National Minority.

The National Council of the Bosniak National Minority states, in the written contribution for this report, that the representative of this Council is included in the activity of the Working Group for coordination of census activities relating to matters of importance for national minorities, created by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. This Council states that any declaration in terms of ethnicity might, through the method of multiple affiliation, weaken the rights of the Bosniak national community and reinforce their assimilation.

*8. Ensure that the right of persons belonging to national minorities to establish religious institutions, organisations or associations is effectively guaranteed in law as well as in practice, including by ensuring that legal provisions governing religious communities do not allow for discrimination, including against those of a numerically smaller size, in particular with regard to access to legal personality or tax status.*

The Law on Churches and Religious Communities<sup>50</sup> establishes that “citizens have the freedom of association and public gathering for the purpose of expressing their religious affiliation in accordance with the Constitution and the law”, as well as that they have the “freedom of joining churches and religious communities in accordance with the law”. In that regard, it is clear that the right of persons belonging to national minorities to establish religious institutions, organisations or association is effectively guaranteed by the law. In practice, there are churches and religious communities in the Republic Serbia whose members are mostly persons belonging to national minorities, such as the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant churches, the Islamic Community of Serbia, the Islamic Community in Serbia, the Jewish Community, etc. This is in accordance with the cited Law, i.e., provisions which guarantee them an autonomous status in relation to state authorities, enjoyment and exercise of the right

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<sup>50</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 36/2006

to establish religious institutions, organisations and associations. In the Republic of Serbia, associations “Maria” and “Caritas” act within the Roman Catholic Church, “Gajret” within the Islamic Community of Serbia, “Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO)” within the Protestant Reformist Churches, “Chabad Serbia” within the Jewish Community, etc.

Also, the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination explicitly prescribes the prohibition of religious discrimination, which entails a conduct in contravention to the principle of free expression of faith or belief, i.e., “if an individual or a group of persons is denied the right to acquire, maintain, express and change faith or beliefs”, or “the right to express, be it privately or publicly, or act in accordance with his/her beliefs”. It also prohibits discrimination “against national minorities and their members on the grounds of religious affiliation, ethnic origin, religious beliefs and language”.

The Criminal Code<sup>51</sup> defines and prescribes numerous criminal acts as regards violation of the freedom of expression of faith, or discrimination on the grounds of religion, *inter alia*, “violation of the freedom of religion and performing religious service,” for which the perpetrator “shall be punished with a fine or imprisonment up to one year”, “ruining the reputation for racial, religious, ethnic or other affiliation” for which the perpetrator “shall be punished with a fine or imprisonment up to one year”, and “instigating national, racial or religious hatred or intolerance among the peoples and ethnic communities living in Serbia” for which the perpetrator “shall be punished by imprisonment of six months to five years”.

Legal provisions contained in the Law on Churches and Religious Communities, which regulates religious communities, do not allow any form of discrimination. The data that, since the adoption of the Law on Churches and Religious Communities (2006), as many as 27 new religious entities have been registered in the Republic of Serbia, which shows to which extent regulations and religious policy are of a liberal nature, even compared to many countries of the European Union. This connection cannot be denied by a simple distinction in terms and a differently prescribed procedure for gaining the legal personality for “traditional” and “non-traditional” religious entities. Namely, it is fully logical and justified that the competent State authority, in accordance with Article 18 of the Law, a religious entity which wants to be registered for the first time (“non-traditional”), and, unlike those who are only re-entered in the Register (“traditional”), request the “Decision on the establishment of a religious organisation with signatures and identification numbers of documents of at least 0.001% of adult citizens of Serbia or persons with a domicile in Serbia...”, “Statute or another document of a religious organisation...”, “overview of religious teachings, service and goals...”, and “data on permanent revenues of a religious organisation”. In 2006, at the time of the adoption of the Law on Churches and Religious Communities, it was not necessary to request such data again from the Serbian Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, Protestant churches, Islamic Community or the Jewish Community (the “traditional” religious entities), as they have a “centuries-old historical continuity and legal personality” in Serbia “in accordance with special Laws”, as far back as 1929, 1939 and 1931. Note that the existence and actions by any religious entity in the Republic of Serbia is not dependant on its registration. This not only provides an opportunity to gain legal personality, which is a necessary assumption for the participation in legal

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<sup>51</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 85/2005, 88/2005 - corr., 107/2005 - corr., 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016 and 35/2019

transactions and enjoyment of certain benefits, for example, gaining financial assistance from the state.

The fact that the legal order of the Republic of Serbia ensures the prohibition of the discrimination of religious institutions, organisations or associations which are smaller in numbers, both in terms of access to legal personality, and in terms of the tax status, is expressly reflected in the fact that the Value Added Tax Law<sup>52</sup> clearly prescribes that all registered churches and religious communities shall be exempt from the value added tax in case of activities of providing “services of religious nature”. Thus, in this case, too, there is no substantial practical discrimination of religious entities (“traditional” and “non-traditional” ones) in the Republic of Serbia.

*9. Closely monitor the impact of the privatisation process on minority media and commission a comprehensive and independent study on this subject; take the necessary measures to ensure editorial independence of private and public minority media, including those owned by political representatives of the national minorities.*

The process of privatisation, as an integral part of the media reform launched over ten years ago, was completed during the reporting period. Due to a fear that the process of privatisation might result in the extinction of media which broadcast their programme in languages of national minorities, the impact of this process has been continuously monitored, both by the state and by other relevant actors in the field of information, primarily associations of journalists and media experts. In that regard, a number of independent surveys and publications which, fully or partially, address that topic, were published over the previous few years. For instance, within the framework of the project "Multilingual media - three years after privatization",<sup>53</sup> a survey on effects of the privatisation to the sustainability and operation of multilingual media as published in December 2018 - dealing with issues such as, whether privatised media still have programmes in minority languages and to what extent, whether there have been any changes in the number of employees compared to 2016, when the previous survey was conducted, what the financial situation of the media is like, and whether project co-financing helps the sustainability of the programme in minority languages. The general conclusion of the survey above is that the position of privatised minority media has not significantly changed since 2016.<sup>54</sup> Also, the study “Media in languages of national minorities - research and analysis”,<sup>55</sup> was published in late 2020, an supported by the OSCE Mission in Serbia. Inter alia, it presents data on media which have media contents in minority languages, both in terms of the language of a national minority, and in terms of the type of media (radio, television, Internet and the press). According to the result of that survey, there are 163 media

<sup>52</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 84/2004, 86/2004 - as amended, 61/2005, 61/2007, 93/2012, 108/2013, 6/2014 - adjusted dinar amount, 68/2014 - as amended, 142/2014, 5/2015 - adjusted dinar amount, 83/2015, 5/2016 - adjusted dinar amount, 108/2016, 7/2017 - adjusted dinar amount, 113/2017, 13/2018 - adjusted dinar amount, 30/2018, 4/2019 - adjusted dinar amount., 72/2019, 8/2020 - adjusted dinar amount and 153/2020

<sup>53</sup> Project of the .Journalists’ Association of Serbia, co-financed from the budget of the Republic of Serbia and the Provincial Secretariat for Culture, Public Information and Relations with Religious Communities.

<sup>54</sup> The full survey, with the main conclusions of the survey presented in the languages of national minorities (Croatian, Ruthenian, Czech, Slovak, Romanian, Bulgarian, Albanian, Hungarian and Roma) are published on the website of the Journalists’ Association of Serbia <https://www.uns.org.rs/sr/desk/Privatizacija/71991/polozej-privatizovanih-manjinskih-medija-nije-se-znacajno-menjao-od-2016-godine-.html>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/a/473682.pdf>

in the Republic of Serbia which broadcast fully or partially in languages of national minorities. These are media published by national councils of national minorities, and privately owned media, including media of civil society organisations.<sup>56</sup> The public policy of the Republic of Serbia, embodied by the Strategy for the Development of Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025, the results of this and other surveys, as well as the fact that an accelerated technological development inevitably poses the question of elaborating the possibilities for larger exploitation of the potentials of social networks and other platforms in information in minority languages, lead to the conclusion that the topics of the “developed study” on the privatisation of media in the context of the exercise of minority rights has been largely outdated.

The financial independence of media is one of the preconditions for ensuring independent editorial policy of the media. The media reform, which was legally shaped by the 2014 laws, consisted in the fact that the state had abandoned the ownership of the media, *inter alia*, with the objective of reducing any kind of impact on the functioning and operation of the media. In accordance with the applicable legal solutions, the state intervenes in the media sphere in order to ensure quality information, free of political, economic and other influences, to citizens, including persons belonging to national minorities, through open competitions for co-financing. In addition, as regards the economic status of minority media, it should be noted that contents of such media are not commercial in nature, where through open competitions for financing is an important source of income for such media and their financial sustainability in the circumstances of a free market competition. Within the framework of the project “Open Data - a Tool for Better Project Co-Financing of Media Content”, executed by the Institute for Sustainable Communities in collaboration with the OSCE Mission in Serbia and the Ministry of Culture and Information, data were published which has been obtained in the open competition procedure for co-financing, which had been implemented by the public authorities at all levels from early 2015 to December 2021. The data do not include so-called individual allowances, i.e., financial resources allocated by a decision of the executive of the authority competent for public information affairs, without any public competition. As regards minority contents of private media, including the media of civil society organisations, data indicate that there was a slight increase of the amount of financial resources allocated for such content in the reporting period. Minority contents in 2017 were co-financed in the total amount of 763,658 EUR. In 2021, more specifically until December 2021, the total amount allocated for such contents through project co-financing was 841,669 EUR.<sup>57</sup>

Ensuring a sustainable editorial independence of media is a challenge for the majority of democratic countries, even the most developed ones with the so-called tradition of a high level of media freedoms. The competent authorities of the Republic of Serbia are re-stating their position that it is appropriate to further improve the mechanisms for protection of the editorial independence of media, in such a manner as not to violate the principle of media autonomy, which arises from Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. In addition to respecting the independence of

<sup>56</sup> A statistical and visual overview of the data (charts, maps etc.) obtained in surveys created by the media expert Nedim Sejdinović and the Institute for Sustainable Communities are available at: [https://tixwitchy.shinyapps.io/minority\\_media/](https://tixwitchy.shinyapps.io/minority_media/)

<sup>57</sup> Available at <https://projektnosufinansiranjehtmlpublikacija.netlify.app/> and the Open Data Portal of the Republic of Serbia <https://data.gov.rs/sr/datasets/rezultati-konkursa-za-projektno-sufinansiranja-medijskikh-sadrzhaja/>

media, as regards media whose indirect founders are national councils of national minorities, the state must take care to observe the minority self-government which is guaranteed by the Constitution, laws and ratified international treaties. The Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia<sup>58</sup> provides for an amendment of the Law on Public Information and Media, in order to establish the guarantees of the editorial independence of media whose founders are national councils of national minorities. Nevertheless, amendments to the law are not a necessary condition for establishing guarantees of the editorial independence of media with the publishers of media whose founders are national councils of national minorities, i.e., developing an internal document which would serve as the basis for further regulation of relations between the founder/owner of the media themselves, whose development at this time depends only on the will of the founders (national council of a national minority). In that regard, there is a positive example of a 2019 pilot project, within which the Institution for Journalism and Publishing “Ruske slovo” and the National Council of the Ruthenian National Minority, with the mediation of the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina and the OSCE Mission in Serbia, developed a self-regulating mechanism which will ensure internal procedures, rules and index for improving the editorial independence and media professionalism in the Institution for Journalism and Publishing “Ruske slovo”. This publishing house has expressed its readiness to share its knowledge and experience with other minority media which have been founded by national councils of national minorities.

*10. In areas traditionally inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities or where they live in substantial numbers, collect data on the number of minority languages spoken by civil servants in State, provincial and local administrations and, in light of such data, take the necessary measures including adequate training targeting persons belonging to the national minorities to ensure that the number of minority languages spoken by civil servants in State, provincial and local administrations corresponds to the greatest possible extent to the proportion of the population speaking minority languages; inform all persons belonging to national minorities, in the areas concerned, that they are entitled to use their minority language in contacts with the State, provincial and local administration; commission a study in order to evaluate the level of implementation of the legal provisions on the official use of minority languages and ensure that in all municipalities where the legal requirements are met minority languages are effectively in official use.*

#### *Data collection, incentives and trainings*

The database, which also includes the data on the number of minority languages spoken by the employees in the provincial and local administration in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, is available at the website of the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities – National Communities.<sup>59</sup> The database has been created on the basis of a poll which is implemented by the Secretariat every year.

<sup>58</sup> *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 148/2020.

<sup>59</sup> [http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/sluzbeno\\_jezik/glavnalist.php](http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/sluzbeno_jezik/glavnalist.php)

Issues included in the poll concern, *inter alia*: mother tongue of the employees; language in which the employed persons acquired their elementary and secondary education; number of employed persons who speak the language of national minority which is in official use; total number of job positions for which it is required to speak the language of a national minority, in accordance with the act on systematisation; funds allocated by the Secretariat in the previous period in competitions for the improvement of multilingualism in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina; in what manner the parties are enabled to use the language of a national minority which is in official use; availability of forms and other templates which are used by the parties in languages of national minorities which are in official use, etc.

According to the data from this database, of a total of 45 local self-government units in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, the act on the systematisation of job positions provides for job positions in 23 local self-government units in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for which it is required to speak the language of a national minority which is in official use. On the other hand, in 23 authorities, organisations and agencies of the AP Vojvodina, such a requirement does not exist for certain job positions in four authorities.

The total number of employees in the public administration in the territory of AP Vojvodina is 6,774 (authorities of local self-government units - 5,594, authorities of AP Vojvodina - 1,180). The tables below contain relevant data.

Mother tongue of the employees

Serbian language	5,270 (77,8%)
Hungarian language	613 (9,05%)
other	443 (6,54%)
undeclared	176 (2,6%)
Slovak language	122 (1,8%)
Romanian language	72 (1,06%)
Croatian language	36 (0,53%)
Ruthenian language	29 (0,43%)
Montenegrin language	13 (0,19%)

Language in which the employed persons acquired their elementary and secondary education

Serbian language	5,643 (83,3%)
Hungarian language	503 (7,43%)
other	442 (6,52%)
Slovak language	89 (1,31%)
Romanian language	45 (0,66%)
Croatian language	24 (0,35%)
undeclared	13 (0,19%)
Ruthenian language	11 (0,16%)
Montenegrin language	4 (0,06%)

Number of employed persons who speak the language of national minority which is in official use

Hungarian language	813
Croatian language	310
Slovak language	147
Romanian language	65

Montenegrin language	46
Ruthenian language	40
other	19

Other than the data contained in the Fourth State Report relating to the number of civil servants who speak minority languages, the then Office for Human and Minority Rights continued to collect appropriate data in the reporting period. For the purposes of developing a special study which would be a result of the cooperation between the Office for Human and Minority Rights of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the OSCE Mission in the Republic of Serbia, and whose main purpose is to serve as a guide for the application of regulations which govern the matter of the use of languages and scripts of national minorities in local self-government units (LSGUs) in the Republic of Serbia, an extensive questionnaire has been created, which has been distributed to all local self-government units in the Republic of Serbia (which will be discussed further at appropriate times).

Of the total of 172 LSGUs, and urban municipalities to which this questionnaire has been sent, the official use of the languages and scripts of national minorities exist in 54. Answers have been sent by 32 LSGUs where the official use of the languages and scripts of national minorities exists (50.26%), of which 27 LSGUs are those where the official use of the languages and scripts covers their entire territory.

The first set of questions in the questionnaire concern personnel capacities of LSGUs. The question whether the systematisation of job positions in the administration prescribes that speaking one of the languages of national minorities which are in official use is required for the job, 17 LSGUs answered affirmatively, which is 53.12 % of the total number of LSGUs where the language and script of the national minority is in official use and which have sent their answers. The requirement to speak one of the languages of national minorities which are in official use due to the systematisation of job positions in the administration, is not prescribed in 15 LSGUs, i.e., 46.87%, where the language and script of a national minority is in official use and which have sent their answers. The records on mother tongues of employees in the administration are kept by 20 LSGUs, i.e., 62.5 %, while 12 LSGUs, i.e., 37.5% of LSGUs which have sent their answers to this questionnaire and where languages and scripts of national minorities are in official use, do not keep such records.

The National Council of the Bosniak National Minority states, in a written contribution for this report, that there are no records on the number of civil servants in State or local administration speak the Bosnian language, and that no support measures are being undertaken, nor are training being implemented for the use of the Bosnian language.

Through an Open Competition for allocation of budgetary means to authorities and organisations in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina with the official use of the language and script of national minorities/national communities, the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities – National Communities allocates funds from the budget of AP Vojvodina for the improvement of the official use of languages and scripts of national minorities. Funds are allocated to authorities of local self-government units whose statute defines the official use of languages and scripts of national minorities and to local communities in the territories of towns and municipalities, as well as other authorities, organisations, agencies and institutions which are beneficiaries of budgetary

resources and which have the seat in the territory of a local self-government (schools, public enterprises etc.). Funds are, *inter alia*, allocated for the development of a system of electronic administration for multilingual conditions.

In addition to the above:, the Secretariat also organises examinations in foreign languages and language of national minorities for activities in the administration bodies and issues certificates of the knowledge of a foreign language/language of a national minority. Until 2020, the Secretariat used to also organise seminars in terminology and language in the field of law in languages of national minorities. The first seminar on the official use of the Hungarian language in administration bodies and judiciary was organised in 2003. Due to the wide interest, the seminar has been regularly taking place each year since. The objective of these seminars is professional development of persons who possess knowledge of the Hungarian language, who are employed in administration bodies or in the judiciary, and who conduct proceedings and/or communicate with parties in that language. The first such seminar in Romanian was organised in 2004.

The Human Resource Management Service of the Provincial Government, within the framework of its General Training Programme in the field of professional development and development of language competences, organises training in languages of national minorities, whose objective is to make trainees able to use languages of national minorities, where the identified target group are all employees in provincial authorities. According to the data of the Service for 2011-2014, there were 10 trainees who had completed their training in Hungarian. In the period 2015-2018, no training was organised, due to the low interest of potential trainees. In 2019, training in Hungarian was organised for 6 trainees. In 2020 and 2021, no training was organised due to the epidemiological reasons. In addition to the opportunities for the Service to organise the trainings in all languages of national minorities which are in official use in provincial bodies, the training is also organised just for Hungarian, and not each year, due to the low interest of potential trainees. The use of this opportunity for free education of persons employed in provincial bodies increases the language capacity and quality of personnel in provincial bodies.

Similar measures are also undertaken at the State level. Each year, the National Academy for Public Administration develops programmes for professional development of employees in State bodies and local self-government units. These programmes include trainings in the protection of human rights.

Professional development of employees in local self-governments is based on the following training programmes: General Training Programme, Programme for the training of executives and special training programmes in accordance with the specific needs from the scope and purview of local self-government units. General Training Programme for employees in local self-government units is adopted each year by the Government, upon a proposal of the National Academy for Public Administration, in accordance with the law. This programme, within the framework of the General Training Programme of continued professional development, includes, *inter alia*, the field of professional development called Development of language competences, within which, with a view to training employees to use languages of national minorities, training programmes are defined for learning languages of national minorities, namely: Hungarian and Albanian language (levels A1, A2, N1 and B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) Also, with a view to improving

the knowledge of Serbian for employed persons belonging to national minorities in local self-government units so they would actively use the language in their working environment, the possibility to learn Serbian is also provided for (levels B1, B2 and C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages).

Also, in accordance with this law, local self-government units adopt special programmes for professional development, on the basis of a previously conducted analysis of needs for professional development, with a view to raising the level of knowledge and skills of employees in certain job positions or type of jobs from the original scope and purview of the local self-government units.

The 2021 General Training Programme for Civil Servants provides for the training in Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities. Also, the online training in Rights of persons belonging to minorities with an emphasis on the official use of languages and scripts of national minorities is available at the LMS platform of the Academy. In collaboration with OSCE, another advanced online training, which will also concern the official use of languages and scripts of national minorities, is under development.

The 2021 General Training Programme for Employees in Local Self-Government Units, within its thematic area Development of language competences, provides for training in Hungarian and Albanian (levels A1, A2, B1, B2). The 2021 Sectoral Programme of continued professional development for Employees in Local Self-Government Units provides for the training Exercise of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities in local self-government units.

*Informing members of minorities, studies on the implementation of legal provisions and effective use of languages in official use*

Informing members of national minorities about their right to use their minority language in communication with the state, provincial and local administration is carried out in different manners, most often through information boards and other notices for clients, through the websites of relevant authorities, organisations and services, as well as through information booklets on their work, which must be published on their websites. In fact, according to the Decree on More Specific Requirements for the Development and Implementation of the Web Presentation of Authorities<sup>60</sup>, which regulates the development and implementation of web presentations of state authorities and organisations, bodies and organisations of provincial autonomy, bodies and organisations of local self-government units, institutions, public companies, special bodies performing the regulatory function and legal and natural entities entrusted with public powers. The aforementioned entities are obliged to create a web presentation in the language and script that are in the official use in accordance with the regulation governing the official use of languages and scripts. Also, according to the Instructions for the Preparation and Publication of Information Booklets on Work<sup>61</sup> pertaining to state authorities, bodies of territorial autonomy, local self-government bodies and organisations entrusted with the exercise of public powers, the aforementioned entities shall

<sup>60</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 104/ 2018

<sup>61</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 68/2010 and 10/2022 – other instructions

prepare information booklets in the languages of national minorities that are in official use in the territory that includes their seat. The information booklet in the language of the national minority shall be published in the version of the web-presentation that was created in the language of that national minority. If there is no version of the web-presentation in the language of the national minority, the information booklet prepared in the language of the national minority shall be published in the Serbian version of the web-presentation.

In the reporting period, several studies were conducted on the implementation of legal provisions on the right of members of national minorities to use their minority language in communication with the public, provincial and local administration. As part of the "Strengthening the Protection of National Minorities in Serbia" project, which is a part of the joint programme of the European Union/Council of Europe entitled "Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey", implemented in the period from 2016 to 2018, an independent consultant issued the " Report on the Use of Languages of National Minorities in Communication with State Authorities". This report states that the *analysis and previous professional and supervisory work activities lead to the conclusion that the Serbian legal framework in terms of minority rights in general, and in particular in terms of the use of the language of national minorities in dealings with the administration, is quite advanced, complex and demanding*, but also states that there is a lot of room for improvement. Based on the recommendations from the aforementioned report and the adopted amended legislative framework, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government sent an official letter to the local self-government units with a proposal for measures that they could take to make minority languages more visible and more widely used.

Within the same project, "Analysis of the Normative Framework on the Use of Languages of National Minorities in Communication with State Authorities" was prepared. In addition, in order to present the news regarding the official use of minority languages and scripts in the light of amendments to the legal regime that were adopted in 2018, round tables were organised within the project, in cooperation with five municipalities (Bosilegrad, Bujanovac, Vranje, Medveđa and Sombor), with the participation of representatives of city/municipal administrations, councils for inter-ethnic relations, national councils of national minorities and the non-governmental sector.

The joint publication/handbook entitled "Introduction to Exercising the Right to the Official Use of Languages and Scripts of National Minorities"<sup>62</sup> prepared by the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, the National Secretariat for Legislation, the Protector of Citizens and the Council of Europe was presented at the round tables. The publication is intended for employees in local self-government units and it gives overview of the legal novelties in the field of official use of languages and scripts of national minorities. It aims to help municipal/city administrations in improving the implementation of the amended legal framework that regulates the status of national councils of national minorities, protection of rights and freedoms of national minorities and the official use of languages and scripts, and in accordance with the provisions and recommendations of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter on Regional or Minority

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[https://www.pravamanjina.rs/images/Uvod\\_u\\_ostvarivanje\\_prava\\_na\\_sluC5%BEBenu\\_upotrebu\\_jezika\\_i\\_pisama\\_nacion\\_alnih\\_manjina\\_Mar\\_2019.pdf](https://www.pravamanjina.rs/images/Uvod_u_ostvarivanje_prava_na_sluC5%BEBenu_upotrebu_jezika_i_pisama_nacion_alnih_manjina_Mar_2019.pdf)

Languages, as well as good international practice. The Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government submitted the aforementioned textbook to city/municipal administrations.

Also, as mentioned, in cooperation with the OSCE Mission in the Republic of Serbia, an analysis was prepared on the "Use of Languages and Scripts of National Minorities in Local Self-Government Units in the Republic of Serbia". The main purpose of this analysis is to serve as a guide for the application of the regulations governing the use of languages and scripts of national minorities in local self-government units in the Republic of Serbia, or rather to improve the use of languages and scripts of national minorities by the authorities of local self-government units.

In addition, the Protector of Citizens prepared a Special Report on the Official Use of the Albanian Language and Script, a Special Report on the Official Use of the Hungarian Language and Script, and a Special Report on the Official Use of the Bulgarian Language and Script, and each of the reports was translated into the language of the national minority it refers to.<sup>63</sup>

In 2018, the provincial ombudsman conducted a study on the "Knowledge of Languages and Scripts of National Minorities in Official Use in Provincial Administration Bodies"<sup>64</sup>, while in 2019, a study was prepared on the "Use of Languages and Scripts of National Minorities in Courts and Prosecutor's Offices in the Republic of Serbia".<sup>65</sup>

The effective use of minority languages in all municipalities, in which the legal conditions are met, is achieved in all forms of official use, which will be discussed in more detail in the corresponding parts of the Report. However, certain problems have been observed in practice. The existing problems are mainly related to insufficient financial resources and insufficient capacities in terms of knowledge of minority languages of officers in public authorities, insufficient knowledge and use of their rights when it comes to members of national minorities, as well as the widespread attitude that the use of minority languages actually slows down, that is, makes it impossible to conduct the procedure effectively.

On the other hand, it must be noted that the increase in professional capacities and the role of national councils in these processes further encouraged members of national minorities to use their rights referring to the use of their language and script, even in some proceedings before state authorities in which such requests were very rare. Also, the state has on several occasions undertaken activities aimed primarily at municipal administrations in terms of presentation and affirmation of the abovementioned rights. In addition, by passing several regulations - and above all the Law on Employees in Autonomous Provinces and Local Self-Government Units - the state enabled the employment of staff who speak minority languages, which is a necessary prerequisite for improving the relations of authorities, primarily local authorities, with clients belonging to a national minority.

Problems in practice also arise due to the fact that the laws regulating procedures (administrative, criminal, litigation and non-litigation proceedings) have not been translated into all languages of national minorities in official use, so it is difficult to implement such procedures by employees in the administration and judiciary. Also, important material laws in

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.ombudsman.rs/index.php/izvestaji/posebnii-izvestaji>

<sup>64</sup> [https://www.ombudsmanapv.org/riv/attachments/article/2131/Istrazivanje\\_sluz\\_upotreba\\_jezika\\_2018-finall.pdf](https://www.ombudsmanapv.org/riv/attachments/article/2131/Istrazivanje_sluz_upotreba_jezika_2018-finall.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/a/461806.pdf>

the field of criminal and civil law are not available in all languages of national minorities in official use. In this regard, it is important to point out that the amendments to the Law on National Councils of National Minorities<sup>66</sup> foresee a new authorisation for national councils - to initiate the publication of the most important laws of the Republic of Serbia in the language of the national minority that is in official use and to provide professional and other assistance, in accordance with their possibilities, in the translation process. Since the introduction of such authority of the national councils in the legal system of the Republic of Serbia, there have been no initiatives originating from the national councils for the translation of any law. The lack of legal texts in minority languages significantly affects the practical exercise of the language rights of members of national minorities, especially in administrative procedures and other actions with the administration.

*11. Increase the availability and quality of teaching in the state language, including when it is taught as a second language, through a balanced approach that includes parallel measures for the protection and promotion of minority languages, and continue with the further development of teaching material in minority languages.*

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development is actively working to improve the availability and quality of education for members of national minorities in the Republic of Serbia, fully respecting international standards in this area. With the aim of improving the quality of education for students who complete their entire education in their mother tongue, which is the language of a national minority, and attend the compulsory course of Serbian as Non-Native Language, the Ministry adopted a new curriculum for the course of Serbian as Non-Native Language, which consists of two programmes : Programme A - for students whose mother tongue belongs to non-Slavic languages and who live in homogeneous environments (basic standard level); Programme B - for students whose mother tongue belongs to the Slavic languages and who live in multinational environments (intermediate-advanced standard level). A series of training sessions for the implementation of the new curriculum were implemented, which included all teachers who teach this course. The document General Achievement Standards for the course of Serbian as a Non-Native Language for the End of the First and Second Cycles of Compulsory Education, General Secondary Education and Primary Education for Adults was also adopted. The course is carried out by three classes per week.

An example of good practice was introduced through the project entitled "Implementation of Recommendations for Improving the Teaching of Serbian as a Non-Native Language in Primary Schools in Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa" by hiring assistants for the Serbian language in schools where teaching is carried out in the Albanian language. With the support of the project entitled "Promotion of Diversity and Equality in Serbia", implemented with the support of the Council of Europe, this school year, as in previous years, six teaching assistants were hired. In schools that are part of the long-term project, a greater interest of students in learning Serbian, their progress in language skills, motivation to participate in class and in extracurricular activities was observed. Knowledge testing of primary school students

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<sup>66</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 72/2009, 20/2014 – decision of the Constitutional Court, 55/2014 and 47/2018

in Preševo and Bujanovac, as a follow-up to the performance of teachers and assistants in the course of Serbian as Non-Native Language, showed that students who had the support of Serbian language assistants, in addition to teachers, achieved a significantly better average result.

A good example is the organisation of a public presentation of selected works from the "Examples of Successful Extracurricular Activities" competition, among which were those that encourage the learning of Serbian as a non-native language. The Institute for the Improvement of Education carries out the monitoring of this programme and analyses the reviewed student tests, with the aim of improving the teaching and learning process and raising the level of teaching quality of Serbian as Non-Native Language. Teachers who teach that subject are provided with Teacher Training for the implementation of the teaching and learning programme for the course of Serbian as a non-native language for the first and second cycle of compulsory education and general secondary education, and the next round of training is also planned. Handbooks<sup>67</sup> containing recommended lexicon for the course of Serbian as Non-Native Language have also been prepared. For students belonging to national minorities, returnees after readmission, who do not speak the Serbian language, a special programme of the course of Serbian as a Foreign Language has been prepared. Standards of academic achievements for all levels of learning were developed for this course, and a handbook was created for teachers who encounter students in their work whose native language is not Serbian. As a special form of support, training was provided under the title Teacher Training Programme for the Implementation of the Standards and Teaching and Learning Programme for Serbian as a Foreign Language, which will continue during the current school year. The website of the Institute for the Improvement of Education and Training contains all relevant documents, information, tools and resources that provide support in improving teaching practice to teachers who teach in the languages of national minorities, to teachers who teach Serbian as Non-Native Language and Serbian as a Foreign Language.

Bearing in mind the organisation of teaching according to the hybrid model, and in certain periods distance teaching, the Ministry, together with the OSCE Mission and with the significant support of educational advisers who reviewed the produced educational material, recorded 300 online lessons for the compulsory course of Serbian as a non-native language, according to models A and B, for students who attend classes in one of the 8 languages of national minorities. Filming was conducted in Subotica and Bujanovac. Along with the RTS Planet's OTT platform, the recorded educational material is available to students who follow classes via the "My School" sub-website.<sup>68</sup>

Recognising the importance of improving the teaching of languages, both native and non-native, as well as foreign, within the process of affirming multilingualism in the AP of Vojvodina, and with the aim of improving education in the languages of national minorities, the Pedagogical Institute of Vojvodina has designed an educational platform with a special section intended for teachers of the Serbian as Non-Native Language<sup>69</sup>. The platform enables the networking of a total of 62 teachers of this subject as well as researchers and scientific workers who deal with language teaching methods. In addition, the platform enables the

<sup>67</sup> <https://zuov.gov.rs/izdanja-zavoda/>

<sup>68</sup> <https://mojaskola.rtsplaneta.rs/list/772/srpski-kao-nematernji-jezik>

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.pzv.edu.rs/>

exchange of educational material that can be used directly and indirectly in the teaching of this subject in the first and second cycle of compulsory education and general secondary education, respecting the general standards of student achievement and in accordance with the Teaching and Learning Programme for the course of Serbian as Non-Native Language for the first and second cycles of compulsory education and general secondary education. Also, the platform provides the possibility of discussion and exchange of experience and examples of good practice between users of the platform. The platform also published the results of research on ways to improve the teaching of Serbian as Non-Native Language.

As part of the Platform for Teachers of Serbian as a Non-Native Language programme, the Pedagogical Institute of Vojvodina, together with the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities - National Communities, organised a conference on the *Theoretical and Methodological Framework of Language Teaching in Primary Schools for Teachers of the Serbian Language, Serbian as a Non-Native Language and the English Language*. The conference is part of the research on teachers' needs for acquiring new and strengthening existing competencies important for improving and modernising the educational process through professional training, in order to improve the educational process in Vojvodina. 56 teachers of Serbian, Hungarian and English languages in primary schools in 17 cities in the territory of the AP of Vojvodina were surveyed. In addition to showing that language teachers in primary schools improve professionally at seminars and training sessions, and that they use the acquired knowledge in teaching, the data obtained in this research also show their great interest in further professional development. However, when asked in which areas they would improve professionally, teachers most often gave general answers. Therefore, the specification of topics or fields of further improvement should be guided by professional monitoring and a systematic plan. The data also show that teachers are very rarely authors/co-authors or implementers of professional development programmes or authors/co-authors of professional articles/textbooks, and it is necessary to strengthen them in that field and motivate them with this kind of professional engagement.

The education development strategy plans to develop new and improve all existing teaching and learning programmes in primary and secondary education of all subjects, among which are teaching and learning programmes in the language and script of national minorities by cycle (first and second cycle of basic education, general secondary education and the general education part in secondary vocational education), as well as the Mother Tongue/Speech with Elements of National Culture programme.

The Institute for the Evaluation of the Quality of Education and Training conducts professional work in the field of monitoring and evaluation of the degree of achievement of the goals of education and training, performance standards by levels and types of education, through four organisational units: Centre for Quality Assurance of Institutions, Centre for Examinations, Centre for International, national tests and research and development activities and the Centre for Educational Technology. Part of the competence of the Examination Centre refers to the final examination at the end of primary education, which has been implemented since the 2010/11 school year in eight languages of national minorities - Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Ruthenian, Slovak and Croatian. The institute prepares tests in the mother tongue, while the tasks for the Mathematics test and for the combined test are translated into the mentioned languages. Students, members of national minorities, receive all

these tests in June and August, as well as tests for trial testing. In addition, the Institute for the Evaluation of the Quality of Education publishes collections of tasks for the preparation of the final exam in native languages every year. At the same time, the Institute creates a test for the final exam in the native language of the participants for adult participants, members of national minorities attending the programme for functional basic education of adults.

In the Centre for the Quality Assurance of Institutions, in the previous period General Performance Standards for the end of compulsory education for the Course Mother Language and Literature (2016) and General Standards for the end of general secondary education and secondary vocational education for the subject Mother Language and Literature (2018) were developed and handbooks in the languages of national minorities were also published: Bosnian; Romanian; Slovakian; Ruthenian; Hungarian; Croatian; Albanian; Bulgarian. Training sessions for the implementation of standards were held during 2019. General performance standards for the Mother Tongue for the end of the first cycle of primary education were developed in 2020, and handbooks in the languages of national minorities were published for: Romanian; Hungarian; Croatian; Bulgarian; Bosnian; Albanian; Slovakian; Ruthenian languages. In 2020, 40 training sessions were held, attended by 953 teachers: Romanian language (31); Hungarian language (403); Croatian language (16); Bulgarian language (41); Bosnian language (285); Albanian language (124); Slovak language (39); Ruthenian language (14).

After the state of emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in the country in 2020, the education system of the Republic of Serbia successfully organised educational work through distance learning in the Serbian language and in eight languages of national minorities. In the preparation and implementation of educational content during the state of emergency, as well as during the 2020/21 and 2021/22 school years, more than 400 teachers participated, and 7,077 educational programmes were recorded in eight languages of national minorities.

In 2022, the Centre for International, National Examinations and Development and Research is planning to implement the PISA 2022 research, which includes testing students in the Hungarian language. The Centre also prepares reports for each school showing the results of the students from the final exam, which are used for self-evaluation and improvement of the school's work. At the national level, two reports are prepared: a report on the results of the final exam for students who took the exam in the Serbian language and a report for students belonging to national minorities. These reports should help to take systemic measures to improve the quality of education for all students in the Republic of Serbia.

In the addendum for the preparation of this report, the Society for Ruthenian Language, Literature and Culture states that for many years it has been taking care of raising the linguistic culture of children and students in cooperation with competent institutions. As early as in 1996, the society started implementing the project entitled "Development and Improvement of the Ruthenian Language of Children, Students and Youth", which was evaluated as very successful and is still being implemented, and in the coming period, it will be extended to the study of the Ruthenian language for interested adults. Since 2000, the society has been the organiser of the national competition, and since 2009, the organiser of the interdistrict competition in Ruthenian language and language culture for primary school students. The publishing activity of the Society takes place within the framework of seven editions, namely: Education (published 12

titles), Preschool education (10), Literature (10), Dictionaries (4), Department (4), Artistic creativity (21), Stolen from oblivion (24). One of the most significant editions of the Society in 2022 will be the Orthography of the Ruthenian language with an orthographic dictionary.

*12. Monitor and periodically review the implementation of the Law on National Councils of National Minorities in consultation with the councils themselves, and commission an independent qualitative study on the functioning of the councils, including an assessment of their inclusivity, independence and representativeness, as well as their capacity to initiate intercultural dialogue and strengthen inter-ethnic relations; devise and implement new ways to represent and effectively include members of national minorities in the decision-making process at the local level, in all areas where national minorities traditionally live or where they live in large numbers, including larger cities, and further strengthen the resources allocated to the budget fund for national minorities in accordance with economic possibilities.*

In order to continuously improve the exercise of the rights of members of national minorities, amendments to the Law on National Councils of National Minorities were adopted in June 2018. The reasons for the adoption of this law stemmed from the need to harmonise the Law with the decision of the Constitutional Court from January 2014, the need to harmonise certain solutions contained in this law and systemic laws that regulate certain areas of social life in which the councils exercise their powers, and the need to specify and regulate certain issues more closely. A special group of reasons for amendments to the Law were the recommendations of relevant international bodies, which were sent to the Republic of Serbia a contracting party as part of the monitoring of the implementation of international agreements on the protection of national minorities. In this sense, it should be emphasised that the Advisory Committee suggested that the amendments to the Law reduce the excessive politicisation of the national councils and ensure a kind of "division of power" in the national councils.

Representatives of national minorities proposed by the Coordination of National Councils of National Minorities (an informal body made up of representatives of all national councils) participated in the work on amendments to the Law. The law has been translated into English and 11 languages of national minorities that are in official use. After the adoption of this Law, corresponding by-laws were adopted.

The monitoring of the legality of the work and acts of the national councils of national minorities continued. In the process of monitoring the work, individual national councils were sent official letters with instructions for action in order to eliminate the observed irregularities, which they acted on.

Bearing in mind that part of the observed, and unfortunately continuing shortcomings in the work of national councils, is related to the area of financial reporting and budget planning, the Office for Human and Minority Rights conducted additional training for national councils in this area in 2019. Training on the topic "Financial operations of national councils of national minorities" was carried out, the aim of which was to make national councils more familiar with the legislative and legal framework for financial operations and reporting. Within the framework of the training, the processes and procedures of programme budgeting, adoption of the financial plan, financial reporting and financial control, procedures in case of established irregularities and/or inappropriate spending of funds, as well as the obligations and importance

of keeping financial documents were clarified. The training was also an opportunity to practically present to the representatives of the national councils the Guide for the Financial Operations of the National Councils of National Minorities, which was prepared as part of the project entitled "Strengthening the Protection of National Minorities in Serbia", in which, in addition to the basic instructions on operations, the models of acts and decisions required for the work of national councils were prepared.

After a set of amendments to "minority laws" was adopted in 2018, among others, and the Law on National Councils of National Minorities, at the end of 2018, the text of the Analysis of the Application of Regulations in the Field of Human and Minority Rights Protection was drafted with an emphasis on the legislative practice of the surrounding countries.

After that, in order to continuously monitor the application of regulations, in 2020 the text of the Analysis of the Application of Regulations in the Field of Protection of Human and Minority Rights was prepared, which shows the results referring to the application and implementation of amendments to the Law on National Councils of National Minorities, the Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities and the Law on the Official Use of Languages and Scripts.

Within the project entitled "Promotion of Diversity and Equality in Serbia", which is part of the joint programme of the European Union/Council of Europe "Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022", a "Handbook for the Work of National Councils of National Minorities in the Republic of Serbia" was prepared and presented on 14 April 2021. The main purpose of the Handbook is to become a useful tool for national councils of national minorities, to find practical examples in one place of acts that national councils of national minorities can adopt, in accordance with the regulations, as well as instructions on what steps and activities they should take in order to timely, completely and effectively exercised some of the public powers entrusted to them. The Handbook was delivered to all national councils and translated into 13 minority languages.

Cooperation with the Coordination of National Councils is continuously achieved regarding all issues of importance for the status of members of national minorities, i.e. the effective exercise of the powers of national councils of national minorities.

In order to continuously improve the exercise of the rights of members of national minorities and to observe the way in which national councils exercise their public powers granted by law, the Protector of Citizens conducted research in 2019 with the support of the OSCE Mission, in order to make recommendations based on the collected data and to assess the needs and opportunities for improving the work of national councils. Based on the given research, the Protector of Citizens prepared a special report entitled "Analysis of the Situation in the Field of Exercise of Public Powers of National Councils of National Minorities for the period 2014-2018",<sup>70</sup> which was presented in 2020.

When it comes to the Budget Fund for National Minorities, in addition to the fact that funds from this fund have been continuously allocated since 2017 in accordance with the Regulation on the Procedure for Distributing Funds from the Budget Fund for National

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<https://www.ombudsman.rs/attachments/article/6484/POSEBAN%20IZVESTAJ%20ZG%20ANALIZA%20O%20STANJU%20U%20OBLASTI%20VRSENJA%20JAVNIH%20OVLASCENJA.pdf>

Minorities<sup>71</sup>, year after year the amount of these funds has continuously increased up until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, compared to the year 2017, in which funds from the Budget Fund for National Minorities were allocated in the amount of 1,800,000 dinars, in the following year of 2018, they were increased to 21,800,000 dinars, and from the budget for 2019, funds were allocated in the amount of 30,000,000 dinars. The budget of the Republic of Serbia for 2020 planned to allocate 30,000,000 dinars from the Budget Fund. However, due to changes in general revenues and receipts, expenditures and costs of the budget of the Republic of Serbia for 2020 in order to eliminate the harmful consequences of the COVID-19 disease, the funds approved in the budget for 2020 were reduced for all beneficiaries of budget funds. For the Budget Fund for National Minorities, funds were reduced in the amount of 6,000,000 dinars, so the total funds allocated from the Budget Fund in 2020 amounted to 24,000,000.00 dinars. In particular, it should be noted that the amount of funds from this fund in 2021 and 2022 was not reduced and amounted to 30,000,000 dinars each, even though these are years in which the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are still present, which led to budget reductions in all other areas.

In regard of the tender procedures referring to the distribution of funds from the Budget Fund which are prescribed by laws and regulations, we point out that during their adoption, care was taken to take into account the needs of minorities, and that minorities actively participate in the development of individual tender stages. Thus, the areas that are financed from this fund and determined as priorities for each year are adopted in accordance with the proposal of the Coordination of National Councils of National Minorities, which is then adopted at the Council for National Minorities, the work of which includes the presidents of all national councils of national minorities. Also, after the adoption of the priority area, the specific objectives of the programmes and projects for which the competition is announced, as well as closer criteria and additional criteria for the selection of programmes and projects that are specific to a certain area, are determined, with prior consultations with the national councils of national minorities, and on proposal of the Coordination of National Councils of National Minorities.

The selection of programmes and projects financed from the Budget Fund is made on the basis of the previous scoring of the submitted projects in accordance with the criteria established by the positive regulations and the competition announcement, and not on the basis of who the applicant is, that is, regardless of the capacities and resources of the organisation proposing the project. The selection of projects is primarily determined by the quality of the projects that organisations submit to the competition and the formal and material compliance of those projects with the selection criteria.

The National Council of the Bosniak National Minority in the addendum to this report points out that the funds planned for the work of the Budget Fund and the financing of programmes under it are not adequate for the needs of national minorities and that it is therefore necessary to increase the amount of funds for that fund and provide additional resources for financing cultural activities.

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<sup>71</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 22/2016 and 53/2021

13. Give priority to the economic revitalisation of areas where members of national minorities live in peripheral and/or economically depressed areas, including infrastructure improvement and incentives for more employment opportunities.

*Economic revitalisation of areas where members of national minorities live*

The economic revitalisation of areas where members of national minorities live is achieved through attracting investments, through support and incentive programmes for businessmen and infrastructure development. In principle, the legal regulations in the field of investment were adopted, among other things, with the aim of new direct investments and reducing unemployment, and in the reporting period, the Government of the Republic of Serbia, with the aim of attracting direct investments, adopted the Decree on Determining the Criteria for Awarding Incentives for the Purpose of Attracting Direct Investments,<sup>72</sup> the Decree on Determining the Criteria for Awarding Incentives to Attract Direct Investment in the Area of Food Production,<sup>73</sup> Decree on Determining the Criteria for Awarding Incentives to Attract Direct Investment in the Hotel Accommodation Services Sector,<sup>74</sup> Decree on Determining the Criteria for Awarding Incentives to Attract Direct Investment in the Automation of Existing Capacities in the Area of Food Industry,<sup>75</sup> as well as the Programme on the Allocation and Use of Funds for the Improvement of Production in Production Industries of Importance for Equal Local and Regional Development, which was accepted by the Conclusion from 3 November 2021.

In the field of investments, the Ministry of Economy implements support programmes for businessmen in all units of local self-government, and the right to participate in the implementation of those programmes is exercised by everyone under equal conditions. According to the records of the Ministry of Economy, in the period from 2017 to 2022, the implementation of 110 contracts on the allocation of incentive funds, i.e. investment projects in the area of central and southern Serbia, is expected to employ 30,482 new workers for an indefinite period of time.

Bearing in mind that some of the peripheral and/or economically depressed areas are those that are mainly inhabited by members of the Albanian, Bosniak, Bulgarian and Roma national minorities, namely the south, south-west and south-east of Serbia, the Ministry of Economy paid special attention to those areas. Overall, in the period from 2017 to 2021, 1,895,773,536.75 dinars were allocated in these areas for investments in the area of small and medium-sized enterprises, of which through support programmes for such enterprises (for the purchase of equipment, development, startup and projects of women and young people), 426,539,918.60 dinars were granted non-refundably. The tables below contain data on the distribution of these funds by area.

Medveđa, Bujanovac, Preševo

Investments	Granted, non-refundable	Request approved
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<sup>72</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 1/2019

<sup>73</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 1/2019

<sup>74</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 33/3019, 42/2019 and 18/2022

<sup>75</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 46/2021

244,033,796.58	62,368,835.28	20
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## Prijepolje, Sjenica, Priboj, Novi Pazar, Tutin

Investments	Granted, non-refundable	Request approved
721,968,366.42	160,430,255.90	68

## Dimitrovgrad, Bosilegrad, Pirot, Babušnica, Vranje, Surdulica

Investments	Granted, non-refundable	Request approved
929,771,373.75	203,740,827.42	115

Apart from the Ministry of Economy, the Government of Serbia Coordination Body for the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja - CB's Office, as well as the Provincial Secretariat for Regional Development, Interregional Cooperation and Local Self-Government, are also investing significant funds in this regard.

The strategic priorities of the CB's Office are the development of infrastructure and the recovery of companies that were the carriers of development in Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja, support for small and medium-sized enterprises, entrepreneurs and cooperatives and attracting investments in three municipalities, which belong to the group of devastated areas the level of development of which is below 50% of the national average. In the period 2000-2020, the CB's Office transferred the most funds to the municipalities in the south of Serbia for the area of infrastructure. In the given period, 6,980,377,644.45 dinars (more than 59 million euros) were invested in this area. When it comes to investments in infrastructure, for the period 2017-2021, funds in the amount of about 1 billion and 220 million dinars (more than 10 million euros) were allocated, which were spent on the implementation of projects related to the creation of conditions for a better and quality of life for the population (construction of roads, water supply, electricity supply, construction and reconstruction of schools and other utility projects in the territory of three municipalities). As for privately owned business entities, the CB's Office provides funds and announces competitions for awarding of grants for subsidies to small and medium-sized businesses, entrepreneurs and agricultural cooperatives. Based on this competition, in the period 2018-2021 over 148 million dinars were allocated for 65 economic entities in the municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja. The CB's Office allocated funds in the amount of 40 million dinars in the 2022 budget for the same purposes. The results of the conducted tenders are an increase in the number of employees, the empowerment of small and medium-sized companies, entrepreneurs and agricultural cooperatives for more efficient connections on the local, regional, national and international markets, the improvement of production for the purpose of economic growth, the improvement of competitiveness on domestic and foreign markets and the improvement of production intended for export or import substitution.

The Provincial Secretariat for Regional Development, Interregional Cooperation and Local Self-Government subsidised business entities in underdeveloped areas: 3<sup>rd</sup> category development group and 4<sup>th</sup> category development group, whereby they were given priority under the conditions of the competition and through the scoring system. In the period from 30 June 2016 to 9 September 2021, 364,587,158.88.00 dinars were allocated to the local self-

government units from the 3<sup>rd</sup> category group (13 LSGUs), and 10,088,006.00 dinars to the local self-government units from the 4<sup>th</sup> category group (one LSGU).

Also, the Chamber of Commerce of Serbia (CCS) continuously works to attract foreign investments by organising promotions of the investment potential of municipalities. CCS also offers a database of investment projects and investment locations to interested investors.

Special attention is given to the improvement of areas where members of the Roma national minority live. In this sense, we remind you of the Programme for the Promotion of the Development of Roma Entrepreneurship adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, as well as the investment and infrastructure results of the implementation of the IPA programme, which are explained in more detail in terms of recommendation 1 from the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

### *Employment incentives*

The problems faced by persons from the harder-to-employ category are recognised in strategic documents and legal regulations, as well as the activities undertaken with the aim of providing support in removing existing obstacles and difficulties on the way to their integration. Belonging to the category of difficult-to-employ persons is determined based on the difficulties they face in the labour market due to their health condition, insufficient or inadequate education, socio-demographic characteristics, regional or professional mismatch of supply and demand on the labour market or other objective circumstances that make it difficult to find employment. Local employment councils were established for the purpose of coordinating activities in the implementation of the employment policy and strengthening ties between different decision-making levels in accordance with strategic documents and employment programmes at the local level. Local employment councils were established with the aim of defining the priorities and objectives of the employment policy at the local level for a certain period, determining measures and programmes to achieve the set priorities and objectives, human and financial resources for their implementation and providing mechanisms for monitoring the effects of the measures. Among other tasks, those tasks of local employment councils are aimed at analysing development potentials, defining measures and instruments of employment policy at the local level through the development of local employment action plans. Special attention when defining priorities and activities is devoted to groups and individuals who have a higher risk of long-term unemployment. Branches of the National Employment Service are members of the local employment council.

Institutions that are members of these councils have the task of carrying out activities to achieve the set objectives individually and through joint institutional cooperation, as well as by participating in project activities. The tasks and activities of the council are formalised by signing a cooperation agreement, which defines the activities of the signatories of the agreement in order to monitor the achieved results and defined deadlines. Practice has shown that the best results in terms of employment and education of persons who have difficult access to the labour market are achieved through the joint cooperation of the institutions that are responsible for these tasks.

In accordance with the Employment Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2026, the employment policy should also contribute to the achievement of

economic development objectives by implementing measures that represent a quality response of local actors to the challenges, needs and opportunities of local labour markets.

As of 2010, when the Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurance created the basis for the decentralisation of employment policy, an increasing number of local self-government units have shown interest in this area and the willingness to be actively involved in improving the situation on local labour markets. Local employment councils are gradually assuming a key role in the processes of defining measures of importance for improving the situation and trends in the local labour market, which is accompanied by an increase in allocations from the budget of local self-government units for the implementation of active employment policy measures.

In accordance with the Action Plan for the period from 2021 to 2023 for the implementation of the Employment Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2026, one of the criteria on the basis of which the amount of funds is approved at the request of the local self-government unit for participation in financing measure is the degree of development of the local self-government unit (local self-government units belonging to less developed areas are provided with a higher amount of funds from the budget compared to developed local self-government units). The minimum amount that can be provided from the budget to a local self-government unit belonging to the fourth category group (level of development below 60% of the national average) and devastated areas (level of development below 50% of the national average) is 60%, except for local self-government units that expressed in the request for co-financing the need to ensure a lower share of funds from the budget of the Republic of Serbia than 60%.

Also, a measure of active employment policy that encourages balanced regional development is the allocation of a subsidy for the employment of unemployed persons from the harder-to-employ category, where the amount of the subsidy depends on the level of development of local self-government units.

In addition to the regular public call for the unemployed to be granted a subsidy for self-employment, where members of the Roma nationality are recognised as a more difficult category to employ, the National Employment Service also announces a special public call for the unemployed of the Roma nationality for the grant of a subsidy for self-employment with a previously defined quota for the grant of a subsidy for this category of unemployed persons.

Apart from the National Employment Service, the Chamber of Commerce undertakes various types of incentives for employment. These incentives include the affirmation of education for personnel lacking in the market, in counseling regarding the use of various loans and subsidies, as well as in connecting with foreign foundations that encourage employment and economic development.

As part of the activities on the affirmation of dual education, the Chamber of Commerce of Serbia (CCS) participated in the work of the Active Principals of Secondary Schools in the area of the CCS-Regional Chamber of Commerce of the North Bačka Administrative District to create an enrollment plan in accordance with the needs of the economy. In accordance with the created enrollment conditions, dual education is introduced in the 2018/2019 school year in four secondary schools, with seven qualifications, in cooperation with 40 companies for 324 students. It is necessary to point out that in two secondary schools, initial classes were formed in Serbian and Hungarian, which represents the potential for members of the Hungarian

national minority to have the opportunity to immediately get a job in the legal entities with which they have signed a preliminary employment contract after completing the educational programme. This method of education provides the opportunity for investors from the home country of the Hungarian national minority to employ personnel with a known occupational profile that satisfy their work processes, thus increasing the attractiveness of Serbia for further investments.

The CCS-Regional Chamber of Commerce Kruševac regularly invites representatives of national minorities who are currently unemployed and socially vulnerable to discussions and counseling pertaining to the granting of non-refundable loans given by the state for starting a business, in order to create and encourage their entrepreneurial spirit. As part of the implementation of the Strategy for Improving the Status of the Roma in the City of Kruševac - the Local Action Plan for Employment, the Regional Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the Department for Social Activities of the City Administration of the City of Kruševac is implementing a free English language school, with the aim of empowering unemployed persons from the records of the National Employment Service, strengthening their competencies and creating more competitive personnel on the labour market.

The Regional Chamber of Commerce of the Rasina District participates in the project on "Family Entrepreneurship and Identification of Competencies of Young Unemployed People", who belong to vulnerable categories, including national minorities, in cooperation with the Tree House, Kruševac organisation. The second project of the Regional Chamber of Commerce of the Rasina District is a project on cooperation with the municipality of Trstenik - "Innovative Employment Generator" covering the topic: Increasing employment through strengthening youth activities, early acquisition of work experience and entrepreneurial practices.

On the initiative of the Hungarian-Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry from Szeged, the CCS - Subotica Regional Chamber of Commerce organised a meeting of representatives of the Chamber with the management of SZEFO, an apparel factory from Szeged. At the meeting, the possibilities and conditions of investment in opening a factory for the production of outerwear in Subotica or in the region of this regional chamber of commerce were negotiated. The SZEFO factory is interested in hiring workers with dual citizenship of Serbia and Hungary or Croatia, due to the simpler training procedure in the parent factory. Workers with knowledge of the Hungarian language have an advantage in employment.

The representative of the Regional Chamber of Commerce of the North Bačka Administrative District is actively involved in the work of the Employment Council of the city of Subotica. The Council makes decisions on measures for the employment of unemployed persons and public works, whereby special attention is given to members of national minorities and vulnerable population groups, specifically with the aim of improving their financial status.

The Prosperitati Foundation - the Hungarian regional foundation for joint development in Vojvodina - is active in the area of the Regional Chamber of Commerce of the North Bačka District (the City of Subotica and the municipalities of Bačka Topola, Mali Idoš, Kanjiža, Senta and Ada). The Foundation is voluntary, non-governmental and non-profit, established for an indefinite period to achieve charitable goals, and one of the main goals of the Foundation is to revive the strategy of economic and regional development of the Hungarian community in Vojvodina.

**b. Measures and policies to implement all detailed recommendations, various findings and conclusions contained in the Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee**

**Article 3 of the Framework Convention**

**Personal scope of application**

*13. The Advisory Committee reiterates its call to the authorities to consider abolishing the potentially restrictive criteria for citizenship contained in the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities.*

The citizenship criterion contained in the legal definition of a national minority refers to *groups of citizens* who can enjoy the status of a national minority in the legal system of the Republic of Serbia. In other words, in the legal system of the Republic of Serbia, the status of a national minority cannot be recognised for groups of persons who possess features such as language, culture, national or ethnic affiliation, origin or religion, by which they differ from the majority of the population, but who do not have citizenship and are not in a long-term and strong relationship with the territory of the Republic of Serbia. This primarily refers to groups of refugees, migrants and persons living in the Republic of Serbia based on economic activities. The fact that such groups of persons do not enjoy the status of a national minority does not mean that they and the persons who belong to them do not enjoy the right to free expression, preservation and development of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity in the Republic of Serbia, in accordance with the highest international standards of human rights.

In the legal system of the Republic of Serbia, the majority of minority rights that are individually enjoyed and exercised, especially in terms of the use of languages and letters, as well as in terms of education, are not reserved exclusively for citizens. Therefore, persons who are not citizens of the Republic of Serbia and who share the same national identity with persons belonging to national minorities in the Republic of Serbia do not have any obstacles regarding the enjoyment and exercise of minority rights. In fact, such persons can be beneficiaries of all minority rights (for example, they can freely use their language and script in contacts with authorities, they can be parties in proceedings conducted entirely in the languages and scripts of national minorities, they can be members of minority associations, they can individually and in community with members of national minorities nurture and develop their religious identity, they can attend all education in the language and script of national minorities, etc.), except in those cases where the condition of citizenship is explicitly stated in the law (for example, they cannot enjoy elective right and in that sense they cannot be political representatives of national minorities, nor participate in the procedure of election of national councils of national minorities and be members of those bodies).

The authorities of the Republic of Serbia reiterate that there are no justified reasons for the initiative contained in this recommendation of the Advisory Committee, especially since the Advisory Committee also finds that it is only a potentially limiting criterion and as stated in the Fourth, as well as in the previous opinions of the Advisory Committee, the flexible approach shown by the Serbian authorities is confirmed regarding access to linguistic minority

rights, which allows non-citizens who speak the same language as the national minority to benefit from many of the same rights as persons who are recognised as members of national minority.<sup>76</sup>

### **Data collection and population census**

*20. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to launch an information campaign long before the next census, aimed at members of national minorities, raising their awareness of the advantages of participation in the census, of multiple affiliations and of their rights, with the aim of successfully combining the protection and promotion of minority rights with the collection of reliable information on the ethnic composition of the population.*

The response to this recommendation is contained in the response to recommendation 6 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

*21. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to provide the effective participation of members of national minorities in shaping the census methodology and in the organisation and functioning of such processes, including pollsters. It also calls on the authorities to make all information about the census methodology and the purpose of data collection available in the languages of national minorities.*

The response to this recommendation is contained in the response to recommendation 7 from the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

### **Article 4 of the Framework Convention Legislative framework for combating discrimination**

*24. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to strengthen the clarity and accessibility of the anti-discrimination legislative framework, and to ensure that all such laws comply with international standards.*

Starting from the presented recommendation, the fact that during the negotiations on the membership of the Republic of Serbia in the European Union, it was observed that the existing solutions of the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination did not reach the common *acquis* and that it was not fully harmonised with the relevant EU legislation, which the European Commission indicated on several occasions,<sup>77</sup> as well as the recommendation of the competent UN treaty bodies that emphasised the need for institutional strengthening of

<sup>76</sup> ACFC/OP/III(2013)006, Paragraph 36.

<sup>77</sup> In the reports on the progress of the Republic of Serbia in the European integration process and the implementation of action plans for Chapters 23 and 24, the European Commission assessed that additional changes to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination were necessary in order to fully harmonise it with the EU *acquis*. In this regard, it was pointed out that the full capacity of the Commissioner to implement the competences in accordance with the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination has not yet been achieved. In its reports and guidelines, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance also pointed out the importance of strengthening the capacity of the Commissioner by expanding the competences.

protection against discrimination, the harmonisation of the provisions of the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination with EU legal instruments, i.e. Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 on the implementation of the principles equal treatment regardless of racial or ethnic origin commenced.

On 20 May 2021, the National Parliament of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Law on Amendments to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, which brings the basic law into line with the legal acquis of the European Union and with national legislation. Several changes and additions to the text of the Law are foreseen. First, the definition of indirect discrimination was harmonised with EU legislation. In addition to association for the purpose of discrimination, incitement to discrimination is also regulated. As part of the ban on harassment and degrading treatment, sexual harassment has also been added. As one of the more significant amendments to the Law, the introduction of the term "segregation" stands out, which is legally defined as a form of direct discrimination that includes any act by which a natural or legal person isolates another person or a group of persons based on personal characteristics without objective and reasonable justification. Three new paragraphs were added pertaining to Article 14, which refer to the obligations of employers and public authorities to promote equality and prevent discrimination.

Regarding the strengthening the clarity and availability of the legislative framework against discrimination, it is important to point out that in January 2022, after a wide round of consultations with all relevant social partners, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted a new Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination for the period from 2022 to 2030.<sup>78</sup> The first specific objective of this strategy is harmonised national legislation with international anti-discrimination standards and practice. By achieving this specific objective, the anti-discrimination legal framework of the Republic of Serbia will be improved, by aligning it with the standards and practices established under the auspices of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union. Also, by achieving this specific objective, the national legal framework will be improved, by aligning sectoral laws and by-laws with anti-discrimination regulations and standards.

### **Monitoring the prohibition of discrimination and available legal remedies**

In regard with the finding of the Advisory Committee emphasising the importance of understanding an institution such as the Protector of Citizens as an accessible source of help, certain data should be provided on the number of complaints in the area of national minority rights that the Protector of Citizens considered in the past years, as well as on the number of cases it initiated itself.

In the area of the rights of national minorities, the Protector of Citizens considered 71 cases in 2019, of which 70 were citizen complaints and one case initiated on its own initiative. Cases from this area make up 2.17% of the total considered cases. The Protector of Citizens sent 24 recommendations to administrative bodies. Out of 71 reviewed cases in 2019, the Protector of Citizens completed work on 39 cases. In the area of the rights of national minorities, 76 violations of rights were found in 71 cases, most of which relate to special rights in the area of

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<sup>78</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 12/2022

the rights of national minorities, such as the special rights of the Roma, the right to cultural creativity in the mother tongue, the right to exercise the competence of national councils of national minorities and prohibition of discrimination.

In the area of national minority rights, the Protector of Citizens considered 46 cases in 2020, of which 43 were citizen complaints and three cases on its own initiative. In 46 cases, 46 violations of rights were found, most of which refer to: special rights of Roma, prohibition of discrimination, individual rights of members of national minorities. Cases in this area make up almost 1% of the total number of considered cases in 2020. In 2020, work on 75 cases was completed, of which 38 cases are from 2020 and 37 cases from previous years. The effectiveness of the Ombudsman's handling of cases in this area has increased by almost 28% compared to 2019, as indicated by the number of completed cases compared to the total number of cases in this area, and 15 recommendations have been sent to administrative bodies.

In the area of national minority rights, the Protector of Citizens considered 44 cases in 2021, of which 43 were citizen complaints and one case on its own initiative, and completed work on 35 cases as well as work on seven cases from the past years. The Protector of Citizens made five recommendations to the administrative bodies. Rights violations in these cases most often, as in previous years, refer to the special rights of the Roma, the prohibition of discrimination and the right to exercise the competence of national councils of national minorities.

The National Council of the Bosniak National Minority believes that due to insufficient knowledge of the law, the number of complaints submitted to the Protector of Citizens about the actions of state authorities is inadequate. During 2020 and 2021, the National Council addressed the Protector of Citizens four times (twice in 2020 and twice in 2021), and the Protector of Citizens issued three recommendations (one in 2020 and two in 2021) .

*29. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to increase their efforts to raise awareness, especially among the groups most often exposed to discrimination, especially Roma living in informal settlements, as well as relevant community workers, about legislative standards and available legal remedies for victims of discrimination.*

The response to this recommendation is given in the response to recommendation 1 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

### **Equality data collection and measures to promote effective equality**

*35. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to significantly step up their efforts to establish and use, as soon as possible and no later than the deadline for issuing the fifth State Report, a sustainable framework for the collection of human rights data based on issues referring to access to the rights of nationals minorities as well as to promote complementary qualitative and quantitative research in order to assess the status of members of national minorities. Based on such data and research, the Advisory Committee also calls on the authorities to establish, implement, monitor and periodically review minority policies with the effective participation of members of national minorities.*

The response to this recommendation is given in the response to recommendation 2 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

### **The status of Roma population**

Regarding the findings and stance of the Advisory Committee, which is *very concerned about the status of Roma, especially women and children in terms of health and social protection*, it is first necessary to point out the normative framework and data on Roma children in foster families.

Pursuant to the Rulebook on foster care<sup>79</sup>, the following standards are applied to achieve the best interests of the child in foster care: 1) the selection of the foster family is made within the circle of relatives, that is, other foster families that have a general suitability for foster care and that meet the conditions for engaging in foster care in accordance with this Rulebook; 2) the choice of a foster family is made primarily in the child's place of origin when it is in his/her best interest; 3) brothers and sisters are, as a rule, placed in the same foster family; 4) no more than three children are placed in a foster family, that is, two if they are children with special needs, except when they are siblings; 5) the child to whom foster care is being applied is being prepared for placement in a foster family, return to the biological family, change in the form of protection and independence; 6) the development and progress of the child in foster care is continuously monitored and an insight into the achievement of the purpose of foster care is provided, with visits to the foster family, more intensively during the adjustment period, and during the foster care at least once a month; 7) for a child in foster care, the competent centre for social work, in cooperation with the centre for family accommodation, adopts a service plan, which includes a plan to support the child and the foster family, the implementation of which is checked twice a year; 8) the child and the foster family are provided with various types of support in accordance with the needs of the child and the foster family; 9) to perform the role of foster parent, the general suitability of the foster parent is assessed, which is reviewed after two years, and in crisis situations, immediately after the change that caused the crisis; 10) foster parents are prepared to engage in foster care according to the Programme of Preparation for Foster Care, in compliance with this Rulebook; 11) for foster parents, during foster care, at least once a year for the duration of 10 hours of work education programmes are organised with the aim of strengthening foster care competencies; 12) education programmes are organised for professional workers who perform foster care duties, at least once a year for the duration of 10 hours of work, with the aim of strengthening professional competencies; 13) foster parents and professional workers of the centre for social work develop a cooperative relationship in order to achieve the purpose of foster care and shared responsibility for the child.

Pursuant to Article 33 of the same Rulebook, for the selection of an adequate foster family for a child, it is necessary that it: 1) corresponds to the goals of the child's protection, according to his/her current and long-term needs; 2) meets the requirements regarding the age difference between the child and foster parent, which should correspond to the parent-child relationship; 3) meets the standards defined by this Rulebook in terms of space and equipment

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<sup>79</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 6/2008

for the child; 4) lives in an environment that has appropriate resources according to the developmental and specific needs of the child; 5) lives in an environment that will enable the preservation of established relationships of the child with relatives and other close persons; 6) ensures the nurturing and preservation of the child's personal, family and national identity; 7) meets the needs of the child in accordance with his/her national origin, age, gender, educational and other needs; 8) has special capacities and motivation to meet the needs of a child with severe health or developmental difficulties.

The following tables provide data on the total number of children in residential care in 2020 and the number of Roma children in residential care by year.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN RESIDENTIAL CARE BY TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION (for 2020)		
	Children`s home accommodation	Family accommodation
Children up to 18 years of age.	633	5,149

NUMBER OF ROMA CHILDREN IN RESIDENTIAL CARE BY TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION (BY YEAR)		
Children up to 18 years of age.	Children`s home accommodation	Family accommodation
2017	120	915
2018	115	830
2019	100	790
2020	86	752
2021	87	725

Source: Data from the Information System of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs

From the given data, it can be concluded that the information available to the Advisory Committee that about 30% of children of Roma nationality are in foster families is not correct, but that percentage is half as low, i.e. about 15% of children (compared to 2020).

With regard to the finding of the Advisory Committee that *poverty was highlighted as a significant factor in making decisions about the removal of Roma children from their families*, it should be pointed out that based on Article 81 of the Family Law<sup>80</sup>, parents can be deprived of parental rights only when they abuse or grossly neglect their parental duties. The essence of deprivation of parental rights is that the parents' behaviour and care for children is such that it requires deprivation of parental rights, and poverty is never a reason for deprivation as long as the parents are conscientious and adequately take care of the child.

Pursuant to Article 81 of the Family Law, a parent abuses rights or grossly neglects

<sup>80</sup> The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, Nos.18/2005, 72/2011 – other law and 6/2015

duties from the content of parental rights if: physically, sexually or emotionally abuses the child, exploits the child by forcing him/her to work excessively or to work that endangers the child's morals, health or education, i.e. to work which is prohibited by law, if it incites the child to commit criminal offences, if it accustoms the child to indulge in bad tendencies, or otherwise abuses the rights of the child.

A parent grossly neglects duties from the content of parental rights: if he/she abandoned the child; if he/she does not take care of the child with whom he/she lives; if he/she avoids supporting the child or maintaining personal relations with the child with whom he/she does not live, i.e. if he/she prevents the maintenance of personal relations between the child and the parents with whom the child does not live; if he/she intentionally and unjustifiably avoids creating the conditions for living together with a child who is in a social protection institution for residential care; if in any other way grossly neglects duties from the content of parental rights.

In regard with the findings of the Advisory Committee, according to which legal and practical obstacles are still reported in terms of administrative procedures for birth registration, acquisition of citizenship, as well as registration of permanent residence and issuance of identity cards, the authorities first emphasise that the legal framework in the Republic of Serbia provides every child the right to be entered in the birth register. Identification of the parents, that is, the mother, in the manner provided for in Items. 10 and 24 of the Instructions on Keeping Registers and Forms of Registers<sup>81</sup> and Article 5 of the Rulebook on the Procedure for Issuing a Birth Registration of a Child and the Form of a Registration of the Birth of a Child in a Health Institution,<sup>82</sup> is harmonised with the positive regulations of the Republic of Serbia regarding the identification of persons. In this way, the legal security of the child is ensured, and this identification does not in any case represent an obstacle for the registration of the child's birth immediately after birth. By implementing this standard in the procedures in which decisions are made about children's rights, a protection mechanism is provided in order to prevent any possible type of abuse (e.g. trafficking in children and people) and in this manner, the Republic of Serbia observes and implements the obligations it has undertaken in accordance with the Council of Europe Convention on the Fight Against Human Trafficking.

In the course of the implementation of the second Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, the Protector of Citizens and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – Representation Office in Serbia, in 2020, the efficiency of the actions of officers in this area was additionally improved by the adoption of Instructions for handling cases of birth of a child whose parents do not have personal documents in order to enable registration in the birth register.<sup>83</sup> The instruction foresees the coordinated work of officers (according to the principle of urgency and the best interest of the child), regardless of whether the child was born in a health institution or outside it, so that the identification of the parents, that is, the mother, is ensured in order to register the child in the birth register.

<sup>81</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos.93/2018 and 24/2022

<sup>82</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos.25/2011, 9/2016, 16/2016, 36/2016 and 103/2018

<sup>83</sup> <http://mduls.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/Instrukcija-za-postupanje-u-slucajevima-rodjenja-deteta-ciji-roditelji-nemaju-licna-dokumenta-radi-omogucavanja-upisa-u-MKR.pdf>

For the purpose of registration in the birth register, in accordance with this instruction, immediately after the birth of the child, the identification procedure of the mother is initiated in cooperation with the officers of the Ministry of the Interior and competent registrars in order to simultaneously initiate the appropriate procedure of securing personal documents for the mother or her subsequent registration in the birth register. The instruction is applied regardless of whether the child was born in a health institution or outside it, and aims not only to efficiently and quickly register a newborn child in the register of births, but also to solve the possible generational problem of persons who are not registered in the register of births and at the same time determining whether the mother has other children who are not registered in the birth register in order to identify and resolve those cases as well. Bearing in mind that according to the latest UNHCR research from November 2020, cases where a person is not registered in the birth register now appear as an exception, in this way the problem of the so-called legal invisibility is solved at the level of the whole family, which effectively eliminates the risks of statelessness.

The Republic of Serbia continues to be committed to solving this issue in the coming period as well, within the framework of the third Agreement on Understanding that was signed on 10 February 2022, within which additional efforts will be made so that the general public, with an emphasis on members of the Roma of national minorities, was informed about the way in which the right to be registered in the birth register, as well as access to personal documents, can be exercised, while providing support for the resolution of individual cases of persons who have not resolved this status issue.

Also, it is important to point out that the birth registration procedure excludes the payment of any fees, because the Law on Republic Administrative Fees<sup>84</sup> stipulates that no fee shall be paid for applications for registration in the register of births, and as early as 2011, the same law established an exemption from the payment of administrative fees for documents and actions related to the procedure for the subsequent registration of the fact of birth in the register of births.

In addition, any person who is not registered in the register of births can exercise that right in the procedure of subsequent registration. For persons who cannot register in the administrative procedure, it is possible to register through a simplified non-litigation procedure for determining the time and place of birth. The right to subsequent registration is exercised smoothly, and by monitoring the situation in this area, the table below provides statistical data on the number of registrations per year.

Year	Persons registered in the registers	
	Administrative procedure - subsequent registration of the fact of birth in the birth register	Non-litigation procedure - determination of time and place of birth
2017	1,537	508
2018	846	261

<sup>84</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 43/2003, 51/2003 - corrected, 61/2005, 101/2005 - other law, 5/2009, 54/2009, 50/2011, 70/2011 - harmonised dinar amounts, 55/2012 - harmonised dinar amounts., 93/2012, 47/2013 - harmonised dinar amounts, 65/2013 - other law, 57/2014 - harmonised dinar amounts, 45/2015 - harmonised dinar amounts, 83/2015, 112/2015, 50/2016 - harmonised dinar amounts, 61/2017 - harmonised dinar amounts, 113/2017, 3/2018 - corrected, 50/2018 - harmonised dinar amounts, 95/2018, 38/2019 - harmonised dinar amounts, 86/2019, 90/2019 - corrected, 98/2020 - harmonised dinar amounts, 144/2020 and 62/2021 - harmonised dinar amounts.

2019	476	451
2020	430	299
2021	316	221

In regard with the allegations that *Roma returnees with children born abroad encounter particular difficulties when registering their children in the birth register*, we point out that, in accordance with positive regulations in the Republic of Serbia that regulate the area of registers, every child born abroad with one parent being is a citizen of the Republic of Serbia, is entered in the register of births upon application by the parents, based on birth certificate of a foreign authority.

With regard to problems related to exercising rights from the social protection system, it is important to point out that personal documents are a prerequisite for someone to have access to financial social assistance or the use of services in the community. Inhabitants of informal settlements who did not have a formally registered place of residence had obstacles in accessing the right to material financial assistance. By improving the regulations and implementing the activities provided for in the aforementioned agreements on understanding, the majority of Roma in Serbia obtained the necessary documents to exercise these rights.

Ending with 28 March 2022, the Ministry of Internal Affairs by means of a decision determined the residence for 4,037 persons, the majority of whom live in informal settlements, at the address of the competent centres for social work (pursuant to the Law on Residence and Domicile of Citizens,<sup>85</sup> which enabled registration of residence at the address of the social protection institution for persons who do not have a registered residence on another basis), after which personal documents were issued to those persons.

In addition, the adoption of the Social Card Law<sup>86</sup> and the establishment of the Register of Social Cards enable easier exercise of rights for users, integration with the National Employment Service data on unemployment, systematic review and finding of the most vulnerable unemployed persons, as well as georeferencing of vulnerable groups and individuals in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. It also contributes to the easier exercise of users' rights through e-Government, because they will be enabled to exercise their rights electronically through a single access point in an easier way. At the same time, it relieves the potential user of the obligation to collect various documents and complicated administrative procedures, given that all necessary databases are networked through the Registry.

*43. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to significantly increase their efforts in implementing and monitoring the action plans within the set deadlines. The measures should be regularly monitored and periodically revised in order to confirm that the indicators have been achieved and that the needs of the interested parties are taken into account. Assessment and evaluation should be carried out in consultation with users.*

Since a number of strategic documents that are important for the exercise of the rights of national minorities expired in the reporting period, the Republic of Serbia began the process of developing and introducing new strategies and action plans, the implementation of which

<sup>85</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 87/2011

<sup>86</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 14/2021

will further improve the status of national minorities or sensitive social groups.

As a result of the revision of the measures and activities from the strategic document for the social inclusion of Roma men and women, which was envisaged for the period 2016-2025, as well as the need to harmonise the strategic measures with the new European framework for the inclusion of Roma, on 3 February 2022, the Government adopted the new Strategy for the social inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2022-2030. In addition, since the public hearing regarding the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2022-2024 has ended, it is expected to be adopted soon.<sup>87</sup>

In June 2021, the Government established a new Coordination Body, chaired by the Prime Minister, with the task of monitoring the process of social inclusion of Roma and monitoring the implementation of the strategy and action plan in this area. In order to be more operational, the Coordination Body also has an expert group within its framework made up of representatives of all departments relevant to the implementation of the measures defined by the strategy, while administrative and technical support in the work of the expert group is provided by the Department for Roma Inclusion within the competent ministry.

For the sake of systematic and more comprehensive management of public policies in the area of inclusion of Roma people, as well as for the purpose of greater involvement of representatives of Roma from the civil sector, the relevant Ministry has started the process of forming the Civil Society Platform, which includes a mechanism for regular exchange of information between citizen associations and institutions, which will be supported by an electronic platform for faster and more efficient communication.

The strategy for prevention and protection against discrimination for the period from 2022 to 2030 was adopted on 20 January 2022. The public hearing on the Action Plan Proposal (2022-2023) for the implementation of the Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination for the period from 2022 to 2030 was held from 10-29 June 2022.

At the end of 2021, a Special Working Group was formed to prepare the text of the Action Plan Proposal for the exercise of rights of national minorities, which comprises representatives of competent institutions, national councils of national minorities and civil society organisations. The action plan will be based, among other things, on the Report on Progress in the process of Serbia's accession to the European Union, recommendations from the Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, as well as on the conclusions and recommendations from the "Ex-post Analysis on the Implementation of the Action Plan for Exercising the Rights of National Minorities". The working group has held a large number of meetings so far, and in order to define the measures and activities from the Action Plan as precisely as possible, individual consultative meetings are regularly held with representatives of relevant state authorities, as well as with representatives of national councils of national minorities.

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<sup>87</sup> In accordance with the regulations governing the field of strategic planning, consultations are carried out from the very beginning of drafting, as well as during the monitoring of the implementation of regulations and public policy documents. The primary goal of the consultation is to gather information about the current situation in the area and the problems that exist and the vision of change that needs to be achieved, as well as to determine opinions and attitudes towards the proposed options, measures and solutions, and to gather additional proposals on possible courses of action. Consultations are conducted using methods such as: collecting written comments, round tables, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, panels and surveys.

All the mentioned documents provide for measures aimed at monitoring their implementation, as well as collecting relevant data. Moreover, in the reporting period, measures were taken for the effective implementation and monitoring of the implementation of previously valid strategic documents, which, among other things, were used for the revision and adoption of new strategic documents. Thus, in the period June - October 2017, the Analysis of the Implementation of the Strategy for Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination for the Period 2014-2018 was prepared. Also, in November 2018, an Analysis of the report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the Exercise of the Rights of National Minorities was carried out within the project entitled "Strengthening the Protection of National Minorities in Serbia", which was an integral part of the "Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey" - a joint programme between the European Union and the Council of Europe. Finally, as part of the project "Promotion of Diversity and Equality in Serbia", which is part of the joint programme of the European Union and the Council of Europe "Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022", independent experts were engaged who prepared "Ex-post Analysis of Effects Implementation of the Action Plan for the Exercise of the Rights of National Minorities". The main goal of the analysis was to provide an assessment of the effects of the Action Plan, i.e. to evaluate its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, in order to make a decision on future steps in planning public policies in the area of the rights of national minorities.

The Analysis states that, based on the available data, it can be concluded that most of the strategic objectives have been "partially achieved". When it came to individual activities, they generally led to the achievement of results, but it was noted that there was often not a sufficiently concrete connection between individual results and activities, and that due to insufficient assessment of the available capacities for the implementation of activities, the delay of one activity often caused the delay of others.

According to the Analysis, the greatest results were achieved in the field of legal solutions and their more consistent application. All activities were completed aimed at amending the legislation necessary to create a legal basis for entering data on nationality into data collections and creating measures of affirmative action, training of registrars, improvement of a electoral roll for national councils of national minorities and registration of persons in the birth register through subsequent registration. Progress is also made by changes to a large number of laws and by-laws, which created the basis for keeping, on a voluntary basis, data on the representation of national minorities and the introduction of specific affirmative measures for employment in the public sector and the judiciary, as well as changes to the legislative framework that regulates the work of national councils and operationalises the Budget Fund for National Minorities.

In order to create a higher quality, more effective, more efficient and sustainable Action Plan in the future, appropriate recommendations were given in the Analysis. Based on the conclusions and recommendations from the *ex-post* analysis, work began on the preparation of a new strategic document for the exercise of the rights of national minorities, which, as noted, was in the drafting phase at the time of preparation of this Report.

*44. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to decisively address the structural discrimination faced by members of the Roma national minority in terms of their citizenship*

*status, as well as housing, health, education and employment, including taking the necessary affirmative measures to address the root causes of the discrimination the Roma are facing.*

The response to this recommendation is given in the response to recommendation 1 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

### **Article 5 of the Framework Convention**

#### **Preservation and promotion of all identities and cultures of national minorities**

*51. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to further increase the funds allocated to the Budget Fund for National Minorities and to take the necessary measures to provide additional funds for national minorities in central and southern Serbia. It also calls on the authorities to develop capacity-building opportunities for organisations with fewer resources to increase their chances of bidding for funding from the Budget Fund for National Minorities and to ensure that bidding procedures are designed to take into account the specific needs of minorities.*

The response to this recommendation is given in the response to recommendation 12 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

*52. The Advisory Committee also calls on the authorities, at the national and provincial levels, to further promote and support multicultural and intercultural projects and ensure regular funding as well as sustainability.*

#### *Multicultural and intercultural projects*

On the occasion of the competitive co-financing of projects of importance for national minorities, which is carried out every year, the Ministry of Culture and Information emphasised on several occasions that the nature of the submitted projects was usually such that the projects did not sufficiently communicate with the wider community, that is, they were closed within the framework of one minority. Bearing this in mind, the competition priorities have been redefined, so that priority is given to projects that nurture the cultural and linguistic peculiarities of several national minorities and encourage intercultural dialogue. Within the competition for cultural activities of national minorities, the number of competition applications for the field of multicultural creativity increased in the reporting period, but, unfortunately, their quality was not at a satisfactory level for the number of supported projects to copy these statistics. In the coming period, as part of the planned educational measures, work will be done on raising awareness of the importance of a multicultural approach, as well as on the content quality of the offered projects. The table below contains data on multicultural projects in specialised tenders that are exclusively intended for co-financing the cultural activities of national minorities.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
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Number of registered projects	9	8	10	10	12
Number of supported projects	6	6	5	7	7
Amount of funds	1,100,000.00	720,000.00	667,000.00	845,000.00	840,000.00

Apart from the specialised tenders that are exclusively intended for the co-financing of the cultural activities of national minorities, the co-financing of multicultural projects was also carried out at other tenders of the Ministry, the information on which is given in the table below.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of supported projects	5	4	7	9	8
Amount of funds	1,850,000.00	2,310,000.00	5,909,000.00	6,640,000.00	7,020,000.00

In the area of protection and preservation of cultural heritage in AP of Vojvodina, the competition for financing - co-financing of projects, which is announced on an annual level, includes projects in the area of protection of immovable, movable and intangible heritage of all peoples and national minorities whose heritage, according to the law, is considered a cultural resource. In accordance with international standards, cultural heritage as an asset of civilization belongs to everyone, and the benefit from its protection and preservation is common, so the largest number of supported projects (more than 80%) according to this competition has a multicultural character. In the field of contemporary creative work, projects with a multicultural dimension are also supported, and the number of supported multicultural projects depend primarily on the number and quality of submitted applications.

Protection and preservation of cultural heritage					
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total number of projects	31	64	36	30	91
Multicultural	28	57	30	25	77
The amount of funds in the competition	7,000,000.00	7,000,000.00	7,000,000.00	7,000,000.00	32,810,400.00
Contemporary creative work					
Number of projects	1	1	1	2	2
	400,000.00	500,000.00	500,000.00	600,000.00	400,000.00

The "Affirmation of Multiculturalism and Tolerance in Vojvodina" project, the objective of which is to nurture cultural diversity and develop the spirit of inter-ethnic tolerance

among the citizens of Vojvodina, has been successfully implemented since 2005. The project's activities are aimed at young people, primarily students in higher grades of primary school and all grades of secondary school, and bearing in mind that the projects involve the inclusion and direct contact of thousands of young people, the implementation of the project indirectly affects the wider population in Vojvodina. In 2020 and 2021, some of the activities within the project were not implemented due to the disease pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus, since they involved the participation of a large number of participants in the same space. The following table contains data on the activities carried out within this project in the reporting period.

Subprojects	Participants	Supporting activities
2017		
"How well do we know each other" quiz	Teams from 44 secondary schools	Features from the regional and semi-final competitions and the entire final show were broadcast in the programmes of the RTV Public Media Institution
"Camp without borders, Kanjiža 2017"	144 competitors from 16 secondary schools	
Educational trip - Slovenia	40 students and six teachers	Features from the trip were broadcast in the programmes of the RTV Public Media Institution
<b>Total funds</b>		<b>29,350,707.92</b>
2018		
"How well do we know each other" quiz	Teams from 27 secondary schools	Features from the regional and semi-final competitions and the entire final show were broadcast in the programmes of the RTV Public Media Institution
"Camp without borders, Kanjiža 2018"	136 competitors from 16 secondary schools	
Educational trip - Slovak Republic	36 students and six teachers	Features from the trip were broadcast in the programmes of the RTV Public Media Institution
<b>Total funds</b>		<b>22,443,212.63</b>
2019		
"How well do we know each other" quiz	Teams from 27 secondary schools	Features from the regional and semi-final competitions and the entire final show were broadcast in the programmes of the RTV Public Media Institution
Competition for co-financing projects to preserve and foster inter-ethnic tolerance in Vojvodina	Out of 288 projects that met the conditions of the competition, 139 projects were financed	
Educational trip - Romania	45 students and 11 teachers	

<b>Total funds</b>		<b>20,968,647.17</b>
2020		
Video competition: "Multiculturalism and Ethnic Diversity in Vojvodina"	Secondary school students	
Competition for co-financing projects to preserve and foster inter-ethnic tolerance in Vojvodina	Out of 445 projects that met the conditions of the competition, 214 projects were financed	
<b>Total funds</b>		<b>15,130,000.00</b>
2021		
"Multiculturalism on a click" - 6 award-winning competitions (video work, photography, literary form, design, art work, etc.)	Primary and secondary school students	
Competition for co-financing projects to preserve and foster inter-ethnic tolerance in Vojvodina	Out of 344 projects that met the conditions of the competition, 184 projects were financed	
<b>Total funds</b>		<b>14,619,645.00</b>

According to the available data, the table below provides an overview of the number of local self-government units, the number of supported multicultural projects and the amount of allocated funds in 2020.

Number of LSGUs	Number of supported projects	Amount of funds
14	29	6,475.800.00

Within the competition for co-financing of projects in the field of public information in the languages of national minorities, the Ministry of Culture and Information supports multilingual and multicultural projects that contribute to the development of dialogue, better acquaintance and understanding in multinational environments. The following table shows data on multilingual and multicultural projects that were supported by the budget of the Republic of Serbia in this reporting period.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of supported projects	8	12	10	9	6
Amount of funds	3,200,000.00	5,800,000.00	4,569,400.00	4,550,000.00	3,800,000.00

Such projects are also supported in other competitions in the field of public information announced by the Ministry. Data on supported multilingual and multicultural projects in those competitions are available for 2020 and are presented in the table below.

Competition	Number of supported projects	Amount of funds
Production of media content for internet media	2	750,000.00
Production of media content for television	7	5,750,000.00
Production of media content, print media and services of news agencies	2	1,300,000.00
Organising and participating in professional, scientific and special gatherings, as well as improving professional and ethical standards	3	1,600,000.00
Production of media content of electronic media whose publishers are based in the territory of AP of Kosovo and Metohija	1	850,000.00

The following table provides data on multilingual projects supported at competitions of the Provincial Secretariat for Culture, Public Information and Relations with Religious Communities in the field of public information in the reporting period.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of supported projects	5	7	4	2	4
Amount of funds	650,000.00	1,050,000.00	550,000.00	350,000.00	450,000.00

According to the available data, the table below provides an overview of the number of supported multilingual projects in competitions for the production of media content announced by local self-government units, the number of local self-government units that announced them, and the amount of allocated funds in 2020.

Number of LSGUs	Number of supported projects	Amount of funds
18	34	23,760,000.00

*Providing regular financing and sustainability of projects of importance for national minorities*

Through the programme budget, the Ministry of Culture and Information provided continuous and sustainable financing of projects that are important for national minorities. Within the strategic priorities of cultural development for the period from 2021 to 2025, the Ministry has envisaged the continuation of a gradual increase in the total available budget for culture, which will also be reflected in the budget intended for the cultural activities of national minorities. In the last two years, the budget allocated for the competition for cultural activities of national minorities grew by an average of about 10% per year, and in 2022 it amounts to

18,680,000.00 dinars. The table below contains data on projects in specialised tenders that are exclusively intended for co-financing the cultural activities of national minorities.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of registered projects	241	206	259	205	303
Number of supported projects	102	116	127	123	139
Percentage of approved projects	42.3%	56.3%	49%	60%	45.9%
Total allocated amount	15,640,000.00	15,380,000.00	16,558,000.00	15,550,000.00	17,000,000.00

The statistics presented in the following table show the amounts of funds allocated by individual minorities in specialised tenders for co-financing the cultural activities of national minorities.

National minority	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Albanians	440,000.00	480,000.00	480,000.00	600,000.00	720,000.00
Bosniaks	2,040,000.00	2,391,000.00	2,312,000.00	2,370,000.00	2,600,000.00
Bulgarians	550,000.00	610,000.00	634,000.00	620,000.00	600,000.00
Bunjevci	560,000.00	520,000.00	650,000.00	510,000.00	480,000.00
Vlachs	520,000.00	720,000.00	754,000.00	810,000.00	360,000.00
Gorani people					270,000.00
Greeks	150,000.00	130,000.00	120,000.00		120,000.00
Jews	480,000.00	240,000.00	240,000.00	120,000.00	240,000.00
Hungarians	2,360,000.00	2,938,000.00	2,465,000.00	1,820,000.00	2,500,000.00
Macedonians	640,000.00	480,000.00	650,000.00	840,000.00	840,000.00
Muslims		150,000.00	120,000.00	120,000.00	
Germans	360,000.00	150,000.00	240,000.00	120,000.00	360,000.00
Roma	1,860,000.00	1,346,000.00	1,747,000.00	1,715,000.00	1,700,000.00
Romanians	860,000.00	600,000.00	800,000.00	960,000.00	750,000.00
Russians					120,000.00
Ruthenians	510,000.00	740,000.00	941,000.00	680,000.00	840,000.00
Slovaks	1,060,000.00	850,000.00	1,044,000.00	1,020,000.00	1,080,000.00
Slovenians	360,000.00	360,000.00	480,000.00	360,000.00	390,000.00
Ukrainians		150,000.00			120,000.00
Croats	1,320,000.00	1,320,000.00	1,614,000.00	1,560,000.00	1,350,000.00
Aromanians			120,000.00	120,000.00	240,000.00
Montenegrins		240,000.00	120,000.00	120,000.00	240,000.00
Czechs	470,000.00	245,000.00	360,000.00	240,000.00	240,000.00

National minority projects, i.e. projects that are important for national minorities, are supported to a significant extent through other tenders announced by the Ministry. The table below contains data on projects that were financed in other tenders. However, it is important to point out that we are only talking about projects that can be determined with certainty to

represent projects related to national minorities, and that the real number of projects and allocated funds is certainly higher, because, in each specific case, it is not possible to get reliable information about the nationality of association members - project applicants and/or beneficiaries of project activities.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of projects	11	14	24	10	16
Amount of funds	5,040,000.00	12,414,400.00	13,223,430.00	3,860,000.00	11,980,000.00

Since the new Action Plan for the exercise of the rights of national minorities, which is being prepared, will be based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, the Ministry of Culture and Information plans activities that would improve the current state of affairs of cultural activities of national minorities. In fact, it is planned to determine, in cooperation with the national councils of national minorities, the degree of satisfaction with the current funding in culture. In addition, education is planned for organisations with weaker capacities, especially for numerically smaller national minorities and national minorities from central and southern Serbia, and the introduction of affirmative measures in the process of co-financing projects in the culture of national minorities.

The provincial secretariat responsible for culture also annually announces a competition for financing projects of importance for the culture and art of national minorities. The following tables provide an overview of the total funds allocated in these competitions by year, as well as the funds allocated by minority.

	Amount of funds				
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Area of protection of intangible cultural heritage and contemporary artistic creative work	6,500,000.00	13,000,000.00	6,500,000.00	6,500,000.00	6,500,000.00
The field of publishing activities in the languages of national communities	2,100,000.00	4,100,000.00	2,100,000.00	2,100,000.00	2,100,000.00

National minority	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Ashkali	20,000.00	20,000.00			
Bulgarians	20,000.00	70,000.00	50,000.00	50,000.00	50,000.00
Bunjevci	337,000.00	897,000.00	470,000.00	560,000.00	530,000.00
Greeks	70,000.00	70,000.00	50,000.00	50,000.00	50,000.00
Jews	20,000.00	100,000.00	50,000.00	50,000.00	
Hungarians	3,570,000.00	6,280,000.00	3,375,000.00	3,325,000.00	3,350,000.00
Macedonians	117,000.00	397,000.00	170,000.00	170,000.00	200,000.00
Germans	155,000.00	350,000.00	200,000.00	200,000.00	200,000.00
Poles				50,000.00	

Roma	320,000.00	770,000.00	300,000.00	250,000.00	250,000.00
Romanians	784,000.00	1,734,000.00	710,000.00	700,000.00	700,000.00
Russians	20,000.00	70,000.00	50,000.00	50,000.00	100,000.00
Ruthenians	735,000.00	1,385,000.00	695,000.00	575,000.00	600,000.00
Slovaks	1,130,000.00	2,350,000.00	1,100,000.00	1,150,000.00	1,150,000.00
Slovenians	20,000.00	20,000.00	50,000.00	50,000.00	
Ukrainians	141,000.00	191,000.00	100,000.00	150,000.00	195,000.00
Croats	914,000.00	1,894,000.00	1,000,000.00	990,000.00	1,000,000.00
Montenegrins	207,000.00	432,000.00	180,000.00	180,000.00	175,000.00
Czechs	20,000.00	70,000.00	50,000.00	50,000.00	50,000.00

As is the case with competitions at the state level, a large number of projects of national minorities or projects of importance for national minorities are financed at the provincial level as well through other competitions of the provincial secretariat in charge of culture. Data on the number of supported projects and the amount of funds per year are given in the table below.

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of projects	9	11	7	15
Amount of funds	2,600,000.00	2,520,000.00	2,050,000.00	5,330,000.00

In addition to the abovementioned, the budget of AP Vojvodina co-finances the work of the Institute for the Culture of National Minorities, the Publishing Institute "Forum" - "Forum Könyvkiadó Intézet", which deals with publishing activities in the Hungarian language, as well as cultural institutions the programmes of which go beyond local importance and are more permanent they meet the cultural needs of citizens in AP Vojvodina, and are important for national minorities. The table below contains data on the financing of these institutes and institutions by year.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Institute for the Culture of Vojvodina Hungarians	15,000,000.00	15,000,000.00	15,000,000.00	15,000,000.00	15,000,000.00
Institute for the Culture of Vojvodina Romanians	9,400,000.00	9,400,000.00	9,400,000.00	9,400,000.00	9,400,000.00
Institute for the Culture of Vojvodina Ruthenians	6,600,000.00	6,600,000.00	6,600,000.00	6,600,000.00	6,600,000.00
Institute for Culture of Vojvodina Slovaks	10,000,000.00	10,000,000.00	10,000,000.00	10,000,000.00	10,000,000.00
Institute for Culture of Vojvodina Croats	10,000,000.00	10,000,000.00	10,000,000.00	10,000,000.00	10,000,000.00

"Forum" publishing house	17,505,719.63	18,206,064.91	20,384,428.00	18,708,327.00	19,643,385.00
Bunjevci Culture Centre	443,000.00	743,000.00	443,000.00	443,000.00	550,000.00
Museum of Vojvodina Slovaks	150,000.00	350,000.00	130,000.00	140,000.00	413,300.00
Gallery of naive Slovak art	100,000.00	100,000.00	70,000.00		
Gallery of naive art of Vojvodina Romanians at the "Doina" Culture Centre	100,000.00	200,000.00	80,000.00		

In addition to the Provincial Secretariat for Culture, Public Information and Relations with Churches and Religious Communities, the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities - National Communities provides regular financing and sustainability of projects of importance to national minorities through co-financing of programmes and projects aimed at improving rights of national minorities in the AP of Vojvodina. At the public tender, funds are allocated for programmes and projects aimed at the exercise of the rights of national minorities, and especially for the preservation and nurturing of languages, folk customs and old crafts, the protection and presentation of folklore heritage, the creation of conditions for the development of culture, science and art, nurturing and encouragement folk creativity, presentation of cultural assets of exceptional importance, literary, dramatic, stage, musical and visual creative work, memorials, festivals, jubilee events, art colonies, camps and conferences that foster tolerance and the rights of national minorities, cultivating and developing amateurism and hosting ensembles, as well as cooperation with home countries and other forms of cooperation. The table below contains data on the distribution of funds on this basis.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Ashkali	95,000.00	95,000.00	200,000.00		140,000.00
Bosniaks	130,000.00	100,000.00	95,000.00		
Bulgarians	230,000.00	220,000.00	120,000.00	160,000.00	138,000.00
Bunjevci	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00	1,045,000.00	1,050,000.00	1,050,000.00
Gorani people					70,000.00
Greeks	95,000.00	95,000.00	155,000.00	150,000.00	138,000.00
Egyptians	95,000.00	95,000.00			130,000.00
Jews	50,000.00			100,000.00	100,000.00
Macedonians	630,000.00	630,000.00	660,000.00	660,000.00	660,000.00
Hungarians	14,600,000.00	14,600,000.00	15,200,000.00	15,450,000.00	15,450,000.00
Germans	280,000.00	280,000.00	290,000.00	300,000.00	300,000.00
Poles		100,000.00	30,000.00	150,000.00	140,000.00
Roma	1,730,000.00	1,730,000.00	1,800,000.00	3,350,000.00	3,350,000.00
Romanians	2,220,000.00	2,220,000.00	2,315,000.00	2,350,000.00	2,350,000.00
Russians				100,000.00	104,000.00
Ruthenians	1,110,000.00	1,110,000.00	1,160,000.00	1,200,000.00	1,200,000.00
Slovaks	3,000,000.00	2,950,000.00	3,130,000.00	3,200,000.00	3,200,000.00
Slovenians	210,000.00	360,000.00	320,000.00	200,000.00	140,000.00

Ukrainians	390,000.00	390,000.00	410,000.00	410,000.00	410,000.00
Croats	3,000,000.00	2,940,000.00	3,130,000.00	3,200,000.00	3,200,000.00
Montenegrins	580,000.00	580,000.00	600,000.00	600,000.00	600,000.00
Czechs	125,000.00	125,000.00	130,000.00	130,000.00	130,000.00
Multicultural	380,000.00	270,000.00	210,000.00	240,000.00	
Total	29,950,000.00	29,890,000.00	31,000,000.00	33,000,000.00	33,000,000.00

Also, local self-government units regularly announce annual tenders for the allocation of funds from the budget for programmes and projects in the field of culture that are important for a specific local self-government unit. Through such tenders, in those local self-government units in which members of national minorities are also represented, funds are allocated for financing programmes and projects in the field of culture of national minorities. The table below provides, according to the available data, an overview of the number of local self-government units that supported the work of cultural associations or projects in the field of culture of importance for a certain national minority and the amount of allocated funds in 2020. It should be noted that in 2020, when these data were collected, some local self-government units, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, did not announce competitions in the field of culture. Also, it is important to note that data on a large number of financed projects that are important for the entire local self-government unit and all its residents, including members of national minorities, are not given in the table below.

Also, it is important to note that data on a large number of financed projects that are important for the entire local self-government unit and all its residents, including members of national minorities, are not given in the table below.

National minority	Number of LSGUs that allocated funds	Amount o funds
Albanians	2	5,615,000.00
Bosniaks	1	70,000.00
Bulgarians	3	844,000.00
Bunjevci	2	2,700,000.00
Vlachs	4	890,000.00
Greeks	3	755,000.00
Jews	2	1,150,000.00
Hungarians	15	22,028,500.00
Macedonians	5	320,000.00
Germans	5	685,000.00
Poles	1	175,000.00
Roma	37	15,615,050.00
Romanians	4	810,000.00
Russians	10	792,000.00
Ruthenians	3	1,825,451.00
Slovaks	7	2,296,737.00
Slovenians	3	690,000.00
Ukrainians	3	820,000.00
Croats	6	5,785,000.00
Montenegrins	2	200,000.00
Czechs	1	100,000.00

In the addendum to this Report, the "Gergina" Association states that it is necessary to strengthen the promotion of Wallachian culture at all levels, from local communities to the national, as well as that information in the Wallachian language is insufficient, since it is provided exclusively through project financing in within the framework of certain local media.

*Financing of national councils of national minorities*

In the reporting period, regular financing of national councils of national minorities continued with funds from the budgets of the Republic of Serbia, AP of Vojvodina and local self-government units. National councils can finance various projects, including projects in the field of culture, with the means at their disposal. The tables below contain data on the financing of national councils from the budget of the Republic of Serbia and the budget of AP of Vojvodina.

*Funding from the budget of the Republic of Serbia*

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NATIONAL MINORITIES	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Albanian	13,226,019.00	13,226,019.00	13,226,019.00	13,226,019.00	13,226,019.00
Ashkali	3,696,225.00	3,696,225.00	1,848,114.00		3,388,209.00
Bosniak	27,828,583.00	27,828,583.00	27,828,583.00	27,828,583.00	27,828,583.00
Bulgarian	7,643,683.00	7,643,683.00	7,643,683.00	7,643,683.00	7,643,683.00
Bunjevci	7,141,540.00	7,141,540.00	7,141,540.00	7,141,540.00	7,141,540.00
Wallachian	7,757,459.00	7,757,459.00	7,757,459.00	7,757,459.00	7,757,459.00
Greek	3,572,471.00	3,572,471.00	3,572,471.00	3,572,471.00	3,572,471.00
Egyptian	3,683,326.00	3,683,326.00	3,683,326.00	3,683,326.00	3,683,326.00
Union of Jewish Municipalities	3,616,063.00	3,616,063.00	3,616,063.00	3,616,063.00	3,616,063.00
Hungarian	59,438,983.00	59,438,983.00	59,438,983.00	59,438,983.00	59,438,983.00
Macedonian	6,952,728.00	6,952,728.00	6,952,728.00	6,952,728.00	6,952,728.00
German	3,963,046.00	3,963,046.00	3,963,046.00	3,963,046.00	3,963,046.00
Polish			3,326,088.00	3,326,088.00	3,326,088.00
Romani	22,122,634.00	22,122,634.00	22,122,634.00	22,122,634.00	22,122,634.00
Romanian	14,160,015.00	14,160,015.00	14,160,015.00	14,160,015.00	14,160,015.00
Ruthenian	9,033,971.00	9,033,971.00	9,033,971.00	9,033,971.00	9,033,971.00
Russian			3,326,088.00	3,326,088.00	3,326,088.00
Slovak	17,778,529.00	17,778,529.00	17,778,529.00	17,778,529.00	17,778,529.00
Slovenian	4,095,241.00	4,095,241.00	4,095,241.00	4,095,241.00	4,095,241.00
Ukrainian	4,601,055.00	4,601,055.00	4,601,055.00	4,601,055.00	4,601,055.00
Croatian	12,975,990.00	12,975,990.00	12,975,990.00	12,975,990.00	12,975,990.00
Montenegrin	7,675,264.00	7,675,264.00	7,675,264.00	7,675,264.00	7,675,264.00
Czech	4,037,175.00	4,037,175.00	4,037,175.00	4,037,175.00	4,037,175.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>245,000,000.00</b>	<b>245,000,000.00</b>	<b>249,804,065.00</b>	<b>247,955,951.00</b>	<b>251,344,160.00</b>

*Funding from the AP of Vojvodina budget*

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NATIONAL MINORITIES	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021

Ashkali	100,000.00	100,000.00	100,000.00	100,000.00	100,000.00
Bunjevci	2,481,260.00	2,480,612.00	2,569,240.00	2,540,920.00	2,533,200.00
Greek	50,000.00	500,000.00	100,000.00	100,000.00	100,000.00
Egyptian	100,000.00	100,000.00	100,000.00	100,000.00	100,000.00
Hungarian	24,349,004.00	24,423,964.00	24,194,720.00	24,672,360.00	24,417,200.00
Macedonian	2,438,340.00	2,456,220.00	2,665,640.00	2,790,440.00	2,729,600.00
German	1,807,084.00	1,787,884.00	1,593,560.00	1,764,360.00	1,754,800.00
Polish			1,282,920.00	1,315,160.00	1,315,200.00
Romani	3,719,928.00	3,802,832.00	3,584,560.00	3,782,080.00	3,771,600.00
Romanian	4,942,824.00	4,636,376.00	4,174,360.00	4,238,600.00	4,314,400.00
Ruthenian	3,185,804.00	3,244,592.00	3,073,000.00	3,114,200.00	3,071,600.00
Russian			100,000.00	100,000.00	100,000.00
Slovak	6,635,876.00	6,779,072.00	6,430,760.00	6,445,960.00	6,391,600.00
Ukrainian	1,821,564.00	1,823,120.00	1,653,640.00	1,683,840.00	1,674,400.00
Croatian	4,151,996.00	4,124,264.00	4,145,800.00	4,437,000.00	4,741,600.00
Montenegrin	2,502,840.00	2,490,132.00	2,601,680.00	2,645,680.00	2,731,200.00
Czech	1,813,480.00	1,800,932.00	1,730,080.00	1,769,400.00	1,753,600.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>60,100,000.00</b>	<b>60,100,000.00</b>	<b>60,100,000.00</b>	<b>61,600,000.00</b>	<b>61,600,000.00</b>

## **Article 6 of the Framework Convention**

### **Tolerance and intercultural dialogue**

*57. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to strongly support the development of independent qualitative and quantitative research that shows the level and nature of inter-ethnic relations, including relations between members of national minorities and members of the majority population.*

*58. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to, based on such research, establish, implement, monitor and periodically review a comprehensive strategy aimed at revitalising inter-ethnic relations, in consultation with members of national minorities and local self-government units. This strategy should clearly take into account the need to include the majority in integration and the inclusion of national minorities in Serbian society.*

Apart from the research referring to the implementation of recommendation 3 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution, it is important to note that various researches were supported and implemented in the reporting period in order to see the implementation of these recommendations of the Advisory Committee. Certainly the most important research in the context of these recommendations is the research entitled "Social Relations Between Ethnic Communities in Serbia" conducted by the Centre for Ethnicity Research and the State Scientific Institute of Social Sciences, with the support of the Open Society Foundation. Also, at the request of the Foundation for Freedom of the Press, which publishes the weekly newspaper "Családi Kör" and the news portal "Szabad Magyar Szó", the Workshop for the Research of Minority Identity in Senča conducted a survey of public opinion on Serbian-Hungarian relations, as well as about friendly and family relationships between members of different communities.<sup>88</sup> In addition to the aforementioned research entirely devoted to inter-ethnic

<sup>88</sup> <https://slobodnarec.rs/2022/04/16/etnicka-distanca-odnos-vojvodjanskih-madjara-prema-drugim-nacionalnostima/>

relations, in the reporting period, research on the nationalist orientation of the population was also carried out as part of the broader research entitled "Stratification Changes in the Period of Consolidation of Capitalism in Serbia"<sup>89</sup> conducted by the Institute for Sociological Research of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade which builds on similar research conducted in 2003 and 2012.

In a study by the Centre for Research on Ethnicity and the Institute of Social Sciences, the social distance between ethnic communities in Serbia was measured based on the expressed views of respondents of Serbian nationality and respondents of the Albanian, Bosniak, Croatian, Hungarian, Roma, Romanian and Slovak national minorities. Social distance was measured based on three groups of questions. The first group of questions referred to mutual social contacts, that is, existing social and kinship ties between members of different nationalities. The second group of questions referred to the personal and assumed attitudes of close members of one's own ethnic group about "others" - cohabitation in a common country and neighbourhood, acceptance of acquaintance and friendship, work collegiality and, finally, marital relationships. Finally, the third group of questions referred to respondents' trust in members of other ethnic groups to perform social roles - president of the state, prime minister, minister, mayor, teacher and elected doctor. According to the results of that survey, members of national minorities have the strongest friendships with Serbs (Albanians 77.6%; Bosniaks 96.2%; Hungarians 97.2%; Croats 89.6%; Roma 97.7%; Romanians 98%; Slovaks 99.1%), but members of the Serbian nationality have a lower degree of friendly relations with members of the same national minorities (Albanians 39.6%; Bosniaks 71.8; Croats 80.7; Hungarians 65.4%; Roma 67.4%; Romanians 41.3%; Slovaks 50.9%).

Data on mutual friendships between members of national minorities indicate closedness towards members of the Albanian and Roma communities. 53.1% of Albanians have friendly relations with members of the Croatian community, 56.7% maintain friendship with Roma, 30.4% with Croats, 17% with Hungarians, 15.8% with Romanians and 9.5% with Slovaks. The most common friendship of Roma, 57.4%, is with Bosniaks and Croats - 53.6%; Half of the 50% of respondents of Roma nationality have friendships with Albanians, 45% with Romanians, 40.8% with Hungarians and 27.1% with Slovaks. Among members of other national minorities, friendships are more common and comprise between 70 and 80 percent of respondents. Family ties are even rarer, although 28% of respondents of Serbian nationality answered that, in addition to their ethnic identity being Serbian, they belong to at least one other "minority" identity. According to the statements of respondents of Serbian nationality, they most often have family ties with members of the Croatian national minority 33.8%, then with members of the Hungarian (17.4%) and Bosniak (14.6%) national minorities; 5.5% of Serbs are related to Romanians, 4.8% to Slovaks, 3.3% to Roma, and 1.8% to Albanians. On the other hand, 8.7% of respondents of Albanian nationality have family ties with members of the Serbian nation, as well as 42.8% of members of the Roma and 80% of the Croat national minorities. Apart from members of the Bosniak national minority, with whom 12.2% of respondents are related, Albanians do not have many relatives among members of other national minorities. The situation is similar in terms of the kinship ties of Roma with members

<sup>89</sup> <https://isi.f.bg.ac.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Mladen-Lazi%C4%87-Slobodan-Cveji%C4%87-prir-Stratifikacijske-promene-u-periodu-konsolidacije-kapitalizma-u-Srbiji.pdf>

of other ethnic groups. Among members of other ethnic groups, family ties are more frequent, but with rare exceptions, their percentage does not exceed 30%. For 63.9% of respondents of Serbian nationality, coexistence in the same country with Albanians is acceptable. Marriage with members of Albanian nationality is acceptable for 31.1% of respondents of Serbian nationality. 65.5% of respondents of Serbian nationality would live in the same neighbourhood with Roma. 54.9% of Serbian respondents would marry a member of Croatian nationality. 26.4% of members of the Albanian national minority would marry members of the Serbian nationality. According to personal statements, 80.6% of Bosniaks would be friends with members of the Slovak national minority. 69.7% of Roma would accept Bosniaks as neighbours. More than half of the surveyed (50.5%) Slovaks would start a marriage union with members of the Romanian nationality. The results indicate the social distance between ethnic groups in Serbia. Social distance is greatest in personal relationships - marriage and cohabitation, but it is evident in other social relationships as well. The greatest social distance is towards Albanians and Roma, and it is variable between members of other nationalities. Members of national minorities who have traditionally settled in the area of Vojvodina have more stable social relations.

The research results of the Minority Identity Research Workshop are similar. According to those results, 35.2% of the surveyed members of the Hungarian national minority believe that their relationship with members of other nationalities has improved over the past ten years, and only 7.6% of them believe that it has worsened. The respondents perceive relations between Serbs and Hungarians as stable and do not see that the relationship between the two peoples is in danger: 5.3% of them think that relations will worsen, 23.3% think that they will improve, and 61.1% think that remain unchanged for the next ten years.

The research of the Institute for Sociological Research of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade indicates, on the one hand, a clear strengthening of the value of organic nationalism, which implies the emphasis of respondents and their overemphasis on the importance of tradition, history and the common origin of members of their own nation, while, on the other hand, it notes a decline of ethnocentric nationalism, more precisely that the respondents had less extreme attitudes when it came to inter-ethnic relations. In fact, the average values obtained on the individual statements used to analyse ethnocentric nationalism in all three time points (2003, 2012 and 2018) were below 3, which clearly indicates that a larger number of respondents rejected nationalist attitudes more often than accepted them. Minor changes in the degree of acceptance of ethnocentric statements are observed. According to that research, a more complete insight into the structure of this dimension of nationalism is provided by the analysis of the intensity of acceptance of three statements by which ethnocentric nationalism was measured. In all three years, the lowest degree of agreement is recorded in the case of the statement according to which ethnically mixed marriages are a factor of marriage instability (2003 - 16.6%; 2012 - 13.4%; 2018 - 18.2%), while a slightly higher agreement percentage is recorded in the case of statements related to trust towards other nations (2003 – 51.7%; 2012 – 40.8%; 2018 – 45.1%), or in the case of statements related to enclosure in nationally clean environments ( 2003 – 34.1%; 2012 – 34.1%; 2018 – 37.4%).

All the mentioned research results are carefully considered and taken into account by the competent authorities of the Republic of Serbia when predicting their actions.

59. *The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to implement without delay the recommendations of the Protector of Citizens of the Republic of Serbia stated in the special report on councils for inter-ethnic relations and to conduct an independent qualitative study as soon as possible, and at the latest before the date of the fifth state report, in order to assess the functionality of the council for international relations.*

The response to this recommendation is given in the response to recommendation 3 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

### **Protection against hate crimes and hate speech**

65. *The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to further align their criminal law with ECRI standards. It also calls on the authorities, at all levels, to systematically and promptly condemn all cases of intolerance, especially in public discourse, and to systematically investigate and, when relevant, prosecute statements of hate speech.*

The criminal law of the Republic of Serbia provides comprehensive protection against discrimination, intolerance and hate speech, which was discussed in previous state reports. As stated in previous state reports, hate speech is not specifically criminalised by the Criminal Code, but is prohibited in national legislation by the Constitution, the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, the Law on Public Information and the Media<sup>90</sup>, and the Law on Electronic Media.<sup>91</sup>

Criminal offences that contain elements of discrimination, incitement to violence and hate speech, include criminal offences of damage to reputation due to racial, religious, national or other affiliation referred to in Article 174 of the Criminal Code, causing national, racial and religious hatred and intolerance referred to in Article 317 of the Criminal Code, violent behaviour at a sports event or public gathering referred to in Article 344a of the Criminal Code, criminal offence of racial and other discrimination referred to in Article 387 of the Criminal Code, but also other crimes if they were committed out of hatred (Article 54a of the Criminal Code).

The criminal prosecution of the perpetrators of the aforementioned criminal acts is undertaken *ex officio*, which means that the public prosecutor is obliged to initiate criminal prosecution whenever they have grounds to suspect that a criminal offence has been committed, in accordance with the principle of legality. Accordingly, the public prosecutor's offices undertake all measures within their competences with the aim of prosecuting the perpetrators of the aforementioned criminal offences, by conducting effective investigations and submitting indictments to the competent court.

Amendments to the Criminal Code from 2012, in Article 54a of the Criminal Code, introduced a special circumstance for sentencing for a criminal offence committed out of hatred, insofar as it is prescribed that if the criminal offence was committed out of hatred due

<sup>90</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 83/2014, 58/2015 and 12/2016 – authentic interpretation

<sup>91</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 83/2014, 6/2016 – other law and 129/2021

to race and religion, national or ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity of another person, the court will appreciate that circumstance as an aggravating circumstance, unless it is prescribed as a feature of the criminal offence. According to the special records established on the basis of the Instructions of the Public Prosecutor of the Republic of Serbia from December 2015, the public prosecutor's offices applied Article 54a of the Criminal Code in a total of 30 cases until 15 June 2021, of which in 14 cases the motive for the commission of the criminal offence was ethnic, national or religious affiliation of the injured person.

In May 2019, the Criminal Code was amended pertaining to Article 344a, which increased the prison sentence, from one to five years, for those who provoke national, racial, religious or other hatred by their behaviour at a sports event or public gathering, or intolerance based on some discriminatory basis, resulting in violence or physical confrontation with the participants.

In the period from 2016 to 2019, the Ministry of Interior filed criminal charges against 39 persons for 57 criminal offences that incriminated any form of discrimination, of which 38 persons were charged with the criminal offence under Article 317 of the Criminal Code - inciting national, racial and religious hatred and intolerance. In terms of nationality, 34 persons are of Serbian nationality, two of Croat, one of Roma and one of Albanian nationality. In the same period, two physical attacks were carried out on a national basis (both resolved), as follows: to the detriment of persons of Albanian nationality and Islamic religion. Criminal charges were filed against two persons of Serbian nationality.

In that period, the Ministry of Interior filed criminal charges for seven anonymous threats (five were resolved), 21 verbal conflicts (20 were resolved), and 21 cases of writing slogans and graffiti (6 were resolved), directed against: Albanians – 6, Hungarians – 3, Roma – 2, and one of the Islamic confession, a Serb and a Croat and at the same time against Bulgarians and Albanians. Also, five Nazi symbols and one slogan were written.

In the period from 2016 to 2019, the Ministry of the Interior recorded a total of 308 incidents that could be characterised as transnational in the broadest sense. The fact that the state authorities react, discover the perpetrators, prosecute and punish the perpetrators and instigators of inter-ethnic incidents, speaks in favour of the readiness of the state and other authorities to quickly and effectively suppress such phenomena.

In the period from January to July 2021, out of a total of 39 incidents, criminal charges were filed for 16 criminal offences, namely: 10 criminal offences of inciting national, racial and religious hatred and intolerance; 3 criminal offences of endangering safety; one criminal offence of light bodily harm; destruction and damage of other people's property and violation of freedom of expression of national or ethnic affiliation. 12 criminal offences were resolved and criminal charges were filed against 12 persons.

Statistical data on the criminal offence referred to in Article 317 of the Criminal Code (causing national, racial and religious hatred and intolerance) for the period 2017 to 2021 are given in the table below.

	total number of pending charges from the previous period		total charges received in the reporting period		Gender of registered persons	FILERS OF CRIMINAL CHARGES							ORDERS ON THE CONDUCT OF THE INVESTIGATION				VERDICTS			
	total charges in progress		Male	Female		TOTAL DISMISSED CHARGES							CHARGES (immediate indictment + indictment proposal + indictment)				CONVICTIONS			
						Police (MoI)	Other state authorities	Injured parties	procedure initiated <i>ex officio</i>	other	TOTAL			Male	Female	of which a prison sentence	Acquittals	Dismissals	total custody	
2017	33	50	83	49	1	24	22	1	8		19	50	2	3	2	1	3	1		1
2018	30	30	60	27	3	15	12		8		10	30	2	6	6		6	4		6
2019	25	30	55	24	6	19	16	3	4		7	30		14	14		9	2		1
2020	38	38	76	30	8	32	9		17		12	38		3	3		4	1		1
2021	34	52	86	39	13	45	16		11	1	24	52		5	4	1	6	2		2

Strategy for prevention and protection against discrimination 2022-2030 envisages a measure that involves improving the mechanism for suppressing and preventing hate speech. The focus of the measure is particularly hate speech on the Internet, which requires a different approach in prevention and suppression due to the nature of the Internet, which includes several important actors in defining responsibility, namely users, Internet access providers, content providers, telecommunications network providers and broadcasters. The effect of this measure is to improve the system of preventing and suppressing hate speech, while respecting the specificity of hate speech on the Internet, which will enable better prevention and protection from hate speech of members of groups against whom hate speech is most often directed.

Hate speech, as mentioned, is also prohibited by special laws, and the bodies provided for in these laws, such as the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality and the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media, condemn hate speech and therefore take measures within their jurisdiction. Thus, the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media, pursuant to Article 51 of the Law on Electronic Media, ensures that the programme content of the media service provider does not contain information that incites, openly or covertly, discrimination, hatred or violence, among other things, because of race, skin color, ancestry, nationality, language, religious

beliefs, etc. The regulator has repeatedly imposed measures prescribed by the Electronic Media Law on media service providers due to hate speech in their programmes. Thus, in November 2019, a reprimand was issued to a commercial media service provider due to discrimination on the basis of nationality by the host to a university professor. In June 2020, a temporary ban on the broadcast of programme content (show) for 7 days was imposed on a commercial media service provider due to hate speech by a show participant towards a politician. In December 2021, a warning measure was issued to a commercial media service provider due to discrimination on the basis of nationality by the participants of the show towards a female politician. In February 2022, it was found that the authors of the show broadcast in the programme of a media service provider that provides media services via an electronic communication network, the programme of which is broadcast in the Republic of Serbia, and registered abroad, used hate speech against a female politician, state official, about which the regulatory body of the country that issued the licence to this media service provider was notified. All previously imposed measures are published on the website of the Regulator.<sup>92</sup>

Organised by the Ministry of Culture and Information in November 2021, two international workshops were held for media and journalist associations and all actors in the field of information and media on the topic of Ethics and Values in the Digital Age, among other things, with a focus on the fight against hate speech. Over 40 stakeholders from the field of public information and media participated in these workshops.

In this reporting period, the Ministry of Culture and Information and the Delegation of the European Union, with the support of the OSCE, issued a Media Literacy Handbook for teachers in pre-university education, since knowledge and skills in this area are internationally recognised tools in the fight against hate speech, stereotyping and disinformation. The Handbook was translated into Albanian and Hungarian. Also, the Ministry of Culture and Information annually allocates significant funds for co-financing projects in the field of public information, providing support to projects in the field of media freedom, protection and safety of journalists, and the fight against hate speech. One of more specific criteria for the co-financing of projects by the Ministry is the prevention of sensationalism, hate speech and aggressive communication. In 2021, the following projects were supported:

- "Under pressure: Research and regional conference on media freedoms, pressures and attacks on journalists and the media", Association of Journalists of Serbia in the amount of 950,000.00 dinars;
- "Strong newsrooms against disinformation and hate speech", a project implemented by Media Center d.o.o. Company for publishing and newspaper activity, Belgrade (Stari Grad), in the amount of 630,100.00 dinars;
- "Stop hate speech", a project implemented by the Local Media Plan from Novi Pazar, supported by the amount of 370,000 dinars;
- "Re-response: the fight against hate speech and toxic narratives in the online sphere", the project of the Novi Sad School of Journalism was supported in the amount of 380,700.00 dinars.

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<sup>92</sup> <http://www.rem.rs/sr/odluke/izrecene-mere>

The Law on Sports,<sup>93</sup> among other things, prescribes the obligations of organisers in terms of the smooth and safe holding of sports events, as well as measures to prevent violence and inappropriate behaviour and other negative phenomena in sports. This law defines the importance and function of the National Council for the Prevention of Violence and Inappropriate Behaviour of Spectators at Sports Events. The Council held 12 sessions, the Action Plan for the Prevention of Violence and Inappropriate Behaviour at Sports Events was adopted, and many measures from the Action Plan are already being implemented. In the Sports Development Strategy for the period 2014-2018, the establishment of a mechanism for the consistent implementation of the National Strategy for the Fight Against Violence and Inappropriate Behaviour of Spectators at Sports Events for the period 2014-2018 was defined.<sup>94</sup> Currently, a new strategic document for the period 2020-2030 is being drafted. The National Youth Strategy for the period from 2015 to 2025<sup>95</sup> under the goal: youth safety, prescribes measures and activities for the prevention and suppression of violence among fan groups, as well as for increasing tolerance, suppressing hate speech among young people, etc.

In compliance with the Regulation on the Safety and Protection of Children When Using Information and Communication Technologies<sup>96</sup>, the National Contact Centre for the Safety of Children on the Internet was established in the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications in 2017. The Contact Centre is a unique place to provide advice on smart and safe use of the Internet, as well as to receive and forward reports of harmful, inappropriate or illegal content and behaviour on the Internet.

*66. The Advisory Committee reiterates its calls to the authorities to significantly increase their efforts in raising the awareness of the police, prosecutors and the judiciary about the importance of investigating and prosecuting hate crimes against members of national minorities and to ensure that the police force adequately reflects the diversity of the population in the local self-government unit in which they operate, in the entire territory of the Republic of Serbia.*

Activities aimed at improving the capacities of relevant state institutions, judiciary, police, media, local self-government units and civil society organisations are continuously implemented for the purpose of applying the law and sanctioning hate speech and crimes and making judgements more efficient.

A working group in which representatives of the public prosecution took part, in cooperation with the OSCE Mission to Serbia, developed Guidelines for public prosecutors for the prosecution of crimes committed out of hatred in the Republic of Serbia, with the aim of improving the implementation of effective investigations and the effectiveness of criminal prosecutions of perpetrators of criminal offences from this area. The guidelines were created as a result of the work of representatives of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Serbia, the Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights - YUCOM and the OSCE Mission in Serbia and are an example of good cooperation between the state and civil sectors.

<sup>93</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 10/2016

<sup>94</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 63/2013

<sup>95</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 22/2015

<sup>96</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 13/2020

In order to achieve legality, effectiveness and uniformity in the actions of public prosecutors in criminal cases initiated for criminal offences committed out of hatred, within the meaning of Article 54a of the Criminal Code, the public prosecutor of the Republic of Serbia issued the General Mandatory Instruction O. No. 4/2018 on 28 September 2018, which stipulates that in all appellate, higher and basic public prosecutor's offices prosecutors are designated as contact persons for crimes committed out of hatred, within the meaning of Article 54a of the Criminal Code.

The contact person is the public prosecutor, i.e. the deputy public prosecutor, in charge of:

- monitoring of the recording of criminal offences committed out of hatred, in accordance with the Instruction of the Public Prosecutor of the Republic of Serbia A. No. 802/15 from 22 December 2015;
- monitoring of proceedings in these criminal cases;
- consultations with the case processor;
- contact with the injured party/victim;
- contact with the competent police officer;
- contact and dialogue with specialised civil society organisations that provide support to victims of hate crimes.

Pursuant to the aforementioned instruction, all public prosecutor's offices of regular competences have designated contact persons for dealing with cases of criminal offences committed out of hatred.

As of 2018, in accordance with the plan and programme of training of the Judicial Academy on hate crimes for public prosecutors, in cooperation with the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Serbia and the OSCE Mission in Serbia, training sessions for public prosecutors are being organised. At these training sessions, the Guidelines for the prosecution of hate crimes in the Republic of Serbia were presented, as well as examples of the practical actions of competent authorities in cases of hate crimes, as well as the practice of the European Court of Human Rights. The planning of new, more advanced training for contact persons designated by the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Serbia in prosecutor's offices is underway.

During 2018 and 2019, the Judicial Academy organised 8 training sessions for representatives of courts and public prosecutor's offices of all levels and cities in the Republic of Serbia. About 200 persons in total, including judges and prosecutors' assistants, underwent the training. The training topics were: concept, elements and international legal framework of hate crime; national legal framework and judicial criminal protection in cases of hate crimes; criminal prosecution of criminal offences committed out of hatred; hate crime in the Republic of Serbia and the obligation to report. A special focus during the training was placed on the analysis of hate crimes pertaining to belonging to national minorities. In December 2021, the Academy organised a presentation of the training plan and programme for contact persons from public prosecutor's offices for the fight against hate crimes. The participants were contact persons from higher public prosecution offices, appellate public prosecution offices and the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Serbia. On that occasion, an analysis of court

practice and previous judgements in the field of hate crimes was presented, as well as a presentation of the future training programme for contact points in the fight against hate crimes.

In addition, participants of the Judicial Academy have the opportunity to use the distance learning model of the Council of Europe, the HELP system on the topic of hate crimes and hate speech, and thus acquire new knowledge in the field of application of the European Convention on Human Rights as well as EKRI recommendations.

Also, in the first half of 2020, the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Serbia joined the project entitled "Increasing Awareness and Resources to Support Victims of Hate Crimes (EStAR)" implemented by the OSCE/ODIHR in 41 OSCE member states in the period from 2020 to 2021. The aim of the project is to, with the support of the European Commission and the German Government, produce tools to improve protection and services for victims of hate crimes and to build the capacity of service providers. In addition, the deputy public prosecutor of the Republic of Serbia was designated as a member of the Network of Experts for Support of Victims of Hate Crimes, which was established as part of the project. The main objective of this network is to collect and exchange knowledge, expertise and practice on existing aspects of support for victims of hate crimes.

In order to implement the legal acquis of the EU and accept the standards of the European administrative space, the Ministry of Interior continuously works on improving the general security standards, as well as the education of employees and future members of the Ministry, paying special attention, among other things, to the integration of national minorities into the police service.

The Police Training Centre of the Ministry of the Interior continuously implements training sessions for police officers that have human rights, prevention of discrimination and torture as their subject, and which are primarily aimed at sensitising police officers to work in multi-ethnic communities, through basic police training that is carried out at the Centre for basic police training in Sremska Kamenica, as well as through annual training sessions that are an integral part of the Professional Training Programme for police officers for the current year, and which are implemented in all organisational units of the Ministry of Interior.

The Ministry of Interior has implemented legal regulations in the given Professional Training Programme, which, among other things, refer to the protection of human rights and freedoms.

Basic police training is aimed at training participants to legally and efficiently perform the duties and tasks of a uniformed police officer, and is mandatory for all future police officers, and is organised before entering the service, that is, before starting an employment relationship with the police.

When establishing an employment relationship, the Ministry of Interior takes into account the national composition of the population, the appropriate representation of members of national minorities and the knowledge of the language and script that is in official use in the territory of the local self-government unit for which the organisational unit in which the person establishes the employment relationship was established, in order to achieve full equality between members of national minorities and citizens belonging to the majority, in accordance with Article 137 of the Law on Police.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 6/2016, 24/2018 and 87/2018

The field of human rights in basic police training is represented in several teaching subjects and professional modules, among which a special role is played by the subject "Police Work in the Community, Human Rights and the Code of Police Ethics" in which participants acquire knowledge about the phenomenon of human rights and freedoms, the categories of morality and ethics, deontology and become familiar with the structure and scope of the national police code and the European code of police ethics, as well as community police work. Participants are introduced to the Code of Police Ethics through case studies, situational exercises and role-playing. Special emphasis is put on understanding the links between the Code of Police Ethics, police powers and human rights.

In addition to the abovementioned, teaching content referring to the protection of human rights and freedoms is also covered in the following subjects: Criminal and Criminal Procedural Law, Police Officers: Rights, Obligations and Duties, as well as professional modules: Suppression of Crime and Application of Police Powers and Use of Means of Coercion. Teaching contents from the mentioned subjects and professional modules are implemented through several topics.

All trainees in the course of professional training have the opportunity to acquire the necessary knowledge and build the necessary attitudes regarding the respect of human rights and freedoms and the prevention of torture and ill-treatment by the police.

Bearing in mind the abovementioned, the Ministry of Interior provides continuous education and training of trainees - future police officers regarding the topics related to respect for human rights and freedoms and prevention of torture and ill-treatment.

In this regard, in the period from 2017 to 2022, a total of 3,023 trainees completed basic police training at the Centre for Basic Police Training, of which 164 trainees were members of national minorities, which is 4.05% of the trainees.

The Ministry of Interior undertook a series of activities with the aim of developing trust, cooperation and partnership with the community in order to motivate members of national minorities to work in the police, and acted affirmatively towards all national communities when announcing the competition for admission to the Centre for Basic Police Training and Work in the Police.

In accordance with the abovementioned, a professional information, recruitment and marketing programme is implemented, which informs potential candidates about the conditions of the competition in their own languages and encourages them to apply for police recruitment competitions. Among other things, when announcing the competition in 2018, the text of the competition and promotional material were translated into the languages of members of national minorities (Romani - dialectal variant, Romani - dialectal variant characteristic of the AP of Vojvodina area, Romanian, Slovak, Hungarian, Czech, Croatian, Ruthenian, Albanian, Bulgarian and Ukrainian), and in addition, within the framework of cooperation with the OSCE Mission in Serbia, in all regional police administrations for which the competition was announced, promotional forums in the form of an Open Door Day were held, intended for those who applied for enrollment for basic police training, as well as for other interested parties, when potential candidates could familiarise themselves with the conditions of the competition, selection and training at the Centre for Basic Police Training of the Ministry. During 2019, promotional activities continued, and in cooperation with the OSCE Mission in the Republic of Serbia, a promotional video was made for the purpose of promoting the police profession

and basic police training, which was also translated into 11 languages of members of national minorities.

During 2020, 2021 and 2022, the Ministry of Interior continued its promotional activities and affirmative actions towards all national communities when announcing the competition for admission to the Centre for Basic Police Training and Work in the Police, and is always ready to cooperate in order to motivate its members of national minorities to work in the police.

Furthermore, the professional training of employees in the Ministry of Interior represents the continuous improvement and development of acquired knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour, as well as the adoption of new ones resulting from practice, scientific and research work or new legal regulations, with the aim of legal, efficient and safe performance of tasks and is mandatory for all employees in the Ministry.

As part of the Professional Training Programme for Police Officers of the Ministry of Interior in the period from 2017 to 2022, through mandatory teaching in the "Theoretical Teaching" teaching area, among other things, the following topics were covered: the concept of recognition and response of the police to emerging forms of discrimination and work of the police with marginalised, minority and socially vulnerable groups. In the course of 2021, more than 30,000 participants attended mandatory classes on the mentioned topics, while as of March 2022, approximately 2,900 participants attended the same. Also, in cooperation with the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality and the OSCE Mission in Serbia, in the period from 2017 to 2022, 14 seminars entitled "Recognising and Responding to Discrimination" were held for a total of 365 police officers.

### **Article 8 of the Framework Convention**

#### **The right to profess one's religion and to establish institutions, organisations and associations**

*70. The Advisory Committee reiterates its call to the authorities to ensure that the right of members of national minorities to establish religious institutions, organisations or associations is effectively guaranteed by law, as well as in practice, including ensuring that legal provisions regulating religious communities do not allow discrimination, including those that are numerically smaller in size, especially in terms of access to legal personality or tax status.*

The response to this recommendation is given in the response to recommendation 8 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

### **Article 9 of the Framework Convention**

#### **Access to print and electronic media in minority languages**

*75. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to closely monitor the impact of the privatisation process on minority media and to commission a comprehensive and independent study on the subject. The Advisory Committee also calls on the authorities to take the necessary*

*measures to provide the independence of private and public media, including those owned by political representatives of national minorities.*

*76. In the context of developing a new media strategy, the Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to consider minority media, from a quantitative and qualitative point of view, and thus consult representatives of national minorities, taking into account the diversity of opinion within each community, as well as media experts and independent researchers.*

The response to this recommendation is given in the response to recommendation 9 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

### **Article 10 of the Framework Convention**

#### **The use of minority languages in relations with the authorities**

*81. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to commission a study to assess the level of implementation of legal provisions on official use of minority languages and ensure that in all municipalities where legal requirements are met, minority languages have effective official use.*

Data on studies based on which the level of application of legal provisions on the official use of minority languages can be assessed are provided in the response to recommendation 10 from the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

In the context of this recommendation of the Advisory Committee, and in terms of ensuring that in all municipalities where legal requirements are met, the languages of minorities have effective official use, it is important to point out that administrative supervision over the implementation of legal decisions on the official use of languages and scripts of national minorities is carried out by the Administrative Inspectorate, and in the territory of AP of Vojvodina, the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities - National Communities.

In its work, the administrative inspection, with the aim of ensuring the implementation of the principle of legality in the work and actions of the supervised authorities and the protection of public and private interests, undertakes preventive measures and warns the supervised authorities of their obligations under the regulations, that is, points out to them the possible harmful consequences due to improper application of the regulations regulating exercise of the rights of members of the national minority (the right to be registered in the special voters` list of the national minority, the right to use the language and script of the national minority and other rights).

In the mentioned period, the Administrative Inspection, as part of the inspection supervision over the implementation of the Law on National Councils of National Minorities, in the part that regulates the special voters` list, ordered the supervised authorities to carry out seven measures referring to the obligation to make decisions on changes in the special voters` list in the languages and scripts of the national minorities as well. Also, the administrative inspection carried out 515 inspection supervisions of the application of regulations on civil

registers, including, among other things, the part regulating the right of members of national minorities to enter their personal names in civil registers according to the language and spelling of members of national minorities. In the records of inspection supervision, the supervised bodies were proposed to carry out 28 measures referring to the aforementioned rights of members of national minorities. In addition, 122 inspection supervisions were carried out over the implementation of regulations governing the official use of languages and letters. In the minutes of the inspection supervision, the supervised bodies were proposed to carry out 10 measures to eliminate the established illegalities, irregularities and deficiencies in the work.

The tasks of inspection supervision in the field of official use of languages and scripts in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina are performed as entrusted tasks that fall under the purview of the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities - National Communities. In case of finding illegality with regard to the official use of languages and scripts, first in the minutes, and in the case of failure to act according to the minutes - and the decision, the elimination of the established illegalities shall be ordered. The control monitoring determines the action according to the ordered measures, or requests are submitted for the initiation of misdemeanor proceedings. The inspection in the field of official use of languages and scripts acts both preventively and in advisory manner within the framework of official advisory visits. Official advisory visits are also conducted for the purpose of familiarisation and interpretation of regulations for authorities and organisations and other supervised subjects, for the proper and complete application of regulations governing the field of official use of languages and scripts. In the reporting period, 77 inspections were conducted in connection with the official use of languages and scripts.

In the period 2018-2021, there were several complaints and petitions regarding the application of regulations in the field of official use of languages and scripts in administrative bodies, public enterprises and organisations with public powers in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, which the Provincial Secretariat acted on independently of the regular inspections it carries out.

2018			
Complainant	Grounds for complaint	Complaint presented pertaining to	Inspection activity
National Council of the Hungarian National Minority  Hungarian movement	Failure to write on the signboard the name of the Palić settlement in all languages that are in official use in the territory of the City of Subotica	City administration of Subotica	An extraordinary inspection was carried out. Ordered measures for inscription. Measures taken.
Natural entity	Incomplete application of the official use of language and script in the part referring to the trilingual writing of notices for the elections of members of the Council of the	Municipal Administration of Kula	An extraordinary inspection was carried out. Ordered measures for providing all voting and election material in languages that are in

	Ruski Krstur Local Community		official use in the Municipality of Kula.
National Council of the Croatian National Minority  National Council of the Hungarian National Minority	Failure to write on the signboard the name of the Bajmok settlement in all languages that are in official use in the territory of the City of Subotica	Local Community of Bajmok	An extraordinary inspection was carried out. Ordered measures for inscription. Measures taken.
National Council of the Hungarian National Minority	Placement of signboards with the names of settlements with incomplete application of regulations on the official use of languages and scripts	PC "Putevi Srbije"	Notification of PC "Putevi Srbije" and joint work on the full implementation of regulations in the field of official use of language and script in the part of writing traditional names of settlements.
<b>2019</b>			
<b>Complainant</b>	<b>Grounds for complaint</b>	<b>Complaint presented pertaining to</b>	<b>Inspection activity</b>
Natural entity	Application of regulations on the official use of languages and scripts at school	"Branko Ćopić" Primary School in Lukićevo	The complainant was informed about the groundlessness of the complaint.
National Council of the Hungarian National Minority	By amending the Statute of the City of Pančevo, it is no longer foreseen that the Hungarian language and script will be in official use in the Cadastral Municipality of Vojlovica, as was prescribed by the previous Statute	City Administration Pančevo	Regular inspection supervision was carried out. Ordered measures. The re-prescription of the official use of the Hungarian language and script in the Cadastral Municipality of Vojlovica, by amending the Statute of the City of Pančevo.
Proceedings on the assigned case of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, on the initiative of the petition of a natural entity	Writing notices only in Hungarian language and script	"Besedeš Jožef" Agricultural Technical - Secondary School Centre in Kanjiža	An extraordinary inspection was carried out. Ordered measures for writing the notices. Measures taken

2020			
Complainant	Grounds for complaint	Complaint presented pertaining to	Inspection activity
Immediate knowledge of the inspection  The media  Anonymous petition	Absence of writing public inscriptions and notices in the Hungarian language and script	Municipal Administration of Temerin	An extraordinary inspection was carried out. Ordered measures for inscription. Measures taken
Immediate knowledge of the inspection  The media	Absence of writing and incorrect writing of public inscriptions and notices in the Hungarian language and script	General Hospital in Subotica	An extraordinary inspection was carried out. Ordered measures for writing. Measures taken
Natural entity	Improper and incomplete official use of language and script in "Uroš Predić" Primary School in Orlovat regarding the writing of the board with the name of the school	"Uroš Predić" Primary School in Orlovat	The inspection issued an act on the application of regulations in the form of a recommendation regarding the proper application of the provisions of the Law on the Official Use of Languages and Scripts. The act was executed
Natural entity	Incorrectness and omissions when writing the names of institutions in the Hungarian language in the City of Kikinda	City Administration of Kikinda	An extraordinary inspection was carried out. Ordered measures for writing. Measures taken
2021			
Complainant	Grounds for complaint	Complaint presented pertaining to	Inspection activity
Natural entity	Incomplete application of the right to the official use of languages and scripts when marking cemeteries in the territory of the City of Novi Sad	PUC "Lisje Novi Sad	An official advisory visit was made to PUC "Lisje" Novi Sad and the City Administration of Novi Sad. A recommendation was issued regarding the provision of complete and correct inscriptions.
A natural entity on behalf of the Democratic Union of Vojvodina Hungarians (DUVH)	Indicating the incomplete implementation of the regulations on the official use of languages and scripts in traffic signs on road routes	Several local self-government units in North Bačka District and North Banat District	The inspection submitted a notice on the implementation of the opinion of the Secretariat for Legislation of the Republic of Serbia, number 011-00-00065/2021-01 from 19 March 2021. No

			inspection has been initiated.
Natural entity	Indicating the crossing out of signs with the names of settlements in the Municipality of Kovačica and the writing of inscriptions on the building of the Municipality of Kovačica. Incomplete implementation of the official use of the language and script on the "Mihajlo Pupin" Grammar School signboard in Kovačica, National Employment Service of the Provincial Employment Service Pančevo Branch - Kovačica Branch, Centre for Social Work in Kovačica, National Health Insurance Fund - Kovačica Branch, RGA – Real Estate Cadastre in Kovačica	Municipal Administration of Kovačica	The complainant was informed about the inspection procedure. No supervision was initiated due to the situation outside the jurisdiction of the inspection and the absence of an appropriate degree of risk. Acts have been issued on the implementation of regulations with recommendations for the full implementation of the official use of language and script in the "Mihajlo Pupin" Grammar School in Kovačica, National Employment Service of the Provincial Employment Service Pančevo Branch - Kovačica Branch, Centre for Social Work in Kovačica, National Health Insurance Fund - Kovačica Branch, RGA – Real Estate Cadastre in Kovačica
Natural entity	Irregularities regarding the application of regulations when writing the name of a settlement in the municipality of Kula	Municipal Administration of Kula	An extraordinary inspection was carried out. Ordered measures for writing. The deadline for the execution of the ordered measures has not expired.
National Council of the Hungarian National Minority	Damage to signboards with the names of settlements in the territory of the municipality of Temerin	Municipal Administration of Temerin	The official letter was forwarded to the competent inspection. Extraordinary inspection supervision of the competent inspection of ordered and executed measures was carried out.
Newspaper article	Placing signboards with the names of settlements only in the Serbian language and script, violating the	Municipal Administration of Vrbas	An extraordinary inspection was carried out. Ordered measures to

	regulations on the official use of languages and scripts		be issued and implemented measures.
Anonymous petition	The existence of a public signboard in the populated place of Stara Pazova only in the Serbian language and script	Municipal Administration of Stara Pazova	An extraordinary inspection was carried out. Ordered measures for writing inscriptions in the Slovak language and script. The ordered measures were not implemented, the control supervision is planned in July 2022.
National Council of the Hungarian National Minority	Incomplete implementation of the regulations on the official use of languages and scripts when writing the name of the Elemir settlement	Local Community of Elemir	An extraordinary inspection was carried out. Ordered measures for writing. The deadline for the execution of the ordered measures has not expired.
"Slovaks and Cohabitation" Association	Indicating the incomplete implementation of the regulations on the official use of languages and scripts in traffic signs on roads	Municipal Administration of Bački Petrovac	Regular inspection supervision was carried out in the field of official use of languages and scripts. The complainant was informed about the Opinion of the Secretariat for Legislation of the Republic of Serbia, No. 011-00-00065/2021-01 from 19 March 2021
Submitted anonymous application by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development	Indicating the incomplete implementation of the official use of the language and script at the "Jan Čajak" Primary School in Bački Petrovac due to the absence of public signboards in the Serbian language and script	"Jan Čajak" Primary School in Bački Petrovac	An extraordinary inspection was carried out. Ordered measures for writing inscriptions. Measure implemented

82. *The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to increase their efforts, in areas traditionally inhabited by members of national minorities or where they live in large numbers, to collect data on the number of minority languages spoken by civil servants in national, provincial and local governments and, in the light of such data, to take the necessary measures, including adequate training for the members of the national minorities in question, in order to ensure that the number of speakers in these administrations corresponds as much as possible to the proportion of the population that speaks minority languages.*

83. *The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to intensify their efforts to inform all members of national minorities in the respective areas that they have the right to use their minority language in contacts with state, provincial and local administration.*

The response to this recommendation is given in the response to recommendation 10 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

### **Article 11 of the Framework Convention**

#### **Personal names, topographical marks and other signs and inscriptions**

86. *The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to ensure that excerpts from registers can be printed bilingually or multilingually in the territory of Serbia when registers contain information in the Serbian language and in one or more minority languages.*

Pursuant to the Law on the Official Use of Languages and Scripts, in areas where the languages and scripts of national minorities are in official use, documents that are of interest for the exercise of the rights of citizens established by law shall also be issued in their language, at the request of members of a national minority. This shall also apply to excerpts from registers that are issued bilingually, in the Serbian language, in the Cyrillic script and in the language and script of the national minority the language of which is in official use.

In all other units of local self-government, excerpts are issued in the Serbian language, and in the excerpt from the register, the personal name in the language and script of the member of the national minority shall be entered after the entry of the personal name in the Serbian language in the Cyrillic script, below it in the same shape and size of the letters, if the personal name of the child, parent, spouse or deceased member of the national minority is entered in the register in the language and script of the national minority.

In the past period, no obstacles were observed in the exercise of this right, nor were the registry offices or citizens addressing the ministry in charge of public administration and local self-government indicating problems in practice. The table below provides statistical data on the number of issued excerpts from registers on bilingual forms for 2020 and 2021.

2020	
Albanian	1
Bosniak	7,378
Hungarian	5,598
Romanian	13
Slovak	165
Croatian	1,405
2021	
Albanian	2
Bosniak	1,785
Bulgarian	6
Hungarian	5,157
Slovak	155

Croatian	1,259
Total	22,924

The number of excerpts from registers that are not printed bilingually, and in which the personal names of members of national minorities are entered in their language as well, is many times higher. This was also contributed to by the fact that, acting on the recommendation of the Ombudsman from the Special Report on the Official Use of the Bulgarian Language and Script, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government sent an instruction to all registry offices on 16 December 2021 to inform citizens about the right to enter a personal name in the language and script of the national minority, in which it is indicated that it is necessary for all registry offices to highlight in a visible place (bulletin boards of the municipal/city administration and internet presentations of the municipality/city) the notification about the right of members of national minorities to enter their personal name in the language and script of a national minority.

In accordance with the regulations, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government in 2020 established a special sectoral professional training of registrars in order to ensure the improvement of existing and the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and abilities of this category of employees in local self-government units for the successful execution of the tasks of keeping registers and acting in the first instance administrative procedure in the area of registers, among other things, regarding the correct application of regulations referring to the official use of language and script in the keeping of registers, entry of data on the personal name of a member of a national minority in the language and script of the national minority, subsequent entry in registers with with special reference to the procedure for registering the fact of birth of a member of the Roma national minority in the birth register, determining the time and place of birth and entering the fact of birth in the birth register based on a court decision. The preparation and adoption of the training programme is preceded by an analysis of the needs for professional training, which is carried out for each calendar year. The sectoral special registrar training programme for 2020 contains seven areas of professional development and 10 thematic units. This programme was implemented in its entirety. 21 training sessions were held, and 718 registrars attended. The sectoral special training programme for registrars for 2021 has been significantly improved and contains six areas of professional development and within them 16 thematic units. This programme was also implemented as a whole. 28 training sessions were held with a total of 1,125 training participants. Progress was made in the number of participants in 2021, since 37.9% more participants participated in this programme compared to the previous year. Based on the previously performed analysis of the needs for professional training of registrars for the year 2022, the Ministry adopted the Sectoral Special Training Programme for registrars for the year 2022. In this way, the Ministry has provided all the necessary prerequisites for continuous professional training of registrars and deputy registrars in order to perform the duties of keeping registers as successfully as possible.

*87. The Advisory Committee reiterates its call on the authorities to ensure that the necessary measures are taken so that all local authorities where a minority language or languages are in*

*official use fulfill their obligation to display topographical signs in the appropriate minority language or languages.*

In 2020, the questionnaires sent to local self-government units (LSGUs) by the Office for Human and Minority Rights,<sup>98</sup> with the aim of assessing the use of languages and scripts of national minorities in LSGUs, also contained questions related to the spelling of place names, other geographical names and public inscriptions. Out of a total of 54 LSGUs in which there are languages and scripts of national minorities in official use, 32 or 59.26% of LSGUs submitted their responses to this questionnaire.

Out of the total number of LSGUs that submitted their responses, 24 or 75% of them answered affirmatively to the question of whether signs with the names of populated places are also written in the languages of national minorities that are in official use. Three LSGUs, although they submitted questionnaires, did not answer that question at all, while 5 or 15.62% of those who submitted questionnaires highlighted the answer based on which it is clear that the relevant legal provisions on writing the names of settlements in languages and scripts of national minorities that are in official use are not fully complied with. Of the 24 LSGUs in which signboards with the names of settlements are written in the languages of national minorities, all stated that such signboards are written in all languages that are in official use. LSGUs that responded that the signboards with the names of populated places were not written in the languages and scripts of national minorities that are in official use were offered answers in the questionnaire regarding the reasons for such absence. LSGUs in which the signboards with the names of populated places are not written in the languages of national minorities that are in official use, indicated various reasons for such absence - from the lack of financial resources for those purposes, to the formulation that "most of the names of populated places on the territory of the municipality, especially in rural areas hilly-mountainous area are not marked at all".

The research conducted in 2020 in cooperation with the Standing Conference of Municipalities and Cities and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, which was mentioned in response to recommendation 3 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution, also referred to the official use of languages and scripts, included 16 LSGUs.<sup>99</sup> Among the abovementioned municipalities and cities, 4 LSGUs did not send responses, so the final sample for analysis amounted to 12. Of the 12 LSGUs that submitted responses, the languages of national minorities are in official use in the entire territory of 7 LSGUs, as well as in several populated places in 3 LSGUs.

Measures to write the names of municipalities/towns, settlements, squares and streets and other toponyms in the languages of national minorities in official use, according to their tradition and spelling, were implemented by 5 LSGUs from the sample, while the same measure was carried out in certain populated places in their territory by 4 LSGUs.

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<sup>98</sup> The questionnaires were sent in order to prepare a special study that was the result of the cooperation between the Office for Human and Minority Rights of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the OSCE Mission to the Republic of Serbia.

<sup>99</sup> The following local self-government units were selected: Apatin, Bela Palanka, Bujanovac, Vranje, Dimitrovgrad, Zrenjanin, Kučevo, Lajkovac, Negotin, Novi Pazar, Novi Sad, Pančevo, Požarevac, Priboj, Sombor and Subotica.

In this research, based on the examined sample, it is found that topographic names and street names are set in populated areas, and a lower level of rights protection was observed in terms of multilingual notices to citizens that they have the right to official language use.

In order to assess the situation regarding the writing and marking of the names of settlements, on signboards/traffic signs - Name of a settlement (III-23) - entrance to a settlement and End of a settlement (III- 23.1) - exit from a settlement in the languages of national minorities which are in official use, as well as due to the need to plan regular inspections in the field of official use of languages and letters and planning budget funds, the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities - National Communities submitted questionnaires to all LSGUs in the territory of AP of Vojvodina. It was necessary to fill in data on the presence/absence of such signboards, provide the reasons for their absence and attach photo documentation of the said signboards. Out of 45 LSGUs in the territory of AP of Vojvodina, 42 LSGUs responded and submitted the completed questionnaire, and only 3 did not submit the completed questionnaire.

Regarding the signboards at the entrances to the settlements, out of a total of 389 recorded settlements in the questionnaire, there are signboards with written names in all languages in official use in 217 settlements (58%), and in 172 settlements (42%) there are no signboards with written names in all languages in official use. With regard to signboards at the exits of populated areas, out of a total of 389 populated areas, signboards with written names in all languages in official use exist in 174 populated areas (45 %), and in 215 populated areas (55 %) there are no boards with written names in all languages in official use. It should be noted that in the case of certain LSGUs, i.e. populated places in that LSGU, there is no obligation to write names in the languages of national minorities in all populated places, since those languages have been introduced into official use only in part of the territory of the LSGU.

In those inhabited places where there are signboards (entrance/exit) with the names of inhabited places in all languages in official use, it is noticeable that only in about 25% of those inhabited places there are signboards with names in all languages in official use on all road directions, i.e. all entrances and exits from populated areas. In other cases, signboards are placed mainly on the main roads, i.e. state roads, the maintenance and installation of traffic signals of which is the responsibility of PC "Putevi Srbije", and less often there are signboards that are also placed on local roads, the maintenance and installation of traffic signals of which is the responsibility of a designated local public company.

During 2018, the Secretariat established successful cooperation with the PC "Putevi Srbije", Sector for Maintenance of State Roads of the First and Second Class - Department for Maintenance and Protection of Roads in Novi Sad, regarding the issue of the official use of languages and scripts on traffic signs. Due to frequent appeals and complaints by several national councils of national minorities regarding the removal of old and installation of new signboards with the names of inhabited places, the Secretariat pointed out that in certain cases the installation of new boards was carried out contrary to the regulations governing the official use of languages and scripts. In certain populated areas, during the replacement of signboards on state roads, by order of the PC "Putevi Srbije", marking of the name of the populated place was carried out without taking into account the correct application of the statutes of certain cities and municipalities, in the sense that the name was not written on the signboards indicating the populated place in all languages that are in official use in the territory of the designated

LSGU by the statutes of municipalities/cities. The Secretariat asked the PC "Putevi Srbije" to take all necessary measures and to install, as soon as possible, new signboards in accordance with the statutes of the LSGU and the regulations pertaining to the official use of the languages of national minorities, as well as to inform the Secretariat of the measures taken. After this intervention by the Secretariat, the PC "Putevi Srbije" started to change the signboards, and with the joint work of the Secretariat and the PC "Putevi Srbije", the abovementioned percentages and numbers of posted signboards was adjusted in a positive sense.

The incomplete writing of signboards in all the languages introduced into official use, in addition to the other previously mentioned reasons, is also the result of the fact that some national councils did not establish traditional names for all settlements in certain LSGUs in which the language of their minority was introduced into official use, but established traditional names only for places where the majority of members of that national minority live (e.g. the National Council of the Romanian National Minority established traditional names for the municipality of Bela Crkva only for the places Grebenac and Bela Crkva, although the Romanian language and script are in official use in the entire territory of that municipality).

In this regard, the Secretariat, through the inspection for the official use of languages and scripts, sent an official letter to all national councils of national minorities that have their languages introduced into official use in the territory of AP of Vojvodina, reminding them of the need to fully and comprehensively determine the traditional names of inhabited places in their language.

In order to improve the display of topographic signs in the appropriate minority language or languages, the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities - National Communities of AP of Vojvodina regularly announces call for competitions for the distribution of budget funds to bodies and organisations in the territory of AP of Vojvodina which use languages and scripts of national minorities in official use in their work. At competitions, among other things, funds are awarded for the production of multilingual signboards with the names of authorities and organisations, populated areas and street names, etc. Information about the funds allocated in these competitions for the installation of signboards with the names of authorities and organisations, populated areas and street names is given in the table below.

Costs of creating and installing multilingual boards		
Year	Number of supported projects	Amount of funds
2017	57	6,834,000.00
2018	62	7,117,000.00
2019	44	5,573,000.00
2020	48	6,937,000.00
2021	62	5,019,500.00

## **Article 12 of the Framework Convention**

### **Promotion of multicultural and intercultural perspectives in education**

*94. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to significantly increase their efforts to promote a multicultural and intercultural perspective in education, including the development*

*of exchange programmes between communities as soon as possible and no later than the deadline for the fifth national report, at every level of education.*

*95. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to ensure, as soon as possible and at the latest before the deadline for the fifth national report, that through a process that includes the effective participation of members of national minorities, curricula and teaching material in History promote respect for all groups in society and provide broad knowledge about minorities constituting an integral part of Serbian society, as well as to ensure that multiple perspectives are encouraged in historical and contemporary research.*

*96. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to promote possible models of bilingual or multilingual education in consultation with representatives of national minorities.*

The responses to these recommendations are contained in the response to recommendation 4 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

### **Access to education for Roma**

*99. The Advisory Committee appeals to the authorities to intensify their efforts to eliminate all forms of segregation of Roma children and to include them in regular education. The situation at all levels should be carefully monitored in order to avoid any segregation based on ethnicity.*

*100. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to redouble their efforts to combat absenteeism and early school leaving among Roma children. Such efforts should include the expansion and development of the long-term use of pedagogical assistants who can help Roma children and their families contact and integrate into the education system.*

The responses to these recommendations are contained in the response to recommendation 1 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

In regard with the Advisory Committee's finding that *early and forced marriages remain an insufficiently and inadequately resolved issue, according to civil society reports, which makes it even more difficult for affected students to access education*, we highlight the following.

In the Republic of Serbia, forced child marriages are prohibited by law and constitute a criminal offence. The Family Law explicitly states that marriage can only be concluded based on the free consent of the future spouses (Article 3), that it cannot be concluded by a person who has not reached the age of 18, and that the court can, for justified reasons, allow the conclusion of marriage to a minor who has reached the age of 16 and has reached the physical and mental maturity required for the exercise of rights and duties in marriage (Article 23), i.e. that the marriage is voidable if it was entered into by a minor without the permission of the court (Article 37).

The Criminal Code prescribes sanctions for violating the guaranteed rights of the child, that is, for the practice of child marriage. Thus, in Article 190, Paragraph 1, a prison sentence of three years shall be prescribed for an adult who lives in an extramarital union with a minor, and the same punishment shall be prescribed for a parent, adoptive parent or guardian who enables a minor to live in an extramarital union with an adult or solicitates the minor to do it (Paragraph 2). Furthermore, Article 191 prescribes a fine or prison sentence for anyone who unlawfully retains or takes away a minor from a parent, adoptive parent, guardian or other person, i.e. institution, to whom the minor is entrusted or prevents the execution of the decision by which the minor is entrusted to a certain person.

According to the results of the MICS 6 survey from 2019, a total of 34% of young women aged 15–19 from Roma settlements are married or cohabiting, but this indicator rises to 41% among women from the poorest households. 16% of women aged 20–24 got married before the age of 15, and 56% before the age of 18. Among women aged 20–24, marriage before the age of 15 and before the age of 18 is much more common among those with primary education than among those with secondary and higher education. Also, early marriages are more characteristic of women from poorer households (73%).

The Government of Serbia is taking steps to provide a systemic and institutional response from the state and society necessary for the disappearance of the practice of child marriage.

Given the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon, the National Coalition to End Child Marriage was established in 2019 at the initiative of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality of the Government of Serbia and UNICEF in Serbia. The general objective of the National Coalition is to contribute to the end of child marriages in Serbia, especially in the Roma population, through the directed and coordinated action of relevant actors, through advocacy for the removal of institutional and social obstacles to the implementation of relevant legislative and strategic frameworks, as well as the promotion of examples of good practice that are implemented in partnership with local communities, non-governmental, governmental and private sectors and the media.

In 2021, the National Coalition to End Child Marriage launched the "Childhood, Not Marriage" media campaign with the aim of drawing attention to the problem and prevalence of child marriage, but also to show examples of women and girls whose families saw the importance of girls' education and thus supported them in adequate growth and development. This media campaign was presented to all local self-government units in the Republic of Serbia, as well as to all national and international actors with an invitation to join the campaign and thus contribute to raising public awareness about the problem of child marriage. According to data available from the UNICEF office in Serbia, during the campaign, four videos promoting examples of good practice were shown 637,000 times. Also, according to their measurements, the campaign reached 530,000 social network users.

The National Coalition for Ending Child Marriage will continue to contribute to the end of child marriage in Serbia through the activities of its members, as well as joint action, through strengthening the system to adequately respond to the problem of child marriage, as well as campaigns aimed at raising awareness of this phenomenon.

During 2018, the National Institute for Social Protection in cooperation with UNICEF carried out an "Analysis of the Practice of Centres for Social Work Regarding Child Marriage". In

2019, as a response to the recommendation within the research, the Ministry responsible for social protection issued an Instruction on the manner social work centres - guardianship bodies work in protecting children from child marriage. Based on this Instruction, the National Institute for Social Protection prepares annual reports. According to the report for 2020, during that year, centres for social work identified 191 child victims of child marriage, of which 11 were boys and 180 were girls. Bearing in mind the municipalities that did not submit data, it is reasonable to assume that the total number of child victims of child marriage is higher. Therefore, it is necessary to additionally strengthen local self-government units to recognise the problem of child marriage and the importance of monitoring this phenomenon in order to plan adequate and timely prevention and response activities to cases of violence based on the data.

Early marriage is one of the reasons for dropping out of students from the education system, especially girls. Therefore, a dropout prevention model was created, which contains school-level measures that include a system for early identification and intervention for students at risk of dropping out, which is the main component of the model, then measures to improve parental involvement in school and peer support measures, as well as training for teachers and a new school model of supplementary teaching.

The dropout rate in schools where the prevention model was changed was reduced by 53.2% compared to previous data, and is an indication that individualised support measures are yielding results. In order to empower education employees to recognise students at risk of dropping out and provide them with adequate support, a training programme for early identification and prevention of dropping out of students was introduced to the list of training sessions of public interest, and manuals for schools on this topic were prepared. Three more programmes were accredited and training sessions were conducted to strengthen the capacity of over 2,000 employees in education for dropout prevention, activities for the inclusion and participation of all children and students through education.

#### **Article 14 of the Framework Convention**

##### **Teaching in minority languages and minority language teaching, including teaching materials**

*105. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to take the necessary measures to close the one-year gap between the revision of the national curriculum and the release of revised materials in minority languages. It also calls on the authorities to find an appropriate and quickly implementable solution for materials in the Albanian language.*

After the submission of the Fourth Periodic Report, the Republic of Serbia continued to make efforts to provide all missing textbooks, focusing especially on solving the issue of providing textbooks in the Albanian language. The process of obtaining missing low-circulation textbooks in the languages of the national minority was significantly improved by the establishment of the Centre for Low-Circulation Textbooks and the adoption of the Rulebook on Issuing Low-Circulation Textbooks.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>100</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 69/2018

Curricular reform of the education system, which includes the preparation of new teaching and learning programmes for all subjects, began in 2018. This actually means that new textbooks are prepared for each subject and class that correspond to the new teaching and learning programmes. When a new curriculum for a particular grade is published, publishers can start preparing new textbooks. After these textbooks are approved, if they are textbooks in the Serbian language, the translation procedure and the approval of translations into minority languages can begin, which also shows why there is a certain time gap between the introduction of textbooks in the languages of national minorities and textbooks in Serbian into the teaching process. However, publishers can also work on publishing author's textbooks in minority languages (which is most often the case for the mother tongue and literature, and subjects of national importance for the national minority - History, Geography, Music and Art, World Around Us/Sciences ) and in those cases there is no significant delay.

So far, reformed teaching and learning programmes for primary school have been adopted for the subjects Mother Tongue and Mother Tongue and Literature for all eight languages of national minorities who receive their entire education in their mother tongue. In addition, reformed teaching and learning programmes were adopted for the elective programme Mother Tongue/Language with Elements of National Culture for 16 languages/speeches. Reformed teaching and learning programmes were also adopted for secondary schools and grammar schools that teach in one of the eight languages of the national minority.

It is important to point out that the national councils of national minorities are the initiators of the preparation of textbooks, as well as that they prepare the list of selected textbooks in the languages of national minorities in cooperation with schools.

A total of 946 textbook units are available in the Catalogue of Textbooks in the Languages of National Minorities for the 2022/23 School Year<sup>101</sup>, of which 482 were published according to the reformed teaching and learning programmes. In addition, the Catalogue contains 24 textbooks for the compulsory subject Serbian as a Non-Native Language.

Significant progress was made by establishing more efficient cooperation in the field of obtaining missing textbooks in the Albanian language. The relevant ministries of the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Albania formed mixed working groups of experts, which work on models for obtaining textbooks in the Albanian and Serbian languages. In the Working Group formed by the Minister of Education of the Republic of Serbia in May 2019, in addition to representatives of competent authorities, there are also representatives of the National Council of the Albanian National Minority and the Government of Serbia Coordination Body for the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja. The work of this group resulted in an affirmative approach in approving textbooks in the Albanian language. In fact, in the period from 2019 to 2022, the Committee for Expert Evaluation of the Quality of Textbook Manuscripts in the Albanian Language for Primary Schools reviewed and approved 43 textbook manuscripts in the Albanian language, which became part of the Catalogue of Textbooks in the Languages of National Minorities. The published textbooks were made according to the reformed teaching and learning programme. For work in preschool institutions and teaching in primary and secondary schools for the 2022/2023 school year, there are 62 textbook units in the Albanian language available, of which 47 units comply with the

<sup>101</sup> <https://mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Katalog-udzbenika-na-jezicima-nacionalnih-manjina.pdf>

reformed teaching and learning programme. This includes four textbooks for the compulsory subject Serbian as a Non-Native Language. As a special support for students who attend classes in the Albanian language, a Serbian-Albanian/Albanian-Serbian Little Dictionary/Fjalor i vogël<sup>102</sup> was drafted, which was promoted and distributed in 16 primary schools with classes in the Albanian language in the municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveda.

In the context of providing textbooks in the Albanian language, it is important to point out that the Coordination Body in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and the National Council of the Albanian National Minority provided additional funds to the National Council for the payment of fees to the respective publishing house in the amount of 1,080,000.00 dinars, for the 2020/2021 school year. With these funds, 15 new textbooks were provided for primary schools where classes are taught in the Albanian language. 1,165,430.00 dinars were allocated for the same purposes for the 2021/2022 school year, for the provision of the seven lacking textbook sets and 12 textbooks for primary schools where classes are taught in the Albanian language.

*106. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to improve the availability and quality of teaching in the state language, including when it is taught as a second language, through a balanced approach that includes parallel measures for the protection and promotion of minority languages.*

The response to this recommendation is given in the response to recommendation 11 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

### **Article 15 of the Framework Convention**

#### **Institutional framework for the participation of national minorities in the decision-making process**

*114. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to monitor and periodically review the implementation of the Law on National Councils of National Minorities in consultation with the councils themselves and to commission an independent qualitative study on the functioning of the councils, including an assessment of their inclusiveness, independence and representativeness, as well as their ability to initiate intercultural dialogue and strengthen inter-ethnic relations.*

The response to this recommendation is given in the response to recommendation 12 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

*115. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities, especially at the local level, to devise and implement new ways of representing and effectively including members of national minorities in the decision-making process, in all areas where national minorities are traditionally inhabited or where they live in large numbers, including bigger cities.*

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<sup>102</sup> <http://dictionary.hcnm.org/dict/>

The authorities of the Republic of Serbia indicate that an extensive legal framework for the representation and effective inclusion of members of national minorities in the decision-making process from the state to the local level is provided for by the Constitution and the corresponding legislation that is effectively applied, about which the Advisory Committee was informed in detail in previous reports and state comments about which it mainly spoke positively. In this sense, we emphasise that designing and implementing new ways of representing and effectively including members of national minorities can refer to the participation of civil society organisations that gather members of national minorities and citizens - members of national minorities in the processes of creating and implementing public policies through the submission of appropriate initiatives, public consultations, public hearings, etc.

Such an approach has also been recognised in the Strategy for the creation of an encouraging environment for the development of civil society in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2022-2030<sup>103</sup> in which it is emphasised that for the achievement of general interests, goals and values, civil society primarily uses the principles and mechanisms of participatory democracy, in a partnership, institutionally and normatively regulated relationship with public authorities at the national, provincial, and especially at the local level. According to this Strategy, using the mechanisms of participatory democracy, citizens as individuals or organised within a civil society organisation have the opportunity to influence decision-making processes and participate in socio-political life, not only during elections, but whenever they feel it is necessary.

Also, in the Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma, it is emphasised that the proposed objectives and measures are based, among other things, on the principles of the full participation of Roma population in all phases of public policy that concern them, as well as on the localisation of measures, i.e. adaptation measure to the local context and support for their participation in the public policy cycle for Roma men and women.

In the context of this recommendation of the Advisory Committee, it is important to point out that the new Law on the Planning System<sup>104</sup> stipulates that the competent proponent of public policy documents shall be obliged to enable the participation of all interested parties and target groups in the consultation process, which is carried out during the preparation of these documents. Depending on the scope of the public policy document, interested parties and target groups are included in the consultation process, among others, from the ranks of citizens, associations of citizens and other civil society organisations. Public policy documents include strategies, programmes, policy concepts and action plans. Also, with regard to the inclusion of members of national minorities in the process of adopting development planning documents, as planning documents of the widest scope, we point out that Article 11, Paragraph 2 of the Law on Local Self-Government stipulates that the statute shall provide for the implementation of a mandatory public hearing procedure, not only during the preparation statute and budget of the local self-government unit, but also during the preparation of strategic development plans and spatial and urban plans.

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<sup>103</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 23/2022

<sup>104</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 30/2018

In the context of designing and implementing new manners of representing and effectively including members of national minorities in the decision-making process, it is important to point out that the Department for Social Dialogue of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue carries out work related to the collection of initiatives and preparation, the organisation, implementation and monitoring of dialogue of all kinds through open debates, among all participants of social life, as well as, with the encouragement of tolerance and mutual understanding, create a policy for the development of social dialogue and promote the improvement of inter-ethnic relations. Since the establishment of the Ministry, a large number of thematic social dialogues have been organised, some of which covered issues of importance for the exercise of the rights of members of national minorities, such as: "Economic Empowerment of Roma and the Goals of Sustainable Development in Serbia" and "Young Roma Drivers of Change ", followed by a dialogue referring to the Proposal for the Strategy for the Development of Education and Training in the Republic of Serbia until 2030 - the education of national minorities, as well as two rounds of thematic dialogues aimed at exercising the rights of members of the Albanian national minority.

*116. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to strengthen their efforts for the political integration of Roma at the national and local levels, including systematic consultation with them in policy-making and decision-making on issues that may affect their rights.*

The response to this recommendation is given in several places in this Report, among others, in the response to recommendation 1 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

### **Representation of national minorities in elected bodies and participation in public affairs**

*122. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to review the provisions related to the election of members of parliament and to consult in this regard with the representatives of all national minorities, including the numerically smaller ones.*

As the Advisory Committee was informed in several state reports, the undertaking of affirmative measures in the field of political life began in 2004 with the abolition of the electoral census, and continued with the adoption of the Law on Political Parties<sup>105</sup>, which defined the term political party of a national minority. Pursuant to that law, a political party of a national minority is a political party the activities of which, among other things, shall specifically be aimed at representing and advocating for the interests of a national minority and protecting and improving the rights of members of that national minority in accordance with the Constitution, the law and international standards. A political party of a national minority can be founded by at least 1,000 citizens of the Republic of Serbia who are of legal age and capable of doing business, which is ten times less than the number of founders needed to establish a political party, which requires 10,000 founders.

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<sup>105</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 36/2009 and 61/2015 – decision of the Constitutional Court

Amendments to the electoral legislation continuously introduce new affirmative solutions into the legal system, which create strong preconditions for effectively ensuring the participation of members of national minorities in the work of the National Parliament and representative bodies at other levels of government. Thus, in 2020, the National Parliament passed the Law on Amendments to the Law on the Election of Members of the Parliament.<sup>106</sup> Among other things, the changes were aimed at an additional reduction of the general electoral census from 5% to 3%, in order to enable participation in the distribution of parliamentary mandates and to ensure that the electoral will of citizens, which is not predominant, is politically articulated and appropriately represented in the National Parliament. Amendments to this law stipulate that political parties of national minorities and coalitions of political parties of national minorities participate in the distribution of mandates even when they received less than 3% of the votes from the total number of voters who voted, in such a way that during the distribution of mandates using the system of the highest quotient, the quotients of those electoral lists of political parties of national minorities and the coalition of political parties of national minorities increase by 35%. In addition, the Law on Amendments to the Law on Local Elections<sup>107</sup> and the Provincial Assembly's Decision on Amendments to the Provincial Assembly's Decision on the Election of Members of the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina<sup>108</sup> from the same year stipulate that political parties of national minorities and coalitions of political parties of national minorities participate in the distribution mandate in an identical manner in the elections for deputies in the Assembly of AP Vojvodina and councilors in local assemblies.

The new Law on the Election of Members of the Parliament<sup>109</sup> from 2022 contains identical affirmative solutions regarding the electoral census and the allocation of mandates to the electoral lists of political parties of national minorities. However, this Law prescribes another new affirmative measure. In fact, the Electoral Commission of the Republic of Serbia can declare an electoral list of a national minority if the applicant of the electoral list submits 5,000 certified statements of voters that they support the electoral list, compared to 10,000 certified statements required for other electoral lists. Also, the new Law on Local Elections<sup>110</sup> from 2022 regulated this issue in a similar way, stipulating that the electoral commission can declare the electoral list of a national minority if the applicant of the electoral list submits a number of signed and certified statements of voters supporting the electoral list that is twice the number which is required according to the general rules of this law. When it comes to the elections for the Assembly of AP of Vojvodina, the minimum number of voter statements necessary for the declaration of election lists of political parties or coalitions of political parties of national minorities is 3,000, while for other election lists, 6,000 certified voter statements are required.

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<sup>106</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, Nos. 35/2000, 57/2003 - decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Serbia, 72/2003 – other law, 75/2003 – corrected other law, 18/2004, 101/2005 - other law, 85/2005 - other law, 28/2011 - decision of the Constitutional Court, 36/2011, 104/2009 - other law, 12/2020 и 68/2020

<sup>107</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 12/2020

<sup>108</sup> *The Official Journal of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina*, Nos. 23/2014, 12/2020 and 14/2020 – authentic interpretation

<sup>109</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 14/2022

<sup>110</sup> *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 14/2022

According to the overall results of the election for deputies of the National Parliament, which were held on 21 June 2020, the electoral lists of political parties or coalitions of political parties of national minorities won a total of 19 mandates.

Name of electoral list	Number of obtained mandates
Vajdasági Magyar Szövetség – Pásztor István – Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians - Ištvan Pastor	9
Academician Muamer Zukorlić – Straight Ahead - Party of Justice and Reconciliation (SPP) - Democratic Party of Macedonians (DPM) / Akademik Muamer Zukorlić – Samo pravo – Stranka pravde i pomirenja (SPP) – Demokratska partija Makedonaca (DPM) / Академик Муамер Зукорлић – Само право – Странка на правда и помиреније (СПП) – Демократска партија на Македонците (ДПМ)	4
"ALBANIAN DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE - UNITED VALLEY", „ALTERNATIVA DEMOKRATIKE SHQIPTARE – LUGINA E BASHKUAR“	3
Democratic Action Party of Sandžak – Sulejman Ugljanin, PhD SDA Sandžaka – dr. Sulejman Ugljanin	3

In addition to the abovementioned, according to the data available to the Committee for Administrative-Budgetary and Mandate-Immunity Issues of the National Parliament, in this convocation of the National Assembly there was a significant number of MPs who declared themselves to be members of national minorities and won the mandate on the electoral lists of other political parties (and not on the electoral lists of parties of national minorities). The number of MPs who declared themselves to be members of national minorities is given in the table below.

Albanians	4
Bosniaks	9
Bulgarians	1
Hungarians	11
Roma	2

According to the overall results of the elections for deputies of the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, which were held on 21 June 2020, the electoral lists of political parties or coalitions of political parties of national minorities won a total of 11 mandates.

Name of electoral list	Number of obtained mandates
Vajdasági Magyar Szövetség – Pásztor István – Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians - Ištvan Pastor	11

Elections for councilors in representative bodies at the local level were held on 21 June 2020 in a large number of local self-government units. The following table provides available data on the number of mandates won by political parties of national minorities or coalitions in which political parties of national minorities participated.

Albanian national minority		
Democratic Party – Nagip Arifi, PhD – Partia Demokratike – Dr. Sc. Nagip Arifi	Bujanovac	10
PARTY FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION - Driton Redzeqi – PARTIA PËR VEPRIM DEMOKRATIK – Driton Rexhepi	Bujanovac	10
ALTERNATIVE FOR CHANGES - Arber Pajaziti – ALTERNATIVA PËR NDRYSHIM – Arbër Pajaziti	Bujanovac	3
MOVEMENT FOR DEMOCRATIC PROGRESS - ŠČIPRIM MUSLIU – LËVIZJA E PROGRESIT DEMOKRATIK – SHQIPRIM MUSLIU	Bujanovac	4
DEMOCRATIC UNION OF ALBANIANS - BASRI VESELI – UNIONI DEMOKRATIK SHQIPTAR – BASRI VESELI	Bujanovac	1
Bosniak national minority		
“EUROPEAN NOVI PAZAR – RASIM LJAJIĆ“ „EVROPSKI NOVI PAZAR – RASIM LJAJIĆ“ (Coalition of Sandžak Democratic Party (SDP), Socialist Democratic Party of Serbia (SDPS), Together for Sandžak (SZS), ЛДП, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Bosniak Democratic Community (BDC))	Novi Pazar	21
TOGETHER FOR PRIJEPOLJE - RASIM LJAJIĆ (Coalition of SDP-SDPS-LDP)	Prijepolje	11
„EUROPEAN SJENICA – RASIM LJAJIĆ“	Sjenica	7
European Tutin - Rasim Ljajić	Tutin	2
ACADEMICIAN MUAMER ZUKORLIĆ –PARTY OF JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION (SPP) „AKADEMIK MUAMER ZUKORLIĆ – STRANKA PRAVDE I POMIRENjA“ (SPP)	Novi Pazar	11
	Priboj	2
	Prijepolje	8
	Sjenica	9
	Tutin	11
DEMOCRATIC ACTION PARTY OF SANDŽAK – SULEJMAN UGLJANIN, PHD „SDA SANDŽAKA – DR. SULEJMAN UGLJANIN“	Novi Pazar	9
	Priboj	2
	Prijepolje	1
	Sjenica	10
	Tutin	18
BEST FOR PRIBOJ SDP-LDP JASMINKO TOSKIĆ, PhD JASMIN HODŽIĆ	Priboj	3
DPS ZULKEFIL BATO SADOVIĆ, PhD	Пријеполје	3
Bulgarian national minority		
IVICA DAČIĆ-"Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), Democratic Party of Bulgaria (DPB)"	Babušnica	4
VLADIMIR ZAHARIJEV-THIS IS US-ALEKSANDAR VUČIĆ-FOR OUR CHILDREN ВЛАДИМИР ЗАХАРИЈЕВ-ТОВА СМЕ НИЕ-АЛЕКСАНДАР ВУЧИЋ-ЗА НАШИТЕ ДЕЦА	Bosilegrad	30
DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF BULGARIANS - NEBOJŠA IVANOV ДЕМОКРАТИЧЕСКА ПАРТИЈА НА БЪЛГАРИТЕ - НЕБОЈША ИВАНОВ	Dimitrovgrad	4

Bunjevac national minority		
BUNJEVCI FOR SUBOTICA - ASSOCIATION OF BUNJEVCI FROM BAČKA	Subotica	2
Wallachian national minority		
Bridge Wallachian Party	Boljevac	2
	Kučevo	1
	Petrovac na Mlavi	2
	Požarevac	2
Together for Boljevac - DEJAN KARABAŠEVIĆ - Wallachian People's Party	Boljevac	2
TOGETHER FOR CHANGES COALITION UNITED SERBIA - WALLACHIAN PEOPLE'S PARTY	Kučevo	2
TRUTH – ADAVIERA	Novi Sad	1
Hungarian national minority		
VAJDASÁGI MAGYAR SZÖVETSÉG – PÁSZTOR ISTVÁN – ALLIANCE OF VOJVODINA HUNGARIANS - IŠTVAN PASTOR	Ada	11
	Apatin	2
	Bačka Topola	19
	Bečej	11
	Žitište	3
	Zrenjanin	3
	Kanjiža	20
	Kikinda	2
	Kovačica	1
	Kovin	3
	Mali Idoš	12
	Nova Crnja	2
	Novi Bečej	2
	Novi Kneževac	10
	Novi Sad	2
	Pančevo	2
	Senta	13
	Sombor	5
	Srbobran	2
	Subotica	22
Temerin	6	
Čoka	9	
„UKROK – ÖSSZEFOGÁS - TANDARI” -TANDARI ZOLTÁN - „UKROK - UNITED - TANDARI“ – ZOLTAN TANDARI	Kanjiža	2
GROUP OF CITIZENS TOGETHER FOR BETTER SENTA - POLGÁROK CSOPORTJA EGYÜTT A JOBB ZENTÁÉRT	Senta	3
ŠANDOR JOŽEF - "CIVIL MOVEMENT FOR SENTA" GROUP OF CITIZENS - SÁNDOR JÓZSEF - "POLGÁRI MOZGALOM	Senta	3

ZENTÁÉRT" POLGÁROK CSOPORTJA - ŠANDOR JOŽEF - GRUPA GRAĐANA "GRAĐANSKI POKRET ZA SENTU"		
"Alliance for Srbobran, Turija and Nadalj" Group of Citizens - Szövetség Szenttamásért, Turiáért, Nádáljáért"	Srbobran	1
"JENŐ MAGLAI – "CITIZENS' MOVEMENT OF SUBOTICA" GROUP OF CITIZENS MAGLAI JENŐ – „SZABADKA POLGÁRI MOZGALMA” POLGÁROK CSOPORTJA JENŐ MAGLAI - GRUPA GRAĐANA „POKRET GRAĐANSKE SUBOTICE"	Subotica	4
Macedonian national minority		
Democratic Party of Macedonians (DPM)– Демократска партија на Македонците (ДМП) – Др Ненад Крстевски	Opovo	1
Roma national minority		
UNITY ROMA PARTY – РОМАНИ СТРАНКА JEKIPЕ – АДЕМ САЛИХИ – PARTIA ROME BASHKIMI – ROMANI STRANKA JEKIPЕ – АДЕМ САЛИХИ	Bujanovac	1
UNITED ROMA PARTY - URP – ЈИР – ФАИК ИСЕНИ – PARTIA E BASHKUAR ROME – PBR – JPR – FAIK ISENI	Bujanovac	1
Russian national minority		
PARTY OF RUSSIAN OF SERBIA	Aleksinac	1
	Čačak	1
WOLVES SERBIAN RUSSIAN PARTY	Velika Plana	1
RUSSIAN PARTY	Vladičin Han	1
	Niš	1
	Niš - Medijana	1
	Niš – Niška Banja	2
	Novi Sad	1
	Subotica	1
IVICA DAČIĆ - "Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), United Russian Party (JRS) - Žanna Knežević"	Opovo	5
Aleksandar Firaunović, B.Sc. Eng. EUROPEAN GREEN PARTY – ЕВРОПЕЈСКАЈА ПАРТИЈА ЗЕЛЕНЬИХ	Bogatić	1
Ruthenian national minority		
Vojvodina Front-Nenad Čanak (League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina, Together for Vojvodina)	Žabalj	1
Coalition VOJVODINA FRONT - united for democratic Novi Sad (League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina, Vojvodina Party, Together for Vojvodina)	Novi Sad	3
VOJVODINA FRONT - united for democratic Šid (League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina, Together for Vojvodina, Vojvodina Party) - Dejana Đurđević	Šid	3
Slovak national minority		
"Together for Bačka Palanka" - Socialist Movement - Vojvodina Slovak Party - Saša Borković, Peđa Vuletić (PS-SVS)	Bačka Palanka	10
Green Party - Zelená Strana	Veliko Gradište	1

	Stara Pazova	2
Croatian national minority		
VOJVODINA FRONT - united for democratic Bač (League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina, Together for Vojvodina, Democratic Alliance of Croats in Vojvodina)	Bač	2
VOJVODINA FRONT - united for democratic Zrenjanin (League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina, Vojvodina Party, Together for Vojvodina, Democratic Alliance of Croats in Vojvodina) - Nenad Čanak	Zrenjanin	4
VOJVODINA FRONT - united for democratic Sombor (League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina, Vojvodina Party, Together for Vojvodina, Democratic Alliance of Croats in Vojvodina)	Sombor	2
"VOJVODINA FRONT – UNITED FOR DEMOCRATIC SUBOTICA (LEAGUE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATS OF VOJVODINA, DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE OF CROATS IN VOJVODINA, VOJVODINIAN PARTY) - TOMISLAV ŽIGMANOV"	Subotica	3

For a complete overview of the representation of national minorities in elected bodies, it is important to point out the fact that the National Parliament of the Republic of Serbia and the Assembly of AP of Vojvodina have established committees that deal with issues of minority rights and national equality. In the National Parliament, it is the Committee for Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality, which, among other things, considers issues referring to the exercise of the rights of national minorities and inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of Serbia and cooperates with the national councils of national minorities. In the Assembly of AP of Vojvodina, the Committee for National Equality was established, which, among other things, monitors the exercise of national equality.

### **Representation of national minorities in public administration**

*128. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to establish and use, as soon as possible, and no later than the deadline for issuing the fifth national report, a sustainable framework for the collection of human rights-based data within the public administration and, based on that data, establish, implement and periodically review concrete and effective measures aimed at creating long-term and measurable progress in the representation of national minorities in public administration, especially those living in remote areas and the most marginalised.*

The response to this recommendation is given in the response to recommendation 5 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

### **Participation in social and economic life**

*135. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to prioritise the economic revitalisation of areas where members of national minorities live in central and southern Serbia, including infrastructure improvements and incentives for greater employment opportunities.*

The response to this recommendation is given in the response to recommendation 13 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

*136. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to strengthen their efforts to ensure the effective participation of Roma in economic and social life, by designing policy measures based on disaggregated data, establishing clear indicators, monitoring them in close cooperation with Roma representatives, in order to adapt and strengthen them on a periodic basis.*

The response to this recommendation is given in the response to recommendation 1 of the Committee of Ministers Resolution.

### **Articles 17 and 18 of the Framework Convention Bilateral agreements and regional cooperation**

*139. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to consider strengthening bilateral cooperation regarding the protection of national minorities, with neighbouring EU countries and non-EU countries, in order to stimulate the economic development of areas where members of national minorities live, especially in central and southern Serbia.*

As the Advisory Committee was informed in previous reports, the institutional framework for bilateral cooperation in the context of the protection of national minorities was established by concluding bilateral agreements on the protection of national minorities with Hungary, Romania, Croatia and North Macedonia, which, among other things, envisage the establishment of intergovernmental mixed bodies the task of which is to monitor the implementation of those agreements.

In the period from 2016, several sessions of mixed bodies were held, and in the periods between the holding of sessions, there were also other activities that are directly related to the work of these bodies. Co-presidents and co-secretaries, and in certain situations the members of the mixed body themselves who are experts in a specific field, meet in the periods between two sessions. Meetings of the presidents of the mixed body are also held with members of the minority, but also with representatives of line institutions with the aim of speeding up the implementation of some of the recommendations or solving an open issue, as well as preparatory meetings of the Serbian part of the delegation in these mixed bodies.

The intergovernmental mixed commission on national minorities with Hungary held its fifth session in 2016. At the meeting, both parties emphasised that there were no open issues in the relations between Serbia and Hungary and that they were committed to determining the status of the two minorities in a long-term manner. In the minutes of the session, the determination of the Republic of Serbia to join the European Union was welcomed, which the Government of Hungary politically supports and provides professional assistance in the process of joining. Also, the adoption of a special Action Plan for the exercise of the rights of national minorities in Serbia, with the participation of representatives of national minorities, was welcomed, which was highlighted as a precedent and example in the region in the field of protection of national minorities. The parties highlighted the fact that owing to the favourable

political environment and the implementation of various tolerance programmes, violence between members of various national communities had been significantly reduced and they welcomed the peaceful coexistence and cohabitation of various ethnic communities. The latest meeting of the co-presidents of the Intergovernmental Mixed Commission was held at the end of 2019. At the meeting, the Serbian side proposed that before the next session of the Commission, which will be hosted by the Hungarian side, a meeting of co-secretaries should be organised in order to harmonise the format and content of the minutes. After the meeting, a corrected proposal for the structure of the minutes was sent to the Hungarian side.

The intergovernmental mixed commission with Romania did not meet, however, two copresidential level meetings were held (2018 and 2022), as well as one cosecretarial level meeting (2018) in order to establish further work dynamic and to prepare the Third session of the Commission that was supposed to be held in Romania, in accordance to the Rulebook of work of the IMC. A large number of preparatory meetings of the Serbian part of the Commission were held on which the representatives of the Romanian national minority were present. The last preparatory meeting of the Serbian part of the Commission was held in December 2021. At the meeting, the status and topicality of all recommendations from previous meetings were discussed in terms of the existing legislative framework, and the relevant institutions reported on the state of implementation of the recommendations. The president of the Romanian part of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission on national minorities visited the Republic of Serbia in February 2022, and on that occasion, a meeting of the two co-presidents of the Mixed Commission was held. The co-presidents emphasised at the meeting that issues related to the status of minority communities in the two countries occupied a special place in the overall bilateral relations, which are characterised by a high degree of mutual respect and trust, and that the legal-institutional framework in this area was good in both countries. They also emphasised their willingness to resolve all issues concerning the status of the Serbian and Romanian national minorities through an open dialogue and within the framework of the Intergovernmental Mixed Commission. At the time of preparation of this report, the parties are in the process of agreeing on all issues that will be on the agenda of the next session of the Commission. An Agreement on the assignment of property rights over the Lucafarul building to Romania, was signed between the Government of Serbia and the Government of Romania in order to strengthen the bilateral cooperation in the field of protection of the Romanian national minority in the Republic of Serbia. This object of great significance for the representatives of the Romanian national minority is located in Vršac, and it is foreseen to be used not only for consular activities, but also for promotion of Romanian culture and tradition and cooperation with persons belonging of the Romanian national minority in the Republic of Serbia.

The Joint Intergovernmental Commission on national minorities with the Republic of Croatia held two sessions, the seventh - in 2018 in Serbia and the eighth - in 2019 in Croatia. At the sessions, it was noted that the legislation regarding the rights of national minorities in both countries was constantly developing, it was generally satisfactory and in accordance with European standards, but the level of its implementation was often not satisfactory. The members of the Mixed Committee welcomed the successes achieved in the implementation of the recommendations accepted at earlier meetings, but also concluded that a part of the recommendations had not yet been implemented, that is, their implementation was in progress.

At the eighth session, the members of the Mixed Committee welcomed, among other things, the strengthening of the staff of the Croatian-language editorial staff at Radio-Television Broadcasting Service of Vojvodina and the increase in the share of Croatian-language programmes in the total programme of the Second Channel of this public media service, the launch of the Croatian language lectureship at the University of Novi Sad and the establishment of a system of checking knowledge of the Croatian language at that lectureship, the progress achieved by the Serbian side through financing and printing textbooks for teaching in the Croatian language for basic education and the efforts of the Serbian side in terms of financing the institutions that are the bearers of the cultural self-government of the Croatian minority in the Republic of Serbia.

The Joint Intergovernmental Commission on national minorities with the Republic of North Macedonia held its first session in February 2022. On the agenda of the First Session was the consideration of current open issues regarding the exercise of minority rights in both countries and the consideration of the Rulebook on the Work of the Intergovernmental Mixed Commission.

Bilateral cooperation, which, among other things, stimulates the economic development of areas where members of national minorities live, is achieved through cross-border cooperation agreements and programmes. The Ministry for European Integration, as part of the Operational Structure (for cross-border cooperation programmes with EU member states - with Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Montenegro) and as a National Body (for cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes with EU member states - with Bulgaria, Hungary, Croatia and Romania and within two transnational cooperation programmes Danube and Adrion), participates in the implementation of nine cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes. The programmes are implemented through public tenders that approve projects with partners from participating countries. For the seven-year period 2014-2020 for the implementation of these programmes, more than 200 million euros from IPA funds were allocated within the EU budget. More than 300 projects with participants from the border areas of the Republic of Serbia were approved. These are cooperation programmes within the framework of environmental protection, response in case of emergency situations, support for young people, cooperation on the development of innovations and their application, as well as improvement of the cultural and touristic position of the programme territories. This bilateral and multilateral cooperation of neighbouring countries or regions aims to improve the development of border areas.