

MINORITIES IN  
**WESTERN  
BALKANS**

ANALYSIS REPORT

# FROM TRANSFER OF MODELS TOWARDS THEIR MULTIPLICATION

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The analysis and results in this report represent the opinion of the author(s) and are not necessarily representative of the position of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BMZ</b>	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>DFN</b>	DialogueForumNorden
<b>ECMI</b>	European Centre for Minority Issues
<b>FUEN</b>	Federal Union of the European Nationalities
<b>GIZ</b>	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
<b>LG</b>	Local Government (authorities)
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum for Understanding
<b>NALAS</b>	Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>SH</b>	Schleswig-Holstein
<b>SoRi</b>	Social Rights for Vulnerable Groups regional project of GIZ

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## INTRODUCTION

Between 2015 and 2021, the regional project Social Rights for Vulnerable Groups (SoRi), implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), has made a significant impact in the targeted Western Balkan states of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Among the most prominent achievements was the successful transfer of two diversity management and social inclusion models from the German state of Schleswig-Holstein (Germany) to Bijeljina (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Tetovo (North Macedonia) within the framework of the component “Minorities in the Western Balkans”, implemented in cooperation with the State Chancellery of Schleswig-Holstein, the Federal Union of the European Nationalities (FUEN) and the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI). As a result of the visionary approach and the effective collaboration, the structures of the Minority Commissioner in Bijeljina, and the Social Dialogue Forum in Tetovo were officially inaugurated at the end of 2017 and since 2018 they have started operating independently.

Introducing the two transferred models, each one adapted to the specific local conditions and needs, the current paper takes a stock of the achievements and challenges faced by the stakeholders during the implementation phase (2016–2017) and over the three-year period after the launch of the models (2018–2021). The purpose of the report is not only to provide information about the developments during the reporting period but also to analyse the processes and to discuss the feasibility of upscaling the models across the Western Balkan countries. The assessment highlights key factors and preconditions that can facilitate or impede future multiplication. Based on identified current needs of local communities, the paper also provides recommendations for fostering the work of the existing and future structures aiming to improve the situation of the vulnerable groups in the region.

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

## THE TRANSFER (2016-2017)

The Minority Commissioner in Bijeljina and the Forum for Social Dialogue in Tetovo were respectively inaugurated in November and in December 2017. The official launch, however, and the signing of the Memoranda for Understanding (MoU) were preceded by two years of intensive transfer of knowledge, awareness-raising and provision of support to the stakeholders, who became the drivers of change for their communities and states.

Since its establishment in 2005 by parents of Roma students and other citizens interested in the issue of Roma education, the Association of Citizens for Promotion of Roma Education "OTAHARIN" has been actively engaged with the educational, social, and economic integration and inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups not only in the city of Bijeljina but all over Bosnia and Herzegovina. Similarly, the Association for Democratic Development of Roma "SONCE" has been contributing to the civic integration and equal practice of Roma democratic rights and opportunities since 1996. Emerging as an informal group for self-help in the Roma community in Tetovo, North Macedonia, until the end of 2011 SONCE has realized a total of 55 projects independently and in collaboration with other organizations. Both organisations have been therefore closely connected to the stakeholders and aware of their needs and by 2017 they have already become trusted and valued partners to local authorities and to international donors.

The participation in the GIZ SoRi-project initiative, which aimed at building capacities of stakeholders from the Western Balkans, enabled the representatives of the two non-governmental organisations (NGO) and their peers from the respective local administrations to learn about the diversity management model and the positive practices of the German state of Schleswig-Holstein. The direct encounters with the minorities and the public authorities from Schleswig-Holstein during the study visits and the subsequent thematic workshops helped the stakeholders to reflect upon the needs of their communities, to overcome the limitations of the status quo, and to see the existing problems as models calling for specific tailor-made measures. The participatory training approach enabled the representatives of the NGOs and the respective local government administrations (LGs) to realise that the adaptation of existing Schleswig-Holstein structures can address the needs of their communities. As a result, the participating project team from Bijeljina

(representing the Citizens Association OTHARIN and the City of Bijeljina) has decided that the adaptation of the Minority Commissioner institution is a relevant structure for their community. The Tetovo team (representing the Association SONCE and the Municipality) has concluded that an adapted version of the DialogueForumNorden model, can serve the needs of the local vulnerable groups.

A major challenge, which has been overcome with the training, was to make participants aware that despite the differences between the situations in Germany and in the Western Balkans, there are identical problem-solution models. The building of the capacities of the NGO and LGs representatives to systematize the community problems into thematic clusters and to think about possible model-solutions allowed the participants to critically assess the information and to identify the Schleswig-Holstein models corresponding to the local needs.

## Bijeljina Minority Commissioner

With the knowledge and experiences gained during the study visit to the German-Danish border region in 2016, the representatives of the Municipality of Bijeljina and the Citizens Association OTHARIN prepared their first concept on the Bijeljina Minority Commissioner. Viewed as a meeting point for the minorities in the Municipality, the Commissioner's Office was conceptualised as a service:

- to collect data and provide information,
- to increase Roma participation,
- to develop minority related projects and to secure funding for their implementation,
- to draft suggestions to the Municipality on diversity management issues,
- to build a network on local, national and international levels.

The opening of an internship position to the Minority Commissioner – to be taken ideally by a minority community member – has also been envisaged.

The implementing partners have agreed that to enable the functioning of the new structure right from the start, the following tasks had to be addressed during the preparatory phase:

- networking with all the minority NGOs in the Municipality,
- raising awareness among stakeholders (future end-users) about the new structure and its functionalities,
- establishing contacts with respected ministries and state institutions,
- defining the legal basis for the position.

A key factor for the successful transfer of the initiative in the period 2016–2017 was the political support provided by the Mayor of Bijeljina – Mr. Mićo Mičić – who also contributed to the adaptation of the model and its sustainable future development. After his proposal, the new Minority Commissioner was accommodated as a position within the new Office for National Minorities and Diaspora, embedded within the Social Department of the Municipality.

The second study visit to Schleswig-Holstein, organized by FUEN in September 2017, enabled the intersectoral delegation from Bijeljina (composed of 6 public officials – four from the Municipality, two from the Social Centre Bijeljina, and two representatives from OTAHARIN) to learn about the mechanism used by the Minority Commissioner to interact with stakeholders. The aim of the Schleswig-Holstein State Chancellery to raise awareness about the Minority Commissioner’s function in enhancing the trust and the cooperation between the civil society and the public authorities was successfully achieved.



Participants of the 2016 study visit meeting with Ms. Renate Schnack, Minority Commissioner of Schleswig-Holstein at the time (photo: FUEN)

MINORITY COMMISSIONER	
SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN MODEL (original)	BIJELINA MODEL (adapted)
Political figure	LG officer
Reports to the Schleswig-Holstein (Schleswig-Holstein) Prime Minister and Parliament	Reports to the Head of the Social Service Department of the Municipality and to the Mayor
Political appointment	Employed (permanent position within the LG)
Link between the Schleswig-Holstein government and the minorities and between bodies on minority issues at different political levels (regional, national, cross-border with Denmark, European)	Link between the LG and the minorities
Contact point for the minority communities and their members	Contact point for the minority communities and their members
Purpose: To ensure and maintain close contacts with the minorities and to enable their access to the Schleswig-Holstein government	Purpose: To support the planning and provision of LG services to the (vulnerable groups from the) minority communities in the region
Role: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides advisory service to the Schleswig-Holstein Prime Minister and government</li> <li>• Represents the Schleswig-Holstein government before the minorities</li> <li>• Conducts dialogue-meetings and consultations with minorities (chairs the DFN sessions)</li> </ul>	Role: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintains close contacts with stakeholders and target groups</li> <li>• Receives complaints and answers enquiries</li> <li>• Collects data and monitors developments within communities</li> </ul>

## Social Dialogue Forum, Tetovo

During the same week of the first intensive study visit to the region of Schleswig-Holstein, organized and hosted by FUEN in October 2016, the representatives of SONCE and the Municipality of Tetovo had the possibility to meet minority organisations and public officials from the region, to learn about their experience, to share views and opinions, and to discuss issues of interest. During the subsequent expert-guided workshop session in December 2016, the participants discussed the lessons learned and brainstormed together with the project partners about the structure, if any, that might contribute to the improvement of the situation of the vulnerable groups in their community. Reflecting on the needs of the various local stakeholders, the Tetovo team concluded that fostering cooperation among minorities, enabling their participation in the decision-making, and improving the dialogue with the public authorities, are of primary importance.



Participants of the 2016 study visit visiting the Association of Sinti and Roma in Kiel, Schleswig-Holstein (photo: FUEN)

Inspired by the model of DialogForumNorden (DFN), the participants developed a plan for action for its adaptation. With respect to the identified need of fostering the provision of social support to the vulnerable groups at local level, the importance of ensuring support and involving the LG in the work of the new structure was recognized by all the partners in

the initiative. The promotion of the initiative before all key stakeholders was recognised as a key factor for enhancing the legitimacy of the Forum as a space for regular dialogue between the local authorities, the civil society and the target groups. The other factor that had to be taken into account were the local elections, scheduled for October 2017. All the details concerning the implementation of the initiative were agreed upon a coordination meeting between SONCE, GIZ, FUEN, and ECMI, which took place in July 2017. Achieving to receive the full support of the Mayor of Tetovo, the Forum for Social Dialogue and Cooperation in Tetovo was successfully launched with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on 13th December 2017 between all the involved parties.

Therefore, the Forum became a joint initiative of the civil society and the local government of Tetovo, aiming to serve for the benefit of all groups in need of social support and of the society at large. After the model of DFN, the partners agreed that the new structure will:

- Be open to all citizens and their associations regardless of their gender, ethnic background, socio-economic status, professional activities, political affiliation, or any other grounds;
- Involve representatives of the local government, public officials from the municipality and especially from the Centre for Social Services;
- Be chaired by the Mayor of Tetovo;
- Aim to attract a wide range of civil society representatives – from different political parties, business, media, education, non-governmental organisations, and other civil society structures;
- Invite all ethnic communities of Tetovo to appoint their representatives;
- Develop its initial agenda based on the intersecting priorities of all involved parties (with regard to the needs of their constituencies);
- Aim to initiate projects and to generate additional funds for the provision of direct support to communities and groups in need alongside with the activities related to awareness-raising, and promotion of minority rights, equality, and non-discrimination.

To ensure continuity and stability of the structure, but also its direct contact with the stakeholders, SONCE took over the role of a Secretary of the FORUM and committed to maintaining the communication between the Forum members and the target groups. To enable the regular flow of information, the partners decided that a special email address and a public phone number will be opened. However, with regard to the specific

circumstances that the people in need might be in, it was also decided that a post box with the logo of the FORUM will be installed in front of the municipality. SONCE, as a Secretary, has committed to process the signals coming via the announced channels for communication and to present them at the regular FORUM meetings.

The table below provides a comparative overview of the key similarities and differences between the Tetovo Dialogue Forum and the original model of DialogForumNorden (DFN), which is not a formal organisation but a platform for exchange of information between the four officially recognised minorities of the German-Danish border region and a number of private and public institutions. DFN is a tool to pool the voices of minority communities and local actors and find desirable solutions to common problems. It is chaired by the Schleswig-Holstein Minority Commissioner, who calls the meetings of the Forum.

SOCIAL DIALOGUE FORUM	
SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN MODEL (original)	TETOVO MODEL (adapted)
Non-formal structure; non-hierarchical cooperation and communication platform	Formal structure to the City Administration of Tetovo
Information exchange between minorities - facilitate the information flow between the participants and agreements regarding any relevant issues	Public-civic partnership for socio-economic development of the community and better planning and provision of support to vulnerable groups
Meetings are called and chaired by the Minority Commissioner of Schleswig-Holstein	Regular meetings chaired by the Major of Tetovo
Members - the Schleswig-Holstein Parliament, public authorities, universities from the region, NGOs, minority organisations	Members - public authorities, NGOs, minority organisations
Indirect impact on developments	Direct impact (decision-making powers)
Informal organisation functioning as a consultative body external to the state-level public administration	Since 2019, merged with the LG Social Council (mandatory by law structure to the local level public administration)

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## ENACTING THE IDEAS (2018-2020)

The current section of the report studies the development of the two new structures over the two-year period after their launch. To gather the necessary information, in February 2021, online interviews were conducted with representatives from Bijeljina and Tetovo, who were also invited to provide additional written contributions. The paragraphs below present an overview of the findings.

An important aspect to be highlighted from the beginning is that both the Minority Commissioner and the Social Dialogue Forum were grass-root initiatives corresponding to identified needs at the community level. In the case of Bijeljina, the new Office for Minorities and Diaspora was established jointly by the civil society and the local government. The aim of the partnership was to fill in the gap of a lacking institutional structure providing targeted support to the minorities and vulnerable groups within the community. Similarly, the Social Dialogue Forum was the first mechanism to enable regular and structured dialogue between the public authorities and the stakeholders (representing minorities and vulnerable groups) in Tetovo, the need of which was acknowledged by both parties. However, the selection of models for transfer and adaptation resulted not only from the awareness of the problems of the stakeholders but also from the adequate assessment of the political situation and of the capacities of the institutional infrastructures to accommodate and make use of the initiatives.

It needs to be noted that in both cases the support of the local government was crucial for the initial transfer of the models and their subsequent development. By the time of opening of the preliminary discussions about the possible transfer of models, the Citizens Association OTHARIN and the Association SONCE had already established good contacts with the respective local governments. As representatives of the targeted groups, the civil society organisations were considered trusted partners that can contribute to improving the provision of municipal support directed towards the advancement of the situation of the vulnerable groups at the local level.

## Office for National Minorities and Diaspora, Bijeljina: Improving the LG services in support to the vulnerable groups

Embedded, upon suggestion of the Mayor, Mr. Mićo Mičić, within the structure of the Bijeljina city administration – Department of Social Services – the Office for National Minorities and Diaspora hosting the position of the Minority Commissioner gained an institutional legitimacy already with its inauguration in late 2017. The activities of the Office have therefore become an inseparable part of the work of the public administration in support of the minority communities and vulnerable groups at the local level and were included in the strategic development planning of the municipality. The elaborated issue during the preparatory period, Job specification for the position of the Minority Commissioner<sup>1</sup>, outlining its tasks and responsibilities, and the appointment of Mr. Ljubiša Stanišić, have enabled commencement of the operation with the launch of the new service.



Official opening of the Office of the Minority Commissioner in Bijeljina, Mr. Ljubiša Stanišić, together with the President of FUEN, Mr. Loránt Vincze, MEP, Mr. Mićo Mičić, Mayor of Bijeljina, Mr. Michael Samec, Programme Leader of GIZ and Mr. Dragan Joković, Director of the NGO Otaharin (photo: FUEN)

In the period between 2018 and 2021, the Bijeljina Office for Minorities and Diaspora has been focused on the provision of support mainly to

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<sup>1</sup> The document is provided in the Annex to the Report.

Roma and Slovak minority representatives. The different needs of the two minorities required the development of different mechanisms to address them. While the Slovak community was offered assistance related mainly to the preservation and maintenance of their cultural identity, the experienced problems by the Roma community related to poverty, exclusion and discrimination, educational integration, and housing, called for the development of a comprehensive support programme. In pursue of its mission, the Minority Commissioner engaged together with the representatives of the civil society in the process of updating the new Local Action Plan for Roma Inclusion and its implementation over the period 2019-2023<sup>2</sup>. In order to support the Minority Commissioner to better plan the activities of the service and its targeted interventions, the Citizens Association "OTAHARIN" has been gathering information on a regular basis about the needs of the Roma community through outreach work and has been sharing the findings with the Office for Minorities and Diaspora.

As an established partner of the Bijeljina City Administration and an initiator of the transfer and adaptation of the Schleswig-Holstein model, the Citizens Association has been supporting the operation of the Office for Minorities right from the start. Working at the grass-root level and being aware of the problems and the needs of the vulnerable groups, especially of the challenges before the local Roma community as one of the largest in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the involvement of OTAHARIN facilitated the contacts between the Minority Commissioner and the target groups and enabled the new service to gain legitimacy among the stakeholders.

Resulting from the partnership between the public authorities and the civil society, the new structure has been enjoying a credit of trust from both sides since its establishment. Nevertheless, to become a mechanism for the delivery of targeted support to the vulnerable groups in the region and to enable efficient cooperation between the service providers and the beneficiaries, additional efforts were needed.

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<sup>2</sup> The Bijeljina Local Action Plan for Roma Integration 2019-2023 is provided in the Annex to the Report

The implementing partners acknowledged that gaining trust among a wide range of stakeholders (representatives of minority communities, of public and private institutions, of donors) is crucial for the efficient functioning of the new structure and requires planning of specific activities. The need to foster the dialogue between the public authorities, service providers, the business, civil society, and end-users, and to interconnect them was also recognised. Networking and promotion of the work of Office, therefore, have become an important aspect of the work of the Minority Commissioner over the two-year period.

To raise awareness about the role and the functions of the new structure, the Office for Minorities has developed info-sheets to be disseminated among the beneficiaries and info-sessions aiming to update the Roma stakeholders about the current developments and future plans that have been established. To improve the communication between the parties, different stakeholders have been included in working groups and consultative bodies to the Office. On numerous occasions, the Commissioner for Minorities has also participated in workshops and informational events organized by the Citizens Association "OTAHARIN" and, on behalf of the City Administration, it supported initiatives such as marking of important days (e.g., 8th April; 5th November; etc.) and delivering campaigns against gender-based violence.

Promotion of the new structure at the regional and state level was also of significant importance to enable the Office to gain legitimacy and recognition for its work and potential impact in the future. The increased media attention to the transfer of the Schleswig-Holstein model to Bijeljina supported by the GIZ, as well as to the partnership established between the City Administration of Bijeljina and the Citizens Association OTAHARIN with the State Chancellery of Schleswig-Holstein and FUEN, was used to increase the public interest in the planned activities of the new Office. It needs to be noted that two years later, the active outreach is still among the mechanisms used to promote the work of the Minority Commissioner and the LG's continuous commitment to improving the situation of the vulnerable groups in the region. The political support provided by the Mayor of Bijeljina had a significant positive impact not only on the transfer and the initial establishment of the service but also on its recognition by stakeholders, partners, and donors. In the context of the political instability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which often leads

to minority issues being pushed at the bottom of the agenda of the public institutions, the fact that the new Mayor of Bijeljina, Mr. Ljubiša Petrovic, as of the end of 2020, reaffirmed the full support to the Office for Minorities, is a public recognition of the importance of the service and a factor for its sustainable development in the future.

The efficient cooperation between the public authorities, the civil society, and the stakeholders enabled the Office for Minorities to account for significant achievements for a period of only two years. These include the following:

- Implementation of the "Housing Care of Roma 2016–2017 in Bijeljina" joint project of the City Administration; the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees; Swiss Caritas, OTHARIN, aiming to provide homes for 24 Roma families;
- Revision of the Local Action Plan for Inclusion of Roma men and women to reflect the goals, activities and budget funds for the period 2019 –2023 – the first policy document recognizing antigypsyism as the major root cause for Roma exclusion;
- Provision of school lunch for Roma children who attend elementary school on the territory of the Municipality of Bijeljina;
- Increased interest at the local and national level in the further multiplication of the model – provided support to the Municipality of Živinice to open a local Office for National Minorities and Diaspora
- Launch of the public campaign "Mayor–Friends of Roma" and attraction of media attention with the awarded title of "the most Roma–friendly mayor in Bosnia and Herzegovina" to the Mayor Mr. Mićo Mičić (for the opening of the first local level Office for National Minorities in the country);
- The widening of the City of Bijeljina networks of partners and donors.
- Employed trainee of Roma origin to support the operation of the Office.
- Provided support to the Roma and Slovak community to organize various ceremonies.

Resulting from the identified need to improve the planning and delivery of municipal services to the vulnerable groups through efficient communication and better contacts between the service providers and the beneficiaries, the position of the Minority Commissioner filled in an existing gap in the Bijeljina social service infrastructure. Sharing the feeling for ownership of the new mechanism for the provision of support to the vulnerable groups in

the region, the Bijeljina City Administration and the civil society have jointly engaged with the further development of the structure. As the respondents have indicated, the identified priorities and goals of the Office for the upcoming period (2021 onwards) include:

- Allocation of targeted budgetary funds to support the operation of the Office;
- Increase of the number of stakeholders (Roma) involved in the Office initiatives with a focus on the fight against anti-Gypsyism;
- Widening of the scope of work - to cover other minorities, target groups, and thematic areas of intervention (e.g., social enterprises);
- To better plan the strategic development of the Office and its services;
- To further build the capacities of the Office as a service provider and key actor in fostering the delivery of targeted support to the minorities in the region;
- To widen their partners' and donors' networks to increase the levels of external support and funding and respectively - the number of implemented projects

## **Forum for Social Dialogue, Tetovo: Improving the Provision of Support to Vulnerable Groups through Fostered Participation and Multi-Stakeholder Cooperation**

After the official agreement signed in December 2017 between the representatives of the LG of Tetovo and the Association SONCE, the Social Dialogue Forum was officially established as a platform for structured dialogue between the civil society and the local government. The joint initiative for setting up a mechanism for cooperation between various stakeholders was inspired by the DialogForumNorden (DFN) model. The Tetovo Forum resulted from the identified needs of both the public administration and the civil society, representing the minority communities in the municipality. The experienced challenges by the public authorities, to find adequate solutions to address problematic issues at the community level and the willingness of the stakeholders to support the service-providers in the processes of planning, decision-making, and implementation of activities, was the point of intersection between the interests of the two parties. The Association SONCE, as an established partner of the City Administration, considered the transfer and adaptation of the DFN model an additional opportunity for

enhancing the participation of the civil society and the stakeholders in the decision-making process at the local level.



Official signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the establishment of the Forum for Social Dialogue in Tetovo. For Tetovo's City Administration: Mayor Mrs. Teuta Arifi and Head of the Sector of Public Affairs, Mr. Ahmed Kazimi; For the Association SONCE: Mr. Ferdi Ismaili and Mr. Nezir Husein; For GIZ: Mr. Michael Samec and Ms. Natalija Spasovska, December 2017 (photo: SONCE)

Conceived as a platform for communication and cooperation between the various local stakeholders concerned with the improvement of the situations of the vulnerable groups on the territory of the Municipality of Tetovo, the Forum was set up as external to both the local public administration and the civil society organisation. Therefore, the official launch of the joint initiative was in fact the launch of the work for the establishment of the new institution. The efforts of the partners in 2018 were directed towards building up the new structure and defining its Statute, composition, priorities, and goals, areas of intervention, and plan for action. Expanding the range of the involved stakeholders was also among the key steps of the preparatory phase (January – October 2018). Attracted at this early stage to the initiative, the NGO Multikultura and the NGO Community Development Institute have also engaged with the establishment of the Forum as its founders, ensuring wider support at the grass-root level.

Already at the time of signing the Memorandum, wherewith the FORUM was officially established, the partners agreed that the determination of the structure and the rules for membership are the first step towards

realization of the initiative. The other key tasks during the 'institution-building period were to determine the Statute of the FORUM (outlining its mission and vision, the roles and responsibilities of all parties, the goals and objectives of the Forum, and the target groups), and to lay out the activities to be undertaken during the first year of its operation. By October 2018, the partners have agreed on:

#### The Structure:

- The Council Chairperson of the Municipality of Tetovo will act as President of the FORUM.
- The Association SONCE will undertake the role of Secretariat of the FORUM and will be responsible for ensuring the continuity and stability of its activities.
- Members of the FORUM can be all citizens and civil society associations, representatives of the local government, public officials from the Centre for Social Work, and other local institutions of public character.
- All political parties will be represented in the FORUM to ensure a political consensus on its decisions.
- Member institutions/organisations will nominate permanent representatives.
- The Municipality of Tetovo appoints at least one representative from the municipal administration.
- Representatives of different sectors – business, education, sports, culture, health, child protection – will be invited to become FORUM members.
- The Secretariat will keep a register of the FORUM members and will report on any changes and amendments thereof on an ongoing basis.

#### Goals and tasks:

- In the FORUM, the participants come together to facilitate the realization of equal and inalienable rights and freedoms of each person and special rights of vulnerable categories.
- The main goal of the FORUM is to provide conditions for achieving equal access and rights of all citizens regardless of their ethnic and social belonging.
- The FORUM works for the benefit of all citizens of the Municipality of Tetovo, all groups in need of social support, all vulnerable groups, all ethnic communities, and the society as a whole.

- The public good takes priority over individual benefits, but besides that, all individuals are treated with respect and care.
- The FORUM can also support individual cases if their importance is determined.
- Projects and activities that are beneficial to more than one group are treated as a priority.

#### Specific objectives:

- Improving the quality of life of vulnerable categories by ensuring cooperation between public institutions and the civil society sector in the Municipality of Tetovo.
- Providing conditions for active integration of vulnerable categories through activities within the sectors: social and health care, education, employment, infrastructure and housing.

#### Meetings:

- The President of the FORUM (President of the Council of the Municipality of Tetovo) will convene meetings at least once a month. FORUM members could request the President of the Council to convene an emergency meeting if requested by 1/3 of the registered members.

#### Functions:

- The FORUM is a platform for structured dialogue between all stakeholders.
- As a consultative and decision-making mechanism, it supports the work of the LG.
- In pursue of its goals and to implement its objectives, the FORUM can initiate and implement projects.
- It can also function as a centre for non-formal education and can organize trainings for practical skills (sewing, IT, etc.).

#### Communication & Outreach:

- A mailbox with the FORUM logo will be placed in front of the Municipality.
- The Secretariat of the FORUM (Association SONCE) maintains communication with the members of the FORUM, with the structures of the Municipality and with the civil society organisations.
- The Association SONCE provides an e-mail address and a telephone number for public contact.

- The Association SONCE, with the support of the Municipality, is responsible for processing the signals that will come through the announced communication channels, and for their presentation at the regular meetings of the FORUM.
- The FORUM holds Open Days in the Municipality every three months (quarterly), when the citizens can turn to the FORUM with their concerns and suggestions.

#### Funding:

- The FORUM is allowed to receive donations in support of its operation.
- The FORUM may also request external funding from national and/or international donors.
- All generated income will be used for the public good.

#### Target groups:

- All citizens and groups in need of social support from the Municipality of Tetovo, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, gender, age, etc.

After the 10 months of preparatory activities, the formal working meeting of the FORUM took place on 16 October 2018, which can be considered its formal inauguration. During the first meeting the FORUM members:

- Approved the Statute of the FORUM, defining its mission, vision<sup>3</sup>, goals, and functions, and made a decision to translate the document in Albanian language.
- Determined the areas of intervention which include social and health protection, education and employment, and infrastructure and housing. Within each of the topics a number of possible actions were proposed.
- Agreed on the establishment of four thematic working groups, namely: Education, Employment, Infrastructure, and Social Services and Healthcare.
- Elaborated and approved the FORUM's communication plan and logo.
- Approved the voting procedures.
- Made a decision about the development of a monitoring and evaluation mechanism.
- Elaborated and approved an Action Plan for 2019. A list of 10 actions listed by priority was developed.

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<sup>3</sup> The Vision of the Forum is: "Tetovo, a municipality that secures conditions for equal access and rights for all citizens regardless of ethnic and social background".

- Agreed that situational analysis mapping of vulnerable groups and their needs is a factor for the future planning of the FORUM'S operation and the provision of targeted support.
- Agreed that the FORUM's operation will be included in the Action Plan of the Municipality.



First meeting of the Forum for Social Dialogue in Tetovo, 16 October 2018 (photo: SONCE)

The real work of the FORUM as a platform for structured dialogue and cooperation between the civil society and the public authorities of Tetovo started at the end of 2018 and in 2019 its members managed to prepare several project proposals, whose implementation was approved and supported by the City Council. However, the new Social Protection Law which was adopted in late 2019 has a significant impact on the development of the FORUM. According to its provisions (Chapter VI, art. 142-143), each municipality in North Macedonia must establish a Council for social protection, composed of representatives of the local level public administrations, the Centres for social work, service providers, civil society associations, representatives of the religious communities, and other public and private stakeholders, engaged with the provision of social support to the people in need. The development of the Social Plan, mapping the vulnerable groups and their needs, the capacities and availability of social services, and the resources needed for addressing the identified needs at the community level, are also stipulated by the Law.

The Social Protection Law has therefore placed the already established and functioning FORUM on a solid legal basis and has legitimised it as an official structure functioning in support to the City Administration. The fact that the law does not have special provisions with regard to the structure and the functioning of the Council, allowed the FORUM to take over the new role without changing the organisational model and the achieved structural and operational arrangements. Furthermore, its two-year experience has made Tetovo a leader in the field and constituted the Social Dialogue Forum as a model to be replicated in other municipalities, facing the need to establish the Social Councils required by the law.

A key challenge that the FORUM faced during the first years of its existence was the lack of trust among the community members. Despite the targeted outreach efforts and the close contacts and established networks between the civil society organisations, the members of the FORUM, and the target groups, the new structure was not immediately recognised by the stakeholders as a trusted service provider. The second factor that enabled the establishment of the Social Dialogue mechanism as a factor in the life of communities was its adequate intervention during the Covid-19 crisis. With the outburst of the pandemic in March 2020, social unrest increased. The LG of Tetovo called upon the Forum members to meet the protestors who gathered in front of the Municipality and thanks to their intervention, the real communication channel and flow of information were established.

Since March 2020, the stakeholders have become active in providing details about their needs and concerns, using the established telephone lines, emails, and mainly the post boxes, which the six civil society organisations – members of the FORUM – have installed in front of their offices in the city of Tetovo. Since the beginning of the work, the Association SONCE on a regular basis collects the letters from the post boxes, processes the information provided, and reports about the current needs of the target groups to the FORUM. This channel for communication proved to be highly efficient and a significant contribution to the data gathered by the local Mobile Teams during their outreach work. This enabled the partners to create a database about the real needs of the community members covering, issues related to housing, lack of IDs, problems faced by returnees, etc, in addition to the challenges related to COVID-19 (which increased the number of vulnerable persons).

Although some of the problems require long-term intervention and planning of complex support, the identification of imminent needs enabled the FORUM, through the NGO-members, to start providing direct assistance to the communities in need. The organised delivery and distribution of food packages and hygiene products such as personal protection masks and sanitizers to the local Roma population significantly increased the trust in the new structure as a municipal mechanism for social protection. A factor that enabled the efficient relief-work was the fact that the Head of Public Affairs of the Municipality of Tetovo, acting both as a FORUM-member and a Head of the Municipal Crisis Team, established a direct connection between the two structures. A positive aspect was that the mobilisation of support during the period of crisis was supported by funds from both national and local budgets. Nevertheless, funding seems to be one of the major challenges before the operation of the FORUM since there are problems that require long-term intervention – such as finding a sustainable waste-management solution.

The key activities and achievements of the FORUM in the period 2018–2021 include the following:

- Facilitated cooperation among public authorities, the civil society, and various local stakeholders.
- Facilitated cooperation among the different minority communities represented in the FORUM.
- Improved information exchange between the parties engaged with the provision of services and/or assistance to vulnerable groups.
- Mapping of vulnerable groups and collecting first-hand information about people's needs through outreach work (involving the Mobile Teams in the process).
- Enabled targeted planning and provision of services based on screening and analysis of the real needs of the targeted beneficiaries.
- Improved access of the local actors and beneficiaries to the decision-making process.
- Several developed project proposals – 3 of them presented at a session of the Council of the Municipality of Tetovo and approved for financing (their implementation was postponed due to the Covid 19 pandemic). Some of the first proposals developed and put forward by the FORUM were: conducting a more detailed mapping, opening a day-care centre for children with special needs, increasing

inclusion of children from vulnerable families in pre-school education, organisation of qualification courses, and supporting the employment of persons in social risk.

- Advocating for funds and their mobilization for the improvement of a community water supply infrastructure (during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic).
- Promoting the Social Dialogue Forum model among civil society organisations – adopting the ROMACTED methodology, the model was transferred by the Association SONCE to another 11 municipalities: Berovo, Bitola, Gostivar, Debar, Kichevo, Kochani, Prilep, Shtip, Strumica, Veles, and Vinica. In 10 out of the 11 locations the model has been implemented as a joint LG-civil society initiative (only in the Municipality of Vinica, the LG has no civil society partners).
- Promoting the need for vaccination against COVID-19 among the vulnerable groups in the region.

The initiative of the Association SONCE for the establishment of a mechanism for structured communication and cooperation between the public authorities and the civil society, developed after the Schleswig-Holstein model, requires not only strong political support at the local level but also at the national (parliamentarian) level. The political instability in the country is perceived as a major challenge of ensuring continuity of the undertaken initiatives and interventions as well as of the sustainability and future development of the established structure.

With regard to the future development of the FORUM as a mechanism for providing targeted support to vulnerable groups, the Association SONCE believes that its efficiency and impact would be enhanced if a similar structure functions as a contact point for all the Social Councils in the country. As of 2021, the Social Dialogue Forum in Tetovo has no connection with the national level authorities, while some of the identified problems (for example, lack of personal identification documents or issuing social security cards) can be addressed only at the ministerial level.

Certainly, the capacity building of the FORUM members is also a precondition for its efficient functioning in the future and for the provision of better assistance to the vulnerable groups. The identified needs include:

- Capacity building and skills enhancement of the FORUM members when writing project proposals, organising and conducting advocacy campaigns, and lobbying;
- Training in preparation of policy briefs to communicate important issues among both public authorities and the general public;
- Development of tools for e-advocacy;
- Improving the cooperation with the public authorities at the national level – the powers at the level of the LG are not enough to enhance the FORUM's positive impact on the situation of the vulnerable groups;
- Securing funding for the implementation of planned activities and projects in support of the vulnerable groups – especially for health-related projects;
- Networking at Parliamentary level to secure additional and stronger support to the FORUM's operation;
- Increasing the level of trust among the stakeholders in regard to the FORUM and its operation.

As a multidisciplinary platform bringing together different private and public actors and intersecting the interests of all of its members, the Forum for Social Dialogue in Tetovo facilitates the cooperation between all stakeholders devoted to the improvement of the situation of the vulnerable groups in the region. The initiative launched in 2017 promotes a people-oriented and non-discriminatory approach to decision-making and seeks to actively involve the people in need of support in the process of finding an adequate solution. Enabling the groups at risk to communicate their problems directly to the local government administration, the FORUM also functions as an advocacy mechanism. As reported by the Association SONCE, the FORUM as of 2021 consists of representatives of the Council of the Municipality (including the Head of the PR office), local-level institutions (Employment Agency, Office for Social Services, Health Centre), local business, and 6 civil society organisations, representing the Roma and the Albanian minority community, the LGBTQI+ community, the local youth and other groups in need of social support. The FORUM holds monthly meetings and its operation is funded by the budget of the municipality.

## TOWARDS MULTIPLICATION OF MODELS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

When the implementation of the project Minorities in the Western Balkans started in 2016, many of the participants believed that the difference between the situations in Germany and in their own countries makes a transfer of positive practices and approaches impossible. After a series of seminars and workshops conducted by the representatives of the Schleswig-Holstein Chancellery, FUEN, ECMI, and GIZ, and the two study visits to the German-Danish border region, the stakeholders managed to overcome the initial preconceptions and to spot the opportunity in adapting certain mechanisms to address the specific needs of their communities. Five years later, the Office for National Minorities and Diaspora in Bijeljina and the Forum for Social Dialogue in Tetovo are not only established and functioning structures, but also recognised positive models that have already attracted the interest of other local governments and NGOs.

Analysing the different experiences of the stakeholders from Bijeljina and Tetovo, a number of factors underlying the successful establishment of the new structure as mechanisms for fostering the provision of support to the vulnerable groups at the local level emerge as common for both cases. Certainly, the challenges that the two initiatives have faced during the process of their implementation also have to be considered with respect to the potential future multiplication of the models at the local and regional level.

The following section outlines key aspects for consideration in order to enable actors from the Western Balkan, but also from other countries, to achieve similar or greater success when transferring and adapting the Bijeljina and Tetovo mechanisms for diversity management and provision of social support to vulnerable groups. Acknowledging that legal, political, social, and other contexts differ from one country to another, the current report lists the **structural preconditions** and indicates the approaches, used by the stakeholders from Bosnia and Herzegovina and from North Macedonia in pursuing the implementation of their initiatives. The representatives of local administrations and civil society organisations, interested in the establishment of any or both structures, **shall therefore use the document**

as Guidelines towards the development of their own strategic implementation plans but not as a ready-to-use Action Plan.

- **Identification of models with respect to local needs**

A key factor for the successful transfer of both initiatives was the fact that each group of stakeholders selected the model that was identified as the most suitable to address the needs of the local communities. Bijeljina has focused on the Minority Commissioner as a mechanism to support the process of identification of the needs of target groups and to foster the coordination of social service delivery. The representatives from Tetovo, however, decided that the model of the Social Dialogue Forum would facilitate the desired direct communication between beneficiaries and service providers and will enhance the participation of the target groups in the decision-making process. The FORUM was also perceived as a tool to foster the cooperation between the members of the different minorities and target groups in need of social support.

Issues to be considered:

- What are the political and social context and administrative infrastructure at the local level?
  - What are the characteristics (demographic, cultural, socio-economic, etc.) of the target groups?
  - What are the weaknesses or shortfalls in the provision of social services and what interventions are needed to overcome them?
  - What is to be achieved by the model-transfer (besides the improved delivery of social services)?
  - What are the needed vs. the available resources? How can the resource shortage be overcome – are there alternative approaches that require minimum or no financial/administrative/human resources?
  - How can the model be tailored with regard to the specific local needs, conditions (political, administrative, economic, social, demographic, cultural, etc), available resources, and expected results?
- **Joint initiatives, implemented in cooperation**  
A crucial characteristic of both cases was that the initiatives were conceived and thereafter implemented as a product resulting from

the joint efforts and cooperation between the civil society and the local authorities. Since the conception of the ideas, both parties have developed a feeling of joint ownership over them. This has led to a mutual commitment to their implementation and current management. The partnership between the LGs and the NGOs allows adequate division of tasks and mobilisation of respective support for their implementation. The NGOs' involvement ensures direct contact between the LG and the target groups and enables the increase of the levels of trust to the institutions. The LG on its turn secures the institutional and the administrative sustainability of the established mechanisms.

Issues to be considered:

- Is there an established partnership between the LG and the civil society sector, representing some or all of the target groups?
- Can a partnership be established?
- What are the points of intersection between the LG and the NGO(s) priorities?
- Can a consensus over priorities be achieved?

- **Institutionalisation of initiatives**

Recognition of the official status of the initiative (new structure) is a precondition for its legitimacy, institutionalisation and future sustainable development. Embedded within the structure of the public city administration from its establishment, the Office for National Minorities and Diasporas in Bijeljina and the appointed Minority Commissioner were able to start working with the launch of the initiative. As a new structure, external to the LG, the Tetovo FORUM needed almost a year to elaborate its Statute and to adopt the strategic organisational documents. As the findings reveal, a major impetus for the development of the FORUM and its wider recognition was the Social Security Law of 2019.

Issues to be considered

- Can the public administration accommodate the transferred structure?
- Is there a legal mechanism, which can legitimise the establishment and the functioning of the new model?

- Are the LG/NGO partners motivated to transfer the model and to work towards its legitimisation and institutionalisation, in case none of the above conditions are present?
  - Is the development of strategic documents prior to the commencement of the operation of the new structure well-planned (in terms of timing, types of documents, involved parties, etc.)?
  - Would the provisions of the envisaged strategic documents enable the structure to function efficiently and to fulfil its mission?
- **Ensuring wider political support to the initiatives**  
 In the context of the unstable political situation in the Western Balkan countries, it is of the utmost importance that the establishment of a new structure at the local level is supported by the different political parties so that it is seen as a public rather than a political endeavour. At the Mayor's initiative, the Office for National Minorities in Bijeljina was embedded within the Social Services Department, which eliminated the risk that it be perceived as a political structure in service of the interests of the current (as of 2017) city administration. The partners from Tetovo have taken a strategic decision to introduce the idea for the transfer to the LG after the local elections (in October 2017) and to mobilise the support of all locally present political parties. The decision that the Chair of the City Council, elected by the representatives of the different parties, would become a Chair of the FORUM, provided the structure with additional political legitimacy.

Issues to be considered:

- Are there any obstacles that prevent support of the initiative by all political parties and if so, how can they be overcome?
  - How to mobilise continuous political support on a wider basis while avoiding political interventions in the functioning of the transferred structure (aimed at gaining certain political advantages)?
- **Engaging the national authorities**  
 As SONCE has outlined, some of the identified problematic issues at the local level can be addressed and solved only by national authorities. Therefore, establishing direct contact and involving the national government with the implementation of the initiative and its

functioning as a mechanism to provide assistance to the groups and individuals in need, appears to be an important factor for achieving some of the targeted positive outcomes. According to Mr. Ferdi Ismaili, the Director of the Association SONCE, to foster the impact that the FORUM can make on a local level, a similar structure or a coordinating body at the national level is required, which can ensure synchronisation of the efforts and synergy between the local and national programs and activities.

Although the interest at the national level in regard to the Minority Commissioner in Bijeljina has been significant as early as at the establishment of the position, governmental support has not been reported by the respondents.

Issues to be considered:

- Which problems can be dealt with at the local level and which require the involvement/support of the national authorities?
  - Can the LG ensure the support of the national government – are there mechanisms that can be activated?
  - Are there mechanisms to directly involve the national government in the operation of the transferred structure?
  - Can efficient channels be established for communication with the national authorities?
  - Can some of the goals be achieved without the involvement of the national authorities and will the operation of the new structure be hampered if no formal support from the government is ensured?
- **Expanding the network of involved stakeholders**  
The provision of adequate social services and the improvement of the situation of the vulnerable groups require not only the involvement of the LGs and civil society organisations, but also of representatives of a range of public and private institutions and organisations. Attracting professionals and service providers in the fields of healthcare, employment, education, housing, social security, business, and media at the local, national and international level, is a prerequisite for the success of the initiative. Both analysed examples confirm the conclusion.

Issues to be considered:

- What are the strategic priorities before the new structure?
- Are the relevant public and private institutions and organisations at local, national and international level known/mapped?
- What are the relevant fields of the representatives who will be addressed and invited to support/join the initiative?
- How can they contribute?
- How can one attract their interest in the initiative?

- **Enhancing the involvement of the civil society and the efficient LG-CSO cooperation**

The continuous and efficient cooperation between the LGs and the civil society organisations is a prerequisite not as much for the establishment, but rather for the efficient functioning and the successful development of the transferred models. As the examples from Bosnia and Herzegovina and from North Macedonia reveal, the Citizens Association OTAHRIN and the Association SONCE are not only implementing partners, but also drivers behind the operation of the two institutions. Apart from the direct communication and interaction with the target groups, allowing the timely identification of needs, data gathering, and provision of direct support, the NGOs play an important role in promoting the models at the national and international level and in widening the network of supporters and donors. Both organisations have contributed significantly to the increase of the levels of trust among stakeholders and to open the channels for communication between the public authorities and the minority communities and vulnerable groups. The attempts for regional model transfer also show that when the initiative is implemented without strong civil society support (such as in Živinice, for example), the levels of success are rather limited.

Issues to be considered:

- Are the civil society organisations, partners in the transfer of the selected model, trusted by the target groups?
- How can the network of supporting CSOs be expanded?
- How can the network of donors and other private, public and institutional supporters can be expanded?

- **Raising awareness about the new structures and their functions**  
Dissemination of information about the transfer of the model and about the role and the functions of the established new structure among all relevant stakeholders is also one of the success factors, as the findings from the analysis reveal. The promotion of the initiatives among potential future partners and donors can mobilise strategic and/or financial support with respect to the planned future development of transferred mechanisms. Raising awareness among target groups, on the other hand, is a prerequisite for the efficient functioning of the service. Targeted outreach activities enable real-time screening and identification of needs based on collected data and regular flow and exchange of information. At the same time, the opening of channels for structured communication and the facilitating of the access of beneficiaries to the LGs have also had a positive impact on the process of building trust between the service providers and the communities and individuals in need of support. The different mechanisms used by the Office for Minorities in Bijeljina and by the Tetovo FORUM have proven to be equally efficient in this process. Regardless of whether through visits to communities, organised hearings and consultations, direct communication with the Mobile Teams, or notifications posted in the mailbox, the key point is that the target groups were to voice their concerns and to continue doing so.

Issues to be considered:

- How do the potential future donors and partners become aware of the existence of the new structure, its role, functions, and plan for action?
  - How do the targeted groups become aware of the role of the new structure and its functions?
  - Are there efficient channels for communication and if not, how can such be established?
  - How would feedback to target groups be provided?
  - How to ensure that the target groups would become motivated to communicate their concerns (including with regard to their personal safety)?
- **Sustainable financing and additional funding (project-based)**  
Securing stable and sufficient funding to support not only the

implementation of initiatives but also the functioning of established structures is among the major challenges that have been experienced by the two groups of stakeholders, adapting the positive practices from Schleswig-Holstein to the Western Balkan region. In this regard, the decision that the position of the Minority Commissioner will be funded by the budget of the Bijeljina City Administration was a factor that contributed to the stable development and sustainability of the structure. Between 2018 and 2021, the provision of direct support to vulnerable groups and individuals was possible thanks to the targeted fundraising activities, conducted by the Citizens Association OTHARIN. Despite the significant external contributions, the efficient functioning of the Office in the future (as a service provider) requires the provision of a budget line for implementation of project activities addressing the needs of the target groups.

Initially established as an external structure to the Municipality, the Forum for Social Dialogue had no budget to operate with and the involvement of the participants was on a voluntary basis. The factors that enabled the development of the new structure was the support from the Municipality of Tetovo and the inclusion of the operation of the FORUM in the annual Action Plan of the LG (for 2019), which opened access to financial mechanisms for project implementation. The second factor was the merging of the FORUM with the institution of the Social Council to the municipality.

The outburst of the COVID 19 crisis impeded the FORUM to organise the provisioned activities, which the Municipal Council of Tetovo has approved for financing through the municipal budget. The good cooperation between the LG and the CSOs however enabled the FORUM to use the re-allocated funds for the provision of humanitarian relief services to the communities in need. Although the projects implemented in 2020 were different from the initially planned, the situation can still be considered beneficial for the development of the new structure. Furthermore, as the respondents have outlined, once the provision of direct assistance to the target groups started, the level of trust of the beneficiaries towards the FORUM increased significantly.

Continuity and sustainability of the services, provided both by the Office for Minorities and by the FORUM, however, depend largely on the funding. A key question, therefore, is to what extent the work of the structures can be supported by the LG budgets and whether the local authorities can make decisions about the allocation of funds. The access to donors and the capacities of the structures to generate and attract project-based funding are also important. Maintaining and expanding the donor networks and developing the institutional capacities in project proposal drafting, project management, and implementation, are also crucial for ensuring sustainable financing and efficient functioning of the mechanisms for social support.

Issues to be considered:

- Does the LG have the powers to make decisions on the (re-) allocation of budgetary spending (with a focus on the provision of social services)?
- Does the LG have the powers to establish new structures and to finance their functioning?
- Are there additional funds that the LG can mobilise to secure the needed funding for the implementation of the project in support of the vulnerable groups?
- How can continuity of activities and initiatives be ensured?
- Are there donors that can be addressed to provide support to the planned initiatives?
- Does the LG/CSO have the needed capacities for efficient fundraising?
- Does the LG/CSO have the needed capacities for efficient project management and implementation?
- Are the widening of the donors' networks and the increase of the LG/CSO capacities included in the plan for strategic development of the established structure?

To support interested stakeholders in the planning of their future activities, the Country Fact Sheets, provided at the end of the document, offer an overview of the legal frameworks regulating the provision of social services at the local level in the targeted Western Balkan countries. Detailed information about a Schleswig-Holstein mechanism for the provision of financial support to initiatives at the community level is also presented in the Appendix.

- **Further development and potential multiplication of models**

The upscaling of the successfully transferred positive models and their successful adaptation into mechanisms for diversity management and provision of social support to the vulnerable groups at the local level is a two-dimensional process. On one hand, there are the already established and functioning structures in Bijeljina and in Tetovo, and on the other hand, there are the communities, interested to establish their own Offices for Minorities and/or Fora for Social Dialogue. Hence, the process of upscaling needs to take into account not only the future multiplication of the structures but also the provision of developmental support to the existing ones with respect to their identified priorities, as listed in the previous section. As the analysis of the two cases reveals, the enhancement of the networking, outreach, and fundraising skills of stakeholders involved with the implementation of the initiatives and the continuous building of their capacities to adapt their work with respect to the changing conditions of the environment (for example, the development of e-advocacy mechanisms in the context of the COVID-19 limitations for interaction) is a factor to ensure stable and sustainable functioning of the new support mechanisms.

The Minority Commissioner/Office for Minorities and the Forum for Social Dialogue models are not mutually exclusive. Although they have been modified with respect to the local needs and have become mechanisms independent from each other (in contrast to the Schleswig-Holstein Minority Commissioner and DialogueForumNorden), the two structures can function together complementing their activities. Therefore, the future multiplication should not disregard the possibility of both of the institutions being established in a single community.

The current section outlined the aspects that stakeholders need to consider if a transfer to a new community is envisaged and planned. Apart from the already mentioned factors, from the selection of the model based on the identified local needs, through its implementation as a joint LG-civil society initiative, to the securing of stable funding for its efficient functioning, it must be pointed out that the success factors also include the clear vision for the role of the structure

and the impact that it aims to achieve as well as the motivation of the stakeholders to invest time and efforts to develop the new mechanisms resulting from their commitment to bring in a positive change to their communities. Certainly, continuous training and capacity building of the involved actors is a prerequisite for the achievement of the expected results.

Issues to be considered:

- Are there communities that have already expressed interest in transferring one of the two models?
- Have the interested communities established LG-CSO partnerships, which can become the drivers behind the processes?
- Can any of the models address the needs of the target groups?
- If not, can the models be further adapted to address the identified needs?
- Are there stakeholders interested in a long-term commitment to the improvement of the situation of the groups in need by establishing the new structure as an efficient mechanism for social service delivery and social protection?
- Are the legal frameworks in place 'supportive' to the initiative? If not, are there alternative mechanisms to legitimise the existence, the functioning and the sustainable financing of the new structure?

## POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO ADDRESSING EXISTING CHALLENGES

As the Report outlined, one of the success factors behind the two models is the fact that the stakeholders have identified them as the most suitable for addressing the structural needs with regard to the diversity management and provision of social support to the vulnerable groups at the local level. To assist the process of future transfer of models at the regional level, a preliminary screening of current problems in the targeted project countries was conducted at the end of 2020, with the support of the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS). The below-presented findings are summarised in several thematic lines. An indication about the specific aspects outlined by the respondents (NALAS members) is provided to enable

future planning of possible capacity building and training activities. To cross-check the collected information – i.e., to identify whether there are points of intersection between the problems identified by the LGs and the stakeholder at the grass-root level, FUEN member organisations have been invited to contribute to the survey. The obtained replies are also listed with regard to the outlined thematic lines.

Since the implementation of positive practices is not a single act but a constant process of adjusting the methods of work and provision of services with respect to the changing needs in the context of the changing conditions of the social, political, or economic environment, the transfer of models shall be seen only as the first step on a long-term developmental path. Therefore, at the end of each thematic section, presenting the current challenges, guiding questions are provided to support the interested actors in their seeking of approaches and mechanisms that can be used for addressing the problematic issues in focus. With respect to the aim of the project to enable the knowledge transfer from Schleswig-Holstein to the Western Balkans, a particular reference is made to the services and mechanisms in the German-Danish border region, which can possibly be adapted and used by the stakeholders, committed to making their Offices for Minorities and Fora for Social Dialogue providers of efficient targeted support to the groups in need. Information about the Schleswig-Holstein approaches, which can potentially be adapted to the needs of the Western Balkan communities, is provided at the end of the current section of the document.

The guiding questions and the information about the Schleswig-Holstein projects and practices are offered also in support of the preparation of the provisioned study visit to the German-Danish border region.

## **Problematic Areas, Identified by the Stakeholders**

The current section outlines the problematic issues, as identified and reported by the stakeholders from the Western Balkans (LGs and NGOs) at the end of 2020/beginning of 2021. The list is certainly not exhaustive and shall be considered as indicative. The fact that some problems have been indicated by the representatives of particular countries does not necessarily mean that these challenges are not valid for the other

targeted project countries.

- Cooperation & Support Mobilisation, Tailor-Made Services, Capacity Building

LG perspective:

- Lack of municipal cooperation in the provision of social services (Albania).
- Low level of initiative from the communities (Albania).
- Data-collection to enable adequate analysis of needs (Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- Inequalities in legal solutions and practices – different services (decentralized) and different capacities (Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- Better cooperation between LA and NGOs (Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- Capacity building of service providers, new services needed (Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- Small localities face bigger challenges – no capacities, Social Protection Programmes have not been adopted (Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- Lack of tailor-made community-based services (North Macedonia).
- Need of integrated, intersectoral, sustainable community-based services (Serbia).

Civil society perspective:

- Municipalities are not involved in solving issues related to national minorities (regulation happens at state level) (Macedonians from Albania).
- Need to improve cooperation with the central and local government (Macedonians from Albania).
- NGOs need advocacy training (Macedonians from Albania).
- Lack of willingness of LGs to involve stakeholders in consultations and in the decision-making process – there are no Roma representatives involved in the Council for improvement of the situation of Roma in Obrenovac (Roma from Serbia).
- Lack of cooperation between the ethnic groups! Political mobilization based on ethnic lines; societal fragmentation. (Roma from North Macedonia).

#### Guiding questions:

- How does Schleswig-Holstein ensure that services are adequate to the needs of the target groups?
- How does Schleswig-Holstein conduct needs assessment data collection? Is the data used for designing services, measures, etc.?
- What cooperation mechanisms have been established: between institutions, between LG and NGOs, between LGs?
- How to overcome the limited capacities of small localities?
- How does Schleswig-Holstein ensure the involvement of stakeholders in consultations and in the decision-making process?
- Are there mechanisms to foster the dialogue among the representatives of the vulnerable groups?

#### • Awareness Raising

##### LG perspective:

- Lack of awareness about rights (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- Lack of awareness about existing services (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- Need of awareness raising (about existing possibilities) among women (North Macedonia).
- Insufficient registration with the Unemployment Agency (North Macedonia).

##### Civil society perspective:

- Lack of awareness among Roma about their rights and about discrimination (Roma from Serbia and North Macedonia).
- Lack of awareness about existing services and ways to access them (Roma from Serbia and North Macedonia).
- Lack of awareness about rights and discrimination (Roma from North Macedonia).
- Impossibility to gather due to pandemic restrictions (Aromanians from Serbia).

#### Guiding questions:

- What mechanisms are used by Schleswig-Holstein to raise awareness about rights & existing services among vulnerable groups and among the general population?
- Do these mechanisms differ?

- How are the groups being reached? Who is responsible?
- Which mechanisms have been/are successful?

- **Gender Equality & Child Protection**

LG perspective:

- Lack of measures to support/ increase labour market participation (especially for women) (North Macedonia).
- Lack of child-care services at the local level (North Macedonia).
- Women are not sufficiently involved in the decision-making process (North Macedonia).
- Provision of training to women (skills) (North Macedonia).
- Lack of tailor-made services and trained staff to provide support to women and children (Albania).

Civil society perspective:

- Need of provision of targeted support to Roma women – acquiring job-related qualification (Roma from North Macedonia).
- Lack of sufficient and targeted social support and services to the Roma community.
- Insufficient protection of the safety of Roma children (Roma from Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Guiding questions:

- Are there particular mechanisms developed for the provision of support to women and children belonging to vulnerable groups (with focus on lack of language skills, cultural and religious differences, low level of civic activism)?
- What are the measures to support socially vulnerable women – with focus on long-term unemployment, domestic violence, trafficking, etc.
- Are targeted groups of women involved in consultations /decision-making?

- **Fostering Employment**

LG perspective:

- Lack of measures to support/ increase labour market participation (especially for women) (North Macedonia).
- Access to the job-market – provision of trainings, ensuring non-discrimination (Albania).

- Limited possibilities for employment and for offering employment-related training (Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- Lack of employment opportunities (Turks from Kosovo).

Civil society perspective:

- Prevention of discrimination in employment – low number of Roma/minorities in public services (Roma from North Macedonia).

Guiding questions:

- Does Schleswig-Holstein have social entrepreneurship programmes (based on identified community needs)?
- How are vulnerable groups assisted to get a job?
- What are the mechanisms to facilitate labour market integration? Of women? Of youth?

- **Discrimination**

LG perspective:

- Discrimination (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- Intersectional discrimination (North Macedonia).

Civil society perspective:

- Discrimination in terms of access to employment, health services, mainstream education and housing (Roma from Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Serbia).
- Lack of awareness about discrimination (Roma from North Macedonia).
- Roma exclusion, marginalization and segregation (Roma from Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- Persistent racism and antigypsyism, also at institutional level – need of awareness raising campaigns (Roma from Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Guiding questions:

- What mechanisms are available in Schleswig-Holstein to ensure prevention of discrimination?
- Does Schleswig-Holstein provide support to vulnerable groups – e.g., assistance in activating complaint mechanisms? Filing complaints?

- How is the access to Ombuds-services ensured? How are they promoted?
- Are there specific trainings for public officials?

Preliminary information about Schleswig-Holstein:

- Contact with the ombudspersons in the various regions of the country can be made via email, telephone or personal appointments. There are regular consultation hours in the cities and municipalities in the country. The anti-discrimination officer and her staff are part of the anti-discrimination network, and they participate in round tables and crime prevention councils.
- The State Administration has an advanced training programme for public officials, which regularly addresses aspects of diversity management, intercultural competences and the opening-up of the administration. Seminars, information and specialist events are offered, supportive handouts and information materials are available.

- Personal Documents & Legal Aid

LG perspective:

- Problems with provision of social services due to lack of personal identification documents (Serbia).

Civil society perspective:

- Lack of personal IDs and support for their issuance (Roma in Serbia).
- Need of legal aid services (Roma from North Macedonia).
- Need of capacity building of NGOs in advocacy (Roma from North Macedonia).

Guiding questions:

- Information about the Schleswig-Holstein 'social security/health card' – how is the registration organised, who is responsible, for what purpose is the card valid, etc.
- What are the Schleswig-Holstein mechanisms for provision of legal aid to vulnerable groups? How is access ensured? How are they made aware about the services?
- Have there been advocacy campaigns involving representatives from the vulnerable groups? On what? Who has organised them?

#### Preliminary information about Schleswig-Holstein:

- In Schleswig-Holstein, numerous municipalities offer their citizens legal advice or legal information. The authorities work with various private or civil society organizations such as consumer advice centres, specialist services for inclusion, integration, social services funded by state or European programs. A partnership with the Counselling Service of the Diakonie<sup>4</sup>.
- Health card for refugees: At the beginning of 2016, an electronic health card was introduced for refugees in Schleswig-Holstein. The basis for this endeavor is a framework contract signed by the state government and initially ten statutory health insurance funds. This framework agreement defines a billing system for health services that are used by asylum seekers after they have been assigned to a district or a district-free city. With a few exceptions, the health insurance funds now function as an administrative body for the provision of medical treatment. The municipalities continue to bear the costs. A billing code is saved on the card for this purpose. The scope of services is based on §§ 4 and 6 of the Asylum Seekers Benefits Law (AsylbLG). The doctors are requested to comply with the statutory restrictions on benefits. Interpreting costs and language mediators can continue to be billed to the electronic health card (eGK) in Schleswig-Holstein, which is explicitly stated in a decree issued by the State Office for Foreign Affairs (Landesamt für Ausländerangelegenheiten).

#### • Healthcare & Education

##### LG perspective on Healthcare:

- Lack of health education and healthcare (Albania).
- Problems with the access to healthcare services - Need to establish a network of health councils to address social protection issues (Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- Lack of sufficient integration of communities in the healthcare system (Kosovo).

##### LG perspective on Education:

- No access to quality education (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

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<sup>4</sup> Diakonie is the Social Service of the evangelist churches in Germany.

- Lack of sufficient integration of communities in the education system (Kosovo).

#### Civil society perspective on Education:

- Need to implement the Action Plan for educational integration of Roma in the Republic of Srpska (Roma from Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- Persistently high dropout rates, in particular among Roma girls (Roma from Bosnia and Herzegovina).
- Lack of mother-tongue education possibilities (Macedonians from Albania, Roma from North Macedonia, Aromanians from Serbia).

#### Guiding questions:

- How does Schleswig-Holstein foster the health-related education among vulnerable groups?
- Did Schleswig-Holstein adopt any particular measures for the educational integration of vulnerable groups (including adults)?
- What are the educational integration measures targeting socially vulnerable groups?
- Are there services offered in other languages but German? How is it organized?

#### Preliminary information about Schleswig-Holstein:

- The Integration Office Schleswig-Holstein has launched a number of projects that help severely disabled people to find and keep a job on the primary labour market.<sup>5</sup> Depending on the requirements, the modules of advice and support, training and financing are used. The project "Transition from School to Work" ("Übergang Schule und Beruf") is aimed at pupils with special educational needs in the areas of mental development, physical and motor development, sensory disabilities (seeing and hearing) or autistic behaviour. The pupils are prepared for a successful entry into the primary labour market while they are still at school. The local integration service provides support. In Schleswig-Holstein, the integration specialist service works at 18 locations with more than 80 specialist advisors

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<sup>5</sup> More information are available at [https://www.schleswig-holstein.de/DE/Landesregierung/IAMT/Projekte/projekte\\_node.html](https://www.schleswig-holstein.de/DE/Landesregierung/IAMT/Projekte/projekte_node.html)

across the country. The project is being implemented jointly by the Integration Office within the Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Youth, Family and Seniors, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Federal Employment Agency, represented by the Regional Directorate North. Funding is provided by means of the equalization levy of the State of Schleswig-Holstein and by means of the Regional Directorate North.

- The website of the responsible ministry (Ministry of Interior) provides information in seven languages on topics related to the integration of immigrants and refugees. It's about school and job, learning the German language, studying, day-care centres, access to the health system or the housing market.
- Schooling is compulsory for all children and young people who have their place of residence in Schleswig-Holstein - this basically applies to newly immigrated children and young people as well.
- DaZ-Centres (German as second language) are part of a general education school and are responsible for the language education of children and young people whose language of origin is not German. That means: school-age children and young people with little or no knowledge of German are taught together at a central location - by specially trained and qualified teachers. The aim of this language training is that children and young people can work successfully in school and achieve a graduation certificate that corresponds to their individual capabilities.
- Pupils obliged to attend vocational schools requiring further assistance in German as a Second Language are cared for and given language support within the process of learning German and the different stages of their integration courses at Regional Professional/Vocational Training Centres (RBZ) and Vocational Schools (BBS). Pupils are first enabled to acquire German-language competence at level A2 through a course entitled Professional Integration Classes in German as a Second Language (BiK-DaZ); this is then accompanied by further language acquisition classes during their subsequent Schleswig-Holstein Vocational Training Preparation year, making it possible for them to be given preparatory training in professional/vocational education and to obtain their initial school leaving certificate in general education (ESA). The aim is that they should be able to transfer to dual

- apprenticeship training or to an additional full-time school-based course of education.
- There are 2.5 million people in Germany who can write single words but who are not able to read or write whole sentences. One out of seven grown-ups can read or write whole sentences but is only able to comprehend continuous texts with considerable difficulty, according to a survey conducted by the University of Hamburg in 2011. Assistance is provided in such cases by the Federal German Association for Literacy and Basic Education; the information made available is also read aloud on the webpages of the association.

## Schleswig-Holstein Approaches for Potential Future Adaptation

In addition to the preliminary information about the existing mechanisms for social support to vulnerable groups in Schleswig-Holstein, kindly provided by the State Chancellery in support of the preparation of the Report, the current section introduces several organisations and institutions, whose work might be of interest to the stakeholders from the Western Balkans. Although some of the presented projects are mainly focused on the provision of support to and integration of refugees, the needs that they are addressing are similar to the needs of the vulnerable groups from the Western Balkans. The examples are therefore presented as structural approaches for consideration. The information collected during the period of the Report preparation is by no means exhaustive. The preliminary screening of practices is intended for inspiring actors, interested in the transfer of positive models and in enhancing the provision of social support to the vulnerable groups in the region, to look beyond the specific examples and to find the mechanisms that can be adapted to the local needs. The listed examples can be explored during the provisioned study visit to the German-Danish border region.

- **STATE WOMEN'S COUNCIL (DER LANDESFRAUENRAT)**  
Website: <https://landesfrauenrat-s-h.de/impressum>

The goal of the Women's Council is "to promote legal and actual gender equality (Art. 3 of the Basic Law) in all areas". The umbrella structure organises about a million women and girls from 45

Women's Associations and Groups. The purpose of the Council is to represent the interests of women and girls in Schleswig-Holstein in the areas of labour market, regional development, care work, elections, political participation, and violence prevention. This body plays an important role for the participation of women in political and administrative decision processes. Similar to the Child Protection Association (Kinderschutzbund), the State Women's Council is one of the organizations that, for example, is mandatory to be consulted on bills that affect the interests of women and children.

- **OMBUDS-PERSON FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS OF THE STATE OF SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN (DIE BÜRGERBEAUFTRAGTE FÜR SOZIALE ANGELEGENHEITEN DES LANDES SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN)**

Website: <https://www.landtag.ltsh.de/beauftragte/bb/>

The Ombudswoman for Social Affairs of the State of Schleswig-Holstein advises and supports citizens in social matters and represents their interests. The position is elected by the Schleswig-Holstein State Parliament and reports to the public. The Ombudswoman and her team give advices in cases of problems with social authorities. The Office also accepts and addresses complaints from children and young people in stationary accommodation (in social homes or residential groups). It enables free, independent advice, support and representation of interests for children, adolescents, as well as their parents or other legal guardians. Currently, the position is held by Mrs. Samiah El Samadoni.

- **ANTIDISCRIMINATION ASSOCIATION OF SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN (ANTIDISKRIMINIERUNGSVERBAND SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN)**

Website: <https://advsh.de/kontakt-2/>

The Antidiscrimination Association gathers a number of associations, institutions, federations and committed individuals. It stands up for people who are discriminated against, it provides information about discrimination, works to improve laws against discrimination and is a mouthpiece in politics and society. Some of the projects implemented by the team of full-time employees and volunteers include:

IQ Network Project: Information and advisory project for vulnerable groups on labour market issues. Workshops and consulting services for labour market actors on the issue of anti-discrimination.

The “NAKi-Schleswig-Holstein project: On-site support!” was a follow-up project of the Networks for an Anti-Discrimination Culture Schleswig-Holstein (NAKi-Schleswig-Holstein) and was dedicated to the idea to further establish a comprehensive advisory and support structure with regard to legal protection against discrimination in Schleswig-Holstein. It turned to those involved in advisory work with various target groups. “NAKi-Schleswig-Holstein: On-site support!” strengthened the counsellors in their work with regard to the affected facts of discrimination, so that their competencies could be expanded.

- **YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AGENCY KIEL (JUGENDBERUFSAGENTUR KIEL)**

Website: <https://www.jba-kiel.de>

The youth employment agency in Kiel involves professionals who (can) support young people in the transition from school to professional life. The agency aims to systematically connect the stakeholders from different areas; education system, business, civil society, parents, etc. with young people to enable them the best decision for their professional path. They aim to build the synergies between those stakeholders and young people, who should have the possibility for successful labour market integration. The work of the Agency is financed by: Bundesagentur für Arbeit, State Schleswig-Holstein, Kiel City and Kiel City School Office, Jobcentre Kiel, RBZ 1, RBZ Technik.

- **PERSPECTIVE TRAINING – VOCATIONAL EDUCATION NETWORK (PERSPEKTIVE BILDUNG GGMBH - AUSBILDUNGSVERBUND KIEL)**

The Vocational Education Network (VEN) supports young people to discover the right profession for themselves, to enrol in vocational training and to find employment. In the Kiel region, VEN works together with many companies so that disadvantaged young people can participate in apprenticeship programmes get a job.

- **AWO INTERKULTURELL (AWO – ARBEITERWOHLFAHRT SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN)**

Website: <https://awo-sh.de/main/awo-interkulturell/>

The goals of the operation of AWO Interkulturell are to promote and improve the integration opportunities and the participation of people in all areas of life. Some of the AWO initiatives include:

Professional integration: Perspective advice taking into account specific occupational fields. Close cooperation between the supervisory and advisory staff with job centres, employment agencies, the Chamber of Crafts, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, companies and educational institutions. Participation in internships, training, job and/or studies.

Housing supply: Provision of education about rights and obligations as a tenant in Germany; provision of information about regional housing offers; mediation with regional real estate companies and cooperatives; support with applications and dealing with authorities.

In 2019, the 12 AWO Integration Centres in Schleswig-Holstein had approximately 210 full-time employees, most of whom have a pedagogical training or a degree. In addition, they have strong intercultural competence since they come from different cultures and have language skills in German and at least one other language, such as: English, French, Turkish, Russian, Polish, Bulgarian, Croatian, Dari, Farsi, Arabic, Albanian, Serbian, Hungarian, Indonesian, Moore, Kurdish, Tigrinja.

- **REFUGEE COUNCIL SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN (DER FLÜCHTLINGSRAT SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN E.V.)**

Website: <https://www.frsh.de>

The independent non-profit umbrella organisation aims to bring together different projects and initiatives aimed at provision that support marginal groups and refugees' integration. It provides lobby and advocacy work, capacity building and educational workshops. Some of its projects include the following:

**Refugee aid** provides information materials, advice and training courses.

**Advice and Refugee Law Clinic Kiel:** Voluntary advice service to provide legal assistance to individuals in need on issues of their concerns.

**West coast ahoy! ("Westküste Ahoi!"):** The project funded by Aktion Mensch and the Robert Bosch Foundation supported full-time and voluntary workers as well as self-help orientation for refugees through informational work and training courses. The project pursued the goal of consolidating structures of solidarity-based aid.

**Everyone on board! (Alle an Bord!):** The aim of the state-funded network "Alle an Bord!" is to foster the labour market integration in Schleswig-Holstein. With its advisory, coaching and mediation services, the network helps people to face and overcome structural access barriers.

**Integration through qualification (IQ):** The state network "Integration through Qualification" (IQ) Schleswig-Holstein is coordinated by the Paritätischer Schleswig-Holstein in cooperation with the Refugee Council. With its 11 cooperating organizations and 15 sub-projects to date, the IQ network offers advice on the recognition of professional qualifications acquired abroad, it mediates in adaptation qualifications, and offers trainings in intercultural openness & anti-discrimination and in questions of residence and social law. The federal program "Integration through Qualification" is funded by the European Social Fund, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Federal Employment Agency.

The projects are financed by: funds provided by the State Schleswig-Holstein and different ministries, donations and grants (EU Migration, Asylum and integration funds, European Social Fund, UNHCR, Nordkirche (church funds), Robert-Bosch Stiftung), membership fees.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of the current Report was to outline the key aspects that supported and/or challenged the implementation of the initiatives by offering an overview of the initial transfer of the Schleswig-Holstein models of the Minority Commissioner and Dialogue Forum to the city of Bijeljina and Tetovo, respectively, and by discussing the processes of their subsequent development (2018-2020). As the analysis has revealed, despite the differences between the setup and functioning of the two structures, several factors and challenges are common for both cases. By adopting different approaches with respect to the specific legal and institutional frameworks, their own capacities, and access to resources, the stakeholders managed to adequately address those issues, which resulted in the successful transfer of the models. Among the key prerequisites for the achievement of the expected positive results is certainly the good cooperation between the LGs and the civil society organizations and their continuous commitment to the development of the established mechanisms. The motivation of the involved parties, resulting from the conviction that the new mechanisms are directly relevant and can contribute to the improvement of the provision of needed services, are also to be acknowledged.

In conclusion, the regional multiplication of the two models is certainly feasible, however the fact that these structures already exist in Bijeljina and Tetovo does not make them directly transferable to other locations across the Western Balkan region. Interested stakeholders need to take into account that a positive practice is not a universal remedy – it might not be adequate unless it is transformed with respect to a particular context. Hence, a model-transfer is in fact a transfer of an idea, adapted to local needs and realities. A key challenge is therefore to assess the potential of a practice, overcoming the limitations that its application in a specific context might pose. In this respect, not only the established practices of cooperation between the German public authorities and the national minorities, but also the Schleswig-Holstein experience in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups can be considered relevant as model-solutions to the challenges faced by the minority communities and the vulnerable groups in the Western Balkans.

Finally, it should be pointed out that upscaling and multiplication of positive practices also requires a provision of continuous support to the

established structure so that they become viable mechanisms that can adapt and face the changing challenges of the changing environment. Joint as well as targeted training and capacity building of representatives of both the public authorities and the civil society, involved in the implementation of the initiatives, but also in the management and development of already functioning mechanisms, is therefore crucial for their future sustainable contribution to the improvement of the situation of the vulnerable groups in the region.

## APPENDIX

### Promoting Minorities in Schleswig-Holstein: Public Support to Community Initiatives<sup>6</sup>

#### **Prerequisite:**

In the annual budget of the state of Schleswig-Holstein drawn up by the state parliament, financial resources are provided for minorities on the expenditure side, for example... euros for the promotion of Low German language, donations to supranational organizations of European minorities and ethnic groups, donations to a border peace union, donations to the German minority in Denmark, grants for the cultural work of the Danish minority, support for the Frisian Foundation, support for the national minority Sinti and Roma.

#### **Determination of needs and application procedure by the Promotion of Minorities Department at the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture:**

In discussions with representatives of the various minorities / ethnic groups, some of whom are invited to the ministry,

- requirements for the next year are queried (which projects are pending and how much money is needed?),
- application forms for the current financial year are handed over personally or sent by electronic mail or post,
- We will advise you in personal or telephone conversations about the manner to fill out the application correctly and which documents

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<sup>6</sup> The information was kindly provided by the Schleswig-Holstein Ministry for Education, Science and Culture

must be attached so that they are successfully submitted and ready for approval.

**Examination of the applications received:**

- **Project value:** Is there a quantitative or qualitative added value that the project has, for example, to achieve the goals set out in the state constitution: protection and promotion of cultural independence and political participation of national minorities and ethnic groups (national Danish minority, minority of German Sinti and Roma, Frisian ethnic group)?
- **Eligibility** (complete documents, submitted in due time and legally signed, the applicant is eligible to apply, the project complies with the guidelines, co-financing is secured, funding quota is adhered to, multiple funding is excluded, the project has not yet started, the project will be completed within the prescribed time, was the publishing of the project approved, will the funds be used sparingly and economically?)
- A positive answer ("yes") to all questions must be possible.

**Examples of projects:**

- Language learning (mother-tongue) in kindergartens, schools or in your free time.
- Organisation of language courses and study programs as well as singing events.
- Organisation of dance and theatrical events as well as ritual acts, sports competitions and anniversaries.
- Making books, games, films, musical works, club magazines or specific items of clothing, living and jewellery accessories.
- Building meeting places and exhibitions / museums and maintaining an office (personnel and material costs are taken into account).

**Selection process:**

If there are more applications than there are financial resources in the budget year: Carry out a comprehensible and transparent selection process.

**Approval procedure:**

Issuing a notification of approval or a notification of rejection on the basis of the relevant legal and administrative provisions (in particular

the following should be included in the notification: purpose of the grant, amount of the grant, form of financing (repayable or not), type of financing, period of approval, if applicable, the timing of the acquired for the purpose of the grant objects) and sending the notices including attachments such as the applicable ancillary provisions to the applicant.

**Payment:**

If the applicants agree to the regulations contained in the approval notification (conditions that have to be met) and the notification becomes final either after the expiry of the legal remedies period or in advance of the applicant's written declaration of waiver of legal remedies, the state treasury will be instructed to provide specific financial resources to be paid to the applicants' accounts at certain times.

**Changes:**

In an event of changes to the application, which must be submitted in writing by the applicant, a notification of changes will be issued and sent.

**Use of the funds:**

The correct use of the funds must be presented and explained in writing using a prescribed form within a certain period of time. The minority department checks whether the form has been fully completed, and legally binding, numerical evidence has been provided and a factual report has been included. The books and receipts are randomly inspected on site at the applicant's premises and checked against the information provided. In the event of errors or a reduction in the funding requirement due to an increase in other cover funds or lower total expenditure, the funds will be reclaimed in whole or in part by means of a written notification.

**Goal:**

Through lot of counseling and financial support, minorities / ethnic groups living in Schleswig-Holstein are protected and promoted in their cultural independence and their ability to participate politically.

## Gender Equality Policy in Schleswig-Holstein: Aspects<sup>7</sup>

- In 1984, Schleswig-Holstein's first municipal equal opportunities officer started to work in the Flensburg city administration.
- In 1989, guidelines on equality for women in the public service of the state of Schleswig-Holstein were passed. The equality guidelines were applied to all offices of the state administration. They already contained efforts to increase the proportion of women in training, recruitment, promotion and also higher groupings and obliged the departments to appoint equality officers
- In Article 3 of the Basic Law, the state has committed itself to promoting the actual implementation of equality between women and men.
- Women who are willing to set up a company need advice that takes their economic, professional and family situation into account. The Women's Network funded by the state government provides this support.
- Due to the tensed situation on the housing market, women and children who live in a women's shelter have particularly significant difficulties in finding adequate and affordable housing after the need for protection has ceased to exist. As a result of their extended stay in the women's shelters, some of the places for women and children seeking protection in acute crisis situations remain occupied. Women and children threatened or affected by violence who turn to women's counselling centres and whose living situation would be significantly improved by having their own apartment are in a similar situation. Conceived in 2017 and implemented since 2018, the "Frauen Wohnen" initiative of the Paritätische Schleswig-Holstein, funded by the Ministry of Equality, addresses this issue. In six regional service points, operated independently, women looking for a home are now supported by committed employees across the country who quickly and unbureaucratically support the search for affordable housing. The employees of the regional service points form interfaces with women's shelters, women's advice

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<sup>7</sup> Information was kindly provided by the State Chancellery of Schleswig-Holstein; further details were obtained from: <https://www.schleswig-holstein.de/DE/Fachinhalte/G/gleichstellung/Gleichstellungsbeauftragte.html>

centres and authorities at the local level. After an initial meeting in which personal needs are discussed, the women are supported in finding apartments and making contacts, as well as in viewing appointments. They are offered advices on rental matters and, even after moving in, they can contact the staff at the service points with questions related to the apartment. The scope and structure of the support is always based on the individual needs of the woman. The regional service points also maintain good contacts with the local housing industry – the network established in this way enables a quick and uncomplicated exchange of free, affordable living space.

- To implement this fundamental right, the state of Schleswig-Holstein passed the Equal Opportunities Act in 1994. With the help of the Equal Opportunities Commissioners (Gleichstellungsbeauftragter), the effectiveness of legal measures to promote women in the public service is to be ensured.

It is important to underline that there is not only one Commissioner on state level. In the Equal Opportunities Act it is laid out that every municipality, university, public authority has to elect or appoint an equal opportunities commissioner. The equal opportunities officer works full-time in municipalities with more than 15,000 inhabitants; In smaller communities, a volunteer officer must be appointed. This ensures that the concerns of women (and their children) are taken into account at the various levels of government and administration. In the Working group of the full-time municipal Equal Opportunities and Women's Representative in Schleswig-Holstein<sup>8</sup> (Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft der hauptamtlichen kommunalen Gleichstellungs-und Frauenbeauftragten in Schleswig-Holstein), 75 women from all regions of the country have come together. Their duties are:

- Promotion of equal opportunities for women and men;
- Reduction of structural disadvantage for women and girls;
- Representation of current women's political issues in relation to politics and the public;
- Networking with professional associations on gender equality issues;

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<sup>8</sup> More information on their activities can be obtained from Working group of voluntary municipal equality officers <https://www.gleichstellung-sh.de/start.html>

- Organization of public national specialist events;
- Implementation of campaigns.
- Furthermore, there is a Working group of voluntary municipal equality officers (Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft der ehrenamtlichen kommunalen Gleichstellungsbeauftragten).
- Women are better qualified these days than ever before. They are self-confident and live independently. They have the possibility to acquire skills that tomorrow's job market will require. However, to support their successful labour-market integration, for many years, women in Schleswig-Holstein have had a special "Woman & Profession" counselling service, organised by the Schleswig-Holstein Investment Bank and funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the State of Schleswig-Holstein (from its State Labour Program). The focus is on women of all ages who are at risk of unemployment and who are not employed full-time, as well as women who are not registered as unemployed. Women with a migration background and refugee women who have access to the labour market (based on their residence status) are also specifically addressed. There are advice centres in every district.<sup>9</sup>
- The responsible institution for the implementation of the gender equality policy in Schleswig-Holstein is the Ministry of Interior, Rural Areas, Integration and Equal Opportunities (Ministerium für Inneres, ländliche Räume, Integration und Gleichstellung)<sup>10</sup>

## Country Fact-Sheet: ALBANIA

- **Relevant legal frameworks**  
The Local Self-Government Law (LSGL) and Self-Government Finance Law (LGFL) of 2015 merged the 373 local governments into 61 municipalities.
- **Decision-making**  
Municipalities have decision-making powers in certain sectors; they are responsible for the management and the financing of the activities.

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<sup>9</sup> More information about the centre in the district Kreis Schleswig-Flensburg are available at [www.frau-und-beruf-sh.de/schleswig-flensburg](http://www.frau-und-beruf-sh.de/schleswig-flensburg).

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.schleswig-holstein.de/DE/Landesregierung/IV/iv\\_node.html](https://www.schleswig-holstein.de/DE/Landesregierung/IV/iv_node.html)

- **Competences**  
The LSGL increased the responsibilities of LGs, e.g., financing and managing of education, social protection and healthcare.
- **Financing**  
From the LG general revenue, not from conditional grants of national government.
- **In case of centralised budget, what steps shall the LGs undertake to secure funding for identified local community needs?**  
Over the past years, the Albanian Government has shown increasing interest in the provision of social services at the local level (including drafting policies, legal initiatives, implementation of programs and projects to increase the number of services, improving the living conditions of groups in need, and improving rural infrastructure). These projects are initiated and supported for the most part by international partners and foreign organizations such as the Council of Europe, OSCE, various UN agencies. Based on the Law 121/2016 and the National Strategy for Social Protection 2015–2020, each Local Government unit set up a Social Protection Plan. After the identification of the local community needs, the most difficult part is the budget. Here, the LG can secure funding through national and regional competitive grants.
- **How efficient is the cooperation between the LGs and the national authorities on social security matters?**  
In order to improve the cooperation between the central and the local governance level, various structures have been set up under the Ministry of Health and Social Protection with mixed appreciation.
- **Are minority/vulnerable groups, representatives involved in the decision-making process?**  
According to the Law 68/2017 "For Local Self-Governance Finances," and the Law 119/2014 "On the Right to Information" the LG is obliged to organize public hearings, participatory budgeting processes with stakeholders, representatives from the civil society, vulnerable groups, minority communities, the youth, etc. Based on the Albanian Labour Code, there is a specific quota for representatives from minorities. In Municipalities where minorities live, they are always represented within the Municipal Council.

## Country Fact-Sheet: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

- **Relevant legal frameworks**  
Article 8 of Law on Principles of Local Self-Government in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, the dominant responsibility lies with the cantons, all with different legislation.
- **Decision-making**  
Highly decentralized, however there are unclear structures between the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the cantons and the municipalities.
- **Competences**  
The municipalities generally provide a wide range of social services, through local centres and their own welfare structures. Pre-school education is a municipal function. Social protection, education and health care are shared differently.
- **Financing**  
Generally, municipalities finance most of their social sector responsibilities through their freely disposable revenues. Local governments receive direct transfers for the purposes of financing the social sector mostly from the cantonal governments.
- **Notes:** The partition of functions and responsibilities is incredibly challenging to understand the structures of Bosnia and Herzegovina (e.g., there are 11 Ministries of Health in Bosnia and Herzegovina).

## Country Fact-Sheet: KOSOVO

- **Relevant legislation**  
The Law on Local Self-Government and Local Government Finance (an amendment to the Local Finance Law) is in a process, which shall reconsider the social services funding. Competences are detailed in different Sectoral Laws.
- **Decision-making**  
In the field of education, policies are developed at national (Ministerial) level; LGs take over the administrative role. In the social sector the situation is similar – LGs operate the Centres for Social Work (CSW) providing local welfare. In health care the LG appoints the responsible municipality.

- **Competences**  
Pre-university education, primary health care, and social protection.
- **Financing**  
Primarily through sectoral block and categorical grants. In addition to their own revenue, local governments receive a freely disposable general revenue grant.
- **In case of a centralised budget, what steps shall the LGs undertake to secure funding for identified local community needs?**  
In such cases, a request for a specific purpose is made also by providing the justification for the intent of the request and it is then sent to the Central Government for approval.
- **How efficient is the cooperation between the LGs and the national authorities on social security matters?**  
The cooperation remains at a satisfactory level (as evaluated by the LG respondents).
- **Are minority/vulnerable groups, representatives involved in the decision-making process?**  
Before the decision is rendered for any particular matter, the Local Government Authorities are obliged to hold meetings with stakeholders regardless of their gender, race or respective community.

## Country Fact-Sheet: NORTH MACEDONIA

- **Relevant legislation**  
The decentralisation process started in 2005, facing many challenges since most of the social sector functions were transferred to the LGs. However, progress has been observed over the past 15 years. 2019 – new Law on Social Protection.
- **Decision-making**  
Decentralised system. LGs are fully responsible for primary and secondary education. In the field of social services, LGs control the homes, providing social care to elderly people. Under the 2019 Social law, municipalities are entitled to additional funding for the provision of social services.
- **Competences**  
Pre-school education, primary and secondary education, and homes for the elderly.

- **Financing**

The LGs are responsible for financing and managing the entire operation, including appointment of staff, determination of school networks and staffing patterns, payment of all wages and benefits, and organizing financing of transportation and food.

The insufficient financing of the sectors under the responsibility of the LGs remains a major challenge.

## Country Fact-Sheet: SERBIA

- **Relevant legislation**

Law on Social Protection and the Rulebook on Detailed Conditions and Standards of Provision of Social Care Services.

Since 2019 new Law on Healthcare which transferred the responsibilities to the central level.

- **Decision-making**

For the most part, the LG can directly decide on the issues of social protection and pre-school education. In the further de-centralisation process, it is planned to get more responsibility in primary education as well.

- **Competences**

Municipalities are in charge of early childhood care and education (incl. staff, salaries, transportation, food, etc.). Primary and secondary education are shared functions. In Social Protection LGs play an important role, providing services and material support, through Centres for Social Work. With the new Law, they are no longer in charge of healthcare.

- **Financing**

The main sources of funding are by far the general LG revenues, while the funds from conditional or block grants represent 4% of total public funding for these first-tier responsibilities of the LGs.

- **In case of centralised budget, what steps shall the LGs undertake to secure funding for identified local community needs?**

The Budget of the Republic of Serbia provides funds for earmarked transfers, which in accordance with the Law on Social Protection and in accordance with the regulations on financing of the local self-government provides financial support for social protection services which, according to the Law, are financed by local self-government

units in local self-government units whose level of development is below the national average. The budget also provides for innovative services and social protection services of special importance for the Republic of Serbia.

- **How efficient is the cooperation between the LGs and the national authorities on social security matters?**

Earmarked transfers in social protection are of great importance for the survival and development of social protection services, especially in LGs with modest material resources.

- **Are minority/vulnerable groups, representatives involved in the decision-making process?**

There is an obligation to conduct consultations at all stages of drafting public policy documents, as well as an obligation to conduct a public hearing before their adoption.



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