

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests,

Like most of the countries in Europe, Serbia has faced an upward trend of the ageing population and decreasing of its youth.

Despite steady increase of the population over 65 and projections whereby until 2041 an estimated 25,2% of the elderly is expected to grow, I am pleased that Serbia has achieved **significant progress** in areas related to the **implementation of the Madrid Action Plan on Ageing and Regional Implementation Strategy**.

The perception of older people as a homogenous population has changed the landscape in Serbia. The Government and other decision makers have become aware of the manifold nature of this population group and it has become reflected in our strategy direction.

Their right to fully participate in the society is recognised as a potential to contribute to the development of society and they are no longer regarded as the sole receiver of social services.

Furthermore, it has extended developing **policy driven practices**, such as supporting participation of the old people in the labour market or addressing their digital exclusion.

The State has adopted several important **strategies** in which the elderly are recognized - Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Discrimination, for the Improving the Position of Persons with Disability, for the Prevention and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, for De-institutionalization and Development of Services in the Community, whereby all developed through participation of relevant stakeholders.

Throughout **COVID-19 pandemic**, the elderly were identified as high risk group. Although special protection measures were provided by State authorities, there were numerous examples of well-designed volunteer activities. Throughout the period, it was shown that community-based services are a very important segment of formal support for the elderly, especially in rural and remote areas, and that their further development should include expanding the offer, but also increasing their accessibility.

Older community were also prioritised in the **Vaccination Programe**. It included retirement homes and other social protection institutions, seniours over 75, general population between 65 and 74 with multiple medical conditions etc.

The **Protector of Citizens and the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality** have, to a significant extent, focused on the rights of senior citizens.

In parallel, the **civil sector** the civil sector contributed to a significant number of studies dealing with social exclusion of the elderly, digital gap, violence against the elderly and some of these studies were conducted with the **support of UNFPA** and the Government of Serbia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Where all work and progress that has been achieved is fully aligned with international and European commitments, Serbia is yet to invest strongly in further development - we remain inspired to creating society for all generations – taking into account social inclusion, reduce of inequalities, care for the gender and other human rights, health and healthy lifestyle, lifelong learning, intergenerational cooperation - thus justifying our position of the champion in promotion of aging in the region.

Thank you!