

## Regional Conference on ICPD, 19 - 20 October 2023, Geneva

### Session: Inequalities, social inclusion and rights

Ladies and gentleman,

The world is aging like never before resulting in, among other, falling fertility and increasing life expectancy which disrupts functioning of social protection systems. Further, various crisis affects whole society and have one thing in common - they have deepest impact on those who are already disadvantaged the most. As the central state institution for the advancement of equality and protection against discrimination, the Commissioner for Protection of Equality of the Republic of Serbia, carries out a variety of different activities to improve the position of social groups that are at risk of discrimination.

Looking at the practice of the Commissioner, discrimination on the grounds of age is among most common grounds according to the frequency of complaints for some years now, including all age categories.

This was grounds for the Commissioner to submit to the Parliament two special reports – ***on Discrimination against Children and on Discrimination against the Older Persons*** in 2021. In the latter we presented the actual situation and challenges regarding equality for older persons, their contribution to society, social inclusion and intergenerational exchange. In addition, targeted recommendations were given aimed at improvement of older person's position, affirmation of active aging notion and above all, provision of social and health care services. Recently, we initiated amendments to the Rulebook on value-added tax concerning exemption for all providers of social protection services, which should contribute to increase of the services scope, number of providers and service user's deinstitutionalization.

With support of the UNFPA in Serbia, a ***Call to Action*** was disseminated to all relevant actors to combat discrimination of older persons, among which a certain number affected by poverty. Pertaining to the mentioned, we have undertaken a series of activities in local self-government units across Serbia to achieve maximal outreach and demonstrate examples of good practice for full inclusion and uphold of the human rights of older citizens.

Through this, the Commissioner became the first institution in Southeast Europe which put the topic of improving the human rights of the older persons on the political agenda at both local and regional level, and the international platform as such.

The other segment of our work is taking action against gender-based violence (GBV) and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) through the **Bodyright** campaign, which we have launched in Serbia at the initiative of UNFPA. GBV is rooted in gender inequality. In the modern world this becomes the domineering violence form, causing severe consequences such as fear, anxiety, shame .... and can last for an unlimited period of time. These activities have been mostly implemented by youngsters, members of the Commissioner's Panel of Young Advisors, spreading knowledge and raising awareness, peer – to –peer.

In line with CEDAW recommendations, through project activities we have provided direct financial support to women in rural areas for starting local business, along with numerous trainings and study visits.

Last, but not the least, our special focus, among other, is on menstrual poverty as one of the least visible public health crises that affect women, especially from underprivileged groups. Therefore, we have initiated a reduction of taxes on feminine hygiene products and extension of the list of contraceptives at the state's expense.

In the coming period, the institution I am in charge of will continue implementing various activities, with special attention on the inclusion of older persons. I would like to emphasize the upcoming activity lot within the Project **PRO - Local Government for People and Nature**, supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Activities shall be implemented in local communities involving different actors. One of the segments thereof will be intergenerational cooperation, connecting young and older, building bridges for future generations by making efforts to leaving no one behind.

Thank you for your attention.