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the European Union**

Project: "Further Development of Civil Dialogue Between Serbia and Kosovo"

Workshop in Sjenica, April 4, 2025

Topic 1: Increase allocations from the local budget for the category of youth's first employment and other forms of their work engagement. The local self-government should support all opportunities advocated by the state to encourage youth employment.

1. Possibilities – readiness of the local budget to allocate greater financial resources to support youth's first employment

- The municipal budget has a “remedial” character and lacks the capacity for increased allocations dedicated to local youth policies.
- Allocated funds remain at the same level as in previous years.
- The local self-government participates in a cross-border cooperation program in a project supporting youth entrepreneurship.
- The local self-government intends to formally establish the Youth Office and strengthen its financial power.

2. Value chain

- The population of the Municipality of Sjenica is among the youngest in Serbia, which is a statistical "comparative advantage."
- Youth make up 23% of the total population, significantly above the national average.
- A lack of adequate new jobs and statistical poverty of the local community are causes of intensive youth migration.
- Traditional economic activities (agriculture and livestock farming) as well as the formerly respectable textile industry are insufficient for the development of the local community.
- The production of healthy food, tourism, and renewable energy sources represent new development opportunities that require young, educated, and adequately qualified labor.

3. Process management

- The legal framework for implementing public youth policies is the Action Plan for the period 2022–2025 for implementing the National Youth Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for 2022–2030.
- Local self-government bodies rely on their own Local Development Strategy, Local Action Plans for Youth, Youth Councils, and the Youth Office.
- Youth associations and organizations also play a role.

4. Challenges and limitations

- Low level of youth participation in creating their own future.

- Low level of achievement of goals from the previous National Youth Strategy (ex-post analysis).
- Ongoing external migration of youth.
- Insufficient financial resources, especially at the local budget level, to significantly trigger territorially balanced economic development and youth employment.
- Ongoing economic underdevelopment of less developed areas compared to more developed ones.

5. Sustainability

- To sustain positive demographic and development goals at the national level, it is necessary to redefine strategic societal goals in favor of the youth population.
- Economic development goals should be directed toward underdeveloped areas, especially those with significant demographic “pools” of young people.

6. Social cohesion

- Sociopolitical events at the beginning of 2025 indicate that the student movement has initiated an intense process of social cohesion and civic solidarity in Serbia.
- The student movement is a strong indicator of the youth's desire to have greater political influence and to be a significant factor in creating their own future.

7. Recommendation

Establish the legal status of Youth Offices, ensure autonomy in their work and paid managerial staff, as well as stable financial resources. Simultaneously, redefine the goals of their work toward stronger connections with young members of the academic community in (and from) the local community in order to define specific and time-bound goals for involving youth in economic and political activities. Youth Offices should become places for creating achievable local youth policy goals and venues for ongoing discussions/dialogues about the problems and solutions offered by members of the academic community.

Topic 2: Activate the work and visibility of the Council for Interethnic Relations as a consultative body for decisions affecting the rights and status of national minorities. Ensure a stable annual budget for its work and activities.

1. Possibilities of the local budget to finance the work of the Council for Interethnic Relations

- The local self-government budget cannot finance the Council’s work because it is currently under a “remedial” status.
- In previous terms, the Council did not express a need for financial support.

2. Value chain

- The official opinion is that there are no open issues in this local community that would require the Council for Interethnic Relations to activate its work.
- Ethnic issues exist at the national-republic level. The problem lies in the discriminatory attitude of the republic authorities toward territories predominantly inhabited by the Bosniak community.

- The consequence of such discrimination is reflected in the insufficiently rapid economic development of the area (Sandzak).
- According to representatives of the local community, the Council for Interethnic Relations has no leverage to influence a change in the republic authorities' stance.
- Research shows that members of the Council usually respond to local ethnic misunderstandings or conflicts.
- Communication with the National Council of the Bosniak National Minority is not well defined.

3. Process management

- There is no national strategy for national minorities that would more precisely define the status and role of the Council for Interethnic Relations.
- Councils, as independent bodies of local assemblies, and their roles are defined by the Law on Local Self-Government and municipal statutes.

4. Challenges and limitations

- The lack of recognition of the Council's role and position within the political system is the only real challenge and limitation to more efficient operation of the Council for Interethnic Relations.
- When selecting Council members, the national structure of the body is taken into account, but criteria of expertise and credibility are lacking.
- It is common practice that most Council members are chosen from among assembly groups, partly based on proposals from National Councils, which may be an obstacle to higher quality and more ambitious work.

5. Sustainability

- The legal status of the Council for Interethnic Relations is defined by the Law on Local Self-Government, and currently there are no initiatives to change this legal framework.
- The Council's inefficiency and inactivity are the only indicators that could jeopardize the justification for its existence.

6. Recommendation

The results of this field research show the Council for Interethnic Relations remains consistently inactive. This statement is supported by the latest research as well (Functionality Analysis of the Councils for Interethnic Relations, European Union, Council of Europe, and the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, 2024). To make the Council's work more efficient, it is necessary to organize appropriate training on rights and competences for all elected Council members in each electoral cycle. Open a dialogue on amending legal norms that define the Council's work. When convening local assembly sessions where decisions affecting national minorities are made, timely invitations and relevant materials should be sent to Council members so that they can express their positions.



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Shoqata Humanitare "Bamirëse e Kosovës "Nëna Tereza"
The Kosovo Humanitarian and Charitable Society "Mother Teresa"
Humanitarno Dobrotvorno Udruzenje Kosova "Majka Tereza"

38400 Prishtinë Rr. Agim Ramadani pn. Tel:00381 38 542 864, Fax: 542 869,
Web site: www.nenatreze.org e_mail: ntreze@yahoo.com



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