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**SUPPORT TO JOINT ACTIVITIES IN SELECTED MULTI-ETHNIC COMMUNITIES THAT  
CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT OF YOUTH, WOMEN AND ETHNIC  
MINORITIES IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF BAC, BUJANOVAC, PRESEVO, SENTA, ZABALJ,  
DIMITROVGRAD, TUTIN, SJENICA, PRIJEPOLJE AND KNJAZEVC**



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## INTRODUCTION

Research on the position of youth, women, and members of national minorities in 10 municipalities of Serbia was conducted during the period 2023–2025. The research team's main approach relied on two methodological procedures: desk research and fieldwork. The criterion for selecting the target group was economically underdeveloped municipalities with a multiethnic population. Geographically, they are located in the following border areas: Senta, Bac, Zabalj, Knjazevac, Dimitrovgrad, Presevo, Bujanovac, Tutin, Sjenica, and Prijepolje.

The main goal of the research was to assess the situation in the target municipalities regarding the project's three target groups and to draw recommendations for the next phase of work with local governments - namely, providing expert support (Act 2.5.) in addressing some of the key issues identified in the research recommendations.

At the beginning of this phase, two key issues were identified for each municipality, which local governments were to focus on with the help of an expert who was part of the project team. Between September 2024 and June 2025, the expert visited all 10 target municipalities and, together with the relevant municipal representatives, reviewed the current situation in the identified areas, determined whether progress had been made since the research phase, and proposed measures or recommendations for resolving the issues.

Some of the problems identified in the 10 municipalities related to shortcomings in local regulations, the practice of implementing them, or gaps in local policies in certain areas. These issues were easier to address because they depended on the political will and competence of local government authorities to correct the deficiencies. However, some of the problems identified in the recommendations, and addressed with expert support, concerned national regulations, practices, and policies that were managed at the central level.

During work with the representatives of the relevant municipal departments, the expert proposed steps for resolving the identified issues. These steps are included in the recommendations contained in the expert support report for each local government covered by the project, and these reports are included later in this publication. In the next phase of work with local governments, the expert and project coordinator will conduct monitoring and mentoring in implementing the recommendations from the expert reports for each target municipality, in order to resolve the identified problems as much as possible.

**Jelena Perkovic, Project Expert**

## **Identified Common Problems**

### **Local level**

In the introduction of this publication, we also list some of the common problems affecting all 10 municipalities covered by the project. The common problem for all observed local governments is their budgets, which lack sufficient funds for implementing public policies (some are operating under a “temporary budget” status). This is a consequence of the lack of their own funding sources, slow economic development, and the inability of local administrations to attract investors by creating a favorable environment, which falls under their competence.

### **Central level**

The inventiveness of local officials, both appointed and elected, is strongly influenced by centralization and party discipline, which discourages and limits local initiatives. Communication with relevant ministries often does not yield the expected results. Members of parliament representing the region’s electorate are not seen as instruments of influence in the National Assembly, its committees, and bodies, and political divisions significantly impact the efficiency of local administrations.

Some local governments make insufficient use of Regional Development Agencies as instruments for faster economic development, as well as organizations dealing with regional development and state system reform. Local governments also make insufficient use of research results from the non-governmental sector and the services they can provide at the local level.

## The Municipality of Bac

The level of development of the municipality of Bac places it in Group III, which ranges from 60% to 80% of the national average (source: Regulation on Determining the Unified List of Development Levels of Regions and Local Government Units for 2014). The most significant economic resource of the municipality is agricultural land.

According to the 2022 census, Bac has 11,484 inhabitants, which is about 18% fewer than in 2011 (source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia - RZS). The majority of the population are Serbs (46%), followed by Slovaks (19%), Croats (8%), Hungarians (6%), Roma, and others. The average age of the population is 45 years. The poverty risk rate is 35.6%, placing Bac in 122nd place among Serbian municipalities according to this indicator (source: RZS).

In the four-year period 2019-2022, the municipality of Bac received more than 1.07 billion RSD in regional incentive funds and implemented 359 projects during the same period. The largest funds were received from the Provincial Capital Investments Administration, the Ministry of Finance, and the Provincial Secretariat for Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry (source: Analytical Service of Local Government Units).

In 2021, the number of registered unemployed persons was 1,300. The unemployment rate per 1,000 inhabitants was 102, while the same indicator at the national level was 67. Women accounted for 53.1% of total unemployment, and 23.7% were young people (source: RZS). The number of young people aged 15-29 in Bac in 2022 was 1,759, while just a year earlier it was 2,187 (source: RZS).

In accordance with the Law on Local Self-Government, the municipality of Bac complied with the legal and institutional framework that defines the rights of the focus groups whose situation was analyzed: youth, women, and members of national minorities.

The expert visit to the municipality of Bac took place on January 21, 2025. There were seven participants in the expert's work with the focus group, including four women and three men.

Expert support was provided on the following two topics:

**Topic 1: When drafting the municipal budget, special attention should be given to the sensitivity of three particularly vulnerable categories that were the subject of this research - youth, women, and national minorities.**

### Objective

To assist municipal authorities in ensuring that the local budget is more effectively utilized for the implementation of public policies related to youth, gender equality, and national minorities.

**Opportunities** to align the local budget more closely with the public policies relevant to the target groups of the project

- In accordance with the Budget Law, the local government regularly allocates funds under the category "Youth and Recreation".
- The local budget provides financial support for travel expenses of high school and university students.
- Under the budget item "Local Economic Development", financial assistance is allocated through the HELP program, which supports youth internships and equipment procurement.
- For the second consecutive year, the municipal budget has been structured as a gender-responsive budget.
- The municipal government provides financial and logistical support for the implementation of educational programs aimed at empowering vulnerable groups, youth and women, economically.
- In accordance with the Law on Local Self-Government, specific budgetary funds are allocated for the functioning of national minority councils and activities aimed at preserving the national identity of minorities residing in the municipality.

### **Value Chain**

- The inability to generate more dynamic employment opportunities contributes to the significant migration of young people to larger regional economic centers and EU countries.
- Youth account for approximately 25% of the total registered unemployed in the municipality, while women make up 53%.
- Women in agriculture in the municipality of Bac are heads of registered family farms in 35% of cases. Most of them live in rural areas and lack significant systemic support that would enable them to develop more rapidly and become more competitive.
- Youth migration reduces the percentage of the working-age population, which directly impacts local community development.
- Public policies have not introduced long-term measures that would effectively reduce migration and increase women's economic inclusion.
- Members of several national minorities make up more than half of the total population of the municipality and exercise all the rights guaranteed to them.

### **Process Management**

- The Municipal Assembly of Bac has a normative and institutional framework

that articulates the interests of the vulnerable groups targeted by the research.

- The Youth Council, the Gender Equality Commission, and the Council for Interethnic Relations serve as important mechanisms, as do local action plans.
- The Budget and Finance Department, along with other municipal departments responsible for issues related to the focus group, play key roles.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

- Limited local budget.
- Misalignment of national public policies with the financial and human resource capacities of local government, affecting their implementation.
- Mechanisms for mitigating unemployment, migration processes, and economic gender discrimination are not exclusively within the jurisdiction of local government.
- The global security, economic, and political situation, as well as rapid technological changes, impact the overall conditions in local communities.

### **Sustainability**

- The budget of the municipality of Bac, in accordance with the Budget Law, allocates funds that support the activities of the target groups.
- The capacities of local government are also directed towards securing additional financial and logistical support from national and international funds.

### **Social Cohesion**

- The gender structure of the population is balanced.
- The proportion of young people in the total population is declining, while the number of elderly is increasing.
- The local government fosters synergy between young and older populations through special support programs, such as home care assistance for the elderly.
- In collaboration with national and international funds, the municipality supports the employment of harder-to-employ categories, including youth, women, and especially members of the Roma population.

### **Recommendations**

Enhance the existing level and quality of support from the local budget for youth, women, and vulnerable groups by reassessing priority goals in budget planning and its individual allocations. Consult the Youth Council, the Gender Equality Council, and the Council for Interethnic Relations during this process. Continue activities aimed at

educating youth and women in project application skills. Increase efforts to attract financial support from national and international funds.

## **Topic 2: Stopping the declining employment trend in agriculture.**

### **Objective**

Given the educational potential and ownership structure of agricultural land, seek a synergy model that combines the real capacities of the local community. Agriculture in this region is a significant resource that could improve the status of the categories covered by this research, particularly young people, thereby reducing youth emigration for work abroad.

### **Opportunities** for the local budget to support increased employment in agriculture

- Approximately 10% of the municipal budget of Bac is allocated annually for "Agriculture and Rural Development".
- These funds are distributed through public calls aimed at increasing agricultural competitiveness.
- The local government provides logistical support for applying to national and international funds intended for agricultural development.

### **Value Chain**

- Agriculture is the leading economic sector in the municipality of Bac.
- The municipal development plan prioritizes intensive crop farming and the expansion of arable land under organic production.
- The missing component in intensive agriculture is the lack of processing capacities for its products.
- The age structure of agricultural workers and the structure of family farm owners are unfavorable.
- The potential future leaders of agricultural production are graduates of the agricultural high school in Bac.

### **Process Management**

- Municipal Budget and Finance Department
- Department of Economy and Agriculture, as well as the Local Economic Development Office
- Municipal Assembly's Agriculture Committee

## **Challenges and Limitations**

- The age structure of those employed in agriculture is unfavorable. The majority of family farm owners are elderly.
- Farmers lack the necessary skills to apply for funding opportunities available for agricultural development.
- The average size of arable land is small and does not generate sufficient income for significant agricultural advancement without external support.
- The absence of adequate processing facilities reduces competitiveness and agricultural income.

## **Recommendations**

Conduct a direct assessment of the real situation and needs in agricultural production by analyzing data on the average farm size, age structure of farm owners, and other relevant factors. Based on these findings, establish priorities and realistic possibilities for directing funds from the local budget's "Agriculture and Rural Development" allocation. Additionally, consider the needs of rural communities regarding social and healthcare services and existing communal infrastructure, which requires an intersectoral approach. Continue the initiative for allocating agricultural funds from national and international funds.

**In addition to the two recommendations mentioned above, the following were also defined during the research, which are directly or indirectly within the competence of the local self-government**

- Create conditions for a more intensive development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurship (develop business zones, speed up permit procedures, encourage and support young people, women, and services that can be provided by the civil sector). The goal is to reach the average indicators related to entrepreneurship and business entities at the level of Serbia and the South Backa District.
- Stop the trend of declining employment in agriculture. Taking into account the educational potential and the structure of land ownership, a model should be sought that consolidates the real capacities available within the local community.
- Resolve uncertainties regarding the payment of work on projects led by the local self-government, as the current solutions do not provide sufficient incentives for this type of engagement for municipal administration employees. Budgetary funds should be planned for the co-financing of future projects to be implemented through international funds.
- Continuously support civil sector projects (public works) that are a permanent need of all citizens of the municipality (home care assistants, elderly care, various types of home services and assistance) so that this support contributes to their self-sustainability.

## The Municipality of Bujanovac

Bujanovac, together with 18 other municipalities in Serbia, belongs to the group of local communities classified as underdeveloped areas, with less than 50% of the gross national income per capita compared to the national average (source: Regulation on Determining the Unified List of Development Levels of Regions and Local Government Units for 2024).

According to the official 2022 census results, the municipality of Bujanovac has 42,634 inhabitants. The population consists of 25,465 Albanians, 10,467 Serbs, and 3,532 Roma. The average age of the inhabitants is 36 years - seven years younger than the Serbian average. Bujanovac is one of the rare municipalities that has not recorded a negative demographic trend.

The population aged 15-29 makes up one-quarter of the total local community, and according to 2022 data, this same group accounted for 22.8% of all registered unemployment (source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia - RZS). Compared to the Serbian average, which has 33 employed persons per 1,000 inhabitants, Bujanovac has only half that number - 16. At the same time, there are 129 registered unemployed persons per 1,000 inhabitants in the municipality, while in Serbia this figure is half as high (67).

During the 2020-2022 period, the average personal income of employees in the municipality grew at an annual rate of around 10%, but in 2022 it still lagged behind the Serbian average salary by 22,579 RSD (source: RZS).

Over four years, the municipality of Bujanovac received more than 621 million RSD in incentive funds from various sources. With these funds, 300 projects were implemented in the 2019-2022 period. The largest share of support came from the Export Insurance and Financing Fund (228 million RSD), followed by the Development Fund (203 million RSD) and the Ministry of Finance (88 million RSD) (source: Analytical Service of Local Government Units).

The position of young people, women, and members of national minorities is defined by the Statute of the Bujanovac Municipal Assembly. The Assembly elects a Youth Council, a Gender Equality Commission, and a Council for Interethnic Relations. All three bodies have their own activities (source: interview conducted in 2023).

The Youth Office was established in 2021 and operates within the office of the municipal president (source: interview conducted in Bujanovac in 2023).

An expert from the Center for Regionalism visited Bujanovac on October 31, 2024, and nine members of the municipal administration participated in expert support activities, including five women and four men.

**Topic 1: Ensure greater allocations for women's needs in the local community.**

## **Objective**

To assess the willingness of the local government to introduce gender budgeting in accordance with the Budget Planning Law by 2026 and to plan larger allocations for the needs of the female population. Through surveys, identify the priority needs of women and define the institutional framework for addressing the identified issues.

**Opportunities** – local budget’s readiness to allocate more financial resources for women’s support

- The municipal budget has consistently financed four programs for women in recent years and will continue to support them in the future.
- There is no data on the effects of the supported projects.
- The local budget for 2025 is planned in accordance with the law and will have a gender-responsive budget character. However, no priorities have been established for the allocation of funds from this budget.
- Due to the limited scope of the local budget, it will not be possible to plan larger financial allocations for women’s support in 2025.

## **Value Chain**

- A balanced gender structure in employment is an important condition for the faster development of the local community. In the studied municipality, women make up 40% of total registered employment, which is a result of the poorer educational structure of the female population.
- Women's exclusion from the economic sphere is also a result of the lack of adequate new job opportunities.
- Discriminatory attitudes toward women in rural areas and the absence of special support for their economic empowerment.
- Traditional views on the role of women are a strong limiting factor for their emancipation.

## **Process Management**

- Through the local development strategy and local action plans, plan stronger support for women in areas where they represent the majority of the workforce.
- Strengthen Gender Equality Councils.
- Introduce new professions into the education system and provide retraining for acquired professions.
- Develop and support cooperatives in rural areas.
- Involve the capacities of the Municipal Development Agency and the Labor

Market in the process of education and empowerment of women.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

- Traditional patriarchal attitudes toward women and the underdevelopment of the local community are obstacles that slow down the socio-economic emancipation of women. While education is equally accessible, it is less utilized by women than by men.
- Only 10% of women are holders of agricultural households, while they perform two-thirds of the work in agricultural households.
- Only 20% of women apply for subsidies in the announced competitions.
- The significant migration of male population creates additional burdens on women to maintain households, especially in rural areas.

### **Sustainability**

Strategic documents of the Republic of Serbia call for greater support for women's overall emancipation. The Budget Planning Law introduces gender-responsive budgeting. This is a prerequisite for the sustainability of the program. Underdeveloped local communities already indicate limitations in their budgets and the inability to allocate additional funds for women's needs, with the caveat that it is unknown what percentage of the budget should be allocated for this purpose.

### **Social Cohesion**

Women's emancipation requires appropriate legal frameworks and continuous engagement of the institutional system in achieving planned goals. Developed societies base their stability to a significant extent on the emancipation of women.

### **Recommendations**

For the realization of the gender-responsive budget program and larger allocations from the local budget to address the issues of the female population, it is necessary to synchronize the planning of the national budget and the budgets of local communities.

## **Topic 2: Activate the work and visibility of the Council for Interethnic Relations.**

### **Objective**

To ensure that the Council for Interethnic Relations becomes more active in decision-making processes that affect the rights and status of national minorities. Ensure a stable annual budget for their work and activities.

### **Value Chain**

- The rights and obligations of the Council for Interethnic Relations in local communities are mechanisms that contribute to harmonized relations in multi-ethnic environments, especially in the public sphere.
- The rights and obligations of the Council, as regulated by law, have not been fully utilized in past practice.

### **Process Management**

- The Bujanovac Municipal Assembly has not yet constituted the new composition of the Council for Interethnic Relations.
- Consultations are currently underway to determine candidates for the future composition of the Council, proposed by the parliamentary groups.
- The constitution of the new Council will be completed by the end of 2024.
- There are no obstacles to supporting the Council's work through the allocation of funds from the local budget.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

- The inactivity of the Council for Interethnic Relations is a result of the lack of continuous communication between the Municipal Assembly and the Council members.
- Underdeveloped awareness among Council members about the importance of their role.

### **Success Story**

The Council for Interethnic Relations of the Bujanovac municipality acted as a mediator in resolving an issue at a primary school in 2023, where classes were held in Serbian, while the school building was under renovation for six months. The problem was solved by using the school building where classes are taught in Albanian.

### **Recommendations**

Every newly elected composition of the Council for Interethnic Relations should be educated about their rights and obligations. Awareness of the importance and role of Council members is a fundamental condition for their greater activity. A request should be made to the Municipal Assembly to allocate funds that would enable more diverse activities of the Council.

## **Recommendations not covered by the special expert support**

- Municipal administrations should develop capacities for strategic planning, and for monitoring data on the economic, social, and financial situation of their municipalities - especially data such as population growth, transportation, housing, infrastructure, and environmental protection, and based on this, identify the development needs of local communities.
- The professional services of the municipal administration, in cooperation with council members, must engage in dialogue with the relevant ministries to present identified projects important for the municipality so that they can be financed from the state budget. It is particularly important to follow and participate in public debates on major national strategies.
- Employees in the professional services of the municipal administration should have stable employment status, which ensures continuity and quality in the work of municipal bodies.
- Monitor the effects of spent incentive and grant funds, especially IPARD funds intended for agricultural development, and inform citizens and entrepreneurs about opportunities to obtain such funds and their positive impact on the development of the municipality.
- Strive to create a database on the number of economic migrants from the territory of the municipality.
- Increase allocations from the local budget for programs supporting the first employment of young people and other forms of their work engagement, and ensure that the local administration supports all state-led initiatives that encourage youth employment.
- The municipalities of Bujanovac and Presevo are multiethnic communities where the majority of the population belongs to the Albanian minority, many of whom speak Serbian very poorly, which has become an obstacle to employment. In addition to Serbian language learning, it is necessary to design events and activities that raise awareness about the importance of knowing Serbian as a language of communication throughout the territory of Serbia. Experiences should be exchanged with other minorities who faced a similar problem but successfully encouraged their members to better master the Serbian language.

### **The Municipality of Presevo**

According to the classification criteria for the economic development of local self-government units, Presevo is an underdeveloped municipality and belongs to Group IV, which is below 50% of the national average level of development and has the status of a devastated area (source: Regulation on Determining the Unified List of Development Levels of Regions and Local Government Units for 2024).

At the last census in 2022, Presevo had 33,449 inhabitants, half of whom are temporarily working abroad (source: Estimate of the Working Group for the Development Strategy of the Municipality of Presevo, Development Strategy of the Municipality of Presevo 2019-2023). The average age of the population in this municipality is 37.7 years, making it one of the youngest in Serbia. Young people aged 15-29 make up 22% of the total population (source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia - RZS).

According to the latest census, Presevo has 1,607 Serbs, 31,340 Albanians, 3 Bosniaks, and 270 others (source: RZS).

The municipality of Presevo has established a Youth Council and a Gender Equality Council. A Council for Interethnic Relations has not been established.

Presevo has a Youth Office, which operates within the office of the municipal president. It has a budget for the implementation of youth public policies, but no Action Plan for Youth has been adopted.

The Gender Equality Council has submitted proposals for amending the municipal Statute to introduce a gender-responsive budget (GRB), participated in the preparation of strategic documents, and collected gender-sensitive data (source: interview conducted in Presevo, 2023).

The expert visit to Presevo took place on December 20, 2024, and ten representatives of local authorities participated in the focus group aimed at providing expert support - five women and five men.

Two recommendations were provided with expert support:

### **Topic 1: Introduction of mandatory gender budgeting.**

#### **Objective**

To assess the realistic potential of the local budget to accept recommendations and support the work of the Gender Equality Commission by fostering its activities.

**Opportunities** – readiness of the local budget to allocate more funds for the support of women

- The local budget of Presevo municipality has not consistently funded programs aimed at strengthening the socio-economic position of women, institutional framework activities, or political emancipation.
- The gradual introduction of gender-responsive budgeting is not planned for 2025 due to limitations in the local budget's financial structure.
- The needs of the Gender Equality Commission will be financed in line with its planned activities.

## **Value Chain**

- The lack of continuous support from the local budget for women's activism, both through institutional frameworks and special programs for economic and political emancipation, delays the implementation of strategic and reform objectives. High levels of discrimination against women persist, regardless of education level, age, or geographic location.
- Women constitute only 30% of council members, meeting the legal minimum.
- The exclusion of women from the economic sphere is further exacerbated by a lack of adequate new job opportunities.
- Discrimination against women is particularly evident in rural areas, with no targeted support for their economic emancipation.
- Traditional attitudes towards women's roles remain a significant limiting factor for faster emancipation.

## **Process Management**

- Development strategies for the local community and action plans should systematically plan for the needs of women, incorporating surveys and aligning budget planning accordingly.
- Provide stronger financial and logistical support to the Gender Equality Commission and organize more educational workshops for its members to encourage greater activity.
- Support women in both urban and rural areas.
- Include logistical support from departments responsible for the community development strategy in the support process.

## **Challenges and Limitations**

- A portion of the female population in Presevo is aware of the need to change patriarchal attitudes toward women's roles.
- Initiatives to change the dominant perception of women's roles exist, but the lack of political and systemic support slows the process.
- A lack of access to information about systemic support opportunities, coupled with limited Serbian language proficiency, hinders communication with potential partners and opportunities.

## **Sustainability**

Strategic documents of the Republic of Serbia mandate increased support for women's emancipation, and the Budget System Law introduces gender-responsive

budgeting. These provide a foundation for sustaining this program. However, underdeveloped local communities highlight budget limitations and uncertainties regarding the proportion of the budget to be allocated for this purpose.

### **Social Cohesion**

Women's emancipation requires an adequate legal framework, which exists. Its implementation demands continuous institutional engagement and political will to realize strategic objectives.

### **Recommendations**

Increase allocations from the local budget to stimulate women's activism and address their issues through the existing institutional framework, aligning them with national budget plans and the Gender Equality Strategy. Accelerate the process of introducing gender-responsive budgeting.

**Topic 2: Securing budget funding for the stability of Youth Offices. Youth Offices must be trained to engage in project preparation to secure funding for youth activities, whether through projects financed by various ministries or donors.**

### **Objective**

Determine the status of the Youth Office, the existence of planning documents, and identify limitations in its planning and activities.

### **Value Chain**

- Presevo has one of the highest youth demographics in Serbia.
- This demographic potential is strategically positive but requires careful channeling and direction.
- The social and economic inclusion of youth in the existing state system is low and inadequate.
- A lack of new job opportunities, non-recognition of diplomas obtained in Kosovo, and limited Serbian language proficiency lead many young people to seek work abroad.
- Migration results in a continuous decrease in the working-age population.

### **Process Management**

- The Youth Office operates within the Cabinet of the Municipal President.
- A Local Action Plan for Youth does not exist.

- During the annual budget process, a special decision is made to finance the Youth Office's work.
- The office employs two associates responsible for organizational tasks.
- The Chief of Staff coordinates communication between the Municipal President and the Youth Office.
- Frequent political changes at the local, national, and regional levels negatively impact the realization of strategic youth policy objectives.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

- The Youth Office's status within the Municipal President's Cabinet offers advantages, as negotiation and direction processes are dynamic.
- However, this setup risks a narrow circle of political allies influencing the office's work.
- Frequent changes in local political power disrupt the engagement of office associates, undermining the quality and continuity of its activities.
- Younger generations are ready to overcome the historical burdens of southern Serbia, but the political context created by older generations remains an obstacle.
- The political landscape in Presevo is becoming younger, though the critical mass necessary for greater involvement in decision-making has not been achieved.
- Adequate education programs must focus on developing young leaders.
- The Youth Office's limited budget is insufficient to establish an Innovation Center where Presevo's youth could acquire skills in modern technologies.

### **Success Story**

The Youth Office plans to overcome youth exclusion in Presevo through future activities. It aims to establish intensive cooperation with regional youth, particularly with those in northern Vojvodina.

### **Recommendations**

Given the absence of legal provisions regarding the institutional status of Youth Offices within the state system, efforts should ensure minimal influence from narrow political groups. Concurrently, provide continuous financial support from the local budget to fund the office's operations and activities fully. Ensure municipal departments responsible for youth-related issues, such as employment, education, healthcare, and family status, provide comprehensive support.

## **Recommendations not covered by the special expert support**

- Train managers and employees in local self-governments to develop strategic documents by familiarizing them with the methodology for creating such documents, as well as improving their use of available statistical data from the Analytical Service for Local Self-Governments (JLS), the DevInfo database of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (RZS), and other sources. Skills should be built for understanding, connecting, interpreting, and linking data to specific activities, in cooperation with Regional Development Agencies, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, and other relevant state institutions.
- Employees in the professional services of the municipal administration should have a stable employment status that ensures continuity and quality in the work of municipal bodies.
- Monitor the effects of used incentive and grant funds, especially IPARD funds intended for agricultural development, and inform citizens and entrepreneurs about the possibilities of obtaining such funds and their positive impact on the development of the municipality.
- Cooperate with other local communities within the region to make more efficient use of human and financial resources of the existing network of institutions, for planning and implementing joint projects, and for jointly presenting development needs to state institutions, development agencies, and others.
- Strive to create a database on the number of economic migrants from the territory of the municipality.
- Activate the work and visibility of the Council for Interethnic Relations as a body for consultations on decisions that affect the rights and status of national minorities. Ensure a stable annual budget for its work and activities.
- The municipalities of Bujanovac and Presevo are multiethnic communities where the majority of the population belongs to the Albanian minority, many of whom speak Serbian very poorly, which has become an obstacle to employment. In addition to Serbian language learning, it is necessary to design events and activities that raise awareness about the importance of knowing Serbian as the language of communication throughout the territory of Serbia. Exchange experiences with other minorities that have faced similar problems but successfully encouraged their members to better master the Serbian language.

## The Municipality of Senta

According to its level of economic development, Senta belongs to Group I of municipalities in Serbia, which means that its GDP is above the national average. The municipality of Senta initiated a proposal to amend the Regulation on Determining the Unified List of Development Levels of Regions and Local Government Units for 2014 (which is still in force), as the real situation has changed and the values of development indicators for certain municipalities are no longer the same as in 2014.

According to the 2022 census, the municipality of Senta has 17,953 inhabitants. Between the two censuses, the municipality lost 5,363 residents - or 23% of its population. In terms of ethnic composition, members of the Hungarian community make up the majority (78.12%), followed by Serbs (13.7%), Roma (1.15%), other nationalities (3.1%), and 2% who did not declare their ethnicity. Within the overall population structure of the municipality, young people (aged 15-29) make up 14% of the total population. At the same time, in 2022 young people accounted for 21% of total registered unemployment.

The average age of the population is 45.08 years - 1.44 years higher than the average age in Vojvodina (43.64 years) and 1.23 years higher than the average age in Serbia (source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia).

From 2019 to 2022, Senta received a total of 769 million RSD in regional development support, through which 380 projects were implemented. The largest funding was provided by the National Employment Service, the Ministry of Finance, and the Provincial Secretariat for Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry (source: Analytical Service of Local Government Units).

In 2016, the Municipal Assembly of Senta, based on Serbia's strategic and legal documents, adopted a decision establishing the Youth Council. The decision to establish the Youth Office was adopted in 2015. The Gender Equality Council was established within the Municipal Assembly of Senta in 2012. The Statute of the Municipality regulates the status, method of election, and competencies of the Council for Interethnic Relations (Articles 45, 46, and 47 of the Statute) (source: <https://zenta-senta.co.rs/>).

The Youth Office is financed from the regular municipal budget, with a recommended amount of 0.2% of the municipal budget. The Youth Office performs professional tasks related to collecting, analyzing, and consolidating data on young people (source: <https://zenta-senta.co.rs/izvor>).

Since its establishment, the Gender Equality Council has actively cooperated with local government bodies, institutions, provincial authorities, and the Provincial Ombudsman by organizing educational programs and round tables (source: interview conducted in 2023).

An expert from the Center for Regionalism visited Senta on April 4, 2025, and nine

people participated in the expert support activities, including five women and four men.

The work of the Council for Interethnic Relations is regulated by the general provisions of the Statute and the Rules of Procedure of the Municipal Assembly.

### **Topic 1: Maximizing the application of public policy measures supporting increased birth rates.**

#### **Objective**

By introducing a responsible budget, find a measure that will effectively connect efforts for economic empowerment of women and the need for increased birth rates. Improve and innovate maternity protection services and childcare and family support services. Plan and maintain long-term support for young couples.

**Opportunities** - local budget readiness in implementing public policies for increasing birth rate

- The Senta municipal budget does not allocate special funds directly supporting pro-natalist policies or the economic emancipation of women.
- Pro-natalist public measures are implemented through national-level mechanisms.
- Economic empowerment incentives for women are provided through the “Prosperitat” program and other domestic and international targeted funds.
- In response to unfavorable demographic trends, the municipal budget partially covers the costs for families with children in primary and secondary education, as well as providing high school and student scholarships.
- Investment in childcare and family services improves and raises the quality of social care for children and families.

#### **Value Chain**

- Registered employment shows a high degree of gender balance in the municipality of Senta.
- Women make up a quarter of the total registered agricultural households, which is significantly above the Serbian average.
- More than half of the families in the municipality of Senta have only one child.
- Social care for preschool children is emphasized in urban areas through a high coverage rate.
- In rural areas, the coverage of social care for children is low.
- The municipal assembly has decided that preschool attendance will be completely free of charge for the next two years.

- The action of supporting young people through free houses in rural areas has mostly involved members of marginalized groups who find it difficult to integrate into society.

### **Process Management**

- The municipal budget in 2025 will be gender-responsive.
- Logistical support for the economic emancipation of women is primarily articulated through cooperation with the Office for Local Economic Development and the Regional Development Agency PanonReg.
- A significant portion of support for women is provided through donations from the Prosperitat organization (established by the Government of Hungary), which local government has limited influence over.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

- Unfavorable demographic trends in the local community include low birth rates, rapid increases in the elderly population (over 65 years old), and pronounced migration.
- Most measures taken to mitigate these challenges fall outside the scope of local government responsibilities.
- The socio-economic development of the municipality of Senta has been in decline for decades, limiting its capacity to undertake more radical actions within its jurisdiction.
- Global security and economic-political situations, as well as rapid technological changes, impact the overall state of local communities.
- No indication of innovative approaches in social care for children and family support.

### **Sustainability**

The Senta local government defines its 2025 budget as gender-responsive. This is a significant step in focusing attention on women's economic emancipation and introducing an innovative approach to motherhood and family support.

### **Social Cohesion**

- In the municipality of Senta, women constitute a significant proportion of the total population.
- Women represent 49% of the total workforce. A notable number of women hold leadership positions in local government and the public sector.
- A quarter of individual agricultural households are headed by women.

- The female population has a high level of education.

### **Recommendations**

Women's emancipation, maternity protection, and family support require continuous institutional commitment to achieving planned goals. To implement a gender-responsive budget and allocate more funds from the local budget to address women's issues, synchronization between the national budget planning and local community budgets is essential.

### **Topic 2: Persisting with measures in the Municipality Development Plan 2022-2030 to mitigate migration.**

#### **Objective**

Provide long-term support to young entrepreneurs through mentorship programs and strategically direct vocational education by opening specialized schools or centers to ensure a qualified and well-paid workforce needed in modern technological times.

#### **Opportunities** concerning the local budget

- The realization of the goals in the current Municipality Development Plan is threatened by the global and regional situation.
- Mitigating migration is not defined as a specific goal in the development plan.
- The development plan prioritizes the localization of sustainable development goals, which involves clearly defining local measures contributing to achieving primary sustainable development goals.
- The local budget does not allocate special funds exclusively aimed at mitigating migration processes.

#### **Value Chain**

- In the municipality of Senta, young people make up 14% of the population, which is below the Serbian average.
- The municipal budget allocates targeted scholarships for industries in demand in the local economy, as well as scholarships for studying.
- The local budget does not allocate specific funds to support young entrepreneurs.
- About 5% of the local budget is allocated for youth sports and recreation.
- Financial support for young entrepreneurs is realized through domestic and international funds.

## **Process Management**

- The Municipality Assembly of Senta has established a Youth Council.
- The Youth Office functions within the Office of the Mayor.
- Its task is to collect, analyze, and consolidate data on youth, collaborate with and support organizations and associations working with youth.
- Key measures that could significantly improve the position of young people are not within the local government's jurisdiction.
- The municipality has four high schools. The profiles offered are competitive in the labor market, and there is no need for new profiles.
- In cases of special requirements or shortages of certain profiles, scholarships are offered through the municipal budget.

## **Challenges and Limitations**

- Over the past two decades, businesses that were key to the municipality's development have shut down.
- This has reduced the potential for opening new jobs.
- The proximity of Hungary, with specific measures (liberalizing passport issuance and allowing dual citizenship for Serbian citizens), has caused excess labor to flow into Hungary and other European countries.
- In the past decade, this has led to a shortage of labor in the municipality.

## **Recommendations**

- Reassess the planned development goals for the municipality of Senta for 2022-2030, particularly regarding youth migration.
- Establish an open social dialogue on mitigating migration processes.
- Search for models that decentralize the application of measures for global migration issues (causes and consequences in specific regions) and, as much as possible, address this problem at the micro level of each local community.

## **Recommendations not covered by the special expert analysis**

- In cooperation with the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities and other organizations and associations, initiate a proposal to the Government of the Republic of Serbia to update the Regulation on Determining the Unified List of Development Levels of Regions and Local Government Units for 2014, since the classification indicator values for some municipalities have changed in the meantime.

## The Municipality of Zabalj

According to its level of development, the municipality of Zabalj is classified in Group III (60% to 80% of the Serbian average).

According to the 2022 census, the municipality has 23,853 inhabitants (11,880 women and 11,973 men). Compared to the 2011 census, the population has decreased by 8.7% (source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia). The share of young people in the total population is decreasing. Likewise, the share of the working-age population is also declining, which represents a limiting factor for the future development of the municipality (source: interview conducted in Zabalj, 2023).

In terms of ethnic composition, the municipality has 19,708 Serbs (82.62%), 1,132 Roma (4.74%), 972 Rusyns (4%), 190 Hungarians (0.79%). 1,464 inhabitants (6.14%) did not declare their ethnicity or it is unknown (source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia). The average age of the population is 41 years, which is 2.6 years lower than the Serbian average (source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia).

The Youth Council of Zabalj has 9 members. The Youth Council has not submitted any documents for consideration or adoption to the Municipal Assembly, the municipal president, or the Municipal Council.

A Gender Equality Commission has been established. The Municipal Finance and Budget Department adopted a plan for the gradual introduction of a gender-responsive budget starting in 2022.

The Statute of the Municipality of Zabalj regulates the status, role, and scope of authority of the Council for Interethnic Relations. The first Council was formed by a decision of the Municipal Assembly in 2005. The Office for Roma Inclusion was established in 2009.

Expert support to the municipality of Zabalj took place on September 27, 2024, and seven people participated, including five women and two men.

Two recommendations were provided with expert support:

**Topic 1: Accelerating the removal of barriers affecting activities related to establishing an industrial zone in the municipality of Zabalj.**

### **Objective**

The goal of the discussion is to remove obstacles in the intention to establish a free zone in the settlement of Zabalj and to determine a roadmap that leads to problem resolution.

**Opportunities** concerning the market

- The geographical location of the municipality of Zabalj.
- Proximity to major economic entities and interest from investors.
- A good network of roads and connectivity to major economic centers.
- Free zones as a condition for faster economic development. The establishment of a free zone is defined in the Development Strategy of the Municipality of Zabalj 2022-2028.
- Identified potential location and part of the infrastructure for the future free zone.

### **Value Chain**

The free zone offers the possibility of partially relieving the large economic centers nearby. It presents an opportunity for public-private partnership, a higher percentage of employment in the local community, and alleviating internal migration.

### **Process Management**

The readiness of the local government to collaborate with relevant institutions (Archive of Vojvodina) to resolve the issue of non-existent documentation regarding legal property relations in the area designated for the future free zone.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

There is uncertainty about how and when to resolve the issue of limited capacity in the gas network, which would supply energy to future users of the free zone. The local government remains committed to achieving the strategic goal of introducing a free zone.

### **Recommendations**

Addressing problems related to the free zone is not exclusively within the jurisdiction of the local government. Therefore, redefining strategic goals from the current local development strategy is essential.

### **Topic 2: The local budget needs to be more sensitive to the female population and youth.**

#### **Objective**

In accordance with the reform of public finances and the Law on the Budget of the Republic of Serbia for 2024 and projections for 2025 and 2026, integrate the principle of gender-responsive budgeting into the local budget as a mechanism for greater sensitivity to the needs of the female population. Optimize financial support for programmatic activities of public youth policy. Organize sessions on the priorities for

supporting the program budget with a focus on the needs of the female population and youth.

### **Opportunities** concerning the local budget and the Local Action Plan for Youth

- The preparation of the budget for the municipality of Zabalj for 2025 is underway and has characteristics of a gender-responsive budget with established priority uses.
- Support for public youth policies is at the level of average annual allocations.
- The process of adopting the Local Action Plan for Youth is ongoing.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

- The Assembly of this local government has a Youth Council, but its members have not submitted any proposals or initiatives to local Assembly members concerning youth.
- In implementing the Decision on gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), the Budget Commission faced the real challenge of determining the criteria that establish priorities for directing local budget funds for the GRB category and establishing indicators for the effects of gender-responsive budgeting.

### **Sustainability**

Gender-responsive budgeting is an integral part of the program budget and is self-sustaining. The establishment of a Youth Office will enhance the coordination of public youth policies.

### **Social Cohesion**

Participants in the session noted a low level of social cohesion regarding the younger generation, which indicates the need to take initiative for better coordination in public youth policies.

### **Success Story**

- The Commission for preparing the local budget for 2025 has allocated resources in accordance with the Assembly's Decision on introducing gender-responsive budgeting (GRB). Last year, a children's kindergarten was opened, significantly addressing the enrollment issues of preschool children in Gospodjinci, where there has been a notable increase in the number of preschool children. The gender-responsive budget in 2025 will focus on improving public lighting as a condition for greater safety for women.

## **Recommendations**

- Intensify cooperation between local authorities and state bodies and institutions responsible for implementing public policies in the area of economic development of local communities (relevant ministries, archives).
- Establish ongoing collaboration with the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM), which monitors the gradual implementation of gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) in local communities at the national level. Address the issues of priorities, indicators, and criteria for the effectiveness of the GRB.
- Activate available capacities and mechanisms to raise awareness and responsibility among youth regarding their position in the community.
- The adoption of the Local Action Plan for Youth (LAP) should institutionalize better coordination in working with youth. Increase the number of formal associations and informal groups that will articulate the interests of the younger generation more strongly in line with the LAP for Youth.
- Seek logistical support from the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS).

## **Remaining recommendations based on observed local community issues and examples of good practice**

- Introduce incentive measures, both financial (within the limits of the local budget) and non-financial (benefits for building family houses, purchasing apartments, favorable rental conditions for apartments or family houses, opportunities for affordable vacations and recreation, childcare support) for personnel who possess competencies needed by the municipal administration or public enterprises. This is intended to retain such personnel in Zabalj or encourage them to come and work in this local community.
- Analyze the circumstances that contributed to the accelerated growth in the number of entrepreneurs in the municipality and the increased employment among them. Share this model as a good practice example with other local self-governments. If the model includes elements applicable to agriculture and forestry, modify it for these two sectors.

## **The Municipality of Dimitrovgrad**

According to its level of development, the municipality of Dimitrovgrad is classified in Group IV (source: Regulation on Determining the Unified List of Development Levels of Regions and Local Government Units for 2014).

According to the 2022 census, the municipality has 8,077 inhabitants (3,991 women and 4,086 men). Compared to the 2011 census, this number has decreased by 20.17%, or 2,041 residents (source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia - RZS).

Dimitrovgrad has a high percentage of residents over 65 years old, at 30%. Conversely, the population aged 15-29 represents 12% of the total population, which is 2.4% below the Serbian average. The average age of the population is 49.3 years, 3.3 years higher than the national average (source: RZS).

The municipal budget annually allocates funds through the "Annual Employment Action Plan" providing 5 million RSD in grants for agricultural households, associations, and business entities for investments in physical assets aimed at opening storage and collection points for agricultural products (source: Draft Development Plan of Dimitrovgrad Municipality 2023-2029).

From 2019 to 2022, the municipality received over 265 million RSD in incentive funds for underdeveloped areas and implemented a total of 239 projects. The largest funding came from the Development Fund, the National Employment Service, and the Ministry of Finance (source: Business Registers Agency - APR).

The decision to establish the Youth Council was made in September 2020 (source: <https://koms.rs>), the Gender Equality Commission was formed in 2014 (source: <http://rr.skgo.org/>), and the Council for Interethnic Relations was defined by statutory decision in 2009 (source: Municipal Statute).

There is a Youth Office, and the coordination of the work of the Gender Equality Commission and the Youth Council is articulated within the Office for Local Economic Development.

Every year, the Youth Office, in cooperation with secondary schools and the Student Parliament, supports ideas defined and implemented by young people, allowing them to be directly involved in the process of local budget creation.

The expert visit to Dimitrovgrad took place on February 26, 2025. Four representatives of local self-government participated in the focus group providing expert support, including three women and one man.

The work and competencies of the Council for Interethnic Relations are regulated by the municipal Statute.

**Topic 1: Define measures, through incentive programs from the local budget and in cooperation with relevant ministries, to increase the share of employment in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries.**

**Opportunities** - readiness of the local budget to create an environment for increasing employment in agriculture

- According to the Budget Law, the local government regularly allocates funds through public calls for the item "Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas."
- On an annual basis, approximately 4% of the total local budget is allocated for

these purposes.

- The capacities of the local government provide necessary logistical support to farmers when applying for domestic and international funds.
- Investments are made in infrastructure development (roads, water supply, transport) as a necessary condition for livestock development, especially considering the mountainous terrain.

### **Value Chain**

- Inability to provide more dynamic employment and the search for better-paid jobs have led to significant migration of young and working-age population to neighboring Bulgaria.
- The municipality of Dimitrovgrad is one of the least populated communities in Serbia.
- A significant portion of arable land and areas for livestock farming remains abandoned by their owners.
- Abandoned agricultural resources are often handed over for cultivation to interested individuals free of charge.
- In rural areas where agriculture and livestock production occur, the population mostly consists of elderly people.
- Assistance from state and international funds only maintains the level of agricultural production, without indicators of production or employment growth.
- Agricultural cooperatives are underdeveloped.
- There is no developed market for agricultural products.

### **Process Management**

- The development of agriculture and rural development falls under the responsibility of the Office for Local Economic Development of the Municipality of Dimitrovgrad.
- The Office works intensively with the relevant Regional Development Agency.
- Agricultural experts from the Agricultural Station in Pirot provide professional advice to farmers.
- General agricultural development directions are defined by the Agricultural Development Plan of the Ministry of Agriculture, which sets the planning framework for every local community.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

- Rapid decline of the working-age population due to pronounced migration.

- A large share of the population is over the age of 65.
- Mountainous terrain configuration.
- Lack of a developed agricultural product market.
- Insufficient financial incentives for initiating or maintaining intensive agricultural production.
- Regional economic and legal discrepancies between the municipality of Dimitrovgrad and neighboring Bulgaria.

### **Sustainability**

- The Dimitrovgrad municipal budget allocates funds, in accordance with the Budget Law, that encourage agricultural production.
- Investments in agriculture only maintain the multi-year level of agricultural production.
- There is no progress index.

### **Social Cohesion**

- Significant migration to neighboring Bulgaria severely undermines community cohesion.
- The participation of youth in the total population is decreasing, while the share of elderly over 65 is increasing.
- The municipality's economic power is based on agriculture (livestock farming), without a significant share of other economic activities.

### **Recommendations**

The socio-economic status of the municipality of Dimitrovgrad should be addressed at a broader regional level, considering the influence of the proximity of an EU member state, which is also the home country of the majority population in this municipality. Solutions should be sought at the state level, with more political will. Use the experience and solutions from the Serbia-Hungary relationship. The first priority is resolving the border crossing at Gradina on the Serbian side.

**Topic 2: Pay attention to the fact that a number of young people with dual citizenship will study in Bulgaria and take measures to encourage as many of them as possible to return by creating employment opportunities upon their return.**

**Opportunities** - Local budget capacity to create an environment for the return of young people to Dimitrovgrad after completing studies in Bulgaria

- The local government provides scholarships to young people attending higher

education institutions in both Serbia and Bulgaria.

- It does not possess legal mechanisms and financial measures that would directly influence the return of young people and graduates to the local community.
- Indirectly, there are initial solutions to stimulate the return of young people and graduates to the local community by offering affordable housing options.

### **Value Chain**

- The imbalance in the age structure of the population is a concerning indicator of the community's overall socio-economic development.
- The permanent decrease in the share of young people in the population structure due to migration poses a threat to the municipality's future development.
- Progress indicators do not show socio-economic growth.

### **Process Management**

- Youth Office
- Office for Local Economic Development
- Youth Strategy
- Local Action Plan for Youth

### **Challenges and Limitations**

- The absence of progress indicators in the local community generates decisions by young people to continue their careers abroad.
- Border areas in eastern Serbia are among the most underdeveloped parts of the country, which influences intense migration processes.
- Local communities with a permanently declining number of young and educated residents cannot expect dynamic development.
- The absence of capital investments directly affects the potential creation of new jobs for educated young workers.
- A distorted system of basic social values discourages young people from continuing their professional careers in Serbia after studying abroad.

### **Recommendations**

The issue of the emigration of educated young residents from Dimitrovgrad should be addressed at the regional level, i.e., with the relevant state institutions of neighboring Bulgaria. Solutions should be sought through balanced regional development

programs for eastern Serbia and cross-border cooperation programs (Interreg, IPA, etc.), as well as with funds from the Republic of Serbia. More political will should be demonstrated, along with intensified cooperation with the relevant Regional Development Agency for this part of Serbia.

### **Recommendations not provided with special expert support**

- Statistical indicators show that Dimitrovgrad, for the first time in 2021, had a higher number of incoming residents than outgoing residents. Analyze this data, particularly regarding the places of origin of the incoming residents, and incorporate this positive experience into future programs of short-term and long-term measures to mitigate adverse demographic trends.
- Analyze the needs arising from the increasing share of residents over 65 years old in the total population of the municipality. Plan short-term and long-term measures that will contribute to a higher level of social care for the elderly, particularly those living in less accessible settlements. In this context, plan specific services and develop specialized professional profiles and skills in the field of social protection.

### **The Municipality of Tutin**

Tutin belongs to Group IV of devastated municipalities, with an economic development level below 50% of the Serbian average (source: Regulation on Determining the Unified List of Development Levels of Regions and Local Government Units for 2014). The dominant natural resource is agricultural land, which covers 53% of the municipality's total area, primarily pastures and meadows, followed by arable land, gardens, and orchards (source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia - RZS).

According to the 2022 census, Tutin has 33,050 inhabitants, which is an increase compared to the previous census. In terms of ethnic composition, Bosniaks are the largest group at 92.01%, followed by Serbs (2.13%), Muslims (1.03%), and others (6.17%) (source: RZS).

The number of registered unemployed per 1,000 inhabitants in Tutin in 2021 was 262, while the Serbian average was 62, which is 4.2 times higher. When analyzed by age group, young people aged 15-29 represent 29% of the total unemployed (source: RZS). The total amount of regional development incentive funds allocated to Tutin from 2019 to 2022, according to the Business Registers Agency, was over 938 million RSD for the implementation of 515 projects.

The poverty risk rate in Tutin is extremely high at 66.1%. Among all municipalities in Serbia, Tutin ranks 168th (source: RZS).

Tutin has a legal framework defining the status of the three observed focus groups:

youth, women, and members of national minorities. There is a Youth Office, funded through the municipal budget. No Local Action Plan for Youth has been adopted. The municipality also has a Gender Equality Council. Members of the Council have participated in the preparation of the Local Action Plan for Gender Equality, the development of strategic documents, and the organization of roundtables and public forums. In 2022, the municipality decided to begin the gradual introduction of a gender-responsive budget starting in 2023 (source: interview conducted in Tutin, 2023).

The municipality of Tutin has not established a Council for Interethnic Relations, but Article 117 of the municipal Statute regulates the status, method of election, and competencies of the Council for Interethnic Relations.

The expert visit to Tutin took place on March 27, 2025, and four representatives of the relevant municipal services participated in the work with the expert, including two women and four men.

**Topic 1: Introduce mandatory gender budgeting and plan the financing of the needs of the female population in the local community, setting goals through surveys and consultations with gender equality commissions. Allocate funds in the annual municipal budgets for the work of assembly commissions or bodies dealing with gender equality issues.**

**Opportunities** – readiness of the local budget to support the real needs of the female population in the community through the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting

- According to the Budget Law, the local government has introduced gender-responsive budgeting.
- Due to a temporary budget and significant local government debt, activities must be reduced.
- Among the reduced activities is the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting.
- Opportunities to apply for relevant calls for proposals issued by competent ministries or institutions supporting the needs of the female population are not being used.

#### **Value Chain**

- A traditional approach to gender role distribution affects the reduced participation of women in the public sector.
- Significant migration of the male workforce shifts part of the household responsibilities, especially in rural areas, to the female population.
- The increased scope of responsibilities for women (both female and male roles)

potentially jeopardizes their care for personal health, education, and potential public engagement.

- Women's associations in this local community are the bearers of a significant number of humanitarian activities carried out in cooperation with the diaspora.

### **Process Management**

- A Commission for Gender Equality has been formed
- A Council for Gender Equality has been formed
- The role of the Islamic religious community is unknown

### **Challenges and Limitations**

- The temporary nature of the local community's budget.
- Reduction of activities that address the specific needs of the female population.
- Potential discouragement, marginalization, and shutdown of women's associations due to lack of financial support.

### **Sustainability**

- The Budget Law obliges local budgets to start implementing gender-responsive budgeting in 2026.
- The Budget Law also mandates budget allocations for the work of civil society organizations and NGOs.
- According to their Statutes, local assemblies must establish certain assembly bodies for gender equality.

### **Social Cohesion**

- The traditional culture of this area defines patterns of socially constructed gender roles.
- Migration movements of the male workforce highlight women as primary heads of households.
- A potential trend is the increased economic emancipation of women and the need to strengthen public services as a real need in that process (organized childcare, elderly care).

### **Recommendations**

Higher levels of government should show sensitivity to the financial problems of the municipality of Tutin. The temporary budget significantly reduces and endangers the implementation of planned activities. The criteria for allocating transfers from higher

levels of government to local budgets should be reconsidered. The activity of MPs representing the Bosniak community in the National Assembly of Serbia should be intensified to resolve the issue of financing in the municipality of Tutin.

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

**Opportunities** - possibilities of the local budget to allocate funds for the work of the Council for Interethnic Relations.

- The local budget does not allocate specific funds for the work of the Council for Interethnic Relations.
- So far, there have been no requests for allocation of funds.

#### **Value Chain**

- In the local community, members of the Bosniak community constitute an absolute majority.
- Interethnic relations with the minority Serbian community are cordial.
- The minority Serbian community maintains its ethnic identity without restrictions.
- Public enterprises and institutions do not take into account the national structure of the population when hiring.

#### **Process Management**

- The Council for Interethnic Relations has been formed

#### **Challenges and Limitations**

- It is assessed that there is no interethnic misunderstanding.
- The Council does not meet because its members believe there is no need.

#### **Recommendations**

It is a fact that the majority of Councils for Interethnic Relations in municipal assemblies are inactive. The justification of their existence or their jurisdiction should be re-evaluated. In any case, special training should be organized for newly appointed Council members on their competencies and scope of work.

## **Recommendations not provided with special expert support**

- Municipal administrations should develop capacities for strategic planning and for monitoring data on the economic, social, and financial status of their municipalities, especially data such as population growth, transport, housing, infrastructure, and environmental protection, and based on this information, identify the development needs of local communities.
- Train managers and employees in local self-governments to prepare strategic documents by familiarizing them with the methodology for creating such documents, as well as improving the use of available statistical data from the Analytical Service of Local Self-Governments (JLS), the DevInfo database of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (RZS), and other sources. Build their skills in understanding, connecting, interpreting, and linking data to concrete activities, in cooperation with Regional Development Agencies, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, and other relevant state institutions.
- Professional services of the municipal administration, in cooperation with elected officials, must participate in dialogue with relevant ministries to present identified projects important for the municipality, so that they can be financed from the state budget. It is especially important to monitor and participate in public discussions on significant national strategies.
- Monitor the effects of used incentive and grant funds, particularly IPARD funds intended for agricultural development, and inform citizens and entrepreneurs about the opportunities to access such funds and the positive impact on municipal development.
- Cooperate with other local communities in the region to use human and financial resources of the existing network of institutions more efficiently, plan and implement joint projects, and jointly present development needs to state institutions, development agencies, and others.
- Activate the work and visibility of the Council for Interethnic Relations as a body for consultations on decisions affecting the rights and status of national minorities. Ensure a stable annual budget for its work and activities.

### **The Municipality of Sjenica**

According to its level of economic development, in line with the Government of the Republic of Serbia's regulation, this municipality belongs to the Group IV of local self-government units, with a development level below 60% of the national average. The majority of the population are Bosniaks (around 74%), followed by Serbs (around 20%), Muslims, and others (source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia - RZS).

Registered unemployment in Sjenica is around 4,500 people during the observed

period, of which 2,300 are women. In 2022, young people accounted for 26% of the total registered unemployed.

The average age of the population in Sjenica is 38 years, which is six years lower than the Serbian average, making it one of the youngest municipalities in the country. In fact, Sjenica has 23% young people (aged 15-29) in its total population, which is 5% higher than the national average, while the share of residents over 65 years old is 15%, which is 6% lower than the Serbian average.

During the last four years (2019–2022), the municipality of Sjenica received a total of 767,857,000 RSD in non-repayable development funds from various sources and implemented 531 projects. The largest amount of funds was allocated by the Ministry of Finance (over 227 million RSD), followed by the National Employment Service (43.5 million RSD) and the Development Fund (25.5 million RSD) (source: Business Registers Agency - APR).

The poverty risk rate, according to the World Bank and RZS data, is 46.6%, ranking Sjenica as the 144th municipality in Serbia by poverty level.

A Youth Council has not been established by the decision of the Municipal Assembly. The Youth Office was formed in 2009 and employs one person. There is no current Local Action Plan for Youth. Its work is financed from the local budget and through donor support (source: interview in Sjenica, 2023).

In 2021, the Municipal Assembly of Sjenica passed a decision to establish a Gender Equality Commission tasked with drafting the Local Action Plan for Gender Equality 2021-2024. The Municipal Assembly has both a Gender Equality Council and a Gender Equality Commission. However, a gender-responsive budget is not applied in the municipal budget.

The status of the Council for Interethnic Relations is defined in the Statute of the Municipality of Sjenica, but the decision to formally establish it has not been adopted (source: interview in Sjenica, 2023).

An expert visit to Sjenica took place on April 4, 2025. Seven representatives of the municipality participated in the focus group session with the expert, including three women and four men.

**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.**

**Opportunities** – 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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **Recommendations**

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.**

**Opportunities** - 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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **Recommendations**

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.

### **Recommendations not provided with special expert support**

- Train municipal leaders and employees in the preparation of strategic documents by familiarizing them with the methodology for drafting such documents, as well as improving the use of available statistical data from the Analytical Service of Local Self-Governments (JLS), the DevInfo database of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (RZS), and other sources. It is necessary to build skills for understanding, connecting, interpreting, and linking data to concrete activities, in cooperation with Regional Development Agencies, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, and other relevant state institutions.
- The professional services of the municipal administration, in cooperation with councilors, must participate in dialogue with the competent ministries in order to present identified projects that are important for the municipality.
- Monitor the effects of spent incentive and grant funds, particularly IPARD funds intended for agricultural development, and inform citizens and entrepreneurs about opportunities to obtain such funds and their positive effects on the development of the municipality.
- Cooperate with other local communities in the area in order to use existing human and financial resources more efficiently, plan and implement joint projects, and jointly present development needs to state institutions, development agencies, and others.
- Strive to establish a database on the number of economic migrants from the territory of the municipality.

## The Municipality of Prijepolje

According to the Regulation on Determining the Unified List of Development Levels of Regions and Local Government Units for 2014, Prijepolje belongs to Group IV of municipalities by level of development.

The territory of this local community is rich in natural resources, the most significant of which are: water, preserved nature, biodiversity, forests, and agricultural land. The dominant sectors are fruit and vegetable production and livestock farming.

According to the 2022 census, Prijepolje has 32,214 inhabitants. Compared to the 2011 census, this represents a 13% decrease, or 4,845 fewer residents. Youth aged 15-29 make up 16.3% of the total population, which is two index points higher than the Serbian average (source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia – RZS).

The municipality has 13,961 Serbs (46.4%), 12,842 Bosniaks (39%), and 1,945 Muslims (6.0%). According to RZS data, 2,079 residents (6.45%) either did not declare their ethnicity or their ethnicity is unknown. Natural population growth has been in constant decline between the two censuses.

The municipality of Prijepolje adopts an Annual Local Employment Action Plan, implemented in cooperation with the National Employment Service branch office, allocating around 50% of the budget section intended for economic development to its implementation. The Development Plan foresees more incentives for youth entrepreneurship as a way of economically empowering them. The biggest problem identified by young people in Prijepolje, during a survey conducted by the Youth Office, is employment, specifically the lack of new jobs, which results in pronounced migration processes. Furthermore, the profiles of secondary school education programs in this municipality do not match the preferences of local youth.

A good practice example is the LGB Call Center, opened in Prijepolje by a private entrepreneur originally from the town, which employs about 300 young people (source: interview conducted in Prijepolje).

Prijepolje has a Youth Office, which, within the Local Youth Action Plan, organizes free language learning courses in English, German, and Turkish (source: interview in Prijepolje, 2023).

In the previous convocation of the Municipal Assembly, the percentage of female councilors was 31.7%, which is at the threshold of the legally prescribed minimum. In addition to the apparent “deficit of political power,” women in Prijepolje also lack significant economic power. They account for nearly 60% of registered unemployment – in 2020, that figure was 1,721 women, and in 2022 it increased by 300 new women seeking employment (source: RZS).

The Municipal Assembly of Prijepolje adopted a decision on the formation of the Gender Equality Council, but apart from the constitutive session, it has not held any

meetings.

The Council for Interethnic Relations was formed by the Municipal Assembly of Prijepolje back in 2005. The decision did not determine the ethnic composition of representatives of national communities.

The expert visit of the Center for Regionalism to the municipality of Prijepolje took place on May 25, 2025. The focus group working on the implementation of two key recommendations from the research included 11 representatives of the relevant municipal bodies, of whom 7 were women and 4 were men.

**Topic 1: The municipality development plan should include special subsidies (for equipment procurement, business space expansion, and new employment) for entrepreneurs who have already started their businesses and have the potential to sustain and develop them. This is particularly important for the youth.**

**Opportunities** - readiness of the local budget to allocate greater financial resources to support economic development and improve the business climate

- Around 12 million RSD is allocated annually from the municipal budget in line with the Employment Action Plan.
- These funds are implemented through public works programs, self-employment initiatives, and professional training.
- In cooperation with the National Employment Service, around 60 people are employed annually.
- The Municipal Development Plan (2022–2030) identifies agriculture as a top priority for local development.
- The same document aims to double the productivity of small-scale food producers by 2030, ensure sustainable production systems, increase investment in agriculture, improve advisory services, apply modern technologies, and enhance international cooperation.
- Annually, 2.57% of the budget (around 20–30 million RSD) is allocated for agricultural development.
- The local government has strategic partnerships with the HELP Foundation and the Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation, which provide support to small-scale agricultural producers.

### **Value Chain**

- After the shutdown of significant industrial capacities, agriculture has become the most important economic potential for local community development.
- Small farms have absorbed part of the surplus labor from the industrial sector.
- There is growing interest in agricultural production, especially livestock and

vegetable farming.

- A slight increase in total registered employment has been observed. However, few people are formally employed on farms as legal entities.
- There is a clear lack of storage and processing capacities for agricultural products. The technology used is outdated.
- Educational profiles oriented toward agriculture are not available in the existing high schools in Prijepolje.

### **Process Management**

Local Employment Council, Department for Economy and Economic Development of the municipality of Prijepolje, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, the Cooperative Union of the Zlatibor District, the Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation, and other relevant ministries and donors.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

- Unfavorable demographic trends (declining population, negative indicators of internal migration), low competitiveness in the agricultural product market.
- Low percentage of educated population suitable for modern and intensive agricultural production.
- Grants and subsidies are insufficient to support more ambitious production on small farms.
- Lack of adequate storage and processing facilities needed to improve competitiveness.

### **Sustainability**

- Planning documents of the Republic of Serbia require continuous support for youth employment through various programs, while funds allocated to agriculture are directed toward fruit and vegetable growing and livestock production.
- Small-scale agricultural producers are dissatisfied with the amount of funds and the pace of distribution to end users.

### **Social Cohesion**

- The municipality of Prijepolje links agricultural development significantly to the development of rural tourism, for which there are real prerequisites.
- The connection between these two economic sectors mobilizes rural populations to use natural resources and state incentives, giving them a chance to become active drivers of local development.

- Internal and external migration processes are reduced.
- Awareness of the interconnection between economic sectors within the local community is growing.

### **Recommendations**

Motivate economic entities to invest in adequate storage capacities for agricultural products, as well as investors willing to invest in processing capacities. This would significantly improve the competitiveness of agricultural producers in the municipality of Prijepolje.

### **Topic 2: Increase the percentage of female municipal councilors and the number of women in elected positions in municipal administration.**

**Opportunities** for local governments to influence the number of women councilors in the municipal assembly and women in elected positions

- The local government has no mechanisms to influence the gender composition of councilors.
- Gender representation is primarily regulated by the Law on Elections, which requires that every third candidate on electoral lists be a woman, ensuring a minimum of 30% women in the assembly.
- Political actors who win mandates in local elections can directly influence the gender composition of the municipal assembly through internal and inter-party agreements.

### **Value Chain**

- In the 2023 local elections, the number of female councilors in the Prijepolje assembly significantly increased from 11 to 16 out of a total of 41 members.
- This notable increase was the result of public pressure and advocacy from women's rights organizations.
- Political parties are voluntarily increasing the number of women councilors beyond the legal minimum through internal agreements.
- Most female councilors in the Prijepolje assembly are young, educated women with ambitions to take responsibility for important decision-making within the local community. However, they are not yet ready to take on elected political positions.
- The absence of women in elected roles is offset by their appointments to leading positions in public sectors (education, healthcare, social protection, culture, public utilities), from where they have real influence on important decisions affecting all citizens.

### **Process Management**

- The Law on Elections sets a general minimum quota for women on electoral lists but does not guarantee that at least one-third of assembly members will be women.
- Political parties and their coalition agreements play a decisive role in mandate allocation.
- It is important that female party members use institutional party structures (party committees and bodies) to influence their party's personnel policies.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

- Women in Prijepolje are willing to participate in the work of the local assembly.
- They are often unwilling to make the compromises required in politics.
- They are reluctant to assume personal political responsibility.
- A significant number of female councilors believe they need additional education to participate more actively in assembly work and understand the state system.

### **Recommendations**

- Organize additional training for female local councilors on the functioning of the state system. Develop intra-coalition partnerships among elected councilwomen and form informal "councilor" groups across all political factions in the local assembly.
- Through women's activism, empower female councilors to more boldly assume personal political responsibility.

### **Recommendations not provided with special expert support**

- Through complex measures of economic and social development, continuously invest in agricultural production and tourism, along with measures that prevent the degradation of the natural environment. Increase real employment in agricultural production, where currently only 1% of the total employed population of Prijepolje works.
- The restructuring of strategic development goals should primarily ensure the creation of new jobs in economic sectors that rely on the natural and tangible resources available in the municipality. Such reorientation also requires a partial reform of educational institutions so that they produce profiles aligned with development needs, which will positively influence the pronounced migration processes within the local community.

## The Municipality of Knjazevac

By its level of development, Knjazevac belongs to Group IV of municipalities, below 60% of the average for the Republic of Serbia (source: Regulation on the Determination of the Unified List of Development Levels of Regions and Local Government Units, 2014).

According to the 2022 census, the municipality has 25,341 inhabitants, of which 12,399 are men and 12,942 women. There are 3,064 young people aged 15-29, making up 12% of the total population, which is 2.4 percentage points below the national average. At the same time, the registered youth unemployment rate is 19.2%, and it has been slightly declining since 2019 (source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia - RZS).

The greatest threat to the implementation of planned development goals is the constant depopulation trend. Over the past two decades, this local community has lost nearly 12,000 inhabitants. To directly influence such demographic trends, the local government implements measures to mitigate the economic cost of raising children by providing support that reconciles work and parenthood, protects women's reproductive health, and participates in the costs of infertility treatment (source: interview conducted in Knjazevac, 2023).

The majority of the population consists of ethnic Serbs. Among minority groups, Roma are the most numerous.

The Youth Office in Knjazevac was established in 2008 as part of the municipal administration. The office operated until 2013 when it was closed due to a reduction in the number of employees in the administration.

The Youth Council operates within the Municipal Administration. It does not have a program or work plan and has not held any meetings so far. It has not submitted any documents to the Municipal Assembly regarding the creation of youth public policies nor has it received such documents for consideration. An Action Plan for Youth for 2022-2025 has been adopted. However, the Youth Office has not been re-established (source: interview conducted in Knjazevac, 2023).

The Gender Equality Council was constituted in March 2015. An Action Plan for Gender Equality has not been adopted. Primary health care indicators in the municipality of Knjazevac are above the Serbian average. At the same time, indicators of women's health care, such as the number of doctors (gynecologists) and the coverage of women during the first months of pregnancy, are below the national average (source: RZS).

Even after the closure of the Roma Inclusion Office in 2010, the municipality of Knjazevac has continued to actively participate in the implementation of programs and projects aimed at the social inclusion of Roma.

The expert visit to the municipality of Knjazevac was conducted on May 19, 2025. Five representatives from the relevant municipal sectors participated in the implementation of expert recommendations, including three women and two men.

**Topic 1: Improving women’s healthcare, especially reproductive health, through measures within the jurisdiction of local government. Encourage employment or engagement of more gynecologists and persist in women's health education.**

**Opportunities** – Readiness of the local budget to allocate funds for women’s healthcare

- The municipal budget does not allocate specific funds for organizing women's health education and prevention.
- Since 2008, special funds have been allocated from the budget to increase birth rates.
- Dedicated funds are intended for prenatal care of married couples facing difficulties in starting a family. Annually, these funds are used by 10 to 20 couples.
- All public primary healthcare in the municipality of Knjazevac falls under the jurisdiction of the Knjazevac Health Center.
- In 2024, the renovation of the gynecology-obstetrics department with 20 beds was completed.
- In 2024, the Knjazevac Health Center approved a specialization for one gynecologist.
- Within its capabilities, the local government provides space and equipment for organizing women’s health education.
- A Women’s Health Education Team was established at the end of 2024 within the Women’s Dispensary of the Knjazevac Health Center.

### **Value Chain**

- Serbia ranks high among European countries in the number of malignant diseases and mortality related to female reproductive organ conditions.
- Preventive and timely detection of malignancies significantly contributes to positive treatment outcomes.
- The formation of the Women’s Health Education Team at the Women's Dispensary of the Knjazevac Health Center has improved professional performance in reproductive health, dental services, and the fight against diabetes.
- Preventive education in the first half of 2025 included around 500 individuals, more than half of whom were women.
- The Women’s Health Education Team held lectures for 140 women employed

in both the public and private sectors.

### **Process Management**

- Women's health education is an activity of the Women's Dispensary at the Knjazevac Health Center, and the Team plans the activities.
- The Team follows the national calendar of mandatory preventive health check-ups at the Republic of Serbia level.
- The Team includes a medical doctor specialized in social medicine, a senior nurse, and guest lecturers—specialists in specific healthcare areas.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

- The Team has no dedicated budget for its activities.
- There is a lack of mobile digital mammography units for broader coverage of the female population in preventive healthcare.
- The Knjazevac Health Center does not have a sufficient number of gynecologist-obstetricians. After completing their specialist training, they often leave for larger cities with better career and salary prospects.

### **Sustainability**

The Women's Health Education Team operates without a budget and adequate mobile equipment.

### **Recommendations**

The Gender Equality Council of the Knjazevac Municipal Assembly should request, during the annual budget planning, that part of the funds allocated to gender-responsive budgeting be directed toward activities for women's health education.

**Topic 2: In Line with the primary goal of the municipality's current development plan to "Increase the Number of Young and Adult Persons With Relevant Skills for Employment, Decent Work, and Entrepreneurship".**

**Opportunities** - Possibilities of the local government to improve the acquisition of professional skills for young people and adults and increase their competitiveness in the labor market

- The municipality of Knjazevac had its own Local Employment Action Plan (2021–2023), which analyzed problems and identified goals.
- The Action Plan notes that labor market needs change rapidly and that better coordination is needed between the needs of the economy, labor market, and

education system.

- Significant funds are allocated from the local budget for scholarships for students and pupils, but this measure primarily has a social dimension.
- The decisive role in career orientation lies with the labor market, i.e., employers' demand for certain profiles, especially those skilled in using modern digital technologies.

### **Value Chain**

- In accordance with existing legal regulations, especially the Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurance, the National Employment Service and the municipality of Knjazevac annually announce a public call for professional practice.
- This practice does not guarantee employment but provides an opportunity to gain professional experience.
- A significant contribution to acquiring professional skills and improving competitiveness in the labor market is also made by the nonprofit organization Timok Club.

### **Process Management**

- The basis for planning is the Local Employment Action Plan, which defines the framework of activities in line with national legislation and employment strategies.
- The National Employment Service and the needs of public enterprises and the private sector play a significant role.

### **Challenges and Limitations**

- The Ministry of Education and Science refuses to introduce new educational profiles in educational centers in Knjazevac.
- The lack of attractive educational profiles in local educational centers contributes to the accelerated migration of young people to cities where they can acquire knowledge and skills needed in the labor market.

### **Recommendations**

With well-argued justification, continuously request from the competent Ministry the introduction of new professional profiles necessary for using modern digital technologies.

### **Recommendations not provided with special expert support**

- Analyze the constant decline in employment in agriculture. In 2016, 3.2% of the employed population in Knjazevac worked in agriculture, and five years later, in 2021, that figure was cut in half, to just 1.6%. Work with the relevant ministries, organizations, and associations to identify the causes of this trend and find solutions.
- Address the growing share of the elderly population. Over the past six years, the municipality has recorded a constant increase in the proportion of residents over the age of 65, reaching 33% in 2022, compared to the Serbian average of 21% in the same year. Such demographic trends require strengthening human resources and technical capacities necessary for assistance and care for the elderly.