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IO3: Improving the Lives of Marginalised Groups

IO3: ITEM - Improve the Life of Marginalised People

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I – Meaning of the terms: marginalised people / marginalised groups

Marginalised people/groups are most commonly defined as populations that are excluded/distanced from sources of social power and thus prevented from having an impact on the public sphere and decision-making. Not only is this reflected on key social issues, the core characteristic of such individuals/groups is that they cannot impact nor make decisions regarding the conditions of their own lives and prospects for improving their own socio-economic positions and open the way for the development of their own primary groups (families, households, children, relatives). A key characteristic of marginalised groups is poverty, which prevents the members of these groups from satisfying their basic civil, social and economic needs, at least at the minimally accepted levels (housing, education, nutrition, income, health care). Marginalised groups have extremely low social mobility and prospects for improving their social and economic status. In other words, marginalised groups are trapped in a vicious circle of poverty and social exclusion which is very difficult to escape from without the organised and coordinated support of various state services, institutions and civil society organisations (CSOs). Additionally, as a rule, marginalised groups are stigmatised. There is a very widespread belief that these people themselves are to blame for their social and economic status, in line with the ‘blaming the victim’ principle.

There is also a global view that new forms of marginalised groups are increasing in number, as are the number of members of these groups, which is also prevalent in the Western Balkans, the Republic of Serbia included. This is in connection with the reduced functionality and amount of available support to public institutions, which were significantly more developed in welfare states, particularly after the Second World War. Over the past few decades, various forms of social support available has been on the steady decline in European countries, especially in former socialist countries, as they underwent transition. It should be noted that increased awareness of the upsurge in the types and mass of marginal groups is the result of greater public attention to the existence of these groups and their increasing public visibility. These groups had always existed in the past but little was known and even less was written about them. They were simply hidden away, unavailable for public inspection.

Today, significant international documents have been drafted obliging countries - members of international organisations, to strive to reduce the poverty and social exclusion of marginalised groups through adapted policies and programmes (European Social Charter, European Convention on Human Rights and Freedoms, European Code of Social European Code of Social Security, European Social Fund and numerous others).

The purpose of this Report is to draw attention to social groups currently on the slippery slope towards marginalisation and those who are already there as a result of circumstances which are preventing them from earning enough to live a dignified life and meet their basic needs because of the unavailability of public services and institutions - services the state is under obligation to guarantee to each one of its citizens. These groups cannot exercise key social and economic rights and thereby ensure decent living conditions for themselves and their families without the organised

and systematic support of the public sector. Also, this Report describes the experiences gained in implementing the following project: **Skilling Marginalised People to Enter the Labour Market**. The project was implemented through the joint collaboration of the Center for Democracy Foundation, through the EU's Erasmus+ programme and seven other partners operating from Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Bulgaria and North Macedonia.¹ Project activities included the provision of various types of training, workshops and other forms of education. Manuals were prepared to support the professional staff in their work with marginalised groups, which included teaching them how to find employment, etc. In the continuation of this Report, we will examine several types of marginalised groups. We will also examine the conditions that the public sector (state services such as public companies, public institutions, local self-governments, and the competent ministries, first and foremost) are able to and must fulfil to support these individuals and lead them out of poverty or away from the brink of poverty.

The focus of this analysis is on the limitations and obstacles that make it impossible for marginalised groups to fulfil the requirements set by the labour market due to their own personal characteristics as well as the characteristics of the primary group to which they belong. In other words, the idea here is to analyse the reasons why the labour market is difficult to penetrate or completely unavailable for many marginalised group members. For the purposes of this Report, we have singled out three categories of characteristics/circumstances that define the position of those belonging to marginalised groups:

In the first category, we classify the objective circumstances in which numerous people in marginalised groups live/are located/inhabit. These refer to type of settlement and the availability of public services, which significantly determine the position of marginalised peoples in relation to the labour market. (Commuting distance and transportation (un)availability from/to place of residence and potential/current place of work, lack and high cost of public transport, inaccessibility to/distance from organised additional education and retraining programmes, etc.) The local self-governments lack a systematic source of information concerning public transport/cost of using public transport (where there *is* public transportation), information concerning subsidies and the conditions that must be met in order to become a beneficiary of a government-subsidised public transportation pass. From the document *Functioning of Urban and Peri-urban Public Transport. Report on the Audit of the Regularity and Expediency of Operations* (State Audit Institution. Number: 400-737/2020-04/37. Belgrade, 23 December 2020), we learn that despite the fact that "the law clearly obliges cities and municipalities to ensure functioning of urban and peri-urban transport, as a communal activity that represents an irreplaceable requirement of the population's life and work (...) in the period from 2017 to 2019, research in the preliminary study (has shown) shows that approximately 40% of local self-government units (53 municipalities), with approximately a million inhabitants, fail to have organised this form of communal activity for the general public. This means that this particular population must fend for itself in terms of transportation by organising their own transportation, using intercity lines that pass through their place of residence or engaging the services of taxi cabs". The SAI document does not specify

¹ Samarcanda società cooperativa sociale Onlus, Italy, SSOU Moshja Pijade, North Macedonia, SYNTHESIS Center for Research and Education Ltd, Cyprus, Asociación Mar Violeta, Spain, Sdruzhenie Yuni Partners, Bulgaria, European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA), France, Ecor International S.p.A. Italy

which local self-government units lack organised public transport. In addition to these data, from the following document drafted by the World Bank Group/IFC and the Commission for the Protection of Competition: *Analysis of the Intercity Bus Transport Market in the Republic of Serbia*² we learn the following: "Intercity public transport in Serbia is double the cost of the European average"³ (16 May 2022): Most towns in Serbia are not connected by rail, so buses are the main form of local public transport. The income per inhabitant in Serbia is roughly 41% of the EU-27 average (after eliminating the effects of the difference in purchasing power), and ticket prices per kilometre between larger, medium and smaller towns are twice as high as the average price in EU countries. Furthermore: "Buses are the main mode of mass transit in Serbia." According to Eurostat data, road traffic accounted for 26% of passenger-kilometres (pkm), over three times more than the average share of bus transport in road traffic in the European Union (in Serbia, private cars accounted for 74% of passengers per kilometre, and trains less than 1% per kilometre in 2018)". The unavailability of public services means that the positions of those in marginalised groups living in rural areas is much more difficult compared to those living in cities/towns and municipal centres. In Serbia, there are examples of good practice in organising public transport within a municipality, adapted to the needs of its users, such as the municipality of Požega (we believe that there are other well-organised municipalities with public transport, but were unable to find such data online). It is necessary to share the experiences of these municipalities with the general public as well as the effects of well-organised public transport on well-being and quality of life, especially on those living in rural areas. Target 11.1 of the UN Convention on Sustainable Development is also relevant to the topic of availability/access to public services: "By 2030, to ensure access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improve road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and the elderly".⁴ The objective circumstances should also include the issues faced by those living in rural settlements and which are the result of substandard and neglected municipal infrastructures (local roads which are difficult to navigate and risky to use, the absence of sewage networks, neglected and unsafe water supply networks, polluted groundwater and the risks of using well water for human and animal consumption, gardening, etc.).

The second category refers to the familial characteristics of marginalised groups that require the daily, time-consuming, labour-intensive and financially-demanding assistance and care of one family member. This category consists of parents, single parents in particular, with underage children, parents with children suffering from autism or other debilitating conditions that require constant supervision and presence, families with elderly, chronically ill members that require constant supervision and care, etc. The sound functioning of these families requires considerable financial resources to pay for services provided by other persons or the full-time engagement of one family member. The members of such families face numerous difficulties in relation to the labour market: the existing mismatch between the working hours of a working parent/guardian and

² <https://www.kzk.gov.rs/kzk/wp/content/2022/analiza-trzista-medjumesnog-autobuskog-prevoza-u-Republici-Srbiji.pdf>

³ <https://rs.n1info.com/biznis/medjumesni-javni-prevoz-u-srbiji-dvostruko-skuplji-od-evropskog-proseka/>

⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/12731/file/mapiranje.pdf>

the working hours of institutions which provide care for a child or ill family member. Most elementary schools work in two (some in three, even) shifts, with rare exceptions, full-day classes are not organised, the working hours of day care centres that accommodate family members who require constant supervision and care do not align with standard working hours of eight to five. There are no day care centres that provide care to elderly persons who require full-time care and supervision, etc. CSOs are an important factor in supporting families with members who require daily care and assistance, but they cannot meet current needs, particularly to families living in rural settlements. It is necessary to systematically resolve the social and economic positions of such families. In this regard, it is particularly vital to define the obligations of the public sector and establish appropriate monitoring of the implementation of established obligations and regulations. Perhaps families/households facing homelessness (for various reasons) should also be included in this group, as well as households that cannot pay their utility bills out of their regular income (here the biggest issue refers to the payment of electricity bills, which results in households being disconnected from the grid). In addition to the difficulties of daily living without electricity, there is also risk to the immediate environment/community/neighbourhood posed from the possibility of the outbreak of fire resulting from attempts to connect to the grid illegally, the use of candles to light rooms, etc.

The third category refers to the individual characteristics of members of marginalised groups (persons with disabilities who are qualified and can perform jobs that require appropriate qualifications and expertise, but due to stigmatisation, misunderstanding and prejudice, they cannot find employment. For example, people with extreme hearing impairment, who are able to perform tasks, where communicating electronically is essential i.e., who do not necessarily need to verbally communicate with colleagues/other team members. This group may also include people who have lost their jobs, but do not yet qualify for a pension. These are usually less qualified persons who find it difficult to find other employment and who require additional education or retraining. It is important to note here that the number of unqualified inhabitants of Serbia will increase. One reason for this is the high percentage of primary school-age children who are not attending primary school. According to data from the DevInfo database of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the net rate of inclusion of the school contingent in primary education in 2019 stood at 93%, and had decreased by 6% compared to 2012. From these data, it follows that roughly 7% of children of primary school age remain outside the education system, and children enrolled in primary school who drop out of school for various reasons during the eight years of ‘compulsory education’ should be added to this number. In other words, we should expect an increase in the share of adults who have failed to complete an elementary education in the Republic of Serbia.

In everyday life, the most common forms of marginalised groups are those identified by multiple forms of poverty and experiencing social exclusion: substandard housing conditions (living in slums and improvised houses and huts, homeless people, tenants at risk of losing tenant status, tenants living in social housing at risk of losing the right to a flat provided by social care due to: inability to make the rent and pay for utilities, inability to afford to purchase firewood, health risks caused by indoor pollution due to substandard fireplaces and firewood, etc.), **without regular income** or with income (regular and/or occasional) below the poverty limit, **with one or**

more sick household member(s) (high cost of medication, care of members who need constant supervision and care), with **a subpar level of formal education and professional knowledge**. Focus group participants and numerous reports available online point to the issues faced by marginalised groups relative to the utility sector. Often, their households are disconnected from utility grids (electricity, water supply) due to outstanding bills. The impossibility of using electricity and running water exposes these household members to numerous risks. From sinking into even greater poverty, homelessness, illness, as well as the dangers these situations pose to the immediate environment - the spread of infectious diseases due to unhygienic conditions, increased crime rates, reduced movement safety, etc. It is necessary to define minimum housing standards, including utility services and to establish mechanisms through which these standards are applied.

As there are no available estimates of the number of citizens and households that we could conditionally classify into one of the marginalised groups, there is even less of a chance to estimate the extent of **(un)employment among members of marginalised groups**. The National Employment Service fails to recognise members of marginalised groups in a separate category. However, even when they are employed, members of marginalised groups are exposed to the constant risk of losing their jobs for various reasons: the inability to coordinate working hours and the other demands and expectations of the employer with the obligations they have toward other members of the family/household, sudden and unexpected obligations to household members, being late for work due to traffic or irregular public transport, inability to fight for their rights arising from the employment relationship (payment of wages and contributions), weak institutional mechanisms that protect employees' rights, etc.

II – Types of Marginalised Groups

We will analyse the position of several types of marginalised groups. We will examine the reasons for their limited access to employment (the labour market) due to obstacles that limit competitiveness on the labour market, which (obstacles) are a consequence of the obligations and circumstances they or their family members find themselves in due to the obligations and responsibilities they face in everyday life and will propose a number of measures to improve the position of marginalised groups and their employment prospects.

- (1) **Single parents with underage children** face numerous issues that significantly reduce their chances of carrying out tasks in the workplace to a quality standard and with full commitment, regardless of whether they are employed in the public or private sector or if the parent is an entrepreneur. The **first** issue that should be addressed is the inconsistency of working hours in primary schools with the working hours of the parents. Classes are organised in two (in some cases three) shifts, absence of all-day classes, etc. These are the difficulties faced by families where both parents are employed and these difficulties only multiply for single parents. One way to resolve this issue is to establish a system whereby each primary school must have at least one class in each grade that works in full-day mode. In which case children from single-parent families or families where both parents are employed would have priority in enrolment. The **second** issue that undoubtedly has a

negative impact on the working capacity of single parents are irregular and unreliable alimony payments. The establishment of an Alimony Fund from which alimony would be paid for children whose divorced father/mother does not pay alimony regularly. This solution has long been announced and requested as an obligation of public/competent services. The Alimony Fund should have the authority to efficiently collect alimony and pay it monthly to the single parent. The formation of an Alimony Fund would prevent arguments between divorced parents concerning alimony, where, as a rule, children are often caught in the cross fire. The Alimony Fund would free the single parent from court costs and the long wait for alimony payments. The introduction of the Alimony Fund and the transfer of the obligation to the Alimony Fund to objectively and reliably determine the amount of income and property of the parents and ensure the payment of alimony into the Fund would reduce pressure on the single parent (mothers significantly more often find themselves in this position) and the preoccupation with this issue while trying to earn a living. It is necessary, among other things, to foresee draconian sanctions for Fund employees in cases where the income and property of the alimony payer are concealed, or in cases when the alimony payer engages in corruption, bribery and/or other dishonourable activities. The **third** issue requiring attention is the night-shift, weekend and holiday work of single parents. There is a provision of the *Employment Act* (Article 91) which stipulates that a single parent with a child under the age of seven or a child who is severely disabled “can work overtime and/or at night, only with their written consent”. “As for other rights to shorter working hours, shift work and days off, the rules apply to all employees equally, there are no privileges or special rights that apply to single parents”.⁵

- (2) **Single parents of special needs children fall into a special category.** It is necessary to analyse and supplement the regulation on the rights of parents, single parents in particular, who have children with special needs. It would be desirable to organise a day care facility and a weekend stay home in every neighbourhood where families with children with special needs live that can also be used by single parents in the case of their own (the parents’) illness. A day care facility could be organised within kindergartens, preschools, primary/secondary schools or in some other suitable facility within the local community, where a single parent can leave their child(ren) for a few hours (or a few days) when needed. It is important to note that the definition of these obligations as a task of local self-government must be continuously monitored by independent and professional institutions at the provincial or state level.

- (3) **Persons with disabilities (especially those with professional knowledge)** who are unemployable as a result of the failure of employers to adhere to the *Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities* (RS Official Gazette, 36/2009; 32/2013; 14/2022). There are many texts available online (brochures, instructions, interpretations of legal provisions) concerning the employment of disabled persons. In one

⁵ <https://www.besplatnopravnaedukacija.rs/2013/12/postovani-zanima-me-radno-pravo-samohrane-majke-da-li-imam-pravo-na-skraceno-radno-vreme-kakva-su-mi-prava-sto-se-tice-smenskog-rada-i-da-li-imam-pravo-na-slobodan-dan-kada-treba-dete-da-vodim-kod/>

report, made under the auspices of the EU Delegation in Serbia, key obstacles in the employment of persons with disabilities were listed as follows: (1) Unfavourable business conditions, unfavourable market and lack of manpower demands; (2) Unequal position of public and private sector employers; (3) The attitude and prejudices of employers towards persons with disabilities; and (4) Insufficient adaptability of workspaces. (Marko Milanović, *U potrazi za sigurnošću. Perspektive zapošljavanja osoba sa invaliditetom*⁶). [in English: *In search of security. Perspectives of employment of persons with disabilities*]. We found information on the Internet that states: "only 9% of people with disabilities are employed in Serbia, and recent data show progress that is too slow to reach the European rate of 50%."⁸ The text states that one of the main issues is the perception of employers who focus on the candidate's disability rather than on their ability to work. Because of this, candidates are often marginalised.

- (4) **People who lost their jobs at the pension-age (eligibility) threshold**, and failed to meet retirement conditions. These are, as a rule, persons aged 50 and over⁹. According to reports, this category of people faces the same threat in other European countries as well. According to data from Great Britain, people over the age of 50 have the highest risk of unemployment.¹⁰ Those over 50 years of age are recognised as a 'harder to employ category', and are classified as persons for whom employers belonging to the private sector can obtain a subsidy from the employment.¹¹ According to data from the Labour Force Survey (Q2 of 2020), out of a total of 974,200 women between the ages of 45 and 64 (category 'older workforce'), 548,000 are employed, slightly more than 24,000 are unemployed, and as many as 401,400 women from this category are inactive on the labour market. According to the Statistical Office of the RS' methodology, inactive are all those who are not employed, do not earn, but are neither looking for nor ready to start working. It is estimated that the percentage of inactive men aged 45 to 64 is approximately 24%, according to the same source. Information on training programmes for women organised by CSOs are available online.¹² Particular focus is placed on the obstacles faced by women from agricultural households if they wish to undergo training, which is a direct result of the large number of daily obligations they have on their agricultural holdings. In any case,

⁶ <http://eng.fmi.rs/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Report-Perspectives-of-employment-of-persons-with-disabilities-2014.pdf>

⁷ On the Internet there are numerous links/websites of organisations dedicated to persons with disabilities and families with disabled members: <http://portalinvalidnosti.net>; From KRUGA - Organisation for Support of Women with Disabilities; <http://www.izkruga.org>; Association of Enterprises for Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities <https://www.uips.rs>; Forum of Young People with Disabilities <https://fmi.rs/>

⁸ <https://biznis.telegraf.rs/karijera/3369713-osobe-sa-invaliditetom-forum-mladih-sa-invaliditetom-posao-inkluzija>

⁹ In 2011, the Center for Democracy Foundation published a study on the working status of elderly workers: Srećko Mihailović and Vojislav Mihailović (2011), *Stariji radnici – Neki na poslu, a neki ni posla ni penzije*. [in English: *Elderly Workers – Some employed, others neither employed nor pension earners*]. Belgrade: Center for Democracy Foundation.

¹⁰ <https://biznis.rs/vesti/stariji-od-50-godina-imaju-najveci-rizik-od-nezaposlenosti/>

¹¹ <https://svrljig.biz/konkursi/subvencije-poslodavcima-za-zaposljavanje-radnika-u-2022-godini/>

¹² <https://novaekonomija.rs/vesti-iz-izdanja/on-je-zreo-a-ona-je-tetka>

of particular importance are the training programmes – additional education and retraining that could be organised by local self-governments in cooperation with CSOs, and which would be adapted to scheduling and location needs, taking specifically into account household obligations.

Through workshops, trainings and education provided by the Center for Democracy Foundation as part of the SMELT project, marginalised groups, the project's target group, were trained to enter the labour market. Through these activities, they gained the know-how and skills needed to write an adequate CV and motivational letter, how to search for vacancies, apply for jobs, prepare for interviews with potential employers. However, it is important to emphasise that additional education and retraining was provided in the area of welding as well as other sectors of importance in Serbia and the EU, through this project. Emphasis was also on raising awareness of labour rights and available mechanisms of protection in the Republic of Serbia. Given that welding jobs pose safety risks, the participants were familiarised with the basics of occupational health and safety.

- (5) **Adults/persons of legal age or persons over the age of 15 without a completed primary level of education i.e., without qualifications.** We have already highlighted that in Serbia, the share of citizens without a completed primary education will increase in future as a result of the decline in primary education coverage over the past decade. The **Roma** population are overrepresented in this category, due to the high percentage of Roma children who are not enrolled in primary school or, if enrolled, drop out early prior to completing their education. Special attention should be paid to this category, due to the fact that this is a violation of children's rights, as established in several international documents and the Constitution of the RS, on the one hand, and as a result of the inevitable increase in the number of poor, and should the trend of not enrolling children into school continues, on the other. It is necessary to establish the complete, responsible and reliable monitoring of child enrolment and regular attendance, and to establish much more precisely the responsibility and sanctions, both on parents and competent services alike, when children are not enrolled/do not attend primary school.
- (6) **Elderly (single and two-member households without members under 65 years of age)** in rural areas, especially in settlements far from municipal centres, on the outskirts of the municipal territory and in hilly and mountainous areas. The largest number of these households have one or two agricultural pensions (which amount to roughly RSD 11,000) or are without a regular income. Healthcare and social services are unavailable to them. Often, their settlements lack public transport lines. According to the already mentioned State Audit Institution Report, in 2019 and 2020, approximately one million people in Serbia lived in settlements that were not connected by public transport to a municipal centre and their sole form of transportation was either their own car or taxi services. The absence of public transport denies those living in rural settlements, outside municipal centres, the means to exercise their basic rights (education, supplementary activities, sports, culture, healthcare, administrative services, etc.). Living conditions in rural settlements make the marginalisation of people multidimensional. For this reason, assistance and support to these

groups requires synchronised and coordinated activity and the joint programmes of a large number of actors and institutions. The legal provision on the abolition of many rights in terms of social protection if a household owns more than one hectare of land (regardless of land category/quality) deprived of social protection and households that cannot cultivate the land due to old age and illness, people who are too ill to work in agriculture, single parents of underage children who cannot work in the fields all day. Given the advanced aging processes in Serbia (44 is the average age, probably closer to 50 in rural areas), it is necessary to analyse the experiences of other countries and the practice of caring for the elderly. Given the expected increase in the share of the elderly in the population, as well as the extension of life expectancy, institutional changes in the support and care of elderly citizens are necessary. There are numerous experiences and examples of good practice, especially in the field of encouraging the **mutual help and support of varying generations**. A separate topic is **housing for the elderly**. Various types of housing communities for the elderly are being set up in European countries (homes for the elderly, groups of small and adapted flats with common/unified maintenance, food preparation, cleaning, joint activities, etc.). It is necessary for us to investigate experiences and the application of adapted models proposed. Housing communities for the elderly do not have to be organised in such a way that users are passive service recipients. A number of users in housing communities can perform different services according to their knowledge and expertise, psycho-physical abilities and thus contribute economically to the functioning of the community and to strengthening various aspects of community integration.

- (7) **Persons who collect secondary raw materials are a category that needs to be paid much more attention.** Those who are engaged in the collection of secondary raw materials do extremely useful work, and they themselves are completely unprotected, both in terms of labour laws (regulation of labour rights and rights arising from employment relationships) and in financial terms (randomness of the purchase prices of secondary raw materials, invisibility of the organisation and purchase control, etc.). First of all, it is necessary to more precisely define the conditions and standards for the collection of **secondary raw materials, as well as storage and purchase modalities**. This area is completely marginalised by the current conditions and left to informal interest groups. The experiences of the Recycling Centre in *Orlovsko naselje*, in Belgrade, indicates the dominant influence of informal groups organised hierarchically/pyramidically, in such a way that the entire system of collection, payment and delivery of secondary raw materials is invisible yet well organised, and has resulted in the interconnectedness of powerful clans and interest groups. Collectors of secondary raw materials i.e., those who are exposed to the risk of disease and the difficult work of waste selection at landfills, in dumpsters etc., are completely unprotected, unsustainably exploited, earn little income from the sale of secondary raw materials, are exposed to contaminants and infection, and there is a high level of child exploitation among this group, etc. We will quote one statement made within the focus group: "Let's talk specifically about collectors of secondary raw materials - these are people who live on the margin, the absolute margin of this entire society, specifically here in Serbia, they need everything, absolutely everything. They are described as being

lazy, people who don't want to work but I will tell you that they are in fact workers who are very much aware of what they are doing. It's true that they live from one day to the next and it is precisely the state that says this about them and absolutely no one, I can safely say, no one takes any notice of them. What they collect today, the state makes light of because it has passed certain laws and regulations that only make their situation more difficult. It's just awful. We have tried in a million ways to help collectors of secondary raw materials, but no one cares, everything boils down to empty words, empty promises; no one has ever helped them. Because, of course, the issue has to be solved systemically. Even though we formed a trade union, created a trade union, we hoped that together we would be able to act; it's not that there hasn't been any progress at all, but very little, a drop in the ocean. It is estimated that 70% of the Roma population is most certainly engaged in the collection of secondary raw materials. It's not just this population, there are more non-Roma persons involved in collecting. I'm waiting for the day when the majority of the population starts collecting, exceed that percentage, even. Poverty is a topic that preoccupies us in this age." The interviewees point to the miserable social status of socially useful activities, such as collecting secondary raw materials. There is no doubt that local self-governments are obliged to regulate and define the framework for the method for the collection and circulation of secondary raw materials. The discrimination faced by secondary raw material collectors is a reflection of a community that is poor yet wasteful and uninterested in improving environmental quality, on the one hand (and whose quality is determined by the relationship between secondary raw materials and the treatment of these materials and waste), and the economic benefits that stem from the responsible treatment of secondary raw materials, on the other.

- (8) **Persons who work in the so-called grey zone, who therefore cannot exercise their rights to social protection, health care and retirement insurance.** Measures to stimulate the transfer of jobs from the grey to the legalised zone (secondary raw materials, trade workers such as those who work as welders, seamstresses, electricians, plumbers, seasonal fruit/vegetable pickers, etc.) and the mechanisms needed to implement these measures are conditions that must set and guaranteed by the public sector and competent services. Both in the short and long term, the grey economy is harmful, both to individuals and to the community. The grey zone should differ from criminality and corrupt activities, because the line of demarcation is clear. Marginalised groups turn to the grey economy because of their social status – where they are not protected by the legal system, have no labour rights and are at the mercy of employers' whims.

Changes in the organisation of public services are necessary in order to increase their availability/location. The **unavailability of these services** is increasingly visible, especially in rural areas. Local communities must be obliged (demanded) to fulfil the legal obligation of **organised public transport** and connecting rural settlements with the municipal centre where educational institutions, preschool child care, health care, administrative and social services, etc, are concentrated. If the local self-government is incapable of organising these services, then this role should be taken over by a higher authority in the state hierarchy, along with a cut in funds

provided to such local self-governments allocated to pay the salaries of administrators engaged to supervise over these segments. There is reason to link the subject of public transport with the subject of primary school enrolment and attendance. Compulsory primary education is a constitutional category. It seems as though this constitutional obligation is not enough, and that it is necessary to establish not only the **obligation to enrol children in elementary school, but also to monitor regular attendance at elementary school, including sanctions for violating this obligation**. In other words, in addition to the obligation to introduce monitoring, public reporting on the scope of enrolment and attendance at primary schools is also needed. In addition to these, it is necessary to increase the volume and types of **mobile services**, which are an important and irreplaceable modality of service provision to rural settlements. Marginalised groups face numerous obstacles in satisfying basic social rights. We will examine just a few of the most common issues relative to health care: (1) A large share of prescription medication is not issued by prescription, but must be paid for out of pocket. This applies specifically to expensive medication; (2) Procedures for scheduling check-ups are complicated and require a great deal of time, waiting in waiting rooms and visits to several specialists; (3) There is a very long waiting list for medical examinations that need to be performed with the use of medical devices, (4) The scheduling of operations is done several months/years in advance; (5) Patients have varying experiences in terms of the doctor/other medical staff – patient relationship – ranging from being treated with kindness, understanding and support to experiencing contempt and delays in getting check-ups. **The Protector of Patients' Rights** is an important actor in fulfilling health care rights, which the state guarantees to its population through appropriate regulations. In addition, the Serbian Ombudsman could be one of the key mechanisms for monitoring the exercise of patients' rights. Most people are unfamiliar with the obligation to organise the Protector of Patients' Rights service. There are no data on the number of health care centres in Serbia, as the basic providers of primary health care, in which the Protector of Patients' Rights service is organised and active, nor is there any information available on the activities and effects of this service in the health care centres themselves. It is necessary to establish monitoring over the work of the Protector of Patients' Rights and the obligation of biannual public reporting/publication of data on received petitions and outcomes. Judging by what the interviewees had to say, Protector of Patients' Rights are inactive in a number of health care centres. Either the service is not organised, or the people are unaware of its existence. Monitoring should be organised at the level of the Republic with clearly stated obligations: the way the service is organised, whether citizens are informed of its existence, whether they receive complaints, how complaints are processed. It is necessary to organise an expert debate on whether to introduce **vouchers** that inhabitants can use to pay for health care services and whether doing so would encourage the opening of primary health care services in the private sector, as well as the organisation of mobile medical teams that would provide health care in rural areas.

The interviewees emphasised the shortcomings and inadequacies of the organisation and quality of the work performed by social services. It would be necessary to establish an independent, publicly accessible and responsible service through which to monitor the work of social services, including achieved effects and outcomes in improving the social and economic situation of poor groups (by category of vulnerable groups) and in relation to the invested funds (administrative

costs, financial support costs, other costs relating to types of support). The encouragement of appropriate and adapted forms of self-organisation and mutual assistance is necessary. One way to do this could be to make social support conditional on a certain number of hours (weekly) of mutual assistance (seniors to assist young families and single parents in child care, preparing meals, and in return, the elderly are assisted when going to the doctor, cleaning/chores, paying bills, going to the shops for supplies).

III - Center for Democracy Foundation, introducing the practical implementation of training for welders

Given that the Center for Democracy Foundation is a civil society organisation, not an educational institution, and therefore has limited capacity for practical training of welders, members of marginalised groups still managed to attend a short course organised by the CDF. They visited a welding school and learned about basic welding processes and techniques. In Serbia, there are VET centres that provide certain welding courses, but they are quite expensive and specific health care check-ups are necessary to attend them, which is also costly. Therefore, the process of attending training in the welding sector in Serbia is quite complex, due to the fact that it is expensive and requires a longer period of time to complete. Attending a welding trade school takes three years to complete, and retraining in a VET centre takes one year to complete. Therefore, the recommendation of the Center for Democracy Foundation is that local self-governments get involved in this process and help individuals who want to retrain, especially members of marginalised groups, by placing an ad offering welding training, the costs of which would be borne by the local self-government. At the same time, this would contribute to rectifying the deficiencies that Serbia is facing in terms of people qualified for the profession.

IV – Examples of good practice

Project: Our Village

The Our Village project is an example of a multidimensional project that included several different activities in a local rural community.

In 2017, in collaboration with Erste Bank, Delta Holding launched the ***Our Village project***, which includes various activities (special terms on interest-free loans for the purchase of agricultural machinery, expansion of the breeding stock, purchase of seedlings, construction of stables and agricultural buildings, advisory activities and mentoring support of experts in agriculture, fruit growing and animal husbandry, with an individual approach to each holding included in the programme, etc.). The project is located in the settlements of Mala Jasikova and Dubočane in the Municipality of Zaječar. After four years of the project, all involved households improved and expanded their agricultural holdings, achieved higher incomes and improved their living standards. In addition to working with agricultural farms, Delta Holding acquired equipment for a children's playground in Dubočani, renovated the village outpatient clinic and other premises of the local community, and collected books to build the village's first library. This same company also

renovated the elementary school in Mala Jasikova. Even after the end of the Project, Delta remains present in these settlements with occasional activities, such as the distribution of New Year's packages to children (also organised at the end of December 2022). After the positive outcomes in both Mala Jasikova and Dubočani, Delta Holding, along with Erste Bank, continued with the implementation of the Our Village project in the municipality of Bač in the Bačko Novo Selo settlement, where residents are primarily engaged in farming, fruit growing and husbandry. Approximately 50 households are included in the Programme in Bačko Novo Selo. According to those we spoke to in the villages of Mala Jasikova and Dubočana (December 2022), Delta Holding's activities would have had a better effect and lasted longer if the state were to support such similar projects, with appropriate amendments to legislation, thereby multiplying the positive effects of the individual economic and social projects/programmes provided by individual actors. Similar to the previously mentioned Project implemented in Mala Jasikova and Dubočani, the local community will be introduced to the characteristics of modern agricultural production through a series of lectures. These will include the following topics: feeding and care of livestock, planting, pruning and harvesting fruit, sowing and growing field crops and other elements necessary for successful agricultural production. It is planned to work individually with agricultural producers, and to provide them with interest-free loans for the purchase of machines and other agricultural equipment.

Self-organisation of pensioners and the activities performed by their Association in the Municipality of Požega

Association of Pensioners of Požega, President of the Association: "To me, all pensioners are family, part of my community." We spend time other, travel, visit each other, visit those who are ill and those who are healthy. We know how each of us is living, what everyone does during the day, and how much of and what each of us needs. Our environment is always in working mode, communicative and positive. We are well organised, I don't want to brag, but I just have to put that out there. Each pensioner has my phone number, I have theirs too. We speak to each other all the time. We hear each other, we listen to each other, we agree. And this is how we should continue. Thank you for coming here so that we can share our experiences. This is one great big community, we have an excellent reputation in Serbia, we travel all over the country, and this is just one additional way that we can get to know each other better. It is important that the voice of our Association is heard today".

This analysis with recommendations and examples for improving the lives of marginalised groups was compiled within the framework of the SMELT Project and will be sent out in print, on recycled paper, to all relevant institutions and associations at the local and national level that have the responsibility and opportunity, though action, to improve and better the living conditions of marginalised individuals relative to the labour market and beyond its scope.