



Ludwig Boltzmann Institute
of Human Rights (BIM)

ANALYSIS OF THE STATE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION AT LOCAL LEVEL



ВЛАДА НА РЕПУБЛИКА МАКЕДОНИЈА
МИНИСТЕРСТВО ЗА ТРУД
И СОЦИЈАЛНА ПОЛИТИКА

OCTOBER, 2010

Financed by

Austrian
Development Cooperation



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Publisher

Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights – BIM-FV Skopje

The preparation and the printing of this publication is financially supported by
The Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC)

Prepared by

Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women -ESE,
Republic of Macedonia

Project

Social Inclusion and Human Rights in Macedonia

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*The Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights (BIM-FV) and the Austrian
Development Cooperation (ADC)*

Preface

This publication is prepared for the needs of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights BIM-FV Skopje, within the framework of the project *Social Inclusion and Human Rights in Macedonia*. The project aims at introducing the Human Rights Based Approach in the area of poverty reduction and social inclusion at local and national level, which involves identification of vulnerable groups, their direct inclusion in the decision-making processes that influence their lives, and establishing a system of monitoring and accountability of the duty-bearers. The subject of the analysis was establishing the state of i.e. the need for social inclusion at local level, in the six following municipalities: Stip, Prilep, Kicevo, Saraj, Caska and Radovis.

This document is aimed at the units of local self-government, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, citizens' organizations, international organisations etc, as a basis for determining the actual state of poverty, discrimination and social exclusion, as well as, for planning appropriate measures and activities for improvement. The recommendations from this document give a solid base for improving the policies, the strategies and the action plans from the area of social inclusion, both at national and at local level.

The research will be an initial point of action of the Macedonian Anti-Poverty Platform-MAPP. Namely, as part of this years' campaign for fight against poverty and social exclusion, organized by MAPP the findings of the research were presented in some of the municipalities on the debates organised with representatives from vulnerable groups.

We hope that this research will become a basis for establishing future cooperation of BIM-FV with the municipalities involved, in order to improve the lives of the most vulnerable and poor groups of the local population.

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1. Title, Objectives and Research Methodology

Title: Factual Analysis for Establishing the State and the Needs for Social Inclusion at Local Level.

Research objectives: The main objective of this research is to establish the state and the needs for social inclusion at local level, with particular emphasis on the following areas:

- Provision of social services by the units of local self-government, social work centres, and other actors at local level;
- Mechanisms for identification of poor and vulnerable groups;
- Mechanisms for protection and assistance to poor and vulnerable groups;
- Mechanisms for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups at local and national level;
- Identification of structural discrimination with regards to access to social services (social inclusion and social protection);
- Identification of structural problems with regards to social exclusion and poverty on local and national level.

Methodology: The factual analysis aims to assess the discrepancy between the officially regulated social policy against the factual implementation at local level in six selected municipalities. To this aim, six municipalities were selected, as follows: Saraj, Caska, Kicevo, Prilep, Stip and Radovis. In the process of selection, the principles of geographical representation were taken into consideration, the demographic characteristics, the ethnical heterogeneity and the principle of rural /urban coverage.

Methodologically, the process consisted of:

- Conducting interviews with relevant professionals at local level, led by ESE expert team, and
- Conducting focus groups with population from the designated municipalities.

To this aim, two types of questionnaires were prepared (one for the representatives from social work centres and the other, for local government representatives) as well as, a script for conducting the focus groups.

The questionnaire for the municipality consisted of seven thematic areas, according to the competences, the scope and the activities of the municipality in the area of social protection and inclusion. The thematic areas were used in the analysis and for establishing the state of:

1. Institutional mechanisms for social protection;
2. Programmes and action plans for social protection at local level, including development programmes for specific citizens' needs;

3. Mechanisms for consultation and participation of the poor and vulnerable groups at local and national level, and cooperation between relevant institutions from the area of social protection and citizens' organisations;
4. Mechanisms for identification of poor and vulnerable groups;
5. Provision of social services by the units of local self-government;
6. Improving the conditions for socially endangered persons, and
7. Capital investments and infrastructure in the area of social protection.

The following legal acts were used the questionnaires for the municipalities were prepared and for their subsequent analysis:

1. Law on Local Self-government in the Republic of Macedonia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No 5/2002),
2. Law on Social Protection (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No. 79/2009), and
3. Law on Financing the Units of Local Self-government (Official Gazette of RM, No 61/2004, 96/2004, 67/2007 and 156/2009).

In addition to the laws, other used sources were:

- The statutes of the selected municipalities;
- Annual work programmes of the municipalities involved;
- Work programmes of the municipal Councils;
- Action plans and programmes from the area of social protection (for the municipalities of: Caska, Kicevo, Stip and Radovis).

The questionnaire for the social work centres consisted of five thematic areas covering the competences, the scope and the activities that the centres performed. The thematic units were used to analyse the state of:

1. Identification of poor and vulnerable groups;
2. Services and access to services provided by social work centres;
3. Prevention and support of poor and vulnerable groups;
4. Consultation and support of poor and vulnerable groups, and
5. Cooperation of social work centres with local self-government and other institutions and organisations.

The following legal acts were used when preparing the questionnaire for the social work centres and for the analysis that followed:

1. Law on Social Protection (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No. 79/2009),
2. Law on Family (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No 84/2008, 67/2010), and
3. Law on Child Protection (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No. 98/2000, 17/2003, 65/2004, 113/2005, 98/2008, 107/2008, 83/2009, 156/2009).

In each of the six selected municipalities, two representatives working in the area of social protection were interviewed:

-A representative from the local government – a representative from the Sector/Unit for Legal and Administrative Affairs with competences in social protection (with the exception of the municipality of Saraj where the interview was conducted with the Secretary of the municipality, and the municipality of Stip where the interview was conducted with the representative from the Unit on Local Economic Development),and

-A representative from the social work centre from the designated municipality.

The list of the interviewed representatives from the municipalities and the social work centres, involved in this analysis, is as follows:

Local self-government units

- **Municipality of Saraj** – the interview was conducted with Mr Jelal Jakupi, Secretary of the municipality of Saraj.
- **Municipality of Kicevo**- the interview was conducted with Mr Marjan Dimoski, Head of Sector for General and Legal Affairs in the municipality of Kicevo.
- **Municipality of Caska**- the interview was conducted with Ms Bojanka Mitrova , Head of Sector for General and Administrative Affairs in the municipality of Caska.
- **Municipality of Radovis**- the interview was conducted with Ms Olivera Dudulova, Head of Sector for Normative, Legal, General and Public Affairs in the municipality of Radovish.
- **Municipality of Stip**- the interview was conducted with Ms Visna Sorova Angelova, Associate in the Unit for Local Economic Development.
- **Municipality of Prilep**- the interview was conducted with Mr Marjan Prodanoski, Head of Unit for Legal Affairs in the municipality of Prilep.

Social work centres

- **Public Institution Inter-municipal Social Centre –Skopje** - the interview was conducted with Ms Penka Nikoloska, social worker, Head of Unit for Social Work of the regional units of the City of Skopje.
- **Social Work Centre Kicevo**- the interview was conducted with Ms Dragica Naumovska, social worker in Social Work Centre (SWC) Kicevo.
- **Social Work Centre Veles** - the interview was conducted with Ms Nada Trajkova, Director of Social Work Centre Veles.
- **Social Work Centre Radovis**- the interview was conducted with Ms Pavlinka Petruseva, social worker in Social Work Centre Radovis.

- **Social Work Centre Stip**- the interview was conducted with Ms Natalija Panova, acting Director of Social Work Centre Stip.
- **Social Work Centre Prilep**- the interview was conducted with Mr Zoran Malkovski, social worker in Social Work Centre Prilep.

In addition to the interviews, for each municipality, two focus groups were conducted. The focus groups participants were from the wider population, so that relevant information for the actual state of the vulnerable groups would be gathered, with reference to exercise of basic rights, types of discrimination, mechanisms for consultation and participation at local level. The focus groups were organised according to criteria related with the characteristics of the respective municipalities, i.e. in most cases the basic criterion for creating the groups was the ethnicity of the population, followed by gender. In one municipality only, the focus groups were created according to the criterion of place of residence i.e. urban vs. rural area, and the secondary criterion applied was the gender.

1. Municipality of Saraj: focus groups with Albanians(male and female) and Macedonians (male and female);
2. Municipality of Caska: focus groups with Macedonians (male and female), Albanians (male and female), and Turks (male and female);
3. Municipality of Kicevo: focus groups with Macedonians (male and female) and Albanians(male and female);
4. Municipality of Prilep: focus groups with Roma (male and female) and Macedonians (male and female);
5. Municipality of Radovis: focus groups with Macedonians from urban and rural areas (male and female);
6. Municipality of Stip: focus groups with Macedonians (male and female) and Roma (male and female).

This report was created in order to provide a comprehensive picture for the state and the treatment of the poor and vulnerable groups in each of the municipalities subject to the analysis, and in view of the stakeholders:

1. Local self-government units
2. Social work centres
3. Citizens i.e. vulnerable groups.

In addition to the findings, the report identifies areas of concern and gives recommendations for the relevant institutions at local level (units of local self-government and social work centres).

2. Social Inclusion and Stakeholders in the Republic of Macedonia

Whenever the concept of social inclusion is mentioned, it is perceived as a contrast to the concept of social exclusion, which is 'a multiple exclusion of individuals or groups from participation in the economic, social and political life in the country where they live.'¹ However, in order to understand the concept of social inclusion, first of all, the concept of social exclusion needs to be defined.

The concept of social exclusion is conceptualised through various social processes and aspects of daily life as economic, cultural, physical and mental disability, or political and institutional exclusion.

Therefore, social exclusion is a result of complex processes, and not a result of poverty as a single factor. Thus, social inclusion needs to be understood as a social structural framework incorporating few areas:

- Political sphere (as a system for democratic distribution);
- Economic sphere (labour market and other instruments of economic integration);
- Social system (welfare system and social integration);
- The system of community and family.²

Therefore, social inclusion needs to be a reversible process which will change the conditions and the habits leading to social exclusion. Social inclusion needs to incorporate various elements: to be a process, a strategy and to be a developmental long-term goal. It has to be a coordinated response to the complex system of problems from the political, economic, social, cultural and the health sphere, and in general, to the comprehensive social sphere of human existence.

Social inclusion needs to provide greater inclusion in decision making processes to most vulnerable and marginalised groups in the society, and help them improve their overall standard and wellbeing.³ It should be a corrective measure of the services offered at local and national level, aimed at providing equal access to services to all the groups in the society.

Thus, all of the actors at national, and particularly, at local level, should be organised so that the social inclusion policy becomes a developmental imperative to all citizens, starting with the local government units, citizens associations, natural and legal person etc.

The main pillars of social inclusion at local level are the units of local self-government and the social work centres.

¹ Hilary Silver, "Social Exclusion: Comparative Analysis of Europe and Middle East Youth," Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper (September 2007), p. 15

² http://www.europace.org/s2net/docs/Soc_incl_discus.doc , webpage accessed on 28.10.2010

³ www.combatpoverty.ie , webpage accessed on 28.10.2010

The Law on Local Self-government, the Law on Social Protection and the Law on Financing the Units of Local Self-government define the competencies of the local government in this area.

The Law on Local Self-government⁴ gives the basic legal framework for the process of decentralisation. This law provides that the municipality, in accordance with the national economic policy, is financed by own revenues, as well as, by other financial sources.⁵

The units of local self-government, as main actors in the area of social protection, are responsible for establishment of public bodies for social protection, developing extra-institutional forms of social protection and realisation of social programmes in cooperation with other public bodies, the private sector and non-governmental organisations.

According to the Law on Local Self-Government⁶, the municipalities and the City of Skopje are responsible for:

- Social protection and protection of children- kindergartens and old people's homes (ownership, financing, investment, and maintenance);
- Social protection for people with disabilities;
- Children without parents or parental care;
- Children with social and behavioural problems;
- Children with special needs;
- Children with single parents;
- Street children;
- Persons facing social risks;
- Persons using drugs or alcohol;
- Raising awareness;
- Housing for persons facing social risks;
- Exercising rights and upbringing of preschool children.

The City of Skopje and the municipalities could establish a public body for extra-institutional or institutional protection, based on approval issued in accordance with the Law on Social Protection, except for a social work centre and a public institution for housing children and young people with behavioural problems.⁷

The Law on Financing of Local Self-government Units⁸ defines the various financial resources of local government units, as municipality's own revenues, as well as, allocations from the state budget, other budget funds, as well as the possibility for financing through loans.⁹

The revenues from own sources need to provide functional and financial independence of the municipalities, and they are defined by the Law on Financing of Local Self-government units:

⁴ The Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No 5/2002

⁵ Article 11 of the Law on Local Self-government, The Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No 5/2002

⁶ Ibid, Article 22

⁷ Article 87 form the Law on Social Protection

⁸ The Official Gazette of RM, No 61/2004, 96/2004, 67/2007 and 156/2009

⁹ Ibid, Art 3

- Local taxes (property tax and other local tax determined by law);
- Local taxes (communal taxes, administrative taxes and other local taxed determined by law);
- Local fees (for planning of building lands, communal fees, fees for spatial and urban plans, and other local fees defined by law);
- Revenues from ownership (rents, interest fees, selling of property which does not interferes with municipality's functions and competencies);
- Proportion of the personal tax paid in the current year (100% of natural persons dealing with craftsmanship in accordance with the Law on Craftsmanship, and 3% from the tax on personal income of persons residing in the respective municipality)
- Other own revenues and incomes;
- Fines determined by law;
- Donations, and
- Other revenues defined with law.

And finally, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia on the basis on the Law on Financing of Local Self-government Units (the Official Gazette of RM, No 61/2004, 96/2004, 67/2007 and 156/2009) adopted a Regulation for the Methodology for VAT Distribution between the Municipalities.

The social work centres, as main actors, have competences in the implementation of programmes and application of legal acts from the area of social protection, adopted and financed by the municipalities, the City of Skopje, as well as, in initiating, organising and coordinating volunteer activities among citizens, associations, humanitarian organisations, and organisations that implement social protection programmes in the municipality, the City of Skopje or in other municipalities in Skopje.

On the basis of the right to social protection, and under conditions defined with the Law on Social Protection, social work centres implement measures for social prevention, institutional and extra-institutional protection, and provide financial assistance.¹⁰

The Government of the Republic of Macedonia adopts National Development Programme for Social Protection which defines the objectives, the priorities and the directions of the development of social protection for the citizens, and the measures for active mid-term and long-term social policy.¹¹ Furthermore, the government adopts Annual Programme for Social Protection which determines social protection areas, needs of the citizens, social prevention and ways in which social protection can be provided.

The municipality, the City of Skopje and other municipalities in Skopje can provide social protection to:

- Disabled children;
- Children without parents or parental care;
- Children with mental or physical disability;
- Street children;
- Children with behavioural problems;
- Children with single parents;
- Persons facing social risks;
- Persons using drugs, alcohol or other substances;
- Human traffic victims;

¹⁰ Ibid, Art 6

¹¹ Ibid Art. 4

- Elderly without family care.

The municipalities could provide institutional¹² and extra-institutional¹³ protection, housing for persons exposed to social risks, raise awareness for the need to social protection, in accordance with the Law on Social Protection.¹⁴

The measures and the activities for social prevention avert social risks, allow for early detection and early treatment of persons facing social risks, hence, they allow for alleviation of the effects from social risks exposure.¹⁵

In order to enable social prevention, measures are implemented to prevent social risks affecting citizens, families or a group of people, by education, counselling, developing forms of self-help, voluntary work or other methods that are in accordance with the needs of the users of social protection.¹⁶

¹² Institutional protection is the right to be trained to perform work activity and the right to housing in social protection institution (Art 41, Law on Social Protection)

¹³ Extra-institutional protection is the right to: primary social service to users of social protection, assistance to individual, assistance to family, home care to an individual or a family, daily and occasional reception as assistance to a person or a family, housing by a host-family, housing in a small group home, and living independently with support (Art 26, Law on Social Protection).

¹⁴ Ibid, Art 11

¹⁵ Ibid, Art 24, Paragraph 1

¹⁶ Ibid, Art 25, Paragraph 1

3. The State of Social Inclusion from Citizens' and Institutional Aspect

3.1. Units of Local Self Government

3.1.1. Institutional mechanisms for social protection in the municipalities

Social protection in the units of local self-government is carried out by two mechanisms:

1. The employees in the municipal administration, and
2. The standing committees of the municipal councils which are active in the areas of social and child protection, education, sports and culture.

Therefore, the institutional mechanisms for social protection elaborated below are conceptualised thorough these two interrelated mechanisms.

1. According to the adopted systematisation of work positions, in four of the six identified municipalities, there are sectors for general, legal-normative and public affairs. In the municipality of Saraj and Caska, as rural municipalities, there are units for general and legal affairs. The employees in the municipal administration, from these sectors or units, work in the area of social, child and health protection, sports or culture. In five of the six identified municipalities there are no employees in the municipal administration working exclusively on social protection issues. The persons employed in the units for local economic development work on social protection related issues, in collaboration with the units or sectors for public affairs. In the Municipality of Prilep, as part of the municipal administration, there are advisors for education and culture, however they do not cover the social protection area.

The Municipality of Caska is the only municipality which has a person employed as an Associate for health, social and civil protection, within the Unit for Education, Culture, Health and Social Protection, Sports and Cooperation with Citizens Associations and Foundations. The municipality of Saraj has no employee in the area of social protection as part of the municipal administration. The person that used to work in the human resource unit has left and the position has not been filled yet.

2. With regards to the committees as assisting bodies to the municipal councils, dealing with social protection, it has to be noted that in four of

the six identified municipalities, there are standing committees working in the area of social protection. They have different names in different municipalities (in the municipality of Kicevo- Health Committee, in the municipality of Radovis- Committee for Health and Social Protection, in Stip- Committee for Social

Activities, in Prilep- Committee for Social Activities and Children's Rights, and in the municipality of Caska – Committee of Equal Gender Opportunities dealing with social protection issues). The committees are consisted of five members who are also members of the municipal councils.

Saraj is the only municipality which has no standing committee on social protection, while in the municipality of Caska the Committee on Equal Gender Opportunities, as permanent council committee, deals with social protection issues, health and women's education. In these two municipalities, if a problem from the area of social protection occurs, an ad hoc committee is created consisted of the municipal employees and council members.

3.1.2. Programmes and action plans for social protection, including development programmes for specific citizens' needs

With regards to social protection programmes in the municipalities, three municipalities only have adopted multi-annual social protection programmes.

The municipality of Stip is the only municipality, of the six identified, that in addition to the Social Protection Programme, has developed an Action Plan for the period of 2007-2012. The Action Plan is created according to the target groups in the municipality and for each target group there is a corresponding programme and an action plan. A detailed budget for realisation of the activities is prepared. There is no timeframe for realisation of the activities. In addition, the municipality has prepared a Local Action Plan for Children's Rights for the period 2009-2014. The plan is divided into six programmes i.e. strategic goals, but it does not have a timeframe for the activities and a budget for their implementation. In the municipality of Stip activities have already been implemented from the two plans-the Action Plan for Social Protection and the Action Plan for Children's Rights.

The only municipality that has never adopted a programme and an action plan for social protection is the municipality of Saraj.

The municipality of Prilep has no programme and a social protection action plan; however it has prepared three local action plans, which are as follows: Action Plan for Children Rights (2009-2013), Local Action Plan for Persons with

Disabilities (2008-2010) and Local Employment Action Plan for 2009-2010. There is no information on what has been realised so far.

The municipality of Radovis adopted a Social Protection Action Plan in 2007, however no activities were realised in this respect. Since then, no such plan has been created since.

In the municipality of Kicevo there is a Programme for Social, Health and Child Protection for 2010, prepared by an employee of the municipal administration. The programme has not been formally adopted by the municipal council, although some of the activities from the programme have already been implemented. The programme has neither been supplemented with an action plan, nor has a timeframe for implementation

of the activities. The programme actually consists of 10 projects. It is very general in the way it is created, without specific objectives and results from its eventual implementation.

In the municipality of Caska there is a Programme for Development of Education, Sports, Culture, Health and Social Protection for 2009-2013. This programme also has no action plan or timeframe for the activities. One activity from the programme has been implemented in the municipality of Caska so far.

In all of the six identified municipalities there are no social protection work programmes of the committees which are part of the municipal councils.

In all of the existing action plans or programmes there is a lack of systemic framework for monitoring the progress of the implemented activities by the coordinative bodies. The preparation of reports for the implemented activities is on ad hoc basis, only for reporting purposes. This is done by the municipal administration, and not by the council members who are also members of the coordinative bodies/ committees.

Most of the action plans and programmes are not supplemented with appropriate budget and indicators for following the developments.

None of the selected municipalities has developmental programme for specific citizens needs.

In the municipalities there is cooperation sectoral cooperation between the administration and the committees for social protection when programmes and plans are created.

3.1.3. Mechanisms for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups at local and national level and cooperation between relevant institutors from social protection area and citizens associations

In all of the municipalities there is no formally developed mechanism for participation of poor and vulnerable groups at local level. The communication with the citizens is direct, when the citizens approach the municipality and seek assistance, when documents are prepared, or when local plans and projects are created.

The cooperation and communication with the citizens is usually through the presidents of the local communities, who inform the municipality about the problems of the community.

The direct participation of the citizens in the municipality through citizens' initiatives for local issues, referendums or petitions as defined in the Law on Local Self-government, Article 25, paragraph 1, occurs seldom.

The municipality of Caska is the only municipality where citizens' initiative was raised, in accordance with the legal norms, for opening a daily care centre for old people in Bogomila.

The acts adopted by the municipal councils are published in the municipal Official Gazette, some information is placed on the web, and some municipalities inform the media with an electronic newsletter (municipalities of Prilep and Stip).

With regards to the cooperation of the municipalities with citizens' organisations, a tendency is observed for cooperation in project activities, i.e. non-governmental organisations approaching the municipalities to offer cooperation. The municipalities usually invite citizens' associations/organisations for consultation or participation in working groups when certain action plans or programmes are prepared. However, there is discontinuity in the cooperation with regards to the monitoring of the implemented activities from a programme or a plan, in which citizens' associations need to take part.

The municipalities cooperate with the centres for social work, in most cases, when obtaining information for the beneficiaries of certain services. This cooperation extends to involvement of social work centres representatives in the preparation of local action plans, such are the examples with the municipalities of Caska, Stip and Prilep.

Yet, in all of the municipalities there is insufficient cooperation with the relevant actors at local level with regards to social protection.

3.1.4. Mechanisms for identification of poor and vulnerable groups

In none of the selected municipalities there is an established mechanism for identifying poor and vulnerable groups. The municipalities do not maintain a database on issues concerning social protection and inclusion, neither classify the data in categories of beneficiaries of services, target groups etc. All of the municipalities receive the lists of the beneficiaries by the social work centres.

Citizens who face certain problems send a letter to the mayor of the municipality requesting assistance. According to the interviewed representative from the municipality of Prilep *'such issues need to be dealt with by the social work centres, and not by the municipality, as the municipality is not a centre'*.

In the municipality of Stip, more specifically, in the Unit for Public Affairs, there is a person working on children related issues and maintains the data on this category.

The municipalities often identify the needs of certain target group when the local action plans are prepared. Often, these plans do not identify all of the target groups. For instance, in certain municipality there is an already mapped target group involved in certain activities, however this group has not been identified in the action plan or the other way round.

In order to illustrate this situation, i.e. the absence of a mechanism, the practice in some of the municipalities will be elaborated below. For example, in Caska, Stip and in Radovis, the presidents of the local communities visit the municipality, which afterwards decides whether certain problem is to be discussed and put on the agenda of the municipal council.

Although this practice provides direct information from the field, it does not provide comprehensive and long-term effects in the process of identification of the poor and vulnerable groups.

3.1.5. Provision of social services by the units of locals self-government and implemented project/programme activities from the area of social protection

In all of the municipalities involved in this research, finances are allocated from the municipal budget to tackle social issues. The finances are provided from the budget item: Current Reserves. The smallest annual amount for 2009, in an urban municipality, was in Radovis and the amount was 191.200 denars; the highest amount was 1.100.000 denars, in the municipality of Stip. In the municipality of Kicevo 760.000denars were allocated, while in Prilep 600.000denars. With regards to the rural municipalities, in the municipality of Saraj 379.400 denars were allocated, and in Caska 314.464 denars.

In addition to provision of finances for social purposes, the municipalities, with participation of the central government, provide other types of social services.

Five of the six municipalities (the exception is the municipality of Saraj) are involved in the government's project 'Public Kitchen' through which, hot meals are provided to users of social services. The smallest number of users of this service is in Radovis (63 persons), and the largest in the municipality of Prilep (100 persons).

Four of the six municipalities (with the exception of Saraj and Caska) have provided spatial facilities to the daily centres for children with special needs. The Municipality of Stip, as part of the Action Plan for social protection, has initiated building infrastructure for persons with special needs and the Mayor requested that all public institutions in the area build special access/ramps for disabled people. The municipality of Caska has submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for opening a daily centre for children with special needs. In the municipalities of Prilep, Kicevo and Radovis activities were completed for building special access (ramps) in front of the public institutions. The municipality of Kicevo has organised an activity for marking all the parking spaces for people with disabilities. The municipality of Prilep was selected as the most accessible municipality for year 2007.

In Caska, 10 years ago, the municipality provided space which is now used as elderly people's club. The municipality has opened another club for elderly people, in the place Bogomila. In the hospital for respiratory diseases 'Jasenovo' a geriatric unit is to open.

The municipality of Stip is the only municipality which has implemented concrete activities from the Local Action Plan for Social Inclusion and from the Local Action Plan for Children's Rights. In the municipality of Caska one activity from the Programme for Development of Education, Sports, Culture, Health and Social Protection for 2009-2013 has been realised so far.

In the municipality of Kicevo through the Work Programme for Social, Child and Health Protection for 2010, not adopted by the municipal Council, financial means are allocated for certain vulnerable categories. The municipality of Kicevo, for the users of social benefits, provides 4m³ of wood per family, quarterly. The municipality paid the expenses for the high school graduation party for the children with no parents etc.

Although the municipalities provide certain social services, there is a lack of sufficient programmes aimed at vulnerable and marginalised groups.

The municipalities, in general, submit proposals for certain projects; however, they do not use this opportunity fully, applying to international institutions, foundations and donors. Usually, the local self-government units apply for projects from the area of social inclusion, mostly when the central government has opened calls for such projects.

The municipality of Stip submitted a proposal for opening a daily centre for young people with mental or physical disability over 18 years old, to an open call by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The Municipality of Kicevo got involved in a project for inclusion of Roma children in preschool education, initiated again by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Furthermore, it has to be noted that many of the projects implemented in the area of education are financially supported by the Ministry of Education and Science (for example in the municipality of Prilep).

The following project activities were carried out by the municipalities:

With regards to housing, the municipality of Kicevo owns barracks to provide housing to persons facing social risks, which are donated by the Republic of Bulgaria. 17 families are living there. The municipality of Kicevo distributed assistance packs donated by the Macedonian emigration in Australia and the USA. A project for saving heating energy was implemented by USAID.

The municipality of Radovis, through the CARDS project, has strengthened the capacities of the relevant institutions to effectively implement, monitor and evaluate the objectives from the National Strategy for Employment 2010 and the National Action Plan for Employment for 2006-2008. To this aim, the municipality has prepared a Local Action Plan for Employment. Through the UN Development Programme, the project EMI 2 was implemented, developing voluntary work and employment of young, unemployed person with completed higher education. Furthermore, the municipality has implemented a project for energy efficiency. With this project the doors and the windows in three kindergartens were replaced in order to save energy and better illuminate the space. Part of the funding from this project was used to replace the lights on the boulevard in Radovis, so it became energy efficient.

The municipality of Stip through the UNICEF programme for early child development, organised visits to groups of pre-school children and children from the rural areas where there were no pre-school education facilities. To this aim, the municipality has organised the transport, and also, in cooperation with the universities, has engaged professors and students to work with these children. The project for building elderly people's home is worth noting. For this project, the municipality of Stip conducted a research in 5 towns in the area around the municipality (Radovis, Sveti Nikole, Probistip, Karbinci and Vinica). 800 citizens were surveyed, of which 500 stated that they would be willing to move in an elderly people's home once it was completed. The municipality intends to build the home using the model of public-private partnership. Furthermore, in August 2010, a project for opening units for children with special needs in the pre-school education facilities was prepared and sent to potential donors.

The municipality of Prilep in cooperation with the Italian non-governmental organisation INTERSOS, and with COSVI, has realised and supported the project for opening Multicultural Centre in the area Trizla (where the dominant population are Roma) in order to improve the quality of life of Roma and to improve the relationships between the various communities in Prilep.

3.1.6. Improving the state of socially endangered persons

The Law on Social Protection¹⁷, in relation with the right to social financial assistance, provides that **every local self-government unit could hire seasonal workers, users of social benefits, to carry out community service.**

Thus, in all of the six identified municipalities, social beneficiaries were contracted to carry out community services. These types of activities in all of the municipalities were carried out in 2009, in accordance with the government's programme for community services.

The municipality of Saraj has contracted persons from families with several children and social benefit users to carry out community service. These persons were paid 100denars for food costs, and 100 denars for travel expenses, without additional payment. The National Employment Agency, with the programme for the unemployed, has involved 100 persons from the territory of the municipality of Saraj to carry out community service for 6.000 denars a month. These people were engaged for 5-6 months, from September 2009 to January 2010.

The municipality of Kicevo, so far, has contracted 30 persons through the Unit for Community Service, to carry out such tasks. These people were engaged through the active employment measures of the government and also, through UNDP programmes. The municipality allocated 8500denars per person per month for carrying out community service. The contracts lasted for 5 months.

In the municipality of Caska, in 2009, through the government project i.e. the active employment measures, 38 unemployed people from 9 towns/villages were engaged to do community service for a period of 6 months.

In the municipality of Radovis long-term unemployed and persons using social benefits were paid 6.000denars, travel and food expense and insurance against accidents for a period of 6 months. The number of persons carrying community service was 45 in 2008, while in 2009 it doubled, and it was 100.

In the municipality of Radovis, in addition to contracting people to carry out seasonal works of public interest, other activities were implemented and supported by various institutions; and they are as follows.

At the territory of the municipality of Radovis, 8 unemployed persons were hired to carry out building and construction works. They received 5100 denars for the job, and 3.200 denars for personal tax, travel and food expenses for a period of 6 months.

With the active measure for training for new qualifications and advice, contacts with employers were established, training in IT skills was delivered to unemployed persons

¹⁷ Article 55, Law on Social Protection, Official Gazette of RM, No 79/2009

with an obligation for the employer to hire the persons completing the training successfully. The assistance provided was 2000denars per person for the employer, and 4000 denars were paid the person trained for a period of 3 months. The Employment Centre in Radovis carried out training in IT skills and English language on regular bases.

The municipality of Stip, through the government's programme for community service, engaged 50 persons, social benefits users, to do community service. This was in 2009. The municipality participated with 2.298.920denars in the total amount of 4.578.920denars. In addition, the municipality of Stip organised English language courses, thus 1500 persons from Stip received certificates for completed language courses.

The municipality of Prilep through the programme for community service, engaged 328 persons for seasonal work. These people received 6.300denars for performing community service. These contracts lasted for 6 months and the activity took place in 2009.

In all of the municipalities, the above-mentioned activities were carried out in 2009, with the exception of the municipality of Radovis, that carried out such activities in 2008 as well.

On one hand, **all of the municipalities lack strategic plan to improve the conditions of the poor and vulnerable groups.** On the other hand, there is lack of active cooperation between the business sector for initiating donor activities for improving the state of the vulnerable and marginalised groups. There is a lack of continuum to contract workers to carry out community service. The aforementioned measures are not continuous and are dependent on government funding.

3.1.7. Capital investments and infrastructure in the area of social protection and inclusion

All of the identified municipalities have entered into the second stage of the process of decentralisation. The municipality of Radovis was the first of the municipalities to enter the second stage of the decentralisation; this was in 2005. The municipalities of Saraj, Stip and Prilep entered the second stage of the decentralisation in 2007. The municipality of Caska entered the second stage in 2009, while Kicevo in 2010. The municipalities have become owners of the buildings received in the process of decentralisation, or to the ones that they have built, and it is their responsibility to finance them, to invest in them and to maintain them.¹⁸

To this aim, all of the identified municipalities have contributed to building of infrastructure, mostly in pre-school facilities, in primary and secondary schools.

The municipality of Saraj has built 6 additional classrooms, and in addition to this, it has contributed with 50% of the municipal budget for building a bridge; the rest, 50% were provided by the residents of the municipality.

The municipality of Kicevo has built additional access for special needs people in the local kindergarten.

¹⁸ Article 22 of the Law on Local Self Government, Official Gazette of RM, No 5/2002

In the municipality of Caska , as rural municipality, daily centres for the elderly were opened in Caska and Bogomila.

The municipality of Radovis in the period of 2005 to 2010 has invested 4.500.000 to 5.000.000denars from the municipal budget into the infrastructure of the pre-school education facility. In addition, it has invested in a primary school to improve the atmospheric sewage system and it has repaired the roof in a secondary school.

The municipality of Stip started building a new playground area in the area 'Senjak' and has started building two classrooms in the regional units of the kindergarten. Finally, it made final preparations to complete the building of 6 classrooms and a gym in a primary school.

The municipality of Prilep has invested mostly in the schools for primary and secondary education, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science and through a project for improving the infrastructure supported by an Italian NGO. The municipality has renovated three primary and two secondary schools. In one of the primary schools, in the area Trizla, where most of the students are Roma, the municipality invested in repairing the floors, the walls and the ceilings. This improved the learning conditions and the integration between the two ethnic groups. With regards to capital investments, the municipality of Prilep in 2008 invested 600.000denars from the municipal budget to build children's fun park. The overall amount of the investments is EUR3.000.000.

In four of the six identified municipalities there are daily centres for special needs persons, with the exception of the municipalities of Saraj and Caska. It has to be noted that the municipality of Caska has already submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for opening such centre.

The municipality of Kicevo is the only municipality which has no old people's home.

In four of the six municipalities, there are daily centres for the elderly, with the exception of the municipalities Prilep and Saraj.

Stip is the only municipality which has a special unit for autistic children. In addition, Stip is the only municipality which has a centre for substance/drug users where they have weekly counselling with a psychologist.

The municipality of Saraj is the only municipality that has no daily centre for people with special needs, elderly people's home or a daily centre for the elderly.

In Caska and Saraj there are no pre-school facilities.

All of the municipalities have no programmes or centres for early child development. So far, Stip is the only municipality which has implemented such programmes in the kindergartens.

3.2. Social Work Centres

3.2.1. Identifying poor and vulnerable groups

In the municipalities where the research was conducted, the following vulnerable groups were identified by the social work centres: old people, women, special needs persons, Roma, minorities and substance/drug users. In all of the municipalities the persons with different sexual orientation were not taken into consideration. Persons facing social risks are not sufficiently protected with the laws whose basic function should be preventing and overcoming social risks in the municipalities. Furthermore, the persons requesting financial assistance cannot exercise their guaranteed rights because of the conditions defined in the laws.

Elderly and weak persons, as clients of the social work centres, apply for assistance when they are exposed to social risks related to their age or health conditions. They cannot meet some of the conditions laid down with the Law on Social Protection and Law on Family, therefore cannot exercise their guaranteed social protection rights (see bullet 2.2 of this Report). The social financial assistance for the elderly is insufficient to meet their basic existential needs.

Women fall into vulnerable category if they are: victims of domestic violence, single mothers or social benefit users. The victims of domestic violence do not report the violence and stay with the violent person as they have no financial independence or housing options. With regards to using benefits, women are faced with variety of problems. Thus, the financial assistance received as a social benefit is insufficient to meet their basic needs. Women who are in divorce proceedings face great problems when applying for social benefits. These women are not entitled to any financial assistance until the proceedings are completed and the decision for divorce is in force. In addition, it is a common knowledge that divorce proceedings last from few months to over a year, thus their possibility for using benefits is delayed. When the divorce proceedings are completed, women who are unemployed can apply to the National Employment Agency for health insurance by submitting the court decision. If we take into consideration that the children usually live with the mother, they are deprived of their right to receive social benefits. It is also important to mention that the husband is the one who is the main beneficiary of the health insurance in a married couple (in both cases, when the insurance is received on the basis of an employment or unemployment). In both cases, the family members use health insurance through the main beneficiary i.e. the husband/the father.

Children fall into a vulnerable group in the following circumstances: children in divorce proceedings and in proceedings for permission to see parents who they do not live with; as secondary victims of domestic violence; abused children; abandoned children; delinquents; children with no parents or parental care; children users of child benefits and special child benefits. The amount of child benefits and special child benefits is insufficient to meet children's basic needs.

Disabled people are vulnerable category in all of the municipalities. According to the Law on Social Protection they are entitled to social benefits. The amount they receive is insufficient to cover their basic needs.

Roma people as vulnerable category are present in all of the municipalities, except for the municipality of Caska. Traditional teenage extra-marital communities, poverty, juvenile delinquency and early school leavers are still widely present among this ethnic group. A great proportion of Roma are social benefit users.

Minorities as vulnerable category are present in all of the municipalities. In different municipality, different ethnic group is predominant. One of the greatest difficulty they face is obtaining a citizenship. As a vulnerable category they are also users of social financial assistance.

Substance (drug) users are recognised as a special vulnerable group, both, at national and local level. The result from the endeavours of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is that some local social work centres have established counselling service and daily centres for these people. The only counselling office for this particular category at the moment is at the territory of the city of Skopje. The mandate of the counselling office is to provide variety of services: assisting users when communicating with other institutions; provide counselling service; providing psycho-social assistance and treatment; helping them contact citizens' organisations that specialise in this area and offer free legal aid and other type of assistance. In other towns i.e. municipalities, there are daily centres that provide focused and specialised activities for this particular category of people. From the municipalities involved in this research, in the municipality of Stip only there is such daily centre. It should be noted that the methodology and the activities in these centres differ. Namely, in some places these centres are managed by the social work centres, while in some areas they are managed in cooperation with the health institutions, which is a more inclusive approach when working with this particular category.

Persons with different sexual orientation, in comparison with the substance users, are not recognised by the society as a vulnerable group and do not receive special treatment in our country. This is applicable to local and national level as well. In this sense, as long as there is no understanding for the needs of this group, there will be no institutional response for providing appropriate protection and meeting their needs.

On the basis of the factual state in the social work centres, it has been established that the centres have no mechanisms for identifying poor and vulnerable groups. Social work centres (hereinafter: SWC) identify poor and vulnerable groups individually, i.e. through direct communication with the clients when they approach the centre and submit an application. All of the centres indicated that there was lack of expert staff, field vehicles and appropriate working conditions, thus there was no possibility to identify poor and vulnerable groups.

3.2.2. Services and access to services of the social work centres

The centres for social work as public institutions for social protection have competences to perform activities from the area of social protection, and they work in accordance with the laws and their mandate.

SWC usually serve more than two municipalities and most often are located in the largest municipality. There are no branch offices of the SWC in the small and rural municipalities. The lack of regional units in the rural areas is a problem, as citizens need to travel to the nearest SWC. This puts additional pressure on their already aggravated financial state.

We observed various obstacles that citizens face when exercising their social protection rights. These are structural weaknesses and are present in all of the municipalities from our research. Following this, we list the obstacles the poor and vulnerable groups face; they apply to all of the municipalities so that repetition in the text is avoided.

The Law on Social Protection lays down the conditions for receiving financial assistance, and one of them is the upper limit of the household income. This is the reason why many interested applicants cannot exercise their social protection rights. For instance, according to the Law on Social Protection, in order for an elderly or a sick person to receive permanent financial assistance, the income of the members of his/her family cannot exceed 4.000denars. If this amount is exceeded for 1denar only, the applicant will not be able to receive financial assistance. Additionally, the applicants for permanent financial assistance on the basis of age or sickness could not exceed the limit of 5 years employment. If the person was employed for a period of 6 to 14 years, he/she cannot receive this type of assistance.

Furthermore, **when different generations of families live in one household they have a problem when they apply for financial assistance.** Thus, instead of taking into consideration the real need for financial assistance of the applicant's family members, the income of a member of the extended family is used as a criterion for approving financial assistance. There is another obstacle for receiving financial assistance and that is the assumed support by the extended family members. Thus, the applicants are interviewed and asked questions with regards to the possibility of the family members to provide financial assistance, however having no consideration for their mutual relationships (for ex: the family relationships are damaged). In cases when the family members do not provide assistance, proceedings are initiated by the social work centre. In such cases, the application for financial assistance is immediately withdrawn in order to avoid criminal liability of the family members.

In addition, there are **obstacles with regards to the right of using child benefits.** Namely, a condition to receive child benefits is that one or both of the parents need to be employed. With this, the parents who are not employed i.e. the users of financial assistance are deprived of their right to child benefits. The same is valid for the parents who are employed, but receive income higher than the one laid down in the regulations. In addition, child benefit according to the Law on Child Protection can be a maximum of 2.415denars (EUR40) regardless of the number of children in the family. One-time assistance by some SWC is not provided, or it is limited because of the lack of resources by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (hereinafter MLSP).

On the other hand, the assistance received from all types of social protection and the Law on Child Protection is insufficient to cover the basic needs of the users of this type of assistance. Therefore, users of financial assistance still face social risks although they are protected with the laws on social and child protection. This especially refers to the

social financial assistance, which is not fixed and the amount decreases after period of time. Consequently, there is a need to calculate the financial assistance for each case individually, i.e. to be calculated according to the needs and the living expenses of the applicant (the monthly average cost¹⁹ in the country does not include the costs for clothing, utilities and other needs of one family, so it is not a relevant criterion when determining the amount of the financial assistance).

In addition to this, the financial state of the users of any type of financial assistance is aggravated further by the documents required. Obtaining certain documents requires paying for them. Additional problem is the procedure for obtaining ID cards. The procedure for receiving an ID card by the Ministry of Interior lasts certain period of time. The applicants cannot submit an application to the SWC without an ID card.

The research carried out in SWC indicated that from the total number of users of any type of financial assistance, the highest number are users of social financial assistance. This group of citizens have working capacity i.e. are able to work, but they face social risks because they are unemployed. SWC representatives said they spent most of their time in dealing with the administrative procedures and that is the reason why they could not devote more time to the professional part of their responsibilities. In order to satisfy the needs of the citizens appropriately the administrative procedure needs to become simpler; i.e. they consider that the Employment Agency needs to provide the service for financial assistance, as it used to be previously. In this way, the clients will not have to report their status for being unemployed twice (once in SWC and once in the Employment Agency).

The users of social and permanent financial assistance receive additional assistance by SWC. This year, in 2010, they were given electricity vouchers of 600denars a month. There are also 'public kitchens' opened by SWC. They offer one hot meal a day, however the number of meals is limited and is not sufficient for all the users. This type of assistance is aimed at the families facing greatest risks. SWC Veles has 'public kitchen' which serves the users from the rural areas. In some SWC, due to the limited number of meals, only the main beneficiary has a meal provided, but not the rest of the family (the co-beneficiaries of financial assistance). In some SWC in order to make this service available to all the users, it has a limited duration- one year per beneficiary. The following year, other beneficiaries will use this service. The main reason for the limitation of this service is the insufficient funding provided by the MLSP.

Other types of assistance are the discount cards for buying food products in particular supermarkets. These cards are only provided by SWC Skopje and the service was introduced last year (2009). In the other municipalities, covered with this research, there is no such service.

All the types of additional assistance are laid down in the Work Programme of the Government, but it is still unclear if they will become regular practise and support provided by SWC. In fact, the need to introduce this type of assistance reflects the level of poverty in the country and that the assistance provided is for 'bare existence'.

The number of daily centres differs in the municipalities covered with this research. In all of the municipalities there is a need for opening daily centres with larger capacities than

¹⁹ Calculated nationally, by the State Statistical Office

the current ones, which will accommodate the needs of greater number of citizens. For instance, in Prilep there was an initiative to open shelter for victims of domestic violence and a daily centre for substance users, however, due to the lack of funds from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the local government such centres are still not opened. It is important to mention that these centres need to be adjusted to the needs of the beneficiaries. Such examples are the daily centres for elderly people in the municipalities Caska and Bogomila. The service offered at the moment is a daily club where the elderly could socialise, and wash their clothes- for the ones in need of that. Also, warm meals are provided for some of the elderly. SWC have positive experience from the work of the daily centres so far.

SWC noted that in addition to daily centres, there is a need for opening shelters for: women victims of domestic violence, elderly people, homeless people and street children. With regards to the counselling offices/units, there is one counselling unit in one SWC, while the other SWC do not offer service.

Through the active employment measures, some of the women victims of domestic violence have been employed. This service was provided with the support of MLSP, the Employment Agency and the business sector. However, this active employment measure was judged to be discriminatory because of the conditions set. Namely, if a woman who was employed decided to leave the job prematurely, the Agency had the right not to register her as an unemployed person i.e. deprived her of the right to use health insurance for three years.

None of the municipalities have comprehensive and long-term programmes developed by MLSP in cooperation with the Employment Agency and the business sector for employment of poor and vulnerable groups.

All the social work centres lack technical and professional staff, as well as appropriate technical equipment, offices, vehicles and IT equipment which will allow suitable conditions work to with all categories of citizens. In the social work centres there are no waiting rooms. Very often, two applicants for social assistance are in the same office at the same time, thus their privacy is invaded. Not all of the centres have branch offices/units in the rural areas. Professional development of SWC staff is needed. It is noted that in one SWC there are no finances provided by the MLSP for hiring a cleaner, and there are no hygienic means for the staff and the clients. The employees of the SWC are not paid for overtime hours, so they have no appropriate conditions to develop a group therapy programme. All SWC have the need of private security and weapons detector. Some of the representatives from the SWC pointed out the need for establishing a unit for registering the applications for social financial assistance. In all of the SWC there is a need for triage service and special unit for social prevention. The expert staff from the units of social prevention will carry out field work and establish cooperation with the public and private entities. SWC emphasised the need for social prevention in the schools.

A programme is under way for creating a network between all the social work centres and the state institutions, so that processing the applications for any type of social protection and completing the documentation would be easier. This programme would decrease the administrative workload of the social workers. The SWC representatives

pointed out that they were not satisfied with the programmes introduced so far, as the system of administration was still very old fashioned. They mentioned that considerable amount of their time was spent performing administrative tasks, instead of professional and expert work with the clients.

3.2.3. Prevention and support of poor and vulnerable groups

According to the Law on Social Protection, social work centres should provide social prevention. The current state indicates that this is not the case. According to the reports from SWC representatives, there are inappropriate work conditions for social prevention, huge administrative workload, lack of expert staff and no vehicles. The social workers suggested that social prevention should be carried out by a separate organisational unit. Thus, expert staff could carry out social prevention through field work. There is a need for social prevention in schools, and it was suggested that a social worker should be employed in schools and companies with over 300 employees. There is a need to create conditions for social prevention in all the spheres of social life.

All of the SWC have no mechanisms and procedures for prevention and assistance for poor and vulnerable groups. A programme that will contain instruments for offering assistance and support to poor and vulnerable groups is needed.

There are no special programmes and approach developed by the social work centres for informing and identifying poor and vulnerable groups. SWC inform the citizens for changes in the legislation through brochures, electronic and printed media or in direct communication with the clients. Some of the social work centres have had one or two workshops per year in order to inform citizens on certain issues.

3.2.4. Consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups

Social work centres have no mechanisms to identify poor and vulnerable groups, neither have systems for consultations with them. The consultations are performed in the SWC premises individually and when they go out on field. Thus, the consultations are done on individual bases, without establishing the needs of the whole group/category of users and finding ways to provide help and assistance to the whole group.

3.2.5. Cooperation of social work centres with the local self-government

Assistance and support of poor and vulnerable groups is provided by the social work centres, as main bodies for providing social protection, in cooperation with other institutions and organisations that have competencies in the area of social protection. It was of our interest to find out what was the cooperation between the SWC and the units of local self-government (hereinafter: ULSG), the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, citizens' associations and the business sector.

The cooperation of the SWC with the units of local self-government from the territory that it covers i.e. the citizens it serves, is judged as insufficient. There are different experiences from the cooperation between SWC and ULSG.

The units of local self-government receive the numbers of registered beneficiaries by SWC. The only form of concrete cooperation between these two entities in the six municipalities are the temporary contracts offered to users of social benefits (for a period of five days to six months). The contracts are for community service on behalf of ULSG. This work placement is limited to a period of six months and for that period the social financial assistance by SWC is on hold. When the contracts terminate the financial assistance recommences again. A small number of the beneficiaries have used this service.

Another example of cooperation is with SWC Skopje that has a member in the local government councils; when such councils are functioning. SWC Stip and ULSG have established a coordinative body for improving the conditions for the clients they serve. In SWC Kicevo the cooperation with LSGU is through participation of SWC into the final annual sessions of the municipality when the centre informs the municipality of the programme activities carried out in the past year. SWC Veles is supported by the municipality with a donation of school equipment for children without parents or parental care. This year, for the first time, the municipality has allocated finances for the victims of domestic violence.

There is no cooperation of SWC with the local government in the rural areas.

Social work centres estimate the cooperation with the competent ministry, i.e. the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, as satisfactory and constant. The only problem is the lack of financial resources to meet the needs of the socially endangered persons; thus SWC cannot respond fully to their duties. The economic and the political situation in the country and the high level of poverty, over 30%, increase the number of citizens facing social risks. Thus, the need to help and support the citizens is great and various (depending on the social risk). Therefore, we judge the statements for the cooperation with MLSP as unrealistic.

There is satisfactory cooperation between social work centres and the Employment Agency when it comes to sharing information; however for the ongoing projects for employment of social benefit users (the active employment measures) there is no information sharing. According to the representative from SWC Skopje, it is the Ministry that has the information. Not all Employment Agencies in the municipalities offer employment to the users of social benefits.

The centres for social work have no policy or strategy developed for cooperation with citizens' organisations. However, in some cases cooperation was established. Our findings indicate that cooperation happens only when it is initiated and financed by the citizens' organisations. The areas of cooperation were: improving the conditions for Roma population, human trafficking, persons with cerebral paralysis, special needs person, women-victims of family violence. SWC judge the cooperation with the citizens' organisations as a positive experience.

Not all of the SWC have established cooperation with the business sector. In certain municipalities the business sector donated finances for opening daily centres. The only example of continuous cooperation is in the municipality of Skopje, where Tinex supermarkets offer employment to children without parents or parental care.

An example mentioned by all the SWC is the employment of disabled people by some companies; this is not on continuous basis. SRW Radovis has no cooperation with the business sector.

3.3. Focus Groups Findings

3.3.1. Old people

The proportion of the elderly is considerable in all of the municipalities. They live in very unfavourable conditions due to the low pensions that do not meet their basic needs. In all the municipalities the unemployment rate is very high, thus many generations live in one household, and the pension is the only source of income for the whole family. There are cases where the finances of the elderly are used by their close family members; but despite this, they are not taken care of. In certain cases, the elderly are victims of domestic violence. Another problem is the lack of capacity in the old people's homes. On one hand, the places in the homes are limited, and on the other, the elderly cannot pay for this service. Their close family members are also not able to pay for this service.

In the old people's homes, the living conditions are good.

The elderly need to use tertiary medical care. The conditions in the health clinics are below the acceptable standards: the hygiene is not satisfactory, the equipment is old, the medical tools are old or insufficient, the beds and covers are also in a very bad shape. The premises have not been renovated since they were opened. In certain municipalities there are no medical institutions offering primary health care. This additionally aggravates the health conditions of the elderly and they have to pay additional expenses to receive health care in other municipalities or towns. Often, they pay for the medicines and the services fully. Sometimes there is lack of medicines, and although they are on the positive list²⁰ of the Health Insurance Fund, the elderly need to pay their full price. Old people also pay for the medicines that are not on the positive list. There are cases when the ambulance is late, or does not respond appropriately. The elderly need physiotherapy, but cannot afford such service. Special programmes for health protection of old and weak persons should be developed. Furthermore, the elderly need to be released from paying contributions for health services and medicines.

The procedure for receiving social protection is long. In order for them to receive assistance and care by third party, their health conditions and the diagnoses are taken into consideration. However, as they are unable to provide the necessary documents and meet the conditions for receiving financial social assistance, the old people are deprived of their rights to social protection.

3.3.2. Women

Women are specific vulnerable category, especially when they are victims of domestic violence and bullying at work, or unemployed women who face great social risks. The living conditions of women are fairly satisfactory. The women are, in most cases,

²⁰ Positive list- medicines paid for by the Health Insurance Fund

employed in the textile industry and the business sector, while in the administration and other public institutions the employment is according to political affiliation. Women over 35 years of age are discriminated against at the labour market because of their age. Furthermore, an employment condition is the family status i.e. women cannot plan extending their families when employed; if they do, they could be fired.

Textile factories do not respect the Law on Working Relations i.e. women working there have no social or health insurance covered, or fixed working hours. The employees in these factories are not paid for overtime work, and the wages are minimal. They are used as cheap labour, and often, are victims at bullying at work by their employers. They do not report the bullying, as they cannot find another employment, and their minimal wages are the only income.

The awareness among women for health protection is satisfactory. They are aware about the health protection rights, but due to their bad financial state they do not regularly use health services. The PAP measures ²¹promoted by the government are insufficient to provide quality services for women. Women in really bad health condition are entitled to one-off financial assistance by SWC, but sometimes they do not receive it.

Women-victims of domestic violence are not satisfied with the treatment by SWC and the Ministry of Interior (hereinafter: MoI). MoI registers such cases as complaints, while SWC as disturbed marriage relations. Psychological violence is not sanctioned by the above-mentioned institutions. The shelter centre is not a real solution to the problem, as it is a temporary shelter. The Ministry needs to react, sanction the violent person and remove him from the household. Women- victims of domestic violence are not financially independent or have own housing, and that is one of the reasons the violence is not reported to the institutions. These women are not entitled to council housing (social flats).

3.3.3. Children

Poverty is the greatest reason why children fall into a vulnerable category and why they start using drugs, alcohol, or display other anti-social behaviours. It was noted that some children are forced by their parents to beg. The money they receive from begging is given to the parents. There are cases when the father uses the money to buy alcohol, and the children are still not fed or dressed. The number of children-beggars is on the rise, and what is noticeable is that many special needs children are used for this type of forced child labour. Other example is when children perform physical work with their parents so the family could earn money to buy food. This research noted that negative social trends, such as paedophilia, juvenile delinquency, child trafficking or juvenile prostitution are on the rise due to poverty. Because of the traditional values of the society, these incidents are rarely reported to the competent institutions.

Lots of municipalities lack sports and recreation facilities for pre-school and school children. As a result there is lack of socialisation through group and social activities. SWC takes care for the children with no parents or parental care. After they leave the institution, some SWC initiate cooperation with the Employment Agency, and the local government in order to seek employment for this category of children. A great problem is providing flats/housing for these children.

²¹ PAP measures- Smear test for prevention of cervix cancer

Children are discriminated against when they are not able to use child benefits. The conditions for receiving child benefits are related to the incomes of the family members and the employment to one of the family members. The children whose parents are unemployed have no right to child benefits. Namely, when children are co-beneficiaries of social benefits, they are not entitled to child benefits. Furthermore, the amount of the child benefits and the special child benefit is minimal, thus it does not meet children's basic needs. Every child should be entitled to child benefit, and enjoy this right since the day of his/her birth. The amount should be calculated according to individual needs.

With reference to special needs children, it should be noted that there are appropriate learning conditions in the specialised schools.

Girls from Albanian and Roma ethnicity are not allowed by their parents to attend schools. Poverty and traditional family values are given as a reason for this.

There are no satisfactory learning conditions for the children in primary and secondary schools. For instance, in some schools there is no heating in winter months, there are old chairs and desks which cause scoliosis, bad hygiene especially in the toilets, where no disinfectants are used, lack of school equipment, old buildings etc.

In the municipality of Saraj, children of Macedonian ethnicity have no appropriate learning conditions. Overall, in the educational process, the focus is on education only, not on upbringing. Children are faced with variety of social risks. Social prevention and education are needed in the schools and social workers should be employed in schools.

3.3.4. People with special needs

Special needs persons are not accepted by the community and there are no conditions for their socialization in the municipalities where the research was conducted. To this aim, establishing daily centres for special needs persons is essential. With reference to their employment, the businesses abuse their position i.e. they do not provide appropriate work conditions for special needs people, neither appropriate payment. Furthermore, their insurance is not regulated fully.

The rights from the area of social protection, to which these people are entitled, are not fully exercised. Their rights are limited by the conditions laid down with the Law on Social Protection. The financial assistance is minimal and it does not meet their basic needs. The amount of financial assistance should be calculated on individual basis and according to the needs. Special needs persons are not exempt from paying for health services and medicines.

3.3.5. Roma

Roma are the most vulnerable category and are present in all the municipalities, except for the municipality of Caska. Most of them live in improvised housing. Most of the Roma children are not vaccinated, neither have been registered by the competent institutions. It has been noted that most often the girls are not registered, while the number of boys entered into the Birth Registry is higher. According to Roma traditions, there are extra-marital underage unions (underage marriages). The usual age of getting 'married' is between 12 and 15. The lack of education is additional problem for this community. Roma who are educated, are employed, and their financial state is good, in comparison

with the Roma who are illiterate. The lack of education is the major obstacle for them to be employed, and to become aware about the rights they are entitled to.

It is a recent trend, that Roma living in the municipality of Radovis, declare themselves as of Turkish ethnicity as donations from Turkish organisations are expected. They consider that if they declare themselves as Turks, they will benefit from the donations.

3.3.6. Minorities

In all of the municipalities there are different minority groups: Roma, Vlachs, Turks, Bonjaks, Serbs, Croatians and others. The unemployment is their biggest problem. Another problem they face is the procedure for obtaining citizenship. A considerable number of them are illiterate, so cannot inform themselves on how to obtain citizenship and enjoy the rights they are entitled to according to the laws. The Juruks community, living in the mountainous regions in the municipalities of Stip and Radovis, were mentioned as a marginalised group.

4. Areas of Concern

4.1. Units of Local Self-Government

4.1.1. Institutional mechanisms for social protection

- In five of the six designated municipalities, there is no person working exclusively on social protection issues;
- The units for public service in the municipalities, have inadequate resources to meet the needs for health and social protection, child protection and protection of vulnerable groups;
- There is no standing commission on the social protection within the Council of the municipality of Saraj, and no Work Programme of the Council for 2010.

4.1.2. Programmes and action plans from the area of social protection, including development programmes for specific citizens' needs

- There are no work programmes of the standing commissions for social protection of the municipal councils;
- In one municipality, a social protection programme and an action plan was never adopted (municipality of Saraj);
- There is lack of inter-sectoral communication for creating plans and proposals for social protection and inclusion(Saraj);
- There are no programmes adopted and action plans for social protection in some of the selected municipalities (Radovis and Prilep);
- There are no action plans prepared for the programmes adopted (in Kicevo and Caska);
- There are no development programmes for the specific citizens' needs prepared by the municipalities;
- There is no detailed budget for the realisation of the activities from the action plans (Stip, Prilep and Caska);
- There is no appropriate timeframe for realisation of the activities from the local action programmes/plans (Prilep, Stip and Caska);
- With regards to the monitoring and evaluation of the local action plans, there is no continuity (some of the members of the coordinative body for monitoring the

- action plans are members of the municipal council, so after their mandate expires, they do not participate in the coordinative body). The progress of the implementation becomes a responsibility of the civil servants, thus the coordinative body has no active role (Stip and Prilep).

4.1.3. Consultation mechanisms and participation of poor and vulnerable groups, and cooperation between relevant institutions from the social protection area and citizens' organisations

- There is no developed mechanism for consultation or participation of poor and vulnerable groups. The communication for the citizens' problems is carried out only upon request by the citizens or in consultations with the presidents of the local/urban communities;
- There is no database for social protection issues, for instance, no data on target groups, by categories of beneficiaries etc;
- There is a lack of cooperation between the municipalities, the civil sector and the social work centres, except in cases when, representatives from the civil sector and the centres participate in the preparation of action plans, in projects proposals and when the municipalities receive data by SWC;
- There is insufficient cooperation between the municipalities and the social work centres, the pre-school institutions, the schools, health institutions and other bodies, the legal and natural person and the citizens' organisations with regards to social prevention.

4.1.4. Mechanisms for identification of poor and vulnerable groups

- There is no formal mechanism for identification of poor and vulnerable groups which will be used regularly, except when local action plans are prepared. Often, the plans do not include mapped target groups present in the municipality;
- There is lack of cooperative activities for social prevention between the citizens' organisations and the social work centres;
- There is no multi-sectoral approach for establishing joint social prevention of the municipalities with the social work centres, the pre-school institutions, the schools, health institutions and other bodies, the legal and natural person and the citizens' organisations.

4.1.5. Provision of social services by the units of local self-government and implemented projects/programme activities from the area of social protection and inclusion

- The municipalities lack pre-school units for children with special needs;
- There is lack of initiative by the municipalities to provide social services to the vulnerable and marginalised groups, especially to the residents of the rural areas;
- No strong initiative from the municipalities to approach international donors for projects from the area of social protection and inclusion;

- The municipalities mostly apply to calls for projects by the central government, and less to external calls for projects.

4.1.6. Improving the state of socially endangered persons

- There is no strategic plan how to improve the conditions of the socially endangered persons in the municipalities. The measures so far were short-term actions with no long-lasting effects;
- There is no proactive cooperation of the municipality with the business sector, or annual initiatives by the municipalities for collecting finances to improve the living conditions of poor and vulnerable groups;
- There is lack of continuous activity of the municipalities for contracting workers to carry out community services. This measure depends on the finances from the central government and it is not continuous.

4.1.7. Capital investments and infrastructure with regards to social protection

- All of the municipalities lack planned investments in infrastructure with regards to social protection. In general, the municipalities make capital investments in the pre-school institutions, the primary and secondary schools;
- There are no finances for building old people's homes and institutions for early child development²²;
- There are no kindergartens in the rural areas.

²² The Law on Child Protection defines early child development as pre-school education which includes measures for child's care, measures and activities to promote the health and foster intellectual, emotional, physical and social development. The education, care and upbringing takes place in the kindergartens, and where there are no kindergartens, there should be other extra-institutional forms (Law on Child Protection, Official Gazette of RM, No 98/2000). In the future, besides the forms of whole-day provision in the kindergartens, there should be other forms responding to the needs and interest of the local community. From the document by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy *Standards for early-child development for children 0-6 years of age*, pg 2. So far, the municipality of Stip is the only one that has implemented such activities, for education of pre-school children in small groups similar to kindergartens. In this case, the children had the opportunity to socialise, and acquire knowledge and skills useful for their further education.

4.2. Social Work Centres

4.2.1. Identification of poor and vulnerable groups

- SWC have no mechanisms to identify poor and vulnerable groups, thus their findings on poor and vulnerable groups do not necessarily give the real picture ;
- At local level, the needs of particularly vulnerable groups are not recognised, with special reference to drug users and persons with different sexual orientation.

4.2.2. Services and access to SWC services

- SWC do not have counselling role due to the great administrative workload related to the procedure for approving assistance;
- The systemic weaknesses, i.e. the conditions determined by law, prevent poor and vulnerable groups to exercise certain rights and satisfy their real needs (the conditions for receiving financial assistance laid down in the law, i.e. the limit of income as a condition for receiving assistance; many generations living in one household have problems obtaining financial assistance and child benefits; limitation of the period spent working etc);
- The amount of the social financial assistance is insufficient to cover the basic needs of the beneficiary and his/her family. Furthermore, the assistance is received a month after it is requested.
- There is one-off assistance, however not regular, and currently, it is not provided in three of the municipalities;
- There are no mechanisms to alleviate the conditions for the users of all type of financial assistance, by simplifying the procedure for obtaining documents that the users have to pay for;
- Systemic measures and activities adjusted to the needs of the poor and vulnerable groups are not in place. Some of the measures underway (public kitchens, discount food cards, electricity vouchers) are project activities from the Work Programme of the government. Therefore, when the projects finish the activities might be terminated;
- The above mentioned project activities of the government (public kitchens, discount food cards) are not available to all users of social protection and do not cover the whole territory of the country;
- SWC lack professional and technical personnel, as well as, technical and IT equipment, offices, vehicles for field work, that will enable professional performance;

- SWC have no sufficient space to work with their clients;
- There are no regional SWC units in the rural areas, and some of them have one designated social worker who performs this duty;
- There are no specialised and specific services available for meeting the needs of socially endangered persons, such as daily centres, shelters for homeless people etc.

4.2.3. Prevention and support of poor and vulnerable groups

- None of the SWC carries out preventive activities.

4.2.4. Consultation and participation of vulnerable groups

- No consultation activities are carried out, neither assessment of the needs of the poor and vulnerable groups separately. Activities of this kind were sporadic and non-systematic.

4.2.5. Cooperation of social work centres with local self-government units and other institutions and organisations

- The cooperation of the SWC with the local self-government units is insufficient and irregular, especially in the rural areas. The cooperation so far, consisted of temporary contracts offered to social benefit users for performing community service;
- There are no measures for employing beneficiaries of SWC services. Certain initiatives i.e. the active employment measures were assessed as discriminatory and inaccessible to all;
- The cooperation between CSW and the Employment Agency is based only on exchange of data/lists of users of social benefit;
- There is no policy, neither strategy for cooperation with the civil sector;
- SWC do not cooperate with the business sector, except in cases when there are donations or individual companies that hire vulnerable groups of citizens.

4.3. Focus Groups Findings

4.3.1. Old and weak persons

- The minimal pensions are insufficient to cover the basic needs of this category;
- Old people's homes lack capacities to accommodate them;
- The elderly with minimal pensions cannot afford staying in old people's homes;
- There are no daily centres for elderly in all of the municipalities;
- No special health protection programmes for elderly people;
- No special services designed to meet the needs of elderly and weak people.

4.3.2. Women

- The state does not provide financial independence and housing for women – victims of violence;
- Psychological violence is not sanctioned appropriately by the relevant institutions;
- No suitable protection for women victims of bullying (mobbing);
- Women in divorce proceedings cannot enjoy the rights to social protection until the procedure is completed.

4.3.3. Children

- No kindergartens in some of the municipalities;
- No appropriate learning conditions in schools;
- Children are not fully exempt from paying for health services;
- No education programmes in place for raising awareness for special needs persons;
- No charity/solidarity fund for children;
- Some children are deprived of their right to child benefits, due to the conditions laid down in the Law on Child Protection;
- SWC do not provide appropriate protection to street children.

4.3.4. People with disabilities

- Special needs persons are not exempt from paying for health services and medicines;
- There are no daily centres for special needs persons in all of the municipalities (especially for persons over the age of 26);
- The conditions laid down with the Law on Social Protection do not offer protection to all the persons from this category;
- The amount of the social assistance is minimal, so it does not cover their basic needs;
- There are no sufficient controls on the businesses where these persons are employed.

4.3.5. Roma

- There are no special activities and measures for inclusion of Roma in the education system;
- No activities to register Roma with no ID documents in the Registry of Birth.

4.3.6. Minorities

- There are insufficient measures and activities for informing and assisting the persons from the minorities with no citizenship status.

5. Recommendations

5.1. Units of Local Self-Government

5.1.1. Institutional mechanisms for social protection

- The municipalities should have institutional structure of expert staff that will work on preparing actions, giving directions and would be the prime creator of local policies with regards to social inclusion;
- Professional development and training is needed for the municipal employees in the area of social inclusion and the human-rights based approach;
- A standing commission as part of the social protection Council of the municipality of Saraj should be created and regular work programmes of the municipal council should be adopted;
- The statute of the municipality of Saraj should be amended and include a provision for creating a Commission on social protection as a standing Council commission.

5.1.2. Programmes and action plans in the area of social protection, including development programmes for citizens' special needs

- The municipalities have to prepare social inclusion programmes as an instrument for integral, multi-sectoral and multi-coordinative planning for social development, involving institutional and extra-institutional stakeholders at local level;
- The municipalities need to create framework for monitoring and evaluation of the activities planned;
- The municipalities need to define and achieve development goals in all spheres of social development at local level (living conditions, working conditions, education conditions);
- They need to create framework for defining, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the activities related to social inclusion (short-term, mid-term and long-term framework);
- The municipalities need to prepare a detailed, and not an indicative budget for the implementation of the activities from the programmes and the action plan.

5.1.3. Mechanisms for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups and cooperation of relevant institutions with citizens' organisations

- The municipalities need to create database for social protection issues , for instance: data for the target groups, the users by category etc;
- The municipalities need to register the applications by the citizens and asses the needs accordingly. This should be a basis for planning activities related to social protection and inclusion;
- They need to develop formal mechanism for consultations with vulnerable groups, and in general, with all the citizens, as their needs constantly change;
- The municipalities need to identify the citizens' organisations which function locally and work in the area of social protection, and publish their contacts on the municipal website;
- They need to coordinate their activities with the activities of the citizens' organisations, plan and apply jointly for projects and be partners in their implementation;
- They need to increase the cooperation with the social work centres in initiating and implementing activities for reducing social risks;
- Special mechanisms need to be developed for including the citizens from rural areas and the children as a special category in their action plans and programmes.

5.1.4. Mechanisms for identification of poor and vulnerable groups

- The municipalities need to introduce formal mechanisms for identifying the needs of poor and vulnerable groups and to apply the mechanisms throughout the year;
- Activities for social prevention need to be incorporated in the action plans for social protection and inclusion, and cooperation with non-governmental organisations and the social work centres foreseen;
- Municipalities have to apply multi-sectoral approach for social prevention, in cooperation with the social work centres, schools, health institutions and other state or private bodies, or citizens' associations.

5.1.5. Provision of social services by the units of local self-government and project/programme activities from the area of social protection and inclusion

- Special services for social protection and inclusion should be introduced for the residents of the rural areas, especially for the young and the elderly and weak people (for instance, preparation of hot meals at certain places, providing means for personal hygiene from the local shops, provision of transport by the municipality to the health centres or other institutions twice a week etc);
- Pre-school units for children with special needs need to be established;
- The municipalities need to take active role in applying to calls for projects by other donors, not only to calls by the central government or the civil organisations;
- The municipalities need to organise annual donor conference with the business sector in order to collect finances for improving the state of the vulnerable and poor groups. The conference will be held once a year. In this way, proactive cooperation with the business sector will be established;
- The municipalities need to give an award for contribution to the society to a business entity or a person who has greatest contribution or an initiative for social inclusion.

5.1.6. Improving the state of the socially endangered persons

- The municipalities need to develop programmes for the specific needs of the vulnerable groups as a result of needs assessment. Thus, the services provided will have long-term effects in satisfying the needs of the citizens. The abovementioned development programmes will have to be financed jointly by the government, the non-governmental organisations or the business sector;
- The new concept will contribute to abandoning the concept of 'projectisation' of the public functions (one of them is the social protection) and a strategic plan for improvement of the state of the socially endangered persons will be prepared;
- The Law on Budget needs to be amended, so that a budget item on social protection is added; at the moment it is under the budget item- Current Reserves.

5.1.7. Capital investments and infrastructure with regards to social protection

- The municipalities need to be active in applying for investment projects, and to international institutions and organisations, in order to receive grants related to social inclusion;
- The municipalities need to apply public-partnership approach when planning, financing and implementing capital projects;
- The municipalities need to build pre-school facilities in rural areas;
- The municipalities need to invest in building old people's homes and centres for early child development.

5.2. Social Work Centres

5.2.1. Identification of poor and vulnerable groups

- SWC need to prepare programmes and develop mechanisms for identification of poor and vulnerable groups;
- SWC need to develop mechanisms to assess the needs of specific vulnerable groups, as drug users and persons with different sexual orientation.

5.2.2. Services and access to SWC services

- SWC need to provide continuous professional service to all categories of users;
- The Law on Social Protection needs to be changed in the part where conditions for financial assistance (social financial assistance, permanent assistance and child benefits) are defined, with reference to the limit of income as a condition for receiving assistance;
- The Law on Social Protection needs to be changed with regards to the amount of financial assistance provided and it should be calculated on individual bases, according to the applicant's needs;
- One-off financial support from the state should be provided;
- To accelerate the process of introducing inter-institutional network with the support of SWC, so the applicants could easily obtain the necessary documents;
- Regular and systemic monitoring of the conditions of the poor and vulnerable groups, and introduction of consultation processes adjusted to these particular categories;
- New programmes should be developed, as well as revision of the existing ones, to enable harmonisation of the changes with the needs of these groups;

- The ad hoc approach should be abandoned and temporary solution to the problems (for instance: the government programme for public kitchens, electricity vouchers etc);
- Employment of poor and vulnerable groups should be fostered, through intensive cooperation of SWC and the employment agencies;
- Providing spatial facilities for SWC clients'
- Regional branch units of SWC need to open, especially in the rural areas;
- Special social services or expanding the existing services is needed in all of the municipalities.

5.2.3. Social prevention and support of poor and vulnerable groups

- Social prevention needs to be done through separate SWC units established for that purpose.

5.2.4. Consultation and participation of vulnerable groups

- Programmes for consultation with vulnerable groups need to be prepared by SWC.

5.2.5. Cooperation with SWC and units of local self-government and other institutions and organisations

- The possibilities for cooperation between SWC, ULSC, citizens' organisations and the business sector need to be explored, especially from aspect of coordinating activities and building a unique system for protection of poor and vulnerable groups.

5.3. Recommendations regarding different vulnerable groups

5.3.1. Old people

- The amount of the pensions should increase following the increase of living costs and of utilities;
- The capacities of old people's homes need to be extended and the costs should decrease;
- The state should find a way of accommodating the elderly with low income into old people's homes;
- Daily centres should open in every municipality;
- Special programmes for health protection of old and weak persons are needed. Such service is essential for this particular group.

5.3.2. Women

- The state needs to provide financial independence and housing for women-victims of any type of violence, thus socialisation of these women will be enabled and the social risks will decrease;
- Social housing should be provided for women-victims of domestic violence as well as to other vulnerable categories of women;
- Measures to sanction psychological violence need to be introduced;
- The state should provide protection of women-victims of bullying (mobbing).

5.3.3. Children

- More kindergartens should open and the conditions in the schools should improve;
- Children should be exempt from paying for health services;
- Raising the awareness for acceptance of special needs children;
- Solidarity fund for children should be established;
- The right to use child benefits should be fully exercised, the amount of child benefits and special child benefit should increase according to individual needs;
- SWC should introduce special programmes for abused children and children victims of family violence;
- SWC should provide better protection to street children.

5.3.4. People with special needs

- The state should cover the costs for health services for people with special needs;
- The state should support opening daily centres for socialisation of these people in all of the municipalities (especially for person above the age of 26);
- The Law on Social Protection should be amended, so that people with with special needs will be entitled to social benefits on the bases of their condition and inability to work;
- Strengthened controls are needed in the companies where people are employed;
- The financial assistance should increase.

5.3.5. Roma

- Special activities and measures should be implemented for inclusion of Roma in the education process;
- Special activities and measures should be implemented to identify Roma with no ID documents, and register them in the Registry of Birth.

5.3.6. Minorities

- Special activities and measures should be implemented to inform them how to obtain citizenship status.

6. Social Inclusion in the Municipalities from Citizens' and Institutional Aspect

A) Municipality of Saraj

1. **Unit for local self-government** – the interview was conducted with Mr Jelaj Jakupi, Secretary of the municipality of Saraj.

1.1. Institutional mechanisms for social protection in the municipality of Saraj

In the municipality of Saraj there is a Unit on General and Administrative Affairs. There is no person employed by this unit, as a civil servant, who will work on social protection issues. This function was carried out by an advisor in the Human Resources Department. That person is not employed by the municipality any longer, and the position is still not filled. In conclusion, there is **no person in the municipality working on social protection issues**.

There is **no standing commission on social protection** within the Council of the municipality of Saraj. No such commission ever existed in the municipality. If there is a problem affecting the citizens, the Mayor forms *ad hoc* commission consisted of civil servants and advisors who examine the situation, write a report and then the mayor responds if he/she considers it necessary.

1.2. Programmes and action plans from the social protection area, including development programmes for specific citizens' needs

There was never a social protection programme prepared and an action plan accordingly. The municipality of Saraj has no programme for 2010 of the municipal Council, where social inclusion could have been introduced as one of its priorities. There is no inter-sectoral cooperation in the preparation of plans and programmes with other bodies working in the area of social protection (for example, the Commission on Equal Gender Opportunities etc).

The municipality **has never adopted or proposed development programmes** for the specific needs of its citizens.

1.3. Mechanisms for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups at local and national level and cooperation with relevant institutions and citizens' organisations

The residents of the municipality of Saraj receive information about the activities of the municipality through its website. The communication is done through the representatives of the local i.e. urban community²³ or through direct contacts with the citizens when they refer to the municipality. In addition to the council, which is responsible for decision-making, sometimes the local communities are consulted on their problems at public meetings. There is also a municipal newsletter where council decisions are published. However, besides these normative forms of communication, **there is no mechanism developed for consultation and participation of the citizens in this municipality.** With regards to social protection, there are cases when the municipality offered free legal aid to persons whose social financial assistance was terminated. In this case, the communication is upon request for assistance by the citizens.

There was no cooperation established with the social work centres. The situation is similar with the non-governmental sector. In 2002, a non-governmental organisation organised sewing courses for the women in the municipality. Since then, no such initiative happened.

1.4. Mechanisms for identifying poor and vulnerable groups

In the municipality of Saraj, no analysis was conducted for the needs of the poor and vulnerable groups. There is no database for issues related to social protection and inclusion. There is no classification of data by categories, neither by target groups. Overall, **no mechanism is in place to identify poor and vulnerable groups.** The interviewed participants stated that if there was a database, it could have been used as a basis for creating a policy on social inclusion. Overall, **the structural problems related to social exclusion and poverty are not identified** by the municipality of Saraj.

1.5. Provision of social services by the units of local self-government

The municipality of Saraj allocates finances for social protection from budget item: Current Reserves. From the budget of the municipality of Saraj, in 2009, 557.835denars were allocated for social issues; while in 2010; 379.400denars were allocated.

²³ The term used in Macedonian is 'mesna zaednica' which means an informal association/community of residents from the area.

1.6. Improving the state of socially endangered persons

The Law on Social Protection²⁴ foresees that every municipality could contract workers to perform seasonal and occasional community service as their right to social financial assistance. The municipality of Saraj, so far, has engaged persons from families with many children or social benefits users, in most cases, to carry out community service. These people were paid 100denars for food, and 100denars for transportation costs, with no additional payment. In addition to this initiative, through the Employment Agency Programme for the Unemployed, 100 persons were contracted by the municipality of Saraj and received 6.000denars a month for community service. They were contracted for 5-6 months, from September 2009 to January 2010.

1.7. Capital investments and infrastructure in the area of social protection

The municipality of Saraj, in 2007, entered the second phase of the decentralisation process, i.e. the fiscal decentralisation. A result of the process of decentralisation is that the municipality became an owner of its buildings and to premises it built, and has the responsibility to finance them, invest in them and maintain them.²⁵ So far, the municipality has built 6 additional classrooms at a local primary school, and it participated with 50% of own resources in building a bridge. The rest of the 50% is provided by the residents of the municipality.

There is no pre-school education facility in the municipality of Saraj. In cooperation with the central government, i.e. the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2 months ago, the foundations for a kindergarten were laid down. However, there is no timeframe when it should be completed.

An area of concern is how the municipality prioritises the needs of the citizens with regards to social protection, while at the same time, has no programme adopted.

There is **no old people's home, daily centre for old people, or a daily centre for people with special needs.**

²⁴ Art 55, Law on Social Protection, Official Gazette of RM, No 79/2009.

²⁵ Art 22, Law on Self-government, Official Gazette of RM, No 5/2002.

2. Inter-municipal Social Work Centre – Skopje

The public institution Inter-municipal Social Work Centre Skopje (hereinafter: ISWC-Skopje) provides services on the territory of the City of Skopje. Thus, this institution is responsible for the social protection rights and the rights from the Law on Family in the municipality of Saraj as well. The findings presented below, refer to the City of Skopje, and with it, to the municipality of Saraj.

The interview was conducted with Ms Penka Nikolovska, a social worker, Head of unit for Social Work, Regional unit for the City of Skopje.

2.1. Identification of poor and vulnerable groups

According to the representative from the centre, categories of vulnerable groups in the city of Skopje are: children, single mothers, special needs persons and old people. The largest group are the elderly with over 65 years of age. Some of them have close relatives that take care for them, however they cannot provide full care because of their own responsibilities. Thus, old people, although in good financial state, need services in their home. The second vulnerable category of old people are the ones with no close relatives, neither sufficient finances to support themselves.

ISWC-Skopje has no mechanisms and ways to identify poor and vulnerable groups. They are determined individually, when clients contact the centre and when the centre inspects the situation in the family prior to approving the assistance (social financial assistance, permanent financial assistance, care by third party, and one-off financial assistance). Therefore, one concludes that the findings of this organisation related to poor and vulnerable groups do not necessarily reflect the real picture in the city of Skopje. Namely, the findings of ISWC-Skopje are based on passive, rather than on active approach, and as a result it is unprepared for appropriate response and reaction to social risks and difficulties.

2.2. Services and access to services of the social work centre

ISWC-Skopje covers i.e. serves the clients from over seven municipalities from the territory of the City of Skopje; and among them, the municipality of Saraj (with the last territorial division of municipalities, the number of municipalities served by the centre increased). In addition to ISWC-Skopje, there are 7 regional units for providing social financial assistance.

The total number of users of financial assistance is 30.000 (we should add the family members to this number, as co-beneficiaries of the assistance). At the moment, the professional staff working on financial assistance deals with great number of cases and huge administrative workload, therefore they have no time for providing counselling services (psychosocial support and assistance to users of financial assistance). When social workers visit the family of the person applying for financial assistance no counselling takes place. This leads us to conclusion that there is a lack of proactive approach in identifying vulnerable categories of citizens and their needs.

Many obstacles to the rights from the area of social protection, as well as structural weakness were registered in all of the municipalities. In that sense, the obstacles that prevent/limit vulnerable and poor groups to enjoy certain rights are listed below. They are applicable for all the municipalities, so repetition is avoided in the further text.

The Law on Social Protection defines the conditions for receiving financial assistance. One condition is **the (upper) limit of the household income of the applicant**, and this deprives the applicant of his/her right to certain social benefits. For instance: the law defines that the upper limit of the income of the persons in the household cannot exceed 4.000denars (per person). If this amount is higher, even for 1denar only, then the applicant is not entitled to the financial benefit he/she requested.

Moreover, **several generations living in one household** face similar problems. Thus, instead of taking into consideration the needs of the immediate family members of the applicant, the income of the extended family members is a criterion for allocating social financial assistance. Another weakness is the assumed care that the extended family members provide to the applicant; in cases, often the family relationships are not taken into consideration. The applicants are interviewed and asked about their family members, with no reference to their relationships (often, family relations are disturbed). In cases when the family members are not able to provide assistance, proceedings are initiated against them by the social work centre. In such cases, the application for financial assistance is immediately withdrawn in order to avoid criminal liability of the extended family members.

In addition, there are **obstacles with regards to the right to child benefit**. Namely, a condition for receiving child benefit is one or both of the parents to be employed. With this, parents who are not employed i.e. the users of social financial assistance are deprived of their right to child benefits. The same is applicable for parents who are employed, but receive income higher than the one laid down in the regulations. In addition, the child benefits according to the Law on Child Protection are limited to 2.415denars (EUR40) regardless of the number of children in the family.

On the other hand, the amount of the social financial assistance is insufficient to cover the basic needs of the beneficiaries. This is also the case with any other type of social assistance. Therefore, there is a need for calculating the financial assistance for each case individually, i.e. it needs to be calculated according to the needs of the applicant (the monthly average living costs²⁶ in the country do not include the costs for clothing, utilities and other needs of one family, so it is not a relevant criterion when determining the amount of the financial assistance). In addition, the condition of the users of any type of financial assistance is aggravated further by the necessary documents. Certain documents need to be paid for. The Law on Social Protection defines the income in the household as a condition for receiving social protection; thus the applicants cannot enjoy social protection rights as the overall income of the household is taken into consideration. Therefore, needs assessment should be done individually for the applicants requesting social assistance.

It should be noted that at the territory of the city of Skopje there are several daily centres for street children, children with cerebral paralysis and special needs children.

²⁶ Calculated nationally, by the State Statistical Office

Furthermore, there are seven 'public kitchens' where social benefit users receive one hot meal a day. The capacity of a 'public kitchen' is 200 meals a day. This service is not available to all social benefit users, but to the ones most exposed to risks. Last year, in 2009, for the users of social and permanent financial assistance discount food cards were introduced. This year electricity vouchers of 600denars per month for the users of social financial assistance were provided. Some of the above-mentioned activities are realised through the Work Programme of the government, so it is still unclear if they will become regular assistance provided by the social work centres. Actually, the introduction of such measures for 'bare existence' reflects the level of poverty in the country.

With regards to its capacities, ISWC-Skopje lacks professional and technical staff, as well as office equipment, IT equipment, vehicles and offices which are needed for professional assistance on their behalf. A programme to create a network between the centres and the relevant institutions is underway; so that the processing of the applications for social protection and completing the documentation would be easier. This programme would decrease the administrative workload of the social workers. ISWC-Skopje and its regional units have no waiting rooms, so no discretion is guaranteed. Often, two clients are received in the same office at the same time, thus the privacy of the clients is invaded.

According to the representative from ISWC-Skopje in order for citizens' needs to be met, professional staff is needed, spatial facilities, vehicles for field work, as well as technical equipment. With regards to prevention, the representatives from the centre consider that this aspect of their work should be further developed and that more field work is needed.

2.3. Prevention and support of vulnerable groups

According to the Law on Social Protection, social work centres should carry out social prevention. Our findings indicate that this is not the case in practise. According to the representative from ISWC-Skopje the conditions do not allow for social protection to be carried out, due to lack of professional staff and huge administrative workload. The professional staff from the centres suggested that a separate organisational unit should work on social prevention. In this way, the social workers could carry out prevention through field work. The need for social prevention is most noticeable in the education institutions.

2.4. Consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups

As it was already mentioned, ISWC-Skopje does not have mechanisms to identify poor and vulnerable groups, neither to consult them. The consultations with the users are done individually, without assessing the needs of the whole group, so that appropriate assistance and protection will be provided.

2.5. Cooperation of the social work centre with the local self-government and other institutions/organisations

The cooperation between the social work centres as providers of social protection, on one hand, and the relevant institutions and organisations on the other, is essential in the process of social protection. Therefore, we were interested in the cooperation of ISWC-Skopje with the units of local self-government (hereinafter ULSG), the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (hereinafter: MLSP) the citizens' organisations and the business sector.

The cooperation of ISWC-Skopje with the units of local self-government is insufficient. The units of local self-government request from ISWC-Skopje the numbers of registered users that live on their territory. Sometimes there is a representative from SWC into the councils of the ULSG, when such councils are formed. There is no cooperation in the rural areas. The only cooperation between these two entities are the temporary contracts (up to six months) to the users of social benefits for community service for the ULSG.

ISWC-Skopje is satisfied with the cooperation with the competent ministry i.e. MLSP. The economic and political situation in the country and the high unemployment rate, over 30%, make Skopje a city of high social risk. Therefore, the protection and assistance that citizens need is great and various (taking into consideration the social risks citizens face). Thus, we judge the statement about the cooperation between ISWC-Skopje and the competent ministry unrealistic.

ISWC-Skopje has satisfactory cooperation with the Employment Agency with regards to information sharing, however the number of users covered with the active employment measures is not available. According to the representative from ISWC-Skopje, this information has MLSP. From the projects implemented so far, the active employment measures are judged as discriminatory and inaccessible.

A number of women-victims of domestic violence were employed with the active employment measures. However, the active employment measure was judged as discriminatory. Namely, if a woman decides to leave her job prematurely, the Agency could remove her from the registry of unemployed persons i.e. deprive her of the right to use health insurance for a period of three years. ISWC-Skopje has no information to which extent the Employment Agency offers employment to SWC clients.

ISWC-Skopje estimates that the cooperation with the citizens' associations is fairly good. Here, it should be noted that social work centres have no policy or strategy developed for cooperation with citizens' organisations. Our findings indicate that such cooperation happens only when it is initiated and funded by the citizens' organisations.

There is no satisfactory cooperation between ISWC-Skopje and the business sector. It happens only when ISWC-Skopje asks for donations from the business sector. The only example of continuing cooperation is with Tinex supermarkets which offer employment to young people without parents or parental care.

3. Focus Groups Findings

In order to establish the state of the vulnerable groups in the municipality of Saraj, two focus groups were conducted. The first focus group consisted of women from Macedonian and Albanian ethnicity, while the second group consisted of men from Macedonian and Albanian ethnicity.

3.1. Old people

In the municipality of Saraj, the elderly generally live in poverty, due to their low pensions, the amount of social assistance or care by third persons. The finances they receive are insufficient to cover their basic needs. In the municipality of Saraj there is no health institution for secondary health care, so the elderly are forced to travel to other municipalities, which puts additional pressure on their health and financial state. Often, they need to pay for the medicines, although some of them are on the positive list of the Health Insurance Fund. They need to participate financially for the secondary and tertiary health care which is also a barrier to them for using these services. Furthermore, the elderly are not satisfied with the quality of service they receive by the public health institutions. When called, the ambulance is usually few hours late. It was noted that the housing conditions of the elderly are good as their close family members provide care for them.

With regards to old people's homes, both private and public, the lack of capacity was pointed out as a problem. The problems they face in the public old people's homes are the limited number of places, the food and bad hygienic conditions. Most of them cannot afford accommodation in private old people's home.

In order to obtain social protection they face the difficulty of providing all the requested documents.

3.2. Women

Vulnerable categories of women are: single mothers, social benefits users and victims of domestic violence.

The living conditions of women are judged as good. With regards to employment, women over the age of 35 are discriminated at the labour market. It was noted that corruption was present in the employment procedures. In the municipality of Saraj the unemployment is equally present among the male and the female population.

Women are aware about their health protection, but due to their bad financial state they do not regularly use health services. The PAP measures ²⁷ promoted by the government are insufficient to provide quality services for women.

²⁷ PAP measures- Smear test for prevention of cervix cancer

The social work centre does not provide appropriate protection to women-victims of domestic violence, victims of human trafficking and prostitution, including underage girls. The shelter centre does not solve the problem, as it is only a temporary shelter.

Urgent action is needed by the relevant institutions so the perpetrators will be sanctioned for the criminal acts. Women in general are not protected by the state in cases of domestic violence.

3.3. Children

In the municipality of Saraj there is no kindergarten for the pre-school children. The residents of the municipality have submitted request for a kindergarten, but received no response. In addition, there are no parks, playgrounds and children cultural facilities.

The school children of Macedonian ethnicity, whose number is smaller than the number of Albanian children, travel daily by bus to other municipalities to continue their schooling. This is due to the fact that two grades have tuition simultaneously (have lessons in the same classroom). Such is the example with the seventh and the eighth grade. One grade receives tuition for 20 minutes, and then the other for another 20 minutes. That is why, the children do not receive good quality education, neither have appropriate learning conditions as the school lacks equipment (blackboards, chalk, microscope etc).

Children are deprived of their social protection rights because of the conditions for receiving social benefits and the limit of family incomes. The child benefit does not meet the basic needs of the children.

There is no kindergarten for special needs children. The special needs unit that used to exist in the school in the municipality of Saraj, was closed down. Specialised schools offer good learning conditions for children with special needs.

3.4. People with special needs

In the municipality of Saraj, people with special needs are a vulnerable category. In most cases, the close family members provide care to these people. The care and assistance provided by the state is insufficient. The psychiatric institutions and the social work centres do not provide sufficient assistance for special needs people. It was registered that the employees in the psychiatric institutions are violent towards people with special needs when they use the services of these institutions.

The state provides incentives to the business sector to employ special needs people. Yet, the businesses pay them minimal wages and do not provide acceptable work conditions.

With regards to their social protection rights, the people with special needs have difficulty to obtain the documents requested. They need to pay for certain documents, which additionally burdens their financial situation. Because of the limited incomes in the household, they cannot enjoy the rights they are entitled to by law.

The financial assistance is insufficient to cover the basic needs of the people with special needs.

3.5. Roma

In the municipality of Saraj, Roma live in poverty. They are discriminated against on the basis of their nationality. They have limited or no education and are not aware about the rights they are entitled to. Their living conditions are bad and do not meet the basic criteria for housing. There are Roma children who have not been registered by the competent institutions, neither entered into the Registry of Birth. That is the reason why they cannot have health insurance, are not vaccinated, and cannot be included in the education system.

Providing the necessary documents when applying for social protection is the greatest difficulty Roma face.

3.6. Minorities

No info on minorities living in the municipality of Saraj was provided by the participants.

B) Municipality of Kicevo

1. Local self-government unit- The interview was conducted with Mr Marjan Dimovski, Head of Sector for Legal and General Affairs in the municipality of Kicevo.

1.1. Institutional mechanisms for social protection in the municipality of Kicevo

In the municipality of Kicevo there is a Sector for General and Administrative Affairs. The civil servants working in this sector deal with issues of health, social and child protection in the municipality.

Within the Council of the municipality of Kicevo there is a **Permanent Health Commission** which deals with social protection issues. The Commission has 5 members from the municipal council. The Commission meets in order to prepare and adopt social protection programme, or meets *ad hoc* to discuss current issues. If there is point on the Council agenda related to the work of the Commission, then the Commission meets.

1.2. Programmes and action plans from the area of social protection, including development programmes for specific citizens' needs

The municipality of Kicevo regularly prepares **Work Programme for Social, Health and Child Protection**. An exception to this was in 2008, when no programme was prepared. The draft-programme for health, social and child protection for 2010, prepared in 2009, is still not adopted by the municipal Council. For the implementation of the programme there is no appropriate action plan, neither timeframe to follow the implementation of the plan. The current programme, prepared in 2009, consists of **10 projects**. It is too general, with no specific objectives and results from its implementation. For its implementation, 760.000denars should be allocated from the municipal budget, distributed as follows:

1. Support and stimulate graduate and postgraduate students from low income families- 400.000denars;
2. Assistance to elderly and socially endangered persons- 300.000denars;
3. Support and assistance to children with special needs-30.000denars, and
4. Other social assistance – 30.000denars.

Although the programme states that "in cooperation with various stakeholders, project activities will be realised to finalise ongoing projects"²⁸ It is still not clear how the activities will be carried out, if the programme is still not adopted.

There is no cooperation for preparation of plans and proposals with other commissions or sectors dealing with related issues (for example, the Commission on Equal Gender

²⁸ Draft-programme for health, social and child protection for the municipality of Kicevo, 2010.

Opportunities etc). With regards to the preparation of the programmes, the administration employees produce draft-proposals which are reviewed later by the members of the Commission.

The municipality of Kicevo **has never adopted or proposed development programme for the specific needs of its citizens'**. There is a **strategy for development**; however it relates to other issues.

1.3. Mechanisms for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups at local and national level, and cooperation with relevant institutions and citizens' organisations

In the municipality of Kicevo, the media are invited at the sessions of the municipal council. Every council decision is published in the Official Gazette of the municipality²⁹. The citizens can obtain information from the municipal website; however certain documents of interest to the citizens are not put up on the website. In most cases, the communication is with the president of the urban/rural communities and NGOs. So far, there was **no cooperation, neither initiative from the area of social protection and inclusion**.

There was consultation when infrastructure projects were planned. For instance, there was an initiative for building a bridge by non-governmental organisations and the local community.

However, besides the abovementioned forms of sharing information and consultation, there is **no mechanism in place for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups** in this municipality. So far, proper citizens' initiatives did not take place. The cooperation happened only when the NGO sector submitted a project proposal in which the municipality was included.

The cooperation with the social work centres happened on several projects, however there are **no mechanism for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups at local level**. To summarise, the communication happens when citizens' or the local communities approach the municipality directly.

1.4. Mechanisms for identification of poor and vulnerable groups

In the municipality of Kicevo the needs of the poor and vulnerable groups are not assessed. There is **no database for issues related to social protection and inclusion**. There is no classification of data by categories, or by target groups. In general, there is **no mechanism to identify poor and vulnerable groups**. The lists of beneficiaries are received by the social work centre. The communication with the citizens happens when citizens apply for assistance. When citizens experience difficulties they approach the council or the mayor of the municipality. Overall, **the municipality does not identify the needs of poor and vulnerable groups**.

²⁹ Not to be confused with the Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia

1.5. Provision of social services by the units of local self-government

The municipality of Kicevo, from its budget, allocates means for social protection, from the budget item- Current Reserves. 760.000denars were allocated for 2010.

The municipality has applied to projects from the area of social protection and inclusion. The project for inclusion of Roma children and the project for special needs children should be mentioned. The project for Roma inclusion was initiated by the Ministry of Transport, and the municipality had active part in it. The project started in 2007 and had been ongoing for 3 years now. Namely, prior to the project, none of the Roma children had been to kindergarten. This project provides free transportation of Roma children to the kindergartens. Despite all of this, there is **no mechanism to register how many children went to pre-school institutions** after this service was introduced.

The municipality donated twice TV, video and audio equipment and toys to the daily centre for special needs persons.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy the project "public kitchen" is ongoing for 3 years now. The municipality receives a list for social benefit users, provides space and pays the people working in the kitchen. The ministry provides the products for the meals. **82 citizens use this service.**

4m³ of wood are given to social benefit users, twice a year; this works out to 8 m³ a year per family. The lists of the beneficiaries are provided by the social work centres.

Furthermore, the municipality provided financial assistance for the graduation party of children with no parents.

With regards to other projects, the municipality distributed assistance packs donated by the Macedonian emigrants in Australia and the US. A project for saving heating energy was implemented by USAID.

In 2009 a project for building ramps in front of the institutions was carried out, and two months ago, parking spaces for disabled people were marked.

1.6. Improving the state of the socially endangered people

The Law on Social Protection³⁰ allows the units of local self-government to offer seasonal contracts to social benefit users to carry out community service, as a way of providing social financial assistance.

The Municipality of Kicevo, so far, has contracted 30 persons (in 3 groups) to carry out seasonal works through the Unit for Community Service. They were contracted through the active employment measures of the government and also, through UNDP programmes. The municipality gave 8.500denars per person per month for carrying out community tasks. These contracts lasted for 5 months. Despite all the above-mentioned measures, the municipality has **no strategic plan for improving the state of socially endangered persons**. The measures are short term, with no mid-term or long term results.

³⁰ Art 55, Law on Social protection, The Official Gazette of RM, No 79/2009

1.7. Capital investments and infrastructure related to social protection

The municipality of Kicevo, in 2010, entered the second phase of the decentralisation process, i.e. the fiscal decentralisation. As a result, the municipality received ownership of certain buildings and to other premises it built, and it has the responsibility to finance them, invest in them and maintain them.³¹ With regards to infrastructure, the municipality has built an **additional unit for special needs children** in the local kindergarten.

In the municipality of Kicevo **there is an old people's home and a daily centre for special needs people**. There is **no daily centre for young people or a daily centre for street children**. With regards to the old people's home, the municipality provides assistance only upon request. So far, it implemented a project for saving energy.

2. Social Work Centre Kicevo

The Social Work Centre Kicevo provides services to 5 municipalities i.e. it serves 70.000 citizens.

The interview was conducted with Ms Dragica Naumovska, social worker at the Social Work Centre Kicevo.

2.1. Identification of poor and vulnerable groups

In the municipality of Kicevo there is presence of each vulnerable group. Bearing in mind that SWC Kicevo uses the approach of 'reporting', i.e. it addresses the problems of the vulnerable groups only when they are reported individually.

The experience of SWC Kicevo indicates that children are the most vulnerable category. There are children delinquents, children with no parents or parental care, and children from disturbed families. Women living in poverty are another vulnerable category, women - victims of domestic violence, as well as women in divorce proceedings. Roma are the largest vulnerable group, due to the poverty they live in, and the children delinquents. There are social benefit users living in violent families. Special needs persons are social benefit users in cases when they receive child benefits or receive care by third persons. There is one daily centre in the municipality of Kicevo, and lack of institutional provisions. The number of old people using benefits is not very high, but they are extremely vulnerable category from aspect of receiving care, accommodation and protection.

SWC Kicevo has no mechanisms developed to identify poor and vulnerable groups, except when clients approach the centre by themselves. The centre lacks technical and human resources. No preventive activities are in place. According to the representative from SWC Kicevo, the centre is willing to carry out social prevention when there are conditions for it. The representative said *'If only we had a vehicle'*.

³¹ Art 22, Law on Self-government, Official Gazette of RM, No 5/2002.

2.2. Services and access to services

The services offered by the SWC in the municipality of Kicevo are in accordance with the Law on Social Protection and the Law on Family.

In the municipality of Kicevo there are 700 to 800 beneficiaries of social financial assistance. The financial assistance is minimal and does not meet beneficiaries' basic needs, as it is the case with the other SWC. When applying to receive social protection, the clients face the problem of providing the necessary documents. When special needs persons cannot obtain the required documents, then the social workers refer to the respective institutions to ask for the documents on their behalf. Another problem the clients face is that the assistance is received at the end of the month when it is approved. One-off assistance is not provided by SWC Kicevo.

In the municipality of Kicevo there is one daily centre for people with special needs. It has got a capacity for 20 people. Due to the lack of funding by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the hot meals are not served any longer; since September this year (2010). According to SWC Kicevo it is a positive thing that there is such centre, though other centres are needed for the other vulnerable groups.

There is a 'public kitchen' which serves 80 meals a day. According to the representative from SWC Kicevo, this number is small bearing in mind the number of social benefit users in the municipality. The 'public kitchen' meets the needs of the beneficiaries in the town of Kicevo, however not to the other municipalities which SWC covers (see above: SWC Kicevo covers the territory of 5 municipalities). Namely, SWC Kicevo does not add on the list for the service of the 'public kitchen' beneficiaries from the rest of the municipalities. It is considered that the municipalities are responsible for this issue and each municipality should solve it individually. In the municipality of Kicevo there are no shops that offer food discounts to users of social benefits.

With regards to client's privacy and discretion, it should be noted that SWC Kicevo has waiting rooms, thus the discretion to the clients is guaranteed.

According to the interviewed representative from SWC Kicevo, the social work centre needs to improve its technical resources, as well as provide professional development of its staff, so the needs of the clients will be fully met.

2.3. Prevention and support to poor and vulnerable groups

No preventive activities are carried out by SWC Kicevo. The centre has no regional units in the rural areas, and does not inform the citizens on their social protection rights and the rights deriving from the Law on Family. SWC Kicevo, through the media, informs the citizens on the activities it carries out; for instance: the public kitchens, daily centres or other activities (targeting street children, domestic violence, foster families etc).

2.4. Consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups

There is no mechanism in place for identification and participation of poor and vulnerable groups.

2.5. Cooperation of the social work centre with the local self-government and other institutions and organisations

SWC Kicevo has fairly good cooperation with the local self-government. The cooperation is based on mutual informing and consultations. Thus, on the final annual sessions of the municipality the Centre informs the Council about the implemented activities from the programme for the year that passed. Furthermore, the Centre was consulted and invited by the municipality to participate in some project activities. For number of social beneficiaries, the municipality of Kicevo offers temporary contracts to carry out community service for few months. Once the contract terminates, the financial assistance recommences. The Centre has no cooperation with the local government in the rural areas.

The cooperation between SWC Kicevo and the competent ministry is judged as satisfactory. The major problem is the lack of finances to meet the needs of the socially endangered persons; what is actually the main competence of SCW. The cooperation with the Employment Agency is judged as fairly good, with regards to information sharing and confirming the employment conditions of the clients. With regards to employment, no employment was offered to social benefit users by the Employment Agency.

According to the Law on Social Protection, the Centre could cooperate with the civil sector. So far, cooperation was established on projects dealing with human traffic issues and domestic violence. At times, civil associations requested information for the numbers of beneficiaries by category. It was noted that there was cooperation established with organisations working on Roma issues, particularly related to underage marriages.

SWC Kicevo has no cooperation with the business sector. The business sector i.e. particular companies asked only for lists of names of special needs persons in order to employ them, (as there are certain incentives for the companies provided) however the Centre has no follow-up information on how many people were actually employed.

3. Focus Groups Findings

The characteristics of the vulnerable groups in the municipality of Kicevo were established by conducting two focus groups. The first focus group consisted of females from Macedonian and Albanian ethnicity, while the second consisted of male participants from Macedonian and Albanian ethnicity.

3.1. Old people

The percentage of old people receiving minimal pensions or social financial assistance is considerable. The housing conditions satisfy the needs of the elderly. Public old people's homes do not provide safe and good living conditions. Another problem the elderly face is the high price for the services of old people's home. The pensions are minimal in order to meet their basic needs.

The elderly pay for health services and medicines, thus their access to these services is limited. They expressed satisfaction with the private health institutions which cooperate with the Health Insurance Fund, and expressed their dissatisfaction with the service they receive in the public health institutions.

Another problem they face are the documents they need to provide in order to enjoy social protection rights. In the municipality of Kicevo, large number of people with disabilities were deprived of their right to social protection due to their inability to provide all the documents. In cases, they are prevented of using social protection services when they are owners of properties.

3.2. Women

Unemployment is the greatest problem of the women in the municipality of Kicevo. There is also large number of women working, but receiving minimal wages. Women are often discriminated against at the labour market because of their age; women over the age of 35 have difficulty in finding jobs. Planning a family is set as an additional condition i.e. women can not plan extending their family as they face the risk of being fired.

The income they receive is insufficient to cover the basic needs of the family. Furthermore, they face problems with their pensions and health insurance. They cannot receive pension, although they are entitled to it. Their living conditions are generally good, but modest, and do not correspond with modern lifestyles. Women are aware about their health protection rights and regularly use health services.

Their economic situation i.e. financial dependence is the main reason why they fail to report domestic violence to the relevant institutions, and in addition, the traditional family values, and the lack of protection by the state. Women, victims of domestic violence expressed that their experience from the social work centre was positive.

3.3. Children

The poverty in the municipality of Kicevo has negative influence over the psycho-physical development of children. The girls from Turkish, Roma and Albanian ethnicity do not continue their education. The municipality lacks sports and recreational facilities, as well as, facilities for cultural activities for children. The consequence of this is inadequate socialisation of children through social activities. The state does not provide employment and housing (flats) for young people without parents or parental care.

The income set as a condition for receiving child benefits is a reason why children cannot enjoy social protection rights. The amount of the child benefit is small and does not cover children's basic needs.

Children with special needs are discriminated against and are not accepted by the community. That is the reason why their parents do not take them to school or socialise them. The schools lack appropriate technical and spatial facilities for children with special needs.

In the municipality of Kicevo there is no institution providing care and improving wellbeing of children with special needs. The child benefit for third child is discriminatory in cases when the third child is born, and the second has died, the parents are not entitled to child benefits for the third child. In addition, if in the third pregnancy, the mother has twins, only one of them is entitled to benefits, not both of them. The Law is ambiguous in this case.

3.4. People with special needs

In the municipality of Kicevo, people with special needs are a vulnerable category. The community discriminates them, therefore their families do not make efforts to socialise them. With regards to their housing conditions, they are estimated as good.

Representatives from the business sector, although use the incentives by the government, abuse their position when employing special needs persons, by paying them minimal wages, in comparison to the other employees who receive twice the amount. Furthermore, their insurance is not covered. Often they are engaged on temporary contracts. The labour inspection should be stronger and more frequent with regards to employment of special needs people.

Furthermore, they are not exempt from paying for health services and medicines, therefore their access to the services is limited.

Special needs people should be entitled to benefits on the bases of their condition, and no other criteria should be applied. The amount they receive from social financial assistance is minimal and cannot meet their basic needs.

3.5. Roma

Roma are vulnerable category in the municipality of Kicevo. In the past few years the NGO sector has greatly contributed to the improvement of the life of Roma. Illiteracy and poverty are widespread among this group. Often, Roma prevent their children from going to school; the parents are the ones that decide on the education on their children. They introduce them in their profession³² and consider that no further education is needed. The amendments on the Law on Education introduced positive changes for improving Roma education.

In the municipality of Kicevo, on one hand, there are Roma families which have fairly good life, and on the other, there are families with no basic living conditions. Educated Roma are employed and their financial state is good, in comparison with Roma who are illiterate and lack education, which is the main reason for their unemployment.

Some Roma have not been entered into the Registry of Birth and this prevents them from obtaining the documents needed to apply for social benefits and health insurance.

3.6. Minorities

Serbs are minority in the municipality of Kicevo. They face the same problems as the other residents of the municipality.

³² Profession meaning what activity they perform to earn for living

C) Municipality of Caska

1. Units of local self-government- The interview was conducted with Ms Bojanka Mirova, Head of Unit for General and Legal Affairs in the municipality of Caska.

1.1. Institutional mechanisms for social protection in the municipality of Caska

According to the organisational structure, the administration of the municipality of Caska consists of 5 units. In addition to the Unit for Legal and General Affairs, there are units for education, culture, health, social protection, sports and cooperation with the civil sector and foundations. Two associates, civil servants, work in this particular unit, and their tasks are distributed accordingly.

There is no standing commission on social protection as part of the Council.

There is a Commission on Gender Equality, which deals with social protection issues, health and education of women. The Commission has 5 members, at the same time members of the municipal Council. According to the Statute³³ of the municipality of Caska, the Commission is not a permanent body. The statute provides that the council could create temporary and permanent commissions dealing with specific areas defined with the act for their establishment.

With regards to its sessions, the commission meets *ad hoc*, depending on the circumstances and the need to solve current social issues. The employees in the municipal administration and the council members discuss issues from the area of social protection at their meetings.

1.2. Programmes and action plans from the area of social protection, including development programmes for specific needs of citizens

The municipality of Caska has adopted **Programme for Development of Education, Sports, Culture, Health and Social Protection for the period of 2009-2013**. The programme was prepared in November 2008, and **adopted by the Council in December 2008**.³⁴ The preparation of the programme was supported by the UN Development Programme. It consists of 5 areas: education, sports, culture, health and social protection. For each thematic area, a strategy was prepared, including objectives, activities, indicators and deliverables. For each area SWOT analysis was conducted. A **coordinative body** was established to prepare the programme, consisted of local coordinator and experts team. Current states and conditions were established with analyses, workshops and meetings. Finally, the programme was revised by the local self-government and adopted by the Council of the municipality of Caska.

³³ Article 53 from the Statute of the municipality of Caska, Official Gazette of the municipality of Caska, No 8/2007

³⁴ Decision of the municipality of Caska, No 07-2030/9, 26.12.2008

Although the programme incorporates guidelines for its realisation and its monitoring, it **does not include an action plan, neither a timeframe** for implementation of the activities. The implemented activities are monitored by competent municipal employees, i.e. associates on social and health protection, local economic development, who prepare report accordingly. Every thematic area consists of **3 sub-programme objectives**, which is a small number bearing in mind the period of implementation of 4 years. In the period of 2009-2010, activities were implemented from all programme areas. From the area of social protection, the following activities were implemented:

1. Opening daily centres for old people in the area of Caska and Bogomila (with support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Social Work Centre Veles and the municipality of Caska).

In the municipality **there is inter-sectoral cooperation with other units and commissions** when plans and proposals from the area of social protection are created (for instance, with the Commission on Equal Gender Opportunities and the Commission on Local Economic Development). With regards to preparation of programmes, often, the employees of the municipal administration prepare drafts which afterwards are reviewed by the Commission advisors.

The municipality of Caska **has never adopted, or prepared developmental programme for the specific needs of its citizens.**

1.3. Consultation mechanisms and participation of poor and vulnerable groups at local and national level and cooperation with relevant institutions from the social protection area and citynes' organisations

In the municipality of Caska, all the acts adopted by the Council are published in the municipal Official Gazette, and at the municipal website, and after every session the minutes are displayed at a notice board.

Furthermore, before the budget is adopted , a general plan or a statute of a local community, there is public presentation for the citizens. The municipality organises consultations with the citizens 5 times a year in the municipal offices, as well as, with the presidents of the local communities in order to inform them on current issues. An example for this is the initiative of the municipality to inform the citizens on the Law on Legalisation of Buildings, that will enter into force in January 2011, so the citizens could prepare the necessary documents. The information process was through the local communities and their presidents.

Another example of transparent initiative is building a road to the village of Mokreni. The donor, who provided EUR400.000, requested meetings to be organised in all of the 42 places (communities) in the municipality of Caska, asked for minutes from these meetings and lists of participants.

In addition, the municipality organised individual meetings with its residents and asked for their opinion on proposed initiatives and heard about the problems in the municipality.

The cooperation in most cases is with the presidents of a local community or the NGO sector. At the territory of the municipality of Caska there are 42 populated places (villages, towns) and 35 local communities.

There was certain initiative in the area of social protection. An example for that is the initiative by the municipality, raised 5 months ago, **for opening a daily centre for special needs children in the school in Caska.**

There are 20 special needs children in the municipality of Caska. The municipality initiated a contact with the Headmaster of the primary school, with the Director of the special needs school in Veles, with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (hereinafter: MLSP) in order to raise finances for such centre. The space will be provided by the municipality, while MLSP will provide the professional staff and the equipment. MLSP committed to allocate finances from its budget for the centre in 2011.

Except these forms of consultation, there is **no mechanism developed for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups from the municipality. Citizens' initiative, as defined by law³⁵**, was raised for opening a daily centre for the elderly in Bogomila. Often, citizens communicate with the municipality to ask for assistance for buying medicines, wood for heating (2-3 requests daily) etc.

The cooperation with social work centres is really good, though no mechanism is in place for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups.

1.4. Mechanisms for identification of poor and vulnerable groups

In the municipality of Caska there is no mechanism for assessing the needs of the poor and vulnerable groups. Although Social Work Centre Veles has information on issues related to social protection, it has **no database for issues related to social protection and inclusion.** The lists of social beneficiaries are provided by Social Work Centre Veles. The communication happens when citizens approach the municipality for assistance or consultation. When citizens have certain difficulty they approach the council or the mayor of the municipality.

1.5. Provision of social services by the units of local self-government

The municipality of Caska allocates finances for social protection issues from the budget item- Current Reserves. According to the annual report of the municipality for 2009, from the planned 180.000denars, under **budget item 413- Current Reserves, which covers also social services, sub-programme AO- Municipal Council, in 2009, 180.000denars were spent.** ³⁶. Namely, they were spent in the period from 08.04.2009 to 11.12.2009, for a medical treatment of a sick child, one-off financial assistance and the traditional event "Bistricki denovi".

Furthermore, out of the planned 150.000denars, under **budget item 413- Current Reserves (various expenditures), sub-programme DO- Mayor, in 2009 134.464denars were spent.** They were allocated to cover expenses of burial of a parent and close family member, and for two redundancy packages.

³⁵ Citizens can take part in decision-making processes for local issues, through citizens' initiatives, referendum, associations, in a manner and procedures determined by Law. Art 25, law on Local Self-Government, Official Gazette of RM, No 5/2002.

³⁶ Annual Report for 2009 of the municipality of Caska, pg 14

314.464denars in total were spent in 2009 in the municipality of Caska under the budget item- Current Reserves.

In addition, the municipality assigned one of its buildings for old people's club. The municipality opened another old people's club in Bogomila.

In cooperation with the central government i.e. the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the service 'public kitchen' is available, for which MLSP allocates 280.000denars. 90 users of social benefits receive one hot meal daily, prepared in the local school.

In the hospital for respiratory diseases 'Jasenovo' a geriatric unit will be opened. This is also in cooperation with SWC Veles. Furthermore, the municipality together with the social work centre organises children excursions and excursions for pensioners.

1.6. Improving the conditions for socially endangered persons

The Law on Social Protection³⁷ allows the units of local self-government to offer seasonal and temporary contracts to social benefit users to carry out community service, as a provision of social financial assistance.

The Municipality of Caska, in 2009 contracted 38 persons through the active employment measures of the government to carry out community service. The contracts were for a period of 6 months. This happened only in 2009.

Despite the measures mentioned above, the municipality has **no strategic plan for improving the state of socially endangered persons**. The measures are short term, with no medium term or long term results.

1.7. Capital investments and infrastructure in the social protection area

The municipality of Caska entered the second phase of the decentralisation process, i.e. the fiscal decentralisation in 2009. As a result, the municipality received ownership of certain buildings in the process of decentralisation and to other premises it built, and it has the responsibility to finance them, invest in them and maintain them.³⁸ With regards to infrastructure, the municipality **has opened daily centre for old people in Caska and Bogomila**.

In addition to the daily centres for old people, the municipality **started negotiations for opening a daily centre for people with special needs**. Few months ago, the municipality **opened a multi-ethnic centre for young people**. The centre has a computer and internet connection.

³⁷ Art 55, Law on Social protection, The Official Gazette of RM, No 79/2009

³⁸ Art 22, Law on Self-government, Official Gazette of RM, No 5/2002.

2. Social Work Centre – Veles

Social Work Centre Veles (hereinafter SWC Veles) provides services to three municipalities i.e. 60.000 to 70.000 citizens. It has got two regional units in two rural municipalities.

The interview was carried out with Ms Nada Trajkova, Director of Social Work Centre Veles.

2.1. Identification of poor and vulnerable groups

SWC Veles has no mechanism for identifying poor and vulnerable groups. The state is identical as with the other municipalities. The data below refer to the municipality of Caska, as SWC Veles serves the residents of this municipality.

According to the data of SWC Veles, widely present vulnerable groups at the territory of the municipality of Caska are the elderly and the people with special needs. Women-victims of violence are in smaller numbers as well as, the children as a vulnerable groups.

Special needs persons are the largest vulnerable group in this municipality, therefore initiative was raised for opening a daily centre for their needs. At present, there is a special needs school.

The largest vulnerable group in the places Caska and Bogomila are the elderly. Therefore, two daily centres for old people were opened in these places.

2.2. Services and access to services of the social work centre

SWC Veles offers services according to the laws on social protection and the Law on Family, as well as the Statute of the Centre.

The number of users of financial assistance in the municipality of Veles is 1200 i.e. there are 150 beneficiaries per social worker (there are 8 social workers). The problems the beneficiaries face are the lack of privacy, as well as, their inability to provide all the necessary documents for any type of social protection. Another problem is that they have to pay for the documents requested. The network that will connect the institutions and allow information sharing is still not in place. The amount the beneficiaries receive from any type of social protection is insufficient to meet their basic needs. Currently, SWC Veles does not provide one-off assistance, as MLSP has lack of funding. Previously, one-off assistance was not regular, however it was provided once in three months.

There are three 'public kitchens' at this territory. One of them is located in Veles and it serves 100 hot meals a day; the second is in Caska and it serves 60 hot meals; and the third one is in Bogomila and it serves 30 meals. It can be concluded that in the municipality of Caska there are 2 public kitchens (in Caska and Bogomila). Users of this

service in general are the users of permanent financial assistance, then beneficiaries who receive care by third person, and the users of social financial assistance (the category of highest social risk). According to the representative from SWC Veles the number of people using the service has increased since its introduction. Although many social benefit users need such service, not all of them have access to it. The main reason is the lack of finances by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The SWC representative said *'We rotate the users from year to year in order to be fair and give chance to others'*.

At the moment, in the municipality of Veles, there is one daily centre for people with special needs and a daily centre for old people. The daily centre is of great importance for the people with special needs as it is a place where they could socialise. The centre accepts people with mild and heavy intellectual disability. The capacity of the daily centre is for 24 persons; at the moment 20 persons use its services. The service also includes transportation to the centre and a hot meal. There is a need for opening a daily centre for people with special needs in the municipality of Caska and such initiative is underway.

In the municipality of Caska there are two daily centres for old people; the centre in Caska has a capacity for 120 persons and in Bogomila the capacity is 105 persons. The elderly can meet and socialise in the daily centres. The centres offer washing of the clothes to the ones that are socially endangered, and a hot meal from the 'public kitchen' from the municipality of Caska.

SWC Veles has two regional units that provide financial assistance (one in the municipality of Caska, and the other in the municipality of Gradsko). In the municipality of Caska, the regional unit is located in the daily centre for old people. The regional unit actually functions on the basis of one social worker (the date is determined by SWC Veles) seeing clients who need to register their employment status.

With regards to the conditions for working with clients it has to be noted that there are no seats in the waiting rooms in SWC Veles.

According to SWC Veles, in order to serve their clients better the administrative workload should decrease and the financial assistance should be provided by the Employment Agency, not by the centre, as it was before. At the moment, clients have to register their status as unemployed twice a month (in the Agency and in the SWC). The employees of the SWC Veles state that if there was a terrain vehicle, money for gas, technical equipment and professional staff, they could respond appropriately to the needs of the citizens. With regards to specialised services, they consider that shelters for women – victims of domestic violence and for the homeless are needed.

2.3. Prevention and support to poor and vulnerable groups

SWC Veles has no resources for preventive activities, due to the fact that it lacks professional staff. When social workers visit rural areas, the local residents approach them and ask for advice. This might be considered as a way of preventive activity.

SWC Veles does not inform the citizens on their rights from the area of social protection and the family law, as it lacks resources. It is most cases, when there are changes in the laws they inform the citizens through the media. This year, they organised one workshop for the Parents Association for children with cerebral paralysis and informed them about the rights of people with special needs.

In addition to the insufficient capacity to inform citizens on their rights, there is also **no approach developed to identify poor and vulnerable groups**. The representative from SWC Veles said that the citizens can use the website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Science where all the laws related to social protection are published and the rights they are entitled to.

2.4. Consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups

SWC Veles has no programme or mechanisms in place for consultation with the residents of the municipality. The representative from the SWC stated *'Our clients inform us on their needs, however, you need to take into consideration our capacity for responding to their needs'*.

2.5. Cooperation of the social work centre with the local self-government

Social Work Centre Veles has good cooperation with the local government. The municipality provides one-off assistance to socially endangered families and the ones hit by disasters. Every year the municipality donates school equipment and books for children with no parents or parental care. For the first time this year the municipality allocated finances for the victims of domestic violence. Last year, 2009, through a joint project of the Employment Agency and the local government, users of social financial assistance were contracted for 6 months to do community services. After the contracts ended, the social assistance from SWC was provided again. 5 women were employed through the project for employing victims of domestic violence. No young people without parents were employed.

SWC Veles cooperates with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The allocations from the budget for SWC activities are insufficient. SWC Veles collaborates with the Employment Agency as well. Every month SWC submits a list to the Employment Agency for the beneficiaries and receives feedback information on their status.

With regards to the cooperation with the NGO sector, SWC Veles collaborated with the NGO Parents for Healthy Generations and the Association of People with Cerebral Paralysis.

SWC Velse has no direct cooperation with the business sector, except in the case when a private factory asked for list of people with special needs so they could be employed in their facilities.

3. Focus Groups Findings

The state of the vulnerable groups in the municipality of Caska was established on the basis of the findings from two focus groups. The first group consisted of women from Macedonia, Albanian and Turkish ethnicity. The second group consisted of men from the same ethnicities.

3.1. Old people

The elderly are vulnerable group in the municipality of Caska. They are in difficult financial situation, as the pensions they receive are insufficient to cover their basic needs. To this aim the municipality has opened two daily centres, one in Caska and the other in Bogomila. In addition, two 'public kitchens' provide hot meals for the elderly. The housing conditions of the elderly are good.

In the municipality of Caska there is not sufficient number of health institutions. In addition, the elderly need to pay for the medical services they receive. Because of the distance from the city of Veles the ambulance often arrives late. In order to receive social protection the elderly need to meet all the requirements laid down in the law. If one requirement is not met, they are deprived of the right of social protection.

3.2. Women

One of the problems of the Albanian women from the municipality of Caska is their low level of education. They do not complete primary education, and very small proportion continues their schooling in secondary education. Poverty is one of the main reasons why female Albanian children do not continue their education. Traditional values are very strong among the Albanian population which additionally places Albanian women in unfavourable position. The changes in the law for making education compulsory has not produced sufficient results, as the fines are not imposed, and female Albanian children are still out of school.

The parents from Albanian nationality arrange marriages for the girls, so they cannot choose their partners independently.

The housing conditions in the municipality of Caska are fairly good.

The labour market discriminates women over the age of 35. Their unemployment rate is very high. In the textile factories their work force is misused, as they have no fixed working hours and have minimal wages.

Although women are aware about their health protection rights they do not use health services often. Due to the fact that they are unemployed and do not own properties, they are dependent on their husbands and do not report domestic violence. If the state institutions could provide security and assistance, the cases of domestic violence would decrease.

3.3. People with special needs

The vulnerable category - people with special needs is present in the municipality of Caska. In total, there are 29 persons with special needs. To this aim, the municipality in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and Social Work Centre Veles initiated opening a daily centre for this category. People with special needs are discriminated by the community.

They have no appropriate living conditions.

The private sector pays lower wages to these people, compared with the rest of the workers, and do not provide suitable working conditions according to their needs.

In order to enjoy social protection rights, they need to meet the requirements related with the household income and other conditions. The conditions laid out in the law are limiting factor to the rights they are entitled to. The financial assistance they receive is not sufficient to meet their basic needs.

3.4. Roma

There are no Roma in the municipality of Caska.

3.5. Minorities

Minority groups in the municipality of Caska are: Bosniaks, Turks and Serbs. They face the same problems as the rest of the residents in the municipality. Their greatest problem is the unemployment, the transport, and not being informed on current social affairs.

D) Municipality of Radovis

1. **Unit of local self-government** – the interview was conducted with Ms Olivera Dudulova, Head of Sector for Legal, General and Administrative Affairs in the municipality of Radovis.

1.1. Institutional mechanisms for social protection in the municipality of Radovis.

The municipality of Radovis has a Sector for Legal, General and Administrative Affairs. The civil servants working in this sector deal with issues of health, social and child protection in the municipality. There is **no person working exclusively on social protection issues**. The activities from the area of social protection are carried out by the Unit on Local Economic Development in cooperation with the Sector for Legal, General and Administrative Affairs.

Standing Social Protection and Health Commission is functioning within the Council of the municipality of Radovis. The Commission has 5 members from the municipal Council. The Commission meets *ad hoc* to discuss current issues. If there is point on the Council agenda related to the work of the Commission, the Commission meets. What is specific for this Commission is that its members, also members of the municipal Council, are competent in the area, i.e. there is a doctor, a social worker, a teacher of Macedonian language and a representative from an ethnic community. If there is particular issue to be solved, occasionally an external advisor is invited, for example, a director of a kindergarten etc.

1.2. Programmes and action plans in the area of social protection, including development programmes for specific citizens' needs

In the municipality of Radovis **no social protection programme was prepared by the Standing Commission for Social and Health Protection**. There is **no action plan for social protection**. In 2007 only, an action plan for social protection was prepared, but no multi-annual action plan was prepared since then.

In the municipality, there is inter-sectoral cooperation with other commissions and sectors from this area when plans and programmes are prepared, for instance, with the Commission on Equal Gender Opportunities, with the Unit for Local Economic Development, as this unit works on social protection issues and local development. The Commission on Social and Health Protection cooperates with the Commission on Equal Gender Opportunities. 2 members from the Commission on Social and Health Protection are also members of the Commission on Equal Gender Opportunities. With regards to strategy and planning, there is cooperation not only between the commissions and the council, but also with citizens' organisations, schools, health institutions etc.

Despite all the abovementioned, the municipality of Radovis **has never prepared development programmes for the specific needs of its citizens.**

Yet, there is a joint **Strategy for Local Development of the Micro-region of Radovis and Konce for 2007-2011**, and **Strategy for Development of Education for 2009-2020**. No action plan has been adopted to support the Strategy for Development of Education. The strategy contains a monitoring plan, although the outputs are not delivered according to the plan.

1.3. Mechanisms for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups at local and national level and cooperation with relevant institutions and citizens' associations

In the municipality of Radovis, the information is placed on the website, and all the Council decisions are published in the Official Gazette of the municipality. The Official Gazette of the municipality can be found at the city library, however, according to the representative of the municipality, the citizens do not show interest for the information published in the Gazette.

The cooperation of the municipality in most cases is with the presidents of the local communities or the NGOs. Despite the abovementioned forms of cooperation, no mechanisms for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups are in place.

In the area of social protection and inclusion, so far, cooperation was established with the Association of Citizens with Intellectual Disability 'Poraka'. In 2006 the municipality offered to provide space for these people in the local kindergarten, however the number of children in the kindergarten increased, so the municipality provided another space instead. Despite all of the abovementioned, the communication with the citizens is one-way communication, and happens only when NGOs approach the municipality. The communication with the citizens is when they directly approach the municipality to ask for documents, one-off assistance etc.

The social work centre and the municipality cooperate when they share information. Except for the centre, the municipality receives data from the hospital, when it prepares its local plans. Formal cooperation happens when the municipality involves relevant institutions and other local entities to participate in the preparation of the plans.

Overall, there is no **mechanism for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups.**

1.4. Mechanisms for identification of poor and vulnerable groups

In the municipality of Radovis **the needs of the poor and vulnerable groups are not assessed**. According to the representative, the municipality 'only gathers information following requests by citizens', and afterwards makes allocations, i.e. prioritises for the next year. When the municipal budget is executed, if the amount allocated for certain activities was overspent, then in the following year the amount increase. Often, the municipality gives one-off assistance, pays for medical services of the citizens etc.

There is **no database for data on social protection and inclusion**. The data is not classified by categories, or by target groups. Overall, there is **no mechanism in place to identify poor and vulnerable groups**. The lists of the users of social benefits are received by the social work centre. The communication with the citizens happens when they approach the municipality for consultation and assistance. When they have a problem, citizens approach the mayor or the council. The municipality has **no formally established mechanism for assessment of the needs of the poor and vulnerable groups**.

1.5. Provision of social services by local self-government units and implemented programmes/ project activities from the area of social protection and inclusion

The municipality of Radovis allocates finances for social protection from the budget item: Current Reserves. In 2010, 200.000denars were allocated. This almost equals the amount in 2009, when 191.500denars were earmarked for the same purpose. This is 0.23% of the overall municipal budget.

The municipality has applied for projects dealing with social protection and inclusion. The CARDS Project -Assistance to Employment Policy, Phase III has strengthened the capacities of the relevant institutions to effectively implement, monitor and evaluate the objectives of the National Employment Strategy 2010 and the National Action Employment Plan 2006-2008. To this aim, **Local Action Employment Plan** for the municipality of Radovis was prepared.

In the municipality of Radovis there is active daily centre for people with moderate and several intellectual disabilities, over the age of 18, run in cooperation with the Citizens Association 'Poraka' from Skopje. The centre is visited by 10 to 15 people daily. The municipality assigned space for the centre.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy the service 'public kitchen' is running. The municipality receives the data on the social benefit users from the social work centre and provides space where the food is served. **63 citizens use this service.**

The UNDP project EMI 2 was implemented dealing with voluntary work and employment of young people with completed higher education. Yet, **projects of this kind produce short term effects**, there is no feedback information whether the people involved were employed and whether the municipality implemented similar measures.

In 2009 the project for building access for disabled people (ramps) in the institutions was completed.

Finally, through GEF³⁹, the municipality implemented project for energy efficiency. With this project the windows and the doors in three kindergartens were replaced in order to save energy and illuminate the space. Furthermore, the finances from the project were used to replace the lights on the boulevard in Radovish, in order to make it energy efficient.

³⁹ Clarification needed for the abbreviation

1.6. Improving the state of the socially endangered persons

In the municipality of Radovis, various projects were implemented following the government's policy for active labour market measures.

Consequently, in the period of 2008-2009, 14 people were involved in the project for supporting employment and starting a business. Target groups of this project were unemployed people from underdeveloped regions, long-term unemployed, users of social financial assistance and young people.

With regards to carrying out community service on behalf of the municipality, the long-term unemployed and persons using social benefits received financial assistance of 6.000denars, were paid travel and food expenses and insurance costs in case of an accident, for a period of 6 months. The number of people using this service was 45 in 2008, while in 2009 it doubled, and it was 100. In 2010, **no such measure was implemented.**

In the period of 2007-2009 the Employment Agency and the Employment Centre in Radovish provided incentives for businesses to employ disabled people. Incentives were provided for employing single parents or young people with no parents, and they were 11.200denars per month, for a period of 6 months, with a liability to the employer to offer them contracts for at least 18 months. **Still, the results of this measure are not available, as the number of people whose employment lasted for a period of 18 months or who are still employed is unknown.**

In the municipality of Radovis 8 unemployed people from underdeveloped regions were hired to carry out construction works. The measure provided 5.100denars for their work, personal tax and 3.200denars for food and transportation costs, for a period of 6 months.

With the employment measure-training for new skills and qualifications, contacts with employers were established, unemployed people were trained in gaining IT skills, and there was a responsibility for the employer to employ the persons who will complete the training successfully. The support consisted of monthly allocations of 2.000denars to the employer and 4.000denars for each person trained, for a period of three months. The Employment Centre in Radovish regularly carried out training of this kind, i.e. in IT skills and English language.

Nevertheless, **the municipality has no strategic plan to improve the state of the socially endangered persons.** The activities undertaken are short-term with no mid-term or long-term effects.

1.7. Capital investments and infrastructure in the area of social protection

The municipality of Radovis, in 2005, entered the second phase of the decentralisation process, i.e. the fiscal decentralisation. As a result, and in the light of social protection, in the period of 2005 to 2010, the municipality invested between 4.500.000 and 5.000.000denars in the pre-school facilities for improving the infrastructure. It invested in building of a fence in one of the three kindergartens; it provided lights around the kindergartens, and improved the atmospheric sewage and sanitation systems.

Furthermore, the municipality financed the construction of the roof in the Primary School 'Nikola Karev' and the atmospheric sewage system.

It provided 1.000.000 denars for the roof construction in the local secondary school.

There is a pensioners' home in the municipality which accommodates people with low pensions or users of social benefits. **There is no old people's home.**

There is **a daily centre for people with special needs**, however the school has **no separate unit for special needs children**. These children go to school in Strumica, as well as the children with intellectual disability.

2. Social Work Centre Radovis

Social Work Centre Radovis (hereinafter SWC Radovis) serves two municipalities i.e. it serves approximately 32.000 citizens.

The interview was conducted with Ms Pavlinka Petrusseva, social worker in Social Work Centre Radovis.

2.1. Identification of poor and vulnerable groups

The interviewed representative used the data from SWC Radovis to establish the state of the vulnerable and poor groups in the municipality of Radovis. The largest vulnerable category are Roma. They represent the highest percentage of the total number of social benefit users. The representative from the SWC pointed out that in the last few years Roma declare as Turks. According to her, they difference between the Turkish population living in the rural areas, and Roma who declare as Turks and speak Turkish language.

Children become vulnerable group when parents divorce; there are few cases of children without parents or with no parental care.

Women who are **single mothers or users of social financial assistance** are vulnerable category also.

Minorities use all types of financial assistance.

The percentage of **people with special needs** that enjoy their social protection rights is very small.

Not many **old people** receive social benefits, the ones who do it is on the bases of their age.

SWC Radovis has no procedures or mechanisms established to identify poor and vulnerable groups. It acts upon individual requests. The situation is similar to the one described for the rest of the municipalities.

2.2. Social Work Centre services and access to services

SWC Radovis provides services according to the Law on Social Protection and the Law on Family.

There are 900 users of social financial assistance registered in SWC Radovis. Three social workers deal with financial assistance, and one social worker is responsible for the other types of social assistance. A condition for receiving social protection is the household income and this is a major obstacle for poor and vulnerable groups to establish their social protection rights. SWC clients feel they have been discriminated against. SWC representative, Ms Petruseva, said that the household income must be set as a condition for receiving social assistance *'There must be a limit imposed on the incomes, otherwise we won't know who to allocate assistance to'*. The conditions for financial assistance to the persons incapable to work (with no working capacity) should be changed i.e. no further requirements should be imposed on them. The amount received from the financial assistance does not satisfy the basic needs of the beneficiaries.

In the municipality of Radovis, there is one daily centre for old people and one 'public kitchen'. The service from the 'public kitchen' is limited i.e. only 80 hot meals are served, to the persons facing greatest social risks.

With regards to providing the necessary documents for receiving social benefits, the problem is persistent as it is with the rest of the social works centres. SWC beneficiaries have problem to obtain ID cards. The Ministry of Interior is competent for issuing ID cards, however the procedure for obtaining ID card takes considerable period of time. Without this document, clients cannot apply to SWC for assistance. In order to get certain documents clients need to pay for them and this additionally aggravates their financial situation. The setting up of the planned network between the institutions is crucial, so the procedure for receiving documents will be shortened.

SWC Radovis has no spatial facilities to work with their clients. The social workers and the clients lack discretion, as there is insufficient office space. SWC Radovis has the need to employ additional professional and technical staff. It is important to mention that there is no cleaning person employed by the CSW to maintain the hygiene in the building. Improved services are needed for the citizens, introduction of the counter system and a field work vehicle. With regards to the amount of the financial assistance, it should be higher and fixed for the period that is approved. In the municipality of Radovis there is a need for shelter centre for women victims of domestic violence, and other daily centres for other types of vulnerable groups. SWC Radovis has no regional units in the rural areas.

2.3. Prevention and support of poor and vulnerable groups

SWC Radovis has no capacity to carry out social prevention. The main reason for this is the lack of professional staff. Prevention is done individually according to the needs of the client at SWC premises or when the client is visited by SWC representative.

SWC Radovis has no mechanisms established to support and protect poor and vulnerable groups.

The residents of the municipality of Radovis are informed about their social protection rights and the rights from the Law on Family through brochures and through direct communication with the SWC.

2.4. Consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups

SWC Radovis has no mechanism and a programme developed for consultation with the citizens of the municipality. The clients are consulted when they approach SWC. The representative from SWC Radovis said *'Our clients come regularly, from 1st to 15th of every month to register. If they have certain problem, they report it to us'*.

2.5. Cooperation of the Social Work Centre with the local self-government

SWC Radovis cooperates with the local self-government. Some of the social benefit users were contracted by the municipality to carry out community service. The contracts were for a limited period of time, from 5 days to 6 months. For the period when the beneficiaries were contracted by the municipality, they were not paid social financial assistance. After the contracts expired, the financial assistance recommenced. Few of the beneficiaries found permanent employment. The cooperation of SWC Radovis with the local self-government in the rural areas is not satisfactory.

SWC Radovis deems the cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy as fairly good; yet there is lack of finances to improve the state of the vulnerable and poor groups. This situation is persistent for a longer period of time.

SWC Radovis cooperates with the Employment Agency. Every month, the Employment Agency sends over a report for the employment status of the users of social services. The Agency implemented projects for employment of single mothers, however there is no data on number of persons employed with this measure.

With regards to the cooperation with citizens' associations, it has to be noted that so far SWC has established good cooperation with the Citizens' Association 'Poraka'. This association offers services to people with special needs and it opened a daily centre for these people. When asked for services of this type, the municipality refers special needs people to the daily centre.

SWC Radovis has no cooperation established with the business sector.

3. Focus Groups Findings

In the municipality of Radovis two focus groups were conducted. The first group consisted of women from Macedonian ethnicity; the second consisted of men from Macedonian ethnicity. The conducted focus groups led to findings about the state of the poor and vulnerable groups in the municipality of Radovis.

3.1. Old people

The state of the elderly in the municipality of Radovis is identified as an area of concern due to the low pensions they receive. As poverty is widespread among them, the pensioners live in multi-generation households. Often, the rest of the family members are unemployed and depend on the pensions of the elderly members in the family.

The housing conditions of the elderly are good, both in their homes, and in the old people's homes. With regards to health protection, the elderly are not satisfied as they need to pay for the medical services and for the medicines. They are frustrated due to the fact that they have paid health insurance to the Health Insurance Fund throughout their life, however they cannot use health services free of charge in their old age. Another problem they face is that the ambulance service does not function in the municipality.

The participants of the focus groups had no knowledge about the problems the elderly faced with regards to their social protection rights.

3.2. Women

In the municipality of Radovis some women are victims of domestic violence. They fear to report the violence, because of the traditional values and their financial dependence. The institutions need to raise the awareness among the citizens for domestic violence, and the victims should be provided appropriate assistance and support by the state.

Women have decent and modest living conditions. They are discriminated at the labour market, on the basis of their age. Additional problem is their health conditions. Often, women over the age of 40 have certain health condition which makes them incapable to work; however their health condition by itself is not a sufficient factor to be granted social assistance. Due to the fact that poverty and unemployment are widespread, women do physical work in the agricultural companies. They emphasised that bullying at work (mobbing) was present in various forms, that they receive minimal wages and have no fixed working hours. In general, in the municipality of Radovis, the unemployment rate is high.

Women are not aware about their health protection rights and the need for regular health care. Health education should be introduced as part of the regular education process. Another problem with regards to health protection is their inability to cover their costs, as the primary and the secondary health care in public health institutions need to be paid partially. In the private health institutions the health services should be paid fully.

3.3. Children

Children from violent families are particular vulnerable category. This is reflected on their psycho-social development. Another major problem is poverty, as parents have no possibility to offer them decent living conditions and healthy child development. Poverty is the greatest factor for children to use drugs and alcohol and to drop out of school.

The state does not provide housing or employment for children without parents when they turn 18. In addition, children are discriminated by the Law on Child Protection as one of the conditions for receiving child benefit stipulates that one of the parents has to be employed. Thus, children whose parents are unemployed are not entitled to child benefits. The financial assistance is minimal and does not meet children's basic needs.

Kindergartens have no appropriate facilities for children with special needs, however the specialised schools offer suitable learning conditions for these children.

3.4. Roma

Roma living in the municipality of Radovis, declare as of Turkish ethnicity. In the censuses in the previous years they declared themselves as Roma, but it is a recent trend that they declare themselves as Turks and speak Turkish language. A reason for this, according to the interviewed representatives, is the announced donation from Turkish organisations. Roma consider that if they declare themselves as Turks, they will benefit from the donations.

Roma have dire living conditions and live in deprivation. They have no education and are not registered by the relevant institutions i.e. have no certificates from the Registry of Birth. In general, Roma girls are not registered in the Registry of Birth, while the boys are registered more frequently. This is a main reason why Roma cannot use health services and they have no health insurance. Most of Roma children do not attend school. Roma are the largest group of social benefit users.

3.5. Minorities

The participants said that the largest minority group are the Roma, who declare as Turks, and that there is a very small number of persons from Albanian ethnicity.

E) Municipality of Stip

- 1. Unit of local self-government-** The interview was conducted with Ms Visna Sorova-Angelova, Associate in the Unit for Local Economic Development in the municipality of Stip.

1.1. Institutional mechanisms for social protection in the municipality of Stip

In the municipality of Stip there is a **Sector for Legal Affairs, Information and Services, IT and General Affairs**. Within this Sector there is a Unit on Legal Affairs, Public Procurement and Support to the Municipal Council and a Unit on General and Administrative Affairs. The **Unit on General and Administrative Affairs among other things, deals with issues on social protection and education**.

There is **no person working exclusively on social protection issues** in the municipality. The civil servants working in the Unit on Local Economic Development deal with issues of health, social and child protection, culture, education and sports. The activities from the area of social protection are carried out in cooperation with the Sector on General, Normative, Public and Administrative Affairs in the municipality of Stip.

Within the Council of the municipality of Stip there is a **standing Commission for Social Affairs**. The Commission deals with issues related to social protection, child care, culture, education, sports, fire protection, public security and traffic safety. The Commission has 5 members from the municipal Council. With regards to its sessions, the Commission meets whenever there is a need to solve certain social protection issues.

Although, the Statute⁴⁰ of the municipality does not foresee a standing **Commission on Child Protection**, such commission is created as a Council body and it has got 5 members.

1.2. Programmes and action plans from the area of social protection, including development programmes for specific citizens' needs

In the municipality of Stip **there is no work programme for the standing Commission on Social Affairs**. Such programme has never been adopted.

In the municipality of Stip there is a **Local Action plan for Social Protection for the period of 2007-2012**, prepared with support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The municipality carries out the activities of the action plan. To this aim, a coordinative body was created to oversee implementation of the activities. The coordinative body consists of relevant actors from the municipality of Stip, advisors in the municipal Council, associates from the Unit on Local Economic Development and

⁴⁰ Article 26, Statute of the municipality of Stip, Official Gazette of the municipality, No 01/03, 18/07, 11/08, 07/09, 16/09

Environment Protection, junior associate for Roma issues, social worker and a representative from the NGO sector.

It should be noted that the local action plan is comprised of several action plans, and it is divided according to six target groups:

1. Street children
2. Old and weak people
3. Persons over 18 with physical and intellectual disability
4. Substance users (alcohol, drugs, nicotine)
5. Victims of domestic violence victims
6. Victims of human trafficking

For each target group a programme is prepared, and an action plan accordingly. A budget for implementation of the local action plan is prepared, with potential donors for financing the activities of the plan.

Yet, the timeframe for implementation of the activities is not clearly defined, and therefore what has been implemented is difficult to monitor. This is also supported with the fact that the planned finances for the activities are only potential finances, which makes determining the timeframe difficult.

On the other hand, the coordinative body has to prepare yearly reports on the implementation of the activities and the progress of the local action plan for social protection, as well as organise regular meetings and share information with the municipality of Stip. But the fact that the majority of the persons involved in the preparation of the action plan are no longer advisors in the Council of the municipality of Stip creates a gap in the implementation and follow-up of the activities of this coordinative body. Consequently, **there is discontinuity with regards to monitoring and evaluation of the local action plan for social protection.** The employees in the municipal administration, more specifically, the Unit on Local Economic Development in coordination with the Unit on Public Affairs prepares a report on the implemented activities from the local action plan. Basically, **it is the municipal administration that has a reporting role with regards to the activities from the plans adopted by the municipality.**

In the municipality of Stip, in addition to the action plan on social protection, there is a **Local Plan for the Rights of Children for the period of 2009-2014**, adopted in January 2009.

The Local Action Plan for the Rights of Children is divided into 6 thematic strands i.e. strategic objectives and they are as follows:

1. **Education-** Strategic goal: Provision of improved quality education;
2. **Social protection and care for children-** Strategic goal: Children to enjoy the rights they are entitled to;

3. **The family as a pillar of the society**- Strategic goal: Every child lives in a family;
4. **Health care for children**- Strategic goal: Protecting and improving children's health condition;
5. **Cultural and sports events**- Strategic goal: Every child has access to culture and sports;
6. **Urban planning and healthy living environment for children**- Strategic goal: Provision of parks, playgrounds and green areas for every child.

In comparison with the local action plan, this plan **has no detailed budget for the activities**. It has cumulative sum i.e. indicative budget for each activity deriving from the strategic goal. The plan **does not incorporate timeframe** for implementation of the activities.

The municipality is the main duty bearer of the plan and it has created a coordinative body to oversee the preparation and the implementation of the local action plan, as well as to establish the needs and the state of the children in the municipality of Stip. Although, this coordinative body consists of members from relevant institutions and organisations at local level (advisors from the municipality, teachers from primary and secondary schools, pre-school facilities, NGO, Sector for Internal Affairs, Health Protection Institute) still, the monitoring of the activities and the preparation of the reports for their implementation is done by the Standing Commission of Children's Rights in cooperation with the Unit of Public Affairs and the Unit of Local Economic development. There is **discontinuity also with regards to monitoring of the plan activities by the coordinative body**, as the advisors are replaced when their mandate expires and it is often unclear who the new members will be.

In the municipality **there is inter-sectoral cooperation** with other commissions and sectors dealing with related issues (for instance: with the Commission on Equal Gender Opportunities which has its action plan and communicates with other commissions from the municipality when implementing plan activities). The council commission collaborate with the Unit on Public Affairs, mainly because the citizens approach this unit when requesting assistance. With regards to preparation of strategies and local plans, there is inter-sectoral cooperation not only with the council commissions, but with citizens' associations, schools, health institutions etc.

The municipality of Stip has never prepared or proposed development programme for specific needs of its citizens. It has to be noted that there is a **Strategic Plan** prepared by the United Nations Development Programme and it serves as a basis for preparing the action plans of the municipality.

1.3. Mechanisms for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups at local and national level and cooperation with relevant institutions and citizens' organisations

The municipality of Stip **maintains good public relations**. Namely, in order to inform the public on the activities, the municipality sends electronic newsletter to the media. The mayor regularly updates the public on the major municipal activities at press conferences. All council decisions are published in the Municipal Gazette.

The mayor regularly visits the local communities. If he is unable to do so, representatives from the municipality visit them and understand the problems of the local communities.

Cooperation was established with non-governmental organisations in the area of social protection and inclusion i.e. in the preparation of local action plans. However, there was no citizens' initiative as defined with the laws. The communication with the citizens is direct when citizens need assistance to obtain documents, when they ask for one-off assistance etc. **There is no proper mechanism for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups in the municipality.**

The municipality of Stip cooperates with the Social Work Centre, especially in the area of sharing data and information. The persons approaching the municipality to request assistance are referred to the Social Work Centre. Furthermore, NGOs, the representatives from the Social Work Centre and the local government communicate when preparing proposals from the area of social protection.

Although such cooperation exists when project or action plans are created, still **there are no mechanisms developed for consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups at local level.**

1.4. Mechanisms for identification of poor and vulnerable groups

Regardless of the fact that local action plans for the rights of children and social protection strategy are prepared, still **there is no mechanism that the municipal administration applies to assess the needs of the poor and vulnerable groups**. If such mechanism existed the municipality would have data on the poor and vulnerable groups and the data would be used as a starting point for preparing mid-term or long-term development programmes for addressing the needs of these groups.

There is no database on social protection and inclusion issues. The presidents of the local/urban communities approach the municipality for a certain problem; then the municipality informs them whether the problem could be solved at local level i.e. if it is going to be placed on the Council agenda. Still, such practise does not provide comprehensive and long-term effects in the process of identification of poor and vulnerable groups. The municipality receives the lists with the names of the social benefits users from the Social Work Centre.

The communication with the municipality is one-way, when citizens ask for assistance or consultation. When they are faced with a problem they approach the municipal council or the mayor. In the Unit on Public Affairs there is a person working on child protection issues. Yet, this is only a segment of what should be a comprehensive mechanism and common practise in the municipality for identification of poor and vulnerable groups.

1.5. Provision of social services by local self-government units and implemented programmes/ project activities from the area of social protection and inclusion

The municipality of Stip allocates finances for social activities from the budget item: Current Reserves. In 2009, 1.100.000denars were allocated, and in 2010 the amount was 900.000denars.

The municipality **has applied for projects from the area of social protection and inclusion**. It is worth mentioning the project for building old people's home. For this project the municipality carried out a research in 5 cities in the area around the municipality (Radovis, Sveti Nikole, Probistip, Karbinci and Vinica). 800 citizens were surveyed, of which 300 stated that they were interested to move in an old people's home if one was built. The municipality intends to complete this project i.e. the old people's home, through the model of public-private partnership.

The municipality carried out equal opportunities project which delivered workshops for domestic violence, gender equality etc.

The Municipality of Stip through the UNICEF programme for early child development, organised visits for groups of pre-school children and children from the rural areas where there were no pre-school education facilities. To this aim, the municipality has organised the transport, and also, in cooperation with the university, has engaged professors and students to work with these children.

The municipality of Stip prepared and submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for opening a **daily centre for old people**. In addition, it submitted a project to the aforementioned Ministry for opening a **daily centre for young people, over 18 years old with mental or physical disability**. In August, 2010, the municipality prepared and submitted a proposal to a potential donor for opening **units for pre –school special needs children**.

With regards to prevention of use of drugs and alcohol, the municipality prepared leaflets on the consequences from using these substances and distributed them in the secondary schools.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy the service 'public kitchen' is available. The municipality receives the lists of beneficiaries from the Social Work Centre and provides the space for preparing the food (in three kindergartens). **85 citizens use the service 'public kitchen'**.

7 activities from the Local Action Plan on Social Protection for the period of 2007-2010 have been completed, and they are as follows:

1. A project is prepared for opening a daily centre for old people in Stip;
2. A project is prepared for old people's home with geriatric unit- the documents are prepared for building an old people's home, following the model of public-private partnership, and the needs of the elderly that will use the services of the old people's home were identified;
3. Building special access (ramps) for people with special needs – the Mayor of the municipality of Stip requested from all the public institutions to build special access (ramps) for people with special needs;
4. Club and daily centre was established for socialisation and education of young people with special needs- the centre is for persons up to the age of 26;
5. Social prevention activities in schools- workshops were carried out in primary and secondary schools for sexually transmitted diseases;
6. Functional centre for rehabilitation and socialisation- A centre was opened where drug users receive their therapy and once a week have sessions with a psychologist;
7. Identifying women with over 35 years of work experience, in order to solve their problem with establishing the right to pension.

The following activities were implemented in the period of January to December 2010 from the Local Action Plan on Children's Rights:

1. Large number of children was involved with the programme on early child development and a research was conducted to discover the number of children that did not attend pre-school institutions. In February, in cooperation with the patronage service of the Public Health Institution 'Pance Karagozov' questionnaires were distributed to parents with regards to children's inclusion in the early child development programme in order to detect the interest of the parents for the programme and to plan further activities.
2. Organising free language and IT courses – the municipality organised free English, German, French, Spanish and Italian language courses, as well as IT courses. There were 1500 participants to the courses.
3. Preparation and implementation of preventive activities- Procter&Gamble and Grey Worldwide Education Programme 'For You' for academic year 2009/2010. The activities were conducted in the primary and in the secondary schools dealing with girls from 6th in grade primary school to year 1 in secondary school. The topics covered were healthy lifestyles and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.
4. Organising the event 'Spring Festival' (April Fools Day on the 1st April 2010). 862 children took part on the April Fools Day. Children from the first grades from the primary schools and the kindergartens in Stip took part in the festival.

5. The project 'Drugs- Youth Killers'. A public debate was organised on the subject Drugs Kill, as part of this project. The Ministry of Interior Stip in cooperation with the municipality of Stip implemented the project.
6. Organising sports competitions in football between school teams. The project was supported by the Social Work Centre, education institutions and health institutions. It started in November 2009 and it was carried out in several stages.
7. Increasing the offer for children's cultural events. The municipality in order to give special emphasis on the children's development and children's cultural events, within Stip Summer Festival organised events aimed at children, lasting from 22 to 29 June, called Children's Days.
8. Organising Cycling Marathon. The Municipality of Stip in cooperation with the Council for Safety and the primary schools in the municipality, on 22 September, the International Car Free Day, organised Cycling Marathon. 100 children from the primary schools in the municipalities of Stip and Karbinci took part. The goal of the marathon was to raise awareness for saving the planet and decrease CO2 emissions.

1.6. Improving the state of socially endangered persons

The Law on Social Protection⁴¹ foresees that the units of local self-government could offer seasonal and temporary contracts to social benefit users to carry out community service, as a way of providing social financial assistance.

The Municipality of Stip, through the active employment measures of the government contracted 50 persons to carry out community services, SWC beneficiaries. Such contracts were offered only in 2009. The municipality participated with 2.298.920denars, from overall amount of 4.478.920denars.

1.7. Capital investments and infrastructure from the social protection area

The municipality of Stip entered the second phase of the decentralisation process, i.e. the fiscal decentralisation in 2007. As a result, the municipality received ownership of certain buildings in the process of decentralisation, and in addition it contributed to building new objects in the light of social protection and inclusion.

In the municipality **there is a pensioners' home**, of the Association of Pensioners. The pensioners' home has a capacity to accommodate 12 people in studio apartments. **There is no old people's home** in the municipality.

There is **a daily centre for children with intellectual disability** in the municipality. In addition, there is a **special unit for autistic children** in the local primary school. There is **no daily centre for street children**, as overall, there are less than 10 street children in the municipality.

A rehabilitation centre opened in the municipality of Stip, where drug users receive their therapy and meet psychologist once a week.

⁴¹ Article 55. Law on Social Protection, Official Gazzette of RM, No 79/2009

In October, the building of a new playground started in the area Senak. The activity is part of the Local Action for Children's Rights, as sub-component of the initiative for building new playgrounds in the urban and rural areas.

Furthermore, in October the foundations for two classrooms in the regional units of the kindergarten⁴² were laid down. This is also an activity deriving from the Local Action for Children's Rights, i.e. subcomponent of the activity for increasing the spatial facilities of the kindergarten 'Astibo, i.e. its regional unit 'Soncogledi' in the area of Senak.

Finally, the municipality made preparations for building 6 classrooms and a gym in the Primary School 'DimitarVlahov', regional school 'Babi'. This is also an activity deriving from the Local Action for Children's Rights, i.e. subcomponent of the activity for improving the conditions of the primary and secondary schools.

2. Social Work Centre Stip

Social Work Centre Stip (hereinafter: SWC Stip) serves two municipalities with approximately 56.000 citizens.

The interview was conducted with Ms Natalija Panova, Acting Director of Social Work Centre Stip.

2.1. Identification of poor and vulnerable groups

According to the data of SWC Stip the most vulnerable category in the municipality are Roma. They are users of all types of financial assistance. The teenage extra-marital relationships are widespread among Roma. They usually approach SWC Stip when the extra-marital relationship has ended, when they change partners, or for child custody.

Children are vulnerable category when parents divorce, when they see parents who they do not live with, or children who are not registered in the relevant institutions. With regards to visit by a parent, even if the relationship parent-child is good, the problem is the limited duration of the visit. SWC usually determines the visit, thus the child sleeps over the weekend, every second week of the month (the child sleeps over at the parent's who he/she does not live with). Except for the weekend, when the child stays over with the parent for one or two days, every second week a weekday is determined for a visit of few hours. For a whole month this adds up to 4 and half days. In Macedonia the joint custody does not exist as a model. Joint custody is possible only when parents agree for such arrangements. Yet, in most cases, the model of visits, as mentioned above is used, which allows limited and little spending time with the parent who the child does not live with.

Children who are not registered in the institutions are deprived of their health protection rights, education and social protection rights. SWC face the difficulty of establishing the identity of these children.

⁴² *Interpreter's note:* the regional units of a kindergarten are called clone-kindergartens in Macedonian language

Women rarely appear as victims of domestic violence in this municipality. Women do not leave the violent person due to their financial and housing dependence.

Old people as vulnerable category are present mostly in rural areas, where they live alone. A large number of the elderly do not have social insurance, because of their inability to provide the necessary documentation for enjoying their rights from the Law on Social Protection.

Juruks, old population of Turkish ethnic origin, are minority living in the mountainous regions in the municipality of Stip and Radovis only. They do not speak Macedonian language, and during their lifetime they were animal farmers. Their average age is above 70, and they have no capacity to work any longer. Their children moved out of the area, and they elderly are alone. Due to the very confined lifestyle and lack of information, the elderly from this Turkish ethnic group, cannot establish their social protection rights.

People with special needs and physical disabilities are a vulnerable category in the municipality of Stip. There is one daily centre for this category. The capacity of the centre is for 25 persons, and at the moment 14 children visit the centre. The major difficulty is the difference in their age as they have different needs and interests. In the daily centre there are no facilities to create two groups according to the age, and because of this, the capacity of the centre is not fully used.

The municipality of Stip has no social shops⁴³. There is a 'public kitchen' with a capacity for serving 85 meals. The number is limited and not all social benefit users could benefit from this service. Although the beneficiary of social protection has co-beneficiaries i.e. family members he/she supports, they are not entitled to hot meal. This service also cannot be used by the beneficiaries living in rural areas. The food is served in three kindergartens in the city of Stip.

SWC Stip has no mechanism and procedures established to identify poor and vulnerable groups. It identifies the groups on individual basis when citizens approach the centre or other institutions.

2.2. Services and access to services offered by the Social Work Centre

SWC Stip offers services in accordance with the Law on Social Protection and Law on Family.

SWC Stip cannot provide discretion to its clients. The main reason for this is the lack of office space. The finances from the social assistance are insufficient to meet the basic needs of the beneficiaries. The financial assistance should be calculated according to the living costs of the family. The users of social benefits have difficulty to provide all the necessary documents. For certain documents they need to pay. SWC Stip officially requests documents from the relevant institutions on behalf of the clients who cannot pay for them. The majority of the clients are uneducated, have no ID documents which poses a difficulty when they apply for assistance. With regards to financial assistance, the number of users receiving financial assistance, with capacity to work, is higher than the ones who have no capacity to work. The majority of SWC clients are users of financial assistance, and according to the Director of SWC Stip this category should

⁴³ Shops offering products with discount for social benefit users

receive the assistance through the Employment Agency. In this way, SWC would have an opportunity to carry out the professional bit of their work.

The users of financial assistance are discriminated because of the condition for the limit on household incomes. Any type of financial assistance is minimal and does not meet the basic needs of the beneficiary. Users of social protection who need care by third person should be entitled to care on the basis of their health condition and incapacity to work, and no further requirements should be asked.

CSR Stip has insufficient technical and expert staff. The Centre needs terrain vehicle for difficult to access mountainous regions. A triage service is needed. The persons in this service would accept all cases and forward them to the appropriate expert staff. The spatial facilities in the Centre need to be reorganised, as there is lack of office space, no waiting rooms, neither a room for group counselling, and other space needed for work with every group of users.

Employment programmes for poor and vulnerable groups should be developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in cooperation with employment agencies. The service 'public kitchen' should be available in the rural areas and hot meals should be served to all family members of the beneficiary.

Daily centres are needed for all vulnerable groups. SWC has no regional units in the rural areas.

2.3. Prevention and support of poor and vulnerable groups

SWC Stip has no capacity to carry out social prevention activities.

SWC Stip has no mechanisms and procedures in place to protect and support poor and vulnerable groups.

The citizens of the municipality are informed on their social protection rights when they approach SWC directly.

2.4. Consultation and participation of poor and vulnerable groups

SWC Stip has no programme neither a mechanism for consultation with the citizens of the municipality of Stip. The consultation takes place in the SWC premises, individually, or when social workers carry out field work.

2.5. Cooperation of Social Work Centre with the local self-government units

SWC Stip has good cooperation with the local self-government. The cooperation is by establishing coordinative bodies that respond to citizens' need when they approach SWC, the local self-government and the relevant institutions in the municipality of Stip.

Furthermore, a form of cooperation is when SWC submits lists of social beneficiaries to the local self-government so that they could be contracted by the municipality to perform community services. While they are contracted by the municipality, the social financial assistance stops, however it recommences after the contracts finish. Often SWC beneficiaries are not interested for this service, as their social financial assistance is on hold for a period of 6 months.

SWC Stip has initiated opening a regional unit in the rural area Karbinci.

SWC Stip cooperates with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The finances are major problem so that SWC can function properly. It was emphasised that the financial assistance provided to poor and vulnerable groups is minimal. Although the Law on Social Protection guarantees the right to social protection, users of social benefits still face social risks.

SWC Stip has cooperation established with the national Employment Agency. The cooperation is continuous, through information sharing for the beneficiaries of these institutions. The Employment Agency does not offer employment to users of social benefits.

There is good cooperation of SWC Stip with the civil sector. The cooperation with Roma organisations, Citizens' Association Eho, Citizens' Association Energija, and Youth Club should be noted. Roma organisations offer assistance to Roma for obtaining ID or other documents. The Citizens' Association Eho offers free legal aid. For SWC Stip the cooperation with the civil sector is a very positive experience.

SWC Stip has no continuous cooperation with the business sector. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy offers incentives to the business sector for employing certain category of SWC beneficiaries. To this aim, the business sector asked SWC to provide data on that category of beneficiaries.

3. Focus Groups Findings

The state of the poor and vulnerable groups in the municipality of Stip was determined by conducting interviews with two focus groups. One focus group consisted of Macedonian and Roma women; the other consisted of Macedonian and Roma men.

3.1. Old people

The number of old people in the municipality of Stip is considerable. They live in very unfavourable conditions due to low pensions that do not cover their basic needs. Due to the high unemployment rate, few generations live in one household, and the pension, although minimal, is the only source of income to the whole family. There are cases where the finances of the elderly are used by their close family members; but despite this, they are not taken care of. There are cases when the elderly are victims of domestic violence. Another problem is the lack of capacity in the old people's homes. On one hand, the places in the homes are limited, and on the other, the elderly cannot pay for this service. Their close family members are also not able to pay for the service.

In general the elderly have good housing conditions, however there are exceptions to this. Old people's homes offer good housing.

The conditions in the health institutions are below the acceptable standards: the hygiene is bad, the equipment is old, the medical tools are old or insufficient, the beds and covers are also in very bad shape. The premises have not been renovated since they

were opened. The elderly have to pay a proportion of the health care costs and the medicines. Often, they need to pay the full cost of the medicines. Often the ambulance is late, or at times does not respond appropriately. The elderly need physiotherapy, but cannot afford such service.

The procedure for granting social protection is long. Only for certain types of diagnosis (medical conditions) social protection is granted. Often, the elderly can not enjoy social protection rights to which they are entitled.

3.2. Women

Most vulnerable category of women are the victims of domestic violence. The living conditions of women are satisfactory. Women are mostly employed in the textile industry, while in the administration and other public institutions the employment is done according to the political affiliation. Women over 35 years of age are discriminated against at the labour market on the basis of their age.

The textile factories do not respect the Law on Working Relations i.e. women have no fixed working hours. They are not paid for overtime work, and the wages are minimal. They are used as cheap labour, and often, are victims at bullying at work by their employers. The employment procedures in the business sector are corrupted.

The awareness among women for their health protection is satisfactory.

The Social Work centre does not provide appropriate protection to the victims of domestic violence. They are not satisfied with the treatment by the SWC and the Ministry of Interior (hereinafter: MoI). MoI registers cases of domestic violence as complaints, while SWC as disturbed marriage relations. The psychological violence is not sanctioned by the above-mentioned institutions. Women- victims of domestic violence are not financially independent and this is one of the reasons they fail to report domestic violence to relevant institutions.

3.3. Children

Poverty is a main reason why children are a vulnerable category in the municipality of Stip. There are cases when children are forced by their parents to beg. The money they receive from begging is given to the parents. There are cases when the parent uses the money to buy alcohol, and the children are still not fed or dressed. The number of children-beggars is on the rise, and it can be noticed that many special needs children are used for this type of forced child labour. There are examples when they are seated in a wheelchair in front of a restaurant and forced to beg. Other example is when children perform physical work with their parents, so the family could earn money to buy food. This research noted that negative social trends, such as paedophilia, juvenile delinquency, child trafficking or juvenile prostitution are on the rise due to poverty. Because of the traditional values of the society, these incidents are really reported to the competent institutions.

The Social Work Centre provides care to children without parents or parental care. After they leave the institution, the Centre establishes contacts with other institutions including the Employment Agency or the local government in order to help them find

employment. The participants emphasised this as a positive experience. The major difficulty is providing housing for this category of children/ young people.

Children are discriminated when they are prevented from receiving child benefits. The conditions for receiving child benefits are related to the incomes of the family members and the employment of one of the parents. The children whose parents are unemployed have no right to child benefits. In addition, the amount of the child benefit and the special child benefit is minimal, thus it does not cover the basic needs of the children.

For the children with special needs suitable learning conditions in the schools are provided.

3.4. People with special needs

In the municipality of Stip there is no place where the people with special needs would socialise. It is essential that a daily centre for special needs people over the age of 26 is established. Businesses exploit this vulnerable category of people i.e. they do not provide for them appropriate work conditions or appropriate pay. The rights from the area of social protection, to which they are entitled to, are limited by the conditions laid down with the Law on Social Protection with regards to the upper limit of the income. The financial assistance is minimal and it does not meet their basic needs.

3.5. Roma

Roma are the most vulnerable category the municipality of Stip. They are not educated, and this is a major obstacle when seeking employment.

Most of them live in improvised housing. The majority of Roma children are not vaccinated, neither have been registered by the institutions. According to Roma traditions, there are underage extra-marital unions (teenage marriages). The usual age of getting 'married' is between 12 and 15.

3.6. Minorities

In the municipality there are various minority groups: Roma, Vlachs, Turks, Bonjaks, Serbs, Croatians and others. As to the rest of the citizens of the municipality, the unemployment is a major problem of the minorities as well. Great number of Roma declare as of Turkish ethnicity. The Jurucks community, living in the mountainous regions are a marginalised group. Education is their greatest problem.

F) Municipality of Prilep

1. Local self-government unit- The interview was conducted with Mr Marjan Prodanoski, Head of Unit for Legal Affairs in the municipality of Prilep.

1.1. Institutional mechanisms for social protection in the municipality of Prilep

There is a **Sector for General and Legal Affairs** in the municipality of Prilep. This sector includes a **Unit for Public Activities**, managed by Head who deals with issues related to social protection, child care, culture, education, sports, etc.

Within the Council of the municipality of Prilep there is a standing Commission for Social Affairs and Children Rights which among other things deals with social protection issues. The Commission has 5 members from the Council of the municipality of Prilep. The Council Working Programme is the main document that defines the frequency of Commission meetings. The Commission also meets depending on the need to resolve specific issues. If there is an item on the Council agenda related to the work of the Commission, the Commission will meet.

1.2. Programs and action plans in the area of social protection, including development programmes for specific needs of the citizens

The Municipality of Prilep **does not have a social protection programme and, therefore, no action plan for social protection.**

With regards to the local action plans developed and adopted, the municipality of Prilep has prepared the following 3 key plans:

- Local Action Plan for Employment 2009-2010
- Local Plan for Action on the Rights of the Child 2009-2013
- Local Plan for People with Disabilities 2008 - 2010

The Local Action Plan for the Rights of the Child for the period of 2009-2013 was drafted in January 2009. The Plan was drafted by the council Commission on Social Activities and Children Rights, supported by UNICEF, the Ministry of Local Self-government and ZELS(Association of Local Government Units). The development of the local plan is one of the activities of the project 'Support of the Decentralisation from Aspect of Children Rights' of the Centre for Human Rights and Conflicts Resolution, and the plan should be implemented by the Commission for Social Activities and Children Rights.

After establishing the criteria for selection of the strategic objectives (quantitative inclusion, marginality, urgency, feasibility and possibility for support from the community), the Commission identified the following three priority areas:

1. Inclusion;
2. Improved health for all children;
3. Protection of the children from harassment, abandonment, exploitation and violence.

Relevant local stakeholders were involved in the process of drafting the local action plan (NGOs, municipal administration representatives, council members of the municipality of Prilep, the Centre for Social Work, etc.).

The Coordinative Body comprised of members from the above-mentioned organisations, as well as the Commission for Social Activities and Children Rights are responsible for successful implementation and monitoring of the activities. The Action Plan includes a timeframe for realisation of the activities, the institutions responsible for implementation, the expected sources of funding, as well as ways of implementation and monitoring.

However, there is a **concern that the timeframe was not conceptualised properly** since it is a general timeframe – most of the activities were planned for the period of 2009-2013, without detailed monthly and annual timeframe for the activities. There is also **detailed budget missing** which leaves a gap and prevents the appropriate monitoring of the implemented activities.

When the municipality of Prilep was asked about the implemented activities from the plan, **no feedback information on their implementation was received.** The response of the municipality indicated that most of the planned activities were to be implemented on continuous basis during the 5 year period of implementation and in addition, a list of indicators was developed that would be used to monitor the situation. This list would be registered in a special database MAKINFO that the municipality received from UNICEF. Indicators will be entered into this database for each year that will enable benchmarking year by year. The Action Plan also includes planned activities for the period of 2009-2010, but no additional information on them was received by the municipality. Therefore, there is a lack of appropriate mechanism established that will enable regular annual monitoring as well as a lack of established indicators on annual level.

The Action Plan for Employment of Roma in the municipality of Prilep is in its final phase.

In the municipality of Prilep there is **inter-sectoral cooperation for development of plans and proposals** with other commissions and sectors (for example: with the Commission on Equal Gender Opportunities etc.). Regarding the development of programmes, often the employees in the state administration make a draft on specific issues and provide the initiatives which are afterwards considered by the Council members, within the frames of the relevant Commission.

The municipality of Prilep **has never adopted nor prepared development programmes for the specific needs of the citizens.**

1.3. Mechanisms for consultation and inclusion of poor and vulnerable groups at local and national level, including cooperation between the relevant institutions and NGOs

In the municipality of Prilep all decisions made by the municipal Council are published in the municipal Gazette as well as, in the electronic newsletter. Citizens also receive the information through the website of the municipality. The cooperation is usually with the local/ urban communities or NGOs. With regards to **the area of social protection and inclusion, so far there was cooperation with NGOs established** only when they approach the municipality to offer cooperation on a specific project. Depending on the project or activity that needs to be implemented, the relevant staff with appropriate background is assigned. The cooperation initiatives happen only if the NGOs have submitted project that involves the municipality or vice-versa.

There is some cooperation with the centres for social work, more specifically, in the development of the local action plan on children's rights or when the municipality requires information about the beneficiaries of social assistance.

However, **there are no mechanisms established for consultation and involvement of poor and vulnerable groups at local level**. In general, the entire communication is done directly upon requests by citizens, who usually ask for financial assistance. Their request is submitted to the Commission on Finances and Budget and their requests are either rejected or approved. The interviewed municipal representatives consider that the payment of one-off assistance should be transferred to the Centre for Social Work and the centre should be responsible to analyse the requests and decide accordingly.

1.4. Mechanisms for identification of poor and vulnerable groups

The municipality of Prilep does not assess the needs of poor and vulnerable groups. **There is no database on issues related to social protection and inclusion**. There is also no classification of data by categories or by target groups. In general, **there is no mechanism whatsoever for identification of poor and vulnerable groups**. The data for the lists of users of social assistance are received only from the Social Work Centre. The communication happens upon request by a citizen for social assistance or for consultation. Citizens that have specific problem submit their requests to the municipal Council and the Mayor. According to the interviewed municipal representative, *'These issues need to be resolved only by the Social Work Centre since the municipality is not a Centre'*.

1.5. Provision of social services by the local self-government units and project/ programme activities carried out in the area of social protection and inclusion

The municipality of Prilep allocates finances for social protection from the budget item - Current Reserves. The local government in 2009 allocated a total of 600.000denars – 100.000 for food for children with special needs and 500.000denars for social allowance following requests by citizens.

The Municipality applied for projects in the area of social protection and inclusion. In cooperation with INTERSOS, an Italian NGO, and with COSVI – another Italian NGO, the municipality carried out and supported the project for Multicultural Centre in the area Trizla, in Prilep, where the majority of the population are Roma. The objective of the project was to improve the quality of living of Roma and improving the relationships between the different ethnic communities living in Prilep, with emphasis on the integration and dialogue between the different communities, and through social integration and education.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and Social Work Centre Prilep, the municipality supports the daily centre for people with special needs.

Furthermore, the project 'public kitchen' is ongoing, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The Social Work Centre provides the municipality with the lists of the social beneficiaries. The municipality assigned the space for the old people's home 'Kiro Krsteski Platnik'. **100 citizens are using the services of the 'public kitchen'.**

In 2007, the municipality of Prilep was selected as the most accessible municipality and it was awarded by the Delegation of the European Union in Macedonia and by the NGO Polio Plus. The Municipality installed access ramps in the schools, in the municipal building, the intersections, the parking lots were adjusted and sound traffic lights were installed on the busiest intersections.

1.6. Improving the state of socially endangered people

The Law on Social Protection⁴⁴ establishes that, in order to exercise the right to social financial assistance, every local self-government unit can contract capable workers to carry out community service. So far, the municipality of Prilep, through the active employment measures of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, more specifically, through the programme for community service, has contracted 328 persons for seasonal works. These people were paid 6.300 denars per month. The contracts lasted for up to 6 months and this took place in 2009. Such activity was not implemented in 2010.

Still, the **municipality does not have a strategic plan for improving the state of the socially endangered persons.** The activities are short-term projects that yield no appropriate middle-term and long-term results, and financed by the central government.

1.7. Capital investments and infrastructure in the area of social protection and inclusion

The municipality of Prilep entered the second phase of the decentralisation i.e. the fiscal decentralisation in 2007. As such, the municipality (in addition to owning the buildings it inherited with the decentralisation process or that were actually built by the municipality) is obliged to finance them, invest in them and provide maintenance.⁴⁵ In this regard, the municipality of Prilep (in the area of social affairs and education) refurbished a number of secondary and elementary schools.

⁴⁴ Art 55, the Law on Social Protection, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No 79/2009

⁴⁵ Art 22, the Law on Local Self-government, Official Gazette of RM, No 5/2002

When it comes to capital investments in the social area, the municipality of Prilep in 2008, invested 600.000 denars from its budget, for building children's fun park.

A 900m² amphitheatre for open-air teaching has been built in the Primary School "Kire Gabriloski". The amphitheatre consists of 6 open-air classrooms and has a capacity of 186 seats. This was a joint activity implemented by the municipality of Prilep in cooperation with the Public Company 'Komunalec' from Prilep.

In the Primary School 'Rampo Levkata' the municipality invested 62.000denars to arrange the school yard. A video surveillance has been installed in the amount of 160.000denars, and for reconstruction of the locker rooms the municipality invested 1.000.000denars.

In the Secondary School 'Gjorche Petrov', the municipality invested 5.000.000denars for installation of heating system in the school. This project is implemented with financial support by the Ministry of Education and Science.

In the Secondary School 'Riste Risteski', in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, the municipality invested 3.000.000denars in the installation of a new boiler heating system.

The primary school 'Dobre Jovanoski' was refurbished. The school is in the area Trizla and the majority of the pupils attending the school are Roma. This activity improved the teaching and learning process in the school, and helped the integration between the two ethnic groups. The municipality invested in the refurbishment of the floors, corridors, walls and ceilings in the amount of 900.000denars, while the rest was co-financed by the Italian NGO COSVI.

The municipality **does not have a home for the elderly or for persons exposed to social risks**, nor has a daily centre for street children.

2. Social Work Centre Prilep

The Centre for Social Work Prilep (hereinafter: CSW Prilep) provides services to three municipalities i.e. serves around 120.000 people.

The interview was conducted with Mr Zoran Malkovski, social worker in the Social Work Centre Prilep.

2.1. Identification of poor and vulnerable groups

Children are the largely present vulnerable group in the municipality of Prilep. They are vulnerable category in divorce proceedings of their parents; when they are neglected and have inappropriate upbringing; when they are victims of human trafficking or they are juvenile delinquents. The indicators for the increase of these negative tendencies are the number of procedures initiated by the Centre to deprive the parents of their custody rights. The Centre has a 24 hours service for this purpose.

Second most present vulnerable category are **women**-victims of domestic violence. The municipality of Prilep does not have a shelter for women- victims of domestic violence. The Centre has established a good cooperation with the competent court and the relevant institutions for temporary protection measures. However, the number of temporary protection measures is not high – according to the statement by the representative from the Centre: *"It is a success when we see 5 court restraint orders"*. The most commonly protection measures are those for compulsory medical treatment.

Roma are also a vulnerable category in the municipality of Prilep. Roma usually have no education. The majority of users of social financial assistance are Roma. When it comes to exercising the right to social protection, there is still a large number of Roma who are not registered by the relevant institutions. This is a problem that most Roma children face.

There are also **minorities** (Albanians and Bosnians) who are beneficiaries of social financial assistance.

People with special needs are another vulnerable category. They are using the rights in the area of social assistance. The Centre does not have appropriate access for the people with special needs, except to the first floor of the building.

The elderly are users of social financial assistance on the basis of their age. The Centre provides health protection to this category of people. Due to the lack of finances from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the health insurance cards for the beneficiaries of health protection from the Centre, arrive in the period from 10th to 20th day in the month. This prevents them from fully using their health protection and at times, they need to cover the full cost of the health protection service.

Additional condition for being eligible for social financial assistance on the basis of one's age is the number of years spent working. The persons that face social risks, and have spent from 6 to 14 years in service are not eligible for social financial assistance on the basis of their age and on the basis of illness (certain health condition). If the elderly would like to use social financial assistance on the basis of their age, they should not have more than 5 years of registered work experience. The same requirement applies for the social financial assistance on the basis of illness.

Additional requirement is the limit on the household income—this is a major problem for the elderly people to exercise their social protection rights. According to the representative from the Centre: *"There were a lot of cases when the individuals were not eligible for financial assistance due to difference of 100 to 200 denars from the upper limit of the income. There was a case where the person was not eligible for assistance because of the difference of only 24 denars!"*.

Social Work Centre Prilep has no appropriate procedures and mechanisms developed for identification of poor and vulnerable groups. Additional reason for this is the lack of professional staff and their large administrative workload.

They identify poor and vulnerable groups on individual basis.

2.2. Services and access to services provided by Social Work Centre Prilep

Social Work Centre Prilep provides its services in accordance with the laws and its mandate.

The total number of beneficiaries of all types of financial assistance in the municipality of Prilep is 6.639. The applicants for financial assistance are discriminated on the basis of the condition for the household income. If the income limit for the family is over 4.000 denars per family member, and this by itself is a minimal sum, the applicants for social financial assistance are not eligible for it. The applicants for permanent financial assistance on the basis of illness and old age are the most vulnerable categories. The amount of financial assistance is not sufficient for the basic needs of an individual. It is necessary to review each and every case separately and then award the assistance on the basis of the costs and needs of the family.

In the municipality of Prilep there is a daily centre for children with special needs. The capacity of the centre is 30 children. The centre provides transportation, hot meal and socialisation for these children. The Social Work Centre has positive experiences so far from the work of the daily centre. **The municipality does not have a shelter centre for the women victims of family violence.** The Social Work Centre raised an initiative to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy but, due to budget constraints, such centre is still not built. When it comes to specialised services, it is essential that a daily centre for substance users is opened. These individuals are in a very difficult situation since there is no centre where they could receive methadone therapy, thus they are forced to travel to the nearby city of Bitola which is additional cost for them. The families cannot pay for travelling costs to other cities. The financial assistance to the individuals using drugs is insufficient for their basic needs, so they continue with the use of narcotics as they receive no treatment.

The municipality of Prilep does not have a shelter for homeless people. This category of individuals is referred to the shelter for homeless people in Skopje. The Social Work Centre raised an initiative for opening a daily centre for street children.

There are no social shops in the municipality of Prilep. There is only one 'public kitchen' with a capacity of serving 100 hot meals a day. The initial target group for this service were the beneficiaries of the permanent financial assistance, but later, it included the beneficiaries of the social financial assistance. The number of meals is limited and this service is not available to clients living in the rural areas.

Social Work Centre Prilep does not have suitable spatial facilities to work with clients. It is necessary to introduce counters and waiting rooms. The Social Work Centre is unable to provide privacy to its clients. A single office accommodates two or more staff, thus two or more clients are served simultaneously. When interviewed clients often ask for privacy and in that case the social worker provides a separate office, according to the centre representative. He also adds: *"If the client would like to discuss something in private, we will provide space or our colleague will leave the office. Thus, we are trying to provide privacy"*. Social Work Centre Prilep does not have regional units in the rural municipalities. It was proposed that the social beneficiaries should be serviced by the employment agencies. At the moment, the beneficiaries have to confirm their unemployment status twice – once in the Social Work Centre and once again in the Employment Agency. Social Work Centre Prilep needs vehicles in order to be able to make field visits. It is also necessary to open counselling office and a daily centre that will provide service to various vulnerable categories. The SWC staff are not paid for overtime work and there are no favourable conditions for developing group therapy. Social Work Centre needs to contract private security agencies and install weapons detector. The professional staff are often subject to threat, aggressive and inappropriate behaviour by some clients.

2.3. Prevention and support to poor and vulnerable groups

The Center for Social Work in Prilep fails to provide social prevention due to the lack of human resources and appropriate working conditions. It is necessary to hire social workers in the schools and companies having over 300 staff. It is also necessary to establish conditions for implementation of the social prevention in all areas of social life. The Centre for Social Work should open a separate department on social prevention.

Social Work Centre Prilep does not have established mechanisms and procedures for protection and support of poor and vulnerable groups.

Social Work Centre Prilep informs the citizens about their rights through the local media, leaflets and through direct communication with the clients in the centre.

2.4. Consultations and inclusion of poor and vulnerable groups

Social Work Centre Prilep does not have programmes and mechanisms established for consultation with the citizens in the municipality of Prilep.

2.5. Cooperation of the Social Work Centre with the local government

SWC Prilep cooperates with the local government. When the families are faced with a situation of social risk (natural disasters and similar), the local self-government provides them with one-off financial assistance. Furthermore, SWC is a donor to the daily centre for children with special needs. The centre for social work in Prilep cooperates with the local self-government when temporary contracts are offered to social beneficiaries. While they are contracted, the social financial assistance is on hold and is activated after the contract terminates. Through this measure, some of the beneficiaries were employed in the local government units for community service. The centre for social work does not cooperate with the local self-government in the rural areas.

SWC Prilep has good cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The staff working in SWC raised initiatives with regards to the specialised services, however, due to lack of finances, these activities are still not realised. The cooperation between Social Work Centre Prilep and the Employment Agency happens when information is shared on the employment status of the beneficiaries. The employment agencies do not provide employment for the social assistance beneficiaries.

Social Work Centre Prilep has established good cooperation with NGOs working with Roma and the Youth Cultural Centre. Roma NGOs assist the clients in completing the documents needed for applying for financial assistance. The assistance provided by the Youth Cultural Centre is a donation of funds and clothes for single parents.

The cooperation between SWC Prilep and the business sector are donations of clothing, blankets and other products. They do not have cooperation when it comes to employment of beneficiaries of social protection.

3. Focus group findings

The state of the vulnerable and poor groups in the municipality of Prilep was established by interviewing two focus groups. The first focus group was consisted of Macedonian and Roma women, and the second group was consisted of Macedonian and Roma men.

3.1. Old people

The number of the elderly in the municipality of Prilep is quite high. The housing conditions of the elderly are quite modest. In the pensioners' homes the living conditions are good, but they lack capacity. The elderly cannot afford to stay at pensioners' homes. The biggest problems they face are the health protection, the very small amount of social financial assistance and the very small pensions. If the elderly do not have sufficient number of years of registered work experience (years in service), they are not eligible to exercise the right to retirement. Furthermore, there a number of requirements to be met so they can enjoy their social protection rights. The elderly people are unable to provide all the needed documents for social financial assistance. If the elderly do not meet the conditions to exercise the right to pension and social protection rights, they cannot receive health insurance. They pay for the health services in full and most of the medicines they need are not on the positive list of the Health Insurance Fund. It is necessary to develop special programmes for health protection of elderly and weak

persons. Furthermore, they need to be exempt from paying for health services and medicines. The pensions and the amount of the social assistance are small and they can not meet the basic needs of the elderly people. They are vulnerable category and they still remain unprotected by the state.

3.2. Women

Women are vulnerable category in the municipality of Prilep. Unemployment is the greatest factor that they are a vulnerable group. There is political influence in the employment procedures, so women can not be employed in the public institutions. Women are most likely employed in the private sector, usually in the textile factories. The employers do not comply with the rights from the Law on Working Relations. They have no specific working hours, are not paid for overtime work and their wages are minimal. It is important to emphasize that the mobbing (bullying at work) is quite present. Women fail to report the bullying because they are unable to find job elsewhere and the minimum salary is their key source of income. Women are discriminated on the labour market due to their age. The living conditions at home are good. Women are aware about their health protection rights but, due to the bad financial situation, they are unable to use the health services on regular basis. Corruption is present in the public health institutions. In the Centre for Social Work, the one-off assistance is not always available to women that are in bad health conditions. Only small percentage of women – victims of family violence actually report the violence to the relevant institutions. The reason why the victims do not report the family violence to the relevant institutions are the bad economic status and the unresolved housing problems. The Centre for Social Work provides appropriate assistance and protection to this category of women.

3.3. Children

Poverty is the main reason why children are vulnerable category in the municipality of Prilep. Parents cannot provide clothing and money to educate them, thus children are deprived of their right to education. Another problem among the school-age children is that their parents neglect their upbringing. The upbringing process is missing from the process of education – the focus is on the teaching/learning process. This exposes the children to various social risks. Social prevention and health education of children are necessary in the schools. In addition, it is necessary to hire a social worker in the schools. Children are discriminated due to the inability to meet the conditions for child benefits (which are defined in the Law on Child Protection). The amount of the financial assistance is minimal and does not satisfy the basic needs of the children. It is important to emphasise that in a family that has more than two children, the total monthly child allowance is 2.415denars. When the children are co-beneficiaries of financial assistance they are not entitled to child benefits. Child benefit should be available to all children and they should be entitled to benefits from their birth. The children with special needs have appropriate learning conditions in the specialised schools.

3.4. People with special needs

People with special needs are another vulnerable category in the municipality of Prilep. This category has difficulties in providing the documentation required so they can enjoy their social protection rights. The amount of social assistance is insufficient to meet the basic needs of this category of people. The requirements for permanent financial assistance on the basis of illness are discriminatory towards the people with special needs. The living conditions for this category of persons are satisfactory. The business sector abuses the position of the people with special needs as they do not respect the worker rights foreseen in the Law on Working Relations. The people with special needs receive a minimum salary and they are not provided with appropriate working conditions. This category of people should be exempt from co-financing the health services and medicines. The social protection beneficiaries have their health insurance covered by the Centre for Social Work. They are prevented from using full health services as they receive their health cards from 15th to 20th day in the month.

3.5. Roma

Poverty is widely present among Roma population. Roma families cannot afford food, clothes and housing. Consequently, they cannot send their children to school. Most of the Roma have no education and no qualifications which is a problem for their employment. Roma are the most common beneficiaries of social financial assistance. The assistance is insufficient to meet the basic needs of the beneficiaries.

3.6. Minorities

The minorities in the Municipality of Prilep are Turks, Bosnians and Albanians. The most common problem of the minorities is the procedure for obtaining citizenship. If they have no citizenship they can not exercise the rights they are entitled in accordance with the laws.

CIP - Каталогизација во публикација
Национална и универзитетска библиотека "Св. Климент Охридски", Скопје

352:364(497.7)(047.31)
352:364-22(497.7)(047.31)

ANALYSIS of the State of Social Protection and Social Inclusion
at Local Level. - Skopje : Institute of Human Rights "Ludwig
Boltzmann", 2011. - 116 стр. ; 21 см

Фусноти кон текстот

ISBN 978-608-65251-5-6

а) Локална самоуправа - Социјална заштита - Македонија -
Истражувања б) Локална самоуправа - Стратегии за социјална инклузија
- Македонија - Истражувања
COBISS.MK-ID 86753290

