

A Society for All Ages: Challenges and Opportunities

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Delegation of the Republic of Serbia

Ministerial Panel

«Society for All Ages: Challenges and Opportunities»

1. A phenomenon of the **demographic change** represents one of the greatest challenges in Serbia owing to ageing of population that is far more rapid than in any developed country in Europe. This is the consequence of specific, conflicting, social and political changes and continuous, difficult economic living conditions for families and all generations in society. We have been confronted with the very low birth rates and effects of extensive migrations. Particular challenge is the regional differences – population in poorer and rural areas in the southeast and central parts of the country is older than in other parts of Serbia.

Since the adoption of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its Regional Implementation Strategy in 2002, general level of social security of the population has risen considerably, pension and social protection systems have become stable, and reforms oriented to preservation of their sustainability and favourable response to basic needs of the population have been initiated.

2. However, the **poverty** continues to be challenge for us, with most vulnerable population groups such as older people and children, refugees and displaced persons as well as Roma being affected by poverty. In the strategic action of the Government, through active international cooperation and support we achieved significant initial results in the reduction of the poverty of population. Nevertheless, the great challenge is the goal that we set ourselves to achieve – to cut in half the number of poor citizens in next three years!

3. Serbia, on the road to European integrations, committed to exercise of human rights, recognizes as a particular challenge the action for enhanced social inclusion of older citizens and combat against all forms of **discrimination**, especially in the **labour market**. Through the reforms of the National Employment Service and establishment of regional agencies that provide

support to small and medium-size enterprises, we expect to achieve significant results in the employment of older workers. Thus we shall make first step in the achievement of one of the priority goals of the Ageing Strategy of Republic of Serbia: to make older persons active participants in accelerated economic and social development of Serbia.

4. We have recognized that **partnership between the state and civil society** is the important opportunity for improvement of the quality of life of older citizens who need social and financial support and daily health care and assistance. With active cooperation of the Government and UN system and donors from developed countries of Europe and the world we have actively been developing NGO sector within social protection especially since 2003. By public and civil sector partnerships in the local communities we have considerably increased the quality, selection and number of services for elderly and all other users. Also, the public sector institutions have been improving the quality and extending scope of services. We are engaged in the introduction of the quality of standards and accreditation of the training programmes for professional staff. Social policy reforms in Serbia have now been in the phase of adoption of new modern methods of work and new values.

5. Also, there are positive opportunities in the process of already initiated **decentralization of the system**. Thus the service provision is now closer to source of the elderly persons' needs –closer to local community and family. The goal of our action is to have older citizens directly take part in this process and progressively enable them to postpone or reduce the need to be placed in residential institution. Economic progress of the country and higher general standard open the possibilities to include private sector in the system of long-term care.

6. It is sure that apart from activities that are going on in this field, the **international cooperation** has been of vital importance for all the results achieved in Serbia in the domain of ageing of population. Therefore we see the successful cooperation with international NGOs, UN Organisations, other institutions, as well as NGOs from other countries as an opportunity to be informed, learn, undertake comparative analysis, exchange of experiences and good practice, but also as the source of immediate support in future development of the society for all ages. It is our as well as common goal of International Plan of Action on Ageing.