

Access for women and children to services in the rural areas of Serbia and proposed measures to improve their situation



Sustainable Tourism for Rural Development
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Access for women and children to services in the rural areas of Serbia and proposed measures to improve their situation

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A: Analysis of access to services and recommendations to improve the situation of women and children living in rural areas.



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Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| CARDS | Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization |
| CSW | Centre for Social Work |
| EARDF | European Agricultural Rural Development Fund |
| EC | European Commission |
| EU | European Union |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| HBP | Household Budget Poll |
| HDR | Human Development Report |
| IPA | Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance |
| IPARD | Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development |
| ISPA | Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession |
| ISSPC | Indicators Subgroup of the Social Protection Committee |
| LAG | Local Action Group |
| LEADER | Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale |
| LSMP | Living Standard Measurement Poll |
| MATFW | Ministry of Agriculture, Trade, Forestry and Water Management |
| MERD | Ministry of Economy and Regional Development |
| MOLSP | Ministry of Labour and Social Policy |
| MICS | Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey |
| MSF | Material Support to Families |
| NES | National Employment Service |
| NGO | Non-governmental Organisation |
| NPA | National Plan of Action (for Children) |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| PDI | Pension and Disability Insurance |
| Phare | A pre-IPA EU programme |
| SAPARD | Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development |
| SORS | Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia |
| UNDAF | United Nations Development Assistance Framework |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| UNWTO | World Tourism Organization |



Introduction

Population drops in 86% of Serbia's villages; every other rural child (45.1%) faces deprivation: and 76% of unemployed women in rural areas have never heard of any active labour market measures. Depopulation and poverty characterize rural Serbia in 2011, as well as weakening those "internal" human resources which should be generating a significant part of the growth and development in rural areas

The United Nations Joint Programme *Sustainable Tourism in the Service of Rural Development* represents one of the country's most important initiatives and is directed toward diversification of the rural economy through tourism, in order to solve problems such as depopulation and poverty, and help the development of the rural economy and society in Serbia.

Economic goals cannot be viewed separately from social goals if the ultimate objective is sustainable rural development and a satisfactory quality of life for the rural population. This study attempts to identify the greatest barriers to rural women's and children's access to social services; to reveal the critical obstacles that prevent rural women and children from achieving better living conditions; and then, based on these findings, to formulate recommendations for resolving the specified problems.

Analysis of the data presented in this study indicates that overcoming the obstacles to access for women and children who live in rural areas to social services requires linking up elements from the economic, educational, health, social, municipal and other sectors, as well as confronting the complex mechanisms of economic decline and social exclusion in Serbia's rural areas. In short, a number of sectoral public policies need to have specific social objectives in order to enable Serbia to start resolving issues related to rural areas and to coordinate its policy with the European Union which, through the

European Agricultural Rural Development Fund (EARDF), conducts an active rural development policy that contributes to development of the social and educational infrastructure and services and general strengthening of the human capital in rural areas.

After the first introductory segment of the Report, the main analysis is presented in the second segment. The basic socio-economic characteristics of the rural areas are outlined, and, within the context of these characteristics, the relative position of women and children and their possibilities for access to social services and achieving a quality life. The analysis then continues according to specific dimensions – economic status and economic empowerment services, education, health, social protection and services significant for socio-cultural participation and quality of life. The third segment of the Report summarizes the key conclusions and outlines general recommendations, while the fourth segment lists the proposed measures aimed at the rural development programme IPARD. In addition, the Report contains two Annexes - the first lists the components and characteristics of the IPARD programme; the second presents a detailed report from focus-group discussions.

1. Abstract

This study on the access of women and children in rural areas to social, health and educational services is based on an initiative started within a broader programme *Sustainable Tourism in the Service of Rural Development*, jointly carried out by five UN agencies (UNDP, UNEP, FAO, UNWTO and UNICEF) and national partners (the Ministry of Economy and Regional Development, the Ministry of Agriculture, Trade, Forestry and Water Management and the National Tourism Organization of Serbia). Those programme components which refer to children also include the Ministry of Education and Science and other national partners.

The United Nations Programme *Sustainable Tourism in the Service of Rural Development* is aimed at diversification of the rural economy through tourism. Since rural development is viewed primarily in terms of economic development, which is also the case in the National Rural Development Programme, this analysis tried to emphasise the other preconditions for sustainable rural development, especially quality of life measured through access to services for those population groups which constitute the cornerstone of the development of human capital in every society – women and children. The plan was to pay special attention to women and children in rural areas because newer research (Statistical Office of the RS, 2007; Cvejić et al, 2010) indicates that these population groups are particularly vulnerable in rural areas, despite being extremely important for the development of rural communities. Therefore – within the United Nations Programme *Sustainable Tourism in the Service of Rural Development* – this analysis was carried out of the accessibility of services in the rural areas of Serbia to women and children. The objectives of the analysis are specified below, as well as the methodology underpinning the analysis, the content of the Report, the basic conclusions and the key recommendations.

1.1 Objectives

The main objectives of this analysis are - to identify the greatest barriers to access for rural women and children to social services; to reveal the crucial obstacles that prevent them from achieving better living conditions; and then, based on these findings, to formulate recommendations for resolving the specified problems. This research is not directed toward a detailed analysis of each sector relevant for the quality of life of rural children and women, but rather towards the idea of putting the rural population, especially children and women, at the centre of the analysis and interconnecting these sectors (economic, educational, health, social, municipal, etc.) in order to discover the complexity of the mechanisms of economic decline and social exclusion in Serbia's rural areas. **Identification of these obstacles serves as a basis for considering opportunities to improve the availability and quality of services, and so improve the quality of life. As these opportunities are considered, they are translated into concrete recommendations for adopting different policies and measures aimed at rural development and improved living conditions for the rural population.**

These main objectives are operationalized through assessment of the following main aspects of the problem –

1. access to educational services,
2. access to services strengthening the economic potential of the population,
3. access to health protection services,
4. access to social protection services,
5. access to services significant for socio-cultural participation.

In addition to these aspects, the characteristics of the local rural infrastructure are also considered, because this represents an important prerequisite for the availability and quality of services, life opportunities and satisfactory living conditions of the rural population.

The recommendations derived from the analysis are intended for all policy creators and implementers whose agenda contains rural development, or whose activities significantly affect the development of rural communities. They therefore refer to the sectors of education, health, infrastructure, economy, agriculture, regional development, government and local self-government, finances, employment, but also to the inter-sectoral policies dealing with reduction of poverty, social inclusion and gender equality.

Moreover, a proposed IPARD measure has been created referring to diversification of the rural economy and improvement of the quality of life within the third “axis”.¹ Specifically, this “axis” implies investment in the rural economy and rural communities to increase the quality of life in rural areas and increase their attractiveness to investors. In this context, it is estimated that it is necessary to increase the possibilities for employment, especially for young people and women in rural areas, and provide them with better access to information and informational and technological solutions.

1.2. Methodology

This report draws on available statistical data, findings of relevant studies, and data from qualitative research organized specifically for the needs of this Project. **The analysis is based on quantitative indicators from various sources, and their interpretation and updating involved qualitative data from earlier research² and focus group discussions carried out for the benefit of this analysis.** It is important to point out that official statistics and reports based on the Living Standards Measurement Poll (LSMP) or the Household Budget Poll (HBP) do not disaggregate their data by urban/rural categories, and when it comes to children as an age group, it is very

¹ In 2005, the EU Agriculture Council adopted a fundamental reform of the rural development policy for the programme implementation period 2007-2013. (Regulation (EC) number 1698/2005 on the support to rural development provided by the European Agricultural Rural Development Fund – EARDF). This policy is aimed at improving the implementation of the rural development support programme with a greater emphasis on employment, competitiveness and innovations in rural areas. It specifies three basic rural development policy “axes” - increased competitiveness of the agricultural sector; improved environment and rural surroundings through support for land management and improvement of the quality of life in rural areas; and thus promotion of the diversification of the rural economy.

² *Poverty with Many Faces. Analysis of poverty in children in Serbia*, UNICEF, 2004.

rarely done. Where data is disaggregated, this is stated and pointed out in the report. Another particular problem is the fact that, in some reports based on the surveys studying large groups of people, the 15-19 age group is not given separate consideration within the age category 16-24 years of age.

A serious flaw in the data is also discovered with regard to monitoring the individual status of rural women and their access to services, namely, that official statistics are gender insensitive to a large extent. Thus, in the reports from the most significant statistical monitoring (Labour Force Survey, Living Standards Measurement Poll, and even the report from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia on monitoring social exclusion), the data is presented either according to gender for the entire population, or according to place of residence for the entire population (urban/other).³ This makes it impossible for rural women to be viewed as a discrete social category, separate from rural men or urban women.

For the purpose of the analysis, a qualitative research was undertaken using focus group discussions (FGD) methodology in four regions where the project *Sustainable Tourism for Rural Development* was being implemented (Central Serbia, Eastern Serbia, Southern Banat on the Danube and the Lower Danube region). FGDs were held in the villages of Leskovica (Valjevo), Temska (Pirot), Izbište (Vršac) and Kumane (Veliko Gradište). In each village, discussions were held with 5 target groups:

- children from 12 to 14 years of age who attend elementary school,
- children from 15 to 19 years of age who attend high school or whose education has been interrupted,
- women from rural households of 27–55 years of age,
- men who are heads of households on a farm,
- social services providers and representatives of the local administration.

³ What is more, in the official statistics of Serbia there is no clear definition of the rural areas, and so the areas and their population are classified as “urban” and “other”, and the rural areas and rural population belong to this second category.

The FGDs' main objective was to gain insight into the needs of rural women and children for social services, the quality and availability of these services, and the major obstacles preventing their successful provision. The wider context of the possibilities for economic and social improvement of rural life was also examined under this objective, including the activities of the entire household, and the connections between local administration and other local actors relevant to the improvement of rural social services.

1.3 Conclusions

a. The quality of life and access to services for rural children

Despite the implementation of poverty reduction measures that resulted in decreasing poverty trends from 2002 to 2007, **in 2007, the poverty rate among children up to 14 years of age increased when compared to other population categories.** In addition, the gap with regard to the poverty of the general population has since increased again (the Living Standards Measurement Study, 2008).

Because of the inappropriate disaggregation of the statistical data, it is impossible to determine to what extent the status of children from rural areas has worsened in relation to the average, and/or in relation to children from urban areas.

In addition to unemployment, poor education of parents, family structure (one-parent families and families with a large number of children), and ethnic affiliation (especially the Roma community), one of the main factors that increase the risks of deprivation and social exclusion of children is living in rural areas, especially in south-eastern and western Serbia. The data points to some aspects of health, educational and cultural deprivation of children and young people from rural areas in relation to the average for Serbia. A large number of rural children is faced with the problems of poor dietary diversity (25.2% of rural households with children), untimely vaccination (10.6%), failure to go to preventive and specialized examinations (23%), purchase of the appropriate clothing (30.9%) and school material (22.7%), the impossibility to go to excursions

(39.5%), attend additional classes (36.1%) or be educated in a different place. Expressed through the synthetic deprivation index, all of this indicates that almost **every other child in the rural areas (45.1%) is faced with deprivation.** (Cvejić et al, 2010)

In the field of education, social exclusion of rural children can be seen through many indicators. The coverage of children with preschool education is lower in rural areas than in the city (in 2005, the general coverage of children with preschool education in Serbia was 33.5%, and in the villages 14%, according to the data from MICS3, which means that the difference increased in relation to the year 2002). This difference is also visible in the coverage with the mandatory preschool education, although that rate is high on the national level, 97.5% (NPA for children). **The coverage with elementary education is good, but among young people 15-19 years of age, 20% of them do not attend high school, the most important reasons being lack of interest (in 52% of cases) and lack of money (in 24% of cases)** (Cvejić et al, 2010). During FGDs, one could hear that the quality standards in teaching in rural elementary schools are lower than in urban ones, which puts rural children in a worse position to continue their education. This is confirmed by the measurements of the achievements of rural and urban children in Serbian language tests and mathematics tests, in which rural children achieved visibly worse results. In Serbian language urban children scored 516 and rural children 461, while for mathematics these figures were 509 and 466, respectively (Ivić, 2009).

In the field of health protection, besides poorer coverage with immunization, it should also be noted that 31.5% of children and young people from urban environments have a correct, desirable attitude toward responsibility for their own health, while in environments outside of cities only 16.9% of children have such an attitude.

FGDs show that poor infrastructural development of the rural areas and lack of extracurricular activities significantly reduces the social and cultural participation of rural children. What was most frequently

mentioned in FGDs was the impossibility of Internet access, the lack of foreign language courses, and school gyms for physical education and sports activities. **Such limitation on freedom of choice at an early age instigates a process of social exclusion of rural children, and in later stages of their life this reduces their social range, decreases the cultural capital and hinders their access to the labour market.** Children and young people from the country understand that moving to a city gives them the quickest escape from the bad living conditions and provides them with better possibilities for social inclusion. This attitude is, in most cases, supported by their parents, which directly contributes to establishing a negative depopulation spiral and leads to the decline of rural areas.

b. The quality of life and access to social services for rural women

A better quality of life, greater chances in the labour market and more developed social services motivate migration movements of the female population from the country to the city. In the age group 71-75 years of age, the share of female population is 57.7% in the urban parts of Belgrade, and 56.1% in the rural areas of central Serbia. In the age group 26-30 years of age, this difference is much more acute and visible – 52.3% in the urban and 47.0% in rural areas.

The economic status of rural women is unfavourable, and the access to services for strengthening the economic participation is extremely limited. **When compared to rural men, there is a greater share of inactive and unemployed rural women (55% compared to 39% of men). The share of the employed in agriculture is somewhat smaller and the share of the employed in the non-agricultural sectors is significantly smaller (20% of women, compared to 34% of men).** Among employed rural women, no less than 56.6% of them are employed in agriculture. Moreover, employment in agriculture takes place almost entirely within the household (only 2% of those women engaged in agriculture do not work in their own household), and a great number of women has a status of a supporting household

member, i.e. only extremely rarely do women participate in the ownership of the farm and they are not considered equal in making decisions about the production and distribution of income (Cvejić et al, 2010).

Employment support services to strengthen the economic potential of women and their households are extremely poor and rarely available in rural areas. **No less than 76% of the unemployed women have never heard of any active labour market measures. No more than 13% of them participated in some of the NES programmes and they estimated that these programmes had not increased their possibilities to find employment.** The programmes of support to agricultural production are intended for farms, and women are rarely found in the position of the head of an agricultural farm, which is why they cannot apply individually for these programmes. In planning support measures, it should also be kept in mind that the heavy burden of women's obligations on the farm and in the household makes their active inclusion in the programmes difficult.

In 2010, the proportion of rural women without education or with only an elementary education amounted to 60% (Cvejić et al, 2010). While this represents an improvement in relation to the 70% which was measured in the 2002 listing, the educational structure of rural women older than 15 years is still significantly more unfavourable when compared with rural men. The educational programmes for acquiring new knowledge and skills, especially those adjusted to the local economic conditions, are mostly unavailable to women. Only 2.8% of unemployed rural women have attended some additional form of education. The skills prevailing among women in the sample study of social exclusion in rural areas, were inadequate with regard to the changes in the labour market. 44% of women listed traditional crafts and handicrafts, while 32% of them stated that they can speak foreign languages, 39% that they know how to use a computer, 31% that they have technical knowledge and skills, and only 15% that they know how to manage agricultural machinery (Cvejić et al, 2010). If we add to this the assessments put forward by the participants in the FGDs that they do not need training, but only state subventions,

we can notice a lack of awareness about the need to develop skills and knowledge in order to improve existing, or start new, economic activities. **This combination of lack of education, skills and interest to promote them produces a weakness of the “internal” human resources necessary to generate a significant part of the growth and development in rural areas.**

The availability of health services is poor, reduced to elementary sanitation of health problems, and the coverage of women with health insurance is unsatisfactory. Among rural women, 9% do not own health insurance (Cvejić et al, 2010), while in the group of marginalized women in the position of supporting members of the household and engaged strictly in agriculture, the share of persons without health insurance is 14% (Babović, Vuković, 2008). Most female rural inhabitants have to travel to cities for specialist examinations, dental examinations and buying medicines. For many of them it represents an enormous cost both in money and time, and therefore they delay examinations and stop taking care about their health condition. According to the Population Health Survey, 6.3% of women in Serbia have never visited a gynaecologist. This percentage is significantly higher in south-eastern Serbia (9.1%) and in women who live outside of cities (7.9%).

It is also a fact that the percentage of rural women between 40-69 years of age who have done a mammogram is significantly lower (6.8%) in relation to women in cities who have done one (13.2%). **Among women older than 20 years, 36.4% of those in urban areas check their health once a year at the gynaecologist in urban areas, but only 23.8% in other areas.** In the last three years, within the age group 20-69 years, 41.8% of women from urban areas, and 25.6% of those from rural areas did a Pap test (*Health of the population in Serbia*, 2008). In the entire sample for the research on poverty and social exclusion in rural areas of Serbia, 1.9% of households receive MSF (in Serbia 2% in total), 11.3% receive child allowance, 3.5% receive others' care and aid support, and 1.2 % have received one-time municipal aid during the previous year. Among rural women,

37% of them have never paid contributions to the Pension and Disability Insurance, while among men, that rate is 24%. Among women who support household members, the situation is even worse – 93% of them do not pay contributions to the Pension and Disability Fund.

As can be seen, **social protection services are unavailable to the majority of the rural population**, which, traditionally, in social provision and care relies mostly on its own resources. Such social care at the same time uses human resources which could be involved in activities significant for improvement of the quality of one's own life and the development potential of the community. Additional hindering factors in one part of the rural population are the lack of knowledge of law as well as of the procedures for application for certain social protection measures, and traditionalistic attitudes which consider social protection as disgrace, and leaving the care of older people to some institution or organization a violation of family ethics. The availability of services important for establishing a satisfactory living standard, quality life and socio-cultural participation is also quite poor. **This is why the life of women and their families is characterized by overall satisfaction of their basic needs, but with ever present financial deprivation. Participation in the social community is superficial and cultural consumption patterns indicate passivism and domination of a lifestyle aimed at mere reproduction.**

Rural children and women are faced with a number of serious obstacles in the access to important social services, which prevents them from achieving better quality of life and developing their potential, based on which they can contribute more actively not only to their own well-being, but also to the development of their community. Deprivation is visible in numerous aspects of the satisfaction of needs, and most services are not available enough and are not of a satisfactory quality.

1.4 Key Recommendations

Based on the research and analysis, the following key recommendations are proposed:

- Define the multi-sectoral approach to rural development.
- Establish inter-sectoral cooperation in realizing rural development policy.
- Plan sustainable diversification of the rural economy at the local level.
- Enable and promote alternative access for rural households to financial markets.
- Make available active employment measures designed according to the needs and potential of rural women and young people.
- Support and stimulate female cooperative societies.
- Improve the range of educational (extracurricular) activities in villages.
- Raise the quality of elementary education so that children can be included more easily in the high school system.
- Strengthen the work of the pedagogical/psychological services on advising students in final grades with regard to continuing their education.
- Establish a local scholarship fund for students in high school and rural students in the local plans for rural development.
- Broaden the capacities of the student dormitories and boarding schools for poor rural children.
- Promote the significance of preschool education and upbringing.
- Increase the coverage of rural women with health insurance.
- Increase the availability of preventive health protection and strengthen the promotion of health in distant rural areas.
- Raise awareness of the significance of the Pension and Disability Fund and inform women about the possibilities of acquiring this type of insurance.
- Increase the availability of social protection services.
- Increase the number of workers in the Centres for Social Work (CSW) according to local needs.



2. Conclusions and Recommendations

2.1. Conclusions

This analysis has shown that women and children in rural areas face a series of serious obstacles to accessing important social services. These also inhibit them from achieving better living conditions and a higher quality of life, and from developing their potential which could be the basis for a more active contribution, not only to their own well-being, but also to the development of their community. Their deprivation is visible in numerous aspects of service provision, and the majority of services are insufficiently available and of inadequate quality. Based on the previously outlined analysis, several general conclusions can be drawn on the **position of children** in rural areas and their access to social services:

1. As opposed to the majority of the population, and in spite of the application of measures for poverty alleviation, **the economic position of children aged 0 – 14 years, and of young people aged 15 – 19 years, has deteriorated in terms of both absolute and relative poverty during the first decade of the 21st century.** Because of the inadequate disaggregation of statistical data, it is not possible to determine the extent of the deterioration in the position of children in rural areas in comparison with the average referential value or with children from urban areas.
2. The data points to some forms of **medical, educational and cultural deprivation of children and young people in rural areas as compared to the average.** In terms of deprivation that indicates discrimination against children in rural areas, the following data is indicative: lower coverage by compulsory pre-school education services; lower rates

of complete immunisation; the difficulties experienced by families with children trying to access material aid and/or child allowance; limited cultural programmes and their inadequacy to children's and young people's needs. The findings of different studies indicate that the teaching quality in rural primary schools is lower than in urban primary schools, which puts children from rural areas at a disadvantage when continuing their education.

3. Focus group discussions showed that **the weak infrastructural development of rural areas and the lack of extra-curricular activities considerably diminish the social and cultural participation of children from rural areas**. This kind of limitation of freedom of choice at such an early age marks the beginning of a process of social exclusion of rural children, which narrows their social range at later life-stages and renders their access to the labour market more difficult. The lack of Internet access, non-existence of foreign language courses and school physical education gymnasiums are the issues which were most frequently mentioned during focus group discussions. **An additional obstacle was an increased household work load when compared with city children**.
4. Multiple risks of deprivation and social exclusion of children stem from combinations of the following factors: unemployment and low education of parents, family structure (single-parent families and families with a large number of children), ethnic affiliation (especially Romani), living in rural areas, especially in South-Eastern and Western Serbia.
5. **Children and young people in rural areas realize that moving to the city is the quickest way to escape poor life conditions** and that it offers them better possibilities for social inclusion. This kind of reasoning is supported by the parents of the majority of them, which directly contributes to the start of a downward spiral of depopulation and regression in rural areas.

6. Qualitative research based on child participation and the child's perspective reveals many specific aspects of the position, deprivation and exclusion of rural children.

The prospects for life in rural areas are to a great extent connected to the potential of the younger generation and their willingness to continue living in rural areas. Young people can master the knowledge and skills needed in order to live in contemporary society and economy more easily, and they have more belief in the possibilities for a quality life in rural areas. **Investment in their education, their integration and encouragement of employment would enable the revival of economic growth and the prosperity of the local community.** SeConS held merely four focus group discussions with young people aged 15 – 19 years, but even in that small sample there were young people with a clear perspective on the sources of problems in rural areas, as well as a vision of potential ways to overcome the present situation.

- *Even though there are people who have high income in villages, they don't know how to put that money to good use..., to invest it in something, because they don't have the necessary knowledge. For example, they invest money in machinery, in building houses, even though there is almost no chance that it would pay off. Houses are empty..., they have three storeys each. For example, you could put up twenty tourists in such a house.*
- *Do you think this village needs outside help? (moderator)*
- *I don't think any outside help is needed; it would be enough if local people organized themselves. Many people here are ready to set aside 1000 euros for a wedding tent. That money could be invested in the renovation of the village hall, from which everyone would benefit.*
- *I suggested building a cold storage facility, but nobody supported me.*
- *People only think of themselves.*
- *That's exactly why I think we need outside help.*

(Extract from a FGD with children from a village in the vicinity of Valjevo, aged 15 – 19 years)

When it comes to the **women in rural areas**, the analysis shows that their position is especially difficult, since they are burdened by a great share of agricultural work, almost all household work, raising children, and the care of elderly members of the family. Women in rural households have potential for the diversification of the economy, because they have the skills necessary, for instance, to revive traditional crafts, or provide services of tourist accommodation and stay, or to care for children or elderly people, etc. They are, however, overburdened with daily duties and tired from working all day, which affects their motivation to set aside time for the training and association necessary for their reorientation to a different type of work and different organization of day-to-day activities. The data presented points to the serious obstacles these women encounter when accessing the services necessary for a quality life, development of human resources and active participation in the local community, all of which have a crucial significance for local development. The data available points to the following conclusions -

- 1. The economic position of women is unfavourable, and their access to services significant for the strengthening of economic participation is extremely limited.** Women in rural areas have only slim chances of obtaining jobs outside the household or in non-agricultural sectors of the economy. A significant number of women perform work activities within low-productive agricultural production within the household and have the status of subsidiary members in the family business. As a result, these women do not have a personal income and face a series of obstacles when they try to exercise their social rights. The availability of employment support services and services for strengthening the economic potential of women and their households is extremely poor in rural areas. **When planning measures of support, it should be borne in mind that the great burden of farm and household duties that women undertake, make women's active inclusion in these programmes more difficult.**

- 2. The availability of services for the advancement of human resources is also limited and reduced to primary education.** Educational programmes for gaining new knowledge and skills, especially those that would improve local economic conditions, are in most cases non-existent. This is why people neglect the fact that relying on “inner” human resources that can generate a significant part of local growth is of crucial significance to local development. **In addition to this, there were also prejudices voiced by female participants of FGDs that they do not need training, just state subsidies.**
- 3. The availability of medical services is scarce, reduced to alleviation of elementary health problems, and the health insurance coverage of women is not at a satisfactory level.** The majority of female inhabitants of rural areas have to travel to cities to be examined by a specialist, to see a dentist, and to buy medication. For many of them, that consumes too much money and time, and that is why they postpone their examinations and stop caring about their health.
- 4. Social protection services are also not available to the majority of the rural population** who, in terms of social security and care, traditionally rely mostly on their own resources. At the same time, this type of self-engagement wastes human resources which could be recruited for activities that are significant for the advancement of the quality of their own lives and the development potential of the community. Additional aggravating factors in one part of the rural population are:

not knowing the law and procedures for applying for certain social protection measures, traditionalist attitudes which label social help as shameful, as well as seeing the care of the elderly by an institution or organization as a breach of family ethics.

- 5. Services which are significant for the establishment of a satisfying standard of living, quality of life and sociocultural participation are also limited.** Because of this, the lives of women and their families are dominated by the need to satisfy basic survival needs, with a strong pattern of material deprivation and superficial participation in the community. The pattern of their cultural involvement indicates passivism and a life-style dominated by reproduction.

Focus group discussions, led to other, more general, conclusions about life in rural areas, which have implications for the quality of life of women and children.

It is clear from FGD discussions that the development of villages and their quality of life in rural areas in Serbia is not homogenous. In this sense, **villages can be divided into bigger and smaller**, where bigger villages have a better built infrastructure, more developed services and easier access to markets. Another categorization could be **into villages from economically, agriculturally and administratively more developed areas**, and **those from less developed areas**. It is already known that the former includes the majority of villages in Vojvodina and villages in the vicinity of more developed cities in central Serbia. These two categorizations overlap for the most part, because bigger villages are usually those in Vojvodina and those closer to administrative centres.

A great number of smaller villages, especially those in highland areas, are exposed to the pressure of various problems. These villages are usually situated in economically underdeveloped municipalities with weak infrastructure where the younger population is moving away in great numbers, companies have shut down, agricultural production is stagnant or dropping, and there are no new jobs. Many inhabitants of these villages who took part in FGDs gave the impression of apathy and lack of motivation towards an active approach to advancing their quality of living. They hardly nurture their social connections and contacts, while children and

young people sometimes do not have enough peers to be friends with. A number of older people are almost totally cut off from the world. The inhabitants of these villages do not list integration as a potential factor in overcoming this difficult situation and expect local and central institutions to take action so that their current life style starts giving better results.

The cycle of negative reproduction is so well established in these villages that it is difficult to determine which element of that chain should be influenced to end the cycle and then start in the opposite direction. The majority of inhabitants of these villages believe that it should be the improvement of infrastructure. The fact is, however, that the number of inhabitants of many villages has decreased, and that the average age has increased, so much that even much wealthier countries and local governments would not be able to justify investment in infrastructural improvement on economic, cultural or historical grounds. In these cases the best solution would seem to be to connect the few inhabitants of hamlets with bigger villages nearby through a system of basic services. Some of these services, eg those for the elderly (basic medical and social services), could be provided in the users' homes, while regular transport to nearby villages or cities should be provided for other services. However, not even this solution would help the economic recovery of the farms where working population exists, because advancement or diversification of production, attendance at training, transport of products or production materials, association with other producers etc would still be difficult in a great number of cases.

Some of the FGD participants' thoughts are rather oriented towards the revival of the labour market. Many inhabitants of villages, however, think that the "state" should open a factory or in some way subsidize agricultural production in today's framework. Very few participants stated that village inhabitants themselves would have to be significantly more active in the process of revitalization of villages, that they would have to reorient production or to start doing something else, and/or something additional, and that it

would be necessary for that purpose to integrate and connect with other important active participants (local administration, banks, those who provide training and support for running business etc.). There is currently a profound distrust in these relations and many village inhabitants do not recognize representatives of local administrations and other public institutions as partners with whom they could cooperate in improving the quality of rural life. The situation is better where there are associations (of producers, farmers, etc.), but only if those associations have achieved some results in such cooperation. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that local administrations have to be more accessible to village inhabitants, and more active in building partnerships for more successful rural development.

2.2. Recommendations

In order to achieve sustainable and inclusive rural development in Serbia, social cohesion should be restored, their economic environment needs to be stimulated, and quality of life and living conditions should be improved in rural areas. Such a comprehensive approach to development cannot be converted into a single-sector strategy i.e. into only one programme. The comprehensive **planning of rural development implies acting in several directions (economic, social and cultural spheres) and on several levels (state, local government, village community) at the same time and implies activating different participants.**

These recommendations correspond to the goals and priorities noted in the “European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion”. This document emphasizes that territorial cohesion is one of the main goals to which the framework of activities for fighting poverty will be adapted, because poor people are usually concentrated in certain territories. The platform recognizes the specific social context of the new EU members, and the fact that their rural population faces considerably bigger problems than the population in the old members. **In order for set goals to be efficiently**

realized, the need for a multi-sectoral approach is emphasized, and acting in “the entire spectrum of public policies”, especially those outside the terms of reference of traditional public policies of social inclusion, is highlighted as one of the most important fields of action. As an example, the platform lists “network services”, such as transport, energetics, and communication technologies, and the significance of their availability for more developed social inclusion. In that sense, **social goals must be emphasized in a wide range of sector policies.** In accordance with that, part of the Platform which concerns budget revision and goals of “Europe 2020 Strategy” specifically stresses that the European Union, with the support of the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)**, pursues an active policy of rural development which **contributes to the development of social and educational infrastructure and services and to the strengthening of human capital in rural areas in general.**

In accordance with the said values and based on the findings of this situation analysis in Serbian rural areas, we can say that **the following preconditions must be fulfilled for the successful development of rural areas:**

- 1. Developed basic infrastructure.** The infrastructure of certain rural areas of Serbia and their need for social services represent the great unknown and there are no reliable data about the situation in certain parts of Serbia. It has to be pointed out that it is difficult to keep the population in the villages, or to attract investors or tourists, if the roads are bad, if the power-supply is unstable, if the telephone signals are weak, and waterworks run-down, which is still the case in many Serbian villages. The description of rural regions in the National Programme for Rural Development correctly states that highland regions have far worse infrastructure, and that good infrastructure in lowland agricultural regions is probably the reason that even small farmers (up to 1 ha of land) do not leave lowland villages.

- 2. Active village communities.** The quality of the human capital in rural areas should be stressed as the most important factor in the sustainability of every programme based on activating the local population. Given that the economic structure of rural areas is heavily dependent on the primary sector, ie that it is still based on exploiting natural resources, and that small farms dominate in the agricultural sector, a great number of economic entities in rural areas have an extremely poor foundation for entrance into the labour market, and also into other markets important for the improvement of their economic position. The ability to perform more actively in the economic sphere and to join resources will have a great bearing on the realization of more significant investments in agricultural production or other types of work.

- 3. Good connections between people in villages and local institutions and administration.** Planning and realization of rural development are sustainable only if they rely on people who live in rural areas and are adapted to them. A prerequisite for the sustainability of rural development is developed communication between local government and village communities and participation of village inhabitants in the processes of planning and realization of rural development. At the moment, distrust is prevalent in these relations in Serbia. What is most important for the improvement of the situation is direct contact between service-users and the representatives of administration, of the kind that usually takes place in the local community office. Right there, in the local community office, the users should feel that the administration is theirs, that the staff is acting in their interest, according to the regulations, of course. Employees at the local community office should cooperate with village associations and cooperatives as closely as possible in all activities concerning the improvement of the quality of village life, and actively represent the interests of organizations and inhabitants before higher authorities in the local administration.

- 4. Defined typologies of rural households** and their appropriate development strategies. Some of this information will be available after the 2011 census, but there still remains a need to take a realistic view of the developmental options and those household needs which are not included in the state support schemes for agriculture.

What follows is a series of recommendations, listed by order of their priority, for more successful rural development. By the nature of this research, they are more focused on inclusive rural development and the improvement of the quality of life and services intended for women and children. The recommendations are based on analysis of the findings of this study. Quantitative data on particular issues have helped to highlight and prioritise solutions to specific problems, and focus group discussions have pointed to the modalities of the solutions, specific combinations of factors which endanger the quality of life, and the order of causes in the establishment of a cycle of devastation of rural areas.

2.2.1 Recommendations aimed at defining the integrated, multi-sectoral rural development policy

Define a multi-sectoral approach to rural development.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia should define a rural development policy which, besides economic development also takes into account other dimensions of the quality of life in the country and clearly determines the responsibilities of the sectors dealing with the development of infrastructure and social policy (education, health care, social protection) in order to improve the quality of life and the condition of the human capital in rural areas.

Establish inter-sectoral cooperation in realizing rural development policy.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia should establish better and more comprehensive cooperation among the relevant ministries, in terms of coordination of activities related to rural areas. This cooperation has to be institutionalized (ministerial group), and the plan of activities and responsibilities precisely developed according to the jurisdictions of the individual government bodies.

Actively advocate in the EU for adjusting the strategic and budget frameworks to the realistic needs of rural development in the countries of the West Balkans.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration and the Ministry of Agriculture, Trade, Forestry and Water Management should lobby the EU and apply a more powerful, pressure in order to participate in the design of EU support for the candidate countries for the budget period 2014-2020, using the experiences of the new member states. Emphasis should be put on greater appreciation of the regional/local specificities of the agricultural and rural structure in the countries of the West Balkans in creating the allowed support measures. Lobbying activities should be coordinated with other countries in the region in order to achieve greater effect. The Permanent Working Group should be used as the instrument of influence.

Improve the quality of the statistical data about rural areas.

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia should improve their statistical definitions of urban/rural areas and disaggregate data in order to enable monitoring of the conditions of different population groups in rural areas. In the meantime, bolstering of the data recorded and the analytical basis for research should be supported.

2.2.2 Recommendations aimed at improving the economic environment and strengthening the financial market in rural areas

Improve the potential of the population currently engaged in agricultural production for modern market-oriented agricultural production.

It is necessary that **the Ministry of Agriculture, Trade, Forestry and Water Management (MATFWM), local offices for economic development and the local government services responsible for the development of agriculture and rural development** organize systematic training on modern forms of agricultural production, appropriate to the economic profile of rural farms; as well as training on European production standards for various products, and on the possibilities of developing new production lines suitable for the given region and the structure of the resources on the farms. Such agricultural production can be partially directed toward the development needs of other, non-agricultural economic sectors in the given rural areas, especially food processing and rural tourism. Sets of these measures should be particularly focused on young people and women from rural areas, considering their more expressed flexibility and openness for new forms of production and a greater tendency toward economic diversification.

Local self governments, the Rural Development Network and MATFWM should make intensive efforts to improve the rural population's awareness of the markets for agricultural products, innovations and available support/resources, in order to create conditions for better access to the market of agricultural products and reduce the dependence on the frequently monopolistic position of the buyers. However, the goal should not be one-time or occasional informative activities, but setting up multiple systems and channels of regular provision of information. Connecting young farmers into associations that, among other things, collect and forward information to their members, access for the individual farmers to sources of information on the Internet, visits to fairs, seminars, similar associations of farmers in more developed countries – all of these should be used to continuously raise the awareness of the rural population and improve their knowledge of the market and of how agricultural production can be increased.

Plan the sustainable diversification of the local the rural economy.

It cannot be expected that diversification of the rural economy will spontaneously develop through the initiative of the rural population. Such development must be carefully planned, and therefore **the local self governments**, in cooperation with **the Rural Development Network, MATFWM and the Ministry of Economy and Regional Development (MERD)**, should devise appropriate plans to diversify rural economies, based on estimated local potential and analysis of market opportunities. These plans should provide for the development of various types of economic activities, from food processing or other related production activities, through a variety of traditional services, rural

tourism, to various forms of social services. Based on these plans, various support measures should be defined, from the measures focused on providing information and increasing knowledge, through financial support measures and setting up pilot projects for new activities, to the networking of actors into the economic activity chains.

Raise the awareness and increase knowledge on the possibilities of sustainable diversification of the local rural economy.

In cooperation with **the regional agencies for economic development** and **the Rural Development Network, MERR and MATFWM** should organize appropriate training aligned with local and national plans for diversification of the rural economy. This training should be carefully designed to offer the needed knowledge for different forms of non-agricultural economic activities which can be initiated through farms, self-employment or rural entrepreneurship. Thus, for example, training for rural tourism should include knowledge about the standards of hospitality, the elements of marketing (advertising, etc.), financial management and the like. Training related to the processing of agricultural products should include standards and technologies of food processing, etc. Training programmes could encompass multiple training modules and combined teams of trainers specializing in various fields who would, similar to the mobile training teams formed at the regional level, carry out systematic training in the rural areas of the given region.

Particular forms of learning should include study visits to rural farms which have proven successful in organizing tourist services; to associations of providers of rural tourism services who have successfully formed partnerships with other actors at the local level and/or connected with other associations in Serbia and

the neighbouring regions; and to successful farm entrepreneurs who are successful in the food processing activities, etc. The manager of this activity can be **the National Tourism Organization of Serbia** in cooperation with **the Rural Development Network**.

Enable and promote alternative access to financial markets.

MERR and **MATFWM** should enable activation of alternative financial mechanisms, such as micro-financing. Micro-credit schemes have proven efficient in overcoming several important barriers to improving the condition of rural areas, because they imply association, a facilitated access to financial capital, empowerment of entrepreneurship. Given the negative attitude of the National Bank towards expanding the possibilities for establishing micro-finance funds, cooperation with organisations with proven experience in this field, like the Micro Development Fund, would be useful.

Make available active employment measures designed according to the needs and potentials of rural women and young people.

Within measures for decentralizing employment policy and stimulating the development of regional and local employment policies, **the National Employment Service**, through the activities of mobile units intended for rural areas far removed from NES branches, should pay special attention to the provision of information to young people and women about employment support programmes. These programmes should be tailored to the needs and potential of these target groups so that the training they receive would be applicable in the context of diversification of the local rural economy. In areas where there is appropriate potential, special attention should be paid to training for achieving standards in

service-provision in rural educational tourism (safety and health needs of children, participation in educational programmes) or in the social services sector, which also includes social protection services (e.g. home care services, day care centres for certain vulnerable categories of the population, etc.).

Support and stimulate female cooperative societies.

Because of the current weak economic potential, special attention should be paid to the potential for forming cooperatives. By associating, women could engage in new economic ventures more easily. The operation of cooperatives should not in any case be limited to agricultural activities, but they should provide organizational frameworks for various activities in accordance with diversification of the rural economy, such as direct services of rural tourism, offering products and services relevant for the development of rural tourism, different social services, etc. Activities focused on supporting cooperatives should have several elements:

- **MATFWM**, in cooperation with **the Rural Development Network** and **the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP)**, should examine thoroughly women's tendency to associate in cooperatives, as well as the terms under which they would get involved in this form of social entrepreneurship. Special attention should be given to local needs and possibilities for establishing social cooperatives which could offer rural areas otherwise scarce or non-existent social services, like care of the elderly, disabled and children. Together with the possibilities of establishing cooperatives in the field of rural development and agriculture, this could be a significant market niche.

- **Through the Rural Development Network, MERR and MATFWM** should provide information to women, in detail and systematically, about the benefits of cooperative societies, procedures for establishing cooperatives, tax obligations.
- **MERR and MATFWM** should, institutionally and programmatically, further reinforce the organizations dealing with rural development and offer support to cooperatives by including them in their activities, providing members with suitable training, enabling cooperation with similar organizations in the region and the EU, and informing them regularly about their activities.

Support female cooperatives and self-employment.

Despite the fact that a relatively small number of rural women expressed an interest in entrepreneurship, this group should not be ignored. It is necessary to intensify the support to women aimed at making them more focused on self-employment and entrepreneurship. Support could include guarantee funds, which could be realized by **MERR and MATFWM** through **micro-finance organizations**, and business incubators for female entrepreneurship in rural areas, which should be established by **the regional agencies for economic development** and **the Rural Development Network**.

Support women in individual “projects” within the farm.

MATFWM, in cooperation with **the Directorate of Gender Equality and the MLSP**, should consider institutional solutions which would enable women who want to improve or develop new forms of agricultural production on the farm, but who are not heads of their farms, to support programmes as members of the registered farms. In this way, women would be encouraged to develop, within the economy of the farm, small autonomous segments of specialized production and thus build up their economic status and a position of power within the household. The very existence of the possibility to access these support programmes could significantly increase their economic potential, as well as their willingness to develop their own ideas about partially autonomous work within the farm. They would thus also strengthen the economy of the entire household. Encouraging individual production within the farm could represent a more suitable form of employment than the traditional entrepreneurship and self-employment for the many women who do not yet exhibit a readiness to get involved in work outside the farm. In this way, they could remain attached to their farm, but at the same time have greater autonomy within the organization of work on the farm.

2.2.3 Recommendations aimed at improving the quality of educational services

Improve the range of extracurricular and out-of-school educational activities in villages.

Schools, which in an optimal educational system, would be central to the local area, should be revitalized and turned into centres for culture, and in most villages become the local cultural centre. **The Ministry of Education** and **the Ministry of Culture** should stimulate local self governments to develop, in cooperation **with local tourist organizations** and **Rural Development Network**, different workshops and programmes through optional classes in schools. Such workshops and programmes could have more than one function: preservation of the spiritual (songs, games, customs) and material culture (crafts, making of objects), creative development of children and youth of different ages, work involvement of young people and rural women as instructors and managers of the workshops, enhancement of local tourist initiatives (music, folklore and drama programmes and festivals, programmes in nature, making of souvenirs, sports tournaments, etc.). Young people should be trained to use IT and foreign languages, especially in villages where development of rural tourism is planned. A school with such a range of programmes on offer could be a part of the local tourist scene, offering programmes for instance to children from the city (RET – Education Forum, 2010).

Raise the quality of elementary education so that more rural children access the high school system more easily.

The Ministry of Education and **UNICEF** should advocate for a stronger focus on rural children in the National Plan of Action for Children within strategic goals 3 and 4 (availability, sustainability and quality of elementary education). They should also encourage continuation and acceleration of the development of local plans for children, emphasising the needs of rural children.

Regional School Administrations should help rural schools in designing updated plans for teacher training and supervise implementation of these plans. They should, also, negotiate more intensively with local self governments about the financial support for such activities.

The Ministry of Education should draw special attention to rural schools in their activities of welcoming guest students in schools, within the programme of improving the quality of education in order to provide a more direct support to rural teachers and increase the quality of the programmes in these schools.

Connect rural elementary schools with urban elementary schools.

The Ministry of Education should stimulate **local self governments** to decrease the social and cultural distance between rural and urban areas through programmes of bilateral cooperation and partnership between schools. One-day excursions, work on joint projects and occasional teaching in the partner school would enable children to get acquainted with the environment, work methods and teaching standards in the other school. These programmes could be part of local tourist initiatives.

Strengthen the work of the pedagogical and psychological services advising final-year students with regard to continuing their education.

The Ministry of Youth and Sport should put special emphasis on rural schools within their Strategy for Career Guidance and support existing services which often do not have either the time or capacity to provide a quality service to all the “additional” schools in their jurisdiction.

Increase the availability of preschool, elementary and extracurricular education to children with disability in rural areas.

The Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy should advise local self governments to pay special attention to rural children and ensure that the recommendations of the interdepartmental committees for providing additional educational support are financially supported and realized.

Establish local scholarship funds for students in high school and rural students according to the local plans for rural development.

Local self governments should use their own budget and public/private partnerships with successful local businesses, especially in the fields of agricultural production and food industry, to establish scholarships for poor rural children. Together with local NGOs active in the field of improving education, they should inform rural children about such funds and encourage them to continue their education. **The Ministry of Education** should support and supplement these actions by organizing mentor support to rural children (and their families) in high school and rewarding teacher/mentors for every rural child who finishes high school successfully.

Broaden the capacities of student-homes and boarding schools for poor rural children.

The Ministry of Education should redefine the conditions for reception into student homes for high school students so that more points are allocated for family-poverty, and that rural students receive additional points. In cooperation with local self governments, ways should be found to expand the accommodation facilities for these children. For rural children with the worst economic status, scholarship and free accommodation should be combined.

Promote preschool education and instruction.

Kindergartens have not become widespread in rural areas. It is not that parents are against preschool education, but they do not pursue the idea if the service is not seen as good value, because every penny counts in rural household budgets. Thoughts should be directed towards ideas that reduce the costs of preschool, so that it remains economically sustainable in the villages (or preferably free of charge). The agents of this recommendation should be **local self governments** and **non-governmental organizations**.

Use available facilities in the villages to meet the needs of preschool education.

Local self government and local communities should make sure that children are provided with room within **the school premises** or **in the local community facilities** (as is done in some villages for the local clinic). Apart from providing facilities for the mandatory preschool programme, **the Ministry of Education** should encourage the use of school premises for occasional playrooms or workshops in which children of older preschool or

younger elementary school age would participate. Alternative forms of preschool education, as mentioned in the new Preschool Instruction and Education Law , should also be developed.

Organize kindergartens on-the-move.

The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self Government and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy should join to encourage local self governments to procure and equip buses which could be adapted as educational playrooms, and which could be available to rural children several times a week for a few hours. In the same way, mobile libraries and IT centres can be equipped, which may also be used by the adult inhabitants in the village.

Improve resources for sports events and recreational practice of sports.

This responsibility should be in the jurisdiction of **the local self governments**, but it would be realized in cooperation with **Rural Development Network**. For restoring sports facilities, especially for building sports gyms, resources could be provided by encouraging socially responsible businesses or successful businesspersons in the region (public and private partnership), but also through self-contribution of successful farms and cooperatives in every village. Here, options should be found for project financing, but some similar facilities could also achieve sustainability and self-financing by renting as tourist facilities (to sports teams, but also to all other visitors). Such activities need to be in accordance with the action plans for reduction of violence and improvement of children's health.

2.2.4 Recommendations aimed at improving the quality of health protection services

Increase the coverage of rural women with health insurance.

Local self governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Rural Development Network should provide rural women with understandable information about how to obtain health insurance.

In the process of reforming the Health Insurance Law, **The Committee on Health and the Family within the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia** should reconsider the possibility of introducing additional provisions which would enable easier exercising of the right to health insurance for rural women, but also to other members of the family, as well as the possibility of a short-term free insurance in emergency cases.

The Ministry of Health should support establishment of local councils for health and encourage a promotional campaign on the importance and possibilities for obtaining health insurance by rural women and their families.

Increase the availability of preventive health protection and health promotion in distant rural areas

The Ministry of Health should enhance their supervision over the preventive and informative work of the regional Institutes of Public Health in the rural areas in order to intensify their work.

The Institutes of Public Health, together with **local self governments**, should pressure the health care centres to increase supervision over the quality public health nursing; and to inform rural populations about the possibilities of using the counselling services in the health care centres.

The Ministry of Health should stimulate the health care centres to participate more actively in the competitions of this ministry for projects to improve the availability and quality of health care for the rural population.

The Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and **the Health Insurance Fund** should change the capitation formula so that the work of the doctors in the environments of mixed generations is recognized (the change of the formula taking into account the proportion of the elderly and children in the local population), as well as considering the complexity of the area and the distance from the city, in order to encourage the doctors to come and stay in rural areas. **The Health Insurance Fund** should redefine their agreements with the health care centres to improve financing while taking these changes into account.

Improve health protection for rural children with disability.

The Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy should stimulate the Institutes of Public Health to improve the work of the health care centres (doctors and public health nurses) in providing services to children, based on the decisions of the local interdepartmental committee for estimating the needs of providing additional health support to children.

The health care centres and non-governmental organizations should educate parents about their entitlements and how to initiate procedures with the local interdepartmental committee for estimating the needs of providing additional educational, health or social support to children.

2.2.5 Recommendations aimed at improving the quality of social protection services

Raise awareness of the significance of the Pension and Disability Fund and inform rural women about the possibilities of acquiring this type of insurance.

The Pension and Disability Fund should overview the gravity of the problem regarding regulating the pension and disability insurance in this group and find solutions that will in the given circumstances encourage women to obtain this form of insurance. To achieve this, an analysis by age should be carried out and appropriate measures found for those women who would not have time to exercise the right to pension even if they started paying insurance immediately.

Make rural households more informed.

Local Centres for Social Work, in cooperation with **NGOs**, should work actively on promoting existing types of help available through the social protection system, as well as on procedures for obtaining financial assistance at local and national level (MSF, child and parental allowance, one-time financial aid).

Increase accessibility to social protection services.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy should increase the mobility of workers in the CSWs and sensitise them to work with rural populations.

Strengthen the capacities of the providers of social protection services.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in cooperation with **NGOs**, which have extensive experience in providing services, should work on improving the knowledge and skills of existing service providers, but also on the development of the new ones, who would be especially sensitized for work with the rural population.

Increase the availability of services for the care of the elderly in the country.

Local self governments, in cooperation with **the Centres for Social Work** and **non-governmental organizations** active in the field of care for the elderly, should develop a network of support services for elderly persons in rural areas. This initiative should ensure more quality services for older women, relieve younger women and enable them to be more active economically. This can also be an opportunity for opening new positions in the economy of care in the country.

Raise the awareness of women about different forms of domestic violence, their rights and support services.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy should encourage more activity within the Centres for Social Work to work with rural women in recognizing different attitudes as forms of violence and in promoting the rights and procedures for the protection from violence which are established at the level of different institutions.

Increase the availability of services to children with disability who live in rural areas.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy should stimulate and foster cooperation between local self governments and the Centres for Social Work to provide individualized support to children with disability and their families, and give them easier access to the social protection system.

Increase the number of workers in the Centres for Social Work according to local needs.

As a necessary precondition for realizing the listed recommendations, **the Ministry of Finance** should support and approve an increase in the number of workers in the CSWs in accordance with the proposed plan of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.



3. IPARD programme

In addition to an analysis and recommendations on how to improve the quality of life, and access to services, in rural areas, **this study also proposes measures for the assistance programme IPARD** (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development). These could significantly influence solutions to the afore-mentioned problems and **be a crucial factor in improving the quality of life of the rural population**, helping to retain people in the countryside, which is essential to the survival of villages.

3.1. About the IPARD programme

To simplify the system of assistance and to achieve maximum effects from invested resources through simplification of administration, control, reporting and evaluation of the achieved results, the European Commission made a decision to replace all pre-accession funds (Phare, ISPA, SAPARD and CARDS) with a new mechanism – Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA).⁴ The Regulation IPA defines the scope and type of support intended for the countries of the Western Balkans for the period 2007-2013.

Those countries applying to join the EU are provided with help to adjust their agricultural sectors to the standards and procedures implied by *acquis communautaire*, as well as help to solve the primary developmental limitations in rural areas. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe used the pre-accession SAPARD programme of assistance. The countries of the Western Balkans have been provided with the IPARD programme, and they can use it from the moment they are granted the status of candidate country. Following the experiences of the SAPARD programme, IPARD assumes achieving a high consistence with the reformed rural development policy of the EU already during the pre-accession period.

⁴ IPA – Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance, Regulation EC. 1085/2006, 17 July 2006.

Table 1. Support measures for rural development within the IPARD programme

Measures of improvement of the efficiency of the market and implementation of EU standards (AXIS 1)

- Investments in farms for restructuring and raising standards to EU level
- Assistance in establishing producer groups and associations
- Investments in processing and advertising of agricultural and fishery products (for restructuring and raising standards to EU level)

Preparatory actions for implementation of the “agro-environmental” measures and LEADER approach (AXIS 2)

- Implementation of measures and actions for restructuring of the environment and landscape
- Preparation of the local and public and private partners for implementation of the local developmental strategies

Development of the rural economy (AXIS 3)

- Improvement and development of rural infrastructure
- Development and diversification of rural economic activities
- Training and education
- Technical assistance

Use of the resources from the IPARD programme fund is not unconditional. To obtain these resources, first a *National Rural Development Programme* should be adopted as the framework programme for development of agriculture and rural areas of the candidate country in the period 2007-2013. This plan is adopted by the national institution responsible for rural development, ie the ministry to which this duty has been delegated. In the case of Serbia, this is MATFWM, although some countries had different solutions since other ministries also deal with the issues of rural development, such as the ministries for regional development, economy or finance.

The programme for rural development implies support measures which will be financed from the resources of the IPARD programme and which have to correspond to measures which will be financed from the national budget (National programme). **The Rural Development Programme has to be adopted by the European Commission as well.** Then, *the multi-year financial agreement* between the EU and the candidate country for membership in the national assembly should be *ratified*. This is followed by *the forming of the Payment Agency* (which, first of all, has to acquire national accreditation, followed by accreditation of the EC), as well as of the *Management Authority and Ministerial Group*.

The prerequisite for signing the multi-year agreement with the EU is a multi-year planning of the budget by the national institutions. The budget planning must cover the period of duration of the national programme and the IPARD programme. The programme must define measures for rural development, which implies defining the sources of financing, so that some of the measures can be financed only from the national budget, while for some other measures, financial support is expected through the IPARD programme. This necessarily implies co-financing from the national budget.

Also, the IPARD programme and measures that need to be accredited for financing from IPARD resources, have to have a clear demarcation line in defining the source of financing for certain measures. IPARD does not allow overlapping in financing certain measures in the sense that for the same interventions, grants may be awarded from different sources.

Rural development programmes must be based on an analysis of the rural context, and it has to present all the relevant parameters of the condition of rural areas, with a special emphasis on the limitations and deficits that rural areas face. Such analysis represents a foundation for defining the vision, goals, measures and indicators. The general approach indicates that issues such as gender equality, protection of the environment and/or other nationally specific

topics are taken as significant for all sectors, and the impact of certain goals and measures on them is especially emphasized. The need to treat the position of women in the rural economy has been specially recognized in European political practice for more than ten years, since the preparations of the rural development programme for the previous budget period 2000-2006 and creating of the AGENDA 2000 (see http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/publi/women/broch_en.pdf).

The approach that has been supported until today is that during the evaluation of projects financed from EU funds for rural development, participation of women is introduced as a criterion. **There is no general rule which regulates the type of support for which women can be prioritized. This is left to national policies, as the states should make evaluations and set a framework appropriate to their own situation.** However, the European Commission developed very precise instructions for evaluation of interventions in the field of rural development for the programming period 2007-2013. These indicators appear in the Annex to the Regulation number 1974/2006 EC (Common monitoring and evaluation framework, Rural Development Policy 2007–2013). Within the provided package of instructions, Annex 3 Indicator Guidance encompasses Chapter G Baseline Indicator Fiches; Chapter H Output Indicator Fiches; and Chapter I Results Indicator Fiches which define the treatment of women and youth to be especially respected in the programme orientation of the national policies. (See http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/index_en.htm).

Although there is no way to first define the measures that are specifically directed toward the improvement of the quality of life for women and children, it is possible to envisage measures for solving the problems particularly affecting these groups, as well as elderly persons and other marginalized groups. The problems that primarily refer to physical infrastructure and social services affect depopulation of the village and migration of the population from villages to cities, while creating multiple problems not only

of economic, but also of a social, psychological and cultural nature that concern the entire population, and therefore it is necessary to address the problems that drastically decrease the possibilities of employment for women and their equal inclusion in the economic streams.

Investment in the improvement of their living conditions is a crucial precondition for the success of all other interventions financed through the programme of support for rural development, that is for successful rural development on the national level. Since the non-existence of services negatively affects the diversification of rural economy and general improvement of the situation in that field, what is necessary is to develop the services and in that way actually invest in the production, rather than investing in the consumption through the usual subsidies.

3.2. The proposed measure for diversification of rural economy and improvement of quality of life

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| IPARD - Priority Axis 3 |
| Measure: Diversification and development of rural economic activities – services sector (Article 12 of Reg. (EC) No. 1085/2006; Article 180 of Reg. (EC) No. 718/2007) |
| Measure Code 302 |

Rationale:

Rural areas of Serbia are characterized by negative economic trends, social decline and depopulation, and support needs to be provided for better access to basic services for the economy and the rural population in order to improve or even maintain the quality of life and to increase the attractiveness of rural areas.

As part of the diversification of economic activities which is intended to create opportunities for all type of enterprises, new and existing businesses/organisations/groups should develop, promote or expand basic services in the rural areas as an additional source of income.

Diversification of economic activities in rural areas through improvement of basic services should help to achieve the overall goal of keeping young people in rural areas by providing new jobs and preserving existing ones. At the same time, improving access to services will take care of two of the most vulnerable categories in rural areas - women and children.

Content of the Measure:

Support can cover establishment of basic services including investment in existing or new buildings or other facilities in rural areas, such as;

- Healthcare and childcare facilities;
- Sports, recreational and leisure infrastructure;
- Service provisions for community building eg care of older people;
- Services for connecting and providing internet (communication activities): IT centres, access to internet, e-skills through community structures;
- Certain arts and cultural facilities, general community and cultural activities, libraries;
- Transport services for rural populations (e.g. mini-buses),
- Other types of economic services (e.g. mechanics' workshops, hairdressing salons).

Eligible expenditure:

Investment in fixed assets:

- Construction / reconstruction of buildings;
- Supply and installation of equipment (including computer equipment, software, internet connection);
- General costs (overheads) of preparing the project (max 12% of eligible expenditure);

Non-Eligible expenditure:

Any activity that could be funded by another statutory body.

Objectives:

Services sector, as part of measure 302, has the following objectives:

- Increased numbers, and improved quality, of services for rural inhabitants,
- Improved social structure in rural areas,
- Diversification into non-agricultural activities,
- Accessibility of services to all age, gender and social groups in the community concerned,
- Creation of new jobs through development and diversification of basic services,
- Preservation of existing jobs,
- Increased revenue from rural service-users through development and diversification of services.

Final beneficiaries:

The services sector will be targeted under measure 302 at a range of small business enterprises (defined under national legislation as those with up to 10 employees); the NGO sector; and VAT taxpayers.

Geographical scope:

The final beneficiaries of the services sector under measure 302 will be rural settlements with up to 20,000 inhabitants on the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

Eligibility criteria for services sector under Measure 302:

- Investment must comply with EC standards at the end of the realization of the investment.
- The enterprise/holding/NGO must respect the relevant national minimum standards regarding environmental protection, public health, animal and plant health, animal welfare and occupational safety at the time when the decision to grant support is taken. Where national minimum standards based on EC standards have been newly introduced at the time of the application, assistance may be granted regardless of non-compliance with those standards on condition that the enterprise shall meet the new standards by the end of the realisation of the investment;
- Beneficiaries must demonstrate economic viability through a business plan;
- Beginners (new entrepreneurs/NGO) are allowed;

- Beneficiaries must have met their obligations to the state.

Ranking criteria:

Investments per sector under measure 302 will be scored, according to the following criteria:

- Investment in basic services- 30 points
- Investment in rural tourism – 25 points
- Investment in on-farm processing – 20 points
- Investment in renewable energy resources – 15 points
- Investment in direct marketing – 15 points
- Investment in traditional crafts - 10 points.

Additional ranking criteria in cases where there are more than one project per sector:

- Investment is recommended by approved LAG (recommendation to be done after LAG Rural Development Strategy is adopted) – 25 points
- Investment will be implemented by a female entrepreneur/ women beneficiaries from an NGO – 20 points
- Investment will be implemented by a young entrepreneur/ young beneficiary from an NGO (less than 40 years of age) – 15 points
- Investment will be implemented in an LFA area – 15 points.

Maximum points: 100

Aid

The amount of public aid shall be up to 50% of the total investment in the project, of which 75% will come from the EU, 25% from national funds.

Maximum total value of eligible investment per project is €250,000. Within the services sector element of measure 302, a maximum of three eligible investments per beneficiary are allowed within the IPARD.

Payment of investment funds can be made in one or more instalments according to the details fixed in the contract signed with Paying Agency. Starting a new project is not conditional on completing a project already started.

Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators:

Baseline:

- Net migration rate;
- Development of services sector;
- Employment development in services in rural areas;
- Economic development in services in rural areas.

Output:

- Number of beneficiaries (division according to gender, age category and the type of services);
- Amount of public expenditure realised;
- Number of new services actions supported (division per type of action);

- Number of small-enterprises/NGO supported (division according to status, age category, gender status and type of small enterprise/NGO).

Result:

- Increased number of services used (division according to age and gender status);
- Increased number of jobs created (division according to age and gender status);
- Population in rural areas benefiting from improved services.

Impact:

- Employment creation (division per age and gender status);
- Economic growth (increase in GVA).

