



Government of the
Republic of Serbia

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NEWS ON SOCIAL INCLUSION LETTER AND POVERTY REDUCTION



Solidarity is one of the fundamental EU principles and represents an overall goal of all European societies. A more inclusive Europe is vital for the realization of EU objectives: sustainable economic growth, new and better jobs and higher social cohesion. EU leaders established the social inclusion process in order to contribute more efficiently to poverty eradication.

The Government of Serbia has launched active participation in the social inclusion process to improve the quality of life its citizens. The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit has been established in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, assisting the Government and line ministries to develop and implement social inclusion and poverty reduction policies in a coordinated and effective manner.

DENISE DE HAUVERE, H.E. AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF BELGIUM TO SERBIA

Social Inclusion – High on the EU Agenda

Belgium always has been strongly in favor of a more social European Union. The current crisis, on a scale without precedent during the last 50 years, has worsened unemployment and further accentuated social inequalities. Therefore social inclusion is very high on the EU policy agenda during the Belgian EU Presidency. Appropriate arrangements are put in place to ensure more effective EU coordination and cooperation in the social field. This is vital if we are to achieve the ambitious social inclusion objectives of the Europe 2020 agenda.

The new EU2020 objective to bring 20 million people out of poverty acknowledges the political and social importance of the fight against poverty. This is a major step forward, and the Belgian Presidency will invite the heads of State and Government to adopt a Declaration on this issue. This Declaration should reflect concrete, feasible commitments of Member States in the fight against poverty, and be presented at the Closing Event of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010.

The following three key issues will receive attention during the Belgian presidency: First, a concrete agenda must be set for the implementation of the European Commission Recommendation on Active Inclusion. Secondly, child poverty and social exclusion must be eradicated. Children born in poverty face a substantial risk of getting stuck in poverty throughout their further life. Thirdly, hundreds of thousands of people throughout the EU are still deemed to sleep rough or beg for shelter.

The Belgian Presidency has therefore decided to host a Consensus Conference in December 2010 where all stakeholders will contribute to define a common framework in this field. Numerous studies, conferences and activities will support the political process. The three priorities set out above are just stepping stones towards a more inclusive Europe. This means that our objectives must be both ambitious and feasible within the short run. The ultimate goal should be that everyone in Europe can lead a decent life.

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from the
EU

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VLADAN MANIĆ, ADVISER TO THE MINISTER OF FINANCE
OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Microfinance – Significant Foothold in Combating Poverty

Microfinance, according to most authors, principally relates to the provision of financial services to low-income clients, in particular to the poor and destitute. The term “microfinance” is frequently used in its narrower meaning, involving mostly microcredits intended for small, informal micro-enterprises, using methods developed mostly in the period after 1980 by the socially-oriented non-governmental organizations (the average amount of microcredit is usually below the GDP of the given economy). In addition to its basic mission – rendering financial services to the poor, microfinance in the modern world emerges as an important leverage of economic development with significant social and economic permeation. Microfinance is often the only way to make financial services available to those with limited or no access to traditional financial service providers.

The providers of microfinance services – microfinance institutions (MFI) are considered to be the organizations offering, inter alia, microfinance services ranging from small not-for-profit, non-governmental organizations to large commercial banks (the definition of KIVA, CGAP). The World Bank estimates that there are currently about 7000 microfinance institutions worldwide, with over 16 million customers, mostly poor people living in developing countries. The total turnover is esti-

mated at over USD 2.5 billion, with exceptional development potential (Data Snapshots on Microfinance – The Virtual Library on Microcredit).

The beginnings of microfinance in the modern meaning of the word date from the late 1970's, after some twenty years of the governments and donors providing subsidized loans to small and marginalized farmers in hope of raising productivity and income. During the eighties, the experiments with micro-enterprise loans intended for women made it possible for them to accumulate funds and increase household income and living standard (source: CGAP). This was followed by the emergence of non-governmental organizations that provided services to the poor, which very soon turned into financial institutions.

One of the greatest dilemmas arising in connection with microfinance institutions and microfinancing on the whole is the issue whether the interest rates charged on microcredit are too high. Basically, experts agree that the tendency of microfinance institutions to establish sustainable business, as well as the fact that it is much more expensive to grant several small loans than one large, are reason enough to keep interest rates in microfinance at a level often significantly higher than that applied by traditional providers of financial services.

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Action against Poverty Requested by 75 Percent of Europeans

Seventy-five percent of the EU population supports the priority delineated in the EU 2020 strategy – support to the elderly and socially excluded, as shown in the Eurobarometer research “European Two-Year Poll.”

The Director of the European Anti-Poverty Network, Mr. Fintan Farrell, stated that this information means that the struggle against poverty and social exclusion should be the key priority of the EU, if it wanted to regain the trust of its citizens.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION: New EU Strategy on Gender Equality Adopted

The European Commission has adopted a five-year strategy for advancing the equality of women and men in Europe.

The strategy transforms the principles comprised in the Women’s Charter into specific measures. It is based on five priorities: equality in the field of economy and labor market, in the field of salaries, in the leading positions in enterprises, addressing issues of gender-based violence and improving equality outside the EU borders.

This entails the entry of more women in the labor market and achievement of the overall employment rate target of 75 percent for men and women, as defined in the Europe 2020 document, through the activities such as promotion of women’s entrepreneurship and self-employment.

In addition, the announcement of the European day of equal salaries is foreseen, aiming to raise awareness of the fact that, on average, women’s salaries are 18 percent below men’s across the EU.

More information at: <http://ec.europa.eu>

The Most Accessible City Award

The European Commission will present an award to the most accessible city in Europe, which will be the city that is found to ensure freedom and choice to its inhabitants and visitors of all ability and mobility levels.

The award will be presented to the cities that have achieved proven better accessibility in the key aspects of city life, cities that keep improving accessibility and that may be role models for other cities.

More information at: www.accesscityaward.eu

EUROPEAN YEAR OF VOLUNTEERING – 2011 Volunteers Building the European Identity

At the proposal of the European Commission, the year 2011 has been declared the European Year of Volunteering. This will mark the tenth anniversary of the International UN Year of Volunteers – the year 2001, which showed that volunteer actions and public interest call for commitment on the part of the government and other stakeholders in society to undertake joint activities.

Over 100 million Europeans are engaged in volunteer activities and, according to the 2006 Eurobarometer research, three out of ten Europeans said they were involved in some sort of volunteer work. About 80 percent of survey respondents consider volunteering to be an important part of the democratic life in Europe and this sector accounts for about 5 percent of the national GDPs.

Volunteering is important as it is one of the pillars of the European values, contributing to the building of the European identity and mutual understanding of people within a particular society and throughout Europe.

Volunteering is necessary in numerous EU strategic fields such as: social inclusion, lifelong learning opportunities for all, policies affecting the youth, intergenerational dialogue, active aging, migrant integration, intercultural dialogue, civil protection, humanitarian aid and development, sustainable development and environmental protection, human rights, provision of social services, growth of employment opportunities, promotion of active European citizenship, bridging the “digital gap” and activities in the domain of corporate social responsibility.

More information at: www.eyv2011.eu

Training 200 Public Servants for the European Integration Process

About 200 staff of state and public authorities will be able to participate in the initiative called “Speak European – Professional Development for Accession”, which will enable them to update their knowledge necessary for the European integration process.

In addition to public servants at all government levels, the training and development program is also aimed at professionals who can contribute to raising public awareness of the benefits and obligations arising from EU membership.

The project principally aims to facilitate the process of EU accession by strengthening the necessary expertise and awareness of civil and public servants at central and local levels of administration in the fields directly relevant to the legal, procedural, financial and technical aspects of European integration.

Formally entitled “European Integration Scholarship”, the project is funded by the European Union and should be completed by early 2012.

The project initiative was launched by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration and the Serbian European Integration Office is the main partner in the project implementation.

More information available at: <http://www.govev.rs/>

SOCIAL PROTECTION, EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC POLICY COMMITTEES OF THE EU COUNCIL

Open Method of Coordination

A conference on the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) was held under the auspices of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union in September, tackling the issue of coordinating the activities of the EU Member States in the field of social affairs.

The goal of the conference was to assess the effectiveness of the Open Method of Coordination mechanism and the manner of improving the social policy in the context of the newly-adopted Europe 2020 strategy, as well as to reach a consensus on the new platform underlying the struggle against poverty.

A clear message about the importance of the OMC was sent to the Member States, as well as a message about the need for mutual learning and joint implementation of activities that would lead to tangible results.

The European Council committees in charge of social protection, employment and economic policy issues have, for the first time, held a joint discussion on the need for integrated approach in the realization of Europe 2020 strategy and the establishment of effective links among priorities in these fields.

EVRONIM: A Multilingual Termbase

Evronim (<http://prevodjenje.seio.gov.rs/evronim>) is a multilingual termbase developed in the process of translation of the *acquis communautaire* into Serbian.

The idea behind this project is to introduce unique Serbian terminology in a wide range of important areas. Its users may find general vocabulary, legal terminology, the terminology of other professional areas, as well as a number of most frequently used phrases and idioms.

Contact: EU Integration Office, tel.: 011 30 61 101; www.seio.gov.rs

2012 – European Year of Active Aging

The European Commission proposed that the year 2012 be declared the European Year for Active Aging, wishing to create better opportunities for the economic activity of the elderly in Europe, enable active participation in the community life and encourage healthy aging.

Active aging involves the creation of opportunities for the elderly to continue working, stay healthy longer and continue to contribute to the society in a variety of ways.

This initiative is launched at a moment when the states all across Europe are facing the issue of constant aging of their populations and the impact of this phenomenon on the public services and finances.

The headcount of the economically active population in Europe will start declining from 2012 and the number of people over 60 years of age will continue to grow by about two million each year.

The heaviest pressure is expected in the period 2015–35, when the Baby Boom Generation is bound to retire. This phenomenon challenges the sustainability of public finances, in particular financing health care and pension funds.

The European Year for Active Aging should serve as a framework for raising awareness, identifying and disseminating good practice examples and for encouraging policymakers to promote active aging.

The European Parliament and the EU Council are expected to adopt this initiative at the beginning of 2011.

Improving Local Services

The project Delivery of Improved Local Services (DILS) is a Government project funded by a loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Three line ministries are tasked with project implementation: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labor and Social Policy.

The project has achieved a set of goals in the field of education: a functional model for inclusive education is ready to be applied, the Inclusive Education Coordination and Implementation Teams have been established and the road map for the implementation of inclusive education has been approved at the Ministry of Education Management Meeting.

A series of 220 training events helped train 7,500 representatives of professional teams for inclusive education from all primary and secondary schools.

The plan for awarding grants until the year 2012 with a view to encouraging inclusion in the field of education has been developed, and grants have already been realized in nine pilot schools where the model of inclusive education has been developed.

For contact and information, please visit: www.dils.gov.rs

THERAPY FOR CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES: **Sensory Room in Novi Sad**

The primary and secondary school "Milan Petrović" in Novi Sad has obtained a sensory room, used for therapeutic purposes for children with difficulties. This is the first sensory room in Novi Sad, and they are also available in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Jagodina. The therapy aims to stimulate children's senses. The method is conducive to regular development in experiencing the outside world, controlling aggression, relaxing a child. According to the plan, 15 members of the school's teaching staff should be trained to work in the sensory room.

The sensory room in Novi Sad has been furnished and equipped through the action undertaken by the National Office and "Vip Mobile" company.

Contact: Primary and secondary school "Milan Petrović," tel.: 021 66 16 366; www.smp.edu.rs

ERASMUS MUNDUS PROGRAM **Scholarship Award Competition**

The European Commission has approved new master and doctoral programs within the Erasmus Mundus program.

Some universities have already announced the competitions for scholarship award and, depending on the study program, the competition invitations for students from Partnership States will be announced in the next few months.

More information on scholarships on the "FAQ" page. Contact: National Office Tempus, tel.: 011 32 33 409 www.tempus.ac.rs

Additional Erasmus Mundus II Competition

As part of the Erasmus Mundus II program, an additional program has been launched for the projects planned within Action 2 based on the partnership among higher education institutions of the countries in the region and in the EU, for the purpose of establishing greater mobility among partners involved in the project. In addition to the already approved project – JoinEU-SEE, there should be another two projects in this action for the Western Balkans.

More information at: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus_mundus/funding/2010/call_eacea_22_10_en.php

SCHOLARSHIPS FOR THE BEST STUDENTS: **Studies at the EU and EFTA Member States' Universities**

The Fund for Young Talents announced the competition for scholarship award to the best students of the final year of studies in the first cycle programs and students of the second and third cycle programs at universities of the EU and EFTA Member States and at the leading world universities for the academic year 2010/2011.

Eligible candidates are students with the average grade of at least 8.5 achieved during previous studies.

Contact and information: Ministry of Youth and Sport – Fund for Young Talents, www.mos.gov.rs, www.zamislizivot.org

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION: **Network for Inclusive Education Support Established**

The Ministry of Education has established a support network for the teachers and schools in introducing inclusive education practice.

The support network includes school employees – practitioners, teachers, staff assistants, principals, Ministry of Education staff, school administrations, experts working for the Institute for the Improvement of Education and the Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation, as well as the representatives of non-governmental organizations.

A team has been appointed for each school administration; it is available to the school for guidance and support via e-mail or telephone.

For queries regarding the inclusive education practice in class,

schools will, as a rule, approach practitioners, whereas the administrative queries will be put forward to educational advisers from school administrations.

A panel offering support to the regional teams has been established on the Ministry of Education level. The panel is comprised of experts on certain issues of inclusive education practice: education of children with development impairments, education of Roma children, issues of teacher strategy in class work, preparation of schools for working with children with different educational needs, as well as legal and financial issues.

Contact: Ministry of Education, tel.: 011 36 16 489; www.mp.gov.rs

Schools Selected for Inclusive Program Testing

At the competition for the participation of educational institutions in the program "Testing the Inclusion Program in 25 Partner Institutions in Serbia," 15 primary schools, three secondary schools and seven preschool institutions have been selected out of 84 applicants.

The program "Testing the Inclusion Program in 25 Partner Institutions in Serbia" aims to test and develop a training package that will help further develop the capacities for inclusive education, before these are realized in the education system, in over 300 institutions.

The program is realized by the Ministry of Education through the Delivery of Improved Local Services (DILS) project.

Contact and information: Ministry of Education, tel.: 011 36 16 489 www.mp.gov.rs; www.dils.gov.rs

Inclusive Education Center to be Established in Kragujevac

As a result of the program "Support to Children and Youth Policy in Serbia", Kragujevac will establish an Inclusive Education Center within a Kragujevac kindergarten and three new youth centers, two of which will be located in rural environments.

The program "Support to Children and Youth Policy in Serbia – Strengthening the Institutions for Decentralization of Social Services, Children's Rights Protection and Regulatory Convergence towards the EU Standards" is realized by the municipality of Emilia-Romagna and the autonomous region of Friuli – Venezia Giulia, in partnership with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and local governments in three Serbian towns: Kragujevac, Loznica and Novi Sad.

Contact: Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, tel.: 011 3112 916 www.minrzs.gov.rs

Brain Drain Research Launched

The Institute for Educational Research in cooperation with Group 484 has launched the project aiming to examine the motivation behind the brain drain, as well as to study the ramifications of this phenomenon. The project is being carried out as part of the regional project "Developing the Brain Gain Policy in the Western Balkans".

The Institute for Educational Research has developed a research project focused on the understanding of key issues in this field.

The research results will be used to draft recommendations for developing policies and programs in our country and in the region. The project is supported by the Balkan Trust for Democracy and European Fund for the Balkans.

According to the research conducted by the World Economic Forum, Serbia occupies the penultimate position out of 133 countries in which the index of brain drain or loss of human resources was measured.

Contact: Institute for Educational Research, tel.: 011 26 58 439; www.ipisr.org.rs Balkan Community Initiative Fund (BCIF), tel.: 011 26 22 511; www.bcif.org European Fund for the Balkans, tel.: 011 30 33 662; www.balkanfund.org

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Microfinance – Significant Foothold in Combating Poverty

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Yet, the positive effects of microfinance on the members of the most vulnerable groups surpass this dilemma and are a significant incentive in microfinance spreading and development. Also, there is a clear tendency of lowering interest rates charged on microcredit.

In addition to the forms that they take (microcredit cooperatives and associations, smaller and larger banks, financial institutions), one of the most significant classification of MFI is based on whether these institutions accept deposits or not, which is of extreme importance for national regulators (prudential and non-prudential regulations – Microfinance Consensus Guidelines, R. P. Christen, T. R. Lyman, R. Rosenberg).

As most transition countries, the Republic of Serbia is facing a range of social and economic issues, such as: insufficient economic development, restrictiveness of the financial market and insufficient financial inclusion, high unemployment rate, unresolved social issues – social exclusion of marginalized groups, poverty and vast social and economic differences, uneven regional development and low rural development, low productivity and illiquid economy, low survival rates among micro and small enterprises in economic crises, their underdevelopment and insufficient access to commercial loans, etc.

Despite the significant measures and progressive steps taken towards solving the abovementioned problems, in particular on the part of the donors of public funds, banking offer, as well as international development aid, the current demand for financial i.e. microfinance support significantly exceeds the current offer.

The fact that, in the Republic of Serbia, the microfinance sector operates and continually invests funds despite the limiting or non-existent legal framework, shows that, although significant progress has been made, the banking, state and public microfinance offer are insufficient to meet the economic and financial needs of corporate and retail customers in the Republic of Serbia, and it is necessary to regulate and strengthen the non-banking, non-deposit microfinance sector.

To that end, a set of activities towards the development of adequate legal framework has been implemented, which is expected to enable an undisturbed operation of microfinance (microcredit) organizations in the Republic of Serbia. A set of analyses performed with this in mind unquestionably prove that there is room for incorporating microfinance in the existing financial system, which should yield significant positive social and economic effects.

Microfinance is surely an emerging industry, but one with exceptional potential and one of the highest growth rates. The methodology of MFI operation, as well as the pertinent legislation, appears to be very flexible and able to keep up with modern trends.

The introduction of microfinance into the given market, taking into account its specific features, is one of the ways to extend the range of resources used to fight poverty and realize sustainable and balanced economic development by another, strategically very important, foothold.

Active Employment Policy Targets

The active employment policy targets in 2011 are oriented towards the increase of employment, investments in human capital and social inclusion.

The National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) 2011 is the main instrument in the implementation of active employment policy in 2011. It defines employment policy goals and priorities and sets forth programs and measures that will be realized so as to achieve the set targets and enable sustainable employment growth.

The National Employment Action Plan 2011 takes into account the goals, priorities and guidelines of the Europe 2020 strategy relating to employment, by means of which smart, sustainable and inclusive economic growth creates possibilities for a high employment rate, high productivity, social and territorial cohesion, as well as goals, priorities and planned activities of the adopted national strategies and development documents.

Social partners, relevant institutions and stakeholders are involved in the definition and development of the NEAP, in order to consider various viewpoints and thereby ensure a comprehensive approach and achieve value-added results in the realization of the planned programs and measures.

Contact and information: Ministry of Economy and Regional Development, Employment Department, tel.: 011 311 4798, www.merr.gov.rs

Competition for the Best Social Entrepreneurship Idea

A competition has been organized within the “Social Business Tour 2010” for the best idea in the domain of social entrepreneurship.

The project “Social Business Tour 2010” has been initiated with the idea of promoting the social entrepreneurship concept in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The tour includes six countries – Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia and Romania.

The competition entries must be innovative and hold the potential to permanently resolve the problems of people who are victims of poverty and social marginalization. The ideas may be realized in the fields of education, agriculture, health, energy, finances and social integration. The idea must be financially, socially and environmentally sustainable. The best ideas will be selected at the national level, and the winner will be decided at the European finals to be held in Bucharest.

This project is a joint initiative of the Erste Foundation, Erste Group, good.bee organization, Grameen Creative Lab and Austrian Ministry of Labor, Social Policy and Consumer Protection. The business concept was developed by the Nobel prize winner Mr. Mohammed Yunus, who will be visiting Belgrade on October 30.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integrations and the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit have also contributed to promoting the idea of social entrepreneurship.

More information at: www.socialbusinesstour.com

MINISTRY FOR THE NIP

Project Competition in 2011

The Ministry for the National Investment Plan announced the competition for projects to be financed in 2011 with a view to developing the infrastructure that would contribute to sustainable economic development, employment growth, raising the citizens' standard of living and reducing regional differences.

Infrastructural project proposals may be submitted by ministries, the autonomous province and local self-governments.

Eligible projects are those in the field of transportation, public utility, economic, energy, telecommunication, tourist, educational, health and sports infrastructure, as well as in the field of culture.

The projects need to be justified by the number of beneficiaries or should provide a stimulus for economic development.

The Ministry for the NIP will finance large-scale national projects, whereas the local self-governments, depending on their development levels, will have to provide funds for co-financing local and regional projects.

The exception to the above are the least developed municipalities, whose projects will be fully funded by the Ministry for the NIP.

Contact: Ministry for the National Investment Plan, tel.: 011 3617 583
www.mnip.gov.rs

EMPLOYMENT FOR MOTHERS-TO-BE Jobs for 185 Pregnant Women

In the action “Pregnancy – a Path to a Job,” realized in Niš, since December last year 185 pregnant women have found employment on an open-ended basis with the subsidies awarded from the city budget.

Through the action “Pregnancy – a Path to a Job,” the city of Niš wishes to promote employment of mothers-to-be and improve their social standing.

The city covers minimum wages, taxes and social insurance contributions, whereas new mothers receive maternity benefits from the state during maternity leave.

The city budget initially allowed for the allocation of about RSD 9 million for this action, but the budget revision allowed for more funds, as a result of the increased interest of employers.

Niš is the first city engaged in such an action.
Contact: The City of Niš, Pro-natal Policy Council
tel.: 018 29 92 10; www.ni.rs

BALKAN COMMUNITY INITIATIVES FUND Corporate Philanthropy Award

The Balkan Community Initiatives Fund (BCIF) has opened the competition for the VIRTUS Corporate Philanthropy Award to the companies with the highest degree of social responsibility in Serbia.

The Award is presented to companies and enterprises which have given material and financial support to a state-owned or non-profit action or organization in 2009 – 2010, and, by their investments for the common good, have helped reaffirm the idea of philanthropy in the world of responsible trading.

The 2010 VIRTUS Award will be presented in four main (Contribution at the National Level, Contribution to the Local Community, Award for SMEs, Award for the Support of the Most Innovative Project of the Year) and two special categories (Long-Term Partnership Between the Business and Non-Profit Sectors and the Special Award for Media Contribution).

The contest will be open to local and foreign companies, public and state-owned companies, small and medium enterprises, media companies, as well as corporate funds and foundations, with an exception of non-profit organizations and governmental institutions.

The BCIF, with financial support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and in partnership with the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) is awarding the VIRTUS Award for the fourth time.

Contact: Balkan Community Initiatives Fund, tel: 011 26 22 511, www.bcif.org

ERSTE FOUNDATION AWARD COMPETITION Social Integration Award for the Third Time

The Erste Foundation has opened the third call for the Erste Foundation Award for Social Integration 2011.

The Award is open to the non-profit organizations, public administration, civil society organizations, private initiatives, religious communities and the media who support social integration and take active part in projects aiming to raise awareness and integrate members of national minorities, marginalized population and individuals with disabilities.

The total value of the awards shall total EUR 610,000. The Award shall be granted to projects in the field of social integration from 11 countries from the CSEE region.

The Award was established in 2007 and is awarded every two years, aiming to stimulate the development of civic society in the CSEE countries.

More information:
www.integrationaward.org

COMPETITION OF THE PLACE IN HEART FUND Award for Best Local Community Projects in 2009

The Place in Heart Fund is awarding for the fifth time the civil society organizations (CSOs) and/or informal groups that implemented projects with most positive effects in their local communities in 2009.

The award for the best local partnership has been established this year with support and in cooperation with the TACSO Office (Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organizations). The purpose of the TACSO project is to support civil society in IPA beneficiary countries. The support includes the implementation of the program for strengthening CSO capacities, technical support to their activities and enhancement of conducive social environment. The Award aims to promote and stimulate the development of partnership between civil sector and the private sector.

The competition in both categories is open to CSO/citizen associations or informal groups who implemented projects, initiatives or activities in 2009.

The competition is open until October 27, 2010. The application forms may be downloaded at www.mestaurcu.org/obraci.html, and for more information see: www.mestaurcu.org

BELGRADE: Supported Housing for 23 Persons

The City of Belgrade has provided funds for the project entitled "Supported Housing" for persons with intellectual disabilities.

The Agreement on the realization of the project shall be signed between the Social Protection Secretariat and the Serbian Association for Promoting Inclusion.

The Association developed the pilot project in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the City of Belgrade.

The project envisages the housing of children with developmental disabilities in apartments with professional supervision.

The project covers 23 beneficiaries.

Contact: Serbian Association for Promoting Inclusion, tel. 011 26 59 267, www.sapi.rs

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, www.minrzs.gov.rs

VRANJE: New apartments for vulnerable families

Twenty families of refugees, internally displaced persons and socially vulnerable persons from Vranje received, on 06. September, keys to their new apartments, the construction of which was funded by the European Union.

The building, consisting of 20 housing units, for Social Housing in Supportive Environment in Vranje is realised as part of the project "Dignified Solutions for Displaced Persons living in Collective Centers or Private Accommodation in Serbia".

The project is funded from the European Union IPA 2007 funds and realised in cooperation with the Commissioner for Refugees of the Republic of Serbia and the UNHCR.

The total value of the construction works and

equipment is approximately RSD 35 million and the municipality donated the land and infrastructure in the value of approximately RSD 8.5 million. The project was implemented in cooperation with the NGO Housing Center.

The concept of Social Housing in Supportive Environment, first introduced in 2002 and included in the Strategy for Development and Social Protection of the Republic of Serbia, has been assessed as the best and most needed solution for the remaining residents of collective centres.

More than 400 housing units have been built in over 20 municipalities.

Contact: Housing Center, tel. 011 27 67 258, www.housingcenter.org.rs

STATE LOTTERY OF SERBIA Over RSD 3.5 Million for Primary Schools

The State Lottery of Serbia has granted aid of RSD 100,000 to 31 schools within the action of assistance for the most underprivileged schools in Serbia. Another nine schools for children with disabilities were awarded RSD 50,000 for the procurement of equipment and teaching tools.

The funds were used to repair windows, construct and reconstruct toilets, finance painting, floor and joinery replacement, construct sewage systems and procure equipment and teaching tools.

There are 3,530 primary and 482 secondary schools in Serbia.

The activity was launched in cooperation with the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit and the People's Office of the President of the Republic. Contact: State Lottery of Serbia tel: 011 20 29 29 2, www.lutrija.rs

Job Fair for a Successful Future

"Job Fair 10 – Create Your Future" is a fair of jobs for students and graduates of technical and technological faculties and represents the largest project of the student associations "Istek" and "Best Beograd".

Students may have their CV uploaded in the database which shall be distributed to participating companies and make direct contact with the representatives of the companies during the manifestation.

On the other hand, the "Job Fair" provides opportunities to companies to obtain the best quality staff in the country.

The fair is of national character for the first time this year, meaning that students from Novi Sad, Kragujevac and Niš may present themselves to the companies.

Contact: EESTEC LK Beograd – Electrical Engineering Students' European Association e-mail: jasma.janus@eestec.etf.rs
BEST Beograd – Technical Students' European Association, e-mail: Stefan.karadzic@best.eu.org

Serbian Anti-Poverty Network

Civil society organizations (CSOs) shall establish the Serbian Anti-Poverty Network whose specific activities and results are envisaged in 2011.

The Network shall be established by: Autonomous Women's Centre, Civic Initiatives, Group 484, Amity, Center for Independent Living, Association for Promotion of Mental Health in Children and Youth of Niš, Education Center of Leskovac, Sunce and Roma Information Center of Kragujevac. The project applicant is the SeConS Development Initiative Group.

The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit takes part and supports the establishment of the Network.

The operations of the Network shall take after the similar national networks operating across Europe.

The project entitled "Networking against Poverty in Serbia" held the first workshop for the representatives of CSOs. The main purpose of the introductory workshop was to present the project objectives, plan of activities and to initiate discussion on the capacities of CSOs to contribute to the work of the Network.

The project is implemented within the program "Strengthening Serbia-EU Civil Society Dialogue" supported by the EU Delegation in Serbia.

The Anti-Poverty Network shall develop the web portal at the beginning of 2011.
Contact: SeConS Development Initiative Group, tel. 011 29 20 352, www.secons.net
Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, tel. 011 311 4798, www.inkluzija.gov.rs

COMPETITION FOR FINANCING THE BEST VOLUNTEER YOUTH ACTION The Youth Rule

The Youth Office of the Palilula Municipality opened a competition for financing the best volunteer youth action entitled "The Youth Rule".

The competition targets the youth aged from 15 to 30 aiming to enable their active involvement in the law development processes and the implementation of the National Youth Strategy.

The maximum value of the proposed action is RSD 80,000.

The "Okolo" organization shall provide support during the action.

Contact: Youth Office of the Palilula Municipality, tel. 011 32 94 733
www.kzmpalilula.rs

COMPETITION WITHIN THE PROJECT:

Sustainable tourism for Rural Development

Within the joint UN program "Sustainable Tourism for Rural Development", the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and the UN Development Program opened the call for submitting project proposals in the field of "Diversification of Rural Economy through Tourism".

The funds are provided by the Millennium Development Goal Achievement Fund of Spain. The results of the competition shall be published in a national paper, as well as on bulletins and webpage of the Rural Development Support Network.

Contact: Rural Development Support Network, www.ruralinfoserbia.rs

Support for Health Centers to Increase Accessibility of Health Care for Vulnerable Population

The Ministry of Health supports 42 Health Centres with EUR 420,000 to increase the accessibility of health care among vulnerable population: persons with disabilities, youth, children and additional services for the elderly and immobile persons.

The funds are disbursed within the project of the Ministry of Health entitled "Delivering Improved Local Services" (DILS) and are granted to health centres involved in the project. The grant value totals EUR 5,000 to 10,000 per project.

The projects shall enable the strengthening of capacities of health centres by developing partnerships with local authorities and non-government organizations dealing with issues of vulnerable population.

Contact: Ministry of Health, tel. 011 36 13 734, www.zdravlje.gov.rs

ECONOMIC AND PROFESSIONAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN Become a Mentor

A competition has been opened for student girls from the University of Belgrade within the program "Share Your Knowledge – Become a Mentor".

The goal of the program is to gather professional leader women from different professions to share their knowledge and experience with young women with various interests who are beginning their careers.

The program shall enable the students to master the networking skills, means of using the existing experiences, gain information and council on how to find a job, learn about the opportunities for further development and international exchange, etc.

The program aims to economically and professionally empower women and has been launched by the USA Embassy in Belgrade, the Erste Bank and the European Movement in Serbia.
Contact: European Movement in Serbia, tel. 011 36 40 174

www.emins.org

Competition for Theses on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs has opened a competition to award the best final theses at post-graduate studies at the topic of sexual and gender-based violence.

Two awards shall be given to authors of defended final theses at master, postgraduate and doctoral studies.

The award is to publish the best papers in print.
Contact: "Combat against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence" Project, tel. 011 22 42 684
e-mail: srzn@minrzs.gov.rs

Non-government Sector Promoting Global Women Issues

Bibija, Roma Women Center of Belgrade, represented Serbia and Roma women in the project "Role of Non-Government Organizations in Promoting Global Women Issues" implemented in the USA.

Bibija presented the needs and issues of Roma women and the civil society environment in Serbia during the three-week program. The need to enhance the legal framework protecting women of all age and social status was pronounced, as well as the need to establish networks on the international level.

Contact: Bibija – Roma Women Center
tel. 011 324 54 54, www.bibija.org

Anti-Trafficking Consultations of European Roma Organizations

The European Roma Rights Center organized informal consultations with non-government organizations on human trafficking.

The consultations involved the Roma Education Fund, the European Women's Lobby, International Roma Union and Terre des Homes.

The representatives thereof discussed the role of Roma organizations and communities in combating human trafficking.

The aim of the consultations was to estab-

lish the social determinants of human trafficking, in particular relating to the representatives of the Roma community and to review the issues relating to the factors which may potentially contribute to the vulnerability of Roma communities in terms of trafficking.

The European Roma Rights Center is an international organization which deals with public law and suppression of racism against the Roma and violation of the human rights of the Roma.

PUBLIC WORKS IN LESKOVAC

Reconstruction of Roma Settlements

The realization of public works in Leskovac envisages the reconstruction of three Roma settlements in this town. The Roma cemetery shall also be renewed, engaging 18 workers who are members of the Roma nationality.

All three programs, organized by the "Public Utility" organization has engaged 48 persons from the register of the National Employment Service in Leskovac. The programs are worth RSD 6 million.

The workers shall be engaged in a period of four to five months, and the average salary shall total RSD 17,000 and shall include paid contributions to the PIO and health insurance funds.

Competition for Projects Targeting the Elderly

The State Lottery of Serbia has opened the third competition within the Dobrota program aiming to improve the quality of the life of the elderly.

The aim of the competition is to contribute to improved status of the elderly, by launching activities for stimulating their active involvement in various fields of social and cultural life and improved social care in municipalities.

The competition targets the elderly aged over 65, and the maximum value of the grant is RSD 800,000.

The fund shall be granted to local non-profit organizations (excluding Belgrade, Niš and Novi Sad).

The idea of the competition is to stimulate actions to contribute to the involvement of the elderly into the social and cultural life of the local community, launch programs developing social services for the elderly, stimulate the principle of life-long learning. The competition shall be administered by the Balkan Community Initiatives Fund (BCIF).

The State Lottery of Serbia has thus far approved of nine grants in two competitions through the Dobrota program, totaling RSD 3,389,186. Contact: Balkan Community Initiatives Fund (BCIF), tel. 011 26 22 511, www.bcif.org

Third Olympics of the Third Age

The Third Olympics of Sports, Health and Culture of the Third Age shall be held in Sokobanja.

The Olympics shall gather citizens over 60 years of age who may compete in fast walking, marksmanship, darts, chess, fishing...

The Olympics shall be organized by the Serbian Association of Pensioners, in cooperation with the "Dr. Laza K. Lazarević" National Foundation, "Sports for All" Association and the Assembly of the Municipality of Sokobanja.

Contact: Olympics of Sports, Health and Culture of the Third Age, tel. 063 85 31 030
www.olimpijada3d.org

International Day of the Elderly

The International Day of the Elderly is commemorated on October 1, by decision of the UN General Assembly adopted in 1990. Serbia has been commemorated the date ever since.

Serbia is at the top of the list of countries with the oldest population. The elderly aged over 65 account for one sixth of the population, while the number of the population below 15 is almost equal to the number of persons older than 65. Experts estimate that the global number of the elderly shall for the first time exceed the number of the youth by 2050.

The global action entitled "The Elderly Call for Action" envisages that the elderly of 50 countries in four continents meet with the representatives of their Governments within the campaign for better conditions of the life of the elderly.

The representatives of the elderly and the organizations dealing with the elderly issues have indicated the issues and needs of the elderly in Serbia to the Government representatives and have called the competent agencies, institutions and organizations to invest efforts to achieve the equality of the elderly, secure and dignified life, and full integration and active participation of the elderly in social community.

Active Communities Competition

The Balkan Community Initiatives Fund (BCIF) has opened the competition for the Active Communities program. The goal of the program is to enhance and develop local communities in Serbia, by stimulating active involvement of citizens in problem solving.

The initiatives should refer to the local community, stimulate active participation of citizens and produce wider gains for the local community relying on local potentials and resources, as well as the cooperation with other sectors on the local level.

The deadline for submitting project proposals is October 13.

Contact: Balkan Community Initiatives Fund (BCIF), tel. 011 26 22 511, www.bcif.org

Help Serbia Helps Open New Jobs in Southern Serbia Municipalities

The German non-government organization Help has signed agreements on cooperation within the project entitled "Poverty Reduction through Support for Local Sustainable Development in South Serbia".

The goal of the project is to contribute to sustainable development, focusing on empowering local economy by facilitating new jobs. The project covers Niš, Vranje, Aleksinac, Bujanovac, Pirot and Preševo.

The project is financed by the Government of Germany through the SEE Stability Pact.

The program includes three components: opening new jobs, cooperatives development and waste management advancement.

Citizens are eligible to obtain equipment or material worth EUR 2,000 to 15,000.

Contact: Help Serbia, tel. 011 30 46 340, www.help-serbia.org.rs

"Children and Poverty" Photo Competition

The Association for Promotion of Mental Health in Children and Youth of Niš has opened the "Children and Poverty" Photo Competition.

The competition was open within the project entitled "Poverty Reduction: Civil Society and Accountable Government" supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway and coordinated by the Institute for Sustainable Communities.

The selected photographs shall be used in the promotional campaign and exhibited within project activities.

The project deals with advancing the status of children and the (lack of) observance of child rights in Serbia.

Contact: Association for Promotion of Mental Health in Children and Youth of Niš, tel. 018 52 34 22, www.oknis.org.rs

17,194 Jobs Opened through Investment Incentives

Serbia has attracted direct investments totaling over EUR 635 million and the total of 17,194 jobs have been opened within 114 investment projects during the first ten rounds of applications for financial support to investors. The disbursed budget totalled EUR 47,331,000 and/or one budgeted euro attracted some 13 euros of direct investments.

Investors from Serbia account for as much as 63 percent of beneficiaries of this assistance, the most active being Soja protein, Drenik, Varvarin voće, Sto posto and Istil metal fer. They are followed by Italians, Germans and Slovenians. The highest share of investments is made in car industry, followed by textile industry, food and beverages and agriculture.

The Government has doubled allocations for investments in Niš, Zaječar, Kraljevo and Novi Pazar, while the amount shall be doubled also for stimulating investments in 40 underdeveloped municipalities.

More information: www.merr.gov.rs/sr/c/resori/siepa

BODY FRAME PROJECT

Dance as a Means of Inclusion

The project "Body Frame" was initiated by the group "Let's..." to stimulate cooperation of persons with disabilities and artists in the field of dance theatre.

Several cycles of workshops have been organized thus far and were led by artists from Serbia and from abroad, gathering the users of wheelchairs, the blind and visually impaired, persons with hearing impairments, choreographers and contemporary dancers.

Modern dance has become a tool of inclusion of persons with disabilities in the theatre thanks to the project "Body Frame". The persons who use wheelchairs, the blind and those with sight and hearing impairments got a chance to become part of "life on stage" in workshops and production of

two professional performances "Guilty for Gaus" and "Reset".

The play "Reset" was awarded for „Specific expressiveness in border area between the theatre and other arts and creativity in their widest meaning” at the 37th International Festival of Modern and New Theatre in Novi Sad.

The Group "Let's..." is a non-government organization established in spring 1999. It was established by young experts from the field of applied psychology who wanted to apply their professional knowledge in order to empower individuals and groups to develop their potentials.

Contact: Group "Let's..."
tel. 011 32 40 425, www.hajdeda.org.rs

MINISTRY OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION SOCIETY

Digital Serbia Programme Presented

The Digital Agenda for Serbia comprises the Information Society Development Strategy and the Electronic Communications Development Strategy, harmonized with the priorities of the Digital Agenda for Europe.

The Digital Agenda for Europe represents one of the seven major initiatives of the new European strategy "Europe 2020 – The Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Growth".

Over the past two years the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Society have worked on creating an institutional and legal framework conducive to further information society development.

The Digital Serbia covers the development

of e-business, including e-government, e-commerce, e-judiciary, e-health and e-education, as well as the development of the Internet and communications infrastructure making electronic services accessible to citizens throughout the country.

Intensive work is under way on developing broadband Internet access, which represents a precondition for e-government, the development of digital television and e-commerce.

The key results achieved thus far in the field of e-government are the electronic sessions of the Government and the eUprava portal.

Contact: Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Society, 011 20 20 057
www.mtid.gov.rs

Electronic Check of Payments for Pension Insurance

Employees can check whether their employers are paying their pension insurance contributions, as well as the declared wage, at the www.pio.rs portal.

By entering their unique personal ID number and PIN code on the portal, employees can learn whether their employment or termination was reported, with the correct dates and/or if the potential changes were entered in the database of the Fund.

In order to be able to use the portal, employees should receive their PIN codes at the offices of the Fund for Pension Insurance.

Contact: Republic Fund for Pension and Invalid Insurance; www.pio.rs

World Bank to Provide RSD 32 Million for the Development of e-Government

Diana Dragutinović, Minister of Finance, and Simon Gray, Head of the World Bank Office in Serbia, signed an Agreement whereby Serbia shall receive a grant of RSD 32 million out of the total of EUR 36 million for implementing the e-government development project.

The grant aims to strengthen the capacities of the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Society. The grant will finance trainings, exchange of international experiences, the organization of trainings and workshops and study visits.

The World Bank is thus providing technical assistance and support to the for the e-Government Development Project in Serbia. The project is part of the Digital Agenda of the

Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Society.

The e-Government portal is available at www.euprava.gov.rs. It represents an online office for the electronic services of public administration agencies, intended for natural persons and legal entities. The portal was officially deployed on June 11 and comprises the following segments: my eGovernment, eServices, eParticipation, news, help and contact.

There are currently over 50 services on the portal.

Contact: Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Society, www.mtid.gov.rs
National Information Technology and Internet Agency, www.rzii.gov.rs, www.euprava.gov.rs

Electronic Public Health Identification Cards by 2013

Electronic public health identification cards will be introduced in Serbia by 2013.

The electronic identification will contain a chip holding the data of the insured person: ID number, first and last name, address and insurance code, but will not contain any health data on the insured person.

The new identifications, similar to bank cards, will be validated by citizens using machines set up in all RZZO branches, as well as certain hospitals. Citizens will thus be able to automatically check whether their employer has paid their contributions.

These identification cards are expected to enable faster and easier medical examinations and purchase of medicines in pharmacies without administration.

Contact: Republic Health Insurance Fund of Serbia; 011 20 53 830, www.rzzo.gov.rs

EUR 9.1 Billion for ICT Projects

The Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Society published a call for scientists and experts specialized in the field of information-communication technologies to take a more active part in the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7).

Funds for various scientific and research projects can be provided as part of this programme. Out of the total of EUR 50 billion, the largest portion, 9.1 billion Euros, is intended for projects in the field of information-communication technologies.

Contact: Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Society,
011 20 20 057; www.mtid.gov.rs
FP7 Programme: www.wins-ict.eu

MINISTRY OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION SOCIETY:

Digital Classrooms in Schools

The Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Society published a call for primary schools to apply for participation in the "Digital School" programme, providing an opportunity for over 1,100 primary schools to be equipped with new digital classrooms.

Depending on the number of students attending classes in the school and the available classrooms, the digital classroom will have up to 30 workstations for students to work on modern personal computers.

Funds totalling RSD 650 million are envisaged for the "Digital School" programme. The Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Society will provide additional assistance to schools in insufficiently developed municipalities in equipping the classrooms and installing the computers.

The "Digital School" programme is part of the greater "Digital Serbia" initiative. The Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Society is set to improve the application of information-communication technologies at all levels of education in the future.

Contact: Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Society, 011 20 20 057; www.mtid.gov.rs

"BEOGRAD" MEDICAL SCHOOL Computers for the Blind and Visually Impaired

The "Beograd" medical school received a computer science classroom equipped with audio software for use by visually impaired students, as well as all citizens of Belgrade with significant visual impairments. The five computers equipped with audio software were donated by the municipality of Savski Venac.

The school has 59 blind and visually impaired students able to attend computer science classes using the software, but also to use the computers for private extracurricular activities. They can visit various social networks and websites, improving their social life.

The school decided to open the computer classroom for all visually impaired citizens of Belgrade, who can apply with the school administration and use the computers free of charge during afternoon hours.

Contact: "Beograd" Medical School
Tel: 011 26 84 544; www.medicinskaskola.edu.rs

JUDICIAL HIGH COUNCIL: Program for Automatic Case Management

The program for Automatic Case Management was introduced in 48 primary and higher courts, and should be introduced in another 12 primary and higher courts in Serbia.

The program was introduced in all commercial courts in 2008. It is planned to be introduced in 102 court units across Serbia by 2012.

All the courts in Serbia should be networked by 2012 and the citizens should be able to track the progress of their cases through a portal which is under development. This is currently

only possible in commercial courts.

The introduction of this program significantly increased the efficiency of the courts. 30 percent more cases were processed in commercial courts during the first six months than during the same period in 2009.

During the same period in primary and higher courts the efficiency was increased by 18 percent.

Contact: Judicial High Council
Tel: 011 36 34 211; www.vss.sud.rs

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