



SECTOR "EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY"
Minutes of the XI Meeting of the Sector Working Group (SWG)

Venue: Cisco Webex Meeting, hosted by Secretariat for European Affairs (SEA)

Date: 30.06. 2021, Tuesday, 10:00 - 12:00

Meeting moderated by Ms. Gerasimova, SEA/NIPAC representative.

Invited 106 attendees, 39 attendees were present during online plenary meeting.

↳ **Opening statements**

Ms. Gerasimova, opened the meeting with a short introduction for the meeting's purpose and its agenda, as well giving a floor for introductory speeches by ministers and EUD representatives.

Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Ms Shahpaska noted that IPA III priorities to be financed in the new programming framework started to be discussed last year. At the meeting, the discussion was going to be resumed and specific projects would be presented as part of the Action document for the programming year 2022. She notified three areas of interventions proposed for support: first, occupation safety and health at work; second, gender equality, combating violence against women and domestic violence; and third, further actions towards quality of social services and their monitoring.

Ms. Shahpaska briefly reflected upon the most recent policy developments in these three areas, as well as their main challenges.

She noted that **safe and healthy working conditions are fundamental for decent work**. COVID-19 has reinforced the need for sound and resilient Occupational Safety and Health system to be in place. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health and relevant stakeholders have started drafting the new National OSH Strategy for period 2021-2025, together with the Operational Plan for its implementation 2021-2023 (in the phase of finalisation), which would be followed by wider presentation and additional round of consultations, in order to ensure its greater relevance and coverage of the most important challenges and priorities. The National Council for Occupational Safety and Health regularly met and contributed to many OSH related issues and it clearly underscored that tripartite national OSH committees as the best place to address concerns and create trust through the design, implementation and monitoring of OSH policies and practices. While the system is in place, it needs further adaptation to the changed world of work and changing working environment and she highlighted that the evident need to modernise the regulatory and institutional frameworks; strengthen enforcement capacities; strengthen information, advisory services and training; strengthen data collection and OSH management systems at all levels to prevent and respond to OSH risks.

Ms. Shahpaska point out that **gender equality** is another area requiring full attention. A new National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2026 was finalised and submitted to the Government for its adoption, which would establish a comprehensive framework of actions in all areas for promotion of gender equality and the women's status. It would demonstrate clear focused on integrating the gender perspective in policies and strategies, combating stereotypes and violence against women, promoting the position of women in all spheres of public and private life and monitoring the situation with gender equality through relevant data and indicators. For the first time, the Strategy would set specific goals in new areas such as climate change, agriculture, culture and sports. In parallel, new Law on Gender Equality was in preparation aimed at achieving full gender equality, strengthening the position and status of women in society, equal access to resources and equal participation in decision-making in all spheres of social life. As well, the law would foresee significant improvements of the mechanism for promotion of gender equality and it is planned to be finalised in the second half of 2021. In the previous period, the Ministry stepped-up with the preparation of the secondary legislation, necessary for implementation of the Law on prevention and protection from gender-based and domestic violence and by-laws regulating delivery of temporary accommodation and counselling services were already adopted, while others would about to be finalised. Thus, the future challenge was to ensure implementation of the laws and strategies and in particular to expand the availability of various services.

Ms. Shahpaska addressed that **social services were central to ensuring equity in opportunity for all, which help individuals and families to overcome risks and improve their wellbeing**. In 2019, the country have embarked on an ambitious reform of social services, towards person centered services that requires the provision of integrated services. Progress has being made to reform the financing of services, to expand the range of services offered, the licensing, including the staff training and monitoring. Through the reform, the Ministry would seek to shift roles, with the municipalities taking the lead in identifying their priorities and offering services in partnership with local service providers, while the Ministry would set standards and frameworks, monitor the provision of services and finance services. As a first step in this reform, the Ministry would finance services through grants awarded in response to a call of applications by municipalities and local service providers (mainly NGOs), as well accompanied by training and



licensing of organisations and their staff. She pointed out that the reform is progressing and require a fundamentally shift in the way organisations work within the system demanding, among other changes, a significant increase in the capacity of municipalities to manage service providers, the Social Work Centres to monitor service provision, and Ministry to support lower-level implementers which are a key to guarantee that the citizens receive services of good quality.

Ms. Gerasimova, SEA/NIPAC representative, noted again that ongoing legal reforms in these three areas require support due to their implementation. She invited MES representative to inform on status in regard to proposing actions for financing under IPA III programming framework, besides that their last-year proposals had not been included for financing under IPA III 2021-2022 programming excessive.

Ms Poposka, MoES representative, excused the minister non-presence due to urgent matters. She noted that this ministry had been working on the preparation to IPA III Strategic Response document. This ministry fits within under the Thematic Priority 3 Ensuring comprehensive, inclusive and integrated modern education. In this document, the MoES proposed the indicators and targets, also with the areas of interventions. In past period, the MoES presented several action fiches, but unfortunately due to the lack of capacity of the IPA structure, the ministry is not included in the programming period 2021-2022. Ms. Popovska noted that at today plenary meeting, the actions in draft action document for improved health, social protection and gender equality under IPA 2022 would be presented. The MoES would be part in other implementation in order to have synchronised policies in the social sector. She informed that in the past period the ministry hardly worked to strengthen the capacity of the IPA structure to be prepared for the upcoming periods for next IPA programming 2023. There had been several open employment calls and MoES have recruited 4 permanently employed staff planned to start with their work from 1 July. This recruitment is important for MoES IPA structure, especially for forthcoming IPA programming, and overall, 8 staff members would count in this structure (regularly employed and contract assigned).

Mr. Bertolini, Head of Cooperation in EUD, expressed their happiness of having another social projects and probably we should have more projects because the country needs a lot of support in this area. The selected activities are important and explanations for relevance and methods of implementation would be welcome for each component.

The EU support in social sector did not come as a new action and a lot of ongoing projects are counted and still not implemented. This is why the IPA 2022 has been limited, and in particularly, the education was not covered because there were backlogs in relation to implementation of educational projects. He was glad to hear that finally MoES IPA structure had been reinforced and most likely the education would be an important focus sector for IPA 2023.

He added that unfortunately the process of approval of IPA III as a new instrument had been very long. All the regulations were not approved and as an important fact noted that the Parliament and the Council had agreed on the main points how to work with IPA III, meaning that finally an IPA III instrument would be. All of us, we had not been there yet in terms of all the templates waited for and so, IPA 2022 would be in delay as it could not be anticipated. He informed that the letter should be soon addressed to NIPACs in this regard and it could provide a time for more accurate programming the education sector. This would not mean changing of objectives and targets, but it would mean few more weeks for planning and the decision of adoption and approval would be during first half of next 2022 year. The IPA 2022 could be implemented at earliest in third or fourth quarter of 2022 and the real possibility could not be anticipated which requires timely preparedness of all the documents, as well if possible to launch some procedures with suspension clause. The IPA 2022 would not come in 2021, but in 2022 and most likely to the end of a year when the first contracts might be signed. This would depend completely on European Commission alone and it would be a result of a long dialogue between three main institutions (European Parliament, European Council and and European Commission).

↳ **Presentation of actions foreseen with IPA III 2022 Action Document "EU for improved health and gender equality and social protection" and discussion**

Ms. Gerasimova, SEA/NIPAC representative, thanked for information given on programming exercise and informed that the IPA 2022 programming documents were in well advanced stage and finalisation process, as well the deadlines were set and IPA Coordinators were informed timely.

Ms. Trenkoska, Head of Unit in MLSP, gave brief overview that the Action was designed to contribute to the achievement of specific objectives of Thematic priority 1. Education, employment, social protection and inclusion policies, and health, which fit under Window 4 Competitiveness and inclusive growth for IPA III programming framework 2021-2027. This Action for 2022 programming year would be the continuation of different actions in the fields of education, employment, and social inclusion in the country. Different projects have been or are being implemented to address needs linked to mid-term and longer-term support provided under separate national IPA programmes. Overall, this IPA III 2022 Action would improve the health and well being of the population in the country and support the promotion of equal opportunities and access to quality jobs, as well as social protection for all. She addressed who of her colleagues from MLSP would present each of three separate actions.

Mr. Dochinski, Deputy Head of Department for Labour Law and Employment Policies in MLSP, gave brief presentation on occupational safety and health (OSH) action envisaged in IPA III 2022 Action Document. The OSH is an important and relevant area with a lot of challenges, which being strengthened and highlighted even during this



Covid-19 crisis faced by all of us, companies and workers. Overall, it was evident that overall OSH system in the country should be reinforced to response to this kind and similar crisis situations.

The overall objective of first OSH action is to improve OSH system and practices in the country in line with EU standards and practices leading to safe and and health environment for all workers in the country. In other words, the main idea behind this project is that the activities envisaged would contribute for improving the enforcement capacities of State Labour Inspectorate (SLI), but also to the MLSP and other stakeholders in OSH related system (other institutions, social partners and organizations of OSH professionals and OSH medicine doctors) to strengthen their working procedures, standards and practices, as well reporting and inspection tools, etc, as the important issue. These activities would be complemented by further improvement of national legislation and its further harmonisation in OSH area with relevant EU OSH Acquis.

Other important part would be design and implementation of a number of promotional activities related to awareness raising and improving the knowledge of stakeholders mentioned in this area. These promotional activities would be designed and adopted for different target groups and parts of society, particularly micro and small enterprises, representing the majority of national companies, proven to be vulnerable to OSH related risks. The workers and employers from various sectors would be targeted with these activities, especially the sectors affected by increased number of OSH accidents, injuries and diseases, which targeting would be main purpose of gradually reducing the number of work-related accidents, especially the number of fatal injuries.

This project would also assist in tackling one of the most important challenges as well recognised by every person working in OSH due to incomplete and fragmented system of recording and keeping data on work-related injuries, accidents at work and occupational diseases. Current system is burdened with different structure and amount of data needed for reporting of work related injuries, even deaths. There are also issues of non-reporting or under-reporting of OSH cases by companies, as well as various statistics and reports which being issued by different institutions and organizations. All these issues related to OSH information system and reporting is hoped to be successfully tackled and targeted by project activities which it would eventually put in place one single unified inter-linked and reliable system of data and statistics gathering and analysis in regard to OSH. Everybody would agree that this is relevant evidence based ingredient for policy making for better OSH system.

The project document is in very advanced stage of drafting the terms of reference, as being organised in four different components: first dealing with strengthening the capacities of SLI in the OSH area by developing new working models and methods, procedures and standards, and streamlining the reporting practise; second dealing with capacity building of all other relevant national OSH stakeholders; third dealing with improving the OSH information system and strengthening the capacities for analysis and use of OSH related data and evidence-based policy making; and fourth dealing with promotion of OSH culture by envisaging tailored actions which target different parts of society and economy, as well OSH culture among the youngest school age population in elementary schools by developing tutorial programmes and materials of basic OSH concepts with educational authorities. The project implementation is last 3 years with a budget around 3 million EUR, in which technical assistance and supplies are foreseen.

Mr. Drago, TA SEA Project Leader, addressed two points. First, in relation to the activities to Output 1 due to strengthening the capacities for implementation for compliance and enforcement of OSH, he pointed out that the final decision is not made whether it would be implemented as a grant to an organisation or as service and supply contract. Second, he pointed out that the baseline value for 2020 of 1062 registered serious occupational injuries is lower than the targets of 1300-1400 set for 2025. A two remarks were done in this regard. Understandable is the meaning behind the baseline value for 2020 and the action, that the intention is the occupational injuries are registered and not hidden. According his opinion, this target is not appropriate and should be made smart. Second suggestion is that the targets should not be put between 1300 and 1400 and the target should be precise, as well formulated as 'at least 1300'. He stressed that this indicator should be removed.

Ms. Dochinski, MLSP representative, informed in regard to implementing arrangements, the decision is still not taken. Currently, three possible implementation modalities are discussed and the advantages-disadvantages. First option is the action to be implemented as regular technical assistance service and supply contract by selected contractors. Other options are related to the possibility the project to be implemented as direct grant award. Second option by ILO considered as relevant and competent knowledgeable expertise in OSH area and the ILO with EU are standard setting authority with non-doubt to implement overall action in efficient and effective way. In this regard, the justification was provided. Third option is to be provided as a direct grant award to EU OSHA, with extremely relevant scope of activities, and the letter was already sent to them with request to express their willingness whether possible and feasible to, as well the MLSP is in contact with DG NEAR and response is expected in forthcoming days. In regard to second comment related to indicator for Output 1, as well we have recently noticed that it looks strange in relation to baseline value, the reason behind was that when the terms of references started to be drafted, the value from 2019 was used which is closed to 1800 and in 2018, the number was above 1800. Somehow in the drafting process of terms of references, the newly available data for this indicators is included. He added that this number of 1062 should be reconsidered because previous year numbers present bigger numbers of occupational accidents in the country. Out of the total inspection and supervisions performed by SLI and 71% of those were conducted as inspections and supervisions due to implementation of various measures, decisions and recommendations related to Covid-19 situation. As well second element that should be considered, there was strong slow down of economy during 2020 and a lot of



sectors or those characterised with high number of occupational diseases were facing a slow down or not even working. He suggested the baseline value to be changed, either by using the baseline for 2019 as similar to previous years or to provide an explanation in footnote.

Mr. Drago, TA SEA Project Leader, suggested that it is better to be used a baseline value for 2019, because 2020 was not a typical year and to use as a target value 'at least 1400' for 2025. This remark was agreed to be added in AD.

Ms. Dochinski, MLSP representative, noted that having in mind a problem on non-reporting of occupational injuries and accidents and after the project implementation, if the system is improved due to registration and reporting, certain increase of number which do not mean an increased number, but it would mean better reporting. He added not to be to optimistically with the target value.

Ms. Prodanova, EUD representative, raised an issue on the background of discussion in regard to source of data for number of occupational accidents and possibly, the OSH system is planned to be linked to e-health, whereas the primary medical staff is registering a case or it would be different system. She also addressed the issue for the reason for underreported and if the cases are under-reported or unrecognised by medical staff or hidden by the employers, how they would be registered in the system, in e-health or separate system.

Ms. Dochinski, MLSP representative, explained the idea behind the component for OSH system that maybe details should be provided. The intention is to experts to come and provide analysis of existing system. There is not plan to reinvent-the-wheel and the intention is to build on EU and international experience, but also to continue with a current idea how to integrate in available IT system and great importance lays in e-health system whereas the doctors are the one who should report when it comes to occupational diseases and injuries. The real problem in practise is that many of those are not being done properly. He expressed the assurance that the OSH system designed would rely again on e-health system. Also, he mentioned the obligations of each company is obliged to report most serious injuries within a 48-hour timeframe to SLI and these numbers are officially published on basis of information received from companies. When the most serious injuries are mentioned, it refers to injuries that cause an absence of worker from its job from more then 3 days. All minor types of injuries are actually not being reported. Therefore, it is much needed the expertise to analyse the current system, problems and deficiencies, as well the challenges for the system improvement by proposing a general solution as unified and implemented further on. Currently, the numbers from SLI are available in OSH area, as well the ones published by Public Health Institute as legally obliged to collect and publish this data. The data from these both institutions has never coincided. As a third source of data, there are data and numbers published by some civil society organisations of OSH professionals. Therefore, the project idea is to connect all pieces together in a single puzzle and the e-health system would be part of whole story, whereas the doctors would be able in first instance to recognise and report on certain type of work-related injuries and occupational diseases.

Ms. Prodanova, EUD representative, explained why this question was raised, because it is foreseen with this Action Document to be support e-health system and this activity could be upgrading of current system. Therefore, it should be considered a synergy between two different parts of this action and also, it there is a need, to ensure smooth interoperability between systems. She agreed that a strong assessment is needed for further activities.

Ms. Cvetkovska, Head of Unit in Equal Opportunities Department in MLSP, gave brief presentation on action under outcome 2 due to establishment of effective and efficient which promotes achievement of gender equality, empowerment of women and ending gender-based violence. Action was drafted with an attitude that gender equality is cross-cutting issue as a priority. So, the gender equality should be mainstreamed in all areas in order to improve the quality of life. When it is spoken about gender quality the most relevant legal instrument the Law on equal opportunities between women and men. Many improvements had been done in this area, but further progress is necessary. When it is spoken about poverty, unemployment and violence, we still speak about the strong gender dimension in these issues. The action proposed considers these topics and focuses on policies, structures and services for an investment for closing the gender gap by addressing the violence against women, bigger participation in the society at local and national level. Beside this, the key changes would be related tackle traditional gender rules, whereas women are much more likely to engage in unpaid and home work compared to men.

Other important law is Law for prevention and protection against discrimination, adopted in October 2020, and it is aligned with relevant international standards. The process of harmonisation with this law is ongoing and all legal framework should be harmonised in a two-year period.

Also, in January 2021, the Law for prevention and protection from violence against women and domestic violence was adopted. This law is aligned with the Istanbul Convention. At this moment, the ministry prepares relevant by-laws for further implementation of the law. The law aimed to prevent violence against women and domestic violence and offers effective protection to women from any form of gender-based and domestic violence. She pointed out that the services need continuously to be developed at whole territory of the country and those to be available for women, especially to those in rural areas.

Another challenge is to strengthen the data collection, especially due to reporting of violence cases, different types of violence, and women from different vulnerable groups (women with disabilities, etc.). The action would improve the empowerment and inactive women to be supported, especially women in rural areas, women from ethnic minorities, Roma women, etc, to be involved in active labour market measures and to be productive in labour market. Moreover, the action would assist in establishment of effective structures for equal opportunities at local level and expertise should



be provided to local self-government in delivery of policies based on real gender mainstreaming.

Regarding gender-based violence (GRB), the action would invest in prevention, counselling and other types of services for victims of GRB and domestic violence. Those efforts would be complied with assistance for licensing and functioning of social services that would support the civil society to be part of this action. In regard to establishment of inter-ministerial system for integrated data collection on GRB in line with relevant law and it would address a data gap linking to violence against women, as well relate to State Statistical Office (SSO) due to National Gender Equality Index (in the domain of violence).

The ministry is in final phase for adoption of National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2026. The action proposed would also support implementation of this strategy.

Mr. Lazovski, Advisor for support of deinstitutionalization process and social services in Social Protection Department in MLSP, addressed the action proposed for improvement of social services. As few words of background in regard to 2019 Social Protection Law has been a major reform in social protection system, both in direction to modifying the social welfare transfers and social services system.

With IPA III action proposed, it is intended to continue working in main frame for improving the quality of social services. The reasons is because in the area of social welfare transfers, the satisfactory progress has been achieved and an initial analysis confirm that this part of reform prove to be successful and gave a background for quick response by the Government during Covid-19 pandemics to most vulnerable groups. At the same time, the system was changed for social services based on licensing and contracting of non-public service providers. Also, the aim was to ensure community based and person-centred social services which represent a need on mid-term and long-term efforts to fully implement the reform, whereas the improvement of social services is one of the main aspects of the reform. As an output aimed to be achieved, it is to have strengthened monitoring and quality assurance of social services at levels (at national, regional, local, and at level of individual service provider).

The main indicator selected is to achieve at least 70% of satisfied social service providers expressed through the impact of the quality of their lives. This would represent major change in line with comprehensive National Strategy for Deinstitutionalization which was developed and implemented by the EU support. This requires not only to design of new architecture of social services system, but also changing the mentality and further capacity building of professionals in different levels of social protection system.

The efforts would go alone to two main paths, on one hand, to design coherent and comprehensive and functional mechanism for monitoring and quality assurance of social services, and on other hand, to increase capacities of managers, social workers, professionals and practitioners, service users and other relevant actors of social services delivery to take part within this system. Therefore, the key envisaged point in social services system would be to have full front of social services which start from the needs of a user, planning and delivery for the user and monitoring and evaluation system in place.

The action proposed is logical continuation of already ongoing reforms in the area of social services, as well continuation of current technical assistance EU funded project for supporting the deinstitutionalization. The intention is to start by reviewing the legal framework for social services, a set of quality standards for social services, and setting different concrete indicators for all aspects and phases of service delivery. It is expected that the system would move beyond for ensuring substantial quality assurance framework for the users. The overall architecture of monitoring and evaluation system of social services would be reviewed by establishing of clear reporting lines and to provide users with a functioning operational mechanism for eventual possible complains. This would be possible with signification capacity building that would include a range of social protection professionals at different levels, including municipal levels and non-public service providers, as major actors.

Mr. Lazovski informed that the MLSP is currently working on development and upgrading the data management system towards comprehensive one applied through overall social protection system. This action would be an additional tool to be used within social services quality reporting and it would fit into design and implementation, as well evaluation of public policies in this area.

As mentioned, he added that the action proposed is in line with comprehensive National DI Strategy and. the Common European Guidelines for Transition from Institutional to Community Based Social Care. The key challenge for next period would be to have an efficient and effective, flexible and people-centred system for social services, which would require major change in social system. The MLSP, together with Social Work Centres, Public Institute for Social Affairs, public and non-public service providers and individual users, would be beneficiaries of an action. He informed that the terms of reference had been initiated

Mr. Maleski, representative from CSO Reactor, congratulated the ministry for excellent document and provides a hope to work together with civil society sector as partners in developing all topics presented. His short question was due to receiving comments in due deadline set.

Ms. Gerasimova, SEA/NIPAC representative, explained the draft action document was submitted with the invitation and comments are expected in next 7 to 10 days. In this regard, **Mr. Drago**, TA SEA Project Leader, again mentioned that the deadlines for IPA III 2022 are expected to be postponed, probably by the end of September, not as it is now till 6 September. He clarified that that having comments after meeting of SWG might have positive aspects, but some comments might be in opposite direction or even conflicting one to another. Additionally, **Ms. Gerasimova**, explained



the role of Mr. Drago as technical assistance and his experts' team in drafting action documents and the comments on draft action document would be beneficial. She noted that as currently set the deadline for submission to EUD of final version of this action document is 10 July, but considering the request for commenting, this deadline would be postponed.

Ms. Kamberi, Head of Department in MLSP, shared the information in relation to conclusions of Second Ministerial Meeting on Roma Integration held on 28 June and following the endorsement of Declaration of Western Balkan (WB) countries on Roma integration in EU within the enlargement process (Poznan Declaration), the ministry participated at this meeting. Poznan Declaration foresees several topics, such as employment, education, health, housing and persons without IDs.

The ministries in WB countries agreed on strengthening the ongoing work on Roma integration in general and most specifically, on employment. It was agreed that support should be directed towards transition from informal to formal economy, notably through intensive reforms and investments.

Since a large portion of Roma population is active in informal economy, the RRC is working with several WB governments on developing policies and programmes including an action on employment which would significantly contribute for enhancing the employment rate on Roma and other vulnerable categories, thus reducing the informal economy activities. It was agreed that this informal economy decreased from 39% to up to 25% until 2025. Such programme could be eventually replicated at regional level and this action would contribute to policy objectives of European Investment Plan (EIP) in WB to encourage vulnerable position of Roma by intensifying among its priorities and opportunities for investments in education and employment. The ministries agreed to explore further opportunities to develop such policy programmes in close cooperation with RCC and EU. The ministries agreed to explore all window opportunities to ensure Roma benefit from the general socio-economic strategies and plans, including the digital transformation of the region.

She informed that this is a topic on which it should be worked next year in order to achieve goals from Poznan Declaration. In line with this issue, the ministries agreed that Roma must be included in the process of operationalization of Green Agenda in WB, in particular, within the measures related to circular economy, environment protection and climate action.

As Roma are not specifically mentioned in IPA III, her opinion is that according Poznan Declaration and these conclusions should be proceeded. She informed also on forthcoming Berlin meeting, whereas the Prime Minister would be present, the Roma issues should be included in all these priorities and plans for IPA III.

Ms. Gerasimova, SEA/NIPAC representative, addressed this information and pointed out that due to Roma issues in IPA III, there is established separate SWG on Roma Integration and there is good base for proposing developed measures which would support Roma in advancement of their status, as well envisioning in strategic documents.

Mr. Bertolini, EUD representative, made a note to couple of points driven by last interventions.

First point, the quality documents are always welcome and this country has big advantage in respect to other countries in the region of having sector working groups. It is welcome that SWG would have a time to listen the discussion, to look at documents and to provide comments. He expressed his opinion against quick deadlines. The fundamental is to have good and valuable action document. As well, he stressed that he would not speculate on the date of submission to EC because his is not entitled and the information is expected to come in next weeks.

Second point, as for education in regard to Roma integration, the reason why there is no action/ project on Roma integration foreseen in IPA 2021-2022 is because there is substantial assistance under implementation and to be completed from bilateral and regional IPA programmes. RCC is also benefiting from regional IPA assistance due to Roma integration. As Ms. Kamberi was right, Roma should be an integral part of Green Deal and Digitalization.

Mr. Bertolini highlighted a challenge for the Government in putting more funds on Roma integration. It should not be that IPA is providing higher amount of funds for Roma integration then the same governmental budget. He stressed to agree on a principle that for all IPA III to be put same amount as Government would put and it would be a big benefit for Roma citizens, as well benefits for having better and more powerful policies from governmental perspective. As it is done with civil society, it could be fifty-fifty starting from IPA 2023.

He encouraged participants to enter into discussion. The action proposed on gender equality were discussed in last months and the ministry agreed of having more citizens and civil society participation, as well he supports the capacity building of relevant institutions due to gender equality and proposed that the actions should be opened for private/business sector, which could be a driver of change in gender mainstreaming. His expectation is to see the comments from civil society sector, someone to raise a hand and to talk, as this meeting should be seen as possibility.

Ms. Anastasovska, representative from CSO FOSM and Project Director of IPA Project "CSO Dialogue - Platform for Structural Participation in EU integration", highlighted that the presentations were very useful for understanding the draft action document and its further implementation, whereas the civil society could work. Her comment was focused on the process due to giving the comments, rather than commenting on the content. She proposed to this action document to be discussed among civil society organizations and previous commenting was in regard to health actions of this document. Having in mind that a lot CSOs are working on gender issues and social services, unfortunately not present at this meeting, her proposal was to have an opportunity to contact them for commenting on



the document with the deadline set. She also requested if there is possibility the CSOs to be part of meetings where these kinds of documents are prepared because it is evident that they are prepared during a year. She expressed a willingness of CSOs to be involved in those technical meetings where documents are created and discussed. As now, it is a case to be involved only in final stage of preparation. In this manner, the CSO could be timely involved in preparation of programming documents. Although, Mr. Drago is concerned in regard to a deadline, but comments could be beneficial within the deadline set up to 9 July.

Mr. Bertolini, EUD representative, noted two points. Firstly, this is not first meeting where this document is discussed and there had been many things done in previous period, starting a year ago. SWGs started to talk about IPA III, its priorities and actions around April-May 2020. The fact of having action document is based on previous discussion. When the project is developed there is always somebody holding a pen, potential meeting could put ideas and then somebody should put done in more logical form.

Secondly, he agreed of having time and deadline postponed for having additional comments by CSOs by the end of forthcoming week and to consult broadly.

Ms. Anastasovska, FOSM representative, agreed on newly set deadline and expressed willingness to consult as much as possible CSOs. Besides previously having IPA III Strategic responses and this action document, she asked whether there are other documents that would be prepared.

Mr. Drago, TA SEA Project Leader, explained that the action documents do not entirely presenting what it foreseen in action fiches sent a year ago to EC services in Brussels. In this case, the action fiche and action document are copy of one-another. The action in action document is entirely built on basis of action fiche. Differences between two documents are having additional explanations on what it suppose to be done, as decided a year ago. A year ago, everybody was consulted and the ideas were developed. He noted that he is not the one fixing the deadlines and expects to see the comments.

Ms Trenkoska, MLSP representative, addressed the issue raised for involvement CSOs, the ministry agreed to have additional time for providing comments till 9 July. She asked from pragmatic point of view; the comments to be received in structural way (which organization, in what part of document gives the comment) in order not to miss some of them and to be properly addressed further. In regard to the ideas of civil society organizations, as was already mentioned, the action fiches were drafted last year. The ministry agreed also of having some kind of consultations with civil society sector when preparing this kind of strategic documents, but they should also understand that they are showing as tenderers or offerers. It was informed that there are also other documents which are part of tendering procedure and it would be good to clear how to involve them in order to have their opinions.

Mr. Bertolini, EUD representative, explained that the technical document where the priorities and objectives could be easily shared. When the call of proposals is launched for civil society sector, all technical information is shared and they are asked to comment and not to hide technical input. The tender instructions or evaluation grid with criteria should not be shared, but it is beneficial of having a document addressing real needs and broadening the discussion with CSOs, whereas the innovative elements could be brought, knowledge not in possession of national authorities or consultants, and it would be beneficial.

Ms. Gerasimova, SEA/NIPAC representative, noted the useful discussion and hoped to have future close cooperation with CSOs. This discussion gave another perspective due to ways in which the exchange of ideas could be on documents in different stages. As well, there is a need for more structured participation from civil society sector in terms of defining the organizations that could be permanently involved in all sector groups.

Ms. Mabera, MLSP representative, thanked the EUD for supporting several projects in relation to Roma integration and in education and housing areas. She mentioned that Poznan declaration is underling that EC have to continue with the support of efforts in WB countries for fulfilling its objectives. She mentioned again that it is important the Roma issues to be the cross-cutting issue. Ms. Kamberi pointed out that nowhere was written that 50% of project budgets to be allocated from EC and other 50% from the Budget of the Government. Thus, she asked again the Roma issue to be cross-cutting issue in IPA III programmes. She also noted that North Macedonia would host the International Conference on Roma Women and the preparations had begun.

Mr. Bertolini, EUD representative, noted that it is always a political decision how much of the budget the state is investing in Roma. In EUD, there is always an ally to increase the budget in relation to Roma and capacities of people, in the areas of employment, education and social inclusion. He noted a matter of willingness. Having a lot of funds for Roma integration, he highlighted as not good point, but it presents that the EC is putting importance and the country does not. This is against the policy objectives. Thus, increasing the assistance is not the only way in order to track more investments for Roma integration.

Mr. Fugger, Austrian Attaché on Social Inclusion and Employment, congratulated on ambitious programme and presented well. In regard to issues of quality assurance and monitoring of social services, he noted usefulness for making a reference on European Quality Framework of Social Services, issued by Social Protection Committee. This is quite comprehensive quality framework and based on it, the social services in North Macedonia could be easily assessed. As the minister mentioned, the financing is important issue in regards to provision of social services and it might be useful to establish an indicator due to financial means available for social services to be developed in future. The Eurofound (European Foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions) is regularly doing



research on quality of social services in EU member states, as well EU Candidate countries.

Ms. Lazovski, MLSP representative, noted a positive suggestion of Mr. Fugger. In regard to European Voluntary Policy Framework might be an acceptable starting point for development of national system, even aligned and harmonized. As well, any suggestions would be helpful in regard to European standards and it would be good to find a way to include them if not in this document, but also in detailed project terms of references. Due to funding of social services, there are already clear indicators on budgetary allocations which could be followed on the amount of state budget provided for social services. Also, there is already a system of following a number of social service providers licensed and authorised which delivery services at the expenses of national budget, even regionally disaggregated data which is already done with clear. Besides increasing the opportunities for social services and social transfers, the budgetary allocations are increased as well. He highlighted that capacity building is evidently needed in mid-term and long-term perspective and beneficiaries of social services to be integrated at labour market, when possible.

Ms. Cvetkovska, MLSP representative, thanked on the potential support of gender equality action. In regard to the question of involvement of civil society sector and private sector, it was already mentioned that CSOs are strong partners in forthcoming period of implementation. Private sector is seen as one pillar to work together to implement the action.

↳ **Concluding remarks by the Co-chairs**

Ms. Gerasimova, SEA/NIPAC representative, concluded the fruitful discussion with following conclusions:

- Deadline for receiving written comments from civil society sector and other SWG members is 9 July.
- During the course of August, another round of consultations through written procedure would be done in which final version of action document would be submitted.
- So far, the deadline for submission of action document to EC services is beginning of September.

Annexes:

- Annex I Agenda
- Annex II Presentation