



# Leave no one behind

Learning from each other  
fosters the inclusion of minorities  
and other vulnerable groups  
in the Western Balkans

Implemented by

**giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



# Ladies and Gentlemen!

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After seven years of cooperation, I would like to thank all partners in the municipalities and the NGOs in Serbia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo for the successful cooperation. Further thanks goes to the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) and the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) as partners from Schleswig-Holstein. They contributed to the success with their academically-based advice and lobbying for the matters of minorities.

Through the exchange of experiences, encounters, successful practical examples, workshops and discussions, we managed to develop various new initiatives that meet the actual needs on the ground. They were implemented as our joint projects by the partners from the municipalities in the region. Each of the implemented measures aimed to strengthen the participation and inclusion in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the most vulnerable in the partner countries.

Schleswig-Holstein contributed with its year-long experiences and structures in minority policy and the established monitoring systems, as well as the mechanisms for inclusion of self-organisations into the political decision-making processes, established over decades. At the same time, the actors in Schleswig-Holstein gained many new insights due to the cooperation with partners in the region, adopted different perspectives and learned to question apparent certainties in integration and inclusion policy. In this way, the project work presented in this booklet has become a gain for all actors involved.

We should be proud about this. And these experiences can encourage us to look into further efforts and new initiatives in future.

*Linda Pieper,  
State Chancellery Federal State of Schleswig-Holstein*

# Background

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The ongoing reform and EU approximation process is an important factor of cooperation and political stabilization in Southeast Europe. The inclusion of particularly disadvantaged groups is a significant element of EU accession negotiations. In many parts of the Western Balkans processes of creating suitable long-term frameworks to ensure the social and economic inclusion of all societal groups, and equal access to economic, social and cultural (ESC) rights in line with the overarching Leave No One Behind Principle, as a central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are currently taking place. Although appropriate legislation, implementation strategies and action plans widely exist on central level, implementation on local level remains a challenge. Throughout the Western Balkan region members of various minority communities, especially Roma, remain among the most vulnerable citizens – they are often exposed to poverty, social exclusion, and various forms of discrimination. Local actors such as social centers and municipalities do not have sufficient capacities and resources to provide qualitatively and quantitatively sufficient services to all citizens, including these vulnerable groups. Often however, a significant impediment to their access to public services, education and the labor market, is not only the limited support but also the lack of information and trust in institutions.



The situation is very different in Schleswig-Holstein, the most northern federal state in Germany. The state borders Denmark and has a long history with the Danish minority which has lived for decades in German territory, as well as the German minority in Denmark and the Frisian ethnic group on both sides. In addition, since 2012 the constitution of Schleswig-Holstein recognizes Sinti and Roma as minority. Today, all four minorities live peacefully together in the German-Danish border region with the local population. Schleswig-Holstein is notorious for its minority policy model in Germany and beyond.

Since 2016 several project measures on the topic “Minorities in Western Balkans” have been part of the German Government and Federal States Programme (German: **Bund-Länder-Programm**, BLP), which is implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

(GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The project and its procurements are financed by the BMZ and co-financed by the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein. The measures were implemented in cooperation with the GIZ Regional Project on Social Rights for Vulnerable Groups (SoRi), the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN), the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) and the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) aiming at promoting the provision of community services for minorities in the Western Balkan states of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia, and Serbia. As a result, two diversity management and social inclusion models were successfully transferred from the German state of Schleswig-Holstein to Bijeljina (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Tetovo (North Macedonia). Building up on these successes in 2022, on behalf of the German Government and Federal States Programme, NALAS in coordination with GIZ, has implemented the project “Scaling up of minorities inclusion models and strengthening of service delivery in municipal structures in the Western Balkans”, contributing to the development of the capacities of relevant state and non-state actors in the field of social, cultural and economic human rights and inclusion of vulnerable groups. The project aimed at enhancing the exchange of good practices at regional level and highlighted the importance of close coordination and cooperation between central state and local government level to jointly contribute to the efficient and effective implementation of inclusion/diversity policy to reach the vulnerable groups and their specific needs identified in a whole of society approach. There is a special focus on people from the LGBTI+ community, people with disabilities, women, girls and Roma.



“The project adds to NALAS’ role as a knowledge hub for local governments in the region to contribute to sensitizing government structures at central and local level to create social justice and to eliminate discrimination against minorities.”

*Joachim Roth, EU Officer, NALAS*

This booklet provides a brief account of the actions, aiming to accelerate the inclusion of minorities and other vulnerable groups in the Western Balkans. It summarizes the lessons learned from the implementation of minority models so far and gives further recommendations for action for municipalities on diversity management and social inclusion.

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

# Joint results and achievements so far

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A strong focus during the project was on knowledge transfer and institutional learning. Therefore, several institutions from Schleswig-Holstein as well as their specific setup and approaches to minority management were presented to various stakeholders from the Western Balkans. Several workshops, trainings and delegation visits to Schleswig-Holstein formed key elements for exchange and peer discussions. The public officials and civil society representatives from the Western Balkans were motivated and inspired by the minority inclusion models in the Danish-German border region and successfully adapted two of the respective models from Schleswig-Holstein – the Minority Commissioner and the civic platform Dialog Forum Norden (DFN).



## Establishment of the Office for National Minorities, Bijeljina (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Inspired by the **Minority Commissioner Schleswig-Holstein Model** the representatives of the Municipality of Bijeljina and the Citizens Association Otaharin prepared their first concept on the Bijeljina Minority Commissioner. The Commissioner's Office was conceptualized as a service to:

- Maintain close contacts with stakeholders and target groups.
- Receive complaints and answer enquiries.
- Collect data and monitor developments within communities.
- Develop minority related projects and secure funding for their implementation.

With strong support of the Mayor of Bijeljina, who gave positive feedback and his trust in the local partners, the Minority Commissioner was accommodated as a position within the new Office for National Minorities and Diaspora, embedded within the Social Department of the Municipality. Since the set-up of the Office for National Minorities in July 2017 in close collaboration between the public sector and representatives of the civil society efforts have been made to improve the inclusion and life quality of the minorities living in the municipality of Bijeljina:

- The conducted campaign “The Mayor is a friend of Roma” raised the awareness about the challenges of Roma people in the municipality and improved the knowledge of the residents about their social rights.
- A Local Action Plan for the inclusion of Roma men and women in the area of the City of Bijeljina (2019 – 2023) was adopted, which for the first time recognizes Antigypsyism as a key cause of exclusion and marginalization of Roma.

- New items “Support to the Action Plan for Roma” and the “National Minorities” were added to the budget plan of the city. Based on this the municipality now provides financial support to associations pursuing and implementing support activities for minorities.
- In cooperation with different non-governmental actors (kindergartens, civil society etc.) the city of Bijeljina is actively promoting the inclusion of Roma children in the educational system.
- In the period of 2017 – 2021 18 apartments were provided to Roma families with homeless status (Initiative “Housing care for Roma in the City of Bijeljina”).
- By placing topographic signs in the languages of the national minorities living in Bijeljina, i.e. Roma as is the most numerous one and the Slovak national minority, the visibility of national minorities in the city of Bijeljina has increased.
- In cooperation with the social enterprise AGRO PLAN the City Administration of Bijeljina is supporting the promotion of national minorities in the labor market.



## Initiation of the Forum for Social Dialogue and Cooperation, Tetovo (North Macedonia)

Inspired by the model of **Dialog Forum Norden**, representatives from the non-governmental organization Sonce and from the Municipality of Tetovo, supported by the project partners ECMI and FUEN developed a plan for action for adaptation of the model. The model aims to serve for the benefit of all groups in need of social support and of the society at large. It is used as a space for regular dialogue between local authorities, civil society and the different target groups. With respect to the identified need of fostering the provision of social support to vulnerable groups at local level, the importance of ensuring support and involving the local government in the work of the forum was recognized and acknowledged by all involved actors in the initiative. Since the launch of the Forum in December 2017 main results are:

- Improved collaboration between relevant local stakeholders, civil society and the target group.
- Participative budget planning, where all relevant stakeholders are involved in and bring their voice to the planning process.
- The conducted campaign “Tetovo, a municipality that provides conditions for equal access and rights to all citizens regardless of their ethnic and social affiliation” raised the awareness about the situation with vulnerable groups and supported children from socially disadvantaged families to be included in pre-school education and persons from minorities and other disadvantaged groups to have access to the labor market.
- Making other municipalities aware of the role, the structure and the added-value of the Forum.

# Multiplication of the models at the regional level

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The Office for National Minorities in Bijeljina and the Forum for Social Dialogue and Cooperation in Tetovo serve as good practice examples when local authorities and representatives of NGOs from the Western Balkan were trained on minority inclusion models:

- Inspired by the model of Bijeljina, a **Minority Commissioner** was installed in the **City of Trebinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina)**, with the idea to provide a new mechanism for supporting minority groups, via a Minority Commissioner employed in the municipal administration. The City of Trebinje institutionalized the Minority Commissioner as a mechanism to increase information sharing and improve access to public services for minority groups, especially for the most vulnerable ones. In addition, it placed the Minority Commissioner within the Community Centre and improved the cooperation and coordination among the relevant institution, to provide faster and better response to the needs of the vulnerable minorities.

“I live with my 18 years old son, Petar, who attends the high school of Economics and receives monthly support from the Municipality. He is a very good student and plans to enroll a faculty in Novi Sad or Banja Luka. I am unemployed and have benefited from the support of the Centre for Social Work, the Red Cross and the City Administration. Receiving the food and hygiene packages is always helpful, as I only occasionally work in the road management company and as an iron collector.”

*Ms. Sanela Hadžović,  
Citizen of the Roma community*

“The City Administration is dedicated to improve the position of minority groups in the local community and beyond, and our determination has resulted in the establishment of a new position of independent professional associate for providing assistance to national minorities and the establishment of a public institution, the Community Centre, which will be a service center for providing assistance to all citizens in the area of the city of Trebinje. In this way, we established communication with vulnerable population groups, enabled their integration in the social community, and encouraged relevant actors in the society to better cooperate by networking in a common database (with prior social mapping) and providing effective services to all citizens, both from urban and from rural areas in order to solve their problems, leaving no one behind.”

*Ms. Slađana Skočajić, Head of the Department  
for Culture, Family, Sports and Education*



Inspired by the Forum for Social Dialogue and Cooperation in Tetovo, the **Municipality of Roskovec (Albania)** established a **Social Dialogue Forum**, coordinated by the municipal administration, in cooperation with all relevant community stakeholders. With the help of the Social Dialogue Forum approach, the municipality reached out to vulnerable groups and all community stakeholders which are able to support them. The needs of the vulnerable groups have been adequately identified and will set the base of the new municipal Social Plan. At the same time, the municipality created a new local mechanism – a body that includes representatives of all relevant institutions (municipality, police, social protection, schools, NGOs, etc.) that will have an active role in creating and implementing local policies in the field of social protection. This body will enable timely identification and appropriate response to the issues vulnerable groups are facing.

“SDF implementation in the Municipality of Roskovec brought together all the main actors aiming to support the domestic violence victims and raise awareness not to be silent about the phenomenon.”

*Jonida Gjoka, Legal Expert*

## Lessons learned and success factors

- **Visionary approach:** Strengthening the capacities of the NGO’s and local government’s representatives to systematize the community problems into thematic clusters and to think about possible model-solutions allowed the participants to critically assess the information and to identify specific models from Schleswig-Holstein corresponding best with their local contexts and needs, despite different context in the German federal state.
- **Effective collaboration between civil society, local and central authorities:** A main success factor for the initial transfer of the models and their development is the support of the local government. The trust among the stakeholders involved (representatives of minority communities, of public and private institutions, of donors) is crucial for the efficient functioning of new structures and has to be thought of when planning specific activities. Establishing direct contact and involving the central government with the implementation of the initiative and its functioning as a mechanism to provide assistance to the groups and individuals in need, appears to be an important factor for achieving some of the targeted positive outcomes.
- **Identification of models with respect to local needs:** A key factor for the successful transfer of both initiatives was the fact that each group of stakeholders selected the model that was identified as the most suitable to address the needs of the local communities. Both the Minority Commissioner and the Social Dialogue Forum were grassroot initiatives corresponding to identified needs at the community level and adopted to local circumstances.



# Looking ahead

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Diversity management and social inclusion are one of the most important and effective instruments for sustainable development of communities. The commitment and engagement of the local governments are crucial when it comes to inclusion and better life quality of the minorities and other vulnerable groups. The following section summarizes suggestions for key action points for local governments:



- State diversity and inclusion of the municipality as a value itself.
- Make diversity and inclusion part of any strategy at municipal level.
- In cooperation with civil society organizations enter into dialogue with all groups (e.g. politicians, public officials) at municipal level, raise their awareness and strengthen their commitment to diversity in the municipality.
- Organize events with experts, practitioners and politicians to initiate public discussion and awareness about the actual problems at municipal level.
- Initiate exchanges with city associations to build alliances for negotiations.
- Set up a diversity and inclusion strategy by involving the civil society and the vulnerable groups.
- Review and identify discriminatory practices and remove them.
- Identify the specific needs of the vulnerable groups and provide need-based services.
- Coordinate municipal efforts between the different sectors (e.g. education and employment) to ensure equal opportunities for all.
- Promote inclusive education and review the municipal employment regulations.
- Gain information about the situation concerning discrimination at municipal level.
- Find out more about discriminatory practices, structures and behavior at municipal level. Establish and promote monitoring bodies and control mechanisms for discrimination.
- Be prepared to react when problems occur.
- Offer diversity- and inclusion-oriented educational measures to all municipal residents and support projects on the topic of diversity and social inclusion.
- Improve the knowledge of the residents about social rights and promote mutual understanding of diversity among all stakeholders at municipal level.
- Empower residents to be aware of their social rights.
- Provide and raise adequate financial, human and material resources.
- Make use of available funds, e.g. from central government and European level.
- Think about new partnerships and lobby for support beyond state funding.

# Conclusion

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The joint effort between the project partners by enabling the representatives of the civil society and local administrations to learn about the diversity management and minority models and the positive practices of the German state of Schleswig-Holstein, helped the stakeholders to reflect upon the needs of their communities, to overcome the limitations of the status quo, and to see the existing problems as models calling for specific tailor-made measures. The impacts of strengthening the service delivery in the municipal structures go far beyond the well-being of vulnerable people. Social inclusion enables all to reach their potential and thus contribute to the social and economic development of the societies as a whole.

Fostering the transfer of know-how and best practices from EU to the Western Balkans is not just helping them to advance on their path towards EU standards and policies. It is fostering the regional cooperation and connectivity in the Western Balkans by itself. Despite having different legal, political, social, and other contexts throughout the Western Balkans, solving local government challenges by thinking regionally is proven to be an effective way of improving social and economic opportunities and health for all, leaving no one behind.



