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Red Cross of Serbia: Public Advocacy – with and on behalf of older people

The Red Cross of Serbia has extensive experience in advocacy with and on behalf of older people, at local, national, regional and global levels.

At local level, one of the most cost-efficient and sustainable activities has over the last several years been establishing and supporting self-help groups for older people. Established in 25 communities and numbering 72 as of 2018, self-help groups for older people are solidarity platforms that are flexible, armed with local knowledge and have access to local level decision makers and community. They run local advocacy initiatives and assist older people with accessing human rights related to health protection, social protection and pension insurance. As of 2017, this form of support and assistance was provided to 1.305 older people by the members of self-help groups

Another local level advocacy activity is organising workshops on the topic of the Human Rights of Older people where participants – older people from local communities – gain knowledge related to human rights and local level advocacy, and are encouraged to be more active in their local communities. 610 older people from across the country attended the workshops so far. The Red Cross of Serbia also provides support for 12 local grassroots civil society initiatives that work on social inclusion of and local level advocacy with and on behalf of older people, to create sustainable, cost-effective and replicable models for social inclusion and local level advocacy of older people.

At national level, a lot of work was done on recognition and prevention of elder abuse through three research studies with policy recommendations on the topic. Discrimination of older people in general is tackled through know-your-rights activities targeting older people – practical and concrete education, promotion of the rights based approach. The National Society has also campaigned for poverty reduction for older people: social pensions; better targeted social welfare financial support as well as to change the image of ageing – through combating ageism and changing public perception of older people.

Importantly, the Red Cross of Serbia has regular communication with national level decision makers, through events such as public hearings in the National Assembly, as well as through participating in the work of the Serbian Government Council on Ageing and the Government Council on Intergenerational Solidarity.

At regional level, the cooperation among Western Balkans countries is important as most of the regional countries share institutional history and are in similar phases of the EU accession process. Therefore, their legal and policy frameworks tend to be similar and civil society partners can exchange

experience, good practice and expertise to influence their change and harmonising with the EU standards. Thus, the Red Cross of Serbia cooperates with regional partners through different projects and initiatives, such as the “Taking Action on Social Inclusion of Older People” a regional project supported by European Union, Austrian Red Cross and Austrian Development Agency is coordinated by the Red Cross of Serbia with partners in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The project supports national level advocacy campaigns with and on behalf of older people based on research and evidence for each country. It also reaches national, regional and global audience through a quarterly newsletter in English and local languages as well as websites for each country and the project website in English: www.tasiop.org

Additionally, the Red Cross of Serbia strives to ensure ageing is viewed from the human rights perspective and therefore works on bringing together the public bodies in charge of protecting human rights from the region and supporting them in advancing the human rights of older people in their respective countries.

At global level, the Red cross of Serbia is participating in advocacy for the new United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older People and is a regular participant in the global Age Demands Action campaign, a grassroots movement of campaigners in 60 countries. In relation to Sustainable Development Goals, the Red Cross of Serbia alongside HelpAge International advocates for inclusion of older people in creation of national development strategies across the world, as well as to include them in creation of global strategic papers. With appropriate policies in place, and a belief in the potential of older people, in particular older women, population ageing can be a stimulus for sustainable development. Acknowledging and responding to the opportunities it presents should be higher on the agenda as is the case in the SDGs.

The National Society contributed to important publications such as Ageing in the Twenty-First Century (<http://www.unfpa.org/publications/ageing-twenty-first-century>) and Global AgeWatch Index (<http://www.helpage.org/global-agewatch/>), its representative co-chairs HelpAge ADA convention Working Group, and they participate in key global meetings in ageing and related policy discussions such as:

- Expert Group Meeting on “Neglect, Abuse and Violence against Older Women”, UNDESA New York, 5-7 November 2013 <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ageing/neglect-abuse-violence-older-women.pdf>
- The fifth Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing meeting at UN New York on the panel on Financial Abuse of Older Women <https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/fifthsession.shtml>
- Ministerial Conferences on Ageing Leon 2007 and Vienna 2012
- Ministerial Conference on Ageing Lisbon 2017