





Joint European Union and Council of Europe Project "Promoting Human Rights and Minority Protection in South East Europe"

REPORT ON THE SELECTION OF ELEMENTS OF GOOD PRACTICE

FEBRUARY 2016

LOCATIONS

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Kosovo*

^{* &}quot;This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence"

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1. General information about the Project

The Joint European Union and Council of Europe (hereinafter: CoE) Project "Promoting Human Rights and Minority Protection in South East Europe" (hereinafter 'The Project) has an **overall objective to improve access to rights for minorities at various levels of government in South East Europe based upon Council of Europe standards** in this field and in particular the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (hereinafter: FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (hereinafter: ECRML). Specifically, the JP Minority Project supports seven beneficiaries to address particular issues raised by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the Advisory Committee on the FCNM and the Committee of Experts of the ECRML, thereby supporting the beneficiaries to honour their obligations under the binding treaties and at the same time promoting minority rights.

Three specific objectives contribute in a complementary manner to achieving the overall objective of the JP Minority Project:

- 1. To support **local governments** to enhance **policies and capacity for implementing recommendations on minority rights in practice** in selected local governments in the region;
- 2. To **identify and share good practices** among the participating local governments and **develop adaptable models** for use in other local governments in the region;
- 3. Based on evidence from the local level coupled with recommendations from CoE monitoring reports, to provide support on **legislative and policy changes at the central government level.**

In order to support the implementation of <u>specific objective 2: 'To identify and share good practices among the participating local governments and develop adaptable models for use in other local governments' the Project has developed a methodology for the identification, selection and replication of good practices. The methodology was adopted at the third Project Steering Committee meeting held on 4 November 2015 in Sarajevo.</u>

2. Background

The report summarises the results of the process of selecting elements of good practice in seven beneficiaries of the Project's small grant scheme that was implemented between February 2015 and February 2016. The Project Steering Committee selected 36 local governments from the seven beneficiaries to participate in the small grants scheme, with the selection being made from a total of 152 local governments that applied in late 2014 to participate in the scheme. The selected local governments received financial and technical support for the realisation of their project ideas in the field of minority protection. The identification of potential projects and the subsequent selection was made through a fully

¹ (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Kosovo* - hereafter "Beneficiaries")

transparent and open selection process that was approved by the Steering Board and was carried out in close cooperation with the Steering Board members.

The 36 selected local governments received support to further develop their project proposals according to the CoE minority protection instruments and were awarded small grants (€18,000 + 10% of municipal contribution) in February 2015. The Grants were awarded for small grant projects to be implemented over a 12 month period. An expert pool of 67 local consultants, selected through a public call from the region, supported this process.

3. Selection process

As the implementation of the small grants scheme came close to completion, the Project secretariat initiated a procedure for the identification and selection of elements of good practice generated by the scheme.

As agreed with the Steering Committee during the meeting held in Sarajevo on 4 November 2015, the Project secretariat formed Selection Committees in each of the beneficiaries consisting of the respective members of the Steering Committee, along with representatives of the European Union and CoE. The local short-term experts who were providing direct support to the local governments in the implementation of their activities also participated in an advisory (non-decision making) capacity.

Timeframe of the Selection Committee meetings on the beneficiary level:

No.	Beneficiary	Proposed date	Location
1.	Albania	25 January 2016	Tirana
2.	Bosnia and Herzegovina	11 January 2016	Sarajevo
3.	Croatia	5 January 2016	Croatia
4.	Montenegro	12 January 2016	Podgorica
5.	Serbia	13 January 2016	Belgrade
6.	'The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia'	18 January 2016	Skopje
7.	Kosovo*	21 January 2016	Pristina

The selection committees applied agreed standard criteria that were an integral part of the adopted methodology for the identification of good practice in each beneficiary jurisdiction. Each of the selection committee members (except the short term experts) completed the evaluation matrix (annex 1) awarding points according to the agreed criteria to each of the respective local governments within their beneficiary.

The selection committee members who were unavailable to participate in the meeting appointed a designated replacement, who was authorised to represent the respective institution at the meeting and to vote on behalf of the institution (in the cases of Kosovo* and Bosnia and Herzegovina). Each of the selection committees reviewed and discussed the respective evaluation matrixes prepared by each of its members, and agreed on a joint ranking of the local governments in the beneficiary. The reports of the meetings were signed

by each of the selection committee members. The short term experts participating at the selection committee meetings were not able to participate in the decision making process, however the steering committee members asked for advice/opinions in cases where additional information was needed. Decision-making was made by consensus through a vote by all members of the selection committee (except the short term experts).

The selection committees selected one example of good practice (per beneficiary) that best matched the criteria and which would receive additional funding under the Project to the amount of €6,000. The additional funding would support the continued promotion of elements of good practise within the beneficiary and more broadly in the region.

When reviewing and ranking the respective projects in their beneficiary, the selection committees also considered the following questions:

- What was the principle reason for selection of the particular municipality? What are the comparative advantages over the other small grants in the same beneficiary?
- What are the observed elements of sustainability of the selected elements of good practice?
- ➤ How replicable are the selected element of good practice on national and regional level?
- > Were there other similarly successful small grant projects in the same beneficiary?
- Were there any small grants that underperformed, what was the principle reason and the lessons learned?

The list of selected local governments along with the short overview of the evaluation per beneficiary (based on the questions from above) is presented below:

Beneficiary	Selected element of good practice	Theme of the small grant project	National minority covered	Main theme of the small grant	
Albania	Përmet	Effective participation	Roma, Egyptians, Aromanian/Vllah To enhance minority (Egyptian, Greek, and Vlach) community participation in public life and the decision-making of policies of their concern, and improve local service delivery for minority communities in the municipality of Përmet.		
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Gradiška	Language and media	Roma, Ukrainian, Polish and Montenegrin	To increase the visibility of the existing national minority associations in Gradiška municipality, raise awareness of all citizens of Gradiška about their existence and activities and promote the use of minority languages;	
Croatia	Pula	Official use of language	Italian	To strengthen policy and capacity for the implementation of recommendations on minority rights of equal official use of the Italian language into practice in the City of Pula-Pola.	
Montenegro	Tivat	Education	Egyptians, Roma	Inclusion of Egyptian and Roma children in the educational system in Montenegro through cooperation with Egyptian and Roma teaching assistants and expert teams that closely cooperate with the Counselling Office for children and parents.	
Serbia	Subotica	Official Use of Languages and Script	Hungarians, Croats	To improve the use of official languages by building the technical capacity of the representative bodies of the local self- Government; procurement of specialized software for systematic organization of documents, with the application for electronic implementation of sessions of the City Council and the City Assembly ("electronic sessions"); and training on the use of applications for systemic organization of documents.	
"the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"	Staro Nagoričane	Culture	Serbs	Establishment of Cultural Community Centre aimed to promote traditional values of the Serbian national community through production and sale of souvenirs. The municipality is willing to employ several persons in the centre and thus ensure sustainability of the project.	
Kosovo*	Vushtrri	Effective participation	All non-majority communities (Serbs, Bosniak, Roma, Turks)	Improvement and empowerment of the non-majority communities' rights increasing their participation in the decision-making process at local level.	

I. What was the principal reason for selection of the particular local government? What are the comparative advantages over the other small grants in the same beneficiary?

The local governments that are selected as elements of good practice fulfilled all objectives set in the action plan and generally went beyond expected results. All of them implemented the small grants in a well-planned and timely manner according to the agreed activity plan. All of them have a very strong local government base and showed drive and commitment to accomplish the small grants and show concrete and easily replicable results. The selected small grants addressed recommendations set by the Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms. Most importantly, each of the selected local governments demonstrated that sustainable change is possible with very limited resources available.

In particular, in the case of Përmet, Albania, the activities were very concrete and focused directly on the empowerment of the local minority groups. More specifically: two persons with a national minority background were included as a part of the local government staff (a young Egyptian woman and a young Egyptian man), almost 30 families belonging to local minority groups benefited from direct project support in meeting their needs, and many more families benefitted indirectly from the information campaigns on minority rights in the sectors of education, culture, use of minority language, voting and health. These project activities served to foster the effective participation of minority groups in the decision-making process at the local level. The comparative advantage of Përmet compared to other local governments in Albania was created by the local government facilitating the active participation of different minority groups in the planning and implementation of the project. Moreover the local government demonstrated a willingness to network with other local governments and to exchange experience through inviting local governments to participate in locally organised events and other joint media activities. In this way, it has further strengthened the position of the national minority communities as rights holders.

In case of Gradiška local government in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the local government demonstrated an innovative approach to addressing the issues of minority inclusion, protection and promotion on the local level. The local government followed a participatory approach that ensured that minority associations were actively involved from the outset of the planning and implementation process. The local government has mainstreamed the use of minority languages through its activities and developed a policy framework that will ensure the sustainability of the project activities implemented in the course of the small grant project.

The selected small grant from Croatia consisted of innovative elements for promoting the official use of Italian language, including the use of the Google virtual tour. The Project also followed a systematic and holistic approach, through a comprehensive package of measures to address the needs, by providing language classes for officials, traffic signs in minority languages, bilingual office labels in the local administration and translation of the key municipal documents/forms to Italian language. *Pula local government* demonstrated the capacity, knowledge and willingness to continue working in the same direction and by providing ownership/leadership over the entire process.

Tivat local government in Montenegro implemented the Project in a well-planned and timely manner according to the agreed activity plan. The approach taken by the local government and its partners to facilitate the enrolment and attendance of Egyptian and Roma pupils in the local primary school has been widely recognised as innovative and holistic. The local government not only introduced teaching assistants (two mediators and two teachers) in the local school to provide coaching/support to the minority pupils (80 Egyptian students), but it also recognised the importance of the role played by the parents, through creating an Info Point for use by the minority children and their parents. The Info Point includes a database on enrolled minority pupils. As part of this comprehensive approach, the local government also provided support for preschool enrolment and testing of the minority children (the local government organised 25 pre-school classes for 12 minority pupils, and as an outcome, all 12 students successfully passed the preschool testing and enrolled into school). The local government demonstrated a strong ownership over the process and facilitated a participatory approach. The Project has demonstrated the importance of a collaborative effort, with various stakeholders contributing to the project and its success, including the local school, relevant central government authorities and the representatives of the minority community.

Our small grant in Subotica, Serbia, focused on the sustainable use of minority languages through software that allows all citizens of Hungarian and Croatian nationality to use their language in their interaction with the public administration. The software development includes the control and monitoring of the language of the administrative procedure or statistical monitoring procedures. Through the system the users are informed about the transition of their case to the next phase, as well as the completion of the process. The added value of this approach is the fact that the software can be upgraded to other minority languages and used in other local governments with minority languages in official use. During the course of the implementation, the Ministry of public administration and local self-government indicated its willingness to utilise the software in local governments throughout Serbia.

The small grant in Staro Nagoričane, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", demonstrated progress in ensuring the sustainable preservation of minority culture: four women were contracted by the local government to learn how to sew traditional costumes from the country and abroad; and there was a willingness of the local government to employ the minority women after the end of the project to produce souvenirs for retail. The results of the Project activities also exceeded their planned objectives: three times more children than originally planned attended the traditional Serbian folk dances; there was considerable interest from neighbouring local governments (including in neighbouring countries) to attend the project events; and a willingness of the Mayor to continue project activities through an EU Cross border project with Bulgaria.

Municipality of Vushtrri in Kosovo*, focused on the preparation of a strategic document for the integration of non-majority communities, increasing the capacities of local government staff and buying sports equipment for schools that cover non-majority communities. The Project witnessed excellent symbiosis between the work of the local government and a very active NGO on the implementation of the activity plan. The local government has followed a responsive and participatory approach to the project planning and implementation, involving representatives from all the non-majority communities.

II. What are the observed elements of sustainability of the selected elements of good practice?

In case of Përmet, Albania, the project activities and objectives that demonstrate the main elements of sustainability are reflected in the establishment of an office for minorities in the local government and the selection of one national minority representative (Egyptian) in the municipal council. The local government has demonstrated a commitment to continue its support to the minority groups living in Përmet on a systemic level by adopting by-laws approved by the municipality council.

In case of Gradiška, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the project activities/outcomes are sustainable, since the bilingual touristic/religious signs (19 touristic/religious signs in minority languages and welcome board in minority languages at the entrance of the municipality) and restructured municipal website with content translated in minority languages (Roma, Ukrainian, Polish) will be maintained by the existing local government officials/departments. Furthermore, the brochure produced under the project that maps the sites of interest to minorities will be available for free distribution and can be reprinted by the local government at minimum cost.

In Pula, Croatia, the local government officials who completed the language classes will continue to use their newly acquired language skills in their regular communication with the Italian minority. Furthermore, the bilingual traffic signs and bilingual office labels will be maintained as part of the routine maintenance undertaken by the public administration. The translated administrative documents/forms will also continue to be available on line and as free of charge hard copies; and the Google virtual tour will be available online.

The Info Point installed by the small grant *in Tivat, Montenegro* has elements of sustainability. The space is located within the school and the operating and utility costs will be included in the budget of the school. The school has also agreed to support the efforts of the local government by requesting the Ministry of Education to include the two teaching assistants within the school staffing structure, at which time, their salaries would be paid from the school budget. In this way the teaching assistants would able to continue their outreach activities, mentoring/coaching and support for the Info Point. The fact the school is willing to support the Info point reflects its success, with the space not only being used by minority pupils, but also a broad range other pupils. The Info point has therefore become a space for supporting and promoting the process of social integration. The database on school enrolment of minority pupils is also under the management of the school and represents an important tool for supporting monitoring and provision of future targeted assistance to the minority pupils.

Our small grant in **Subotica, Serbia** provided for the development of specialised software for the introduction of a Document Management System (DMS) in the local government. The

software is available to all interested parties in the local government, which provided training in its use to staff and other interested persons.

Staro Nagoričane, "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" procured looms for weaving, sewing machines and ironing sets that will be used in the future by the four women who received training as a part of the grant, in order to produce traditional costumes and souvenirs.

In Vushtri, Kosovo*, the local government has worked towards sustainability through adopting an appropriate strategic framework, and is committed to allocate resources for its implementation. The two main elements that demonstrate the sustainability of the project's activities and objectives are the fact that the Strategy that defines the measures to be implemented by the local governments has been officially adopted; and the civil servants responsible for realisation and monitoring of the Strategy received capacity-building training during the project implementation. The sports equipment purchased and distributed under the project is part of the schools and will be used in the future by children from non-majority communities.

III. How replicable are the selected element of good practice on the national and regional level?

Each of the selected local governments has very replicable ideas adaptable to different context. The selected governments were chosen also because they demonstrated that the elements developed can be replicated with limited funds.

In case of Përmet, Albania, the project is highly replicable on the local and regional level. It aims to enhance participation in decision-making of minority groups. The legislative framework in Albania highlights the need to enhance the participation of minorities in the various decision making process, and this is also highly recommended by the CoE mechanisms/institution. In institutional and practical term this can be achieved relatively easily.

The small grant project in *Gradiška, Bosnia and Herzegovina*, offers value for money and it is sustainable. The placing of bilingual signs and the translation of local government websites is replicable on the national and regional level.

Pula local government implemented a set of measures that are easily replicable in part or as a package by other local governments in the beneficiary and region. These activities are tangible, cost effective and bring immediate results. In particular the placing of bilingual traffic signs and the translation of key administrative documents/forms into minority languages can be easily replicated and highly effective.

The Info Point introduced by the small grant in *Tivat, Montenegro*, offer the possibility for replication in other primary schools in Montenegro and the region, however this would depend on the willingness of the respective school authorities to introduce this initiative and allocate the necessary resources for the future operation of the Info Points. The introduction of the Info Points along with the other measures would also require the identification and

training of teaching assistants. It is a positive sign that the Ministry of Education in Montenegro is in the process of systemising the role of the mediators, which would create the possibility for other schools to also introduce this new position. The database could also potentially be replicated in other schools, since the costs of introducing the software is not excessive, and the database has proved its value in terms of monitoring and supporting the targeting of assistance.

The software developed *in Serbia, Subotica*, is easily replicable at national and regional level and could be applied to all minority languages.

The small grant implemented in *Staro Nagoričane*, "The former Yugoslav Republic of *Macedonia*" demonstrates how practical steps can be taken to preserve minority culture both at the national and regional level by procurement of machines that could be used for producing traditional costumes and other traditional items and the training of individuals capable to carry out these skilled craft works.

The small grant project in *Vushtrri, Kosovo** demonstrates that with very modest resources a local government can realise a highly consultative process that can lead to systemic results such as the approval of a Strategy and action plan for the integration of non-majority communities. The Strategy will serve as a policy and operational framework that will assist the local government in taking concrete and coordinated steps towards the integration of the non-majority communities. The commission established for drafting the Strategy in Vushtrri could help other interested stakeholders at the national and regional level to follow a similar approach.

IV. Were there other similarly successful small grant projects in the same beneficiary?

In some cases, on beneficiary level, the Selection Committee had a clear preference (Serbia and Croatia), while in other cases there were several equally successful projects and the Selection Committees found it difficult to make a choice.

In the case of *Albania*, Dropulli was a similarly successful small grant that achieved the planned goals and objectives. It was however decided to select Përmet since it had a higher number of beneficiaries and included more than one minority group, it was regarded as easier to replicate and it had more concrete results.

In *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, five out of six local governments during the project implementation clearly demonstrated potential elements of good practice. All local government approached the project implementation with commitment, motivation and overall ownership over the process. However, Gradiška achieved a particularly high level of success with its implementation, along with demonstrating the potential for sustainability. The implementation was supported by a dedicated team of officials who ensured that the local government took a lead role, while actively coordinating with other stakeholders.

Four of the six projects in *Croatia* demonstrated elements of good practice during the project implementation. However, Pula local government implemented a project that was particularly effective in meeting local needs, was comprehensive and showed potential for sustainability. In addition the local government demonstrated ownership over the process and invested a lot of its resources to implement the activities with the maximum efficiency.

Elements of good practice in *Montenegro* were identified in Plav and Kotor, as well as Tivat. The projects in Plav and Kotor achieved considerable success; however in the opinion of the selection committee the Tivat local government had implemented a comprehensive project that had effectively included all the relevant stakeholders, including institutions and civil society. The Tivat project also supported institutional reforms (in the education system) that offered good value for money and potential for replication.

Even though all Selection Committee members in **Serbia** agreed that Subotica was the best example, there were other successful small grants. In the case of Pančevo local government there was more limited scope for replication, for example whereby the settlements' websites were connected to the website of the City of Pančevo.

There were two other highly successful grants in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" implemented by the local governments of Kruševo and Saraj. In the former, the project provided support for the traditional summer festival "Days of Vlachs", which took place over seven days only, whilst the project activities in Staro Nagoričane took place throughout the year. The festival also depends on the availability of trained musicians and performers who might not be available in other local governments. Saraj local government successfully demonstrated the political will of two mayors to work on common interests among different ethnic communities (Albanians and Macedonians). This highly politicised project was reliant on the political interest of the mayors.

In *Kosovo**, Rahovec was a similarly successful small grant. The representative of the EU delegation in Kosovo* informed that this local government will receive EU funding from other sources.

V. Where there any small grants that underperformed and what was the principal reason? What lessons were learned?

All the local governments that participated in the small grant scheme achieved the results defined in their respective action plans. In some cases the results came later than expected for specific reasons, which can be divided into two categories. Firstly, the issue of elections and political "mobility" (case of Albania) where the municipal task force could not influence at all times of the small grant implementation and secondly, the small grants that had issues with local ownership, capacity at the local level to implement the activities or general lack of interest of the local stakeholders in the implementation of the small grants.

In the case of *Albania*, the small grants that underperformed were managed by the local governments of Shijak and Rrethina. The principal reasons for this underperformance were

the impact of the local elections and territorial reform process that took place in Albania, and lack of capacity of the local stakeholders.

The local governments in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** implemented the small grants according to the respective activity plans, although in some cases, delays resulted from the administrative demands of the tendering procedures. In addition, economic migration led to a significant decrease in the size of the Roma population in Jablanica over the course of the project implementation, which impacted the number of beneficiaries, but not the overall success of the project. Lessons learned would be to allow more time for the project implementation so that any unforeseen circumstances (such as complications with the tendering procedures) could be mitigated.

In *Croatia*, the project activities were implemented according to the respective action plans, although in some cases the implementation faced delays. These delays resulted from the local governments allocating insufficient staff resources to the implementation and the political dynamics caused by the 2015 local elections. The lesson learned would be the importance of a participatory approach and ensuring a clear division of tasks, along with planning realistically and within existing capacities, and undertaking detailed risk analysis and development of risk mitigation plans.

In *Montenegro* the project implemented by Bijelo Polje local government was terminated due to the inability of the local government to follow the project implementation guidelines. In addition, there was evidence of the poor involvement of one of the local governments in the planning and implementation of its project. The lesson learned would be that successful project planning and implementation requires the commitment and active participation of the local government. A lack of commitment and ownership undermines the implementation and eventual sustainability of the activities.

In **Serbia,** Bosilegrad local government did not implement all its project activities primarily because of the limited capacity of its staff and due to the lack of motivation of the Municipal Task Force.

In 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' the Municipal Task force in Tetovo local government primarily lacked motivation to implement the project. Only after removal of some municipal task force members the small grant started to function to the desired level.

In **Kosovo***, Kamenica and Leposavić local governments underperformed due to a lack of capacity at the local level to implement projects funded by international donors or political sensitivities (Leposavić). In order to mitigate this risk, the commitment of the beneficiary to implement the procedures according the agreement is essential.

4. Next steps

In 2016 the JP Minority Project will focus on providing policy support at the beneficiary level as well as promoting good practices and results achieved under the small grant programme.

Detailed calendar of activities:

No.	Activity description	Timeframe	Responsible entity
1.	JP Minority Secretariat and short-term experts to share the template for additional funding with selected good practice local governments. Template for additional funding to be completed by the local governments and cleared by the JP Minority Project	By end of March 2016	JP Minority Project, Selected local governments
2.	Prepare the grant agreements and good practice implementation guidelines	By end of March 2016	JP minority Project
3.	Organise the 4 th meeting of the Steering Committee and best practice award ceremony (and provide additional funding to selected good practice local governments) in Montenegro, Podgorica – to be confirmed	First week of April	JP Minority Project
4.	Finalise the good practice activity plan for 2016	By the end of April 2016	JP Minority Project, selected local governments
5.	Conduct the evaluation of the thirty-six small grants implemented in 2016	By the end of April 2016	JP minority Project, selected short-term experts;
6.	Produce a publication on good practices based on the results of the small grant program	March to August 2016;	JP Minority Project, selected service provider;
7.	Produce a short TV documentary on good practices from seven beneficiaries and present it at the various regional events;	March to August 2016;	JP Minority Project, selected service provider;
8.	Provide policy support on beneficiary level (to all seven beneficiaries)	Throughout 2016	JP Minority Project, Steering Committee,