

[Coat of arms]

**Republic of Serbia
GOVERNMENT
OFFICE FOR HUMAN AND
MINORITY RIGHTS**

Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities

By adopting the Action Plan for the Negotiating Chapter 23, the Republic of Serbia has set a strategic commitment to improving the institutional and legislative framework in the area of basic human and minority rights and freedoms. The AP NC 23 identifies the need to improve the position of national minorities and provides for the development of a special **Action Plan for the Exercising of National Minority Rights**. Even before the adoption of the AP, we had both a legislative and an institutional framework that is above the European average, but in this way we managed to raise the scope and quality of the enforcement of the law in practice, especially in the fields of education, culture, and information.

I would just like to remind you that after the elections for the National Councils of National Minorities, which were held in November 2018, there are 22 national councils operating in Serbia, as well as the Union of Jewish Municipalities.

In the election cycles of 2010, 2014 and 2018, national councils of national minorities were elected in direct elections, which places Serbia in one of the few states that thus provides conditions for national minorities to elect their representatives. Direct elections for national councils are held in the same fashion as elections for the National Assembly. Four national minorities elected their representatives through the electoral assembly (Macedonian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Russian national minorities).

More than € 15 million has been earmarked for the financing of the work of National Councils of National Minorities from 2013 to the present.

The basic framework for drafting the Action Plan is the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and the European Commission Expert Mission on National Minorities Report. The Action Plan is a medium-term strategic document that contains strategic goals set in accordance with the recommendations of the Advisory Committee of the Council of Europe Framework Convention, whose implementation is necessary to remedy the perceived deficiencies in the exercise of the rights and freedoms of national minorities.

In order to develop the Action Plan, a multi-sectoral working group was formed, consisting of relevant state and provincial bodies, representatives of national councils of national minorities and representatives of the Council of Europe, and the civil society organizations. The Action Plan has been developed through a broad inclusive process, aimed at ensuring the maximum possible level of consensus among all actors and enabling national minorities, through their representatives, to ensure the highest level of participation in the formulation of this key document for the exercising of national minority rights. In order to make the working group transparent, all meetings were open to representatives of embassies and international organizations.

The very fact that the RS has adopted the AP, and that 77 bodies, over 50 LSGUs, councils for inter-ethnic relations and national councils of national minorities are involved in its implementation is a huge improvement. Local self-governments are actively involved not only in reporting, but in conducting activities as well. The information we receive from the local level contributes to a clearer picture of what is happening in the field, as this is the best way to identify the needs and problems of NM members. The report also provides insight into capacities of local governments in this area.

With regard to the local level, we would like to emphasize the great importance of the establishment and the functioning of local councils for inter-ethnic relations. Practice has shown that these bodies, at the local level, are an effective way of resolving inter-ethnic relations, while also ensuring greater involvement of national minorities in community life.

In particular, we emphasize that, by investing in areas where members of national minorities live, we have contributed to their faster and easier employment, and we have raised awareness of the rights of NM members at all levels.

Three years have passed since the adoption of the AP, while we have been collecting data quarterly and preparing reports on its implementation.

So far, 11 reports have been publicized, based on 1,013 contributions and we would like to underline that 73% of the activities have been fully implemented or are ongoing. We believe this data clearly reflects the progress we have made.

The Action Plan contains clearly stated agents, who have been allocated funds, as well as a precise source of financial resources.

With President Vučić's commitment to peace and stability in the region, strengthening relations with neighbors, and reconciliation policies, we continue to create a strong support for the implementation of a successful and advanced policy of respect for the rights of persons belonging to each and every national minority in the Republic of Serbia.

In the coming period, we will take steps to improve the interaction between different communities living in Serbia, and we will work to promote intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.