

ACTIVITY REPORT

Study Visit: Social Inclusion of People in Situations of Vulnerability, with Community Development Institute (CDI)

3-4-5 November 2021
Tetovo, North Macedonia

Day 1 – 3rd November

On Day 1, the three Secretariat employees and two representatives from member organisations arrived at Skopje airport in the beginning of the afternoon, and transferred to Tetovo by private transportation. The Study Visit really began at 18:30 with the welcoming activity, on the rooftop terrace of Hotel Mercure where all non-local participants were staying. After a round of brief introductions, **Sreten Koceski**, Director of the hosting member CDI, gave all a general introduction of the Macedonian geographic, demographic and historical context, followed by a focus on Tetovo specifically. He draw our attention on the **multi-ethnic nature of the Republic of North Macedonia**, in which Macedonians are the majority ethnic group at national level but not in Tetovo for instance, where Albanians are dominant. Inter-ethnic tensions have culminated in the 2001 insurgency, of which Tetovo happened to be the largest battleground. The **Ohrid Agreement**, signed after the conflict, shaped the new inter-ethnic relations and the new face of Macedonia still to this day. North Macedonia is currently embedded in tensions with most of its neighbours in the region, who do not recognize it as a separate country with its own identity. This is the case with Greece, Serbia or Bulgaria – the latter currently blocking North Macedonia’s access process to the EU on claims that Macedonian history has Bulgarian roots. Albania is the one country with which North Macedonia enjoys good neighbourly relations.

SOLIDAR Social Policy Coordinator **Carlos Roldán** then presented the programme of the Study Visit for the following two days. The moment was the occasion for everyone to meet each other, many of them for the first time. Documents were distributed, practicalities were addressed, and the evening went on with a warm team-building dinner at a restaurant nearby.

Day 2 – 4th November

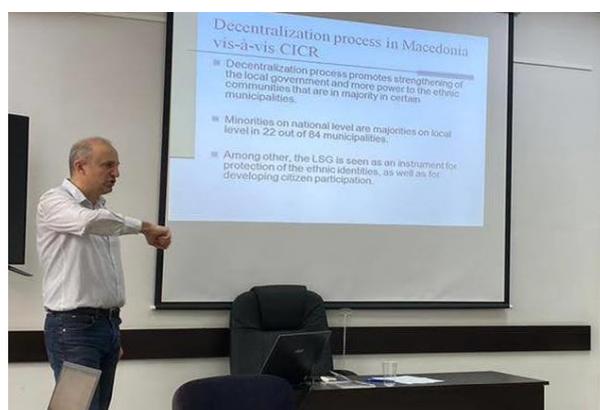


After a quick visit of the premises of CDI, the technical part of the Study Visit started with an presentation of the work of CDI, given by Sreten Koceski.

Community Development Institute (CDI) was founded in 1996. **It is a non-governmental, non-profit umbrella association for development, education and social services in North Macedonia.** In its 25 years of existence, it became a point of reference for the region and for other organisations that work on similar topics, for which it provides support through trainings and sharing funding opportunities. CDI also works directly with beneficiaries on access to social services, and labour market and social inclusion of marginalized groups, such as prisoners or refugees, offering career counseling, coaching etc. Eventually, they work with the private sector and public administrations, for instance by collaborating with companies through chambers of commerce, trying to understand their needs in terms of labour force and trying to make the offer coincide with the demand.

Interethnic relations: inclusion of the non-majority ethnic groups in decision making at local level

Sreten presented a good practice of CDI on interethnic relations. In North Macedonia, there is a consensus in the population for majority ethnic groups (Macedonians – 64.17% and Albanians – 25.17%¹) to be included in decision-making, but it is much less obvious for non-majority groups. **According to the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement and the ensuing decentralization reform, all ethnic communities are entitled to equitable representation in the public institutions at both local and central level.**



¹ Source: State Census of 2002, State statistical office of the Republic of Macedonia

*The **Committees for inter-community relations (CICRs)** are a body gathering representatives from all ethnic groups present in the municipalities in which at least 20% of the population is from a non-majority ethnic group. CICRs were made mandatory by a 2002 law, to guarantee representation of minority groups that cannot access representation through elections (Turkish, Vlach, Roma, Serbian and Bosnian ethnic communities). In the concerned municipalities there is one at least one representative per community, with a 5 year mandate. CICRs function as advisory boards to municipalities on matters of interethnic relations, organized in four policy areas: names of infrastructural objects, culture, symbols, use of languages). Following the so-called Badinter Majority rule, 50% of the minority group councilors (taken together) need to vote in favour of a decision for it to be adopted. The Committee can also block the budget of the municipality in the areas of competence.*

CDI works to ensure the involvement of non-majority ethnic groups and the respect of their rights. While it is convinced it is a very effective model for the integration of minorities, CDI has designed, together with experts, recommendations for improving the CICR system in place. Some of CDI's proposals are: putting in place criteria to ensure transparency and inclusiveness of the committee. **The most important idea is that the communities should be consulted and aware of their rights.** CDI also provides capacity-building for members of the members of the municipal council. [Check out the CDI proposed amendments to the Law on Local Self-Government.](#)



We then discovered another CDI practice: the **CDI audio-visual room**. It is made available free of charge for CSOs or similar organizations, to support them with visibility or to build their audio visual capacity. CDI also gives training to people in vulnerable situations for audio-video production techniques, so that they can use these new skills can make them more competitive for the labour market. CDI

delivers an internationally recognized diploma in this domain.

The Study Visit went on with the visit of a **social entrepreneurship workshop** in the vicinity of the CDI office. There, CDI offers vocational training (carpentry, baking, welding or CNC machine operator) to trainees from partner schools, unemployed people or impaired people, in order to support their labour market integration. Companies willing to employ people at risk of exclusion can also use it free of charge.



In the afternoon, the SOLIDAR delegation made its way to the Tetovo campus of the **South East European University**, to have an exchange with the Dean. Founded in 2001 to respond to a need of higher education in the Albanian language, the University prides itself on being fully trilingual, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, offering courses in Macedonian, Albanian and English. This approach shows that socio-cultural inclusion of all ethnicities is possible. Another specificity of this University according to the Dean, is the

gender equality focus: the University offers training for gender focal points in municipalities, as well as for intersectoral focal points to integrate gender responsive budgeting.



The second part of the afternoon focused on the **social inclusion of people with disabilities**. A representative of a State daycare centre for the disabled presented their work. With disabled people from age 3 to 26, they work on socialization and occupational therapy. They propose activities such as speech therapy, psychomotoristics course, music, art, training on IT skills. While the activities offered cannot really be considered training - the beneficiaries are not in capacity to receive proper training - the aim is to make them more independent.

The last speaker of Day 2 was expert Aleksandra Jakovchevska, educator in a school for the visually impaired. She explained in her school the same curriculum is taught as in mainstream schools, but with different educational tools. Until 2019, the Macedonian law on primary education left to the parents the choice of whether to send their disabled child to a mainstream, or to a special school. But in 2019 was introduced what she called the **“total inclusion approach”**: the special schools still exist, but they partner with mainstream schools. The pending issue with this approach, is that the buildings and the staff of mainstream schools are unprepared for disabled children and oppose resistance to integrating them. Aleksandra concluded by sharing an interesting yet upsetting fact: the school mostly works alone. They are wary of engaging with CSOs for the lack of sustainability of the cooperation, due to **CSOs’ capacities being majoritarily project-based. Such short-term partnerships are incompatible with the long term processes necessary for meaningful inclusion of groups in vulnerable situations**, such as disabled children.

To close the day, the CDI staff took the group on a walk around the city centre to see the main sightseeings of Tetovo. This turned into a nice community-building activity, allowing every visitor to learn about Tetovo, realizing with our own eyes the multi-culturality of the city by strolling through the Albanian area, then going for dinner in the Macedonian area.

Day 3 – 5th November



On the third day, a local policy-maker, **Bekim Memeti**, outgoing President of the Municipal Council (the elections took place a few days before the Study Visit) came to the CDI offices to answer our questions, and to present **Tetovo municipality' good practices on social inclusion matters**.

Among the things the discussion highlighted: while education is free of charge in Macedonia, there are always some side financial contribution to put a child in school. The municipalities covers this fee for low-income families. **Quotas** exist for Roma and Turkish communities' enrollment in school, to decrease the competition and create an enabling environment for them.

Intercultural events between communities (mostly Albanians and Macedonians) are organized by the municipality twice a year. The municipality also tries to push mixed classes from kindergarten.

The municipality is diversifying the options for urban mobility. In the summer 2021, the first four bus lines were put in service, with the first month free of charge. Bike trails were also arranged. However, the dominant mode of urban mobility remains the individual car in Tetovo and much remains to be done to transition to greener means of transportation.

Eventually, the discussion also shed light on the fact the **local policy-making is still very centralized and could be more participatory**. For instance, in Estonia, 1% of the budget is participatory: citizens can submit ideas and vote for 1% of the total budget of a municipality. The vote is open from age 14.

In the next session, the focus moved away from North Macedonia to go broader. After brief policy updates from the Secretariat and a discussion on the proposal for a Task Force on Migration, **the exchange shifted to the Western Balkans as a sub-region**. CDI made the constatation that candidate countries in the Balkans often lack the capacity and expertise to

implement reforms in line with EU standards. Here emerged the idea that SOLIDAR could work as a link, if a working group was created including both members from EU countries and members from enlargement countries, working specifically on advocacy for better social policies in candidate countries.



Aleksandra Dimić (IDC) presented the **European Migration Network** and its last meeting which took place in parallel to the EU-Western Balkans summit 2021. What was highlighted was the **systematic violations of the human rights of migrants (including children) in the Balkans region**, in particular at the Serbian borders with Croatia and with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Secretariat followed with a recap of the main outcomes of the **EU-Western Balkans summit**, especially the part on migration, regretting the framing of migration as a mere security issue and the heavy focus on returns.

Eventually the last input of the Study Visit was provided by **Edison Hoxha (CLR)**, with a talk on the organisation’s involvement in a **cooperation process with Western Balkans**, initiated by the European Economic and Social Committee, specifically on **social dialogue**. This year, CLR intervened to present the state of social dialogue and civic space in Albania.



Edison’s presentation emphasized the **high numbers of Albanian emigration to the EU**, and the problem this represents for employers, especially in the health and industry sectors. Edison stressed the main factor for emigration is the **lack of decent working conditions in Albania**. This leads to regular and facilitated entry of migrants coming for work from Turkey, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh to fill vacancies left by emigrated Albanians.

However, some of these economic migrants, shortly after they arrive, are nowhere to be found on the Albanian labour market; they are believed to have migrated, or been trafficked into the EU. Besides, Albania also serves as a transit country to the EU for asylum-seekers arriving from essentially the same regions as above. A major problem remains the lack of reliable data on all these migratory phenomena in Albania.

The session of the day concluded with the evaluation of the Study Visit, and an interactive check-out activity.