

ROADMAP FOR DEVELOPMENT OF A SHOCK-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM IN REPUBLIKA SRPSKA 2023-2027

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past four years, institutions in the social protection system of Republika Srpska (RS) have been actively involved in the implementation of the Joint Swiss - UN Programme1 "Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) for Sustainable Development in Bosnia and Herzegovina" and have achieved substantial progress in building a crisis-resilient social protection system in BiH.

In coordination with partner UN agencies, UNICEF supported the competent institutions at the entity and local level to implement a component of the Programme dedicated to strengthening the capacity of the social protection system to prepare, respond and recover from crisis situations and forge cross-sector links with other sectors and systems in an integrated model of disaster risk reduction in 5 municipalities and cities in RS (Banja Luka, Bijeljina, Prijedor, Trebinje, Srebrenica), or a total of 10 in BiH.

Key interventions in this Programme component included:



i) Support to the development of integrated DRR coordination mechanisms with the participation of social protection institutions;



 ii) Creation of methodological frameworks and development of Risk Assessments and Crisis Preparedness and Disaster Response Action Plans for institutions of social protection, including Standard Operating Procedures, and integration of these documents into local development strategies;



iii) Development and implementation of comprehensive training packages for disaster risk reduction and management, adapted to match the competences of social protection institutions;



iv) Implementation of measures from formally adopted Crisis Preparedness and Response Action Plans by means of financial, technical and operational support to Centres for Social Work (CSWs) in the implementation of local social protection DRR projects.

The experiences and lessons learned in the implementation of these measures have shaped the needs, solutions and the vision for further system improvements in the DRR area sublimated in this Roadmap.

The aim of the Roadmap is to disseminate good practices and experiences to other municipalities and cities in BiH, including investments in systemic DRR integration measures in the social protection sector, by addressing the legislative, strategic and budget frameworks inside the system.

¹ The Joint Swiss-UN Programme is implemented by the following UN agencies: UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO, FAO.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN DISASTER AND CRISIS PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) acquired the status of a candidate country for EU membership in 2022, and the focus of this path is on sustainable and inclusive development that pays special attention to the most vulnerable population groups by providing opportunities for equal and equitable participation in the socioeconomic development of society.

Numerous studies of the social protection system in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska conducted by UN agencies and other international organizations (UNICEF, UNDP, ILO , World Bank, etc².) have identified the need to review the coverage, targeting and adequacy of cash benefits and the coverage and quality of services provided by the social protection system, with the aim of fostering equality, comprehensiveness and fairness in order to reduce poverty and social exclusion.

The institutional framework of the social, family and child protection system in RS is organized at the entity local self-government unit levels, while the normative and legal framework comprises a number of legal solutions, with the Law on Social Protection, the Law on Child Protection and the Family Law as the fundamental regulations. The overall institutional and normative-legal framework requires all social protection actors in RS to ensure access to rights, including financing, as well as to extend the rights in line with the needs and legal possibilities and to set the requirements for access thereto, as well as to establish institutions for the exercise of such rights. Access to rights under the social protection system aims to prevent and overcome social risks and vulnerabilities of individuals and families, with special emphasis on the most vulnerable groups. These risks include poverty, social exclusion, support for families with children and persons with disabilities, as well as assistance to civilian victims of war.

Besides the long-term challenges of fighting high poverty rates³, especially of children⁴, and the country's slow rate of economic development, additional risk arises from the increasing occurrence of natural and other hazards in the form of emergencies and disasters (major floods in 2010 and 2014, landslides, the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic crisis and inflation) which cause significant economic and social losses and particularly negatively impact the most vulnerable population groups (multi-member families with children, families with children at risk of poverty, persons and children with disabilities, girls and women from vulnerable groups, families and children at risk of separation, violence, abuse and neglect, Roma, the elderly).

In this regard, over the last decade, all public and private systems in society have faced the need for better and more efficient planning of resources as well as technical and operational capacities in order to better prepare for crisis and prevent/mitigate their adverse consequences to the maximum extent possible.

² ILO: Issues in Social Protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina: coverage, adequacy, expenditure and financing World Bank: Social Protection Situational Analysis: Bosnia and Herzegovina UNIDP and UNICEF: Social Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Bosnia and Herzegovina UNIDP: Social Inclusion in BiH, National Human Development Report 2020

³ The relative poverty rate for the population of Republika Srpska in 2021/2022 was 11.2%, or 1.6 percentage points lower than in 2015. According to the Household Budget Survey, 49,197 households or 125,537 inhabitants of Republika Srpska were below the relative poverty line in 2021/22. The poverty gap in Republika Srpska in 2021/2022 was 21.2%, or 0.9 percentage points lower than in 2015.

⁴ The child poverty rate according to the 2011 Household Budget Survey which generated the child poverty data was 30.6%, compared to 23.4% for the general population.

A social protection system that includes contributory (pensions, health insurance and unemployment insurance) and non-contributory cash benefits and services (family and child benefits, including maternity benefits, means-tested welfare benefits and war veteran benefits) is a key mechanism and one of the fundamental human rights that should provide everyone with full access to protection services and income security throughout their life, including in emergencies and crises.

Due to the increasing frequency and intensity of emergencies and crises, the social protection system and its sub-segments (family and child protection) in RS are increasingly faced with the need to refine the existing or develop new legal mechanisms, financial and executive frameworks that are flexible enough for intervention-based activation and can adapt to the growing beneficiary needs during emergencies, with the aim to prevent, reduce or eliminate poverty, social exclusion and a number of cascading social impacts that arise from emergencies and crisis (violence, including gender-based violence, corporal punishment, abuse, neglect, psycho-social issues, disabilities) and lead to an increased risk of family separation, including institutionalization of children). Furthermore, there is a need for greater investment in planning, development and support for social service workforce capacity building in the social protection system to ensure that human resources are trained to provide services during crises and emergencies.

The recent social protection system activation during the COVID-19 crisis indicates that the amount of permanent social assistance and one-off cash benefits in RS were slightly increased, but mostly failed to cover additional households at risk of poverty that were adversely affected by the crisis.⁵

Following the 2014 floods, UNICEF has been continuously cooperating with the social protection institutions in RS to build their capacities for crisis preparedness, response and recovery and to forge cross-sectoral links in an integrated DRR model. This cooperation started with the development of the Manual for the Role of Centres for Social Welfare in Crisis and Emergencies in 2016⁶, and continued with a systemic approach and testing of the integrated DRR mechanism in five municipalities and cities in cooperation with CSWs as lead partners at the local level. CSWs in Republika Srpska have adopted Risk and Vulnerability Assessments, developed and adopted Crisis and Emergency Response Plans/Protection and Rescue Plans, and these planning documents have been integrated into target municipalities' and cities' development strategies. Furthermore, priority measures from CSW Action Plans have been implemented through needs-based capacity building of social and child protection professionals in CSWs and Civil Protection structures, simulations and emergency drills with beneficiaries from the most vulnerable groups, procurement of emergency response equipment, development of risk and vulnerability databases and the appointment of CSW representatives to the Civil Protection Headquarters/protection and rescue headquarters and cross-sectoral DRR coordination mechanisms at the level of municipalities and cities – the DRR Platforms.

In this effort, the social protection system relies on and is closely connected to other relevant sectors for the development of an integrated and coordinated DRR system in the entities and Brcko District (the protection & rescue/civil protection system, education, healthcare), in accordance with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. BiH as a signatory country is implementing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. This international treaty aims to prevent and respond to disaster risks worldwide and significantly reduce the risk of disasters and loss of life, livelihoods and health.

Also, the Sendai Framework is closely connected to the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030 as the overarching international sustainable development framework is also implemented by the BiH authorities at all levels. These are the goals the UN is pursuing in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021-2025, approved by the UN and the BiH authorities through four strategic priorities: Sustainable, resilient and inclusive growth; Quality, accessible and inclusive education, health and social protection; People centred governance and rule of law; Citizen and community engagement for social cohesion. DRR is an integrative part of these priorities.

⁵ World Bank: Social Protection Situational Analysis: Bosnia and Herzegovina

⁶ Produced in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Republika Srpska, Faculties of Political Science in Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar.

KEY CHALLENGES

According to the data of the RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, in October 2023 there were 7,189 beneficiaries of disability benefits, 3,708 beneficiaries of cash benefits (1,517 covered by health insurance based on the right to cash benefits) and 32,754 allowances for assistance and care of another person (1,200 covered by health insurance based on the right to allowance for assistance and care of another person).

The budget of Republika Srpska provides funds for: 50% co-financing of cash benefits, 50% co-financing of allowances for assistance and care of another person; 50% co-financing of health insurance coverage for beneficiaries; 100% financing of disability benefits; financing of equal opportunity support for children and youth with disabilities; co-financing of accommodation costs for beneficiaries placed in Government-founded institutions of social protection upon referral from CSWs.

The share of social protection expenditure in the GDP of Republika Srpska in 2021 was 21.7%,⁷ equivalent to two thirds of the EU average of 28 percent. In the total allocations for cash benefits (63.2%), the highest share relates to non-means-tested benefits or 97.1% of the total number of allocated benefits⁸, which indicates limited spending on targeted social support for the poor (in the form of permanent cash benefits/social assistance and one-off cash benefits).

Given that the negative impacts of disasters and crissi lead to significant challenges and needs that require regular but extended interventions of the social protection system, and that the beneficiaries of the social protection system are among the most vulnerable population groups facing such negative impacts, the key needs that should be addressed are grouped into several thematic areas:

Cross-sectoral coordination in DRR⁹ and the protection and rescue system:

- Note that Individuals who find themselves in a state of social need due to natural and other disasters may be eligible for social protection, what is missing are the more specific legal acts and operating procedures that will clearly regulate the actions of social protection system institutions before, during and after disasters and the integrated intervention of protection and rescue system in RS.
- The majority of CSWs and other institutions from the social and child protection system / service providers (institutions for accommodation of beneficiaries, day centres, etc.) are not members of the Emergency HQs in local self-government units and at the level of RS, although the COVID-19 experience substantially improved the membership structure and the leading role of the social protection system in response efforts. Best practices and examples of inclusion of the social protection system in all emergencies should be disseminated in order to foster systematic planning of preparedness, response and recovery measures and coordination with other sectors and institutions in the protection and rescue system at the local and RS level.

Development of planning documents for actions before, during and after emergencies:

Most of CSWs and other institutions in the RS social and child protection system do not conduct disaster risk assessments and emergency response plans, despite the legal grounds and obligation

⁷ Integrated Social Protection System (ESSPROS), 2021

⁸ Integrated Social Protection System (ESSPROS), 2021.

⁹ Disaster risk reduction.

- under the RS protection and rescue system¹⁰. In practice, inconsistent availability of such documents puts social and child protection institutions at a disadvantage and further exacerbates the lack of beneficiary needs assessments, evidence-based institutional capacity assessments and clearly planned actions in all stages of disaster risk management.
- ≥ Planning methodologies existing in the RS protection and rescue system are not properly aligned with the competences and scope of activities of the social protection institutions and need to be modified for consistent use in regular planning process in social protection institutions (including in sub-segments such as family and child protection).
- The normative framework in the social protection and protection and rescue system in RS should clearly impose mandatory disaster response planning in social protection institutions as an integral part of the protection and rescue system, while also regulating the monitoring of compliance with this obligation in system institutions at the entity level.

Cash benefits and services in the social and child protection system

- The legislative framework regulating the social protection system in RS recognizes the status of social need caused by crisis and disasters and beneficiaries of social protection services who are in social need due to emergency situations. However, the cash benefits and services provided through the social protection system and the related budget allocations are mostly inadequate and lack the flexibility to effectively meet the needs of regular and new beneficiaries during disasters (experience from floods and the COVID-19 pandemic).
- Note The coverage, targeting and adequacy of amounts, requirements and eligibility criteria for the allocation of (various types of) cash benefits in RS are continuously improving, but remain mostly restrictive in terms of the effective and rapid exercise of the right to cash benefits by newly eligible beneficiaries in emergency and crisis situations (for example, persons able to work who have lost their income).
- ☑ In addition to legal, there are also budgetary limitations and the absence of planned contingency funds that could be used to cover a horizontal expansion of cash benefits and the introduction of new beneficiaries in emergency situations.
- Cash benefits in the form of one-off/temporary/rapid-response support could be a good basis for reforming the eligibility criteria for this type of support by means of relaxing the requirements, reforming the criteria and ensuring more efficient emergency payouts (granting temporary eligibility for emergency benefits to beneficiaries and additional households at risk of crisis-induced poverty).
- Note that The legal option to expand social protection rights at the level of the local self-government units represents a good basis for special, rapid-response disbursements with appropriate requirements and criteria that could be applied and triggered in emergency situations to provide rapid-response cash benefits, i.e., to expand the scope of services.

Emergency financing of the social protection system

- The social protection system lacks the integrated budget items for extraordinary/emergency response that could be used as rapid response funding for social and child protection institutions or for expanded beneficiary coverage based on clearly defined requirements.
- ≥ Legal and administrative obstacles arising from the lack of regulations governing the provision of cash benefits in emergency situations (as mentioned above), together with the lack of capacity in CSWs to receive and process potential requests of this kind, restrict the SP institutions from providing quick assistance to beneficiaries eligible for support due to emergencies and disasters.

¹⁰ Entity and Brcko District laws on protection and rescue require legal persons to, as part of protection and rescue forces, inter alia, implement appropriate preparation measures, develop threat assessments and protection and rescue plans within their scope of competence and action, plan for and provide the necessary resources and other resources required for successful execution of planned measures and tasks. Pursuant to these regulations, CSWs and other SP institutions form a part of the protection and rescue forces in the capacity of a legal person.

This calls for better cooperation between different levels of government relevant to budget allocations.

Data management and information systems for the vulnerability-informed planning of disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery

- The official database of beneficiaries using social and child protection services in RS (SOTAC) represents a good foundation for further upgrades, but it should be interoperable with databases and information systems in other departments, specifically protection and rescue through DRAS, for better mapping of vulnerable groups exposed to disaster risk (potential beneficiaries of social and child protection services). An initiative was launched in RS to design and conduct a social card in order to improve the system for monitoring and recording the social needs of the population.
- Databases should be supplemented by local social cards/maps/registries to provide a better overview of actual social needs, beyond the already registered social protection beneficiaries, to help assess the volume of potential beneficiaries in emergency and crisis situations (e.g., the new poor).
- The data on vulnerable population groups at the local level contains discrepancies, is scarce or insufficient, thus negatively affecting ground-level needs assessments in the context of disaster response and evidence-based resource allocation. This includes data on violence against children and family separation, which should be closely monitored in emergency situations on account of increased risk.

Organizational and professional disaster response capacity of social protection institutions before, during and after emergencies

- > Professional and technical disaster response capacities of the staff employed in social and child protection system are limited, especially in the scenario with the expanding beneficiary coverage.
- Disaster risk management training has increased the capacities of CSWs, but there is a need for a systemic approach and standardization of training packages that would be available to all CSWs and institutions for social and child protection in RS.
- ✓ In cooperation with the protection and rescue sector, the DRR and the supporting financial frameworks should be integrated into the operating standards for social and child protection institutions to ensure the inclusion of disaster risk in the planning of structures, material/technical capacities and human resources.
- The level of digitalization in social and child protection institutions is low, which negatively affects
 the access to and quality of services when physical access to social protection institutions is not
 possible or when the capacity to provide services in direct contact with beneficiaries is exhausted,
 including in emergency and crisis situations.



ROADMAP VISION:

The social protection system in Republika Srpska has the regulatory and financial framework, human and technical resources/capacities and the mechanisms to effectively support beneficiaries before, during and after emergencies, in coordination with other sectors and stakeholders in the protection and rescue and DRR system.

These mechanisms are fully harmonized with European Union standards and other international standards arising from, inter alia, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1:

Standardize and integrate disaster risk management into the RS social protection system through policies, strategies, laws and budget frameworks that effectively support beneficiaries through a system of cash benefits and services before, during and after emergencies.



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2:

Position social protection sector in integrated disaster risk reduction models through coordination mechanisms and participation in civil protection headquarters in RS



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3:

Introduce standards and the practice of regular development of planning documentation for action before, during and after emergencies in social protection institutions in RS



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4:

Ensure that data management and information systems in the social protection sector are effectively improved and linked to DRR systems and emergency risks and hazards databases in RS



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5:

Invest in standardization of organizational and professional capacities for action before, during and after emergencies in social protection institutions through continuous and long-term capacity building through the system

SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRIORITIES

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STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: Interaction between DRR and the strategic, regulatory and budget frameworks in the social protection system in RS

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SYSTEMIC MEASURES	TIMEFRAME	COMPETENCE
1.1 Integrate DRR into strategic frameworks for social protection	2023	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS
1.2 Take disaster vulnerability factors into account when reviewing existing and drafting new normative solutions and laws governing cash benefits and social protection services	2023-2027	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS
1.3 Improve the flexibility of eligibility criteria and requirements for (one-off) cash benefits and also for expanded rights, so that these can be provided effectively during and after emergencies to a greater number of beneficiaries	2023-2027	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS Local self-government units
1.4 Ensure that budgetary frameworks and social protection allocations include dedicated emergency contingency funds, which would allow for more efficient funding to expand the scope of assistance and the number of beneficiaries in emergency situations	2023-2027	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS Ministry of Finance of RS
1.5 Continue and scale up the practice of integrating DRR, namely CSW/SP institutions> emergency response plans, into strategic development documents at the level of LSGUs and RS, with the participation of the social protection sector	2023-2027	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS RS Government, Strategic Planning Departments Local self-government units



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: Position the social protection sector in the integrated DRR models and coordination mechanisms

SYSTEMIC MEASURES	TIMEFRAME	COMPETENCE
2.1 In cooperation with the protection and rescue sector, revise the frameworks and ordinances governing the membership structure of Coordination Bodies/ Emergency HQs to appoint the representatives of the social protection sector	2023-2025	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS Civil Protection Administration of RS Civil protection services in LSGUs CSWs
2.2 Maintain active participation of the social protection sector in DRR platforms at the entity and local level	2023-2027	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS Civil Protection Administration of RS Civil protection services in LSGUs CSWs
2.3 Include the social protection sector in disaster damage assessment committees in order to assess social risks, impacts and needs and thereby improve the response and evidence-based allocation of recovery resources (to move away from material damage and eliminate discrepancies, scarce and incomplete data on the social impact of emergencies)	2023-2025	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS Civil Protection Administration of RS Local self-government units Civil protection services in LSGUs CSWs



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: Formalize the standards and the practice of regular development of planning documentation in social protection institutions in RS for action before, during and after emergencies

SYSTEMIC MEASURES	TIMEFRAME	COMPETENCE
3.1 Harmonize and adopt development methodologies for risk assessments and emergency action plans in CSWs and SP institutions in line with applicable methodologies for the development of protection and rescue planning documents in RS, in close coordination with the Civil Protection Administration of RS	2023-2024	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS Civil Protection Administration of RS
3.2 Standardize the obligation to create planning documents for disaster preparedness, response and recovery in social protection institutions through applicable ordinances, i.e., by-laws in the social protection sector, pursuant to the Law on Protection and Rescue of RS.	2023-2024	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS Civil Protection Administration of RS
3.3 Conduct continuous training and professional development in CSWs and other SP institutions for DRR planning with regular updates	2023-2027	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS Civil Protection Administration of RS The Union of Associations of Professional Social Workers of Republika Srpska Academic community CSWs and SP institutions in RS
3.4 Increase the number of SP institutions with developed DRR planning documents (risk assessments and action plans, including standard operating procedures)	2023-2027	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS Civil Protection Administration of RS CSWs Social protection institutions in RS



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: Effective data management and information systems in the social protection sector, including interconnectivity with DRR information systems and databases

SYSTEMIC MEASURES	TIMEFRAME	COMPETENCE
4.1 Increase data availability in regular social protection system (SOTAC) databases and interoperability with information systems and databases in other sectors, especially concerning vulnerable population groups registered in the social protection system, and improve the flow of information between different sectors through DRR coordination mechanisms	2023-2025	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS Civil Protection Administration of RS CSWs Social protection institutions in RS
4.2 Continuously update service providers> beneficiary databases to reflect changes in vulnerable groups> actual circumstances on the ground and ensure the exchange of data required for comprehensive risk assessments	2023-2027	SP institutions in RS Non-governmental and civil society organizations, SP service providers
4.3 Raise the level of digitalization of databases and information systems in the social protection sector for more efficient rapidresponse use and identification of beneficiaries in emergency situations	2023-2027	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS Social protection institutions in RS



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5: Standardization of organizational and professional capacities in social protection institutions for action before, during and after emergencies through continuous training and long-term capacity building

SYSTEMIC MEASURES	TIMEFRAME	COMPETENCE
5.1 Develop a standard emergency response training/professional development package for social service workforce in social protection system (based on best practices from training modules delivered in the DRR programme)	2023 - 2025	Civil Protection Administration of RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS Social protection institutions in RS
5.2 Integrate the standard training package into specialized training programmes for SP professionals (e.g., reference manuals, e-learning packages)	2023 - 2027	Civil Protection Administration of RS Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS
5.3 Create and expand a network of social protection professionals trained in shock-responsive SP in order to disseminate this knowledge and capacities to other SP personnel/institutions (mentoring programs, knowledge exchange, study trips, etc.)	2023 - 2027	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of RS CSWs Social protection institutions in RS

Note: UNICEF BiH provides expert and technical support to the implementation of competences, i.e., strategic goals and systemic measures from the Roadmap, through relevant DRR programmes and ongoing/planned SP system development interventions in BiH.

KEY PARTNERSHIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SOLUTIONS

Ministries and incumbents: Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of Republika Srpska, in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance of Republika Srpska and, as appropriate, in coordination with the Ministry of Security of BiH. Administrative bodies and administrative organizations: Republic Administration of Civil Protection **Professional associations:** Social welfare associations of Republika Srpska Service providers and administrative authorities at the local level: centres for social welfare and other social protection institutions, civil protection services, providers of social services (e.g., day care centres), municipal and city administrations, DRR Platforms11, civil protection headquarters / protection and rescue headquarters, associations of social protection beneficiaries, civil society organisations, citizen associations Media: electronic, digital and print media. **United Nations:** UNICEF in the social protection sector, in partnership and coordination with the UN agencies implementing the Joint Swiss-UN DRR Programme and/or operating in the field of DRR in BiH.

¹¹ Cross-Sector Coordination Body for Integrated Disaster Risk Planning and Management. DRR Platforms were created in ten municipalities and cities in BiH targeted in the first phase of the Joint Swiss-UN DRR Programme. The long-term vision is to establish such mechanisms in all LSGUs in RS and BiH, as well as at higher levels of government (establish or strengthen).