



STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 2024 - 2028

1. INTRODUCTION

Presenting the new five-year Strategic Plan (SP) of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (EHO) for the period 2024 to 2028.

The new five-year Strategic Plan (SP) of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation for the period from 2024 to 2028 was worked on throughout 2023. The process involved the participation of all EHO stakeholder groups. Through consultative sessions with employees, members and members of the EHO Assembly, beneficiaries, donors, local and foreign partners and volunteers, essential, relevant information was collected in order to define the strategic framework for the operation and further development of the organisation.

In the process of implementation of the SP, and depending on the internal and external environment, it is also possible that the SP may be revised or supporting documents created.

2. HISTORY OF THE ORGANISATION

The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (EHO) is a non-profit citizens' association that continues the work of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Service founded on February 19th, 1993 at the initiative of the World Council of Churches. The organisation was founded out of a desire to respond to the needs of vulnerable citizens of Vojvodina, regardless of their religious or national affiliation, and to provide them with appropriate humanitarian aid. Some of the founders of EHO, also members of the organisation's Assembly, are: the Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia, the Reformed Christian Church in Serbia, the Greek Catholic Eparchy of St. Nicholas in Ruski Krstur and the Evangelical Christian Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia – Vojvodina. The work of EHO, since its foundation, has served as an example of the cooperation of churches in performing diaconal, humanitarian and development work throughout Serbia and a testament to the mission of churches in working with the poor and marginalised, thus proving that traditional social structures such as churches can also be a driving force in the development of civil society. EHO has shown itself to be an open and flexible organisation that has been successfully meeting the challenges placed before it and society as a whole by the process of reform, democratisation and European integration.

During its three decades of operation, EHO has shifted from being an organisation providing humanitarian aid to an organisation focusing on development projects that contribute to addressing social issues and empowering vulnerable groups, not only in Vojvodina but in all parts of Serbia. EHO has thus far also proven itself able to react quickly in crisis situations and respond to the needs of vulnerable people, such as during the migrant crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and the floods in 2023.

3. MANDATES AND OBLIGATIONS

In the period from 2019 to 2023 (during implementation of the previous Strategic Plan), the following mandates and obligations were put into effect:

- Licenses were obtained to provide child personal assistance services, home assistance for adults and the elderly, and home assistance for children with developmental disabilities.
- Cooperation agreements were entered into with several institutions, municipalities and organisations: the National Council of the Roma Minority in Serbia, the government of the

Autonomous Province of Vojvodina Office for the Inclusion of Roma , the General Secretariat of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Roma Students' Association, the European Consulting Group, the European Youth Capital Novi Sad – OPENS, DIMAK (the German Information Centre for Migration, Vocational Training and Careers), the Roma Education Foundation, the local governments of Smederevska Palanka, Valjevo, Kovin, Stara Pazova, Alibunar, Zrenjanin, Kanjiža, Beočin, Zvezdara, Velika Plana, Voždovac, Obrenovac, Žabalj, Arandjelovac, Raška and Požega, the cities of Šabac, Kragujevac, Novi Sad and Niš, and schools in numerous local communities.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

4.1. Social, economic and political context:

According to the data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, based on the population census conducted October 2022, the Republic of Serbia excluding the autonomous province of Kosovo and Metohija, has a population of 6,647,003, of whom 3,415,025 (51.4%) are women and 3,231,978 (48.6%) men. Since the census of 2011 the population of the Republic of Serbia has declined by 495,975 people, a reduction of 6.9%. The demographic situation in Serbia is characterised by an ageing population and a high average age (43.85 years), a declining fertility rate and a high mortality rate, coupled with continuous economic migration.

Data from the national statistics office also show that about 7% of the population (486,166 people in 2019) cannot meet their basic needs, i.e. they live in absolute poverty. Just half of these are recognised as poor by state institutions and receive financial assistance. The at-risk-of-poverty rate was 21.2% in 2021 (0.5 percentage points lower than in 2020). The figures show that young people (from 18 to 24 years old) were most exposed to the risk of poverty (27.7%), as well as people over 65 (22.7%). Of the working population those most exposed to the risk of poverty were unemployed persons (48.6%). According to data from the National Employment Service, in October 2023, the total number of unemployed persons was 386,839. Also, self-employed persons were at higher risk of poverty. The poverty risk rate for pensioners was 19.9%.

The National Report on Inclusive Education for the period 2019-2021 indicates that the inclusion of children from sensitive groups in pre-school education (ages 3 to 5) is very poor, and this especially applies to Roma children living in substandard settlements where the figure is 7%, while inclusion among the general population is 61%. Also, 64% of Roma children finish primary school compared to 100% of children from the majority population. The number of children attending classes for the education of children with developmental disabilities in regular schools and schools for the education of children with developmental disabilities is decreasing, while the number and percentage of children in primary schools being educated under IEPs (Individualised Education Plans) 1 and 2 is increasing. As regards secondary education, 28% of Roma children enrol in secondary school (versus 94% in the general population). The completion rate is 61% (compared to 98% in the general population). Enrollment in secondary education is also poor for children from families of lower social and economic status – 79%. The number of pupils in classes and schools for the education of children with developmental disabilities in secondary education is increasing (327 more in the 2020/2021 school year), and the number of pupils who are educated under an IEP2 in regular secondary schools has also increased. The majority of refugee and migrant children are enrolled in the education system (over 85%) and are provided with the necessary support (supplementary education, nutrition, IT equipment, textbooks, etc.)

The political situation in Serbia is sensitive due to unresolved issues in the dialogue between those deciding on the status of Kosovo and Metohija, as well as tensions at the global level caused by the conflicts between Russia and Ukraine and in Gaza. In its annual progress report for 2022, the European Commission stated that the pace of negotiations would continue to depend on the pace of rule of law reforms and on the normalisation of Serbia's relations with Kosovo*. The European integration process is important in terms of prioritising issues of importance for poverty reduction and social inclusion, especially under the Action Plan for Chapter 23 and the Action Plan for Chapter 19.

In the preceding period Serbia has adopted a series of relevant strategic documents and action plans: Education Development Strategy in the Republic of Serbia until 2030 and Action Plan until 2023; Employment Strategy 2021-2026 with Action Plan for 2021-2023; Strategy for Prevention of and Protection from Discrimination 2022-2030 with Action Plan for 2022-2023; Strategy for the Deinstitutionalisation and Development of Social Services in the Community 2022-2026; Strategy for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for Civil Society 2022-2030 with Action Plan for 2022-2023; Action Plan 2021-2023 for the implementation of the Strategy for Economic Migration 2021-2027; Law on Social Enterprises; amendments to the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children and the Law on the Social Card.

Also, relevant strategic documents and action plans for vulnerable groups were adopted: Youth Strategy 2023-2030; Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women 2022-2030 with Action Plan for 2022-2024; Action Plan for Gender Equality 2022-2023; Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the Improvement of the Status of Persons with Disabilities 2020-2024.

The action plan of the government of the Republic of Serbia for 2023-2026 mentions the adoption of a Social Protection Strategy (Q2 of 2024), a Strategy for Monitoring and Improving Human Rights and Action Plan 2024-2030 (Q4 of 2023), a Social Enterprise Development Plan (Q2 of 2023), and a Family Law (Q4 of 2023).

4.2. EHO stakeholder groups:

Beneficiaries: EHO's most important stakeholder group is comprised of the beneficiaries of its services. Through direct assistance in meeting basic needs, education, employment, public advocacy, participation, mobilising local communities and other forms of support, EHO intends to empower the beneficiaries themselves, and together with them, leveraging their capacities, numbers, visibility and motivation, continue to work on poverty reduction, social inclusion and civil society development.

Together with its beneficiaries, EHO will continue to fight for respect for human rights and against all forms of prejudice, marginalisation and discrimination.

Member churches: Four minority churches, founders of the organisation, have been important EHO stakeholders since the very beginning. Represented through the governing body (the Assembly and Director), they play a key role in the adoption of the strategic documents of the organisation that determine the direction of its development, as well as in the implementation of projects, primarily through the action of church volunteer or diaconal groups. **EHO will continue to improve communication with representatives of churches and church groups and to work on the exchange of experiences and synergy of activities.**

Volunteers: Another significant resource of the organisation is its volunteers, both local and foreign, men and women, who have become involved in the implementation of projects and who through their efforts have promoted voluntary work and mobilised the public to help the vulnerable in their own communities.

EHO, together with its volunteers, will continue to provide services and promote the mobilisation of the public in order to contribute to the development of the local community.

EHO employees: An important resource of the organisation is its employees, who with their knowledge, experience and commitment contribute to the successful implementation of projects and the resolution of numerous problems in local communities, thus strengthening the leadership position of EHO in the civil sector in Serbia and beyond.

EHO will continue to empower its employees by investing in their capacities and the development of their knowledge and skills through their participation in training events and seminars in the country and abroad in order to better respond to the problems that our beneficiaries face.

Civil sector: EHO cooperates with other civil society organisations (CSOs) through long-term partnerships and networking, as well as at the project and programme level, where the partnership is time-limited to the duration of the project.

EHO will seek to promote networking and joint action among CSOs. This will significantly increase the influence of CSOs on government at the local, provincial and state levels. EHO will strive towards synergy with other CSOs with the aim of achieving more effective public advocacy and lobbying in areas relevant to EHO's work.

Local government bodies: At the local level EHO has established cooperation with a number of local government departments (LGDs). Cooperation with LGDs is most often pursued by EHO for the purpose of joint implementation of projects for a specific period (projects usually last one year), but also through public procurement processes where EHO implements social services in the local community (home assistance for adults and the elderly, home assistance for children with developmental disabilities and day centres for children and youth with disabilities).

Today, LGDs participate in financing EHO projects. EHO will continue to work with local government departments and through intersectoral partnerships contribute to the improvement of the position of vulnerable and marginalised groups in society. EHO will seek to cooperate with LGDs with the aim of building their capacities and resources, in order to make use of opportunities for donations for LGDs.

Provincial government bodies: At the provincial level, partnership has been further strengthened with the Vojvodina Provincial Secretariats for Economy, Employment and Gender Equality and for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities and Communities, as well as the Vojvodina government Office for the Inclusion of Roma.

EHO will continue to work with provincial government and through intersectoral partnerships contribute to the improvement of the position of vulnerable and marginalised groups in society. In addition, EHO will in cooperation with provincial government bodies promote examples of good practice and provide methods and instruments for pursuing projects in the areas of social welfare and social inclusion.

National government bodies: At the national level, EHO has intensified cooperation with the Serbian government's Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, its Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Team, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration.

EHO will continue to work with government bodies and through intersectoral partnerships contribute to the improvement of the position of vulnerable and marginalised groups in society. In addition, EHO will in cooperation with government bodies promote examples of good practice and provide methods and instruments for pursuing projects in the areas of social welfare and social inclusion.

International partners – non-governmental organisations: International partners – the churches and church organisations from Europe and the United States from whom EHO has received the ideas and the financial and material assistance that have made a range of projects possible – have been of great significance to the organisation from its very beginnings. EHO's membership in international networks – Eurodiaconia, ACT Alliance and BCSDN – are also of great importance.

International partners – governmental organisations: EHO has successfully worked with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swedish International Development Agency, the Canadian International Development Agency, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the embassies of various countries and other international governmental organisations and agencies.

EHO will continue to cooperate with international partners and by working with them contribute to the improvement of the position of marginalised groups in the Republic of Serbia.

4.3. What does EHO need to do?

In the next five years EHO needs to focus on the areas in which it will be able to develop and improve its services (providing direct services to people in need), but at the same time, more than previously, work to promote its expertise and thereby increase its influence at the political level.

EHO will continue to promote activism in churches and work on mobilising and developing local communities and strengthening civil activism in order to improve the position of the most vulnerable groups.

EHO will seek to strengthen its position in society and strive towards establishing cooperation and partnerships with national government bodies in order to pursue strategically important projects in the areas of social welfare, social inclusion, improving the status of marginalised groups and the democratisation of society.

5. TARGET GROUPS

EHO's target groups are all vulnerable and marginalised groups of people whose human rights are compromised or they are discriminated against. EHO works directly with the following target groups: children and young people, people with disabilities, the elderly, refugees and migrants,

Roma men and women, people with health issues, the rural population, the unemployed, girls and women, church leaders and civil society organisations. EHO's target groups are local authorities, provincial and national bodies and state institutions, all responsible for the implementation of policies aimed at improving the position of vulnerable and marginalised groups in Serbia, as well as the international donor community that facilitates the sustainability of project activities.

6. MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

6.1. Mission

The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation is a diaconal association contributing to the building of a just society in which diversity is respected.

6.2. Vision

We empower society to respect human dignity.

6.3. Values

- **Human rights, equality and human dignity**

EHO recognizes the inherent dignity of every person and supports vulnerable individuals and communities in their efforts to fight for a dignified future and for a society that fosters human rights, non-discrimination, equality and equal opportunities for all people whilst respecting their diversity. EHO's projects encourage the empowerment of the people the organisation works for and with in order to achieve these goals.

- **Peace and reconciliation**

EHO advocates for peace and supports the resolution of all types of conflict by non-violent means.

- **Interfaith and inter-religious cooperation**

EHO supports cooperation and closer ties between Christian churches, whilst at the same time promoting inter-religious dialogue. EHO believes that churches and believers have a responsibility towards those most vulnerable, regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation, and that caring for marginalised individuals presents an excellent opportunity for ecumenical and interfaith action and dialogue.

- **Solidarity, social justice and inclusion**

EHO advocates for solidarity and social justice, and for the greater involvement of those at risk of poverty and social exclusion in decision-making that concerns their own lives, the improvement of their living standards and their general well-being. Solidarity, networking and inclusion are factors that contribute to overcoming social problems and achieving a dignified life for all.

- **Sustainable development**

EHO supports the establishment of a balance between social, economic, technological and environmental factors in order for the wealth and resources of our planet to be safeguarded for future generations.

- **Responsibility, efficiency and transparency**

In all aspects of its work, EHO strives for the highest standards of efficiency, quality, flexibility, and transparency, as well as for responsibility towards all stakeholders. It does so through the proper and efficient distribution and use of available resources, by investing in their development, and through its readiness to learn and change in accordance with the demands of the environment.

- **Participative approach**

EHO strives for constant dialogue and partnership, inclusion and networking of all stakeholders in all areas of its work, especially during the planning and implementation of projects. In accordance with this principle EHO supports the participation of all citizens in the process of making decisions of significance for their own lives and the lives of their communities because it believes that the development of a stable and cohesive society will result from inclusive and participatory processes.

7. PROGRAMME AREAS

EHO's activities are conducted across four programme areas:

1. humanitarian work;
2. ecumenical dialogue;
3. social inclusion and human rights;
4. social welfare

7. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1. Development of civil society through advocacy for rights, social inclusion and development of the potential of vulnerable groups, as well as partnership with state institutions and other stakeholders;
2. Integration of EHO services into the existing system of social welfare and the development of innovative services by building its own capacities and through partnerships with all stakeholders;
3. Improvement of cooperation between ethnic and faith communities in the country through the communication of information, public advocacy, partnership, development of inter-cultural values, the establishment of dialogue and joint initiatives for peace-building and reconciliation;
4. Participatory management, the development and strengthening of organisational resources and capacities and ensuring the institutional and financial sustainability of the organisation.

8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation of the plan will be performed by project coordinators. Annual action plans will be created internally and the implementation of individual activities will be monitored. The annual report on the organisation's work will be presented to the members of the EHO Assembly.