

8. Ageing in Dignity - Improving the Social and Health Situation of Older People in Serbia

STEFANIE EICHHORN, AUSTRIA

She is a political scientist and has worked in programme management at the UN Office on Drugs and Crime in different countries. She is now project coordinator at Diakonie ACT Austria.

Ageing in dignity
**Improving the social and health
situation of older people in Serbia.**

Vienna, 30. September 2024

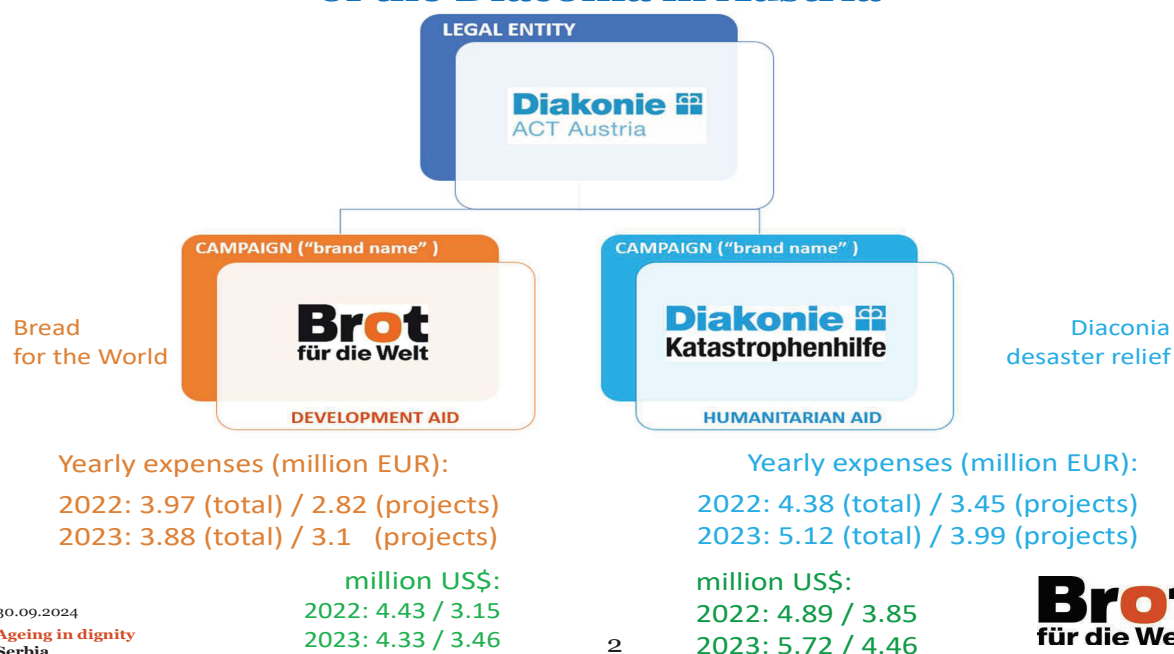
Presenter:

Stefanie Eichhorn, Project Coordinator

30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

Brot
für die Welt

Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid of the Diaconia in Austria



STRATEGIC GOALS / priority areas of work

Food sovereignty and climate justice

Promote global lifestyles and economies designed to enable the livelihoods of all people while respecting the limits of the natural environment.

Social inclusion - "Leave No One Behind"

Promote equal participation of all people in society. Overcome obstacles that people affected by social exclusion - such as minorities, people with disabilities, or old people - face in exercising their rights.

Gender equality

Promote the opportunity of all people regardless of their sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation to exercise their rights equally. The equality of all people is a prerequisite for social justice, peace, and sustainable development.

OUR APPROACH

- **Human rights promotion & empowerment:** empowering disadvantaged social groups to exercise their rights, participate in society and access supporting networks.
- **Meeting basic needs:** promoting equal access to sufficient and appropriate food, health, and protection from violence. We advocate for equal access to basic services of disadvantaged population groups.
- **Partnership & participation:** working directly with local partner organizations and with self-advocacy organizations.
- **Networking & learning:** promoting networking, learning and regional exchange among partners as well as in Austria.

30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

4

Brot
für die Welt

SERBIA – Situation

Basic indicators

SERBIA – basic data	
Population million	6.7
GDP, billion US\$	75.5
GDP per capita, US\$	11,270.8
HDI rank (out of 193)	65
Life expectancy at birth, years	72.7
Average age	43.9

Sources:

World Bank/Serbian National Statistics Office/UNDP, 2023/2024

According to UNFPA population dashboard (2024):

Population 7.1 million / life expectancy: 77 (fem.: 80 / m: 74)

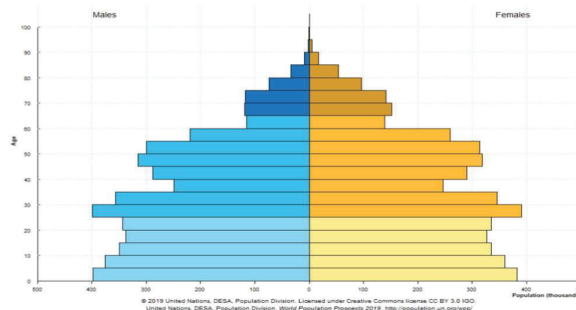
30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

5

Brot
für die Welt

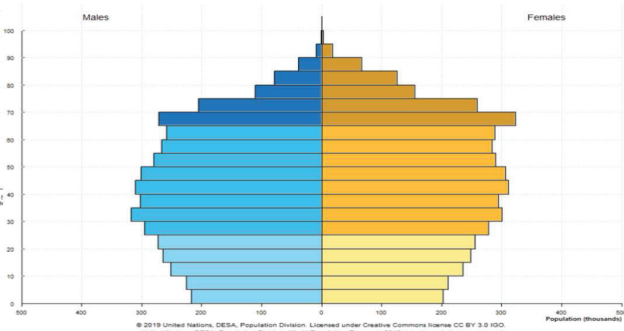
SERBIA - Situation diminishing and ageing population

Fig Serbia: population pyramid 1980



Source:
UN DESA, Population Division 2019

Serbia: population pyramid 2020



Reasons for overageing:

- lower birth rates
- increased life expectancy
- emigration

push factors in Serbia:

Balkans war, economic and social crises situations
following Covid-19 pandemic and outbreak of Ukraine war

30.09.2024

Ageing in dignity
Serbia

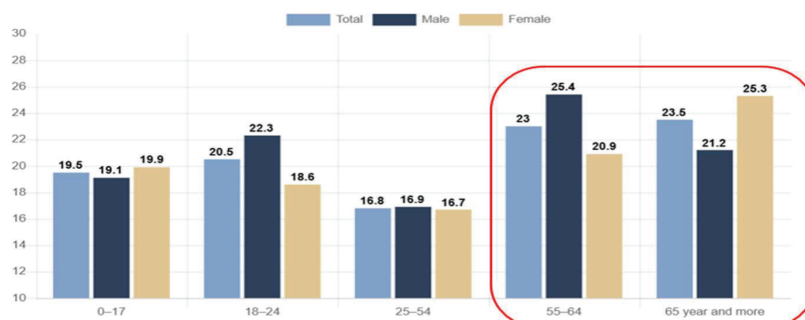
6

Brot
für die Welt

SERBIA – Situation poverty and social exclusion at higher age

- Older people in Serbia are among the population groups most at risk of poverty and social exclusion.
- 25.3 % of people aged 65 and over are at risk of poverty.

Poverty and social inequality, 2023
Graph 1. At-risk-of poverty rate by sex and age, 2023, %



Source:
Statistical Office of the Government of Serbia: Household budget Survey, Income and living conditions Survey
<https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/vesti/statisticalrelease/?p=15328&a=01&s=0102?s=0102> (15/10/2024)

30.09.2024

Ageing in dignity
Serbia

7

Brot
für die Welt

SERBIA – Situation

poverty and social exclusion at higher age

- The risk of poverty and social exclusion is more pronounced among women and in rural areas
- Farmers' pensions are particularly low. In practice, 90% of farmers receive only the minimum pension.
- **Average Serbian pension (2024): EUR 390 (US\$ 430)***
- **Average pension farmers (2024): EUR 170 (US\$ 190)***
- However, a share of old people receive pensions below this level. We have beneficiaries with less than EUR 100 or no pension.

** Data source: The Pension and Disability Fund of the Republic of Serbia, 2024

30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

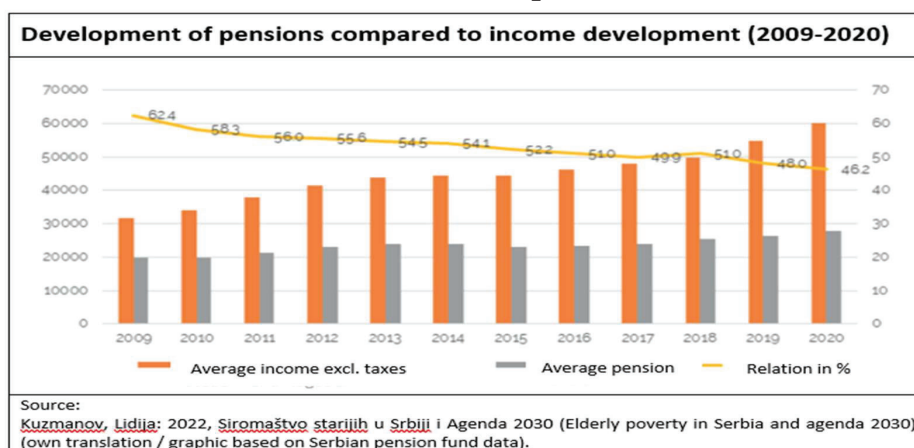
8

Brot
für die Welt

SERBIA – Situation

poverty and social exclusion at higher age

- Pension levels have fallen in comparison to income.



30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

9

Brot
für die Welt

SERBIA – Situation

Social welfare system

The **Serbian Law on Social Welfare** was adopted in **2011** aiming

- (1) To improve the protection of the poorest, ensuring minimum subsistence level and a more efficient system of benefits; and
- (1) To develop a network of well functioning quality community services.

According to a 2022 Worldbank study on social protection in Serbia,

- „the challenges posed by aging, low productivity and inequality of opportunities (...) require systemic social protection reforms (...);
- Serbia operates a comprehensive social protection system; however, policy priorities and inefficiencies in program execution reduce efficiency and effectiveness.“

(Source: “Serbia. Social Protection Situational Analysis”, World Bank 2022)

SERBIA – Situation

Social welfare system

- „Social assistance programs do not sufficiently reach the poor.
- (T)he support provided does not adequately cover beneficiaries’ essential needs. (...)
- Within poverty-targeted programs, overly strict eligibility criteria and case management challenges (...) reduce coverage.
- (...) the provision of social services (...) varies across the country, with many Local Self-Governments (LSGs) not providing key services.
- Case management and referral procedures are underdeveloped and there is not sufficient coordination across social assistance and social services to ensure client-oriented, tailored services or efficient resource management.“

(Source: ibid.)

SERBIA – The situation we face

- Many old people in Serbia are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, with older women in rural areas being more affected.
- The poor and most vulnerable are still insufficiently covered by social assistance programmes.
- Especially in rural areas there is hardly any government support for older people and social or medical services are often difficult to access.

30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

12

Brot
für die Welt



Federal Ministry
Republic of Austria
Social Affairs, Health, Care
and Consumer Protection

- **Working for elderly in rural areas (since 2019)**
- Average yearly budget:
- EUR 162,000 (US\$ 180,000)



Funding sources:
Government of Austria
and BfdW own funds

<https://www.covekoljublje.org/>

30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

13

Brot
für die Welt



Cooperation
since 2021



Average yearly budget:
EUR 22,000 (US\$ 24,500)

Funding sources:

Valdesian Church of Italy
(otto per mille) and
Brot für die Welt own funds

30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

<https://nshc.org.rs/>

otto
per
mille
CHIESA VALDESE
IPSOPE DELLE CHIESE METODISTE E VALDESE

Brot
für die Welt

14

Key areas of our project work

- 1) Adressing immediate needs
 - access to health and social services
 - psycho-social support
 - material aid for the poorest (food)
- 2) Action against loneliness and for active ageing
 - Social gatherings
 - Creativity and learning opportunities
 - Volunteering
- 3) Capacity building
 - Training and exchange opportunities for local partners

30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

15

Brot
für die Welt

Present Philantropy project

“SAVE - Social Protection and Poverty Reduction for Vulnerable Adults in the Context of Multiple Crises” (Sep. 2024- Aug. 2026)

• Objective

Reducing poverty among older people through access to quality social and health services

Poverty is understood as a multi-dimensional problem that must be considered from multiple perspectives, incl. material and non-material circumstances.

Accordingly, different fields of action to reduce or avoid poverty are required. This may include food aid or housing as well as access to health and social services or learning opportunities etc.

30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

16

Brot
für die Welt

Project SAVE: target group and project areas

Target groups:

670 vulnerable older people in rural areas in Serbia in **Ruma**, **Kragujevac** and **Kraljevo** and **17 surrounding villages.**

Implementing organization:

PHILANTROPY

The Charitable Foundation of the Serbian Orthodox Church

Budget (2 years):

EUR 387,000 (US\$ 432,000)

70% Government of Austria/ 30% BfdW own funds

30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

17

Brot
für die Welt

SERBIA – Brot für die Welt partnership projects supporting older people



30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia



30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

Claiming rights and seeking help

Information guides to the local social welfare system and leaflets



30.09.2024

Ageing in dignity
Serbia

20

Brot
für die Welt

Help at home

... for frail people
and those with
limited mobility
once per week.

beneficiaries: 75



... and in shelter for people
in particularly difficult
situations in Kragujevac



(no picture available)

30.09.2024

Ageing in dignity
Serbia

21

Brot
für die Welt

Material aid for the poorest:

- food items to support a more healthy diet
- hygiene articles
- beneficiaries: 600



30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

22

Brot
für die Welt

Medical check-ups in villages or at home

Beneficiaries: total 670 (70 at home or in shelter)



general practioner, internist, ophtalmologist, dentist



30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

23

Brot
für die Welt

Psychological support and moderated peer group discussions (2021-2023)



2024-2026:
psychological counselling
by phone or face-to-face

beneficiaries: 50

30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

24

Brot
für die Welt

Socializing: gathering – creativity – learning - fun

... organized by
volunteers.
... in 15 villages

beneficiaries in
rural areas: 450



30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

25

Brot
für die Welt



Inter- generational exchange



30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia



Spajalica = paperclip

26

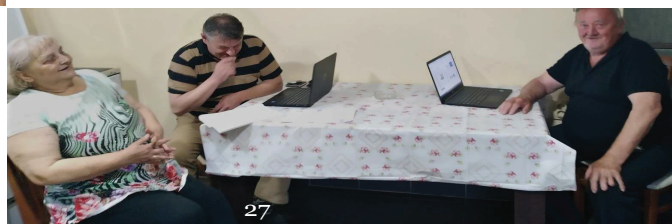
Brot
für die Welt

Learning how to use computers, smart phones, internet and basic IT applications ...

... with teachers in classroom settings in town ...



... or with WiFi hot spots and
volunteers in remote villages ...



30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

27

Brot
für die Welt

Capacity building – locally and inter-country exchange



Visiting mobile home care in rural Austria (South –Burgenland, 2019)



30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia



Capacity building of institutions and organisations working with older persons



Older persons is one of the most vulnerable population group in Serbia. In order to address the needs of this population more adequately and provide conditions for dignified living, all societal actors need to become more proactive and enhance multisectoral cooperation, both in terms of strategic planning and in developing and providing direct services for older persons. Philanthropy pays particular attention to older persons living in rural areas, as their position is even more deprived than for those living in urban zones. Within the project 'Empowerment of Vulnerable Older Persons Waliberg in Kragujevac and Kraljevo Region', supported by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection and Brot für die Welt Österreich, Philanthropy organised three capacity building trainings – in Batare, Kragujevac and Kraljevo. The trainees were

Planned 2024-26:

- **Training on Dementia at the Neoumanist Day Care Centre in Strasen, Moldova**
- **Local training for social service providers in Serbia**

Brot
für die Welt

28

Our main challenges

- 1. Funding limitations**
- 2. Short funding periods (only 18 months – 2 years)**
- 3. Lack of qualified local personnel**
There are not enough trained people/ they often prefer to work abroad.
- 4. Physical infrastructure in rural areas.**

30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

29

Brot
für die Welt

Voices from Serbia

Savka (81):

“I feel as if the Club beneficiaries are all members of my family... It is difficult to explain how much it means to me at this age to hang out with all of them. Most of the volunteers are much younger than me, but they have accepted me so nicely, and I accepted them as my family.”

Savka lives alone in a village half an hour's bus ride away from Novi Sad. Every Thursday she travels to come to the Paperclip Club and enjoy the company of volunteers.

Mira V. (75) volunteer, village of Vrba, Kraljevo:

“The best moments are when we meet. We feel useful, we are creative and proud of our handicrafts and of preserving our tradition. We have learned (...), but what we like most is the socializing.”

30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

30

Brot
für die Welt

Voices from Serbia

Slavica R., home care assistant in rural communities:

“Most of our clients have several chronic illnesses. I know most of them because I was born here. I am familiar with their life stories and health problems, the biggest of which is loneliness. The biggest problem in my job is the difficulty of reaching some areas and the lack of bus routes, so sometimes I have to walk for up to 2.5 hours a day. Access to health services, food and medication is also more difficult in rural areas”.

30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

31

Brot
für die Welt

MANY THANKS TO OUR DONORS

With funding from

 **Federal Ministry**
Republic of Austria
Social Affairs, Health, Care
and Consumer Protection


otto per mille
CHIESA VALDESE
UNIONE DELLE CHIESE METODISTE E VALDESI

**... AND THANK YOU FOR YOUR
INTEREST IN OUR WORK!**



<https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.at>

30.09.2024
Ageing in dignity
Serbia

32

Brot
für die Welt