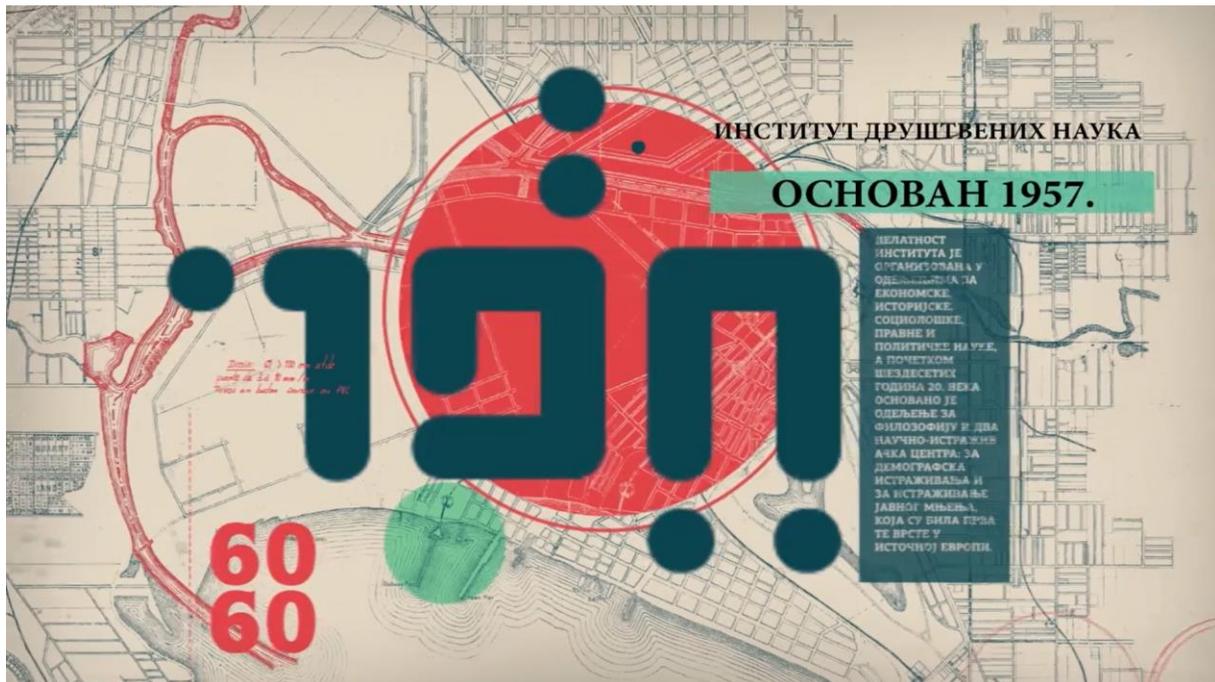


**PERFORM**

Performing and Responsive Social Sciences

# Supporting the Institute of Social Sciences



The Institute of Social Sciences is one of the oldest scientific institutions in the field of social sciences in the region of Southeast Europe. For the past 60 years, it has oriented its research on social phenomena, the improvement of scientific thought and the development of scientific methodology. Still, the Institute faced challenges with regard to low recognition of its work among social actors, i.e. the public and policymakers. Over the course of two and a half years, PERFORM supported ISS in building its capacities, diversifying its sources of funding and raising its visibility vis-à-vis the public and policymakers.

## **Background**

Social science institutes in Serbia represent invaluable national wealth that have a long tradition of contributing to social developments at many levels. They are sources of scientific thoughts and translators of knowledge generated by research community into public arena. And even though they are responsible for questioning changes and providing answers to complex phenomena within society, the environment in which they operate is not always favourable nor supportive of their work.

Social science institutes face mistrust in policy community that regards them as steered away from social and political demands. And while social scientists claim policymakers are unable to uptake the knowledge produced by research community, their scientific work is perceived by policymakers as inadequate in relation to the quality and relevance required. Consequently, policymakers distance themselves from cooperating with institutes.

Despite insufficient science-policy interaction, the funding of social science institutes mostly comes from the state budget, which allocates this support through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD). Even though state funding of science institutions is practiced in many countries, in Serbia, 100% of projects proposed get funded regardless of their relevance or quality. This is set to change with the announced restructuring of research funding system by the Ministry.

The Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) is one of the oldest scientific institutions in the field of social sciences in the region of Southeast Europe. For the past 60 years, it has oriented its research on social phenomena, the improvement of scientific thought and the development of scientific methodology. Still, as many other institutes in the field of social science and humanities, the ISS faced challenges with regard to low recognition of its work among social actors, i.e. the public and policymakers.

Over the course of two and a half years, PERFORM supported ISS in building its capacities, diversifying its sources of funding and raising its visibility vis-à-vis the public and policymakers.

## **Different Avenues of Support**

### ***Breaking the circle of mistrust***

PERFORM facilitated cooperation between the Center for Demography of ISS and the Ministry without portfolio in charge of demography and population policy. As decreasing population is one of the biggest challenges that Serbian society is facing, collaboration between the two came as a natural meeting point for systemic feeding of research inputs to policymaking process. Researchers from the Center for Demography formed a multidisciplinary working group together with members from other research institutes to gather qualitative data on the latest trends population is experiencing.

Along this process, there was a challenge of distributing evidence in a manner more suitable for scientists than policy users, which created an uncertainty that the research inputs will be acted upon. Therefore, translation of the data gathered for policy users' purposes was of equal importance as their collection. PERFORM supported a workshop between the two communities, the providers and users of the research results, for the purpose of transferring knowledge into policies and breaking communication barriers. In other words, this project served as a mechanism for knowledge diffusion from science to policy and for establishing linkages of trust for future science-policy collaboration.

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*“When I took office in 2016, my first step was to admit that we did not know enough about the issue of demography, and that we needed to be educated in order to implement real change. To that end, we have established a very successful cooperation with the Centre for Demography of the Institute of Social Sciences on revising the strategies related to population policies.”*

- Slavica Djukic Dejanovic, Minister without portfolio in charge of Demography and Population Policy

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*“The purpose of the four workshops we held with the Ministry was to strengthen their team in order to better perform their work. The Minister admitted she was not very familiar with the subject, but she was willing to listen. I believe we contributed to empowering the Ministry. We interpreted the results of the census for them and presented the research as evidence for policy making.”*

- Representative of ISS



*First workshop on Demography and Population Policy, February 2017*

## ***Raising visibility***

Communication of scientific work was not only challenging with its primary counterpart, i.e. policy community. The general public was also very much unacquainted with it. Contributions of scientific institutes, including ISS, regarding societal changes rarely encountered the eye of the public, thus making research performance less relevant. In response to this aspect, PERFORM decided to support ISS to better position itself publicly by communicating their expertise and increasing their visibility. The celebration of the **60<sup>th</sup> anniversary** of the Institute of Social Sciences provided a space for promotion of ISS work through media reporting and guest appearances in television programmes. The public got informed about the ISS scope of work as well as its significance to society as a whole.



## ***Joining forces***

Knowing that strong regional and international cooperation between social science researchers is a prerequisite for improving research performance outside domestic programmes and with funding instruments, PERFORM decided to support the establishment of a meeting place for researchers and thus improve their interaction. All the more reasons for this initiative was the fact that social science research sector in Serbia has a low success rate in European funding infrastructure, namely FP7 and Horizon 2020 programmes. Only one out of nine participating projects of University of Belgrade in Horizon 2020 are from social science area.

By facilitating collaboration between ISS and other institutions, PERFORM sought to overcome this barrier and intensify researchers' linkages across the region. At the initiative of PERFORM, the **Academic Network for Cooperation in South East Europe** was established among research institutions in the field of social sciences and humanities. The members include: Institute of Social Sciences Belgrade, Faculty of Political Science of Zagreb University, Institute for Ethnic Studies from Ljubljana, Institute for Social and Human Research, Euro-Balkan University of Skopje, Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo, and Faculty of Political Sciences – University of Montenegro.

## ***Responding to the changing environment***

For the upcoming year of 2019, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development announced changes in the ways science institutes are organised and funded. The aim of the changes is to establish an effective national research and innovation system that is integrated into the European Research Area. The achievement of this goal, in one part, is planned through evaluation of all research institutes, a process that should provide a basis for restructuring the landscape of research community. The other aspect relates to the ways public institutes are funded, which currently means relying predominantly on institutional support.

These plans were met with certain apprehension, particularly with institutes in the field of social sciences, as they have little experience in attracting projects through competitive bidding. Furthermore, changing the structure of funding would reflect on internal capacities of institutes, forcing them to focus more on project-based research instead of basic research, for which they have no internal capacities and which would take a long time to develop.

In an effort to prepare ISS for the forthcoming changes, PERFORM piloted two projects, both directed toward making ISS more flexible in its work and to the changing environment. In the first project, ISS was assisted in developing and conducting **self-evaluation assessment**. The assessment, which is in implementation phase, aims to improve the quality of Institute's work and increase its influence on politics and society. The Institute plans to orient its work strategy toward the results of the self-assessment and showcase the model to other research organisations.

The other project was designed with ISS as partner to answer to planned restructuring of the funding mechanisms of research organisations. In order to steer science research to be more responsive to socio-economic needs, the MoESTD is planning to reduce institutes' dependence on state budget and to divide available funds into institutional support and project-based funding. ISS was one of the first institutes to turn this planned change into an opportunity and, with the assistance of PERFORM, start exploring ways in which they can make synergies between the two funding options for conducting research. What followed was the creation of a service unit that holds capacities and competences to access alternative sources of research funding, which will diversify funding portfolio of ISS and positively affect performance of social sciences. Thus, **Resource Centre** (RC) was born.

For two years of its operation, RC and ISS staff developed capacities for project management. They significantly increased both proposals submitted for project funding and their success rate. The Centre reinforced ISS by positioning it as a new type of public research institute with diverse funding portfolios. And more importantly, it provided incentives to other research organisations to generate their own resources through expanding opportunities.

### **Impact**

Projects through which PERFORM supported ISS stimulated **cooperation and trust** between social science researchers and policymakers. Both parties became reactive to each other's perspectives and needs, which resulted in working together on creating policies.



*“Our work with the Ministry resulted in drafting the Population Strategy and the Action Plan. After the Action Plan was approved by the working group, the Strategy and Action Plan were sent to other line ministries for comments at the end of 2017. We expect them to be adopted by the Parliament later this year.”*

– Representative of ISS

Cooperation between ISS and decision-makers brought about the signing of several important agreements of cooperation between the Institute of Social Sciences and the Cabinet of Minister without

portfolio in charge of demography and population policy, thus **increasing the relevance of ISS** among policymakers.

Relationships developed during the project echoed beyond its scope, showing interest and enthusiasm from both actors. In the words of an ISS researcher who was actively involved in this project:

“At the moment, the Minister and I are supposed to write a paper together. I am not sure what the process will look like as something like this has never been done before, but I am excited about this new form of cooperation between researchers and policy makers.”

The establishment of the Academic Network for Cooperation in South East Europe has contributed to the **strengthening of ISS and research community and their voice in the region**. This cross-border cooperation between professors and researchers has contributed to the first high quality research publication *“Multiculturalism in Public Policies”* published by the Academic Network for Cooperation in South East Europe in cooperation with the Institute of Social Sciences. The publication brought together some of the most prominent authors dealing with the problem of national minorities and multiculturalism from the South East Europe.



*Roundtable “Democracy, Multiculturalism and Ethno-cultural Policy in the Western Balkan Countries”, April 2017*

The self-evaluation process, in addition to preparing ISS for external evaluation announced by the MoESTD, is expected to **improve the quality of ISS work** and consequently their research footprint vis-a-vis policy and social developments. The results of this process should assist ISS in structuring its future work, especially with regard to it combining quality and social relevance.

Lastly, the establishment of RC **strengthened ISS** by increasing their ability to expand the scope of research and perhaps more importantly, to change their attitude concerning dependency on MoESTD,

ISS became more confident in structuring its work and combining basic research with the project-funded ones.

### **Next Steps**

Only empowered and capacitated institution, strengthened in the aspect of generating knowledge, can truly guide the developments in a society. The Institute of Social Science is emerging as a confident and well publicly positioned institution ready to comply with these tasks. However, much effort is needed for steering science system in Serbia to be responsive to social and economic aspects of the society.

The incentives PERFORM provided to ISS are invaluable for its future development and operation, both in terms of capacities and financial security. They put ISS forward as a model for other institutes. It is expected from ISS and RC to help other institutes design and manage international projects; access alternative sources of research funding and advise them on developing efficient operations, systems and networking.

### **Additional Sources**

21/12/2017 [60 Years of Institute of Social Sciences \(video\)](#)

25/10/2017 [Social Sciences and Political Institutions: Challenging the Boundaries of \(Non\)Cooperation](#)

22/04/2017 [Social Science Research Contributing to the Population Policy in Serbia](#)

21/04/2017 [Ethnic Relations: Democracy Is a Lengthy Process](#)

27/02/2017 [Toward a Better Demographic Future of Serbia \(SASA\)](#)

22/02/2017 [Key Demographic Challenges for Serbia](#)