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## **PROGRAMMES FOR SUPPORT OF THE ELDERLY FOR AN ACTIVE AND HEALTHY AGEING IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

### **The ageing trend**

**T**he world faces a major demographic transition with the number of elderly people being significantly larger. Reducing the rate of population growth, but also the increase of longevity will result in continuous aging of the global population in the world. The need for support of elderly persons living in their homes will most likely increase in the future as a result of these demographic changes.

The World Health Organization (WHO) notes that the average life expectancy in European countries is already at the highest level in the world and it is expected for the proportion of people aged 65 and older to rise from 14 per cent in 2010 to 25 per cent in 2050. People do live longer in the majority of the region; however, there are exceptions within the countries themselves and between countries, meaning that not all people spend their last years in good health and well-being.

In relation to the elderly population, this trend will bring upon certain social and economic challenges for individuals, communities and state

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authorities since there is a need for increase of the state systems' support for the elderly that can be considered vulnerable population for a variety of reasons.

Even though dependency does not necessarily have to be the result of aging, it is very probable that the dependency ratio will increase – a fact that will lead to a greater burden of systems for provision of social protection of vulnerable elderly persons.

The non-communicable diseases are becoming the leading cause of increase in death and disability with the ageing of individuals; moreover, the elderly are becoming more vulnerable as a result of loneliness, social isolation and/or marginalization in a fast-pace changing world.

Elderly persons can also face certain forms of violence or abuse, whether it is a matter of physical abuse, psychological abuse, neglect of basic needs, financial abuse or economic exploitation. All these issues are potential threats to the physical, mental or social well-being of the elderly, which can further lead to additional vulnerability toward or before certain things that the elderly face.

## **Active ageing**

According to WHO (2002), active aging can be defined as a “the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age..... [it] allows people to realize their potential for physical, social, and mental well-being throughout the life course and to participate in society, while providing them with adequate protection, security and care when they need.”

In reality this means that, after turning the 65<sup>th</sup> year of life, biological factors are not a decisive factor in how we age, but it is rather the lifestyle as well as the living environment and the culture in which we live. The health condition is a factor that has a strong effect on ageing and is particularly important for active ageing. The World Health Organization notes that healthy ageing actually begins with healthy habits and behavior in the earlier phases of people's lives.

This involves choosing what we eat, how physically active we are and our level of exposure to health risks such as those caused by smoking, harmful alcohol consumption, or exposure to toxic substances. But, it is never too late to start: for example, the risk of premature death in elderly people is reduced by fifty percent if we stop smoking between 60 and 75 years of age.

WHO also explains that the word “active” in “active ageing” refers to “continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic

affairs, not just the ability to be physically active or to participate in the labour force. Older people who retire from work, are ill or live with disabilities can remain active contributors to their families, peers, communities and nations”.

Therefore, active ageing as a process can be recognized as a way for promoting “healthy ageing of the individual as a full member of society, with a sense of greater fulfillment in work, greater independence in our daily live and a greater involvement as citizens. Regardless of our age, we can still play our role in the social environment and enjoy a better quality of our life.”

This requires the right conditions so to promote participation of elderly people in the community, workplace, in families and social life and to provide learning and other opportunities in order for elderly people to be able to fulfill their expectations and capacities as means for having a longer and quality life during the third age”.

### **Strategic documents and national healthy ageing framework**

Active and healthy ageing is a key aspect of health and well-being. At a national level, there are adopted strategic documents and policies aimed at the adult population, such as the National Strategy for the Elderly 2010-2020 by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. Subsequently, within the activities of the Ministry of Health, several activities have been implemented to ensure greater accessibility to health services to every citizen, in particular vulnerable groups, such as home visit by the polyvalent patronage nurses, the Rural Doctor project and mobile pharmacies.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the proposed Action Plan for healthy ageing will provide an integrated approach and harmonization of efforts of all involved sectors and institutions for provision of a healthy, dignified and quality life of the adult population.

The National Strategy for the Elderly of the Republic of Macedonia is in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, the Government’s Programme for European Integration, Economic Growth and Social Commitment, the National Plan for Development (2007-2009), the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia (2006-2010), the Macroeconomic Policy of the Republic of Macedonia, The National Strategy for Education, the National Strategy for Housing, the National Health Strategy, the Strategy for Demographic Development in the Republic of Macedonia as well as other national strategies and with the documents of the European Union. The Strategy respects the human right to individual behavior and choice, in the context of the fundamental rights of the current and the needs of the future population. Through a social and economic development, it enables creating comprehensive, sustainable and

equal opportunities for development of individuals. This way, there is a guarantee of the strategic commitments of the Republic of Macedonia to move within the values, norms and social rights that are a fundament of Europe's region, especially regarding the Strategy for Sustainable Development of the European Union (EU) adopted in 2001 and revised in 2006, the revised Lisbon Strategy (2000), the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing adopted in 2002, the last UNECE Ageing Conference held in Leon, Spain (6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> November 2007). The decision made in Stockholm (2001) by the EU Council according to which, 50% of the population aged 55-64 should be employed until 2010. The European Council in Barcelona (2002) concluded that, by 2010, progressive growth should be achieved for five years in average effective years when people should stop working.

### **Support in the implementation of activities for the elderly at a local level**

According to the Law on Local Self-Government, the municipalities are responsible for providing social protection. Depending on their financial capacities, they can regulate other laws in the field of social protection by expanding the range of rights determined in the Law on Social Protection and better conditions for their implementation, as well as other forms of social protection. CSOs registered by MLSP can realize social protection activities under the conditions and in a manner prescribed by the Law on Social Protection.

Reforms in the field of social protection in the Republic of Macedonia were promoted in 2004 through MLSP. Decentralization of social protection was one of the priorities of the reform and it includes promotion of non-institutional forms of protection, promotion of alternative social services, enabling different legal entities and individuals, including civil organizations to provide certain social services in the social protection system.

Involving them should contribute to the development of alternative non-institutional forms of social protection, development of social protection for the elderly, improved access to services as well as converging social services of the citizens, involving families and civil associations in provision of social protection and improvement of the quality of life.

The Law on Social Protection supports the local self-government in establishing institutions for social protection of the elderly, such as establishing Centres for Day Care and Temporary Protection. The Law allows local self-governments to delegate responsibilities to other legal entities and individuals, including civil organizations active in the field of social protection.

The exiting legislative stimulates multisectoral cooperation in providing protection for the elderly. According to the Law on Social Protection, preventive action is taken by the Centres for Social Work in cooperation with local self-governments, local health institutions and other public institutions, individuals and legal entities, as well as civil associations.

### **Activities for healthy ageing – support of an active and healthy life**

At a national and local level, there are numerous activities related to healthy ageing, i.e. support for an active and healthy life and, even though they are not always labeled as such, they can still contribute to the improvement of social integration and quality of life of the elderly. Apart from the services of the health and social protection systems, there are other activities usually organized through the civil society, aimed at healthy ageing. One of the most famous actors in the country is the Red Cross of the Republic of Macedonia and the Union of Pensioners' Associations of the Republic of Macedonia (*Sojuz na zdruzenija na penzionerite na Makedonija*). Their activities can serve as a matrix and a template for expanding the scope of multiple communities and can be potentially seen as an opportunity for their institutionalization through programmes and projects for support of active and healthy ageing, financed by the national budget.

### **Example of a good practice for support of the elderly in household conditions at a local level**

#### ***1. Daycare Centre for The Elderly and Centre for Support in Household Conditions***

A project devoted to care of the elderly - "Daycare Centre for the Elderly and Centre for Support in Household Conditions" is being implemented from 2011 onwards within the Red Cross of the Republic of Macedonia. By the financial support and experience of the Austrian Red Cross and the Austrian Development Agency, implementation of the project began in 2011. The main objective of the project is developing non-institutional protection and providing care and health protection of elderly and feeble persons.

Specific goals of the project:

- Improvement of the quality of life, health and psychophysical condition of the elderly;
- Satisfying the health and social needs of the elderly;

- Socialization and enrichment of the education level of the elderly;
- Promotion of an active approach to life in old age;
- Promotion of volunteering and including the citizens in voluntary work in activities for third age persons.

The first phase of the project was a preparatory period with main objective being identification of the needs of the elderly for obtaining services in the field of social and health protection and proposal of specific recommendations for improvement of the current situation, having in mind age, sex, the social, economic, family and psychosocial functionality of the elderly, in which research in all three cities was realized.

For the research of the needs and the rights of the elderly for realization of the rights and services at the home and in the area of social and health protection, the following methodological framework was used:

- Review and analysis of existing official documents (laws and strategies), as well as findings from previous surveys and relevant data on the conditions, the presence and the levels of exercise of rights and services for the elderly.
- Conducting a survey among elderly persons - potential service users.

The research was conducted over a sample of 240 elderly persons, 80 persons per city in: Veles, Kriva Palanka and Skopje. In the process, several socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were taken into account, such as:

- Sex
- Age
- Education
- Income
- Condition of health
- Functioning ability
- Who provides help at home
- Satisfaction with life/feelings

The general picture of service needs in the homes of the elderly was, as follows:

- Most of the elderly persons are women with a lower education level/primary
- Dominant source of income are the pensions which in our conditions are not at a high amount
- Most of the elderly persons are widows
- The households in which elderly people live are small and a part of

them live alone.

- Most of the elderly persons are functional – otherwise they would not be able to live independently in their homes. The average rate of their health is good.
- Most of the elderly persons have social support.
- They expressed satisfaction with life which indicated that they accept it for what it is.
- The elderly persons need services in their home.

The elderly persons covered in this research have clearly stated that they need some form of protection.

The municipal organization of Red Cross of Veles and of Kriva Palanka and the Red Cross of the City of Skopje made a selection of elderly people involved in the project in accordance with the data obtained from the research combined with data from the Centres for Social Work.

At the level of every city, the research covered 60 elderly persons that fit the following established criteria for their inclusion in the project: to be above 65 years of age (with exception of certain elderly people), to be immobile, to live alone and to have low income.

At the level of each of these three cities, local teams were formed consisting of two nurses and 20 volunteers, i.e. a total of 6 nurses and 20 volunteers through the project. A total of 180 elderly persons were covered in this project.

In 2012, the project gained support from the City of Skopje, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the EVN Macedonia Company. From 2012 to 2016, the project activities were supported by: the Austrian Red Cross, the Austrian Development Agency, UNIKA Insurance, the City of Skopje, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, EVN Macedonia and the Albiz Foundation.

Within the service in the City of Skopje, a weekly visit is made to elderly persons living in the municipal territories of: Chair, Butel, Gjorche Petrov, Karposh, Centar, Kisela Voda, Shuto Orizari and Saraj. This service covers 180 elderly persons that are continuously visited at their home.

Three Daycare Centres operate for the needs of active third age persons in the municipal territory of Centar, Chair and Saraj. The capacities of these centres allow for at least 30 people to concurrently stay in the daycare centres' premises.

This service is offered by a trained team of professional collaborators and volunteers of the Red Cross of Skopje (6 nurses, 13 volunteers, 2 work organizers in the Daycare Centre, 1 social worker).

The services provided by the medical person are: measuring blood glucose levels, measuring blood pressure, contacting the family doctor, distributing free medicine (predicted in the project), giving advice regarding therapy intake, giving advice regarding nutrition, accompanying the elderly person when going to the doctor.

The services provided by the volunteers are: conversation and other socialization-related activities, food distribution, assistance when purchasing foodstuffs, medicine etc., accompanying the elderly person when going to the doctor, for a walk etc., completing administrative work for the elderly person.

**2. The following activities** are held at the daycare centre: education on subjects interesting and useful for the elderly, marking the calendar activities of the Red Cross (Cardiovascular Disease Week, the Fight Against Tuberculosis Week, Elderly Care Week etc.) organizing social and/or competitive games (Bingo, Chess, Darts), celebrating holidays and birthdays, organizing joint walks, organizing various creative workshops, discussion on various themes (books, movies, current issues), musical activities and administrative support of some of the rights from the health and/or the social system of the Republic of Macedonia.

## **Contribution from the implementation of the project to the elderly and the local communities themselves**

The Red Cross of the Republic of Macedonia evaluated the project from aspect of both the persons included in the project and of the clients. The findings and the results of the evaluation of project activities that began implementing since June 2011 through the Red Cross of the City of Skopje and the municipal organizations of the Red Cross of Veles and Kriva Palanka were presented at the National Workshop. The evaluation identified the following:

- The project implemented in the local self-governments was within the framework of the reforms made in the social and health care of the elderly. The project implementation provided excellent results and is a good experience and practice for establishing cooperation and coordination among various partners at a local level. The efficiency of the project was demonstrated by the will of the elderly to participate in implementation of the project activities, which was proved in the preliminary research before implementing the project. The project team and the nurses and volunteers functioned very well, with a plan for



action and in line with the standardized working methods and working documentation.

- There were multiple effects from the project in regards to positive change on the elderly, such as decrease of loneliness in 95.14% of elderly persons, decreased fear of disease in 88.89% of elderly persons, decreased feeling of abandonment and dissatisfaction among the greater number of elderly persons. 92.36% of the elderly persons in Skopje declared that the project contributed to saving money. 65.28% of elderly persons confirmed that their health condition, nutrition and hygiene have been improved.
- The short-term effects of the project proved very positive on an individual and on a local level, while the long-term effects will be evidenced during the implementation of other project activities for promotion of social and health protection of the elderly persons in their local self-communities
- The quality of life of the elderly was significantly improved through an improved approach to relevant institutions, exercising their rights and becoming an integral part of the local communities.
- The capacities of all institutions and organizations involved in the project were increased in the field of social and health protection, both of the Red Cross of the Republic of Macedonia mainly through volunteer support and of the local self-governments and other local partners as well.
- The process of obtaining financial support from local self-government began by adoption of strategic documents, policies and within the available budgets. The Social Protection Councils established in local self-governments support similar project activities as a result of good cooperation and participatory approach. The transparency and accountability of providers in providing relevant services for the elderly at a local level increased.

Efforts of the Red Cross of the Republic of Macedonia for providing sustainability of the project, primarily through local self-governments and from the corporate sector, resulted in support for existing and expanding activities in new municipalities. Namely, through support from EVN Macedonia, funds were provided for implementation of the activities in Veles, Kriva Palanka and Skopje and their expansion in Kichevo and Debar.

Table 1. Activities by the Red Cross of the Republic of Macedonia in household conditions at a local level

No.	MUNICIPALITY	No. of service users	No. of volunteers (delivery of social services)	No. of nurses (delivery of medical services)
1.	SKOPJE	180	13	6
2.	VELES	60	15	2
3.	KRIVA PALANKA	71	22	2
4.	KICHEVO	30	5	1
5.	DEBAR	30	5	1
6.	STRUGA	30	5	1

Source: the Red Cross of the Republic of Macedonia, 2016

### ***3. Pensioners' Clubs***

In 2010, with the support of the German Red Cross of Baden-Württemberg, the Red Cross of the Republic of Macedonia established a Pensioners' Club through the municipal organization of the Red Cross – Kriva Palanka that continuously functions to date. There are 40 pensioners active in the club. The project aims at providing a dignified life of the elderly. Activities are directed towards inclusion of the elderly in the social activities of the community and a fulfilled daily life. The main objective is to improve the quality of life of the elderly by improving their psychosocial condition. The club implements educational activities in order to acquire new skills and knowledge, activities for raising the level of health prevention, as well as organizing creative workshops, recreational activities, etc. The implementation of activities in the club is realized by cooperation and support with the Municipal Association of Pensioners, the Centre for Social Work and other institutions at a local level. Such clubs also function through the municipal organization of the Red Cross in Negotino and Veles. During 2015 a club in Prilep was also established as a result of the long-standing cooperation of the municipal organization of the Red Cross in Prilep with the “Kiro Krstevski-Platnik” Public Facility for Elderly Persons, the local self-government, the “Svetlost za Nas” Diabetes Association and the Municipal Association of Pensioners.

### ***Activities for raising public awareness and strengthening intergenerational solidarity***

In order to raise awareness on the rights and on the proper care of the elderly, the Red Cross of the Republic of Macedonia traditionally marks the

“Week for Elderly Care” in the month of November. Particular emphasis is being placed on raising awareness among youth regarding their active involvement in activities on ageing. Educational activities, creative workshops for the elderly, visiting elderly persons in their homes, free examinations, visiting facilities for elderly persons, retirement homes etc. are being organized on the occasion of the Week through the municipal organizations of the Red Cross and the Red Cross of the City of Skopje. An action for free measuring of blood glucose levels to 2000 elderly persons is also organized within the Week. In the past three years, this action has been supported by the EVN Macedonia Company. Past experience confirms the number of more than 4000 people included in various activities throughout the Week. The implementation of the activities includes volunteers of the Red Cross of different ages, with an emphasis on active involvement of third age persons. Activities on a local level are implemented in cooperation with the Municipal Associations of Pensioners that have a continuous and good cooperation with the Red Cross of the Republic of Macedonia, as well as with the Centres for Social Work and citizen associations in partnership-based cooperation with the municipal organizations of the Red Cross.

#### ***4. Strengthening capacities for advocacy and lobbying of the elderly and their own efforts in exercising their rights***

The Red Cross of the Republic of Macedonia is committed to increasing the social inclusion of the elderly in all spheres of social life. The main objective through the Active Ageing Project, financially supported by the ERSTE Foundation and the Austrian Red Cross in 2013, was that the elderly representatives from the three cities - Skopje, Kriva Palanka and Veles receive training and acquire skills and knowledge on development and implementation of awareness raising and advocacy activities for their needs and rights at a local level.

Social participation of the elderly in the social life should be increased through implementation of such activities developed by the elderly persons themselves and intended for them. Another positive effect that should be realized is involvement of the elderly in the fight for their rights and needs and in efforts to achieve them.

## Recommendations

Elderly persons are a large group with special characteristics, much like other age groups. The humanitarian needs of the elderly require special attention both on an individual and on a local community level.

The need of services for support of elderly persons who need help and support is getting bigger by the minute, therefore:

- The experiences acquired regarding established cooperation of the partner organizations and the support of local communities should be used and shared with other local self-governments.
- Efforts should be aimed at promotion of such initiatives in order to obtain financial support from the local communities in the process of development and implementation of activities for health and social protection and of services for protection of the elderly at a local level.
- Realization of the local self-government responsibility is based on available funds, human resources and expertise, technical resources and capacities. All these resources are a basis for providing quality services at a local level. The Law on Local Self-Government provides opportunities for building quality services through mutual cooperation between institutions and organizations at a local level, which should be maximally used towards improvement of the quality of life of the elderly.
- Social inclusion of vulnerable groups/elderly persons is most efficient through development of social services at a local level, namely, appropriate measures should be taken to provide equal opportunities for integration of the elderly in the local communities.

## **Abstract**

The world faces a major demographic transition with increasing number of elderly people. Reducing the rate of population growth, but also the increase of longevity will result in continuous aging of the global population in the world. The need for support of elderly living in their homes will most likely increase in the future as a result of these demographic changes. Active and healthy ageing is a key aspect of health and well-being. At a national level, there are strategic documents and policies aimed at the ageing population, such as the National Strategy for elderly 2010-2020. Based on the strategy, at a national and local level there are number of activities related to healthy ageing, i.e. support for an active and healthy life and, even though they are not always labeled as such, they can still contribute to the improvement of social integration and quality of life of the elderly. This paper provides an overview of the activities at local level in several municipalities, pertaining to healthy ageing, which can be used by other municipalities in their commitment to improving the life of those in advanced age.

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