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Final International Conference I-CCC

Summary

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Summary

On **23 October 2023** the **international final conference** on “**Innovative community care centers for older people and their informal carers**” took place in Belgrade, Serbia. The conference came at the right point in time, shortly before the International Day of Care and Support, which was announced this year by the UN General Assembly.

Together **we celebrated three years of I-CCC** by lectures from health care professionals, academia and decision-makers and showcased the achievements the I-CCC project has produced during the last years. In total **120 people attended the closing event**. Representatives of the public sector, academia, civil sector, as well as health professionals who work with older people and informal carers participated.



Mr. Christian Grünhaus, Ms. Maria Doppler, Ms. Andrea Stöckl

In the beginning, His Excellency Christian Ebner, Ambassador of Austria in Serbia spoke and emphasized the importance of continuous cooperation and support of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) in strengthening the capacities of the Red Cross and civil society organizations in Serbia. Demographic aging is a global phenomenon, it affects all societies, but its effects are particularly visible in the northern hemisphere, especially on the European continent. This, of course, requires strategic action and recognition of the threats and opportunities related to demographic change, which is how societies adapt to ageing. This also often requires innovative approaches in adapting services to the needs of the population, but also the use of modern technology in the service of care.



H.E. Mr. Christian Ebner, Ms. Anya Blum & Ms. Olivera Vukovic

Mr. Nicola Bertolini, Head of the Cooperation of the Delegation of the European Union in Serbia, referred to the fact that the European Union, through various instruments, provides support to countries in the process of accession, and this includes support at the highest level in creating policies and harmonizing national legislation with EU standards, as well as support at the local level. The development and prosperity of local communities is very important in this regard, and one of the key elements of this support is the effort to make them as inclusive and fair as possible. It is also important to take care that these services are sustainable and recognized by the local community.



Ms. Nataša Todorović, Ms. Saša Vukotić, Mr. Nicola Bertolini

The president of the Red Cross of Serbia, Prof. Dr. Dragan Radovanović pointed out that by the end of the century, more than 30% of the EU population will be over 65 years old. On the other hand, it is estimated that in the European Union approximately 100 million people provide informal care. During the COVID-19 pandemic, informal caregivers found themselves in an even more demanding role, they became a “dam of protection” and one of the pillars of the healthcare system and the social welfare system, however, although this was emphasized, informal caregivers remain “invisible” from the point of view of the system, policy, and support services worldwide.



Ms. Natasa Todorovic, Ms. Sasa Vukotic, Mr. Nicola Bertolini, Dr. Dragan Radovanovic, H.E Christian Ebner, Ms. Anya Blum, Ms. Oliver Vukovic

Mr. Saša Vukotić, special advisor to the Minister of Labor, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, emphasized that projects such as the I-CCC are important and that they promote the availability of services, social inclusion, and family solidarity. Aging has an important impact on the social protection system. Due to demographic aging, in the future, exactly these services will play a central role in the local community. Ms. Anya Blum from the Austrian Red Cross, International Department, underlined that the Red Cross has extensive experience in developing community-based programs, such as the I-CCC, to support older people, informal carers and to promote healthy ageing. Unfortunately, even in well-developed countries, for many families care related expenses are not bearable. However, everyone should have the right to affordable long-term care services of good quality. Therefore, the I-CCC project is essential and valuable to support not only older people but also their informal carers.

Ms. Olivera Vuković from SeConS, presented the research results on access to long-term care services in the Western Balkans region with a special emphasis on informal caregivers. Research has shown that informal caregivers are the backbone of care, with little or no support from society. Ms. Nataša Todorović from the Red Cross of Serbia presented the project's achievements to the participants, referring to the activities and services in the local community: 60 people received respite services, 40 older persons had regular cognitive exercises on tablets, training cabinets were equipped for education of informal caregivers in two municipalities.



Ms. Ivana Smolovic, Ms. Natasa Todorovic, Ms. Andrea Stöckl

Ms. Ivana Smolović from the Red Cross of Montenegro emphasized the importance of preventive home visits to older persons, while Ms. Andrea Stöckl from Austrian Red Cross emphasized the importance of counseling services for informal caregivers.

In the following session the impact evaluation of the I-CCC project was presented by the evaluation team: Ms. Maria Doppler, Mr. Christian Grünhaus from the Vienna University of Economics and Business, Competence Centre for Non-Profit Organizations, Ms. Sanja Miloradović and Ms. Slavica Milojević, from the Republic Institute for Social Protection (RISP) and Ms. Lidija Brnović, Independent Consultant from Montenegro.



The I-CCC evaluation team

According to the **impact valuation the I-CCC showed positive changes on life of older people who used CCC service in all 3 countries**. Consultations and activities provided by the I-CCC **increased functional abilities** relevant to daily life in older age and enabled older people and their informal carers to live healthier. **Older people acquired more knowledge and information**, they **strengthened their self-help skills and health literacy**. Older people received appropriate psychological support. The tablet-based training was a good tool for the inclusion and engagement of older people at risk of dementia. The intervention had a

positive effect on their feelings of depressiveness. Regarding cognitive status, on average clients stuck to the same category and got slightly worse, but clients with severe cognitive impairment showed improvement on retest in all 3 countries. The evaluation results will be used **to contribute to national policy reforms in the field of long-term care** and to advocate for the development of new services. Recommendations for each country- Austria, Serbia, and Montenegro – have been developed by the NPO Competence Center and they will be shared with decision makers to enhance the sustainability of the project.



In the last session of the final conference, **three non-governmental organizations participated and presented their activities**. Mr. Nadežda Satarić from the Serbian Association for Alzheimer's Disease spoke about the activities that are carried out in Belgrade and are intended for people diagnosed with dementia and their families. Ms. Karolina Stamenković from "Lužničke rukotvorine-Ž.E.C." from Babušnica, said that it is important to talk about older women who live in the countryside and whose access to services is difficult due to the lack of infrastructure. And finally, Mr. Ivica Durmišević, from the "Đurđevdan" NGO, from Bela Palanka, spoke about the older Roma persons and their needs. He pointed out that loneliness especially affects both physical and mental health. The conclusion of the conference is that we need partnerships at all levels to improve the quality of life of both older persons and their families.



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