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## **Leaving no one behind**

Adequate housing and active inclusion of vulnerable social groups in Cacak





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**The project was financed by the European Union within the program "European Union Support to Social Housing and Active Inclusion" implemented by UNOPS.**

# Introduction

Adequate housing is one of the first and basic steps in the process of socio-economic inclusion of vulnerable groups in Serbia and the protection of their human rights. However, regardless of the provision of support in this form, beneficiaries often remain exposed to the risk of poverty and social exclusion. Due to multidimensional social exclusion, they remain trapped in the cycle of poverty, which further leads to the unsustainability of housing solutions and ultimately the entire support system. According to the Council of Europe, social inclusion is a process that enables those at risk of poverty and social exclusion to obtain the opportunities and resources needed to participate fully in economic, social, and cultural life and to achieve a standard of living and conditions that are considered normal in society, where they live.

The project aimed to provide a diverse set of support measures that include solving the housing issue, employment support, education, enabling access to social and health care services, providing psychological and socio-educational support, and helping to solve other challenges when it comes to the social inclusion of vulnerable groups on at the local level.

The project included a combination of beneficiaries from 5 different target groups living in inadequate housing conditions and a situation of social exclusion: Roma, women victims of domestic violence, persons with disabilities, and children and youth without parental care, who leave foster families or social welfare institutions, as well as local socially vulnerable population.

The project "Leaving No One Behind - Adequate Housing and Active Inclusion of Vulnerable Social Groups in Cacak" was realized by the City of Čačak in partnership with the City Housing Agency, the Center for Social Work Cacak, the Center for the Provision of social protection services Zračak Cacak and the citizens' association Initiative for development and cooperation. The project is financed by the European Union within the **European Union Support to Social Housing and Active Inclusion** program, which is implemented by UNOPS.

The project was implemented in the period from July 2021 to November 2023 and during this period we managed to achieve significant results that are presented in this publication. The publication also presents personal stories of beneficiary families with the aim of raising awareness of the problems faced by disadvantaged families and the importance of this type of support.

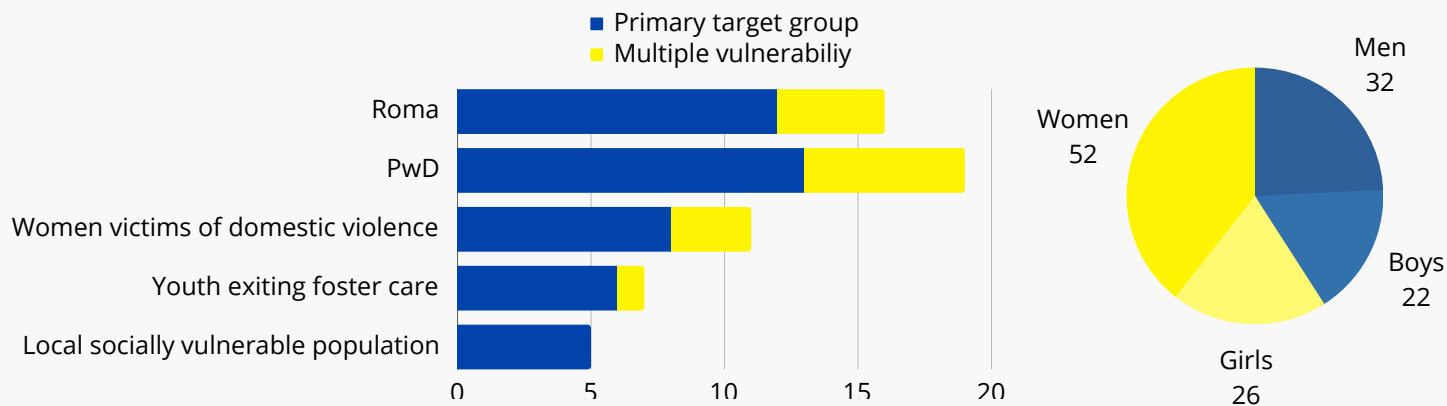


# Main project results

**A TOTAL OF 44 FAMILIES WERE PROVIDED WITH ADEQUATE HOUSING AND SUPPORT IN THE FORM OF ACTIVE INCLUSION MEASURES.**

Adequate housing conditions and active inclusion measures were provided for as many as 132 citizens of Čačak, of which 84 adults (52 women and 32 men) and 48 children (22 boys and 26 girls).

Beneficiaries of the project are 6 families of young people whose placement in a foster family or social protection institution has ended (7 in total, including families in other categories that have among their members young people from this category), 8 families of women victims of domestic violence (11 in total if we count multiple vulnerability), 13 families that have a member who is a person with a disability (19 families with a member who is a PWD in total), 12 Roma families (16 in total, if we count Roma families among other categories) and 5 families from the local socially vulnerable population.



## HOUSING SOLUTIONS



14 family housing units were purchased, 13 of them were improved through small reconstruction work



One multi-family building was built with 12 apartments and 2 rooms for common activities



18 family housing units are reconstructed or adapted

## ACTIVE INCLUSION

A total of 44 families received a donation in the form of a package of **furniture and household appliances**. From kitchen elements to wood stoves, electric stoves, freezers and refrigerators, beds, wardrobes, and other equipment, family households are equipped for modern and functional everyday life according to the individual needs of each family.

Beneficiary families received **laptops and bicycles**, in order to influence the overcoming of the digital divide and encourage sustainable modes of transport in the City of Cacak.



An economic empowerment support program dedicated to strengthening the employability of project beneficiaries was implemented. A total of 19 beneficiaries completed **Vocational Education Training**, of which 14 were women; 2 **business start-up training** were held with a total of 27 beneficiaries, 17 of whom are women; 2 **active job search training** were held for 25 beneficiaries, 12 of whom are women. One training in **agricultural production** was held for a total of 20 participants, 10 of whom were women.

**Machines and equipment** in the amount of up to EUR 3,000 per beneficiary were awarded with the aim of strengthening or creating sources of income and making our beneficiaries materially and financially stronger. Within this component, 27 families received greenhouses, machines and tools, cosmetics, hairdressing, catering, IT equipment, and other.

A **program of psycho-social support** was implemented during the project. A team made up of special education teachers, psychologists and sociologists worked with members of all 44 families. Through individual and group work, we provided psychological and defectological treatments, counseling, and therapeutic work, support to learning for children. We mediated between beneficiaries and institutions of social and health care. We organized group educational workshops on various topics and support groups, treatments in the sensory room, sports activities for children, preventive medical examinations by gynecologists and pediatricians, and other activities were carried out.

A series of **workshops in the local community** were implemented with the aim of strengthening empathy, solidarity, and tolerance. The program was implemented in local schools and included 114 participants, of which 51 were boys and 63 were girls, students of higher grades.







## PURCHASE OF A HOUSING UNIT

As part of the project, 14 families received an adequate housing solution through the purchase of a family residential house or apartment. Out of these 13 houses were reconstructed through minor repairs. Total of 9 Roma families, 3 families of women victims of violence (one of which is a Roma family with PwD among their members) and 2 local socially vulnerable families, both single-parent families consisting of mothers with several children, became the owners of the housing units.

# Four of us, girls, will face this life together



Everyone tells me - you're crazy, but I do what I want and I don't give up. My brother got married and gave birth to three daughters. His wife became mentally ill and started beating them, so the social care service took away their children. Poor children, it's never their fault.

Until I had my own house, I only had the conditions to take custody of one of them. I took the youngest, who is four years old, and I am now her guardian. I make sure that she goes to kindergarten and to the doctor regularly. The two of us talk about everything and do everything together. I am teaching her to fight for herself and that I am always there for her.

We have solved the most important things. We got the house and it has been reconstructed. There are still some things left to change, but slowly. The greenhouse has also arrived, we have prepared the ground and we are planting vegetables in the spring. Now that I have a house, I am waiting for the approval to take her older sisters, who are nine and seven years old, under custody. The children will finally be together and at least have their own peace, and I will try as long as I live to ensure that they at least have the basics.

I'm single, I don't have a husband, and today I turn 43! I was always a fighter, I never gave up. I can't say to myself: "Stop!". There is no stopping for me, I try, I struggle, I strive, but I know what I live for - for these children who, even though I didn't give birth to them, are like mine.

The four of us girls will face this life together, whatever happens.

# The darkness does not scare us anymore



When we got the keys and entered the house that was bought for us, my son was speechless. "Mom, is it possible that this is ours?", he asked. Believe me, I didn't believe it myself. He has his own room and a TV in it. I couldn't believe that I would get to the point where he would have one TV in his room and I would be alone in the other watching something of my own interest. Do you know what is my biggest impression? My son was very afraid of the dark before, and now he goes to his room and falls asleep alone. Miraculously, he is no longer afraid at all. We had a hard life. As a child, he experienced a lot of violence in the family.

I really liked the workshops I attended - you talk to women who had similar problems, and share your pain. It's easier when you know you're not alone and the things that happened didn't just happen to you. It is difficult to be a woman, to have no understanding in the family, to try to raise a child, and to protect it from arguments and violence. To protect him from everything that is happening around him.

Now we have our own peace and no one will come to disturb us anymore. In the morning, I get up and go to work. He stays on his own, wakes up for school, and makes his own breakfast. He's starting second grade now and I am very proud.

The house is located in the countryside, so I also went to agricultural production training. I also received a greenhouse equipped with an irrigation system and a tiller. I just need to find some time and my plan is to plant a garden so that we have enough for the two of us. Slowly, we will manage everything. Now, I have the will to turn over a new page.

# It is time for joy and relaxation



When I was little, I used to pass by that beautiful house in the village and look at it. Who would have thought that one day I would live in it? I have two daughters. The older one is 14 years old, a real teenager. The younger one is 10. We were jumping for joy when I told us "You got a house!" I will never be able to say thank you enough for how much that woman was a wind at my back and how much she changed my life. It is a human relationship, and understanding, when you see that someone cares about you and understands you, it's priceless.

I did not expect that approach, because my life was such that one would not wish it on own's worst enemy. I never had anything in the fridge, to prepare lunch for the children. Once he brought home full bags, of fish, wine, and salad, I was delighted. I thought we would finally have lunch! I prepared that fish and seasoned it. The whole house smelled good. When I put it on the table, he asked us: "And where did you go?" You can sit and eat when I'm done if there's any leftover!" No matter who I complained to, no one believed me. He was wonderful and perfect to everyone, except us.

I've always been a fighter and looked ahead. A colleague informed me about the Call and insisted that I apply, I didn't believe that it was possible for me to win it. The house is now renovated, I also took a masseur course and got the equipment to open my own salon. I realized that I enjoy doing it. The woman from the studio where I went to training taught me a lot. Even now when I go to the studio she says "D. show them". She believes in me that I know the job and I am sure that I will do it very well. For my girls, I put the party light in the room so that the children can gather with friend, and that our house is filled with music and joy!

Before



After



## RECONSTRUCTION OF FAMILY HOUSING UNITS

Within the project, 18 families received an adequate housing solution through the reconstruction, renovation, or adaptation of a family house or apartment. In this way, the living conditions of 11 families with a member who is a person with a disability were improved (12 in total, including families with a PwD in other categories within this component), 3 Roma families (4 in total, including Roma families in other categories), 3 families of the local socially vulnerable population and 2 families belonging to the group of women victims of domestic violence.

# When people feel close to you



I said to my wife: "See the Call." The wife says: "There is no way. We have never been given anything in life." But she was wrong and I'm glad she was. Do you know what meant the most to me? The people. The people who contacted and visited us, can never be forgotten. They became close to my heart, and I am not a person who lets someone close easily. It's no wonder, given the way our lives are.

My older son is 19 years old and has a severe form of autism. He doesn't react to anything, he doesn't talk and someone always has to be by his side. It is very difficult to be a parent and not be able to reach your child. You wake up and go to bed with the thought: "If only my health will serve me, while I'm standing, he will have someone to take care of him." The younger son has now finished the first grade. He is a really restless child, a curious boy. Because of them, my wife and I have to be strong and not sink. When I think back of my "past" life, I used to write poetry, they called me "young Dis". I have started seven or eight novels,. Who would have thought that life would give me such challenges?

The house was reconstructed for us, we received furniture and appliances to complete everything. We do sublimation printing on mugs, t-shirts, etc. We try as much as we can so that our business does not fail because we live from it. With the new machines, we will realize our desire to turn the photocopy service into a gift shop. My wife and I went through Corel and Photoshop training. We both gained valuable knowledge. As much as I knew the basics before that, it's different when someone guides you through the whole process. We will fight, we have no choice.

# I have the will to learn and grow



Are you asking me how I am? I'm on a salary, I'm picking raspberries, I guess I'm fine. I am 27 years old and have three sons: 9 years old, 5 years old, and the youngest 17 months old. Grandma takes care of them while we work, and we work for 15 hours a day, just to afford the basics. We also collect secondary raw materials, children help us. We stick together, so life is easier.

I finished training for a hairdresser and I really liked it. You wash someone's hair, curl it, talk to those women and hear all kinds of clever things, laugh and it's easier for you. I really liked that job! My husband got a wood splitter, I think every day of work with the splitter will bring us much more than wages or collecting raw materials.

Believe me, we are very satisfied, our house has been renovated and we have received furniture. Now I can also plant flowers, then sit down, make coffee, and say to myself: "Hey, this is yours!". I am happy that my children have a normal bed, wardrobe, desk, bicycle, and laptop, like all other children. I have the will in me, I want to learn, to move forward, and to use this life to the best of my ability.

My husband also went to training for agricultural production, so we are also planning to plant a garden next to the house. It's different when you plant it and nurture it, so the children have something healthy to eat. A man must fight and move forward and find some joy in what he has around him. My children are my greatest joy and for them, I will work and strive as long as I live.

# Optimism must live within us



I am 38 years old and retired, as are my mother and father with whom I live. I am active in two associations of people with disabilities, I am a member of the Board of the Society for Cerebral Paralysis Cacak, I write songs and I use the personal assistance service.

One can not understand what we are struggling with until, he sits alone in a wheelchair. Wherever I go, I come across intersections and curbs that are impossible to cross. I have no way to enter a post office, a bank, or any institution unless someone brings me to the counter.

I finished the seventh and eighth grades, as well as the entire high school, at a hospital for the treatment of neuromuscular diseases. Imagine what it's like to spend your young years in a hospital. I didn't let myself sink. My friend and I bought a packaging machine for powdered materials, so we packed baking powder, allspice, and spices. That's how I qualified for retirement. In my spare time, I work as a radio amateur and write poetry. That's why I was most happy when I got a laptop and a printer.

We replaced the carpentry in the house and painted it, the bathroom was renovated and adapted for my use as well. We have built-in windows that I too can open and close. Before I could just sit and look through them. Optimism must live in a person because, without it, not even good things can happen. I have been fighting all my life and now finally good things have happened to me. I'm sitting in my room, and everything smells brand new. I immediately get some strength and the thoughts are different.





## PROVISION OF APARTMENTS

As part of the project, a multi-family building was built in which 12 families received an apartment for use for a period of 5 years with the payment of non-profit rent. Inhabitants of the building are 6 families of young people whose placement in a foster family ended, 4 families whose members are women victims of domestic violence, and 2 families whose members are persons with disabilities. Many of these women belong to multiple vulnerable populations, so it can be said that the total number of families with a PwD is 5, while 6 are women victims of domestic violence and 3 are Roma families.

## The better life



My brothers and I lost our parents early. My mother left us when I was 4 years old, and my father passed away later. The Center for Social Work in Cacak found a foster family where we had a good time, but we were there for three months. The woman who accepted us had a daughter and became pregnant and realized that five children would be too many for her. We had to go to a home for neglected children.

In the meantime, while the three of us were inseparable, a friend from my class started an action. Our friends from school and the whole town of Cacak joined in that action and collected money and reconstructed and furnished our house. The Center for Social Work found a guardian and after a month we were returned to the family home. We were happy there, I managed to finish university. However, luck turned its back on us once again, we lost the house in the restitution process and it was demolished.

Shortly after graduating, I got a job and met my partner at the time, with whom I had a daughter. From that extramarital union, which was increasingly toxic and dysfunctional for both me and the child, I finally separated. With my child, I started a new life.

This project has reawakened in me the hope that there are people who care about us. I felt some kind of social protection. Which gave me security because I no longer live with my child as a tenant. I also completed a programming course and got a laptop so I could do extra work from home. Now I believe in the possibility of giving my child and myself a better life.

## Behind this door is where I find my peace



There were six of us sisters in the family, we lived in a house without electricity or water. My father was violent and I never had peace. When I got married, I escaped from violence but ended up in another violence. At one point, I fell into depression and was unable to even get up to make lunch for the child.

My son was 8 years old when one day I got up, gathered our things, and left. I had nowhere to go, but anyway, I kept going, to escape the hurt.

We got this apartment for use, they say for five years, then three more. When we entered, my son locked the door and said, "Mom, now no one will come to hurt us". He then lay down on the new bed and immediately fell asleep. I have two jobs, always, nothing is difficult for me. He is 12 years old and we agree on everything like two adults. He learned everything by himself, including how to cook lunch and do laundry, but most importantly to greet me with a smile when I walk in the door. How surprised I was that we have the right to furniture. We were happy and jumping for joy, believe me! We lived in an apartment where we didn't even have heating.

I am planning to plant a purple vine on this terrace of mine, to make it beautiful. There are many children here in the neighborhood, so I transferred my child to the nearby school so it is closer to him. When he misses his old friends, he sits on his bike and goes to visit them. Slowly things are coming into order. I also went through pedicure and manicure training and got the equipment to be able to start working on my own. I'm sure, with such persistence and stubbornness, I will succeed in that business.

# The life on my own



I grew up in a foster family, the only family I am aware of. With a lot of love and attention from my parents. I never complained because I knew there is nothing to gain from complaining. If you don't take life into your own hands, no one will do it for you.

I saw the competition, I applied, I didn't have high expectations, and I didn't ask for anything else before.

It's been a while since I became independent, I'm working, and I've provided myself with the basic things for life. Now I have an apartment to use - I'm thrilled! For me, more than enough, I don't have to worry for a while. I will be able to save some money and when the lease period is over I hope I will have something for myself and hopefully for my family when the time comes.

My apartment is located in a neighborhood known for social housing, but that doesn't bother me. The building is beautiful and the neighborhood is nice. I got to know all the neighbors thanks to having some tools of my own, and that information easily spread around. I can help everyone with something, install the curtain, mow the lawn, and that's how we get to know each other and socialize. I just hope I can keep the apartment as long as possible.

There are still some little things left to sort out, to arrange a little more to my taste, slowly. When you have good health and a positive attitude - you can do anything! I work, and I'm good at my job. I get along with my colleagues and I try my best to make my life go in a good direction. When I hear some friends complaining, saying "I miss this and that". I smile and say: "You people don't know what the real problems are, and it's better that you do not find out."

# PROJECT PARTNERS



## City of Cacak

The project lead implementing partner is the City of Cacak. Cacak is the administrative, economic, medical, educational, and cultural center of the Moravicki district. According to the Decree of the Government of the Republic of Serbia on establishing a unique list of development of regions and local self-government units, by its level of development, it is classified into the first group of local self-government units in Serbia. Cacak, regardless of the fact that it is an economically developed city, represents an environment where depopulation is increasingly present, as in numerous other cities of a similar size. Therefore, the City considers this project as one of the important activities in terms of investment in human capital and services that aim to enable citizens to participate in economic and social life and thus fully realize their potential. As such, the project contributes to the stable and sustainable development of the City.

## City Housing Agency

The City Housing Agency was founded by the City of Cacak in 2005. The agency is the implementation partner of the City on housing projects and successfully cooperates with the City of Cacak. Over the years, the City Housing Agency has implemented numerous projects related to the construction of over 170 apartments for socially vulnerable persons, mainly refugees, Roma, single mothers, PWDs, and IDPs. Over the years, the Agency has successfully implemented projects financed by UN Habitat, the EU and the Government of the Republic of Italy, the World Bank and the Housing Agency of the Republic of Serbia.





## Centre for Social Welfare of the City of Cacak

The Center for Social Welfare of the City of Cacak was founded in 1959. The Center is a key institution in the field of social protection in charge of planning, coordination, and development of social protection at the local level. In 2021, all the services of the center moved into a new workspace at Pivarska 1. The staff of the center has a high level of professional knowledge, as well as an understanding of the socially vulnerable population and their needs, rights and obligations in the field of social protection.

## Center for Provision of Social Care Services Zracak Cacak

The founder of the Zracak institution is the City of Cacak. The Zracak occupies an area of 1500 m<sup>2</sup> with fully equipped workshop spaces, a physiotherapy room, cabinets, instruments, a sensory room, and a hydromassage block, while in the yard there is a gym, a field with an anti-traumatic surface, and a sports hall. Zracak provides 4 licensed services: Daycare for children, youth, and adults with developmental disabilities, Personal companion to a child, Personal assistance for adults, and Help at home for the elderly. Zracak implemented several projects financed by TIKa, NIS, the Ministry responsible for Demography and population, the Ministry of Justice, etc.



## Initiative for Development and Cooperation

The Association of Citizens Initiative for Development and Cooperation, IDC, is a non-profit organization dedicated to the social and economic inclusion of vulnerable categories of the population and the protection of their human rights. The association was officially registered in 2007 and over the years has provided more than 200 housing solutions, more than 2,300 people have gone through economic empowerment programs, while over 2,000 people have received legal aid or support, through projects funded by the EU, German donors, and others. The association deals with the provision of humanitarian aid, the development of social entrepreneurship and social services.







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