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“Getting a Life” - Deinstitutionalisation of Residents of Demir Kapija Institution

REPORT

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CONTENT

Content	3
List of Acronyms	5
1. Executive Summary	6
2. Introduction	10
3. Background and Context Analysis	12
4. Evaluation design and approach.....	13
4.1 Methodological approach.....	13
4.2 Data collection and analysing tools	13
5. Evaluation Findings	15
5.1 Evaluation findings by the DAC OECD Criteria.....	15
RELEVANCE CRITERIA	15
COHERENCE CRITERIA.....	16
EFFECTIVENESS CRITERIA.....	16
EFFICENCY CRITERIA.....	17
IMPACT CRITERIA.....	18
SUSTAINABILITY AND REPLICABILITY	19
CROSS- CUTTING ISSUES	20
5.2 Evaluation findings by target groups	20
5.2.1 Summary of interview’s results with the key stakeholders	20
5.2.2 Summary of survey results assessing satisfaction of PwIDs resettled into group homes	23
5.2.3 Summary of online survey results assessing the impact of the trainings in daily work of care givers 25	
5.2.4 Summary of results from FGDs with the self-advocates	26
6. Conclusions.....	28
7. Recommendations	29

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: DATA COLLECTION CHART PROCESS

14

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Disclaimer: This is an independent evaluation report prepared by ITM Consulting, International consultant entity, commissioned by People in Need. Views, findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the contractors.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BDE	Bureau for Development of Education
ChwID	Children with Intellectual Disability
DI	De-institutionalisation
DKSI	Demir Kapija Special Institution
DPOs	Disabled people's organizations
EQ	Evaluation Question
ET	Evaluation Team
GBV	Gender Based Violence
I	Indicator
IR	Inception Report
KF	Key finding
LE	Lead Evaluator
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoH	Ministry of Health
MOLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OO	Overall Objective
PIN	People in Need
PwID	People with intellectual disabilities
SP	Specific Objective
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
ToR	Theory of Change
UN	United Nations
UN CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UN WOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report represents the Final Evaluation of the Project “Getting a Life” - Deinstitutionalisation of Residents of Demir Kapija Institution” (hereafter the Project), implemented by People in Need in North Macedonia with financial support by European Union, covering the implementation period from January 1, 2020 until March 31, 2023.

The project contributes to strengthening the social protection system and social inclusion of persons with disabilities in North Macedonia. Thus, aiming to establish services functioning fully in line with current European DI trends including person centered approach, individual support, personal assistance etc., and local legislation and standards, but on closing RIs and transforming these into community-based service providers. Additionally, the project actions contribute to the fulfilment of the National Strategy on Deinstitutionalization 2018-2027 and Action Plan especially the priorities related to creation of Monthly Action Plans with DKSI on the Transformation Plan with SMART objectives; Resettling 45 clients of DKSI to the local communities, respecting their choice of where and with whom to live (in line with UN CRPD Article 19) and Establishing person-centred community-based services for PwID such as Group homes, and a Club for social activation in target municipalities of Vardarski region and Skopje region.

The **overall impact** of the Project contributes to “*strengthening social protection system and social inclusion of persons with disabilities in North Macedonia*”, whereas the **Project’s outcomes** contribute to (1) *strengthen capacity of Demir Kapija Special Institution (DKSI) to provide tailor made community-based services for PwID and act like a national deinstitutionalization resource center* and to (2) *scale up community-based services for persons with intellectual disabilities (PwID) in North Macedonia and support resettlement of residential institution clients back into the community*.

The **evaluation methodology and approach** to perform this assignment has been developed taking into account the evaluation purpose as defined in the ToR, the entire scope of the project and its results framework including all elements of the intervention logic covering the entire period of the project. The evaluation is performed using inclusiveness process of the project management structure, operational strategies conducted, and the project monitoring system and procedures undertaken during the project implementation. The assignment included beneficiary groups both direct and indirect, staff members of DKSI, municipal authorities in Demir Kapija, users/PwID (when possible) and their family members or guardians, caregivers working in houses, Center for Social Work in Gevgelija, Negotino and Skopje and representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The OECD/DAC criteria were the focus of the evaluation. The methodology was based on mixed methods and involved the usage of the commonly applied evaluation tools such as documentary review, interviews, focus group/workshop, information triangulation, analysis and synthesis. Such participatory approach was also practised for the collection of data, formulation of recommendations and identification of lessons learned.

This report covers topics such as key findings per each OECD criteria and evaluation question, overview of the evaluation process describing its scope and specific objectives, analysis of the background and context, evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Key findings

In section below, we present findings according to OECD/DAC criteria

Relevance criteria- findings demonstrate that the EU-funded project for DI managed by People in Need in improving care and support for people with disabilities, in the targeted region is considered as highly relevant. The project's design and results are in line with the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries and stakeholders, including the MLSP. The project has contributed to strengthening the capacities of care providers and scaling up community-based services for PwID. However, challenges such as rising prices for services, limited resources, and staff hesitancy still oppose the DI process itself. The project has positively affected beneficiaries and contributed to improving the social protection system and social inclusion of PwID in the country. The full integration of clients into society remains a challenge despite project's efforts to increase their capacities and assert their rights.

Coherence criteria - findings confirm that the project is coherent with the country's National Strategy on DI, which prioritizes the transformation of the DKSI, resettlement of residents in the community, development of community services and prevention of institutionalization. The project is also aligned with the Common European Guidelines on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care. The project has helped DKSI meet EU DI standards, respecting the needs and rights of PwIDs and contributing to their individual wellbeing. The project has also contributed to the recognition of the rights of PwIDs by various stakeholders.

Effectiveness criteria - findings indicate that the project was effective in modernizing and improving community-based services for PwIDs in the country. Its efforts focused on improving the functioning of the DKSI and establishing various community-based services for PwIDs in the Vardarski region resulted positively. The project has been successful in transforming the DKSI into a national DI resource center and providing tailor-made community-based services for PwIDs. The project has also prepared nine group homes, out of which three are awaiting process of licencing. The six currently opened houses have accommodated 30PwIDs, while another 15 will be resettled in the three other houses who are waiting licence. The PwIDs and care workers living in the group homes have reported 100% satisfaction with their improved living conditions and personal well-being. The project has also fostered interlinkages with other EU projects and adapted to pandemic times to avoid replicating activities. Overall, the project has been effective in achieving its goals and improving the lives of PwIDs in RNM.

Efficiency criteria - findings **show that** due to the pandemic and the change of the partner the project necessitated an extension of its timeline. However, the project team responded proactively by adapting its activities and implementing some of the activities planned for 2020 in a modified form. Despite these challenges, the project team executed the budget in line with annual work plans approved by the donor, with no significant budget re-allocations. The project monitoring framework proved to be well-established, with SMART indicators that enable precise monitoring of achieved results. The project team's efforts to coordinate with other EU projects working in the same field are commendable, and the project's delivery rates were very good. Overall, the Project was managed efficiently and effectively, with no significant financial management or implementation issues, and the team's ability to adapt to unforeseen circumstances bodes well for the project's future success.

Impact criteria- findings show initial evidence of positive results. At the national level, the project has influenced the implementation of the National Strategy of DI and impacted decisions by relevant parties. At the institutional level, the project has supported the transformation of the DKSI institution and established small group homes. However, the impact of the project on the institution's culture is uncertain. At the individual level, the project has resettled 30 people with intellectual disabilities into communities and improved their living conditions. At the community level, the project has raised awareness, promoted rights, established community service providers, and trained institution staff to

provide better services. Although the full impact of the project is yet to be seen, the initial achievements suggest positive results.

Sustainability and replicability criteria- findings prove the sustainability of the reforms in the field of DI in North Macedonia. The MoLSP has shown dedication to leading the reforms in DI, and has received support from EU-funded projects to create and strengthen facilities. However, long-term sustainability of these services is complex and requires significant effort. The MoLSP has allocated a budget for services, but it may not be sufficient for the actual cost limits, and potential shifts in national priorities could harm project results. Capacity building of staff in small group homes is crucial, as high turnover could lead to loss of project legacy. The sustainability of the project also depends on establishing a network of stakeholders and nurturing inter-institutional communication to ensure equal rights for people with intellectual disabilities. Overall, the sustainability of the project could be ensured as it highly depends on the MoLSP, private providers, and additional funds from the EU and other donors. The Ministry has a functioning system to financially support social service providers, and the EU will ensure technical expertise in the upcoming period.

In section below, we present findings according to Evaluation Questions:

The findings by cross-cutting confirm that this project promote the right-based approach for PwIDs through their resettlement in small group homes. The intervention aligns with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the European Parliament resolution towards equal rights for persons with disabilities. The intervention also includes a component of self-advocacy for PwIDs, although it is in its early stages. In the longer term, there is a need for more support for PwIDs' wellbeing, including social, health, and educational support, and the development of their skills and potential, in line with the SDG goals.

The **evaluation findings from the KIIs** confirms that the project clearly contributes to improving social protection and social inclusion of persons with disabilities in North Macedonia. The implementation faced challenges, but the project is considered relevant to the national context and its resources are used efficiently. The project has positive impacts on the beneficiaries, and has mainstreamed gender and social inclusion in its implementation. Despite facing challenges, the project was well-planned, is deemed relevant, effective, and efficient and its sustainability depends on the availability of human resources. The final beneficiaries reported improved living conditions, but the shortage of caregivers remains a concern. Additionally, the project is considered as successful in socializing people with disabilities and improving their living conditions. The impact is difficult to measure at this stage, but the project is fully in line with the EU strategy for social assistance reform in North Macedonia and with the DI process in the country.

The findings from the satisfaction survey with ChwIDs and PwIDs resettled in small group homes in Demir Kapija, Negotino, and Skopje showed that 100% of respondents were satisfied with their current living place and felt more socialized. 81.5% of respondents rated their health as good and most communicate regularly with their families. 57.7% of participants contribute to maintaining the home and are satisfied with the care and support received. However, 70.4% of respondents have not learned anything new in the last 3 months and not really interested in learning new skills. 70.4% are not willing to work or help in the community and 96.3% do not attend recreational activities. The majority of respondents requested transportation services, visits to the hairdresser, and New Year packages from local authorities. It is important to point out that replacement of the beneficiaries in the small group homes was performed a couple of months before this evaluation. Thus, the residents didn't had enough time to completely resettle and accommodate to the new conditions.

The findings on the impact assessment of the daily work trainings of care givers demonstrates the need for continuous investment in trainings. The majority of caregivers (56.7%) stated the need for formal training and even more caregivers (63.6%) stated the need for informal training and support, while 70% of participants needed follow-up training. Of all participants about 33.3% of caregivers participated in 1-2 trainings organized by the project and most found the training relevant to their job

(66.6%) and agreed that the basic principles of inclusiveness and interaction were used (80%). 56.7% of caregivers would recommend the training to other peers and 63.3% would use the knowledge obtained in their personal or professional life and 86.7% believed colleagues from the small group homes and even the DKSI would benefit the most.

The FGDs results with the PwIDs self-advocates showed that 100% of the participants reported being able to make decisions about their daily routines and basic rights such as food, clothes, and activities. 60% of the participants were able to choose between two options of food and all 100% said they could choose their clothes, but stressed the lack of clothing options. The participants reported a lack of financial stability and communication with local authorities. They would like the municipality to provide social and health support and improve living conditions. However, they were not able to answer more critical questions related to advocating for their rights. The participants have limited involvement in the community and do not have proper inclusion in society, which may prevent them from developing critical thinking and awareness of their rights.

Based on the findings it can be **concluded** that the project “Getting a Life” - Deinstitutionalisation of Residents of Demir Kapija Institution” contributed to the overall objective by March 2023 to a great extent. The evaluation confirmed that it is a well-designed and effective project that had a significant positive impact on the care and support for people with disabilities. Despite challenges such as resistance from employees and limited resources, the project achieved its objectives and changed the lives of 45 people with intellectual disabilities. The financial management was well executed, and the monitoring framework was established to measure the results. The project had a positive impact at the national, institutional, community and individual levels, with the most obvious impact seen at the individual level. The support from the MoLSP provides confidence in the sustainability of the project outputs, but long-term sustainability will require continued support from the EU and other donors. The project was well-received by key stakeholders, including the EU Delegation and MoLSP, and a survey of clients resettled into group homes showed high levels of satisfaction with their current living conditions and care. The future activities and projects should focus on socialization and providing education and health services for people with disabilities.

The Ministry of Labor, Social Protection and Aging (MoLSP) has taken significant steps in leading the deinstitutionalization (DI) reforms in coordination with international organizations and donors. However, to fully succeed in the process, the evaluation **recommends** to maintain human resources, secure financial and reform commitments, enhance cooperation with local authorities and other sectors, adapt models for service providers and housing conditions, increase financial support per person with disabilities (PwID), raise awareness about the DI process and inclusion, and facilitate connections with mainstream services.

Furthermore, the report **recommends** the project to enhance the cooperation with local authorities and other sector (civil sector and private one) so local players can not only be active in the DI process but as well become the driver force for the proper inclusiveness process of the DI to ensure sustainability to **increase the potential for impact**.

Commitment towards DI and the Strategy, both financially and in reforms, but also identification and implementation of effective strategies to maintain the human resources engaged in the process, especially the caregivers in the small group homes are most crucial to **ensure sustainability of the project results**.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Project, that is leaded and implemented by PIN and, in coordination with the local partners, was designed to contribute to the efforts of the DKSI in the process of the DI. Namely, to support the already started processes of the DI, in the 80-ies when the institution, with support of Kriva Palanka municipality, resettled clients to Kriva Palanka and later on, in the 90-ies, through Poraka Negotino to group-homes in Negotino. Especially, since the latest efforts made in the last twenty years did not resulted positively, which might be attributed to the type of interventions initiated and leaded by outside partners, without great support by the management of the DKSI.

In that regard, the current intervention aims to support directly the DKSI in the resettlement processes of its clients that started in mid-2019, with the establishment of three (3) Group homes in Vardar region and two (2) in Skopje, initiative supported by the UNICEF. The established group home's situation does not share equal terms. The ones in Vardar region uses the staff from the Special Institutions and can apply for funding within the MoLSP, whereas the group homes in Skopje needed to be equipped with staff, need to obtain license and authorization from the MoLSP and then request for funding for the staff and running of the facility.

The recent resettlements efforts have been focussing on taking the children out of the institution, in coherence with the National Strategy for Deinstitutionalization "Timjanik" (2018-2028) and its Action Plan, and the Law on Social Protection adopted in May 2019demonstrating governments commitment to changing and transforming RIs and prioritize this question. Additionally, the intervention is in coherence and harmonization with the EU legislation and the overall objective of the call for proposals. Which is to *promote and support the DI of persons with intellectual disabilities in North Macedonia; ensure their inclusion in local communities through establishment of community-based supported living services; and facilitate their connections with mainstream services (health care, church, cultural activities, local infrastructure).*

PIN is managing the implementation of the Project in co-partnership with the relevant public institution DKSI, and local NGOs SOLEM and KRIK.

Purpose and Objectives of the Final Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to perform an **efficient and effective evaluation of the project** "Getting a Life" - Deinstitutionalization of Residents of Demir Kapija Institution by including independent and inclusive assessment of all related stakeholders and parties.

The evaluation aimed at assessing whether the project intervention has achieved its objectives, the level of achievements and impact of project toward intended results.

Additionally, the final evaluation served to identify the best examples, lessons learned and recommendations to relevant stakeholders to adjust the contents of the ongoing and future interventions in relation to support the DI of PwID at national level in North Macedonia and proposes suggestions on how to ensure the sustainability of the results and the way of maximizing the impact on beneficiaries.

Scope of the evaluation

The final evaluation analyses the entire scope of the project and its results framework including all elements of the intervention logic covering the entire period of the project.

The evaluation is performed using inclusiveness process of the project management structure, operational strategies conducted, and the project monitoring system and procedures undertaken during the project implementation.

The assignment included beneficiary groups both direct and indirect, staff members of DKSI, municipal authorities in Demir Kapija, users/PwID (when possible) and their family members/guardians, caregivers working in houses, Center for Social Work in Gevgelija, Negotino and Skopje and representatives of the MoLSP and the EU delegation representative.

Finally, there was a **validation workshop where all relevant stakeholders participated which served to confirm the findings** obtained in the previous phases and elucidated several issues regarding the findings and recommendations proposed.

Specific objectives of the evaluation

The evaluation objectives were to:

- ✓ Assess the overall implementation of the project to date, identifying factors (either positive or negative) affecting project implementation of the project. If deemed necessary, suggest potential revisions to the expected level of achievement of the objectives and remedial actions needed to achieve the initially set objectives;
- ✓ Analyse the project's implementation strategies and actions from the effectiveness perspective in achieving the project expected results as per the approved logical framework;
- ✓ Analyse the institutional set-up, partnership capacity for project implementation and coordination amongst partners;
- ✓ Identify lessons and potential good practices for the key stakeholders;
- ✓ Provide strategic recommendations for the different key stakeholders in sustaining of the project and its replication.

The evaluation applied the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the program using OECD DAC criteria for evaluation renewed and adapted by adding one major new criterion – coherence – to capture linkages better, systems thinking, partnership dynamics, and complexity.

The evaluation assignment looked at the current policy priorities, including equity, gender equality, and the “leave no-one behind” agenda as the definitions of relevance and effectiveness in particular, encourage more in-depth analysis of equity issues.

GE and social inclusion, in line with the logical framework of the project, were taken in consideration largely during the evaluation process. In addition to this, the ET also paid attention to issues related to social inclusion, poverty and the environmental and climate resilience approach.

3. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT ANALYSIS

The deinstitutionalization process in North Macedonia had 3 phases. First phase was implemented between 2000 and 2007, the second phase was implemented between 2008 and 2017 and third the deinstitutionalization process started in 2017 and remains.

The first two phases resulted with deinstitutionalization of 123 beneficiaries and 244 children (107 children with disabilities) that were placed in foster families or resettled to their biological families. Furthermore, in the second phase was adoption of the National Deinstitutionalization Strategy 2008 – 2018.

In the third phase was adopted the new Strategy for Deinstitutionalization 2018-2027 “Timjanik” and its Action Plan. Apart the strategy for deinstitutionalization in 2019 was adopted the new Law for Social Protection. The law foresees a provision of community-based services and strengthens the role of the centres for social works and CSO’s.

Most remarkable achievements were notable changes in perception and actions of the professional and general population.

All the social protection institutions for persons with disabilities have devised the transformation plans and settled on the path of transformation. Since then, there were no new admissions or readmissions to these institutions, and no plan for major refurbishments of the institutional premises. In the next period it is expected to establish and complete reorganisation of the institutions into a variety of community-based services, including transfer of the professionals from the institutions.

All the children from the institutions are resettled and this is the major achievement.

At the end of 2019, the rate of resettlement as part of the deinstitutionalization process was 43.15%. In particular, 19 small group homes with 93 persons/beneficiaries were established. The number of foster families in October 2019 was 208 in which 347 children were placed. In the period 2019-2020 the government developed by-laws and rulebooks for almost all services given in the law.

The state has developed Methodology for determination of service price according to the norms and standards per services. However, based on the service provider’s practices, it seems that the amount of money foreseen for each service per user is not sufficient to provide the beneficiaries with necessary and integrated multi-sectoral services.

The network of available service providers at local and regional level is not sufficient yet. Many donors provided support to different organisations and entities to support the transformation process and establishment of new services at local level but most of them are lacking exit strategies and sustainability.

4. EVALUATION DESIGN AND APPROACH

4.1 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The evaluation methodology and approach have been developed considering the evaluation purpose as defined in the ToR and the OECD DAC evaluation criteria. The evaluation adhered to UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation, Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct, UNEG guidance on integrating HR and GE approaches into the scope and conduct of the evaluation, including a broader HR context, gender and intersectional discrimination, power structures and exclusion, participation, inclusiveness and affirmation of HR of the most vulnerable and gender responsive approach in programming, monitoring and reporting, taking into account fair relations of power, empowerment, participation and inclusion, independence and integrity, transparency, quality, credibility and ethics.

The methodology was based on mixed methods and involved the use of commonly applied evaluation tools such as documentary review, interviews, focus group / workshop, information triangulation, analysis and synthesis. A participatory approach was used for the collection of data, formulation of recommendations and identification of lessons learned.

In terms of lessons learned, the ET utilised appreciative inquiry and positive deviances approaches that focus on existing strengths, but it identified the main implementation's challenges of the strategy and achievements of desired results and impacts.

The evaluation was a transparent and participatory process involving representatives from the relevant stakeholders and collaborates proposed by the project team and carefully selected based on their involvement in project activities and their field of work.

Having in mind that most of the project interventions are still ongoing, the ET took into consideration the fact that it is early to expect systematic change from the project results. However, the initial orientation and direction towards impact was assessed.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSING TOOLS

The evaluation activities were conducted by the ET consisted of five consultants and delivered according to the following stages: i) inception phase and methodology; ii) data collection; and, iii) data analysis and reporting.

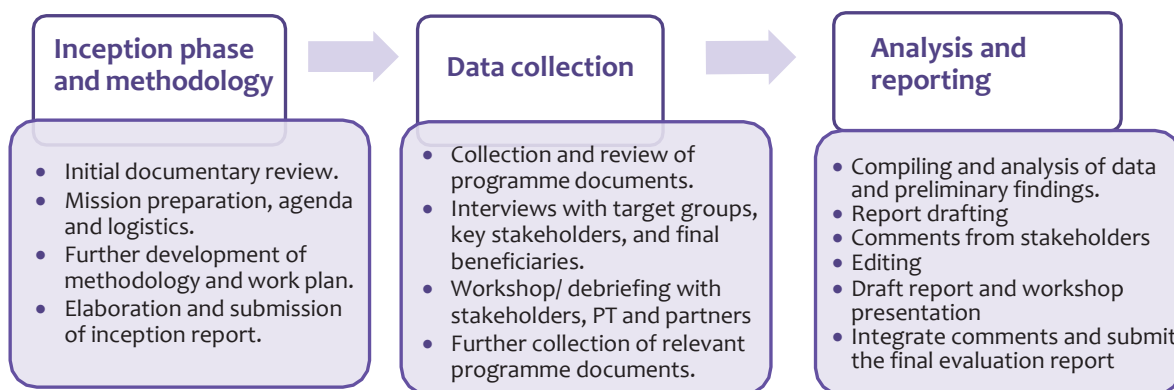
1. Inception phase and methodology

The inception report served as a roadmap for the evaluation ensuring share understanding between the ET and the PIN project team regards to finalised work, plan, deliverables and timelines. It also furthered in details the evaluation design and presented the data collection and analysis methods and tools that were used as well as identification of potential risks and limitations along with adequate mitigation strategies.

2. Data Collection process

Quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques were used to gather data and evidence needed for evaluation purposes. Three different techniques were used to ensure an objective, clear and unbiased approach to assessing the effectiveness and impact of the project. Comprehensive desk review, field/online research including interviews and surveys as well as focus group were the four techniques used.

Figure 1: Data collection chart process



The techniques were identified because of the ET’s detailed analysis of all project documents, brainstorming sessions, and a coordination meeting with the project management team and were adjusted to the target groups. The sampling frame was agreed between the ET and the project team. In particular, a list of proposed persons to be interviewed divided by the target group was prepared by the project team.

In the course of the evaluation the following was undertaken: 14 (out of 12) KIIs with the key stakeholders; 29 (out of 30 resettled persons) individual interviews with the PwIDs resettled into group homes were interviewed; 30 (out of 35) caregivers from the small group homes and, focus group discussion with 8 (out of 12) PwIDs (self-advocates), so in total 81 persons were involved in this project evaluation. In terms of gender, more female (47) than male (23) interviewees were involved in the evaluation process.

3. Data Analysis and Reporting

ET undertook serious measures to ensure that the collected data are of the expected quality, reliable and valid for the evaluation process and respective findings. In that regard, the following tools were developed: an interview guide consisted of four different types of questionnaires for all different groups of interviews, a scenario for the FG and a template for observation notes from the interviewees.

The interview guide covered the technical information opening statements including the statement for the confidentiality of the information and data shared during the interview followed by the request for sharing valid and reliable data that will serve the evaluation process. The questionnaires compiled a set of open-ended questionnaires, requesting specific examples, data and information related specifically to the project grouped respectively in accordance with two criteria for evaluating effectiveness and impact. The observation notes served to the ET for collecting notes and information shared during the interviews.

The validation workshop was intended to clarify any outstanding issue regarding the findings and recommendations proposed. Briefing and clarification meeting with the part of the project management team), coordination meetings with the partners and one-day workshop for all ET members served as an additional check about the data and evidences quality, reliability and validity.

Triangulation of the sources, methods and data was applied to ensure the credibility and validity of the evaluation findings. Documentary and desk review, interviews and written answers received from certain target groups were the two main sources that facilitated the validation of data. The collection of data in this way tested the consistency of findings obtained through different instruments and increased the chance to control, and assess some of the threats or multiple causes influencing the evaluation findings.

In particular, questions related to the OECD DAC criteria were asked to all representatives from different target groups that were interviewed.

In addition, the collected inputs were analysed using the MAXQDA software. Interview transcripts/notes as well as documentation analysis notes were coded in line with the evaluation matrix and were analysed systematically, ensuring objectivity of the evaluation process.

5. EVALUATION FINDINGS

5.1 Evaluation findings by the DAC OECD Criteria

RELEVANCE CRITERIA

The EU-funded projects for deinstitutionalization, including the one managed by People in Need, have significantly improved the care and support for people with disabilities in the targeted region. The design of the intervention and its results are of highest importance to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries. They represent an adequate response to the need to improve the lives of ChIDs and PwIDs in the country by improving their living conditions, improve their socialization and relationships, better quality of care and access to services as well as their empowerment and participation in decision making. The needs of stakeholders were taken into account during the project design directly through consultation with the main partner (DKSI) as well as with the strategic priorities of the MoLSP as the main players regarding the DI process.

“At the beginning, there was scepticism among the families and the care-givers, but now the outlook is different. Today we have families who are calling the Ministry and saying I have a house and I want to give the first floor to social services. This is the process that leaves a mark and has continuity”- said a representative from MoLSP.

“The project was evaluated as very relevant, and it has complied with all conditions. It’s fully in line with the strategy as well as our concept in the reforms of the EU of the social assistance in North Macedonia” – said the representative from the EU Delegation.

In specific, the project **“Getting a Life” - Deinstitutionalization of Residents of Demir Kapija Institution**, has contributed to strengthen the capacities of the DKSI in the provision of tailor-made community-based services for PwID, has scaled up the community-based services for PwIDs and improved their living conditions by supporting the resettlement of clients into small group homes, and increasing their capacities for their own self-advocacy. All intervention actions have clearly contributed to strengthening the social protection system and social inclusion of PwIDs in the country.

This intervention has supported the efforts of the MoLSP to strengthen the position of the care providers; however, rising prices for services and limited resources for the actions still pose challenges. The implementation of the project had some delays due to obstacles related to pandemics Covid-19, but the support provided from the EU and the well-established network of the partner organizations helped overcome them. The process of DI goes rather slow due to its complex nature. It faces challenges in the process. At the beginning of the project, at some point, it faced staff resistance within the DKSI mostly due to the uncertainty about their labour security, their exposure to similar activities in the past 10-15 years, the overloaded and sometimes, confusion related to the DI process, which during the project implementation is overcome. The lack of resources are still being issues. Nevertheless, the trainings delivered to the caregivers were relevant to their needs and to the workplace and aligned with the policy objective. Despite mentioned challenges, the trainings were well received, and the beneficiaries have been positively impacted.

The integration of the clients into society remains still a challenge, despite the intervention efforts to increase the capacities of the PwIDs to know their basic rights, their ability to make decisions, increase communication with local authorities and their ability to assert opinions and advocate for rights.

“The fact that we have the opening of homes, and the transformation of homes means contributing to the system, improving the system and inclusion. A lot has been contributed. The uniqueness of this project is that they are the leaders of the Ministry’s reforms for these people with disabilities. These people

should not be looked at with pity, but should live and enjoy their rights like any citizen”- said the representative from MOLSP.

COHERENCE CRITERIA

This intervention proved to be highly appropriate to the country’s context. The project is entirely coherent with the National Strategy on Deinstitutionalization 2018-2027 and Action Plan priorities by: The transformation of the DKSI, the resettlement of residents in the community, development of community services and the prevention of institutionalization are the priorities of the national strategy.

According to the strategy, DKSI is considered as a priority as despite being the largest social institution, due to its pejorative conditions for residents and staff it was predicted to have the biggest impact on the creation of new community services and deliver a positive message about the commitment and means to deliver the transition from institutionalization to community-based care and service provision.

The intervention is coherent and fully aligned with the Common European Guidelines on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care, which recognizes damaging effects of the institutionalization on people with disabilities and promotes community-based services such as supported living proposed in this action. The project activities followed the same principles as emphasized in the Guidelines such as person-centered approach, individual planning, connection with local society etc.

The project activities directly contributed to reaching the priorities set by the national authorities. The project output has helped the DKSI acting as social service provider with EU DI standards by respecting the needs and rights of the PwIDs. Moreover, the project has directly contributed by establishing small group homes. The project resulted clearly in improving their living conditions and individual wellbeing of 30 PwIDs (out of 75 of total PwIDs resettled by the time of the evaluation). And last, the project has contributed to recognize the rights of PwIDs by all relevant stakeholders (workers of service providers through trainings and capacity building activities, national and local authorities through implementation of joint activities such as establishing of small group homes, local service providers), clients neighbourhood and even the entire population.

The project focused on improving the strategy of the institution and after resettlement, the clients were happier and more satisfied. It shifted focus to the social caregivers when it became clear that the staff was difficult to change.

EFFECTIVENESS CRITERIA

Target values against which the effectiveness was assessed relate to the revised result framework due to the extension of the project till the first trimester of 2023, as to assess and estimate the achievement of results that will occur in the remaining part of the project implementation.

Main achievements in regard to project intervention and its **output** (1)the modernization and functioning of the DKSI according to European standards in its role as a social service provider is evidenced through activities that resulted in strengthening the capacities of the DKSI in the provision of tailor-made community-based services (Manual) for PwID and in its transformation into a national DI resource centre (consultations and action plans prepared in regards to the transformation plan) and in scaling up the community-based services for PwIDs.

In regard to the **output (2)** establishment of various types of community-based services for 55 PwID established in Vardarski region, the achievement is evidenced through the already functioning six group homes, which has accommodated 30 PwIDs and, three more homes pending final approval (at this moment, due to the licensing permits), that will accommodate 15 more PwIDs. Achieving this output meant going through a very comprehensive process and activities including the assessment of the PwIDs needs, development of personal plans, mapping report with existing services for PwID, allocation and adaptation of houses/premises, engagement and training of professionals able to apply the acquired knowledge in their new work environment, resettlement process in the community; operationalization and fully functioning of group homes and activities offered in the Dependanza Club.

100% satisfaction level of PwIDs and ChwIDs living in small group homes in Demir Kapija, Negotino, and Skopje, with better living conditions and personal well-being, improved access to community services and medical care are evidence of the effectiveness of this intervention. But, still there is need to continue the support to the PwIDs and advance their inclusiveness process through provision of opportunities for learning and participating in recreational activities, supporting their financial independence and possibilities to freely move and attend various activities including their involvement

“The living conditions in the Institution are very bad. Now they live better. Food hygiene, care. Huge differences. Now when you enter the houses, you can see that it is a home. Personal plans are important but there are challenges, such as lack of staff, because the prices of services are very low” – said one of the project partners.

The project intervention nourished and promoted the interlinkages with the other two EU projects operating in the same area and working with the same target group. Moreover, even in the pandemic times it did manage to adapt some of its actions to avoid replication of activities, so that the general outputs result in more effective approach.

EFFICIENCY CRITERIA

The Project was planned originally to be implemented with the course of three years (2020-2022), but due to several important challenges encountered it was extended until end of March 2023. The extension of the project did occur for two main reasons: (1) the Covid- 19 pandemic crisis in 2020 coincided with the start of the project implementation, and (2) change of a project partner, hampered substantially the implementation of the project activities. For the entire 2020, the project team had no direct access to users due to Covid 19 protective measures, thus obliging the project team to react by undertaking risk mitigation strategy and adapt some of its project activities, in coordination with the donor, and implement part of the activities planned for that year. The project team reacted quite proactively, and due to the impossibility to meet online, shifted all the capacity building activities (trainings to the professionals by the Slovenian experts) online. This budget revision did not impact the implementation of activities foreseen in the project document and did not impact the achievement of the respective project outputs.

Although this Evaluation is not a financial audit nor cost-benefit analysis, it is important to note that basic observations of resource allocations indicate positive results. The funds were allocated to the planned activities, and no major budget re-allocations were made during the implementation. There have been some reallocations but within the allowed framework – up to 25% without interfering the proved budget structure. Financial management and the operational implementation of activities have not faced any problems. The project is in its final phase. So far, there is no evidence demonstrating financial management and implementation issues.

The Project budget was executed in line with the annual work plans as approved by the donor. The project team was very efficient in taking smart decisions which improved the efficiency of its actions. There were actions where the budget was reallocated from one budget line to other with the aim to

increase its efficiency, which is the case with the house adaptation with the elevators, budget reallocated from printed materials.

Project monitoring framework is well established. The indicator framework is well developed and enables precise monitoring of the achieved results. The indicators are SMART and specific enabling adequate measurement of result.

The ET would like to acknowledge the PIN's project management team for putting a great emphasis into coordinating with the other EU projects working in the same field. As ET learned on an initiative of PIN an ad-hoc coordination body was created managed by MoLSP. In addition, PIN's project management team included all projects in implementation of their activities making all results more effective and efficient and ensuring that the funds are spent on as wider as possible spectrum of support.

Overall, the Project had very good delivery rates and demonstrated readiness to adjust to the new normality caused by COVID-19 and other unpredicted issues. The budget planning was done accurately and based on existing market prices. No other issues have been noted.

IMPACT CRITERIA

Despite the fact that the project is still ongoing and it is too early to estimate full impact of the project, the evaluation evidence points to the initial achievement of the results and to the processes that create prerequisites for the full desired impact at several levels: national, institutional, community as well as individual levels.

At the national level, the project results are visible directly influencing the implementation of the National strategy of DI process and the decisions taken by the relevant parties, such as the main actor of the DI process the MoLSP which has undertaken the overall support both institutionally and financially of the small group homes established. This process might indirectly impact other related institutions such as the MoES and MoH undertaking policies to fully support the inclusion of the PwIDs in all levels of educational processes and in social and health care systems.

On the institutional level the results are more obvious, but yet the impact is uncertain. The fact that DKSI institution is transformed represents a great result. All this was achieved through a combination of efforts by providing trainings to its staff, helping the institution in its transformation process, supporting the resource center, establishing the small group homes and raising awareness in the community. Moreover, the Slovenian expertise offered to the DKSI staff helped them change or at least comprehends the approach towards the clients and to see them as human beings with wants and desires, despite the persistence of the old institutional practices, such as not following the methodology provided in the training. Despite its great results the impact of the same is uncertain having in mind the existence of traditional norms and beliefs within the institution culture.

On the individual level the project did have the most obvious and evident impact. As a result of it has changed the lives of, 45 (by the end of project) ChwIDs and PwIDs by resettling them into communities, as opposed to institutions. They are 100% happier with the current living conditions, have more opportunities to socialize and feel closer to the community.

On the community level, the project worked on raising awareness and promoting the rights of people with intellectual disabilities to live within the community. They had successful advocacy campaigns, including an event in Negotino where children drew with people with intellectual disabilities. The project also established community service providers and trained the institution staff to provide better services.

SUSTAINABILITY AND REPLICABILITY

The MoLSP has demonstrated its interest and dedication in leading the reforms in DI which apart from the state budget, it did manage to get support by three EU funded projects that have created new facilities and strengthened existing ones. Sustainable and continuous care of the services related to the PwIDs represents a really complex process requiring extraordinary efforts. The EU and other donors in the country continuously assist this process such is the case with the development of the National strategy, provision of technical and project support to be able to advance the DI in the country. So far, 60-70% of the predicted reforms have been done but there is still a lot to do.

The MoLSP persistence to support the DI process and the proper inclusion of the PwIDs provides confidence that there is institutional will and dedication to make the project outputs sustainable. But, in order to be able to talk about long-term sustainability of the services, there are several important issues that needs to be taken into consideration. Even though the MoLSP will undertake the overall management of the small group homes established during the project, yet it should be bear in mind that the budget allocated for this purpose is below the actual cost limits, and potential shift of national priorities might harm the project results.

“The ministry has prepared and adopted a methodology for the price at which it works, and every year the minister decides on the price of services. A budget of 7.2 million was passed for services. The number of employed people, licensed services, etc. has increased. The biggest challenge is care services, they are the most difficult work and a complex process”- as representative from the MoLSP said.

Capacities of caregivers and other professionals in small group homes are developed to a certain extent, but sustainability of this resource depends on the stability of staff. In case of high turnover, this project legacy might be lost. Continuous capacity building of the staff and most importantly finding effective strategies to maintain them, represents a prerequisite for the sustainability and replicability of project results.

Another prerequisite to ensure sustainability will be establishing a network and nurturing inter-institutional communication between relevant stakeholders (various ministries, local authorities, NGOs, donors etc.) to undertake coordinated efforts in regard to the inclusiveness processes of the PwIDs and ensure they equal rights in education, labour, social and health care systems.

In general, the sustainability of the project depends on the MoLSP and the private providers, as well as additional funds from the EU and other donors. The Ministry has a functioning system to financially support the social service providers and those who are resettled will not go back to institutions. The EU will not continue to finance projects supporting the DI but will ensure technical expertise in the upcoming period.

“We can say that 60-70% of the reforms have been done, but still there is a lot to work on and a significant effort is needed for that. The basis of decentralization is also a segment of social protection and law. Cooperation with the local community should best strengthened. Coordination efforts from the municipalities should continue, other departments and primary medicine should also work more because they are not always open to be available to our users. Also, the educational process requires solutions to make the transition from primary to secondary education with the help of personal and educational assistance. Skills of these users are needed through non-formally educated etc. adjustment for work and the like”- as representative from the MoLSP said.

CROSS- CUTTING ISSUES

This intervention clearly promotes the human rights for PwIDs (UN CRPD) with right-based approach. With their resettlement in the small group homes their human rights are protected, discrimination levels decreased and, especially the human rights of women who are even more vulnerable than men PwID are respected, all designed actions are in line with the European Parliament resolution of 13 December 2022 towards equal rights for persons with disabilities.

As an added value to this intervention is observed the component of self-advocacy of PwIDs. Although it's still considered in its first stage yet represents possibility to increase their potential to defend for their rights and enhance their position in the society. The baby steps of this activity suggest that the PwIDs increased their ability to make basic decisions about their daily routines and activities closely related to their environment. However, limitations, such as communication with local authorities and their inclusion in decision making still has way to go.

The inclusiveness process of PwIDs in North Macedonia has not yet reached its desired outcome, which obviously goes beyond this intervention. On a longer term, there is a need for more support for the PwIDs' wellbeing, such as social, health and educational support, and for the development of their skills and potential, which are in line with the SDG goals (Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of life-long learning opportunities; Goal 8 promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, Goal 10 strives to reduce inequality within and among countries by empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all and Goal 11 on trying to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe and sustainable.

5.2 Evaluation findings by target groups

5.2.1 Summary of interview's results with the key stakeholders

Interview with project leaders

A coordination body was established by the EU delegation and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MOLSP) to address duplication of activities in three (3) projects granted by the EU to the same institution. In response to an urgent request from the ministry, two (2) houses were rented and prepared in 2 months for resettlement of clients from the institution. However, the resettlement process took more time, due to the non-readiness of the DKSI staff for a change, from an institutionalized institution to a decentralized system took some time to adapt and accept it. They declared to receive repetitive trainings from various organizations and can become confused and frustrated. Despite efforts to provide tailored trainings by Slovenian experts, the staff were not motivated. At the end, the Slovenian experts were unhappy with the trained staff who kept their old habits and practices.

The only way to change the staff's attitudes is to have all clients resettled into the houses and have the staff work in the houses with smaller groups of clients. The project leaders perceive the project results to be sustainable. The Ministry has a system for social service providers. The ones who are resettled will not go back in institution. EU will not continue to finance and the Ministry is not so good with the budget. One thing that we can do is to lobby with the Ministry. This year the EU funds are allocated to the energy and MOLSP does not see the interest from the institutionalization. Finally, involvement of MOLSP or even development of partnership with them could have been done better.

Interview with the project partners

The partners perceived the project improved social protection and social inclusion of persons with disabilities in North Macedonia through deinstitutionalization. The implementation faced challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, institutional obstacles, and a slow transformation process that requires the development of new skills among caregivers and municipalities. Despite these challenges, the project is considered relevant to the national context and the resources used efficiently to achieve its goals.

The project has had positive impacts on the beneficiaries, who now have improved living conditions, better food hygiene and care. As partners declared, the project mainstreamed gender and social inclusion in its implementation by including everyone who was offered to participate, without any exclusion policy. The self-advocates are actively involved in the project, making budgets in the municipalities and participating in activities that bring the community closer to them. The project was well planned but faced challenges that required more time for implementation. Due to the already defined circumstances, the project activities planned for 3 years were actually executed in the last one and a half (1,5) year. One of the obstacles is that the deinstitutionalization is perceived only from the perspective of better care for the beneficiaries, instead of their full inclusion in the society. The partners emphasized that there is a need for involvement of students and young professionals in the DI, and later in the work with PwID. KRIK, one of the project partners, continues to work with the center and has licenses from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Interview with the Director of Demir Kapija Special Institution

She highlighted that the whole project contributes towards strengthening the social protection system and social inclusion of persons with disabilities in North Macedonia confirming the project's support received by the ministry and municipality. The project organized trainings for the institution's employees to enhance their skills. From the very beginning, the director requested the trainings to be focused on the real needs and we told in which topics we need more knowledge.

She informed about the resistance from the employees to participate in the project. The project team and the director were persistent and sent the employees to try to work in the small homes. *“At the end we managed to break the resistance, they were afraid from losing a job, and we proved the exact opposite”* – as the director said.

The final beneficiaries, persons with disabilities, reported their lives have improved as a result of the project. The project's benefits are expected to last but the shortage of care givers remains the main concern. The prospects of the project being sustained are good with the support of the municipality and the local institution, but the sustainability of the project depends on the availability of human resources to a large extent according to the director.

The future activities and/or projects in this area should be focused on socialization of the persons with disability focusing on ensuring education and health services for them.

Interview with the mayor of municipality of Demir Kapija

The mayor presented the social inclusion process in Demir Kapija which started two years ago. This was one of the first and rare municipalities to adopt a plan for social protection, including the transformation of the DKSI into small group homes for people with disabilities as he proudly shared.

“We were one of the first and rare municipalities that has adopted a plan for social protection. We were part of the social inclusion process in general, including other measures as well. But the transformation of the DKSI from a large institution into small group homes where the conditions are much better for person with disabilities is one of the processes that we have been part of”- said the mayor of municipality Demir Kapija.

The mayor saw similar processes in France and believes that the project has been successful in socializing the people with disabilities and improving their living conditions. The MOLSP is the relevant institution for the process and they need to prepare the citizens and integrate the people with disabilities. The project has also improved the employment and quality of life of the caregivers and clients.

Interview with the representative from the EU Delegation

The interviewed person acted as a project’s task manager since the start of the project. He witnessed that the project faced some challenges, such as a change of partners and the impact of Covid-19, but overall, it has been deemed relevant and in line with the Strategy for social assistance reform in North Macedonia. The task manager has cooperated well with the project consortium and the project has been compatible with other interventions in the country. He believes the project has been effective and efficient, though the impact is difficult to measure at this stage.

“The project was evaluated as very relevant, and it has complied with all conditions. It’s fully in line with the strategy as well as our concept in the reforms of the EU of the social assistance in North Macedonia” – said the representative from the EU Delegation.

The sustainability of the project will depend on the MOLSP and other partners, and a continuation of technical assistance for the monitoring and evaluation of the houses has been planned.

Interview with representative from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

The representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MOLSP) in North Macedonia shared how they have been leading the process of deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities and strengthening the social protection system and social inclusion of these individuals. The Ministry cooperated with the PIN project, Eptisa and other funded EU projects, and played a coordinating role to avoid overlapping of all projects. The cooperation was intensive at the beginning, but later allowed PIN to strengthen its connections with stakeholders. The Ministry has achieved results through the opening of homes and transformation of institutions for the disabled, and has strengthened service providers.

Despite challenges such as resistance from employees, insufficient housing, and lack of caregiver interest, the Ministry is working towards ensuring sustainability and replicability of the project. The ministry has a budget for the services that need to be provided to the persons with disabilities, has increased the number of licensed private providers, and has adopted a methodology for pricing services.

The biggest challenge is in providing care services. The Ministry will continue to receive support from the EU delegation and other donors. 60-70% of the reforms have been done, but there is still a lot of work to be done, particularly in decentralization including strengthening the cooperation with the local community and other departments, and primary medicine.

Interview with Slovenian experts

The Slovenian experts trained the caregivers as well as the coordinators that were working in the Demir Kapija Institution. One of the trainings was dedicated to a group of people who were establishing the day center.

The cooperation with the project partners, including People in Need and KRIK, was maintained through zoom. The experts mentions that the three EU-funded projects were in line with the strategy and improved living conditions, but the impact on social inclusion of the final beneficiaries is questionable. The project's implementation was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of coordination among the three projects and the institution. Accordingly, to the experts, the trainings were very successful but there were lack of cooperation and coordination with the home institution. The participants were not interested in the trainings and there was a lack of leadership from the institution.

“Just to add as an idea that the team in Skopje, maybe could be also the one providing training or supporting people working in institutions, because they got the point of the process, and they could also support them on some way. We did provide training to KRIK and they provided to the clients and it went quite well. We delivered the trainings into Serbo-Croatian so we could understand Macedonian”-as the Slovenian experts highlighted.

5.2.2 Summary of survey results assessing satisfaction of PwIDs resettled into group homes

Demographic Data

Out of 30 clients in the small group homes, 29 participated in the survey. 33.3% of them were able to respond on their own, while 66.7% participated with the help of caregivers or other professional staff. The participants ranged in age, but most were older, with 31% being between 51-64 years old and the least represented being 19-30 years old (3.4%). The gender representation was almost even, with women being slightly overrepresented (53.8%) compared to men (46.2%).

Individual Perception of Personal Well-Being

All participants (100%) responded that they liked their current living place and were satisfied with it. When asked about the comparison between the current houses and the institution, only 15 of 29 respondents answered, and all of them preferred the current houses to the institution. 88.9% of respondents share a room with a roommate, while 11.1% have a private room. 76.2% are happy with the current conditions, while 23.8% would like some changes. All participants (27 of 29) have friends in the house and feel more socialized. 59.3% rarely socialize outside the house, 37% never do, and 3.7% often do. 66.7% do not have a partner, while 33.3% do. 81.5% rated their health as good, 14.8% as relatively good, and 3.7% as relatively bad. 66.7% consider their neighbours treat them well, 29.6% relatively well, and 3.7% relatively bad. 50% communicate regularly with their families, with 53.8% communicating often, 30.8% sometimes, and 15.4% rarely. 57.7% contribute to maintaining the home, while 42.3% do not. 100% are completely satisfied with the care and support received in the group home.

Access to community services

When asked about how often clients go out of the house, the majority stated that they go out sometimes 77.8%, 14.8 rarely and 7.4% never go out. None of them sated that they go out often.

When they go out in 100% of the cases spend time in the community- walking. None of them stated other options offered such as attending a cultural/sporting event, visiting friends/relatives or other

reasons. Asked about whether they have visited a doctor (dentist, eye doctor, other specialist) in the last 6 months, the majority stated that they have not visited any doctor 59.3% while 40.7% stated that they did. The visit to the doctor was rated as very good with 25% and 75% as good.

Majority of participants stated that they have not learned anything new in the last 3 months 70.4% and about 29.6% stated that they did. Among the things they learned they stated: “here I learnt how to write the alphabet, peel potatoes, I learned to make necklaces, to clean, I learned new songs, to dance, to make necklaces, rings, I don't do the bad habits I did in the institution, I was swearing, fighting..., I learned to go to the toilet alone, here I learned to make cakes, rolls, salad, here he learned to control his physiological needs etc. When asked about their willingness to learn new things, majority of them could not state anything in particular of what they would like to learn.

And even when asked about do they want to learn to play an instrument or crafts, the majority stated that they do not like 80.8%, and only 19.2% stated that they would like to learn, five respondents said that would like to learn to play kaval, to play harmonic or to learn to disassemble toys (probably kind of lego blocks).

There was a question related to the religion they practice, their beliefs, but participants were not able to respond, therefore it was excluded from the survey.

Asked about their willingness to work/help in the community, the majority stated that they will not want to 70.4% and 29.6% stated that they will like to but so far have not been offered such an opportunity.

The majority of respondents 96.3% do not attend recreational activities, while only 3.7% said that they do attend recreational activities.

About 38.5% stated to have ever participated in meetings or forums where they could tell their needs to the municipal employees, the councillors or the mayor, and the majority 61.5% stated that haven't.

On the question, if given the possibility to express their needs to local authorities, what would they ask among the articulated requests will be: cooperation with the municipality to offer transportation services, visit to the hairdresser, and packages for the new year.

Asked about how often they can buy something they want, the majority 77.8% stated that can never do that, 3.7% sometimes and 18.5% stated that always can buy whenever they want.

Asked about their plans for the next period, of what would they like to do most of the answers were related to family bonding such as: *visiting my mother, to live close to my brother in Veles, to hear from my family, to visit my brother etc.*

84.6% of responders stated that would recommend other friends from the Institute to move to small group homes because: *it's nicer here, we can hang out together, because it's beautiful, here are better conditions.* Whereas of those 15.4% that stated that won't recommend their friends among stated reasons where: *I won't recommend because we used to fight with them, or do not understand the question.*

5.2.3 Summary of online survey results assessing the impact of the trainings in daily work of care givers

The questionnaire included 30 caregivers and professionals from the small group homes and the institution that participated in at least one training offered by the project to assess the impact of training on their work.

The majority of the staff (93.3%) involved in the survey were employees engaged in small group homes, of which 73.3% in the category of caregivers. Most participants were middle age (36 to 45 years old).

Asked about caregiver's perception related to their needs for new skills / training, the majority of them stated that: 56.7% need new formal training; 53.3% believe that the workplace requires adequate support from the relevant institutions: 63.6% answered that they need informal trainings and support, 60% stated that they need coaching/counselling and on-the-job training and 70% of the participants answered that there is a need for follow-up trainings. This clearly demonstrates that the majority of them are aware of their need to continue and develop professionally through continuous educational support (formal, non-formal training) as well as on job counselling.

93% of caregivers are aware of the trainings and project activities delivered under the project "Getting a life"- Deinstitutionalization of residents from DKSI".

As per the awareness of the project activities implemented under the same project, caregivers stated that they know and are aware about the following project activities: development of the transformation plans (23.3%), mapping of needs and creation of plans (16.7%), and establishment of services (13.3%). This confirms that the project has been recognized among caregivers and especially with the activities closely related to their field of work.

In regards to their participation in the delivered trainings by this project 33.3% of them confirmed to have participated in 1-2 trainings, 30% of them in more than 5 trainings, 26.7% in 2-3 trainings and 10% haven't participated in any training. The majority of them have participated in at least 1-2 trainings.

When asked about which training did, they liked the most: 43.3% of participants stated that they liked the teamwork training related to providing customer service, 26.7% liked the training on creating personal plans for customers and 13.3% liked the training related to creation of plans for resettling clients. The majority of the caregivers (56.7%) hat would recommend the trainings to their colleagues. This demonstrates that the training has brought satisfaction to the caregivers as they want to recommend to their peers.

Caregivers assessed the trainings quite positively: 63.3% of them said they would use the obtained knowledge in their personal or professional life; 66.6% of caregivers found the trainings relevant to their job, 96% assessed the trainers as very skilled in delivering the trainings; 80% of participants agreed that the basic principles of inclusiveness and interaction were used during the training and 80% of the participants agree that during the trainings special attention was given to the particular needs of the participants. This clearly shows impact of the trainings, as the majority of them will use the obtain knowledge in their daily work. The trainings were assessed as well as inclusive, interactive, delivered by proper experts and offering individual attention to participants.

In regards to possible feedback from the trainings 96.7% of caregivers stated that everything was perfectly organized and tailored accordingly. There was a comment related to the lack of certificates issued which would demonstrate their participation in the trainings. 13% of caregivers faced difficulties following the training. Some expressed their non-willingness to attend several times same/similar trainings due to their long working shifts which leaves no space for extra activities.

Asked about potential benefits from those trainings 86.7% of caregivers believe that their colleagues in other small group homes and in the DKSI would benefit the most from such trainings.

Caregivers will be interested to attend future trainings that are related to: advanced training on team work related to service provision to the clients (50%); how to develop effective participatory approaches between staff and PwIDs for the entire transformation process, and advanced training on drafting personal plans for clients (13.3%).

5.2.4 Summary of results from FGDs with the self-advocates

The results of the FGDs with the PwIDs self-advocates were related mostly to their daily routines and the ways they exercise their basic rights. On the questions related to Do you know your rights? Name some of them? 100% of them responded individually that since the moment they have been resettled in small group homes they are in position to be able to decide on their basic rights, such as what to be in the daily menu, which clothes to wear in a particular day, what they would like to do in their free time and even express their desires for their future. Asked about their consent when of resettling process, all of them 100% said that agreed to move, and are very happy with the new life style, they have decent conditions, heating, food, clothes, privacy even shared TV. If asked, would they want to go back to the institution, all 100% clearly said NO.

Additionally, when asked Do you decide in the house when some changes are made (menu, house order, plan for the week, rearrangement, decoration, room arrangement? How do you decide, what is the process describe? They did repeat the ability to choose and even propose the menu, choose their clothes. On the question related Do you choose the foods you want to eat? 60% of PwIDs (self-advocates) were able to choose between two offered options of food, clothes, activities etc., whereas the 40% can even propose completely new option and even express desires. On the question Can you choose the clothes to wear? All participants 100% said yes, but did stress that they lack options of clothes, even suggesting donations in regards to that. Moreover, some of them stated that do actively contribute with the house arrangement (cleaning, making their clothing), a smaller number 40% are involved around preparing their own food (peel potatoes and other vegetables, put the dishes in the table etc.).

In regard to their communication with the local authorities, when where asked the question: Can you tell the municipality what your needs are? Where and with whom do you communicate in the municipality? PwIDs where not able to respond regarding the way they communicate with them, but did express their needs and what do they lack at the moment: for example, some of them stressed the need to have some financial stability (to have their own money) to be able to exercise their right and buy something they want. Additionally, some of them mentioned that would appreciate if he has phone so that he can communicate with his family (in this particular case with his brother). Someone else, mentioned the lack of transport support to be able to freely move, in particular to be able to participate in some cultural activities, or at least to go for a trip visit. Another member even articulated the lack of leisure tools and activities which will help them develop their skills and potential. It was mentioned that it would be great for them if they had handcraft materials and tools to be able to exercise and practice, even requesting music instrument to be able to practice, leisure tools (sport materials, balls and others).

Questioned about is there something you would like the municipality to do it for you? And do you know how to ask the institutions for something that will improve your life? All 100% said that it would be good if there are possibilities to support their wellbeing through provision of social and health support, by covering some expenses related to their cutting their hair, bring some healthy medical tools to exercise. Some of them (20%) even think that their life would be even more joyful if they would

have TVs in their own rooms, computer and so on to offer them more privacy. Other 40% believe that having washing machines, air condition and other utilities will improve their live conditions. Even though 100% of them are quite satisfied with their current living conditions and would never want to come back to the institution. One of them even said “We should live like the rest” clearly demonstrating her willingness of being treated on equal terms.

In regards to some of the questions that require more critical and in depth thinking, participants were not able to respond such as the questions: Do you know how to respond to someone who does not respect your rights? How do you do that? When you say your opinion that is different from others how do people react to it? How often can you assert your opinion in a group? If someone is denying you your rights, do you know where to report it? Which institutions should protect you? Do they teach you here how to fight for children and their rights? What do they teach you? How do they do it? Explain how you would fight (advocate) for your rights?

Apart from their limited capabilities another issue that might have prevented them to be able to respond to the mentioned questions, is their limitations regarding their proper inclusion in the society. Most of them do not go out to public to participate in public events, being cultural or at least go for a walk, have a coffee or spend some time in a park, in a school yard with kids, or even visit the municipality where they will feel as part of the society and by the time be able to develop more critical thinking, and be aware of the rights. Because not being aware of something that exists, they are not in a position to think about what they are lacking or what they do deserve to have it as they basic right. These are only assumption based on the fact that, while residing in the institutions they were not aware of their utmost basic rights such as the possibility to choose what to eat, with whom to play cards or share rooms, and not even think about articulating desires. During the project, with the resettlement process, apart from their improving of living conditions, they did develop some of their critical thinking capabilities, such as their thinking about options and possibilities of their wellbeing. Now they can articulate what they are missing, what would they want to do in their free time, develop some skills, or even indirectly suggest what the municipality can do for them and even propose actual activities. This is a process, but indeed the project has clearly contributed to their wellbeing first and then contributed to improve their self-advocacy capabilities. Certainly, this path should be continued, enhanced and enriched with continuous actions aiming to develop their self-advocate capacities, as they best what they need, so that can be fully integrated in the society as they should not because of mercy but because they develop a voice and fight for their rights.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The project “Getting a Life” - Deinstitutionalisation of Residents of Demir Kapija Institution aimed at deinstitutionalization in North Macedonia was well-designed and relevant to the needs of the beneficiaries. It had a significant impact on the care and support for people with disabilities, including improving their living conditions and capacities for self-advocacy. The project faced some challenges, including resistance from employees and limited resources, but was successful in achieving its objectives and changing the lives of 45 people with intellectual disabilities. The project was well-monitored, and the budget was allocated effectively. The project partners acknowledged the challenges faced but emphasized the positive impact of the project on the beneficiaries.

The sustainability of the project is a concern, but the support from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, provides confidence in its continued success. The EU Delegation and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy considered the project relevant and effective, but the impact is difficult to measure.

It was evaluated that the project had a significant positive impact on the care and support for people with disabilities in the targeted region. The design of the intervention was relevant to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries and was in line with the National Strategy on Deinstitutionalization and the Common European Guidelines on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care. The project activities have helped to strengthen the capacities of the Demir Kapija Institution (DKSI) in providing community-based services for people with intellectual and physical disabilities, improve their living conditions, and increase their capacities for self-advocacy. The establishment of small group homes for PWDs has had a positive impact on their wellbeing and individual satisfaction.

Despite challenges such as resistance from employees and limited resources, the project has been effective in achieving its objectives, including the transformation of the DKSI into a national resource centre for deinstitutionalization and the establishment of various types of community-based services for PWLD in the Vardarski region.

The project was extended due to the challenges faced, including the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and the change of a project partner. The financial management of the project was well executed, and the budget was allocated to the planned activities with some reallocations within the allowed framework. The project monitoring framework was well established and the indicators were SMART and specific, enabling adequate measurement of results. The project had good delivery rates and demonstrated readiness to adjust to new challenges. The initial impact of the project was visible at the national, institutional, community and individual levels, with the most obvious impact being seen at the individual level. The project was successful in changing the lives of 45 people with intellectual disabilities by resettling them into communities. The Ministry of Labour, Social Policy, and Equal Opportunities (MoLSP) demonstrated its interest and dedication in leading the reforms in the disability inclusion process and has received support from EU-funded projects. The MoLSP's persistence in supporting the disability inclusion process provides confidence in the sustainability of the project outputs. However, long-term sustainability will require continued support from the EU and other donors.

The interviews with key stakeholders provided valuable insights into the impact of the project on social protection and social inclusion of persons with disabilities in North Macedonia. The project management acknowledged the challenges faced during the implementation of the project, such as resistance from the institutionalized staff and a slow transformation process. Despite these challenges, the project partners and the director of the Demir Kapija Special Institution emphasized the positive impacts of the project on the beneficiaries, who have improved living conditions and better care. The mayor of the municipality of Demir Kapija also praised the project for being successful in socializing people with disabilities and improving their quality of life.

The main concern for the sustainability of the project was the shortage of care givers, but the prospects for sustainability were considered good with the support of the municipality and the local institution. The future activities and projects in this area should focus on socialization and providing education and health services for people with disabilities.

The representative from the EU Delegation believes the project was effective and efficient, though the impact is difficult to measure. The representative from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy mentioned the ministry's role in leading the process of deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities and strengthening the social protection system and social inclusion of these individuals. Despite challenges such as resistance from employees and lack of caregiver interest, the ministry is working towards ensuring sustainability and replicability of the project. The Slovenian experts trained caregivers and coordinators and considered the trainings to be successful, but noted the lack of cooperation and coordination with the home institution and the lack of interest from participants in the trainings. They suggested that the team in Skopje could provide training or support to people working in institutions to better understand the process.

A survey among 29 clients resettled into group homes indicated high levels of satisfaction with their current living conditions and care. The participants preferred their current homes over the institution and felt more socialized. However, they had limited access to community services and opportunities to learn new things.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The final evaluation suggests that the project on oncoming future phases needs to undertake the following measures:
- **Overall Recommendation:** To continue its efforts in DI processes by strengthening the institutional and human capacities of the DKSI in becoming a “real” national resource centre, scaling up the service centers for PwIDs and finalize the resettlement of residential institution clients back into the community.
- The MoLSP as a leader in the DI reforms despite coordinating the efforts with the international donors such as EU funds, UNICEF and other bilateral donations, has undertaken considerable steps to be able to overcome the challenges deriving a decade ago when the DI process started. With coordinated efforts about 60-70% of the reforms have been done. To be able to successfully implement the DI process it will be recommended to:
- Identify and implement effective strategies to maintain the human resources engaged in the process, especially the caregivers in the small group homes. The experience demonstrates that the human capital is not maintained well (trained staff leave the job) for reasons not quite related to the DI process, but still affect the same. Try to model partnership with educational institutions to ensure that enough human capacities are available, for example partnership with Faculties for students whose studies will be paid and they will work in the small homes afterwards. There is a lot of potential for employment of caregivers, not only for PwID, but also for the elderly people, etc. Thus, there is a need to systematize this position into profession.
- Commitment towards DI and the Strategy, both financially and in reforms, and proactively look for partnership support from the international organizations and bilateral diplomatic representations. Delegation of the EU tends to continue its efforts in the finalization of the DI process and although in different ways (not project base) will continue supporting this process through technical support, yet requires efforts to identify the urgent needs in this process.
- Enhance the cooperation with the local authorities and other sector (civil sector and private one) so local players can not only be active in the DI process but as well become the driver force for the proper inclusiveness process of the DI.
- Look for gradation and adaptation models when it comes to service providers and the conditions of the houses, since the project did face some issues related to finding appropriate buildings to comply with the criteria which is quite difficult to meet.
- Making efforts to increase the financial support per PwID since even before the inflation the provided support is not fully covering the basic needs of the ChwIDs and PwIDs. The existing support is covering mainly the basic needs, but not extra funds for educational, cultural and leisure activities, which will increase their quality of life.
- Work on awareness raising campaign in regards to the DI process and the proper inclusion of ChIDs and PwIDs in the society, as resettling process as the first step of the DI needs to be developed towards their acceptance in the society, inclusion in the educational systems, labour market and in decision making.
- Proactively facilitate their connections with mainstream services (health care, church, cultural activities, local infrastructure).
- To include biological family into the DI process deinstitutionalisation, and provide support services for biological families in order to have more PwID living in their natural homes.



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