## AMPLIFYING LOCAL VOICES FOR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT DOBROTASMILEPËRGAFIM APDIMMËPIA

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...Amplifying Local Voices for Equitable Development... LJUBAVDASHURILOVE



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...All terms used in the masculine grammatical gender include the masculine and feminine gender of the persons to which they refer...



The story of the Amplifying Local Voices for Equitable Development (ALVED) project is not an ordinary story supported by numbers and other statistical data, but a story whose epilogue means a lot of new friendships and working collaboration experiences by which each participant improved themselves first of all, and then the community they live in. For almost three years (from September 2020 to March 2023), all generations of residents of Vranje, Bujanovac and Lebane collaborated and implemented **over 100 different activities**, often joined by the activists from Presevo who also made a great contribution to the overall results. The primary aim of these activities was to foster empathy among citizens in the south of Serbia, encourage active citizenship, and celebrate diversity.

The focus of the ALVED project was on three important areas: participatory planning of social services, the needs and concerns of young people, as well as strengthening local civil society organisations. The total number of direct beneficiaries in all aspects of the project is close to 6,000, but the number of people who have had an indirect benefit from the activities is far greater.

The project was successfully implemented in Serbia by a consortium led by the organisation Peaceful Change initiative (PCi), in close cooperation with People in Need (PIN) and in partnership with Civic Initiatives (CI), with funding provided by the Government of the United Kingdom.

In the following pages, we will present activities that are more than project activities, because for the ALVED team, and we hope for all the participants as well, they mean a small school of life that we went through together...



Participatory Social Service Planning (PSSP) is a collaborative approach to social service planning which involves all stakeholders in the local community - users of social services, civil society organisations, local authorities, government agencies, and social service providers. The main objective of the PSSP is to ensure that the needs and interests of the most vulnerable groups are taken into account in a transparent, systematic, and cooperative manner. The PSSP aims to alleviate poverty

non-monetary support from the local selfgovernments of Vranje, Bujanovac and Lebane, as well as ALVED grants. The impact of the PSSP can be seen in the work of organisations such as Association for Assistance to Mentally Underdeveloped Persons - MNRO in Vranje, which provides crucial support to users with disabilities, such as multiple sclerosis, improving their quality of life and social status.

Similarly, the Association Fenniks in Lebane offers daycare services for children with

> developmental disabilities. Through cooperation with the municipality, a complete reconstruction of the daycare facility has begun, with the aim of maximising improvement and providing enriched resources for the children.

> The Youth Forum for Education of Roma in Bujanovac is dedicated to providing equal opportunities in education and social inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as poor families and the Roma

community, supporting children's education through financial assistance, free textbooks and incentives for regular attendance and academic performance.

Other organisations, such as the Roma Cultural Centre in Vranje, focus on the prevention of social dysfunction, while the Human Rights Committee Vranje - SOS telephone provides a reliable and sustainable SOS telephone to women who are victims of domestic violence. Similarly, the Association of Roma Women in Bujanovac has taken proactive measures to bridge the communication gap for victims of violence by hiring and training staff who can provide support in three languages: Serbian, Albanian and Roma.

The PSSP approach has had a positive impact on social protection services in Bujanovac, by creating a web page of the Centre for social work through the joint efforts of the Association The Future, the Municipality of Bujanovac, and the Centre for Social Work.

the most vulnerable groups to participate in political dialogue on issues of social protection and inclusion.

By including all parties in the planning process, the PSSP promotes a holistic approach to social protection, ensuring that no one is neglected in the global efforts to achieve sustainable development goals.

Since 2016, People in Need has been working in the EU neighbourhood, drawing experience from the Czech Republic and adapting it to the local context. As a result, the PSSP approach has been successfully implemented in the south of Serbia, in the municipalities of Vranje, Bujanovac and Lebane, leading to the adoption of three action plans for the improvement of social services.

Several organisations in these municipalities have successfully implemented elements of the action plans to provide high-quality social services, with financial, infrastructural and

# **COMMUNITIES OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**





Local action plans for Vranje, Bujanovac and Lebane you can find here: <u>www.gradjanske.org/akcioni-planovi-</u> <u>usvojeni-tokom-alved-projekta/</u>

Video about social protection services that are implemented within the framework of action plans:

https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=a0Sz2w0fhMY&t=6s

#### Study visit to Prague

In order to further improve their efforts, representatives of all three municipalities participated in the study visit to the Czech Republic. Through interaction with local



Visit to the social enterprise Tulipan in Liberec, Czech Republic; photo: GI



Tour of Jedličkův ústav school's kitchen for training students in household chores and independent living; photo: Gl



Visit to the premises of the PIN Social Integration Program; photo: GI

organisations, social enterprises and institutions working to provide social services to vulnerable groups, 13 representatives from Vranje, Bujanovac and Lebane gained a comprehensive picture of an innovative and efficient approach to providing social services. The basis of our mission is a belief that education and practical



Visit to Jako Doma, an organisation providing care for homeless women; photo: Dragan Cvetković



*Visit to the People in Need premises in Prague, Czech Republic; photo: GI* experience have the capability to bring posit

experience have the capability to bring positive changes to the world.

The PSSP approach has surely helped to improve social services in these municipalities and pointed out the importance of cooperation and inclusion in creating sustainable and influential programmes.

### WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IS THE HEART OF THE ALVED PROJECT

A particularly important and challenging part of the project was working with young people, considering that a significant number of young individuals got involved in all

municipalities, over 1300 of them. We worked on some very important topics and covered areas that will have a long-term effect on them, both as individuals and as members of activist groups, who would continue to strive to make the place they live in a better place for all its members. All activities with young people were organised on their initiative and based on their wishes and needs.

#### • ACTIONS FOR THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE LIVING SPACES:

- Cleaning up the illegal landfill in Bujanovac
- Creating the Mural of Unity in Vranje
- Cleaning up the picnic area at Aleksandrovačko Lake near Vranje
- Planting of generation trees at the "Sezai Suroi" and "Sveti Sava" schools in Bujanovac
- Courtyard arrangement at the School of Chemical Technology in Vranje
- Arranging the sports field in Bujanovac
- Quay arrangement along the Šimanka River in Lebane
- Planting trees in the courtyard of the Gymnasium in Lebane
- Arranging the canteens at the "Sezai Suroi" and "Sveti Sava" schools in Bujanovac



Quay arrangement by the Šimanka River in Lebane; photo: GI





Planting of generation trees at "Sveti Sava" and "Sezai Suroi" schools; photo: Gl

Cleaning of the picnic area at Aleksandrovačko Lake in Vranje; photo: Gl



Creation of the "Mural of Unity" in Vranje; photo: Likovna Radionica Vranje (Art Workshop Vranje)



Courtyard arrangement at the School of Chemical Technology in Vranje; photo: GI



A significant number of young individuals participated in the cleanup of the illegal landfill in Bujanovac; photo: GI

#### • HUMANITARIAN ACTIONS:

- > Establishing and opening solidarity houses in Vranje, Bujanovac, Presevo, and Lebane
- Charity photoshoot for Vukan
- Distribution of New Year's presents for socially disadvantaged children
- Humanitarian workday at the "Radanska Ruža" social enterprise in Lebane



Distribution of New Year's presents for socially disadvantaged children in Bujanovac, Vranje, Presevo, and Lebane; photo: Gl



Opening of solidarity houses in Bujanovac, Vranje, Presevo and Lebane; photo: GI



Humanitarian working day by youth at the "Radanska ruža" social enterprise in Lebane; photo: Gl



Distribution of New Year's presents for socially disadvantaged children in Bujanovac, Vranje, Presevo, and Lebane; photo: Gl



*Opening of solidarity houses in Bujanovac, Vranje, Presevo and Lebane; photo: GI* 

#### • HIGHLIGHTING IMPORTANT DATES AND TOPICS:

- Marking of International Day of the Girl Child in Vranje
- > Panel discussion on the position of Roma women and the performance of the group Pretty Loud in Vranje
- Marking of International Youth Day
- Literary competition "Reveal the beauty of your region"
- Marking of International Women's Day
- Panel discussion "Why is it important to report partner violence?"
- Celebrating Earth Day in Vranje
- Supporting the worldwide campaign "One Billion Rising"
- Observing World Health Day in Bujanovac
- Study visit to "Radanska Ruža" on the occasion of International Women's Day



Marking of International Women's Day in Bujanovac; photo: Gl



Celebrating Earth Day by climbing Šiljati Kamen Hill near Vranje; photo: GI



Young people supporting the "One Billion Rising" campaign against violence towards women, Bujanovac; photo: GI



Panel discussion on the position of Roma women and the performance of the group Pretty Loud in Vranje; photo: GI

#### • TRAINING AND WORKSHOPS ON VARIOUS TOPICS (CONDUCTED IN SERBIAN/ALBANIAN/ENGLISH):

- Youth activism
- Basics of photography
- Mobile journalism
- Video editing
- Entrepreneurship
- Human rights
- Digital skills
- Interculturalism
- Gender equality
- Communication skills
- Media literacy
- Serbian language classes in Bujanovac and Presevo
- **English language classes in Vranje and Lebane**



Outdoor Serbian and English language lesson at the Zoo next to Vranje; photo: GI



The Serbian language course in Presevo raised great interest among young people; photo: GI



"From A to Equality and Freedom" training in Vranje; photo: GI



Training on gender equality in Leskovac; photo: GI



Training on photography organised in Albanian and Serbian; photo: GI



Outdoor English language course at the archaeological site of Justiniana Prima, Lebane; photo: GI

#### Internships

An especially important part of the work with young people were the internships in civil society organisations and the media, which were organised for young individuals from Bujanovac, Vranje, Lebane, and Presevo in two cycles. Out of the 13 young people who completed the one-month or two-month internships, as many as five of them managed to find a job immediately after the end of the program. We would like to express our gratitude to the following organisations and media for their cooperation: Human Rights Committee Vranje, CRTA, BOŠ, Proaktiv, Belgrade Centre for Rights, PreshevaPRESS, Human Bujanovačke, InfoVranjske and

JUGpress. One intern completed her internship at Civic Initiatives and has continued working there.



Young people from Bujanovac signing a volunteer contract with the Human Rights Committee in Vranje; photo: GI



Tour of the Assembly of Serbia as part of a study visit to Belgrade; photo: GI



The study visit to Belgrade was enjoyable and memorable; photo: GI



*Cl hosted a study visit to Belgrade for young people from Pristina, including socialising with students of the Albanian Studies department; photo: PEN* 



A unique experience for participants of the study visit: Exploring Belgrade's underground; photo: PEN

#### Study Visits: Belgrade and Pristina

The exchange of experiences, opinions and attitudes of young people from all municipalities is something ALVED insisted on, because by learning from each other, young people become more versatile and ready for life, but also for activism. The study visits of young people to **Belgrade in 2021** and **Pristina in 2022** were events that greatly marked the ALVED project. Young people from Presevo, Bujanovac, Lebane



Tour of Pristina during the study visit; photo: GI

and Vranje spent 5 days in Belgrade and 4 days in Pristina, getting to know the sights of the cities, but also learning a lot from each other about the Serbian and Albanian cultures. In both cities, young people visited civil society organisations working with young people, as well as cultural institutions and decisionmakers who are important for the development of young people in every aspect.

Apart from that, we hosted young people from Pristina on a study visit to Belgrade.

#### Local Youth Action Plan in Vranje

In order to systematically regulate youth work, there must be a strategic document that will ensure it. ALVED helped a group of young enthusiasts who wanted Vranje to adopt the Youth Action Plan again after six years. The members of the associations "Activists from the Neighbourhood", "Our world, our rules" and the Youth Office gathered together to, first of all, conduct research on the needs of young people, and later on, to adopt an official document, all the time professionally supported by a youth worker Ana Pecarski. With the support of the competent representatives of the local authorities, the Youth Action Plan was adopted at the end of 2021.

#### LAP for young people in Vranje: https://www.gradjanske.org/ wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ Strategija-unapredjenja-polozajamladih-u-Vranju.pdf

Working with young people in the south of Serbia resulted, among others, in the founding of a formal youth organisation in Bujanovac, "Youth Centre for Changes", and an informal one in Lebane. A longterm cooperation between students' parliaments of "Sveti Sava" and "Sezai Suroi" schools in Bujanovac was established, based on which they were also supported by an ALVED grant.



The ALVED team is proud of the remarkable cooperation between the student parliaments of "Sezai Suroi" and "Sveti Sava" schools in Bujanovac, showcasing the beauty of life in a multi-ethnic environment; photo: Beyond



### **ONE WORLD IN SCHOOLS (OWIS)**

The innovative teaching methodology, One World in Schools (OWIS), uses documentaries and interactive methods to inspire and educate future generations of active and engaged citizens. Developed by People in Need, OWIS covers a range of important issues and is designed to encourage critical thinking and promote a deeper understanding of the world around us.



Each OWIS class started with a documentary screening; photo: GI

By being present in 16 schools throughout Vranje, Bujanovac, Lebane and Presevo, OWIS trained 47 teachers and was effectively implemented in both formal educational systems and community-based structures, such as youth centres, thus ensuring a wide reach and longterm sustainability.

OWIS is integrated into schools as an additional

tool to support civic education curricula. The programme includes 11 documentaries and accompanying teaching materials that provide a methodological basis for working with the audiovisual materials and creating an interactive space for learning about a range of important topics. These topics include environmental behaviour, food waste, migrations, propaganda and misinformation, social media and advertising, cyber security, social exclusion based on sexual orientation, social cohesion, multigenerational dialogue, volunteering and diversity.

Through its engaging and interactive approach, OWIS has the potential to improve and enrich students' learning experience, helping to create a more informed, critical and active citizenry.



Cybersecurity as one of the topics covered in classes; photo: GI

#### **OWIS outside the classroom**

By empowering and inspiring young people to take action and initiate positive changes in their communities, OWIS goes beyond a simple documentary screening.

Inspired by the screenings of OWIS documentaries, the young citizens of Bujanovac organised an activity to promote social inclusion



Students from the "Sezai Suroi" school wrote essays inspired by OWIS documentaries and shared them with their peers; photo: GI

for migrants. They wrote essays on the topic of the struggle and resilience of migrants and displayed them in the school hall for other students to read. In addition, they visited the **Presevo Reception Center** in order to connect with their peers and convey a message of support and acceptance.



The OWIS documentary addressing migration and integration inspired young people from Bujanovac to visit their peers at the Reception Center in Presevo; photo: GI

Young people in Bujanovac launched an inspiring initiative to promote preventive health care measures and cooperation among Serbian, Albanian and Roma children. Through creative activities such as joint drawings and posters, **they successfully worked on raising awareness of the importance of preventive health care measures**. Additionally, they organised a lecture to highlight the connection between health and the environment.



Movie night in Presevo, fulfilling young people's desire to explore OWIS documentary themes; photo: Livrit

Drawing inspiration from OWIS documentaries, we have created a safe and engaging space for young people **to openly discuss mental health and promote well-being through open dialogue.** The theatre play "On the cliff", which was shown



Through the theatrical performance of the play "On the Cliff," by the association "Budi," we created a platform for discussion on the mental health of young people; photo: GI

in Vranje, Bujanovac and Lebane, presented the problems of mental health in a different and interesting way, encouraging young people to open up and share their thoughts and feelings.

#### IMPRESSIONS AND TESTIMONIALS FROM TEACHERS AND PARTICIPANTS:

"As a teacher, I have discovered that using documentaries is an excellent way to engage my students and stimulate their interest in our topics. Documentaries are a powerful tool that can help students better understand complex ideas, compared to just reading or listening to explanations. They bring topics to life and make them more meaningful and unforgettable."

"The film 'Children Online' raises awareness about the increasing misuse of images on social media and emphasises the importance of empathy, understanding, and family support, especially in our community where victims are often stigmatised."

► OWIS handbook in Albanian and Serbian languages: https://westernbalkans.peopleinneed.net/media/ publications/1915/file/web\_pin-prirucnik\_srb-globalnaedukacija\_avg2022.pdf

https://westernbalkans.peopleinneed.net/media/ publications/1916/file/web\_pin-toolkit-srb-globaleducation-with-films\_alb\_avg2022.pdf



### **STRONG LOCAL CSOs = ACTIVE SOCIETY**

Strengthening formal and informal citizen associations in the south of Serbia was one of the important tasks of the ALVED project, because only empowered and stable associations can actively engage in activism in the long run, even after the end of support through large projects, such as this one. Training sessions and workshops were organised based on the needs of members of the local associations:



*"It's never too early to change the world for the better" – This catchphrase guided us throughout the entire project; photo: Art Media Team, Vranje* 

- ► Managing finances and administration
- ► How to successfully prepare our project?
- ► Civic participation
- Providing social protection services

#### **Civil Society Fair**

In August 2022, a Civil Society Fair took place in Bujanovac, bringing together organisations from south of Serbia, specifically from municipalities involved in the ALVED project. The fair showed



Bujanovac youth basketball club "PLAY 017" because the world rests on the young; photo: Art Media Team, Vranje



Dominic Otway, Deputy Head of Mission at the British Embassy in Belgrade, opened the Civil Society Fair in Bujanovac; photo: Art Media Team, Vranje

in one place the initiatives led by the citizens of Bujanovac, Lebane and Vranje, but it was also a place where some ideas were exchanged and some new collaborations were born. Also, the



Local Voices: Civil Society Fair organised by People in Need; photo: Gl

presence of representatives of the British Embassy and all partners who lead the ALVED project, as well as municipal representatives, showed local organisations that they are not alone and that they have support in everything they do for the benefit of their fellow citizens.



When working cooperation turns into friendship - Radanska Ruža from Lebane; photo: Art Media Team, Vranje

### **ALVED GRANT SCHEMES**

PIN ran three grant schemes to provide funds to support local CSOs in the following areas: ► The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on communities (2021)

► The implementation of local action plans to improve social services (2022)

► Activating young people to promote positive changes in their communities (2022)



Fenniks: Presentation of daycare workshops; photo: PIN



A silent mime performance presented by the "Sveti Sava" and "Sezai Suroi" schools; photo: Beyond



The awarding of the first ALVED grants, capturing the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on communities; photo: PIN

Grant recipients were selected based on their ideas and visions to support the communities in which they live. For several grant recipients, it was the first project funded by an international donor. 19 grant contracts were awarded to the following local CSOs and their consortium members: way, the grant schemes built the capacities of civil society actors in municipalities in the south of Serbia, which will improve their ability to attract other donors and continue their work on important issues in their communities.

#### • RECIPIENTS OF ALVED GRANTS:

- Association Beyond
- Association Beyond + student parliaments from Sveti Sava and Sezai Suroi secondary schools
- Association of Roma Women Bujanovac 2 grants
- Women's Association Ruža Lebane + an informal group of secondary school students
- Centre for Equal Regional Development (CenTriR) + Women's Association Ruža Lebane
- Center for Activism Vranje
- Human Rights Committee Vranje (HRCVR) 2 grants
- Youth Forum for Education of Roma (OFER)
- Association The Future
- Association Fenniks
- Roma Cultural Center Vranjska Banja
- Association for Assistance to Mentally Underdeveloped Persons (MNRO)
- Youth Basketball Club Play 017 Bujanovac
- Association Our World, Our Rules
- Cultural Humanitarian Organization Alternativa Internacionale
- Association Team 42 + an informal group of secondary school students
- Union of Secondary School Students of Serbia (UNSS) + with Bora Stanković Secondary School



Cultural humanitarian organisation Alternativa Internacionale; photo: Alternativa Internacionale

PIN disbursed approximately **GBP 250,000** to grantees. There were **4,052 direct beneficiaries** of the grant projects.

PIN took a proactive approach to open communication in supporting these grassroots CSOs in improving their capacity to meet contractual requirements, including financial and narrative reporting, procurement of goods and services, as well as implementation, monitoring and evaluation activities. In this

### Citizen Lab "Zemlja za nas"

Another useful thing that ALVED leaves behind is the platform "Zemlja za nas", which enables greater community participation in decision-making. It proved to be an effective tool for the municipalities of Vranje, Buianovac and Lebane for conducting public consultations for action plans for social services.

This platform encourages interaction among community members, facilitating discussions on common concerns and generating solutions that can improve their environment. Through the "Zemlja za nas" platform, users can engage in various activities, including forums and polls, in order to give their opinion and collect feedback and community viewpoints.

<u>www.zemljazanas.rs</u>

#### Every ending heralds a new beginning

ALVED is a project that left a deep mark on the local communities where it was implemented, but also on all the members of the Civic Initiatives and People in Need (PIN) organisations that were engaged in the project.

Many topics were opened in Bujanovac, Vranje, Lebane and Presevo, many actions were initiated, and most importantly, many people became activists with the desire to make their community a better place to live.

Hereby, we would like to thank everyone who was part of the ALVED project and helped its implementation in any segment - leadership of local self-government units, centres for social work, all civil society organisations, young people and all the individuals who contributed to ALVED, setting some standards that will be a benchmark for future activities in the field of social work, informal education and youth activism.

Special thanks to the Government of the United Kingdom, the donor for this project, as well as the organisation Peaceful Change initiative (PCi), which led the consortium that implemented the project.



**Civic Initiatives (CI)** is an association of citizens for democracy and civic education that has been working for more than 25 years on strengthening civil society, by promoting activism and fostering an environment that actively encourages citizen participation in driving social change.

CI conduct their activities through two thematic areas:

The first area is dedicated to civic activism. Through programs for capacity building of civil society organisations, campaigns, and networking, CI works on informing and encouraging citizens to engage in activism.

The second thematic area is dedicated to contributing to an open and responsible state where citizens are involved at all levels.

Through its work, CI strives to create a just society in which citizens are aware of their responsibility and role, socially active and loud in constant dialogue with an open and responsible state.

Civic Initiatives Kneza Miloša 4, 11000 Beograd civin@gradjanske.org gradjanske.org People in Need (PIN) is a Czech nongovernmental organisation (NGO) providing aid in troubled regions and supporting human rights since 1992. Since then, PIN has grown into one of the largest non-governmental organisations in Central and Eastern Europe. Today, its work focuses on humanitarian and development aid, advocacy for human rights and democratic freedoms, social work in the field and education, awareness raising and information. PIN addresses long-term problems in developing countries such as lack of safe water, food insecurity, environmental degradation and limited access to quality education and health services

**PIN Western Balkans** is part of PIN's Relief and Development Department (RDD), which helps people in emergencies, conflict areas, areas affected by natural disasters and those living in extreme poverty. RDD operates in 22 countries, every year implementing projects worth millions of euros for hundreds of thousands of people in endangered regions.

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