

FINAL EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT  
OF THE PROJECT



# Strengthening Local Development and Inclusion of Vulnerable groups in Croatia

NO. 00055684

**Project implementer:** UNDP Croatia/UNV

**Donor:** The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) of the Federal Republic of Germany

**External evaluator:**

Marina Škrabalo

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## Abbreviations/Acronyms

ASSC = Areas of Special State Concern

BMZ = Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung  
(The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development)

CSO = civil society organisation

CBS = Croatian Bureau of Statistics.

B-H = Bosnia-Herzegovina

GOfNGOs = Government Office for non-governmental organisations

MoSES = Ministry of Science, Education and Sports

MHSW = Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

MoFVAIS = Ministry of Family, Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity

NAP = Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 of the Government of the Republic of Croatia

NFCSD = National Foundation for Civil Society Development

NPfR = National Programme for the Roma

ONM = Office for National Minorities

OG = Official Gazette (of the Republic of Croatia)

UI-SMZ = Udruženje osoba s invaliditetom Sisacko-moslavačke županije (Association of People with Disability of Sisak-Moslavina County)

UNV = United Nations Volunteers

UNDP = United Nations Development Programme

## Maps of the Region:

The project locations **Capraske Poljane**, **Gvozd**, **Hrvatska Kostajnica**, and **Petrinja** are in the Sisak-Moslavina County, south of the county capital of **Sisak**, marked on the map.

The project location **Donji Lapac** is in the Licko-Senjska County, south-east of the capital **Gospic** (marked on the map), close to the border with B-H.

The project location **Srb** is in the Zadar county, the municipality of Gracac, north-east of the town of **Gracac** (marked on the map) and close to the border with B-H (also only 40 km south from Donji Lapac).

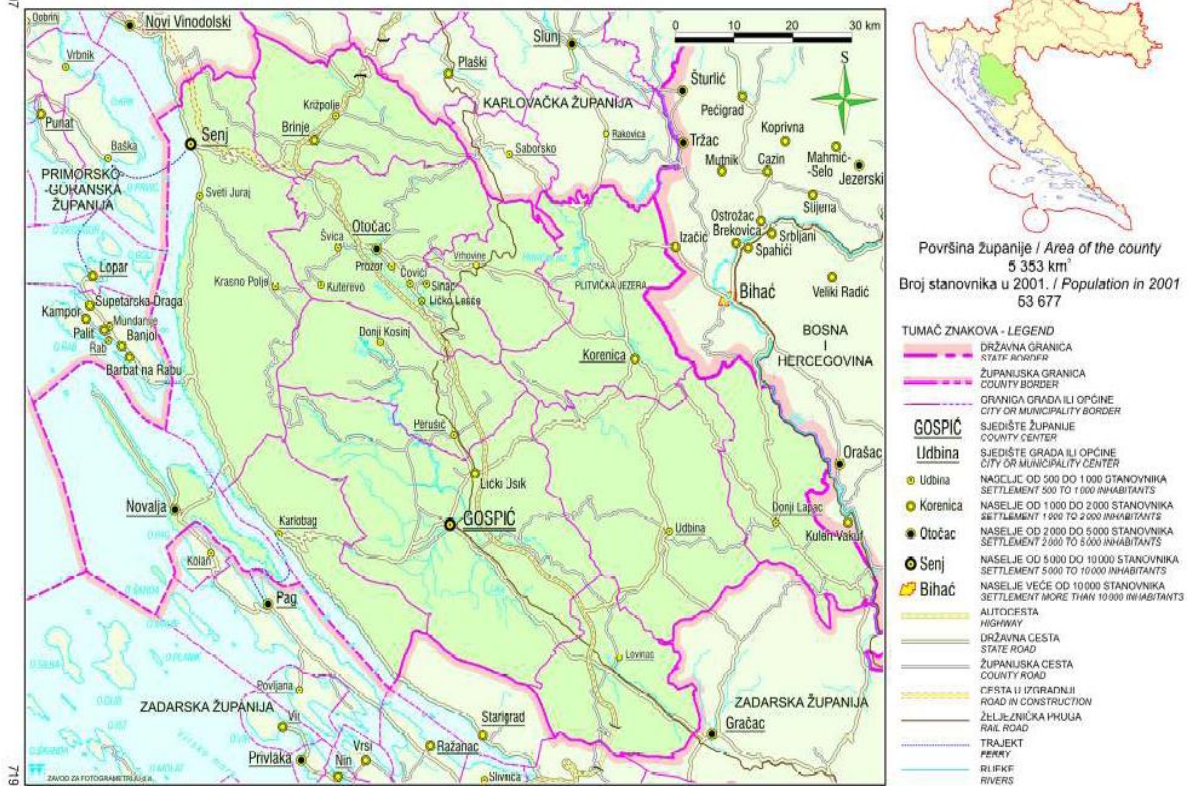


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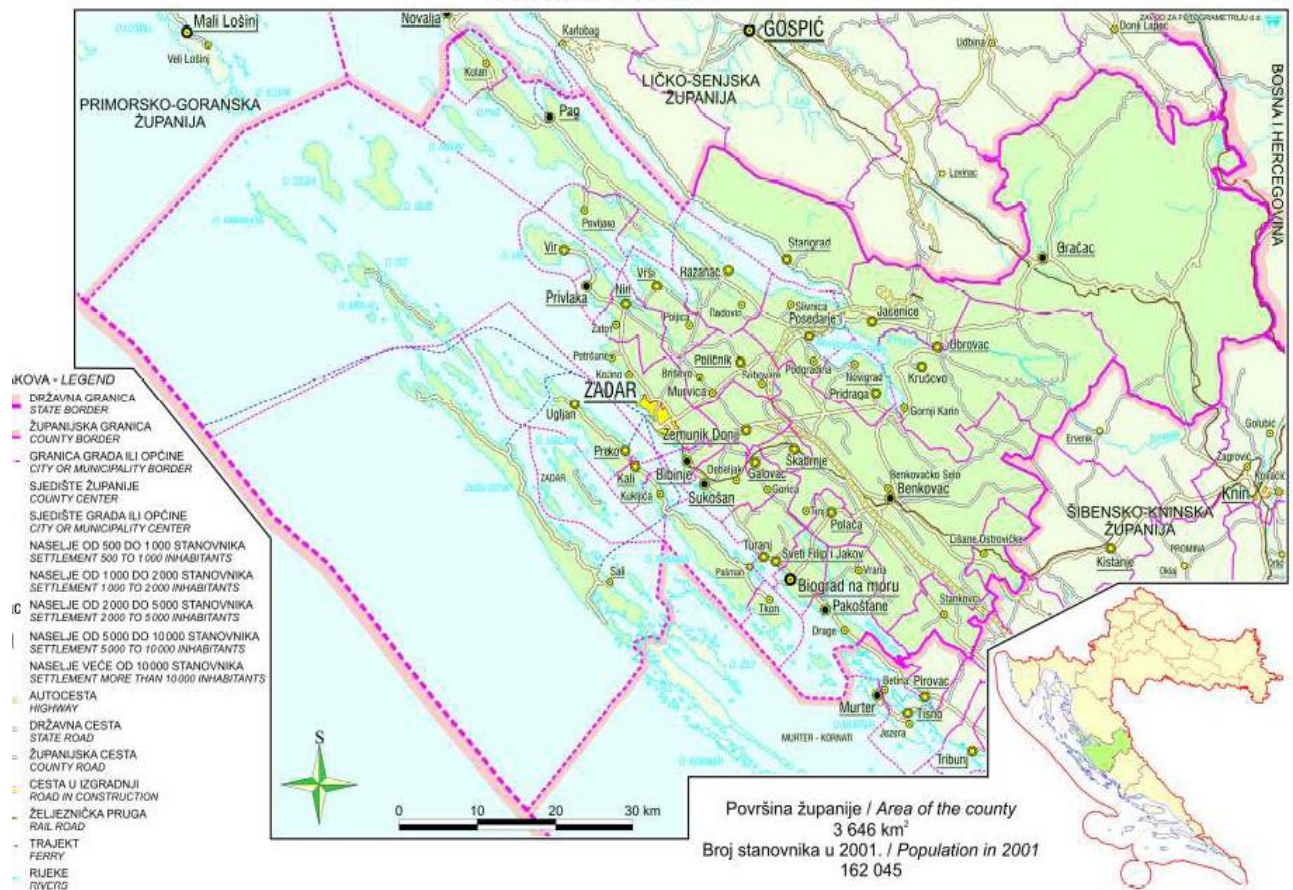




# IX. LIČKO-SENJSKA ŽUPANIJA COUNTY OF LIKA-SENJ



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## Executive Summary:

This report presents the findings, recommendations and key lessons learned from the external evaluation of the project “Strengthening Local Development and Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups in Croatia” implemented by UNV and UNDP Croatia and funded by BMZ. The financial value of this two-year project is 292.240 USD, including 30.000 USD of UNDP cost-share. The project duration is 24 months (April 1, 2007 – March 31, 2008) with the possibility of a two months no-cost extension. The evaluation was conducted by Marina Škrabalo, a Croatian social development consultant and commissioned by the UNDP country office in Croatia, in cooperation with UNV headquarters in Bonn, Germany.

The evaluation took place during March 2009, i.e. the last month of the original project time-frame, totalling 20 consultancy days, including 10 days of field research. The evaluation plan took into account the UNV recommendation that participatory, interpretative and prevalently qualitative evaluation methodology be used. The data collection relied on two main methods, applied iteratively – (1) desk research, including the analysis of relevant national policies, project documentation and retrieval of additionally needed data from project staff and (2) focused field research, allowing for the collection of qualitative data in each of the six target communities including 71 selected project stakeholders. The preliminary evaluation findings were validated at the evaluation workshop with project management staff and active UN volunteers, while the draft evaluation report was validated at the meeting of the project Steering Committee, including representatives of UNV and UNDP Croatia.

By posting national UN Volunteers in six target communities in the post-war regions of Banovina and Kordun as well as Lika and Dalmatian hinterland, the project aimed **to improve the quality of life and social services for groups facing social exclusion**, under the assumption that through volunteerism and self-help programmes, deprived communities would increase their ownership of and skills for development schemes to meet their needs. The focus was put on enhancement of social services, by ensuring greater access to institutional care and statutory entitlements, as well as expansion of community-based, complementary or compensatory support. It is particularly important to emphasize that the project aimed to put both *its means* and *its ends* to service of empowering the marginalized individuals and social groups in these disadvantaged communities. That was the reason why the national UNV volunteers recruited by the project were recruited from the marginalized groups in the target regions.

Specifically, the project intended to contribute to the following objectives:

1. Improved social inclusion of unemployed Roma youth, children, elderly and people with disabilities in remote and rural areas. Providing easier access to information and social services for the socially excluded.
2. Community ownership and mobilization strengthened through decentralized social service delivery.
3. Community local development projects monitored and exchange of best practices between different localities stimulated
4. Community-based volunteerism and activism promoted and encouraged.



It can be generally concluded that **in all six target communities in the Croatian post-war counties of Sisak Moslavina, Lika-Senj and Zadar, the nine NUNV volunteers have recognized and responded to real social needs of the disadvantaged community members**, and in most cases, without unnecessary overlaps with other service providers. In total, nine NUNV volunteers, including the project coordinator, have served **2070 socially disadvantaged individuals**; assisted **30 different communities based organisations**, and **cooperated with 20 CSOs providing support to target communities**. In all communities, they **established fruitful relations with local authorities and their social programmes**, especially the home-care programmes for the elderly in Donji Lapac and Gvozd, funded by the Ministry of Family, Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity. The **NUNV volunteers' outreach to community members from both domicile (mostly Serb returnee) and settler (mostly Bosnian Croat) social groups and their associations** has also been beneficial in terms of social cohesion. The underlying, even if not always explicit, **human rights' based approach, has in practice meant that NUNV volunteers' primarily focused on the burning issue of the lack of access to statutory entitlements and social services**, guaranteed, yet often unrealized by the institutional system of human rights and social protection.

Even though gender issues are not a special project focus, **the project has provided social support to women experiencing multiple marginalization – a girl and women with disability, elderly rural women in single-headed households and Roma girls**. In addition, **among the select nine NUNV volunteers, 7 were women, including 3 middle-aged, long-term unemployed minority returnees and 2 young women with no previous employment**.

Regarding the **promotion of volunteerism**, the effects are particularly visible in those communities where NUNV volunteers cooperated with local CSOs committed to that specific cause. Hence, the project has **significantly enhanced the human resources, fundraising ability, quality and scope of activities and reputation of Suncokret, Center for Community Development in Gvozd**, which has good prospects of becoming the regional volunteer center, acting as a partner to local government and a resource to other municipalities in organizing volunteer actions and international camps. The project has **also contributed to the organisational growth of Una, the local CSO in Srb**, which is about to become accredited to host EVS volunteers and is also organising international volunteer camps during summer months. To a degree, it has **also strengthened community activism of the local Red Cross in Donji Lapac**.

The project has assisted the **municipality of Gvozd** and the local CSO Suncokret with 3 NUNV volunteers (including the project coordinator), who primarily focused on children and youth development, promotion of international and community-based volunteerism. In Gvozd, NUNV volunteers also provided complementary support to the local primary school, local Red Cross and municipal home-visits' programme to the elderly. The key indicators of the value of NUNV volunteers' engagement in Gvozd and Suncokret are impressive:

- Total 500 beneficiaries served, among whom 268 are children and youth and 100 are elderly.

- Outreach to both Serbian returnee and Bosnian Croat settler communities - 169 vs.195, the latter being higher due to the fact that settlers' families are younger with more children
- Support to adult community members – 100 assisted with administration, 100 provided humanitarian aid, 10 provided with parental counselling
- Support to children and youth – 100 provided with teaching assistance, 150 engaged in creative workshops
- Support to community initiatives – 15 other local initiatives assisted, 9 local actions directly organised.
- Suncokret's organisational capacity building – core team increased from 2 to 4 full-time members; expanded community center premises - additional floor donated by the municipality and renovated with UNDP Local Development grant; additional house for art activities donated by the Kids' Earth Fund (a Japanese foundation that set-up a local branch in Gvozd, in partnership with Suncokret). The organisational budget increased 3,8 times over the project period 2007-2008, about to reach a quarter of a million EUR in the first quarter of 2009. Multiyear state funding and the EU funding through PHARE 2006 Youth Programme ensure greater organisational stability.

In the **municipality of Hrvatska Kostajnica**, one NUNV volunteer position was entrusted to a renowned humanitarian and active supporter of returnees, settlers and other poor community members, which has enabled him to extend his previous voluntary work and cooperation with the local authorities and a number of humanitarian organisations (Serbian Democratic Forum; Patria, Milosrdni Samarjanin; Red Cross). NUNV volunteer provided logistical assistance with accessing bureaucratic institutions, getting social benefits, humanitarian assistance and reconstruction support. The following are the impressive quantitative indicators of NUNV volunteer's engagement in Hrvatska Kostajnica:

- Total beneficiaries of social assistance – 1247 in Hrvatska Kostajnica and neighbouring municipalities of Majur, Donji Kukuzari and Hrvatska Dubica
- Balanced outreach to Serbian returnees (962) and Bosnian Croat settlers (285)
- Information and support provided to 6 local associations and cooperative and 4 national/regional CSOs (including the organisation of training for 12 prospective local volunteers)
- A range of social services provided to a large number of beneficiaries– humanitarian assistance (425), administrative assistance (640), transport and mobility (62), shopping (143), housework and repairs (25).
- Local beneficiaries identified and supported by the UNDP Local Development Programme's procurement of social infrastructure - Association of beekeepers "Kostanj" (office equipment), 3 Serbian returnee households (house repairs)

In **Petrinja**, two NUNV volunteers were placed to support the management of the Association for People with Disabilities of the Sisak-Moslavina County and in particular, to match the institutional gap in provision of personal and learning assistance to a girl with cerebral palsy, who was about to enter regular primary school (the first such case in the entire county). The tasks of one of the two NUNV volunteers was also monitoring local development projects undertaken by the local UNDP office, yet the actual needs for this service were very low. Due

to the resignation of one NUNV volunteer four months after the recruitment, most of the work in Petrinja was carried out by one NUNV volunteer. The following are key indicators of the overall value of NUNV volunteers' support in Petrinja:

- 100 direct beneficiaries, including 30 elderly persons (in cooperation with association Nas Život) and 70 people with disabilities (in cooperation with UI-SZM)
- Range of service provided by NUNV volunteers – home visits, shopping, creative workshops for children, personal and teaching assistance, assistance with mobility
- A girl with cerebral palsy integrated in regular primary education, as precedent at county level
- A multidisciplinary programme of rehabilitation of children with development difficulties "Small House" of the UI-SZM set up and running, offering logotherapy on a daily basis, psychological counselling and creative therapeutic workshops for children. At the time of evaluation there are 53 regular beneficiaries of the programme (32 from Petrinja, 3 from Glinja, 7 from Kostajnica and 11 from Sisak) and a total of 67 children enrolled.
- The premises of "Small House" fully renovated with UNDP Local Development Programme major donation of 170,000 kn, with additional donation of 45,000 kn by the RTL foundation
- Two staff positions in 2008 secured by the Adris Foundation donation of 105,500 kn
- Total value of funding increased 5 times over one-year period - 486,260.00 kn in 2008, compared to 95,052.38 in 2007. Funding for 2009 is less certain - 100,000 kn approved, but not transferred yet.

In **Capraske Poljane, the Roma settlement near Sisak** (the capital of Sisak-Moslavina County), two NUNV volunteers were active – one full time (a member of the target Roma community himself) and one part-time NUNV volunteer from Gvozd, a professional teacher, who visited the Roma community once a week to help the children with homework). The tasks of the full-time NUNV was ensuring safe and regular attendance of Roma children in the pre-school programme in Sisak, by escorting them and assisting the pre-school teacher, as well as organizing creative activities in the Roma community center. In this case, the project identified and addressed the problem of exclusion of Roma children from pre-school programmes as well as their need for additional teaching assistance in the first years of the primary school. The following are key indicators of NUNV volunteer's work in Capraske Poljane:

- Escort and teaching assistance provided to all Roma children attending the pre-school programme - 32 in year 2006/07, 28 in year 2007/2008 and 17 in year 2008/09
- Teaching assistance and creative workshops in Roma community center – total 56 different children over two-year period
- 20 parents of pre-school children regularly contacted with reminders of pre-school hours and need to prepare their children
- Excellent relations built with the Sisak kindergarten and the primary school
- Key stakeholders – Roma leaders, parents, local authorities and the Ministry of Education have acknowledged the vital role of Roma pre-school assistant for ensuring the local Roma children's enrolment and attendance of the programme offered in Sisak kindergartens.

In **Donji Lapac, a remote municipality in Lika-Senj County**, one NUNV volunteer was supported, who chose the focus on the provision of home-based support to the elderly, in close collaboration with the Red Cross, and during the last six months of the project, with the newly established municipal programme for home-based care for the elderly, supported by the Ministry of Family, Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity, joined by NUNV volunteer in the role of team leader. In that way, the project helped build competencies and leadership for the provision of a new, much needed social service in the community. The following are key indicators of NUNV volunteer's performance in Donji Lapac:

- Direct beneficiaries: 70, including 65 returnees and 5 settlers from Bosnia, among whom 48 are elderly, 8 are persons with disability and 24 are other persons living in poverty (children and youth)
- A range of services provided: regular personal assistance with daily living activities (43), administrative assistance (47 beneficiaries), shopping assistance (24), house-keeping (24), humanitarian aid (25 families) and parents' counselling (5)
- Municipal emerging programme of home-care to the elderly strengthened by transfer of know-how and contacts developed by NUNV during the project
- Excellent coordination with NUNV in Srb throughout the project
- Community-based humanitarian actions of local Red Cross improved

In **Srb, an isolated returnee community** in the mountainous part of the municipality of Gracac, one NUNV volunteer was supported, in close collaboration with the local CSO Una, the main generator of community mobilization and development, both in terms of economic issues as well as social solidarity. NUNV volunteers's focus on home visits to the elderly, people with disabilities and other persons living in poor, rural households was fully aligned with Una's objective to develop its social service programme, as an upgrade to spontaneous acts of solidarity of its members and a longer-term compensation for the evident lack of institutional resources for adequate filled presence of social workers. The following are key indicators of NUNV volunteer's performance in Srb:

- Direct beneficiaries: 76, including 73 returnees and 2 settlers from Bosnia, among whom 42 are elderly, 22 are persons with disability and 22 are other person living in poverty
- A range of services provided: administrative assistance (57 beneficiaries), shopping assistance (19), house-keeping (12), transport and mobility (7) and targeted humanitarian aid (2 families).
- Association Una's emerging programme of social assistance to the elderly and other disadvantaged persons launched and strengthened, in close collaboration with Centre for Social Welfare
- Excellent coordination with NUNV in Donji Lapac throughout the project.

### **Key lessons learned:**

The value added by the NUNV volunteer's engagement in social service provision has been the creation of new ties between citizens in need and existent institutional and community-based social services. In the Roma community of Capraske Poljane and Petrinja, NUNV volunteers' engagement has traced the path for a more long-term, previously unavailable service. By identifying and supplying the missing links which prevent real access to nominally available social protection, the volunteers have managed to slightly reshape the institutional



system, to better respond to the citizens' needs, as opposed to the prevalent expectation that citizens should adjust to the system's requirements.

The innovative approach of recruiting NUNV volunteers who themselves come from disadvantaged social groups in post-war communities has put the project means (in addition to ends) to service of social inclusion. Out of eight recruited NUNV volunteers (project coordinator excluded) all of whom were previously unemployed or without work experience, two have found paid position in social service provision, four are counted on as core team members local CSOs, and, in one case, the project has motivated the NUNV volunteer to advance his level of education, by completing the forth year of higher education (with focus on administration) and ICT management certificate. The NUNV volunteer recruitment has also enhanced the social status and employability of 6 women NUNV volunteers (either long-term unemployed or without work experience), as all of them have improved their skills, gained work experience and new contacts that were useful in finding employment or continued volunteer engagement.

It was particularly useful to entrust NUNV volunteers with identification of the most appropriate community focus, in terms of target groups, host organisations and types of services to be provided. Not only did it result in needs-based interventions, but also was fully respectful of the principles of freedom of choice, autonomy and leadership that are inherent to true volunteerism. The variety of local foci is reflected in the variety of numbers of beneficiaries served – a day-long personal and teaching assistance to a girl with cerebral palsy in Petrinja takes as much time as provision of administrative assistance to a dozen of elderly returnees in one day in Hrvatska Kostajnica, each service being exactly what was needed.

The main challenge identified in the project design and implementation relates to insufficient funding and human resources devoted to interventions at (inter)organisational and local policy levels, based on more timely identification of prospects and factors influencing sustainability of greater social inclusion, triggered by NUNV volunteers's service provision. For that purpose, a separate technical assistance component of the project, complementing the service provision and community mobilization component performed by NUNV volunteers, would have been useful, combining social inclusion programme staff time with external consultants who are already active in supporting civil society development and social inclusion initiatives in the target regions. Metaphorically speaking, in retrospect, it might have been more useful to secure a position of "monitoring officer" of local social policy and organisational development interventions, as opposed to the under-used "monitoring officer" for social infrastructure interventions. In that respect, an internal mid-term review of prospects of sustainability should become standard monitoring procedure in similar projects in the future. Nevertheless, the good timing of this evaluation, taking place prior to the completion of all project activities is an indicator of commitment on part of UNV and UNDP Croatia to invest additional thought, energy and financial resources in ensuring that key positive effects of this project last.

The evaluation of this project also draws attention to specific challenges and benefits of promoting volunteerism in disadvantaged, post-war regions that may be relevant to the fine-

tuning of the national policy on the promotion of volunteerism. Challenges relate to the local socio-economic context where employment is not available, younger generations are decimated and social energy for public action is low, beyond traditional solidarity networks that consume most of the voluntary engagement of active, able citizens. In such conditions, any kind of cash revenue is highly valued, including volunteer living allowances, which are hard to distinguish in terms of their amount and function from locally available honoraria for seasonal work or even unpredictable salaries for work in the private sector. At the same time, the benefits of promoting volunteerism in these communities are outstanding – volunteerism contributes to social inclusion and cohesion (across ethnic and age groups), but also to the generation of human capital – enhanced skills and knowledge, broadened social networks beyond local settings, boosted self-confidence and leadership competencies. Resources invested in providing local volunteers with systematic support (coverage of expenses, training, TA) are paid back in terms of the volunteers' consistent community engagement, improved social standing and agency. Therefore, volunteerism makes up for instrumental deficits in social and human capital that are hindering development of these areas.

#### **Recommendations to Social Inclusion Programme of UNDP Croatia:**

1. Based on the discussion of the evaluation findings and identified prospects of sustainability, a UNV/UNDP project follow-up plan should be designed and implemented over year 2009, with the principal instrument being technical assistance to individual organisations and institutions, as well as informal social service networks in target communities. The most appropriate external resources for the provision of TA should be identified, with long-term prospects in mind, of expanding the local actors' access to specialized knowledge and advocacy allies.
2. The SOS Programme is in a unique position to act as facilitator of a collaborative process among the Roma leaders in Capraske Poljane, necessary for the securing both community ownership and external funding for community-based activities for children and their parents, primarily a Roma assistant to children attending the pre-school programme, a teaching assistant running after-school activities in the Roma community centre and a facilitator of creative workshops for children as well as, optimally, workshops or meetings of parents. This is a challenging task, due to urgency of securing the funding for pre-school assistant, expected competition between the three leaders and conditional approach to funding such activities expressed by the local government. Developing a community programme for children and youth, accounting for all infrastructural and service cost is the optimal option, which will require continued engagement of SOS Programme officer, who has all necessary expertise, as well as respect and trust of all key stakeholders, including the local and national authorities.
3. In the scope of this project, knowledge of the particular challenges and opportunities for upgrading local social programmes, especially those for the elderly, in the six target communities has been accumulated. Considering the slow pace of systematic introduction of local social planning processes in Croatia, SOS Programme could consult with MoFVAIS about ways it can assist in the process of improving the quality and institutional sustainability of home-care programmes for the elderly, used as a starting point for

stimulating greater coordination and synergy among all local actors providing various forms of assistance to the vulnerable social group. The next step may be stimulating local social planning processes in those communities where local authorities remain open to UNDP, as well as the social reform process (e.g. Gvozd, Donji Lapac, Srb, perhaps Hrvatska Kostajnica).

4. The project results and lessons learned about the challenges and benefits of the promotion of volunteerism in multiply deprived, post-war regions of Croatia communities can be presented to the National Committee for the Promotion of Volunteerism. Furthermore, a thematic event, with contributions of different volunteer initiatives taking place in post-war regions could be jointly organised, contributing to the knowledge of more and less effective approaches, and generate ideas about more targeted, systematic support for voluntary work that helps enhance in-country mobility and activation of human capital in deprived regions. In addition, UNDP Croatia may also consider stimulating policy discussion about ways in which the Republic of Croatia, as emerging donor, may promote volunteerism in the scope of peacebuilding and regional development cooperation efforts in South-eastern European region, with focus on Western Balkans.

**Recommendation to UNDP Croatia Senior Management Team:**

1. Closer, mutually enriching collaboration between the SOS and Local Development programmes should be explored, using past examples of complementarities, as well as collisions in programme logic, some of which took place during this project, as learning tools.

**Recommendations to UNV:**

1. Streamlining and simplification of financial reporting may be explored, especially in respect to very low-scale costs such as UNV volunteers' local travel and communications that is time-consuming (introducing monthly lump sums, that do not need to be backed-up by bills as long as they are within approved budget may be an option)
2. Problems related to the use of ATLAS in budget monitoring encountered in this project should be further explored and compared to experiences of other project implementers, to determine if there are common problems that could be eliminated by technical upgraded or targeted training<sup>1</sup>.

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1. <sup>1</sup> Based on the written feedback of UNV representative presented at the evaluation briefing held in Zagreb on April 6, 2009, the challenges in obtaining ATLAS training and delays in processing and approving POs and vouchers encountered in the scope of this project have in the meantime been resolved practically for all UNV funded project, as it has been decided to provide COs with appropriate Authorized Spending Limit (ASL) to enable payments to be processed and approved at the country level.

3. UNV may explore the costs and benefits of obliging all agencies proposing UNV projects to include a basic training plan for UNV and NUNV volunteers, supportive of their prospective tasks within a certain project.



## Introduction

The purpose of the external evaluation of the project “Strengthening Local Development and Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups in Croatia” is to assess the relevance, performance (effectiveness and efficiency) and success (impact and sustainability) of the project, draw lessons learned and make recommendations for future similar projects, which will also inform the project up scaling and replicating processes. In particular, the recommendations stemming out of the evaluations should assist in enhancing the prospects of sustainability of identified project results, in the light of the forthcoming two months of the no-cost extension of project activities, during which the implementing agency, UNDP Croatia is in the position to provide support to the direct project implementers – national UN volunteers, in negotiating institutional support for some of the project results. The evaluation was commissioned by the UNDP country office in Croatia, in cooperation with UNV headquarters in Bonn, Germany.

The evaluated project is a two-year effort to place and provide support to a group of nine national UN volunteers, themselves coming from and providing social service support to vulnerable groups in six post-war communities in Croatia, located in two regions where the level of economic deprivation and accompanying social exclusion have been assessed as particularly grave. These include the region of Banovina (Sisak-Moslavina County) in central Croatia, with the communities of Capraske Poljane (a large Roma settlement), Gvozd, Petrinja and Hrvatska Kostajnica, as well as the region of Lika in southern Croatia, with the communities of Donji Lapac (in Lika-Senj County) and Srb and the broader municipality of Gracac (in Zadar County). These isolated and predominantly rural areas are inhabited by Serb returnees, Croatian Bosnian refugees settlers and often have a high rate of elderly and are negatively affected by unemployment, lack of educational and social services and depopulation. The uniqueness of the project has been the provision of the opportunity to act as national UN volunteers to a group of local people with demonstrated commitment to voluntary work and community development. Based on their assessment of priority needs in their own communities, each national UN volunteer provided a particular set of social services and promoted cooperation among local institutions and community-based organisations. It was the projects’ overall objective to promote volunteerism as a way to enhance social inclusion and capacity development of groups at greatest risk of social exclusion so that they may improve the quality of their lives through access to social services and employment.

The evaluation took place during March 2009, i.e. the last month of the original project time-frame, totalling 20 consultancy days, including 10 days of field research. The evaluation plan took into account the UNV recommendation that participatory, interpretative and prevalently qualitative evaluation methodology be used. The data collection relied on two main methods, applied iteratively – (1) desk research, including the analysis of relevant national policies, project documentation and retrieval of additionally needed data from project staff and (2) focused field research, allowing for the collection of qualitative data in each of the six target communities including 71 select project stakeholders. The preliminary evaluation findings were validated at the evaluation workshop with project management staff and active NUNV

volunteers, while the draft evaluation report was validated at the meeting of the project Steering Committee, including representatives of UNV HQ and UNDP Croatia.

The report follows the recommended structure by UNV, including the project description and evaluation profile, discussion of evaluation findings, in line with key evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and prospects of sustainability), main conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations. The annexes include the list of interviewees, the list of reviewed documents as well as evaluation instruments and evaluation TOR.

# 1. Project description and evaluation profile

## 1.1. Project rationale and objectives

The main rationale for this project is the correlation of economic deprivation and social exclusion, which has been identified as particularly striking in several Croatian post-war regions, based on the UNDP Croatia research on the quality of life in Croatia, conducted and published in 2006. According to the research and subsequent project justification, the rise of economic growth in Croatia over the period 2000-2005 does not simply translate into benefits for post-war communities in Areas of Special State Concern (ASSC) namely in the counties of Sisak-Moslavina, Zadar and Lika-Senj. These areas are inhabited by Serb returnees and Croatian Bosnian refugees - settlers, many of them (69%) over the age of 60.

There are multiple, inter-connected obstacles to socio-economic development affecting these, mostly rural communities, which can be subsumed as overall lack of social, human and economic capital - high unemployment, low education, damaged infrastructure, weak transport connections, devastated business sectors, few or no extracurricular opportunities for children and youth (who in most cases need to attend higher education elsewhere), limited access to social services and health care, including non-institutional services, low budgetary and managerial capacity of local self-government structures as well as civic initiatives. There is a wide gap between the needs of impoverished segments of the population and the capacity of authorities to offer timely and adequate response. In addition, social cohesion and self-help are negatively affected by the war (fragmentation of the social fabric, passivity and distrust) and weak tradition of civic organizing. Key statistical indicators of regional differences in socio-economic development in Croatia, including data for target counties are presented in Annex 1.

It is important to stress that the problems of social exclusion and lagging socio-economic development of post-war regions of Croatia have been addressed in the central policy document of the Croatian Government - Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion (JIM) of the Republic of Croatia and the European Commission, of March 2007, the conceptualization and implementation of which has been significantly supported by the expertise and TA of the UNDP Croatia's Social Inclusion Programme. To address some of these issues also at the community-based level, in spring 2007, with the funding of BMZ, UNV/UNDP launched a

project entitled, “Strengthening Local Development and Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups through Volunteerism.” The financial value of this two-year project is 292. 240 USD, including 30.000 USD of UNDP cost-share.

By posting national UN Volunteers in six target communities in the post-war regions of Banovina and Lika, the project aimed **to improve the quality of life and social services for groups facing social exclusion**, under the assumption that through volunteerism and self-help programmes, deprived communities would increase their ownership of and skills for development schemes to meet their needs. The focus was put on enhancement of social services, by ensuring greater access to institutional care and statutory entitlements, as well as expansion of community-based, complementary or compensatory support. It is particularly important to emphasize that the project aimed to put both *its means* and *its ends* to service of empowering the marginalized individuals and social groups in these generally disadvantaged communities. That was the reason why the national UNV volunteers recruited by the project come from the target marginalized groups in the target regions.

Specifically, the project intended to contribute to the following objectives:

5. Improved social inclusion of unemployed Roma youth, children, elderly and people with disabilities in remote and rural areas. Providing easier access to information and social services for the socially excluded.
6. Community ownership and mobilization strengthened through decentralized social service delivery.
7. Community local development projects monitored and exchange of best practices between different localities stimulated
8. Community-based volunteerism and activism promoted and encouraged.

## **1.2. Scope of NUNV volunteers’ engagement**

Over the project duration, a total of nine national UN volunteers (NUNV volunteers) were recruited (six in April 2007 and additional three after budget revision, in October 2007), including the project coordinator, who was offered a service contract in the second year of project implementation due to the magnitude of managerial tasks required of her. There were six NUNV volunteers and the project coordinator who remained engaged in the project until the time of this evaluation (March, 2008). One NUNV volunteer, recruited in October 2007, left the project in January 2008, due to a permanent job offer at a Centre for Social welfare, while another NUNV volunteer, recruited in April 2007, closed her contract at the end of 2008, due to pregnancy leave.

It is important to note that UNDP received a large number of applications for NUNV positions and handled the selection process thoroughly, in collaboration of the human resources department, social inclusion programme and local development programme. For illustration, in March 2007, there were 60 applicants for 5 NUNV positions, out of whom 18 were short-listed and interviewed. This shows the relevance of NUNV’s scope of work to civic

engagement and employment needs in post-war regions of Croatia. With the exception of project coordinator, a highly educated young woman raised in Western Europe who has herself chose to return to Croatia from doctoral studies in the U.S. in order to help develop the organisational and programming capacities of Suncokret in Gvozd, all other eight NUNV volunteers can be considered members of one or even several disadvantaged social groups in Croatia – Serbian minority (4), war migrants – returnees (3) or settlers (1), Roma (1) young adults with no previous formal employment (3), long-term unemployed (4) and women (6) (see Annex 2 for social profiles of all NUNV volunteers). In that sense, the project has provided clear opportunity to these individuals with commitment to community development and social inclusion, to improve their social status, as well as employability, by becoming visible agents of positive change and models for community action in their native settings.

According to the job descriptions for NUNV volunteer positions, which were advertised through web sites of UNDP Croatia and Moj Posao (web based employment service), through local UNDP offices, partner CSOs and mailing lists, all volunteers were required to act as catalysts of collaboration among various local actors focused on social-service delivery, as well as direct organisers and providers of encouragement and social support to vulnerable groups. They were expected to enhance their knowledge and skills related to volunteerism, social service delivery and community mobilization and take part, where opportunities arise, in local development planning initiatives.

In most cases, the recruited NUNV volunteers were given freedom to identify the focus of their community engagement, both in terms of the priority social group and support CSOs, based on their own interests, initial consultations with various community-based organisations and their own familiarity with local social needs. At the project start in spring 2007, targeted recruitment related to the NUNV position of monitoring officer of small social and private household infrastructure projects undertaken by UNDP Local development office in Sisak-Moslavina county as well as the NUNV position organiser and escort of pre-school and primary school children in the Roma settlement of Capraske Poljane. As the project progressed, additional three recruitments were also targeted, in response to a pressing need (provision of full-time personal assistance and learning support to a disabled primary-school girl in Petrinja) and evident opportunity for significant project impact on building the capacities of Suncokret, the key CSO in Gvozd, with regional outreach, promoting volunteerism, children and youth development (an overview of activity areas of all NUNV volunteers engaged in this project is provided in Annex 2).

The project has assisted the municipality of Gvozd and the local CSO Suncokret with 3 NUNV volunteers (including the project coordinator), who primarily focused on children and youth development, promotion of international and community-based volunteerism. In Gvozd, NUNV volunteers also provided complementary support to the local primary school, local Red Cross and municipal home-visits' programme to the elderly. In the municipality of Gvozd, NUNV volunteers directly assisted a total of 500 community members.

In the municipality of Hrvatska Kostajnica, one NUNV volunteer position was entrusted to a renowned humanitarian and active supporter of returnees, settlers and other poor community members, which has enabled him to extend his previous voluntary work and cooperation with



the local authorities and a number of national and international humanitarian organisations (Serbian Democratic Forum, Patria, Milosrdni Samarjanin, Red Cross, ADRA), which has encompassed as many as 1247 beneficiaries of advice and assistance with accessing administrative institutions, getting social benefits, humanitarian assistance and reconstruction support.

In Petrinja, two NUNV volunteers were placed to support the management of the Association for People with Disabilities of the Sisak-Moslavina County and in particular, to match the institutional gap in provision of personal and learning assistance to a girl with cerebral palsy, who was about to enter regular primary school (the first such case in the entire county). The tasks of one of the two NUNV volunteers was also monitoring local development projects undertaken by the local UNDP office, yet the actual needs for this service were very low. Due to the resignation of one NUNV volunteer four months after the recruitment, most of the work in Petrinja was carried out by one NUNV volunteer, resulting in outreach to a total of 100 beneficiaries, mostly people with disabilities.

In Capraske Poljane, the Roma settlement near Sisak (the capital of Sisak-Moslavina County), two NUNV volunteers were active – one full time (a member of the target Roma community himself) and one part-time (from Gvozd, who visited the Roma community once a week to help the children with homework). The tasks of the full-time NUNV was ensuring safe and regular attendance of Roma children in the pre-school programme in Sisak, by escorting them and assisting the pre-school teacher, as well as organizing creative activities in the Roma community centre. In this case, the project identified and addressed the problem of exclusion of Roma children from pre-school programmes as well as their need for additional teaching assistance in the first years of the primary school. In Capraske Poljane, NUNV volunteers served a total of 77 Roma community members, predominantly children.

In Donji Lapac, a remote municipality in Lika-Senj County, one NUNV volunteer was supported, who chose the focus on the provision of home-based support to the elderly, in close collaboration with the Red Cross, and during the last six months of the project, with the newly established municipal programme for home-based care for the elderly, supported by the Ministry of Family, Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity, joined by NUNV in the role of team leader. In that way, in addition to serving a total of 70 beneficiaries, the project helped build competencies and leadership for the provision of a new, much needed social service in the community.

In Srb, an isolated returnee community in the mountainous part of the municipality of Gracac, one NUNV volunteer was supported, in close collaboration with the local CSO Una, the main generator of community mobilization and development, both in terms of economic issues as well as social solidarity. NUNV volunteers' focus on home visits to the elderly, people with disabilities and other persons living in poor, rural households was fully aligned with Una's objective to develop its social service programme, as an upgrade to spontaneous acts of solidarity of its members and a longer-term compensation for the evident lack of institutional resources for adequate field presence of social workers. Hence, a total of 76 most disadvantaged community members of Srb and scattered villages were provided with regular social support.

In each target community, NUNV volunteers were expected to establish links with all institutions and organisations relevant to the provision of social support and services to the disadvantaged groups on whom they focused, such as local authorities, centres for social work, other CSOs and humanitarian organisations active in the area. In some cases, such as the Roma community of Capraske Poljane, the support of local Roma leaders and their CSOs was vital for project implementation, and in some others, good relations with all relevant actors meant avoiding the traps of political divisions within the community as well as duplication with other efforts.

At the national level, UNDP Croatia used high stance in social policy circles to engage representatives of key government and public institutions in the project Steering Committee (Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Ministry of Family, Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity, National Foundation for Civil Society Development) which had already included the representative of the Volunteer Centre Zagreb, the most experienced national CSO promoting volunteerism. In addition, UNDP Social Inclusion Programme managers also relied on already established ties with the national Roma policy stakeholders in order to address the educational needs of Roma children in Sisak-Moslavina County. Cross-departmental consultations between the social inclusion and local development programmes of UNDP Croatia were also envisioned, as reflected in the structure of the NUNV selection committee.

### **1.3. Purpose and Scope of External Project Evaluation**

The purpose of the external evaluation of the project “Strengthening Local Development and Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups in Croatia” is to assess the relevance, performance (effectiveness and efficiency) and success (impact and sustainability) of the project, draw lessons learned and make recommendations for ensuring sustainability of project results and the design of future, similar projects undertaken in Croatia or elsewhere, by UNDP and UNV.

Providing insights and advice on the prospects for sustainability of identified project results is related to the forthcoming two months of the no-cost extension of project activities, during which the implementing agency, UNDP Croatia may be in the position to provide support to the direct project implementers – national UNV volunteers, in negotiating institutional support for some of the project results.

Based on the evaluation TOR and consultations with the project management, this evaluation has primarily attempted to explore the issues of project relevance, effectiveness, sustainability, partnerships and coordination.

Project relevance has been explored in respect to (1) the social problem that is being addressed, i.e. social exclusion in disadvantaged post-war communities; (2) national policies of social inclusion, promotion of voluntarism and civil society development; and (3) organisational policies of development agencies that have undertaken and supported this project (UNDP, UNV and BMZ).

The discussion of effectiveness represents the core part of this evaluation report, and forms the basis for the discussion of sustainability of project results. The discussion of effectiveness

is organised according to project locations, while concluding remarks relate to the degree to which project objectives have been met, at the level of the project as a whole. In addition to the analysis of quantitative data and information of project activities, the assessment of project effectiveness has greatly relied on the collected perspectives of key community stakeholders, as well. It has been the intention of the evaluator to identify specific factors that have influenced project performance, as a basis for lessons learned for other similar future efforts in the same communities or elsewhere, undertaken by UNV/UNDP.

The discussion of institutional relationships (partnerships and coordination) developed throughout the project has been guided by the questions of the relevance of these relations to the achievement and sustainability of project results, as well as efficiency of project implementation. The quality of relations was explored at the community, regional and national levels, across institutions, CSOs and development agencies, as well as in terms of inter-departmental coordination of the main implementer, UNDP Croatia. The evaluation also attempted to sketch key factors influencing partnerships and collaboration in the scope of the project.

Project impact has not been considered as a stand-alone issue, as the project has just been completed so its impact is contingent on the sustainability of project results, as well as established partnerships and institutional support at the local, regional and national levels. Sustainability of efforts made in the scope of the project, to lessen social exclusion and promote the community-based delivery of social services in the six target communities, is the central issue explored by this evaluation, under the assumption that UNDP Croatia may consider investing into enhancing its prospects beyond the actual project implementation period and allocated budget. The following sustainability issues have hence been considered:

- potential durability of project results beyond the period of project implementation, without further investments
- organisational capacities of project implementers to continue the project without financial assistance provided by the donor
- potential political, institutional and financial support for project activities and results at the level of local communities and relevant regional and national institutions
- needs and opportunities for ensuring other donor support
- recommendations for enhancing the chances for sustainability over the upcoming two months of extended project implementation, with identified indicators of success

In addition to preliminary discussion of project costs vs. outputs<sup>2</sup>, explored project efficiency issues have included timeliness of project implementation and assessment of administrative vs. programme activities at the managerial level, as well as overall capacities for smooth project implementation, geared towards attainability and sustainability of project results.

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<sup>2</sup> Project efficiency has been only initially discussed, due to the fact that the actual project spending rate has not been fully determined at the time of project evaluation, which has taken place prior to project full completion, with its no-cost extension still pending.

Additional attention has been paid to the project contribution to the promotion of volunteerism, gender-sensitive and rights-based development, both in respect to the benefits and obstacles experienced by NUNV VOLUNTEERS, as well as at the level of target communities. In particular the evaluation attempted to disclose different, specific understandings of the concept of volunteerism, held by different project stakeholders and their relevance to the project objectives, as well as correspondence to the UNV and national policy framework for volunteering.

The evaluation of this project was carried out in the period February 24 – March 31, 2009, i.e. the last month of the original project time-frame, totalling 20 consultancy days, including 10 days of field research. The evaluation plan took into account the UNV recommendation that participatory, interpretative and prevalently qualitative evaluation methodology be used (Appendix 3 – Evaluation Plan and Timetable of Field Activities). Hence, the evaluator attempted to collect and compare different perspectives of various project stakeholders, as a basis for forming evaluative arguments about the project performance. The data collection relied on two main methods, applied iteratively – (1) desk research, including the analysis of relevant national policies, project documentation and retrieval of additionally needed data from project staff and (2) focused field research, allowing for the collection of qualitative data in each of the six target communities including select project stakeholders, NUNV volunteers and where feasible, project beneficiaries. The breadth of project documentation enabled rather detailed and timely insight into project activities, thanks to availability of all monthly, quarterly and annual narrative reports, project case study prepared in collaboration with UNV; minutes from the meetings with Steering Committee, the NUNV interview panels etc. Upon evaluator's request, the project coordinator retrieved additional information from NUNV volunteers on total numbers of beneficiaries, broken down by socio-demographic features and services provided, as well as educational inputs provided to NUNV volunteers throughout the project.

Field work included six day-long visits to each target community, an additional interview in Sisak, an interview in Karlovac and ten interviews in Zagreb and the participation in the project management meeting with local authorities and Roma leaders in Sisak. Individual and group interviews were combined, depending on the availability of interviewees and efficiency of field visits. Data collection instruments included three interview guides (for NUNV volunteers, project stakeholders and UNDP programme management) as a basis for semi-structured interviewing where key issues were additionally probed based on the interviewees' feedback. Due to limited time for field research and strong focus put on issues of sustainability, the evaluator prioritized interviews with institutional stakeholders, over those project beneficiaries whose level of satisfaction with NUNV volunteers support has been monitored by the project coordinator and where other equivalent social services are already in place, e.g. home (visits to the elderly). In other cases, where the beneficiaries' views were deemed vital for the assessment of the prospects of sustainability of project results, group and individual interviews were held, e.g. with the Roma mothers and leaders in Capraske Poljane, mother of the disabled girl in Petrinja, parents and members of various local initiatives in Gvozd.

The following is the break-down of interviewed stakeholders, by location and institutional affiliation (see Annex 3 for full list):

UNV/UNDP evaluation - interviewed and consulted stakeholders, by institutional affiliation:	
Institutional stakeholders	24
Civil society stakeholders	19
Direct project beneficiaries	11
UNV/UNDP staff and NUNV volunteers	17
<b>Total stakeholders</b>	<b>71</b>

UNV/UNDP evaluation - interviewed and consulted stakeholders, by location:	
Gvozd	14
Hrvatska Kostajnica	5
Srb	4
Lapac	7
Petrinja	9
Sisak and Caprag	18
Zagreb and other	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>

The preliminary evaluation findings were validated at the evaluation workshop held on March 19., 2009, at Suncokret's community centre in Gvozd, including the project management of the UNDP Social Inclusion programme, directly engaged in project management (Lidija Japac and Jasmina Papa), project coordinator (Maja Turniski) and all of the six, still active NUNV volunteers. The draft evaluation report was discussed at the meeting of the project Steering Committee, including representatives of UNV HQ and UNDP Croatia on April 6, 2009 in Zagreb and written comments submitted by UNV representative, UNDP SOS Programme Officer and the project coordinator were considered in the preparation of the final evaluation report.

## 2. Project Relevance

### 2.1. Relevance to the national policy of social inclusion

The project rationale and its logic of intervention directly relate to the national policy of social inclusion, as formulated in the Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion (JIM) of the Republic of Croatia and the European Commission, signed on March 5, 2007. The purpose of JIM is to assist the candidate countries in becoming more successful in their fight against poverty and social exclusion and in modernizing their social protection systems, thus preparing for full participation in the open method of coordination (OMC) in the areas of social protection and social inclusion (SPSI) upon accession.

The very process of JIM's formulation dynamized communication among relevant stakeholders – public officials, academics, civil society leaders and regional authorities, and, despite some rather worrying delays in its full implementation, the inclusive process of

monitoring of its progress continues to represent a unique opportunity for gradual increase of horizontal and vertical coordination capacities of state institutions, without which such a comprehensive policy cannot succeed in the long-run. Even though the scope and financial value of the UNV/UNDP project is rather modest, it has been designed and implemented in a way to respond to three of the seven key challenges identified in the JIM: (1) raising employability of those social groups affected by long-term unemployment, as part of developing of an inclusive labour market and promotion of employment as a right and opportunity for all citizens; (3) expanding the network of social services, developing a system of community-based services and improving access to services and (5) revitalization and sustainable development of deprived areas and promote the regionally balanced development of Croatia.

It is evident that the very choice to place NUNV volunteers into rather small communities in post-war areas, under special state concern, is a small, yet valuable step towards a more regionally balanced development of Croatia. This is also in line with UNDP Croatia's general approach of prioritizing these regions of Croatia across its programme areas, as evidenced its multi-year Local Development Programme, focusing on the regions of Banovina, Eastern Slavonia and Dalmatian hinterland.

The project's central intention has been to contribute to the density and complementarity of social services in post-war communities, by encouraging NUNV volunteers to identify and make up for the „missing links“ between citizens' needs for social support and institutional service providers - by enhancing the non-institutional local capacities to provide alternative or compensatory services, by improving information flows among all local social service stakeholders, by advocating for the needs of the beneficiaries, and by identifying the gaps in service provision and their accessibility. The main idea behind this approach, fully aligned with the reformist platform of JIM, is that social services at the level of a community constitute a dynamic network among various institutional and non-institutional actors, where vital roles are played by citizens themselves, both as beneficiaries, empowered to express their needs, demand their rights and make a choice among different service providers, and as active citizens, volunteering their time and competencies to respond to their fellow citizens and monitor local institutional practices. Furthermore, by providing extensive volunteering opportunity to persons from post-war communities as well as various disadvantaged social groups, the UNV/UNDP project has also promoted the role of volunteering in enhancing civic engagement and mobility on the labour market, the latter issue still not being adequately addressed by the Croatian volunteering policy and labour market institutions.

It should be noted, however, that the project could only partially take advantage of its conceptual congruence with JIM, due to two key challenges – (1) delays in the social service reform process, and (2) insufficient attention paid to the need for technical assistance to social service organisations in the project design and resource planning.

Regarding the first, external, challenge, the first phase of the decentralization of social services (2007-2009) did not take place systematically, as envisioned in the National Implementation Plan of JIM for the period 2007-2008 – only a draft policy document has been produced. Based on the first government report on JIM's implementation, the prospective first



phase of decentralization is supposed to ensure legislative changes required for the process of fiscal and administrative decentralization, human resources development and the development of standards for the implementation of service. These institutional changes would enable the centres for social welfare to provide services in partnership, on a contractual basis, with non-governmental non-profit and profit organisations, while the beneficiaries could ideally choose among the types of services and service providers in accordance with the available funds. Similarly, as pointed out in the first implementation report on JIM for the period April 2007 – June 2008, efforts to engage local governments in prevention and alleviation of social exclusion have not been sufficient, due to a lack of clear coordination mechanisms between the central and local authorities, necessary to encourage local and regional authorities to undertake their own social planning. Therefore, expected contribution of the project to systematic decentralization, at the level of target communities, could not take place, although there were some opportunities for bottom-up initiatives, at the level of municipalities.

Regarding the second, internal challenge, while the original project design foresaw one specific activity geared towards capacity building and networking of municipal-level social service providers, the activity was omitted from the revised project budget and activity plan. That was due, as explained by UNDP programme officer, to rather unpredictable transfers of funds, which prevented the planning of public events requiring coverage of direct costs, in comparison to ensuring timely monthly funding for NUNV volunteers' core work. From the selected NUNV volunteers' profiles it is apparent that none of them had competencies to provide technical assistance to local institutions and CSOs engaged in social service provision, such as fundraising strategy development, standardization and improving efficiency of social service provision or, most importantly creation of joint social service programmes for target groups (e.g. the elderly, Roma children, children with disability), nor were such organisational and local policy interventions, envisioned in the scope of work of project coordinator and the support provided by senior programme officers of UNDP. For these reasons, the actual opportunities to stimulate local social policy planning or more systematic coordination among various funders and providers of social services in several cases were identified only during the project evaluation process. Hence, the central lesson learned from this project is the importance of combining direct social service provision and networking with organisational and policy support at the level of local communities, in case the gaps in lagging social reform process are to be partially bridged, and positive effects on beneficiaries extended beyond the project completion.

## **2.2. Relevance to the national policy on Roma**

With the aim of improving the living conditions of the Romani national minority, and their social inclusion, alongside the implementation of the 2003 National Programme for Roma (NPfR), the Republic of Croatia voluntarily joined the regional policy initiative - the Decade of Romani Inclusion 2005-2015, put forth by the World Bank, Open Society Institute and other development agencies. Systematic improvement of human rights, living conditions, educational opportunities and social integration of the Roma is also prescribed in JIM. Like other countries of the Decade programme, the Republic of Croatia has prepared its national Action Plan (NAP) and assumed responsibility for its ten year implementation. The allocated state funding has grown from 2,7 million kn (360,000EUR) in 2005, to 17,5 million kn (2,3

million EUR) in 2008 and 38,5 million kn (5 million EUR) in 2009. The implementation of NAP is monitored by the multi-stakeholder Commission, with five working groups. The UNV/UNDP project directly relates to Education policy area of NAP, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports acting as implementing agency.

The UNV/UNDP project directly relates to the following 5 out of 6 measures in the area of pre-school education:

- Informing Roma children and parents about the importance of pre-school education
- Involving parents in an effort to stimulate and support pre-school education, especially the inclusion of children in pre-school education programmes.
- Promote a multicultural climate in pre-school institutions
- Provision of adequate space, staff and other resources necessary for the setting up of pre-school education
- Inclusion of Roma children in two-year programmes to ensure healthy psycho-physical, socio-emotional and physical development, prepare them for school and community life and for enrolment in primary school programmes

In Croatia, pre-school and primary school education is de-centralised, i.e. local government is responsible for funding core infrastructural and staffing costs, while the coverage of additional costs related to specific national action plans and programmes is often contingent of local authorities', mostly very limited, budgetary capacities and pro-activity in seeking state subsidies, which is often lacking, as was the case in Sisak/Caprag. While NAP does not list specific measures to be undertaken by Roma communities themselves, in respect to the goal increasing the number of Roma children of both sexes in primary school education, the involvement of Roma CSOs in the policy implementation and monitoring indicates that their contribution in mobilizing their communities is assumed, without clear assessment of the Roma NGOs' actual capacities to mobilize their communities and deliver complementary social programmes. The project's attempt to provide primary school children with additional teaching assistance and creative workshops, available in their own community and delivered by a Roma NUNV is geared towards the same goal, especially the prevention of drop-out rate, due to poor school performance and low self-esteem.

### **2.3. Relevance to the national policy of the promotion of volunteerism**

The project has also attempted to promote volunteerism as a tool for alleviating social exclusion in post-war communities, both by providing selected local inhabitants to act as NUNV volunteers, as well as by strengthening capacities of at least three local CSOs that are actively promoting voluntary work at the community level (Suncokret in Gvozđ, Una in Srb and, to a lesser degree, Red Cross in Lapac). In this respect, the strong focus on Suncokret is particularly valuable as it is at present the only Croatian CSO which hosts international volunteers all year around, in addition to organizing summer volunteer camps and community actions.

The project's focus on the promotion of volunteerism is generally in line with the national policy for the promotion of voluntary work, which is being formulated and implemented by the Ministry of Family, Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity, in cooperation with the

Government Office for CSOs, National Foundation for Civil Society Development and the emerging network of CSOs focused on this issue. An important incentive for the national policy formulation was the UN's declaration of the year 2001 as the International Year of Volunteerism, resulting in various promotional activities and the establishment of the National Committee on Volunteerism, as a multistakeholder working group of the Council for Civil Society Development. The National Committee prepared the draft law on volunteerism which was taken up by the Ministry of Family, Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity in 2004 and eventually adopted in May 2007. It is interesting to note that the policy formulation remained constant despite the change of government in November 2003, demonstrating the political consensus, as well as the strong voice of civil society organisations for systematic promotion of volunteerism as a vital societal value and development asset.

The new Law on Volunteerism defines voluntary work, delineates rights and obligations of volunteers and organisers of voluntary work, specifies type of reimbursements and awards that volunteers can and should receive, as well as prohibitions of using volunteers for jobs that should be performed by employees. The main difference in remuneration is that volunteers can only be compensated for costs of performing work (travel, work insurance, food, accommodation, direct activity costs etc.), which is voluntary in the sense that it cannot be commanded and is agreed upon by verbal or written contracts. In November 2007, the new National Committee for the Development of Volunteerism was convened, with the broad mandate of proposing further policy and public actions that would improve the status of volunteers and social acceptance of volunteerism. Over the past year and a half, the National Committee has held eight sessions, mostly focused on the drafting of the national Code of Volunteer Ethics (adopted in May 2008), rules of procedure for reporting on part of organisers of voluntary work as well as for the awarding of the State Reward for Volunteering. The Committee has also been coordinating the annual celebration of the International Volunteers' Day (December 5). MoFVAIS has also provided institutional support to four regional volunteer centres, and other CSOs actively promoting voluntary work, especially with the elderly and persons with disabilities.

It should be noted, however, that the national policy on volunteerism has so far not been developed to the point of stimulating specific benefits of volunteerism - enhanced employability; international solidarity and interculturalism; and generation of human capital in depopulated, underdeveloped regions - all of which have been attempted in the scope of this project. The evaluation of this project also draws attention to two issues that may be relevant to the fine-tuning of the national volunteerism policy - the challenge of promoting volunteerism in economically deprived communities, where employment is not available and social energy for public action, beyond traditional solidarity networks, is low and the challenge of making a more clear distinction between volunteer living allowances and honoraria or even salaries, especially in cases where the actual amounts are very similar, as is the case with NUNV volunteer living allowance, compared to honoraria and salaries of local community workers in CSOs and local institutions. Considering the overlap in membership between the National Committee and the project Steering Committee, it is realistic to expect that key lessons learned from this project, related to the benefits and challenges of promoting volunteerism in Croatian post-war regions will be communicated to the National Committee on the Promotion of Volunteerism.

## **2.4. Relevance to the national policy of civil society development**

The project is in accordance with several priority themes of the National Strategy for the Creation of Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development and accompanying operational Plan for the period 2006-2011 –strengthening the role of civil society organisations in regional development (chapter 9); improving the regulatory framework for subcontracting CSOs as social service providers (chapter 8.2) and the promotion of volunteerism (chapter 10, described in more detail in the previous section of this report). In line with the Strategy, over the past two years the National Foundation for Civil Society Development has decentralized its support programmes, enabling provision of funding, training and TA on part of regional foundations and consortia of resource CSOs. Regarding the UNV/UNDP project locations, relevant resources include the foundation ZAMAH and the capacity building programme E-misija at disposal to initiatives in Sisak-Moslavina County (Gvozd, Hrvatska Kostajnica and Sisak); the capacity building programme MRRAK and the Foundation for partnerships and civil society development Pula which also covers Lika-Senj county (Donji Lapac) and the programme STEP and the Foundation Kajo Dacic, also targeting Zadar county (hence Srb). The director for NFCSD was also a member of the project SC, so it could have been reasonably expected that the project would help distribute information on these newly available resources in target communities. Nevertheless, the evaluation findings show that NUNV volunteers did not systematically engage with the regional resource CSOs nor was there concerted effort to use NUNV volunteers and project activities, with the exception of volunteer fairs in Gvozd, to link local CSOs with NGCSD resources. That omission can be related to a more general problem of insufficient articulation of the role of NUNV volunteers' and the project as a whole in strengthening organisational, and not only human capacities for social service provision in target communities.

## **2.5. Relevance to project implementers' development policies**

This project has ensured greater contact of the UNDP Social Inclusion Programme (also known as SOS Programme) with daily obstacles to social service provision in post-war communities, which stem out of the structural problems that SOS Programme is addressing at the national policy level, by continuous provision of expertise and technical assistance to key state institutions responsible for the social policy reforms. UNDP has used the knowledge of the social exclusion issues in Croatia, generated in the scope of its SOS Programme (e.g. the 2007 Study on the Quality of Life in Croatia, 2005-07 JIM consultation process), as a basis for the project design. In turn, the project has provided UNDP with insight into local challenges that can be used as illustrative examples in forthcoming advocacy of systematic solutions.

The original project design also envisioned collaboration with the UNDP Local Development Programme, i.e. its regional office for the county of Sisak-Moslavina (originally in Sisak, later in Petrinja) which complements government efforts in rebuilding public and social infrastructure and setting-up incentives for economic development in areas of special state concern. For that reason, the position of "monitoring officer" of small-scale social infrastructure projects was created within the UNV/UNDP project and the local programme manager was engaged in the selection of NUNV volunteers. While the actual workload of the monitoring officer proved smaller than planned, on several occasions, consultations between

the SOS and Local Development programme related to certain project activities proved vital and there were several infrastructure investments made by the Local development programme, based on the needs identified by NUNV volunteers. Yet, it is the evaluator's assessment that the full potential of inter-programmatic collaboration was not realized.

It is important to emphasize that UNDP Croatia is in favourable institutional position to catalyze cooperation among national, regional and local institutions responsible for social protection, as well across sectors, strengthening the voice of civil society organisations and community leaders, as was evident in regard to the Roma component of this project. At the same time, the project design did not foresee a more prominent role of UNDP SOS Programme officers or associates in the encouragement of local social planning and organisational development support to institutions and CSOs in target communities, which is definitely the task of instrumental importance for ensuring sustainability of positive effects that the project has had on its direct beneficiaries - members of disadvantaged social groups. For this reason, the main recommendation stemming out of this evaluation report is enhancing UNDP's institutional leverage in the upcoming months of project completion, the incorporation of project sustainability actions into the forthcoming planning of the SOS Programme, as well as joint revisiting of the cross-cutting issues related to social inclusion on part of the Local Development and the SOS Programmes.

Regarding the UNV, the main purpose of this specialized agency is the promotion of volunteerism worldwide, as a valuable component of peace building and development programmes and initiatives, especially in terms of enhancing inter-cultural understanding, transnational solidarity and transfer of knowledge and skills between more and less privileged social classes and world regions. While the focus is put on stimulating mobility of professionals, UNV also promotes the idea that every individual with good will, regardless of education, can contribute to peace and development. If UNV's criteria for the recruitment of NUNV volunteers are considered (university degree, proved professional experience) it is evident they were not fully adhered to in this particular project, since the focus was put on civic and professional empowerment of active citizens living in post-war communities and themselves belonging to disadvantaged social groups. In several cases, both professional and empowerment criteria were met, i.e. in the recruitment of a young female school teacher, settler from B-H or long-term unemployed middle-aged woman, Serbian returnee, with educational background in social work. The empowerment potential of NUNV positions for members of disadvantaged social groups, as utilized in this project, is perhaps a lesson learned for future UNV programming.

The main donor of the project, the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), with its impressive annual budget of over 5 billion EUR in 2009, is one of the biggest bilateral donors of the UNV (around 1,8 million EUR of annual investment) as well as reliable an important contributor to UNDP core budget and specific programmes. As BMZ seems not to have a portfolio in Croatia, it can be inferred that this project has been funded as part of BMZ's strategic support to UNV's mission.

## 3. Effectiveness, Partnerships and Prospects of Sustainability

### 3.1. Project Contribution to the Community of Gvozd

#### Community Profile

The municipality of Gvozd is made up of some 3000 inhabitants, with apparent depopulation trend - there were 3779 inhabitants in 2001 census; currently 60% are the elderly and only 7% are primary school children. Around 70% of inhabitants are Serbian minority returnees and 30% are Croat settlers from B-H. Gvozd is governed by the coalition of the Croatian Democratic Alliance (HDZ) and the Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS), which has been commended as effective in promoting a variety of social and economic development initiatives, as well as inter-ethnic cooperation, the central asset being the entrepreneurial spirit of the current mayor. Differently from the overarching spirit of apathy of local authorities in post-war settings, the mayor is optimistic about the local development prospects – he has increased local revenues, due to the recent fiscal decentralization, proactive collection of communal tax and successful applications for state funding (Fund for Environmental Protection) and donor support (UNDP) for communal infrastructure. The municipality is active in several regional development initiatives, such as the constitution of Local Action group with other neighbouring municipalities and has a long-standing cooperation with international reconstruction programmes, such as UNHCR and USAID. It is mayor's intention to fight depopulation by make Gvozd an attractive community for young families with children and for that reason he takes economic and social development equally seriously.

Regarding social programmes, the primary school founded a kindergarten, which is financed from the municipal budget, and the municipality has accessed the MOFVAIS funding for the municipal home-visits' programme for the elderly, which started in October 2007 and is run by the municipality directly, employing 7 persons, with 3 additional positions approved from June 2009 onwards. Regarding socio-cultural life in Gvozd, there is a local library, two cultural associations (one gathering the returnees, and the other Bosnian Croat settlers), and then, there is Suncokret – “the lifeline of the community”, as it has been described in an evaluation interview. Suncokret is a community development centre focusing on children and youth and promotion of community-based, as well as transnational volunteerism, which has acted as an independent local CSO in Gvozd since 2004, and, prior to that, since 1998, as a field operation of a broader national grassroots relief organisation whose well-known name the Gvozd centre inherited.

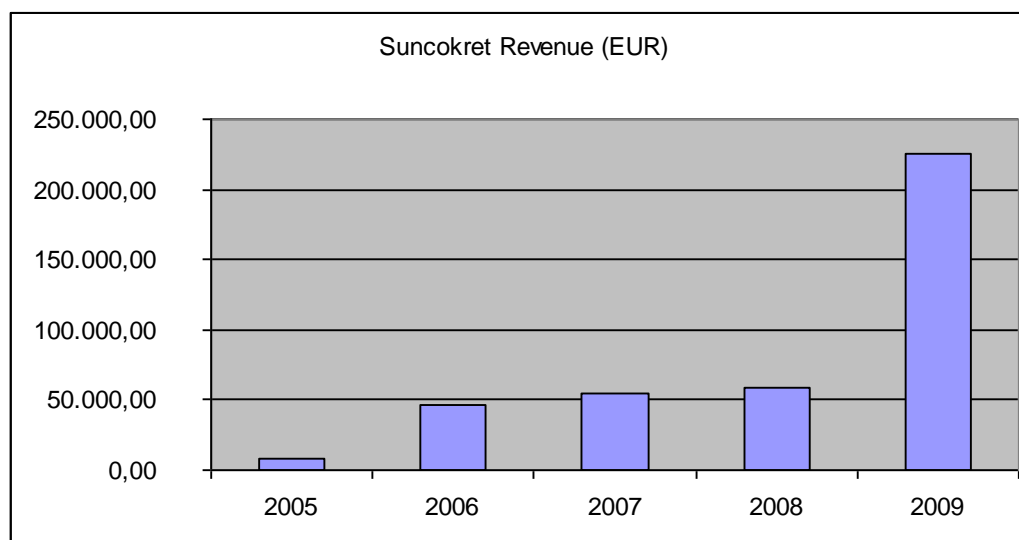
#### Key project results

The UNV/UNDP project correctly recognized Suncokret as the anchor of its engagement in Gvozd, and by placing two NUNV volunteers and selecting one of the leaders of Suncokret to act as project coordinator, it has clearly contributed to organisational capacities and the breadth and quality of services provided by Suncokret, which has in turned strengthened its agency as the generator of social development in the community, with prospects of broader regional impact.



The key indicators of the value of NUNV volunteers' engagement in Gvozd and Suncokret are impressive:

- Total 500 beneficiaries served, among whom 268 are children and youth and 100 are elderly.
- Outreach to both Serbian returnee and Bosnian Croat settler communities - 169 vs. 195, the latter being higher due to the fact that settlers' families are younger with more children
- Support to adult community members – 100 assisted with administration, 100 provided humanitarian aid, 10 provided with parental counselling
- Support to children and youth – 100 provided with teaching assistance, 150 engaged in creative workshops
- Support to community initiatives – 15 other local initiatives assisted, 9 local actions directly organised
- Suncokret's organisational capacity building – core team increased from 2 to 4 full-time members; expanded community centre premises - additional floor donated by the municipality and renovated with UNDP Local Development grant; additional house for art activities donated by the Kids' Earth Fund (a Japanese foundation that set-up a local branch in Gvozd, in partnership with Suncokret). The organisational budget increased 3,8 times over the project period 2007-2008, about to reach a quarter of a million EUR in the first quarter of 2009. Multiyear state funding and the EU funding through PHARE 2006 Youth Programme ensure greater organisational stability.



The two NUNV volunteers in Gvozd – Dusanka Jovicic (Serbian returnee, former leader of pre-school playgroups, which preceded the founding of the municipal kindergarten) and Sanja Brkic (Bosnian Croat, settler, young school teacher), took a lead in organizing daily activities for children and youth in Suncokret's community centre, hence enabling the two coordinators to focus more on partnership development and engaging the youth (the main tasks of Predrag Mraovic, Suncokret's main founder) and fundraising (Maja Turniski, also acting as UNV/UNDP project coordinator). It must be highlighted that Suncokret is recognized as an

inclusive community space, attended both by domicile Serbs and Bosnian Croat settlers, where ethnic differences do not turn into tensions. On the contrary, Suncokret successfully promotes cultural diversity, enhanced by continued presence of international volunteers.

Regular, day-long working hours of the centre (from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. and even longer during summer volunteer camps), steady presence of NUNV volunteers and a range of structured activities (creative workshops, teaching assistance, ICT courses) have also attracted more beneficiaries, not only children and youth but also adults - as parents entrusting their children to the NUNV volunteers; as beneficiaries of computer literacy courses and assistance with administrative issues and as members of local associations seeking advice on fundraising and organisation of community actions (e.g. the local association of antifascists). Suncokret has also successfully encouraged closer cooperation between the two folk-dancing cultural associations, representing the two ethnic communities in Gvozd, as part of the current PHARE 2005 project.

Sanja Brkic's parallel engagement at the community center and at the primary school, where she assisted children with learning during the two hours of leeway between the end of classes and arrival of the bus for pupils from rural areas has strengthened Suncokret's connection with the school, whose teachers have also attended computer literacy courses at Suncokret. As emphasized by the headmistress, Suncokret is an indispensable and trustworthy organisation. It provides the only alternative to lingering and coffee bars, and on top of that, the quality of educational and social activities far exceeds the headmistress's expectations, considering the fact that not all of the Suncokret's core team members are education professionals. She has commended Suncokret on keeping records on all activities and beneficiaries, and deep trust that the volunteers have established with the children and their parents. After five years, the on-going engagement of international volunteers (both long-term and short-term during the summer voluntary camp) is widely accepted in the community as a welcome influx of creativity, interculturalism and enthusiasm. The success formula of Suncokret is the combination of international and local volunteers, the latter being crucial for bridging the cultural gap between the mainstream community culture and the subculture of international volunteers. In that respect, it has been helpful that Dusanka is a respected mother of twins, the wife of the mayor and proven community volunteer, while Sanja is a young, competent teacher whose family live in Gvozd.

An example of highly visible volunteer action undertaken by Suncokret was the internal decoration of the new information center for rural development in the near-by village of Slavsko Polje, undertaken upon request of the organic farming cooperative Svarun and the regional community development resource CSO Center for Civil Initiatives. Over only 10 days, an Australian family of international volunteers, joined by local children and youth and NUNV volunteers Sanja Brkic and Dusanka Jovicic, turned a former school into an optimistic space and thus contributed to the PHARE 2005 project stimulating job retraining in the Banovina region, providing 57 unemployed industrial workers with agricultural specializations for which there is demonstrated market demand. The celebration of the centre's opening on November 14, 2008 also included the cultural programme performed by children gathering at Suncokret.

Another example of partnership approach is NUNV volunteers' participation in home visits and humanitarian actions for the elderly and infirm, in cooperation with both the municipal programme for the elderly and the local Red Cross, also collecting humanitarian aid themselves, based on identified needs, bringing along international volunteers. The humanitarian action "Children to Children" taking place in Suncokret has been particularly effective in promoting the value of community solidarity – children attending the center were asked to donate their own clothes and toys and then all the children could take what they needed, while the rest was donated to remote rural households with children. In total, humanitarian actions did not take more than 10% of NUNV volunteers' time, so they cannot be considered duplication, but rather an act of support to the other local social assistance programmes.

The central public event, organised by the project was the Volunteer Fair, held in Gvozd on July 12, 2007, in collaboration with Suncokret and the Volunteer Center Zagreb. All at that time active NUNV volunteers contributed to its organisation and ensured the attendance and presentation of 15 volunteer CSOs from all three regions targeted by the project, including several highly experienced organisations, such as Center for Civic Initiatives, MOST from Split. The fair mobilized the entire community - local women in Gvozd baked cakes and cookies for the event, the policeman from the neighbouring town of Vojnic cooked a stew that was served to all participants and volunteers and Suncokret's international volunteers, local children and youth helped in the preparations of the event. At a round table held during the fair, a representative of MoFVAIS presented the recently adopted Volunteersim Act, and activists from MOST and Volunteer center Zagreb introduced their programmes - best practice examples of the promotion of volunteerism in the country. At present, the UNV/UNDP project coordinator and Suncokret are preparing a celebration of the EU Day of Inter-generational Solidarity (April 29), in collaboration with MoFVAIS, of similar scale to the volunteer fair, to be held for the first time in Croatia - in Gvozd. The event will be opened by the Minister of Family, Veterans Affairs and Inter-generational Solidarity and will provide space to a variety of community-based programmes for the elderly to present themselves.

#### Sustainability Prospects and Opportunities for Greater Impact

In Gvozd, the synergy between the NUNV volunteers and the local host organisation was achieved, improving the quality and breadth of non-institutional social services, as well as the organisational capacities and cooperative relations Suncokret. Due to secured funding, all activities performed during the project can be continued by the two NUNV volunteers and the project coordinator who can immediately be integrated in Suncokret's core team, with attention to be paid to the importance of ensuring a salary with security benefits for Sanja Brkic, who is willing to re-orient her teaching career to becoming Suncokret's educational specialist.

The trusting relationship developed with the local authorities and general high standing in the community are the basis for Suncokret's positioning as the long-term partner in the forthcoming regional development programmes, which the municipality plans to design and nominate for IPA regional development funding and other state-level and cross-border sources. The mayor has clearly stated his expectation that Suncokret grow into a regional volunteer center, with adequate premises for accommodation of international volunteers, who

can boost up local tourism and contribute to a range of reconstruction projects and social actions. Hence, the mayor is willing to include Suncokret in the management of the new multifunctional community centre that is currently being renovated, which will also host the local action planning group (LAG) and the tourist association that is also about to be formed.

Suncokret is also a prospective regional resource for engagement of international volunteers in community actions. While no such joint volunteer actions took place over the project, greatly due to the overburdened of NUNV volunteers' with local activities, there are several opportunities for helping other communities, where Suncokret has established cooperation, including the NUNV volunteers, to organise international volunteer camps, as add-ons to the massive summer camp in Gvozd. Some of the identified opportunities are the expansion of the children's playground and further works on the Roma community centre in Capraske Poljane and small-scale reconstruction projects for single-headed returnee households in Hrvatska Kostajnica.

The prospects of local social planning in Gvozd are good, under the assumption that reformist local leadership, with contacts with national institutions and integrated approach to local development, stays in power. Suncokret is in the position to advocate the launch of the local social planning process, act as the facilitator of consultations among various social service providers, and facilitate contacts with regional and national authorities and experts. This is particularly valuable in light of the present, however subdued, political tensions which also play out in the relations between the local authorities and some CSOs (e.g. local Red Cross). Obvious local social planning priorities are the creation of an appropriate institutional nest for the municipal programme for the elderly, which should be outsourced to a local institution or an CSO, and the formulation of the municipal programme for children and youth development, which may enhance strategic fundraising for all relevant needs, including higher education scholarships, regular pre-school programmes, and, possibly, a complementary education programme in civic education, as suggested by the headmistress.

Regarding further support to other civic initiatives in Gvozd and regionally, Suncokret is already recognized as a source of inspiration and support. In case there is adequate staff time, it would be worth trying to encourage the local Red Cross to take fundraising and programme development more seriously and revitalize the club for the elderly. Also, it is apparent that local women, many of whom are also parents, find Suncokret as the only public space for their gathering (cafés are traditionally dominated by males drinking alcohol), and it may be useful to encourage some of the most active local volunteers, to take initiative in creating a women's club which may also be self-financed (e.g. a pastry parlour).

### **3.3. Project Contribution to the Community of Petrinja**

#### **Community Profile**

Petrinja is a post-war municipality of approx. 23 000 inhabitants, located near Sisak, the capital of the Sisak-Moslavina County. Its ethnic structure has significantly changed after the war, as the proportion of Serbs has decreased from 44, 9% to 11, 9% and the overall population dropped by 35%. It is estimated that around 4000 elderly Serbs have returned to the area. Traditionally, the main employer in Petrinja is the meat industry Gavrilovic that has expanded its production capacities since 2006, hence creating new job opportunities that

have also been ensured by the recent opening of two new trade centers. Still, some 3000 - 3300 inhabitants are unemployed and depend on seasonal job opportunities. Over 730 families are permanent beneficiaries of social assistance and over 3000 persons are provided with humanitarian aid through the Red Cross. Other obstacles to the economic growth include underdeveloped infrastructure, non-functional or devastated utilities, slow process of demining, devalued real-estate property and a lack of public funding for full community development. However, more optimistic prospects for economic and social development are indicated by the increase of Petrinja's city budget. Due to the new law on fiscal decentralization, fiscal revenues increased from 68 million kuna in 2006 to estimated 90 million kuna in 2008.

Since the local elections in 2005, the City has been governed by the centre-left coalition with strong dedication of the City government to economic development projects. The local government is also expressing cooperativeness and responsiveness toward citizens and specific groups among city population as well as toward representatives of civil society. National minorities participate in the City government with their representative; the City has ensured a working space for the national minorities' council and is financing a weekly radio show on Radio Petrinja covering ethnic minorities' issues. The City has also expressed a special interest for the position of the youth population adopting the Local Youth Programme and forming the City Youth Commission.

The municipal government is open to CSOs in the community, as evidenced by the office responsible for the cooperation with civil society. According to the official statistics, Petrinja has 100 registered CSOs, but a more realistic number is 20 active CSOs. Sport clubs, cultural, and veterans' associations prevail, while a smaller number are those dedicated to democratization and advocacy. The most active CSO in Petrinja is the Association for promotion of computer science, culture and coexistence, IKS. It has launched a very successful interactive website [www.petrinja.com](http://www.petrinja.com), putting youth problems on the city agenda and providing space for citizens for active participation in local development policies. IKS is a partner in the regional CSO development programme "E-misija", together with Center for Civic initiatives and Ars Publica, with the multi-year funding support of the National Foundation for Civil Society Development. IKS has also started publishing a community newsletter INFOte(t)ka, which has improved transparency and visibility of CSOs in the community and has acted as one of the initiators of the Coordination CSOs in Sisak-Moslavina County.

#### Key Project Results

Differently from the situation in Gvozd, where the agency of Suncokret was evident, in Petrinja, a much larger community with relatively developed civil society organisations, the project management encouraged the recruited NUNV, Magdalena Gabrisa, a social work graduate, to take initiative in identifying potential host organisations, which might benefit the most from the NUNV contribution. At the same time, she was entrusted with the role of monitoring officer, to be shared with Milan Knezevic, NUNV in Hrvatska Kostajnica. Based on consultations with the local government official for cooperation with CSOs and social affairs, Magdalena established cooperation with: association IKS (very proactive and advocacy-oriented), the Association of the People with Disability of the Sisak-Moslavina County (UI-

SMZ) and the association “Nas zivot”, assisting the elderly. After the initial three months of “time-sharing” between the three CSOs, Magdalena focused her efforts on assisting Štefica Grubar, the leader of the UI-SMZ, herself a woman with disability, in setting up the new, highly ambitious therapeutic programme for children with development difficulties, named “Small House”, which required intensive fundraising for the renovation of the house donated by the State Property Agency in March 2007, staffing and programme delivery.

As judged by the interviewed representatives of the City of Petrinja whom Magdalena originally approached, the leader of the Association IKS and Ms. Grubar, Magdalena made the right choice at the right time. Her administrative assistance and personal support to Ms. Grubar were very important during the intense year of fundraising, renovation and programme development. In addition, Magdalena facilitated contact between UI-SMZ and the UNDP Local Development Programme which provided significant funding for the renovation of the premises for the “Small House”. Even though the actual renovation process was at times filled with misunderstandings between Štefica, the local contractor and the UNDP Local Development team in Petrinja, the task was successfully accomplished in January 2008. Magdalena’s role was not as much that of monitoring the actual construction, for which she was not adequately trained, but more about mediating the communication between the parties, for which she has been commended by interviewed representative of UNDP.

Additional, extremely time-intensive, yet at the time indispensable contribution of NUNV volunteers’ in Petrinja was been the provision of personal and teaching assistance to a six-year old girl with cerebral palsy, during her first year and the first term of the second year of enrolment in regular primary school (September 2007 – December 2008). In September 2007, upon Magdalena and Ms. Grubar’s initiative, and as a response to that urgent need, UNV/UNDP project decided to recruit an additional NUNV, Maja Durbic, a young unemployed social worker, to act as personal and teaching assistant.

After Maja’s resignation only four months later (due to a job offer at the Centre for social welfare), Magdalena took up the duty and performed it until the end of her engagement as NUNV at the end of December 2008. In addition to full five hours of assistance to the girl on a daily basis, Magdalena continued to volunteer at the office of UI-SZM, in response to Ms. Grubar’s requests which were less frequent as the programme of Small House progressed. Several months prior to the end of Magdalena’s contract, the mother, with help from UI-SZM, managed to ensure a professional personal and teaching assistant for Maja and regular supervision of the service, by contacting the specialized association IDEM. A teacher previously employed at UI-SZM took up the job, but soon resigned due to the magnitude of duties and was replaced by another woman, a family acquaintance with professional educational background. Due to her accrued health problems, she is not capable of providing the girl with assistance with personal hygiene, so the school cleaners step in.

The following are key indicators of the overall value of NUNV volunteers’ support in Petrinja:

- 100 direct beneficiaries, including 30 elderly persons (in cooperation with association Nas Život) and 70 people with disabilities (in cooperation with UI-SZM)
- Range of service provided by NUNV volunteers – home visits, shopping, creative workshops for children, personal and teaching assistance, assistance with mobility

- A girl with cerebral palsy integrated in regular primary education, as precedent as county level
- A multidisciplinary programme of rehabilitation of children with development difficulties “Small House” of the UI-SZM set up and running, offering logotherapy on a daily basis, psychological counselling and creative therapeutic workshops for children. At the time of evaluation there are 53 regular beneficiaries of the programme (32 from Petrinja, 3 from Glina , 7 from Kostajnica ad 11 from Sisak) and a total of 67 children enrolled.
- The premises of “Small House” fully renovated with UNDP Local Development Programme major donation od 170, 000 kn, with additional donation of 45,000 kn by the RTL foundation
- Two staff positions in 2008 secured by the Adris Foundation donation of 105,500 kn
- Total value of funding increased 5 times over one-year period - 486.260,00 kn in 2008, compared to 95.052,38 in 2007. Funding for 2009 is less certain - 100.000 kn approved, but not transferred yet.

Based on the feedback from Ms. Latincic, the mother of the disabled girl, as well as the girl's class mistress, both NUNV volunteers demonstrated outstanding commitment and ability to relate to the girl and provide educational stimuli as well as appropriate assistance with personal hygiene and mobility. Magdalena's ability to act both as her friend and authority was highlighted, especially in light of some emotional challenges that the girls is facing, in accepting failure and being treated as equal to other children. The presence of NUNV volunteers in the classroom was also well accepted by other pupils, and provided the teacher with adequate time to focus on all children. Considering the fact that none of the NUNV volunteers were trained or previously experienced as personal and teaching assistants to children with disability, the expressed high satisfaction on part of the mother and the teacher with the quality of the services provided by Maja and Magdalena should be taken as an indicator of outstanding accomplishment.

While personal benefits from this service are evident for the girl, her family and the class environment, it is legitimate to pose the question of efficiency of this project input, considering that 50% of total NUNV time in Petrinja over a two-year period was devoted to only one beneficiary. The justification provided by the UNDP project management team is convincing - at that time and upon short notice, the need was precedent in the municipality, with no easily accessible funding at any government level.

Namely, while the new law on primary education recognizes the need to integrate children, with special needs in regular schools and the new Croatian National Educational Standard for Primary Schools (HNOS) envisions additional assistance to children with disabilities in regular schools, the Ministry of Education is not obliged to secure the funding for this service, nor is there any clear funding mechanism in place (primary education falls under the decentralized funding responsibilities of local authorities). In practice, funding responsibilities seem to be shared by local authorities (depending on their funding capacity and sensitivity, the City of Zagreb taking the lead) and the ministries, in all cases by means of funding the services organised and provided by still too few specialized, Zagreb-based CSOs, primarily IDEM and PUŽ, which try to provide support to a number of local communities throughout Croatia. It is



evident that there is a lack of a systematic, sustainable solution for ensuring equal access to personal and teaching assistants to all children with disabilities, without which they cannot exercise their right to regular primary education and social integration.

The positive news is the current drafting of the rules of procedure for the provision of personal and teaching assistance to children with disabilities, chaired by Ms. Igric, a renowned expert and the president of IDEM. It is the intention of Ms. Igric to build in the obligation of back-up funding from state institutions for services that cannot be covered by municipalities with low social budgets. The Hence, UNV/UNDP project stepped in, to full satisfaction of the primary school, UI-SZM and the girl's family. Nevertheless, it remains unclear why UNDP SOS Programme management, who are familiar with the policy deficiencies related to people with disability and have cooperated with the association IDEM over previous years, did not act earlier, using the case of Maja as a starting point for ensuring the inclusion of and the cost-share on part the municipality of Petrinja and the county of SZM in the existing programme of the association IDEM. Considering the collaboration with UI-SZM, the case could have been elaborated into an advocacy initiative targeting local and regional authorities and the Ministry of Education. This was an opportunity for expanding local access to a social service which seems to have been missed by the project.

#### Sustainability Prospects and Opportunities for Greater Impact

Based on the evaluation interviews with key project stakeholders in Petrinja, it seems that UNDP SOS Programme still has a role to play in supporting UI-SZM. At present, a sustainable mechanism of co-funding the programme, "Small House" needs to be agreed upon, between the City of Petrinja, the County authorities and other municipalities in the region from where 40% of all regular beneficiaries of the Small House come (Sisak, Glina, Hrvatska Kostajnica). UNDP could play the valuable role of facilitating the agreement process, which is currently stuck, due to a lack of willingness of Ms. Grubar to expose herself as a critic of regional authorities, and the City of Petrinja's expressed need for support in getting the other authorities to pay their share of costs. Further engagement of UNDP with UI-SMZ may also be beneficial in supporting the organisation to introduce service quality standards and monitoring procedures which seem to be missing at present. It is also evident that upon UNV's departure, the organisation has not ensured sufficient funding for the paid position of assistant manager, which puts utmost burden on the leader of the organisation. It would be useful to assist the leader of UI-SZM to develop a more strategic approach to organisational development.

### **3.4. Project Contribution to the Community of Hrvatska Kostajnica**

#### Community Profile

Hrvatska Kostajnica is a small municipality in the Sisak – Moslavina County, situated on the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The town itself, without gravitating municipalities Donji Kukuzari, Hrvatska Dubica and Majur, has a population of 2 746 inhabitants, of whom 2115 are Croats. The biggest minority are 433 Serbs. The population is mainly elderly and the town is dealing with a negative demographic trend, as youth are leaving Kostajnica and moving to other cities such as Sisak or Zagreb. The negative demographic structure is related to the overall economic and agricultural underdevelopment. Kostajnica has 1 307 unemployed and

900 employed citizens and 10% of the population receive social welfare benefits. Even more, of the 900 employed citizens, half of them are not actually living in the town, only 250 of them are working in the industry, and the rest are employed as public servants. The population is mostly active in the agricultural sector, but producing only for personal use rather than the market. In addition, there are around 15 small companies in the service sector such as shops, bakeries, bars.

In past years, Kostajnica underwent several political crises and changes of the government. After the 2005 local elections the councillors could not reach consensus about electing the mayor, so there were three mayors and one government appointee managing the city. Political conflict was transferred to the citizens and created divisions within the community. After the by-elections in 2006, a coalition of five parties formed the government, which had to deal with large budget deficits and inherited debts during its first two years of mandate. There has been progress over the past two years as the government managed to focus on addressing economic problems with a positive trend toward gradual adoption of a strategic approach. Information channels between the city government and citizens are limited and not interactive, as there are no local CSOs stimulating the dialogue; the local authorities lack human resources for public relations, as evidenced by the fact that the only official informative bulletin *Kostajnicki list* was closed several years ago.

Although there are 30 CSOs registered in Kostajnica, only 10 of them are active. The most of them are engaged in sports and cultural activities or veterans' associations. The only CSO that organised civic activities and supported alternative culture KAOS does not exist anymore. CSO ROSA offers psychosocial support, consultations and workshops for children and parents and has a good partnership with the local high school and the Serbian Democratic Forum has its office in this area, providing free legal support to citizens. Social services are a big issue in this community, thus the city established the Center for the Care of the Elderly, financed by the Ministry of Family, veterans and intergenerational solidarity. The City contributed to the project by donating space and partially financing its activities.

#### Key project results

In Hrvatska Kostajnica, the local NUNV volunteer is Milan Knezevic, an outstanding humanitarian, a Serbian returnee in mid 50s, with refugee and returnee experience, who has been active in supporting refugees and returnees since the war during his exile in Banja Luka and upon his return to Croatia. He is also a member of municipal council and government structure, in his capacity of member of the municipal Council of the Serbian national minority. Milan is also a member of political party HNS with no leadership position. As highlighted by the interviewed representative of the Serbian democratic forum, "there is no money that can pay Milan's work", since he is one of those rare individuals that are ready to assist anybody in need 24 hours a day, without any hesitation to answer a call, jump into his car, take humanitarian aid packages, bring medicines or collect documents in a remote village to help with a returnee with citizenship application or a settler with one-time monetary assistance from the municipality.

Milan is probably the best acquainted person in the municipality with the actual social needs of every single family, and in a different, more flexible system of social protection, he would definitely be assigned the role of outreach community worker, in charge of monitoring social

needs and proposing appropriate actions that combine different resources. That is exactly what he did as NUNV volunteer – he responded to a number of request for social support and identified beneficiaries on his own, and brokered provision of humanitarian and legal assistance from various organisations, primarily the local authorities, Adventist Association Charitable Samaritan and ADRA, the Red Cross, the Serbian Democratic Forum, Patria and municipal programme for the home care of the elderly. On several occasions, such as that of a single woman returnee with grave asthma, he procured small reconstruction assistance and organised neighbours to volunteer in repairing the ruined dwellings. In addition, he assisted several local associations in accessing funding, as well as regional or national CSOs in accessing beneficiaries and setting up local activities.

The following are the impressive quantitative indicators of NUNV volunteer's engagement in Hrvatska Kostajnica:

- Total beneficiaries of social assistance – 1247 in Hrvatska Kostajnica and neighbouring municipalities of Majur, Donji Kukuzari and Hrvatska Dubica
- Balanced outreach to Serbian returnees (962) and Bosnian Croat settlers (285)
- Information and support provided to 6 local associations and cooperative and 4 national/regional CSOs (including the organisation of training for 12 prospective local volunteers)
- A range of social services provided to a large number of beneficiaries– humanitarian assistance (425), administrative assistance (640), transport and mobility (62), shopping (143), housework and repairs (25).
- Local beneficiaries identified and supported by the UNDP Local Development Programme's procurement of social infrastructure - Association of beekeepers "Kostanj" (office equipment), 3 Serbian returnee households (house repairs)

Milan Knezevic facilitated the contact between the local beekeepers' association "Kostanj" and the field office of UNDP Local Development Programme in Petrinja, which procured the association with full office equipment, including the computer, PCD projector, office shelves, desks and chairs.. Even though the procurement process took over a year, it has improved the management and meeting premises of the association, granted by the municipal authorities. The association "Kostanj" was founded in October 2006 and has since maintained high level of enthusiasm among its 42 members, mostly young and middle-aged men, also coming from neighbouring municipalities, and, more importantly, from all three main social groups – the Serbian returnees domestic Croats and Bosnian Croat settlers. Milan Knezevic is also the member of Kostanj and has completed the beekeeping course, but is mostly engaged in providing logistical assistance to his fellow members.

Despite radically different party affiliations of the most active members, countered by the internal rule to stay away from political discussions, the leadership of Kostanj is proud of the solidarity and a sense of common cause expressed by the members, who often assist each other in beekeeping. The association is very successful in regional contests in beekeeping and for the past two years has organised courses in beekeeping in cooperation with experts from the Agricultural Faculty in Zagreb, including a cross-border course with beekeepers from Bosanska Kostajnica and Bihac. The association is run on a fully voluntary basis and plays a valuable role in promoting beekeeping not only as a hobby, but an opportunity for local economic development. The leaders of the association plan to encourage the most advanced

local beekeepers to set-up a cooperative, which would run parallel to the association, whose main purpose is education, awareness-raising and networking with other similar organisations in the region. It is apparent that beyond good relations with the municipal authorities and the county, experts and several other beekeeping associations, the leadership of Kostanj is not sufficiently informed about funding and TA opportunities for CSOs and cooperatives in Croatia, e.g. the NGCSD's regional development programme (E-misija, Zamah, particularly the work of the Center for Civil Initiatives), even though the leaders took part in the Volunteer Fair organised by the project in Gvozd.

Another important contribution to development of volunteerism was NUNV volunteer's assistance in organizing a training course for prospective local volunteers, undertaken by the Association for the promotion and protection of human rights and improvement of quality of life Patria, from Zagreb and with funding of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. NUNV helped recruit 12 persons, all unemployed who attended the four day-long workshops in the period October-December, 2008, on the following topics: project planning, monitoring and evaluation, home-care and assistance and needs and opportunities for community volunteering (local social initiatives and programmes were presented). Since the training, four out of 12 trained volunteers are actively providing social assistance to the elderly and infirm and are planning creative workshops with children.

Patria was founded in early 2007, by two former members of the Serbian Democratic Forum, with the aim of strengthening community-based social services in the Banovina region. There is apparently no overlap with the local SDF office in Kostajnica, which focuses on legal aid, and has no capacity for social assistance. Patria has secured initial funding for voluntary social work until summer 2009 from the Dutch Embassy (85 000 kn) and has been granted free office premises by the local authorities, Mr. Milorad Lukic, Patria's president, is most interested in continuing cooperation with Milan Knezevic, as a prospective Patria's local volunteers' team leader. Yet, the funding needs to be secured and it is evident that Patria needs technical assistance in developing a multi-year programme of work in Hrvatska Kostajnica, which would complement existing social services provided by other actors.

#### Sustainability Prospects and Opportunities for Greater Impact

While UNV/UNDP project definitely recruited an outstandingly sensitive, informed, well-connected and proactive person in Hrvatska Kostajnica who was extremely committed and efficient in helping marginalized community members to access various forms of social assistance, the organisational level of intervention was limited to logistical assistance and contacts with UNDP field office in Petrinja and local authorities. Namely, NUNV volunteer is not familiar with civil society development opportunities for funding and TA available at the regional and national levels, so he could not link the local civic initiatives with those resources. Similarly, the focus of Milan's work was helping individual beneficiaries, and not the improvement of collaboration among different actors engaged in social service provision in Kostajnica. His circle of cooperation did not adequately include the Center for Social Welfare, seemingly due to political reasons (the director is also a president of HDZ which is in opposition to HNS, the governing party of choice of local Serbian returnees, including Milan).

Based on the evaluation interview with the secretary of the municipal government, himself an experienced civil society activist (former member of SDF), there is a burning need for external support in civil society development, setting-up local information channels between local authorities, CSOs and citizens about community affairs and greater coordination among social service providers. Over the upcoming months of the project no-cost extension or follow-up, it would be useful if UNDP Croatia, invested additional time and if possible funding, in organizing a local volunteer fair where all CSOs active in the region would present their programmes, and exploring further the possibility of providing the local authorities with TA (facilitation) of the at least local social planning, including both civil society development and social service provision. Considering the interest of association Patria to establish a long-term social programme in Hrvatska Kostajnica and expressed mutual interest in integrating NUNV volunteer in its local team, provision of TA in local programme development and fundraising would be valuable for ensuring sustainability of Milan's outstanding voluntary work.

### **3.5. Project Contribution to the Roma Community of Capraske Poljane**

#### **Community Profile**

Capraske Poljane is a large settlement of over 1000 Roma from the Bajashi language group, on the outskirts of Sisak. Most adult community members are engaged in the informal sector of metal recycling and the majority is permanent beneficiaries of social assistance (a field social worker visits the beneficiaries rather frequently). The settlement is undergoing legalization and urbanization process, as envisioned in the National Action Plan for the Roma Decade and the National Programme on Roma. The community seems to be a rather safe environment (low crime and alcoholism) and houses seem to be in rather good shape, with well organised recycling yards dominating the landscape. By summer 2009 it is expected that all houses will get access to electricity; running water is available and land registry has been created, in line with the new municipal spatial plan. The remaining half of the main road will be asphalted in 2009, too. The next step would be the granting of property ownership of houses that were once illegal. The City of Sisak granted the Local Council of Capraske Poljane a house, purchased by the City, for the purpose of setting up a local community center. This "Roma house" as it is called, has still not been legalized and despite its seemingly good shape, the municipal and UNDP's engineers claim that there are problems with its static, which would require substantial investments of approx. 200, 000 kn to make the house eligible for utilization permit. The house also lacks running water and electricity. Behind the house, there is a large lawn with basic playground equipment.

According to the headmistress of the primary school in Sisak closest to the Roma community of Capraske Poljane, in the school year 2008/09, there are 115 children who attend the local primary school and 17 are enrolled in the pre-school programme, both taking place in Sisak (transport by bus is secured by local authorities). According to the same source, approximately every third child completes the entire primary school education and only three-year degrees of vocational high schools. Over the past four years, as observed by the headmistress of the primary school, the number of children enrolled in the primary schools has significantly risen, reaching 30 per year, due to greater parents' awareness of the importance of education. Since spring 2009, the school has a Roma teaching assistant, funded by the local authorities and MoSES, who is also a resident of Capraske Poljane and holds a high school diploma.

There are three local associations active in the settlement, each dominated by a leader who is also represented in one or several of local, regional or national advisory bodies for Roma national minority – the Local Council, the municipal and regional Councils for Roma minority and most importantly, the national Commission for Monitoring Implementation of the National Programme for Roma. The leaders communicate with each other but have not yet taken up joint advocacy and comprehensive planning of community development, which is necessary for accessing funding for the Roma minority, available through the NAP and line ministries. It seems that the general level of solidarity is low, as community members do not trust the leaders with community funds and, as experienced by the NUNV volunteers, it is expected to have one's wood storage taken away. Nevertheless, the awareness of the need for greater pro-activity on part of the community members themselves seems to be spreading.

#### Key Project Results

It is in Capraske Poljane that the contribution of the UNV/UNDP project to the broader social development agenda is perhaps the most instrumental, as it provided a critical, previously missing link between the primary and pre-school education system in Sisak and the Roma community, increasing the chances of children's successful integration and school performance in the long-run. Current SOS Programme officer, herself an expert on Roma human rights and social inclusion issues, identified the opportunity to include the community of Capraske Poljane in the UNV/UNDP project, which has been in general disadvantaged by the fact that the area does not belong to area of special state concern, so development funds are harder to channel. In consultations with local Roma leaders, the issue of pre-school education arose as the priority. Namely, at the time of project design, local authorities of Sisak and the local kindergarten finally agreed to create conditions for the Roma children's enrolment in a year-long pre-school programme (250 hours, organised into 2,5 hour sessions taking place three and then two times a week). The City of Sisak committed to covering the costs of special bus line and the pre-school teacher costs.

By targeted recruitment of a Roma NUNV volunteer, to act as an escort and teaching assistant to the first generation of Roma children to attend the official pre-school programme, UNV/UNDP project ensured the missing link without which the plan would not have worked. Namely, children as young as six had to be accompanied on their way to and from Sisak, and due to a lack of previous experience with educational institutions, and, to a degree, their limited knowledge of the Croatian language, a teaching assistant from their own background, taking up the role of parent, was an important factor of making them feel safe in the new environment, but also of facilitating their contact with the pre-school teacher. Additional tasks of providing teaching assistance, organizing creative workshops and playgroups for primary school children in the Roma House, were included in the NUNV volunteer's TOR in Capraske Poljane.

The plan was not only well devised, but also smoothly implemented. The inclusive approach modelled by UNV/UNDP project, ensured adequate level of support from the Roma community leaders, the kindergarten and local authorities. The selection of a Roma NUNV volunteer was the most sensitive moment, especially in the light of four applicants, and one strongly favoured by a Roma leader. The interview panel selected the person that they found

the most suitable but reached out to all Roma leaders, asking for their approval, which they granted. The selected NUNV volunteer, despite initial suspicions (and jealousy) in the community, proved to be the right choice that the mothers of children now find irreplaceable and “even better suited than their own husbands” who had applied for the job! Zoran Vasiljevic is a young, yet mature man, who had just completed his 3 years of vocational high school and had no previous work experience. His firm yet kind stance, attention and interest in children and fine manners have made him extremely well accepted but also respected by the children, the kindergarten and primary school staff, parents and other NUNV volunteers. Zoran’s tasks have included escorting and teaching assistance in the pre-school (every third day one week, followed by two classes the next week and so on), and running workshops in the Roma community center in after-school hours (twice a week), which he also complemented with some revision sessions during summer months. During 2008, Sanja Brkic, NUNV volunteer from Gvozd supported Zoran once a week, in providing teaching assistance to the pupils of the first two grades of the primary school.

The following are key indicators of NUNV volunteer’s work in Capraske Poljane:

- Escort and teaching assistance provided to all Roma children attending the pre-school programme - 32 in year 2006/07, 28 in year 2007/2008 and 17 in year 2008/09
- Teaching assistance and creative workshops in Roma community center – total 56 different children over two-year period
- 20 parents of pre-school children regularly contacted with reminders of pre-school hours and need to prepare their children
- Excellent relations built with the Sisak kindergarten and the primary school
- Key stakeholders – local Roma leaders, parents, local authorities and the Ministry of Education have acknowledged the vital role of Roma pre-school assistant for ensuring the local Roma children’s enrolment and attendance of the programme offered in Sisak kindergartens.

The following evaluation feedback from the key stakeholders indicates that the services provided by NUNV volunteers in Capraske Poljane have been indispensable. The kindergarten headmistress and the pedagogue have confirmed that Zoran established excellent cooperation with each of the three pre-school teachers that worked with the Roma children over the past two years. Especially during the first two months of the adaptation period, children tended to speak only Roma among themselves, and the teacher would have had much harder time building contact with them had it not been for Zoran who encouraged them to speak in Croatian to the teacher, himself modelling such behaviour. He has also helped the teacher maintain order and motivation in the group. When posed the question about the reasons for running a separate pre-school group for Roma children, the kindergarten headmistress provided an explanation that that was exclusively due to logistical complications – namely had the children been divided in two groups, the bus line would have had to run every day, doubling the cost and also the for of NUNV. She stressed that during the past months of pre-school programme, the Roma children’s group was moved from afternoon to morning hours in order to ensure contact with the other group and day-care children, which took place smoothly. She also raised the issue of infrequent attendance of Roma children, which was at some points as low as 3 out of 17, but on the whole found the enrolment satisfactory. The only negative aspect of the NUNV volunteer’s escort was a lack



of direct contact between parents and kindergarten staff, which was happening in cases of other children.

The Roma children's progress has been outstanding, according to the pedagogue, greatly thanks to their enthusiasm to play and learn. The command of Croatian language is not considered a major problem, nor is personal hygiene habits and skills (which has been assessed as excellent), it is rather a lack of previous exposure to structured play and learning, demonstrated in less developed fine motorics (practiced by drawing), self-expression, persistence and attention span. On the other hand, the pedagogue has highlighted the children's initiative, problem-solving and adaptability, which indicate a much greater degree of life experience in comparison to non-Roma children. It is the pedagogue's assessment that it would be ideal if the Roma children could attend two fully years of a pre-school programme (a combination of a year of creative workshops followed by a year-long standard programme is also an option).

The pedagogue's assessment coincided with the primary headmistress' recommendation that full two years of pre-school programme be provided, which she basis on her insight into school performance of the past two generations that completed pre-school programme, who had entered school better prepared than the previous generations but still seem to lag behind, in terms of their ability to concentrate, draw and write and absorb new concepts. These field-based observations are fully in line with the measure of the NAP, proposing 2 years (i.e. 500h) of the pre-school programme for Roma children, which is the actual scope that MoSES will be co-funding from September 2009 onwards (matching the parental cost share, which Roma families are not required to pay).

The six interviewed mothers of children that have attended either the pre-school programme or creative workshops have commended NUNV volunteers, based on their children's eagerness to participate in these activities, stressing the rare opportunities that their children get to feel appreciated and cheered for their good school performance. The sense of failure is their prevalent memory of school education, which in turn kills motivation. For that reason, the interviewed mothers find teaching assistance provided after-school extremely useful and would like that it be extended to upper grades (5th and 7th) when most Roma children eventually fail and lose motivation to complete primary education (at the age of 15 they are no more obliged to attend school).

It was evident that most mothers did not fully understand the point of pre-school, as some of them thought their children should learn there how to read, count and write, but they understood that their own children enjoyed it and stressed the importance of early social integration. The main issue raised was the fact that Roma children were in a separate pre-school group, which they would like to stop in the future. They emphasized that Zoran's escorting assistance was critical, as most of them worked away from home on waste management sites or had small babies, so they could not escort children themselves. They insisted that escorting be secured in the future, if pre-school attendance is to continue. Finally, they expressed their willingness to meet again, as a group (organised for the purpose of evaluation, in rather informal atmosphere with coffee and cookies), to learn about ways to assist their children in education and discuss other issues that concern them.

The three Roma leaders also confirmed that the escorting service was critical for preventing the drop outs from the pre-school programme, which would, in their opinion, surely happen if children were entrusted to the parents' escort, who would not be able to agree upon taking turns or finding a solution among themselves. All the leaders agreed that ensuring favourable upbringing and education conditions for the children in Capraske Poljane should become the priority for the entire community.

#### Prospects of Sustainability and Opportunity for Greater Impact

Ensuring sustainability of pre-school programme and after-school support to Roma children in Capraske Poljane is the most important and the most task that UNDP Croatia should tackle, as a follow-up to this project which has set the grounds for the new quality of children's lives in that community. As already discussed in detail at the joint meeting of UNDP SOS Programme, UNV/UNDP project coordinator, Sisak City representatives and the three Roma leaders, it would be important to create a multi-year programme for childrens' development in Capraske Poljane, which would account for all needed infrastructural investments and service funding.

It is evident that state co-funding for the parental-cost share for full 500h (two years) of pre-school programme for all Roma children that enrol will be available in 2009 and probably onwards, and that the rest will covered by the City of Sisak, which is also committed to cover all necessary transport costs (no matter how many rides per week, differently from the perception of the headmistress of the kindergarten). The funding of Roma escort and teaching assistant in the pre-school programme remains unresolved, as the state and local authorities only fund primary school teaching assistants. MoSES has recommended that the local Roma association(s) include this cost into the project to be proposed for funding to MoSES; through a forthcoming grant scheme for non-institutional education services, performed by CSOs. Similarly, after-school teaching assistance and playgroups for children, as well as potential parental workshops could be designed and proposed to MoSES on part of the local Roma associations(s).

In the future, it would be important to negotiate with the kindergarten that the schedule of the pre-school classes with Roma children runs parallel to other classes and groups, so that there is regular inter-cultural contact. Ideally, Roma children should be integrated into two different pre-school groups of the same age. It will also be important to negotiate with the MoSES that two consecutive years of attendance of the pre-school programme is a better solution for Roma children than a more intensive, year long programme, as they are given more time to practice new language, fine motoric and social skills. The kindergarten staff is very willing in cooperating with the Roma associations in designing a creative workshop programme for children and even a programme of parental workshops, and even in identifying potential mentor or facilitator with education credentials (who could facilitate these activities in cooperation with a local Roma volunteer).

The issue of reconstruction and legalization of the Roma House is the greatest challenge. Namely, the City of Sisak conditions any funding for children's activities performed in the Roma House with the facility's legal status and utilization permit. At the same time, it has no

resources for full reconstruction of the house, which should be sought in the scope of NAP for the Decade of Roma. This is ironical, considering the fact that it was the City itself which purchased the land parcel with that house and even publically promoted the opening of the Roma community center. Nevertheless, from the legal perspective, this is understandable considering the issue of liability for children's' safety. UNDP Local Development programme is also procedurally prohibited from investing into an illegal dwelling. On the other hand, both MoSES and UNDP SOS Programme highlight the instrumental importance of community-based support for children's educational development, which should not be put on hold due to infrastructural reasons. There is an evident need for multi-stakeholder resolution of the problem over the upcoming months, in order to prevent discontinuity of children's pre-school preparation.

The most important issue, from the perspective of SOS Programme, is maintaining credibility and momentum in relation to the local Roma leaders who have counted on UNV/UNDP project to install running water in the house and provide resources for the children's' activities. For all these reasons, the forthcoming three months, prior to summer holidays, will be critical for ensuring the sustainability of the much needed services previously provided by NUNV volunteers. This will not happen unless UNDP SOS Programme takes a lead and negotiates cooperation among the three, competitive Roma associations and helps them design and fundraise for a comprehensive, multi-year children's investment programme in Capraske Poljane.

An additional problem is unavailability of Zoran Vasiljevic, current NUNV volunteer from September onwards, due to his planned move to Austria, so it will be important to identify a suitable replacement, possibly with the help of MoSES's Directorate for National Minorities, which keeps records of all Roma high school graduates and students on government scholarships. For the sake of credibility of the UNV/UNDP project it is absolutely necessary to secure funding for Zoran's continued services until the end of the current pre-school programme, i.e. May 31, 2009. over the upcoming two months Zoran and preferably Sanja could provide mentoring to the new primary school Roma teaching assistant Marijan Nikolic, who has just started his duties that are completely new to him. It would also be useful to take advantage of the UNV/UNDP project no-cost extension or follow-up for the planning of long-term cooperation between Suncokret and the Roma community, on joint cultural events and possibly a volunteer camp in Capraske Poljane.

### **3.6. Project Contribution to the Community of Donji Lapac**

#### Community Profile

Donji Lapac is a remote, traditionally Serbian municipality in Lika-Senj County, with around 1800 inhabitants (compared to 8000 before the war), of whom 60% are the elderly. Due to depopulation and collapse of local textile and wood-processing industry and a transport company, there are very few jobs available in the private sector - around 40 in the revitalized wood processing, and the only prospects are self-employment in farming and cattle-breeding. While inter-ethnic tensions between domestic Serbs and Croat settlers (mostly from B-H) seem to have ceased, the municipality is highly politicized and there are strong tensions between domestic Serbs supporting SDSS vs. SDP. That is the cause of frequent changes of government. Over the past two years, upon intermediary elections, a coalition of HDZ and SDSS has taken power, and the municipality is run by one of the youngest mayors in Croatia

– Ilija Obradovic, SDSS. According to interviewed stakeholders, the coalition reflecting the national government structure has been useful in enabling greater access to state funding. Hence, out of the municipal budget of 7 million kn, only 2 million are due to local revenues. The municipality has secured funding for water sewage reconstruction, public housing and road renovation. In September 2007, the municipality was included in MoFVAIS's programme of home-care for the elderly, which has resulted in the employment of 10 caregivers, with two additional positions approved. The municipality has co-funded the salary costs, granted office space to the team, while the Red Cross donated an old vehicle which is also maintained by the municipality.

Donji Lapac has the image of a closed community, where civic initiatives are frail, despite external stimuli, in contrast to the near-by Srb where social cohesion is strong. Interviewed stakeholders assign it to the tradition of state an industrial employment and a traditional stance of superiority expressed by townsmen, over the inhabitants of the surrounding villages. As illustrated by the NUNV volunteer Brankica Bubalo, people are regularly appearing at political round-tables, but it is very hard to get them to take part in blood donor drives, children's Santa Claus or Saint Sava celebrations. Indeed, despite significant investments in youth development and volunteerism, facilitated by USAID's ECCRA project (implemented among others, by ZaMirNET) and latter initiatives on part of the current mayor to set up a youth council, none are currently active, and the most recent attempt of the Volunteer center Zagreb to start-up a local volunteer service has also failed. A local Women's Club Donji Lapac is running human rights education activities, but seems not to be very visible or connected with other social service-oriented associations. A Bosnian Croat settlers' folk society Katarina Zrinska is showing initiative and readiness to share its resources, a new van, with the municipal programme for the elderly. The local Red Cross serves 400 community members and has operated a mobile team for home-care for the past 10 years and until recently, ran a pre-school children's playgroup, funded by local authorities.

#### Key Project Results

In Donji Lapac, Brankica Bubalo, a middle-aged, previously unemployed woman from a remote village of Nebljusi, was recruited as NUNV volunteer, to provide social assistance to the elderly and others in need. Brankica was already a proven volunteer, helping out the elderly in her village and cooperating with the Red Cross. In close coordination with the Red Cross and the NUNV volunteer from Srb, Brankica covered the remote part of the municipality close to her native village. She also helped out with humanitarian actions – the preparation and distribution of aid packages and organisation of blood donor drives. Together with the director of the Red Cross, Brankica helped the mayor in preparing the application to MoFVAIS for funding the municipal home care programme for the elderly.

The following are key indicators of NUNV volunteer's performance in Donji Lapac:

- Direct beneficiaries: 70, including 65 returnees and 5 settlers from Bosnia, among whom 48 are elderly, 8 are persons with disability and 24 are other persons living in poverty (children and youth)
- A range of services provided: regular personal assistance with daily living activities (43), administrative assistance (47 beneficiaries), shopping assistance (24), house-keeping (24), humanitarian aid (25 families) and parents' counselling (5)

- Municipal emerging programme of home-care to the elderly strengthened by transfer of know-how and contacts developed by NUNV volunteer during the project
- Excellent coordination with NUNV volunteer in Srb throughout the project
- Community-based humanitarian actions of local Red Cross somewhat improved

Brankica is well known in the community as the “woman always carrying a bag with medicines for the elderly”, as she was described by the local clerk of the registry office. She was the contact person for administrative assistance for beneficiaries from remote villages, entrusted with tasks by various institutions and organisations – the Red Cross, (which also took care of such task for the Center of Social Welfare in Korenica), the municipal programme for the elderly. She is fully trusted by the local nurse and one of the doctors, as well as the clerks in the field office for medical insurance and the registry, to the point that they do not require her to get letters of authorization from her beneficiaries.

In September 2008, Brankica was asked by the municipality to help form and lead the home-care team, which was enabled by MoFVAIS's financial support. After consultations with UNV/UNDP project management she accepted the offer and has since done her NUNV work, with additional coordination and monitoring responsibilities, in the context of the municipal programme. She has continued to cooperate with the Red Cross, whose director, an experienced field social worker, acts as informal mentor of the municipal programme. Hence the self-confidence, contacts and know-how that Brankica accumulated during her first year of NUNV service have directly contributed to the start-up and capacity of a multi-year social service programme for the elderly. Based on the discussion with the mayor, in case his political option retains power, he plans to ensure funding for the construction of a new medical center and the adaptation of the current building into a center for care for the elderly, founded by the municipality as a separate institution. The prospective center would take over the home-care programme, while a day-care service and an in-patient ward, especially needed during winter months.

#### Prospects of Sustainability and Opportunities for Greater Impact

The sustainability of the service to the elderly provided by NUNV has already been secured, by her integration into the municipal home-care team for the elderly, financed by MoFVAIS, where she has been active as team leader since September 2008. She has also continued her cooperation with the local Red Cross which needs external technical assistance in revitalizing its children's' playgroup programme.

In case project capacities allow, it would be useful to support the transfer of know-how from Suncokret to the Red Cross in Donji Lapac, regarding the structuring of a children's development programme and engagement of long-term international volunteers.

Similarly to the situation in Gvozd, UNDP SOS Programmes, thanks to the relationships established within the scope of this project, has an opportunity to stimulate more strategic management of the municipality home-care programme of the elderly. The programme is currently directly administered by the local authorities, due to the local Red Cross's decline of the offer to implement the programme, out of the director's concern that she has no resources to take over administration of home-care workers salaries and travel expenses. The present institutional set-up is not in line with the social reform objective of enhanced provision of non-

institutional services at the local level, and the municipality will eventually need to either set up a specialized social care institution, or transfer the programme to a CSO or another existent institution.

Considering the openness of the current municipal leadership to UNDP and its strategic objective to set up a center for care for the elderly, it would be useful to explore how UNDP SOS Programme can encourage and provide support, contacts or even TA to the municipality of Donji Lapac, in the process of local social planning, with focus on services for the elderly and the infirm. This would also require coordination with MoFVAIS, as part of the Ministry's continued efforts to improve the quality of its innovative programme.

### **3.7. Project Contribution to the Community of Srb**

#### **Community Profile**

Srb is a small, rural, Serbian returnee community close to the border with B-H, which traditionally belonged to the municipality of Donji Lapac that is only 40 km away, but has, after the war, included in the municipality of Gracac. The area of the local self-government (represented by the Local Council of Srb) consists of 17 villages and the small town of Srb, totalling around 1200 inhabitants, of whom around 600 are permanent dwellers. Srb proper has around 300 inhabitants, over 60% of whom are domicile Serbs and the rest are Croat settlers from Bosnia.

Differently from most returnee settings, local activism in Srb is strong and effective, due to a cohesive group of younger people who have decided to build future for their families in their native community. They founded the Local Council as well as the association Una, hence combining advocacy at the municipal and regional level with community development work and funding for CSOs. Their main goal was improving local infrastructure (electricity, phone lines, transport, medical services, post office, all of which was missing) by leveraging the municipal government support and that of international donors.

The association Una has fully used a series of development projects in the area, such as USAID's ECRA programme 20012-04, which brought several regional and national CSOs to the region (ZaMirNET, organizing ICT courses and a volunteer camp; Dalmatian Committee for Solidarity, providing legal assistance, Stope nade, organizing local women etc.), and latter collaboration with the women's rights group B.a.B.e. Una's priority has been community development, through sustainable tourism, ecological farming and volunteerism. Hence, its members have also started engaged in education and start-up of a local cooperative. At present, with the EU CARDS 2004 funding of 135,000 EUR, Una is implementing a cross-border project Una-adventurism, which attempts to create small tourist infrastructure on both banks of the river Una, for fishing, cycling, tracking etc. As part of that project, in summer 2008, Una organised an international volunteer camp, in cooperation with the Volunteer center Zagreb, which is currently mentoring the set-up of the local volunteer center in Srb (supported by an EU funding from PHARE 2006 Youth programme).

Solidarity with the elderly, who are the predominant inhabitants of Srb, mainly living alone with scarce contact with their children abroad has been an on-going, spontaneous activity undertaken by members of Una. In order to provide the much needed service more

systematically, in 2006, Una successfully applied to NFCSD for a community development grant of 112,000 kn, for a year-long provision of social assistance to the elderly.

### Key Project Results

The association Una recognized the NUNV volunteer contest as a clear opportunity to strengthen its emerging social assistance programme hence it is not surprising that two of its members applied for the position. Tanja Rastovic, an experienced volunteer who has already cared for the elderly and disadvantaged, and also a holder of the higher education degree in social work was selected. In turn, association Una reviewed its project budget granted by NFCSD, by redirecting the funds for the volunteer reimbursement for Tanja, towards direct costs (particularly gasoline for several volunteers). That enabled Una to extend the project duration from 12 to 15 months.

Tanja cooperated closely with the field social worker located in Gracac who has confirmed in the evaluation interview that without NUNV volunteer's support he would have not been able to perform his job. Namely, he is in charge of 700 beneficiaries, scattered on a huge, badly connected territory. Tanja helped him keep in touch with the beneficiaries whom she visited regularly, also checking upon beneficiaries he could not see, and the two of them functioned as a team. On one occasion, in consultation with the social worker, Tanja initiated a solidarity action in Srb, to collect urgently needed money for a single-mother Bosnian Croat settler family with eight children, which was fully supported by all citizens and the local council (5000 kn were collected).

The following are key indicators of NUNV volunteer's performance in Srb:

- Direct beneficiaries: 76, including 73 returnees and 2 settlers from Bosnia, among whom 42 are elderly, 22 are persons with disability and 22 are other person living in poverty
- A range of services provided: administrative assistance (57 beneficiaries), shopping assistance (19), house-keeping (12), transport and mobility (7) and targeted humanitarian aid (2 families).
- Association Una's emerging programme of social assistance to the elderly and other disadvantaged persons launched and strengthened, in close collaboration with Center for Social Welfare
- Excellent coordination with NUNV volunteer in Donji Lapac throughout the project

In December 2008, association Una has been approved a new grant from NFCSD for its social assistance project to the elderly and the poor, in the amount of 101,000 kn, which will enable Tanja to continue her much appreciated services.

### Prospects of Sustainability and Opportunities for Greater Impact

In Srb, UNV/UNDP inputs fitted perfectly with the host organisations' strategic objective of setting-up a social assistance programme. Hence, there is no immediate concern for sustainability of project results - NUNV volunteer Tanja Rastovic is a member of Una and will continue performing the same social services with the funding that Una has already secured from NFCSD, although it is less than a half of the amount of VLA. The next step would be to present the results of UNV/UNDP and Una's social assistance in Srb at the municipal level, with the request that the municipality re-apply to MoFVAIS for funding the municipal home-

care programme for the elderly, a part of which could be implemented on part of or in partnership with Una.

The broader challenge is the evident marginalization of the area and a lack of human resources for the provision of social services. A proactive approach of the Local Council of Srb and Una may be required for a timely social needs' assessment in collaboration with the field worker of the Center for Social Welfare in charge of Gracac municipality. Namely, the main lesson learned by activists of Una is that Srb is a marginal returnee community within a disadvantaged municipality of Gracac and if it waits for institutional initiative from above, it may wait forever. A bottom-up social planning, from Srb to the level of municipality, taking into account the reality of inter-dependence with the municipality of Donji Lapac, may identify options for capacity building of CSW field team in Gracac which is in desperate need of additional staff, as well for start-up support to emerging social entrepreneurship initiatives in the municipality. The process may also result in the formalization of Una's close collaboration with the Centre for Social Welfare, with headquarters in Zadar, also covering the municipality of Gracac.

## 4. Efficiency of Project Implementation

### 4.1. Management of NUNV volunteers

The management of NUNV volunteers included four key aspects – administration of costs (VLA, health insurance and travel expenses), monitoring NUNV volunteers' community activities, and provision of guidance and advice upon request and organisation of educational opportunities.

Maja Turniski, in the role of project coordinator performed these tasks, to full satisfaction of all of the seven interviewed NUNV volunteers. Her assistance with administration and reporting was particularly appreciated, as the UNV's assumption that all NUNV volunteers could fill out on-line forms on their own proved unrealistic. Namely, in several cases (Milan, Brankica, Zoran, and Magdalena) they possessed very basic ICT skills, which all of them improved by attending ICT courses as part of their personal development during the project. In the case of Tanja in Srb, there is no stable and fast internet connection (cell phones are still the only option). In the case of Zoran in Capraske Poljane, the nearest computer and fax machine were at the UNDP field office in Sisak and later Petrinja, to which he had to travel by car. Also, NUNV volunteers recruited for this project do not meet the standard criteria of well-educated professionals, used to administrative jargon and procedures. For those reasons, the project coordinator collected travel cost receipts and often hand-written travel logs, as well as their weekly reports written in formats that each NUNV felt comfortable with, to adjust and upload them into the forms required by UNV.

The monitoring of NUNV volunteers' community activities primarily took place by means of weekly reports and regular phone contact, both of which were assessed as useful by all



NUNV volunteers and the project coordinator. The preparation of weekly reports well served the NUNV volunteers to keep track of their numerous contacts and actions, and were valuable and highly informative basis for the compilation of first monthly, and later quarterly project reports submitted to UNV. All NUNV volunteers highlighted that the project coordinator was easily accessible and highly responsive and that they felt free to approach her with any question, at any time.

With the exception of Sisak and Capraske Poljane that she visited rather frequently, the project coordinator visited each community approximately twice a year, and in addition, there were two NUNV team meetings held each year. While the frequency of meetings has been assessed as sufficient, all NUNV volunteers stressed that they would have benefited from more frequent field visits by the project coordinator. As agreed upon at the evaluation workshop, more systematic engagement of the project coordinator, as well as SOS support programme staff, with key local stakeholders in each community, would have been useful in more timely identification of obstacles and opportunities for greater UNDP leverage in each community. In particular, the project start-up could have been accompanied by a series of interviews in each community, which could have been used as a data collection instrument for creating baseline community profiles, with focus on the quality of cooperation among different service providers, social needs and availability of services. That would have also been an instructive exercise in community needs assessment for NUNV volunteers who had no such prior experience. UNDP's officers' interactions with local institutional actors are also an important way of strengthening the status of NUNV volunteers, as demonstrated in the case of the Roma community.

Regarding guidance and advice, all NUNV volunteers' felt that they could ask the project coordinator for all advice that they needed, in one occasion, the support received was extremely important (one NUNV volunteer was exposed to sexual harassment by a local CSO activist, and she found the personal support as well as advice how to handle the situation locally very satisfactory). Nevertheless, it seems that NUNV volunteers were not very proactive in seeking guidance, as they failed to seek advice regarding several examples of local obstacles or dilemmas, mentioned or observed during evaluation interviews (the evaluator asked them explicitly if they sought guidance and they said they did not). That was the case with at times extremely stressful relationship that Petrinja NUNV had with the leader of UI-SZM (personal boundaries were lost), or resistance to cooperation demonstrated by the director of the Center for Social Welfare in Hrvatska Kostajnica, or a conflict with a local doctor in Donji Lapac, which seems to also have political background. The exceptions are Sanja and Dusanka in Gvozd who took full advantage of their daily interactions with the project coordinator who is also a highly skilled development psychologist.

A clear area of improvement in volunteer management of this and future similar projects is the evident lack of systematic and targeted education opportunities, both for NUNV volunteers and the project coordinator. That is greatly due to the fact that no funding was allocated for education of volunteers, so the project coordinator mainly compiled and forwarded education opportunities provided by other organisations, which she thought would be of interest to NUNV volunteers. For instance, in November 2008, Zoran attended 17. training workshop „Monitoring of the implementation of the action plans for Roma“, organised

by Organization of Civic Initiatives in partnership with the Finnish Embassy in Hotel Central Zagreb. In addition, NUNV volunteers used the training resources of host and partner organisations – e.g. Zoran and Magdalena completed the ICT course offered by Association IKS in Petrinja and Milan attended the ICT course offered in Suncokret. Sanja Brkic took advantage of a variety of workshops and regional study tours for youth, offered to Suncokret, in addition to the trainings and onsite skill building in fundraising and advanced computer skills provided in Suncokret. In retrospective, it is unfortunate that the project did not develop and implement a skill-development plan, which would include key skills relevant to all NUNV volunteers (community mobilization and action planning, negotiations, overview of national and regional resources for civil society development and promotion of voluntaries, project design and basic management skills) as well as a set of specific information and skills relevant for particular service provision (e.g. home-care for the elderly, including information on efficiency standards, teaching assistance, working with people with disability, human rights issues of various target groups).

#### **4.2. Managerial and Budgetary Issues at the level of UNDP/UNV Cooperation**

The main managerial challenge that the project coordinator Maja Turniski and support UNDP officer Lidija Japcec encountered was resolving budgetary issues in extensive correspondence with three UNV backstopping officers, consecutively assigned to this project. The initial problem was the lack of training in ATLAS accounting application, which project coordinator expected to attend during the UNV training in Bonn (May 2007). She had to learn how to use ATLAS in Zagreb, with assistance of a UNDP financial manager and Ms. Japcec, both of whom were also burdened with other tasks, so on-site coaching could not be systematic. During the first six months of project implementation, it was Ms. Japcec who checked all ATLAS data inputs. It would have been useful if UNV and UNDP Croatia had made a clear mutual, written agreement on project staff training and support responsibilities prior to the actual project implementation.

Another problem seems to have been technical, as there were instances where automatically produced calculations of spending status seem to have lagged behind actual expenses, of which the project coordinator kept a parallel record. The example is the current lack of clarity on the exact remaining amount of original approved budget, which is being resolved in daily communication with UNV HQ, without which the length and scope of the project wrap-up/follow-up phase cannot be planned.

In addition, based on information provided by the project coordinator and the support UNDP officer, there was significant delay with the transfer of the second year instalment which was available to the project staff only in September 2008, even though the proposed budget revision was submitted in February 2008 and approved in April 2008, while the narrative report for the first year of implementation was submitted to UNV on May, 2, 2008. The financial arrangements between UNV and UNDP seem not to enable the temporary “borrowing” of cash from another local UNDP source for the implementation of UNV/UNDP project activities, which has in practice meant that the project managers were extremely cautious with announcing community activities, in order to avoid raising expectations that might not be met. The current example is the planning of the celebration of the International day of Inter-generational Solidarity, to take place in partnership with the Ministry of family, war

veterans and intergenerational solidarity, a highly visible event of high protocolar status, which was planned a month ago, under the premise that the project had plenty of remaining funding, which seems not to be the case. The planning of the event is proceeding smoothly thanks to the funding back-up earmarked by UNDP Croatia.

The budgetary challenges, when combined with outstanding workload of on-line financial reporting (also performed on behalf of NUNV volunteers) was the major time consumer and source of stress experienced by the project coordinator, also limiting her ability to spend more time in the field, supporting NUNV volunteers and contributing to Suncokret. At the time, she also faced serious health problems with her back. Even though she regularly spent two workdays in UNDP office in Zagreb, she still used at least one day in Gvozd on purely administrative matters. She has also been often asked to provide additional briefings on project activities, on top of quarterly and annual reports, which has contributed to already unexpectedly large scope of project administration.

Regarding the appropriateness of budget planning, there was a need for a larger local travel budget, considering the large territory covered by NUNV volunteers and the need for more frequent field visits (both the project coordinators and several NUNV volunteers spent significant personal amounts on petrol). Also, the standard UN fee for car costs per km is 2,5 times lower than the amount proscribed by the Croatian law, which also takes into amortization costs. Since local volunteers used their own cars, they accrued additional costs for car maintenance. A budget allocation of NUNV volunteers' training would have been useful, as well as a small, flexible fund for voluntary actions and repairs, assigned to each NUNV, which they could quickly tap into, based on identified needs in the community, with obligatory community cost-share in materials or cash.

Regarding the appropriateness of human resource planning, the major miscalculation was the scope of engagement of "monitoring officer" of social infrastructure projects, undertaken by the UNDP Local Development field office in Petrinja. Due to the fact that a project proposal for 20 such planned projects was not approved by a donor, only 7 of those projects were carried out with UNDP's own resources. In practice, most of them did not require additional monitoring, as confirmed by the local project manager Boncina. The NUNV volunteers in Petrinja and Kostajnica were therefore involved in the monitoring of those projects that they helped identify. As no NUNV time was wasted, this miscalculation has had no impact on the overall project performance.

Another challenge, identified during this evaluation, was too limited time that SOS Programme managers, with expertise in relevant policy areas (Roma, people with disability, decentralized social service provision) could devote to strategic reflection on project achievements and sustainability prospects, which would have been vital for earlier intervention at organisational and policy levels. The project Steering Committee could have also been used more frequently (only two meetings were held until the end of March 2009), especially during the planning of the second year of the project, the right time to start discussing sustainability prospects. It is evaluator's firm conviction that the project would have greatly benefited from a technical assistance component, complementing service provision enabled by NUNV volunteers, provided in collaboration of SOS Programme staff and external

consultants, preferably coming from resource organisations and institutions active in target regions.

## 5. Conclusion and Lessons Learned

It can be generally concluded that in all six target communities in the Croatian post-war counties of Sisak Moslavina, Lika-Senj and Zadar, the nine NUNV volunteers have recognized and responded to real social needs of the disadvantaged community members, and in most cases, without unnecessary overlaps with other service providers. In total, nine NUNV volunteers, including the project coordinator, have served 2070 socially disadvantaged individuals; assisted 30 different communities based organisations, and cooperated with 20 CSOs providing support to target communities. In all communities, they established fruitful relations with local authorities and their social programmes, especially the home-care programmes for the elderly in Donji Lapac and Gvozd, funded by the Ministry of Family, Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity.

The NUNV volunteers' outreach to community members from both domicile (mostly Serb returnee) and settler (mostly Bosnian Croat) social groups and their associations has also been beneficial in terms of social cohesion. The underlying, even if not always explicit, human rights' based approach, has in practice meant that NUNV volunteers' primarily focused on the burning issue of the lack of access to statutory entitlements and social services, guaranteed, yet often unrealized by the institutional system of human rights and social protection.

Even though gender issues were not a special project focus, the project has provided social support to women experiencing multiple marginalization – a girl and women with disability, elderly rural women in single-headed households and Roma girls. In addition, among the select nine NUNV volunteers, 7 were women, including 3 middle-aged, long-term unemployed minority returnees and 2 young women with no previous employment.

Regarding the promotion of volunteerism, the effects are particularly visible in those communities where NUNV volunteers cooperated with local CSOs committed to that specific cause. Hence, the project has significantly enhanced the human resources, fundraising ability, quality and scope of activities and reputation of Suncokret, Center for Community Development in Gvozd, which has good prospects of becoming the regional volunteer center, acting as a partner to local government and a resource to other municipalities in organizing volunteer actions and international camps. The project has also contributed to the organisational growth of Una, the local CSO in Srb, which is about to become accredited to host EVS volunteers and is also organising international volunteer camps during summer months. To a degree, it has also strengthened community activism of the local Red Cross in Donji Lapac.

The following are key lessons learned:

- The added value of the NUNV's engagement in social service provision has been the creation of new ties between citizens in need and existent institutional and community-based social services. In the Roma community of Capraske Poljane and Petrinja, NUNV volunteers' engagement has traced the path for a more long-term, previously unavailable service. By identifying and supplying the missing links which prevent real access to nominally available social protection, the volunteers have managed to slightly reshape the institutional system, to better respond to the citizens' needs, as opposed to the prevalent expectation that citizens should adjust to the system's requirements.
- The innovative approach of recruiting NUNV volunteers who themselves come from disadvantaged social groups in post-war communities has put the project means (in addition to ends) to service of social inclusion. Out of eight recruited NUNV volunteers (project coordinator excluded) all of whom were previously unemployed or without work experience, two have found paid position in social service provision, four are counted on as core team members local CSOs, and, in one case, the project has motivated the NUNV to advance his level of education, by completing the forth year of higher education (with focus on administration) and ICT management certificate. The NUNV volunteer recruitment has also enhanced the social status and employability of 6 women NUNV volunteers (either long-term unemployed or without work experience), as all of them have improved their skills, gained work experience and new contacts that were useful in finding employment or continued volunteer engagement.
- It was particularly useful to entrust NUNV volunteers with identification of the most appropriate community focus, in terms of target groups, host organisations and types of services to be provided. Not only did it result in needs-based interventions, but also was fully respectful of the principles of freedom of choice, autonomy and leadership that are inherent to true volunteerism. The variety of local foci is reflected in the variety of numbers of beneficiaries served – a day-long personal and teaching assistance to a girl with cerebral palsy in Petrinja takes as much time as provision of administrative assistance to a dozen of elderly returnees in one day in Hrvatska Kostajnica, each service being exactly what was needed.
- The main challenge identified in the project design and implementation relates to insufficient attention and resources devoted to interventions at (inter)organisational and local policy levels, to complement direct service provision and community activism enhanced by NUNV volunteers. For that purpose, a separate technical assistance component of the project, complementing the service provision and community mobilization component performed by NUNV volunteers, would have been useful, combining social inclusion programme staff time with external consultants who are already active in supporting civil society development and social inclusion initiatives in the target regions. Metaphorically speaking, in retrospect, it might have been more useful to secure a position of "monitoring officer" of local social policy and organisational development interventions, as opposed to the under-used "monitoring officer" for social infrastructure interventions. In that respect, an internal mid-term

review of prospects of sustainability should become standard monitoring procedure in similar projects in the future. Nevertheless, the good timing of this evaluation, taking place prior to the completion of all project activities is an indicator of commitment on part of UNV and UNDP Croatia to invest additional thought, energy and financial resources in ensuring that key positive effects of this project last.

- The evaluation of this project also draws attention to specific challenges and benefits of promoting volunteerism in disadvantaged, post-war regions that may be relevant to the fine-tuning of the national policy on the promotion of volunteerism. Challenges relate to the local socio-economic context where employment is not available, younger generations are decimated and social energy for public action is low, beyond traditional solidarity networks that consume most of the voluntary engagement of active, able citizens. In such conditions, any kind of cash revenue is highly valued, including volunteer living allowances, which are hard to distinguish in terms of their amount and function from locally available honoraria for seasonal work or even unpredictable salaries for work in the private sector. At the same time, the benefits of promoting volunteerism in these communities are outstanding – volunteerism contributes to social inclusion and cohesion (across ethnic and age groups), but also to the generation of human capital – enhanced skills and knowledge, broadened social networks beyond local settings, boosted self-confidence and leadership competencies. Resources invested in providing local volunteers with systematic support (coverage of expenses, training, TA) are paid back in terms of the volunteers' consistent community engagement, improved social standing and agency. Therefore, volunteerism makes up for instrumental deficits in social and human capital, hindering development of these areas.

## 6. Recommendations

### 6.1. Recommendations to Social Inclusion Programme of UNDP Croatia

1. Based on the discussion of the evaluation findings and identified prospects of sustainability, a UNV/UNDP project follow-up plan should be designed and implemented over year 2009, with the principal instrument being technical assistance to individual organisations and institutions, as well as informal social service networks in target communities. The most appropriate external resources for the provision of TA should be identified, with long-term prospects in mind, of expanding the local actors' access to specialized knowledge and advocacy allies.
2. SOS Programme is in unique position to act as facilitator of a collaborative process among the Roma leaders in Capraske Poljane, necessary for the securing both community ownership and external funding for community-based activities for children and their parents, primarily a Roma assistant to children attending the pre-

school programme, a teaching assistant running after-school activities in the Roma community center and a facilitator of creative workshops for children as well as, optimally, workshops or meetings of parents. This is a challenging task, due to urgency of securing the funding for pre-school assistant, expected competition between the three leaders and conditional approach to funding such activities expressed by the local government. Developing a community programme for children and youth, accounting for all infrastructural and service cost is the optimal option, which will require continued engagement of SOS Programme officer, who has all necessary expertise, as well as respect and trust of all key stakeholders, including the local and national authorities.

3. In the scope of this project, knowledge of the particular challenges and opportunities for upgrading local social programmes, especially those for the elderly, in the six target communities has been accumulated. Considering the slow pace of systematic introduction of local social planning processes in Croatia, SOS Programme could consult with MoFVAIS about ways it can assist in the process of improving the quality and institutional sustainability of home-care programmes for the elderly, used as a starting point for stimulating greater coordination and synergy among all local actors providing various forms of assistance to the vulnerable social group. The next step may be stimulating local social planning processes in those communities where local authorities remain open to UNDP, as well as the social reform process (e.g. Gvozd, Donji Lapac, Srb, perhaps Hrvatska Kostajnica).
4. The project results and lessons learned about the challenges and benefits of the promotion of volunteerism in multiply deprived, post-war regions of Croatia communities can be presented to the National Committee for the Promotion of Volunteerism. Furthermore, a thematic event, with contributions of different volunteer initiatives taking place in post-war regions could be jointly organised, contributing to the knowledge of more and less effective approaches, and generate ideas about more targeted, systematic support for voluntary work that helps enhance in-country mobility and activation of human capital in deprived regions. In addition, UNDP Croatia may also consider stimulating policy discussion about ways in which the Republic of Croatia, as emerging donor, may promote volunteersim in the scope of peacebuilding and regional development cooperation efforts in South-eastern European region, with focus on Western Balkans.

## **6.2. Recommendation to UNDP Croatia Senior Management Team**

1. Closer, mutually enriching collaboration between the SOS and Local Development programmes should be explored, using past examples of complementarity, as well as collisions in programme logic, some of which took place the scope of this project, as learning tools.

## **6.3. Recommendations to UNV**

1. Streamlining and simplification of financial reporting may be explored, especially in respect to very low-scale costs such as NUNV volunteers' local travel and

communications that is time-consuming (introducing monthly lump sums, that do not need to be backed-up by bills as long as they are within approved budget may be an option).

2. Problems related to the use of ATLAS in budget monitoring encountered in this project should be further explored and compared to experiences of other project implementers, to determine if there are common problems that could be eliminated by technical upgrading or targeted training of UNV project managers<sup>3</sup>.
3. UNV may explore the costs and benefits of obliging all agencies proposing UNV projects to include a basic training plan for UNV and NUNV volunteers, supportive of their prospective tasks within a certain project.

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<sup>3</sup> Based on the written feedback of UNV representative presented at the evaluation briefing held in Zagreb on April 6, 2009, the challenges in obtaining ATLAS training and delays in processing and approving POs and vouchers encountered in the scope of this project have in the meantime as it has been decided to provide CO Croatia with appropriate Authorized Spending Limit (ASL) to enable payments to be processed and approved at the country level.