

SUMMARY

In Zadar County, Croatia, many villages face ageing populations, long distances to services and limited local capacity. Through an Erasmus+ exchange project, the 'Bura' Local Action Group (LAG) identified practical ways of **organising social care in low-density areas**, which later helped municipalities to launch services such as a **home-care team, multi-municipal mobile support programme, and community day centre**, through other EU funded projects. Together, these actions **strengthened local skills, diversified service delivery, and improved access to care** across scattered villages.



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CONTEXT

Low population density, long travel times and tight local budgets make it difficult to run permanent facilities and retain staff in rural Croatia. The elderly and disadvantaged residents often rely on family help, while formal services struggle to reach small, dispersed communities. Local authorities and providers have **limited training in social-care planning** for very small service areas, and infrastructure projects have often overshadowed social needs.

The Erasmus+ cooperation project exposed local decision-makers to workable rural models and introduced simple tools such as route planning for home visits, mixed on-site/outreach delivery, and shared resources. This created a basis to align EU and local funds and scale services across neighbouring municipalities.



OBJECTIVES

- > Develop and test a practical education and training approach for councillors and social-service providers in low-density rural areas;
- > Raise awareness and shift attitudes towards lifelong learning among local leaders and front-line staff;
- > Secure recognition that social development and residents' needs are core to municipal investment, not secondary to infrastructure;
- > Improve leaders' ability to adapt to changing needs of residents and service users;
- > Foster ongoing dialogue between municipal representatives and residents to guide service improvement;
- > Co-design locally adapted service models (home support, mobile outreach, day services) that help older people remain at home and reduce institutionalisation.

Themes: Social inclusion, health and care, women; access to services

Countries: Croatia, Czechia, France

Organisations:

- > Local Action Group (LAG) 'Bura', Croatia, NGO
- > 'Místní akční skupina svatého Jana z Nepomuku' LAG, Czechia, NGO
- > Syndicat de Lorge, France, public authority
- > Municipalities of Ražanac, Poličnik, Zemunik, Donji Jasenice, Obrovac, Croatia, public authorities
- > Ministry of Agriculture, Croatia, public authority

Start & end date: 09/2016 - ongoing

Budget: EUR 2 902 528

Funding sources:

- > Erasmus+ project 'Education of decision-makers and social services providers – quality in care' (EUR 43 300)
- > ESF project 'Ražanac-My home', 02/2020-08/2022 (EUR 203 700)
- > ESF project 'Fulfil Your Golden Age', 2021-2023 (EUR 382 808)
- > ERDF project 'Tereza Community Service Centre' (EUR 2 272 720)

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

Education of decision-makers and social service providers – quality in care (Erasmus+, 2016-2018): LAG Bura worked with partners in Czechia and France to train councillors and front-line staff, run study visits in all three countries, and co-produce simple tools for low-density areas (route planning for home visits; mixed on-site/outreach delivery; sharing resources across municipalities).

Ražanac – My Home (02/2020–08/2022), renewed (08/2023-12/2024) under ESF+ '**Zaželi – prevention of institutionalisation**' the Municipality of Ražanac, partnering with LAG Bura, set up a home-care team that employed five local women to support older and disadvantaged residents for up to 24 months per beneficiary.

Fulfil Your Golden Age (ESF, 2021-2023): project led by the Municipality of Poličnik with neighbouring municipalities (Nin, Bibinje, Preko, Ražanac, Zemunik Donji, Galovac) and partners (LAG Mareta, HVIDRA Zadar). This multi-municipal programme in Zadar County delivered mobile assistance, psychosocial support and counselling, and on-site workshops, and financed basic accessibility and transport so services could reach scattered hamlets.

Tereza Community Service Centre (ERDF, 2019-2022): the Town of Obrovac, with the Municipality of Jasenice, established a non-residential day centre with home-based outreach to serve more than 200 older people across the area. The centre offers daily activities, advice and coordinated home visits to help residents remain at home and avoid unnecessary institutionalisation.



RESULTS

Education of decision-makers and social services providers – quality in care project: around 120 participants took part in three international study visits (Croatia, France, Czechia) that enabled peer exchange and first-hand observation of rural service models. The project produced a [practical brochure](#) – 'How to provide services for 32 inhabitants per km²' – a set of recommendations, and a short [documentary](#), and tested a training approach that fostered lifelong-learning values among local leaders. It also won 'Best International Project of 2019 in Adult Education' from Czechia's National Agency for Erasmus+.

Ražanac – My Home project: a home-care team was created, employing five local women who delivered up to 24 months of daily in-home support to 20 older or disadvantaged residents, while earning formal care certifications that improved employability. The Municipality of Ražanac later secured follow-up financing under subsequent Zaželi calls.

Fulfil Your Golden Age project: a multi-municipal network delivered mobile assistance and on-site activities to 200+ end-users, hired six social assistants (12 months), purchased three vehicles for outreach, provided 600+ psychosocial/counselling sessions, and ran 200+ workshops (communication, creativity, environmental education). It also financed basic accessibility (e.g. a sea-access ramp) and physiotherapy sessions in public spaces, boosting inclusion and well-being.

Tereza Community Service Centre project: a non-residential day centre with outreach is being established to serve 50-100 people daily (target 200+ across the catchment). The model combines on-site activities with home-based support and plans three vehicles for food, laundry and transport, adapting Czech approaches seen during the Erasmus+ exchange.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > Start with **targeted training for councillors and providers** so they can analyse needs and plan services for very small service areas;
- > Make **well-being and social development a core part of municipal planning and investment**;
- > Use **cross-border cooperation** to spot workable models and adapt them to local conditions;
- > **Co-design** with users and front-line staff, and combine formats – **home support, mobile outreach and day services** – to reach scattered villages;
- > Build **multi-municipal partnerships** with LAG brokerage to pool budgets, vehicles and staff;
- > **Train and employ local caregivers**, creating jobs (often for women) while expanding home support;
- > Invest in **basic accessibility** (transport, ramps, equipment) to unlock service use;
- > **Sequence funding**: pilot with Erasmus+ learning, operate with ESF (e.g. *Zaželi*), and sustain with local budgets;
- > **Document and share simple tools** (brochures, checklists, short videos) so other LAGs and municipalities can replicate the approach.



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