

## ENGLISH VERSION

The first event, Kick off meeting, took place over three days (Wednesday 29 to Friday 31 March 2023) in Cestica and Varaždin, Varaždin County, Croatia. All event activities took place on site. On Day 1, the Municipality of Cestica organized the opening conference for the project at the Municipal Hall of Cestica. The purpose of the conference was to introduce the project to citizens and explain how it contributes to enhancing citizen engagement in civil society. After the opening presentation, the partner representatives presented briefly on they implemented actions relating to civil protection and volunteering during the pandemic. This format allowed participants to exchange know-how and emphasize how they adapted their activities during the COVID-19 pandemic (highlighting how EU values such as solidarity have been incorporated into actions and providing recommendations the lessons-learnt). As a means to engage participants and find out about their needs concerning volunteering in their communities, the conference included an interactive quiz with participants (Via Slido) about the impacts of volunteering during the pandemic. The findings showed that the majority of participants believed that we are moving beyond the pandemic and that rural communities have come close to a full recovery (76% of respondents) and the participants also indicated a positive opinion towards EU values (76%). Regarding the pandemic, 21% participants regarded vaccinations as the main solution to ending COVID19, while 72% of respondents considered that a combination of actions (vaccines, actions of volunteers, security measures, direct subsidies to citizens) led to rural communities ending the pandemic's toll on rural communities. In order to fully recover from the impacts of the pandemic, the participants considered that rural communities need to encourage more volunteering, promote social inclusion, and work more with other communities in the EU. Through the Q&A session at the end of the opening conference, participants were able to gain new information and know-ho about how rural communities adjusted civil protection measures, engaged citizens and adapted in order to overcome the pandemic. Day 2 (Thursday, March 30th, 2023) was held at the Municipal Hall of Cestica. An interactive workshop focusing on how civil protection bodies provided support to citizens during the COVID-19 was organized in order to engage participants and encourage the exchange of know-how. The first part of the workshop included presentations on best practices in civil protection during the pandemic. There were 4 presentations held in total: Municipality of Cestica; ESF Project "Zaželi" (Presenter: Marina Dukarić, project manager) Dukarić explained that through the project 6 women were trained and employed to provide support services to elderly person in Cestica. It was explained that the activities of the project needed to be adjusted in order to account for the challenging work conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic; Red Cross Society of the City of Varaždin: Activities and actions organized and implemented by the Red Cross in rural areas during the pandemic (Presenter: Filipa Blažon Šumečki, EU project manager and general affairs manager) Blažon Šumečki presented how the Red Cross incorporates humanitarian/European values in its work and how volunteers and field teams of the Red Cross were able to adjust operations and reach out effectively to persons in need during the pandemic; Home for the Elderly/Dom "Novi Život" (Presenters: Iva Roža and Valentina Kocet Martinec) Roža and Kocet Martinec described the work of the organization and its mission. After that, they explained the negative impacts that the pandemic had on the health of residents at the home and the mental health of workers. Details were provided on how the staff at the home adjusted their operations and activities in order to ensure that residents could overcome the pandemic; Udruga "Hiperaktivni": The activities of the organization and how they operated during the COVID 19 Pandemic; (Presenters: Tomislav Milec and Matija Hrman) Milec and Hrman first described that the association aims to engage youth in the community and encourage them to take action to address various community issues (e.g. mental health and well-being, employment, cultural heritage, etc.), and described the main activities performed annually by the association. The presenters also described how they coordinated with the Red Cross to deliver food and medicine to persons in need during the pandemic. To end the workshop, Patrick Galeski (from Galeski Management Services j.d.o.o.) held a group activity that takes into account the consequences and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. He first presented on how the COVID 19 pandemic mirrors the entire situation faced by citizens during the Influenza Pandemic of 1918-20. This was done in order to show how although many people acted correctly during the pandemic, there are also many that responded poorly. He emphasized that for the most part history repeated in a bad way during the pandemic. To follow-up on that presentation, Galeski conducted a group activity where participants reviewed a scenario about a lack of doctors in a rural community. The participants needed to consider possible solutions and also

discussed on how they are addressing similar issues in their communities. In the afternoon session, the Firefighting department of Cestica, in cooperation with the Varazdin County Firefighting Community, presented their activities and held a short demonstration. Darko Mahjen from the Municipality of Cestica presented on the main activities of the firefighting associations of Cestica (6 firefighting HQs in total) and described how they operated during the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e. included COVID-19 safety measures in their responses). After the presentation, a firefighting demonstration took place at the Municipality which demonstrated how teams cooperate and operate in emergency situations. On Day 3 (Friday, March 31st 2023) a project meeting was held in Varazdin, at the Varazdin County Palace. The meeting was held in order to describe the outcomes of the project event and discuss the next steps in project implementation. Representatives of the media were present in order to cover the project. At the meeting, the representatives of the project provide statements to reporters about the project and its expected results. In addition to this, a short tour of the city of Varazdin was organized for participants in order to introduce them to the city and Varaždin County's cultural heritage.