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## Slovenia – Regional Red Cross Association Ljubljana

### The Srečevalnica project

#### WHY?

Project 'Srečevalnica' was developed in order to offer additional support to individuals who come to the Regional Red Cross Association of Ljubljana for food and material assistance. It was recognised that among those aid recipients there was a significant group of **long-term, unemployed women** and **single mothers**. With this in mind, the Red Cross sought to offer activities that would be of particular interest to this group. The association felt it was important to help the women to expand their social networks, and that the organisation of these activities could contribute to the greater social inclusion of long-term unemployed and excluded people.

#### WHAT?

Project Srečevalnica started in October 2014 and consists of a range of activities that are organised on a weekly basis. The events, workshops and meetings enable participants to access information and advice, and also support their mental and physical health through exercise and active participation. The activities represent an opportunity to **develop social skills** (e.g. communication skills and increasing confidence), as well as providing support in the development of the **practical skills**. The number of workshops can differ per year as the organisation responds to the demand for particular activities, as well as the resources available.

In 2016, around 200 workshops were carried out covering topics such as sewing, recycling, reusing materials, producing natural housecleaning products and cosmetics, relaxation techniques, etc.

The regular weekly activities provide an opportunity for **lifelong learning** and the expansion and **strengthening of the social networks** of the participants. The number of participants per workshop ranges from 4-16 and the organisation believes it's important to have a manageable size per group. In order to allow parents to participate, a **parallel programme for children** has been developed and activities for children are organised in the same location as the activity for adults.



I never thought that I'd be someone who could stand up and talk to a group of people or even mentor them. But now here I am, sharing my knowledge with others."

An unemployed participant, after taking on the role of a workshop mentor volunteer

## WHO?

Project Srečevalnica is run by the local Red Cross branch of Ljubljana. The organisation carries out a range of activities to support the most deprived individuals in the Slovenian capital, including the provision of FEAD-funded material assistance.

## HOW?

Project Srečevalnica was initially piloted in one location: the Humanitarian Aid Centre of Regional Red Cross Association of Ljubljana. As the organisers believed it to be important to reach as many people as possible, they expanded the workshops to several locations across the city. Activities are currently organised at eight locations in both the mornings and afternoons.

Notably, in 2016, more than 50 volunteers participated in the implementation of the Srečevalnica project and since 2017, there have been two part-time employees involved in running the project. Volunteers are included in the planning and execution of the project, and actively **receive training opportunities** and **mentoring support** from the Red Cross.

It's important to note that workshop participants are encouraged to take an active role in **defining future workshops**. For example, at one location, participants indicated they were interested in learning how to grow their own vegetables, so the Red Cross hired a plot of land and organised sessions where participants would be taught how to best grow fruits and vegetables.

Where possible, the Red Cross also seeks to **involve participants in running the workshops** as it's felt that such engagement is a good first step to engagement in other areas of their lives. They are therefore encouraged to become volunteers and mentors.

Red Cross staff and volunteers also try to support and mentor participants where needed in order to help them to address any issues in other areas of their lives.

While the Red Cross actively promotes the activities among people and families receiving material aid support, **attracting new participants remains one of the key challenges** of Project Srečevalnica. The Red Cross particularly tries to encourage long-term beneficiaries of support, in order to re-engage them. An emphasis has been placed on making personal contact and directly inviting people to participate in the project's workshops as a personal touch has been found to be more effective than distributing leaflets or displaying posters.

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