

Evaluation Brief

Navigating Life with Dementia: A Project for People with or at Risk of Dementia and Their Families

1. Project Overview

The project “**Navigating Life with Dementia**” (2024-2025) was implemented across eight municipalities in Montenegro — Nikšić, Plužine, Šavnik, Berane, Andrijevica, Petnjica, Gusinje and Plav — with the aim of strengthening community-based services for elderly people living with dementia or at risk of dementia and their families. Project was financially supported by the European Union, the Government of Montenegro, and the Ministry of Public Administration of the Republic of Slovenia.

Led by **Institute Circle (Slovenia)** in partnership with **NGO Impuls (Montenegro)**, and supported by municipalities, Centres for Social Work and the Red Cross Nikšić, the project combined:

- establishment of licensed counselling services
- training of volunteers for psychosocial support (PSP)
- wide public awareness campaigns
- direct support to families and elderly persons

The initiative addressed a major service gap in Montenegro, where structured dementia-focused community services previously did not exist.

2. Purpose of the Evaluation

The external evaluation assessed:

- effectiveness of service delivery
- impact on beneficiaries and communities
- efficiency of implementation
- sustainability of results

It drew on document review, interviews with professionals and stakeholders, beneficiary feedback, and service monitoring data.

3. Key Results at a Glance

✓ Community-Based Services Established

- **2 licensed counselling services** in Nikšić and Plužine
- **24 trained volunteers** providing psychosocial support
- Services operational across **8 municipalities**

✓ Direct Beneficiaries Reached

- **31 families / 54 individuals** received counselling

- **228 elderly people and caregivers** supported through PSP
- **811 hours of volunteer visits** delivered

✓ Awareness and Public Engagement

- **17 community awareness activities** (target: 6)
- **401 media publications** (target: 30)
- **Over 52,500 citizens informed** about dementia, early detection and available support (target: 4,000)

✓ Impact on Quality of Life

- **98% of beneficiaries** reported improved coping and emotional wellbeing
- **98% showed increased self-reliance and social engagement**
- Caregivers experienced reduced stress and stronger confidence in care

4. Impact on Individuals and Communities

Improved Wellbeing and Inclusion

The project produced measurable improvements in:

- emotional stability of elderly people with dementia
- reduced isolation and loneliness
- improved family communication and coping strategies
- increased autonomy in daily activities

Families repeatedly described the services as transformative, often stating:

“The visits brought warmth and light into our home.”

Strengthened Community Response to Dementia

Public discourse around dementia shifted significantly:

- stigma was reduced
- early detection was promoted
- families became more willing to seek help
- municipalities increased engagement with social services

Dementia began to be recognized as both a **social and health issue**, rather than a private family burden.

5. Service Innovation and Institutional Change

The project introduced Montenegro's **first structured, licensed dementia counselling services** at community level.

Its integrated model combined:

- ✓ professional counselling
- ✓ volunteer-based outreach
- ✓ institutional partnerships
- ✓ continuous supervision

This created a **replicable, cost-efficient and scalable system** of dementia support that can be expanded nationally.

6. Sustainability of Results

The evaluation confirms strong long-term sustainability across four dimensions:

Institutional Sustainability

- Licensed counselling services will continue beyond the project
- Strong partnerships between NGOs, municipalities and Centres for Social Work

Financial Sustainability

- Services positioned for integration into national and municipal funding
- Model aligned with EU and donor funding frameworks

Policy Alignment

- Fully aligned with Montenegro's social protection, ageing and mental health strategies
- Consistent with WHO dementia action frameworks

Social Sustainability

- Reduced stigma and increased community ownership
- empowered caregivers and volunteer networks
- enduring public awareness

Training materials, service protocols and an upgraded PSP manual ensure knowledge transfer and replication.

7. Lessons Learned

The evaluation highlights several critical success factors:

- ✓ Blending professional services with volunteer engagement expands reach while maintaining quality
- ✓ Early involvement of municipalities ensures ownership and sustainability
- ✓ Continuous awareness (not one-off campaigns) changes behaviour
- ✓ Addressing both caregivers and persons with dementia is essential
- ✓ Intersectoral cooperation strengthens service effectiveness

8. Overall Conclusion

The **Navigating Life with Dementia** project successfully transformed dementia support in participating municipalities by:

- creating services where none previously existed
- improving quality of life for hundreds of families
- strengthening institutional cooperation
- shifting public attitudes toward inclusion and care

All objectives were fully achieved — many exceeded.

The project stands as a **national best-practice model** for community-based dementia care in Montenegro and a strong foundation for future policy development and service expansion.

9. Key Recommendations (Summary)

1. Expand licensed counselling services to additional municipalities
2. Formalize cooperation between health and social sectors
3. Integrate dementia services into national social protection budgets
4. Continue public awareness and caregiver education
5. Establish coordinated monitoring and referral systems

Final Message

Navigating Life with Dementia demonstrates that with coordinated community action, professional support, and compassion, it is possible to restore dignity, connection, and quality of life for elderly people and their families — even in small and remote communities.

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